Fully Revised Fourth Edition

THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE

New Revised Standard Version With The Apocrypha

An Ecumenical Study Bible



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New Revised
Standard Version

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An Ecumenical Study Bible

Michael D. Coogan, *Editor*

Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom,
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THE EDITORS' PREFACE

For nearly five decades *The Oxford Annotated Bible* and its successor *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* have served generations of readers and students as a study Bible. That extraordinary longevity alone is eloquent testimony to its success. This new edition retains the format and features that have proven so attractive. At the same time, the field of biblical studies has not been static, and this edition is a thoroughgoing revision of the previous ones. In particular, the editors have recruited contributors from a wide diversity of backgrounds and of scholarly approaches to the biblical traditions. In order to present this diversity more fully, the introductions to the biblical books, the maps and charts, the annotations, and the study materials at the end of the book have been significantly enhanced and lengthened since the third edition.

We recognize that no single interpretation or approach is sufficient for informed reading of these ancient texts, and have aimed at inclusivity of interpretive strategies. On a great number of issues there is a consensus among scholars, and the contributors have been encouraged to present such consensus when it exists. Where it has broken down, and has not yet re-formed, alternatives are mentioned. Moreover, in order to respect the canonical status of various parts of the Bible for different communities, and to avoid privileging any book or part of the Bible, we have kept both introductions and annotations roughly proportionate to the length of the books, while recognizing that some parts require more elaboration than others.

The editorial process was collaborative. Each contribution was read in its entirety by at least three of the editors, and revised with a view toward consistency of tone, coherence of approach, and completeness of coverage. We have also wanted to allow the contributors' own voices to be heard, and we have avoided imposing a superficial uniformity of style and approach. Throughout, we have kept the needs of the general audience firmly in mind during the editorial stages, and our aim has been a congruity of experience as a reader turns from book to book and from section to section of the finished volume.

CONTENTS OF THE ANNOTATED BIBLE

The biblical text stands apart from any editorial contributions, in both placement and format. This will enable anyone who wishes to do so to read the text unprejudiced by editorial judgments.

The footnotes that are part of the New Revised Standard Version (indicated by an italic superscript letter after the word or phrase in question) are printed at the bottom of the right-hand column of the biblical text on each page where they occur. In these notes, divergent textual readings and alternate translations are printed in italics. The phrase "Other ancient authorities read" means that the reading (i.e., the wording) of the passage is different in various manuscripts and early versions, and the word "Or" signifies that the Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, or Latin text permits an alternate rendering besides the one given in the text. (See "Textual Criticism," p. 2192.)

Discussion of larger units in the Bible is provided by essays introducing each of them: "The Pentateuch," "The Historical Books," "The Poetical and Wisdom Books," "The Prophetic Books," "The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books," "The Gospels," and "Letters/Epistles in the New Testament."

Each book is preceded by its own introduction, which sketches the book's structure, main themes, literary history, and historical context, as well as broad lines of interpretation; they therefore present a clear overview and guide to reading. For this edition we have not only made the introductions longer than in previous editions but have also organized them so that they cover the same topics in the same order.

At the bottom of each page of the biblical text, in a different font from it and in a single column, are the annotations. The annotations are just that, notes rather than paraphrase or commentary, although these genres admittedly overlap. They are intended to enhance the reader's understanding of the text, providing essential information, background, and interpretation, rather than only summarizing what it says. The boldface headings delineate the larger units of the book and provide a detailed consecutive outline of its contents. The word or phrase being glossed is given in italics. Quotation marks are used for words quoted from elsewhere in the Bible as well as for transliterations of ancient languages. Since we desire each book to stand on its own, as much as possible the annotations are self-contained. We have thus tried to avoid both cross-references to fuller discussions elsewhere, and the misconception that a book or larger part of the Bible is merely a perfunctory reworking of other material, or that a particular passage can only be understood fully in the light of later

biblical traditions. At the same time, we recognize that the Bible is often a progressive text, and that later parts of the Bible often contain the oldest interpretations of earlier traditions. The best starting point for interpreting a particular passage is often another passage, and we have encouraged contributors to point out interconnections in the biblical material by means of cross-references. (The cross-references that end with "n." refer to the annotation as well as to the biblical text.)

A listing of abbreviations for the books of the Bible used in this edition is found on p. xxi. The chapter and verse divisions in a reference are separated by a period; thus, Gen 3.8 refers to the book of Genesis, chapter 3, verse 8. Inclusive references are used for both chapters and verses; thus, Ex 1–15 refers to the first fifteen chapters of the book of Exodus; Rom 11.33–36 to verses 33 through 36 of chapter 11 of the letter to the Romans; and so forth. When a book of the Bible is referred to within an annotation on that book, the name of the book is not repeated unless there is ambiguity.

In keeping with our general desire to take account of the diversity of the users of this study Bible, we have adopted two widely accepted conventions: We have referred to the first portion of the text as "the Hebrew Bible," since it is a collection preserved by the Jewish community and that is how Jews regard it; and we have cited all dates in the notes as BCE or CE ("Before the Common Era" and "Common Era") instead of BC or AD ("Before Christ" and "Anno Domini" ["in the year of the Lord"]), which imply a Christian view of the status of Jesus of Nazareth. Use of the title "Old Testament" for those books here designated as "the Hebrew Bible" is confined to instances expressing the historical view of various Christian interpreters. These conventions are followed in the study materials that we have produced; the translation has its own conventions, which we are not at liberty to alter.

Several dozen maps and plans are interspersed in the biblical text. These will assist readers to locate important places mentioned in the text or to clarify the prose descriptions of such structures as the Tabernacle and the Temple.

The study materials at the end of the volume are a series of interconnected essays that provide background information for understanding the Bible, the processes by which it was formed, the contexts in which it was produced, and the ways in which it has been interpreted through the ages. These essays are followed by tables of rulers, of weights and measures, of the calendar, and of parallel passages in the biblical traditions. There is also a brief bibliography to English translations of ancient writings that are referred to in the notes. A select chronology provides a quick reference for major events, rulers, and other persons contemporaneous with the biblical accounts. The study materials also include a glossary of important terms and concepts.

At the end of the book is a comprehensive subject index to all of the study materials, including the annotations. Finally, there is a separate set of fourteen color maps, with a separate index to them, that constitute a brief historical atlas to the Bible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It remains to express our gratitude, first and above all to the contributors, whose learning has made this a work of which we are immensely proud, and whose uncommon patience with the editorial process made our task light. Donald Kraus, Executive Editor in the Bible department at Oxford University Press, U.S.A., has guided this edition from its inception with wisdom and tact. Elisabeth Nelson carried out with efficiency and accuracy a wide variety of editorial tasks that are needed in a project of this complexity. Mary Sutherland prepared the text for composition, and 2Krogh AS, Denmark, designed and typeset the entire text. We thank them all.

MICHAEL D. COOGAN, MARC Z. BRETTLER,
CAROL A. NEWSOM, PHEME PERKINS
August, 2009

TO THE READER

[The following prefatory essay, "To the Reader," is part of the New Revised Standard Version Bible translation (NRSV), and is reprinted here in accordance with the requirements of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., which holds copyright to the NRSV.]

This preface is addressed to you by the Committee of translators, who wish to explain, as briefly as possible, the origin and character of our work. The publication of our revision is yet another step in the long, continual process of making the Bible available in the form of the English language that is most widely current in our day. To summarize in a single sentence: the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is an authorized revision of the Revised Standard Version, published in 1952, which was a revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901, which, in turn, embodied earlier revisions of the King James Version, published in 1611.

In the course of time, the King James Version came to be regarded as "the Authorized Version." With good reason it has been termed "the noblest monument of English prose," and it has entered, as no other book has, into the making of the personal character and the public institutions of the English-speaking peoples. We owe to it an incalculable debt.

Yet the King James Version has serious defects. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the development of biblical studies and the discovery of many biblical manuscripts more ancient than those on which the King James Version was based made it apparent that these defects were so many as to call for revision. The task was begun, by authority of the Church of England, in 1870. The (British) Revised Version of the Bible was published in 1881–1885; and the American Standard Version, its variant embodying the preferences of the American scholars associated with the work, was published, as was mentioned above, in 1901. In 1928 the copyright of the latter was acquired by the International Council of Religious Education and thus passed into the ownership of the Churches of the United States and Canada that were associated in this Council through their boards of education and publication.

The Council appointed a committee of scholars to have charge of the text of the American Standard Version and to undertake inquiry concerning the need for further revision. After studying the questions whether or not revision should be undertaken, and if so, what its nature and extent should be, in 1937 the Council authorized a revision. The scholars who served as members of the Committee worked in two sections, one dealing with the Old Testament and one with the New Testament. In 1946 the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament was published. The publication of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, took place on September 30, 1952. A translation of the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament followed in 1957. In 1977 this collection was issued in an expanded edition, containing three additional texts received by Eastern Orthodox communions (3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151). Thereafter the Revised Standard Version gained the distinction of being officially authorized for use by all major Christian churches: Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox.

The Revised Standard Version Bible Committee is a continuing body, comprising about thirty members, both men and women. Ecumenical in representation, it includes scholars affiliated with various Protestant denominations, as well as several Roman Catholic members, an Eastern Orthodox member, and a Jewish member who serves in the Old Testament section. For a period of time the Committee included several members from Canada and from England.

Because no translation of the Bible is perfect or is acceptable to all groups of readers, and because discoveries of older manuscripts and further investigation of linguistic features of the text continue to become available, renderings of the Bible have proliferated. During the years following the publication of the Revised Standard Version, twenty-six other English translations and revisions of the Bible were produced by committees and by individual scholars—not to mention twenty-five other translations and revisions of the New Testament alone. One of the latter was the second edition of the RSV New Testament, issued in 1971, twenty-five years after its initial publication.

Following the publication of the RSV Old Testament in 1952, significant advances were made in the discovery and interpretation of documents in Semitic languages related to Hebrew. In addition to the information

that had become available in the late 1940s from the Dead Sea texts of Isaiah and Habakkuk, subsequent acquisitions from the same area brought to light many other early copies of all the books of the Hebrew Scriptures (except Esther), though most of these copies are fragmentary. During the same period early Greek manuscript copies of books of the New Testament also became available.

In order to take these discoveries into account, along with recent studies of documents in Semitic languages related to Hebrew, in 1974 the Policies Committee of the Revised Standard Version, which is a standing committee of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., authorized the preparation of a revision of the entire RSV Bible.

For the Old Testament the Committee has made use of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1977; ed. sec. emendata, 1983). This is an edition of the Hebrew and Aramaic text as current early in the Christian era and fixed by Jewish scholars (the "Masoretes") of the sixth to the ninth centuries. The vowel signs, which were added by the Masoretes, are accepted in the main, but where a more probable and convincing reading can be obtained by assuming different vowels, this has been done. No notes are given in such cases, because the vowel points are less ancient and reliable than the consonants. When an alternative reading given by the Masoretes is translated in a footnote, this is identified by the words "Another reading is."

Departures from the consonantal text of the best manuscripts have been made only where it seems clear that errors in copying had been made before the text was standardized. Most of the corrections adopted are based on the ancient versions (translations into Greek, Aramaic, Syriac, and Latin), which were made prior to the time of the work of the Masoretes and which therefore may reflect earlier forms of the Hebrew text. In such instances a footnote specifies the version or versions from which the correction has been derived and also gives a translation of the Masoretic Text. Where it was deemed appropriate to do so, information is supplied in footnotes from subsidiary Jewish traditions concerning other textual readings (the *Tiqqune Sopherim*, "emendations of the scribes"). These are identified in the footnotes as "Ancient Heb tradition."

Occasionally it is evident that the text has suffered in transmission and that none of the versions provides a satisfactory restoration. Here we can only follow the best judgment of competent scholars as to the most probable reconstruction of the original text. Such reconstructions are indicated in footnotes by the abbreviation Cn ("Correction"), and a translation of the Masoretic Text is added.

For the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament the Committee has made use of a number of texts. For most of these books the basic Greek text from which the present translation was made is the edition of the Septuagint prepared by Alfred Rahlfs and published by the Württemberg Bible Society (Stuttgart, 1935). For several of the books the more recently published individual volumes of the Göttingen Septuagint project were utilized. For the book of Tobit it was decided to follow the form of the Greek text found in codex Sinaiticus (supported as it is by evidence from Qumran); where this text is defective, it was supplemented and corrected by other Greek manuscripts. For the three Additions to Daniel (namely, Susanna, the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews, and Bel and the Dragon) the Committee continued to use the Greek version attributed to Theodotion (the so-called "Theodotion-Daniel"). In translating Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), while constant reference was made to the Hebrew fragments of a large portion of this book (those discovered at Qumran and Masada as well as those recovered from the Cairo Geniza), the Committee generally followed the Greek text (including verse numbers) published by Joseph Ziegler in the Göttingen Septuagint (1965). But in many places the Committee has translated the Hebrew text when this provides a reading that is clearly superior to the Greek; the Syriac and Latin versions were also consulted throughout and occasionally adopted. The basic text adopted in rendering 2 Esdras is the Latin version given in *Biblia Sacra*, edited by Robert Weber (Stuttgart, 1971). This was supplemented by consulting the Latin text as edited by R. L. Bensly (1895) and by Bruno Violet (1910), as well as by taking into account the several Oriental versions of 2 Esdras, namely, the Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic (two forms, referred to as Arabic 1 and Arabic 2), Armenian, and Georgian versions. Finally, since the Additions to the Book of Esther are disjointed and quite unintelligible as they stand in most editions of the Apocrypha, we have provided them with their original context by translating the whole of the Greek version of Esther from Robert Hanhart's Göttingen edition (1983).

For the New Testament the Committee has based its work on the most recent edition of *The Greek New Testament*, prepared by an interconfessional and international committee and published by the United Bible Societies (1966; 3rd ed. corrected, 1983; information concerning changes to be introduced into the critical apparatus of the forthcoming 4th edition was available to the Committee). As in that edition, double brackets are used to

enclose a few passages that are generally regarded to be later additions to the text, but which we have retained because of their evident antiquity and their importance in the textual tradition. Only in very rare instances have we replaced the text or the punctuation of the Bible Societies' edition by an alternative that seemed to us to be superior. Here and there in the footnotes the phrase, "Other ancient authorities read," identifies alternative readings preserved by Greek manuscripts and early versions. In both Testaments, alternative renderings of the text are indicated by the word "Or."

As for the style of English adopted for the present revision, among the mandates given to the Committee in 1980 by the Division of Education and Ministry of the National Council of Churches of Christ (which now holds the copyright of the RSV Bible) was the directive to continue in the tradition of the King James Bible, but to introduce such changes as are warranted on the basis of accuracy, clarity, euphony, and current English usage. Within the constraints set by the original texts and by the mandates of the Division, the Committee has followed the maxim, "As literal as possible, as free as necessary." As a consequence, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) remains essentially a literal translation. Paraphrastic renderings have been adopted only sparingly, and then chiefly to compensate for a deficiency in the English language—the lack of a common gender third person singular pronoun.

During the almost half a century since the publication of the RSV, many in the churches have become sensitive to the danger of linguistic sexism arising from the inherent bias of the English language towards the masculine gender, a bias that in the case of the Bible has often restricted or obscured the meaning of the original text. The mandates from the Division specified that, in references to men and women, masculine-oriented language should be eliminated as far as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture. As can be appreciated, more than once the Committee found that the several mandates stood in tension and even in conflict. The various concerns had to be balanced case by case in order to provide a faithful and acceptable rendering without using contrived English. Only very occasionally has the pronoun "he" or "him" been retained in passages where the reference may have been to a woman as well as to a man; for example, in several legal texts in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. In such instances of formal, legal language, the options of either putting the passage in the plural or of introducing additional nouns to avoid masculine pronouns in English seemed to the Committee to obscure the historic structure and literary character of the original. In the vast majority of cases, however, inclusiveness has been attained by simple rephrasing or by introducing plural forms when this does not distort the meaning of the passage. Of course, in narrative and in parable no attempt was made to generalize the sex of individual persons.

Another aspect of style will be detected by readers who compare the more stately English rendering of the Old Testament with the less formal rendering adopted for the New Testament. For example, the traditional distinction between *shall* and *will* in English has been retained in the Old Testament as appropriate in rendering a document that embodies what may be termed the classic form of Hebrew, while in the New Testament the abandonment of such distinctions in the usage of the future tense in English reflects the more colloquial nature of the koine Greek used by most New Testament authors except when they are quoting the Old Testament.

Careful readers will notice that here and there in the Old Testament the word LORD (or in certain cases GOD) is printed in capital letters. This represents the traditional manner in English versions of rendering the Divine Name, the "Tetragrammaton" (see the notes on Exodus 3.14, 15), following the precedent of the ancient Greek and Latin translators and the long established practice in the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogue. While it is almost if not quite certain that the Name was originally pronounced "Yahweh," this pronunciation was not indicated when the Masoretes added vowel sounds to the consonantal Hebrew text. To the four consonants YHWH of the Name, which had come to be regarded as too sacred to be pronounced, they attached vowel signs indicating that in its place should be read the Hebrew word *Adonai* meaning "Lord" (or *Elohim* meaning "God"). Ancient Greek translators employed the word *Kyrios* ("Lord") for the Name. The Vulgate likewise used the Latin word *Dominus* ("Lord"). The form "Jehovah" is of late medieval origin; it is a combination of the consonants of the Divine Name and the vowels attached to it by the Masoretes but belonging to an entirely different word. Although the American Standard Version (1901) had used "Jehovah" to render the Tetragrammaton (the sound of Y being represented by J and the sound of W by V, as in Latin), for two reasons the Committees that produced the RSV and the NRSV returned to the more familiar usage of the King James Version. (1) The word "Jehovah" does not accurately represent any form of the Name ever used in Hebrew. (2) The use of any proper name for the one and only God, as though there were other gods from whom the true

God had to be distinguished, began to be discontinued in Judaism before the Christian era and is inappropriate for the universal faith of the Christian Church.

It will be seen that in the Psalms and in other prayers addressed to God the archaic second person singular pronouns *thee*, *thou*, *thine*) and verb forms (*art*, *hast*, *hadst*) are no longer used. Although some readers may regret this change, it should be pointed out that in the original languages neither the Old Testament nor the New makes any linguistic distinction between addressing a human being and addressing the Deity. Furthermore, in the tradition of the King James Version one will not expect to find the use of capital letters for pronouns that refer to the Deity—such capitalization is an unnecessary innovation that has only recently been introduced into a few English translations of the Bible. Finally, we have left to the discretion of the licensed publishers such matters as section headings, cross-references, and clues to the pronunciation of proper names.

This new version seeks to preserve all that is best in the English Bible as it has been known and used through the years. It is intended for use in public reading and congregational worship, as well as in private study, instruction, and meditation. We have resisted the temptation to introduce terms and phrases that merely reflect current moods, and have tried to put the message of the Scriptures in simple, enduring words and expressions that are worthy to stand in the great tradition of the King James Bible and its predecessors.

In traditional Judaism and Christianity, the Bible has been more than a historical document to be preserved or a classic of literature to be cherished and admired; it is recognized as the unique record of God's dealings with people over the ages. The Old Testament sets forth the call of a special people to enter into covenant relation with the God of justice and steadfast love and to bring God's law to the nations. The New Testament records the life and work of Jesus Christ, the one in whom "the Word became flesh," as well as describes the rise and spread of the early Christian Church. The Bible carries its full message, not to those who regard it simply as a noble literary heritage of the past or who wish to use it to enhance political purposes and advance otherwise desirable goals, but to all persons and communities who read it so that they may discern and understand what God is saying to them. That message must not be disguised in phrases that are no longer clear, or hidden under words that have changed or lost their meaning; it must be presented in language that is direct and plain and meaningful to people today. It is the hope and prayer of the translators that this version of the Bible may continue to hold a large place in congregational life and to speak to all readers, young and old alike, helping them to understand and believe and respond to its message.

For the Committee,
BRUCE M. METZGER

ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books

The Acts 1919
Additions to Esther (Gk) 1411
Amos 1282
Azariah, Prayer of 1543
Baruch 1529
Bel and the Dragon 1552
1 Chronicles 575
2 Chronicles 617
Colossians 2067
1 Corinthians 1999
2 Corinthians 2025
Daniel 1233
Deuteronomy 247
Ecclesiastes 935
Ecclesiasticus 1547
Ephesians 2052
1 Esdras 1633
2 Esdras 1675
Esther 707
Esther (Gk), Additions to 1411
Exodus 81
Ezekiel 1159
Ezra 667
Galatians 2041
Genesis 7
Habakkuk 1321
Haggai 1333
Hebrews 2103
Hosea 1259
Isaiah 965
James 2119
Jeremiah 1057
Jeremiah, Letter of 1537
Job 726
Joel 1275
John 1879
1 John 2137
2 John 2145
3 John 2147
Jonah 1301
Joshua 318
Jude 2149
Judges 355
Judith 1389
1 Kings 485
2 Kings 531
Lamentations 1147
Letter of Jeremiah 1537
Leviticus 141
Luke 1827
1 Maccabees 1555
2 Maccabees 1599
3 Maccabees 1659
4 Maccabees 1717
Malachi 1351
Manasseh, Prayer of 1656
Mark 1791
Matthew 1746
Micah 1306
Nahum 1316
Nehemiah 685
Numbers 185
Obadiah 1298
1 Peter 2126
2 Peter 2132
Philemon 2100
Philippians 2061
Prayer of Azariah 1543
Prayer of Manasseh 1656
Proverbs 895
Psalm 151 1658
Psalms 773
Revelation 2153
Romans 1975
Ruth 392
1 Samuel 399
2 Samuel 445
Sirach, Wisdom of Jesus, Son of . . 1457
Song of Solomon 950
Song of the Three Jews 1543
Susanna 1548
1 Thessalonians 2074
2 Thessalonians 2080
1 Timothy 2085
2 Timothy 2091
Titus 2096
Tobit 1368
Wisdom of Solomon 1427
Zechariah 1337
Zephaniah 1327

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Books of the Bible: Abbreviation First

HEBREW BIBLE

Gen ..... Genesis
Ex ..... Exodus
Lev ..... Leviticus
Num ..... Numbers
Deut ..... Deuteronomy
Josh ..... Joshua
Judg ..... Judges
Ruth ..... Ruth
1 Sam ..... 1 Samuel
2 Sam ..... 2 Samuel
1 Kings ..... 1 Kings
2 Kings ..... 2 Kings
1 Chr ..... 1 Chronicles
2 Chr ..... 2 Chronicles
Ezra ..... Ezra
Neh ..... Nehemiah
Esth ..... Esther
Job ..... Job
Ps ..... Psalms
Prov ..... Proverbs
Eccl ..... Ecclesiastes
Song ..... Song of Solomon
Isa ..... Isaiah
Jer ..... Jeremiah
Lam ..... Lamentations
Ezek ..... Ezekiel
Dan ..... Daniel
Hos ..... Hosea
Joel ..... Joel
Am ..... Amos
Ob ..... Obadiah
Jon ..... Jonah
Mic ..... Micah
Nah ..... Nahum
Hah ..... Habakkuk
Zeph ..... Zephaniah
Hag ..... Haggai
Zech ..... Zechariah
Mal ..... Malachi

THE APOCRYPHAL/DEUTEROCANONICAL BOOKS

Tob ..... Tobit
Jdt ..... Judith
Add Esth ..... Esther (Greek)
Wis ..... The Wisdom of Solomon
Sir ..... Sirach
Bar ..... Baruch
Let Jer ..... The Letter of Jeremiah
Song of Thr ..... Azariah and the Three Jews
Sus ..... Susanna
Bel ..... Bel and the Dragon
1 Macc ..... 1 Maccabees
2 Macc ..... 2 Maccabees
1 Esd ..... 1 Esdras
Pr Man .... The Prayer of Manasseh
Ps 151 ..... Psalm 151
3 Macc ..... 3 Maccabees
2 Esd ..... 2 Esdras
4 Macc ..... 4 Maccabees

NEW TESTAMENT

Mt ..... Matthew
Mk ..... Mark
Lk ..... Luke
Jn ..... John
Acts ..... Acts of the Apostles
Rom ..... Romans
1 Cor ..... 1 Corinthians
2 Cor ..... 2 Corinthians
Gal ..... Galatians
Eph ..... Ephesians
Phil ..... Philippians
Col ..... Colossians
1 Thess ..... 1 Thessalonians
2 Thess ..... 2 Thessalonians
1 Tim ..... 1 Timothy
2 Tim ..... 2 Timothy
Titus ..... Titus
Philem ..... Philemon
Heb ..... Hebrews
Jas ..... James
1 Pet ..... 1 Peter
2 Pet ..... 2 Peter
1 Jn ..... 1 John
2 Jn ..... 2 John
3 Jn ..... 3 John
Jude ..... Jude
Rev ..... Revelation

In the textual notes to the books of the Bible, the following abbreviations are used:

Ant.	Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*
Aram	Aramaic
Ch, chs	Chapter, chapters
Cn	Correction; made where the text has suffered in transmission and the versions provide no satisfactory restoration but where the Standard Bible Committee agrees with the judgment of competent scholars as to the most probable reconstruction of the original text.
Gk	Septuagint, Greek version of the Old Testament [also used in the NT, where it means simply Greek]
Heb	Hebrew of the consonantal Masoretic Text of the Old Testament
Josephus	Flavius Josephus (Jewish historian, about A.D. 37 to about 95)
Macc.	The book(s) of the Maccabees
Ms(s)	Manuscript(s)
MT	The Hebrew of the pointed Masoretic Text of the Old Testament
OL	Old Latin
Q Ms(s)	Manuscript(s) found at Qumran by the Dead Sea
Sam	Samaritan Hebrew text of the Old Testament
Syr	Syriac Version of the Old Testament
Syr H	Syriac Version of Origen's Hexapla
Tg	Targum
Vg	Vulgate, Latin Version of the Old Testament

For a detailed discussion of these terms, see "Textual Criticism," p. 2192.

The following abbreviations of additional ancient works are used in the introductions and annotations to the biblical books, and in the General Essays at the end of the volume:

Ag. Ap.	Josephus, *Against Apion*
Apoc. Bar.	*Apocalypse of Baruch*
Apoc. Zeph.	*Apocalypse of Zephaniah*
Aristophanes, *Ran.*	Aristophanes, *Ranae* (*Frogs*)
Aristotle, *Pol.*	Aristotle, *Politics*
Aristotle, *Rh.*	Aristotle, *Rhetoric*
Aristotle, *Virt.*	Aristotle, *Virtues and Vices*
2 Bar.	*2 Baruch* (another name for the *Apocalypse of Baruch*)
b. B. Bat.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Baba Bathra*
b. Ber.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Berakot*
b. Eruv.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Eruvim*
b. Git.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Gittin*
b. Meg.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Megillah*
b. Ned.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Nedarim*
b. San.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Sanhedrin*
b. Shabb.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Shabbat*
b. Yoma	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Yoma*
CD	Cairo Genizah, Damascus Document
Cicero, *Fin.*	Cicero, *De finibus*
1 Clem	*1 Clement* (First Epistle of Clement)
CoS	*The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions, and Archival Documents from the Ancient World,* 3 vols. (ed. W.W. Hallo; Leiden: Brill, 1997-2002)
Did.	*Didache*
Dio Chrys., *Or.*	Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes*
Diod. Sic.	Diodorus of Sicily (*Library of History*)
1 En.	*1 Enoch*
Ep. Arist.	*Letter of Aristeas*
Euripides, *Tro.*	Euripides, *Trojan Women*
Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*	Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*
Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.*	Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*
Gen. Rab.	*Genesis Rabbah*
Gk	Greek
Hermas, *Mand.*	*Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate*

Hermas, *Sim.*	Shepherd of Hermas, *Similitude*
Hist.	Herodotus, *Histories*
Homer, *Od.*	Homer, *Odyssey*
HS	Holiness School
Ignatius, *Philad.*	Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians*
Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*	Irenaeus, *Adversus omnes Haereses*
JB	Jerusalem Bible
Jer. Sot.	Jerusalem Talmud, *Sotah* (see *y. Sot.*)
Josephus, *Ant.*	Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*
Josephus, *Ap.*	Josephus, *Against Apion*
Josephus, *J.W.*	Josephus, *Jewish War*
Jub.	*Jubilees*
Juvenal, *Sat.*	Juvenal, *Satires*
KJV	King James Version (1611)
l	liter
Lam. Rab.	*Lamentations Rabbah*
lit.	literally
LXX	the Septuagint
m. Abot	*Mishnah Abot*
m. Avoda Zara	*Mishnah Avoda Zara*
m. Ber.	*Mishnah Berakot*
m. Ketub.	*Mishnah Ketubim*
m. Ned.	*Mishnah Nedarim*
m. Ohalot	*Mishnah Ohalot*
Midr.	*Midrash*
Midr. Pss.	*Midrash Psalms*
Midr. Rab.	*Midrash Rabbah*
m. Shabb.	*Misnah Shabbat*
m. Sot.	*Mishnah Sotah*
NIV	New International Version
NT	New Testament
P. Oxy.	*Oxyrhynchus Papyri*
Philo, *De Conf.Ling.*	Philo, *De Confusione Linguarum*
Philo, *De spec. leg.*	Philo, *De specialibus Legibus*
Philo, *Flaccus*	Philo, *Against Flaccus*
Philo, *Her.*	Philo, *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*
Philo, *Leg. all.*	Philo, *Legum allegoriae*
Philo, *Leg. Gai.*	Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*
Philo, *Migr.*	Philo, *De migratione Abrahami*
Philo, *Opif.*	Philo, *De opificio mundi*
Philo, *Quest. in Gen.*	Philo, *Quaestiones in Genesis*
Plato, *Cri.*	Plato, *Crito*
Plato, *Gorg.*	Plato, *Gorgias*
Plato, *Phaedr.*	Plato, *Phaedrus*
Plato, *Symp.*	Plato, *Symposium*
Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*	Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*
Plutarch, *Mor.*	Plutarch, *Moralia*
Pro Rabirio	Cicero, *Pro Rabirio Postuma*
Pss. Sol.	*Psalms of Solomon*
11QTemple	The Temple Scroll from Qumran Cave 11 (11Q19)
1QH	Hodayot (Thanksgiving Hymns) from Qumran Cave 1
1QM	Milhamah (War Scroll) from Qumran Cave 1
11QMelch	Melchizedek Scroll from Qumran Cave 11 (11Q13)
1QpHab	Pesher to Habakkuk from Qumran Cave 1
11QPs[a]	The Psalms[a] Scroll from Qumran Cave 11 (11Q5)
1QS	Rule of the Community (Serek Hayahad) from Qumran Cave 1
Quintilian, *Inst.*	*Institutio Oratoria*
REB	REVISED ENGLISH BIBLE
RSV	REVISED STANDARD VERSION
Seder Olam R.	*Seder Olam Rabbah*
Shab.	*Shabbat*
Sifre Num.	*Sifre Numbers*
Sib. Or.	*Sibylline Oracles*
Sophocles, *Ant.*	Sophocles, *Antigone*
Strom.	Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*
Tacitus, *Hist.*	Tacitus, *Historiae*
T. Abr.	*Testament of Abraham*
T. Jos.	*Testament of Joseph*
T. Jud. (Test. Jud.)	*Testament of Judah*
T. Levi	*Testament of Levi*
T. Moses	*Testament of Moses*
T. Naph.	*Testament of Naphtali*
T. Reuben	*Testament of Reuben*
T. Sol.	*Testament of Solomon*
Tg. Ps-.J.	*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*
Tr. Eruv.	Babylonian Talmud, *Tractate Eruvim* (see *b. Eruv.*)
y.	Jerusalem Talmud
y. Sot.	Jerusalem Talmud, *Sotah*
v., vv.	verse, verses

Note: The abbreviation "Q," unless specified as "Quelle" ("Source") for the posited New Testament document of non-Markan common material in Matthew and Luke, refers to Qumran, and manuscripts from Qumran are identified by the cave number, which precedes the Q, and the official manuscript number, which follows it; thus, 1Q34 = Manuscript 34 from Cave 1 at Qumran; 4Q174 = Manuscript 174 from Cave 4; etc.

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THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE

Fully Revised
Fourth Edition

New Revised Standard Version

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THE HEBREW BIBLE

The Hebrew Scriptures
commonly called
The Old Testament

New Revised Standard Version

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PENTATEUCH

TERMINOLOGY, CONTENTS, AND TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF AUTHORSHIP

The word "Pentateuch," from the Greek for "five (*penta*) books (*teuchos*)," has entered English by way of Latin as the designation for the first group of books in the Bible, comprising Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Unlike other canonical divisions, where there is significant debate within and between different religious traditions, both Jewish and Christian traditions view these five books in this order as a single unit, introducing the Bible. The unanimity of tradition and the initial placement of these five books reflect their significance within both Judaism and Christianity.

Despite this unanimity of tradition, it is not so obvious how these five books cohere. They certainly do not form a single book in the modern sense, with a single author; modern scholarship has persuasively argued that each of these books is composite, consisting of several sources from different periods in Israel's history (see below). Nor is there complete coherence of plot among them. Moses is the central human character of much of the Pentateuch, but he is only introduced in ch 2 of Exodus, the second book. Nor is the early development of Israel as a people the Pentateuch's unifying theme, as may be seen from the first eleven chapters of the Bible, which are concerned with the world from creation to the birth of Abraham (Gen 11.27). Other suggested unifying themes for the Pentateuch, such as covenant, are also inadequate, since they do not explicitly appear at the beginning of the Pentateuch and continue well beyond it. The suggestion that the promise of the land unifies the Pentateuch is especially problematic, since this theme, though introduced in Gen 12, is only fulfilled with the conquest of the land in the book of Joshua, in which case the Hexateuch ("six books": the Pentateuch plus Joshua) rather than the Pentateuch should be seen as the decisive unit.

The Hebrew terms *torah*, *torat moshe* ("the Torah of Moses"), *torat YHWH* ("the Torah of the LORD"), and *torat ha'elohim* ("the Torah of God"), already in use in late biblical literature to describe what is later called the Pentateuch (e.g., 2 Chr 23.18; Ezra 7.6,10; Neh 8.1,18; Dan 9.11), offer a better clue to the nature and unity of these books. *Torah* is often understood as "law," and indeed this is one of its frequent meanings in the Bible, as in Ex 12.49; "There shall be one law [Heb *torah*] for the native and for the alien who resides among you." Law is a predominant genre of the Pentateuch, which contains extensive legal collections in Ex 21–23, Lev 17–26, and Deut 12–26, as well as selected laws within various narratives, such as the law of circumcision in the narrative about Abraham in Gen 17 and the law concerning inheritance of the land by women in Num 36, embedded within a section about the possession of the land. Many narrative sections also contain material that is of legal significance. For example, the first creation account in Genesis culminates with the "creation" of the sabbath (Gen 2.2–3), though this would only be legislated in Exodus, first in ch 16, and then as part of the Decalogue, in Ex 20.8–11. Similarly, the account of the construction of the tabernacle (Ex 25–40), a temporary temple for God in the wilderness, is not narrated for its own sake, but as an introduction to the various laws of sacrifice, narrated at the beginning of Leviticus, the book that immediately follows these chapters.

Yet "law" is not the only possible translation of *torah*, and the Pentateuch should not be described as a book of law. The Hebrew term *torah* also means "instruction" or "teaching," as in Prov 1.8, "Hear, my child, your father's instruction, and do not reject your mother's teaching [Heb *torah*]." Teaching is not confined to law; indeed narratives or stories are as effective a medium of instruction. Thus, given the predominance of narrative in significant portions of the Pentateuch, especially in Genesis, the beginning of Exodus, and Numbers, it is best to understand the biblical term *torat moshe* as "the instruction of Moses." This instruction was realized through narratives and laws, which together elucidate the proper norms of living and the relationship between God and the world.

The term *torat moshe*, in various late biblical books such as Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles, refers to the Pentateuch more or less as it now exists, but it is not found in the Pentateuch. In fact, the Torah does not explicitly suggest that it was compiled by Moses himself. (The phrase "the Torah" in passages such as Deut 4.44, "This is the law [Heb *torah*] that Moses set before the Israelites," never refers to the complete Pentateuch.) It is easy

to see how the tradition ascribing these five books as a whole to Moses developed. In several places, the Bible suggests that Moses stayed on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights (Ex 24.18; 34.28; Deut 9.9; 10.10). Clearly, this was too long a time for short legal collections such as Ex 21–23 to have been conveyed to him, and thus traditions developed that Moses received the entire written Torah from God at that point. According to the classical rabbis, Moses simultaneously received the oral law, which served as the authoritative interpretation of the written law. The written Torah would include, according to all rabbinic sources (which are followed by the early church), even the book of Genesis, which represents God's narration to Moses of the early history of the world and of Abraham and his family. Some rabbinic sources even suggest that the final chapter of the Torah, Deut 34, which narrates the death of Moses, was dictated by God to Moses, who wrote it with his tears. The view that the Torah should be understood as the divine word mediated by Moses was the standard view of synagogue and church through the Renaissance.

This view is explicitly contradicted by the Torah's narrative, as was sometimes (though rarely) recognized in the Middle Ages. Thus, Abraham ibn Ezra, a scholar active in the twelfth century CE, noted that Gen 12.6 states in reference to Abraham that "at that time the Canaanites were in the land." The words "at that time" suggest that for the author, the Canaanites were no longer in the land; in other words, it appears that the text was written after the time of Moses, because during his time the Canaanites were still in the land. A small number of other places that indicate authorship later than Moses were pointed out by a few medieval scholars, but these were not systematized into a thesis that could challenge the dominant view concerning Moses' authorship of the Torah.

MODERN SOURCE THEORIES

Slowly, with the rise of rationalism, particularly as associated with figures such as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and Benedict (Baruch) Spinoza (1632–1677), the view that the Torah was a unified whole, written by Moses, began to be questioned. (For additional information on this development, see the essays on "The Interpretation of the Bible,") This culminated in the development of the Documentary Hypothesis in the nineteenth century, according to which the Pentateuch (or Hexateuch) is composed of four main sources or documents that were edited or redacted together: J, E, P, and D. Each of these sources or documents is embedded in a (relatively) complete form in the current Pentateuch, and each has a distinct vocabulary and theological perspective.

J and E are so called after the names for God that each of them uses in Genesis: J uses the name "Yahweh" (German "Jahwe," hence "J"), translated in the NRSV as "LORD," though it is really a personal name, whose exact meaning is unknown, from the root "to be"; E prefers to call the deity "Elohim" (translated "God"), an epithet that also serves as the generic term for God or gods in the Bible. P, which also uses "Elohim," is an abbreviation for the Priestly material, and D refers to Deuteronomy.

The difference in divine names, however, is not the main criterion used by scholars for suggesting that the Torah is not a unified composition. Much more significant are doublets and contradictions, in both narrative and legal material. For example, it has long been noted that chs 1–3 of Genesis twice narrate the creation of the world. People are created first in 1.27—"So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them"—and then again in 2.7—"Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." Furthermore, the second creation account does not simply mirror or repeat the first, but differs from the first both in outline and in detail. Gen 1.1–2.3, the first account, narrates the creation of a highly symmetrical world by a very powerful deity who creates through the word. In this account, for example, man and woman are created together (1.27) after the creation of the land animals (1.25). In contrast, the second account, in Gen 2.4–3.24, suggests that man was created (2.7), then the animals (2.19), and then woman (2.21–22). Its focus is on the creation of humanity, not of the entire physical world, and God experiments and anthropomorphically "forms" various beings, rather than creating them with the word. Thus, these are two distinct accounts, written by two authors, representing different worldviews about the nature of creation, humanity, and God.

The two creation accounts appear as two totally separate blocks of material in Gen 1.1–2.3 and 2.4–3.24. In several cases, however, such a clear-cut division of sources is impossible. For example, the flood story culminates in a tradition that God will never again bring a flood on the land (Gen 9.11); for this reason, the J and P flood narratives cannot appear as separate and complete narratives, so they are intertwined. Similarly, the

story of the plague of blood (Ex 7.14–24) contains two intertwined accounts; in one (J), Moses is the protagonist, and the blood affects only the Nile, and the main plague is death of fish (e.g., vv. 17–18), while in the other (P), Aaron appears as well, and blood affects all Egyptian water sources (e.g., vv. 19, 24). In such cases, the narratives are combined with skill, though careful attention to plot and vocabulary help to discern the original building blocks or sources of the story.

In addition to narrative, the legal material in the Torah is also the product of several sources. For example, slave laws concerning Hebrew or Israelite slaves are found in the Torah in Ex 21.1–6, Lev 25.39–46, and Deut 15.12–18. These laws cannot be reconciled in a straightforward fashion since three different notions of slavery underlie them. Most significant is the way in which Exodus differentiates between the treatment of male and female slaves, whereas Deuteronomy claims that they should both be treated similarly. While Exodus and Deuteronomy agree that a slave who loves his master may opt to remain a slave "for life" (Ex 21.6) or "forever" (Deut 15.17), Lev 25 insists that slavery does not really exist, since slaves must be treated "as hired or bound laborers," and they may only serve "until the year of the jubilee" (v. 40). Such legal differences are not surprising given that the Bible is composite, and that the different legal collections reflect norms or ideals of different groups living in different times.

In fact, it is possible to trace distinctive styles and theological notions that typify individual Pentateuchal sources. For example, the J source is well known for its highly anthropomorphic God, who has a close relationship with humans, as seen in Gen 2.4–3.24, which includes, for example, a description of the Lord God "walking in the garden" (3.8) and says that the Lord God "made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them" (3.21). On the other hand, in E, the Elohist source, God is more distant from people, typically communicating with them by dreams or through intermediaries, such as heavenly messengers (NRSV "angels") and prophets. The P or Priestly source is characterized by a strong interest in order and boundaries (see Gen 1), as well as an overriding concern with the priestly family of Aaron and the Temple-based religious system, which is prefigured by worship at the tabernacle in the wilderness. D, or Deuteronomy, is characterized by a unique hortatory or preaching style and insists strongly that God cannot be seen, as in this source's description of revelation: "Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice" (Deut 4.12). This explains why this source, uniquely, insists that God does not physically dwell in the Temple or tabernacle; rather, the Temple is "the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name" (Deut 12.11). D further emphasizes that this one God must be worshiped in one place only (see especially Deut 12); this place is later understood to be Jerusalem. Deuteronomy also shows exceptional concern for the underclasses, such as the widow and orphan, and it focuses on Moses.

The narrative sources J, E, P, and D also have legal collections associated with them. The Covenant Collection or Covenant Code (see Ex 24.7) in Ex 20.22–23.33 is associated with J or E. The Holiness Collection or Holiness Code of Lev 17–26 is so named because of its central injunction, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev 19.2). Though not composed by the Priestly author (P), it represents Priestly theology. The Deuteronomic law collection appears in Deut 12–26. These blocks of material were called "codes" by earlier scholars; but since the blocks are neither complete nor organized for the law court, as a "code" might be, the term "collection" is more suitable.

Critical biblical scholarship, through the latter part of the twentieth century, was quite confident in dating each of these Pentateuchal sources along with the legal collections they incorporated. Thus, J was seen as the earliest collection, often dated to the period of David and Solomon in the tenth century BCE, followed by E, which was often associated with the Northern Kingdom of Israel, established after the death of Solomon. D was connected to the reform of King Josiah of Judah in the late seventh century, and P was seen as deriving from the Babylonian exile in the sixth century. Scholars now agree that the reasons usually given for assigning these dates are problematic, and a lively debate has developed concerning such fundamental issues as the relative order of these sources and the extent to which any of them are as early as previous scholars had suggested. The existence of E as a complete source has been questioned as well, especially since E first appears well after the beginning of the Torah and is very difficult to disentangle from J after the beginning of Exodus. Thus, many scholars now talk of JE together as an early narrative source, incorporating diverse traditions. Additionally, most scholars no longer see each source as the work of a single author writing at one particular time but recognize that each is the product of a single group or "school" over a long time. Thus, it is best to speak of streams or strands of tradition and to contrast their basic underpinnings, rather than to speak of a source coming from

a single author, period, and locale. Some scholars are also exploring the possibility that Genesis–2 Kings, rather than Genesis–Deuteronomy, should be considered a book. Yet, despite the unraveling of a consensus on the exact date and nature of the sources, it is still valid to contrast the ideologies and worldviews of the sources, contrasting, for example, the Deuteronomic view of Israel's fundamental, intrinsic holiness—as seen, in Deut 7.6, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God"—with the Priestly view, articulated most clearly in the Holiness Collection, which suggests that Israel must aspire to holiness—as in Lev 19.2, "You shall be holy."

COMPILATION AND REDACTION OF THE PENTATEUCH

It is unclear how these various sources and legal collections, which now comprise the Torah, came together to form a single book. A number of scholars have recently posited that the Torah was compiled by Ezra on the basis of a request by the Persian authorities, but this goes beyond the evidence available. Most scholars posit an editor or series of editors or redactors, conventionally called R, who combined the various sources, perhaps in several stages, over a long time. Not all ancient Israelite legal and narrative traditions were collected and redacted as part of the Torah, as the Torah itself occasionally indicates when it refers to other sources (see Num 21.14,27). Much was certainly lost. Without access to this lost material, it is impossible to suggest in detail how and why the redactor(s), R, functioned in a particular way. It is sufficient to notice that in contrast to modern editing, which is fundamentally interested in developing a single viewpoint, the redaction of the Torah, like the editing of other ancient works, was not interested in creating a purely consistent, singular perspective but incorporated a variety of voices and perspectives and wished to preserve them despite their repetitions and contradictions. This is part of the process of the formation of authoritative scripture.

The ultimate result of this redaction, which most likely took place during the Babylonian exile (586–538 BCE) or soon thereafter in the early Persian period, was the creation of a very long book, narrating what must have been thought to be the formative period of Israel, from the period of the creation of the world through the death of Moses. Perhaps the events narrated in Gen 1–11 were included as a type of introduction to the choosing of Abraham, describing in detail the failures of humanity, as seen especially in the flood narrative (Gen 6–9) and the Tower of Babel episode (Gen 11.1–9), which necessitated the choosing of a particular nation by God.

No other work of comparable length or inclusiveness, in terms of the time covered and the sources systematically incorporated, was produced in the ancient Near East. This extensive, inclusive nature of the Torah has created a fundamental and interesting problem with which all serious biblical interpreters have either consciously or subconsciously grappled: Do we concentrate on interpreting the individual sources, on hearing the voices of the constituent parts of the text before redaction took place? Or do we focus on the final product, an approach that has been called holistic reading? The annotations of the following books will draw attention to this issue, showing how meaning may be uncovered by looking both at the early building blocks of the text, and at the text in its final, redacted form.

Dwane Harris

GENESIS

NAME

Jewish tradition calls the first book of the Bible after its first significant word, *Bereshit*, which can be translated as "in the beginning" or "when first." It was common in the ancient world to name a book after its first word(s); for example, the great Mesopotamian epic of creation, *Enuma Elish*, gets its name from its first words, which mean "When on high." *Bereshit* also highlights the character of the book as the beginning of the Bible.

Christian tradition takes its name for the first book of the Bible, "Genesis," from the old Greek translation of the Torah, the Septuagint. *Genesis* in Greek means "origin" or "birth," and it appears in labels throughout the Greek translation of book, starting with two labels that refer to a "book of origins/births" (2.4 and 5.1 in the Septuagint). This name highlights an important dimension of the book of Genesis: its focus on genealogical origins. Though Genesis contains some of the most powerful narratives in the Bible, these stories occur within a genealogical structure, starting with 2.4 and ending with 37.2. Within this framework, the book may be understood as an expanded genealogy of the "children of Israel" who will be the focus of attention in the book of Exodus and subsequent books.

CANONICAL STATUS AND LOCATION

The book of Genesis, along with the rest of the Pentateuch/Torah, is one of the most central parts of both the Jewish Tanakh and the Christian Old Testament. Every ordering of the Bible places it first, and as such it sets the stage for what follows. Jews have long revered Genesis as the first book in the Torah, the most authoritative part of the Hebrew Bible. Christians have paid particular attention to Genesis because of its focus on God's work with humanity prior to the giving of the law. When Islam arose, it too featured a prominent focus on traditions from Genesis, such as the stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Ishmael, and Joseph. As a result, three major religious traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—all lay claim to the characters and stories of Genesis, each with their distinct understanding of the meaning of this important book of beginnings.

AUTHORSHIP

Ancient manuscripts of Genesis lack any claim of authorship. In the ancient Near East, most literary compositions were anonymous. Only during the Greco-Roman period do we start to see statements in early Jewish texts that Moses wrote Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch. By this time Judaism had been influenced by Greek culture, where authorship was important and the writings of Homer enjoyed the highest prestige. In response, the Jewish authors of texts such as Jubilees (second century BCE) claimed that their Pentateuch had an ancient author as well—Moses. This identification of authorship made some sense since the four books of the Pentateuch that follow Genesis all are set during the lifetime of Moses, and Moses is by far the most prominent human character in the Pentateuch. In addition, verses such as Deut 4.44, "This is the law [Heb *torah*] that Moses set before the Israelites," were understood by later tradition as attributing the authorship of the entire Pentateuch to Moses.

Nevertheless, careful readers of the Bible realized in subsequent centuries that there were problems with this claim of authorship by Moses. Some verses in Genesis refer to events after the time of Moses, such as when the Canaanites were no longer in the land (12.6). In addition, a few rabbis wondered how Moses would have written a narrative about his own death and burial (Deut 34). To be sure, interpreters who have made it an article of faith to affirm Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch have found ways to explain these and other problems. These discussions, however, highlight ways that Genesis and other books of the Pentateuch do not seem to have been written originally in the voice of Moses. Like other ancient texts, it was originally anonymous, and only attributed to Moses in the context of later, author-oriented cultures.

DATES OF COMPOSITION, HISTORICAL CONTEXTS, AND LITERARY HISTORY

Two hundred and fifty years of historical scholarship on Genesis have established that Genesis was written over many centuries, using oral and written traditions. "In the beginning," so to speak, were oral traditions, since

Genesis was composed in a largely oral culture. We can see marks of that oral culture in the way similar stories about wife endangerment, wells, and oaths were attached to different patriarchs; compare, for example, stories about Abraham in Philistia in 20.1–18; 21.22–34 with stories about Isaac in the same location in 26.6–33. Indeed, these sorts of oral traditions about beginnings were important at every stage in the composition of Genesis.

Most scholars agree that the texts now found in Genesis began to be written down sometime after the establishment of the monarchy in Israel in the tenth century BCE. Building on German scholarship from the nineteenth century, many scholars think they can find (fragments of) two early sources in Genesis, a tenth-century BCE Yahwistic source ("J" for German "Jahwist") written in Judah during the reign of David or Solomon, and an Elohistic source ("E") written in the Northern Kingdom of Israel sometime during the eighth century BCE. Much recent scholarship, however, has doubted the existence of such sources and preferred to see the earliest written origins of Genesis in separate compositions, such as a Yahwistic primeval history covering the creation and flood, an originally Northern Israelite narrative about Jacob and Joseph, and a separate Moses story. In either case, the earliest works now embedded in Genesis were products of scribes working in the context of the monarchies of early Judah and Israel.

Many important parts of Genesis, however, were not written until after the monarchy had fallen in 586 BCE and Judean leaders were living in exile in Babylon. According to many scholars, this is the time when the Abraham narrative was written, and the theme of the promise of the land and much progeny was added to earlier stories about Jacob and Joseph. Through such new compositions and additions, former royal scribes adapted earlier writings about creation and ancestors to reassure the exiles of God's intent to bless them as God once blessed their ancestors. Moreover, they used this theme of promise to link earlier separate stories to each other and to the Moses story that followed. Alongside these scribal adaptations, a priestly group of authors wrote a parallel version of many stories in Genesis, starting with the seven-day creation account in 1.1–2.3 and the genealogy in ch 5, continuing with a priestly version of the flood story, and moving on from God's covenant of circumcision with Abraham (ch 17) to short stories about the inheritance of this covenant promise by his descendants. This layer of texts in Genesis, parallel to the non-Priestly texts, is called "P" for "Priestly source," because of its strong links to other Pentateuchal texts in Exodus–Numbers that focus on the priesthood of Aaron and sacrificial worship. For example, in structure and vocabulary, the seven-day creation account in 1.1–2.3 anticipates the story of the creation of the Priestly tabernacle at the end of the book of Exodus (Ex 35–40).

The last major stage in the composition of Genesis was the combination of the older non-Priestly writings about creation–flood and ancestors with their priestly counterparts. This probably happened during the postexilic period, when exiles such as Nehemiah and Ezra had returned and were rebuilding Jerusalem and its Temple. The consolidation of parallel traditions now in Genesis (and the rest of the Pentateuch) resulted in a common Torah around which the community could unite. This consolidation, however, also produced powerful contrasts in Genesis that can be seen by the attentive reader, such as between the seven-day creation in 1.1–2.3 (P) and the earlier non-Priestly story of creation and aftermath in 2.4–3.24, or between a version of the flood culminating in Noah's sacrifice (e.g., 7.1–5 and 8.20–22) and a Priestly version of the flood that lacks such a sacrifice and does not describe the provision of extra animals for it (e.g., 6.11–22 and 9.1–17). The contrasts are so clear that historical scholars already started to distinguish between the Priestly layer and the other parts of Genesis almost three hundred years ago, and the specifics of this distinction of P and non-P throughout the Pentateuch has remained an assured result of historical scholarship.

In sum, we do not know many of the details of the earliest composition of Genesis, and the oral stories that stand behind the book are lost. Nevertheless, we do know that the book was written over centuries by multiple authors, and we have a more specific and assured picture of the final stages of its composition. This picture highlights the way Genesis is not limited to just one situation or set of perspectives. Instead, it is a chorus of different voices, a distillate of ancient Israel's experiences with God over the centuries, written in the form of continually adapted stories about beginnings.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

There are two main sections in Genesis, the primeval history in chs 1–11 and the ancestral history in chs 12–50. The latter section is often divided into the story of Abraham and Sarah (chs 12–25), the story of Jacob and Esau (chs 26–36), and the story of Joseph and his brothers (chs 37–50). Notably, despite the male focus of headings

like this and in the book itself, it is matriarchs of ancient Israel, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, who often play a determinative role in the Genesis narratives of birth and the fulfillment of God's promise.

The primeval history has two major sections that parallel each other: (1) the creation of the cosmos and stories of the first humans (1.1–6.4); and (2) the flood and dispersal of post-flood humanity (6.5–11.9). It features universal traditions similar to myths in other cultures, particularly in the ancient Near East and Greece. For example, the Mesopotamian Atrahasis epic was written hundreds of years before chs 1–11, yet it parallels numerous particulars of the biblical narrative as it describes the creation of the world, a flood, and the vow of the gods (here plural) not to destroy life with a flood again.

The ancestral history picks up where the primeval history left off and tells the story of God's choice of Abraham and the transmission of the promise (12.1–3) through Isaac and Jacob (whose name is changed to Israel in 32.28; 35.10), down to Jacob's twelve sons, the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. These stories are closest to oral folklore, so it is often difficult to find ancient written parallels to chs 12–50. Nevertheless, recent scholarship has found similarities between Israelite tales about the matriarchs and patriarchs and modern legends told in oral cultures. For example, there are some striking parallels between the depiction of the clever deceptions of Jacob and others (e.g., 25.27–34; 27.1–45) and the celebration of wily "tricksters" in Native American and other traditions.

These different parts of Genesis are brought together through the framework of *toledot* ("generations" or "descendants") headings (originally from the Priestly source), each of which guides the reader to the major focus of the section that follows it (2.4; 5.1; 6.9; 10.1; 11.10; 11.27; 25.12; 25.19; 36.1,9; 37.2). After an initial focus on all the peoples of the world descending from Adam (5.1) and Noah (6.9; 10.1), they highlight a narrowing focus in Genesis on those who receive the divine promise. The headings first lead us to Abraham, the first to receive God's promise (11.10,27). Then they distinguish between descendants of Abraham who receive the promise (Isaac and Jacob/Israel) and those who do not (Ishmael and Esau).

Using these kinds of guides, we can outline Genesis as follows:

I.	The primeval history	1.1–11.26
	A. Creation and violence before the flood	1.1–6.4
	B. Re-creation through flood and multiplication of humanity	6.5–11.26
II.	The ancestral history	11.27–50.26
	A. Gift of the divine promise to Abraham and his descendants	11.27–25.11
	B. The divergent destinies of the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac (Jacob/Esau)	25.12–35.29
	C. The divergent destinies of the descendants of Esau and Jacob/Israel	36.1–50.26

By the end of the book, the lens of the narrative camera has moved from a wide-angle overview of all the peoples of the world to a narrow focus on one small group, the sons of Jacob (also named "Israel"). As the book concludes, this family is stuck together in Egypt because of famine in their homeland, but they all are heirs of the promise of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This family of promise will become the people of promise featured at the outset of the book of Exodus.

INTERPRETATION

The history of interpretation of Genesis begins with its gradual composition over centuries. Early monarchic scribes reinterpreted oral traditions in writing the first preexilic compositions behind Genesis. Later exilic scribes expanded and joined earlier compositions in the process of addressing an audience of Judeans exiled in Babylon. Priests (exilic or postexilic) wrote their own versions of the beginnings of Israel, "P." Later postexilic writers consolidated the non-Priestly and Priestly writings into a common Torah that was the foundation for later Judaism. Each of these stages involved interpretation of how earlier writings pertained to the present. Genesis as we have it now is a crystallization of these multiple interpretations.

As discussed, the book has continued to be centrally important to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It was a major focus of early Jewish writings from the fifth century BCE to the first century CE. Later Jewish rabbinic scholars built on these traditions, writing midrashic interpretations of Genesis and expansive Aramaic translations of the book. Some of these Jewish traditions adapted the stories of Genesis so that they linked better with Torah law. For example, already in the book of Jubilees (written in the second century BCE), Abraham was portrayed as the first monotheist, destroying his father's idols before departing for the promised land. More-

over, the story of Abraham's virtual sacrifice of Isaac (22.1–19), termed the "Akedah" (the "binding") in Jewish tradition, was adapted by some readers into an account of how Isaac actually was sacrificed by Abraham and resurrected by God—anticipating later Jewish suffering and hopes for redemption.

Christian communities likewise focused on the stories of Genesis. For example, Paul, the central figure behind the outreach of Christians to Gentiles, argued that Abraham was an important example of how grace, through faith, came before the giving of the law. In his letter to the Romans (4.1–15) he notes that Abraham had his faith "reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gen 15.6) before he had undergone circumcision (Gen 17). Based on this and other arguments, Paul argued that Gentiles did not have to fulfill Torah requirements such as circumcision in order to partake of God's promise, as long as they joined themselves to Jesus Christ, whom Paul affirmed as the true spiritual offspring and heir of Abraham. Thus, whereas earlier and later Jewish interpreters tended to stress Abraham's and other patriarchs' Torah obedience, Paul, himself also a Jew, reinterpreted Abraham apart from Torah obedience in order to create a place for non-Jews to have a full relationship with the God of Israel.

Stories originating from Genesis also play a prominent role in Islam. Building on older Jewish traditions about Abraham destroying his father's idols, the Koran and other Muslim traditions revere Abraham as one of the first monotheists. Yet within Islam, Ishmael and not Isaac is the most important of his sons. It is Ishmael and not Isaac whom Abraham almost sacrifices (cf. Gen 22) according to Islamic tradition. Moreover, after that, Islamic tradition holds that Abraham and Ishmael went on to find and rebuild the Kaaba shrine at Mecca, Islam's most holy site. In this way, stories from Genesis are linked to two of the five central pillars of Islam: monotheism and pilgrimage.

In the modern era, Genesis has been an important battleground as communities have worked to live out ancient faiths in a modern world. For example, much discussion of Genesis, at least among Christians in the West, has focused on whether the stories of Genesis are historically true. Astronomers, biologists, and other scientists have offered accounts of the origins of the cosmos and humanity different from those in Gen 1–2. Some believers, however, insist on the importance of affirming the historical accuracy of every part of Genesis, and have come to see such belief as a defining characteristic of what it means to be truly faithful. This definition is relatively new: the historicity of Genesis was not a significant concern prior to the rise of modern science and the historical method; in fact, in premodern times, the stories of Genesis were often read metaphorically or allegorically. Moreover, many would argue that an ancient document such as Genesis is not ideally treated as scientific treatise or a modern-style historical source. Instead, its rich store of narratives offer nonscientific, narrative, and poetic perspectives on values and the meaning of the cosmos that pertain to other dimensions of human life.

Finally, recent years have seen a proliferation of other approaches to Genesis, particularly literary studies of Genesis in its final form and feminist rereadings of many narratives in Genesis. For example, some feminist scholars have questioned whether the typical reading of the garden of Eden story, which is highly critical of women, is correct. Others have highlighted the crucial role of the matriarchs as actors in the Genesis drama, especially as determiners of which son of a given patriarch will inherit the promise (e.g., Sarah and Rebekah) or as influencers of the levels of privilege among brothers (e.g., Rachel). Reading from another perspective, African American interpreters have traced the misuse of the story of Ham to reinforce racism and slavery, and a wide variety of interpreters have called into question the traditional interpretation of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as a judgment on homosexuality. In these ways and many others, an ever more diverse range of interpreters of the Bible have offered new perspectives on a text centrally important to readers for many centuries.

GUIDE TO READING

Many who have resolved to read the whole Bible actually have made it through Genesis, but what they find often surprises them. Those who know the stories of Genesis through the lens of later interpretation often assume that the characters in the book are saints. A closer reading reveals otherwise. The supposedly "faithful" Abraham often seems doubtful of God's intent to protect and provide for him, and Jacob and his family are distinguished by their ability to survive in the world through bargaining and trickery. Such stories pose a challenge to those who would use the Bible as a source of role models for ethical behavior. Standing at the Bible's outset, they challenge readers to develop other models for understanding and appreciating this ancient text.

Genesis has been a major focus for literary approaches to the Bible. These approaches adopt techniques from study of contemporary literature to illuminate the artistry and poetics of the Bible. The story of Joseph

and his brothers is a particularly constructive place to explore this kind of approach. Note how the narrator subtly leads the reader through an arc extending from Joseph's initial dreams of rule of his brothers in ch 37 to their submission to him and his provision of food for them in chs 42–50. Along the way, the speeches of Joseph and his brothers often do not correspond precisely to the reality described by the narrator, and the divergences reveal much about their characters. For example, Joseph's brothers trick their father about Joseph being killed (37.31–35), but their failure to report that their money was back in their sacks (42.25–34) is found out by Jacob, who guesses that they were planning to take Benjamin from him (42.35–38) as they actually took Joseph. Later, Joseph puts his brothers in a position where they can save themselves from slavery by betraying Benjamin, Joseph's full brother, as they once betrayed Joseph himself (44.1–17). Only when Judah, who formerly initiated the sale of Joseph into slavery (37.26–28), offers himself in place of Benjamin (44.18–34) does Joseph break down and reveal his true identity to his brothers (45.1–15). In this way the Joseph story artfully describes the first movement in Genesis from the urge toward fratricide (cf. 4.1–16; 27.41–45; see 33.12–17n.) to full reunion. Reading the Joseph story for such turns and characterizations can be an excellent introduction to the elegance of biblical narrative more generally.

Finally, one strategy in reading Genesis is to observe the differences between some of the writings embedded in it. The reader can compare parallel stories in Genesis, such as the different stories of creation in 1.1–2.3 and 2.4–3.24 or the parallel and yet different accounts about Hagar (chs 16 and 21), the covenant with Abraham (chs 15 and 17), or Abraham and Sarah (12.10–20 and 20.1–18), or Abraham, Abimelech, and Isaac (20.1–18; 21.22–34 and 26.6–33). Comparing these different accounts helps uncover the distinct perspectives of each and their contribution to the book of Genesis as a whole.

David M. Carr

1 In the beginning when God created[a] the heavens and the earth, [2] the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God[b] swept over the face of the waters. [3] Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. [4] And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. [5] God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was

[a] Or *when God began to create* or *In the beginning God created*

[b] Or *while the spirit of God* or *while a mighty wind*

1.1–11.26: The primeval history: from creation to the birth of Abraham. This unit is composed of two principal layers, a Priestly source that also provides an editorial framework (1.1–2.3; 5.1–28,30–32; 6.9–22; 7.6,11,13–16a,18–21,24; 8.1–2a,3–5,14–19; 9.1–17; 10.10–27), and an earlier non-Priestly primeval history that uses the divine name Yahweh (represented as LORD in the translation) found in the rest of 2.4–11.9. As seen in the chart on correspondences spanning the primeval history (see p. 13), the present combined text is an intricate narrative, with echoes of creation and un-creation, struggles surrounding human god-likeness, and other themes.

1.1–2.3: Creation culminating in sabbath. This Priestly account of creation presents God as a king, creating the universe by decree in six days and resting on the seventh. **1.1:** Scholars differ on whether this verse is to be translated as an independent sentence summarizing what follows (e.g., "In the beginning God created") or as a temporal phrase describing what things were like when God started (e.g., "When God began to create . . . the earth was a formless void"; cf. 2.4–6). In either case, the text does not describe creation out of nothing (contrast 2 Macc 7.28). Instead, the story emphasizes how God creates order from a watery chaos. **2:** As elsewhere in the Bible, *the deep* (Heb "tehom") has no definite article attached to it in Hebrew. Some scholars understand "tehom" to be related to the Babylonian goddess Tiamat, a deity representing primeval oceanic chaos, whom the head god, Marduk, defeated in *Enuma Elish,* a major Babylonian myth that includes an account of creation. Christian interpreters have often seen the "Spirit" of the Trinity later in this verse. *Wind* fits the ancient context better (see 8.1). **3:** The first of eight acts of creation through decree. Like a divine king God pronounces his will and it is accomplished. **4–5:** These verses introduce two other themes crucial to this account: the goodness of creation and the idea that creation is accomplished through God's separating, ordering, and naming elements of the universe. The seven-day scheme of 1.1–2.3 requires the creation of light, day, and night at the outset.

evening and there was morning, the first day.

6 And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." 7 So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. 8 God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

9 And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. 16 God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17 God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

20 And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." 21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." 23 And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind[a] in our image, according to our likeness;

[a] Heb *adam*

6–8: The *dome*/*Sky* made on the second day separates an upper ocean (Ps 148.4; see Gen 7.11) from a lower one. This creates a space in which subsequent creation can take place. **9–13:** Two creative acts: creation of dry land and command that the land bring forth vegetation. *Earth* is a feminine noun in Heb. The text thus echoes other ancient mythologies and the life cycle in having a feminine earth bring forth the first life in the universe (cf. Job 1.21). God is involved only indirectly here, commanding the earth to *put forth.* **14–19:** There is a correspondence between days one to three and days four to six (1 || 4, 2 || 5, 3 || 6), which heightens the symmetry and order of God's creation. Here, God's creation of heavenly *lights* on the fourth day corresponds to creation of light, day, and night on the first. In a critical response to non-Israelite cultures who worshiped these heavenly bodies, the bodies are not named and are identified as mere timekeepers. **20–23:** See vv. 14–19n. The second day featured the dome separating upper and lower oceans; the corresponding fifth day features the creation of birds to fly *across the dome* and ocean creatures, including sea monsters (Ps 104.25–26)—this is probably a polemic against other ancient Israelite traditions, which suggested that the sea monsters rebelled against God (e.g., Isa 51.9). God's blessing of the swarming creatures (1.22) anticipates a similar blessing that God will give humanity (1.28). **24–30:** The third day described creation of land and plants in turn, the corresponding sixth day involves the creation of two types of plant-eating land-dwellers: animals and then humans. **24–25:** Again, earth is involved in bringing forth life (see 1.9–13n.). **26:** The plural *us, our* (3.22; 11.7) probably refers to the divine beings who compose God's heavenly court (1 Kings 22.19; Job 1.6). *Image, likeness* is often interpreted to be a spiritual likeness between God and humanity. Another view is that this text builds on ancient concepts of the king physically resembling the god and thus bearing a bodily stamp of his authority to rule. Here this idea is democratized, as all of humanity appears godlike. This appearance equips humans for godlike rule over the fish, birds,

and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,[a] and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

27 So God created humankind[b] in his image,
in the image of God he created them;[c]
male and female he created them.
28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." 29 God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2 And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the LORD[d] God made the earth and the heavens, 5 when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; 6 but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— 7 then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the

[a] Syr: Heb *and over all the earth*
[b] Heb *adam*
[c] Heb *him*
[d] Heb YHWH, as in other places where "LORD" is spelled with capital letters (see also Exod 3.14-15 with notes).

and animals. **27–28:** The text stresses the creation of humanity as simultaneously male and female. This leads to the emphasis in the blessing of v. 28 and the book of Genesis as a whole on the multiplication of humanity in general (6.1; 9.1–7) and Israel in particular (17.2–6; 47.27). **29–30:** The text envisions an ancient mythological time before violence disturbs God's perfect order (cf. 6.11). **31:** Where individual elements of creation were "good" (vv. 4,10, etc.), the whole is *very good,* perfectly corresponding to God's intention. **2.1–3:** This day is the climax to which the whole seven-day scheme has led. God does not command the sabbath, but does rest (Heb "shabat") on the seventh day and bless it, weaving the seven-day rhythm into creation. The establishment of institutions is found in other ancient creation stories as well.

2.4a: Although many scholars view this as the conclusion to the Priestly creation account, it is probably a separate introduction to the following material, as elsewhere in Genesis (e.g., 5.1; 6.9; 10.1).

CORRESPONDENCES SPANNING THE PRIMEVAL HISTORY

Creation (1.1–2.3)	
Crime and punishment with eating of fruit (2.4–3.24)	Crime and punishment with *brother conflict* (4.1–16)
Prevention of godlike immortality (3.23–24)	Origins of cultures (4.17–24 origins of peoples, ch 10)
Flood: un-creation and re-creation (6.5–9.17)	
Spreading of **peoples** (10.1–11.9) as part of divine prevention of people gaining godlike power (11.1–9)	*Brother separation*: subjugation of a **people** (9.20–27) as a result of the first drinking of wine

2.4b–25: Creation in a garden. This non-Priestly Yahwistic tradition is different from 1.1–2.3, as evidenced by the different style and order of events. Though distinct from the Priestly account of 1.1–2.3, it nevertheless reflects ancient temple imagery. **4b–6:** A description of how things were prior to creation (cf. 1.1–2) is common in ancient Near Eastern creation stories. **7:** The wordplay on Heb "'adam" (human being; here translated "man" [cf. 1.26]) and "'adamah" (arable land; here *ground*) introduces a motif characteristic of this tradition: the relation of humankind to the soil from which it was *formed.* Human nature is not a duality of body and soul; rather

ground,[a] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. [8] And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. [9] Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[10] A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. [11] The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; [12] and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. [13] The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. [14] The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

[15] The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. [16] And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

[18] Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." [19] So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. [20] The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man[b] there was not found a helper as his partner. [21] So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. [22] And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. [23] Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,[c]
for out of Man[d] this one was taken."

[24] Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they be-

[a] Or *formed a man* (Heb *adam*) *of dust from the ground* (Heb *adamah*)
[b] Or *for Adam*
[c] Heb *ishshah*
[d] Heb *ish*

God's *breath* animates the *dust* and it becomes a single *living being* (Ps 104.29; Job 34.14–15). **8–9:** *Eden* means "delight." This divine garden recalls the "garden of God/the LORD" mentioned elsewhere in the Bible (13.10; Ezek 28.13–16; 31.8–9; Isa 51.3; Joel 2.3); such sacred gardens are known in other ancient Near Eastern temple traditions. In addition, ancient Near Eastern art and texts feature a prominent focus on trees, often associated with feminine powers of fertility. Usually such trees symbolize life, as in the *tree of life* here (3.22; see Prov 3.18; Rev 22.2,14,19). But this story focuses more on the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil,* symbolizing wisdom (2 Sam 14.17; 1 Kings 3.9). See further 12.6–8n. **10–14:** This section, along with the preceding one describing the "stream" rising up to water the ground (2.6), may draw on the ancient tradition that a temple is built on a primal mountain of creation from which the waters of the earth flow. The rivers mentioned here combine world rivers like the *Tigris* and *Euphrates* (both in Mesopotamia) with the local *Gihon* that flowed from Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Ps 46.4; Isa 7.6; Zech 14.8), although *Cush* is generally either Ethiopia or in Arabia. *Pishon* is unknown; *Havilah* is probably in Arabia. **16–17:** The speech concludes with a legal prohibition using technical Priestly death-penalty language (e.g., Lev 20.9,11,12). **18–20:** Animals are created after the first human rather than before (cf. 1.24–25). The human's naming of the animals implies a dominion over them analogous to that seen in 1.26–28. Yet the LORD God here contrasts with the all-powerful deity depicted in ch 1. The LORD God creates the animals in a comical, failed attempt to make a *helper* for the human that "corresponds to him" (NRSV: *as his partner*). **21–23:** Just as the connection of humanity to the ground is affirmed in the making of the first human (Heb "'adam") from earthy "humus" ("'adamah") (2.7), so also the connection of men and women is affirmed here through the crowning event of creation: the making of the woman from a part of the man (2.21–22). The man affirms this connection in a jubilant poem (2.23) featuring a wordplay on "man" (Heb "'ish") and "woman" ("'ishshah"). This concluding song of praise of the woman corresponds to God's concluding affirmation of all of creation as "very good" in 1.31. **24–25:** Sex between a *man* and *his wife* is regarded here as reflecting the essence

come one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,[a] knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

8 They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." 14 The LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all animals
and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.
15 I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel."

16 To the woman he said,

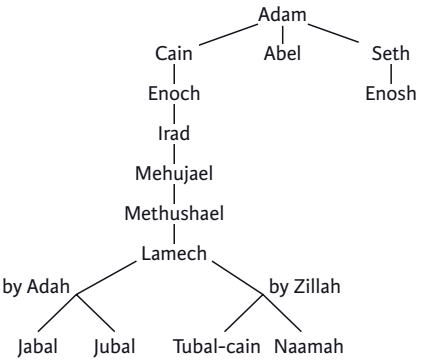
"I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;

[a] Or *gods*

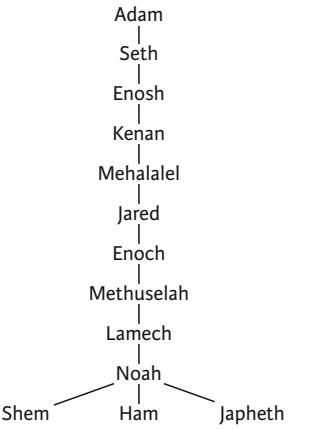
of the connection God created between men and women. The unashamed nakedness of the man and woman indicates their still uncivilized and innocent status.

3.1–24: Garden disobedience and punishment. Though this story is often taken by Christians as an account of "original sin," the word "sin" never occurs in it. Instead, it describes how the maturing of humans into civilized life involved damage of connections established in 2.4–25 between the LORD God, man, woman, and earth. **1:** This characterization of the snake emphasizes his wise craftiness (Heb "'arum"), a characteristic that contrasts with the innocent nakedness ("'arum") of the man and woman. Snakes were a symbol in the ancient world of wisdom, fertility, and immortality. Only later was the snake in this story seen by interpreters as the devil (see Wis 2.24). **4–5:** The snake introduces doubt by rightly predicting the consequences of eating the fruit—the humans will not be put to death as implied in the language of 2.17 and their eyes will be *opened* (see v. 7) so they gain wisdom, *knowing good and evil.* **6–7:** The woman sees that the pleasant fruit of the tree is desirable *to make one wise;* she eats it and shares it with her husband. The result is enlightenment: *the eyes of both were opened.* Such wisdom takes them from the earlier unashamed nakedness (2.25) to clothing, a mark of civilization. **8–13:** Legal forms recur as the LORD God interrogates first the man and then the woman (see 2.16–17n.). The disintegration of earlier connectedness is shown by the hiding of the humans from the LORD God and the tendency of the man to blame the woman (and implicitly the LORD God) for his action. Later interpreters of the story have shown a similar tendency to blame the woman (e.g., Sir 25.24; 1 Tim 2.14). **14–19:** A proclamation of sentence or penalty follows the interrogation, starting with the snake and concluding with the man. **14–15:** Here the crawl of the snake is linked to the LORD God's punishing curse. As a result, later audiences can look to the crawling snake as a reminder of the story and testimony to its truth. **16–19:** Though this is often understood as a curse of the woman to pain in childbirth, the word "curse" is not used in these verses. Another interpretation is that the woman is sentenced to endless "toil" (not *pain*) of reproduction, much as the man is condemned in vv. 17–19 to endless toil in food production. The man's *rule* over the woman here is a tragic reflection of the disintegration of

The descendants of Adam according to the Yahwistic source (Gen 4)



The descendants of Adam according to the Priestly source (Gen 5)



in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you."
17 And to the man[a] he said,
"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
about which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
19 By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."

20 The man named his wife Eve,[b] because she was the mother of all living. 21 And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man[c] and for his wife, and clothed them.

22 Then the LORD God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"— 23 therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. 24 He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

4 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced[d] a man with the help of the

[a] Or *to Adam*
[b] In Heb *Eve* resembles the word for *living*
[c] Or *for Adam*
[d] The verb in Heb resembles the word for *Cain*

original connectedness between them. **21:** The LORD God's clothing of the humans here reflects care for them in the process of becoming civilized, even though that process involved disobedience. **22:** As elsewhere in the ancient Near East, humans here are depicted as having a brief opportunity for immortality. The LORD God's fear of humans becoming godlike (cf. 1.26–27) recalls the snake's assertions in 3.4–5. The term "us" probably refers to the heavenly court (see 1.26n.). **24:** Cf. Ezek 28.13–16. The last echoes of temple imagery (see 2.8–9n.; 2.20–11n.) occur here. *The cherubim* are composite, winged creatures like the Sphinx of Egypt, half human and half lion. Representations of them guarded sanctuaries like the one in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6.23–28,32,35). The gate to the garden of Eden is in the east, like the processional gate to the Temple (Ezek 10.19).

4.1–16: Cain and Abel. While 2.4–3.24 featured relations between men and women, 4.1–16 turns to relations between brothers, paralleling 3.1–24 in many respects. **1:** This first verse emphasizes the wonder of creative

LORD." [2] Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. [3] In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, [4] and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, [5] but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. [6] The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? [7] If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

[8] Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field."[a] And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. [9] Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" [10] And the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! [11] And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. [12] When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." [13] Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! [14] Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me." [15] Then the LORD said to him, "Not so![b] Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him. [16] Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod,[c] east of Eden.

[17] Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch. [18] To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech. [19] Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. [20] Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who live in tents and have livestock. [21] His brother's name was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe. [22] Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

[23] Lamech said to his wives:
"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.

[a] Sam Gk Syr Compare Vg: MT lacks *Let us go out to the field*
[b] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *Therefore*
[c] That is *Wandering*

power in the first birth of a child. The child's name, "Cain," derives from a Hebrew word for create, "qanah." Ancient Israelites may have associated this Cain with the Kenite tribe (Num 24.21–22). **2:** The name "Abel" is the same word translated as "vanity" (or "emptiness") in the book of Ecclesiastes. His name anticipates his destiny. The distinction between Cain and Abel's occupations implies a further step toward culture. **3–5:** The story does not explain why the LORD *had regard for Abel and his offering* but not *for Cain and his offering.* Instead, it focuses on Cain's reaction to this unexplained divine preference for the sacrifice of his younger brother. **6–7:** This is the first mention of *sin* in the Bible. It is depicted as a predatory animal, *lurking at the door.* **10–11:** Blood is sacred, for it is the seat of life (9.4; Deut 12.23), and blood of unpunished murders pollutes the ground (Num 35.30–34). **13–14:** The importance of arable ground in these chapters can be seen in Cain's conclusion that expulsion from the *soil* means being *hidden* from the LORD's *face.* **16:** See 11.1–9n.

4.17–26: First overview of generations from creation to flood. Though the order of the names is different, most of them are variants of those in 5.1–32. **17:** Cain's marriage, along with his fear of others (4.14), presumes the presence of a broader population, indicating that the narratives about him were not originally connected with creation. **19–22:** The emphasis on civilization seen in 3.1–24 emerges again here in the depiction of the occupations of Lamech's sons. This tradition does not anticipate a flood narrative. **23–24:** The first half of this song may once have been used to brag about the ability of Lamech and his family to avenge their honor. Placed where it is and including v. 24, it now functions to demonstrate a major consequence of the expansion of civilization: an expansion of the violence with which the family tree began (see 4.1–16). **25:** A parallel to 4.1,

[24] If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold."
[25] Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, for she said, "God has appointed[a] for me another child instead of Abel, because Cain killed him." [26] To Seth also a son was born, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to invoke the name of the LORD.

5 This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind,[b] he made them[c] in the likeness of God. [2] Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them "Humankind"[b] when they were created.

[3] When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth. [4] The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters. [5] Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years; and he died.

[6] When Seth had lived one hundred five years, he became the father of Enosh. [7] Seth lived after the birth of Enosh eight hundred seven years, and had other sons and daughters. [8] Thus all the days of Seth were nine hundred twelve years; and he died.

[9] When Enosh had lived ninety years, he became the father of Kenan. [10] Enosh lived after the birth of Kenan eight hundred fifteen years, and had other sons and daughters. [11] Thus all the days of Enosh were nine hundred five years; and he died.

[12] When Kenan had lived seventy years, he became the father of Mahalalel. [13] Kenan lived after the birth of Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and had other sons and daughters. [14] Thus all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.

[15] When Mahalalel had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Jared. [16] Mahalalel lived after the birth of Jared eight hundred thirty years, and had other sons and daughters. [17] Thus all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred ninety-five years; and he died.

[18] When Jared had lived one hundred sixty-two years he became the father of Enoch. [19] Jared lived after the birth of Enoch eight hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. [20] Thus all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty-two years; and he died.

[21] When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. [22] Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. [23] Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years. [24] Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.

[25] When Methuselah had lived one hundred eighty-seven years, he became the father of Lamech. [26] Methuselah lived after the birth of Lamech seven hundred eighty-two years, and had other sons and daughters. [27] Thus all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty-nine years; and he died.

[a] The verb in Heb resembles the word for *Seth*
[b] Heb *adam*
[c] Heb *him*

introducing a new line of Seth. **26:** This tradition locates the beginning of use of the divine name "Yahweh" (LORD) in the primeval period, in contrast to the Priestly tradition, in which the divine name is not used until the time of Moses (Ex 6.2–6).

5.1–32: Second overview of generations from creation to flood. This Priestly genealogy parallels 4.1–26, building from the P creation story (1.1–2.3) to the Priestly strand of the flood narrative. **1a:** *The list of the descendants of Adam* was evidently a separate source which the Priestly writer drew upon for this chapter and used as a model for later notices (6.9; 10.1; etc.). **1b–2:** The Priestly writer uses this reprise of 1.26–28 to bind his genealogical source (where "'adam" designates a particular person) to 1.1–2.3 (where "'adam" designates humanity as a whole). **3:** The divine *likeness* (v. 1; see 1.26n.) was continued in Adam's son Seth and thus transmitted to succeeding generations (9.6). **4–32:** Ancient Babylonian lists similarly survey a series of heroes before the flood, each of whom lived fantastically long times. Like those lists, the list in 5.4–32 gives extraordinary ages for pre-flood figures, with ages declining over time to the 100–200 years of Israel's ancestors. The names in this list resemble those of 4.17–26 (see 4.17–26n.). **24:** Babylonian traditions also report that some individuals—e.g., Emmeduranki (a pre-flood figure), Etana, and Adapa—were taken up into heaven by God. Later Jewish tradition

28 When Lamech had lived one hundred
eighty-two years, he became the father of
a son; 29 he named him Noah, saying, "Out
of the ground that the LORD has cursed
this one shall bring us relief from our work
and from the toil of our hands." 30 Lamech
lived after the birth of Noah five hundred
ninety-five years, and had other sons and
daughters. 31 Thus all the days of Lamech
were seven hundred seventy-seven years;
and he died.

32 After Noah was five hundred years old,
Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and
Japheth.

6 When people began to multiply on the
face of the ground, and daughters were
born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that they
were fair; and they took wives for themselves
of all that they chose. 3 Then the LORD said,
"My spirit shall not abide[a] in mortals forever,
for they are flesh; their days shall be one
hundred twenty years." 4 The Nephilim were
on the earth in those days—and also after-
ward—when the sons of God went in to the
daughters of humans, who bore children to
them. These were the heroes that were of old,
warriors of renown.

5 The LORD saw that the wickedness of
humankind was great in the earth, and that
every inclination of the thoughts of their
hearts was only evil continually. 6 And the
LORD was sorry that he had made humankind
on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.
7 So the LORD said, "I will blot out from the
earth the human beings I have created—
people together with animals and creeping
things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that
I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in
the sight of the LORD.

9 These are the descendants of Noah.
Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his
generation; Noah walked with God. 10 And
Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and
Japheth.

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight,
and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And
God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all
flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth.
13 And God said to Noah, "I have determined
to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is
filled with violence because of them; now
I am going to destroy them along with the
earth. 14 Make yourself an ark of cypress[a]
wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it
inside and out with pitch. 15 This is how you
are to make it: the length of the ark three
hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

speculated at length on Enoch's travels. **29:** This (non-Priestly) verse links the curse of the ground in 3.17–19 and viticulture, which was inaugurated by Noah (9.20).

6.1–4: Divine-human reproduction illustrates the breaching of the divine-human boundary that the LORD God feared in 3.22. There the LORD God drove humans away from the tree of life. Here, in an abbreviated narrative often attributed to the Yahwistic primeval history, the LORD God limits their life span to *one hundred twenty* years, the life span of Moses (Deut 31.2); another interpretation is that the *one hundred twenty* years refer to a reprieve from punishment for several generations. Nothing appears to happen to the *sons of God* (see the "heavenly court" in 1.26n.) who instigated it all. **4:** The products of divine-human intercourse are legendary *warriors of renown*. They are distinguished here from the *Nephilim,* a race of giants said to exist both prior to and after those times (cf. Num 13.33; Deut 2.10–11).

6.5–8.19: The great flood. This story describes God's un-creation and re-creation of the world. The version preserved here is an interweaving of parallel accounts, one of which links with the Priestly traditions of 1.1–2.3; 5.1–32 and the other of which links with the Yahwistic primeval history in 2.4b–4.26. This type of intertwining of traditions is less usual but is necessary here to avoid describing two consecutive floods. **6.5–8:** This introduction links with the non-Priestly material, particularly 2.7 (compare 6.7). **5:** Though the biblical account is quite close in many respects to Mesopotamian flood stories, one significant difference is that this text attributes the flood to God's judgment on *the wickedness of humankind* rather than divine frustration with human overpopulation and noise. **9–22:** This section begins the Priestly account of the flood. **11–13:** Here the Priestly writers attribute the flood to corruption of the earth and *violence* filling it (see 4.8,10,23–24). **14–16:** In the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, the hero, named Utnapishtim, is told to build a similar houseboat, sealing it with pitch. The description of a three-leveled ark may be based on an ancient idea that the ark reflects the

height thirty cubits. [16] Make a roof[a] for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. [17] For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. [18] But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. [19] And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. [20] Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. [21] Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them." [22] Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

7 Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation. [2] Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate; [3] and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth. [4] For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground." [5] And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

[6] Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came on the earth. [7] And Noah with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood. [8] Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, [9] two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. [10] And after seven days the waters of the flood came on the earth.

[11] In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. [12] The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. [13] On the very same day Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark, [14] they and every wild animal of every kind, and all domestic animals of every kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every bird of every kind—every bird, every winged creature. [15] They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. [16] And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

[17] The flood continued forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. [18] The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. [19] The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; [20] the

[a] Or *window*

three-part structure of both universe and temple. It is about 437 x 73 x 44 ft (133 x 22 x 13 m). **18:** *Covenant,* see 9.8–17n. **19–20:** See 7.2–3n. **7.1–5:** This non-Priestly text parallels P in 6.11–22 and continues the tradition seen in 6.5–8. **2–3:** The provision of extra *clean* animals allows for the sacrifice that will occur in 8.20. If only one pair of each animal were taken, every sacrifice would eliminate a species. In contrast, the Priestly tradition presumes that both sacrifice and the distinction between clean and unclean animals (see Lev 11) were not introduced until Sinai. Therefore only one pair of each species is taken in that tradition (6.19–20; 7.14–15; cf. 7.9), and there is no concluding sacrifice (9.1–17). **6–16:** Noah, his family, and the animals enter the ark twice (7.7–9 || 7.13–16), reflecting the interweaving of the two flood accounts discussed earlier. Whereas the non-Priestly account has the flood caused by forty days of rain (7.4,12), the Priestly account attributes the flood to God's opening of the protective dome created on the second day (1.6–8), thus allowing the upper and lower oceans to meet (7.11). **17–24:** The P and non-P strands are thoroughly interwoven in this description of the flood itself, including multiple descriptions of the extinction of life outside the ark (7.21–23). Such flood imagery seems to have been a powerful image of worldwide chaos. Though many world traditions speak of floods, there is no geological

waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. 21 And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings; 22 everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. 23 He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. 24 And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days.

8 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; 2 the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, 3 and the waters gradually receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred fifty days the waters had abated; 4 and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5 The waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared.

6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made 7 and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. 8 Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; 9 but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. 10 He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; 11 and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. 12 Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more.

13 In the six hundred first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying. 14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. 15 Then God said to Noah, 16 "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. 17 Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." 18 So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. 19 And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every

evidence of a global flood of the sort described here. **8.1–5:** With the exception of 8.2b–3a, this unit comes from the Priestly writer. **1–2a:** God's wind echoes the first creation (1.2) in the process of starting the re-creation process. The closing of the *fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens* reestablishes the space for life that was first created on the second day (1.6–8). **4:** In the Gilgamesh epic the boat also rested on a mountain. *Ararat,* a region in Armenia. **6–12:** Part of the non-Priestly account. In the Gilgamesh epic the hero sent out two birds, a dove and a swallow, each of which came back; the third, a raven, did not return. **13–19:** The Priestly account resumes here with a description of the exit from the ark of Noah, his family, and the animals.

8.20–9.17: Divine commitments after the flood. This section features two accounts of God's commitments after the flood (8.20–22 [non-P]; 9.1–17 [P]), both of which include God's promise not to destroy life through such a flood ever again. **8.20–22:** The non-Priestly tradition describes Noah's *burnt offerings* of clean animals (see 7.2–3n.). In the Gilgamesh epic (see 6.14–16n.; 8.4n.; 8.6–12n.) the hero offered sacrifices and "the gods smelled the pleasant fragrance" and repented of their decision to destroy humanity. Here the LORD smells the *pleasing odor* of Noah's offering and resolves never again to curse the ground or destroy all creatures (v. 21). The LORD does this despite full recognition that the human heart has not changed (cf. 6.5–7). The final result of Noah's sacrifice is the LORD's promise to preserve the cycle of agricultural seasons (v. 22). A central aim of temple sacrifice in Israel and elsewhere was to preserve that cycle. The echo of that idea here is yet another way in which the "non-Priestly" primeval history reflects temple concerns (see also the focus on responses to

clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

22 As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease."

9 God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. 2 The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. 3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. 4 Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. 5 For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

6 Whoever sheds the blood of a human,
by a human shall that person's blood be shed;
for in his own image
God made humankind.

7 And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it."

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.[a] 11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 17 God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

18 The sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. 19 These three were the

[a] Gk: Heb adds *every animal of the earth*

sacrifice in 4.1–8 and notes on 2.8–9,10–14; 3.24). **9.1–17:** The Priestly tradition lacks an account of sacrifice (see 7.2–3n.). Instead it focuses on affirmations of some aspects of the creation in 1.1–31 and revisions of others. **1–7:** This section begins and ends with a reaffirmation of the fertility blessing (vv. 1,7; cf. 1.28). **2–6:** Here God revises the earlier command of vegetarianism (1.29–30). This is a partial concession to the "violence" observed prior to the flood (6.11,13) and an extension of the human dominion over creation described in 1.26–28. At the same time, God regulates this violence through stipulating that humans may not eat the blood in which life resides (see 4.10–11n.) and that humans as bearers of God's image (1.26–27) may not be killed. Since these laws are given to Noah and his sons, the ancestors of all post-flood humanity, they were used in later Jewish tradition as the basis for a set of seven Noachide laws that were seen as binding upon Gentiles as well as Jews (see Acts 15.20; 21.25; *b. San.* 58b). **8–17:** This is the first covenant explicitly described as such in the Bible, and it encompasses all of humanity, as well as the animal world (vv. 10,12,15) and even the earth (v. 13). A "covenant" is a formal agreement, often between a superior and inferior party, the former "making" or "establishing" (vv. 9,11) the bond with the latter, and the superior protecting the weaker party. This agreement is often sealed through ceremonies. In this case, God sets his weapon, the bow (Ps 7.12–13; Hab 3.9–11), in the sky facing away from humanity as a sign of God's commitment not to flood the earth again.

9.18–29: Noah and his sons. Aside from P in vv. 18–19 and 28–29, this text is part of the Yahwistic primeval history. It repeats major themes from the pre-flood period: farming (see 3.17; 5.29), nakedness, alienation in



Ch 10: The table of nations. Only places that can be identified with probability are shown.

sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.

[20] Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. [21] He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. [22] And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. [23] Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. [24] When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, [25] he said,

"Cursed be Canaan;
lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers."

[26] He also said,

"Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.
[27] May God make space for[a] Japheth,
and let him live in the tents of Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave."

[28] After the flood Noah lived three hundred fifty years. [29] All the days of Noah were nine hundred fifty years; and he died.

10 These are the descendants of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; children were born to them after the flood.

[2] The descendants of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. [3] The descendants of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. [4] The descendants of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim.[b] [5] From these the coastland peoples spread. These are the descendants of Japheth[c] in their lands, with their own language, by their families, in their nations.

[6] The descendants of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. [7] The descendants of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. [8] Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on earth to become a mighty warrior. [9] He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." [10] The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. [11] From that land he went into Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, and [12] Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. [13] Egypt became the father of Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, [14] Pathrusim, Casluhim, and Caphtorim, from which the Philistines come.[d]

[a] Heb *yapht*, a play on *Japheth*
[b] Heb Mss Sam Gk See 1 Chr 1.7: MT *Dodanim*
[c] Compare verses 20, 31. Heb lacks *These are the descendants of Japheth*
[d] Cn: Heb *Casluhim, from which the Philistines come, and Caphtorim*

the family, curse, and domination. **22–23:** Some have speculated that Ham had sex with his father, since seeing nakedness refers to incestuous behavior in Lev 20.17. Nevertheless, a more common expression for sexual intercourse in Leviticus is "uncover nakedness" (e.g., 18.6; 20.18) or "lie with" (e.g., 20.11–12). Moreover, the description of Ham's brothers' contrasting behavior in v. 23 (*their faces were turned away*) makes clear that the problem with Ham's behavior was that he did not look away. In the ancient Near East, sons were expected to protect the honor of their father, including caring for him when he was drunk (there was no negative judgment attached to getting drunk). Ham here does the opposite, both looking upon his father naked and telling his brothers about it. Such behavior is an example of the breakdown of family relationships seen in ch 3 (see 3.8–13,16–19n.) and ch 4 (see 4.1–16n.). **24–27:** Many have puzzled over why Canaan is cursed for his father, Ham's, misdeed (9.25–26). Some speculate that a story originally focusing on Canaan was modified to focus on Ham, featured in the broader context. Yet it is more likely that a later editor redirected an earlier curse on Ham toward Canaan, so that the curse could help justify the conquest of the land of Canaan (see 10.16–18a; 14.1–12,13–16n.).

10.1–32: The table of nations. See map on p. 23 and compare with 1 Chr 1.4–23. This is a (largely Priestly) survey of the world of the Israelites. Like many ancient peoples, they depicted the relations between national groups in kinship terms. This list identifies three large spheres of nations—Japhethites, Hamites, and Shemites—that overlap precisely in the holy land of Canaan. **2–5:** *The descendants of Japheth* had their center in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). **6–20:** *The descendants of Ham* lived in the Egyptian orbit. **8–15:** A fragment of the non-Priestly primeval history. It features a legend regarding Nimrod's building a kingdom in *Shinar* (southern Mesopotamia) and Assyria (vv. 8–12). Canaan is the father of two sons, *Heth* (representing the Hittites originally of Asia Minor) and *Sidon* (who represents the Phoenician coastal cities). **14:** See Jer 47.4; Am

15 Canaan became the father of Sidon his
firstborn, and Heth, 16 and the Jebusites, the
Amorites, the Girgashites, 17 the Hivites, the
Arkites, the Sinites, 18 the Arvadites, the Zema-
rites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the fami-
lies of the Canaanites spread abroad. 19 And
the territory of the Canaanites extended from
Sidon, in the direction of Gerar, as far as Gaza,
and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah,
Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. 20 These
are the descendants of Ham, by their families,
their languages, their lands, and their nations.

21 To Shem also, the father of all the chil-
dren of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth,
children were born. 22 The descendants of
Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and
Aram. 23 The descendants of Aram: Uz, Hul,
Gether, and Mash. 24 Arpachshad became
the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the
father of Eber. 25 To Eber were born two sons:
the name of the one was Peleg,[a] for in his
days the earth was divided, and his brother's
name was Joktan. 26 Joktan became the father
of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah,
27 Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 28 Obal, Abimael,
Sheba, 29 Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these
were the descendants of Joktan. 30 The ter-
ritory in which they lived extended from
Mesha in the direction of Sephar, the hill
country of the east. 31 These are the descend-
ants of Shem, by their families, their languag-
es, their lands, and their nations.

32 These are the families of Noah's sons, ac-
cording to their genealogies, in their nations;
and from these the nations spread abroad on
the earth after the flood.

11 Now the whole earth had one language
and the same words. 2 And as they mi-
grated from the east,[b] they came upon a plain
in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And
they said to one another, "Come, let us make
bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they
had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.
4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves
a city, and a tower with its top in the heav-
ens, and let us make a name for ourselves;
otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon
the face of the whole earth." 5 The LORD came
down to see the city and the tower, which
mortals had built. 6 And the LORD said, "Look,
they are one people, and they have all one
language; and this is only the beginning of
what they will do; nothing that they propose
to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come,
let us go down, and confuse their language
there, so that they will not understand one
another's speech." 8 So the LORD scattered

[a] That is *Division*
[b] Or *migrated eastward*

9.7. **16–18a:** This survey of Canaanite peoples lists ethnic groups rather than ancestors, including the *Jebusites* (centered in Jerusalem), *Amorites* (natives of the hill country), and the *Hivites* (a group in central Palestine). The list resembles later lists of peoples displaced by Israel (e.g., 15.19–21; Deut 7.1) and may be an addition from the same hand that directed Noah's curse toward Canaan (see 9.18–27n.). **21–31:** *Shem* is the father of the Semitic peoples, including Israel. Another pair of fragments of the non-Priestly primeval history (vv. 21,24–30) focuses on the *children of Eber.* The name *Eber* may be related to "Hebrew." If so, then this text postulates a wider group of *children of Eber* of which the Israelites are a part.

11.1–9: The tower of Babel. This narrative (from the non-Priestly Yahwistic primeval history) revisits the theme of preservation of the divine-human boundary. The threat to that boundary, self-reflective speech by the LORD, and act of divine prevention all parallel 3.22–24 and 6.1–4. With 11.2 the human family completes the eastward movement begun in 3.22–24 (cf. 4.16). Yet this story will focus on a scattering of the human family into different ethnic, linguistic, and territorial groups. As such, it now gives background for the table of nations in ch 10, although it was not originally written with that in view. **2:** *Shinar,* see 10.8–15n. **4:** The humans are depicted as fearful of being scattered and thus aiming to make a name for themselves through a *tower* reaching into heaven. The humans' intention here to stay together contradicts the divine imperative to "fill the earth" now found in Priestly traditions (1.28; 9.1,7). **6:** The LORD is described here as fearing the human power that might result from ethnic and linguistic unity (see 3.22). **7:** *Let us,* see 1.26n. **8–9:** The LORD's scattering of humanity and confusing of language is the final step in creation of civilized humanity, with its multiple territorial and linguistic groups. The movement toward cultural maturity begun in ch 3 is complete. Each step toward this end has been fraught with conflict and loss. The name "Babel," interpreted here as "confusion" but originally meaning "gate of god" (cf. 28.15n.) serves as a final testimony to the ambiguous results of this process.

them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused[a] the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

10 These are the descendants of Shem. When Shem was one hundred years old, he became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood; 11 and Shem lived after the birth of Arpachshad five hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.

12 When Arpachshad had lived thirty-five years, he became the father of Shelah; 13 and Arpachshad lived after the birth of Shelah four hundred three years, and had other sons and daughters.

14 When Shelah had lived thirty years, he became the father of Eber; 15 and Shelah lived after the birth of Eber four hundred three years, and had other sons and daughters.

16 When Eber had lived thirty-four years, he became the father of Peleg; 17 and Eber lived after the birth of Peleg four hundred thirty years, and had other sons and daughters.

18 When Peleg had lived thirty years, he became the father of Reu; 19 and Peleg lived after the birth of Reu two hundred nine years, and had other sons and daughters.

20 When Reu had lived thirty-two years, he became the father of Serug; 21 and Reu lived after the birth of Serug two hundred seven years, and had other sons and daughters.

22 When Serug had lived thirty years, he became the father of Nahor; 23 and Serug lived after the birth of Nahor two hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.

24 When Nahor had lived twenty-nine years, he became the father of Terah; 25 and Nahor lived after the birth of Terah one hundred nineteen years, and had other sons and daughters.

26 When Terah had lived seventy years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

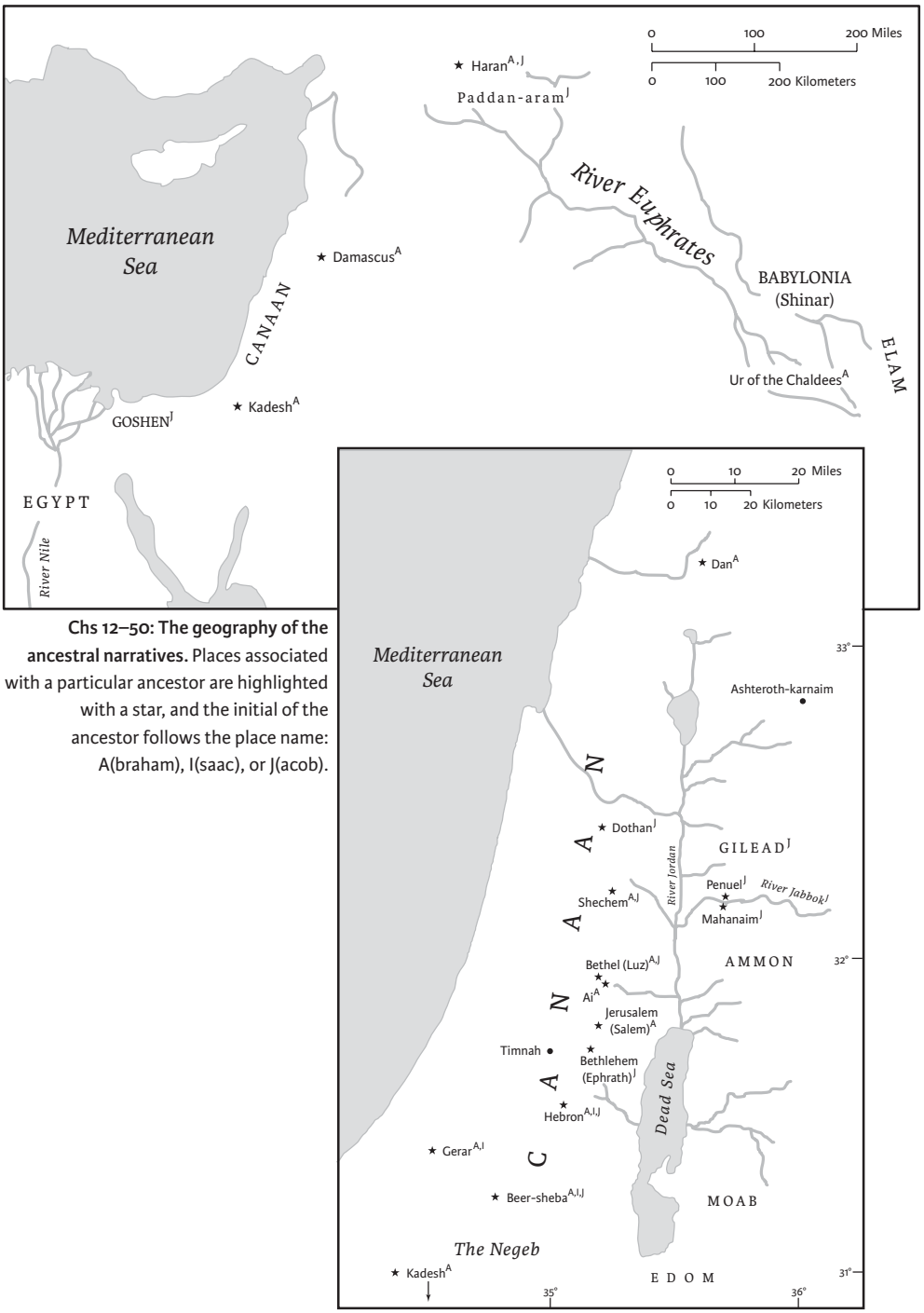
27 Now these are the descendants of Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot. 28 Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran

[a] Heb *balal*, meaning *to confuse*

11.20–26: The descendants of Shem. This genealogy from the Priestly tradition closely parallels 5.1–32 (though it lacks death notices). It builds a genealogical bridge from Shem to Terah, the father of Abraham. Parts of the genealogy of Shem (10.21–31) are repeated, but now the text focuses exclusively on those descendants who will lead to Abraham. The text implies that all these descendants are firstborn sons, thus setting up Abraham as the firstborn heir of Shem, the eldest of Noah's sons.

11.27–25.11: The story of Abraham and his family. The bulk of this section is a non-Priestly narrative about Abraham. It builds on a blend of oral traditions about him, such as the stories standing behind the present narratives about his descent into Egypt (12.10–20), the Abraham and Lot cycle (13.2–13; 18.1–16; 19.1–28,30–37), a pair of Hagar and Ishmael narratives (16.1–14 and 21.8–20), and the tradition about Abraham's stay in Philistine Gerar (20.1–18; 21.22–34; cf. 26.6–33). Some scholars think that these once were part of two separate written J and E sources, with remnants of J (the Yahwistic source) found primarily in chs 12–19 (along with ch 24) and E (Elohistic source) fragments in chs 20–22. Others see indicators that these chapters, though building on a range of separate traditions, were composed as a single whole (see the Introduction and 20.1–18n.). Scholars generally agree, however, that other parts of the Abraham story were added later, such as the story of conquest and covenant in 14.1–15.21 and Priestly materials found in 17.1–27 and elsewhere (see 11.27–32n.; 12.4b–5n; 16.3n; 17.1–27n; 21.3–5n; 25.7–11n). For patterns uniting this complex whole, see "Chiasm in the Abraham Story" on p. 38.

11.27–32: Introduction to the Abraham story. The genealogical heading (v. 27) and the concluding notices regarding Terah's travels and death (vv. 31–32) are Priestly, but most scholars consider vv. 28–30 to be earlier, non-Priestly material. **27:** *Abram,* see 17.5n. The designation "Abraham" is used here in the annotations as the better-known name of Abra(ha)m. Aside from his birth, nothing is told about the early life of Abraham; this lack is filled in by later postbiblical tradition. **29–30:** *Sarai,* see 17.15n. This is the first appearance of the theme of barrenness of the three most central matriarchs: Sarai/Sarah, Rebekah (25.21), and Rachel (29.31). Their initial



Chs 12–50: The geography of the ancestral narratives. Places associated with a particular ancestor are highlighted with a star, and the initial of the ancestor follows the place name: A(braham), I(saac), or J(acob).

the father of Milcah and Iscah. 30 Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

31 Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there. 32 The days of Terah were two hundred five years; and Terah died in Haran.

12 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."[a]

4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons

[a] Or *by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves*

barrenness helps highlight God's power to provide heirs of the promise. **31:** *Haran,* in northwest Mesopotamia, was Abraham's ancestral home, according to 24.10 (cf. 29.4). Nonbiblical sources show that several of the names of Abraham's ancestors in the preceding genealogy were place names near Haran; e.g., Peleg (vv. 16–19; also 10.25), Serug (vv. 20–23), Nahor (vv. 24–25; cf. 26), and Terah (vv. 24–26).

12.1–3: The LORD's call and promise to Abraham initiates a major new movement in the story of Genesis. This is the first of three divine speeches in which a patriarch is given travel directions and promises of blessing (12.1–3; 26.2–5; 46.1–4; see also 31.3,13). The combination of command (v. 1) and promise (vv. 2–3) implies that the LORD's fulfillment of the promise will follow upon Abraham's fulfillment of the command. **1:** This command to Abraham is similar to, and may have been modeled on, the later divine command for Jacob to return to the "land of your ancestors and to your kindred" (31.3) and to "the land of your birth" (31.13). Due to the complex history of the book of Genesis, it is not surprising that material found in earlier chapters is based on material found in later parts of the book. **2:** The promise that *a great nation* will come from Abraham stands in tension with Sarah's barrenness in 11.30. Much of the following narrative revolves around this tension. *Nation* implies not just a numerous people (cf. 13.16; 15.5; etc.), but a politically independent social group. *I will bless you,* involves giving Abraham the power to flourish in flocks, other riches, and offspring (12.16; 13.2,5,16; etc.; cf. Job 42.12–13). *And make your name great,* to become famous. The LORD promises Abraham a fame similar to that promised to Israelite kings (2 Sam 7.9; 1 Kings 1.47). Thus Abraham, as heir of Shem (see 11.20–26n.)—which means "name" in Hebrew—gains the great "name" that the peoples at Babel had futilely sought for themselves (cf. 11.4). *So that you will be a blessing,* implies that those associated with Abraham and his heirs will flourish as well. Later Laban (30.27–30) and Potiphar (39.5) will both gain blessing through their association with Abraham's heirs. **3:** Though obscured in the translation, the promise to curse *the one who curses* Abraham is a slight modification of a similar formula. Whereas the parallel texts (e.g., 27.29; Num 24.9) speak of God cursing the one who curses, the LORD in this text promises to curse anyone who even "treats [Abraham] lightly." *In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* has been a particularly important passage in Christian tradition. Building on the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, Paul interpreted this as a blessing of the Gentiles through Abraham (Gal 3.8). Yet the closest analogies to this promise suggest that the alternate translation, *by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves,* i.e., they will say "may we be like Abraham," is probably closer to the meaning of the Hebrew. Like 48.20, it envisions other nations of the world looking to Abraham's great blessing and wishing a similar one on themselves (see Ps 72.17). Later in the narrative we see this kind of recognition of Abraham and his heirs' special blessing by foreigners like Abimelech (26.28), Laban (30.27), Potiphar (39.3–5), Joseph's jailer (39.21–23), Pharaoh (Ex 1.9), Jethro (Ex 18.10–12), and Balaam (24.1).

12.4–9: Abraham's first journey to the land. 4b–5: Part of the Priestly Abraham narrative. **6–8:** This brief report of Abraham's journey anticipates the much longer story of Jacob's travels through similar places: Shechem with its oak (cf. 33.18–35.4) and Bethel (cf. 35.1,9–16; see map on p. 27). Sacred trees like the *oak of Moreh* ("oracle giver"; cf. 13.18; 18.1; 35.4; Deut 11.30; Josh 24.26; Judg 9.37) occur elsewhere in Genesis (e.g., 21.33; 35.8) and seem to have played an important role in the religion of the ancient Israelites and surrounding peoples (see 2.8–9n.).

whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, [6] Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak[a] of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. [7] Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring[b] I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. [8] From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD. [9] And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

[10] Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land. [11] When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; [12] and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. [13] Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account." [14] When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. [15] When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. [16] And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels.

[17] But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. [18] So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? [19] Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her, and be gone." [20] And Pharaoh gave his men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had.

13 So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb.

[2] Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. [3] He journeyed on by stages from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, [4] to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. [5] Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, [6] so that the land could not support both of them living together; for their possessions were so great that they could not live together, [7] and there was strife between the herders of Abram's livestock and the herders of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites lived in the land.

[8] Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred. [9] Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." [10] Lot looked about him, and saw that the plain of the Jordan was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; this was before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. [11] So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward; thus they separated from each other. [12] Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the Plain and moved his

[a] Or *terebinth*
[b] Heb *seed*

12.10–13.1: First story of endangerment of the matriarch (cf. ch 20; 26.6–11). Putting Sarah in jeopardy to protect himself, Abraham appears not to trust the promise of protection just offered him. On Abraham's later claim to be Sarah's half-brother, see 20.12n. Overall, this story of descent into Egypt because of famine and rescue through plagues anticipates many aspects of the later narrative about Israel's descent into Egypt and Exodus from it (Gen 45–Ex 14).

13.2–18: Split of Abraham and Lot. 2–7: This narrative describing huge flocks and riches in Abraham's household testifies to the preliminary fulfillment of the promises of blessing in 12.2–3. *Lot,* see 11.27,31. **8–13:** The narrative anticipates the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (ch 19) through mention of those cities, the wickedness of their inhabitants (13.13), and references to *Zoar* (19.19–23). It also notes that Lot, the heir apparent, does

tent as far as Sodom. 13 Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.

14 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring[a] forever. 16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. 17 Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." 18 So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks[b] of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the LORD.

14 In the days of King Amraphel of Shinar, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Chedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim, 2 these kings made war with King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). 3 All these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea).[c] 4 Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. 5 In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and subdued the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, 6 and the Horites in the hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the edge of the wilderness; 7 then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and subdued all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who lived in Hazazon-tamar. 8 Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim 9 with King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar, four kings against five. 10 Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits; and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. 11 So the enemy took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way; 12 they also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who lived in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

13 Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks[b] of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner; these were allies of Abram. 14 When Abram heard that his nephew had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred eighteen of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and routed them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16 Then he brought back all the goods, and also brought

[a] Heb *seed*
[b] Or *terebinths*
[c] Heb *Salt Sea*

not choose to stay in the land of Canaan (vv. 10–12). **14–17:** Only after Abraham has split from Lot and settled in *Canaan* does God show him the land (cf. 12.7). This certifies that Abraham has fulfilled God's command to go to the land that God "will show" him (12.1). Similarly, Jacob is promised the land after he has split from Esau (28.13–14). **18:** *Mamre* was an ancient southern sacred place, slightly north of Hebron, with which Abraham was associated (see ch 23).

14.1–24: Abraham's rescue of Lot from the eastern kings. This and ch 15 are closely related (see 15.1n., 15.12–16n.) and link in multiple ways with late layers of the primeval history (see 9.18–27n.; 10.16–18a n.). **1–12:** Here an alliance of four eastern kings conquers five Canaanite kings associated with the Dead Sea region where Lot is said to have settled. In a fulfillment of the curse of Noah predicting the enslavement of Canaan by Shem (9.25–26), these Canaanite kings had been subject for twelve years to an eastern alliance of kings headed by the Shemite king, *Chedorlaomer* (cf. 10.22). When the Canaanite kings rebel, the eastern kings crush the revolt and seize Lot and his household and take them back toward their home. Neither the battle nor any of the kings can be identified in nonbiblical sources. **13–16:** Abraham's ability to pursue and overcome the Shemite conquerors testifies to his status as heir of Shem and recipient of Shem's blessing (9.25–27). Moreover, this demonstrates the fulfillment of the divine promise to protect Abraham and his household (12.3). **13:** *Hebrew,* probably meaning

back his nephew Lot with his goods, and the women and the people.

17 After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18 And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High.[a] 19 He blessed him and said,

"Blessed be Abram by God
Most High,[a]
maker of heaven and earth;
20 and blessed be God Most High,[a]
who has delivered your enemies into
your hand!"

And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything. 21 Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." 22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD, God Most High,[a] maker of heaven and earth, 23 that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, so that you might not say, 'I have made Abram rich.' 24 I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. Let them take their share."

15 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." 2 But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"[b] 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." 4 But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." 5 He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed the LORD; and the LORD[c] reckoned it to him as righteousness.

7 Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." 8 But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9 He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove,

[a] Heb *El Elyon*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Heb *he*

an outsider, as often in the Bible (see 39.14; Ex 1.15; 1 Sam 29.3; Jon 1.9). **17–20:** This is the only section of Genesis associating a patriarch with Jerusalem; indeed, it is the only place in the entire Torah where Jerusalem is referred to by name. As heir of Shem, Abraham now receives the blessing of the priest in what will become Israel's royal and religious center. *Salem* is a name for Jerusalem (Ps 76.2), where the ancient high god of the Canaanite pantheon, El Elyon (*God Most High*), was worshiped in pre- and early Israelite times. The *King's Valley* is near Jerusalem (2 Sam 18.18), and the priest *Melchizedek* appears as the founder of a royal priesthood in an ancient Jerusalemite psalm (110.4). This mysterious Melchizedek was later interpreted eschatologically at Qumran and typologically by early Christians (Heb 7.1–17). **20:** *One-tenth,* i.e., a tithe; cf. 28.22; Num 18.21–28.

15.1–21: The first covenant with Abraham. The LORD promises Abraham protection, reward, and an heir in the wake of his recent military encounter with the eastern kings. **1:** The promise to be a *shield* (Heb "magen") for Abraham echoes Melchizedek's praise of the god who "delivered" ("miggen") Abraham (14.20), and the *reward* replaces the goods he had refused from the king of Sodom (14.21–24). **2–5:** The parallel objections from Abraham (vv. 2 and 3) and parallel divine responses (vv. 4 and 5) may be indicators of growth in this text, whether parallel sources (J and E; see the Introduction) or the supplementation of an earlier story by later material. **6:** This verse indicates that Abraham considered his objections answered. Though later tradition has generally understood God to be the one who reckoned righteousness to Abraham (e.g., Rom 4.9; Gal 3.6), the subject and object are not specified in Hebrew. *Righteousness* is being true to one's social obligations and commitments. It is possible that it is Abraham here who reckons righteousness to the LORD, certifying that he now believes that the LORD will be true to his commitments in 15.1 (cf. 15.2–3). **7–21:** This section parallels the promise-objection-reassurance pattern of 15.1–6, but with the added component of a covenant ceremony sealing God's promise to give Abraham the land. **9–17:** The ceremony (9–11,17) reflects an ancient practice in which the participants in a covenant oath passed through the dismembered parts of an animal and proclaimed a similar fate on themselves if they

and a young pigeon." [10] He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. [11] And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

[12] As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. [13] Then the LORD[a] said to Abram, "Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; [14] but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. [15] As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. [16] And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

[17] When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. [18] On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, [19] the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, [20] the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, [21] the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

16 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, [2] and Sarai

[a] Heb *he*

disobeyed the terms of the agreement (see Jer 34.18). Likely because of this, the Hebrew word for "making" a covenant is literally to "cut" a covenant (found in 15.18). In this case, God passes between the pieces in the form of fire (see Ex 3.2; 13.21). **12–16:** A speech has been inserted into this ceremony that echoes Abraham's earlier triumph over the eastern kings at "Dan" and return from there with "goods" (Heb "rekush"; 14.14–16). Here in v. 14 God promises a future *judgment* (Heb "dan") on Egypt and escape of Abraham's descendants from there with yet more goods (again "rekush" in 15.14; see Ex 3.21–22; 12.33–36). Though this is promised in four generations at the end of the speech (15.16), a Priestly editor may have modified this in v. 13 to four hundred years in order to better match Priestly material in Exodus (Ex 12.40). **16:** *The iniquity of the Amorites,* see Lev 20.23; Deut 9.4. **18–21:** The ceremony is concluded with God's promise to give the land of the Canaanite peoples (cf. 10.16–18) to Abraham. **18:** The boundaries given here are the broadest definition of the promised land in the Bible. They correspond to similarly broad, ideal descriptions of the land in the Deuteronomistic History (e.g., 2 Sam 8.3; 1 Kings 4.21; cf. Deut 1.7; 11.24; Josh 1.4). The phrase *river of Egypt* occurs only here, and may refer to the Nile. But elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., Num 34.5; 2 Kings 24.7; Isa 27.12) and in other sources, the "Wadi of Egypt" is apparently either the Wadi Besor or the Wadi el-Arish, both south of Gaza. **19–21:** The form of this list of ten nations to be displaced resembles the list of Canaanite groups in Gen 10.16–18, but its contents more resemble lists of Canaanite peoples in the Tetrateuch (e.g., Ex 3.8,17; 13.5) and Deuteronomistic History (e.g., Deut 7.1; 20.17; Josh 3.10). This list, however, is longer than others. Though it is missing the "Hivites" (see 10.16–18a n.), who occur on most other lists, this list is unique in including the *Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites,* and *Rephaim.*

16.1–16: Hagar's encounter with God and the birth of Ishmael stand at the heart of the Abraham story (see "Chiasm in the Abraham Story" on p. 38), enveloped by parallel traditions dealing with covenant (chs 15 and 17), Lot and Abraham (chs 13–14 and 18–19), the endangerment of Sarah (12.10–20 and ch 20), and the promise (12.1–6 and 22.1–19). This story echoes the story of Abraham's endangerment of Sarah in 12.10–20 in describing the complications resulting from human attempts to fulfill the promise, in this case the promise of offspring. In addition, like that story, this one links with the Exodus, though offering a quite different picture. In the book of Exodus Israelites are "oppressed" (Heb "'anah") by the Egyptians (Ex 1.12), flee east toward Israel through the wilderness, and meet God there (Ex 19.24.1–2,10–11). In this chapter, however, it is an *Egyptian*, Hagar, who is "oppressed" (Heb "'anah"; "dealt harshly with" in the NRSV of v. 6) by the Israelite matriarch Sarah; Hagar flees west from Israel toward Egypt and meets God in the wilderness. Later, in Gen 21.8–21, we will see a doublet of this story, where Hagar again must leave Abraham's clan, go into the desert, and hear an oracle that will revolve around an interpretation of the name of Hagar's son, Ishmael (Heb for "God hears"). Both stories have their origins in ancient traditions surrounding the origins of the Ishmaelites, seen in Genesis as ancestors of the Arab peoples (see Gen 25.12–18), but the version here in Gen 16 is distinguished by its echoes of the Exodus story

said to Abram, "You see that the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. 4 He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" 6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her.

7 The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." 9 The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." 10 The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." 11 And the angel of the LORD said to her,

"Now you have conceived and shall bear
a son;
you shall call him Ishmael,[a]
for the LORD has given heed to your
affliction.
12 He shall be a wild ass of a man,
with his hand against everyone,
and everyone's hand against him;
and he shall live at odds with all his kin."

13 So she named the LORD who spoke to her, "You are El-roi";[b] for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?"[c] 14 Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi;[d] it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

15 Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him[e] Ishmael.

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty;[f] walk before me, and be blameless. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." 3 Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram,[g] but your

[a] That is *God hears*
[b] Perhaps *God of seeing* or *God who sees*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] That is *the Well of the Living One who sees me*
[e] Heb *Abram*
[f] Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*
[g] That is *exalted ancestor*

and ultimately sympathetic focus on Hagar. **2:** According to ancient surrogate motherhood customs, a wife could give her maid to her husband and claim the child as her own (30.3,9). **3:** This duplicate notice of Sarah's transfer of Hagar to Abraham as a surrogate mother probably comes from the Priestly source. **4–5:** The translation *looked with contempt* implies that Hagar disdained her mistress, whereas the Hebrew verb ("qll," "to treat lightly") only implies that Hagar did not look up to her mistress the way she once did. Having had a child, Hagar is now derisively seen by her mistress as a slave who is not sufficiently submissive. **7:** Here *the angel of the LORD* is not a heavenly being subordinate to God but the LORD (Yahweh) in earthly manifestation, as is clear from v. 13 (cf. 21.17,19; Ex 14.19). **11:** *The LORD has given heed,* lit., "The LORD has heard," an explanation of the name Ishmael (see note *a* and 21.17n.). **13:** *God of seeing* (see note *b*) was the name of the deity at the Beer-lahai-roi well, now identified with Israel's God. On Hagar's question, cf. 32.30; Ex 33.20; Judg 6.22–23; 13.22. **15–16:** Priestly material focusing more on Ishmael than on Hagar.

17.1–27: The everlasting covenant and sign of circumcision. This account from the Priestly tradition is parallel to that in 15.1–21 and links to the Priestly covenant with Noah in 9.8–17; see further 9.8–17n. **1:** The phrase translated as *God Almighty* (Heb "El Shadday") is variously understood as "God [or "El"], the one of the mountains," "God of the Shadday [deities]," or even "fertile God" (literally, "God with breasts," see 49.25). Whatever its original meaning, the Priestly tradition understands this epithet to be what the early ancestors of Israel called God before they learned the name Yahweh (Ex 6.2–8). **2–6:** In a parallel to 15.1–6 this text includes the

name shall be Abraham;[a] for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring[b] after you. 8 And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God."

9 God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. 13 Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. 14 Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

15 God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!" 19 God said, "No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac.[c] I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. 20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year." 22 And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

23 Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. 24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the

[a] Here taken to mean *ancestor of a multitude*
[b] Heb *seed*
[c] That is *he laughs*

promise of offspring in the covenant. **5:** A new name signifies a new relationship or status (see 32.28). *Abraham,* a dialectal variant of *Abram,* means "the [divine] ancestor is exalted." Here the name is explained by its similarity to the Hebrew for *ancestor of a multitude,* referring to nations whose ancestry was traced to Abraham (v. 16; 28.3; 35.11; 48.4), such as Edomites and Ishmaelites. The promise to make Abraham "exceedingly numerous" (v. 2) and *exceedingly fruitful* (v. 6) echoes the broader fertility blessing given animals (1.22; 8.17) and humanity (1.28; 9.1,7) in the primeval history. **7:** Within the Priestly tradition, the promise to be God to Abraham and his offspring leads to the divine provision of religious laws and a tabernacle sanctuary into which God comes to dwell in Israel's midst (Ex 25–31; 35–40). Like the covenant with Noah (9.8–17), this covenant to be bound to Israel is *an everlasting covenant* (vv. 13,19) because it is grounded in the will of God, not human behavior. It is a covenant of grant, rather than a conditional covenant. **9–14:** Circumcision was an ancient rite practiced among some Semitic groups, perhaps originally connected to marriage (see 34.14–17), probably having to do with warding off demons (see Ex 4.24–26). Here, however, it is moved to early childhood and reinterpreted as a sign of God's everlasting covenant with Israel, a mark of membership in the covenant community. Unlike the covenant with Noah (9.1–17), this one pertains only to the household and heirs of Abraham. **15:** *Sarah,* meaning "princess," is a variant of *Sarai;* see v. 5n. **17:** Abraham's laughter here in the Priestly tradition anticipates Sarah's laughter in the non-Priestly account (18.9–15n.).

flesh of his foreskin. 25 And his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26 That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised; 27 and all the men of his house, slaves born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

18 The LORD appeared to Abraham[a] by the oaks[b] of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. 3 He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5 Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." 6 And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures[c] of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." 7 Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 8 Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

9 They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." 10 Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" 13 The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

16 Then the men set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way. 17 The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?[d] 19 No, for I have chosen[e] him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." 20 Then the LORD said, "How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! 21 I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know."

[a] Heb *him*
[b] Or *terebinths*
[c] Heb *seahs*
[d] Or *and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him*
[e] Heb *known*

18.1–15: The LORD's visit to Abraham and Sarah. 1: The *oaks of Mamre,* see 12.6–8n.; 13.18n. **2–8:** A description of ideal hospitality of Abraham parallel to that of Lot in 19.1–11. This motif of secretly divine visitors is widespread in folklore. The relation between the three visitors and the LORD (v. 1) is unclear. The narrative fluidly shifts from speaking of them as a group (e.g., v. 9) to having "the LORD" speak alone (e.g., v. 13; cf. v. 10). Later materials in v. 22 and 19.1 conceive of "the LORD" as one of the three angels (see 16.7n.), though this is not specified in the preceding narrative ("one" in the NRSV of v. 10 is a translator's addition). **9–15:** The narrator uses the theme of Sarah's laughter (cf. 17.17) to stress the incredibility of God's promise of a son (eventually Isaac, 21.1–3). **11:** *Ceased . . . after the manner of women,* a circumlocution for menopause. **12:** Isaac's name means "he [God] laughs," and other traditions develop the link with laughter as well (17.17–19; 21.6,8; 26.8).

18.16–33: Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah. 17–19: This first speech by the LORD stresses that he speaks to Abraham because he chose him to teach his household the ways of righteousness. In vv. 22–32 the LORD will model such righteousness in his responsiveness to Abraham. **18:** See 12.3n. **20–21:** This second speech by the LORD echoes his decision at Babel to *go down* and *see* what was going on there (11.5; cf. divine self-reflection in 3.22; 6.3,5–7; 11.6–7). Unlike vv. 17–19, this speech suggests that the LORD has not yet

22 So the men turned from there, and went
toward Sodom, while Abraham remained
standing before the LORD.[a] 23 Then Abraham
came near and said, "Will you indeed sweep
away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Sup-
pose there are fifty righteous within the city;
will you then sweep away the place and not
forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in
it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing, to
slay the righteous with the wicked, so that
the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that
from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth
do what is just?" 26 And the LORD said, "If I
find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I
will forgive the whole place for their sake."
27 Abraham answered, "Let me take it upon
myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but
dust and ashes. 28 Suppose five of the fifty
righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the
whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I
will not destroy it if I find forty-five there."
29 Again he spoke to him, "Suppose forty are
found there." He answered, "For the sake of
forty I will not do it." 30 Then he said, "Oh do
not let the Lord be angry if I speak. Suppose
thirty are found there." He answered, "I will
not do it, if I find thirty there." 31 He said,
"Let me take it upon myself to speak to the
Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He
answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not
destroy it." 32 Then he said, "Oh do not let the
Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Sup-
pose ten are found there." He answered, "For
the sake of ten I will not destroy it." 33 And
the LORD went his way, when he had finished
speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned
to his place.

19 The two angels came to Sodom in the
evening, and Lot was sitting in the
gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he
rose to meet them, and bowed down with
his face to the ground. 2 He said, "Please, my
lords, turn aside to your servant's house and
spend the night, and wash your feet; then you
can rise early and go on your way." They said,
"No; we will spend the night in the square."
3 But he urged them strongly; so they turned
aside to him and entered his house; and he
made them a feast, and baked unleavened
bread, and they ate. 4 But before they lay
down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom,
both young and old, all the people to the last
man, surrounded the house; 5 and they called
to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you
tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may
know them." 6 Lot went out of the door to the
men, shut the door after him, 7 and said, "I
beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.
8 Look, I have two daughters who have not
known a man; let me bring them out to you,
and do to them as you please; only do noth-
ing to these men, for they have come under
the shelter of my roof." 9 But they replied,
"Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow
came here as an alien, and he would play the
judge! Now we will deal worse with you than
with them." Then they pressed hard against
the man Lot, and came near the door to break
it down. 10 But the men inside reached out
their hands and brought Lot into the house
with them, and shut the door. 11 And they

[a] Another ancient tradition reads *while the* LORD *remained standing before Abraham*

decided what to do. **22–33:** Like Moses (e.g., Ex 32.9–14), Abraham negotiates with an angry God, appealing to God's righteousness. In this case, however, the terms he ends up winning—aversion of disaster if ten righteous people can be found—do not avert destruction. Thus, this text appears to be a theoretical reflection on God's righteousness and how many righteous people are required to save a broader group; cf. Ezek 14.12–23.

19.1–38: The rescue of Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was a prominent example in Israelite tradition of God's total judgment (Deut 29.23; Isa 1.9; Jer 49.18; Am 4.11). **1:** *Two angels,* see 18.2–8n. **1–11:** As in the case of 18.1–8, the main issue here is hospitality to secretly divine visitors. Here, however, the sanctity of hospitality is threatened by *the men of the city* who wish to rape (*know*) the guests (cf. Judg 19.22–30). The primary point of this text is how this threat by the townspeople violates the value of hospitality (contrast 18.1–16). Hospitality is valued so strongly in this context that Lot offers his virgin daughters in place of his guests (vv. 7–8). Nevertheless, this foolish and cruel act has the opposite of its intended effect, leading the townspeople to threaten worse things to Lot than the rape they were going to inflict on his guests (v. 9), and requiring the guests to protect their host (vv. 10–11). Where Abraham was the model of hospitality (Gen 18.1–16), Lot's actions show him to be a bungling, almost heartless

struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door.

12 Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city—bring them out of the place. 13 For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it." 14 So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up, get out of this place; for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

15 When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Get up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or else you will be consumed in the punishment of the city." 16 But he lingered; so the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and left him outside the city. 17 When they had brought them outside, they[a] said, "Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, or else you will be consumed." 18 And Lot said to them, "Oh, no, my lords; 19 your servant has found favor with you, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, for fear the disaster will overtake me and I die. 20 Look, that city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!" 21 He said to him, "Very well, I grant you this favor too, and will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. 22 Hurry, escape there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there." Therefore the city was called Zoar.[b] 23 The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

24 Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven; 25 and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. 26 But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

27 Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD; 28 and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the Plain and saw the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace.

29 So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had settled.

30 Now Lot went up out of Zoar and settled in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; so he lived in a cave with his two daughters. 31 And the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the world. 32 Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father." 33 So they made their father drink wine that night; and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. 34 On the next day, the firstborn said to the younger, "Look, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, so that we may preserve

[a] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *he*
[b] That is *Little*

imitator who does not deserve to be the heir of the promise to Abraham. **12–14:** In place of Sarah's laughter (Heb "tsḥq") in the preceding hospitality scene (18.11–14), we have here the Sodomite *sons-in-law* assuming that Lot is *jesting* (Heb "tsḥq"). **15–23:** Once again, Lot is unfavorably contrasted with Abraham. Where Abraham hurried to serve his angelic guests (18.2,6,7), Lot hesitates at their urging to leave Sodom, requiring them to take him away by force (vv. 15–16). Then, doubting their rescue plan, he asks them to let him stop in a nearby city (Zoar, which means "little"; see note *b* and v. 20) lest he be caught up in the coming destruction (vv. 17–22). In the end, though Lot claims that he has found a Noah-like favor with his angelic rescuers (19.19; cf. Gen 6.8), this is not affirmed by the angels or the narrator. **24–25:** The *rain* of destruction continues the echoes of the Noah story. **26:** This text turns salt formations in the Dead Sea area into a testimony to the truth of the story, asserting that one of those formations was Lot's wife, who disobediently looked back at the cities God was destroying. **29:** This is a Priestly summary of the story, echoing 8.1 and attributing Lot's rescue to his relation with Abraham.

offspring through our father." [35] So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger rose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. [36] Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. [37] The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day. [38] The younger also bore a son and named him Ben-ammi; he is the ancestor of the Ammonites to this day.

20 From there Abraham journeyed toward the region of the Negeb, and settled between Kadesh and Shur. While residing in Gerar as an alien, [2] Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." And King Abimelech of Gerar sent and took Sarah. [3] But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "You are about to die because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a married woman." [4] Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent people? [5] Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' I did this in the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands." [6] Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart; fur-

37–38: This story suggests that two of Israel's closest neighbors, the Moabites and Ammonites in Transjordan, originated in incest. Mistakenly assuming that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was so total that there is no one else on earth by whom to have children (19.31), Lot's daughters get their father drunk so that he will conceive with them. The themes of drunkenness and (implicit) nakedness are reminiscent of the story of Noah and his sons (9.20–27).

20.1–18: The second story of endangerment of the matriarch (cf. 12.10–20; 26.6–11). Many scholars have argued that chs 20–22 contain the first major block of an Elohistic (E) source parallel to the Yahwistic (J) source found in chs 12–19 and extending through the rest of the Pentateuch (see further 15.2–5n. and the Introduction). Note parallels between stories of endangerment of Sarah in 20.1–18 (E) and 12.10–20 (J); the Hagar stories 21.8–19 (E) and 16.1–14 (J), and even stories about Abimelech in 21.22–34 (E) and 26.17–33 (J). These similarities indicate that the author of the non-Priestly Abraham narrative probably drew upon cycles of Yahwistic and Elohistic traditions that were parallel at some points. Nevertheless, there are some important indicators that the Elohistic traditions seen in Gen 20–22 were written down as part of a larger whole that included the preceding narratives in Gen 12–19 and thus do not reflect (in their present form) a separate written source. Not only are the Elohistic accounts organized as part of a broader chiasm that includes the narratives of Genesis 12–19, but details of Genesis 20–22 are understandable only when these chapters are read following Genesis 12–19.

CHIASM IN THE ABRAHAM STORY

There are a series of correspondences between different parts of the Abraham story, where themes introduced at the outset of a narrative are resumed in reverse order in its second half. This chiastic pattern binds many parts of the Abraham story together and puts a heightened emphasis on the sections that occur at the center (in **boldface**).

A. Prologue (11.28–30)
  B. First challenge: call for Abraham to leave family of origin (12:1–3)
    C. Wife-sister story 12:10–13:1
      D. Separation from Lot (13:2–18)
        E. Covenant of pieces with Abraham (14–15)
          F. Hagar-Ishmael story (Gen 16:1–14)
        E.' Covenant of circumcision with Abraham (17)
      D.' Hospitality/progeny episodes; Abraham contrasted with Lot (18–19)
    C.' Wife-sister story (20)
  B.' Final challenge: calls for Abraham to let go of family of future (21.8–21 and 22.1–19)
A.' Epilogue 22.20–24

For example, Abraham's brief claim in 20.2 that Sarah is his sister would not make sense without the explanation of his request to her to make the same claim in 12.11–13. **3–7:** The depiction of Abimelech is far more detailed and sympathetic than that of the foreign king in either of the parallel accounts (cf. 12.15–19; 26.9–10).

thermore it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 Now then, return the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all that are yours."

8 So Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants and told them all these things; and the men were very much afraid. 9 Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I sinned against you, that you have brought such great guilt on me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that ought not to be done." 10 And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What were you thinking of, that you did this thing?" 11 Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. 12 Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. 13 And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother.'" 14 Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him. 15 Abimelech said, "My land is before you; settle where it pleases you." 16 To Sarah he said, "Look, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your exoneration before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated." 17 Then Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. 18 For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

21 The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. 2 Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." 7 And she said, "Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

8 The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. 9 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac.[a] 10 So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." 11 The matter was very distress-

[a] Gk Vg: Heb lacks *with her son Isaac*

7: To Abraham is attributed the intercessory role of *prophet;* this is the Bible's first use of the term, and the only designation of Abraham as a prophet in the Torah (but see Ps 105.15). **12:** The narrator never asserts that Sarah is Terah's daughter (cf. 11.27–30). Nevertheless, faced with Abimelech's passionate questioning, Abraham claims to be her half-brother by way of his father. Though many have taken his assertion at face value, it may be an attempt to provide as many excuses for his behavior as possible (cf. 20.11).

21.1–21: Isaac and Ishmael. 3–5: A notice of Isaac's birth and circumcision taken from the Priestly source (see 17.1–24). On *the name Isaac,* see 18.12n. **6:** See 18.9–15n. **8–21:** This story of endangerment of Ishmael parallels the following one of endangerment of Isaac. After God gives Abraham the command to let his child go (v. 12; 22.2), he rises *early in the morning* to fulfill it (v. 14 || 22.3), the child is delivered when an *angel of God/the LORD* cries out from heaven (v. 17; 22.11–12), and Hagar and Abraham both see a way to save the child (v. 19 || 22.13). These features distinguish this story of Hagar and Ishmael from its parallel in ch. 16, where Hagar likewise left Abraham's clan, went into the desert, and heard a message from an angel of God (there an "angel of the LORD") about her child's destiny. Though the divinity is referred to in ch. 16 as "the LORD" and here in ch. 21 as "God," the angel in both cases promises that Hagar's offspring will be numerous (16.10; 21.18) and assures her that God has "heard" hers (ch. 16.11) or her child's (ch. 21.17) suffering, wordplays on Ishamel's name, which means "God hears" (see also 17.20, part of the Priestly tradition). These are probably oral variants of a story about the origin of the Ishmaelites (see 25.12–18). **9:** *Playing with,* literally "making [him] laugh," another reference to Isaac's

ing to Abraham on account of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. 13 As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

15 When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. 18 Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." 19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

20 God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. 21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

22 At that time Abimelech, with Phicol the commander of his army, said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do; 23 now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but as I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and with the land where you have resided as an alien." 24 And Abraham said, "I swear it."

25 When Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized, 26 Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today." 27 So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. 28 Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs of the flock. 29 And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?" 30 He said, "These seven ewe lambs you shall accept from my hand, in order that you may be a witness for me that I dug this well." 31 Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba;[a] because there both of them swore an oath. 32 When they had made a covenant at Beer-sheba, Abimelech, with Phicol the commander of his army, left and returned to the land of the Philistines. 33 Abraham[b] planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.[c] 34 And Abraham resided as an alien many days in the land of the Philistines.

22 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take your

[a] That is *Well of seven* or *Well of the oath*
[b] Heb *He*
[c] Or *the* LORD, *El Olam*

name; see 18.12n. **14–17**: In these verses Ishmael is a little boy, a stark contrast to the presentation of him as a teenager in the preceding Priestly traditions (16.16; 17.25; 21.5). This is just one sign that stories like this one about Hagar and Ishmael were not originally written with the Priestly tradition in view. **17:** See 16.7n.

21.22–34: Abraham's dispute with Abimelech. This text continues the story about Abraham and Abimelech that was begun in ch 20. Together, the narratives of Abraham's sojourn in Gerar in ch 20 and 21.22–34 resemble that of Isaac's sojourn in Gerar in 26.6–33, and they may have a common oral background. This story combines a tradition that explains the name *Beer-sheba* as meaning "well of seven" (see 22.28–30) with an explanation (parallel to 26.31–33) that it means "well of oath." **33:** On the tamarisk tree, see 12.6–8n. *Everlasting God* ("El Olam") may be an ancient divine name once associated with the sanctuary at Beer-sheba.

22.1–19: The testing of Abraham. Although in later tradition this is one of the most significant chapters in the ancestral narratives, nothing in the text marks it as such. **1a:** The narrative begins by informing the reader of something that Abraham does not know, that *God tested Abraham.* Abraham's "fear" of God is not proven (v. 12) until he has reached out his hand to slaughter his son (v. 10). **1b–2:** After giving up Ishmael earlier (see

son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." [3] So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. [4] On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. [5] Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." [6] Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. [7] Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" [8] Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

[9] When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. [10] Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill[a] his son. [11] But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." [12] He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." [13] And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. [14] So Abraham called that place "The LORD will provide";[b] as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."[c]

[15] The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, [16] and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, [17] I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, [18] and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." [19] So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

[20] Now after these things it was told Abraham, "Milcah also has borne children, to your brother Nahor: [21] Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, [22] Che-

[a] Or *to slaughter*

[b] Or *will see*; Heb traditionally transliterated *Jehovah Jireh*

[c] Or *he shall be seen*

21.8–21n.), Abraham must prepare to give up Isaac, his promised heir, as well. The story echoes the opening of the Abraham story. Just as he was once asked to *go* (Heb "lek leka") from his family of origin and travel to a land God would show him (12.1), so now he must *go* ("lek leka") and sacrifice his future family on a mountain that God will show him (v. 2). The way the command is stated (*your only son . . . whom you love*), which parallels the syntax of 12.1, presupposes that what is being asked of Abraham is extraordinary and extremely difficult. The narrative is not a polemic against child sacrifice: while it does not presuppose a general practice of sacrifice of the firstborn, it does suggest that such a practice could be performed under extraordinary circumstances (see 2 Kings 3.27). **3:** As in 12.4–6 Abraham obeys the command immediately. **5:** Abraham's promise that he and Isaac will return may suggest a faith that God will work out an alternative sacrifice (see v. 8). **9–13:** The narration slows down here, showing how close Abraham came to fulfilling the command. Some later Jewish traditions understood Abraham to have actually sacrificed (an obedient) Isaac, making both men models for later generations of Jewish martyrs. A similar image stands behind the Christian understanding of Isaac as a prefiguration of Jesus. **12:** See 22.1a n. **14:** Like other characters in Genesis (e.g., Jacob in 28.19 and 32.2,30), Abraham names the place in response to his encounter with God (see 22.8; cf. 28.19; 32.30). The name *The LORD will provide* is not attested elsewhere as a place name. The mention of *Moriah* in v. 2 and of *the mount of the LORD* in v. 14 may be allusions to Jerusalem (see 1 Chr 3.1). **15–18:** This second divine call stands out as an additional divine response to his obedience (cf. vv. 11–12), this time providing a reward for Abraham's passing of the "test." **18:** See 12.3n.

22.20–24: The descendants of Abraham's brother Nahor. See 11.27–29; 24.15.

sed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel."
23 Bethuel became the father of Rebekah.
These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's
brother. 24 Moreover, his concubine, whose
name was Reumah, bore Tebah, Gaham,
Tahash, and Maacah.

23 Sarah lived one hundred twenty-seven
years; this was the length of Sarah's
life. 2 And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is,
Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham
went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for
her. 3 Abraham rose up from beside his dead,
and said to the Hittites, 4 "I am a stranger and
an alien residing among you; give me property
among you for a burying place, so that I may
bury my dead out of my sight." 5 The Hittites
answered Abraham, 6 "Hear us, my lord; you
are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead
in the choicest of our burial places; none of
us will withhold from you any burial ground
for burying your dead." 7 Abraham rose and
bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land.
8 He said to them, "If you are willing that I
should bury my dead out of my sight, hear
me, and entreat for me Ephron son of Zohar,
9 so that he may give me the cave of Machpe-
lah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field.
For the full price let him give it to me in your
presence as a possession for a burying place."
10 Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites;
and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham
in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went
in at the gate of his city, 11 "No, my lord, hear
me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave
that is in it; in the presence of my people I give
it to you; bury your dead." 12 Then Abraham
bowed down before the people of the land.
13 He said to Ephron in the hearing of the
people of the land, "If you only will listen to
me! I will give the price of the field; accept it
from me, so that I may bury my dead there."
14 Ephron answered Abraham, 15 "My lord, lis-
ten to me; a piece of land worth four hundred
shekels of silver—what is that between you
and me? Bury your dead." 16 Abraham agreed
with Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for
Ephron the silver that he had named in the
hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels
of silver, according to the weights current
among the merchants.

17 So the field of Ephron in Machpelah,
which was to the east of Mamre, the field
with the cave that was in it and all the trees
that were in the field, throughout its whole
area, passed 18 to Abraham as a possession in
the presence of the Hittites, in the presence
of all who went in at the gate of his city. 19 Af-
ter this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the
cave of the field of Machpelah facing Mamre
(that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. 20 The
field and the cave that is in it passed from
the Hittites into Abraham's possession as a
burying place.

24 Now Abraham was old, well advanced
in years; and the LORD had blessed
Abraham in all things. 2 Abraham said to his
servant, the oldest of his house, who had
charge of all that he had, "Put your hand
under my thigh 3 and I will make you swear
by the LORD, the God of heaven and earth,
that you will not get a wife for my son from
the daughters of the Canaanites, among
whom I live, 4 but will go to my country and
to my kindred and get a wife for my son
Isaac." 5 The servant said to him, "Perhaps the
woman may not be willing to follow me to
this land; must I then take your son back to
the land from which you came?" 6 Abraham

23.1–20: Abraham's purchase of a family burial place. A late Priestly tradition. **2:** *Kiriath-arba,* the older name of Hebron (Josh 14.15; 15.13; Judg 1.10). **3:** The *Hittites* are considered at this point to be among the Canaanite peoples (see v. 7 and 10.15; 15.9). **4–16:** The narrative stresses the legitimacy of the Israelites' claim to this burial plot. **10:** Legal transactions often took place at the city gate; see 34.20; Deut 20.19; 25.7; Ruth 4.1–11; 2 Sam 15.2). **15:** *Four hundred shekels,* about 10 lb (4.5 kg). **17–20:** As in many ancient cultures, the Israelites believed that burial of ancestors in a plot of land gave their heirs a sacred claim to it. The Priestly notices of the Genesis story indicate that descendants of Abraham who did not inherit the promise ended up outside Canaan (e.g., Ishmael in 25.12–18 and Esau in 36.1–43; cf. 25.1–6), while Israel's early patriarchs and matriarchs were buried in the land (25.9–10; 35.27–29; 49.29–32; 50.12–13; etc.; cf. non-Priestly traditions in 35.19–20; 50.5,25).

24.1–67: Finding a wife for Isaac among kinfolk in Haran. **2:** Putting the hand under the thigh, an old form of oath taking (47.29), reflected the view that reproductive organs were sacred. **3:** The text describes a concern by Abraham about intermarriage with Canaanites that is otherwise seen primarily in late materials from Deuter-

said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. 7 The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. 8 But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there." 9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

10 Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all kinds of choice gifts from his master; and he set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. 11 He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was toward evening, the time when women go out to draw water. 12 And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. 13 I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. 14 Let the girl to whom I shall say, 'Please offer your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master."

15 Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, coming out with her water jar on her shoulder. 16 The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. 17 Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me sip a little water from your jar." 18 "Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. 19 When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." 20 So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. 21 The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.

22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, 23 and said, "Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" 24 She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." 25 She added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night." 26 The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD 27 and said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin."

28 Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. 29 Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran out to the man, to the spring. 30 As soon as he had seen the nose-ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah, "Thus the man spoke to me," he went to the man; and there he was, standing by the camels at the spring. 31 He said, "Come in, O blessed of the LORD. Why do you stand outside when I have prepared the house and a place for the camels?" 32 So the man came into the house; and Laban unloaded the camels, and gave him straw and fodder for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. 33 Then food was set before him to eat; but he said, "I will not eat until I have told my errand." He said, "Speak on."

34 So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. 35 The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. 36 And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my

onomy (e.g., Deut 7.3–4) and texts influenced by Deuteronomy. **10:** *Aram-naharaim,* the upper Euphrates region of northern Syria, in which Haran, Abraham's original home, was located (see 12.4). **12:** *Steadfast love,* NRSV's translation of Heb "ḥesed" that signifies the loyalty arising from a relationship (e.g., friendship; see 1 Sam 20.8). Applied to God, it means benevolent action, loyalty manifest in deeds. **15:** See 22.20–23. **22:** A *shekel* weighed

master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. 37 My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; 38 but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.' 39 I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' 40 But he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your way successful. You shall get a wife for my son from my kindred, from my father's house. 41 Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my kindred; even if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'

42 "I came today to the spring, and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! 43 I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," 44 and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also"—let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.'

45 "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' 46 She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. 47 Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. 48 Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. 49 Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left."

50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you anything bad or good. 51 Look, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken."

52 When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the LORD. 53 And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. 54 Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they rose in the morning, he said, "Send me back to my master." 55 Her brother and her mother said, "Let the girl remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go." 56 But he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the LORD has made my journey successful; let me go that I may go to my master." 57 They said, "We will call the girl, and ask her." 58 And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will." 59 So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. 60 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

"May you, our sister, become
thousands of myriads;
may your offspring gain possession
of the gates of their foes."

61 Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

62 Now Isaac had come from[a] Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. 63 Isaac went out in the evening to walk[b] in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. 64 And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, 65 and said to the servant, "Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. 66 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

25 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. 2 She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and

[a] Syr Tg: Heb *from coming to*

[b] Meaning of Heb word is uncertain

Shuah. [3] Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. [4] The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. [5] Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. [6] But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, while he was still living, and he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country.

[7] This is the length of Abraham's life, one hundred seventy-five years. [8] Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. [9] His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, [10] the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with his wife Sarah. [11] After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

[12] These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave-girl, bore to Abraham. [13] These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, [14] Mishma, Dumah, Massa, [15] Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. [16] These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. [17] (This is the length of the life of Ishmael, one hundred thirty-seven years; he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.) [18] They settled from Havilah to

about .4 oz (11.5 gr). **62:** *Beer-lahai-roi,* see 16.14; 25.11.

25.1–11: The death of Abraham. 1–6: The ancestry of Arabian tribes, including Midian (Ex 2.15b–22; 18.1–27), is traced to Abraham through another wife, Keturah. **7–11:** A conclusion to the Abraham story taken from the Priestly source. On the cave of Machpelah, see ch 23. **11:** *Beer-lahai-roi,* see 16.14; 24.62.

25.12–18: Overview of the descendants of Ishmael (cf. 36.1–43). Before the narrative discusses the descendants of Isaac (25.19–35.29), it gives an overview of the descendants of Ishmael, the firstborn son of Abraham. For the genealogy of Abraham, see chart on p. 52. **16:** Like Israel, the Ishmaelites are said to have twelve tribes. **18:** The Ishmaelites are placed in the desert on either side of the Red Sea. See map on p. 23.

25.19–35.29: The story of Jacob and his family. The bulk of this section of Genesis goes back to early traditions about Jacob/Israel, the father of the Israelite tribes. Though many originated as ancient Israelite oral traditions, this written version of the Jacob story shows multiple connections to places that were important in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (see 28.10–11n., 20–22n., 31.13n., 32.1–2n., 32.30–31n., and 33.18n.), and it thus likely originated there. This story has been enriched through additions that balance the early northern focus on Jacob with an emphasis on Judah, King David's ancestor (see 30.21n.; 34.1–31n. and 49.1–28n.). Later, still other texts were added, such as the interlude about Jacob's father, Isaac (26.1–33), the gift of the Abrahamic promise to Jacob at Bethel (28.13-16), and fragments of Priestly material (25.19–20; 26.34–35; 27.46–28.9; 31.17–18; 35.9–15,22b–29).

CHIASM IN THE JACOB STORY

As in the Abraham story [see p. 38], there may be a chiastic pattern in the Jacob story, where themes introduced in its first half are resumed in reverse order in the second. This kind of pattern places emphasis on its center (in **boldface**), in this case the fertility of Jacob himself and of his flocks:

A. Encounter between Jacob/Esau (25.21–34; 27)
  B. Encounter with God and departure from home (28)
    C. Acquisition of wives, Leah and Rachel (29.1–30)
      D. Fertility: the birth of Jacob's children (29.31–30.24)
      D.' Fertility: the growth of Jacob's flocks (30.25–43)
    C.' Jacob's removal of his wives from their father's household (31.1–32.1)
  B.' Encounter with God on return home (32.22–32)
A.' Reunion encounter between Jacob and Esau (33.1–33.17)

Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria; he settled down[a] alongside of[b] all his people.

19 These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, 20 and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. 21 Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. 22 The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?"[c] So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples born of you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the elder shall serve the younger."

24 When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. 25 The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. 26 Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob.[d] Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. 28 Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. 30 Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.[e]) 31 Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." 32 Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" 33 Jacob said, "Swear to me first."[f] So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

26 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines. 2 The LORD appeared to Isaac[g] and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; settle in the land that I shall show you. 3 Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. 4 I will make your offspring as numerous as the

[a] Heb *he fell*
[b] Or *down in opposition to*
[c] Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] That is *He takes by the heel* or *He supplants*
[e] That is *Red*
[f] Heb *today*
[g] Heb *him*

25.19–28: Introduction of the descendants of Isaac. 19–20: Introductory Priestly material. For the genealogy of Isaac, see chart on p. 52. **22–23:** The narrative presupposes an ancient practice of seeking a divine oracle at a local sanctuary. **25:** The Hebrew word for *red* ("'admoni") is a play on the word "Edom" ("'edom"; v. 30); *hairy* ("se'ar") is a play on Seir, the region of the Edomites (32.3). **26:** *Jacob,* which probably means "may (God) protect," is interpreted here by a play on the Hebrew word for "heel," i.e., "he takes by the heel" or "he supplants"; see Hos 12.3. **27–28:** As in the Cain and Abel story, this narrative plays on the tension between the hunter and the shepherd (4.2), as well as between the older and the younger brother.

25.29–34: Jacob buys Esau's birthright. 30: See 25.25n. **31–34:** The *birthright* refers to the extra rights that normally go to the eldest son: leadership of the family and a double share of the inheritance (Deut 21.15–17). This caricature of Esau as a dull person, outwitted on an empty stomach, is intended to explain Israel's domination of Edom (2 Sam 8.9–14; 1 Kings 11.14–22; 1 Kings 3.9–12; 8.20–22).

26.1–33: Interlude on Isaac. Whereas the surrounding sections focus primarily on Isaac's descendants, this chapter focuses on Isaac apart from his children. Although relatively little is told about Isaac, it is significant that each element makes him parallel to his father Abraham: the initial note linking his trip to Gerar with Abraham's initial journey to Egypt (v. 1; cf. 12.10), the travel command and promise (vv. 2–5; see 12.1–3n.; 22.18n.), the story of endangerment of the matriarch (vv. 6–11; cf. 12.10–13.1 and 20.1–18), the manifestation of blessing on Isaac (vv. 12–14; cf. 12.16; 20.14), the recognition of that blessing by Abimelech (v. 28; cf. 21.22), and the well stories (vv. 17–33; see 21.22–34n.). The narratives of Abraham and Isaac have clearly influenced one another. By the end of the chapter it is clear that Isaac has successfully inherited Abraham's blessing and is thus prepared

stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring, [5] because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."

[6] So Isaac settled in Gerar. [7] When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister"; for he was afraid to say, "My wife," thinking, "or else the men of the place might kill me for the sake of Rebekah, because she is attractive in appearance." [8] When Isaac had been there a long time, King Abimelech of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw him fondling his wife Rebekah. [9] So Abimelech called for Isaac, and said, "So she is your wife! Why then did you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought I might die because of her." [10] Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." [11] So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death."

[12] Isaac sowed seed in that land, and in the same year reaped a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, [13] and the man became rich; he prospered more and more until he became very wealthy. [14] He had possessions of flocks and herds, and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him. [15] (Now the Philistines had stopped up and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham.) [16] And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us; you have become too powerful for us."

[17] So Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar and settled there. [18] Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of his father Abraham; for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the names that his father had given them. [19] But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, [20] the herders of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herders, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the well Esek,[a] because they contended with him. [21] Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also; so he called it Sitnah.[b] [22] He moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth,[c] saying, "Now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

[23] From there he went up to Beer-sheba. [24] And that very night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you and make your offspring numerous for my servant Abraham's sake." [25] So he built an altar there, called on the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.

[26] Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army. [27] Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" [28] They said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we say, let there be an oath between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you [29] so that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD." [30] So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. [31] In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths; and Isaac set them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. [32] That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water!" [33] He called it Shibah;[d] therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba[e] to this day.

[34] When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and

[a] That is *Contention*
[b] That is *Enmity*
[c] That is *Broad places* or *Room*
[d] A word resembling the word for *oath*
[e] That is *Well of the oath* or *Well of seven*

to pass it on to one of his sons (see ch 27). **8:** *Fondling,* Heb "metsaḥeq," another reference to Isaac's name; see 18.12n. **33:** Another explanation of the name "Beer-sheba"; see 21.22–34n.

26.34–28.4: The transfer of blessing to Jacob and not Esau. 26.34–35 (cf. 28.8–9 and 36.2–3): This Priestly

Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; 35 and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, "My son"; and he answered, "Here I am." 2 He said, "See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. 3 Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me. 4 Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die."

5 Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, 6 Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I heard your father say to your brother Esau, 7 'Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food to eat, that I may bless you before the LORD before I die.' 8 Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. 9 Go to the flock, and get me two choice kids, so that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he likes; 10 and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies." 11 But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, "Look, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a man of smooth skin. 12 Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing." 13 His mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me." 14 So he went and got them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savory food, such as his father loved. 15 Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; 16 and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. 17 Then she handed the savory food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

18 So he went in to his father, and said, "My father"; and he said, "Here I am; who are you, my son?" 19 Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me." 20 But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the LORD your God granted me success." 21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." 22 So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." 23 He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. 24 He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." 25 Then he said, "Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." 27 So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said,

"Ah, the smell of my son
is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed.
28 May God give you of the dew of heaven,
and of the fatness of the earth,
and plenty of grain and wine.
29 Let peoples serve you,
and nations bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be everyone who curses you,
and blessed be everyone who blesses you!"

30 As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother

note on Esau's difficult marriages was originally connected with 27.46–28.9 (P). Now, however, it helps legitimate the following story about how he was tricked out of his father's blessing. **27.1–45:** This non-Priestly story of Rebekah and Jacob's cunning resembles "trickster" traditions in other cultures, where a culture hero flourishes through underhanded tactics (cf. 29.23–25; 31.19–35; 34.1–31; 38.1–30). Women had little power and often had to use unconventional means to accomplish their goals. **4:** Deathbed blessings (and curses) were important in the life and literature of ancient peoples (e.g., 48.8–20; 49.1–28). It was believed that such blessings irrevocably released a tangible power that determined the character and destiny of the recipient. Ch 27 itself focuses exclusively on Isaac's blessing, but the preceding chapter (ch 26) makes clear that this is Isaac's transfer of

Esau came in from his hunting. [31] He also prepared savory food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father sit up and eat of his son's game, so that you may bless me." [32] His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your firstborn son, Esau." [33] Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all[a] before you came, and I have blessed him?—yes, and blessed he shall be!" [34] When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, me also, father!" [35] But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing." [36] Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob?[b] For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and look, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" [37] Isaac answered Esau, "I have already made him your lord, and I have given him all his brothers as servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?" [38] Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

[39] Then his father Isaac answered him:
"See, away from[c] the fatness of the earth
shall your home be,
and away from[d] the dew of heaven on high.
[40] By your sword you shall live,
and you shall serve your brother;
but when you break loose,[e]
you shall break his yoke from your neck."

[41] Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob." [42] But the words of her elder son Esau were told to Rebekah; so she sent and called her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. [43] Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran, [44] and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away— [45] until your brother's anger against you turns away, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send, and bring you back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?"

[46] Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

28 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women. [2] Go at once to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father; and take as wife from there one of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. [3] May God Almighty[f] bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples. [4] May he give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your offspring with you, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien—land that God gave to Abraham." [5] Thus Isaac sent Jacob away;

[a] Cn: Heb *of all*
[b] That is *He supplants* or *He takes by the heel*
[c] Or *See, of*
[d] Or *and of*
[e] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[f] Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

a divine blessing first given to Abraham (12.1–3; etc.). **11:** See 25.25n. **34–35:** The blessing was believed to release a power that could not be retracted (see v. 4n.). **36:** See 25.26n.; 25.29–34. There is a wordplay in the Heb words for *my birthright* ("bekorati") and *my blessing* ("birkati"). **39:** An inversion of the same words in v. 28. **40:** See 25.31–34n. Edom repeatedly revolted from subjection by Judah (1 Kings 11.14–22; 2 Kings 8.20–22). **43:** See 24.4,29. *Haran* was the home of Abraham's brother Nahor, whose son was Laban. Like Isaac, Jacob will marry within the extended family; see 24.4,10n.,29; 29. **46:** See 26.34–35n. **27.46–28.2:** On intermarriage, see 24.3n. **28.1–4:** A Priestly parallel to the preceding story (27.27–29) where Isaac was not tricked into blessing Jacob, but intended from the outset to bless him in the process of sending him away to find a proper wife (see 26.34–35n.). Compare with P in 17.1–8; 35.11–12; 48.3–4. **3:** *God Almighty,* see 17.1n.

28.5–22: The split between Jacob and Esau occurs twice here, the Priestly version in 28.5–9 and the non-

and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

6 Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he charged him, "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women," 7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram. 8 So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please his father Isaac, 9 Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael, and sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.

10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. 11 He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. 12 And he dreamed that there was a ladder[a] set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And the LORD stood beside him[b] and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; 14 and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed[c] in you and in your offspring. 15 Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." 16 Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!" 17 And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

18 So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. 19 He called that place Bethel;[d] but the name of the city was Luz at the first. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, 21 so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, 22 and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you."

29 Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. 2 As he looked, he saw a well in the field

[a] Or *stairway* or *ramp*
[b] Or *stood above it*
[c] Or *shall bless themselves*
[d] That is *House of God*

Priestly account in 28.10–22. **8–9:** See 26.34–35 and compare 36.2–3. **10–11:** Bethel (see 12.6–8n.; map on p. 27) was one of the two major royal sanctuaries of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12.26–13.10; Am 7.10–13). Here it is depicted as an unsettled place. **12:** The earliest version of this oracle described divine messengers (NRSV *angels*) ascending and descending a stairway (a better translation than NRSV's *ladder*) to heaven. This is reflected in v. 17. **13–15:** God's appearance here is awkwardly linked to the preceding stairway vision. Therefore, many scholars see another authorial hand here, adding the Abrahamic promise to an early Bethel narrative that lacked it. **13–14:** The promise to Jacob here after his split from Esau is similar to the promise to Abraham in 13.14–17 just after his split from Lot. On the formulation of these promises, see 12.1–3n. **15:** This portion of the divine promise relates specifically to Jacob's journey and anticipates both his vow (vv. 20–22) and later references to this event (35.3; cf. 31.13). It may be the earliest layer of the promise speech. **16–17:** Some scholars have seen a doubled response here by Jacob, a response to God's appearance and speech in v. 16 and a (possibly earlier) response to the vision of the stairway in v. 17 (see v. 12n.). Verse 17 explains the name "Bethel" ("house of El") as *house of God. Gate of heaven* suggests the ancient view that a sanctuary was a place where the god came to earth, like "Babel" ("gate of god," 11.1–9). **18:** Ancient Israelite local sanctuaries featured sacred pillars, perhaps signifying male powers of fertility (see v. 22; 31.13,45–54; 35.14,20). For feminine tree imagery, see 2.8–9n. **19:** *Bethel,* see vv. 16–17n. **20–22:** This text looks toward both Jacob's immediate trip to Haran and the longer range future of the sanctuary at Bethel (see 28.10–11n.). **22:** *One-tenth,* see 14.20n.

29.1–30: Jacob's marriages to Laban's daughters. 2–12: Wells often serve as meeting places for men and women in the cultures of the Near East. The Bible describes several such well scenes (e.g., 24.10–27; Ex 2.15–22).

and three flocks of sheep lying there beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, 3 and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.

4 Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." 5 He said to them, "Do you know Laban son of Nahor?" They said, "We do." 6 He said to them, "Is it well with him?" "Yes," they replied, "and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with the sheep." 7 He said, "Look, it is still broad daylight; it is not time for the animals to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them." 8 But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."

9 While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. 10 Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban, and the sheep of his mother's brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of his mother's brother Laban. 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud. 12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father.

13 When Laban heard the news about his sister's son Jacob, he ran to meet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob[a] told Laban all these things, 14 and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

15 Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" 16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah's eyes were lovely,[b] and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. 18 Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." 19 Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

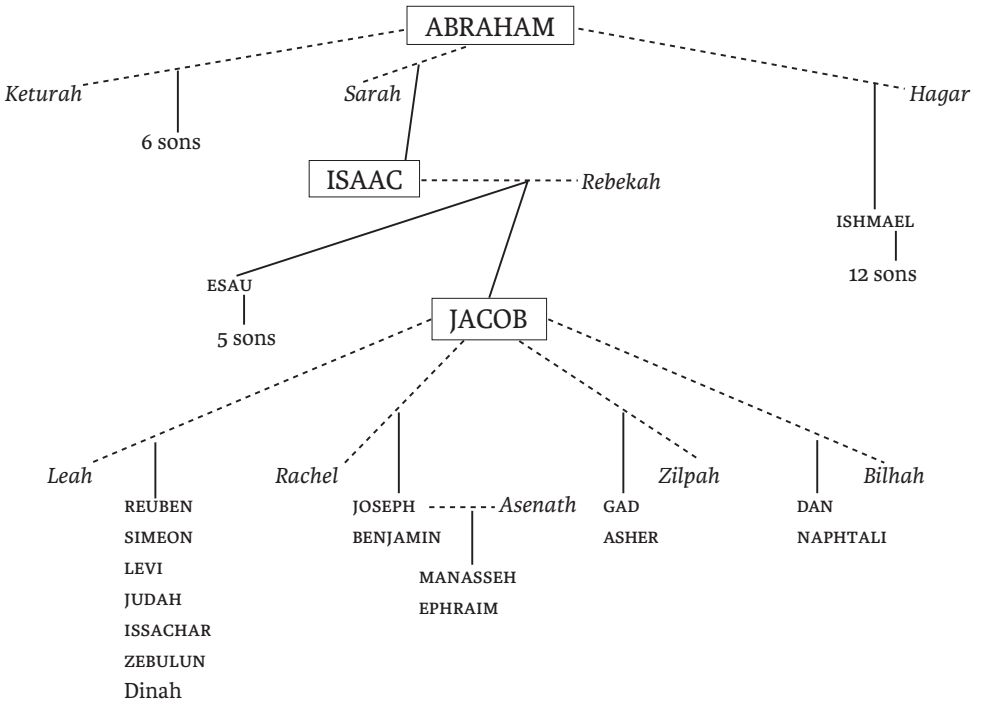
21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." 22 So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. 23 But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. 24 (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) 25 When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" 26 Laban said, "This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. 27 Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." 28 Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. 29 (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) 30 So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban[c] for another seven years.

31 When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. 32 Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben;[d] for she said, "Because the LORD has looked on my affliction; surely

[a] Heb *He*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Heb *him*
[d] That is *See, a son*

4–5: See 24.10n.; 26.43. **10:** Jacob, the folk hero, has superhuman strength (see v. 3). **18:** Jacob asks for Rachel as a reward for service (cf. Josh 15.16–17; 1 Sam 17.25; 18.17) instead of paying the usual marriage price (34.12; Ex 22.16–17; Deut 22.29). **23–25:** Here Jacob the trickster (see 27.1–45n.) is tricked; this motif will continue throughout the Jacob story. The exchange could be made because the bride was brought veiled to the bridegroom (24.65). **27:** *The week* refers to the week of marriage festivity (Judg 14.12).

29.31–30.24: The birth of eleven of Jacob's sons and Dinah (for Benjamin's birth, see 35.16–18). This birth of children and the later birth of flocks (30.25–43) stand at the heart of the Jacob story. The pathos of the conflict



Chs 12–50: The genealogy of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Dashed lines show wives or concubines; solid lines show descendants.

now my husband will love me." [33] She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard[a] that I am hated, he has given me this son also"; and she named him Simeon. [34] Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be joined[b] to me, because I have borne him three sons"; therefore he was named Levi. [35] She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise[c] the LORD"; therefore she named him Judah; then she ceased bearing.

30 When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" [2] Jacob became very angry with Rachel and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" [3] Then she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees and that I too may have children through her." [4] So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife; and Jacob went in to her. [5] And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. [6] Then Rachel said, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son"; therefore she named him Dan.[d] [7] Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. [8] Then Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled[e] with my sister, and have prevailed"; so she named him Naphtali.

[9] When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. [10] Then Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. [11] And Leah said, "Good fortune!" so she named him Gad.[f]

[a] Heb *shama*
[b] Heb *lawah*
[c] Heb *hodah*
[d] That is *He judged*
[e] Heb *niphtal*
[f] That is *Fortune*

between women is expressed through folk-explanations of the names (see NRSV text notes). **30.3,9:** Like Sarah, Rachel and Leah give their servants to Jacob as surrogate wives; see 16.2n. **14:** *Mandrakes,* roots of a potato-like

12 Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second
son. 13 And Leah said, "Happy am I! For the
women will call me happy"; so she named
him Asher.[a]
14 In the days of wheat harvest Reuben
went and found mandrakes in the field, and
brought them to his mother Leah. Then
Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some
of your son's mandrakes." 15 But she said to
her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken
away my husband? Would you take away my
son's mandrakes also?" Rachel said, "Then
he may lie with you tonight for your son's
mandrakes." 16 When Jacob came from the
field in the evening, Leah went out to meet
him, and said, "You must come in to me; for I
have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So
he lay with her that night. 17 And God heeded
Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth
son. 18 Leah said, "God has given me my hire[b]
because I gave my maid to my husband"; so
she named him Issachar. 19 And Leah con-
ceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son.
20 Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with
a good dowry; now my husband will honor[c]
me, because I have borne him six sons"; so
she named him Zebulun. 21 Afterwards she
bore a daughter, and named her Dinah.
22 Then God remembered Rachel, and God
heeded her and opened her womb. 23 She
conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has
taken away my reproach"; 24 and she named
him Joseph,[d] saying, "May the LORD add to me
another son!"
25 When Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob
said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may
go to my own home and country. 26 Give me
my wives and my children for whom I have
served you, and let me go; for you know
very well the service I have given you." 27 But
Laban said to him, "If you will allow me to
say so, I have learned by divination that the
LORD has blessed me because of you; 28 name
your wages, and I will give it." 29 Jacob said to
him, "You yourself know how I have served
you, and how your cattle have fared with
me. 30 For you had little before I came, and it
has increased abundantly; and the LORD has
blessed you wherever I turned. But now when
shall I provide for my own household also?"
31 He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said,
"You shall not give me anything; if you will
do this for me, I will again feed your flock and
keep it: 32 let me pass through all your flock
today, removing from it every speckled and
spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the
spotted and speckled among the goats; and
such shall be my wages. 33 So my honesty
will answer for me later, when you come to
look into my wages with you. Every one that
is not speckled and spotted among the goats
and black among the lambs, if found with
me, shall be counted stolen." 34 Laban said,
"Good! Let it be as you have said." 35 But that
day Laban removed the male goats that were
striped and spotted, and all the female goats
that were speckled and spotted, every one
that had white on it, and every lamb that was
black, and put them in charge of his sons;
36 and he set a distance of three days' journey
between himself and Jacob, while Jacob was
pasturing the rest of Laban's flock.
37 Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and
almond and plane, and peeled white streaks
in them, exposing the white of the rods. 38 He
set the rods that he had peeled in front of the
flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering
places, where the flocks came to drink. And
since they bred when they came to drink,
39 the flocks bred in front of the rods, and so
the flocks produced young that were striped,
speckled, and spotted. 40 Jacob separated
the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks
toward the striped and the completely black
animals in the flock of Laban; and he put his

[a] That is *Happy*
[b] Heb *sakar*
[c] Heb *zabal*
[d] That is *He adds*

plant, were thought to have aphrodisiac properties. **21:** The note about the birth of Dinah is inserted (without a story or explanation of the name) to anticipate the story about her in ch 34.

30.25–43: The birth of Jacob's flocks. Since striped or speckled coloration was unusual, Laban seemingly had nothing to lose. **37–40:** Ancient breeders believed that the female, at the time of conception, was influenced by visual impressions that affect the color of the offspring. Jacob produced striped animals by putting striped sticks before the females' eyes while they were breeding.

own droves apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock. 41 Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob laid the rods in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the rods, 42 but for the feebler of the flock he did not lay them there; so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. 43 Thus the man grew exceedingly rich, and had large flocks, and male and female slaves, and camels and donkeys.

31 Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's; he has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father." 2 And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him as favorably as he did before. 3 Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you." 4 So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was, 5 and said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me as favorably as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. 6 You know that I have served your father with all my strength; 7 yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me. 8 If he said, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore speckled; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped. 9 Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father, and given them to me.

10 "During the mating of the flock I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats that leaped upon the flock were striped, speckled, and mottled. 11 Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!' 12 And he said, 'Look up and see that all the goats that leap on the flock are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. 13 I am the God of Bethel,[a] where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and return to the land of your birth.'" 14 Then Rachel and Leah answered him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? 15 Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us. 16 All the property that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you."

17 So Jacob arose, and set his children and his wives on camels; 18 and he drove away all his livestock, all the property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

19 Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods. 20 And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee. 21 So he fled with all that he had; starting out he crossed the Euphrates,[b] and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.

22 On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. 23 So he took his kinsfolk with him and pursued him for seven days until he caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. 24 But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night, and said to him, "Take heed that you say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad."

25 Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsfolk camped in the hill country of Gilead. 26 Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You have deceived me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword. 27 Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and not tell me? I would have sent you away

[a] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *the river*

31.1–55: Jacob's departure from Laban's family. 4–16: This speech by Jacob and reply by his wives is often assigned by scholars to a different author than the surrounding verses, generally identified as J. In it Jacob presents to his wives a particular perspective on the previously narrated events (cf. 30.25–43). **13:** Where Jerusalem Zion traditions claimed that the LORD dwells in Zion (Ps's 9.12; 135.21), God claims in this text to be "the god of Bethel" (see 28.10–11n.). This probably reflects the particular perspective of this originally northern Jacob story in comparison with Jerusalem-oriented traditions that predominate in the Bible. **19–35:** The *household gods* (see 1 Sam 19.13–17) may have been figures representing ancestral deities. Possession of them ensured leadership of the family and legitimated property claims. Here Jacob's favored wife, Rachel, is the trickster (see

with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre. 28 And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? What you have done is foolish. 29 It is in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Take heed that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.' 30 Even though you had to go because you longed greatly for your father's house, why did you steal my gods?" 31 Jacob answered Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. 32 But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsfolk, point out what I have that is yours, and take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.[a]

33 So Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two maids, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah's tent, and entered Rachel's. 34 Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. Laban felt all about in the tent, but did not find them. 35 And she said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me." So he searched, but did not find the household gods.

36 Then Jacob became angry, and upbraided Laban. Jacob said to Laban, "What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? 37 Although you have felt about through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsfolk and your kinsfolk, so that they may decide between us two. 38 These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. 39 That which was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself; of my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. 40 It was like this with me: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. 41 These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. 42 If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear[b] of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night."

43 Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about their children whom they have borne? 44 Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me." 45 So Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar. 46 And Jacob said to his kinsfolk, "Gather stones," and they took stones, and made a heap; and they ate there by the heap. 47 Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha:[c] but Jacob called it Galeed.[d] 48 Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." Therefore he called it Galeed, 49 and the pillar[e] Mizpah,[f] for he said, "The LORD watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other. 50 If you ill-treat my daughters, or if you take wives in addition to my daughters, though no one else is with us, remember that God is witness between you and me."

51 Then Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap and see the pillar, which I have set between

[a] Heb *them*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] In Aramaic *The heap of witness*
[d] In Hebrew *The heap of witness*
[e] Compare Sam: MT lacks *the pillar*
[f] That is *Watchpost*

27.1–45n.). **35:** *The way of women,* menstruation. **42:** The Hebrew word rendered as *Fear* in *Fear of Isaac,* is different from the Hebrew word usually used for "fear" of the LORD. The same word clearly means "terror" or "dread" elsewhere, as in the "terror of the LORD" refrain in Isa 2.10,19,21. Some scholars, however, have proposed alternative understandings of the word in this context, such as "refuge" of Isaac. **43–54:** The story is built around an older tradition regarding a boundary covenant between Arameans and Israelites (vv. 44,52), both of whom laid claim to the region of Gilead in northern Transjordan (see map on p. 252). On the *pillar,* see 28.18n. **47:** The stone heap is given two names (see notes *c* and *d*), one in Laban's language (Aramaic) and one in Jacob's (Hebrew).

you and me. 52 This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. 53 May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor"—the God of their father—"judge between us." So Jacob swore by the Fear[a] of his father Isaac, 54 and Jacob offered a sacrifice on the height and called his kinsfolk to eat bread; and they ate bread and tarried all night in the hill country.

55 [b]Early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them; then he departed and returned home.

32 Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him; 2 and when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called that place Mahanaim.[c]

3 Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, 4 instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have lived with Laban as an alien, and stayed until now; 5 and I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male and female slaves; and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'"

6 The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." 7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies, 8 thinking, "If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, then the company that is left will escape."

9 And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,' 10 I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies. 11 Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children. 12 Yet you have said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their number.'"

13 So he spent that night there, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, 14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15 thirty milch camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. 16 These he delivered into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on ahead of me, and put a space between drove and drove." 17 He instructed the foremost, "When Esau my brother meets you, and asks you, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?' 18 then you shall say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob; they are a present sent to my lord Esau; and moreover he is behind us.'" 19 He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, "You shall say the same thing to Esau when you meet him, 20 and you shall say, 'Moreover your servant Jacob is behind us.'" For he thought, "I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me." 21 So the present passed on ahead of him; and he himself spent that night in the camp.

22 The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven chil-

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Ch 32.1 in Heb
[c] Here taken to mean *Two camps*

53: *Nahor,* Laban's father, and *Abraham,* Jacob's father, were brothers (11.27).

32.1–32: Journey toward Esau. 1–2: The Transjordanian town of Mahanaim (see map on p. 252) may have been a capital of the Northern Kingdom during the brief reign of Ishbaal, Saul's heir (2 Sam 2.8–9); was a site to which David fled during Absalom's rebellion (17.24–29) and was an administrative center in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 4.14). *Angels,* see 28.12n. **3–21:** The ever-clever Jacob develops multiple strategies to appease his brother: dividing his camp (vv. 6–8), praying for divine help (vv. 9–12), and then sending several waves of livestock as a gift to Esau (vv. 13–21). **22–32:** Abraham unknowingly hosted divine visitors (18.1–15); now Jacob unknowingly

dren, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. 24 Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." 27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 Then the man[a] said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,[b] for you have striven with God and with humans,[c] and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. 30 So Jacob called the place Peniel,[d] saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

33 Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. 2 He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. 3 He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.

4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. 5 When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." 6 Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; 7 Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. 8 Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor with my lord." 9 But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." 10 Jacob said, "No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor. 11 Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want." So he urged him, and he took it.

12 Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you." 13 But Jacob 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; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die. 14 Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant,

[a] Heb *he*
[b] That is *The one who strives with God* or *God strives*
[c] Or *with divine and human beings*
[d] That is *The face of God*

fights with God (cf. Ex 4.24–26). The narrative includes a complicated wordplay on the names of Jacob (Heb "ya'aqob"), the river Jabbok ("yabboq"; modern Nahr ez-Zerqa), and *wrestled* ("wayye'abeq"; v. 24). **25:** Jacob is so strong (29.10) that he is winning the contest until his divine opponent pulls Jacob's hip out of joint. **26:** The divine being had to vanish before sunrise—a mark of the antiquity of the tradition on which this story is based. **28:** Jacob's new name reflects a new self: no longer was he the "supplanter" (25.26; 27.36), but *Israel* (35.10), which probably originally meant "El rules" (the god El was the head of the Northwest Semitic pantheon). Here, however, it is interpreted to mean "the one who strives with God" (cf. Hos 12.3–4). *And with humans* refers to Jacob's strife with Esau and Laban. In this way, the community of Israel, as descendants of this god-wrestler, is depicted as a group that successfully strives with God and humans. **29:** The divine being refuses lest Jacob, by possessing the name, gain power over him. **30:** Jacob had feared to see Esau's face (v. 20), but instead saw God *face to face* and lived (see 16.13n.). **30–31:** The story is located at Penuel/Peniel ("face of El"), one of the first capitals of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12.25). **32:** An Israelite prohibition against eating the thigh muscle of an animal is cited as testimony to the truth of the story. This prohibition is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.

33.1–17: Partial reunion with Esau. 10: *Like seeing the face of God,* who at Penuel (or Peniel) also proved to be gracious (32.30–31). **12–17:** Esau proposes to stay with Jacob, but Jacob sends him ahead, promising to join with him (v. 14). Jacob does not join him, however (v. 17), perhaps noting that Esau had always planned to wait

and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir."

15 So Esau said, "Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me." But he said, "Why should my lord be so kind to me?" 16 So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. 17 But Jacob journeyed to Succoth,[a] and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth.

18 Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram; and he camped before the city. 19 And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for one hundred pieces of money[b] the plot of land on which he had pitched his tent. 20 There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.[c]

34 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the region. 2 When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the region, saw her, he seized her and lay with her by force. 3 And his soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl, and spoke tenderly to her. 4 So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this girl to be my wife."

5 Now Jacob heard that Shechem[d] had defiled his daughter Dinah; but his sons were with his cattle in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. 6 And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him, 7 just as the sons of Jacob came in from the field. When they heard of it, the men were indignant and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done.

8 But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The heart of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage. 9 Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. 10 You shall live with us; and the land shall be open to you; live and trade in it, and get property in it." 11 Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, "Let me find favor with you, and whatever you say to me I will give. 12 Put the marriage present and gift as high as you like, and I will give whatever you ask me; only give me the girl to be my wife."

13 The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. 14 They said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. 15 Only on this condition will we consent to you: that you will become as we are and every male among you be circumcised. 16 Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live among you and become one people. 17 But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone."

18 Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. 19 And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he was

[a] That is *Booths*
[b] Heb *one hundred qesitah*
[c] That is *God, the God of Israel*
[d] Heb *he*

to kill him until their father died (27.41; cf. 35.29). **17:** *Succoth* means "booths." Its precise location is uncertain.

33.18–35.5: The stay in Shechem and the rape of Dinah. 33.18: *Shechem,* see 12.6–8n., was an important town in early Israel and one of the first capitals of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12.25). **19:** Here and in ch 34 *Shechem* is a personal name. As elsewhere in Genesis, the story portrays, in the guise of individuals, relations between Israel and non-Israelite groups. **20:** The name of the altar ("El is the God of Israel") may be another reflection of the worship of El in early Israel (see 28.16–17n.; 32.28,31–32n.). **34.1–31:** In its broader context, this story explains why Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's elder sons, did not receive his highest blessing; see 49.1–28n. **2:** See 33.19n. *Lay with her by force,* raped her, though some scholars interpret the Hebrew verbs as suggesting illicit sexual intercourse rather than rape. **7:** *Committed an outrage in Israel* is an old expression for ultimate offenses, such as violations of the sexual honor of the tribal group (here), the ban on booty in holy war (Josh 7.15), and the sanctity of hospitality (Judg 19.23–24; 20.6,10). **8–12:** Israelite law stipulates that a man who has sex with an unbetrothed woman must retroactively marry her by paying her father a high marriage price (Ex 22.16–17; Deut 22.28–29). This narrative either does not recognize this law, or assumes that it does not apply outside the

delighted with Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his family. 20 So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, 21 "These people are friendly with us; let them live in the land and trade in it, for the land is large enough for them; let us take their daughters in marriage, and let us give them our daughters. 22 Only on this condition will they agree to live among us, to become one people: that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised. 23 Will not their livestock, their property, and all their animals be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will live among us." 24 And all who went out of the city gate heeded Hamor and his son Shechem; and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

25 On the third day, when they were still in pain, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city unawares, and killed all the males. 26 They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away. 27 And the other sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. 28 They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. 29 All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and made their prey. 30 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household." 31 But they said, "Should our sister be treated like a whore?"

35 God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and settle there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." 2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes; 3 then come, let us go up to Bethel, that I may make an altar there to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone." 4 So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak that was near Shechem.

5 As they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities all around them, so that no one pursued them. 6 Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, 7 and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel,[a] because it was there that God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. 8 And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So it was called Allon-bacuth.[b]

[a] That is *God of Bethel*
[b] That is *Oak of weeping*

people of Israel. **13–17:** Jacob's sons now are the tricksters (see 27.1–45n.). On circumcision see 17.9–14n. **21–23:** In contrast to Hamor's proposal to the Israelites of intermarriage and acquisition of land (vv. 8–10), his speech to his countrymen here betrays an interest in impoverishing the Israelites through assimilating them. On concern about intermarriage, see 24.3n. **25–26:** Simeon and Levi lead the killing and recapture of Dinah because, as older full brothers of Dinah (29.33–34; 30.21), they were responsible for avenging the violation of the family's honor through her. **27–29:** In a reversal of what the Shechemites had planned for them (vv. 21–23), the Israelites take all the Shechemites' possessions. **30–31:** Jacob is depicted here as less concerned about family honor than about good relations with the Canaanites (see 35.5). His sons' question is left unanswered at the end of the story (cf. Jon 4.11), but is ultimately addressed in 49.5–7. **35.1–4:** The present narrative reflects a later judgment on non-Yahwistic ritual objects. Like its parallels (Josh 24.23; Judg 10.16; 1 Sam 7.3), it may presuppose, however, a more ancient practice of burial of divine images in sacred places, i.e., by a sacred tree (see 12.6–8n.). **5:** Jacob's fears (see 34.30) prove to be unfounded.

35.6–15: Jacob's return to Bethel (cf. 28.10–22). **6–7:** In the ancient world deities had local manifestations (e.g., on two ancient inscriptions we find "Yahweh of Samaria"). Jacob honors the local manifestation of El at Bethel by calling the sanctuary there "El of Bethel." **8:** Once again a tree is associated with a revered sanctuary

9 God appeared to Jacob again when he
came from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him.
10 God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no
longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel
shall be your name." So he was called Israel.
11 God said to him, "I am God Almighty:[a] be
fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company
of nations shall come from you, and kings
shall spring from you. 12 The land that I gave
to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I
will give the land to your offspring after you."
13 Then God went up from him at the place
where he had spoken with him. 14 Jacob set up
a pillar in the place where he had spoken with
him, a pillar of stone; and he poured out a
drink offering on it, and poured oil on it. 15 So
Jacob called the place where God had spoken
with him Bethel.

16 Then they journeyed from Bethel; and
when they were still some distance from
Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she
had hard labor. 17 When she was in her hard
labor, the midwife said to her, "Do not be
afraid; for now you will have another son."
18 As her soul was departing (for she died),
she named him Ben-oni;[b] but his father called
him Benjamin.[c] 19 So Rachel died, and she was
buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethle-
hem), 20 and Jacob set up a pillar at her grave;
it is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there
to this day. 21 Israel journeyed on, and pitched
his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

22 While Israel lived in that land, Reuben
went and lay with Bilhah his father's concu-
bine; and Israel heard of it.

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

27 Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre,
or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abra-
ham and Isaac had resided as aliens. 28 Now
the days of Isaac were one hundred eighty
years. 29 And Isaac breathed his last; he died
and was gathered to his people, old and full of
days; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

36 These are the descendants of Esau
(that is, Edom). 2 Esau took his
wives from the Canaanites: Adah daughter
of Elon the Hittite, Oholibamah daughter
of Anah son[d] of Zibeon the Hivite, 3 and

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*
[b] That is *Son of my sorrow*
[c] That is *Son of the right hand* or *Son of the South*
[d] Sam Gk Syr: Heb *daughter*

(see 12.6–8n.). **9–15:** A Priestly parallel to the non-Priestly renaming tradition in 32.28 and the Bethel tradition in 28.10–22. **10:** Cf. 32.28. **11–12:** Cf. non-P, 28.13–15. The divine fulfillment of Isaac's wish (28.3–4) that God bestow Abraham's blessing (17.1–8) on Jacob. **11:** *God Almighty,* see 17.1n. **13:** P stresses that God is not bound to Bethel in the way asserted in the non-Priestly Bethel narratives (28.10–22; 32.6–7). God merely spoke there and left. **14:** In a P doublet of 28.18–19, Jacob sets up a pillar at Bethel (see 28.18n.) and (re)names the place.

35.16–21: The birth of Benjamin and death of Rachel. 18: Dying in childbirth, Rachel gives an ominous name ("son of my sorrow") to the baby. In this instance (cf. 29.31–30.24) the father overrules his wife's naming and gives him a more propitious one. *Benjamin* (see note *c*) refers either to the right hand as a symbol of power or to the tribe's position south ("right") of Ephraim. **19:** Here and in 48.7 the tomb of Rachel is located near Bethlehem (south of Jerusalem). Compare 1 Sam 10.2 and Jer 31.15. **20:** On pillars, see 28.18n. **21:** From this point on the name *Israel* is often used to refer to Jacob (32.28).

35.22–29: Concluding materials on Jacob's sons and Isaac's death and burial. 22a: This aside describes how Reuben violated his father's honor by sleeping with Jacob's concubine, the servant of recently deceased Rachel, Bilhah (29.29; 30.3–8). Later he will be cursed for this act (see 49.3–4n.). This is a part of a series of texts added to the early Jacob and Joseph narratives that explain Jacob's preference for Judah (see 49.1–28n.), and thus Judean kingship under David and his successors. **22b–29:** A Priestly listing of Jacob's sons and the death and burial notice of Isaac.

36.1–43: Overview of the descendants of Esau and prior inhabitants of Edom/Seir. Cf. 25.12–18. Before the narrative goes into detail on the descendants of Jacob (37.2–50.26), it gives an overview (largely Priestly) of the descendants of Esau, the firstborn son of Isaac. **2–3:** Though this note agrees with other Priestly material in stressing his intermarriage with foreigners, the names or parentage of Esau's wives are different here (cf.

Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebaioth. 4 Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau; Basemath bore Reuel; 5 and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

6 Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle, all his livestock, and all the property he had acquired in the land of Canaan; and he moved to a land some distance from his brother Jacob. 7 For their possessions were too great for them to live together; the land where they were staying could not support them because of their livestock. 8 So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir; Esau is Edom.

9 These are the descendants of Esau, ancestor of the Edomites, in the hill country of Seir. 10 These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz son of Adah the wife of Esau; Reuel, the son of Esau's wife Basemath. 11 The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. 12 (Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz.) These were the sons of Adah, Esau's wife. 13 These were the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These were the sons of Esau's wife, Basemath. 14 These were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah son[a] of Zibeon: she bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

15 These are the clans[b] of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: the clans[b] Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, 16 Korah, Gatam, and Amalek; these are the clans[b] of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; they are the sons of Adah. 17 These are the sons of Esau's son Reuel: the clans[b] Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah; these are the clans[b] of Reuel in the land of Edom; they are the sons of Esau's wife Basemath. 18 These are the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah: the clans[b] Jeush, Jalam, and Korah; these are the clans[b] born of Esau's wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. 19 These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their clans.[b]

20 These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, 21 Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan; these are the clans[b] of the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom. 22 The sons of Lotan were Hori and Heman; and Lotan's sister was Timna. 23 These are the sons of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. 24 These are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah; he is the Anah who found the springs[c] in the wilderness, as he pastured the donkeys of his father Zibeon. 25 These are the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah daughter of Anah. 26 These are the sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. 27 These are the sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan. 28 These are the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. 29 These are the clans[b] of the Horites: the clans[b] Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, 30 Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan; these are the clans[b] of the Horites, clan by clan[d] in the land of Seir.

31 These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites. 32 Bela son of Beor reigned in Edom, the name of his city being Dinhabah. 33 Bela died, and Jobab son of Zerah of Bozrah succeeded him as king. 34 Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites succeeded him as king. 35 Husham died, and Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab, succeeded him as king, the name of his city being Avith.

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *daughter*
[b] Or *chiefs*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Or *chief by chief*

26.34–35; 28.8–9). **6–8:** Echoes the (non-Priestly) story of Abraham's split from Lot (13.2–13). **9–14:** A list of Esau's descendants organized by the mother (cf. 35.23–26). **9:** The repeated introduction (cf. 36.1) may indicate that an earlier Priestly overview of Esau's descendants began here. **15–19:** A list of clans of the sons of Esau that diverges slightly from vv. 9–14 in its list of offspring of Eliphaz (cf. 36.11 and 15–16). **20–30:** A list of clans of Horite inhabitants of Seir (see 14.6), which may have been originally understood as a region in Transjordan different from Edom. In Deut 2.12,22 Esau (Edom) is described as having expelled the Horites from Seir. **31–39:** A

36 Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah
succeeded him as king. 37 Samlah died,
and Shaul of Rehoboth on the Euphrates
succeeded him as king. 38 Shaul died, and
Baal-hanan son of Achbor succeeded him as
king. 39 Baal-hanan son of Achbor died, and
Hadar succeeded him as king, the name of
his city being Pau; his wife's name was Me-
hetabel, the daughter of Matred, daughter
of Me-zahab.

40 These are the names of the clans[a] of
Esau, according to their families and their
localities by their names: the clans[a] Timna,
Alvah, Jetheth, 41 Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon,
42 Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, 43 Magdiel, and
Iram; these are the clans[a] of Edom (that
is, Esau, the father of Edom), according
to their settlements in the land that they
held.

37 Jacob settled in the land where his father
had lived as an alien, the land of Ca-
naan. 2 This is the story of the family of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was
shepherding the flock with his brothers;
he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and
Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought
a bad report of them to their father. 3 Now
Israel loved Joseph more than any other of
his children, because he was the son of his
old age; and he had made him a long robe
with sleeves.[b] 4 But when his brothers saw
that their father loved him more than all
his brothers, they hated him, and could not
speak peaceably to him.

5 Once Joseph had a dream, and when
he told it to his brothers, they hated him
even more. 6 He said to them, "Listen to this
dream that I dreamed. 7 There we were, bind-
ing sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf
rose and stood upright; then your sheaves

[a] Or *chiefs*

[b] Traditional rendering (compare Gk): *a coat of many colors*; meaning of Heb uncertain

list of early kings of Edom (see Num 20.14). **40–43:** A list of a slightly different kind of clan group (Heb "'alup") in Edom that partially overlaps with names occurring in 36.9–19.

37.1–50.26: The story of Joseph and his family. As indicated in the Introduction, this portion of Genesis features an intricate depiction of Joseph's relations with his brothers and father. Starting with a pair of dreams (37.5–11), the narrative follows a trajectory from his brothers' murderous hatred of Joseph to Joseph's eventual testing of and reunion with them (chs 42–45; 50). Like the Jacob story, this narrative has Northern connections, especially with the addition of the story in 48.8–14 of Joseph's special blessing on his son, Ephraim. The first king of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam, was a member of the tribe of Ephraim (1 Kings 11.26), and stories like these about early Israelite ancestors would have reinforced his claim to rule. Yet over time the story evolved in significance, through additions assuming *Judah's* destiny to rule (see 49.1–28n.), inserted echoes of the promise theme first introduced in the Abraham story (such as 46.1–4; 48.15–16 and 12.1–3n.), connections leading to the book of Joshua (50.24–25), and a few fragments that may come from the Priestly source (e.g. 37.1–2; 46.8–27; 47.27–28; 48.3–6; 49.29–33).

37.1–11: Joseph's dreams of power. These narratives open the remarkably cohesive story of Joseph and his brothers in chs 37–50. Source critics have attempted to trace strands of the hypothesized Yahwistic and Elohistic source documents (see Introduction) through the Joseph story; thus sections focusing on Reuben and Midianites (e.g., 37.22–24,28–36) were assigned to E, while sections focusing on Judah and the Ishmaelites (e.g., 37.25–28) were assigned to J. Others suggested that an early Joseph story focused on Reuben was revised by an author who focused on Judah and referred to Jacob as "Israel." Despite the presence of some additions and modifications (e.g., 37.2a; 41.46), however, the essential unity of the Joseph story is clear. **2a:** *This is the story*, despite the different translation here in the NRSV, this heading is identical with those in 5.1; 6.9; 10.1; 11.27; 25.12,18; 36.1,9 that refer to the "descendants" of a given figure. Here it identifies what follows as concerning the "descendants of Jacob," that is Joseph and his brothers. **2b–4:** According to the Priestly narrative (vv. 1–2), Joseph tattled on his brothers. The non-Priestly narrative (vv. 3–4) explains his brothers' antagonism toward him as resulting from jealousy about Jacob's love. Joseph is favored as the eldest of the children of Jacob by his favorite wife, Rachel (30.22–24). The *long robe with sleeves* (v. 3; see note *b*) is a royal garment (2 Sam 13.18–19) anticipating Joseph's future status. At this point in the story neither the reader nor the brothers know how this will come about. **5–8:** This first dream report predicts Joseph's domination of his brothers (43.26; 50.18; cf. 42.6). The story may intend to predict the future rule of Jeroboam, a member of the

gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf." [8] His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

[9] He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." [10] But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, "What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?" [11] So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

[12] Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. [13] And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." [14] So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

He came to Shechem, [15] and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" [16] "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." [17] The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. [18] They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. [19] They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. [20] Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." [21] But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." [22] Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. [23] So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves[a] that he wore; [24] and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

[25] Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. [26] Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? [27] Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. [28] When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

[29] When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes. [30] He returned to his brothers, and said, "The boy is gone; and I, where can I turn?" [31] Then they took Joseph's robe,

[a] See note on 37.3

Joseph tribe of Ephraim, over the other tribes of northern Israel (1 Kings 11.26; 12.1–14.20). **9–11:** Jacob sees this dream as predicting that he and Joseph's mother, Rachel, will join the brothers in submitting to Joseph. This episode was probably part of an independent Joseph story that originally did not follow an account of Rachel's death (see 35.16–20).

37.12–36: Joseph is sold into slavery. 17: Dothan is about 15 mi (24 km) north of Shechem and lay along a trade route from Syria to Egypt. **20:** *The pits* were cisterns for storing rain water and sometimes used to imprison people (Jer 38.6). **22–27:** The advice of Reuben and Judah reflects the ancient idea that blood cannot be "concealed" (v. 26), but cries out for requital (see 4.10–11n.). **25–36:** Most scholars agree that some combination or modification of traditions has occurred here. Though the brothers decide here to sell Joseph (v. 27) and Joseph later says that they did so (45.4–5), this narrative describes the *Midianite*s as drawing him out and selling him to the *Ishmaelites* (v. 28). Later, both the *Midianites* (37.36) and the *Ishmaelites* (39.1; cf. 37.25) are identified as the ones who sold Joseph to Potiphar. **25:** *Gilead,* in northern Transjordan, was famous for its *balm,* an aromatic resin used in healing (see Jer 8.22). **26–27:** On the role of Judah, see 44.18–34n. **31–34:** Now Jacob is tricked by an

slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. 32 They had the long robe with sleeves[a] taken to their father, and they said, "This we have found; see now whether it is your son's robe or not." 33 He recognized it, and said, "It is my son's robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." 34 Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. 35 All his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father bewailed him. 36 Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

38 It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and settled near a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. 2 There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her. 3 She conceived and bore a son; and he named him Er. 4 Again she conceived and bore a son whom she named Onan. 5 Yet again she bore a son, and she named him Shelah. She[b] was in Chezib when she bore him. 6 Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn; her name was Tamar. 7 But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death. 8 Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her; raise up offspring for your brother." 9 But since Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, he spilled his semen on the ground whenever he went in to his brother's wife, so that he would not give offspring to his brother. 10 What he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death also. 11 Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"—for he feared that he too would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went to live in her father's house.

12 In course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died; when Judah's time of mourning was over,[c] he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13 When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," 14 she put off her widow's garments, put on a veil, wrapped herself up, and sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. She saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage. 15 When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a prostitute, for she had covered her face. 16 He went over to her at

[a] See note on 37.3
[b] Gk: Heb *He*
[c] Heb *when Judah was comforted*

article of clothing (contrast 27.15; see 29.23–25n.). **35:** *Sheol,* the underworld to which a person went at death—the Hebrew Bible does not recognize a differentiated heaven and hell. Since this afterlife was at best a shadowy existence (see Ps 6.5; Eccl 9.10), Jacob's going to his son there was not a comforting expectation. **36:** Multiple traditions testify to some kind of connection between Joseph and an Egyptian *Potiphar/*" Potiphera." *Potiphar* is a form of "Potiphera," the name of the Egyptian priest who is Joseph's father-in-law in 41.45 and 46.20.

38.1–30: Judah and Tamar. Though an apparent interlude in the Joseph story, this chapter echoes elements of ch 37 and anticipates themes from the upcoming Joseph story. Yet this story contrasts with most of this part of Genesis in its focus on Judah, not Joseph. Moreover, it has striking parallels with later narratives about David (see 38.1–2n., 6n.). Both elements—the focus on Judah and anticipation of David—link 38.1–30 with a sequence of episodes, starting in 30.21; 34.1–31; 35.22, that prepare for Jacob's blessing of Judah and prediction of the Davidic dynasty in 49.8–12. See 49.1–28n. and 8–12n. **1–2:** *Adullam,* a town where David later built up his mercenary army (1 Sam 22.1; 2 Sam 23.13). The locales in this narrative are appropriately in the territory of the tribe of Judah. Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua (Heb "Bat Shu'a," v. 12), anticipates the later "Bathsheba" of the David and Solomon narratives (2 Sam 11; cf. 1 Chr 3.5). **6:** Links to the David and Solomon story continue with mention of "Tamar" (see 2 Sam 13). **8–10:** According to the ancient custom of levirate marriage (Deut 25.5–10), *the duty of a brother-in-law* was to father a male descendant for his deceased brother and thus perpetuate his name and inheritance. Onan's death is attributed to his refusal to perform this duty (thus endangering Judah's line), probably by coitus interruptus (rather than "onanism," masturbation). **11:** Judah apparently fears that the death of his sons resulted from Tamar's sinister power. **12–19:** Tamar tricks Judah into playing the role of the brother-

the roadside, and said, "Come, let me come in to you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" 17 He answered, "I will send you a kid from the flock." And she said, "Only if you give me a pledge, until you send it." 18 He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your signet and your cord, and the staff that is in your hand." So he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. 19 Then she got up and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

20 When Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to recover the pledge from the woman, he could not find her. 21 He asked the townspeople, "Where is the temple prostitute who was at Enaim by the wayside?" But they said, "No prostitute has been here." 22 So he returned to Judah, and said, "I have not found her; moreover the townspeople said, 'No prostitute has been here.'" 23 Judah replied, "Let her keep the things as her own, otherwise we will be laughed at; you see, I sent this kid, and you could not find her."

24 About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the whore; moreover she is pregnant as a result of whoredom." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." 25 As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "It was the owner of these who made me pregnant." And she said, "Take note, please, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff." 26 Then Judah acknowledged them and said, "She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not lie with her again.

27 When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb. 28 While she was in labor, one put out a hand; and the midwife took and bound on his hand a crimson thread, saying, "This one came out first." 29 But just then he drew back his hand, and out came his brother; and she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" Therefore he was named Perez.[a] 30 Afterward his brother came out with the crimson thread on his hand; and he was named Zerah.[b]

39 Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. 2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. 7 And after a time his master's wife

[a] That is *A breach*

[b] That is *Brightness*; perhaps alluding to the crimson thread

in-law by dressing as a prostitute and allowing him to hire her to have sex (see 27.1–45n.). **18:** The *signet* was a seal, often suspended from the neck with a *cord,* used to "sign" documents. **20–22:** Though some interpret the Hebrew here for "holy woman" ("qedeshah") as referring to a *temple prostitute* (so NRSV), it is unlikely that there was an institution of sacred prostitution in ancient Israel. Some commentators propose that Judah's Adullamite friend is just delicately referring to the missing "prostitute" as a similarly unattached "holy woman." **24:** Stoning was the usual punishment for adultery (Deut 22.23–24; cf. Jn 8.5), although burning was prescribed for exceptional cases (Lev 21.9). **25–26:** The presentation of evidence to Judah here echoes the presentation of the bloody robe to Jacob in 37.32–33. **27–30:** The birth of Judah's twins is depicted in terms similar to that of Jacob and Esau (25.24–26). The final link of this chapter to the David narrative (see 38.1–2,6n.) occurs with Perez, the firstborn and ancestor of David (Ruth 4.18–22; see 49.1–28 and 8–12n.).

39.1–23: Joseph's success, temptation, and imprisonment. 1–6: Joseph's enjoyment of blessing and Potiphar's recognition of it are an outgrowth of the promise to Abraham in 12.1–3 (see 12.2n.). **7–20:** A parallel Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers" also tells a tale of how a man rejected the advances of another's wife, who then

cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." [8] But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. [9] He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" [10] And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not consent to lie beside her or to be with her. [11] One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, [12] she caught hold of his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. [13] When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, [14] she called out to the members of her household and said to them, "See, my husband[a] has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; [15] and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside." [16] Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home, [17] and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; [18] but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside."

[19] When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, "This is the way your servant treated me," he became enraged. [20] And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. [21] But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. [22] The chief jailer committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. [23] The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

40 Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt. [2] Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, [3] and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. [4] The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he waited on them; and they continued for some time in custody. [5] One night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own meaning. [6] When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. [7] So he asked Pharaoh's officers, who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?" [8] They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me."

[9] So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream there was a vine before me, [10] and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and the clusters ripened into grapes. [11] Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." [12] Then Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days; [13] within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. [14] But remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. [15] For in fact I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also

[a] Heb *he*

laid false accusations against him and almost brought about his death. **12–15:** Again (see 37.31–33), Joseph's *garment* is used as misleading evidence. **14:** *Hebrew,* see 14.13n. **21–23:** Abraham's blessing is again evident here.

40.1–23: Joseph establishes his expertise as dream interpreter. Doubled dreams are a recurring motif in the Joseph narrative (see 37.5–10; 41.1–7,32; 42.9). **13:** *Lift up your head,* i.e., graciously free you from prison (2 Kings 25.27). The same expression is applied ironically to the baker's fate in v. 19. **15:** *Stolen,* 37.28.

I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon."

16 When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, "I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, 17 and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head." 18 And Joseph answered, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; 19 within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a pole; and the birds will eat the flesh from you."

20 On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. 21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand; 22 but the chief baker he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. 23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

41 After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, 2 and there came up out of the Nile seven sleek and fat cows, and they grazed in the reed grass. 3 Then seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. 4 The ugly and thin cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke. 5 Then he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. 6 Then seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them. 7 The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Pharaoh awoke, and it was a dream. 8 In the morning his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

9 Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my faults today. 10 Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard. 11 We dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own meaning. 12 A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each according to his dream. 13 As he interpreted to us, so it turned out; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged."

14 Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. 15 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." 16 Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." 17 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile; 18 and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. 19 Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and thin. Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt. 20 The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows, 21 but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly as before. Then I awoke. 22 I fell asleep a second time[a] and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk, 23 and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them; 24 and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians, there was no one who could explain it to me."

25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 26 The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. 27 The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of

[a] Gk Syr Vg: Heb lacks *I fell asleep a second time*

41.1–57: Joseph's elevation as the result of successful dream interpretation. **8:** The narrator intends to demonstrate the superiority of Israel's God over Egyptian magic and wisdom (cf. Ex 8.18–19; 9.11; Dan 2.2–19; 5.8,15–

famine. [28] It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. [29] There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. [30] After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. [31] The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous. [32] And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. [33] Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. [34] Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. [35] Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. [36] That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine."

[37] The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. [38] Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?" [39] So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. [40] You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you." [41] And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." [42] Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck. [43] He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they cried out in front of him, "Bow the knee!"[a] Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. [44] Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." [45] Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt.

[46] Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. [47] During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. [48] He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty[b] in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. [49] So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure.

[50] Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. [51] Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh,[c] "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." [52] The second he named Ephraim,[d] "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes."

[53] The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; [54] and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. [55] When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do." [56] And since the famine had spread over all the land,

[a] *Abrek*, apparently an Egyptian word similar in sound to the Hebrew word meaning *to kneel*
[b] Sam Gk: MT *the seven years that were*
[c] That is *Making to forget*
[d] From a Hebrew word meaning *to be fruitful*

28). **16:** Joseph denies having any occult art and ascribes his skill solely to God. **42:** *His signet ring* (see 38.18n.) empowered Joseph to act as Pharaoh's representative. **45:** The installation rites culminate in the bestowal of an Egyptian name on Joseph. Joseph's adoption into the Egyptian court is further indicated by his marriage into the priesthood of *On* or Heliopolis. No judgment is attached to this intermarriage with an Egyptian foreigner (see Deut 23.8–9). *Potiphera,* see 37.36n. **46:** This is the first Priestly notice since the outset of the Joseph story (37.2). **50–52:** The birth of Joseph's two sons; see 46.20; ch 48.

Joseph opened all the storehouses,[a] and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. 57 Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

42 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you keep looking at one another? 2 I have heard," he said, "that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." 3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him. 5 Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan.

6 Now Joseph was governor over the land; it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. 7 When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." 8 Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. 9 Joseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them. He said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!" 10 They said to him, "No, my lord; your servants have come to buy food. 11 We are all sons of one man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies." 12 But he said to them, "No, you have come to see the nakedness of the land!" 13 They said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no more." 14 But Joseph said to them, "It is just as I have said to you; you are spies! 15 Here is how you shall be tested: as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here! 16 Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies." 17 And he put them all together in prison for three days.

18 On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: 19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here where you are imprisoned. The rest of you shall go and carry grain for the famine of your households, 20 and bring your youngest brother to me. Thus your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they agreed to do so. 21 They said to one another, "Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this anguish has come upon us." 22 Then Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." 23 They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter. 24 He turned away from them and wept; then he returned and spoke to them. And he picked out Simeon and had him bound before their eyes. 25 Joseph then gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to return every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. This was done for them.

26 They loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed. 27 When one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money at the top of the sack. 28 He said to his brothers, "My money has been put back; here it is in

[a] Gk Vg Compare Syr: Heb *opened all that was in* (or, *among*) *them*

42.1–38: Joseph's brothers' first journey to Egypt. 5: See 12.10; 26.1. **6:** *Bowed themselves before him,* since all but Benjamin are present, Joseph's first dream (37.5–8) is almost fulfilled (cf. 43.26). **9–14:** The charge of spying is natural, since Egypt's frontier, facing Canaan, was vulnerable to attack (Ex 1.10). Nevertheless, the narrator (v. 9) explains Joseph's accusation as related to his memory of his dreams (37.5–11). **15–17:** Though Joseph claims to be "testing" whether his brothers are spies, he actually seems to be "testing" whether they will betray his full brother and father's favorite (v. 4), Benjamin, the way they once betrayed him (see chs 43–44). The reader, however, does not yet know this and is left to wonder about Joseph's motives for putting his brothers through the following ordeal. **21–23:** The brothers' expression of guilt at their earlier betrayal of Joseph hints at the change

my sack!" At this they lost heart and turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

29 When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, 30 "The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly to us, and charged us with spying on the land. 31 But we said to him, 'We are honest men, we are not spies. 32 We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' 33 Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. 34 Bring your youngest brother to me, and I shall know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will release your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'"

35 As they were emptying their sacks, there in each one's sack was his bag of money. When they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. 36 And their father Jacob said to them, "I am the one you have bereaved of children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has happened to me!" 37 Then Reuben said to his father, "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." 38 But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should come to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."

43 Now the famine was severe in the land. 2 And when they had eaten up the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little more food." 3 But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' 4 If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food; 5 but if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'" 6 Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?" 7 They replied, "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?" 8 Then Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the boy with me, and let us be on our way, so that we may live and not die—you and we and also our little ones. 9 I myself will be surety for him; you can hold me accountable for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. 10 If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice."

11 Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry them down as a present to the man—a little balm and a little honey, gum, resin, pistachio nuts, and almonds. 12 Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the top of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. 13 Take your brother also, and be on your way again to the man; 14 may God Almighty[a] grant you mercy before the man, so that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin. As for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." 15 So the men took the present, and they took double the money with them, as well as Benjamin. Then they went on their way down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.

16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon." 17 The man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house. 18 Now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, "It is because of the money, replaced in

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

of heart for which Joseph is looking. **25:** *Money,* lit., "silver." **38:** *Sheol,* see 37.35n.

43.1–34: Joseph's brothers' second journey to Egypt. 1–2: Simeon, left as a hostage in Egypt (vv. 14,23), is apparently forgotten, for the brothers return only when more grain is needed. **3–7:** Cf. 42.29–34. **8–10:** Again (see 37.26–27) *Judah* is depicted as the hero; see 44.18–34n. **11:** *Balm . . . gum,* and *resin,* echoing 37.25. **14:** *God*

our sacks the first time, that we have been brought in, so that he may have an opportunity to fall upon us, to make slaves of us and take our donkeys." [19] So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the entrance to the house. [20] They said, "Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food; [21] and when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was each one's money in the top of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it back with us. [22] Moreover we have brought down with us additional money to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks." [23] He replied, "Rest assured, do not be afraid; your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you; I received your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them. [24] When the steward[a] had brought the men into Joseph's house, and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, [25] they made the present ready for Joseph's coming at noon, for they had heard that they would dine there.

[26] When Joseph came home, they brought him the present that they had carried into the house, and bowed to the ground before him. [27] He inquired about their welfare, and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" [28] They said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." And they bowed their heads and did obeisance. [29] Then he looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!" [30] With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private room and wept there. [31] Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, "Serve the meal." [32] They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. [33] When they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, the men looked at one another in amazement. [34] Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.

44 Then he commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the top of his sack. [2] Put my cup, the silver cup, in the top of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him. [3] As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. [4] When they had gone only a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward, "Go, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my silver cup?[b] [5] Is it not from this that my lord drinks? Does he not indeed use it for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.'"

[6] When he overtook them, he repeated these words to them. [7] They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should

[a] Heb *the man*

[b] Gk Compare Vg: Heb lacks *Why have you stolen my silver cup?*

Almighty, see 17.1n. **23:** The Egyptian steward anticipates the emphasis of the story on divine providence (44.16; 45.5–8; 50.20). **26:** With all eleven brothers now bowing down (cf. v. 15), they unknowingly fulfill the first dream in 37.5–8 (see 50.18n.). **29–30:** Joseph *was overcome with affection* for Benjamin, his only full brother (through Rachel). **34:** Just as Benjamin (42.4,38; 43.6–14) and before him Joseph (37.3–4) was favored by Jacob, so here—through Joseph's actions—the brothers watch a son of Rachel enjoy special privilege in the Egyptian court. The stage is set for a reprise of their murderous envy once shown toward Joseph in Gen 37 and now potentially directed at Benjamin.

44.1–34: Joseph's final test of his brothers. 1–5: Here the focus is on Joseph's cup, a sacred vessel for divination, prediction of the future (cf. 42.25–28). The brothers' (unknowing) taking of the cup and pronouncement of a death penalty on the thief (v. 9) echo the earlier story of Rachel's stealing of Laban's household gods (31.19) and Jacob's pronouncement of the death penalty on the thief (31.32). In a narrative that parallels those stories,

do such a thing! [8] Look, the money that we found at the top of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; why then would we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? [9] Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover the rest of us will become my lord's slaves." [10] He said, "Even so; in accordance with your words, let it be: he with whom it is found shall become my slave, but the rest of you shall go free." [11] Then each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. [12] He searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. [13] At this they tore their clothes. Then each one loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

[14] Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house while he was still there; and they fell to the ground before him. [15] Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that one such as I can practice divination?" [16] And Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? How can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; here we are then, my lord's slaves, both we and also the one in whose possession the cup has been found." [17] But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the one in whose possession the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."

[18] Then Judah stepped up to him and said, "O my lord, let your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are like Pharaoh himself. [19] My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' [20] And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead; he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' [21] Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, so that I may set my eyes on him.' [22] We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' [23] Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.' [24] When we went back to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord. [25] And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' [26] we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother goes with us, will we go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' [27] Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; [28] one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. [29] If you take this one also from me, and harm comes to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol.' [30] Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, [31] when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. [32] For your servant became surety for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I will bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.' [33] Now therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers. [34] For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father."

45 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away

Joseph lays a trap for his brothers. **17:** Joseph tests his brothers (see 42.15–17) to see whether they will let Benjamin go into slavery as they once did with him (37.25–35). In this case, the stakes are higher, since the brothers now think that they themselves will go into slavery if they do not betray Benjamin. **18–34:** Judah had secured Jacob's release of Benjamin through offering himself as collateral (43.8–10; see v. 32). Now he steps forth to express a respect for their father's bond to Rachel's son(s) that had not been evident among the brothers before (cf. 37.19–35). This is a prime example of a passage in the Joseph narrative where Judah, rather than the elder Reuben, plays the role of the most powerful and prominent son (see also 37.26–27; ch 38; 43.3–5,8–10; 46.28). Such texts have typically been assigned to a Judah-Israel (or J) layer of the story (see Introduction and 37.1–11n.), but may rather reflect an attempt in the Joseph story as a whole (perhaps an early Northern text) to show even Judah, King David's ancestor, eventually recognizing Joseph's right to rule over his brothers.

from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 10 You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' 12 And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." 14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

16 When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers have come," Pharaoh and his servants were pleased. 17 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your animals and go back to the land of Canaan. 18 Take your father and your households and come to me, so that I may give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you may enjoy the fat of the land.' 19 You are further charged to say, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. 20 Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"

21 The sons of Israel did so. Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. 22 To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. 23 To his father he sent the following: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. 24 Then he sent his brothers on their way, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Do not quarrel[a] along the way."

25 So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. 26 And they told him, "Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt." He was stunned; he could not believe them. 27 But when they told him all the words of Joseph that he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28 Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die."

46 When Israel set out on his journey with all that he had and came to Beer-sheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. 2 God spoke to Israel in visions

[a] Or *be agitated*

45.1–28: Joseph makes himself known to his brothers and father. 1–3: The brothers initially react with shock to the knowledge that they face the brother whom they sold into slavery. **4–13:** Joseph reassures his brothers by telling them that God—not they—sent him into slavery. God sent him there so that he might feed his family in the famine. **10:** *The land of Goshen,* probably located in the eastern Nile Delta. **16–20:** Asiatics are frequently attested as living in Egypt, though no Egyptian records refer specifically to the Israelites living there.

46.1–27: Jacob's migration to Egypt. 1–4: Jacob's first stop on the way out of the land is *Beer-sheba,* where the same God who told Isaac to stay in the land and not to go to Egypt (26.2–3) now tells his son, Jacob, to leave

of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." 3 Then he said, "I am God,[a] the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. 4 I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph's own hand shall close your eyes."

5 Then Jacob set out from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. 6 They also took their livestock and the goods that they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, 7 his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters; all his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

8 Now these are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his offspring, who came to Egypt. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, 9 and the children of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. 10 The children of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul,[b] the son of a Canaanite woman. 11 The children of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 12 The children of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the children of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. 13 The children of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Jashub,[c] and Shimron. 14 The children of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel 15 (these are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; in all his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three). 16 The children of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. 17 The children of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah. The children of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel 18 (these are the children of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah; and these she bore to Jacob—sixteen persons). 19 The children of Jacob's wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 20 To Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. 21 The children of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard 22 (these are the children of Rachel, who were born to Jacob—fourteen persons in all). 23 The children of Dan: Hashum.[d] 24 The children of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem 25 (these are the children of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Rachel, and these she bore to Jacob—seven persons in all). 26 All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own offspring, not including the wives of his sons, were sixty-six persons in all. 27 The children of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy.

28 Israel[e] sent Judah ahead to Joseph to lead the way before him into Goshen. When they came to the land of Goshen, 29 Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to meet his father Israel in Goshen. He presented himself to him, fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. 30 Israel said to Joseph, "I can die now, having seen for myself that you are still alive." 31 Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. 32 The men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have.' 33 When Pharaoh calls you, and says, 'What is your occupation?' 34 you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our ancestors'—in order that you may settle in the land of Goshen, because all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians."

[a] Heb *the God*
[b] Or *Saul*
[c] Compare Sam Gk Num 26.24; 1 Chr 7.1: MT *Iob*
[d] Gk: Heb *Hushim*
[e] Heb *He*

the land for Egypt (see 12.1–3n.; 28.13–15n.). God also expands the earlier promise that Abraham would be a *great nation* (see 12.2n.) by saying that God will make Jacob a great nation in *Egypt* (v. 3; see 47.27; Ex 1.7,9). **8–27:** A Priestly section listing Jacob's descendants by their mothers, using the traditional number seventy (v. 27; Ex 1.5; Deut 10.22). Most names of the clan leaders are in the Priestly list in Num 26. **12:** See ch 38.

46.28–47.28: Jacob's family settles in Egypt. 46.34: *All shepherds are abhorrent,* there is no nonbiblical evi-

47 So Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; they are now in the land of Goshen." [2] From among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. [3] Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our ancestors were." [4] They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to reside as aliens in the land; for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks because the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, we ask you, let your servants settle in the land of Goshen." [5] Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. [6] The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock."

[7] Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob, and presented him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. [8] Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the years of your life?" [9] Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my earthly sojourn are one hundred thirty; few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the life of my ancestors during their long sojourn." [10] Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. [11] Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and granted them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had instructed. [12] And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

[13] Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. [14] Joseph collected all the money to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. [15] When the money from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan was spent, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, "Give us food! Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone." [16] And Joseph answered, "Give me your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone." [17] So they brought their livestock to Joseph; and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. That year he supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock. [18] When that year was ended, they came to him the following year, and said to him, "We can not hide from my lord that our money is all spent; and the herds of cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. [19] Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate."

[20] So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. [21] As for the people, he made slaves of them[a] from one end of Egypt to the other. [22] Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh, and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land. [23] Then Joseph said to the people, "Now that I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you; sow the land. [24] And at the harvests you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones." [25] They said, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh." [26] So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have

[a] Sam Gk Compare Vg: MT *He removed them to the cities*

dence for this assertion. **47.7,12:** According to this Priestly tradition, *Jacob blessed Pharaoh.* **11:** A Priestly notice. *The land of Rameses* cannot be identified with certainty. The first Egyptian pharaoh with that name ruled at the beginning of the thirteenth century BCE. **13–26:** Joseph's clever impoverishment of the Egyptians here contrasts

the fifth. The land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.

27 Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly. 28 Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred forty-seven years.

29 When the time of Israel's death drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favor with you, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt. 30 When I lie down with my ancestors, carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." He answered, "I will do as you have said." 31 And he said, "Swear to me"; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself on the head of his bed.

48 After this Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," he[a] summoned his strength and sat up in bed. 3 And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty[b] appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me, 4 and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers; I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your offspring after you for a perpetual holding.' 5 Therefore your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are now mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are. 6 As for the offspring born to you after them, they shall be yours. They shall be recorded under the names of their brothers with regard to their inheritance. 7 For when I came from Paddan, Rachel, alas, died in the land of Canaan on the way, while there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem).

8 When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" 9 Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." 10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not see well. So Joseph brought them near him; and he kissed them and embraced them. 11 Israel said to Joseph, "I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also." 12 Then Joseph removed them from his father's knees,[c] and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. 13 Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them near him. 14 But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. 15 He blessed Joseph, and said,

"The God before whom my ancestors
Abraham and Isaac walked,

[a] Heb *Israel*
[b] Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*
[c] Heb *from his knees*

with his beneficent provision for his own family (see 45.5–11; 50.20–21). **27–28:** Another fragment from P. Here the Priestly fertility promise to Abraham (17.2,6; cf. 1.28; 9.1,7) is fulfilled in Egypt. **27:** *Goshen,* see 45.10n.

47.29–49.33: Jacob's preparations for death, including the adoption and blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh. This section is viewed by many scholars as a series of later insertions into the Joseph story, linking it back to the Jacob story and forward to the story of the Israelites. **47.29:** *Put your hand under my thigh,* see 24.2n. **30–31:** Joseph binds himself by oath to bury Jacob in an ancestral burial place, perhaps in Transjordan (see 50.10n.). This non-Priestly notice parallels the Priestly notice where Jacob orders his sons to bury him in the cave at Machpelah (49.29–33; see ch 23). **48.3–6:** This Priestly narrative refers to the Priestly Bethel (Luz) account (35.9–13) in describing Jacob's adoption of his two grandsons by Joseph. The narrative accounts for the division of the "house of Joseph" (Josh 17.17; 18.5; Judg 1.23,35) into two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim. **7:** 35.16–20. **8–14:** In having Jacob favor the younger son, Ephraim, over the older, Manasseh, this non-Priestly narrative echoes the previous accounts of Jacob's achievement of ascendancy over Esau (25.22–34; 27.1–45). Like the older Joseph story into which this scene is inserted (see 47.28–49.33n.), this section may intend to predict the Ephraimite Jeroboam's ascendancy over the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 11.26; 12.1–14.20; see 37.5–8n.). **10:** Cf. 27.1. **15–16:** Jacob passes

the God who has been my shepherd all my
life to this day,
16 the angel who has redeemed me from all
harm, bless the boys;
and in them let my name be perpetuated,
and the name of my ancestors
Abraham and Isaac;
and let them grow into a multitude on the
earth."
17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his
right hand on the head of Ephraim, it dis-
pleased him; so he took his father's hand, to
remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's
head. 18 Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my
father! Since this one is the firstborn, put
your right hand on his head." 19 But his father
refused, and said, "I know, my son, I know; he
also shall become a people, and he also shall
be great. Nevertheless his younger brother
shall be greater than he, and his offspring
shall become a multitude of nations." 20 So he
blessed them that day, saying,
"By you[a] Israel will invoke blessings,
saying,
'God make you[a] like Ephraim and like
Manasseh.'"
So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.
21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to
die, but God will be with you and will bring
you again to the land of your ancestors. 22 I
now give to you one portion[b] more than to
your brothers, the portion[b] that I took from
the hand of the Amorites with my sword and
with my bow."

49 Then Jacob called his sons, and said:
"Gather around, that I may tell you
what will happen to you in days to come.
2 Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob;
listen to Israel your father.

3 Reuben, you are my firstborn,
my might and the first fruits of my
vigor,
excelling in rank and excelling in
power.
4 Unstable as water, you shall no longer
excel
because you went up onto your father's
bed;
then you defiled it—you[c] went up onto
my couch!

5 Simeon and Levi are brothers;
weapons of violence are their
swords.
6 May I never come into their council;
may I not be joined to their
company—
for in their anger they killed men,
and at their whim they hamstrung
oxen.
7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce,
and their wrath, for it is cruel!

[a] *you* here is singular in Heb
[b] Or *mountain slope* (Heb *shekem*, a play on the name of the town and district of Shechem)
[c] Gk Syr Tg: Heb *he*

onto the Joseph tribes the special blessing of Abraham and Isaac (12.1–3; 26.2–5; etc.). **17–19:** See 8–14n. **20:** This older version of the blessing on Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. vv. 15–16) is an example of people "blessing themselves by" another (see 12.3n.). **22:** In Hebrew *one portion* (or "shoulder," Heb "shekem") is a play on the name "Shechem" (see 12.6n.). *With my sword and with my bow,* cf. 33.19–34.31. *Amorites,* see 10.16–18a n.

49.1–28: Jacob's blessing on his twelve sons. Though the poem is depicted as a deathbed *blessing* by the text following it (49.28; cf. 27.4 and n.), this poem seems to have been originally designed as a prediction of the destinies, good and bad, of the tribes of Israel. Many scholars have argued that the poem is ancient on the basis of its language and resemblance to tribal poems in Deut 33 and Judg 5. Nevertheless, the present form of the poem appears to have been modified to fit the narrative context in which it has been put. Its first part follows the birth order of 29.31–35 and legitimates rule for Judah and—by extension—the Davidic dynasty. The author of these changes may be responsible for inserting the whole poem into its present context, as well as for the addition to the Jacob-Joseph story of the narratives referred to in 49.3–7 (30.21; 34.1–31; 35.21–22a; cf. 37.36–38.30). **3–4:** This section justifies Reuben's ejection from favor as firstborn by recalling the story of his sleeping with his father's concubine (see 35.22n.). **5–7:** Judah's older brothers, Simeon and Levi, fail to take Reuben's place because of their role in the despoiling of Shechem (34.25–31). **8–12:** With his three older brothers out of favor (vv. 3–7), Judah receives the greatest part of his father's blessing. The narrative of the succession to David features a similar displacement of older sons: Amnon (2 Sam 13), Absalom (2 Sam 15–18), and Adonijah

I will divide them in Jacob,
and scatter them in Israel.

8 Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
your father's sons shall bow down before you.
9 Judah is a lion's whelp;
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion,
like a lioness—who dares rouse him up?
10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;[a]
and the obedience of the peoples is his.
11 Binding his foal to the vine
and his donkey's colt to the choice vine,
he washes his garments in wine
and his robe in the blood of grapes;
12 his eyes are darker than wine,
and his teeth whiter than milk.

13 Zebulun shall settle at the shore of the sea;
he shall be a haven for ships,
and his border shall be at Sidon.

14 Issachar is a strong donkey,
lying down between the sheepfolds;
15 he saw that a resting place was good,
and that the land was pleasant;
so he bowed his shoulder to the burden,
and became a slave at forced labor.

16 Dan shall judge his people
as one of the tribes of Israel.
17 Dan shall be a snake by the roadside,
a viper along the path,
that bites the horse's heels
so that its rider falls backward.

18 I wait for your salvation, O LORD.

19 Gad shall be raided by raiders,
but he shall raid at their heels.

20 Asher's[b] food shall be rich,
and he shall provide royal delicacies.

21 Naphtali is a doe let loose
that bears lovely fawns.[c]

22 Joseph is a fruitful bough,
a fruitful bough by a spring;
his branches run over the wall.[d]
23 The archers fiercely attacked him;
they shot at him and pressed him hard.
24 Yet his bow remained taut,
and his arms[e] were made agile
by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob,
by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel,
25 by the God of your father, who will help you,
by the Almighty[f] who will bless you
with blessings of heaven above,
blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

[a] Or *until Shiloh comes* or *until he comes to Shiloh* or (with Syr) *until he comes to whom it belongs*
[b] Gk Vg Syr: Heb *From Asher*
[c] Or *that gives beautiful words*
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[e] Heb *the arms of his hands*
[f] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*

(1 Kings 1–2). See 38.27–30n. **10:** The *scepter* and *staff* are symbols of sovereignty. The latter part of the verse, however, is obscure (see note *a*). It appears to predict rule for Judean royalty until Judah's Davidic descendants achieve universal dominion (Num 24.17; Pss 2, 110) and is therefore preexilic. **13–27:** This latter part of the blessing (vv. 13–27) diverges from the birth order of 30.1–24. This section appears to predate placement into its present context in the story of Jacob and Joseph. **16:** The tribal name *Dan* is derived from the Hebrew verb for "judge" ("dan"). **18:** Probably a late scribal addition; cf. Ps 119.166. **22–26:** The lengthy blessing on Joseph and its triumphant conclusion (v. 26) suggest that he may have been the original focus of the early blessing (see 49.1–28n.). **25:** *The Almighty,* see 17.1n. *Blessings of heaven,* i.e., rain, dew, sun. *The deep that lies beneath,* an allusion to the subterranean ocean (see 1.6; 2.6). Compare Deut 33.13.

[26] The blessings of your father
are stronger than the blessings of the
eternal mountains,
the bounties[a] of the everlasting hills;
may they be on the head of Joseph,
on the brow of him who was set apart
from his brothers.

[27] Benjamin is a ravenous wolf,
in the morning devouring the prey,
and at evening dividing the spoil."

[28] All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, blessing each one of them with a suitable blessing.

[29] Then he charged them, saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my ancestors—in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, [30] in the cave in the field at Machpelah, near Mamre, in the land of Canaan, in the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial site. [31] There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah— [32] the field and the cave that is in it were purchased from the Hittites." [33] When Jacob ended his charge to his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

50 Then Joseph threw himself on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. [2] Joseph commanded the physicians in his service to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel; [3] they spent forty days in doing this, for that is the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

[4] When the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph addressed the household of Pharaoh, "If now I have found favor with you, please speak to Pharaoh as follows: [5] My father made me swear an oath; he said, 'I am about to die. In the tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.' Now therefore let me go up, so that I may bury my father; then I will return." [6] Pharaoh answered, "Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear to do."

[7] So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, [8] as well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen. [9] Both chariots and charioteers went up with him. It was a very great company. [10] When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed a time of mourning for his father seven days. [11] When the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning on the part of the Egyptians." Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim;[b] it is beyond the Jordan. [12] Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them. [13] They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, the field near Mamre, which Abraham bought as a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. [14] After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

[15] Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?"

[a] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *of my progenitors to the boundaries*

[b] That is *mourning* (or *meadow*) *of Egypt*

49.29–33: This Priestly section includes an order to bury Jacob at Machpelah (see ch 23) that parallels the earlier non-Priestly burial order (47.29–31).

50.1–26: Burial of Jacob and final days of Joseph. 1–11: This non-Priestly narrative seems to presuppose that the burial and mourning occurred in Transjordan, not at the cave at Machpelah (23.1,19). **2–3:** Jacob is provided with Egyptian honors: embalming and lengthy mourning. **5:** This speech by Joseph links to the non-Priestly order to bury him at an ancestral burial place, here a tomb that Jacob had hewn out for himself (see 47.30–31n.). **10:** Hebron/Mamre (see v. 13) is much closer to Egypt than this unidentified location in Transjordan. **12–13:** The Priestly narrative. **15–16:** In fear now that their father is dead (cf. 27.41 and 33.12–17n.), Joseph's brothers attempt

16 So they approached[a] Joseph, saying, "Your
father gave this instruction before he died,
17 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime
of your brothers and the wrong they did in
harming you.' Now therefore please forgive
the crime of the servants of the God of your
father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him.
18 Then his brothers also wept,[b] fell down
before him, and said, "We are here as your
slaves." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not
be afraid! Am I in the place of God? 20 Even
though you intended to do harm to me, God
intended it for good, in order to preserve a
numerous people, as he is doing today. 21 So
have no fear; I myself will provide for you
and your little ones." In this way he reassured
them, speaking kindly to them.

22 So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's household; and Joseph lived one hundred
ten years. 23 Joseph saw Ephraim's children of
the third generation; the children of Machir son
of Manasseh were also born on Joseph's knees.

24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am
about to die; but God will surely come to you,
and bring you up out of this land to the land
that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to
Jacob." 25 So Joseph made the Israelites swear,
saying, "When God comes to you, you shall
carry up my bones from here." 26 And Joseph
died, being one hundred ten years old; he was
embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *they commanded*
[b] Cn: Heb *also came*

to protect themselves through reporting that Jacob had ordered Joseph to forgive them (vv. 16–17). **18–21:** For the first time, the brothers knowingly subject themselves to Joseph (cf. 43.26), fulfilling Joseph's first dream (37.5–7) and thus refuting their challenge of his destiny to rule them (37.8). Since they had just spoken of themselves as God's slaves (v. 17; translated in the NRSV as *servants*), their description of themselves here as Joseph's slaves implicitly equates him with God. Echoing his father's words to Rachel (30.2), Joseph rejects this equation, attributing his dominion over his brothers as resulting from God's plan. Later readers could have taken this as an implicit endorsement of the divine destiny of Joseph's descendants—such as the Ephraimite king Jeroboam (1 Kings 11.26)—to rule over the other tribes. **23:** *Machir* was an early tribal group (Judg 5.14), later viewed as a clan within Manasseh that laid claim to Gilead (Num 32.39–40; Deut 3.15). *Born on Joseph's knees,* see 30.3. **24:** A reference to God's covenant oath to give the land to Abraham (15.9–17n.; 22.15–18). It closely resembles similar texts in Deut 1.8; 6.10 and related materials. **25:** This request will be fulfilled in Ex 13.19; Josh 24.2, one of the links between Genesis and the narrative extending to the end of Joshua.

EXODUS

NAME

The English name "Exodus" derives from a Latinized abbreviation of the Greek title *exodos aigyptou* ("exit from Egypt"); this title highlights the storyline of the first third of the book. In keeping with the ancient practice of naming books after their opening words, the Hebrew title is *Shemot* ("names"), taken from the beginning ("These are the names").

CANONICAL STATUS AND LOCATION

The second book of the Bible in all canonical traditions, Exodus is not an independent work but rather is an integral part of the Torah, or Pentateuch. Its opening verses connect it to Gen 46.8–27; and it closes with the completion of the tabernacle, the wilderness shrine that prefigures the Temple and its endowment with the divine presence. Details of worship at that shrine dominate the next book, Leviticus; and Numbers and Deuteronomy continue the journey narrative.

AUTHORSHIP

Traditional authorship is ascribed to Moses in part based on passages such as 24.4 and 34.27. Modern biblical scholarship, however, has noted many problems with the view that Moses wrote the entire Torah, including Exodus. Like the rest of the Pentateuch, Exodus contains contradictions and redundancies. For example, Moses' father-in-law is sometimes called Reuel and sometimes Jethro; and the mountain of revelation is Sinai in some passages and Horeb in others. The narratives of Moses on the mountain in chs 19 and 24 have many overlapping and conflicting details, as does the account of the nine marvels in 7.8–10.29. Differences in vocabulary, style, and ideas are also discernible. Thus Exodus is best understood as a composite of traditions shaped over many centuries by an unknown number of anonymous storytellers and writers. Those traditions eventually comprised four major sources (known as J, E, D, and P) that were skillfully combined into the present canonical book by one or more redactors or editors who felt that all the sources were valid. The redactor(s) or editor(s) can be credited with the overall interweaving of disparate materials—narratives, legal texts, priestly records, lists, and one long poem. Redaction also introduced patterns, such as the repetition of a thematic word or phrase a symbolic number of times (usually seven or ten) in a literary unit (see, e.g., 4.21n.; 5.1n.; 18.26n.; 40.16n.), and also the triadic arrangement of the account of the nine marvels (see 7.8–10.29n.).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The diverse materials in Exodus are situated within a storyline describing the departure of a group of oppressed people from Egypt to a sacred mountain in Sinai where they enter into a covenant with the God they believed rescued them; at God's direction, they construct a portable shrine for their deity before continuing their journey. The historicity of that story has been questioned, partly because the sources comprising Exodus date from many centuries after the events they purport to describe. The events themselves, which involve the escape of a component of the Pharaoh's workforce, the disruption of Egyptian agriculture, and the loss of many Egyptian lives, are not mentioned in Egyptian sources (although the Egyptians would not necessarily record such events). Similarly, the larger-than-life leader Moses is not mentioned in contemporaneous nonbiblical sources; and no trace of a large group of people moving across the Sinai Peninsula has been found by archaeological surveys or excavations. Moreover, virtually none of the places mentioned in Exodus, including the holy mountain, can be identified with sites discovered in Sinai or with names known from other sources (see 12.37n.; 19.1n.). In addition, features of the story, such as the signs and wonders performed in Egypt and the exceedingly large number of people said to have left Egypt (see 12.37n.), defy credibility. Finally, the Exodus story culminates in Joshua, with the conquest of the land of Israel; and here too the archaeological record does not corroborate the main biblical narrative.

Despite these problems, the basic storyline is supported by evidence from Egyptian and other sources. Foreigners from western Asia, called "Asiatics" in Egyptian documents, periodically did migrate to Egypt, especially during times of famine (see Gen 12.10; 41.57; 43.1–2); others were taken to Egypt as military captives or were

forcibly sent there as human tribute by Canaanite rulers. Moreover, many of these groups, including those who had voluntarily entered Egypt, were vulnerable to conscription for state projects. This pattern was especially strong toward the end of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1400–1200 BCE). And, although virtually all of the foreigners in Egypt were assimilated into local culture, there is at least one documented instance of several workers escaping into the Sinai wilderness. Thus the overall pattern of descent into Egypt followed by servitude and escape is based on information in ancient documents. In addition, the end of the Late Bronze Age, by which time the Israelites would have left Egypt, coincides with the date of inscriptional evidence—a stele erected by the pharaoh Merneptah in ca. 1209 BCE, which contains the first mention of Israel outside the Bible—for a people called "Israel" in the land of Canaan.

A plausible reconstruction is that a relatively small group of people, descendants of western Asiatics who had entered Egypt generations before, managed to escape from servitude. So improbable was such an event that the people, or their leader, attributed it to miraculous divine intervention. This experience bonded them in their loyalty to that deity and gave them a collective identity. This story was originally oral and developed like other oral tales. Upon entering Canaan, they told their story and spread word about their unusual saving God, Yahweh, a name perhaps learned from Midianites with whom they interacted (see 3.15n.). Their stories about securing freedom are collective memories meant to re-create for others the intense emotional experience of liberation rather than to record accurate details of their flight. As time passed, major features of Israelite culture—such as the main agricultural festivals (especially passover), the custom of redeeming firstborn males, the idea of a people in a covenant relationship with God, prophets as the transmitters of God's word, the sabbath, the construction of a central shrine as God's earthly abode, a sacrificial system administered by priests—were assimilated into the core Exodus story, which gives them their emotional power and authority (see 11.1–13.16n.). This commemoration of the past makes the experience of a few the collective story, the very identity, of the community taking shape and expanding in the highlands of Canaan and later struggling to survive the traumas of division and exile.

LITERARY HISTORY

The components of the book of Exodus have been so skillfully woven together that it is no longer possible to reconstruct the process by which they emerged and were ultimately combined. The overall story comprises elements of both the J source (which may have its origin when the monarchy was established in the tenth century BCE and then circulated in the Southern Kingdom of Judah) and the E source (formed and circulated in the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the eighth century BCE). Deuteronomic elements (D, usually linked to seventh-century developments) can also be identified; it is even possible that all three—J, E, and D—drew from a common commemorative tradition but developed it in their own particular ways. A strong P (Priestly) component is present not only in the passages dealing with the sanctuary, priests, and rituals, but also in several points of the story line, notably in the accounts of the marvels in Egypt and the deliverance at the sea. The final redaction reflects priestly emphases of the sixth century BCE or later but also preserves ritual and ceremonial practices many centuries older.

STRUCTURE

The book can be subdivided into thematic and literary units in various ways; this one positions the revelation at Sinai and the covenant in the center:

Part I: Israel in and out of Egypt (1.1–15.21): God sees Israelite suffering in Egypt (chs 1–2), Moses becomes God's spokesperson (3.1–7.7), and a series of marvels (7.7–10.29) and a plague (11.1–13.16) culminate in the escape of the people (13.17–15.21).

Part II: Sinai and Covenant (15.22–24.18): After traveling through the wilderness (15.22–18.27), the Israelites arrive at Sinai, where they experience a theophany, a divine appearance (ch 19), and receive the covenant (chs 20–24).

Part III: Sanctuary and New Covenant. An episode of apostasy followed by covenant renewal (chs 32–34) separates instructions for building the sanctuary (chs 25–31) from the account of its construction (chs 35–40).

INTERPRETATION

Exodus is arguably the most important book in the Hebrew Bible. It presents an explanation of God's name YHWH and central biblical ideas about God, especially that God responds to and saves people who are suffer-

ing or oppressed. Major institutions of ancient Israel—such as prophecy, covenant, community regulations, a central shrine, festivals, sacrifice, and the sabbath—are grounded in the narrative of liberation. Exodus likely struck a resonant cord for Judeans experiencing defeat and exile in the sixth century BCE and later; for them, maintaining or restoring the institutions set forth in Exodus contributed to their emerging identity and to their very survival as a dispersed people. A similar dynamic can be posited for subsequent Jewish history. Although the institutions of Exodus played a lesser role in Christian tradition, the concept of divine self-revelation as manifest in Jesus Christ is rooted in the prominence of God's self-revelation in Exodus; and the story of suffering leading to redemption shapes key Christian beliefs. For both Jews and Christians, identification with the suffering in Egypt contributes to the moral imperative to alleviate the suffering of others. As a story of liberation, Exodus has infused hope into many peoples. Despite its many positive features, however, some aspects of Exodus—such as the loss of innocent Egyptian lives and the investment of community resources in an elaborate shrine—continue to trouble readers.

GUIDE TO READING

An awareness of literary patterns and the repetition of words and phrases, as pointed out in the notes, can contribute to the reader's awareness of the power of the unfolding drama of the story and an understanding of important themes.

Carol Meyers

1 These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: [2] Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, [3] Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, [4] Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. [5] The total number of people born to Jacob was seventy. Joseph was already in Egypt. [6] Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. [7] But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

[8] Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. [9] He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. [10] Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." [11] Therefore they set taskmasters

1.1–15.21: Israel in and out of Egypt. The Israelites are oppressed in Egypt; but they escape from Pharaoh's control through the intervention of their God, whose identity is revealed to their heroic leader Moses, who then carries out God's directives to secure their release.

1.1–22: The oppression of the Israelites. The introductory chapter connects Exodus with Genesis and serves as a prologue to the story of deliverance by describing how the Israelites became oppressed (in fulfillment of Gen 15.13). **1–7:** A brief retelling of the account in Gen 46.8–27 of Jacob's family relocating in Egypt. **1:** *Israel* here refers to the patriarch Jacob. **2–4:** The sons of Jacob, the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel, are listed by groups according to their mothers (see Gen 29.31–30.24; 35.16–20,23–26): the six sons of Leah; Rachel's second son; two each of the handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah; and Rachel's firstborn *Joseph*, the one with a position of power in the Egyptian court (Gen 41.37–45). **5:** Because the number seven and its multiples symbolize totality, the notion of *seventy* descendants of Jacob signifies that all Israel is present in Egypt (cf. Gen 46.27; Deut 10.22). **7:** The language of Israelite increase echoes God's commands at creation (Gen 1.28) and after the flood (Gen 9.1,7) and also God's promises to the ancestors (Gen 12.2; 15.5; 17.2; 18.18; 22.17; 26.4; 28.14; 46:3; 48.4), suggesting that the divine promise is now fulfilled through Israel. **8–14:** The Egyptian ruler considers the increased Israelite population a threat and attempts to restrict their growth, first by subjecting them to *forced labor*. **8:** The *new king* is often identified by modern scholars as Rameses II (1279–1213 BCE), but he is not named here (or anywhere in the Bible). This anonymity perhaps demeans him and gives the narrative an ahistorical character. **10:** The possibility of *escape* is mentioned, foreshadowing what will eventually happen. **11:** *Forced labor* probably does not designate chattel slavery but rather corvée or compulsory unpaid labor, a typical way to mobilize labor for state projects in the ancient Near East (e.g., 1 Kings 5.13). *Supply cities* in border areas served military

over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. 13 The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, 14 and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." 17 But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. 18 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." 20 So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews[a] you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

2 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. 3 When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. 4 His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's

[a] Sam Gk Tg: Heb lacks *to the Hebrews*

purposes. *Pithom* and *Rameses* were probably located in the eastern Nile Delta, protecting the northeastern frontier of Egypt; attempts to identify them with sites dating to the reign of Rameses II are inconclusive. **13–14:** Words using the root "to serve" appear five times in these two verses (translated *imposing tasks*, *service*, *labor*, *tasks*, and *imposed*), emphasizing the difficult lives of the Israelites; they are forced to work in state agriculture as well as construction. **15–22:** Forced labor apparently has failed to deplete the Israelite population, so another strategy, selective infanticide, is implemented. **15:** The term *Hebrew* seems to denote the Israelites as a people rather than a social class, usually when contrasting them with non-Israelites, as in Gen 14.13; Ex 21.2; 1 Sam 29.3. *Shiphrah* and *Puah* are the first two of a series of twelve women featured in the life of Moses, the deliverer of the twelve tribes. Although some interpreters and ancient traditions consider them Egyptians who are "midwives *to* the Hebrews" rather than *Hebrew midwives*, their Semitic names make it more likely that they are Hebrew professionals. **16:** *Birthstool*, the two bricks or stones on which a woman in labor was positioned. The instruction to *kill* infant boys, and not girls, in order to limit population growth suggests the king's ineptitude and introduces the violence that will recur as the story of oppression and liberation continues. **22:** *Every boy . . . you shall throw into the Nile,* the final strategy for depleting the Israelite population anticipates the appearance of the baby Moses.

2.1–25: The emergence of Moses. 1–10: As in the birth legends of other heroic figures in ancient Near Eastern literature, the miraculous rescue of the doomed infant Moses signifies that he is destined for greatness. **1:** Moses' parents, both from the priestly tribe of *Levi*, are named in 6.20. *Woman*, Moses' mother, the third in a series of twelve women featured in chs 1–2; see 1.15n. **2:** *Saw that he was a fine baby*, lit., "saw that he was good," echoes the language of creation in Gen 1. **3:** The Hebrew word for *basket* appears elsewhere in the Bible only as a designation for Noah's ark (Gen 6.14) as the instrument for saving God's creation. Here it is the means for rescuing the person who will save the Israelites. *Reeds*, see 13.18n. **4:** Moses' *sister*, elsewhere called Miriam—the fourth woman of the story (see 1.15n.)—is not named until 15.20. She appears in four additional books of the Hebrew Bible (Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1 Chronicles, and Micah), more than any other woman. **5:** The royal *daughter* is the fifth woman of chs 1–2; see 1.15n. **6:** *Hebrew*, see 1.15n. **7:** Hiring a wet *nurse* was usually a practice

daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" [8] Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. [9] Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. [10] When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses,[a] "because," she said, "I drew him out[b] of the water."

[11] One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. [12] He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. [13] When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?" [14] He answered, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "Surely the thing is known." [15] When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well. [16] The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. [17] But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. [18] When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" [19] They said, "An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." [20] He said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread." [21] Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. [22] She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, "I have been an alien[c] residing in a foreign land."

[23] After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. [24] God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. [25] God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

[a] Heb *Mosheh*
[b] Heb *mashah*
[c] Heb *ger*

of elites in the ancient Near East. **10:** *Moses*, an Egyptian name meaning "give birth" and often part of Egyptian names joined with the name of a god (e.g., Thutmoses, Ahmoses, Rameses), is given a Hebrew etymology ("he who draws out") in anticipation of Moses' role in drawing his people through the sea (14.21–29). Such folk etymologies are common in the Torah. **11–15:** In the first two episodes of his adult life, Moses saves one Hebrew and tries to adjudicate between two others; both roles will recur but will involve all his people. **11:** *His kinsfolk*, he identifies with his people even though he was raised in the royal court. **14–15a:** Moses is rejected by his own people, and the pharaoh seeks his life. **14:** *Ruler*, Heb "sar;" cf. 18.21,25. *Judge*, one of Moses' roles as a ruler or administrator; see 18.13–27n. **15b–22:** Moses flees to Midian and marries. **15b:** *Midian*, probably in northwest Arabia. The Midianites, said to be descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25.2), were caravaneers whose routes stretched across Sinai to southern Palestine. Moses meets his future wife at a *well*, a pattern appearing in the stories of Rebekah (Gen 24) and Rachel (Gen 29). **16:** Moses' future father-in-law is a *priest*, an important role in ch 18. **16:** *Seven daughters*, making a total of twelve female figures (see 1.15n.). **17:** Saved by the daughter of a king, Moses now saves the daughters of a priest, one of whom will save him (4.24–26); the motif of saving recurs, anticipating the ultimate deliverance at the sea (13.17–15.21). **18:** *Reuel*, elsewhere called Jethro (as 3.1) or Hobab (Judg 4.11); these may reflect different ancient sources. **19:** Probably because of his manner of dress, Moses is mistaken for an *Egyptian*. **21:** *Gave . . . in marriage*, lit., "gave . . . as a wife," the usual idiom for marriage in biblical Hebrew. **23–25:** A postscript to the marriage episode provides a transition to the account of Moses becoming deliverer of his people in response to God's call. *God* is mentioned in the midwives episode but only now is said to be aware of the Israelites' plight. **23:** They *cried*, the Egyptians eventually will cry louder (11.6), and the Israelites will cry again at the sea (14.10). *Their slavery*, that is, "their work." **24:** Referring to the ancestral *covenant* (Heb "berit," as in 6.4–5; cf. 25.16n.) links the book of Exodus with Genesis and anticipates the Sinai covenant (Ex 19–24).

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. **3** Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." **4** When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." **5** Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." **6** He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, **8** and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. **9** The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. **10** So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." **11** But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" **12** He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

13 But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" **14** God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."[a] He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" **15** God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say

[a] Or *I AM WHAT I AM* or *I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE*

3.1–4.17: Moses' call and mission. The god of the ancestors appears to Moses in Midian, reveals the divine name, and commissions him to deliver his people. The term "prophet" is not used for Moses in Exodus, but this call narrative presents him as one. **3.1–10:** Theophany: divine revelation at the bush. **1:** *Keeping the flock*, the role of the shepherd signifies both human (e.g., 1 Sam 17.15; 2 Sam 5.2; 7.8) and divine (e.g., Pss 23.1; 80.1; 100.3) kingship. *Horeb* (or Sinai; see 19.1n.) is called *mountain of God*, perhaps indicating its sanctity for Midianites. **2:** An *angel* (lit., "messenger") is a manifestation of God who sometimes takes human form. God's presence also appears in clouds and especially *fire* (e.g., Gen 15.17; Ex 19.9; 24.15–18; 33.9; 40.34–38), which are sometimes depicted as pillars (Ex 13.21; 14.19,24). *Bush*, (Heb "seneh") is an unidentifiable but specific type of bush, perhaps alluding to Sinai (as also Deut 33.16), another place of divine presence and revelation. God's appearance in a bush may also reflect the role of plants or trees as symbols of fertility and divine presence (see 25.31–40n.). **5:** *Place* (Heb "maqom") often signifies holy space (Gen 28.11; Josh 5.15), as does *holy ground*; both indicate a site of theophany. **6:** Divine presence represents such intense, mysterious, and powerful holiness that it was considered dangerous to humans, hence Moses' reluctance to *look* at God's manifestation (see 19.10–15n.; cf. 24.10; 33.20,23; 34.29–35; contrast 33.11). **8:** *Come down* implies that God resides in a heavenly abode (see 25.9n.). *Flowing with milk and honey* (and 33.3), a recurrent vision of a fertile land, is a reality only when people obey God (Deut 28). The *honey* is probably not bees' honey but rather syrup made from cooking dates or grapes. *Canaanites . . . Jebusites* is one of several lists in the Torah (Pentateuch) of the indigenous inhabitants of the land; the longest appears in Gen 15.19–21; cf. 23.23,28; 33.2; 34.11. **10:** Prophets are called and then *sent* to deliver God's message (Isa 6.8; Jer 1.7). **3.11–4.17.** Moses is in dialogue with God about four issues. **3.11–12:** Moses' first problem is a sense of unworthiness for the mission; and the *sign* of divine help will be *worship* at the *mountain*, although it is not clear if present or future worship is implied. **13–15:** The next problem is not knowing God's name, for deities are identified by their proper names (not by generic "God") in the polytheistic world of the Israelites. Moses needs to know which deity is calling him. **14:** *I am who I am* renders the first name (Heb "'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh") that God provides; a shortened form, *I am* ("'ehyeh") renders the second. Because the Hebrew is grammatically problematic, these translations are uncertain. **15:** The third name is LORD. In Hebrew the name has four letters, "yhwh" (perhaps pronounced Yahweh), and is thus known as the Tetragrammaton. Like the first two

to the Israelites, 'The LORD,[a] the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

16 Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. 17 I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.' 18 They will listen to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days' journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' 19 I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.[b] 20 So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders that I will perform in it; after that he will let you go. 21 I will bring this people into such favor with the Egyptians that, when you go, you will not go empty-handed; 22 each woman shall ask her neighbor and any woman living in the neighbor's house for jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; and so you shall plunder the Egyptians."

4 Then Moses answered, "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'" 2 The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." 3 And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail"—so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand— 5 "so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

6 Again, the LORD said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous,[c] as white as snow. 7 Then God said, "Put your hand back into your cloak"—so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body— 8 "If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. 9 If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

[a] The word "LORD" when spelled with capital letters stands for the divine name, *YHWH,* which is here connected with the verb *hayah,* "to be"
[b] Gk Vg: Heb *no, not by a mighty hand*
[c] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

versions of God's name, it is from a root meaning "to be." God's name thus has a verbal rather than a noun form, but its specific meaning is uncertain. Because of the great sanctity of the divine name, early Jewish tradition avoided pronouncing it and used the Heb word "'adonay" ("my lord") as a substitute. Most translations respect that tradition and use LORD for the deity's proper name. According to Gen 4.26 (see also Gen 13.4) people knew God's name early in human history; but this passage along with 6.3 suggests a different tradition, that Moses is the first to hear it. In contemporaneous nonbiblical sources this divine name is known only from a Late Bronze Age inscription that mentions the "Shasu of *ya-h-wa* [or *yhw*]"; the Shasu were desert-dwellers, and probably included Midianites. **16–22:** A directive to Moses about speaking to his people and Pharaoh comes before the other two problems. **18:** *God of the Hebrews*, which relates the LORD to a specific people, is used when Moses is addressing non-Israelites (5.3; 7.16; 9.1; 9.13; 10.3); see 1.15n. Egyptians did allow their state workers time off, so the request to make a *three days' journey* is reasonable. **19:** *Mighty hand* is an image of divine power in the ancient Near East (13.9; 15.6). **22:** That an Israelite woman can request jewelry (see also 11.2–3; 12.35–36; 32.2–3) and clothing from her Egyptian *neighbor* suggests that they live peacefully together in workers' villages; yet this transfer of goods is called *plunder*, perhaps in reference to Gen 15.14. **4.1–9:** God responds to Moses' third problem, that the people will not heed him, by providing three supernatural signs: changing a *staff* (see 4.20n.) to a *snake* (4.2–5), making Moses' *hand* diseased and then restoring it (4.6–8), and turning *water* bloody (4.9).

10 But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord,
I have never been eloquent, neither in the
past nor even now that you have spoken to
your servant; but I am slow of speech and
slow of tongue." 11 Then the LORD said to him,
"Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes
them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not
I, the LORD? 12 Now go, and I will be with your
mouth and teach you what you are to speak."
13 But he said, "O my Lord, please send some-
one else." 14 Then the anger of the LORD was
kindled against Moses and he said, "What of
your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that
he can speak fluently; even now he is coming
out to meet you, and when he sees you his
heart will be glad. 15 You shall speak to him
and put the words in his mouth; and I will be
with your mouth and with his mouth, and
will teach you what you shall do. 16 He indeed
shall speak for you to the people; he shall
serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve
as God for him. 17 Take in your hand this staff,
with which you shall perform the signs."

18 Moses went back to his father-in-law
Jethro and said to him, "Please let me go back
to my kindred in Egypt and see whether they
are still living." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go
in peace." 19 The LORD said to Moses in Mid-
ian, "Go back to Egypt; for all those who were
seeking your life are dead." 20 So Moses took
his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey,
and went back to the land of Egypt; and Mo-
ses carried the staff of God in his hand.

21 And the LORD said to Moses, "When you
go back to Egypt, see that you perform before
Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your
power; but I will harden his heart, so that he
will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say
to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: Israel is my
firstborn son. 23 I said to you, "Let my son go
that he may worship me." But you refused to
let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son.'"

24 On the way, at a place where they spent
the night, the LORD met him and tried to kill
him. 25 But Zipporah took a flint and cut off
her son's foreskin, and touched Moses'[a] feet
with it, and said, "Truly you are a bridegroom
of blood to me!" 26 So he let him alone. It was
then she said, "A bridegroom of blood by
circumcision."

27 The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wil-
derness to meet Moses." So he went; and he
met him at the mountain of God and kissed
him. 28 Moses told Aaron all the words of the

[a] Heb *his*

The last sign anticipates the first of the marvels (7.14–25). **10–17:** God answers Moses' fourth problem – that he cannot speak – by assuring him of divine help and then assigning his brother to speak for him. **10:** *Slow of speech* may indicate a speech impediment (cf. 6.12,30) or perhaps a prophet's reluctance to accept a commission from God (cf. Jer 1.6–7). **14:** The first mention of *Aaron*. **15–16:** As Moses' spokesperson, Aaron will be to Moses as Moses is to God. **17:** *Staff,* see 4.20n.

4.18–31: Moses returns to Egypt. **20:** Two *sons*, as in 18.3, although only one is mentioned in 2.22 and 4.25. **20:** Moses' staff, which he used as a shepherd (see 3.1; 4.2), has now become *the staff of God*, the instrument through which he and Aaron exert divine power; see further 17.9n. **21:** The motif of the Pharaoh's hardened *heart* (stubbornness) appears frequently in the narrative of Moses' negotiations with the Egyptian ruler, serving to increase dramatic tension. The number ten plays a role: ten times the Pharaoh hardens his own heart (e.g., 8.15), although even then it is part of God's plan (7.3; 11.9); and ten times God hardens it directly (e.g., 9.12). **22:** Based on the formulaic words of heralds bearing messages in the ancient Near East, the biblical expression *thus says the LORD* introduces words conveyed by a prophetic messenger of God. The prominent *firstborn son* motif, here used for Israel as the child of God (who will live), in v. 23 and in chs 11 and 12 designates the Egyptians' offspring (who will die). Firstborn of animals as well as humans have special status—they open their mothers' wombs and represent all future progeny (cf. 34.19–20). **24–26:** In this enigmatic episode, God attacks Moses for reasons that are unclear. **24:** Moses again is saved by a woman, his wife Zipporah; see 2.17n. In performing her son's circumcision, she may be carrying out a female role in Midianite and Israelite culture (1 Macc 1.60; 2 Macc 6.10; 4 Macc 4.25; cf. Gen 17.23–27 and Josh 5.2–7, where men are the circumcisers). **25:** *Feet,* a euphemism for genitals (see Isa 7.20). *Bridegroom of blood* may connote an ancient apotropaic function of circumcision as a rite of passage, for the Heb word for bridegroom ("ḥatan") in other Semitic languages can mean "protect" as well as "circumcise." Marriage and circumcision are also associated in Gen 34.14–24. **27–31:** Aaron joins Moses and convinces the people with words and signs that God sees their plight. **27:** *The mountain of God,* 3.1.

LORD with which he had sent him, and all the signs with which he had charged him. [29] Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. [30] Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and performed the signs in the sight of the people. [31] The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

5 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.'" [2] But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go." [3] Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword." [4] But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!" [5] Pharaoh continued, "Now they are more numerous than the people of the land[a] and yet you want them to stop working!" [6] That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors, [7] "You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. [8] But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.' [9] Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words."

[10] So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw. [11] Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.'" [12] So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. [13] The taskmasters were urgent, saying, "Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when you were given straw." [14] And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, "Why did you not finish the required quantity of bricks yesterday and today, as you did before?"

[15] Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, "Why do you treat your servants like this? [16] No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people."[b] [17] He said, "You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' [18] Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks." [19] The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, "You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks." [20] As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them. [21] They said to them, "The LORD look upon

[a] Sam: Heb *The people of the land are now many*
[b] Gk Compare Syr Vg: Heb *beaten, and the sin of your people*

5.1–6.1: Moses and Aaron have their first encounter with Pharaoh. 5.1–3: They request only a three-day leave, not permanent freedom; but Pharaoh refuses as anticipated in 3.19. **1:** *God of Israel*, rather than the usual "God of the Hebrews" (see 3.18n.), is used uniquely here to identify the LORD to the Egyptians. The imperative *Let my people go* appears for the first time and anticipates its sevenfold use in the account of nine divine marvels; see 7.16n. **2:** *Know the LORD*, which entails acknowledging the LORD's authority, is a recurrent theme in Exodus; God's mighty deeds finally convince the Egyptians of God's reality and power (14.4,18) and cause the Israelites to affirm their belief (16.12; 29.46). Knowing God means experiencing God's powerful deeds (1 Kings 20.13). **3:** *God of the Hebrews*, see 3.18n. *Fall . . . sword* indicates that failure to carry out religious obligations would cause more Israelite suffering (and Pharaoh would lose his laborers). **4–19:** Pharaoh again employs strategies, now also punitive, to deal with the burgeoning Israelite population. **7:** *Straw*, an essential component in brick-making, binds the particles of Nile mud. **9:** *Deceptive words* probably refers to Moses' promise of liberation. **10:** Introducing Pharaoh's words with *Thus says Pharaoh* sets him in opposition to the LORD, whose words are similarly announced (see 4.22n). **5.20–6.1:** The Israelites are disheartened, and Moses turns to God who promises to take action.

you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

22 Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, "O LORD, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people."

6 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land."

2 God also spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the LORD. 3 I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty,[a] but by my name 'The LORD'[b] I did not make myself known to them. 4 I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. 5 I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. 6 Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 7 I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.'" 9 Moses told this to the Israelites; but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.

10 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, 11 "Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his land." 12 But Moses spoke to the LORD, "The Israelites have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, poor speaker that I am?"[c] 13 Thus the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them orders regarding the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, charging them to free the Israelites from the land of Egypt.

14 The following are the heads of their ancestral houses: the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben. 15 The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul,[d] the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon. 16 The following are the names of the sons of Levi according to their genealogies: Gershon,[e] Kohath, and Merari, and the length of Levi's life was one hundred thirty-seven years. 17 The sons of Gershon:[e] Libni and Shimei, by their families. 18 The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, and the length of Kohath's life was one hundred thirty-three years. 19 The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their genealogies. 20 Amram married Jochebed his father's sister

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*
[b] Heb *YHWH*; see note at 3.15
[c] Heb *me? I am uncircumcised of lips*
[d] Or *Saul*
[e] Also spelled *Gershom*; see 2.22

6.2–7.7: God reaffirms the mission of Moses and Aaron in the light of the worsened circumstances of the people. This section from the Priestly source parallels 3.1–4.17. **6.2:** God's self-identification (also vv. 5 and 6) emphasizes the connection of God's identity to the promise. **3:** *Almighty* (Heb "shadday"), an epithet of God (Gen 17.1n.; 35.11), probably meaning "the one of the mountains." **4:** The ancestral *covenant* promised the land (Gen 15.7–21; 17.1–8; see 2.24n.). **5:** Similar to 2.23–25. **6-8:** Seven dynamic verbs (*will free, deliver, redeem, take, will be, will bring, will give*), with God as the first-person subject, connote the totality of God's commitment. Two other verbs in dependent clauses (*swore, freed*) bring the total up to nine divine actions, anticipating the nine signs and wonders of the next section. **7:** *I will take you as my people, and I will be your God* is formulaic language emphasizing the two partners of a covenant (Jer 31.33). *Know*, see 5.2n. **9:** *Cruel slavery*, or "hard work," referring to their predicament rather than their status. **12:** *Poor speaker* (also v. 30) is another expression of a prophet's reluctance; see 4.10n. **14-25:** A genealogy, similar to other genealogies in the Pentateuch (Gen 46.8–27; Num 3.1–37; 26), gives authority to Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons and grandsons by tracing their lineage in the priestly tribe of Levi. **20:** Moses' mother *Jochebed*, whose name probably means "Yah [Yahweh] is glory," is the first person in the Bible to have a name formed with the name of Israel's God. *Aaron and Moses* but not Miriam;

and she bore him Aaron and Moses, and the length of Amram's life was one hundred thirty-seven years. 21 The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. 22 The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri. 23 Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 24 The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph; these are the families of the Korahites. 25 Aaron's son Eleazar married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the ancestral houses of the Levites by their families.

26 It was this same Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, "Bring the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company." 27 It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, the same Moses and Aaron.

28 On the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, 29 he said to him, "I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I am speaking to you." 30 But Moses said in the LORD's presence, "Since I am a poor speaker,[a] why would Pharaoh listen to me?"

7 The LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. 2 You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land. 3 But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I will multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. 4 When Pharaoh does not listen to you, I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring my people the Israelites, company by company, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. 5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out from among them." 6 Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. 7 Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

8 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 9 "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a wonder,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.'" 10 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the LORD had commanded; Aaron threw

[a] Heb *am uncircumcised of lips*; see 6.12

several women appear in this lineage but only as wives and mothers (vv. 15,23,25). **23:** *Nadab* and *Abihu*, priestly leaders with Aaron in the Sinai narrative (24.1). **25:** *Eleazar . . . Phinehas*, the successors of Aaron (not Moses) conclude the genealogy, revealing its priestly interest; see 28.1. **26–30:** The narrative resumes with a brief recapitulation of 6.2–12. **26:** *Company by company*, military language depicts the fleeing Israelites (also 12.17; 12.37n.; 13.18). **7.1–7:** Another account of the affirmation of Moses' mission. **1:** See 4.15–16n. **3:** *Harden*, see 4.21n. *Signs and wonders* anticipates the nine marvels of the next section; these acts of God, together with the plague (slaying of Egyptian firstborn), are the source of knowing God. **5:** *Know*, see 5.2n.

7.8–10.29: The nine marvels. The designation "ten plagues" is not used in the Bible. Fewer than ten catastrophes appear in the two psalms that mention them, Pss 78.44–51 and 105.28–36. The narrative in the book of Exodus likely draws from several sources to form a three-triad pattern, totaling nine marvels: Pharaoh receives a warning, in the morning, for the first, fourth, and seventh marvels; Pharaoh receives a warning, time unspecified, for the second, fifth, and eighth ones; the third, sixth, and ninth happen unannounced. Each triad has the same sequence, an arrangement suggesting that nine is the appropriate number, with the slaying of the firstborn coming as a separate, tenth, climactic event. The noun "plague" appears only for the tenth calamity, the death of firstborn (11.1), except for once at 9.14 (see n.). "Signs and wonders" (or, marvels) appears to be the Bible's designation (as in 7.3; cf. 10.1–2; 11.9–10; Pss 78.43; 105.27) for the first nine, which do not fit the meaning of "plague" as an epidemic of deadly disease understood to be a punitive measure (cf. 32.35; Num 25). The marvels unfold in a dramatic series of encounters between God's emissaries, Moses and Aaron, and the deified Pharaoh and his officials and magicians; and they result in the Pharaoh's acknowledging ("knowing") God. Although each of the first nine alone might reflect a natural occurrence, the intensity and rapid-fire timing are not natural; grouped together, they are a vivid expression of God's extraordinary power, as is the wholly supernatural tenth event, the slaying of the firstborn.

7.8–13: Preface to the marvels. The introduction to the marvels, like 4.1–5, features a staff turning into a snake in a competition with Egyptian magicians. **9:** *Aaron*, not Moses, has the leading role in this episode and in

down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. 11 Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. 12 Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes; but Aaron's staff swallowed up theirs. 13 Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. 15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake. 16 Say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, "Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness." But until now you have not listened. 17 Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD." See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood. 18 The fish in the river shall die, the river itself shall stink, and the Egyptians shall be unable to drink water from the Nile.'" 19 The LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over its rivers, its canals, and its ponds, and all its pools of water—so that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout the whole land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'"

20 Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood, 21 and the fish in the river died. The river stank so that the Egyptians could not drink its water, and there was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt. 22 But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. 23 Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. 24 And all the Egyptians had to dig along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the river.

25 Seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

8 [a] Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 2 If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs. 3 The river shall swarm with frogs; they shall come up into your palace, into your bedchamber and your bed, and into the houses

[a] Ch 7.26 in Heb

the first three marvels. **11:** *Magicians* appear for the first time; the Hebrew term is derived from an Egyptian word denoting a priestly official. **11:** *Secret arts* refers to spells or incantations that the Egyptians use, whereas Aaron simply casts his staff down. **13:** *Hardened*, appearing in the preface, anticipates Pharaoh's response to every marvel and to the climactic plague; see 4.21n. *As . . . said*, noting the veracity of God's predictions, similarly anticipates what will be said for most of the marvels.

7.14–8.19: First three marvels. Aaron's staff is the instrument of divine power. **7.14–25: First marvel, bloody waters.** This marvel, like some others, combines two traditions: in one, Moses' action pollutes the Nile only, while in the other, Aaron turns all Egyptian water into blood. **15:** *Water* and *river bank* evoke the image of the infant Moses in the river (2.3) and anticipate the role of water in the final water event, when the Red (Reed) Sea splits and the Egyptian troops drown (14.21–29). **16–17:** The Israelites have heard what God will do (6.6–8), as has Moses (7.1–5); now the Pharaoh is told. **16:** *God of the Hebrews*, see 3.18n. *Let my people go* appears six more times in the marvels sequence (8.20,21; 9.1,13; 10.3,4; cf. 5.1); this sevenfold usage emphases the theme of securing freedom for the Israelites. **17:** The entire *Nile* turns bloody, making this far more extensive than the bloody-water sign to the Israelites (4.9). **18:** The *Egyptians* (but apparently not the Israelites) will be affected (as in vv. 21,24, and in the next marvel, 8:3–4,9–11). **19:** The abundance of water terms, *rivers . . . water*, stresses the role of water; see 7.15n. **22:** The magicians can duplicate this calamity, but again (as in 7.11) they must use spells. The text here and elsewhere reflects humor—the Egyptian magicians make the calamity even worse! **22:** *Hardened*, see 4.21n. **8.1–15: Second marvel, frogs. 3:** The Pharaoh, his *officials*, and the *people*, that is, all Egyptians, are affected. These three elements of Egypt's hierarchical society are mentioned nine times in the account of

of your officials and of your people,[a] and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. [4] The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your officials.'" [5] [b]And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, the canals, and the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.'" [6] So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. [7] But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs up on the land of Egypt.

[8] Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, "Pray to the LORD to take away the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD." [9] Moses said to Pharaoh, "Kindly tell me when I am to pray for you and for your officials and for your people, that the frogs may be removed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile." [10] And he said, "Tomorrow." Moses said, "As you say! So that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God, [11] the frogs shall leave you and your houses and your officials and your people; they shall be left only in the Nile." [12] Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh; and Moses cried out to the LORD concerning the frogs that he had brought upon Pharaoh.[c] [13] And the LORD did as Moses requested: the frogs died in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. [14] And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. [15] But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

[16] Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt.'" [17] And they did so; Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and gnats came on humans and animals alike; all the dust of the earth turned into gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt. [18] The magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, but they could not. There were gnats on both humans and animals. [19] And the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God!" But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

[20] Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. [21] For if you will not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you, your officials, and your people, and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies; so also the land where they live. [22] But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people live, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I the LORD am in this land. [23] Thus I will make a distinction[d] between my people and your people. This sign shall appear tomorrow.'" [24] The LORD did so, and great swarms of flies came into the house of Pharaoh

[a] Gk: Heb *upon your people*
[b] Ch 8.1 in Heb
[c] Or *frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh*
[d] Gk Vg: Heb *will set redemption*

the nine marvels and once more in the account of the slaying of the firstborn (12.30). **8:** Despite the magicians' replication of this event (v. 7), the Pharaoh momentarily relents and seems to recognize Israel's god by asking Moses and Aaron to *pray* (lit., "plead") on behalf of the Egyptians (cf. 8.28–30; 9.28; 10.17–18). **10:** *Tomorrow*, a one-day delay; see 8.23n. Here too Pharaoh is depicted as a buffoon, as he does not opt to cease the plague immediately. **15:** *Hardened*, see 4.21n. **8. 16–19: Third marvel, gnats. 16:** *Dust* represents what is countless (Gen 13.16). **18–19:** Failing this time to replicate the calamity, the magicians—but not Pharaoh—recognize the infestation as an act of Israel's god. **19:** *Hardened*, see 4.21n.

8.20–9.12: Second group of three marvels. Instrumentality shifts: God is the direct agent (8.24; 9.6), and then Moses and Aaron are agents together (9.8). **8.20–32: Fourth marvel, flies.** The meaning of the Hebrew term for this marvel is uncertain; some scholars understand it as a plague of mixed animals. **20:** Although Aaron is sometimes mentioned, *Moses* dominates the accounts of the remaining six marvels. **22:** *Goshen*, unknown in Egyptian sources, appears here and in 9.26 as the location of the Israelite work camps, probably in the eastern Nile Delta; see 1.11n. and Gen 45.10. **23:** *Distinction*, now God explicitly excludes the Israelites from the calamities; see 7.18n. *Tomorrow* introduces a time element; a delay in the onset of the marvel (as also in 9.5,18; 10.4) is

and into his officials' houses; in all of Egypt the land was ruined because of the flies.

25 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." 26 But Moses said, "It would not be right to do so; for the sacrifices that we offer to the LORD our God are offensive to the Egyptians. If we offer in the sight of the Egyptians sacrifices that are offensive to them, will they not stone us? 27 We must go a three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he commands us." 28 So Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness, provided you do not go very far away. Pray for me." 29 Then Moses said, "As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart tomorrow from Pharaoh, from his officials, and from his people; only do not let Pharaoh again deal falsely by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD."

30 So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. 31 And the LORD did as Moses asked: he removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his officials, and from his people; not one remained. 32 But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and would not let the people go.

9 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 2 For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, 3 the hand of the LORD will strike with a deadly pestilence your livestock in the field: the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. 4 But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites.'" 5 The LORD set a time, saying, "Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land." 6 And on the next day the LORD did so; all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but of the livestock of the Israelites not one died. 7 Pharaoh inquired and found that not one of the livestock of the Israelites was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the people go.

8 Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. 9 It shall become fine dust all over the land of Egypt, and shall cause festering boils on humans and animals throughout the whole land of Egypt." 10 So they took soot from the kiln, and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw it in the air, and it caused festering boils on humans and animals. 11 The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils afflicted the magicians as well as all the Egyptians. 12 But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

13 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 14 For this time I will send all my plagues upon you yourself, and upon your officials, and upon your people, so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. 15 For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. 16 But this is why I have let you live: to show you my power, and to make my name resound through all the earth. 17 You are still exalting yourself against my people, and will not let them go. 18 Tomorrow at this time I will

a twist on the delay of Moses' wonder-ending prayer (8.10n.). **25:** As in 8.8, Pharaoh seems to relent; but in v. 32 he reneges. **26:** *Offensive*, practices of one people are odious to another. **28–29:** *Pray*, as in 8.9. **32:** *Hardened*, see 4.21n. **9.1–7: Fifth marvel, pestilence. 1:** *God of the Hebrews*, see 3.18n. **3:** *Hand*, see 3.19n. *Pestilence* in Deuteronomic and prophetic texts kills humans as well as animals but here only animals. **4:** *Distinction*, see 8.23n. **5:** *Tomorrow*, see 8.23n. **7:** *Hardened*, see 4.21n. **9.8–12: Sixth marvel, boils. 11:** *Magicians* cannot compete and are themselves afflicted (cf. 7.11,22; 8.7,18–19). **12:** Now Pharaoh's heart is *hardened* by God; see 4.21n.

9.13–10.29: Third group of three marvels. Moses' outstretched hand is now the instrument, and the severity of the calamities escalates. **9.13–35: Seventh marvel, hail. 13:** *God of the Hebrews*, see 3.18n. **14:** Only here is *plagues* used for one of the first nine calamities, perhaps because, as for the climactic slaying of the firstborn, there is extensive loss of human as well as animal life; see 7.8–10.29n. and 11.1n. **18:** *Tomorrow*, see 8.23n. So

cause the heaviest hail to fall that has ever fallen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. 19 Send, therefore, and have your livestock and everything that you have in the open field brought to a secure place; every human or animal that is in the open field and is not brought under shelter will die when the hail comes down upon them.'" 20 Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried their slaves and livestock off to a secure place. 21 Those who did not regard the word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock in the open field.

22 The LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that hail may fall on the whole land of Egypt, on humans and animals and all the plants of the field in the land of Egypt." 23 Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire came down on the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; 24 there was hail with fire flashing continually in the midst of it, such heavy hail as had never fallen in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25 The hail struck down everything that was in the open field throughout all the land of Egypt, both human and animal; the hail also struck down all the plants of the field, and shattered every tree in the field. 26 Only in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail.

27 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. 28 Pray to the LORD! Enough of God's thunder and hail! I will let you go; you need stay no longer." 29 Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's. 30 But as for you and your officials, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God." 31 (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. 32 But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they are late in coming up.) 33 So Moses left Pharaoh, went out of the city, and stretched out his hands to the LORD; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured down on the earth. 34 But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned once more and hardened his heart, he and his officials. 35 So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

10 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his officials, in order that I may show these signs of mine among them, 2 and that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I have made fools of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them—so that you may know that I am the LORD."

3 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 4 For if you refuse to let my people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country. 5 They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They shall devour the last remnant left you after the hail, and they shall devour every tree of yours that grows in the field. 6 They shall fill your houses, and the houses of all your officials and of all the Egyptians—something that neither your parents nor your grandparents have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day.'" Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

7 Pharaoh's officials said to him, "How long shall this fellow be a snare to us? Let

severe is the *hail* that it figures in the next calamity (10.5,15). **19:** The severity prompts God, uniquely, to suggest a protective measure. **24:** *Fire flashing*, probably lightning, along with thunder accompanies the hail (vv. 23–24) to deadly effect, in contrast to the thunder and lightning in the theophany at Sinai (19.16,19). **26:** See 8.22n. and 8.23n. **27:** *Sinned*, an apparently unqualified admission; but Pharaoh continues to sin by reneging again (v. 34; 8.15,32). **28:** *Pray*, see 8.8n. **35:** *Hardened*, apparently by God; see 4.21n. **10.1–20: Eighth marvel, locusts. 1:** God *hardened* the hearts of both the Pharaoh and his officers; see 4.21n. **2:** *Tell . . . grandchildren* heralds the importance of remembering; see 11.1–13.16n. **3:** *God of the Hebrews*, see 3.18n. **4:** *Tomorrow*, see 8.23n. *Locusts* are extremely damaging; they reflect disaster (Joel 1.2–2.27) and divine judgment (as Amos 4.9). **5:** *No one . . . see*,

the people go, so that they may worship the LORD their God; do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?" 8 So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, "Go, worship the LORD your God! But which ones are to go?" 9 Moses said, "We will go with our young and our old; we will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, because we have the LORD's festival to celebrate." 10 He said to them, "The LORD indeed will be with you, if ever I let your little ones go with you! Plainly, you have some evil purpose in mind. 11 No, never! Your men may go and worship the LORD, for that is what you are asking." And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

12 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt, so that the locusts may come upon it and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left." 13 So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night; when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts. 14 The locusts came upon all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever shall be again. 15 They covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was black; and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left; nothing green was left, no tree, no plant in the field, in all the land of Egypt. 16 Pharaoh hurriedly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. 17 Do forgive my sin just this once, and pray to the LORD your God that at the least he remove this deadly thing from me." 18 So he went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. 19 The LORD changed the wind into a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea;[a] not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt. 20 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.

21 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt." 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was dense darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. 23 People could not see one another, and for three days they could not move from where they were; but all the Israelites had light where they lived. 24 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses, and said, "Go, worship the LORD. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind. Even your children may go with you." 25 But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings to sacrifice to the LORD our God. 26 Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must choose some of them for the worship of the LORD our God, and we will not know what to use to worship the LORD until we arrive there." 27 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was unwilling to let them go. 28 Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me! Take care that you do not see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die." 29 Moses said, "Just as you say! I will never see your face again."

11 The LORD said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go from here; indeed, when he lets you go, he

[a] Or *Sea of Reeds*

a result replicated by the ninth wonder (10.23). **13:** An *east wind*, which will also part the Red (Reed) Sea (14.21), brings the locusts; and a "west wind" will remove them by casting them into that sea, v. 19. **16:** *Sinned*, see 9.27n. **17–18:** *Pray*, see 8.8n. **19:** *Red Sea*, see 13.18n. **20:** *Hardened* by God; see 4.21n. **10:21–29: Ninth marvel, darkness. 21:** *Darkness . . . felt*, perhaps reflecting the thick air of Near Eastern sandstorms. Darkness anticipates the midnight setting of the climactic death of the firstborn (12.29) and the nighttime sea crossing (14.20). **22:** *Three days* mirrors the requested three-day journey for sacrifice (3.18; 5.3; 8.27) and anticipates the three-day duration of the first post-Sinai journey (15.22). **27:** *Hardened* by God; see 4.21n. **28–29:** Rejecting further direct encounters with Pharaoh, who has divine pretensions, Moses will uniquely meet the LORD directly (33.11; but cf. 33.20–23).

11.1–13.16: Plague, commemorative rituals, and departure. After the firstborn plague is announced, detailed commands for commemorative rituals appear interspersed with accounts of the Egyptian deaths and the Is-

will drive you away. [2] Tell the people that every man is to ask his neighbor and every woman is to ask her neighbor for objects of silver and gold." [3] The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, Moses himself was a man of great importance in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's officials and in the sight of the people.

[4] Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out through Egypt. [5] Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the female slave who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the livestock. [6] Then there will be a loud cry throughout the whole land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again. [7] But not a dog shall growl at any of the Israelites—not at people, not at animals—so that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. [8] Then all these officials of yours shall come down to me, and bow low to me, saying, 'Leave us, you and all the people who follow you.' After that I will leave." And in hot anger he left Pharaoh.

[9] The LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, in order that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt." [10] Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh; but the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

12 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: [2] This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. [3] Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. [4] If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. [5] Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. [6] You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled con-

raelite Exodus. Although addressed to the Israelites as they leave Egypt, the directives for various rituals also mandate future behaviors that will commemorate the radical change from servitude to freedom through God's intervention. The miraculous departure from Egypt becomes part of the collective memory of future generations, kept alive through religious practices that enable later generations to recall and relive the experiences of the Exodus generation. The rituals will contribute to Israelite communal identity and help maintain community values. Present and future merge in this composite and somewhat redundant account drawing on Priestly and other sources.

11.1–10: Announcement of the plague. 1: *Plague* is now the appropriate term for the horrific loss of life that ensues; see 7.8–10.29n. and 9.14n. *Drive* echoes the prediction of 6.1. **2:** That Israelite women would acquire Egyptian goods is announced in 3.22 (also 12.35–36; cf. 35.22,29). Here men too will obtain jewelry; but the clothing of 3.22 is omitted, as is the involvement of children. **5:** *Firstborn*, see 4.22n. *Pharaoh . . . female slave,* opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum form a merism indicating that all Egyptians will be affected. **6:** The Egyptians' unique *loud cry* surpasses the Israelites' cry (see 2.2n.). Uniqueness also features in the seventh marvel, which similarly involves human and animal death (see 9.18,25 and 9.14n.), and the eighth (10.14). **7:** *Distinction between Egypt and Israel*, again indicating the selective nature of what will happen (see 8.23n. and 9.4). **10:** *Hardened* by God, see 4.21n.

12.1–28: Preparations for departure: passover and unleavened bread festivals. Here, in vv. 43–49, and in 13.3–10, God ordains what will become a major Israelite festival (Deut 16.1–8; Num 9.1–14; 2 Kings 23.21–23; Ezek 45.21–24). Agricultural and pastoral components of the Canaanite ritual calendar—springtime birth of lambs, growth of green herbs, and ripening of grains—are given antecedents in Israel's story. Linked to the Exodus, the heightened emotions of such celebrations help re-create for later generations the exultant experience of liberation. This historicization of festivals contributes to their enduring nature (see 11.1–13.16n.). **1–13: Passover. 2:** *This month* (March-April), called Aviv in 13.4 and 23.15, is later called Nisan (Neh 2.1; Esth 3.7). This spring New Year (*the first month of the year*) probably reflects a priestly reckoning (Lev 23.5; Num 9.1–5) in contrast to an older tradition of an autumn New Year (23.16; 34.22). **3:** *Whole congregation of Israel*, repeated in v. 47, denotes gender and probably age inclusiveness (throughout time; vv. 14,17). **4:** *Household* likely indicates an extended (not a nuclear) family—enough people to consume a lamb in one sitting. **5:** *Without blemish* introduces the

gregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. 7 They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8 They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9 Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. 10 You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 11 This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. 13 The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

14 This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. 15 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day shall be cut off from Israel. 16 On the first day you shall hold a solemn assembly, and on the seventh day a solemn assembly; no work shall be done on those days; only what everyone must eat, that alone may be prepared by you. 17 You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt: you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance. 18 In the first month, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day, you shall eat unleavened bread. 19 For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether an alien or a native of the land. 20 You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.

21 Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb. 22 Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. 23 For the LORD will

language of sacrifice, for offerings to God are to be perfect (Lev 22.19–25; Deut 15.21; 17.1). **7:** *Blood* can have an apotropaic (evil-averting) quality; see 4.25n. and 12.11n. **8:** Unlike other sacrifices, this one is *roasted*. *Unleavened bread* appears here without comment, as if it were already known and incorporated into the passover festival; see 12.15n. *Bitter herbs*, probably a green plant serving as a condiment. **11:** The people must be ready to travel while they consume the lamb. *Passover* ("pesaḥ"), is often understood as "passing over," but is more likely from a word meaning "protect" ("spare," Isa 31.5), which is in accord with the apotropaic role of the blood smeared on doorways (12.5n.). Here (and in vv. 27,43) "passover" refers to the lamb sacrifice; eventually, it designates a longer commemorative festival (Deut 16.1–8; Ezek 45.21) that includes the seven-day festival of unleavened bread with which it is associated (12.14–20; 13.2–10). **12:** *I will strike* has God slaying the firstborn, but see 12.23n. **13:** *Pass over*, see 12.11n. **14–20: Unleavened bread. 14:** *This day* is the fifteenth day, after the passover of the fourteenth of Nisan; see 12.2n. and 12.6. Thus, the nighttime passover is followed by a seven-day festival of unleavened bread (see Lev 23.5–8). *Remembrance* proclaims the commemorative aspect of the festival, and *throughout . . . perpetual* applies it to all future Israelites (see 10.2n. and 11.1–13.16n.). **15:** *Unleavened bread* (Heb "matsah," spelled "matzah" or "matzo" in English), which originated in an ancient spring harvest festival, is given an explanation (vv. 34,39; 23.15; 34.18) connecting it to the hasty departure from Egypt; cf. the similar "historicization" of the lamb festival with which it is ultimately combined (see 12.11n. and 11.1–13.16n.). *Cut off*, the penalty for many serious violations of priestly law (e.g., 30.33,38; 31.14), probably does not mean excommunication but rather signifies dying without heirs, that is, having one's lineage ended; it would thus be implemented by God, not humans. **16:** *No work* signifies a holy day, as on the sabbath (20.8–11). **17:** *Companies*, a military term; see 6.26n. **19:** Although not obliged to celebrate the passover (v. 48), an *alien* (non-Israelite) must refrain from eating leavened bread. **21–28: Passover again. 22:** *Hyssop*, an aromatic plant used in rituals, including for sprinkling a liquid (Num 19.18). **23:** *Pass over*, that is "protect;" see 12.11n. Representing a variant tradition, a divine agent,

pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down. 24 You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. 25 When you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance. 26 And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this observance?' 27 you shall say, 'It is the passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed down and worshiped.

28 The Israelites went and did just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron.

29 At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. 30 Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. 31 Then he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, "Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD, as you said. 32 Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!"

33 The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for they said, "We shall all be dead." 34 So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders. 35 The Israelites had done as Moses told them; they had asked the Egyptians for jewelry of silver and gold, and for clothing, 36 and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And so they plundered the Egyptians.

37 The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. 38 A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. 39 They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

40 The time that the Israelites had lived in Egypt was four hundred thirty years. 41 At the end of four hundred thirty years, on that very day, all the companies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. 42 That was for the LORD a night of vigil, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. That same night is a vigil to be kept for the LORD by all the Israelites throughout their generations.

the destroyer, rather than God, carries out the mission. **24–27:** Commands for future observance emphasize the educational function of the passover (also 10.2; 13.8–9,14–16; cf. Deut 6.6–7); see 11.1–13.16n.

12.29–52: Plague, departure, and passover. As soon as the firstborn of the Egyptians die, the Israelites leave Egypt and are reminded to celebrate the passover. **29–36: Plague.** What God announced in 11.1–8 is carried out. **29:** *Firstborn*, see 4.22n. *Pharaoh . . . prisoner* represent the two ends of the Egyptian social continuum; see 11.5n. **30:** *Cry*, see 11.6n. **32:** Cf. 10.24. A master who releases servants receives a *blessing* (Deut 15.18). **33:** *Urge*, perhaps fulfilling the notion of driving out the Israelites (6.1; 11.1). **35:** *Jewelry . . . clothing*, rather than "plunder" (in v. 36; see 3.22n.), may represent the goods given to released servants (Deut 15.13–15). **12.37–42: Exodus,** departing Egypt and beginning the wilderness journey (which continues in Numbers). **37:** Each stage of the journey is marked by formulaic language: traveling from Place A to Place B. Both *Rameses* (see 1.11n.) and *Succoth* are probably in the eastern Nile Delta; like virtually all the stops on the journey, however, they cannot be clearly identified and may not reflect accurate or actual memories. *Six hundred thousand* (as Num 11.21; cf. 38.26) is likely hyperbole meant to reflect the proliferation of Israelites (1.7–9,20; 5.5) and the concept of all Israel experiencing the Exodus; cf. 14.7n. *Men on foot*, or infantry, continues the military imagery; see 6.26n. *Children* are mentioned, but not the elderly or women; the latter may be subsumed into the "men" who are their husbands (see 20.8–11n). **38:** *Mixed crowd* suggests that non-Israelites were among those escaping. **39:** See 12.15n. **40–41:** *Four hundred and thirty years* is close to the period of "four hundred years" foreordained in Gen 15.13 (but cf. Gen 15.16); suggested reasons for the additional thirty years are speculative. **41:** *Companies*, see 12.17n. **42:** *Vigil*, from a root meaning "to guard" and also "to observe, perform (an obligation)" appears twice, forming a wordplay

43 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: This
is the ordinance for the passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, 44 but any slave who has been
purchased may eat of it after he has been
circumcised; 45 no bound or hired servant
may eat of it. 46 It shall be eaten in one house;
you shall not take any of the animal outside
the house, and you shall not break any of its
bones. 47 The whole congregation of Israel
shall celebrate it. 48 If an alien who resides
with you wants to celebrate the passover to
the Lord, all his males shall be circumcised;
then he may draw near to celebrate it; he
shall be regarded as a native of the land.
But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it;
49 there shall be one law for the native and for
the alien who resides among you.

50 All the Israelites did just as the Lord had
commanded Moses and Aaron. 51 That very
day the Lord brought the Israelites out of the
land of Egypt, company by company.

13 The Lord said to Moses: 2 Consecrate
to me all the firstborn; whatever is the
first to open the womb among the Israelites,
of human beings and animals, is mine.

3 Moses said to the people, "Remember
this day on which you came out of Egypt,
out of the house of slavery, because the
Lord brought you out from there by strength
of hand; no leavened bread shall be eaten.
4 Today, in the month of Abib, you are going
out. 5 When the Lord brings you into the land
of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites,
the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore
to your ancestors to give you, a land flowing
with milk and honey, you shall keep this observance in this month. 6 Seven days you shall
eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day
there shall be a festival to the Lord. 7 Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no
leavened bread shall be seen in your possession, and no leaven shall be seen among you
in all your territory. 8 You shall tell your child
on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord
did for me when I came out of Egypt.' 9 It
shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and
as a reminder on your forehead, so that the
teaching of the Lord may be on your lips; for
with a strong hand the Lord brought you out
of Egypt. 10 You shall keep this ordinance at
its proper time from year to year.

11 "When the Lord has brought you into
the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to
you and your ancestors, and has given it
to you, 12 you shall set apart to the Lord all
that first opens the womb. All the firstborn
of your livestock that are males shall be the
Lord's. 13 But every firstborn donkey you shall

connoting present divine protection and future Israelite commemoration. **43–51: Further passover instructions,** explicitly for future observances. **43:** *Ordinance for the passover* (also cited in Num 9.12 and probably in Ex 13.10) is likely the title of a priestly document containing rules for passover observance. *Foreigner*, non-Israelite living temporarily in the land. **44:** A *slave* who is *purchased* is *circumcised* and considered part of the household (Gen 17.12–13). **45:** *Bound or hired servant* denotes a temporary member of a household. **46:** *In one house*, see 12.4n. **47:** *Whole congregation*, see 12.3n. **48:** Unlike the "foreigner" of v. 43, an *alien* is usually a permanent, non-Israelite resident and must be *circumcised* in order to celebrate the passover. Circumcision in this instance is not a conversion rite. **49:** *Law* (Heb "torah") is better translated "instruction" or "teaching" (as 13.9; 18.20) because the regulations for Israelite communal life are considered divinely revealed instruction. *Native*, or citizen, that is Israelite. **50–51:** These verses resume the narrative of vv. 37–41. **51:** *Company*, see 12.17n.

13.1–16: More commemorative rituals: consecration of the firstborn and unleavened bread festival. 2: The *consecration* of the *firstborn*, which reflects the special status of the first offspring of a woman or animal (see 4.22n.; 13.12n; 22.29–30; 34.19–20; Num 8.16–18), will receive its commemorative connection in vv. 11–16. **3:** The charge to *remember* prescribes commemoration; see 10.2n. and 11.1–13.16n. *House of slavery*, parallel to *Egypt* (also 13.14; 20.2), suggests that the entire country is the site of forced labor. **4:** *Abib*, meaning "new grain," is an older name for this springtime month; see 12.2n. **5:** See 3.8n. **8:** See 11.1–13.16n. and 12.24–27n. **9:** *Sign . . . forehead* (also v. 16; Deut 6.6–8) probably denotes metaphoric modes of commemoration (as Prov 6.20–21; 7.1–3) but is interpreted literally in postexilic times, giving rise to the Jewish custom of phylacteries. The phrase *teaching* (Heb "torah") *of the Lord* appears for the first time in the Bible; see 12.49n. *Hand*, see 3.19n. **11:** Instructions for the consecration of the firstborn resume. **12:** *Set apart to the Lord*, for the firstborn belong to God; see 4.22n. *Males*, specifying for the first time the gender of the firstborn to be consecrated. **13:** Because the *donkey* is an impure animal (according to the categories in Lev 11; Deut 14.3–21), it is redeemed by a pure one, a

redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. Every firstborn male among your children you shall redeem. 14 When in the future your child asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall answer, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. 15 When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human firstborn to the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD every male that first opens the womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.' 16 It shall serve as a sign on your hand and as an emblem[a] on your forehead that by strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

17 When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, "If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt." 18 So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea.[b] The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle. 19 And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph who had required a solemn oath of the Israelites, saying, "God will surely take notice of you, and then you must carry my bones with you from here." 20 They set out from Succoth, and camped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. 21 The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. 22 Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

14 Then the LORD said to Moses: 2 Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall camp opposite it, by the sea. 3 Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, "They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them." 4 I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD. And they did so.

5 When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed toward the people, and they said, "What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?" 6 So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; 7 he took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. 8 The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out boldly. 9 The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his chariot drivers and his

[a] Or *as a frontlet*; meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *Sea of Reeds*

sheep; see also 34.20. The procedure for redeeming the human *firstborn male* is not specified. **14–15:** Linking the consecration of the firstborn to the firstborn slain in the plague gives the custom a pedagogical function; see 10.2n. and 11.1–13.16n. **16:** See 13.9n.

13.17–15.21: Journey to and through the sea, described in prose and poetry.

13.17–14.31: The narrative account, somewhat repetitive and inconsistent, is probably composite. **13.17:** *Way of the land of the Philistines*, the shortest land route from Egypt to Canaan, runs parallel to the Mediterranean coast toward southwest Canaan where the Philistines, a people from the Aegean, settled in the late thirteenth and early twelfth centuries BCE. **18:** *Roundabout way of the wilderness*, that is, not a specific route. This vague description fits the ahistorical character of the places along the way; see 12.37n. *Red Sea* (Heb "yam sup"), properly Reed Sea, probably designates the reedy marshes of northeastern Egypt; but the miraculous sea-splitting account (14.21–29) does not fit the marshland referent and may reflect a different, perhaps imaginary or mythological, sea tradition. *Battle*, in keeping with the military language for the journeying Israelites; see 6.26n. **19:** Gen 50.24–26. **20:** Next stage of the journey; see 12.37n. **21:** *Pillar of cloud* and *pillar of fire*, probably one column manifesting the divine presence as a shielding cloud by day and a guiding light by night; see 3.2n. **14.1:** *Moses* acts alone, without Aaron, in the sea-crossing episode. **2:** Next stage of the journey; see 12.37n. *Sea*, see 13.18n. **4:** *Harden*, by God; see 4.21n. *Glory*, or more likely "power" and thus "authority" (also v. 17). *Know*, see 5.2n. **7:** *Six hundred*, perhaps a stock military unit (cf. Judg 18.11), provides a 1:1000 ratio with the Israelite infantry (12.37n.). **8:** *Hardened* by God; see 4.21n. **9:** *Pursued . . . overtook* is formulaic language (15.9; Deut 19.6; etc.). **10:** *Cried*, see

army; they overtook them camped by the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

10 As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD. 11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." 13 But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. 14 The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

15 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. 16 But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. 17 Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. 18 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers."

19 The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. 20 It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. 22 The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. 23 The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. 24 At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. 25 He clogged[a] their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

26 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." 27 So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. 28 The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. 29 But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

30 Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

15 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

"I will sing to the LORD, for he has
triumphed gloriously;

[a] Sam Gk Syr: MT *removed*

2.23n. **11–12:** For the first but not the last time the Israelites complain in a crisis situation, challenging Moses' authority (15.24; 16.2–3; 17.3; and frequently in Numbers). **14:** *The LORD will fight* introduces the concept of the Divine Warrior, based on the Canaanite deity Baal who battles watery chaos often depicted as a sea monster. The image is used metaphorically in the Bible to represent divine might wielded to save Israel (v. 25; 15.3; Deut 20.4; 1 Sam 17.47; Zech 9.13–14.) **15:** *Cry*, see 2.23n. **16:** Moses' *staff* (see 4.17n.) is not mentioned in vv. 21,26,27. **17:** *Harden* appears for the last time; see 4.21n. *Glory*, see 14.4n. **18:** *Know*, see 5.2n. **19–20:** *Angel* and *pillar*, both manifestations of God's presence (see 3.2n. and 13.21n.), are used sequentially, perhaps indicating a composite. **21:** *Wind*, *dry land*, and *divided waters*, which evoke creation (Gen 1.2,6,9; cf. Gen 8.2), are from a Priestly hand. **24:** *Pillar*, see 3.2n. **31:** The Hebrew for *believed* means to "trust" in God rather than to affirm God's existence.

15.1–21: The Song of the Sea is a lyric victory hymn generally considered one of the oldest literary units

horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.
2 The LORD is my strength and my might,[a]
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.
3 The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name.

4 "Pharaoh's chariots and his army he cast into the sea;
his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.[b]
5 The floods covered them;
they went down into the depths like a stone.
6 Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power—
your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.
7 In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries;
you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble.
8 At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,
the floods stood up in a heap;
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.
9 The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.
I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.'
10 You blew with your wind, the sea covered them;
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

11 "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in splendor, doing wonders?
12 You stretched out your right hand,
the earth swallowed them.

13 "In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed;
you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.
14 The peoples heard, they trembled;
pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

[a] Or *song*
[b] Or *Sea of Reeds*

in the Bible, perhaps from the twelfth century BCE; it probably was an independent composition, not part of one of the other sources of Exodus. Influenced by mythic accounts of the Divine Warrior's battle with watery chaos (see 14.14n.), it is rich in metaphors and terms that preclude single explanations and at times even defy comprehension; its general meaning would be less clear without the prose version, although in some details it diverges from that version. **1:** Although attributed to *Moses*, female authorship cannot be ruled out (see 15.21n.); note that *I* need not be Moses. **2:** *The LORD . . . salvation*, a hymnic bicolon appearing (perhaps as a quotation) in Isa 12.2 and Ps 118.14. *My father's God*, Israel's ancestral deity (3.6,13,15; 4.5; 6.2–4). **3:** *Warrior*, see 14.14n. *Name*, see 3.13–15n. **4:** *Red Sea*, see 14.18n. **5:** Hebrew for *floods* is the same term used for the watery chaos in Genesis 1 ("deep," Gen 1.2) **6:** The *right hand* of God (also v. 12), not Moses' hand (as 14.16,21,26), directly vanquishes the enemy; see 3.19n. **7:** *Consumed . . . stubble* evokes imagery of fire, which can be paired with water as elements of devastation (Isa 43.2,16–17). **8:** *Blast of your nostrils*, poetic language for a strong wind (v. 10), usually destructive (see Job 4.9). **9:** *Pursue . . . overtake*, see 14.9n. **11:** *Among the gods* may be language of Israelite monolatry in which the existence of other (inferior) gods is not denied (18.11; 20.3; 23.32–33) until universal monotheism emerges in the seventh or sixth century BCE. Another possibility is that *gods* denotes the lesser divine manifestations or angels in God's heavenly court (Pss 82.1; 89.5–8). Either way, the incomparability of Israel's god is forcefully proclaimed by the rhetorical questions of this verse. **12:** *Right hand*, see 15.6n. *Earth*, seemingly incompatible with the water imagery, refers to the underworld (Sheol or death), which swallows the living (Num 16.32; Isa 29.4; Prov 1.12). **13:** The Hebrew for *love* ("ḥesed") also connotes "kindness" and especially "faithfulness." *Holy abode* most likely refers to God's heavenly dwelling (as do the terms of v. 17b) or mythical home in the north (Ps 48.1–2); but it perhaps also alludes to the Promised Land as God's mountainous possession (v. 17a; Ps 78.54–55) and to the Israelites as God's sanctuary (Ps 114.1–2). If this is not a premonarchic poem, it may also refer to the

15 Then the chiefs of Edom were
dismayed;
trembling seized the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan melted
away.
16 Terror and dread fell upon them;
by the might of your arm, they became
still as a stone
until your people, O LORD, passed by,
until the people whom you acquired
passed by.
17 You brought them in and planted them
on the mountain of your own
possession,
the place, O LORD, that you made your
abode,
the sanctuary, O LORD, that your hands
have established.
18 The LORD will reign forever and ever."
19 When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

20 Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. 21 And Miriam sang to them:

"Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed
gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."

22 Then Moses ordered Israel to set out from the Red Sea,[a] and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. That is why it was called Marah.[b] 24 And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" 25 He cried out to the LORD; and the LORD showed him a piece of wood;[c] he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

[a] Or *Sea of Reeds*
[b] That is *Bitterness*
[c] Or *a tree*

Jerusalem Temple (v. 17b). **14:** *Philistia*, see 13.17n. **15:** The Transjordanian kingdoms of *Edom* and *Moab*, as well as many inhabitants of *Canaan*, figure among the early enemies of the Israelites. **16:** *Arm*, instead of "hand" (see 15.6n.), as in 6.6. **17:** This verse contains overlapping and multileveled imagery similar to that of ancient Canaanite poetry (see 15.13n.). *Mountain of your possession* can refer to Israel's homeland in Canaan, conceptualized as God's inheritance (see v. 13n.; 34.9); other biblical references to God's mountain as the Temple mount (e.g., Isa 2.3) may derive from this verse. The Hebrew for *abode*, not the same as for "abode" in v. 13, designates God's heavenly throne. *Sanctuary*, "holy place" in Hebrew, is never used in 1 Kings for the Jerusalem Temple; and elsewhere it designates places or objects possessing sanctity, including celestial dwellings of deities (see 25.9n.). *Your hands have established*, indicates that God made the sanctuary, implying that it is the heavenly one, not the copy constructed in Jerusalem by humans; or, it could give God credit for building the earthly shrine (cf. Ps 78.69). Either way, the verb also connotes God's creative activity (Ps 8.3). **18:** *Reign* introduces the prominent biblical metaphor of God as king. **19–21:** A brief narrative with a final poetic section. **19:** A summary of 14.23–29. **20:** The title *prophet* is used for Miriam (whose name appears here for the first time) but not Moses in Exodus. *Tambourine* is an anachronistic translation of Hebrew "top," a small handheld frame drum (without jingles) played mainly by women in the ancient Near East. *All the women . . . dancing* indicate a woman's performance genre—usually involving drums, dance, and song—for victory celebrations (1 Sam 18.6–7; Jer 31.4,13). **21:** This poem, similar to 15.1, may be an abbreviation or title of 15.1–18, in which case Miriam would be the composer of the song attributed to Moses (see 15.1n.), a possibility also suggested by the association of women with the victory song genre (15.20n.).

15.22–24.18. Sinai and Covenant. Facing recurrent difficulties, the Israelites cross the wilderness to Sinai (15.22–18.27) where they experience a theophany (ch 19) and receive the covenant (chs 20–24).

15.22–18.27: Crises and reorganization in the wilderness. The journey resumes; four crises foreshadowing the difficulties of life in Canaan—two water shortages, lack of food, and a military threat—and a meeting with Jethro prepare Moses for the Sinai experience.

15.22–27: First crisis, lack of water. 22–23: Next stage of the journey; see 12.37n. **22:** *Red Sea*, see 13.18n. **24:** *Complained*, see 14.11–12n. **25b:** *Statute . . . ordinance*, necessary because a community cannot exist without regulations; see 21.1–22.17n. The wilderness crises constitute a *test* of the Israelites (also 16.4) and of God (17.2,7);

There the LORD[a] made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test. 26 He said, "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the LORD who heals you."

27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they camped there by the water.

16 The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. 2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. 5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?" 8 And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD."

9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" 10 And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. 11 The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 12 "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?"[b] For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. 16 This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.'" 17 The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. 18 But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had noth-

[a] Heb *he*

[b] Or *"It is manna"* (Heb *man hu*, see verse 31)

see Deut 8.1–3,16. **26:** The term *diseases*, although not used in the marvels episodes (7.8–10.29), may allude to them or to general Egyptian maladies or to both. **27:** Next stage of the journey; see 12.37n.

16.1–36: Second crisis, lack of food (cf. Num 11). **1:** Next stage of the journey, see 12.37n. *Fifteenth day . . . second month* is a month after departing Egypt (12.17–18). The name *Sinai* appears for the first time (see 19.1n.); cf. Horeb in 3.1. **2:** *Complained*, see 14.11–12n. **3:** *Hand of the LORD*, see 9.3n. *Fleshpots* (referring to meat) and *bread*, their food in Egypt, will be matched by quails (v. 13) and bread (v. 4; or manna, vv. 15,31) in the wilderness. **4:** This *test* (see 15.25n.) may be about obeying God's instructions (Heb "torah"; see 12.49n.) as well as about believing God will provide for them. **6:** To *know* God here (and v. 12) is to recognize that God can miraculously provide sustenance; cf. 5.2n. **7:** The phrase *glory of the LORD*, signifying (the cloud of) divine presence, appears for the first time in the Bible (also v. 10; 24.16,17; 40.34,35); see 3.2n. **9:** *Aaron* again speaks for Moses; see 4.15–16n. **12:** *Know*, see 16.6n. **13:** *Dew*, like rain, signifies divine favor (e.g., Gen 27.28)—both were essential for agriculture in an-

ing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. 19 And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over until morning." 20 But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. 21 Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

22 On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, 23 he said to them, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the LORD; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.'" 24 So they put it aside until morning, as Moses commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. 25 Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. 26 Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a sabbath, there will be none."

27 On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. 28 The LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? 29 See! The LORD has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day." 30 So the people rested on the seventh day.

31 The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. 32 Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, in order that they may see the food with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" 33 And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout your generations." 34 As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the covenant,[a] for safekeeping. 35 The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a habitable land; they ate manna, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. 36 An omer is a tenth of an ephah.

17 From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5 The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the

[a] Or *treaty* or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

cient Israel. **16:** *Omer*, see 16.36n. **19:** This will indicate trust in God. **23–30:** Instructions for the *sabbath* as a *day of rest* on the *seventh day* (cf. Gen 2.2–3) are presented as preceding the Decalogue's sabbath commandment (see 20.8–11n.); observing the sabbath is part of Israel's learning to obey God (see 16.4n.); see also 20.8–11; 23.12; 31.12–17; 34.21; 35.1–3. **31:** *House of Israel*, see 40.34n. Verse 15 provides an etymology for *manna*, which cannot be identified and may be a mythic substance (cf. Num 11.7–9). **32:** *Kept throughout your generations* alludes to an otherwise unknown commemorative ritual; see 11.1–13.16n. **34:** *Covenant*, elliptical for the not-yet-announced "ark of the covenant" (25.10–22), is parallel to LORD (v. 33), indicating that the ark signifies God's presence (see 25.17–22n.). **35:** *Forty years,* the first mention of the length of the wilderness sojourn. **36:** *Ephah* (ca. 21 qts [23 liters]) and *omer* (2 qts [2.3 liters]) are dry measures, usually for grain.

17.1–7: Third crisis, lack of water (cf. Num 20.2–13). **1:** Further stages of the journey; see 12.27n. **2–3:** The people *complain* again (see 14.11–12n.), with the synonym *quarrel* (Heb "rib") providing an etymology for Meribah (v. 7). Similarly, *test* (Heb "nissah") provides an etymology for Massah (v. 7). **6:** *Water* coming from a *rock* at the mountain *Horeb* (see 3.1n.) invokes mythic imagery of the cosmic mountain, source of all water and the

rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He called the place Massah[a] and Meribah,[b] because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

8 Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. 9 Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some men for us and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." 10 So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses' hands grew weary; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady until the sun set. 13 And Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the sword.

14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua: I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." 15 And Moses built an altar and called it, The LORD is my banner. 16 He said, "A hand upon the banner of the LORD![c] The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

18 Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. 2 After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro took her back, 3 along with her two sons. The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been an alien[d] in a foreign land"), 4 and the name of the other, Eliezer[e] (for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"). 5 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came into the wilderness where Moses was encamped at the mountain of God, bringing Moses' sons and wife to him. 6 He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons." 7 Moses went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed down and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent. 8 Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had beset them on the way, and how the LORD had delivered them. 9 Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the Egyptians.

10 Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you from the Egyptians and

[a] That is *Test*
[b] That is *Quarrel*
[c] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Heb *ger*
[e] Heb *Eli,* my God; *ezer,* help

divine home. **7:** *Among us*, or "with you/us," an expression denoting God's potent presence, which provides food or water for Israelites and protects them (Judg 8.12–13).

17.8–16. Fourth crisis, military threat. 8: *Amalek* refers to a seminomadic group and habitual enemy of Israel (v. 16; Deut 25.17–19; Judg 6.1–3; etc.). It is not attested in nonbiblical records. **9:** Moses' successor *Joshua*, whose name appears seven times in Exodus, is first mentioned here. Moses' *staff* (presumably held in his hand, vv. 11–12) can secure military victory (as also in the sea crossing, 14.16) and produce water (17.5–6) or make it undrinkable (7.15–19); see 4.20n. **10:** *Hur*, with an Egyptian name and as an associate of Moses and Aaron (also 24.14), is likely a Levite; but he is a Judahite in 31.2. **14:** The instruction to *write* is the first biblical mention of Israelite literacy. *Reminder*, another indication of the commemorative aspects of the Exodus narrative; cf. 11.1–13.16n. *Book,* or "document." *Recite* implies oral as well as written recollection. **15–16:** The construction of an *altar* may be a third commemorative act.

18.1–27: Meeting with Jethro, who solves an organizational crisis. **1:** *Jethro*, see 2.18n. Because the Hebrew for *father-in-law* ("ḥoten") connotes the concept of marriage as a bond between two families, not just between the conjugal pair, its frequent and redundant use in ch 18 emphasizes Moses' connection with the Midianites. **2:** *Sent away* may be a mistranslation of "dowry" (1 Kings 9.16), meaning that Zipporah (2.21–22; 4.20) had been Moses' *wife* since receiving it. **3–4:** *Gershom*'s symbolic name appears in 2.22 but *Eliezer*'s only here. **5:** *Mountain of God*, i.e., Sinai/Horeb (see 3.1n.); compare 19.2, a tradition implying that the Israelites reach the mountain

from Pharaoh. 11 Now I know that the LORD
is greater than all gods, because he delivered
the people from the Egyptians,[a] when they
dealt arrogantly with them." 12 And Jethro,
Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offer-
ing and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came
with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with
Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

13 The next day Moses sat as judge for the
people, while the people stood around him
from morning until evening. 14 When Moses'
father-in-law saw all that he was doing for
the people, he said, "What is this that you
are doing for the people? Why do you sit
alone, while all the people stand around you
from morning until evening?" 15 Moses said
to his father-in-law, "Because the people
come to me to inquire of God. 16 When they
have a dispute, they come to me and I decide
between one person and another, and I make
known to them the statutes and instructions
of God." 17 Moses' father-in-law said to him,
"What you are doing is not good. 18 You will
surely wear yourself out, both you and these
people with you. For the task is too heavy for
you; you cannot do it alone. 19 Now listen to
me. I will give you counsel, and God be with
you! You should represent the people before
God, and you should bring their cases before
God; 20 teach them the statutes and instruc-
tions and make known to them the way they
are to go and the things they are to do. 21 You
should also look for able men among all the
people, men who fear God, are trustworthy,
and hate dishonest gain; set such men over
them as officers over thousands, hundreds,
fifties, and tens. 22 Let them sit as judges for
the people at all times; let them bring every
important case to you, but decide every
minor case themselves. So it will be easier for
you, and they will bear the burden with you.
23 If you do this, and God so commands you,
then you will be able to endure, and all these
people will go to their home in peace."

24 So Moses listened to his father-in-law
and did all that he had said. 25 Moses chose
able men from all Israel and appointed
them as heads over the people, as officers
over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.
26 And they judged the people at all times;
hard cases they brought to Moses, but any
minor case they decided themselves. 27 Then
Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he
went off to his own country.

19 On the third new moon after the Israel-
ites had gone out of the land of Egypt,
on that very day, they came into the wilder-
ness of Sinai. 2 They had journeyed from
Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai,
and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped
there in front of the mountain. 3 Then Moses
went up to God; the LORD called to him from
the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to
the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: 4 You
have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and
how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought
you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you obey my

[a] The clause *because… Egyptians* has been transposed from verse 10

after the Jethro episode. **10–12:** As a priest (v. 1, see 2.16n.) who blesses the LORD, acknowledges the LORD (see 5.2n.) as greater than other deities (see 15.11n.), and sacrifices to the LORD, Jethro may reflect Midianite familiarity with this deity; see 3.15n. **12:** *Eat bread* denotes a communal sacrificial meal binding the Israelites, Jethro, and God (see 24.5n). **13–27** (cf. Deut 1.9–18): Rendering justice will be the responsibility of a hierarchy of administrative officials (vv. 13,22; NRSV "judges"). **20:** *Statutes*, see 15.25b n. *Instructions* (Heb "torot," pl. of "torah"), see 12.49n. **26:** *Case* (also, "thing, word, matter") translates a Hebrew root ("dbr") appearing ten times in ch 18, anticipating the ten "words" of the Decalogue; see 20.1–17n. **27:** *Depart*, cf. Deut 10.29–32.

19.1–25: Revelation at the mountain, God's second appearance at Sinai/Horeb (cf. ch 3) is a composite of traditions, at times contradictory or redundant; but at the same time conveying the mystery of this momentous theophany. Sinai/Horeb is depicted as an earthly manifestation of the cosmic mountain (see 17.6n.), the axis of the mythic connection between the divine and the human realms. **1:** The precise location of *Sinai* (or Horeb; see 3.1n.) is uncertain. Some passages locate it in southern Jordan (Deut 33.2; Judg 5.4; Hab 3.3,7); the traditional site in the southern Sinai Peninsula is unlikely. **3:** *House of Jacob* is parallel with "sons of Israel" (*Israelites*), the two names of the ancestor of the twelve tribes (Gen 32.28). **4:** The reminder of God's past actions for the Israelites, as preface to the covenant, is typical of Near Eastern treaties in which an overlord states past benefactions; also 20.2. *Eagle's wings*, an image of parental protection and nurturance (Deut 32.11–13). **5:** *Obey*

voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, [6] but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

[7] So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. [8] The people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do." Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. [9] Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after."

When Moses had told the words of the people to the LORD, [10] the LORD said to Moses: "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes [11] and prepare for the third day, because on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. [12] You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death. [13] No hand shall touch them, but they shall be stoned or shot with arrows;[a] whether animal or human being, they shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain." [14] So Moses went down from the mountain to the people. He consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes. [15] And he said to the people, "Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman."

[16] On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. [17] Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. [18] Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. [19] As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. [20] When the LORD descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the LORD summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. [21] Then the LORD said

[a] Heb lacks *with arrows*

. . . *keep* signifies the people's responsibilities to the god who saved them, thus anticipating the Sinai *covenant*, first mentioned here (cf. 2.24; 6.4–5). The concept of a pact between God and Israel is a theologized form of Near Eastern treaty agreements in which a ruler is the patron of a vassal, who has obligations in return. Unlike most vassals, Israel will have special status as the *treasured possession* of its overlord (Deut 7.6; 14.2; 26.18). **6:** *Priestly kingdom . . . holy nation* poetically expresses the idea that all Israelites are priestly; that is, they will have privileges of intimacy with God and responsibilities of physical and moral purity—both associated with priests in the ancient world. **8:** This unanimous agreement is reaffirmed after the covenant is presented (24.7). **9:** *Cloud*, see 3.2n. *Hear*, denoting an auditory theophany; v. 11 implies a visual one. **10–15:** God's presence will render the mountain intensely holy and too dangerous for people and for priests (v. 22; cf. 24.11) to approach (see 3.6n.); even being at a slight remove requires purification. **10:** *People*, perhaps only men; see v. 15n. *Consecrate*, that is, make ritually fit to approach divine sanctity (Josh 3.5). *Wash* as an antidote to ritual impurity (see 29.4). **12:** *Limits* (and v. 23), the border around dangerous sanctity. *Death*, because the intense holiness of God's presence has a dangerous quality (also v. 21; 20.19); see 24.9–11n. and Num 4.15. **13:** *Go up on the mountain*, after the theophany when the mountain is no longer holy, or reflecting a different tradition in which the people do ascend the mountain. **14:** *Consecrated . . . washed*, see v. 10n. **15:** *Go near a woman,* that is, have sex, which causes ritual impurity (Lev 15.18). Addressed to men, this seems to exclude women from experiencing the theophany; but see 20.1–17n. **16–19:** Intense natural phenomena of a thunderstorm and a volcano (*thunder*, *lightning,* a thick *cloud*, dense *smoke*, *violent* shaking) in combination connote the extraordinary phenomenon of revelation (Judg 5.4–5; Pss 18.7–15; 68.7–8; Hab 3.3–6; cf. 1 Kings 19.11–13). A blaring *trumpet*, otherwise used to herald sovereigns (as 1 Kings 1.34) or signal momentous (as 1 Sam 13.3; Isa 18.3) and sacred events (as Lev 25.9), augments the sensory images. **20–25:** Three zones of sanctity are established—holiest at the top for God and Moses (vv. 20,24); a middle stage for Aaron (v. 24) and perhaps leaders (v. 22; 24.1–2,9–11); least holy at the bottom for the people (vv. 12,17,21,23). These zones correspond to the tabernacle's three levels of holiness (see 25.1–31.17n.).

to Moses, "Go down and warn the people not to break through to the LORD to look; otherwise many of them will perish. 22 Even the priests who approach the LORD must consecrate themselves or the LORD will break out against them." 23 Moses said to the LORD, "The people are not permitted to come up to Mount Sinai; for you yourself warned us, saying, 'Set limits around the mountain and keep it holy.'" 24 The LORD said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you; but do not let either the priests or the people break through to come up to the LORD; otherwise he will break out against them." 25 So Moses went down to the people and told them.

20 Then God spoke all these words: 2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3 you shall have no other gods before[a] me.

4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, 6 but showing steadfast

[a] Or *besides*

20.1–24.18: Covenant. The stipulations of the covenant—Decalogue (20.1–17) and Covenant Rules (20.22–23.19)—are interspersed with additional Sinai narratives (20.18–21; 23.20–24.18).

20.1–17: Decalogue (also Deut 5.6–21). These ten precepts (see 18.26n.; also called the "Ten Commandments") are not titled here but are called "ten words" or "ten sayings" in 34.28; Deut 4.13; 10.4. Set forth in apodictic (absolute) form, they constitute unconditional community policy rather than law. Not numbered in the Bible, they are counted in diverse ways.

NUMBERING OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS IN EXODUS 20.1–17			
	MOST JEWISH TRADITION	EASTERN ORTHODOX, ANGLICAN, MOST PROTESTANT CHURCHES	ROMAN CATHOLIC AND LUTHERAN CHURCHES
Ex 20.2	1	1	1
20.3	2	1	1
20.4–6	2	2	1
20.7	3	3	2
20.8–11	4	4	3
20.12	5	5	4
20.13	6	6	5
20.14	7	7	6
20.15	8	8	7
20.16	9	9	8
20.17a	10	10	9
20.17b	10	10	10

The first several deal with human obligations to God and are accompanied by explanations (called motive clauses); the others concern social issues and usually do not mention God. Because its pronouns are all second-person masculine singular, the Decalogue seems to address the adult men responsible for Israelite households (as v. 17), with its stipulations otherwise applying to all people as appropriate. However, the masculine singular sometimes represents both members of the conjugal pair (as v. 10; see Gen 2.24). **1:** *God spoke* these words to the people directly, not through Moses. **2:** Divine self-identification and recapitulation of past benefaction (see 19.4n.). **3:** Worship of the LORD alone, without denying other deities; see 15.11n. **4–6:** Imageless worship of God distinguished Israelite religion from those of their neighbors. **5:** *To the . . . generation*, transgenerational

love to the thousandth generation[a] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

12 Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

13 You shall not murder.[b]

14 You shall not commit adultery.

15 You shall not steal.

16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

18 When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid[c] and trembled and stood at a distance, 19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." 21 Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

22 The LORD said to Moses: Thus you shall say to the Israelites: "You have seen for yourselves that I spoke with you from heaven. 23 You shall not make gods of silver alongside me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. 24 You need make for me only an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings

[a] Or *to thousands*
[b] Or *kill*
[c] Sam Gk Syr Vg: MT *they saw*

guilt (see 34.7; cf. Gen 15.16) is sometimes rejected (Jer 31.29–30; Ezek 18). **7:** As a metaphor for divine presence (20.24; Deut 12.5; etc.), God's *name* is potent and cannot be misused (as in false oaths, Jer 7.9). **8–11:** The *sabbath* is to be *holy* (v. 8; the same Heb word is translated "consecrated" in v. 11), that is, distinct from other days (see 16.23–30n.), and is directed to God as creator (v. 11, as in the Priestly creation story [Gen 1.1–2.3; contrast Deut 5.15]). "Wife" is omitted from the otherwise inclusive list because she is included in *you*; see 20.1–17n. **12:** Parental authority, akin to that of God, likewise deserves *honor* (see 14.4n., where "glory" is from the same root as *honor*, and 21.15,17n). **13:** *Murder* is forbidden, but not killing in war or in capital punishment. **14:** *Adultery,* sexual intercourse between a man and a married or betrothed woman, is a grave offense (Lev 20.10; Deut 22.22) because lineages could be compromised by this infidelity. **15:** Theft of both persons and property is prohibited; the Hebrew word for "kidnap" (21.16) is the same as for *steal*. **16:** Forbidding *false witness* is indicative of strong concerns for justice (23.1–3). **17:** Considered two separate "words" in some traditions, this prohibition addresses the male head of household; see 20.1–17n.

20.18–21: The Sinai account resumes, with the people insisting that Moses transmit God's word. In the retelling of this in Deut 18.15–22, he becomes the prototype of a true prophet. **18:** *Thunder . . . lightning . . . trumpet . . . smoking*, see 19.16–19n. **19:** *Die*, see 19.13n.

20.22–23.33: Community regulations. This collection of legal materials, sometimes called the Book of the Covenant (24.7) or Covenant Code or Covenant Collection (cf. Josh 24.26, "book of the law [Heb 'torah']"), is diverse in content and form. Introductory instructions (20.22–26) and a concluding narrative (23.20–33) frame a two-part enumeration of community rulings (ordinances) and rules (statutes). The first part (21.1–22.17) consists mainly of casuistic materials—case laws with attached punishments. The second part (22.18–23.19) comprises ethical or religious norms and exhortations typically expressed in apodictic or absolute form. These two parts may reflect the merging of ancient customary regulations with covenant-oriented materials.

20.22–26: Introductory instructions are given in the second-person plural. The forbidden statues (see 20.4–5) made of costly *silver* and *gold* are contrasted with the simple, low altars of *earth* or unhewn *stone* for sacrificing to God, which (unlike the single "place" in Deuteronomic tradition; see Deut 12.5–14; etc.) can take

and your offerings of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. 25 But if you make for me an altar of stone, do not build it of hewn stones; for if you use a chisel upon it you profane it. 26 You shall not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it."

21 These are the ordinances that you shall set before them:

2 When you buy a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh he shall go out a free person, without debt. 3 If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's and he shall go out alone. 5 But if the slave declares, "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out a free person," 6 then his master shall bring him before God.[a] He shall be brought to the door or the doorpost; and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him for life.

7 When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. 8 If she does not please her master, who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed; he shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt unfairly with her. 9 If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. 10 If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife.[b] 11 And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out without debt, without payment of money.

12 Whoever strikes a person mortally shall be put to death. 13 If it was not premeditated, but came about by an act of God, then I will appoint for you a place to which the killer may flee. 14 But if someone willfully attacks and kills another by treachery, you shall take the killer from my altar for execution.

15 Whoever strikes father or mother shall be put to death.

16 Whoever kidnaps a person, whether that person has been sold or is still held in possession, shall be put to death.

17 Whoever curses father or mother shall be put to death.

18 When individuals quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or fist so that the injured party, though not dead, is confined to bed, 19 but recovers and walks around outside with the help of a staff, then the assailant shall be free of liability, except to pay for the loss of time, and to arrange for full recovery.

20 When a slaveowner strikes a male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies immediately, the owner shall be punished. 21 But if the slave survives a day or two, there

[a] Or *to the judges*
[b] Heb *of her*

place wherever people invoke God's *name* (presence); cf. 27.1–8. **26:** *Nakedness may not be exposed*, probably because undergarments were not normally worn; contrast 28.42.

21.1–22.20: Ordinances (rulings) and statutes (rules). In form and content, this section resembles other ancient Near Eastern legal collections. It comprises four sections: two groups of rulings (*ordinances*, v. 1), beginning with *when* or *if*, on specific cases (21.1–11; 21.18–22.17), and stringent rules (statutes) beginning with *whoever* or *you* (21.12–17; 22.18–20).

21.2–11: Manumission regulations (cf. Deut 15.12–18; Lev 25.39–55) for indentured Israelite (*Hebrew,* v. 2; see 1.15n.) servants, which provide procedures rather than penalties. **2:** *Buy*, better "acquire." *Slave*, better "servant" (and v. 7). *Six years* limits the duration of service. **5–6:** The servant can irrevocably forego independence; a physical mark involving little trauma signifies that status (v. 6). **6:** *Before God*, probably either by swearing an oath in God's name or by holding this ceremony at a local sanctuary. **7–11:** The rights of an indentured female who becomes a wife in the household where she serves are established.

21.12–32: Violence regulations include absolute rules for capital offenses (vv. 12–17) and case rulings concerning assault on people by humans (18–27) and animals (28–32). **12–14:** Distinction between deliberate and accidental homicide. **13:** *Place to . . . flee* because the victim's kin would seek revenge (cf. Num 35.12; Deut 4.41–43; 19.1–13; Josh 20). **15,17:** Two rules supporting parental authority, probably over adult children in an extended family (also Lev 20.9). **16:** *Kidnap*, lit., "steal"; see 20.15n. **17:** *Curses* had potency and were as serious as physi-

is no punishment; for the slave is the owner's property.

22 When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined what the woman's husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine. 23 If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

26 When a slaveowner strikes the eye of a male or female slave, destroying it, the owner shall let the slave go, a free person, to compensate for the eye. 27 If the owner knocks out a tooth of a male or female slave, the slave shall be let go, a free person, to compensate for the tooth.

28 When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall not be liable. 29 If the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not restrained it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death. 30 If a ransom is imposed on the owner, then the owner shall pay whatever is imposed for the redemption of the victim's life. 31 If it gores a boy or a girl, the owner shall be dealt with according to this same rule. 32 If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall pay to the slaveowner thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

33 If someone leaves a pit open, or digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, 34 the owner of the pit shall make restitution, giving money to its owner, but keeping the dead animal.

35 If someone's ox hurts the ox of another, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the price of it; and the dead animal they shall also divide. 36 But if it was known that the ox was accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has not restrained it, the owner shall restore ox for ox, but keep the dead animal.

22 [a] When someone steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, the thief shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.[b] The thief shall make restitution, but if unable to do so, shall be sold for the theft. 4 When the animal, whether ox or donkey or sheep, is found alive in the thief's possession, the thief shall pay double.

2 [c] If a thief is found breaking in, and is beaten to death, no bloodguilt is incurred; 3 but if it happens after sunrise, bloodguilt is incurred.

5 When someone causes a field or vineyard to be grazed over, or lets livestock loose to graze in someone else's field, restitution shall be made from the best in the owner's field or vineyard.

6 When fire breaks out and catches in thorns so that the stacked grain or the standing grain or the field is consumed, the one who started the fire shall make full restitution.

7 When someone delivers to a neighbor money or goods for safekeeping, and they are stolen from the neighbor's house, then the thief, if caught, shall pay double. 8 If the thief is not caught, the owner of the house shall be brought before God,[d] to determine whether or not the owner had laid hands on the neighbor's goods.

9 In any case of disputed ownership involving ox, donkey, sheep, clothing, or any other

[a] Ch 21.37 in Heb
[b] Verses 2, 3, and 4 rearranged thus: 3b, 4, 2, 3a
[c] Ch 22.1 in Heb
[d] Or *before the judges*

cal assault. **20:** *Slave*, probably a non-Israelite (cf. vv. 21,32). **22–27:** Measure-for-measure punishment, or "lex talionis" (Lev 24.19–20; Deut 19.21) is a principle of fair treatment of assailants rather than a literal prescription for retaliatory treatment in all cases; note that indemnity and compensation are sometimes acceptable (vv. 22,26,27). **28–32:** Goring ox cases mandate liability for accidental or negligent homicide. **32:** A chattel *slave* (as in v. 21) rather than an indentured servant (as in vv. 2–11), because monetary value is assigned. A *shekel* weighed about .4 oz (11.4 gm).

21.33–22.15: Property and restitution, more case rulings. **21.33–36:** Compensation for death or injury to animals because of negligence. **22.1–4:** Theft of property (cf. 22.16n.). **1:** *Sold*, to secure funds for the fine. **2–3:** Nighttime theft is more serious, presumably because the intruder's intent is less clear. **5–6:** Restitution for agri-

loss, of which one party says, "This is mine," the case of both parties shall come before God;[a] the one whom God condemns[b] shall pay double to the other.

10 When someone delivers to another a donkey, ox, sheep, or any other animal for safekeeping, and it dies or is injured or is carried off, without anyone seeing it, 11 an oath before the LORD shall decide between the two of them that the one has not laid hands on the property of the other; the owner shall accept the oath, and no restitution shall be made. 12 But if it was stolen, restitution shall be made to its owner. 13 If it was mangled by beasts, let it be brought as evidence; restitution shall not be made for the mangled remains.

14 When someone borrows an animal from another and it is injured or dies, the owner not being present, full restitution shall be made. 15 If the owner was present, there shall be no restitution; if it was hired, only the hiring fee is due.

16 When a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to be married, and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife. 17 But if her father refuses to give her to him, he shall pay an amount equal to the bride-price for virgins.

18 You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live.

19 Whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death.

20 Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, shall be devoted to destruction.

21 You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. 22 You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. 23 If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; 24 my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans.

25 If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them. 26 If you take your neighbor's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; 27 for it may be your neighbor's only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbor cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate.

28 You shall not revile God, or curse a leader of your people.

29 You shall not delay to make offerings from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses.[c]

The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me. 30 You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep: seven days it shall remain with its mother; on the eighth day you shall give it to me.

31 You shall be people consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any meat that is mangled by beasts in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs.

[a] Or *before the judges*
[b] Or *the judges condemn*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

cultural damages caused by negligence. **7–15:** Restitution for loss of property in another's care. **9–11:** Two cases of judicial impasse. Disputes lacking evidence or witnesses are decided using unspecified priestly mechanisms; cf. Num 5.11–31.

22.16–20: Social and religious stipulations, including one case ruling (22.16–17) and three rules (22.18–20). **16–17:** Consensual premarital sex obligates the man to marry the woman or compensate her father for the decrease, because of her lost virginity, in the *bride-price* (better "marital gift") a future husband might pay. **16:** *Seduces*, not coerces, implying her consent. **18–20:** Like 21.12–17, this second group of absolute rules—prohibiting sorcery (cf. Deut 18.10–11), bestiality (cf. Lev 18.23; 20.15–16; Deut 27.21), and apostasy—are unequivocal and involve capital punishment. **20:** *Devoted to destruction* (execution) may also entail eradicating the offender's family and confiscating their property (Lev 27.28–29).

22.21–23.19. Ethical and religious exhortations and norms. The stipulations of the second part of the community regulations (see 20.22–23.33n.) are mostly unconditional. Some concern social relationships and justice (22.21–27; 23.1–12) and the others present obligations to God (22.28–31; 23.13–19), thus linking humanitarian and religious matters. **22.21–27:** Concern for the disadvantaged appears repeatedly in the Pentateuch (e.g., 23.6,9–12; Lev 19.33–34; 23.22; Deut 1.16; 10.18–19; 24.17–22). **28–31:** Several religious matters: prohibitions (vv. 28,31) and prescriptions (vv. 29–30). **28:** Cf. Lev 24.15–16; 1 Kings 21.10,13. **29–30:** See 13.2.n.; 34.19–20; Num

23 You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness. [2] You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice; [3] nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit.

[4] When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back.

[5] When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free.[a]

[6] You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits. [7] Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. [8] You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.

[9] You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

[10] For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; [11] but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.

[12] Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed. [13] Be attentive to all that I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips.

[14] Three times in the year you shall hold a festival for me. [15] You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread; as I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt.

No one shall appear before me empty-handed.

[16] You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall observe the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. [17] Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God.

[18] You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the fat of my festival remain until the morning.

[19] The choicest of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

[20] I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. [21] Be attentive to him and listen to his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him.

[22] But if you listen attentively to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

18.27. **31:** *Consecrated* (lit., "holy"), see 19.6n. Elsewhere, to be edible animals must be drained of their blood (Lev 7.24; 17.13–15). **23.1–12:** Judicial integrity (vv. 1–3,6–8) and the protection of animals and marginal groups (vv. 4–5,6,9–12). **1–3:** 20.16; Lev 19.12,15; Deut 19.15–19. **4–5:** Cf. Deut 22.1–4. **6–9:** See 22.21–27n. **10–12:** A seventh-year agricultural hiatus favors the poor; and the seventh-day rest (see 16.23–30n.) benefits animals, servants, and foreigners. **13–19:** Obligations to God. **13:** See 15.11n; 20.3. **14–19a:** The three major agricultural festivals (cf. 34.22–23)—*unleavened bread* (linked to passover and the Exodus; see 12.15n.); *harvest*, or *first fruits*, also called Shavuot or Festival of Weeks (34.22,26; Lev 23.15–21; Deut 16.9–12); *ingathering*, also called Sukkot or Festival of Booths (Lev 23.33–43; Deut 16.13–15). **17:** *All your males*; cf. Deut 31.11–12. *Before the Lord God*, presumably wherever there is an altar (20.22–26n.); cf. Deut 16.2,6,7,11,15,16, which stipulates pilgrimage to one place, presumably Jerusalem. **18:** The blood prohibition probably applies to all sacrifices, not just festival ones. *Until the morning*, cf. 12.8. **19a:** *House*, a general designation for a shrine (Gen 28.22). **19b:** *Milk*, perhaps "fat," prohibiting the slaughter of the kid's mother to protect its breeding potential (also 34.26; Deut 14.21).

23.20–33: The Sinai narrative resumes with further divine promises and admonitions. **20–23:** The *angel* (lit., "messenger") represents God's presence (see 3.2n.) as does God's *name*. **22:** *Enemy . . . foes* employs Near East-

23 When my angel goes in front of you, and
brings you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the
Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and
the Jebusites, and I blot them out, 24 you shall
not bow down to their gods, or worship them,
or follow their practices, but you shall utterly
demolish them and break their pillars in pieces. 25 You shall worship the LORD your God,
and I[a] will bless your bread and your water;
and I will take sickness away from among you.
26 No one shall miscarry or be barren in your
land; I will fulfill the number of your days. 27 I
will send my terror in front of you, and will
throw into confusion all the people against
whom you shall come, and I will make all your
enemies turn their backs to you. 28 And I will
send the pestilence[b] in front of you, which
shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites,
and the Hittites from before you. 29 I will not
drive them out from before you in one year, or
the land would become desolate and the wild
animals would multiply against you. 30 Little
by little I will drive them out from before you,
until you have increased and possess the land.
31 I will set your borders from the Red Sea[c] to
the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates; for I will hand over to
you the inhabitants of the land, and you shall
drive them out before you. 32 You shall make
no covenant with them and their gods. 33 They
shall not live in your land, or they will make
you sin against me; for if you worship their
gods, it will surely be a snare to you.

24 Then he said to Moses, "Come up to
the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and
Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel,
and worship at a distance. 2 Moses alone shall
come near the LORD; but the others shall not
come near, and the people shall not come up
with him."

3 Moses came and told the people all the
words of the LORD and all the ordinances;
and all the people answered with one voice,
and said, "All the words that the LORD has
spoken we will do." 4 And Moses wrote down
all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the
morning, and built an altar at the foot of the
mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 He
sent young men of the people of Israel, who
offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as
offerings of well-being to the LORD. 6 Moses
took half of the blood and put it in basins,
and half of the blood he dashed against the
altar. 7 Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people;
and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken
we will do, and we will be obedient." 8 Moses
took the blood and dashed it on the people,
and said, "See the blood of the covenant that
the LORD has made with you in accordance
with all these words."

[a] Gk Vg: Heb *he*
[b] Or *hornets:* Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Or *Sea of Reeds*

ern treaty language. **23–33:** Cf. 34.11–17. **23,28:** See 3.8n. **24:** Cf. 20.3; 23.13. *Pillars*, upright stones sometimes acceptable, when signifying social or political groups (24.4) or embodying God's presence (Gen 28.16–22), but otherwise considered idolatrous (34.13; Lev 26.1; Deut 12.3, etc.). **25–26:** Sustenance and progeny are the blessings produced by covenant fealty (Lev 26.3–10; Deut 28.1–6). **27–30:** The indigenous inhabitants of the land are driven away; using "holy war" language; other passages say they are to be exterminated (e.g., Deut 7.2; Josh 10–11). **31:** This territorial delineation is one of several traditions about the extent of the land (e.g., Gen 15.18; Num 34.1–12). *The sea of the Philistines,* the Mediterranean. **32–33:** *Their gods,* see 15.11n.

24.1–18: Theophanies and covenant ceremonies. Repetitive or conflicting details again (see 19.1–25n.) indicate a composite narrative about God's appearance—to Moses and the leaders (vv. 1–2,9–11), and to Moses alone (vv. 12–18). Covenant ratification rituals are known from ancient Near Eastern documents. **1–2:** Several zones of sanctity are implied; see 19.20–25n. **1:** *Nadab* and *Abihu*, 6.23. **3–8:** Covenant ceremony. **3:** *Words* and *ordinances*, referring to the Decalogue (see 20.1–17n.) and community rulings (see 20.22–23.33n.); cf. Josh 24.25. *One voice*, unanimous agreement, as in 19.8. **4:** *Moses wrote,* see 24.12n. *Pillars*, see 23.24n. **5:** *Burnt offerings . . . offerings of well-being* (cf. 18.12), the former burned entirely with the rising smoke constituting God's portion (Lev 1) and the latter providing food for the participants (Deut 27.6–7); a ceremonial feast is implied (cf. v. 11). Celebratory repasts are vehicles for creating relationships between the parties (here, God and the people) sharing the meal; see also 18.12n. **6–8:** Another ratification ritual draws on the life-death quality of blood (see 22.31n.); throwing half on the people and half on the altar (for God, as 20.24) serves to bind the two parties. **7:**

[9] Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, [10] and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. [11] God[a] did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

[12] The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." [13] So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. [14] To the elders he had said, "Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them."

[15] Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. [16] The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. [17] Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. [18] Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

25 The LORD said to Moses: [2] Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give you shall receive the offering for me. [3] This is the offering that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, [4] blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine linen, goats' hair, [5] tanned rams' skins, fine leather,[b]

[a] Heb *He*

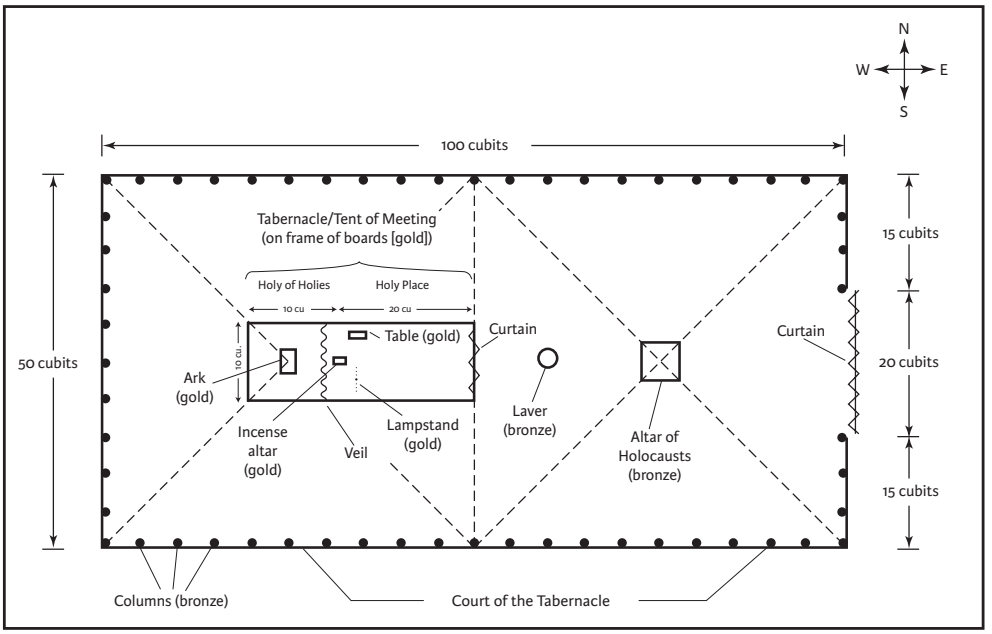
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

Book of the covenant, see 19.8n. **8:** *On the people,* perhaps on the pillars (v. 4) representing them. **9–11:** Partway up the mountain (continuing from vv. 1–2), the leaders too partake of a ceremonial meal and, despite the danger (see 3.6n.), have a visual experience of God. **10:** *Sapphire,* cf. Ezek 1.26. **12–18:** The theophany to Moses alone in the holiest zone will resume in the golden calf episode of 31.18–34.35. **12:** *Tablets*, probably two (31.18; 32.15); important documents were thus recorded. *I have written* (also 31.18; 32.16; 34.1; Deut 9.10) has God writing the document; contrast 24.4; 34.27–28. **13–14:** *Joshua* and *Hur* each appear for the second time (17.9–10). **15–17:** *Cloud* and *fire*, see 3.2n. and 19.16–19n. *Glory of the LORD*, see 16.7n. **15:** *Covered*, see 40.34n. **16:** *Settled*, better "dwelled," uses the same Heb root as the noun for God's wilderness dwelling, the tabernacle; see 25.9n.

Chs 25–40: Building the tabernacle and receiving a new covenant. The remaining chapters of Exodus have as their main focus the construction of the tabernacle as an earthly home for God. Directions for building the portable wilderness shrine (25.1–27.21; 30.1–31.18) and for clothing and inaugurating the priests who would be custodians of the shrine and its rituals (28.1–29.46) are followed by an account of how the directions are carried out so that the divine presence can enter (35.1–40.38). Much of the information in the second section is exactly the same as in the first, although the internal order differs. Between the two sections comes the golden calf episode (chs 32–34), which results in a restored covenant.

25.1–31.18: Instructions for building the tabernacle and inaugurating the priesthood. Unlike religious edifices today, which are places for people to enter and worship, temples and shrines in the ancient world were considered earthly residences for deities (see 25.8) and were off-limits for most humans. They were costly, well-furnished structures, befitting their divine occupants. Although a modest tent shrine, perhaps reflected in the designation "tent of meeting" (see 27.21n.), would have been possible, the elaborate and costly structure of Exodus likely draws in part from knowledge of the Jerusalem Temple. Like Mount Sinai (and the Jerusalem Temple), the portable wilderness shrine of the Israelites would have three zones of sanctity; see 19.20–25n. Following an introduction (25.1–9) and instructions for making its sacred furnishings (25.10–40), come directions for making the structure itself (ch 26) and then its courtyard and altar (27.1–19); an addendum prescribes lamp oil (27.20–21). A concluding section (28.1–31.18) gives instructions for the priestly vestments (ch 28) and for consecrating the priests (ch 29), and ends with God's announcing the two chief artisans and calling for sabbath observance (ch 31).

25.1–9: Introduction: the materials (also 35.4–29). Seven kinds of substances (metals, yarn, skins, wood, oil, spices, and gemstones) signify the totality of supplies. **2:** *Offering . . . hearts*, indicating that materials for the shrine will come from donations, not taxes. **3:** Three precious metals for components will be used according to the three zones of sanctity (see 19.20–25n.), with *gold* for those most holy or



Chs 25–31; 36–39: The structure of the Tabernacle as described in the book of Exodus.

acacia wood, [6] oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, [7] onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and for the breastpiece. [8] And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. [9] In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

[10] They shall make an ark of acacia wood; it shall be two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. [11] You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside you shall overlay it, and you shall make a molding of gold upon it all around. [12] You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side. [13] You shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. [14] And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, by which to carry the ark. [15] The

closest to the most holy and bronze for the least holy. **8:** *Sanctuary*, see 15.17n. *Dwell among them*, indicating that the shrine will be God's earthly residence (see 25.1–31.17n.). The Hebrew term for *dwell* denotes a portable presence rather than one tied to a fixed location. **9:** *Pattern* likely designates the heavenly abode after which the earthly one is to be modeled (see 3.8n.). *Tabernacle* is a noun formed from the Hebrew verb "to dwell" (see 25.8n.) and suggests God's indwelling presence. Used fifty-eight times in the book of Exodus, here it refers to the entire sacred complex; in other passages (e.g., 26.1) it denotes just the tent structure.

25.10–40: Interior furnishings. The most holy item, the gold-covered ark (vv. 10–22), will be situated in the inner sanctum. Three more gold items—table (vv. 23–30), lampstand (vv. 31–40), and incense altar (which is not prescribed in this section; see 30.1–10)—will be near the ark, in the main room of the shrine.

25.10–22: The ark and its cover (also 37.1–9). A gilded chest that will contain the sacred covenant document, the ark has a lid surmounted by winged creatures over which God's invisible presence rests. In ancient Israel's aniconic tradition, the ark comes closest to a physical symbol of God (see 1 Sam 4.4; 2 Sam 6.2). **10:** Its size (ca. 114 × 69 × 69 cm = 45 × 27 × 27 in) is similar to that of chests known from ancient Egypt for keeping valuables. **12–15:** *Rings* and *poles* for transport are also known from ancient Egypt. **16:** The Hebrew word for *covenant* here ("ע֫edut"; see 2.24n.) is favored by the Priestly writer; perhaps referring to the tablets of 24.12,

poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. 16 You shall put into the ark the covenant[a] that I shall give you.

17 Then you shall make a mercy seat[b] of pure gold; two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its width. 18 You shall make two cherubim of gold; you shall make them of hammered work, at the two ends of the mercy seat.[c] 19 Make one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other; of one piece with the mercy seat[c] you shall make the cherubim at its two ends. 20 The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat[c] with their wings. They shall face one to another; the faces of the cherubim shall be turned toward the mercy seat.[c] 21 You shall put the mercy seat[c] on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the covenant[a] that I shall give you. 22 There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat,[c] from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the covenant,[a] I will deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites.

23 You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. 24 You shall overlay it with pure gold, and make a molding of gold around it. 25 You shall make around it a rim a handbreadth wide, and a molding of gold around the rim. 26 You shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs. 27 The rings that hold the poles used for carrying the table shall be close to the rim. 28 You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these. 29 You shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. 30 And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always.

31 You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The base and the shaft of the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its cups, its calyxes, and its petals shall be of one piece with it; 32 and there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; 33 three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on one branch, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. 34 On the lampstand itself

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*
[b] Or *a cover*
[c] Or *the cover*

it is similar to the word for "meet," thus signifying the role of the ark as a place for oracular revelations (v. 22; 29.42–43; 33.7–10) and alluding to another name for the tabernacle, "tent of meeting" (see 27.21n.). **17–22:** The ark's cover (*mercy seat*) features imaginary composite beings (*cherubim*) whose wings form the throne, with the ark as its footstool, on which God's invisible presence rests (1 Sam 4.4; 1 Chr 28.2; Pss 99.1,5; 132.7); see 16.34n. Such composite figures as components of thrones are known from ancient Near Eastern art. **22:** *Meet*, see v. 16n.

25.23–30: The table (also 37.10–16; cf. 1 Kings 7.48) is the repository for sacred vessels and for the bread offering. A dwelling place for a deity, as for humans, needs a table for food. Bread and libations (and animals) are among the comestibles brought to God, though elsewhere the Torah makes it clear that the priests, not God consume the bread (Lev 24.5–9). **23:** Its dimensions (1 × .5 m = 36 × 18 in; height: .75 m = 27 in) are similar to those of offering tables depicted in ancient Near Eastern art. **27–28:** Its *rings* and *poles* provide portability. **29:** *Incense*, see 30.34–38. **30:** *Bread of the Presence*, or "bread [set] before [God]," refers to loaves offered to God on the sabbath.

25.31–40: The lampstand (Heb "menorah"; also 37.17–24) will hold oil lamps for illuminating God's dwelling (cf. the ten lampstands of the Jerusalem Temple, 1 Kings 7.49). No dimensions are provided. The wealth of botanical terms (branches, calyxes, almond blossoms, petals) suggests that in shape and decoration, it represented a sacred tree and perhaps even God as source of fertility (see 3.2n.). **31:** *Base and shaft* together denote a cylindrical stand flared at the bottom. **37:** *Seven lamps*, perhaps one on each branch; otherwise, a

there shall be four cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with its calyxes and petals. 35 There shall be a calyx of one piece with it under the first pair of branches, a calyx of one piece with it under the next pair of branches, and a calyx of one piece with it under the last pair of branches—so for the six branches that go out of the lampstand. 36 Their calyxes and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it one hammered piece of pure gold. 37 You shall make the seven lamps for it; and the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. 38 Its snuffers and trays shall be of pure gold. 39 It, and all these utensils, shall be made from a talent of pure gold. 40 And see that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.

26 Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twisted linen, and blue, purple, and crimson yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them. 2 The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall be of the same size. 3 Five curtains shall be joined to one another; and the other five curtains shall be joined to one another. 4 You shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set; and likewise you shall make loops on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set. 5 You shall make fifty loops on the one curtain, and you shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite one another. 6 You shall make fifty clasps of gold, and join the curtains to one another with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be one whole.

7 You shall also make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; you shall make eleven curtains. 8 The length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; the eleven curtains shall be of the same size. 9 You shall join five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves, and the sixth curtain you shall double over at the front of the tent. 10 You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the second set.

11 You shall make fifty clasps of bronze, and put the clasps into the loops, and join the tent together, so that it may be one whole. 12 The part that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. 13 The cubit on the one side, and the cubit on the other side, of what remains in the length of the curtains of the tent, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and that side, to cover it. 14 You shall make for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins and an outer covering of fine leather.[a]

15 You shall make upright frames of acacia wood for the tabernacle. 16 Ten cubits shall be the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the width of each frame. 17 There shall be two pegs in each frame to fit the frames together; you shall make these for all the frames of the tabernacle. 18 You shall make the frames for the tabernacle: twenty frames for the south side; 19 and you shall make forty bases of silver under the twenty frames, two bases under the first frame for its two pegs, and two bases under the next frame for its two pegs; 20 and for the second side of the tabernacle,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

single lamp in the middle (see 27.20n.; Lev 24.2). **39:** A *talent*, or 3,000 shekels, is about 34 kg = 75.5 lb. **40:** *Pattern*, see 25.9n.

26.1–37: The tabernacle structure (also 36.8–38). The tent itself consists of coverings (vv. 1–14), frames (vv. 15–30), and textile partitions (31–37) that form two interior spaces: the most holy place for the ark, and the holy place where the furnishings will be placed. **1–14: Coverings.** The tentlike structure will be formed with two fabric layers—panels of linen and tricolored wools decorated with *cherubim* (see 25.17–22n.), and unadorned goat hair panels—covered with two layers of animal skins (v. 14). **1:** *Tabernacle*, referring to the tent itself; see 25.9n. *Linen* renders an Egyptian term for a luxury fabric. *Blue, purple, and crimson* were the most costly and highly prized dyes. **15–30: Frames**. A complex system of wooden boards and bars, with metal fastenings and bases, will form frames for the hangings. The information is incomplete, with the exact size and manner of assembly

on the north side twenty frames, [21] and their forty bases of silver, two bases under the first frame, and two bases under the next frame; [22] and for the rear of the tabernacle westward you shall make six frames. [23] You shall make two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear; [24] they shall be separate beneath, but joined at the top, at the first ring; it shall be the same with both of them; they shall form the two corners. [25] And so there shall be eight frames, with their bases of silver, sixteen bases; two bases under the first frame, and two bases under the next frame.

[26] You shall make bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, [27] and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the side of the tabernacle at the rear westward. [28] The middle bar, halfway up the frames, shall pass through from end to end. [29] You shall overlay the frames with gold, and shall make their rings of gold to hold the bars; and you shall overlay the bars with gold. [30] Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain.

[31] You shall make a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. [32] You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, which have hooks of gold and rest on four bases of silver. [33] You shall hang the curtain under the clasps, and bring the ark of the covenant[a] in there, within the curtain; and the curtain shall separate for you the holy place from the most holy. [34] You shall put the mercy seat[b] on the ark of the covenant[a] in the most holy place. [35] You shall set the table outside the curtain, and the lampstand on the south side of the tabernacle opposite the table; and you shall put the table on the north side.

[36] You shall make a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework. [37] You shall make for the screen five pillars of acacia, and overlay them with gold; their hooks shall be of gold, and you shall cast five bases of bronze for them.

27 You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and it shall be three cubits high. [2] You shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. [3] You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze. [4] You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze; and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. [5] You shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net shall extend halfway down the altar. [6] You shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze; [7] the poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. [8] You shall make it hollow, with boards. They shall be made just as you were shown on the mountain.

[9] You shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side the court shall have

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*
[b] Or *the cover*

remaining conjectural. But the tent is clearly rectangular and measures ca. 13.8 × 4.6 m = 45 × 15 ft. **31–37: Partitions.** A textile curtain with *cherubim* decorations (see 25.17–22n.) will subdivide the interior space into two zones of holiness (v. 33), and a textile panel will form the entrance; both will be made of linen and tricolored wool (see 26.1–14n.). **33:** *Most holy [place]*, or inner sanctuary (1 Kings 6.16).

27.1–19: The courtyard and its altar (also 38.1–20). Directions for making the courtyard altar (27.1–8) precede instructions for making the enclosure wall, ca. 2.3 m. = 7.5 ft high, forming a courtyard (27.9–19) measuring ca. 45.7 × 22.9 m = 150 × 75 ft. **1–8: Altar.** The sole courtyard appurtenance in this passage (see 30.17–21 for the courtyard basin) is the large and elaborate altar (ca. 7.5 × 7.5 × 4.5 ft = 2.3 × 2.3 × 1.4 m); contrast the earthen altar of 20.24–26. **2:** *Horns*, quarter-round pieces, on the corners (as for the incense altar, 30.2), are attested in many excavated examples; they are used in the ritual of 29.12. **9–19: Enclosure.** As the least sacred zone, the courtyard will have unadorned textiles and metal fittings and utensils mainly of bronze; the linen panel for the entrance, however, will be decorated with tricolored wool (see 26.1n.). The location of the tent within the court is unspecified.

hangings of fine twisted linen one hundred cubits long for that side; [10] its twenty pillars and their twenty bases shall be of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be of silver. [11] Likewise for its length on the north side there shall be hangings one hundred cubits long, their pillars twenty and their bases twenty, of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be of silver. [12] For the width of the court on the west side there shall be fifty cubits of hangings, with ten pillars and ten bases. [13] The width of the court on the front to the east shall be fifty cubits. [14] There shall be fifteen cubits of hangings on the one side, with three pillars and three bases. [15] There shall be fifteen cubits of hangings on the other side, with three pillars and three bases. [16] For the gate of the court there shall be a screen twenty cubits long, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework; it shall have four pillars and with them four bases. [17] All the pillars around the court shall be banded with silver; their hooks shall be of silver, and their bases of bronze. [18] The length of the court shall be one hundred cubits, the width fifty, and the height five cubits, with hangings of fine twisted linen and bases of bronze. [19] All the utensils of the tabernacle for every use, and all its pegs and all the pegs of the court, shall be of bronze.

[20] You shall further command the Israelites to bring you pure oil of beaten olives for the light, so that a lamp may be set up to burn regularly. [21] In the tent of meeting, outside the curtain that is before the covenant,[a] Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the LORD. It shall be a perpetual ordinance to be observed throughout their generations by the Israelites.

28 Then bring near to you your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the Israelites, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. [2] You shall make sacred vestments for the glorious adornment of your brother Aaron. [3] And you shall speak to all who have ability, whom I have endowed with skill, that they make Aaron's vestments to consecrate him for my priesthood. [4] These are the vestments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban, and a sash. When they make these sacred vestments for your brother Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests, [5] they shall use gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine linen.

[6] They shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

27.20–21: Lamp oil (also 35.8,28). **20:** A single *lamp* may belong to the tradition that uses "tent of meeting" for the wilderness shrine; see v. 21n. (cf. 25.37n.). *Regularly* probably means perpetually; light symbolizing divine presence will always be there. **21:** *Tent of meeting*, designating the place where the Israelites or their representatives meet God, is used thirty-four times in the book of Exodus to refer to the tent-shrine (see 25.16n.); it may reflect a tradition that is separate from and older than that of texts using "tabernacle" (see 25.9n). *Covenant,* perhaps elliptical for "ark [or tablets] of the covenant." *Aaron* appears for the first time in the tabernacle texts.

28.1–43: Vestments for the priests (also 39.1–31). After an introduction (vv. 1–5), the focus is on Aaron's apparel (vv. 6–39) with less attention to the garb of his sons, who were second-tier priests (vv. 40–43). No title is given for Aaron in the Pentateuch; the titles "high priest" (as Hag 1.12; Zech 3.1) or "chief priest" (2 Kings 25.18) are in non-Torah texts only. **1–5: Introduction.** The priestly lineage is announced, followed by a summary of the six prescribed vestments for which fabric of linen and tricolored wool is to be used. **1:** See the genealogy of 6.16–25, especially v. 23. *Aaron* has appeared frequently, but the term *priest* is first used here. **2:** *Sacred*, better "holy," because they are worn in and correspond to the holy space of the shrine. **3:** *All . . . ability*, including women; see 35.4–29n. **5:** Sumptuous fabrics, like those of the holy space of the shrine; see 26.1n. **6–39: Aaron's garments.** The first two—ephod (vv. 6–14) and breastpiece (vv. 15–30)—and possibly the fourth (turban) have ritual functions; the others—robe (vv. 31–35), turban (vv. 36–38), tunic (v. 39), and sash (v. 39)—are opulent garments like those clothing royalty and statues of the gods in Near Eastern shrines. **6–14:** The somewhat enigmatic *ephod* (contrast other biblical uses, e.g., Judg 8.27; 1 Sam 2.18; 14.3) is a ceremonial garment like a bib or apron, adorned with engraved stones (vv. 9–12) representing the Israelite tribes. Oracles from God to the

twisted linen, skillfully worked. 7 It shall have two shoulder-pieces attached to its two edges, so that it may be joined together. 8 The decorated band on it shall be of the same workmanship and materials, of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. 9 You shall take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, 10 six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth. 11 As a gem-cutter engraves signets, so you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel; you shall mount them in settings of gold filigree. 12 You shall set the two stones on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel; and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for remembrance. 13 You shall make settings of gold filigree, 14 and two chains of pure gold, twisted like cords; and you shall attach the corded chains to the settings.

15 You shall make a breastpiece of judgment, in skilled work; you shall make it in the style of the ephod; of gold, of blue and purple and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen you shall make it. 16 It shall be square and doubled, a span in length and a span in width. 17 You shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of carnelian,[a] chrysolite, and emerald shall be the first row; 18 and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire,[b] and a moonstone; 19 and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; 20 and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper; they shall be set in gold filigree. 21 There shall be twelve stones with names corresponding to the names of the sons of Israel; they shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes. 22 You shall make for the breastpiece chains of pure gold, twisted like cords; 23 and you shall make for the breastpiece two rings of gold, and put the two rings on the two edges of the breastpiece. 24 You shall put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edges of the breastpiece; 25 the two ends of the two cords you shall attach to the two settings, and so attach it in front to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod. 26 You shall make two rings of gold, and put them at the two ends of the breastpiece, on its inside edge next to the ephod. 27 You shall make two rings of gold, and attach them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder-pieces of the ephod, at its joining above the decorated band of the ephod. 28 The breastpiece shall be bound by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it may lie on the decorated band of the ephod, and so that the breastpiece shall not come loose from the ephod. 29 So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart when he goes into the holy place, for a continual remembrance before the LORD. 30 In the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD; thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the Israelites on his heart before the LORD continually.

31 You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. 32 It shall have an opening for the head in the middle of it, with a woven binding around the opening, like the opening in a coat of mail,[c] so that it may not be torn. 33 On its lower hem you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, all around the lower hem, with bells of gold between them all around— 34 a golden bell and a

[a] The identity of several of these stones is uncertain
[b] Or *lapis lazuli*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

priest (v. 30) would thus be given to all Israelites. **15–30:** Just as enigmatic in design, despite or because of its detailed presentation, is the *breastpiece of judgment*. Like the *ephod* to which it is attached, it has gemstones (twelve of them) representing the Israelite tribes (vv. 17–21). Also, it has a pouch for the *Urim* and *Thummim* (v. 30), whose exact meaning and mode of functioning are uncertain. They are specially marked pebbles or rocks cast or thrown to secure divine decisions, a form of divination. Set close to its wearer's *heart*, the site of intellect and wisdom, the breastpiece was to be used in seeking divine *judgment* on matters brought to God by the chief priestly official. **31–35:** The *robe* is adorned at its hem with tricolor woolen *pomegranates*, like the tassels appearing in iconographic representations of the clothing of deities and royalty in the ancient Near East. The golden *bells* at the hem bring the auditory sense into the shrine; the jingling was perhaps apotropaic as the

pomegranate alternating all around the lower hem of the robe. 35 Aaron shall wear it when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the holy place before the LORD, and when he comes out, so that he may not die.

36 You shall make a rosette of pure gold, and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, "Holy to the LORD." 37 You shall fasten it on the turban with a blue cord; it shall be on the front of the turban. 38 It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take on himself any guilt incurred in the holy offering that the Israelites consecrate as their sacred donations; it shall always be on his forehead, in order that they may find favor before the LORD.

39 You shall make the checkered tunic of fine linen, and you shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash embroidered with needlework.

40 For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics and sashes and headdresses; you shall make them for their glorious adornment. 41 You shall put them on your brother Aaron, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, so that they may serve me as priests. 42 You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh; they shall reach from the hips to the thighs; 43 Aaron and his sons shall wear them when they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place; or they will bring guilt on themselves and die. This shall be a perpetual ordinance for him and for his descendants after him.

29 Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, so that they may serve me as priests. Take one young bull and two rams without blemish, 2 and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil. You shall make them of choice wheat flour. 3 You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, and bring the bull and the two rams. 4 You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and wash them with water. 5 Then you shall take the vestments, and put on Aaron the tunic and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the decorated band of the ephod; 6 and you shall set the turban on his head, and put the holy diadem on the turban. 7 You shall take the anointing oil, and pour it on his head and anoint him. 8 Then you shall bring his sons, and put tunics on them, 9 and you shall gird them with sashes[a] and tie headdresses on them; and the priesthood shall be theirs by a perpetual ordinance. You shall then ordain Aaron and his sons.

10 You shall bring the bull in front of the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons shall lay

[a] Gk: Heb *sashes, Aaron and his sons*

priest approached the dangerous, most holy zone (v. 35; see 3.6n.; 19.13n.; 30.7n.). **36–38:** The headpiece was to be a *turban* (also v. 39) notable for its golden *rosette* (and also a crown; see *diadem*, 29.6). The rosette's engraved words were perhaps part of a ritual purifying the priest and thus protecting him as he approached the perfect (and dangerous) purity of God's presence; see preceding note. **39:** An embroidered *sash* and a *checkered* (more likely, "fringed") *tunic* complete the vestments for Aaron. **40–43: Vestments for other priests,** less elaborate and costly than those for Aaron. **42:** *Undergarments*, see 20.26n. **43:** *Perpetual . . . descendants*, that is, the hereditary priestly lineage.

29.1–46: Consecration of the priests. The authority of priests derives from the installation rites they undergo as well as from the symbolic garments they wear. The rites are set forth (vv. 1–37), followed by instructions for a regular sacrifice (vv. 38–43) and then a final summation (vv. 44–46). **1–37: Installation procedures** (also Lev 8), which will last seven days and are performed by Moses acting as priest, comprise three rites and the sacrifice of three animals for expiatory and purificatory purposes. **1–9: Three rites**—washing, dressing, anointing. **1:** *Consecrate* (to make holy) appears seven times in this chapter. **4:** *Wash*, see 19.10n. **7:** *Anointing* Aaron (but not his sons; contrast 28.41; 30.30) is a symbolic procedure marking transition to a new status (as for royalty, 1 Sam 24.6); here it gives priests the requisite holiness for entering the tabernacle's holy space. **5:** *Vestments*, see notes to ch 28. **9:** *Ordain*, lit., "fill the hand," is an idiom alluding to the scepter or staff often held by an officer; it thus indicates taking on the rights and duties of a position. **10–37: Animal sacrifices**. The first two—bull of purification (vv. 10–14; see Lev 4.1–12) and ram for burnt offering (vv. 15–18; see Lev 1)—prepare the priests;

their hands on the head of the bull, [11] and you shall slaughter the bull before the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, [12] and shall take some of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and all the rest of the blood you shall pour out at the base of the altar. [13] You shall take all the fat that covers the entrails, and the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and turn them into smoke on the altar. [14] But the flesh of the bull, and its skin, and its dung, you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering.

[15] Then you shall take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, [16] and you shall slaughter the ram, and shall take its blood and dash it against all sides of the altar. [17] Then you shall cut the ram into its parts, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its parts and its head, [18] and turn the whole ram into smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering to the LORD; it is a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD.

[19] You shall take the other ram; and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, [20] and you shall slaughter the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the lobes of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet, and dash the rest of the blood against all sides of the altar. [21] Then you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his vestments and on his sons and his sons' vestments with him; then he and his vestments shall be holy, as well as his sons and his sons' vestments.

[22] You shall also take the fat of the ram, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the appendage of the liver, the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and the right thigh (for it is a ram of ordination), [23] and one loaf of bread, one cake of bread made with oil, and one wafer, out of the basket of unleavened bread that is before the LORD; [24] and you shall place all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and raise them as an elevation offering before the LORD. [25] Then you shall take them from their hands, and turn them into smoke on the altar on top of the burnt offering of pleasing odor before the LORD; it is an offering by fire to the LORD.

[26] You shall take the breast of the ram of Aaron's ordination and raise it as an elevation offering before the LORD; and it shall be your portion. [27] You shall consecrate the breast that was raised as an elevation offering and the thigh that was raised as an elevation offering from the ram of ordination, from that which belonged to Aaron and his sons. [28] These things shall be a perpetual ordinance for Aaron and his sons from the Israelites, for this is an offering; and it shall be an offering by the Israelites from their sacrifice of offerings of well-being, their offering to the LORD.

[29] The sacred vestments of Aaron shall be passed on to his sons after him; they shall be anointed in them and ordained in them. [30] The son who is priest in his place shall wear them seven days, when he comes into the tent of meeting to minister in the holy place.

[31] You shall take the ram of ordination, and boil its flesh in a holy place; [32] and Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. [33] They themselves shall eat the food by which atonement is made, to ordain and consecrate them, but no one else shall eat of them, because they are holy. [34] If any of the flesh for the ordination, or of the bread, remains until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire; it shall not be eaten, because it is holy.

the third and most elaborate is the ram for ordination (vv. 19–34; see the well-being offering, Lev 3). **12:** *Horns,* see 27.2n. The altar itself must be purified. **14:** The *sin offering* brings about the moral purification necessary for approaching God's total purity. Some scholars understand this as an offering that cleanses sections of the tabernacle from ritual impurity. **18:** *Burnt offering*, see 24.5n. *Pleasing odor,* see Gen 8.21. **20:** Sprinkling the ram's blood on the priests' extremities (*lobes . . . thumbs . . . toes*), which represent their entire bodies, substitutes animal blood and death for that of the priests; their symbolic death means they belong to God. **22:** *Ordination*, see v. 9n. **24:** *Elevation offering*, lifted to God. **26–34:** Without lands or agricultural holdings, priests depended on a *portion* of the sacrifice for their maintenance (Lev 7.31–36; 22.1–16); the meat and accompanying bread are

35 Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons,
just as I have commanded you; through seven
days you shall ordain them. 36 Also every day
you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atone-
ment. Also you shall offer a sin offering for the
altar, when you make atonement for it, and
shall anoint it, to consecrate it. 37 Seven days
you shall make atonement for the altar, and
consecrate it, and the altar shall be most holy;
whatever touches the altar shall become holy.

38 Now this is what you shall offer on the
altar: two lambs a year old regularly each day.
39 One lamb you shall offer in the morning,
and the other lamb you shall offer in the
evening; 40 and with the first lamb one-tenth
of a measure of choice flour mixed with one-
fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and one-fourth
of a hin of wine for a drink offering. 41 And
the other lamb you shall offer in the evening,
and shall offer with it a grain offering and its
drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleas-
ing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD. 42 It
shall be a regular burnt offering throughout
your generations at the entrance of the tent
of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet
with you, to speak to you there. 43 I will meet
with the Israelites there, and it shall be sanc-
tified by my glory; 44 I will consecrate the tent
of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and his
sons I will consecrate, to serve me as priests.
45 I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will
be their God. 46 And they shall know that I am
the LORD their God, who brought them out of
the land of Egypt that I might dwell among
them; I am the LORD their God.

30 You shall make an altar on which to
offer incense; you shall make it of
acacia wood. 2 It shall be one cubit long, and
one cubit wide; it shall be square, and shall
be two cubits high; its horns shall be of one
piece with it. 3 You shall overlay it with pure
gold, its top, and its sides all around and its
horns; and you shall make for it a molding
of gold all around. 4 And you shall make two
golden rings for it; under its molding on two
opposite sides of it you shall make them,
and they shall hold the poles with which to
carry it. 5 You shall make the poles of acacia
wood, and overlay them with gold. 6 You
shall place it in front of the curtain that is
above the ark of the covenant,[a] in front of
the mercy seat[b] that is over the covenant,[a]
where I will meet with you. 7 Aaron shall
offer fragrant incense on it; every morning
when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it,
8 and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the
evening, he shall offer it, a regular incense
offering before the LORD throughout your
generations. 9 You shall not offer unholy
incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain
offering; and you shall not pour a drink
offering on it. 10 Once a year Aaron shall
perform the rite of atonement on its horns.
Throughout your generations he shall per-
form the atonement for it once a year with
the blood of the atoning sin offering. It is
most holy to the LORD.

11 The LORD spoke to Moses: 12 When you
take a census of the Israelites to register
them, at registration all of them shall give
a ransom for their lives to the LORD, so that
no plague may come upon them for being
registered. 13 This is what each one who is

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*
[b] Or *the cover*

eaten in sacred space, affirming their special relationship with God (see 24.5n.). **35–37:** During the seven-day installation ceremonies, the altar too must be purified and sanctified (also v. 12). **38–42: Regular sacrifices.** A daily *burnt offering* (see 24.5n.) of animals with grain, oil, and wine is prescribed. **40:** *Hin*, a liquid measure (3.8 liters = 4 qts). **42–43:** *Meet*, see 25.16n. **44–46: Summation,** using covenant language (see 6.7n.; 19.4n.; 20.2n.). **45–46:** *Dwell*, see 25.8n.

30.1–31.18. Additional instructions. The divine instructions conclude with information about four more components of the shrine (incense altar, laver, oil, and incense) and about a census, the artisans, and the sabbath. **30.1–10: Incense altar** (also 37.25–28). Smaller (ca. .5 × .5 × 1.0 m = 18 × 18 × 36 in) than the horned courtyard altar (see 27.2n.), it is the third golden object to be placed in front of the inner sanctum (see 25.10–40n.). **7:** *Fragrant incense* (vv. 34–38) involves the olfactory senses; and its smoke would be apotropaic, shielding the priest from the potent divine presence (Lev 16.13); see 28.31–35n. **9:** Food is not offered on this altar. **10:** See Lev 16.29–34; cf. Num 16.46. *Sin offering*, see 29.14n. **11–16: Census.** People are counted for taxes or for conscription (Num 1); but ancient peoples believed that counting people could bring disaster (as 2 Sam 24), and the

registered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as an offering to the LORD. 14 Each one who is registered, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the LORD's offering. 15 The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when you bring this offering to the LORD to make atonement for your lives. 16 You shall take the atonement money from the Israelites and shall designate it for the service of the tent of meeting; before the LORD it will be a reminder to the Israelites of the ransom given for your lives.

17 The LORD spoke to Moses: 18 You shall make a bronze basin with a bronze stand for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it; 19 with the water[a] Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. 20 When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to make an offering by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. 21 They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die: it shall be a perpetual ordinance for them, for him and for his descendants throughout their generations.

22 The LORD spoke to Moses: 23 Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, two hundred fifty, and two hundred fifty of aromatic cane, 24 and five hundred of cassia—measured by the sanctuary shekel—and a hin of olive oil; 25 and you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil. 26 With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the covenant,[b] 27 and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, 28 and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin with its stand; 29 you shall consecrate them, so that they may be most holy; whatever touches them will become holy. 30 You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, in order that they may serve me as priests. 31 You shall say to the Israelites, "This shall be my holy anointing oil throughout your generations. 32 It shall not be used in any ordinary anointing of the body, and you shall make no other like it in composition; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you. 33 Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on an unqualified person shall be cut off from the people."

34 The LORD said to Moses: Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (an equal part of each), 35 and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy; 36 and you shall beat some of it into powder, and put part of it before the covenant[b] in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you; it shall be for you most holy. 37 When you make incense according to this composition, you shall not make it for yourselves; it shall be regarded by you as holy to the LORD. 38 Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from the people.

31 The LORD spoke to Moses: 2 See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: 3 and I have filled him with divine spirit,[c] with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every

[a] Heb *it*
[b] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*
[c] Or *with the spirit of God*

payment here is to forestall misfortune. **13:** *Shekel*, a weight (ca. .4 oz = 11.4 gm), not a coin. The half-shekel (Heb "beka") of the census is mentioned in the metal inventory (38.26). *Shekel of the sanctuary* may allude to a priestly role in maintaining standard weights. **17–21: Laver** (also 38.8; 40.7,30). Made of bronze, the least holy metal, the washstand will be in the courtyard, the least sacred zone. Washing is part of the process of purification before approaching the perfect purity of God's presence (see 19.10n.). **22–38: Oil and incense** (also 37.29) are to be made of costly aromatic substances. For the oil (vv. 22–25), these include myrrh, a resin, and cassia, a variety of cinnamon; for the incense, stacte, galbanum, and frankincense, different varies of resin, and onycha, a perfume from a mollusk found in the Red Sea. Anointing will change the status of the shrine, its furnishings, and its personnel from profane to holy; see 29.7n. **23–24:** *Shekels*, see 30.13n. *Hin*, see 29.40n. **36:** *Tent of meeting . . . meet*, see 27.21n. **31.1–11: Artisans** (also 35.30–36.7). Two chief artisans are designated, one from the southernmost tribe (Judah) and one from the northernmost (Dan). **2:** *Bezalel*, see 1 Chr 2.18–20. *Hur*, see 17.10n. **3:** *Divine spirit*, see v. 11n. *Ability* (or, "wisdom, skill"), *intelligence, and knowledge* constitute artistic genius (cf.

kind of craft, [4] to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, [5] in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. [6] Moreover, I have appointed with him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given skill to all the skillful, so that they may make all that I have commanded you: [7] the tent of meeting, and the ark of the covenant,[a] and the mercy seat[b] that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, [8] the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, [9] and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin with its stand, [10] and the finely worked vestments, the holy vestments for the priest Aaron and the vestments of his sons, for their service as priests, [11] and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the holy place. They shall do just as I have commanded you.

[12] The LORD said to Moses: [13] You yourself are to speak to the Israelites: "You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. [14] You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people. [15] Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. [16] Therefore the Israelites shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. [17] It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed."

[18] When God[c] finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant,[a] tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

32 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." [2] Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." [3] So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. [4] He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold,[d] and cast an image of

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*
[b] Or *the cover*
[c] Heb *he*
[d] Or *fashioned it with a graving tool*; Meaning of Heb uncertain

1 Kings 7.14). **6:** *Oholiab* is otherwise unknown. **11:** *Do . . . commanded* implies that human creativity is subordinated to divine inspiration. **12–17: Sabbath** (also 35.1–3), see 16.23–30n. Its mention here combines sacred time with sacred space, and serves as an introduction to the episode of the golden calf, which separates the divine instructions from the account of their being carried out. **12:** The command for the seventh-day observance is fittingly introduced by a phrase (*The LORD said/spoke to Moses*) used here for the seventh time in this section (25.1; 30.11,17,22,34; 31.1,12). This directive for *holy* time (vv. 14,15) is the climax of the directives for holy space. **17:** As circumcision is the sign of the covenant with Abraham in Priestly tradition (Gen 17), so the sabbath is the *sign* of the covenant with Israel. **18:** This verse concludes the divine instructions and resumes the narrative of the Sinai theophany (24.18). *Two tablets . . . written*, see 24.12n.

32.1–34.35: Covenant violation and restoration. The golden-calf apostasy interrupts the tabernacle sequence. The people arouse divine wrath by their sins; Moses too is angry but intercedes several times (ch 32). After Moses seeks God's presence and pleads once more for his people (ch 33), God reestablishes the covenant (ch 34).

32.1–35: Sin, divine anger, and several intercessions by Moses. 1: *Delayed*, for forty days and nights (24.18). *Make gods*, that is, provide visible evidence of divine presence. **2–3:** *Gold rings* (earrings); cf. 3.22; Gen 35.4; Judg 8.24. **4:** A *calf* (better "young bull"), like cherubim, could form the pedestal or throne of the invisible deity (see 25.17–22n.); or it may itself have been the object of worship, representing bovine strength and fertility associated with the LORD. *Gods*, a plural form (also vv. 1,8), is probably influenced by 1 Kings 12.25–30; contrast Neh

a calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" [5] When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD." [6] They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

[7] The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; [8] they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" [9] The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. [10] Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation."

[11] But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? [12] Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. [13] Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" [14] And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

[15] Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain, carrying the two tablets of the covenant[a] in his hands, tablets that were written on both sides, written on the front and on the back. [16] The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets. [17] When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." [18] But he said,

"It is not the sound made by victors,
or the sound made by losers;
it is the sound of revelers that I hear."

[19] As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. [20] He took the calf that they had made, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it.

[21] Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?" [22] And Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn hot; you know the people, that they are bent on evil. [23] They said to me, 'Make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' [24] So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, take it off'; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

[25] When Moses saw that the people were running wild (for Aaron had let them run wild, to the derision of their enemies), [26] then

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

9.18; Ps 106.19–20. **5–6:** The festival is for the LORD, indicating that the calf is not the image of another deity. **6:** *Burnt offerings . . . well-being*, see 24.5n. **7:** *Your people,* not "my people" (3.7; 5.1; etc). *You,* that is, Moses (also 33.1; cf. 20.2; 32.11–12, where God secures Israel's freedom). **10–12:** *Wrath . . . hot . . . consume,* language associated with punitive plagues (Num 11.33; 16.35,46; 25.4,8–9,11). **11:** *Mighty hand*, see 3.19n. **13:** Moses reminds God that the ancestral covenant (see 2.24n.) is unconditional and irrevocable (Gen 13.15–16; etc.). **15–16:** *Tablets . . . written*, see 24.12n. **17:** *Joshua* is partway up the mountain (24.9–14). **19:** The Heb term for *dancing* denotes circle dancing, usually done by women (as 15.20). **20:** *Burned . . . ground* is idiomatic language for complete demolition (cf. 2 Kings 23.15). Moses subjects the people to a trial by ordeal (cf. Num 5.16–28). Those who suffer ill effects from drinking the water and pulverized metal are considered guilty and die in a plague (v. 35). **21–24:** Aaron, however, remains unpunished (cf. Num 12). **26–29:** The shocking violence of the Levites, perhaps reflecting

Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. 27 He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Put your sword on your side, each of you! Go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill your brother, your friend, and your neighbor.'" 28 The sons of Levi did as Moses commanded, and about three thousand of the people fell on that day. 29 Moses said, "Today you have ordained yourselves[a] for the service of the LORD, each one at the cost of a son or a brother, and so have brought a blessing on yourselves this day."

30 On the next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." 31 So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written." 33 But the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. 34 But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; see, my angel shall go in front of you. Nevertheless, when the day comes for punishment, I will punish them for their sin."

35 Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf—the one that Aaron made.

33 The LORD said to Moses, "Go, leave this place, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, and go to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' 2 I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."

4 When the people heard these harsh words, they mourned, and no one put on ornaments. 5 For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, and I will decide what to do to you.'" 6 Therefore the Israelites stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

7 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. 8 Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each of them, at the entrance of their tents and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. 9 When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. 10 When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and bow down, all of them, at the entrance of their tent. 11 Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then he would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent.

12 Moses said to the LORD, "See, you have said to me, 'Bring up this people'; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' 13 Now if I have found favor in your

[a] Gk Vg Compare Tg: Heb *Today ordain yourselves*

an ancient power struggle, earns them eternal priesthood. **33:** *My book,* cf. Ps 69.28; Dan 12.1; Mal 3.16. **34:** *The people*, not "my people"; see v. 7n. *Angel*, see 3.2n.; 23.23. **35:** The *plague* is punitive (see 7.8–10.29n.; 32:10–12n.).

33.1–23. The divine presence is secured through further intercession by Moses. 1: *You*, see 32.7n. *The people*, see 32.34n. **2:** *Angel*, see 3.2n. *Canaanites . . . Hivites*, see 3.8n. **3:** *Flowing . . . honey*, see 3.8n. *Among*, see 17.6n.; the divine presence can be punitive as well as beneficial. *Consume*, see 32.10–12n. **7:** *Tent of meeting*, see 25.16n.; 27.21n. *Sought the LORD*, elliptical for seeking an oracular pronouncement from God, here procured by Moses, not priests; see 28.6–14n., 15–30n. **9–10:** *Pillar of cloud*, divine presence; see 3.2n. **11:** *Face to face*, intimacy available only to Moses (see Num 12.7–8; Deut 34.10–12); but cf. 3.6n. **13:** *Your people* is covenant terminology (see

sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." [14] He said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." [15] And he said to him, "If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. [16] For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth."

[17] The LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." [18] Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray." [19] And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD';[a] and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. [20] But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." [21] And the LORD continued, "See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; [22] and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; [23] then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen."

34 The LORD said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke. [2] Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to me, on the top of the mountain. [3] No one shall come up with you, and do not let anyone be seen throughout all the mountain; and do not let flocks or herds graze in front of that mountain." [4] So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the former ones; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tablets of stone. [5] The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, "The LORD."[a] [6] The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed,

"The LORD, the LORD,
a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
[7] keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation,[b]
forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,
yet by no means clearing the guilty,
but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children
and the children's children,
to the third and the fourth generation."

[8] And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. [9] He said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance."

[10] He said: I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform marvels, such as have not been performed in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you live shall see the work of the LORD; for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.

[a] Heb *YHWH*; see note at 3.15
[b] Or *for thousands*

6.7n.); Moses reminds God of this relationship (contrast 32.7; 33.1). **14:** *My presence will go*, better, "I personally will go." **18:** *Glory*, see 16.7n. **19:** Just as God knows Moses' name (v. 17), Moses will know God's (see 3.15n), an expression of reciprocal intimacy. *I will be gracious . . . mercy*, see 34.6. **20,23:** *Face*, see 3.6n.; cf. 33.11n. **23:** *Back* (like arm, hand, and face) refers to God in anthropomorphic, metaphorical terms.

34.1–35: Covenant restoration and Moses' fourth plea to God. 1: Moses is to *cut* the tablets; contrast 32.16, where God makes them. *Tablets . . . write*, see 24.12n. *Words*, referring to the ten *words* (sayings) of the covenant (the Decalogue), v. 28; see 20.17n. **3:** As a holy zone, access to the mountain is restricted; cf. 19.13n., 20–25n. **5:** *Cloud*, see 3.2n. **5:** *Name*, see 33.19n. **6–7:** This catalogue of divine qualities, known in Jewish tradition as the Thirteen Attributes of God, appears fully or in part frequently in the Bible, at times omitting transgenerational punishment (20.5–6; Num 14.18–19; Deut 7.9–10; etc.). *Generation*, see 20.5n. **9:** *Inheritance*, or "possession," that is, the promised land; see 15.17n. **11–26:** These stipulations concerning religious obligations and festivals

11 Observe what I command you today. See, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 12 Take care not to make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are going, or it will become a snare among you. 13 You shall tear down their altars, break their pillars, and cut down their sacred poles[a] 14 (for you shall worship no other god, because the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God). 15 You shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, someone among them will invite you, and you will eat of the sacrifice. 16 And you will take wives from among their daughters for your sons, and their daughters who prostitute themselves to their gods will make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods.

17 You shall not make cast idols.

18 You shall keep the festival of unleavened bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib; for in the month of Abib you came out from Egypt.

19 All that first opens the womb is mine, all your male[b] livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. 20 The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem.

No one shall appear before me empty-handed.

21 Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even in plowing time and in harvest time you shall rest. 22 You shall observe the festival of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year. 23 Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. 24 For I will cast out nations before you, and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.

25 You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven, and the sacrifice of the festival of the passover shall not be left until the morning.

26 The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

27 The LORD said to Moses: Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. 28 He was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.[c]

29 Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant[d] in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him,

[a] Heb *Asherim*
[b] Gk Theodotion Vg Tg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Heb *words*
[d] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

include features of the Decalogue (especially 20.3,4,8–11) and of the community regulations (especially 23.14–19); because its primary focus is on worship, it is often called the Ritual Decalogue. **11:** *Drive*, see 23.27–30n. *Amorites . . . Jebusites*, see 3.8n. **13:** *Altars* and *pillars* (see 23.24n.) dedicated to the gods of other peoples are forbidden. *Sacred poles* probably were symbols of Asherah, a Canaanite goddess associated with the LORD in several ancient inscriptions. See also Deut 7.5; 12.3. **14:** See 20.3n. **15–16:** *Prostitute,* sexual metaphors are used in the Bible to characterize human-deity relationships, both positively and negatively (e.g., Isa 62.4–5; Jer 2.2; Ezek 16; 23; Hos 1–3). **16:** Intermarriage with local peoples—but not with all other peoples—is prohibited only for men (Gen 24.3; Ezra 9.2; etc.; but cf. Deut 7.3; Josh 23.12–13; etc.). **18–26:** For the three festivals, see 23.14–19a n.; for the sabbath (v. 21), see 16.23–30n.; for the kid-cooking regulation, see 23.19bn.; for the firstborn redemption, see 13.2n.,13n. **27–28:** Moses is to *write*; see 24.12n. *Words*, see 34.1n. **28:** *Forty . . . nights,* like the first time, 24.18. **29–35:** Moses' special status, as mediator between the people and God, is manifest in his radiating countenance, akin to divine luminosity (Ps 104.2; Ezek 1.27–28; Hab 3.4) and thus too intense to be routinely visible. **29,35:** *Shone* and *shining*, better "radiant," for the Hebrew word may denote emanating rays.

and Moses spoke with them. 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; 34 but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35 the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

35 Moses assembled all the congregation of the Israelites and said to them: These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do:

2 Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy sabbath of solemn rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. 3 You shall kindle no fire in all your dwellings on the sabbath day.

4 Moses said to all the congregation of the Israelites: This is the thing that the LORD has commanded: 5 Take from among you an offering to the LORD; let whoever is of a generous heart bring the LORD's offering: gold, silver, and bronze; 6 blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine linen; goats' hair, 7 tanned rams' skins, and fine leather;[a] acacia wood, 8 oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, 9 and onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and the breastpiece.

10 All who are skillful among you shall come and make all that the LORD has commanded: the tabernacle, 11 its tent and its covering, its clasps and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; 12 the ark with its poles, the mercy seat,[b] and the curtain for the screen; 13 the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; 14 the lampstand also for the light, with its utensils and its lamps, and the oil for the light; 15 and the altar of incense, with its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the entrance, the entrance of the tabernacle; 16 the altar of burnt offering, with its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin with its stand; 17 the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court; 18 the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court, and their cords; 19 the finely worked vestments for ministering in the holy place, the holy vestments for the priest Aaron, and the vestments of his sons, for their service as priests.

20 Then all the congregation of the Israelites withdrew from the presence of Moses. 21 And they came, everyone whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and brought the LORD's offering to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the sacred vestments. 22 So they came, both men and women; all who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and pendants, all sorts of gold objects, everyone bringing an offering of gold to the LORD. 23 And everyone who possessed blue or purple or crimson yarn or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or fine leather,[a] brought them. 24 Everyone who could make an offering of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD's offering; and everyone who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work, brought it. 25 All the skillful women spun with their hands, and brought what they had spun in blue and

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *the cover*

Chs 35–40: The tabernacle is constructed and God's presence enters it. The tabernacle narrative (which began with the divine instructions of chs 25–31) resumes: carrying out preliminary procedures (35.2–36.7); making the tabernacle components (36.8–39.43); erecting the tabernacle and God's presence filling it (40.1–38). These chapters contain nearly verbatim repetitions of many passages of chs 25–31, except that they describe action taken (rather than commanded) and are arranged according to pragmatic construction concerns rather than according to degree of sanctity.

35.1–36.7: Preliminary procedures. **35.1–3: Sabbath instructions** concluded the prescriptive texts (31.12–17; see 16.23–30n.) and begin the descriptive ones. **1:** *Things*, or "words"; see 18.26n. **4–29: Materials (**25.1–9), provided by both women and men (vv. 22,29; see 11.2n.) and including fabrics made by female craftspersons (vv.

purple and crimson yarns and fine linen; [26] all the women whose hearts moved them to use their skill spun the goats' hair. [27] And the leaders brought onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and the breastpiece, [28] and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. [29] All the Israelite men and women whose hearts made them willing to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done, brought it as a freewill offering to the LORD.

[30] Then Moses said to the Israelites: See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; [31] he has filled him with divine spirit,[a] with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, [32] to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, [33] in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. [34] And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. [35] He has filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of artisan or skilled designer.

36 Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful one to whom the LORD has given skill and understanding to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded.

[2] Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful one to whom the LORD had given skill, everyone whose heart was stirred to come to do the work; [3] and they received from Moses all the freewill offerings that the Israelites had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, [4] so that all the artisans who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task being performed, [5] and said to Moses, "The people are bringing much more than enough for doing the work that the LORD has commanded us to do." [6] So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." So the people were restrained from bringing; [7] for what they had already brought was more than enough to do all the work.

[8] All those with skill among the workers made the tabernacle with ten curtains; they were made of fine twisted linen, and blue, purple, and crimson yarns, with cherubim skillfully worked into them. [9] The length of each curtain was twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains were of the same size.

[10] He joined five curtains to one another, and the other five curtains he joined to one another. [11] He made loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain of the first set; likewise he made them on the edge of the outermost curtain of the second set; [12] he made fifty loops on the one curtain, and he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that was in the second set; the loops were opposite one another. [13] And he made fifty clasps of gold, and joined the curtains one to the other with clasps; so the tabernacle was one whole.

[14] He also made curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; he made eleven curtains. [15] The length of each curtain was thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; the eleven curtains were of the same size. [16] He joined five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves. [17] He made fifty loops on the edge of the outermost curtain of the one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the other connecting

[a] Or *the spirit of God*

25–26; cf. 2 Kings 23.7), are donated. **35.30–36.7: Artisans** (31.1–11), who have the added role of teachers (v. 34), receive the materials.

36.8–39.42: The tabernacle components are made: structure (36.8–38), interior furnishings (37.1–29), courtyard and its furnishings (38.1–20), inserted inventory (38.21–31), vestments (39.1–31). Then the work is completed (39.32–42).

36.8–38: Structure (26.1–37), consisting of fabrics (vv. 8–19) over frames (vv. 20–34) followed by the internal fabric divider and entry screen (vv. 35–38).

curtain. [18] He made fifty clasps of bronze to join the tent together so that it might be one whole. [19] And he made for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins and an outer covering of fine leather.[a]

[20] Then he made the upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood. [21] Ten cubits was the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the width of each frame. [22] Each frame had two pegs for fitting together; he did this for all the frames of the tabernacle. [23] The frames for the tabernacle he made in this way: twenty frames for the south side; [24] and he made forty bases of silver under the twenty frames, two bases under the first frame for its two pegs, and two bases under the next frame for its two pegs. [25] For the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, he made twenty frames [26] and their forty bases of silver, two bases under the first frame and two bases under the next frame. [27] For the rear of the tabernacle westward he made six frames. [28] He made two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear. [29] They were separate beneath, but joined at the top, at the first ring; he made two of them in this way, for the two corners. [30] There were eight frames with their bases of silver: sixteen bases, under every frame two bases.

[31] He made bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, [32] and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the tabernacle at the rear westward. [33] He made the middle bar to pass through from end to end halfway up the frames. [34] And he overlaid the frames with gold, and made rings of gold for them to hold the bars, and overlaid the bars with gold.

[35] He made the curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, with cherubim skillfully worked into it. [36] For it he made four pillars of acacia, and overlaid them with gold; their hooks were of gold, and he cast for them four bases of silver.

[37] He also made a screen for the entrance to the tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework; [38] and its five pillars with their hooks. He overlaid their capitals and their bases with gold, but their five bases were of bronze.

37 Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood; it was two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. [2] He overlaid it with pure gold inside and outside, and made a molding of gold around it. [3] He cast for it four rings of gold for its four feet, two rings on its one side and two rings on its other side. [4] He made poles of acacia wood, and overlaid them with gold, [5] and put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark. [6] He made a mercy seat[b] of pure gold; two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its width. [7] He made two cherubim of hammered gold; at the two ends of the mercy seat[c] he made them, [8] one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other end; of one piece with the mercy seat[c] he made the cherubim at its two ends. [9] The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat[c] with their wings. They faced one another; the faces of the cherubim were turned toward the mercy seat.[c]

[10] He also made the table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. [11] He overlaid it with pure gold, and made a molding of gold around it. [12] He made around it a rim a handbreadth wide, and made a molding of gold around the rim. [13] He cast for it four rings of gold, and fastened the rings to the four corners at its four legs. [14] The rings that held the poles used for carrying the table were close to the rim. [15] He made the poles of acacia wood to carry the table, and overlaid them with gold.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *a cover*
[c] Or *the cover*

37.1–29: Interior furnishings (25.10–40; 30.1–10) and **anointing oil and incense** (30.22–28). The ark for the holiest space is again first (vv. 1–9), followed by all three objects for the holy space: lampstand (vv. 17–24), table, and incense altar (vv. 25–28); the incense altar does not come immediately after the table and the lampstand in the earlier instructions. This section ends with an account of making the anointing oil and incense (v. 29), much shorter than in the instructions.

16 And he made the vessels of pure gold that
were to be on the table, its plates and dishes
for incense, and its bowls and flagons with
which to pour drink offerings.

17 He also made the lampstand of pure
gold. The base and the shaft of the lampstand
were made of hammered work; its cups, its
calyxes, and its petals were of one piece with
it. 18 There were six branches going out of its
sides, three branches of the lampstand out
of one side of it and three branches of the
lampstand out of the other side of it; 19 three
cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with
calyx and petals, on one branch, and three
cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with
calyx and petals, on the other branch—so for
the six branches going out of the lampstand.
20 On the lampstand itself there were four
cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with
its calyxes and petals. 21 There was a calyx
of one piece with it under the first pair of
branches, a calyx of one piece with it under
the next pair of branches, and a calyx of one
piece with it under the last pair of branches.
22 Their calyxes and their branches were of
one piece with it, the whole of it one ham-
mered piece of pure gold. 23 He made its seven
lamps and its snuffers and its trays of pure
gold. 24 He made it and all its utensils of a tal-
ent of pure gold.

25 He made the altar of incense of acacia
wood, one cubit long, and one cubit wide;
it was square, and was two cubits high; its
horns were of one piece with it. 26 He over-
laid it with pure gold, its top, and its sides
all around, and its horns; and he made for
it a molding of gold all around, 27 and made
two golden rings for it under its molding,
on two opposite sides of it, to hold the poles
with which to carry it. 28 And he made the
poles of acacia wood, and overlaid them
with gold.

29 He made the holy anointing oil also, and
the pure fragrant incense, blended as by the
perfumer.

38 He made the altar of burnt offering
also of acacia wood; it was five cubits
long, and five cubits wide; it was square, and
three cubits high. 2 He made horns for it on
its four corners; its horns were of one piece
with it, and he overlaid it with bronze. 3 He
made all the utensils of the altar, the pots,
the shovels, the basins, the forks, and the
firepans: all its utensils he made of bronze.
4 He made for the altar a grating, a network
of bronze, under its ledge, extending halfway
down. 5 He cast four rings on the four corners
of the bronze grating to hold the poles; 6 he
made the poles of acacia wood, and overlaid
them with bronze. 7 And he put the poles
through the rings on the sides of the altar, to
carry it with them; he made it hollow, with
boards.

8 He made the basin of bronze with its
stand of bronze, from the mirrors of the
women who served at the entrance to the
tent of meeting.

9 He made the court; for the south side the
hangings of the court were of fine twisted
linen, one hundred cubits long; 10 its twenty
pillars and their twenty bases were of bronze,
but the hooks of the pillars and their bands
were of silver. 11 For the north side there
were hangings one hundred cubits long; its
twenty pillars and their twenty bases were
of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and
their bands were of silver. 12 For the west side
there were hangings fifty cubits long, with
ten pillars and ten bases; the hooks of the
pillars and their bands were of silver. 13 And
for the front to the east, fifty cubits. 14 The
hangings for one side of the gate were fifteen
cubits, with three pillars and three bases.
15 And so for the other side; on each side of
the gate of the court were hangings of fifteen
cubits, with three pillars and three bases.
16 All the hangings around the court were of
fine twisted linen. 17 The bases for the pillars
were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars
and their bands were of silver; the overlaying

38.1–20: Altar (27.1–8), **laver** (30.17–21), **and courtyard** (27.9–19). Unlike in the earlier instructions, the two ritual items—altar (vv. 1–7) and laver (v. 8)—appear sequentially, the latter without the functional details given earlier but with the added information that its *bronze* comes from the *mirrors* of women (also mentioned in 1 Sam 2.22), who were probably low-rank temple servitors. **8:** The *entrance to the tent of meeting*, a highly significant location as the site of Moses' oracular interactions with God (33.9–10), was not off-limits to women (see Num 27.1–2).

of their capitals was also of silver, and all the pillars of the court were banded with silver. 18 The screen for the entrance to the court was embroidered with needlework in blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine twisted linen. It was twenty cubits long and, along the width of it, five cubits high, corresponding to the hangings of the court. 19 There were four pillars; their four bases were of bronze, their hooks of silver, and the overlaying of their capitals and their bands of silver. 20 All the pegs for the tabernacle and for the court all around were of bronze.

21 These are the records of the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the covenant,[a] which were drawn up at the commandment of Moses, the work of the Levites being under the direction of Ithamar son of the priest Aaron. 22 Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the LORD commanded Moses; 23 and with him was Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, engraver, designer, and embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen.

24 All the gold that was used for the work, in all the construction of the sanctuary, the gold from the offering, was twenty-nine talents and seven hundred thirty shekels, measured by the sanctuary shekel. 25 The silver from those of the congregation who were counted was one hundred talents and one thousand seven hundred seventy-five shekels, measured by the sanctuary shekel; 26 a beka a head (that is, half a shekel, measured by the sanctuary shekel), for everyone who was counted in the census, from twenty years old and upward, for six hundred three thousand, five hundred fifty men. 27 The hundred talents of silver were for casting the bases of the sanctuary, and the bases of the curtain; one hundred bases for the hundred talents, a talent for a base. 28 Of the thousand seven hundred seventy-five shekels he made hooks for the pillars, and overlaid their capitals and made bands for them. 29 The bronze that was contributed was seventy talents, and two thousand four hundred shekels; 30 with it he made the bases for the entrance of the tent of meeting, the bronze altar and the bronze grating for it and all the utensils of the altar, 31 the bases all around the court, and the bases of the gate of the court, all the pegs of the tabernacle, and all the pegs around the court.

39 Of the blue, purple, and crimson yarns they made finely worked vestments, for ministering in the holy place; they made the sacred vestments for Aaron; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

2 He made the ephod of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. 3 Gold leaf was hammered out and cut

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

38.21–31: The **inventory of work and metal materials**, beginning with the most valuable (gold), has no parallel in the instructions except for the reference in v. 26 to the silver acquired at the census assessment (30.11–16), where it was earmarked for operating, not construction, expenses. **21:** *Records*, tallies of resources about to be enumerated rather than accounts of work done. *Tabernacle of the covenant*, meaning that the tabernacle houses a receptacle (ark) for the covenant document (tablets). The *work of the Levites* is collecting and accounting; later it will include maintaining and moving the shrine (Num 4; 7.1–8). *Ithamar*, Aaron's youngest son (6.23; 28.1), has a major administrative role. **22–23:** *Bezalel . . . Oholiab*, see 31.1–11n. **24:** *Talent*, see 25.39n. The amount of gold is slightly less than Hezekiah's tribute to Sennacherib (2 Kings 18.14). *Sanctuary shekel*, see 30.13n. **25–26:** For the collected silver, see 30.11–16. The number of men is slightly more than the earlier enumeration; see 12.37n. **27–28:** Information about the uses of the census (but not the donated) silver is provided; such information is absent for the gold. **30–31:** The uses of the bronze (as of the silver but not the gold) are specified; but the lavers made of women's mirrors (38.8) are omitted.

39.1–31: Vestments (28.1–43). This section includes some technical details, such as how the ephod's golden threads were made (v. 3), absent in the earlier commands. It also omits some aspects of function: the breastpiece is called "breastpiece of judgment" three times in ch 28 (vv. 15,29,30; see 28.15–30n.) in reference to its oracular function but not once here; and the Urim and Thummim, used for divination (28.30), are not mentioned. **1:** *Aaron* is named only here and in v. 27, at the beginning and end of this section, whereas he appears throughout (sixteen times) the earlier instructions on vestments. The name *Moses* appears seven times here as part of a formula punctuating the narrative (*as the LORD had commanded Moses*; vv. 1,5,7,21,26,29,31; cf. 40.16n.).

into threads to work into the blue, purple, and crimson yarns and into the fine twisted linen, in skilled design. 4 They made for the ephod shoulder-pieces, joined to it at its two edges. 5 The decorated band on it was of the same materials and workmanship, of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

6 The onyx stones were prepared, enclosed in settings of gold filigree and engraved like the engravings of a signet, according to the names of the sons of Israel. 7 He set them on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, to be stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

8 He made the breastpiece, in skilled work, like the work of the ephod, of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. 9 It was square; the breastpiece was made double, a span in length and a span in width when doubled. 10 They set in it four rows of stones. A row of carnelian,[a] chrysolite, and emerald was the first row; 11 and the second row, a turquoise, a sapphire,[b] and a moonstone; 12 and the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; 13 and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper; they were enclosed in settings of gold filigree. 14 There were twelve stones with names corresponding to the names of the sons of Israel; they were like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes. 15 They made on the breastpiece chains of pure gold, twisted like cords; 16 and they made two settings of gold filigree and two gold rings, and put the two rings on the two edges of the breastpiece; 17 and they put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edges of the breastpiece. 18 Two ends of the two cords they had attached to the two settings of filigree; in this way they attached it in front to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod. 19 Then they made two rings of gold, and put them at the two ends of the breastpiece, on its inside edge next to the ephod. 20 They made two rings of gold, and attached them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder-pieces of the ephod, at its joining above the decorated band of the ephod. 21 They bound the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it should lie on the decorated band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece should not come loose from the ephod; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

22 He also made the robe of the ephod woven all of blue yarn; 23 and the opening of the robe in the middle of it was like the opening in a coat of mail,[c] with a binding around the opening, so that it might not be torn. 24 On the lower hem of the robe they made pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. 25 They also made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates on the lower hem of the robe all around, between the pomegranates; 26 a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate all around on the lower hem of the robe for ministering; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

27 They also made the tunics, woven of fine linen, for Aaron and his sons, 28 and the turban of fine linen, and the headdresses of fine linen, and the linen undergarments of fine twisted linen, 29 and the sash of fine twisted linen, and of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, embroidered with needlework; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

30 They made the rosette of the holy diadem of pure gold, and wrote on it an inscription, like the engraving of a signet, "Holy to the LORD." 31 They tied to it a blue cord, to fasten it on the turban above; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

32 In this way all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished; the Israelites had done everything just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 33 Then

[a] The identification of several of these stones is uncertain
[b] Or *lapis lazuli*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

39.32–43: Completing and inspecting the work, listing the components of the tabernacle in the same order as in chs 35–39 (rather than the order of chs 25–31). **32:** *Work . . . finished* echoes the Priestly language of Gen 2.2, as does 40.33; thus the construction of the tabernacle, a microcosm of the cosmos, echoes its creation. *Tabernacle of the tent of meeting*, used only here and in 40.2,6,29, combines the two designations of the wilderness shrine and thus its two functions: a place for God's earthly presence, and a locale for oracular interactions; see

they brought the tabernacle to Moses,
the tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its
frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases;
34 the covering of tanned rams' skins and
the covering of fine leather,[a] and the cur-
tain for the screen; 35 the ark of the cov-
enant[b] with its poles and the mercy seat;[c]
36 the table with all its utensils, and the
bread of the Presence; 37 the pure lampstand
with its lamps set on it and all its utensils,
and the oil for the light; 38 the golden altar,
the anointing oil and the fragrant incense,
and the screen for the entrance of the tent;
39 the bronze altar, and its grating of bronze,
its poles, and all its utensils; the basin with
its stand; 40 the hangings of the court, its
pillars, and its bases, and the screen for the
gate of the court, its cords, and its pegs;
and all the utensils for the service of the
tabernacle, for the tent of meeting; 41 the
finely worked vestments for ministering
in the holy place, the sacred vestments for
the priest Aaron, and the vestments of his
sons to serve as priests. 42 The Israelites had
done all of the work just as the LORD had
commanded Moses. 43 When Moses saw that
they had done all the work just as the LORD
had commanded, he blessed them.

40 The LORD spoke to Moses: 2 On the
first day of the first month you shall
set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.
3 You shall put in it the ark of the covenant,[b]
and you shall screen the ark with the
curtain. 4 You shall bring in the table, and ar-
range its setting; and you shall bring in the
lampstand, and set up its lamps. 5 You shall
put the golden altar for incense before the
ark of the covenant,[b] and set up the screen
for the entrance of the tabernacle. 6 You
shall set the altar of burnt offering before
the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of
meeting, 7 and place the basin between the
tent of meeting and the altar, and put water
in it. 8 You shall set up the court all around,
and hang up the screen for the gate of the
court. 9 Then you shall take the anointing
oil, and anoint the tabernacle and all that is
in it, and consecrate it and all its furniture,
so that it shall become holy. 10 You shall also
anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its
utensils, and consecrate the altar, so that
the altar shall be most holy. 11 You shall also
anoint the basin with its stand, and conse-
crate it. 12 Then you shall bring Aaron and
his sons to the entrance of the tent of meet-
ing, and shall wash them with water, 13 and
put on Aaron the sacred vestments, and you
shall anoint him and consecrate him, so that
he may serve me as priest. 14 You shall bring
his sons also and put tunics on them, 15 and
anoint them, as you anointed their father,
that they may serve me as priests: and their
anointing shall admit them to a perpetual
priesthood throughout all generations to
come.

16 Moses did everything just as the LORD
had commanded him. 17 In the first month
in the second year, on the first day of the
month, the tabernacle was set up. 18 Moses
set up the tabernacle; he laid its bases, and
set up its frames, and put in its poles, and
raised up its pillars; 19 and he spread the tent
over the tabernacle, and put the covering of
the tent over it; as the LORD had commanded
Moses. 20 He took the covenant[b] and put it
into the ark, and put the poles on the ark,
and set the mercy seat[c] above the ark; 21 and
he brought the ark into the tabernacle,
and set up the curtain for screening, and

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*
[c] Or *the cover*

25.9,16n.; 27.21n. **43:** *Saw*, reminiscent of God seeing the completion of creation (Gen 1.31). *Blessed*, just as God offers blessings in the creation account (Gen 1.22,28; 2.3).

40.1–38: Erection of the tabernacle and God's presence filling it. After the final instructions for assembling and anointing God's earthly abode (vv. 1–15; cf. 29.4–9; 30.26–30; Lev 8.10–13) are carried out (vv. 16–33), God's presence enters it (vv. 34–38). Moses alone assembles and sanctifies the tabernacle's components and consecrates the priests and their vestments. **2:** Setting up the tabernacle on the *first day of the first month* (of the second year after the Exodus; v. 17), that is, New Year's Day, keys it to the beginning of creation, to the new creation after the flood (Gen 8.13), and to the beginning of freedom (see 12.2n.). **16:** *As the LORD had commanded him* appears in this introductory command and then seven more times, following seven units of assembly

screened the ark of the covenant;[a] as the LORD had commanded Moses. 22 He put the table in the tent of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the curtain, 23 and set the bread in order on it before the LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses. 24 He put the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle, 25 and set up the lamps before the LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses. 26 He put the golden altar in the tent of meeting before the curtain, 27 and offered fragrant incense on it; as the LORD had commanded Moses. 28 He also put in place the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle. 29 He set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the grain offering as the LORD had commanded Moses. 30 He set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing, 31 with which Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. 32 When they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed; as the LORD had commanded Moses. 33 He set up the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and put up the screen at the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work.

34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 36 Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; 37 but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. 38 For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud[b] by night, before the eyes of all the house of

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*
[b] Heb *it*

(vv. 19,21,23,25,27,29,32), perhaps replicating the seven days of creation (see 39.2n.). **33:** *Finished the work*, see 39.32n. **34–38:** *Cloud*, see 3.2n.; 13.21n. *Glory of the LORD*, see 16.7n. **34:** The cloud *covered* the shrine, just as it covered the mountain of revelation (24.15). Here the cloud indicates divine satisfaction with the construction of the tabernacle as a residence for the divine. **38:** *House of Israel*, which designates the Israelites only here and 16.31 in the book of Exodus, may be a wordplay: the Israelites are a house and the LORD now has an earthly house (cf. 2 Sam 7.11,13,16). The cloud and fire of divine presence will guide the people on the remaining *stages* of their *journey* (see 12.37n.; 13.21n.; Num 9.15–23; 10.11–28).

LEVITICUS

NAME AND LOCATION IN CANON

Leviticus is situated at the center of the Torah, the Pentateuch. It derives its English name from the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, where the book is titled "Leviticus" because its main concern is worship practices officiated by the high priest Aaron and his descendants, who belong to the tribe of Levi. Because Levites not belonging to Aaron's line are mentioned only briefly in Leviticus (25.32–33), the early rabbinic title, "The Priests' Instruction" (*torat kohanim*), is perhaps more fitting. The book's Hebrew name, *wayyiqra'* ("And he [the LORD] summoned"), follows the custom of titling ancient literary works according to their opening word(s).

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

Though traditionally attributed to Moses, the book of Leviticus is part of the larger Priestly source in the Pentateuch, which appears primarily in Genesis–Numbers and is so named because its content, theological ideas, and literary style reflect priestly perspectives. This Priestly source was penned by several different anonymous authors or groups of authors. The two main compositional strata in Leviticus are known as P ("Priestly"), which comprises most of chs 1–16; and H ("Holiness"), which includes the "Holiness Collection" (chs 17–26; so named because of its repeated exhortation to the Israelites to be holy), the addendum on vows, dedications, and tithes in ch 27, and brief interpolations in chs 1–16. These two strata are distinguishable on the basis of ideological and stylistic differences.

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that H was composed to revise, supplement, and complete the earlier P strata of the Priestly source, even as it agrees with P's basic historical myth and religious ideology. Many of H's innovations over against P are mediating positions between P and non-Priestly Pentateuchal legislation. For example, in P the only Israelites who are holy are priests. In Deuteronomy, all of Israel is holy. H mediates between these positions by providing a means for lay Israelites to attain holiness by obeying the divine commandments. H also introduces ethical commandments that parallel non-Priestly Pentateuchal laws but fall outside the scope of P's ritual concerns.

Scholars have proposed various methods for dating Leviticus. One of the most promising exploits correspondences between its H portions and laws in the book of Deuteronomy. Strong evidence suggests that at least the core of Deuteronomy originated in the late seventh century BCE. Because H seems to revise this Deuteronomic core, it must postdate Deuteronomy. The P portions of Leviticus, which predate H, exhibit little or no correspondence with Deuteronomy and thus may be contemporary with or older than Deuteronomy; at the very least, they did not know Deuteronomy. Thus, Leviticus, like other books of the Torah, was composed over a long period: it preserves some preexilic traditions, but its literary form likely originated in the exilic period. Correlations between Leviticus and the exilic book of Ezekiel also support this view.

CONTENTS AND STRUCTURE

Though its content is primarily religious ritual and law, Leviticus is part of the larger Priestly story in the Pentateuch. It recounts the delivery of its divine instructions to Moses at the tent of meeting (1.1; 7.38). The book also includes two sections of narratives not dominated by divine instruction (8.1–10.20; 24.10–23); yet even these narrative sections serve as historical context and rationale for the laws embedded within them. Situated in Leviticus, however, the priestly legislation receives powerful validation through its narrative setting. The larger Priestly narrative secures the proper pedigree for these laws: they are divine revelation mediated by Moses in the wilderness.

Set at Mount Sinai, Leviticus begins exactly one year after the Israelites' departure from Egypt, immediately following Moses's construction of the tent of meeting and its indwelling by the deity at the end of the book of Exodus (Ex 40.17–35). The Priestly source's plot continues in the book of Numbers from the exact moment that Leviticus ends. The date in Num 1.1 ("the first day of the second month, in the second year") confirms that the series of divine speeches delivered in Leviticus and the other events recorded in the book ostensibly occurred over a period of one month.

Leviticus can be divided into five major sections:

1. Sacrifice (chs 1–7). In the Priestly source, the Israelites present no sacrificial offerings prior to receiving these laws. The sacrificial laws must precede the consecration of the priests and dedication of the

tabernacle in chs 8–9 because Moses and the priests must know how to perform the sacrifices at these events. This section is subdivided into two parts: (a) basic prescriptions for presenting sacrificial offerings (1.1–6.7); and (b) elaborations on the preceding instructions (6.8–7.38), with particular emphasis on priestly concerns.

2. The dedication of the tabernacle and priests and the transgression of Aaron's sons (chs 8–10). This unit is subdivided into two sections: (a) the seven-day consecration of the priests by Moses, including the dedication of the tabernacle (ch 8); and (b) the inaugural service of the priests on the eighth day, culminating in the revelation of the divine glory, and the subsequent transgression of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu (9.1–10.20).
3. Ritual purity (chs 11–16). This section is subdivided into two parts: (a) the impurity laws (chs 11–15); and (b) the Day of Atonement (ch 16). The impurity laws are enumerated prior to the description of the Day of Atonement in order to clarify the impurities cleansed in the annual ritual.
4 The Holiness Collection (chs 17–26). This unit (also called the Holiness Code; see 17.1–26.46n.) has six subdivisions: (a) laws governing sacrifice and meat consumption (ch 17); (b) miscellaneous ethical laws (chs 18–20); (c) priestly and sacrificial rules (chs 21–22); (d) laws governing calendrical observances (23.1–24.9; 25.1–26.2); (e) the account of the blasphemer, with related measure-for-measure laws, which interrupt the calendrical observance laws (24.10–23); and (f) inducements for Israel's obedience, with summary postscript (26.3–46).
5. An addendum concerning vows, dedications, and tithes (ch 27).

INTERPRETATION

Leviticus is difficult to understand and appreciate because it is highly technical and regularly assumes knowledge of its ritual system. Its sparse narrative structure is also easily obscured due to the large blocks of laws that dominate the book. In addition, its authors' approaches to the issues they treat and their assumptions about them are often far removed from modern Western views.

One attempt by the translators of the NRSV to bridge the gap between the ancient text of Leviticus and its modern readers is their substitution of gender-neutral language for many of the masculine pronouns and verbal forms in the book. While the intent motivating this effort is laudable, elimination of male-centered language has resulted in sometimes confusing alterations to the original Hebrew text. For example, laws expressed with third-person masculine forms ("If *his* offering is from the herd, *he* shall make it an unblemished male") are regularly left untranslated or rendered into English with (nongendered) second-person forms ("If *the* offering is from the herd, *you* shall offer a male without blemish"). Likewise, singular verbs ("When any of you *brings* an offering") are translated as plurals ("When any of you *bring* an offering") or converted from active ("*he shall slaughter* the bull") to passive voice ("the bull *shall be slaughtered*"). The foregoing examples, drawn from Lev 1.2–5, are representative of similar changes elsewhere in the book and are problematic for two reasons. First, such changes prevent the reader from understanding both individual verses and the larger religious program of the Priestly authors. Second, these alterations obscure the formal characteristics of biblical legislation and distinguishing features of both smaller, preexisting units assembled by P and, at times, even differences between P and H.

In their ancient context, the primary concern of the laws in Leviticus is to establish the requisite circumstances for the deity's habitation among the Israelites. The Priestly authors claim that following the commandments in Leviticus will ensure the tangible benefits and protection of the divine presence in the Israelites' midst. Failure to adhere to these laws will result in the deity's departure from the tabernacle and the loss of divine benefaction.

With the later emergence of Judaism, the laws of Leviticus became a major source for rabbinic Jewish *halakhah* (law) and remain the basis for many modern Jewish religious practices, such as dietary rules, purity rules, and holidays. The laws of Leviticus also inform many New Testament texts.

GUIDE TO READING

Because the focus of Leviticus's narrative is the law in its divine speeches, the book is most profitably read first according to legal topic rather than from beginning to end. An initial reading might begin with a sampling of Leviticus's purity and ethical laws in chs 11–12 and 19 and rules for removal of impurity and sin, as found in chs 4

and 16. The reader could then turn to other exemplary chapters: chs 8 and 21 on the priesthood, ch 17 on slaughter and meat consumption, ch 23 on festivals, ch 25 on the sabbatical and jubilee years, and ch 26 on divine inducements for obedience. Further study may focus on a particular chapter or group of thematically related chapters, as outlined earlier. The distinctiveness of the laws in Leviticus and the theological perspectives they express can also be appreciated through comparison with topically related laws in Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Ezekiel 40–48. The authors of the book of Leviticus created a remarkably coherent system of ritual and theology, and the different parts of the book should be read with an eye toward this larger internal logic.

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1 The Lord summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying:
2 Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When any of you bring an offering of livestock to the Lord, you shall bring your offering from the herd or from the flock.

3 If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you shall offer a male without blemish; you shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before the Lord. 4 You shall lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be

1.1–7.38: Sacrificial prescriptions. This section comprises two parts: 1.1–6.7 and 6.8–7.38. In Priestly thought, sacrifice, a ritualized meal for the deity at times shared with its offerers, is the basic mode of interaction with God. To be accepted, sacrifices must be performed according to the divine instructions.

1.1–6.7: Basic sacrificial instructions. These laws address basic procedures for presenting food gift offerings (1.1–3.17) and purification and atonement offerings (4.1–6.7). These sacrifices can also be categorized according to the quality of each offering's sanctity. The grain, purification, and reparation offerings are each "most holy," a designation that reserves their edible portions for the priests (cf. 6.17; Num 18.8–10). Well-being offerings, portions of which are consumed by lay Israelites, are less holy sacrifices. Because burnt offerings are not eaten by humans, their holiness status is undesignated. All offerings in Leviticus share the underlying rationale for sacrifice in Israel and the ancient Near East: sacrifice is an enticement to the deity to engender good will or to mitigate potential threats.

1.1–3.17: Instructions for gift offerings of food. The burnt offering, grain offering, and well-being offerings (thanksgiving, votive, or freewill; cf. 7.11–18) presented by Israelite laypersons are impromptu sacrifices. Each is described as "an offering by fire" (e.g., 1.9; 2.2; 3.3), better translated "a gift offering (of food)" (cf. 3.11,17). Presentation of gift offerings provides laypersons a specific means of expressing devotion to the deity and of favorably disposing God toward the offerer. As gifts, sacrifices become personal possessions of the deity. Further, God is understood to consume the sacrificial portions burned on the altar (cf. 21.6,8), though this view is partially sublimated in Priestly theology.

1.1–17: The burnt offering. The burnt offering is completely consumed in fire on the altar. Its name literally means "that which goes up" (in smoke from the altar; cf. 1.9). Three different types of animals for burnt offerings are listed (in descending order of value): a bull (vv. 3–9), a male sheep or goat (vv. 10–13), and turtledoves or pigeons (vv. 14–17). **1:** *Tent of meeting*, see Ex 26; 29.42–46; 40.34–38. The tent of meeting is situated in the middle of the Israelite wilderness camp (Num 2.2) and is the dwelling place of the Lord. **2:** This is a general introduction to the burnt offering here and the well-being offering in ch 3. It clarifies that all animal food gift offerings must be from domesticated animals (cf. 17.1–16n.). Omission of birds here suggests that vv. 14–17 are a secondary addition. *You shall bring your offering,* lit. "he shall bring his offering." Throughout this chapter, the offerer is described in the grammatical third-person masculine singular. **3:** *Without blemish*, cf. Mal 1.6–14. Burnt offerings are impromptu sacrifices of religious devotion (cf. 22.18–20). They are also regularly included in statutory religious observances (Ex 29.38–42; Num 28–29). Because of the prominence of burnt offerings in sacrificial worship, the main altar in the tabernacle courtyard is called the "altar of burnt offering" (Ex 38.1; 40.6). *The entrance of the tent of meeting* is the courtyard area between the altar of burnt offering and the tent (Ex 29.4; 30.17–21). **4:** *Lay your hand*, one hand only, to designate ownership of the animal prior to sacrifice. *And it shall be acceptable*, better, "and it will be accepted" (cf. 19.5–8). The language of acceptance in vv. 3–4 underscores the sacrifice as a gift eliciting divine favor (cf. Mal 1.6–14). *As atonement for you*, better, "as a ransom for him"; see

acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you. 5 The bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer the blood, dashing the blood against all sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. 6 The burnt offering shall be flayed and cut up into its parts. 7 The sons of the priest Aaron shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 8 Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the parts, with the head and the suet, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; 9 but its entrails and its legs shall be washed with water. Then the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on the altar as a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

10 If your gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, your offering shall be a male without blemish. 11 It shall be slaughtered on the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. 12 It shall be cut up into its parts, with its head and its suet, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; 13 but the entrails and the legs shall be washed with water. Then the priest shall offer the whole and turn it into smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

14 If your offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, you shall choose your offering from turtledoves or pigeons. 15 The priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head, and turn it into smoke on the altar; and its blood shall be drained out against the side of the altar. 16 He shall remove its crop with its contents[a] and throw it at the east side of the altar, in the place for ashes. 17 He shall tear it open by its wings without severing it. Then the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

2 When anyone presents a grain offering to the LORD, the offering shall be of choice flour; the worshiper shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it, 2 and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests. After taking from it a handful of the choice flour and oil, with all its frankincense, the priest shall turn this token portion into smoke on the altar, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD. 3 And what is left of the grain offering shall

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

17.11n. **5:** *The bull shall be slaughtered*, lit. "he [the offerer] shall slaughter the bull" (contrast Ezek 44.11). Dashing blood on the altar ransoms the life of the offerer who kills the animal (cf. 17.4,11); it is also found in the cases of the well-being offering (3.2,8,13), the reparation offering (7.2), and the offering of firstborn animals (Num 18.17); cf. Ex 24.6. **7:** *The sons of the priest Aaron*, though referring immediately to the male children of Aaron, these include all subsequent priests from Aaron's clan (cf. v. 8). **9:** *Turn the whole into smoke*, emphasizing that God enjoys the entire sacrifice and concretizing the image of the sacrifice's *pleasing odor* (cf. Gen 8.21). Though the Priestly authors view the earthly tabernacle as God's dwelling place, the imagery of smoke rising from the altar suggests that the deity is in the heavens. Burning sacrificial portions is a ritualized manner of effecting divine consumption.

2.1–16: The grain offering. Instructions for the grain offering, whose name literally means "gift, tribute (eliciting favor)," interrupt the animal food gift offerings in chs 1 and 3 (cf. 1.2). Like the passage on the birds in 1.14–17, these instructions are inserted into an earlier unit and were likely added in order to provide a still more affordable alternative for the burnt offering (cf. 1.1–17n.; 5.1–13). The second-person address of vv. 4–16, which accurately reflects the underlying Hebrew text, further sets these verses apart from vv. 1–3 and chs 1 and 3, all of which employ third-person language to describe the offerer (see Introduction). The grain offering is also a regular accompaniment to the burnt offering presented in statutory religious observances and on other occasions (cf. Ex 29.38–42; 40.29; Lev 9.17; Num 15.1–12; 28.4–6). Two main types of grain offerings are described: raw (vv. 1–3) and cooked (vv. 4–10). The cooked type is further subdivided according to method of preparation. While the raw variety is accompanied by oil and frankincense, only oil accompanies the cooked varieties, perhaps to make them more affordable for the poor. The required preparation may compensate for the lack of frankincense. **1:** *Frankincense*, an aromatic resin from shrubs found in Arabia and East Africa. **2–3:** *Token portion*, unlike the burnt offering, only a portion of the grain offering is burned. The remainder is designated as compensation for the priests (cf. Num 18.8–10). *Offering by fire*, see 1.1–3.17n. *Pleasing odor*, see 1.9n. While the

be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy part of the offerings by fire to the LORD.

4 When you present a grain offering baked in the oven, it shall be of choice flour: unleavened cakes mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers spread with oil. 5 If your offering is grain prepared on a griddle, it shall be of choice flour mixed with oil, unleavened; 6 break it in pieces, and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. 7 If your offering is grain prepared in a pan, it shall be made of choice flour in oil. 8 You shall bring to the LORD the grain offering that is prepared in any of these ways; and when it is presented to the priest, he shall take it to the altar. 9 The priest shall remove from the grain offering its token portion and turn this into smoke on the altar, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD. 10 And what is left of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings by fire to the LORD.

11 No grain offering that you bring to the LORD shall be made with leaven, for you must not turn any leaven or honey into smoke as an offering by fire to the LORD. 12 You may bring them to the LORD as an offering of choice products, but they shall not be offered on the altar for a pleasing odor. 13 You shall not omit from your grain offerings the salt of the covenant with your God; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.

14 If you bring a grain offering of first fruits to the LORD, you shall bring as the grain offering of your first fruits coarse new grain from fresh ears, parched with fire. 15 You shall add oil to it and lay frankincense on it; it is a grain offering. 16 And the priest shall turn a token portion of it into smoke—some of the coarse grain and oil with all its frankincense; it is an offering by fire to the LORD.

3 If the offering is a sacrifice of well-being, if you offer an animal of the herd, whether male or female, you shall offer one without blemish before the LORD. 2 You shall lay your hand on the head of the offering and slaughter it at the entrance of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons the priests shall dash the blood against all sides of the altar. 3 You shall offer from the sacrifice of well-being, as an offering by fire to the LORD, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is around the entrails; 4 the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which he shall remove

frankincense is aromatic, the pleasing smell to God is not from incense, for the grain offering without frankincense produces the same effect (cf. v. 9). *Most holy part*, see 1.1–6.7n. **11:** *Honey*, fruit syrup made from dates or grapes, not bees' honey (cf. 2 Chr 31.5). Leavening agents (including honey, which supports fermentation) are prohibited from grain offerings, perhaps to expedite their preparation (cf. Ex 12.39; Deut 16.3). **12:** *Choice products*, first-processed products, such as oil, wine, grain, and dough (cf. Num 15.20–21; 18.12–13). Contrast the first-harvested grain offering of vv. 14–16. **13:** NRSV omits the beginning of this verse: "You shall season each of your grain offerings with salt." *Salt* inhibits fermentation and thus may be a corollary to the prohibitions against leaven and honey. It is more likely, however, that salt functions as a flavor enhancer for the deity's food, as it does in Mesopotamian food offerings (cf. 1.1–3.17n.; 1.9n.; Job 6:6). *Salt of the covenant*, the term *covenant* (Heb, "berit") here refers to a statutory requirement (cf. Ex 31:16; contrast Lev 24.8–9, Num 18.19, and Num 25.13, where *covenant* refers to a due or allotment). The text is better translated, "You shall not omit from your grain offering the salt required by your God." **14–16:** The first ripe offering may be a form of the offering in 23.10–11.

3.1–17: The well-being offering. There are three subtypes of well-being offerings: thanksgiving, votive, and freewill (7.11–18; 22.21). The meaning of the Hebrew name of the offering, "shelamim," is uncertain. Proposals include "gift," "payment," "communion," "covenant," "peace," "whole," and "salvific," among others. "Well-being" is preferable because the offering is motivated by the positive circumstance of its offerer. It is the only sacrifice whose meat may be consumed by laypersons (rather than priests). As such, it is a less holy offering (cf. 1.1–6.7n.; 7.19–21). According to the Priestly authors, all sacrificeable animals must be presented as offerings at the tabernacle if their meat is to be eaten (cf. 17.3–7)—they serve as a communal feast between the Israelites and God. Both male and female herd (vv. 1–5) and flock animals (vv. 6–16) are eligible as well-being sacrifices, for their primary purpose is to provide meat for lay consumption. Portions of the sacrifice are burned on the altar (3.9–10,14–15), and portions are designated for the priests (7.28–36), but the main share is retained by the offerer (7.15–21; 19.6–8). **1:** *Without blemish*, see 22.21–30. **2:** *Lay your hand*, see 1.4n. *Dash the blood*, see 1.5n. **3–5:** The visceral fat and the organs are considered the most desirable portions and are thus reserved for God

with the kidneys. 5 Then Aaron's sons shall turn these into smoke on the altar, with the burnt offering that is on the wood on the fire, as an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

6 If your offering for a sacrifice of well-being to the LORD is from the flock, male or female, you shall offer one without blemish. 7 If you present a sheep as your offering, you shall bring it before the LORD 8 and lay your hand on the head of the offering. It shall be slaughtered before the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. 9 You shall present its fat from the sacrifice of well-being, as an offering by fire to the LORD: the whole broad tail, which shall be removed close to the backbone, the fat that covers the entrails, and all the fat that is around the entrails; 10 the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which you shall remove with the kidneys. 11 Then the priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as a food offering by fire to the LORD.

12 If your offering is a goat, you shall bring it before the LORD 13 and lay your hand on its head; it shall be slaughtered before the tent of meeting; and the sons of Aaron shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. 14 You shall present as your offering from it, as an offering by fire to the LORD, the fat that covers the entrails, and all the fat that is around the entrails; 15 the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which you shall remove with the kidneys. 16 Then the priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as a food offering by fire for a pleasing odor.

All fat is the LORD's. 17 It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, in all your settlements: you must not eat any fat or any blood.

4 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 Speak to the people of Israel, saying: When anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them:

3 If it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull of the herd without blemish as a sin offering to the LORD. 4 He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD and lay his hand on the head of the bull; the bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD. 5 The anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting. 6 The priest shall dip his finger

alone (cf. vv. 16–17). In Hebrew, *fat* often connotes "best." **5:** *With the burnt offering*, referring to the statutory daily morning offering (Ex 29.38–42); *pleasing odor*, see 1.9n. **9:** *Broad tail*, the predominant species of sheep in the Levant has a fatty area surrounding the tail that can weight up to 33 lb (15 kg). **16b–17:** See 17.10–14n.; Gen 9.4; Ezek 44.7. These verses are an H addition to P.

4.1–6.7: Instructions for atonement offerings. Unlike gift offerings, which are spontaneous acts of worship, atonement offerings are required to purge the sanctuary of ritual contamination caused by various sins and impurities. Left unpurged, the accumulation of sin and impurity in the tabernacle threatens the abiding presence of the deity. If God departs, Israel loses all divine protection and benefaction (cf. Ezek 8–11).

4.1–35: The purification offering. Traditionally translated "sin offering," this sacrifice actually purifies the sanctuary from defilement, not the individual from sin; it is thus better translated "purification offering." The purification offering's blood acts as a ritual detergent, cleansing the tabernacle complex from inadvertent transgressions of divine prohibitions. Numbers 15.22–31 expands the application of the purification offering to inadvertent transgression of all divine prescriptions, including explicit commandments. Ch 4 considers inadvertent sins of four different parties: the high priest (vv. 3–12), the entire Israelite congregation (vv. 13–21), a chieftain (vv. 22–26), and an ordinary Israelite (vv. 27–35). The severity of the resulting sanctuary pollution relates to the status of the sinner and is reflected by the animal required for the offering and the locations where its blood is applied. Sins of the high priest and entire community penetrate into the outer room of the tabernacle (vv. 5–7,16–18), while sins of a chieftain or ordinary layperson are less potent, accumulating only on the outer sacrificial altar (vv. 25,30,34). Ch 16 adds a third tier to this gradation: deliberate sins penetrate into and pollute the holy of holies, the inner sanctum of the deity (16.11–17). **2:** *Unintentionally*, lit. "in error," referring to actions done in negligence or ignorance (cf. vv. 13–14). **3–12:** Offering of the high priest. **4:** *Entrance of the tent of meeting*, see 1.3n. *Lay his hand*, see 1.4n. **6:** *Curtain*, Ex 26.31–33. Sprinkling blood purges the outer room of the

in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the LORD in front of the curtain of the sanctuary. 7 The priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is in the tent of meeting before the LORD; and the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. 8 He shall remove all the fat from the bull of sin offering: the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is around the entrails; 9 the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins; and the appendage of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys, 10 just as these are removed from the ox of the sacrifice of well-being. The priest shall turn them into smoke upon the altar of burnt offering. 11 But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, as well as its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung— 12 all the rest of the bull—he shall carry out to a clean place outside the camp, to the ash heap, and shall burn it on a wood fire; at the ash heap it shall be burned.

13 If the whole congregation of Israel errs unintentionally and the matter escapes the notice of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done and incur guilt; 14 when the sin that they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull of the herd for a sin offering and bring it before the tent of meeting. 15 The elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD. 16 The anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the tent of meeting, 17 and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain. 18 He shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the LORD in the tent of meeting; and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. 19 He shall remove all its fat and turn it into smoke on the altar. 20 He shall do with the bull just as is done with the bull of sin offering; he shall do the same with this. The priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven. 21 He shall carry the bull outside the camp, and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly.

22 When a ruler sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done and incurs guilt, 23 once the sin that he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a male goat without blemish. 24 He shall lay his hand on the head of the goat; it shall be slaughtered at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered before the LORD; it is a sin offering. 25 The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering. 26 All its fat he shall turn into smoke on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of well-being. Thus the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.

27 If anyone of the ordinary people among you sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done and incurs guilt, 28 when the sin that you have committed is made known to you, you shall bring a female goat without blemish as your offering, for the sin that you have committed. 29 You shall lay your hand on the head of the sin offering; and the sin offering shall be slaughtered at the place of the burnt offering. 30 The priest shall take

tent. **7:** *Horns*, see Ex 27.2; 30.2–3. *The altar of fragrant incense* is in the outer room of the tabernacle (Ex 30.1–10); see plan on p. 118. Daubing blood on the altar's horns purges it from sin and pollution. The remainder of the blood is poured on the ground for disposal (cf. 17.13; Deut 12.16,27). **8–10:** see 3.3–5. **11–12:** Unlike purification offerings from the flock (cf. 6.24–29), no meat from the bull purification offering may be eaten (cf. 6.30), for the priest may not benefit from his own transgression. **13–21:** Offering for the entire congregation. **20:** *For them*, meaning "on their behalf," i.e., in response to their sin. *And they shall be forgiven*, forgiveness is assured once the required ritual procedure is accomplished. Though this concluding formula is omitted from the high priest's offering, it should be assumed there as well (cf. vv. 26,31,35). **22–26:** Offering for a chieftain. **22:** *Ruler* probably means "chieftain" or "clan leader" (see Num 1.16). **27–35:** Offering for an ordinary Israelite.

some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and he shall pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. 31 He shall remove all its fat, as the fat is removed from the offering of well-being, and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar for a pleasing odor to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf, and you shall be forgiven.

32 If the offering you bring as a sin offering is a sheep, you shall bring a female without blemish. 33 You shall lay your hand on the head of the sin offering; and it shall be slaughtered as a sin offering at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered. 34 The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. 35 You shall remove all its fat, as the fat of the sheep is removed from the sacrifice of well-being, and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, with the offerings by fire to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the sin that you have committed, and you shall be forgiven.

5 When any of you sin in that you have heard a public adjuration to testify and—though able to testify as one who has seen or learned of the matter—do not speak up, you are subject to punishment. 2 Or when any of you touch any unclean thing—whether the carcass of an unclean beast or the carcass of unclean livestock or the carcass of an unclean swarming thing—and are unaware of it, you have become unclean, and are guilty. 3 Or when you touch human uncleanness—any uncleanness by which one can become unclean—and are unaware of it, when you come to know it, you shall be guilty. 4 Or when any of you utter aloud a rash oath for a bad or a good purpose, whatever people utter in an oath, and are unaware of it, when you come to know it, you shall in any of these be guilty. 5 When you realize your guilt in any of these, you shall confess the sin that you have committed. 6 And you shall bring to the LORD, as your penalty for the sin that you have committed, a female from the flock, a sheep or a goat, as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for your sin.

7 But if you cannot afford a sheep, you shall bring to the LORD, as your penalty for the sin that you have committed, two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. 8 You shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer first the one for the sin offering, wringing its head at the nape without severing it. 9 He shall sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar, while the rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the

5.1–13: Purification offerings for specific offenses. This passage extends the scope of ch 4, detailing four specific sins that require purification offerings. In each case (v. 1, withholding testimony; v. 2, contracting impurity from an animal; v. 3, contracting impurity from a person; v. 4, failure to fulfill an oath due to negligence), the sin or pollution has persisted over a prolonged period (vv. 4–5). This lapse of time, which in no case diminishes the gravity of sin or pollution but instead exacerbates it, unites the case of withholding testimony, which is premeditated, with the final three cases, which involve inadvertent actions. Verses 1–4 each present the circumstance of a person's actions and state of mind but do not render a verdict or outline a required response, which comes only in v. 5ff. **1:** *You are subject to punishment*, lit. "and he bears his sin" (cf. 1.2n.). P portrays sin both as a weight of guilt shouldered by the offender until it is borne away through forgiveness and as a defiling object attracted to the sanctuary like certain metals to a magnet. Left unremedied, such sins will accumulate in the sanctuary and drive the deity from it (cf. 16.1–34n.). **2–3:** *You have become unclean, and are guilty*, emendation yields, "but he has realized it and now feels guilt." For impurity contracted by touching animal carcasses, see 11.8,24–40. *When you come to know it, you shall be guilty*, lit. "but he has realized it and now feels guilt." For impurity contracted by touching a human, see 15.4–10,19–24,26–27; Num 19.11–13,16. In each of these cases, had the person who contracted pollution immediately purified him- or herself, no purification offering would have been required. **4:** *When you come to know it . . . be guilty*, lit. "but he has realized it and now feels guilt." *In any of these* was inadvertently inserted here from v. 5 because the scribe's eye skipped. **5–6:** The ritual procedure for sanctuary purification in these four cases requires confession as well as a purification offering, unlike the unintentional sins in ch 4. **7–13:** Less costly alternatives for the purification offering. It is not clear whether these substitutions may be made only in cases of the four sins in vv. 1–4 or for any purification offering. **7:** Two

altar; it is a sin offering. 10 And the second he shall offer for a burnt offering according to the regulation. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the sin that you have committed, and you shall be forgiven.

11 But if you cannot afford two turtledoves or two pigeons, you shall bring as your offering for the sin that you have committed one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour for a sin offering; you shall not put oil on it or lay frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering. 12 You shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall scoop up a handful of it as its memorial portion, and turn this into smoke on the altar, with the offerings by fire to the LORD; it is a sin offering. 13 Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for whichever of these sins you have committed, and you shall be forgiven. Like the grain offering, the rest shall be for the priest.

14 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 15 When any of you commit a trespass and sin unintentionally in any of the holy things of the LORD, you shall bring, as your guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without blemish from the flock, convertible into silver by the sanctuary shekel; it is a guilt offering. 16 And you shall make restitution for the holy thing in which you were remiss, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. The priest shall make atonement on your behalf with the ram of the guilt offering, and you shall be forgiven.

17 If any of you sin without knowing it, doing any of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, you have incurred guilt, and are subject to punishment. 18 You shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, or the equivalent, as a guilt offering; and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the error that you committed unintentionally, and you shall be forgiven. 19 It is a guilt offering; you have incurred guilt before the LORD.

6 [a] The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:
2 When any of you sin and commit a trespass against the LORD by deceiving a neighbor in a matter of a deposit or a pledge, or by robbery, or if you have defrauded a neighbor, 3 or have found something lost and lied about it—if you swear falsely regarding any of the various things that one may do and sin thereby— 4 when you have sinned and realize your guilt, and would restore what you took by robbery or by fraud or the deposit that was committed to you, or the lost thing that you found, 5 or anything else about which you have sworn falsely, you shall repay the principal amount and shall add one-fifth to it. You shall pay it to its owner when you realize your guilt. 6 And you shall bring to the priest, as your guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without blemish from the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering. 7 The priest shall make atonement on your behalf before the LORD, and you shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and incur guilt thereby.

[a] Ch 5.20 in Heb

birds are necessary, one for the purifying blood, and the other for the fat pieces to be burned on the altar. **10:** *According to the regulation*, see 1.14–17. **11–13:** The substitution of a grain offering is a noteworthy accommodation because it includes no blood, the essential component of the purification offering. Because this grain offering is presented in response to wrongdoing, frankincense and oil, symbols of joy, are excluded from it. **11:** *Ephah,* about 21 qts (23 l).

5.14–6.7: The reparation offering. Traditionally translated "guilt offering," this sacrifice actually serves as compensation for sacrilege against the sacred items (vv. 14–16), an unknown sin (vv. 17–19; the "unknown sin" is a common motif in Near Eastern texts), or fraud arising from a false oath (presumably spoken in the name of the LORD and thus sacrilege; 6.1–7). The cases of sacrilege require the offering and restitution plus damages (cf. 22.14). This sacrifice is thus better understood as a "reparation offering." The ritual procedure for this "most holy" sacrifice is found in 7.1–6. **14–16:** Inadvertent trespass against sacred items. **15:** *Holy things*, the most holy sacrificial portions, the altar, and the tabernacle and its furnishings belong to and exist in close proximity to the deity. They are thus sacred. **5.15,18; 6.6:** *Convertible into silver*, a person may bring the *equivalent* value of the offering in silver. **5.16,18; 6.7:** *Make atonement*, appease the deity on behalf of the sinner (cf. 7.1–6n.). **17–19:** Unknown sin. Though ambiguous, this case may differ from those addressed by the purification offering because here the person senses that he or she sinned, but the act itself is unknown. **6.1–7:** See Num 5.5–10 and contrast damages in Ex 22.7–15.

8 [a]The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 9 Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the ritual of the burnt offering. The burnt offering itself shall remain on the hearth upon the altar all night until the morning, while the fire on the altar shall be kept burning. 10 The priest shall put on his linen vestments after putting on his linen undergarments next to his body; and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar, and place them beside the altar. 11 Then he shall take off his vestments and put on other garments, and carry the ashes out to a clean place outside the camp. 12 The fire on the altar shall be kept burning; it shall not go out. Every morning the priest shall add wood to it, lay out the burnt offering on it, and turn into smoke the fat pieces of the offerings of well-being. 13 A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar; it shall not go out.

14 This is the ritual of the grain offering: The sons of Aaron shall offer it before the LORD, in front of the altar. 15 They shall take from it a handful of the choice flour and oil of the grain offering, with all the frankincense that is on the offering, and they shall turn its memorial portion into smoke on the altar as a pleasing odor to the LORD. 16 Aaron and his sons shall eat what is left of it; it shall be eaten as unleavened cakes in a holy place; in the court of the tent of meeting they shall eat it. 17 It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it as their portion of my offerings by fire; it is most holy, like the sin offering and the guilt offering. 18 Every male among the descendants of Aaron shall eat of it, as their perpetual due throughout your generations, from the LORD's offerings by fire; anything that touches them shall become holy.

19 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 20 This is the offering that Aaron and his sons shall offer to the LORD on the day when he is anointed: one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour as a regular offering, half of it in the morning and half in the evening. 21 It shall be made with oil on a griddle; you shall bring it well soaked, as a grain offering of baked[b] pieces, and you shall present it as a pleasing odor to the LORD. 22 And so the priest, anointed from among Aaron's descendants as a successor, shall prepare it; it is the LORD's—a perpetual due—to be turned entirely into

[a] Ch 6.1 in Heb

[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

6.8–7.38: Elaborations on the sacrificial instructions. This section, which contains five divine speeches, offers further instructions for each of the offerings detailed in 1.1–6.7 and focuses especially upon ritual performance, distribution of sacrificial pieces, and disposal procedures. The first three are ostensibly directed to the priests alone (6.9–7.21), although the instructions in 7.11–21 are pertinent to both priests and laypersons. The final two speeches are directed to all of the Israelites (7.22–36), and 7.37–38 serves as a subscript to this section.

6.8–13: The burnt offering. Cf. 1.3–13. Alternatively, this may refer to the statutory daily burnt offerings (cf. Ex 29.38–42; Num 28.3–8). **10–11:** The priestly garb is described in Ex 28.39–43. The linen garments must be worn in approaching the sacred altar, while nonsacral garb is worn for ash disposal outside the camp. **12:** This verse may be punctuated differently: *lay out the burnt offering on it* may actually be a new sentence, viz., "He shall arrange the burnt offering upon it and turn into smoke the fat pieces of the well-being offering." If so, this burnt offering is likely not the daily statutory offering (cf. 3.5). **12–13:** The perpetual fire maintains a direct link to the divine fire that ignites the altar in 9.24. It is God who consumes all sacrificial pieces burned on the altar.

6.14–23: The grain offerings. 14–18: These verses provide instructions for the grain offering described in 2.1–13. **15:** *Frankincense*, see 2.1n. *Pleasing odor*, see 1.9n. **16:** *Holy place*, the priests' portions of most holy offerings must be consumed within the sanctuary complex in order to ensure their sanctity and to avoid communicating holiness (cf. v. 18). *Court*, see Ex 27.9–19. **17:** *Offerings by fire*, see 1.1–3.17n. **18:** *Shall eat*, better, "may eat." All males of Aaron's line are priests and thus may share in most holy sacrificial portions (cf. 21.22). Women belonging to priestly families may partake of lesser holy sacrificial portions assigned to the priests (22.10–13). *Become holy*, holiness is conceptualized as an invisible divine essence that is communicable through physical contact (cf. v. 27; Ex 29.37; 30.29; Ezek 44.19). **19–23:** These verses provide instructions for the statutory grain offerings that the high priest must present daily. **20:** *On the day when he is anointed*, better, "once he has been anointed." Aaron, the first high priest, is not anointed until ch 8. This statute is also applicable to all future high priests (cf. v. 22).

smoke. 23 Every grain offering of a priest shall be wholly burned; it shall not be eaten.

24 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 25 Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the ritual of the sin offering. The sin offering shall be slaughtered before the LORD at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered; it is most holy. 26 The priest who offers it as a sin offering shall eat of it; it shall be eaten in a holy place, in the court of the tent of meeting. 27 Whatever touches its flesh shall become holy; and when any of its blood is spattered on a garment, you shall wash the bespattered part in a holy place. 28 An earthen vessel in which it was boiled shall be broken; but if it is boiled in a bronze vessel, that shall be scoured and rinsed in water. 29 Every male among the priests shall eat of it; it is most holy. 30 But no sin offering shall be eaten from which any blood is brought into the tent of meeting for atonement in the holy place; it shall be burned with fire.

7 This is the ritual of the guilt offering. It is most holy; 2 at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered, they shall slaughter the guilt offering, and its blood shall be dashed against all sides of the altar. 3 All its fat shall be offered: the broad tail, the fat that covers the entrails, 4 the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which shall be removed with the kidneys. 5 The priest shall turn them into smoke on the altar as an offering by fire to the LORD; it is a guilt offering. 6 Every male among the priests shall eat of it; it shall be eaten in a holy place; it is most holy.

7 The guilt offering is like the sin offering, there is the same ritual for them; the priest who makes atonement with it shall have it. 8 So, too, the priest who offers anyone's burnt offering shall keep the skin of the burnt offering that he has offered. 9 And every grain offering baked in the oven, and all that is prepared in a pan or on a griddle, shall belong to the priest who offers it. 10 But every other grain offering, mixed with oil or dry, shall belong to all the sons of Aaron equally.

11 This is the ritual of the sacrifice of the offering of well-being that one may offer to the LORD. 12 If you offer it for thanksgiving, you shall offer with the thank offering unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour well soaked in oil. 13 With your thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being you shall bring your offering with cakes of leavened bread. 14 From this you shall offer one cake from each offering, as a gift to the LORD; it shall belong to the priest who dashes the blood of the offering of well-being. 15 And the flesh of your thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being shall be eaten on the day it is offered; you shall not leave any of it until morning. 16 But if the sacrifice you offer is a votive offering or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that you offer your sacrifice, and what is left of it shall be eaten the next day; 17 but what is left of the flesh of the sacrifice shall be burned up on the third day. 18 If any of the flesh of your sacrifice of well-being is eaten on the third

6.24–30: The purification offering. 24–29: These verses provide instructions for purification offerings whose blood is applied to the outer altar (cf. 4.22–35). Portions of these most holy offerings may be eaten by the priests (see 1.1–6.7n.). **25:** *Sin offering*, see 4.1–35n. **26:** *Holy place*, see 6.16n. *Court*, see Ex 27.9–19. **27–28:** *Become holy*, see 6.18n. The blood of the offering seems to decontaminate by absorbing impurities, which explains how it contaminates garments and vessels. **29:** *Shall eat*, better, "may eat" (cf. 6.18n.). **30:** This verse refers to the purification offering for more virulent contamination and any purification offering of a priest (cf. Ex 29.14; Lev 4.1–21; 6.23; 8.17; 9.11; 16.27).

7.1–10: The reparation offering. Cf. 5.14–6.7. **1:** *Guilt offering*, see 5.14–6.7n. **2:** *Its blood shall be dashed*, see 1.5n. **6:** *Shall eat*, better, "may eat" (cf. 6.18n.). **7:** *Ritual*, better, "instruction." **7–10:** These verses summarize some of the compensation given to the priests for their ritual activities (cf. Num 18.8–20).

7.11–38: The well-being offerings. Cf. 3.1–17; 22.21–23. This unit provides instructions for three different types of well-being offerings: thanksgiving, votive, and freewill. The thanksgiving offering is more complex than the votive and freewill offerings, requiring accompanying grain offerings (cf. 2.4–10) and leavened bread (contrast 2.11–12). In addition, the thanksgiving offering may be eaten only on the day it is presented, while other well-being sacrifices may be consumed for two days. **13:** Lit. "The foregoing he shall offer with loaves of leavened bread, together with his well-being offering of thanksgiving." **18:** *Acceptable*, lit. "accepted" (cf. 1.4n.;

day, it shall not be acceptable, nor shall it be credited to the one who offers it; it shall be an abomination, and the one who eats of it shall incur guilt.

19 Flesh that touches any unclean thing shall not be eaten; it shall be burned up. As for other flesh, all who are clean may eat such flesh. 20 But those who eat flesh from the LORD's sacrifice of well-being while in a state of uncleanness shall be cut off from their kin. 21 When any one of you touches any unclean thing—human uncleanness or an unclean animal or any unclean creature—and then eats flesh from the LORD's sacrifice of well-being, you shall be cut off from your kin.

22 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 23 Speak to the people of Israel, saying: You shall eat no fat of ox or sheep or goat. 24 The fat of an animal that died or was torn by wild animals may be put to any other use, but you must not eat it. 25 If any one of you eats the fat from an animal of which an offering by fire may be made to the LORD, you who eat it shall be cut off from your kin. 26 You must not eat any blood whatever, either of bird or of animal, in any of your settlements. 27 Any one of you who eats any blood shall be cut off from your kin.

28 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 29 Speak to the people of Israel, saying: Any one of you who would offer to the LORD your sacrifice of well-being must yourself bring to the LORD your offering from your sacrifice of well-being. 30 Your own hands shall bring the LORD's offering by fire; you shall bring the fat with the breast, so that the breast may be raised as an elevation offering before the LORD. 31 The priest shall turn the fat into smoke on the altar, but the breast shall belong to Aaron and his sons. 32 And the right thigh from your sacrifices of well-being you shall give to the priest as an offering; 33 the one among the sons of Aaron who offers the blood and fat of the offering of well-being shall have the right thigh for a portion. 34 For I have taken the breast of the elevation offering, and the thigh that is offered, from the people of Israel, from their sacrifices of well-being, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons, as a perpetual due from the people of Israel. 35 This is the portion allotted to Aaron and to his sons from the offerings made by fire to the LORD, once they have been brought forward to serve the LORD as priests; 36 these the LORD commanded to be given them, when he anointed them, as a perpetual due from the people of Israel throughout their generations.

37 This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the offering of ordination, and the sacrifice of well-being, 38 which the LORD commanded Moses on Mount Sinai, when he commanded the people of Israel to bring their offerings to the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai.

8 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Take Aaron and his sons with him, the vestments, the anointing oil, the bull of sin offering, the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread; 3 and assemble the whole congregation at the entrance of the tent

19.5–8; 22.17–30). *Incur guilt*, cf. 5.1n. **19–21:** Sacrificial portions are to be kept from impurity because, as holy food, they belong to God, whose presence is threatened by impurity (cf. 4.1–35n.; 11.1–16.34n.; 19.8). *Cut off*, this penalty is applied by the Priestly authors to several offenses against God and likely refers to the complete destruction of the offender's lineage. **22–27:** These commands develop further the prohibition against fat and blood in 3.17. **23:** *Ox or sheep or goat*, i.e., sacrificeable animals. **25,27:** *Cut off*, see 7.19–21n. **28–36:** The priests' portion of the well-being offering. **30:** *Elevation*, a ritual act dedicating the offering to the deity. **31–33:** The breast belongs to all of the priests, while the thigh is designated for the priest who officiates over the sacrifice. **37–38:** A summarizing postscript to 6.8–7.36. The inclusion of the ordination offering here may be due to its similarity to the well-being offering (cf. 8.22–32n.). **38:** *On Mount Sinai*, better, "at Mount Sinai," namely at the tabernacle erected at the foot of the mountain after Moses's descent (Ex 34.29).

8.1–10.20: The dedication of the tabernacle and priests and the transgression of Aaron's sons. Chs 8–10 narrate the consecration of the tabernacle complex, the seven-day ordination of the priests, the inaugural priestly service on the eighth day that culminates in the revelation of the divine presence through fire, and the subsequent illicit ritual of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu.

8.1–36: The dedication of the tabernacle and priests. A fulfillment of the consecration rituals as instructed

of meeting. [4] And Moses did as the LORD commanded him. When the congregation was assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting, [5] Moses said to the congregation, "This is what the LORD has commanded to be done."

[6] Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward, and washed them with water. [7] He put the tunic on him, fastened the sash around him, clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him. He then put the decorated band of the ephod around him, tying the ephod to him with it. [8] He placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. [9] And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden ornament, the holy crown, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[10] Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. [11] He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the basin and its base, to consecrate them. [12] He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him. [13] And Moses brought forward Aaron's sons, and clothed them with tunics, and fastened sashes around them, and tied headdresses on them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[14] He led forward the bull of sin offering; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bull of sin offering, [15] and it was slaughtered. Moses took the blood and with his finger put some on each of the horns of the altar, purifying the altar; then he poured out the blood at the base of the altar. Thus he consecrated it, to make atonement for it. [16] Moses took all the fat that was around the entrails, and the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat, and turned them into smoke on the altar. [17] But the bull itself, its skin and flesh and its dung, he burned with fire outside the camp, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[18] Then he brought forward the ram of burnt offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, [19] and it was slaughtered. Moses dashed the blood against all sides of the altar. [20] The ram was cut into its parts, and Moses turned into smoke the head and the parts and the suet. [21] And after the entrails and the legs were washed with water, Moses turned into smoke the whole ram on the altar; it was a burnt offering for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[22] Then he brought forward the second ram, the ram of ordination. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, [23] and it was slaughtered. Moses took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. [24] After Aaron's sons were brought forward, Moses put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet; and Moses dashed the rest of the blood against all sides of the altar. [25] He took the fat—the broad tail, all the fat that was around the entrails, the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat—and the right thigh. [26] From the basket of unleavened bread that was before the LORD, he took one cake of unleavened bread, one cake of bread with oil, and one wafer, and placed them on the fat and on the right thigh. [27] He placed all these

by God (cf. vv. 5,9,13,17,21,29,31,34) to Moses in Ex 28–29; 30.26–30; 40.9–15. **2:** *Anointing oil*, Ex 30.22–33; 37.29. *Bull of sin offering*, see Lev 4.3. For the offerings listed here, see Ex 29.1–3. **5:** *What the LORD has commanded*, i.e., Ex 29. **7–9,13:** For descriptions of the priestly vestments, see Ex 28.1–43; 39.1–31. The high priest's clothing is intended for his "honor and beauty" (Ex 28.2) and distinguishes him from the other priests, whose ritual attire is simpler. **10–12,30:** Anointing infuses the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priests with ritual holiness, setting them apart as the personal possessions of the deity and his ceremonial servants. Anointing with oil was a common transition rite for persons and objects in the ancient Near East (cf. 14.15–18,26–29), and was therefore also used in Israel to change the status of a commoner to king (e.g., 1 Sam 10.1; 16.13). **14–17:** 4.1–12. **18–21:** 1.10–13. **22–32:** *Ram of ordination*, cf. Ex 29.22–28,31–34. The ordination offering is similar (but not identical) to the well-being offering. It inaugurates the system for priestly compensation, as indicated by its name: *ordination*, literally, "filling (the hand)," refers to the assignment of part of the offerings to the priests. **23–24:** *Ear . . . thumb . . . big toe*, treating the bodily extremities symbolizes application

on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and raised them as an elevation offering before the LORD. 28 Then Moses took them from their hands and turned them into smoke on the altar with the burnt offering. This was an ordination offering for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD. 29 Moses took the breast and raised it as an elevation offering before the LORD; it was Moses' portion of the ram of ordination, as the LORD commanded Moses.

30 Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled them on Aaron and his vestments, and also on his sons and their vestments. Thus he consecrated Aaron and his vestments, and also his sons and their vestments.

31 And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Boil the flesh at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of ordination offerings, as I was commanded, 'Aaron and his sons shall eat it'; 32 and what remains of the flesh and the bread you shall burn with fire. 33 You shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the day when your period of ordination is completed. For it will take seven days to ordain you; 34 as has been done today, the LORD has commanded to be done to make atonement for you. 35 You shall remain at the entrance of the tent of meeting day and night for seven days, keeping the LORD's charge so that you do not die; for so I am commanded." 36 Aaron and his sons did all the things that the LORD commanded through Moses.

9 On the eighth day Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. 2 He said to Aaron, "Take a bull calf for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before the LORD. 3 And say to the people of Israel, 'Take a male goat for a sin offering; a calf and a lamb, yearlings without blemish, for a burnt offering; 4 and an ox and a ram for an offering of well-being to sacrifice before the LORD; and a grain offering mixed with oil. For today the LORD will appear to you.'" 5 They brought what Moses commanded to the front of the tent of meeting; and the whole congregation drew near and stood before the LORD. 6 And Moses said, "This is the thing that the LORD commanded you to do, so that the glory of the LORD may appear to you." 7 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Draw near to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people; and sacrifice the offering of the people, and make atonement for them; as the LORD has commanded."

8 Aaron drew near to the altar, and slaughtered the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself. 9 The sons of Aaron presented the blood to him, and he dipped his finger in the blood and put it on the horns of the altar; and the rest of the blood he poured out at the base of the altar. 10 But the fat, the kidneys, and the appendage of the liver from the sin offering he turned into smoke on the altar, as

to the entire person. **31:** Once the ordination process has begun, the priests may partake of the sacred offering portions. **33:** *It will take seven days to ordain you*, better, "He (i.e., God) will fill your hand for seven days." Sacrifices are the possession of the deity, who shares a portion with the priests. **33–35:** The purification and ordination ritual is to be repeated for seven days (cf. Ex 29.35–37), during which the priests must remain in the sanctuary complex to preserve their purity. **36:** This verse covers the time period of the six remaining days of the priestly ordination. Priestly literature often describes the fulfillment of complex instructions through short report statements (cf. 16.34b).

9.1–10.20: The inauguration of priestly service and the transgression of Nadab and Abihu. Chs 9–10 narrate the events of the eighth day, i.e., the day after the consecration of the priests is completed. The priests perform their first sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD appears to the people with fire, confirming the deity's presence and approval of the priests' ritual activities. Immediately following this joyous occasion, however, Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, commit sacrilege by making an unauthorized incense offering, which prompts the divine fire to emerge once more to consume them. The deaths of Nadab and Abihu occasion further instructions for the priests.

9.1–24: The inauguration of priestly service. 4,6: The deity's appearance is the fire that emerges from the tabernacle (vv. 23–24; cf. Ex 40.38). **6–21:** While Moses performed the sacrificial ritual in lieu of the priests in

the LORD commanded Moses; [11] and the flesh and the skin he burned with fire outside the camp.

[12] Then he slaughtered the burnt offering. Aaron's sons brought him the blood, and he dashed it against all sides of the altar. [13] And they brought him the burnt offering piece by piece, and the head, which he turned into smoke on the altar. [14] He washed the entrails and the legs and, with the burnt offering, turned them into smoke on the altar.

[15] Next he presented the people's offering. He took the goat of the sin offering that was for the people, and slaughtered it, and presented it as a sin offering like the first one. [16] He presented the burnt offering, and sacrificed it according to regulation. [17] He presented the grain offering, and, taking a handful of it, he turned it into smoke on the altar, in addition to the burnt offering of the morning.

[18] He slaughtered the ox and the ram as a sacrifice of well-being for the people. Aaron's sons brought him the blood, which he dashed against all sides of the altar, [19] and the fat of the ox and of the ram—the broad tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat on them,[a] and the appendage of the liver. [20] They first laid the fat on the breasts, and the fat was turned into smoke on the altar; [21] and the breasts and the right thigh Aaron raised as an elevation offering before the LORD, as Moses had commanded.

[22] Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he came down after sacrificing the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the offering of well-being. [23] Moses and Aaron entered the tent of meeting, and then came out and blessed the people; and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. [24] Fire came out from the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

10 Now Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his censer, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered unholy fire before the LORD, such as he had not commanded them. [2] And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. [3] Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD meant when he said,

'Through those who are near me
I will show myself holy,
and before all the people
I will be glorified.'"

And Aaron was silent.

[4] Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come forward, and carry your kinsmen away from the front of the sanctuary to a place outside the camp." [5] They came forward and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had ordered. [6] And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not dishevel your hair, and do not tear your vestments, or you will die and wrath will strike all the congregation; but your kindred, the whole house of Israel, may mourn the burning that the LORD has sent. [7] You shall not go outside the entrance

[a] Gk: Heb *the broad tail, and that which covers, and the kidneys*

ch 8, here the priests, having been fully ordained, perform the sacrifices as described in chs 1–5. **22–23:** *Lifted his hands*, a ritual action accompanying the blessing. The people receive two blessings—one from Aaron and one from Moses and Aaron together. For a priestly blessing, see Num 6.22–27. **22:** *Came down*, an anachronistic reference to the altar of burnt offering in the Temple, which was elevated (cf. 2 Kings 16.10–13; Ezek 43.13–17). The tabernacle's altar was portable and had no steps (Ex 27.1). **23–24:** God's fiery *glory* is also manifested in the cloud and fire pillar that led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness, and that rested over the tent of meeting (Ex 13.21; 40.38; Num 9.15–23); see also Ex 24.17; Ezek 1.27–28. **24:** *They shouted*, for joy, not out of fear. Prostration is a ritual act of submission.

10.1–20: The transgression of Nadab and Abihu. 1: *Unholy fire*, lit. "strange fire," referring to the unauthorized incense offering. **2:** *Fire*, because God had not instructed the priests to present incense offerings, the fire that would consume the offerings instead consumed Nadab and Abihu. The Korah rebellion ends similarly with divine fire consuming the offerers of illicit incense (Num 16.35). For God viewed as a consuming fire in P, see Ex 24.17. **3:** *When he said*, perhaps referring to Ex 29.43–44, but more likely referencing a text that is now lost. **4–7:** Because of their ritual holiness, the priests are not allowed to contact a corpse or to mourn for the dead

of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for the anointing oil of the LORD is on you." And they did as Moses had ordered.

8 And the LORD spoke to Aaron: 9 Drink no wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons, when you enter the tent of meeting, that you may not die; it is a statute forever throughout your generations. 10 You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; 11 and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them through Moses.

12 Moses spoke to Aaron and to his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar: Take the grain offering that is left from the LORD's offerings by fire, and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy; 13 you shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due, from the offerings by fire to the LORD; for so I am commanded. 14 But the breast that is elevated and the thigh that is raised, you and your sons and daughters as well may eat in any clean place; for they have been assigned to you and your children from the sacrifices of the offerings of well-being of the people of Israel. 15 The thigh that is raised and the breast that is elevated they shall bring, together with the offerings by fire of the fat, to raise for an elevation offering before the LORD; they are to be your due and that of your children forever, as the LORD has commanded.

16 Then Moses made inquiry about the goat of the sin offering, and—it had already been burned! He was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and said, 17 "Why did you not eat the sin offering in the sacred area? For it is most holy, and God[a] has given it to you that you may remove the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement on their behalf before the LORD. 18 Its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary. You should certainly have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded." 19 And Aaron spoke to Moses, "See, today they offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD; and yet such things as these have befallen me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been agreeable to the LORD?" 20 And when Moses heard that, he agreed.

11 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them: 2 Speak to the people of Israel, saying:

From among all the land animals, these are the creatures that you may eat. 3 Any animal that has divided hoofs and is cleft-

[a] Heb *he*

(cf. 21.1–6,10–12). **8–11:** These verses, the only instance in Leviticus of God speaking to Aaron alone, are likely an H insertion into P. The stated mourning restrictions motivate the introduction of further priestly responsibilities. **10:** *The holy and the common . . . the unclean and the clean*, the two fundamental binary distinctions in Priestly literature. All persons, objects, and places are characterized by one quality of each pair: holy and clean (e.g., the properly functioning sanctuary, including its priests); common and clean (the default status of lay Israelites not suffering from impurities such as found in chs 11–15 and Num 19); common and impure (e.g., lay Israelites suffering from impurity); and, less frequently, holy and impure (such as holy ritual items that become impure during the course of purification rituals, e.g., purification offering carcasses, cf. 6.27–28; 16.26–28). **11:** *To teach . . . all the statutes*, better, "to give rulings regarding all the statutes." The priests do not actively instruct the people in the law (cf. Hag 2.11–13). **12–15:** Cf. 7.11–14,28–36. Aaron and his remaining sons must complete the rituals as prescribed, even after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. **16–20:** A somewhat enigmatic section, in which Moses is upset that the priests did not consume the people's purification offering, although he never explicitly commanded them to do so in ch 9. Verse 17 suggests that the priestly consumption of the offering itself is expiatory (cf. 6.24–30, although these verses imply that eating the purification offering is a privilege, not a requirement). Aaron's response is unclear, yet Moses accepts it, perhaps because of the unique circumstance of the eighth day.

11.1–16.34: Ritual impurity and purification. Chs 11–16 narrate divine instructions concerning impurity and various processes for purification. In Priestly literature, impurity is a real, though invisible, film that adheres to persons and objects and is attracted to the tabernacle as some metals are attracted to a magnet. However, impurity is fundamentally different from sin: impurity is contracted in the course of normal, daily activities and carries no moral stigma (see further 10.10n.). Yet because impurity is contagious and threatens the continued

footed and chews the cud—such you may eat. [4] But among those that chew the cud or have divided hoofs, you shall not eat the following: the camel, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you. [5] The rock badger, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you. [6] The hare, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you. [7] The pig, for even though it has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed, it does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. [8] Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean for you.

[9] These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the streams—such you may eat. [10] But anything in the seas or the streams that does not have fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and among all the other living creatures that are in the waters—they are detestable to you [11] and detestable they shall remain. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall regard as detestable. [12] Everything in the waters that does not have fins and scales is detestable to you.

[13] These you shall regard as detestable among the birds. They shall not be eaten; they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, [14] the buzzard, the kite of any kind; [15] every raven of any kind; [16] the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk of any kind; [17] the little owl, the cormorant, the great owl, [18] the water hen, the desert owl,[a] the carrion vulture, [19] the stork, the heron of any kind, the hoopoe, and the bat.[b]

[20] All winged insects that walk upon all fours are detestable to you. [21] But among the winged insects that walk on all fours you may eat those that have jointed legs above their feet, with which to leap on the ground. [22] Of them you may eat: the locust according to its kind, the bald locust according to its kind, the cricket according to its kind, and the grasshopper according to its kind. [23] But all other winged insects that have four feet are detestable to you.

[a] Or *pelican*

[b] Identification of several of the birds in verses 13-19 is uncertain

presence of the deity in the sanctuary, its disposal must be accomplished fastidiously. Failure to purify is sinful and carries dire consequences (cf. 15.31). The sources of impurity are human and animal corpses (ch 11; Num 19), normal and abnormal genital discharges (chs 12; 15), and a disease, "surface affliction," often mistranslated as "leprosy" (chs 13–14). The common denominator among these sources of impurity is their association with death or at least a loss of life force. In cases of minor impurity, purification is accomplished through some combination of bathing, laundering, and the passage of time. In addition to these rites, major impurities also require presentation of a purification offering to cleanse the altar, for major impurities penetrate into the tabernacle complex. Because of their regular contact with the sanctuary and the threat of its contamination, priests are required to avoid virtually all impurity (cf. 21.1–15).

11.1–47: Dietary laws. The dietary laws provide a bridge between the sacrificial instructions that precede them and the following purity rules. In their concern for meat consumption, the instructions in ch 11 correlate strongly with the sacrificial laws, which themselves outline the foods that the deity eats and restrict meat consumption according to its sanctity. A comparison of the sacrificial and dietary laws reveals that the Israelite God has the most restrictive diet, followed by the priests, the Israelite laypersons, and finally non-Israelites. By following the dietary rules, the Israelites observe the order of creation and are separated from the other nations. Such separateness is a fundamental component of holiness (vv. 44–45). Ch 11 also looks forward to the issues of impurity and its disposal in chs 12–16, for animals deemed unsuitable for consumption are termed impure, and contact with their corpses explicitly defiles. **2b–23:** Cf. Deut 14.3–21. **2b–8:** Permitted large land animals must have split hooves and chew their cud. The examples of prohibited animals suggests that undomesticated animals are the special focus of this chapter (see 1.2n.; 17.1–16n.). **9–12:** Permitted sea creatures must have fins and scales. **13–19:** Rather than providing dual characteristics, as with large land animals and sea creatures, a list of prohibited birds is provided. **20–23:** Winged insects are generally forbidden. The only exceptions are those with jumping legs, which are specifically enumerated. **24–40:** Laws concerning impurity contracted through contact with animal corpses. Generally speaking, more intense contact (e.g., carrying or eating vs. touching) requires

24 By these you shall become unclean;
whoever touches the carcass of any of them
shall be unclean until the evening, 25 and
whoever carries any part of the carcass of
any of them shall wash his clothes and be
unclean until the evening. 26 Every animal
that has divided hoofs but is not cleft-footed
or does not chew the cud is unclean for you;
everyone who touches one of them shall
be unclean. 27 All that walk on their paws,
among the animals that walk on all fours,
are unclean for you; whoever touches the
carcass of any of them shall be unclean until
the evening, 28 and the one who carries the
carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean
until the evening; they are unclean for you.

29 These are unclean for you among the
creatures that swarm upon the earth: the
weasel, the mouse, the great lizard according
to its kind, 30 the gecko, the land crocodile,
the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chame-
leon. 31 These are unclean for you among all
that swarm; whoever touches one of them
when they are dead shall be unclean until
the evening. 32 And anything upon which
any of them falls when they are dead shall be
unclean, whether an article of wood or cloth
or skin or sacking, any article that is used for
any purpose; it shall be dipped into water,
and it shall be unclean until the evening, and
then it shall be clean. 33 And if any of them
falls into any earthen vessel, all that is in it
shall be unclean, and you shall break the ves-
sel. 34 Any food that could be eaten shall be
unclean if water from any such vessel comes
upon it; and any liquid that could be drunk
shall be unclean if it was in any such vessel.
35 Everything on which any part of the carcass
falls shall be unclean; whether an oven or
stove, it shall be broken in pieces; they are
unclean, and shall remain unclean for you.
36 But a spring or a cistern holding water
shall be clean, while whatever touches the
carcass in it shall be unclean. 37 If any part of
their carcass falls upon any seed set aside for
sowing, it is clean; 38 but if water is put on the
seed and any part of their carcass falls on it, it
is unclean for you.

39 If an animal of which you may eat dies,
anyone who touches its carcass shall be
unclean until the evening. 40 Those who eat
of its carcass shall wash their clothes and be
unclean until the evening; and those who
carry the carcass shall wash their clothes and
be unclean until the evening.

41 All creatures that swarm upon the
earth are detestable; they shall not be eaten.
42 Whatever moves on its belly, and whatever
moves on all fours, or whatever has many
feet, all the creatures that swarm upon the
earth, you shall not eat; for they are detest-
able. 43 You shall not make yourselves detest-
able with any creature that swarms; you shall
not defile yourselves with them, and so be-
come unclean. 44 For I am the LORD your God;
sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for
I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with
any swarming creature that moves on the
earth. 45 For I am the LORD who brought you
up from the land of Egypt, to be your God;
you shall be holy, for I am holy.

46 This is the law pertaining to land animal
and bird and every living creature that moves
through the waters and every creature that
swarms upon the earth, 47 to make a distinc-
tion between the unclean and the clean, and
between the living creature that may be eaten
and the living creature that may not be eaten.

12 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:
2 Speak to the people of Israel, saying:
If a woman conceives and bears a male
child, she shall be ceremonially unclean

more complex purification rites. **41–45:** Small land animals are forbidden. *Be holy, for I am holy*, see 11.1–47n., 19.2n. **43,44:** *Defile yourselves*, see 18.20n. **46–47:** A typical Priestly summary postscript.

12.1–8: Childbirth. Childbirth produces impurity because of the mother's postpartum flow of blood, which is viewed as analogous to menstruation (cf. vv. 2,5). The period of impurity differs according to the sex of the child and is divided into a shorter, major phase (seven or fourteen days) and a longer, minor phase (thirty-three or sixty-six days). In each case, the entire period of impurity is a multiple of forty, a common biblical number representing completion. **2–5:** *As at the time of her menstruation*, see 15.19–24. Because this reference anticipates ch 15, it is possible that the purity laws were once ordered differently, with ch 12 following ch 15. During the initial, major phase, the parturient can contaminate the sanctuary as well as common objects and persons through physical contact. During the subsequent, minor phase, her impurity only threatens the sanctuary. **3:**

seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. [3] On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. [4] Her time of blood purification shall be thirty-three days; she shall not touch any holy thing, or come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification are completed. [5] If she bears a female child, she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation; her time of blood purification shall be sixty-six days.

[6] When the days of her purification are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. [7] He shall offer it before the LORD, and make atonement on her behalf; then she shall be clean from her flow of blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, male or female. [8] If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement on her behalf, and she shall be clean.

13 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

[2] When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous[a] disease on the skin of his body, he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. [3] The priest shall examine the disease on the skin of his body, and if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous[a] disease; after the priest has examined him he shall pronounce him ceremonially unclean. [4] But if the spot is white in the skin of his body, and appears no deeper than the skin, and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall confine the diseased person for seven days. [5] The priest shall examine him on the seventh day, and if he sees that the disease is checked and the disease has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall confine him seven days more. [6] The priest shall examine him again on the seventh day, and if the disease has abated and the disease has not spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only an eruption; and he shall wash his clothes, and be clean. [7] But if the eruption spreads in the skin after he has shown himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again before the priest. [8] The priest shall make an examination, and if the eruption has spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is a leprous[a] disease.

[9] When a person contracts a leprous[a] disease, he shall be brought to the priest. [10] The priest shall make an examination, and

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

Circumcision is unrelated to impurity or purification. It is mentioned here because it is performed on the eighth day after birth and thus immediately follows the initial seven-day period of impurity. **6–8:** *Sin offering*, lit. "purification offering." The new mother has committed no sin. She must present a purification offering because her impurity polluted the altar (see 4.1–35n.). Verse 8 is an addendum that follows the original ending of the law in v. 7b, providing a more affordable sacrificial option for a poor mother.

13.1–14.57: Surface afflictions. Though consolidated under a single term (Heb "tsara'at") traditionally translated "leprosy," the surface afflictions described in these chapters are not modern leprosy (Hansen's disease), which was unknown in the ancient Near East when these texts were written. The inclusion of conditions affecting fabrics and houses alongside human disease also rules out modern leprosy, as do the symptoms of the human diseases described. The Priestly authors do not view disease in general as causing impurity; surface affliction causes impurity because it is associated with death (cf. Num 12.12).

13.1–46: Surface affliction on humans. Various symptoms are enumerated for determining whether a condition is surface affliction. In each case, the priest must give a ruling regarding the skin disease, differentiating between clean and unclean (cf. 10.10). The skin conditions most consistent with the various symptoms described include eczema, psoriasis, and vitiligo. **2:** *He shall be brought*, or perhaps, "It shall be reported." In either case, others in the community have an interest in diagnosing surface affliction not because the disease is contagious but because the impurity it produces threatens the sanctuary. **3:** *Examine*, without touching the affected skin, for the impurity of surface affliction is communicable. *His body*, or her body: the law applies to both men and women (cf. vv. 2,29). **4:** *The priest shall confine*, in order to determine whether the skin disease produces

if there is a white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white, and there is quick raw flesh in the swelling, 11 it is a chronic leprous[a] disease in the skin of his body. The priest shall pronounce him unclean; he shall not confine him, for he is unclean. 12 But if the disease breaks out in the skin, so that it covers all the skin of the diseased person from head to foot, so far as the priest can see, 13 then the priest shall make an examination, and if the disease has covered all his body, he shall pronounce him clean of the disease; since it has all turned white, he is clean. 14 But if raw flesh ever appears on him, he shall be unclean; 15 the priest shall examine the raw flesh and pronounce him unclean. Raw flesh is unclean, for it is a leprous[a] disease. 16 But if the raw flesh again turns white, he shall come to the priest; 17 the priest shall examine him, and if the disease has turned white, the priest shall pronounce the diseased person clean. He is clean.

18 When there is on the skin of one's body a boil that has healed, 19 and in the place of the boil there appears a white swelling or a reddish-white spot, it shall be shown to the priest. 20 The priest shall make an examination, and if it appears deeper than the skin and its hair has turned white, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; this is a leprous[a] disease, broken out in the boil. 21 But if the priest examines it and the hair on it is not white, nor is it deeper than the skin but has abated, the priest shall confine him seven days. 22 If it spreads in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is diseased. 23 But if the spot remains in one place and does not spread, it is the scar of the boil; the priest shall pronounce him clean.

24 Or, when the body has a burn on the skin and the raw flesh of the burn becomes a spot, reddish-white or white, 25 the priest shall examine it. If the hair in the spot has turned white and it appears deeper than the skin, it is a leprous[a] disease; it has broken out in the burn, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean. This is a leprous[a] disease. 26 But if the priest examines it and the hair in the spot is not white, and it is no deeper than the skin but has abated, the priest shall confine him seven days. 27 The priest shall examine him the seventh day; if it is spreading in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean. This is a leprous[a] disease. 28 But if the spot remains in one place and does not spread in the skin but has abated, it is a swelling from the burn, and the priest shall pronounce him clean; for it is the scar of the burn.

29 When a man or woman has a disease on the head or in the beard, 30 the priest shall examine the disease. If it appears deeper than the skin and the hair in it is yellow and thin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is an itch, a leprous[a] disease of the head or the beard. 31 If the priest examines the itching disease, and it appears no deeper than the skin and there is no black hair in it, the priest shall confine the person with the itching disease for seven days. 32 On the seventh day the priest shall examine the itch; if the itch has not spread, and there is no yellow hair in it, and the itch appears to be no deeper than the skin, 33 he shall shave, but the itch he shall not shave. The priest shall confine the person with the itch for seven days more. 34 On the seventh day the priest shall examine the itch; if the itch has not spread in the skin and it appears to be no deeper than the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean. He shall wash his clothes and be clean. 35 But if the itch spreads in the skin after he was pronounced clean, 36 the priest shall examine him. If the itch has spread in the skin, the priest need not seek for the yellow hair; he is unclean. 37 But if in his eyes the itch is checked, and black hair has grown in it, the itch is healed, he is clean; and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

38 When a man or a woman has spots on the skin of the body, white spots, 39 the priest shall make an examination, and if the spots on the skin of the body are of a dull white, it is a rash that has broken out on the skin; he is clean.

40 If anyone loses the hair from his head, he is bald but he is clean. 41 If he loses the hair from his forehead and temples, he has baldness of the forehead but he is clean.

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

42 But if there is on the bald head or the bald forehead a reddish-white diseased spot, it is a leprous[a] disease breaking out on his bald head or his bald forehead. 43 The priest shall examine him; if the diseased swelling is reddish-white on his bald head or on his bald forehead, which resembles a leprous[a] disease in the skin of the body, 44 he is leprous,[a] he is unclean. The priest shall pronounce him unclean; the disease is on his head.

45 The person who has the leprous[a] disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." 46 He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

47 Concerning clothing: when a leprous[a] disease appears in it, in woolen or linen cloth, 48 in warp or woof of linen or wool, or in a skin or in anything made of skin, 49 if the disease shows greenish or reddish in the garment, whether in warp or woof or in skin or in anything made of skin, it is a leprous[a] disease and shall be shown to the priest. 50 The priest shall examine the disease, and put the diseased article aside for seven days. 51 He shall examine the disease on the seventh day. If the disease has spread in the cloth, in warp or woof, or in the skin, whatever be the use of the skin, this is a spreading leprous[a] disease; it is unclean. 52 He shall burn the clothing, whether diseased in warp or woof, woolen or linen, or anything of skin, for it is a spreading leprous[a] disease; it shall be burned in fire.

53 If the priest makes an examination, and the disease has not spread in the clothing, in warp or woof or in anything of skin, 54 the priest shall command them to wash the article in which the disease appears, and he shall put it aside seven days more. 55 The priest shall examine the diseased article after it has been washed. If the diseased spot has not changed color, though the disease has not spread, it is unclean; you shall burn it in fire, whether the leprous[a] spot is on the inside or on the outside.

56 If the priest makes an examination, and the disease has abated after it is washed, he shall tear the spot out of the cloth, in warp or woof, or out of skin. 57 If it appears again in the garment, in warp or woof, or in anything of skin, it is spreading; you shall burn with fire that in which the disease appears. 58 But the cloth, warp or woof, or anything of skin from which the disease disappears when you have washed it, shall then be washed a second time, and it shall be clean.

59 This is the ritual for a leprous[a] disease in a cloth of wool or linen, either in warp or woof, or in anything of skin, to decide whether it is clean or unclean.

14 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 This shall be the ritual for the leprous[a] person at the time of his cleansing:

He shall be brought to the priest; 3 the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall make an examination. If the disease is healed in the leprous[a] person, 4 the priest shall command that two living clean birds and cedarwood and crimson yarn and hyssop be brought for the one

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

impurity and to limit exposure to impurity in the event that it is surface affliction. **38–44:** These verses consider difficult cases and supplement vv. 2–37 by focusing upon skin conditions that do not cause impurity. **45–46:** The afflicted person dresses as a mourner (cf. 10.6; Ezek 24.17,22) because of the association between surface affliction and death. *He shall live alone . . . outside the camp*, cf. 2 Kings 7.3–8; 15.5; 2 Chr 26.21; Lk 17.12. Separation from the camp limits the spread of impurity, but impurity still contaminates the sanctuary (cf. 14.1–32).

13.47–59: Surface affliction on cloth. Illustrating the systematization of Priestly thought, the instructions for fabrics are similar in structure and detail to the preceding instructions for skin diseases. The surface affliction includes various forms of mold, fungus, and mildew. **51:** *Spreading*, meaning uncertain. Unlike a person with surface affliction, an afflicted fabric, like the twice-afflicted house (14.45), cannot be cleansed. **59:** Summary postscript for vv. 47–59, which interrupts 13.1–46 and 14.1–32.

14.1–32: Purification after surface affliction. The ritual here does not heal surface affliction; it only purifies

who is to be cleansed. [5] The priest shall command that one of the birds be slaughtered over fresh water in an earthen vessel. [6] He shall take the living bird with the cedarwood and the crimson yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the fresh water. [7] He shall sprinkle it seven times upon the one who is to be cleansed of the leprous[a] disease; then he shall pronounce him clean, and he shall let the living bird go into the open field. [8] The one who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and bathe himself in water, and he shall be clean. After that he shall come into the camp, but shall live outside his tent seven days. [9] On the seventh day he shall shave all his hair: of head, beard, eyebrows; he shall shave all his hair. Then he shall wash his clothes, and bathe his body in water, and he shall be clean.

[10] On the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, and one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish, and a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of choice flour mixed with oil, and one log[b] of oil. [11] The priest who cleanses shall set the person to be cleansed, along with these things, before the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. [12] The priest shall take one of the lambs, and offer it as a guilt offering, along with the log[b] of oil, and raise them as an elevation offering before the LORD. [13] He shall slaughter the lamb in the place where the sin offering and the burnt offering are slaughtered in the holy place; for the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest: it is most holy. [14] The priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of the right foot. [15] The priest shall take some of the log[b] of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand, [16] and dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand and sprinkle some oil with his finger seven times before the LORD. [17] Some of the oil that remains in his hand the priest shall put on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of the right foot, on top of the blood of the guilt offering. [18] The rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed. Then the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the LORD: [19] the priest shall offer the sin offering, to make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. Afterward he shall slaughter the burnt offering; [20] and the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement on his behalf and he shall be clean.

[21] But if he is poor and cannot afford so much, he shall take one male lamb for a guilt offering to be elevated, to make atonement on his behalf, and one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offer-

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

[b] A liquid measure

a person. Note that the priest only performs the rites after confirming the person's recovery (v. 3). **2:** *He shall be brought*, better, "It shall be reported," cf. v. 3. **4–7:** The same rite is found in vv. 49–53 for purifying houses. **4:** Many of the materials in this verse probably have symbolic significance and are well attested in biblical and other ancient Near Eastern rituals (cf. Ex 12.22; Num 19.6; Job 9.19; Ps 51.7). **6–7:** The person's impurity is purged by the sprinkling of blood and transferred to the living bird, which carries it away (cf. the goat in 16.21–22). **8–9:** The staged transition constitutes a rite of passage from impure to pure and underscores the severity of impurity caused by surface affliction. **10–20:** The eighth-day sacrifices purge the tabernacle of impurity (cf. 4.1–6.7). **10:** *Ephah,* about 21 qts (23 liters). *Log,* about 11 oz (.32 l). **12:** *Guilt offering*, better, "reparation offering"; see 5.14–6.7n. *Elevation offering*, see 7.30n. **14,17,25,28:** For smearing of blood and oil and the significance of the ear, thumb, and toe, see 8.10–12,30n.; 8.23–24n. **20:** *And he shall be clean*, a summary statement for the foregoing purification rituals. The sacrifices purify the tabernacle, not the person. **21–32:** More affordable provisions for purification (cf. 2.1–16n.; 5.7–13n.; 12.6–8n.).

ing and a log[a] of oil; [22] also two turtledoves or two pigeons, such as he can afford, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. [23] On the eighth day he shall bring them for his cleansing to the priest, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, before the LORD; [24] and the priest shall take the lamb of the guilt offering and the log[a] of oil, and the priest shall raise them as an elevation offering before the LORD. [25] The priest shall slaughter the lamb of the guilt offering and shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of the right foot. [26] The priest shall pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand, [27] and shall sprinkle with his right finger some of the oil that is in his left hand seven times before the LORD. [28] The priest shall put some of the oil that is in his hand on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot, where the blood of the guilt offering was placed. [29] The rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed, to make atonement on his behalf before the LORD. [30] And he shall offer, of the turtledoves or pigeons such as he can afford, [31] one[b] for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, along with a grain offering; and the priest shall make atonement before the LORD on behalf of the one being cleansed. [32] This is the ritual for the one who has a leprous[c] disease, who cannot afford the offerings for his cleansing.

[33] The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

[34] When you come into the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a leprous[c] disease in a house in the land of your possession, [35] the owner of the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, "There seems to me to be some sort of disease in my house." [36] The priest shall command that they empty the house before the priest goes to examine the disease, or all that is in the house will become unclean; and afterward the priest shall go in to inspect the house. [37] He shall examine the disease; if the disease is in the walls of the house with greenish or reddish spots, and if it appears to be deeper than the surface, [38] the priest shall go outside to the door of the house and shut up the house seven days. [39] The priest shall come again on the seventh day and make an inspection; if the disease has spread in the walls of the house, [40] the priest shall command that the stones in which the disease appears be taken out and thrown into an unclean place outside the city. [41] He shall have the inside of the house scraped thoroughly, and the plaster that is scraped off shall be dumped in an unclean place outside the city. [42] They shall take other stones and put them in the place of those stones, and take other plaster and plaster the house.

[43] If the disease breaks out again in the house, after he has taken out the stones and scraped the house and plastered it, [44] the priest shall go and make inspection; if the disease has spread in the house, it is a spreading leprous[c] disease in the house; it is unclean. [45] He shall have the house torn down, its stones and timber and all the plaster of the house, and taken outside the city to an unclean place. [46] All who

[a] A liquid measure

[b] Gk Syr: Heb *afford,* [31]*such as he can afford, one*

[c] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

14.33–53: Surface affliction in houses. 34: *When you come into the land*, in the narrative, the Israelites are living in the wilderness camp; they therefore do not currently live in houses. *I put*, surface affliction is viewed as divine punishment (Num 12.10; Deut 28.27,35; 2 Sam 3.29; 2 Kings 5.26–27; 2 Chr 26.16–21). **35:** *The owner*, though it is potentially inconvenient and even a potentially significant financial loss (cf. vv. 43–45), the homeowner is expected to report possible surface affliction because of the threat of contamination and its effect on the entire community. **36:** The impurity caused by surface affliction will contaminate other objects and persons in the house (cf. vv. 46–47), but an allowance is made for removing objects before the priest officially diagnoses surface affliction. **40–41,45:** Disposal outside the city parallels the exclusion of surface-afflicted persons out-

enter the house while it is shut up shall be unclean until the evening; 47 and all who sleep in the house shall wash their clothes; and all who eat in the house shall wash their clothes.

48 If the priest comes and makes an inspection, and the disease has not spread in the house after the house was plastered, the priest shall pronounce the house clean; the disease is healed. 49 For the cleansing of the house he shall take two birds, with cedarwood and crimson yarn and hyssop, 50 and shall slaughter one of the birds over fresh water in an earthen vessel, 51 and shall take the cedarwood and the hyssop and the crimson yarn, along with the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the slaughtered bird and the fresh water, and sprinkle the house seven times. 52 Thus he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird, and with the fresh water, and with the living bird, and with the cedarwood and hyssop and crimson yarn; 53 and he shall let the living bird go out of the city into the open field; so he shall make atonement for the house, and it shall be clean.

54 This is the ritual for any leprous[a] disease: for an itch, 55 for leprous[a] diseases in clothing and houses, 56 and for a swelling or an eruption or a spot, 57 to determine when it is unclean and when it is clean. This is the ritual for leprous[a] diseases.

15 The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 2 Speak to the people of Israel and say to them:

When any man has a discharge from his member,[b] his discharge makes him ceremonially unclean. 3 The uncleanness of his discharge is this: whether his member[b] flows with his discharge, or his member[b] is stopped from discharging, it is uncleanness for him. 4 Every bed on which the one with the discharge lies shall be unclean; and everything on which he sits shall be unclean. 5 Anyone who touches his bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. 6 All who sit on anything on which the one with the discharge has sat shall wash their clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. 7 All who touch the body of the one with the discharge shall wash their clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. 8 If the one with the discharge spits on persons who are clean, then they shall wash their clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. 9 Any saddle on which the one with the discharge rides shall be unclean. 10 All who touch anything that was under him shall be unclean until the evening, and all who carry such a thing shall wash their clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. 11 All those whom the one with the discharge touches without his having rinsed his hands in water shall wash their clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. 12 Any earthen vessel that the one with the discharge touches shall be broken; and every vessel of wood shall be rinsed in water.

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

[b] Heb *flesh*

side the camp (13.46). **46–47:** See 11.24–40n. **54–57:** A typical Priestly conclusion formula for chs 13–14, though the items in the summary are ordered differently in the chapters.

15.1–33: Sexual discharges. This chapter outlines impurities caused by regular and irregular discharges from the genitals. As with other causes of contamination, sexual flows generate impurity because of the perceived loss of life that accompanies them. The chapter exhibits a chiastic structure of impurity sources: A: Abnormal male discharge (vv. 2–15); B: Normal male discharge (seminal emission; vv. 16–17); C: Seminal discharge during sexual intercourse, affecting both men and women (v. 18); B': Normal female discharge (menstruation; vv. 19–24); A': Abnormal female discharge (vv. 25–30). None of these sexual discharges is considered sinful; rather, the contamination caused by them threatens the presence of the deity and thus requires careful measures for containment and purification (cf. 11.1–16.34n.). **3:** *Flows . . . stopped*, likely due to one of several infections of the urethra, including gonorrhea. **4–12:** Impurity is contagious through physical contact with the impure person or objects contaminated by him. **13–15:** See 14.8–9n.; 14.10–20n. *Sin offering*, lit. "purification offering." **18:** Normal

13 When the one with a discharge is
cleansed of his discharge, he shall count
seven days for his cleansing; he shall wash
his clothes and bathe his body in fresh
water, and he shall be clean. 14 On the eighth
day he shall take two turtledoves or two
pigeons and come before the LORD to the
entrance of the tent of meeting and give
them to the priest. 15 The priest shall offer
them, one for a sin offering and the other for
a burnt offering; and the priest shall make
atonement on his behalf before the LORD for
his discharge.

16 If a man has an emission of semen, he
shall bathe his whole body in water, and be
unclean until the evening. 17 Everything made
of cloth or of skin on which the semen falls
shall be washed with water, and be unclean
until the evening. 18 If a man lies with a
woman and has an emission of semen, both
of them shall bathe in water, and be unclean
until the evening.

19 When a woman has a discharge of blood
that is her regular discharge from her body,
she shall be in her impurity for seven days,
and whoever touches her shall be unclean
until the evening. 20 Everything upon which
she lies during her impurity shall be unclean;
everything also upon which she sits shall be
unclean. 21 Whoever touches her bed shall
wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and
be unclean until the evening. 22 Whoever
touches anything upon which she sits shall
wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be
unclean until the evening; 23 whether it is the
bed or anything upon which she sits, when
he touches it he shall be unclean until the
evening. 24 If any man lies with her, and her
impurity falls on him, he shall be unclean
seven days; and every bed on which he lies
shall be unclean.

25 If a woman has a discharge of blood for
many days, not at the time of her impurity,
or if she has a discharge beyond the time of
her impurity, all the days of the discharge
she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the
days of her impurity, she shall be unclean.
26 Every bed on which she lies during all
the days of her discharge shall be treated
as the bed of her impurity; and everything
on which she sits shall be unclean, as in the
uncleanness of her impurity. 27 Whoever
touches these things shall be unclean, and
shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water,
and be unclean until the evening. 28 If she is
cleansed of her discharge, she shall count
seven days, and after that she shall be clean.
29 On the eighth day she shall take two
turtledoves or two pigeons and bring them
to the priest at the entrance of the tent of
meeting. 30 The priest shall offer one for a
sin offering and the other for a burnt offer-
ing; and the priest shall make atonement on
her behalf before the LORD for her unclean
discharge.

31 Thus you shall keep the people of Israel
separate from their uncleanness, so that they
do not die in their uncleanness by defiling my
tabernacle that is in their midst.

32 This is the ritual for those who have
a discharge: for him who has an emission
of semen, becoming unclean thereby, 33 for
her who is in the infirmity of her period, for
anyone, male or female, who has a discharge,
and for the man who lies with a woman who
is unclean.

sexual relations cause impurity, yet according to the Priestly authors, God commands humans to "be fruitful and multiply" (e.g., Gen 1.28; 9.1,7). It is thus clear that sources of impurity are generally unrelated to sin. **19–24:** Menstrual impurity persists for seven days, presumably approximating the longest duration of regular menstruation. The strength of the impurity communicated by the menstruant is related to the intensity of contact with her (cf. 11.24–40n.). No rules for purification are given; presumably the woman bathes and launders on the seventh day, and waits until evening (2 Sam 11.2,4; cf. Num 19.19). **24:** *If any man lies with her, and her impurity falls on him*, lit., "If any man lies with her, with the result that her impurity falls on him." Although it communicates impurity, intercourse with a menstruant is permitted by P (contrast 18.19 and 20.18, which are H). **25–30:** Irregular female blood flow, like irregular male discharge, produces impurity until the flow stops and requires a seven-day waiting period and sacrificial blood for sanctuary purification (cf. vv. 13–15). **31:** The rationale for proper disposal of impurity: impurity is attracted to the sanctuary, where it will accumulate and threaten the divine presence (cf. 4.1–6.7n.; 11.1–16.34n.). **32–33:** A typical Priestly summary postscript (cf. 7.37–38; 11.46–47; 13.59; 14.54–57).

16 The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died. [2] The LORD said to Moses:

Tell your brother Aaron not to come just at any time into the sanctuary inside the curtain before the mercy seat[a] that is upon the ark, or he will die; for I appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.[a] [3] Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. [4] He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and shall have the linen undergarments next to his body, fasten the linen sash, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy vestments. He shall bathe his body in water, and then put them on. [5] He shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

[6] Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. [7] He shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting; [8] and Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel.[b] [9] Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD, and offer it as a sin offering; [10] but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel[b] shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.[b]

[11] Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house; he shall slaughter the bull as a sin offering for himself. [12] He shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of crushed sweet incense, and he shall bring it inside the curtain [13] and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat[a] that is upon the covenant,[c] or he will die. [14] He shall take some of the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat,[a] and before the mercy seat[a] he shall sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times.

[15] He shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the curtain, and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull,

[a] Or *the cover*
[b] Traditionally rendered *a scapegoat*
[c] Or *treaty*, or *testament*; Heb *eduth*

16.1–34: The Day of Atonement. This chapter describes the annual purification of the entire tabernacle complex, including the purgation (Heb "kippur") of the inner sanctum of the deity, the holy of holies. According to v. 29, "yom hakkippurim" ("the day of purifications," cf. 23.26–32; 25.9)—in later Judaism, Yom Kippur (often mistranslated as the Day of Atonement)—is the tenth day of the seventh month. Though the sanctuary complex is regularly purged by the blood of purification offerings, further purification ensures thorough cleansing. Moreover, routine purification does not purge the contamination of intentional sins, which penetrates all the way into the holy of holies and is therefore especially threatening to the deity (cf. 4.1–35n.). This system creates the remarkable circumstance that the holy of holies, purged only once each year, could become the most polluted area in the tabernacle complex. This potential flaw in the Priestly system of purification reveals the fundamental optimism of its authors: in their view, once Israel knows the commandments of God, they will carefully obey them. Intentional sin is expected to be a rare occurrence; unintentional sin and impurities, by contrast, are unavoidable and thus greater concerns. **1:** *After the death of the two sons of Aaron*, some interpreters have argued that ch 16 originally followed ch 10 and that its purification ritual was intended to purge the tabernacle of corpse contamination after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, and after other emergencies, rather than once a year on Yom Kippur. Alternatively, this reference simply situates ch 16 in the chronology of the overall narrative, perhaps indicating that chs 11–15 were not actually narrated immediately after the events of ch 10 (cf. 16.34b n.). **2:** *Mercy seat*, the cover of the ark upon which the cherubim are set (cf. Ex 25.17–22). **3:** See 4.3. *Sin offering*, lit. "purification offering" (cf. 4.1–35n.) **4:** See 8.6–9. **6–22:** Aaron applies the sacrificial blood to the sanctuary and its furnishings, effecting their purification. In later Judaism, after the Temple is destroyed, the focus of the Day of Atonement shifts to the repentance and forgiveness of individuals. **7:** *Tent of meeting*, see 1.1n. **8:** *Azazel*, probably, "angry" or "fierce god," a demonic figure (cf. 17.7), in contrast to the Israelite deity. Rabbinic interpreters understood *Azazel* as "the goat that goes away," i.e., the "scapegoat." **13:** When he enters

sprinkling it upon the mercy seat[a] and before the mercy seat.[a] 16 Thus he shall make atonement for the sanctuary, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel, and because of their transgressions, all their sins; and so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which remains with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. 17 No one shall be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the sanctuary until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. 18 Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement on its behalf, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and of the blood of the goat, and put it on each of the horns of the altar. 19 He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

20 When he has finished atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. 21 Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task.[b] 22 The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness.

23 Then Aaron shall enter the tent of meeting, and shall take off the linen vestments that he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there. 24 He shall bathe his body in water in a holy place, and put on his vestments; then he shall come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, making atonement for himself and for the people. 25 The fat of the sin offering he shall turn into smoke on the altar. 26 The one who sets the goat free for Azazel[c] shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward may come into the camp. 27 The bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken outside the camp; their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be consumed in fire. 28 The one who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward may come into the camp.

29 This shall be a statute to you forever: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall deny yourselves,[d] and shall do no work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you. 30 For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the LORD. 31 It is a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall deny yourselves;[d] it is a statute forever. 32 The priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his

[a] Or *the cover*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Traditionally rendered *a scapegoat*
[d] Or *shall fast*

the holy of holies, Aaron must burn incense to conceal the deity from his sight (cf. v. 2). **16:** The beginning of the verse is better translated, "He shall purify the sanctuary from the Israelites' impurities and, of all their sins, from their rebellious acts." Impurity and intentional sins are hereby both purged from the inner sanctum. *And so he shall do for the tent of meeting*, referring to the cleansing of the outer room of the tabernacle (cf. 4.5–7,16–18; Ex 30.10). *Remains*, better, "dwells." **18–19:** Working out from the inner and outer rooms of the tabernacle, Aaron is to purify the altar of burnt offerings in the courtyard. **21–22:** Aaron slaughtered one of the people's goats as a purification offering (v. 15). The other carries away their sins, which Aaron loads onto it by reciting them while placing *both his hands* on its head (contrast 1.4). *Wilderness*, a region viewed in the ancient Near East as the domain of demons. **29–34a:** An H addition to vv. 1–28+34b, which are P. H expands the ritual to include fasting and work cessation and thereby provides the laity a role in the Day of Atonement. **31:** *Sabbath of complete rest*, lit. "sabbath of sabbaths," emphasizing the requirement for a complete cessation of work. This term is also applied to the sabbath day (Ex 31.15; 35.2; Lev 23.3,32) and to the sabbath year (Lev 25.4). **34b:** Moses delivers the divine commands to Aaron, but Aaron does not perform them immediately because the Day of Atonement is six months away (see Introduction).

father's place shall make atonement, wearing the linen vestments, the holy vestments. 33 He shall make atonement for the sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. 34 This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the people of Israel once in the year for all their sins. And Moses did as the LORD had commanded him.

17 The LORD spoke to Moses: 2 Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the people of Israel and say to them: This is what the LORD has commanded. 3 If anyone of the house of Israel slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or slaughters it outside the camp, 4 and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to present it as an offering to the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD, he shall be held guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood, and he shall be cut off from the people. 5 This is in order that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they offer in the open field, that they may bring them to the LORD, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and offer them as sacrifices of well-being to the LORD. 6 The priest shall dash the blood against the altar of the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and turn the fat into smoke as a pleasing odor to the LORD, 7 so that they may no longer offer their sacrifices for goat-demons, to whom they prostitute themselves. This shall be a statute forever to them throughout their generations.

8 And say to them further: Anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, 9 and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to sacrifice it to the LORD, shall be cut off from the people.

10 If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people. 11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for mak-

17.1–26.46: The Holiness Collection. Most scholars agree that chs 17–26 (H) comprise a compositional stratum in the book of Leviticus separate from chs 1–16 (P). Chs 17–26 are especially concerned with holiness and extend the potential for holiness to the Israelite laity. For this reason, chs 17–26 are titled the Holiness Collection (see Introduction). Many scholars call this the Holiness Code, but like other ancient Near Eastern law collections, it is not a code: it has redundancies and contradictions, is not organized for use by judges, and is not complete. Though initially believed to be older than chs 1–16, recent scholarship has demonstrated that chs 17–26, as well as ch 27, are later additions to the preceding chapters meant to revise and supplement them. It is likely that H supplements P in part by borrowing and revising non-Priestly laws from the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy.

17.1–16: Slaughter. In light of the sacrificial laws in chs 1–7, H here provides a new set of regulations concerning eating meat. Most notably, H requires that the Israelites present as offerings at the sanctuary all sacrificeable animals that are slaughtered (vv. 3–7). This command supplements the P rules in Gen 9.3–4, which permit nonsacrificial slaughter of animals for meat, provided that no blood is consumed. Having received the sacrificial laws, Israel is obligated to treat every slaughter of a domesticated animal as a sacrifice. The Priestly source thus divides culinary history into three epochs: (1) Creation to Flood (vegetarianism, Gen 1.29–31); (2) Post-Flood to Sinai (nonsacrificial slaughter, Gen 9.3–4); (3) After Sinai (sacrificial slaughter of all domesticated animals, Lev 1–7; 17.3–7). Lev 17 contrasts markedly with Deut 12.15–27, which expressly permit profane slaughter of sacrificeable animals. **3–4:** All slaughtered sacrificeable animals must be presented as offerings. Such sacrifices, intended to provide meat for eating, are undoubtedly well-being offerings (cf. 3.1–17; 7.11–34). Within its wilderness setting, H envisions a single sanctuary, making adherence to this command possible. **4:** Nonsacrificial slaughter is tantamount to murder (cf. 1.4; 17.11), a view that enforces sanctuary slaughter. **5,7:** With the introduction of sacrifice, what was once nonsacrificial slaughter is perceived as sacrificial. Any slaughter of sacrificeable animals outside of the sanctuary is viewed as sacrifice to other deities or to demons. Prostitution is a frequent metaphor for worshiping other gods. *Goat demons*, cf. 16.8n.; 2 Chr 11.15; Isa 13.21; 34.14. **8–9:** Foreigners residing among the Israelites presumably may slaughter domesticated animals nonsacrificially, but neither Israelites nor foreigners may offer sacrifices to any deity but the LORD. **10–14:** Consumption of blood from both wild and domesticated animals is prohibited (cf. Gen 9.4; Lev 3.17; Deut 12.23–25). Once the blood

ing atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement. 12 Therefore I have said to the people of Israel: No person among you shall eat blood, nor shall any alien who resides among you eat blood. 13 And anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.

14 For the life of every creature—its blood is its life; therefore I have said to the people of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off. 15 All persons, citizens or aliens, who eat what dies of itself or what has been torn by wild animals, shall wash their clothes, and bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until the evening; then they shall be clean. 16 But if they do not wash themselves or bathe their body, they shall bear their guilt.

18 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: I am the Lord your God. 3 You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes. 4 My ordinances you shall observe and my statutes you shall keep, following them: I am the Lord your God. 5 You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the Lord.

6 None of you shall approach anyone near of kin to uncover nakedness: I am the Lord. 7 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. 8 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is the nakedness of your father. 9 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether born at home or born abroad. 10 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter, for their nakedness is your own nakedness. 11 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, begotten by your father, since she is your sister. 12 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's flesh. 13 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's flesh. 14 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother, that is, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt. 15 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law: she is your son's wife; you shall not uncover her nakedness. 16 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness. 17 You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, and you shall not take[a] her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to uncover her nakedness; they are your[b] flesh; it is depravity. 18 And you shall not take[a] a woman as a

[a] Or *marry*
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *your*

is drained, the meat may be eaten. **11:** *For making atonement for your lives*, better, "as a ransom for your lives." According to H, sacrificial blood on the altar not only purifies but also ransoms (Heb "kipper") the offerer from shedding the animal's blood (cf. 1.4; 17.4). Compare the payment of a ransom in Ex 30.11–16 and Num 31.48–50 to appease divine wrath. **15–16:** Laypersons (but not priests; cf. 22.8) may eat an animal that died naturally or was killed by other animals, but they must purify afterwards (cf. 11.40; contrast Ex 22.30; Deut 14.21). Later Judaism prohibits such eating, following Deut 14.21.

18.1–30: Foreign abominations. The prohibitions in this chapter are primarily sexual in nature, though child sacrifice to Molech is also included. These sins are associated with foreigners and especially the Canaanites, whom God will remove from their land so that Israel may dwell in it. There is no evidence that the Canaanites actually engaged in these practices. **1–5:** A general prohibition against following the statutes of the Egyptians and Canaanites, and adjuration instead to obey the Lord's commands, which follow in vv. 6–23. **2,4:** *I am the Lord your God*, a characteristic H expression, underscoring that because the Israelites belong to the Lord, they must be distinct from other nations and follow the rules of their god alone. **6–20,22–23:** Sexual prohibitions, with special focus on various forms of incest. 20.10–21 enumerates punishments for sexual sins; cf. Deut 27.20–23. **6:** *Uncover nakedness*, nakedness is a euphemism for the genitals, and the entire phrase refers to intercourse.

rival to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive.

19 You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness. 20 You shall not have sexual relations with your kinsman's wife, and defile yourself with her. 21 You shall not give any of your offspring to sacrifice them[a] to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. 22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. 23 You shall not have sexual relations with any animal and defile yourself with it, nor shall any woman give herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it: it is perversion.

24 Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves. 25 Thus the land became defiled; and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. 26 But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you 27 (for the inhabitants of the land, who were before you, committed all of these abominations, and the land became defiled); 28 otherwise the land will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. 29 For whoever commits any of these abominations shall be cut off from their people. 30 So keep my charge not to commit any of these abominations that were done before you, and not to defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God.

19 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. 3 You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. 4 Do not turn to idols or make cast images for yourselves: I am the LORD your God.

5 When you offer a sacrifice of well-being to the LORD, offer it in such a way that it is acceptable in your behalf. 6 It shall be eaten on the same day you offer it, or on the next day; and anything left over until the third day shall be consumed in fire. 7 If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an abomination; it will not be acceptable. 8 All who eat it shall be subject to punishment, because they have profaned what is holy to the LORD; and any such person shall be cut off from the people.

9 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you

[a] Heb *to pass them over*

17: *Depravity*, a term of opprobrium employed by H for sexual sins. **19:** Contrast 15.24, which allows intercourse with a menstruant. **20:** *Defile yourself*, referring to moral impurity, which is prohibited by H. Ritual impurity, by contrast, is permitted (cf. 15.18n.). **21:** *Molech*, a Canaanite deity associated with child sacrifice; see 20.2–5. *Profane the name*, to deny the Israelite God the honor and fame due him or to dishonor him directly. It also seems to connote diminishing the deity's holiness. **24–30:** God avenged the land for the defilement caused by its inhabitants, whom the land in turn expelled. Such will be the fate of the Israelites if they too commit the sins prohibited in vv. 6–23. Punishment for prohibited moral impurity is often exile or other destruction (Isa 64.4–11; Ezek 20.38; 22.2–16; 39.23–24; cf. Lev 26.33–39). **25:** For crimes and sins polluting the land, see Num 35.33–34; Isa 24.5–7; Ezek 22.24; Ezra 9.11. **29:** *Cut off*, see 7.19–21n.

19.1–37: Holiness of Israelite laypersons. This chapter is a miscellany of ethical and ritual laws introduced by the command for all Israelites to be holy (v. 2), an imperative fulfilled through careful observance of all the statutes presented by the Priestly authors. **2:** Lay holiness expresses the separateness of Israel from the other peoples (cf. vv. 36–37; 25.38,55): Israelites worship the LORD and express their fidelity through obedience to the LORD's commands (cf. 11.44–45; 20.7–8,24–26; Num 15.40–41). Cf. Ex 19.6; Deut 14.2,21; 26.19; 28.6. **3–4,11–13:** These verses have close correspondence with the Decalogue (cf. Ex 20.2–17; Deut 5.6–21). **5–8:** Cf. 7.15–18. The grammatical formulation here differs in part from 7.15–18 (here, genuine second-person plural construction; in ch 7, third-person singular). Note too that 7.15–18 is addressed to the priests alone (6.24) while this chapter is addressed to the Israelite laity (v. 2). Verse 8 also clarifies the nature of the penalty for one who eats the well-being offering on the third day: as in the case of consuming the sacrifice in an impure state, eating on the third day leads to complete destruction of the offender's lineage (cf. 7.19–21). **9–10:** Cf. Ex 23.10–11; Lev 23.22;

shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God.

11 You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. 12 And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD.

13 You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. 14 You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

15 You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. 16 You shall not go around as a slanderer[a] among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood[b] of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

17 You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. 18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

19 You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials.

20 If a man has sexual relations with a woman who is a slave, designated for another man but not ransomed or given her freedom, an inquiry shall be held. They shall not be put to death, since she has not been freed; 21 but he shall bring a guilt offering for himself to the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, a ram as guilt offering. 22 And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of guilt offering before the LORD for his sin that he committed; and the sin he committed shall be forgiven him.

23 When you come into the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall regard their fruit as forbidden;[c] three years it shall be forbidden[d] to you, it must not be eaten. 24 In the fourth year all their fruit shall be set apart for rejoicing in the LORD. 25 But in the fifth year you may eat of their fruit, that their yield may be increased for you: I am the LORD your God.

26 You shall not eat anything with its blood. You shall not practice augury or witchcraft. 27 You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. 28 You shall not make any gashes in your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the LORD.

29 Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, that the land not become prostituted and full of depravity. 30 You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.

31 Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.

32 You shall rise before the aged, and defer to the old; and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

33 When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. 34 The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

35 You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight, or quantity. 36 You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *stand against the blood*
[c] Heb *as their uncircumcision*
[d] Heb *uncircumcision*

25.2–7; Deut 24.19–22; Ruth 2.1–10. **15:** Cf. Ex 22.2–3; Deut 1.17; 16.18–20. **17–18:** For attitudes and actions toward foreigners, see 17.8–9; 19.33–34; 25.39–46. **18b:** This verse, along with Deut 6.5, is quoted in Mt 22.37–40 (cf. Mk 12.28–33; Lk 10.27; Rom 13.9; Gal 5.14). The neighbor here is a fellow Israelite (cf. vv. 17,34). **19:** One reason mixtures are prohibited is to remind the people to keep themselves distinct, i.e., holy (cf. Deut 22.9–11). The mixture of wool and linen is reserved for the priestly vestments (Ex 28.6; 39.29) and fringes to be worn (Num 15.37–41). **20–22:** Contrast the case of the free, betrothed woman in 20.10; cf. Ex 22.16–17; Deut 22.23–27. **26:** *Blood*, cf. 3.17n.; 17.10–14n. For prohibitions against various forms of divination, see also v. 31; Ex 22.18; Deut 18.9–14. **27–28:** Cf. 21.5n. **35–36:** Cf. Deut 25.13–16; Am 8.5; Mic 6.11. An *ephah* was a dry measure equivalent to ca. 21 qts (23 liters); a *hin* was a liquid measure equivalent to ca. 1 gal (3.8 liters).

and an honest hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. 37 You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them: I am the LORD.

20 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Say further to the people of Israel:

Any of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside in Israel, who give any of their offspring to Molech shall be put to death; the people of the land shall stone them to death. 3 I myself will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people, because they have given of their offspring to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name. 4 And if the people of the land should ever close their eyes to them, when they give of their offspring to Molech, and do not put them to death, 5 I myself will set my face against them and against their family, and will cut them off from among their people, them and all who follow them in prostituting themselves to Molech.

6 If any turn to mediums and wizards, prostituting themselves to them, I will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people. 7 Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am the LORD your God. 8 Keep my statutes, and observe them; I am the LORD; I sanctify you. 9 All who curse father or mother shall be put to death; having cursed father or mother, their blood is upon them.

10 If a man commits adultery with the wife of[a] his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death. 11 The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall be put to death; their blood is upon them. 12 If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall be put to death; they have committed perversion, their blood is upon them. 13 If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them. 14 If a man takes a wife and her mother also, it is depravity; they shall be burned to death, both he and they, that there may be no depravity among you. 15 If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he shall be put to death; and you shall kill the animal. 16 If a woman approaches any animal and has sexual relations with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.

17 If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace, and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people; he has uncovered his sister's nakedness, he shall be subject to punishment. 18 If a man lies with a woman having her sickness and uncovers her nakedness, he has laid bare her flow and she has laid bare her flow of blood; both of them shall be cut off from their people. 19 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister, for that is to lay bare one's own flesh; they shall be subject to punishment. 20 If a man lies with his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness; they shall be subject to punishment; they shall die childless. 21 If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity; he has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.

22 You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them, so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out. 23 You shall not follow the practices of the nation that I am driving out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. 24 But I have said to you: You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am the LORD your God; I have

[a] Heb repeats *if a man commits adultery with the wife of*

20.1–27: Various prohibitions. Some of the laws in chs 18–19 are repeated here, although many are in a different legal form (some of the absolute prohibitions [apodictic laws] of ch 18 are here formulated as legal cases [casuistic laws] with stated penalties). Other laws are also added. The significant overlap between the two chapters suggests that they are independent reflections of a common tradition subsequently compiled by H. **2:** *Molech*, see 18.21n. **5:** *Cut them off*, see 7.19–21n. **5–6:** *Prostituting*, cf. 17.5,7n. **7–8:** *Consecrate yourselves*, i.e., separate from foreign worship practices by following the LORD's commands (cf. vv. 24–26). **9:** Cf. Ex 21.17. **10–21:** Cf. 18.6–20,22–23. **18:** *Sickness*, i.e., her menstrual period (cf. 15.33). Contrast 15.24. **20–21:** *Die childless*, perhaps a variant of the "cut off" formula (cf. 7.19–21n.). **22–26:** A concluding exhortation similar to 18.24–30;

separated you from the peoples. 25 You shall therefore make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; you shall not bring abomination on yourselves by animal or by bird or by anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. 26 You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine.

27 A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned to death, their blood is upon them.

21 The LORD said to Moses: Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them:

No one shall defile himself for a dead person among his relatives, 2 except for his nearest kin: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his brother; 3 likewise, for a virgin sister, close to him because she has had no husband, he may defile himself for her. 4 But he shall not defile himself as a husband among his people and so profane himself. 5 They shall not make bald spots upon their heads, or shave off the edges of their beards, or make any gashes in their flesh. 6 They shall be holy to their God, and not profane the name of their God; for they offer the LORD's offerings by fire, the food of their God; therefore they shall be holy. 7 They shall not marry a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled; neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband. For they are holy to their God, 8 and you shall treat them as holy, since they offer the food of your God; they shall be holy to you, for I the LORD, I who sanctify you, am holy. 9 When the daughter of a priest profanes herself through prostitution, she profanes her father; she shall be burned to death.

10 The priest who is exalted above his fellows, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured and who has been consecrated to wear the vestments, shall not dishevel his hair, nor tear his vestments. 11 He shall not go where there is a dead body; he shall not defile himself even for his father or mother. 12 He shall not go outside the sanctuary and thus profane the sanctuary of his God; for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the LORD. 13 He shall marry only a woman who is a virgin. 14 A widow, or a divorced woman, or a woman who has been defiled, a prostitute, these he shall not marry. He shall marry a virgin of his own kin, 15 that he may not profane his offspring among his kin; for I am the LORD; I sanctify him.

16 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 17 Speak to Aaron and say: No one of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the food of his God. 18 For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, one who is blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, 19 or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, 20 or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles. 21 No descendant of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the LORD's offerings by fire; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the food of his God. 22 He may eat the food of his God, of the most holy as well as of the holy. 23 But he shall not come near the curtain or approach

cf. 20.7–8n. **24:** *Milk and honey*, a typical biblical description of the land of Canaan (e.g., Ex 3.8; Deut 6.3). **27:** Because it follows the concluding paragraph, this verse is likely a later insertion; cf. v. 6; 19.31.

21.1–22.33: Priestly restrictions and sacrificial rules. These chapters are directed primarily to the priests (21.1,17; 22.2; cf. 21.24; 22.18) and are especially concerned with maintaining their ritual holiness, which was granted to them through ordination (ch 8), as well as the holiness of the sacrifices.

21.1–15: Because of their regular contact with the sanctuary, priests must avoid impurities otherwise tolerated for lay Israelites. The high priest must observe greater restrictions (vv. 10–15) because of his closer contact with the sacred. **1:** *Defile himself*, through corpse contamination (cf. 10.4–7n.; Num 19). **5:** Apparently mourning rituals, also prohibited to nonpriests (19.27–28); cf. Deut 14.1–2; Isa 22.12; Jer 16.6. **6:** *Profane the name*, cf. 18.21n. *Offerings by fire*, see 1.1–3.17n. *Food of their God*, cf. 1.1–3.17n.; 1.9n. **8:** Though vv. 1b–15 are ostensibly directed to the priests and not the Israelite laity, this verse addresses all Israelites. **10–15:** Stricter regulations for the high priest. **10:** See 8.10–12,30n. **16–23:** Bodily defects disqualify priests from altar service, for they undermine the wholeness of the priest (cf. 22.17–25). However, such defects do not render them impure. Such priests may still

the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries; for I am the LORD; I sanctify them. 24 Thus Moses spoke to Aaron and to his sons and to all the people of Israel.

22 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Direct Aaron and his sons to deal carefully with the sacred donations of the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they may not profane my holy name; I am the LORD. 3 Say to them: If anyone among all your offspring throughout your generations comes near the sacred donations, which the people of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he is in a state of uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from my presence: I am the LORD. 4 No one of Aaron's offspring who has a leprous[a] disease or suffers a discharge may eat of the sacred donations until he is clean. Whoever touches anything made unclean by a corpse or a man who has had an emission of semen, 5 and whoever touches any swarming thing by which he may be made unclean or any human being by whom he may be made unclean—whatever his uncleanness may be— 6 the person who touches any such shall be unclean until evening and shall not eat of the sacred donations unless he has washed his body in water. 7 When the sun sets he shall be clean; and afterward he may eat of the sacred donations, for they are his food. 8 That which died or was torn by wild animals he shall not eat, becoming unclean by it: I am the LORD. 9 They shall keep my charge, so that they may not incur guilt and die in the sanctuary[b] for having profaned it: I am the LORD; I sanctify them.

10 No lay person shall eat of the sacred donations. No bound or hired servant of the priest shall eat of the sacred donations; 11 but if a priest acquires anyone by purchase, the person may eat of them; and those that are born in his house may eat of his food. 12 If a priest's daughter marries a layman, she shall not eat of the offering of the sacred donations; 13 but if a priest's daughter is widowed or divorced, without offspring, and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food. No lay person shall eat of it. 14 If a man eats of the sacred donation unintentionally, he shall add one-fifth of its value to it, and give the sacred donation to the priest. 15 No one shall profane the sacred donations of the people of Israel, which they offer to the LORD, 16 causing them to bear guilt requiring a guilt offering, by eating their sacred donations: for I am the LORD; I sanctify them.

17 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 18 Speak to Aaron and his sons and all the people of Israel and say to them: When anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens residing in Israel presents an offering, whether in payment of a vow or as a freewill offering that is offered to the LORD as a burnt offering, 19 to be acceptable in your behalf it shall be a male without blemish, of the cattle or the sheep or the goats. 20 You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable in your behalf.

21 When anyone offers a sacrifice of well-being to the LORD, in fulfillment of a vow or as a freewill offering, from the herd or from the flock, to be acceptable it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it. 22 Anything blind, or injured, or maimed, or having a discharge or an itch or scabs—these you shall not offer to the LORD or put any of them on the altar as offerings by fire to the LORD. 23 An ox or a lamb that has a limb too long or too short you may present for a freewill

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

[b] Vg: Heb *incur guilt for it and die in it*

eat of the offering portions designated for the priests (cf. Num 18.8–10). **22.1–16:** Rules for avoiding defilement of offerings. Verses 1–9 focus on priests and their impurity (cf. 11.1–16.34n.), while vv. 10–16 focus on laypersons. **2:** *Direct Aaron . . . sacred donations*, better, "Speak to Aaron and his sons so that they will keep themselves from the sacred donations," referring to times when priests who have contracted impurity are therefore barred from eating holy offering portions (cf. 7.20–21). **7:** *For they are his food*, offering portions are the priests' primary remuneration (Num 18.8–10). **8:** Unlike laypersons (cf. 11.39–40; 17.15–16), priests are prohibited from eating such animals. **9:** Death is the assumed penalty for trespass upon the sacred (cf. 10.2; 16.2). **14–16:** Cf. 5.14–16. **17–30:** Animals not accepted as well-being offerings. **17–25:** The topic of physical defect or impurity-causing disease connects these verses to 21.16–22.9. Anything or anyone contacting the altar must be without defect; cf. Mal

offering; but it will not be accepted for a vow.
24 Any animal that has its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut, you shall not offer to the LORD; such you shall not do within your land, 25 nor shall you accept any such animals from a foreigner to offer as food to your God; since they are mutilated, with a blemish in them, they shall not be accepted in your behalf.

26 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:
27 When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as the LORD's offering by fire. 28 But you shall not slaughter, from the herd or the flock, an animal with its young on the same day. 29 When you sacrifice a thanksgiving offering to the LORD, you shall sacrifice it so that it may be acceptable in your behalf.
30 It shall be eaten on the same day; you shall not leave any of it until morning: I am the LORD.

31 Thus you shall keep my commandments and observe them: I am the LORD. 32 You shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel: I am the LORD; I sanctify you, 33 I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the LORD.

23 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:
2 Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals.

3 Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work: it is a sabbath to the LORD throughout your settlements.

4 These are the appointed festivals of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall celebrate at the time appointed for them. 5 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight,[a] there shall be a passover offering to the LORD, 6 and on the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of unleavened bread to the LORD; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. 7 On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. 8 For seven days you shall present the LORD's offerings by fire; on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation: you shall not work at your occupations.

9 The LORD spoke to Moses: 10 Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest.
11 He shall raise the sheaf before the LORD, that you may find acceptance; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall raise it.
12 On the day when you raise the sheaf, you shall offer a lamb a year old, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD. 13 And the grain offering with it shall be two-tenths of an ephah of choice flour mixed with oil,

[a] Heb *between the two evenings*

1.6–14. **19–21:** *Acceptable*, lit. "accepted." See 1.4n.; cf. 22.25. **23:** This verse asserts differentiation and hierarchical valuation among freewill offerings (cf. 7.15–16). **30:** Cf. 7.15–18; 19.5–8. **31–33:** The Israelites' adherence to the commandments brings honor to the deity and assures his presence among the people. Failure to follow the commandments profanes that aspect of the holy God that is directly accessible to the people, his "name," i.e., his reputation (cf. 19.2,37; 20.7–8,24–26).

23.1–44: Calendar of sacred occasions. Alongside Num 28–29, which focus on the offerings required for each sacred occasion, this chapter outlines the Priestly calendar of religious holidays. For non-Priestly calendars, see Ex 23.10–17; 34.18–24; Deut 16. **2:** *Convocations*, better, "occasions." **2b–3:** An interpolation that elevates the sabbath to the level of the other sacred festivals. Note the nearly identical formulation of v. 2b and v. 4, which originally followed v. 2a. The equation of sabbath and sacred festivals may have led to the prohibition of work on the festivals, which is not attested in the non-Priestly calendars. *Sabbath of complete rest*, referring to the prohibition of all work (cf. v. 28; Num 29.7; Lev 16.31n.). On other holy occasions, regular occupational work is prohibited but not light work such as food preparation (23.7–8,21,25,35–36; Num 28.18,25–26; 29.1,12,35). **5–8:** The combined observance of Passover and the immediately following pilgrimage festival of unleavened bread is the first sacred occasion of the year. It coincides with the barley harvest. For further Priestly prescriptions concerning Passover and the festival of unleavened bread, see Ex 12.1–20,43–49; Num 9.1–14; 28.16–25. **5:** *First month*, March–April. **9–14:** The first-fruits offering from the barley harvest; cf. 19.23–25. **13:** *Ephah . . . hin,* see

an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD; and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin. 14 You shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements.

15 And from the day after the sabbath, from the day on which you bring the sheaf of the elevation offering, you shall count off seven weeks; they shall be complete. 16 You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the LORD. 17 You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering, each made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of choice flour, baked with leaven, as first fruits to the LORD. 18 You shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, one young bull, and two rams; they shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, along with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD. 19 You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of well-being. 20 The priest shall raise them with the bread of the first fruits as an elevation offering before the LORD, together with the two lambs; they shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. 21 On that same day you shall make proclamation; you shall hold a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a statute forever in all your settlements throughout your generations.

22 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the LORD your God.

23 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 24 Speak to the people of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of complete rest, a holy convocation commemorated with trumpet blasts. 25 You shall not work at your occupations; and you shall present the LORD's offering by fire.

26 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 27 Now, the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you: you shall deny yourselves[a] and present the LORD's offering by fire; 28 and you shall do no work during that entire day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God. 29 For anyone who does not practice self-denial[b] during that entire day shall be cut off from the people. 30 And anyone who does any work during that entire day, such a one I will destroy from the midst of the people. 31 You shall do no work: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements. 32 It shall be to you a sabbath of complete rest, and you shall deny yourselves;[a] on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening you shall keep your sabbath.

33 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 34 Speak to the people of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, and lasting seven days, there shall be the festival of booths[c] to the LORD. 35 The first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. 36 Seven days you shall present the LORD's offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a holy convocation and present the LORD's offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations.

37 These are the appointed festivals of the LORD, which you shall celebrate as times of

[a] Or *shall fast*
[b] Or *does not fast*
[c] Or *tabernacles*: Heb *succoth*

19.35–36n. **14:** *Statute forever . . . all your settlements*, hallmark H language (cf. vv. 21,31,41). **15–21:** Though this observance coincides with the "pilgrimage festival of weeks" elsewhere (Ex 34.22; Deut 16.10,16; cf. Ex 23.16), H leaves it unnamed and does not require any pilgrimage for it, perhaps because the community was occupied with the wheat harvest. **22:** See 19.9–10n. **23–25:** The beginning of the agricultural calendar. In later Jewish tradition, this calendar became preeminent, and thus the first day of the seventh month became the new year. **24:** The *trumpet blasts* (or, alternatively, "shouts") are intended to remind God of his people (cf. Num 10.10). **26–32:** Cf. ch 16. These verses correspond especially with 16.29–34a (H). **33–36:** The *festival of booths,* celebrating the

holy convocation, for presenting to the LORD offerings by fire—burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day— 38 apart from the sabbaths of the LORD, and apart from your gifts, and apart from all your votive offerings, and apart from all your freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD.

39 Now, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the festival of the LORD, lasting seven days; a complete rest on the first day, and a complete rest on the eighth day. 40 On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic[a] trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. 41 You shall keep it as a festival to the LORD seven days in the year; you shall keep it in the seventh month as a statute forever throughout your generations. 42 You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths, 43 so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

44 Thus Moses declared to the people of Israel the appointed festivals of the LORD.

24 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil of beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly. 3 Aaron shall set it up in the tent of meeting, outside the curtain of the covenant,[b] to burn from evening to morning before the LORD regularly; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. 4 He shall set up the lamps on the lampstand of pure gold[c] before the LORD regularly.

5 You shall take choice flour, and bake twelve loaves of it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. 6 You shall place them in two rows, six in a row, on the table of pure gold.[d] 7 You shall put pure frankincense with each row, to be a token offering for the bread, as an offering by fire to the LORD. 8 Every sabbath day Aaron shall set them in order before the LORD regularly as a commitment of the people of Israel, as a covenant forever. 9 They shall be for Aaron and his descendants, who shall eat them in a holy place, for they are most holy portions for him from the offerings by fire to the LORD, a perpetual due.

10 A man whose mother was an Israelite and whose father was an Egyptian came out among the people of Israel; and the Israelite woman's son and a certain Israelite began fighting in the camp. 11 The Israelite woman's

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *treaty*, or *testament*; Heb *eduth*
[c] Heb *pure lampstand*
[d] Heb *pure table*

fruit harvest (cf. Ex 23.16; 34.22; Deut 16.13; 1 Kings 8.65). **37–38:** An earlier conclusion to the chapter. **39–42:** Further instructions for the festival of booths. **40:** In Neh 8.14–17, these branches are used to construct booths. **43:** Only here is the festival of booths historicized. There is no mention of the Israelites living in booths in the stories of the Exodus and wilderness period. This claim may originate by analogy to the deity's wilderness tent sanctuary.

24.1–9: Ritual lamps and bread. These two regular rites (lighting lamps and displaying bread) performed by the high priest effect the perpetual worship of God in his sanctuary. As such, they are an appropriate sequel to the ritual calendar in ch 23. **1–4:** The lampstand and its maintenance; cf. Ex 27.20–21. **2:** *Lamp*, cf. Ex 25.31–40; 26.35; 27.20–21; 30.7–8; 37.17–24; 40.24–25; Num 8.1–4. **5–9:** On this bread and its table, see Ex 25.23–30; 26.35; 37.10–16; 40.22–23. **8:** This verse is better translated, "Every sabbath day in perpetuity he shall arrange it before the LORD; it is required from the Israelites until the end of time." Cf. 2.13n. **9:** The bread is not eaten by the deity, but is given to the priests as remuneration for their ritual service. It must be eaten in the sanctuary complex because of its absorption of holiness by close and prolonged proximity to the deity.

24.10–23: The case of the blasphemer and laws arising from it. The incident of the blasphemer unexpectedly interrupts the divine revelation of law, as in the case of Nadab and Abihu (cf. 9.1–10.20n.). Because no law had yet been given to address such a case of blasphemy (v. 12), God intervenes to resolve the issue and gives further legislation prompted by this case (cf. Num 9.6–14; 15.32–36; 27.1–11). **10:** The incident involves a "half-Israelite" of matrilineal descent, which prompts the question of his culpability. Verse 16 clarifies this issue. **11:** *Blasphemed*, likely referring to uttering a curse against the LORD (cf. v. 15), not simply pronouncing

son blasphemed the Name in a curse. And they brought him to Moses—now his mother's name was Shelomith, daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan— [12] and they put him in custody, until the decision of the LORD should be made clear to them.

[13] The LORD said to Moses, saying: [14] Take the blasphemer outside the camp; and let all who were within hearing lay their hands on his head, and let the whole congregation stone him. [15] And speak to the people of Israel, saying: Anyone who curses God shall bear the sin. [16] One who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer. Aliens as well as citizens, when they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death. [17] Anyone who kills a human being shall be put to death. [18] Anyone who kills an animal shall make restitution for it, life for life. [19] Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: [20] fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered. [21] One who kills an animal shall make restitution for it; but one who kills a human being shall be put to death. [22] You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen: for I am the LORD your God. [23] Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel; and they took the blasphemer outside the camp, and stoned him to death. The people of Israel did as the LORD had commanded Moses.

25 The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: [2] Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the LORD. [3] Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; [4] but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. [5] You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. [6] You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; [7] for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.

[8] You shall count off seven weeks[a] of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. [9] Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. [10] And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. [11] That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the

[a] Or *sabbaths*

his *Name* (a circumlocution for the divine proper name, Yahweh). The name is holy—belonging to God—but is accessible to all and thus particularly vulnerable to trespass. **14:** *Lay their hands*, ritually placing guilt upon the blasphemer (cf. 1.4n.; 16.21–22n.). **17–22:** Further laws arising from the blasphemer's case, each of which exhibits the measure-for-measure (talion) principle (cf. Ex 21.23–35; Deut 19.21). **23b:** The enactment of the divine command in v. 14.

25.1–26.2: The sabbatical and jubilee years. This unit institutes a fixed seventh-year and fiftieth-year rest for the land that is likely based on the seventh-year laws in Ex 23.10–11 and Deut 15.1–18. It also ties manumission of Hebrew slaves (called "hired servants") to the fiftieth year, termed the "jubilee." The sabbatical and jubilee years are coordinated numerically, and each is part of the larger system of social welfare legislated here. These laws are motivated by the conviction that the land and the Israelites each belong to God (vv. 23,42,55). **2–7:** In every seventh year all agricultural work must cease so that the land may observe a *sabbath of complete rest* (see 16.31n.); cf. Ex 23.10–12. **5–6:** The *aftergrowth* of the seventh year may be eaten, but it must not be harvested for use as in the preceding six years. **8–17:** The jubilee (from Heb "yobel," meaning "ram's horn," blown to signal the holy day) is to begin on the Day of Atonement in the fiftieth year, counted according to the sabbatical years. All agricultural work must cease, debts and indentured servants are released, and ancestral property that was sold reverts to its original owners. Contrast Ex 21.2–6; Deut 15.1–3,12–18; Jer 34.8–22, where the seventh year serves some of these purposes. There is no evidence for the practice of the jubilee in the bibli-

aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines.
12 For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you
shall eat only what the field itself produces.

13 In this year of jubilee you shall return,
every one of you, to your property. 14 When
you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from
your neighbor, you shall not cheat one anoth-
er. 15 When you buy from your neighbor, you
shall pay only for the number of years since
the jubilee; the seller shall charge you only
for the remaining crop years. 16 If the years
are more, you shall increase the price, and
if the years are fewer, you shall diminish the
price; for it is a certain number of harvests
that are being sold to you. 17 You shall not
cheat one another, but you shall fear your
God; for I am the LORD your God.

18 You shall observe my statutes and faith-
fully keep my ordinances, so that you may
live on the land securely. 19 The land will yield
its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on
it securely. 20 Should you ask, "What shall we
eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or
gather in our crop?" 21 I will order my blessing
for you in the sixth year, so that it will yield a
crop for three years. 22 When you sow in the
eighth year, you will be eating from the old
crop; until the ninth year, when its produce
comes in, you shall eat the old. 23 The land
shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is
mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.
24 Throughout the land that you hold, you
shall provide for the redemption of the land.

25 If anyone of your kin falls into diffi-
culty and sells a piece of property, then the
next of kin shall come and redeem what the
relative has sold. 26 If the person has no one
to redeem it, but then prospers and finds
sufficient means to do so, 27 the years since
its sale shall be computed and the difference
shall be refunded to the person to whom it
was sold, and the property shall be returned.
28 But if there are not sufficient means to
recover it, what was sold shall remain with
the purchaser until the year of jubilee; in the
jubilee it shall be released, and the property
shall be returned.

29 If anyone sells a dwelling house in
a walled city, it may be redeemed until a
year has elapsed since its sale; the right of
redemption shall be one year. 30 If it is not
redeemed before a full year has elapsed, a
house that is in a walled city shall pass in
perpetuity to the purchaser, throughout the
generations; it shall not be released in the
jubilee. 31 But houses in villages that have no
walls around them shall be classed as open
country; they may be redeemed, and they
shall be released in the jubilee. 32 As for the
cities of the Levites, the Levites shall forever
have the right of redemption of the houses in
the cities belonging to them. 33 Such property
as may be redeemed from the Levites—hous-
es sold in a city belonging to them—shall be
released in the jubilee; because the houses in
the cities of the Levites are their possession
among the people of Israel. 34 But the open
land around their cities may not be sold; for
that is their possession for all time.

35 If any of your kin fall into difficulty
and become dependent on you,[a] you shall
support them; they shall live with you as
though resident aliens. 36 Do not take interest
in advance or otherwise make a profit from
them, but fear your God; let them live with
you. 37 You shall not lend them your money
at interest taken in advance, or provide them
food at a profit. 38 I am the LORD your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to
give you the land of Canaan, to be your God.

39 If any who are dependent on you be-
come so impoverished that they sell them-
selves to you, you shall not make them serve
as slaves. 40 They shall remain with you as

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

cal period. **13–17:** Because nonancestral property cannot be held in perpetuity, land "sales" are leases calculated according to the jubilee calendar. **18–22:** God will provide a miraculous bumper crop in the sixth year so that no one will suffer by observing the sabbatical or jubilee years. The sabbatical year thus should not be viewed as land fallowing, which would presume the least agricultural fertility in the sixth year. **23–55:** Successively greater levels of poverty are considered: property sale and redemption (vv. 25–34); dependence upon fellow Israelites' support (loans) (vv. 35–38); "hired service" (enslavement) to a fellow Israelite (vv. 39–43; vv. 44–46 address permanent enslavement of foreigners); "hired service" (enslavement) to a resident alien (vv. 47–55). **32:** *Cities of the Levites,* see Num 35.1–8; Josh 21.1–42. This is the only mention of Levites in the book. **36–37:** Cf. Ex 22.24;

hired or bound laborers. They shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. 41 Then they and their children with them shall be free from your authority; they shall go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property. 42 For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold. 43 You shall not rule over them with harshness, but shall fear your God. 44 As for the male and female slaves whom you may have, it is from the nations around you that you may acquire male and female slaves. 45 You may also acquire them from among the aliens residing with you, and from their families that are with you, who have been born in your land; and they may be your property. 46 You may keep them as a possession for your children after you, for them to inherit as property. These you may treat as slaves, but as for your fellow Israelites, no one shall rule over the other with harshness.

47 If resident aliens among you prosper, and if any of your kin fall into difficulty with one of them and sell themselves to an alien, or to a branch of the alien's family, 48 after they have sold themselves they shall have the right of redemption; one of their brothers may redeem them, 49 or their uncle or their uncle's son may redeem them, or anyone of their family who is of their own flesh may redeem them; or if they prosper they may redeem themselves. 50 They shall compute with the purchaser the total from the year when they sold themselves to the alien until the jubilee year; the price of the sale shall be applied to the number of years: the time they were with the owner shall be rated as the time of a hired laborer. 51 If many years remain, they shall pay for their redemption in proportion to the purchase price; 52 and if few years remain until the jubilee year, they shall compute thus: according to the years involved they shall make payment for their redemption. 53 As a laborer hired by the year they shall be under the alien's authority, who shall not, however, rule with harshness over them in your sight. 54 And if they have not been redeemed in any of these ways, they and their children with them shall go free in the jubilee year. 55 For to me the people of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

26 You shall make for yourselves no idols and erect no carved images or pillars, and you shall not place figured stones in your land, to worship at them; for I am the Lord your God. 2 You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.

3 If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, 4 I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. 5 Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land. 6 And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land. 7 You shall give chase to your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. 8 Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, and a hundred of you shall give chase to ten thousand; your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. 9 I will look with

Deut 23.21. **42,55:** Israelites may not be enslaved because they are already enslaved to God (cf. 26.13). Contrast Ex 21.2–11; Deut 15.12–18. **26.1–2:** These verses conclude the H legislation and thus belong with the preceding (cf. ch 19), not with the rest of ch 26, which moves from legislation to inducements for obeying God's laws.

26.3–46: Inducements for obedience. This unit is the conclusion to chs 17–26, the Holiness Collection (ch 27 is a later addition). Although similar in structure and content to the blessings and curses in Deut 28 and in ancient Near Eastern political treaties, these verses never use that terminology. Moreover, unlike the curse sections of Deut 28 and Near Eastern treaties, the threatened punishments in vv. 14–39 proceed incrementally and are explicitly aimed at compelling obedience (cf. vv. 18,21,23–24,27–28). For H, Israel's disobedience does not abrogate God's commitment (covenant) to his people. Because he owns them as slaves (cf. 25.42,55), God will punish his people, but in so doing he never gives up ownership of them. The prominent use of covenant language and strong ties to Deut 28 suggest that H here may have borrowed from and revised D. **3–13:** Rewards for obedience. **9:** *Covenant*, for P and H, this is the divine promise of land and progeny (Gen 17.1–8; 28.3–4;

favor upon you and make you fruitful and multiply you; and I will maintain my covenant with you. 10 You shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall have to clear out the old to make way for the new. 11 I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. 12 And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. 13 I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be their slaves no more; I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

14 But if you will not obey me, and do not observe all these commandments, 15 if you spurn my statutes, and abhor my ordinances, so that you will not observe all my commandments, and you break my covenant, 16 I in turn will do this to you: I will bring terror on you; consumption and fever that waste the eyes and cause life to pine away. You shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. 17 I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down by your enemies; your foes shall rule over you, and you shall flee though no one pursues you. 18 And if in spite of this you will not obey me, I will continue to punish you sevenfold for your sins. 19 I will break your proud glory, and I will make your sky like iron and your earth like copper. 20 Your strength shall be spent to no purpose: your land shall not yield its produce, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.

21 If you continue hostile to me, and will not obey me, I will continue to plague you sevenfold for your sins. 22 I will let loose wild animals against you, and they shall bereave you of your children and destroy your livestock; they shall make you few in number, and your roads shall be deserted.

23 If in spite of these punishments you have not turned back to me, but continue hostile to me, 24 then I too will continue hostile to you: I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins. 25 I will bring the sword against you, executing vengeance for the covenant; and if you withdraw within your cities, I will send pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into enemy hands. 26 When I break your staff of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven, and they shall dole out your bread by weight; and though you eat, you shall not be satisfied.

27 But if, despite this, you disobey me, and continue hostile to me, 28 I will continue hostile to you in fury; I in turn will punish you myself sevenfold for your sins. 29 You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. 30 I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars; I will heap your carcasses on the carcasses of your idols. I will abhor you. 31 I will lay your cities waste, will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing odors. 32 I will devastate the land, so that your enemies who come to settle in it shall be appalled at it. 33 And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste.

34 Then the land shall enjoy[a] its sabbath years as long as it lies desolate, while you are in the land of your enemies; then the land shall rest, and enjoy[a] its sabbath years. 35 As long as it lies desolate, it shall have the rest it did not have on your sabbaths when you were living on it. 36 And as for those of you who survive, I will send faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; the sound of a driven leaf shall put them to flight, and they shall flee as one flees from the sword, and they shall fall though no one pursues. 37 They shall stumble over one another, as if to escape a sword, though no one pursues; and you shall have no power to stand against your enemies. 38 You shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall devour you. 39 And those of you who survive

[a] Or *make up for*

35.11–12; Ex 6.2–8). **11:** The ultimate reward for obedience is the divine presence in Israel; cf. Ex 6.7; Jer 7.23; 30.22. **14–39:** Threats of successive punishments intended to ensure Israel's compliance. The punishments address the reverse topics mentioned in the rewards section. As in Deut 28 and Near Eastern treaties, rhetorical impact is heightened by focusing more on punishments than rewards. **31:** *Sanctuaries*, multiple sanctuaries are not endorsed but presented as evidence of disobedience (cf. v. 30; 17.3–4n.). **33–45:** These verses address exile, indicating that this chapter may have been written or edited after Babylonian conquest of Judah in 586 BCE. **34:**

shall languish in the land of your enemies because of their iniquities; also they shall languish because of the iniquities of their ancestors.

40 But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their ancestors, in that they committed treachery against me and, moreover, that they continued hostile to me— 41 so that I, in turn, continued hostile to them and brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, 42 then will I remember my covenant with Jacob; I will remember also my covenant with Isaac and also my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. 43 For the land shall be deserted by them, and enjoy[a] its sabbath years by lying desolate without them, while they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they dared to spurn my ordinances, and they abhorred my statutes. 44 Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, or abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God; 45 but I will remember in their favor the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, to be their God: I am the LORD.

46 These are the statutes and ordinances and laws that the LORD established between himself and the people of Israel on Mount Sinai through Moses.

27 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When a person makes an explicit vow to the LORD concerning the equivalent for a human being, 3 the equivalent for a male shall be: from twenty to sixty years of age the equivalent shall be fifty shekels of silver by the sanctuary shekel. 4 If the person is a female, the equivalent is thirty shekels. 5 If the age is from five to twenty years of age, the equivalent is twenty shekels for a male and ten shekels for a female. 6 If the age is from one month to five years, the equivalent for a male is five shekels of silver, and for a female the equivalent is three shekels of silver. 7 And if the person is sixty years old or over, then the equivalent for a male is fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels. 8 If any cannot afford the equivalent, they shall be brought before the priest and the priest shall assess them; the priest shall assess them according to what each one making a vow can afford.

9 If it concerns an animal that may be brought as an offering to the LORD, any such that may be given to the LORD shall be holy. 10 Another shall not be exchanged or substituted for it, either good for bad or bad for good; and if one animal is substituted for another, both that one and its substitute shall be holy. 11 If it concerns any unclean animal that may not be brought as an offering to the LORD, the animal shall be presented before the priest. 12 The priest shall assess it: whether good or bad, according to the assessment of the priest, so it shall be. 13 But if it is to be redeemed, one-fifth must be added to the assessment.

14 If a person consecrates a house to the LORD, the priest shall assess it: whether good or bad, as the priest assesses it, so it shall stand. 15 And if the one who consecrates the house wishes to redeem it, one-fifth shall be added to its assessed value, and it shall revert to the original owner.

[a] Or *make up for*

Sabbath years, cf. 25.2–7; 2 Chr 36.21. **40–45:** Those who remain and repent will be restored, for God's commitment to Israel is unmoved. This was likely a particularly meaningful promise to the exiles. **46:** Concluding summary to chs 1–26 (cf. 27.34). *On Mount Sinai*, better, "at Mount Sinai" (see 7.38n.).

27.1–34: Vows, dedications, and tithes. This chapter is a later addition to Leviticus, inserted as an appendix. Its author(s) attempted to integrate it into the book by repeating the concluding summary from 26.46 in 27.34. **2–13:** Procedures for vows of persons and animals; cf. Num 30.1–16. Vows are promised gifts to God in exchange for divine favor. In the case of vows of humans (oneself or another), an equivalent monetary gift is presented in lieu of human sacrifice. Calculations are made according to the vowed person's socioeconomic worth. **3:** A *shekel* weighed about .4 oz (11.4 gr). **9–10:** Sacrificeable animals offered as vows are viewed as the deity's food and are thus holy. **11–12:** Nonsacrificeable animals vowed to God are intended to be sold by the sanctuary according to their valuation. **13:** *One-fifth*, cf. 5.16; 6.5. **14–24:** Dedications of houses, ancestral land, and non-

16 If a person consecrates to the LORD any
inherited landholding, its assessment shall be
in accordance with its seed requirements: fifty
shekels of silver to a homer of barley seed. 17 If
the person consecrates the field as of the year
of jubilee, that assessment shall stand; 18 but
if the field is consecrated after the jubilee, the
priest shall compute the price for it according
to the years that remain until the year of jubi-
lee, and the assessment shall be reduced. 19 And
if the one who consecrates the field wishes to
redeem it, then one-fifth shall be added to its
assessed value, and it shall revert to the origi-
nal owner; 20 but if the field is not redeemed,
or if it has been sold to someone else, it shall
no longer be redeemable. 21 But when the field
is released in the jubilee, it shall be holy to the
LORD as a devoted field; it becomes the priest's
holding. 22 If someone consecrates to the LORD
a field that has been purchased, which is not
a part of the inherited landholding, 23 the
priest shall compute for it the proportionate
assessment up to the year of jubilee, and the
assessment shall be paid as of that day, a sacred
donation to the LORD. 24 In the year of jubilee
the field shall return to the one from whom it
was bought, whose holding the land is. 25 All
assessments shall be by the sanctuary shekel:
twenty gerahs shall make a shekel.

26 A firstling of animals, however, which
as a firstling belongs to the LORD, cannot be
consecrated by anyone; whether ox or sheep,
it is the LORD's. 27 If it is an unclean animal,
it shall be ransomed at its assessment, with
one-fifth added; if it is not redeemed, it shall
be sold at its assessment.

28 Nothing that a person owns that has
been devoted to destruction for the LORD, be
it human or animal, or inherited landhold-
ing, may be sold or redeemed; every devoted
thing is most holy to the LORD. 29 No human
beings who have been devoted to destruction
can be ransomed; they shall be put to death.

30 All tithes from the land, whether the
seed from the ground or the fruit from the
tree, are the LORD's; they are holy to the
LORD. 31 If persons wish to redeem any of
their tithes, they must add one-fifth to them.
32 All tithes of herd and flock, every tenth one
that passes under the shepherd's staff, shall
be holy to the LORD. 33 Let no one inquire
whether it is good or bad, or make substitu-
tion for it; if one makes substitution for it,
then both it and the substitute shall be holy
and cannot be redeemed.

34 These are the commandments that the
LORD gave to Moses for the people of Israel on
Mount Sinai.

ancestral land. Valuations of land are accounted according to the jubilee calendar (cf. 25.13–17n.). **16:** A *homer* was about 6.5 bushels (230 l). **26–27:** Firstborn animals already belong to God (Ex 13.1–2,12; 22.29–30; 34.19; Num 3.40–51; 18.17; Deut 15.19–20) and therefore cannot be dedicated or vowed. *It shall be ransomed*, better, "It may be ransomed"; cf. Num 18.15. **28:** *Devoted to destruction*, a type of dedication found mostly in biblical war texts (e.g., Num 21.2; Deut 2.34; 3.6; 7.2; Josh 6.17–21; 8.26; 10.1,28; 1 Sam 15) and in the Moabite Mesha Inscription. Here, such dedication (Heb "ḥerem") is applied to one's own property. **30–33:** Tithes (cf. Num 18.20–32; Deut 14.22–29; 26.12). This is the only occurrence of an animal tithe in Pentateuchal law, but see Gen 14.20; 28.22; 1 Sam 8.15–17; 2 Chr 31.5–6. **34:** A variation on the conclusion in 26.46.

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NUMBERS

NAME AND LOCATION IN CANON

Numbers is the fourth of the five books of the Pentateuch. Its narrative tells the story of Israel's journey from the final stages of the stay at Mount Sinai through the wilderness to the eastern border of the promised land of Canaan. The English title, "Numbers," derived from the Greek (*Arithmoi*) and Latin (*Numeri*) translations, is based on its census lists (chs 1; 26). In early Jewish tradition, it is called "The Fifth of the Census," based on its opening theme; later, it was known by its first significant Hebrew word, *bemidbar*, "In the wilderness (of)."

AUTHORSHIP, DATES OF COMPOSITION, AND LITERARY HISTORY

The issue of authorship is part of the larger question pertaining to the Pentateuch (see pp. 3–6). Moses was traditionally considered its author. Biblical scholars have now come to view the Pentateuch as a work of many authors and editors from various periods of Israel's history.

The origin of Numbers is disputed and difficult to discern. The book itself speaks of sources: the "Book of the Wars of the LORD" (21.14) and popular songs (21.17–18,27–30). The tradition most identifiable is the Priestly (P) writing, with its interest in matters of worship and the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants; it is most attested in chs 1–10; 26–36. Other sources, such as J and E (esp. in chs 11–25), are more difficult to discern; scholars often speak simply of combined JE or a non-Priestly stratum. Earlier scholars called this an "epic tradition," even though it is not certain that it originally had the form of a poetic epic. The association of texts with three primary locales (Sinai: 1.1–10.10; Kadesh: chs 13–20; Moab: chs 22–36) could reflect a way in which traditions were gathered over time. Editorial activity, combining these disparate materials, is unusually frequent.

Scholars have also studied individual traditions and their development, such as the Balaam cycle, the murmuring stories, the censuses, the wilderness encampment, the Transjordan conquest, the cities of refuge, land apportionment, and the priesthood. This research shows that various Israelite interests from different settings underlie the present text. These traditions have been brought together, most likely during and after the exile to Babylon in the early sixth century BCE, to form a single composition.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

The complex character of Numbers is evident in the genres it includes: lists, itineraries, statutes, ritual and priestly prescriptions, poetic oracles, songs, wilderness stories, and even a well-known benediction (6.22–27). The interweaving of law and narrative characteristic of the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy is most evident in Numbers; statutes regularly emerge from specific situations, revealing a dynamic relationship of law and life.

Moreover, several texts border on the bizarre, with talking donkeys, curses from a non-Israelite diviner turned into blessings with messianic implications, the earth swallowing up people, copper snakes with healing powers, an almond-producing rod, an execution for picking up sticks on the sabbath, Miriam turning leprous, and anomalous procedures for discerning a wife's faithlessness. Might these unusual goings-on have been constructed to match the incredible character of Israel's response to God? Moreover, God is often depicted in ways that challenge traditional understandings.

The structure of Numbers is best seen from two angles:

1. ***The census lists***. The book's overarching structure is laid out in terms of two census lists (chs 1; 26). The first registers the generation of the Exodus and Sinai prepared to move toward the promised land. When faced with dangers, however, they do not trust the promise; they experience God's judgment (14.32–33) and finally, in the wake of apostasy, die off in a plague (25.9). Even Moses and Aaron mistrust God and are prohibited from entering the land (20.12); only the faithful scouts, Caleb and Joshua, and the young (14.29) are allowed to do so. The oracles of Balaam (chs 22–24) provide a positive sign, as God blesses the insiders through this outsider.

   The second census (ch 26) lists the members of the new generation. They signal God's continuing faithfulness to ancestral promises and to those who will enter the land. The following texts (chs 27–36)

deal with issues regarding that future. No deaths, murmurings, or rebellions against the leadership are narrated, while hopeful signs are presented.

2. ***The geography of a journey toward the promised land***, with all the problems encountered along the way in spite of careful preparations. The itinerary of 33.2–49, toward the book's conclusion, offers a detailed itinerary of that journey.
   A. Numbers begins with the people preparing to leave Sinai (1.1–10.10). That includes the camp's organization and various statutes, especially regarding the sanctuary and its leadership. An idealized picture emerges: a community ordered in all ways appropriate to God's dwelling in the center of the camp and the precise obedience to every divine command (e.g., 1.17–19,54). The reader may wonder how anything could go wrong.
   B. In episodic fashion, Israel moves through the wilderness from Sinai to Transjordan (10.11–25.18). The disjunction of the opening and closing chapters of this section is remarkable: obedience turns to rebellion; trust becomes mistrust; the holy is profaned; order becomes disorder; the future of God's people is threatened. Continuities with the wilderness stories in Ex 15.22–19.1 are seen in the gifts of quail and manna, the ongoing complaints, and military victory; but discontinuities are also sharp, evident especially in sin and judgment. Integrated with the journey reports are various statutes (15; 18; 19), focused on purification and leadership support, the need for which grows out of these experiences.
   C. The journey concludes in the plains of Moab (26.1–36.13), an entirely positive stage. Conflicts are resolved through negotiation and compromise and land begins to be settled. Various statutes anticipate a future in the land; the community is to order its life so that this dwelling place of both God and people is not ritually polluted.

These three stages may also be characterized in terms of Israel's changing relationship with God, moving from fidelity to unfaithfulness and back. Through all these developments, God remains faithful to the unconditional ancestral promises. Though Israel's journey involves judgment, that judgment finally serves God's objectives of blessing.

INTERPRETATION

Such portrayals of a journey mirror the situation of the implied readers, especially if this book was compiled in the Babylonian exile. Israel's apostasy and experience of judgment lie in their recent past; signs of a hopeful future are articulated in both law and promise. The paradigm of old generation and new generation would be pertinent both for the years of exile as well as for the uncertainties of the postexilic period. Certain themes provide compass points for navigating the journey through Numbers:

1. ***A wilderness book***. The entire book is set in the wilderness. This setting presents problems and possibilities for shaping a community identity for the newly redeemed people of God. As a long-oppressed community, Israel has a deeply ingrained identity as "slaves." It does not have the resources to move quickly to a "slaves no more" (Lev 26.13) mentality; God must be at work to enable them to "walk erect" once again. For the purpose of forming such a new identity, the period of wandering is a necessary buffer between liberation from Egypt and residence in the new land. Such a process does not unfold easily for Israel or for God; even the most meticulous preparations do not make things go right.

   Israel's time in the wilderness is shaped by God's extraordinary patience and mercy, and the divine will to stay with Israel in this time of adolescence. If God wants a mature child, defiance must be risked. It soon becomes clear that the maturation process will take longer than a single generation.
2. ***Ancestral promises***. God is committed to the ancestral promise of the gift of the land. As Israel moves out from Sinai, the goal is the land God is "giving" (10.29, and often). Conditions regarding the promise of the land are expressed (14.8), but they affect the future of individuals—even an entire generation—not Israel as such. Beyond that, Balaam's oracles ironically gather the clearest references to promises in Numbers; no Israelite, including Moses, has standing enough left to bring them to expression.

   The middle section (chs 11–25) reveals the complexities and the problems in the movement toward fulfillment; the wilderness is a time of endangered promises. Again and again the people trust the deceptive securities of the past more than God's promised future (11.5; 21.5). Hence, they experience

disasters of various kinds that threaten progress toward the goal, including plagues (11.33; 16.49), abortive conquest (chs 13–14), and snake infestation (21.6).

The final section (chs 26–36), with the new generation in place, expresses confidence in the promise with the apportionment of lands and the specification of boundaries. Initial settlements in Transjordan initiate the fulfillment of the promise. Moreover, various laws dealing with emerging issues constitute a hopeful sign in the midst of much failure and grief: a community will exist to obey them.

3. ***Divine presence and guidance***. God, not Moses, has birthed this people (11.12) and chosen to stay with them and to dwell in the heart of their camp (5.3). From this womblike center blessings flow out into the encircled community. This intense kind of presence is promised for Israel's future in the land as well (35.34), as even Balaam testifies (23.21–22).

   Because of the presence of God in Israel's midst in the tabernacle, it was to be protected from casual contact. The tribe of Levi was consecrated for tabernacle service and made responsible for guarding this holy place (1.50–53). Sharp warnings about intrusion are issued (1.51–53; 3.10,38), even for Levites (4.17–20). Strikingly, encroachment is not a serious problem in the subsequent narratives (see ch 16). The more problematic issue is mistrust and rebellion with respect to God and God's chosen leaders. These forms of sinfulness pervade chs 11–25, deeply affecting the character of the journey and the shape of Israel's future.

   Israel's God not only dwells in the midst of Israel, but also goes before them. The accompanying presence of God is marked by the pillar of cloud and fire (9.15–23). This symbol is linked to the ark of the covenant, representing God's presence (10.35–36). God's ongoing presence is the decisive factor in Israel's journey, but various texts witness also to the import of human leaders (e.g., 10.29–32). God works in and through what is available, even characters like Balaam.

4. ***Divine revelation and human leadership***. Revelation is not confined to Sinai; it occurs throughout Israel's journey. Statutes and other divine words newly enjoin Israel all along the way. God's word is a dynamic reality, intersecting with life and all of its contingencies. This is demonstrated in the very form of this material, interweaving law and narrative. God's word is usually mediated through Moses, but not uniquely so. This becomes an issue during the journey. Challenges to Moses' (and Aaron's) leadership that began before Sinai are intensified and other leaders take up the argument.

   This issue is voiced most sharply by Miriam and Aaron: Has God spoken only through Moses? (12.2). The response is negative. God's spirit even rests upon the outsider Balaam who mediates remarkably clear words of God (24.2–4,15–16). Yet Moses does have a special relationship with God and challenges to his role are not countenanced.

   God often communicates to and through Moses; indeed, 7.89 speaks of Moses' contact with God as routine. In 12.8 Moses actually "beholds the form of the LORD" and lives to report it. One facet of this relationship is especially remarkable: the genuine give-and-take between them as they engage issues confronting the wandering community. This interaction says something about both Moses and God. Moses' leadership credentials are considerable, including a capacity to tolerate threats to his authority (11.29) and to persevere with God (chs 11; 14; 16), calling forth the strong statement regarding his unique devotion (12.3). God also is remarkably open to such discourse and honors Moses' insights. Indeed, God may shape a different future in view of the encounter (14.13–20; 16.20–22). But such divine openness to change will always be in the service of God's unchanging goals for Israel and the creation (Balaam's point in 23.19).

   Some disputes are focused on Aaron (and his sons) and their priestly leadership (chs 16; 17). Actual tests are carried out, which substantiate their unique role with respect to the sanctuary. Members of this family also assume an intercessory function; they "stand between the dead and the living" and a plague is averted (16.47–50; see 25.7–13). This correlates with their mediating role in various rituals (chs 5; 15). Interest in the proper succession of leaders (Eleazar: 20.22–29; Joshua: 27.12–23) demonstrates their importance for the stability of the community. Rebellion against God-chosen leaders is subversive of God's intentions for the community and risks death. But the leaders themselves are not exempt from strict standards (20.10–12).

5. ***Holy people and holy priests***. The call in Leviticus for the people to be holy is continued here (15.40). What constitutes a holy life, or is inimical to it, is central. Various uncleannesses—whether moral or ritual—are incompatible with holiness (chs 5; 6).

A case for more democratic forms of priestly leadership is pursued by Korah on the basis of the holiness of all (16.3). Moses' reply assumes gradations of holiness; even if all are holy, God chooses certain persons to exercise priestly leadership, and this status constitutes a holiness that sets them apart from other holy ones. The disaster experienced by Korah and his company (16.23–35) demonstrates the special status of Aaron's family (16.40), as does the test with staffs (ch 17).

Gradations of holiness are also evident within the members of the tribe of Levi. The Levites are set aside to care for the tabernacle, symbolized by their encampment between tabernacle and people. Among the Levites the family of Aaron is set aside for priestly duties (16.40; 17; 18.7–11,19). Indeed, a "covenant of perpetual priesthood" is made with this family because of the mediating actions of Phinehas (25.10–13). Specific groups of Aaron's descendants are differentiated based on their roles of caring for the tabernacle; for example, the family of Kohath alone is responsible for the "the most holy things" (4.1–20).

GUIDE TO READING

When first reading the book, one might begin with the main narrative (chs 1; 10–14; 16–17; 20–27; 31–33). The legal sections may best be read according to different topics: the Levites (chs 3–4; 7–8; 18; 35); priestly and levitical duties (chs 3–4; 16–17; 18; 35); the arrangement of the camp (chs 2–3; 10); laws pertaining to women (ch 5; 27.1–11; 30; 36); holy days (9.1–14; 15.32–36; 28–29); impurity and holiness (5.1–4; 6; 16–17; 19; 35); sacrifices and offerings (chs 7; 15; 28–29); and distribution of the land (27.1–11; 32; 34–36). Numbers also contains poetic passages (6.24–26; 10.35–36; 20.14–15,17–18, 27–30; 23.7–10,18–24; 24.3–9,15–24), which might be studied together and in connection with the style of the Psalms.

Terence E. Fretheim

1 The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: **2** Take a census of the whole congregation of Israelites, in their clans, by ancestral houses, according to the number of names, every male individually; **3** from twenty years old and upward, everyone in Israel able to go to war. You and Aaron shall enroll them, company by company. **4** A man from each tribe shall be with you, each man the head of his ancestral house. **5** These are the names of the men who shall assist you:

From Reuben, Elizur son of Shedeur.
6 From Simeon, Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai.
7 From Judah, Nahshon son of Amminadab.
8 From Issachar, Nethanel son of Zuar.
9 From Zebulun, Eliab son of Helon.
10 From the sons of Joseph:
from Ephraim, Elishama son of Ammihud;
from Manasseh, Gamaliel son of Pedahzur.
11 From Benjamin, Abidan son of Gideoni.
12 From Dan, Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai.
13 From Asher, Pagiel son of Ochran.
14 From Gad, Eliasaph son of Deuel.
15 From Naphtali, Ahira son of Enan.
16 These were the ones chosen from the congregation, the leaders of their ancestral tribes, the heads of the divisions of Israel.

1.1–10.10: Israel prepares to leave Sinai for the promised land. This task includes the organization of the camp and various statutes, especially regarding the sanctuary and its leadership.

1.1–54: The first census of the tribes. Moses is commanded to conduct a census of each tribe. **1:** The census (see Ex 38.26) occurs one month after the completion of the tabernacle, here called *the tent of meeting* (Ex 40.17; compare Ex 33.7–11), shortly before the departure from Sinai (10.11), where Israel had been for almost a year (Ex 19.1). **2–3:** The *census* is of males twenty years and older; and seeks to determine those *able to go to war*. Each tribe was divided into *clans*, which included several *ancestral houses* (family groups). **4–16**: God names *a man from each tribe*, . . . *head of his ancestral house*, to assist Moses. Most of the individuals named do not occur elsewhere in the Bible outside of the book of Numbers (see also chs 2; 7; 10). The tribe of Levi is omitted, and the tribe of Joseph is subdivided into Ephraim and Manasseh (see Gen 48), thus keeping the number of the tribes at

17 Moses and Aaron took these men who
had been designated by name, 18 and on the
first day of the second month they assembled the whole congregation together. They
registered themselves in their clans, by their
ancestral houses, according to the number
of names from twenty years old and upward,
individually, 19 as the Lord commanded
Moses. So he enrolled them in the wilderness
of Sinai.

20 The descendants of Reuben, Israel's
firstborn, their lineage, in their clans, by their
ancestral houses, according to the number of
names, individually, every male from twenty
years old and upward, everyone able to go to
war: 21 those enrolled of the tribe of Reuben
were forty-six thousand five hundred.

22 The descendants of Simeon, their lineage, in their clans, by their ancestral houses,
those of them that were numbered, according
to the number of names, individually, every
male from twenty years old and upward, everyone able to go to war: 23 those enrolled of
the tribe of Simeon were fifty-nine thousand
three hundred.

24 The descendants of Gad, their lineage, in
their clans, by their ancestral houses, according to the number of the names, from twenty
years old and upward, everyone able to go to
war: 25 those enrolled of the tribe of Gad were
forty-five thousand six hundred fifty.

26 The descendants of Judah, their lineage,
in their clans, by their ancestral houses, according to the number of names, from twenty
years old and upward, everyone able to go
to war: 27 those enrolled of the tribe of Judah
were seventy-four thousand six hundred.

28 The descendants of Issachar, their lineage, in their clans, by their ancestral houses,
according to the number of names, from
twenty years old and upward, everyone able
to go to war: 29 those enrolled of the tribe
of Issachar were fifty-four thousand four
hundred.

30 The descendants of Zebulun, their lineage, in their clans, by their ancestral houses,
according to the number of names, from
twenty years old and upward, everyone able
to go to war: 31 those enrolled of the tribe
of Zebulun were fifty-seven thousand four
hundred.

32 The descendants of Joseph, namely,
the descendants of Ephraim, their lineage,
in their clans, by their ancestral houses, according to the number of names, from twenty
years old and upward, everyone able to go to
war: 33 those enrolled of the tribe of Ephraim
were forty thousand five hundred.

34 The descendants of Manasseh, their
lineage, in their clans, by their ancestral
houses, according to the number of names,
from twenty years old and upward, everyone
able to go to war: 35 those enrolled of the tribe
of Manasseh were thirty-two thousand two
hundred.

36 The descendants of Benjamin, their
lineage, in their clans, by their ancestral
houses, according to the number of names,
from twenty years old and upward, everyone
able to go to war: 37 those enrolled of the tribe
of Benjamin were thirty-five thousand four
hundred.

38 The descendants of Dan, their lineage,
in their clans, by their ancestral houses, according to the number of names, from twenty
years old and upward, everyone able to go to
war: 39 those enrolled of the tribe of Dan were
sixty-two thousand seven hundred.

40 The descendants of Asher, their lineage,
in their clans, by their ancestral houses, according to the number of names, from twenty
years old and upward, everyone able to go
to war: 41 those enrolled of the tribe of Asher
were forty-one thousand five hundred.

42 The descendants of Naphtali, their lineage, in their clans, by their ancestral houses,
according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, everyone able to go to
war: 43 those enrolled of the tribe of Naphtali
were fifty-three thousand four hundred.

44 These are those who were enrolled,
whom Moses and Aaron enrolled with the
help of the leaders of Israel, twelve men,
each representing his ancestral house. 45 So
the whole number of the Israelites, by their
ancestral houses, from twenty years old
and upward, everyone able to go to war in
Israel— 46 their whole number was six hun-

twelve. Having a name on this list assured each tribal group of their present identity. **17–46:** The census. **27:** The largest tribe is Judah, probably because of its importance to the author. **46:** The results of the census: 603,550

dred three thousand five hundred fifty. 47 The Levites, however, were not numbered by their ancestral tribe along with them.

48 The LORD had said to Moses: 49 Only the tribe of Levi you shall not enroll, and you shall not take a census of them with the other Israelites. 50 Rather you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the covenant,[a] and over all its equipment, and over all that belongs to it; they are to carry the tabernacle and all its equipment, and they shall tend it, and shall camp around the tabernacle. 51 When the tabernacle is to set out, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up. And any outsider who comes near shall be put to death. 52 The other Israelites shall camp in their respective regimental camps, by companies; 53 but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the covenant,[a] that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the Israelites; and the Levites shall perform the guard duty of the tabernacle of the covenant.[a] 54 The Israelites did so; they did just as the LORD commanded Moses.

2 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 2 The Israelites shall camp each in their respective regiments, under ensigns by their ancestral houses; they shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side. 3 Those to camp on the east side toward the sunrise shall be of the regimental encampment of Judah by companies. The leader of the people of Judah shall be Nahshon son of Amminadab, 4 with a company as enrolled of seventy-four thousand six hundred. 5 Those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar. The leader of the Issacharites shall be Nethanel son of Zuar, 6 with a company as enrolled of fifty-four thousand four hundred. 7 Then the tribe of Zebulun: The leader of the Zebulunites shall be Eliab son of Helon, 8 with a company as enrolled of fifty-seven thousand four hundred. 9 The total enrollment of the camp of Judah, by companies, is one hundred eighty-six thousand four hundred. They shall set out first on the march.

10 On the south side shall be the regimental encampment of Reuben by companies. The leader of the Reubenites shall be Elizur son of Shedeur, 11 with a company as enrolled of forty-six thousand five hundred. 12 And those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Simeon. The leader of the Simeonites shall be Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai, 13 with a company as enrolled of fifty-nine thousand three hundred. 14 Then the tribe of Gad: The leader of the Gadites shall be Eliasaph son of Reuel, 15 with a company as enrolled of forty-five

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

males (see 11.21; Ex 12.37); the second census yields 601,730 (26.51). When women, children, and Levites are added, the total is well over two million. This impossibly high number testifies to God's blessing this people, keeping promises. At the same time, this generation will prove unfaithful and will die off in the wilderness (see 14.22–30; 26.65). **47–54:** The Levites, who do not bear arms and are not registered here, are given duties regarding the tabernacle (chs 3–4). They are charged to encamp around it, protect it from casual contact, maintain it, carry it during the journey, and pitch it at each stop. The rare phrase, *tabernacle of the covenant* (vv. 50,53; 10.11; Ex 38.21), extends the designation for its major sacred object, the ark of the covenant. **51:** The *outsider* refers to non-Levites, Israelite or alien (see 16.40). The sense of *comes near* is encroach; the encroacher is executed on the spot by levitical guards (see 18.7). **53:** This action is in the interests of the community, so that it not experience the *wrath* of God, which may cause death, often through a plague (16.46–50; 31.16). These strict measures are instituted to preserve a proper relationship between God and the people. **54:** Throughout chs 1–9, the Israelites are reported to have done exactly as God commanded. Later failures cannot be blamed on faulty preparations.

2.1–34: The tribal arrangement around the tabernacle. With the *tent of meeting* (the tabernacle) centered in the camp, and the *Levites* camped immediately around it (2.17; see ch 3), God commands that the tribes be precisely ordered around the perimeter. They are to be ordered as *companies* (or *regiments*, 2.17,34), specifying military readiness. Three tribes are to be positioned at each side of the tent, under their distinctive banners; each triad named for the dominant tribe of the three from the perspective of Israel's later history, which is flanked by the other two tribes in each case—*the regimental encampment of Judah* (v. 3; the most dominant; see 1.27n.) to the east; Reuben to the south; Ephraim to the west; Dan to the north. This order of the tribes is

thousand six hundred fifty. 16 The total enrollment of the camp of Reuben, by companies, is one hundred fifty-one thousand four hundred fifty. They shall set out second.

17 The tent of meeting, with the camp of the Levites, shall set out in the center of the camps; they shall set out just as they camp, each in position, by their regiments.

18 On the west side shall be the regimental encampment of Ephraim by companies. The leader of the people of Ephraim shall be Elishama son of Ammihud, 19 with a company as enrolled of forty thousand five hundred. 20 Next to him shall be the tribe of Manasseh. The leader of the people of Manasseh shall be Gamaliel son of Pedahzur, 21 with a company as enrolled of thirty-two thousand two hundred. 22 Then the tribe of Benjamin: The leader of the Benjaminites shall be Abidan son of Gideoni, 23 with a company as enrolled of thirty-five thousand four hundred. 24 The total enrollment of the camp of Ephraim, by companies, is one hundred eight thousand one hundred. They shall set out third on the march.

25 On the north side shall be the regimental encampment of Dan by companies. The leader of the Danites shall be Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai, 26 with a company as enrolled of sixty-two thousand seven hundred. 27 Those to camp next to him shall be the tribe of Asher. The leader of the Asherites shall be Pagiel son of Ochran, 28 with a company as enrolled of forty-one thousand five hundred. 29 Then the tribe of Naphtali: The leader of the Naphtalites shall be Ahira son of Enan, 30 with a company as enrolled of fifty-three thousand four hundred. 31 The total enrollment of the camp of Dan is one hundred fifty-seven thousand six hundred. They shall set out last, by companies.[a]

32 This was the enrollment of the Israelites by their ancestral houses; the total enrollment in the camps by their companies was six hundred three thousand five hundred fifty. 33 Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, the Levites were not enrolled among the other Israelites.

34 The Israelites did just as the LORD had commanded Moses: They camped by regiments, and they set out the same way, everyone by clans, according to ancestral houses.

3 This is the lineage of Aaron and Moses at the time when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. 2 These are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar; 3 these are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to minister as priests. 4 Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they offered unholy fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children. Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron.

5 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 6 Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, so that they may assist him. 7 They shall perform duties for him and for the whole congregation in front of the tent of meeting, doing service at the tabernacle; 8 they shall be in charge of all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and attend to the duties for the Israelites as they do service at the tabernacle. 9 You shall give the Levites to Aaron and his descendants; they are unreservedly given to him from among the Israelites. 10 But you shall make a register of Aaron and his descendants; it is they who shall attend to the priesthood, and any outsider who comes near shall be put to death.

11 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 12 I hereby accept the Levites from among the Israelites as substitutes for all the firstborn that open the womb among the Israelites.

[a] Compare verses 9, 16, 24: Heb *by their regiments*

the order for the march, beginning with Judah (see 10.14–28). **17:** The tent, transported by Levites, is to move between the camps of Reuben and Ephraim. **34:** God's commands are again followed.

3.1–4.49: The Levites are set apart; organization and responsibilities. **3.1:** The formula links Moses and Aaron with the genealogies in Genesis (the last is Gen 37.2; see Ex 6.23–25). **3–4:** Moses (*he*) ordains the two remaining sons of Aaron, *Eleazar and Ithamar* (Lev 8.30). On Nadab and Abihu, see Lev 10.1–20. **5–10:** A distinction is made within the tribe of Levi between descendants of Aaron, who attend to priestly duties, and other Levites, who assist the priests, with responsibilities for *service at the tabernacle* (see 1.50–53). **11–13:** Restated in 8.16–18, recalls the sparing of Israel's firstborn (Ex 13.1–2,11–15), in remembrance of which God had consecrated them;

The Levites shall be mine, 13 for all the firstborn are mine; when I killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both human and animal; they shall be mine. I am the LORD.

14 Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying: 15 Enroll the Levites by ancestral houses and by clans. You shall enroll every male from a month old and upward. 16 So Moses enrolled them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded. 17 The following were the sons of Levi, by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 18 These are the names of the sons of Gershon by their clans: Libni and Shimei. 19 The sons of Kohath by their clans: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. 20 The sons of Merari by their clans: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites, by their ancestral houses.

21 To Gershon belonged the clan of the Libnites and the clan of the Shimeites; these were the clans of the Gershonites. 22 Their enrollment, counting all the males from a month old and upward, was seven thousand five hundred. 23 The clans of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle on the west, 24 with Eliasaph son of Lael as head of the ancestral house of the Gershonites. 25 The responsibility of the sons of Gershon in the tent of meeting was to be the tabernacle, the tent with its covering, the screen for the entrance of the tent of meeting, 26 the hangings of the court, the screen for the entrance of the court that is around the tabernacle and the altar, and its cords—all the service pertaining to these.

27 To Kohath belonged the clan of the Amramites, the clan of the Izharites, the clan of the Hebronites, and the clan of the Uzzielites; these are the clans of the Kohathites. 28 Counting all the males, from a month old and upward, there were eight thousand six hundred, attending to the duties of the sanctuary. 29 The clans of the Kohathites were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle, 30 with Elizaphan son of Uzziel as head of the ancestral house of the clans of the Kohathites. 31 Their responsibility was to be the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the vessels of the sanctuary with which the priests minister, and the screen—all the service pertaining to these. 32 Eleazar son of Aaron the priest was to be chief over the leaders of the Levites, and to have oversight of those who had charge of the sanctuary.

33 To Merari belonged the clan of the Mahlites and the clan of the Mushites: these are the clans of Merari. 34 Their enrollment, counting all the males from a month old and upward, was six thousand two hundred. 35 The head of the ancestral house of the clans of Merari was Zuriel son of Abihail; they were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. 36 The responsibility assigned to the sons of Merari was to be the frames of the tabernacle, the bars, the pillars, the bases, and all their accessories—all the service pertaining to these; 37 also the pillars of the court all around, with their bases and pegs and cords.

38 Those who were to camp in front of the tabernacle on the east—in front of the tent of meeting toward the east—were Moses and Aaron and Aaron's sons, having charge of the rites within the sanctuary, whatever had to be done for the Israelites; and any outsider who came near was to be put to death. 39 The total enrollment of the Levites whom Moses and Aaron enrolled at the commandment of the LORD, by their clans, all the males from a month old and upward, was twenty-two thousand.

40 Then the LORD said to Moses: Enroll all the firstborn males of the Israelites, from

the Levites serve in their stead as representatives of all Israel. **14–39:** Continues the narrative from 2.34, describing a census of the non-Aaronide *Levites* (actual total: 22,300; see 3.39), their encampment positions, and their nonmilitary responsibilities (see 1.47–49). Their camp is ordered in terms of Levi's sons; their clans encamp on three sides of the tabernacle and have varying duties with respect to its transit. **25–37:** The Kohathites (Moses and Aaron are descendants of Kohath; Ex 6.18–20) are responsible for the most sacred objects, the Gershonites for the fabrics, and the Merarites for the supporting structures (detailed in 4.1–33; for the objects, see Ex 25–30). **38:** Aaron and his sons are preeminent, encamping on the entrance (eastern) side of the tabernacle. Aaron's son, Eleazar, is in charge of the leaders of the three clans (3.32) and has general oversight of the tabernacle

a month old and upward, and count their names. 41 But you shall accept the Levites for me—I am the LORD—as substitutes for all the firstborn among the Israelites, and the livestock of the Levites as substitutes for all the firstborn among the livestock of the Israelites. 42 So Moses enrolled all the firstborn among the Israelites, as the LORD commanded him. 43 The total enrollment, all the firstborn males from a month old and upward, counting the number of names, was twenty-two thousand two hundred seventy-three.

44 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 45 Accept the Levites as substitutes for all the firstborn among the Israelites, and the livestock of the Levites as substitutes for their livestock; and the Levites shall be mine. I am the LORD. 46 As the price of redemption of the two hundred seventy-three of the firstborn of the Israelites, over and above the number of the Levites, 47 you shall accept five shekels apiece, reckoning by the shekel of the sanctuary, a shekel of twenty gerahs. 48 Give to Aaron and his sons the money by which the excess number of them is redeemed. 49 So Moses took the redemption money from those who were over and above those redeemed by the Levites; 50 from the firstborn of the Israelites he took the money, one thousand three hundred sixty-five shekels, reckoned by the shekel of the sanctuary; 51 and Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and his sons, according to the word of the LORD, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

4 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 2 Take a census of the Kohathites separate from the other Levites, by their clans and their ancestral houses, 3 from thirty years old up to fifty years old, all who qualify to do work relating to the tent of meeting. 4 The service of the Kohathites relating to the tent of meeting concerns the most holy things.

5 When the camp is to set out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the screening curtain, and cover the ark of the covenant[a] with it; 6 then they shall put on it a covering of fine leather,[b] and spread over that a cloth all of blue, and shall put its poles in place. 7 Over the table of the bread of the Presence they shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the plates, the dishes for incense, the bowls, and the flagons for the drink offering; the regular bread also shall be on it; 8 then they shall spread over them a crimson cloth, and cover it with a covering of fine leather,[b] and shall put its poles in place. 9 They shall take a blue cloth, and cover the lampstand for the light, with its lamps, its snuffers, its trays, and all the vessels for oil with which it is supplied; 10 and they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of fine leather,[b] and put it on the carrying frame. 11 Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth, and cover it with a covering of fine leather,[b] and shall put its poles in place; 12 and they shall take all the utensils of the service that are used in the sanctuary, and put them in a blue cloth, and cover them with a covering of fine leather,[b] and put them on the carrying frame. 13 They shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it; 14 and they shall

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

(4.16), his brother Ithamar over the work of the Gershonites and Merarites (4.28,33). **40–51:** The *firstborn males* of Israel are numbered; see 3.11–13. **43–48:** The total of 22,273 seems much too low in view of the census (1.32); no satisfactory explanation is available. Given the one-to-one ransom of Levites for firstborn males, the 273 persons over 22,000 are redeemed by five shekels apiece (cf. Lev 27.6). *I am the LORD*, see Lev 19. **49–51:** The ransom, reckoned by *the shekel of the sanctuary* (Ex 30.13), is paid by the firstborn to Moses and given to the priests; a shekel weighed about .4 oz (11.4 gr). **4.1–49:** The second levitical census (compare 3.15), taken to determine those Levites (ages thirty to fifty) who are to perform the duties detailed in 4.4–33; the differing ages in 8.24–26 (compare Ezra 3.8) may reflect expanding community needs. The responsibilities for certain sanctuary items are commanded in detail, so that each item is accounted for. **2–20:** The Kohathites are distinguished by their responsibility for *the most holy things*, with different colors of cloth marking gradations of holiness. **5–15:** Aaron and his sons are responsible for packing and unpacking the most holy things; only they are allowed to see and

put on it all the utensils of the altar, which are used for the service there, the firepans, the forks, the shovels, and the basins, all the utensils of the altar; and they shall spread on it a covering of fine leather,[a] and shall put its poles in place. 15 When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, as the camp sets out, after that the Kohathites shall come to carry these, but they must not touch the holy things, or they will die. These are the things of the tent of meeting that the Kohathites are to carry.

16 Eleazar son of Aaron the priest shall have charge of the oil for the light, the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering, and the anointing oil, the oversight of all the tabernacle and all that is in it, in the sanctuary and in its utensils.

17 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 18 You must not let the tribe of the clans of the Kohathites be destroyed from among the Levites. 19 This is how you must deal with them in order that they may live and not die when they come near to the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and assign each to a particular task or burden. 20 But the Kohathites[b] must not go in to look on the holy things even for a moment; otherwise they will die.

21 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 22 Take a census of the Gershonites also, by their ancestral houses and by their clans; 23 from thirty years old up to fifty years old you shall enroll them, all who qualify to do work in the tent of meeting. 24 This is the service of the clans of the Gershonites, in serving and bearing burdens: 25 They shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle, and the tent of meeting with its covering, and the outer covering of fine leather[a] that is on top of it, and the screen for the entrance of the tent of meeting, 26 and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the entrance of the gate of the court that is around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords, and all the equipment for their service; and they shall do all that needs to be done with regard to them. 27 All the service of the Gershonites shall be at the command of Aaron and his sons, in all that they are to carry, and in all that they have to do; and you shall assign to their charge all that they are to carry. 28 This is the service of the clans of the Gershonites relating to the tent of meeting, and their responsibilities are to be under the oversight of Ithamar son of Aaron the priest.

29 As for the Merarites, you shall enroll them by their clans and their ancestral houses; 30 from thirty years old up to fifty years old you shall enroll them, everyone who qualifies to do the work of the tent of meeting. 31 This is what they are charged to carry, as the whole of their service in the tent of meeting: the frames of the tabernacle, with its bars, pillars, and bases, 32 and the pillars of the court all around with their bases, pegs, and cords, with all their equipment and all their related service; and you shall assign by name the objects that they are required to carry. 33 This is the service of the clans of the Merarites, the whole of their service relating to the tent of meeting, under the hand of Ithamar son of Aaron the priest.

34 So Moses and Aaron and the leaders of the congregation enrolled the Kohathites, by their clans and their ancestral houses, 35 from thirty years old up to fifty years old, everyone who qualified for work relating to the tent of meeting; 36 and their enrollment by clans was two thousand seven hundred fifty. 37 This was the enrollment of the clans of the Kohathites, all who served at the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron enrolled according to the commandment of the LORD by Moses.

38 The enrollment of the Gershonites, by their clans and their ancestral houses, 39 from thirty years old up to fifty years old, everyone who qualified for work relating to the tent of meeting— 40 their enrollment by their clans

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *they*

touch them. **15–16:** The (other) Kohathites carry the items prepared by Aaron and his sons; they are supervised by Eleazar. *Oil for the light,* Ex 27.20; *incense,* Ex 30.7; *grain offering,* Lev 6.14–18; *anointing oil,* Ex 30.22–34. **17–20:** God takes the greater risk of the Kohathites into account and specifies precautionary procedures. **21–28:** The service of the Gershonites; see 3.25–26. **29–33:** The service of the Merarites; see 3.36–37. **34–45:** The implemen-

and their ancestral houses was two thousand six hundred thirty. 41 This was the enrollment of the clans of the Gershonites, all who served at the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron enrolled according to the commandment of the LORD.

42 The enrollment of the clans of the Merarites, by their clans and their ancestral houses, 43 from thirty years old up to fifty years old, everyone who qualified for work relating to the tent of meeting— 44 their enrollment by their clans was three thousand two hundred. 45 This is the enrollment of the clans of the Merarites, whom Moses and Aaron enrolled according to the commandment of the LORD by Moses.

46 All those who were enrolled of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the leaders of Israel enrolled, by their clans and their ancestral houses, 47 from thirty years old up to fifty years old, everyone who qualified to do the work of service and the work of bearing burdens relating to the tent of meeting, 48 their enrollment was eight thousand five hundred eighty. 49 According to the commandment of the LORD through Moses they were appointed to their several tasks of serving or carrying; thus they were enrolled by him, as the LORD commanded Moses.

5 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Command the Israelites to put out of the camp everyone who is leprous,[a] or has a discharge, and everyone who is unclean through contact with a corpse; 3 you shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp; they must not defile their camp, where I dwell among them. 4 The Israelites did so, putting them outside the camp; as the LORD had spoken to Moses, so the Israelites did.

5 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 6 Speak to the Israelites: When a man or a woman wrongs another, breaking faith with the LORD, that person incurs guilt 7 and shall confess the sin that has been committed. The person shall make full restitution for the wrong, adding one-fifth to it, and giving it to the one who was wronged. 8 If the injured party has no next of kin to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for wrong shall go to the LORD for the priest, in addition to the ram of atonement with which atonement is made for the guilty party. 9 Among all the sacred donations of the Israelites, every gift that they bring to the priest shall be his. 10 The sacred donations of all are their own; whatever anyone gives to the priest shall be his.

11 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 12 Speak to the Israelites and say to them: If any man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him, 13 if a man has had intercourse with her but it is hidden from her husband, so that she is undetected though she has defiled herself, and there is no witness against her since she was not caught in the act; 14 if a spirit of jealousy comes on him, and he is jealous of his wife who has defiled herself; or if a spirit of jealousy comes on him, and he is jealous of his wife, though she has not defiled herself; 15 then the man shall bring his wife

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

tation of the divine commands. **46–49:** Summary. The reason for the difference in the number of Levites from 3.39 is not clear. The encampment is now fully prepared for the journey.

5.1–6.21: Purification of the camp. Matters needing attention for the journey to come.

5.1–4: Persons who are ritually and communicably impure for various reasons are to be put outside the camp, so as not to contaminate the community or defile the tabernacle (see Lev 13.45–46; 15.31–33; 21.1–3,11). **5–10:** This case law extends Lev 6.1–7: when the wronged party dies without next of kin, priests receive the appropriate restitution. The public confession of this deliberate sin (see Lev 5.5) is also new. **11–31:** This case law regarding a woman suspected of adultery has many difficulties. Though often called a trial by ordeal, the coalescence of verdict and sanction, effected by God not the community, suggests a dramatized oath. **12–14:** The focus is a wife, possibly pregnant, whose husband suspects (*a spirit of jealousy*) her of adultery but has no evidence, whether she has actually done so (5.12–14a) or is only suspected (5.14b). In the former case, this text softens the penalty prescribed for an adulteress in Lev 20.10, probably because there was no evidence. In the latter case, a woman unjustly accused could be vindicated; the jealous husband (or the community) could not arbitrarily decide her fate. **15:** In either case, the man brings his wife (who is *under [his] authority*, vv.19,20,29) to the priest with a simple grain offering, without the usual oil and frankincense (Lev 2.1–10; 5.11). *One-tenth of an*

to the priest. And he shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley flour. He shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, for it is a grain offering of jealousy, a grain offering of remembrance, bringing iniquity to remembrance.

16 Then the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD; 17 the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water. 18 The priest shall set the woman before the LORD, dishevel the woman's hair, and place in her hands the grain offering of remembrance, which is the grain offering of jealousy. In his own hand the priest shall have the water of bitterness that brings the curse. 19 Then the priest shall make her take an oath, saying, "If no man has lain with you, if you have not turned aside to uncleanness while under your husband's authority, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings the curse. 20 But if you have gone astray while under your husband's authority, if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has had intercourse with you," 21 —let the priest make the woman take the oath of the curse and say to the woman—"the LORD make you an execration and an oath among your people, when the LORD makes your uterus drop, your womb discharge; 22 now may this water that brings the curse enter your bowels and make your womb discharge, your uterus drop!" And the woman shall say, "Amen. Amen."

23 Then the priest shall put these curses in writing, and wash them off into the water of bitterness. 24 He shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings the curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her and cause bitter pain. 25 The priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy out of the woman's hand, and shall elevate the grain offering before the LORD and bring it to the altar; 26 and the priest shall take a handful of the grain offering, as its memorial portion, and turn it into smoke on the altar, and afterward shall make the woman drink the water. 27 When he has made her drink the water, then, if she has defiled herself and has been unfaithful to her husband, the water that brings the curse shall enter into her and cause bitter pain, and her womb shall discharge, her uterus drop, and the woman shall become an execration among her people. 28 But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, then she shall be immune and be able to conceive children.

29 This is the law in cases of jealousy, when a wife, while under her husband's authority,

ephah, ca. 2 qts (2.3 liters). *Frankincense* is an aromatic resin from shrubs in Arabia and East Africa. Such offerings *bring the* (potential) *iniquity to remembrance* before God. **16–28:** The procedure: the priest prepares a mixture of holy water (see Ex 30.17–21) and tabernacle floor dust, potent because of its contact with holy things, in an earthen vessel (which could be broken after use; see Lev 11.33). The priest then brings the woman *before the LORD* (the altar), loosens her hair (a sign of humiliation or [potential] uncleanness; Lev 13.45), and puts the grain offering in her hands. **19–22:** She takes an oath regarding the suspicions registered: if she has been faithful, she will be immune from the water; if unfaithful, the water will cause her sexual organs to be affected adversely in some way (correlated with the crime) and she will be ostracized among the people and precluded from having children. If the woman is pregnant, the effect may have been a miscarriage. The effect of the water upon the woman is considered a sign as to whether the woman has told the truth. **22:** *"Amen. Amen"* expresses willingness to accept either result (see Deut 27.15–26). Unlike her husband, she is given no other voice in the ritual. **23–28:** 5.24 anticipates 5.26b, as 5.16a does 5.18a. The priest writes the curses on a surface from which the ink could be washed off into the water the woman is to drink; the imbibed water is thought to contain the curses' power (Ex 32.20,35). The priest takes the offering from her and burns a portion on the altar, after which she drinks the water. If the woman has been unfaithful, she will experience distress (no time frame is specified), hence the phrase *water of bitterness*. The potion has no bitter taste nor brings pain, but this would be the effect if God adjudged the woman guilty (5.21; see Zech 5.1–4; Jer 8.14; 9.15). **26:** *Memorial portion*, see Lev 2.2–3. **28:** The effect for the guiltless woman is that she will *conceive children.* **29–31:** A summary of the two cases for which this ordeal would be applied. The man is freed from responsibility for a false accusation. If the woman is guilty, she bears the consequences by divine agency. The ritual could not certainly verify suspicions; but, as with sacrifices, God is believed to effect the proper result. In this polygynous society, where men could have many sexual partners,

goes astray and defiles herself, 30 or when a spirit of jealousy comes on a man and he is jealous of his wife; then he shall set the woman before the LORD, and the priest shall apply this entire law to her. 31 The man shall be free from iniquity, but the woman shall bear her iniquity.

6 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When either men or women make a special vow, the vow of a nazirite,[a] to separate themselves to the LORD, 3 they shall separate themselves from wine and strong drink; they shall drink no wine vinegar or other vinegar, and shall not drink any grape juice or eat grapes, fresh or dried. 4 All their days as nazirites[b] they shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins.

5 All the days of their nazirite vow no razor shall come upon the head; until the time is completed for which they separate themselves to the LORD, they shall be holy; they shall let the locks of the head grow long.

6 All the days that they separate themselves to the LORD they shall not go near a corpse. 7 Even if their father or mother, brother or sister, should die, they may not defile themselves; because their consecration to God is upon the head. 8 All their days as nazirites[b] they are holy to the LORD.

9 If someone dies very suddenly nearby, defiling the consecrated head, then they shall shave the head on the day of their cleansing; on the seventh day they shall shave it. 10 On the eighth day they shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, 11 and the priest shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, and make atonement for them, because they incurred guilt by reason of the corpse. They shall sanctify the head that same day, 12 and separate themselves to the LORD for their days as nazirites,[b] and bring a male lamb a year old as a guilt offering. The former time shall be void, because the consecrated head was defiled.

13 This is the law for the nazirites[b] when the time of their consecration has been completed: they shall be brought to the entrance of the tent of meeting, 14 and they shall offer their gift to the LORD, one male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb a year old without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as an offering of well-being, 15 and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of choice flour mixed with oil and unleavened wafers spread with oil, with their grain offering and their drink offerings. 16 The priest shall present them before the LORD and offer their sin offering and burnt offering, 17 and shall offer the ram as a sacrifice of well-being to the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread; the priest also shall make the accompanying grain offering and drink offering. 18 Then the nazirites[b] shall shave the consecrated head at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall take the hair from the consecrated head and put it on the fire under the sacrifice of well-being. 19 The priest shall take the shoulder of the ram, when it is boiled, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them in the palms of the

[a] That is *one separated* or *one consecrated*
[b] That is *those separated* or *those consecrated*

but women could have only one, women lived under the threat of this ritual.

6.1–21: A temporary, voluntary nazirite vow. 2: Nazirites were male or female individuals who took a vow of consecration for a special vocation *to separate themselves to the LORD*. The precise purpose for becoming a nazirite remains elusive; they function as temporary priests in some fashion. Other texts describe both lifetime and temporary nazirites (Judg 13.5; 1 Sam 1.11; Am 2.11–12). **3–5:** The nazirite vow entailed separation from products of the vineyard (and other intoxicants), haircuts, and corpses; their return to secular life was signified by cutting the hair. Highly visible members of the community, they were public signs of total dedication to God, similar to the Rechabites (2 Kings 10.15; Jer 35). **6–12:** Nazirites were not to come into contact with (or even within sight of) a corpse; accidental contact defiled *the consecrated head* (long hair) and required rites of purification (19.1–22; Lev 21.1–12). Upon being purified, they were to *sanctify the head*, i.e., be reconsecrated. **13–20:** The law for terminating the vow. For the range of offerings see Lev 1–7. The ritual includes the shaving of the

nazirites,[a] after they have shaved the consecrated head. 20 Then the priest shall elevate them as an elevation offering before the LORD; they are a holy portion for the priest, together with the breast that is elevated and the thigh that is offered. After that the nazirites[a] may drink wine.

21 This is the law for the nazirites[a] who take a vow. Their offering to the LORD must be in accordance with the nazirite[b] vow, apart from what else they can afford. In accordance with whatever vow they take, so they shall do, following the law for their consecration.

22 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:
23 Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them,

24 The LORD bless you and keep you;
25 the LORD make his face to shine upon
you, and be gracious to you;
26 the LORD lift up his countenance upon
you, and give you peace.

27 So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

7 On the day when Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, and had anointed and consecrated it with all its furnishings, and had anointed and consecrated the altar with all its utensils, 2 the leaders of Israel, heads of their ancestral houses, the leaders of the tribes, who were over those who were enrolled, made offerings. 3 They brought their offerings before the LORD, six covered wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon for every two of the leaders, and for each one an ox; they presented them before the tabernacle. 4 Then the LORD said to Moses: 5 Accept these from them, that they may be used in doing the service of the tent of meeting, and give them to the Levites, to each according to his service. 6 So Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them to the Levites. 7 Two wagons and four oxen he gave to the Gershonites, according to their service; 8 and four wagons and eight oxen he gave to the Merarites, according to their service, under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron the priest. 9 But to the Kohathites he gave none, because they were charged with the care of the holy things that had to be carried on the shoulders.

10 The leaders also presented offerings for the dedication of the altar at the time when it was anointed; the leaders presented their offering before the altar. 11 The LORD said to Moses: They shall present their offerings, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar.

12 The one who presented his offering the first day was Nahshon son of Amminadab,

[a] That is *those separated* or *those consecrated*
[b] That is *one separated* or *one consecrated*

head and the burning of the hair (because it was holy). **20:** *Elevation offering*, see Lev 7.27–36. **21:** A summary.

6.22–27: The priestly blessing. Almost identical forms of this blessing were found on two small silver plaques in a tomb near Jerusalem, dating to the late seventh or early sixth century BCE. **24–26:** Each line, with God as subject, is progressively longer (three, five, seven Hebrew words). Perhaps the second verb in each case defines the first more specifically; together the six verbs cover God's benevolent activity from various angles and state God's gracious will for Israel. To *bless* signifies any divine gift that serves the life and well-being of individuals and communities. To *keep* is a specific blessing to those with safety concerns, focusing on God's protection from all forms of evil (cf. Ps 121.7–8). The shining *face* of God (contrast the hiding face) signifies God's benevolent disposition (cf. Ps 67.1). *Lift up his countenance* signifies a favorable movement toward the other in granting *peace*, that is, wholeness and fullness of life. **27:** To *put my name on the Israelites* emphasizes that the priests are representatives—only God can bless.

7.1–8.26: Final preparations for tabernacle worship. **7.1–88:** The consecration of the tabernacle with offerings made by the tribal leaders. **1:** A flashback occurs (through 10.10), one month earlier than 1.1, coinciding with the day Moses set up the tabernacle (Ex 40); it returns the reader to God's descent to dwell among the people and their response. **2–9:** One offering: six wagons and twelve oxen to carry the tabernacle and its furnishings. The Merarites receive two-thirds of the wagons and oxen because they carry the supporting structure; the Kohathites carry the *holy things* by hand, reflecting the importance of these items (4.1–15). **10:** Refers to the *offerings* presented in both 7.1–9 and 7.12–88. **11–83:** Another offering: necessities for the public altar sacrifices and the priesthood, to be offered at the altar whenever needed. The tribal leaders (see 2.3–31) each give the same offerings on twelve successive days of the celebration; the names are the same as in 1.5–15, but the

of the tribe of Judah; [13] his offering was one silver plate weighing one hundred thirty shekels, one silver basin weighing seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; [14] one golden dish weighing ten shekels, full of incense; [15] one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [16] one male goat for a sin offering; [17] and for the sacrifice of well-being, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Nahshon son of Amminadab.

[18] On the second day Nethanel son of Zuar, the leader of Issachar, presented an offering; [19] he presented for his offering one silver plate weighing one hundred thirty shekels, one silver basin weighing seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; [20] one golden dish weighing ten shekels, full of incense; [21] one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, as a burnt offering; [22] one male goat as a sin offering; [23] and for the sacrifice of well-being, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Nethanel son of Zuar.

[24] On the third day Eliab son of Helon, the leader of the Zebulunites: [25] his offering was one silver plate weighing one hundred thirty shekels, one silver basin weighing seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; [26] one golden dish weighing ten shekels, full of incense; [27] one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [28] one male goat for a sin offering; [29] and for the sacrifice of well-being, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Eliab son of Helon.

[30] On the fourth day Elizur son of Shedeur, the leader of the Reubenites: [31] his offering was one silver plate weighing one hundred thirty shekels, one silver basin weighing seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; [32] one golden dish weighing ten shekels, full of incense; [33] one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [34] one male goat for a sin offering; [35] and for the sacrifice of well-being, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Elizur son of Shedeur.

[36] On the fifth day Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai, the leader of the Simeonites: [37] his offering was one silver plate weighing one hundred thirty shekels, one silver basin weighing seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; [38] one golden dish weighing ten shekels, full of incense; [39] one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [40] one male goat for a sin offering; [41] and for the sacrifice of well-being, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai.

[42] On the sixth day Eliasaph son of Deuel, the leader of the Gadites: [43] his offering was one silver plate weighing one hundred thirty shekels, one silver basin weighing seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; [44] one golden dish weighing ten shekels, full of incense; [45] one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [46] one male goat for a sin offering; [47] and for the sacrifice of well-being, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Eliasaph son of Deuel.

[48] On the seventh day Elishama son of Ammihud, the leader of the Ephraimites: [49] his offering was one silver plate weighing one hundred thirty shekels, one silver basin weighing seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; [50] one golden dish weighing ten shekels, full of incense; [51] one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; [52] one male goat for a sin offering; [53] and for the sacrifice of well-being, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Elishama son of Ammihud.

[54] On the eighth day Gamaliel son of Pedahzur, the leader of the Manassites:

55 his offering was one silver plate weighing
one hundred thirty shekels, one silver basin
weighing seventy shekels, according to the
shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of
choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offer-
ing; 56 one golden dish weighing ten shekels,
full of incense; 57 one young bull, one ram,
one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering;
58 one male goat for a sin offering; 59 and for
the sacrifice of well-being, two oxen, five
rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a
year old. This was the offering of Gamaliel
son of Pedahzur.

60 On the ninth day Abidan son of Gideoni,
the leader of the Benjaminites: 61 his offering
was one silver plate weighing one hundred
thirty shekels, one silver basin weighing
seventy shekels, according to the shekel of
the sanctuary, both of them full of choice
flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 62 one
golden dish weighing ten shekels, full of
incense; 63 one young bull, one ram, one male
lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; 64 one
male goat for a sin offering; 65 and for the
sacrifice of well-being, two oxen, five rams,
five male goats, and five male lambs a year
old. This was the offering of Abidan son of
Gideoni.

66 On the tenth day Ahiezer son of Am-
mishaddai, the leader of the Danites: 67 his
offering was one silver plate weighing one
hundred thirty shekels, one silver basin
weighing seventy shekels, according to the
shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of
choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offer-
ing; 68 one golden dish weighing ten shekels,
full of incense; 69 one young bull, one ram,
one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering;
70 one male goat for a sin offering; 71 and for
the sacrifice of well-being, two oxen, five
rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a
year old. This was the offering of Ahiezer son
of Ammishaddai.

72 On the eleventh day Pagiel son of
Ochran, the leader of the Asherites: 73 his of-
fering was one silver plate weighing one hun-
dred thirty shekels, one silver basin weighing
seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the
sanctuary, both of them full of choice flour
mixed with oil for a grain offering; 74 one gold-
en dish weighing ten shekels, full of incense;
75 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb
a year old, for a burnt offering; 76 one male
goat for a sin offering; 77 and for the sacrifice
of well-being, two oxen, five rams, five male
goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was
the offering of Pagiel son of Ochran.

78 On the twelfth day Ahira son of Enan,
the leader of the Naphtalites: 79 his offering
was one silver plate weighing one hundred
thirty shekels, one silver basin weighing sev-
enty shekels, according to the shekel of the
sanctuary, both of them full of choice flour
mixed with oil for a grain offering; 80 one
golden dish weighing ten shekels, full of
incense; 81 one young bull, one ram, one male
lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; 82 one
male goat for a sin offering; 83 and for the sac-
rifice of well-being, two oxen, five rams, five
male goats, and five male lambs a year old.
This was the offering of Ahira son of Enan.

84 This was the dedication offering for the
altar, at the time when it was anointed, from
the leaders of Israel: twelve silver plates,
twelve silver basins, twelve golden dishes,
85 each silver plate weighing one hundred
thirty shekels and each basin seventy, all
the silver of the vessels two thousand four
hundred shekels according to the shekel of
the sanctuary, 86 the twelve golden dishes,
full of incense, weighing ten shekels apiece
according to the shekel of the sanctuary, all
the gold of the dishes being one hundred
twenty shekels; 87 all the livestock for the
burnt offering twelve bulls, twelve rams,
twelve male lambs a year old, with their grain
offering; and twelve male goats for a sin offer-
ing; 88 and all the livestock for the sacrifice of
well-being twenty-four bulls, the rams sixty,
the male goats sixty, the male lambs a year
old sixty. This was the dedication offering for
the altar, after it was anointed.

89 When Moses went into the tent of
meeting to speak with the LORD,[a] he would

[a] Heb *him*

order of tribes is different, with Judah first. **13:** *Shekel,* see 3.49–51n. **84–88:** Summary and total. The repetition underlines the unity and equality of the tribal groups and their support for the tabernacle. **89:** God's ongoing commitment to Israel (to dwell among them; to speak to Moses) matches the people's obedient response. The

hear the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat[a] that was on the ark of the covenant[b] from between the two cherubim; thus it spoke to him.

8 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: [2] Speak to Aaron and say to him: When you set up the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand. [3] Aaron did so; he set up its lamps to give light in front of the lampstand, as the LORD had commanded Moses. [4] Now this was how the lampstand was made, out of hammered work of gold. From its base to its flowers, it was hammered work; according to the pattern that the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.

[5] The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: [6] Take the Levites from among the Israelites and cleanse them. [7] Thus you shall do to them, to cleanse them: sprinkle the water of purification on them, have them shave their whole body with a razor and wash their clothes, and so cleanse themselves. [8] Then let them take a young bull and its grain offering of choice flour mixed with oil, and you shall take another young bull for a sin offering. [9] You shall bring the Levites before the tent of meeting, and assemble the whole congregation of the Israelites. [10] When you bring the Levites before the LORD, the Israelites shall lay their hands on the Levites, [11] and Aaron shall present the Levites before the LORD as an elevation offering from the Israelites, that they may do the service of the LORD. [12] The Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, and he shall offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites. [13] Then you shall have the Levites stand before Aaron and his sons, and you shall present them as an elevation offering to the LORD.

[14] Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the other Israelites, and the Levites shall be mine. [15] Thereafter the Levites may go in to do service at the tent of meeting, once you have cleansed them and presented them as an elevation offering. [16] For they are unreservedly given to me from among the Israelites; I have taken them for myself, in place of all that open the womb, the firstborn of all the Israelites. [17] For all the firstborn among the Israelites are mine, both human and animal. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I consecrated them for myself, [18] but I have taken the Levites in place of all the firstborn among the Israelites. [19] Moreover, I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the Israelites, to do the service for the Israelites at the tent of meeting, and to make atonement for the Israelites, in order that there may be no plague among the Israelites for coming too close to the sanctuary.

[20] Moses and Aaron and the whole congregation of the Israelites did with the Levites accordingly; the Israelites did with

[a] Or *the cover*
[b] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

mercy seat is the cover of *the ark of the covenant*, upon which were fixed two *cherubim*, sphinxlike creatures, shaped to form a throne for the invisible God (1 Sam 4.4; 2 Sam 6.2); the ark functioned as God's footstool (1 Chr 28.2; Ex 25.17–21), where God speaks to Moses when he enters the tabernacle, fulfilling God's promise in Ex 25.22 (see Num 11.16–30). **8.1–26:** Consecration of the Levites. **1–4:** Lighting directions for the tabernacle lamps (Ex 25.37), with a reminder of the *pattern* of their construction (Ex 25.9). The seven branches and flowery design may have symbolized the tree of life (see 1 Kings 7.49; Zech 4.1–14); the branched lampstand (Heb "menorah") remains an important symbol of light. **5–26:** The Levites are consecrated *to do service at the tent of meeting* (v. 15; see Lev 8; the priests are sanctified; the Levites are purified). **5–8:** This entails participation in a purification rite (see Lev 14.8–9) so they can perform this service without endangering themselves or the community. **9–18:** The Levites are presented *before the tent of meeting* and before *Aaron and his sons*. The people *lay their hands* on them, symbolizing the Levites as a living sacrifice dedicated to the service of God instead of their firstborn (vv. 16–17; see 3.11–13,40–51). The Levites in turn *lay their hands* on the bulls—sacrificed *to make atonement* for sins committed (v. 12b; see Lev 1; 4). God claims that the Levites are *mine . . . unreservedly given to me from among the Israelites* (vv.14–16; 3.9); God in turn gives them to the Aaronides for service at the tabernacle. **19**: This action is *to make atonement* for Israelites to prevent any plague resulting from too close contact with the holy things. **20–26:** The divine commands are obeyed: a summary of the cleansing, age requirements (see 4.47), and a clarification that they *assist* the Aaronides.

the Levites just as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning them. 21 The Levites purified themselves from sin and washed their clothes; then Aaron presented them as an elevation offering before the LORD, and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them. 22 Thereafter the Levites went in to do their service in the tent of meeting in attendance on Aaron and his sons. As the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did with them.

23 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 24 This applies to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall begin to do duty in the service of the tent of meeting; 25 and from the age of fifty years they shall retire from the duty of the service and serve no more. 26 They may assist their brothers in the tent of meeting in carrying out their duties, but they shall perform no service. Thus you shall do with the Levites in assigning their duties.

9 The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: 2 Let the Israelites keep the passover at its appointed time. 3 On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight,[a] you shall keep it at its appointed time; according to all its statutes and all its regulations you shall keep it. 4 So Moses told the Israelites that they should keep the passover. 5 They kept the passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight,[a] in the wilderness of Sinai. Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so the Israelites did. 6 Now there were certain people who were unclean through touching a corpse, so that they could not keep the passover on that day. They came before Moses and Aaron on that day, 7 and said to him, "Although we are unclean through touching a corpse, why must we be kept from presenting the LORD's offering at its appointed time among the Israelites?" 8 Moses spoke to them, "Wait, so that I may hear what the LORD will command concerning you."

9 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 10 Speak to the Israelites, saying: Anyone of you or your descendants who is unclean through touching a corpse, or is away on a journey, shall still keep the passover to the LORD. 11 In the second month on the fourteenth day, at twilight,[a] they shall keep it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 12 They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute for the passover they shall keep it. 13 But anyone who is clean and is not on a journey, and yet refrains from keeping the passover, shall be cut off from the people for not presenting the LORD's offering at its appointed time; such a one shall bear the consequences for the sin. 14 Any alien residing among you who wishes to keep the passover to the LORD shall do so according to the statute of the passover and according to its regulation; you shall have one statute for both the resident alien and the native.

15 On the day the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the

[a] Heb *between the two evenings*

9.1–14: The passover at Sinai. The flashback begun at 7.1 continues. **1–5:** A second celebration of passover (see Ex 12.24). **6–14:** A question to Moses regarding passover celebration upon touching a corpse (5.1–4; 19.11–20) results in new legislation from the LORD: such persons shall keep the same regulations one month later (see Ex 12). The case of persons *away on a journey* is another adjustment. **12:** Not *break a bone* of the passover lamb: see Ex 12.46; Jn 19.36. **13:** Those *not on a journey* that refrain from passover shall be *cut off from the people*, that is, *bear the consequences for the sin*, most likely extermination of the family line. **14:** A permissive rubric for the *resident alien*, a non-Israelite residing permanently in the land.

9.15–23: Divine guidance in the wilderness. A supplement to Ex 40.34–38, anticipating 10.11–13. The (single) pillar of cloud and fire (Ex 13.21–22; 14.24; 40.38) in which God was present was an ongoing feature of the wilderness journey. Linked to the tabernacle (and the ark, 10.33–36), the pillar's lifting and resting scheduled the stages of Israel's journey. The cloud would rest on the tabernacle and, while the tabernacle remained in the middle of the marching people, the cloud would proceed to the front of the procession (9.17; 14.14). Israel's obedience to these signs is stressed.

covenant;[a] and from evening until morning it was over the tabernacle, having the appearance of fire. [16] It was always so: the cloud covered it by day[b] and the appearance of fire by night. [17] Whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, then the Israelites would set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the Israelites would camp. [18] At the command of the LORD the Israelites would set out, and at the command of the LORD they would camp. As long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they would remain in camp. [19] Even when the cloud continued over the tabernacle many days, the Israelites would keep the charge of the LORD, and would not set out. [20] Sometimes the cloud would remain a few days over the tabernacle, and according to the command of the LORD they would remain in camp; then according to the command of the LORD they would set out. [21] Sometimes the cloud would remain from evening until morning; and when the cloud lifted in the morning, they would set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud lifted they would set out. [22] Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, resting upon it, the Israelites would remain in camp and would not set out; but when it lifted they would set out. [23] At the command of the LORD they would camp, and at the command of the LORD they would set out. They kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by Moses.

10 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: [2] Make two silver trumpets; you shall make them of hammered work; and you shall use them for summoning the congregation, and for breaking camp. [3] When both are blown, the whole congregation shall assemble before you at the entrance of the tent of meeting. [4] But if only one is blown, then the leaders, the heads of the tribes of Israel, shall assemble before you. [5] When you blow an alarm, the camps on the east side shall set out; [6] when you blow a second alarm, the camps on the south side shall set out. An alarm is to be blown whenever they are to set out. [7] But when the assembly is to be gathered, you shall blow, but you shall not sound an alarm. [8] The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; this shall be a perpetual institution for you throughout your generations. [9] When you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, so that you may be remembered before the LORD your God and be saved from your enemies. [10] Also on your days of rejoicing, at your appointed festivals, and at the beginnings of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over your sacrifices of well-being; they shall serve as a reminder on your behalf before the LORD your God: I am the LORD your God.

[11] In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the covenant.[a] [12] Then the Israelites set out by stages from the wilderness of Sinai, and the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran. [13] They set out for the first time at the command of the LORD by Moses. [14] The

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*
[b] Gk Syr Vg: Heb lacks *by day*

10.1–10: Two silver trumpets. God commands Moses to make two trumpets of hammered silver to be blown by priests on various occasions. **7:** *Blow*, one long blast; *alarm*, a series of short blasts. **9–10:** The rationale: to bring Israel's situation before God, who is called to act on their behalf, either in battle (salvation from enemies) or in and through the offerings (forgiveness and well-being).

10.11–25.18: The wilderness journey, from Sinai to the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River, the border of the promised land. Israel's obedience to this point stands in sharp contrast to what follows. Warnings of divine judgment go unheeded, with disastrous results (1.53; 8.19). Many of these narratives mirror Ex 15.22–18.27: manna, rocks producing water, battles with desert tribes, and nonstop complaints, and may be from different sources than the accounts of these events in the book of Exodus. But Numbers is different: the people are sharply identified as rebellious, against both God and Moses and Aaron.

10.11–28: Departure from Sinai. **11:** Nineteen days after the census (1.1) and eleven months after arrival at Sinai (Ex 19.1). The time of departure is set by divine command, signaled by the cloud (9.15–23). **12:** *By stages*, see ch 33. The end of the first stage is signaled by the cloud settling in *the wilderness of Paran*, the arid region

standard of the camp of Judah set out first, company by company, and over the whole company was Nahshon son of Amminadab. [15] Over the company of the tribe of Issachar was Nethanel son of Zuar; [16] and over the company of the tribe of Zebulun was Eliab son of Helon.

[17] Then the tabernacle was taken down, and the Gershonites and the Merarites, who carried the tabernacle, set out. [18] Next the standard of the camp of Reuben set out, company by company; and over the whole company was Elizur son of Shedeur. [19] Over the company of the tribe of Simeon was Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai, [20] and over the company of the tribe of Gad was Eliasaph son of Deuel.

[21] Then the Kohathites, who carried the holy things, set out; and the tabernacle was set up before their arrival. [22] Next the standard of the Ephraimite camp set out, company by company, and over the whole company was Elishama son of Ammihud. [23] Over the company of the tribe of Manasseh was Gamaliel son of Pedahzur, [24] and over the company of the tribe of Benjamin was Abidan son of Gideoni.

[25] Then the standard of the camp of Dan, acting as the rear guard of all the camps, set out, company by company, and over the whole company was Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. [26] Over the company of the tribe of Asher was Pagiel son of Ochran, [27] and over the company of the tribe of Naphtali was Ahira son of Enan. [28] This was the order of march of the Israelites, company by company, when they set out.

[29] Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well; for the LORD has promised good to Israel." [30] But he said to him, "I will not go, but I will go back to my own land and to my kindred." [31] He said, "Do not leave us, for you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us. [32] Moreover, if you go with us, whatever good the LORD does for us, the same we will do for you."

[33] So they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey with the ark of the covenant of the LORD going before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them, [34] the cloud of the LORD being over them by day when they set out from the camp.

[35] Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say,

"Arise, O LORD, let your enemies be
scattered,
and your foes flee before you."

[36] And whenever it came to rest, he would say,

"Return, O LORD of the ten thousand
thousands of Israel."[a]

11 Now when the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, the LORD heard it and his

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

south of Canaan. **14–28:** The marching order and levitical responsibilities follow the arrangement in chs 2–3.

10.29–36: Human and divine guidance. **29:** The name of Moses' father-in-law varies: *Hobab* (here and Judg 4.11); Jethro (Ex 3.1; 18.1); *Reuel* (here and Ex 2.18). Hobab was leader of the Kenites (Judg 1.16), a desert tribe; they would know the wilderness. Moses' invitation shows that the cloud's guidance is not deemed sufficient: both divine and human activities are necessary for the people to find their way. **33–36:** The ark with the cloud precedes the community. **33:** The second *three days' journey* is probably an erroneous scribal repetition. **35–36:** Moses' directives to the LORD, at the departure and arrival of the ark, are old poetic pieces, portraying the march as a liturgical procession. God was intensely present with the ark (7.89; see Ps 68.1; 132.7–8). God, the "LORD of Hosts" (*the ten thousand thousands of Israel*), leads Israel in battle against its enemies (1 Sam 4.1–7.2). That Moses invites God to become active on Israel's behalf again demonstrates the integration of human activity and divine.

11.1–3: A paradigm of rebellion. Provides a pattern in both form and content for several episodes that follow: murmuring; judgment; cry (of repentance); intercession; deliverance.

The people's complaints of unidentified misfortunes are not specifically directed to God, but God hears them. The divine anger is provoked by the people's *complaining*; *the fire of the LORD*, perhaps lightning (see Ex 9.23–24), consumes outlying areas of the camp. Moses intercedes and the storm stops.

anger was kindled. Then the fire of the LORD burned against them, and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. 2 But the people cried out to Moses; and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire abated. 3 So that place was called Taberah,[a] because the fire of the LORD burned against them.

4 The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6 but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color was like the color of gum resin. 8 The people went around and gathered it, ground it in mills or beat it in mortars, then boiled it in pots and made cakes of it; and the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil. 9 When the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna would fall with it.

10 Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents. Then the LORD became very angry, and Moses was displeased. 11 So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? 12 Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child, to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors'? 13 Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they come weeping to me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!' 14 I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. 15 If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me see my misery."

16 So the LORD said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you. 17 I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself. 18 And say to the people: Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wailed in the hearing of the LORD, saying, 'If only we had meat to eat! Surely it was better for us in Egypt.' Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. 19 You shall eat not only one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, 20 but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you—because you have rejected the LORD who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, 'Why did we ever leave Egypt?'" 21 But Moses said, "The people I am with number six hundred thousand on foot; and you say, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month'! 22 Are there enough flocks and herds to slaughter for them? Are there enough fish in the sea to catch for them?" 23 The LORD said to Moses, "Is the LORD's

[a] That is *Burning*

11.4–35: Rebellion and leadership. The coherence is difficult and likely reflects different interwoven traditions about food and Moses' leadership. On the provision of food, see 20.1–13. **4–15:** The *rabble* (non-Israelites, Ex 12.38), along with the Israelites, despise God's gifts of food (and deliverance, v. 20). Nostalgic for Egyptian food, they consider the *manna* (see Ex 16.14–21) insufficient. In response to God's anger, Moses complains that given what the people have become, God has mistreated him, placing too heavy a leadership burden on him (see Ex 18.18) and not providing sufficient resources. Moses uses maternal imagery for God: God has conceived and birthed this people (Deut 32.18) and should assume the responsibilities of a wet nurse. Moses should not have to carry this burden *alone*, implying that God is negligent. Feeling caught in the middle, Moses asks for either relief or death. **16–20:** God's reply: God will share the spirit given to Moses with others, who will share the burden (vv. 24–30), and God will provide the asked-for meat (vv. 31–35). Repeating the complaints, God declares that they are to prepare for an encounter with God; they will indeed get meat, but too much! **21–22:** Moses wonders about the numbers to feed. **23:** God's response: God's hand is not *too short* (see textual note

power limited?[a] Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not."

24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. 25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.

26 Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. 27 And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men,[b] said, "My lord Moses, stop them!" 29 But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!" 30 And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

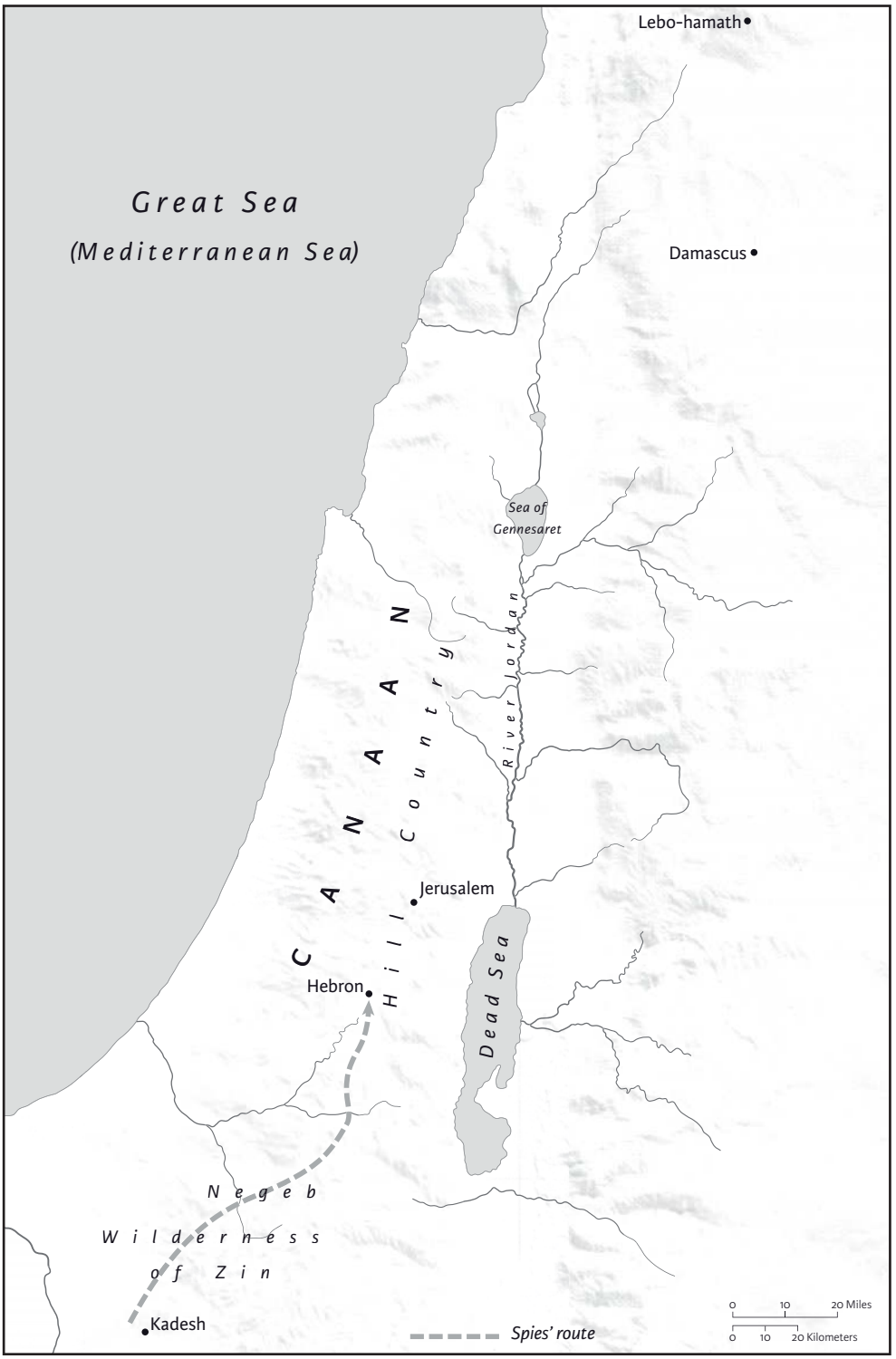
31 Then a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quails from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, about two cubits deep on the ground. 32 So the people worked all that day and night and all the next day, gathering the quails; the least anyone gathered was ten homers; and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. 33 But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague. 34 So that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah,[c] because there they buried the people who had the craving. 35 From Kibroth-hattaavah the people journeyed to Hazeroth.

12 While they were at Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had indeed married a Cushite woman); 2 and they said, "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. 3 Now the man Moses was very humble,[d] more so than anyone else on the face of the earth. 4 Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." So the three of them came out. 5 Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the entrance of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and

[a] Heb *LORD's hand too short?*
[b] Or *of Moses from his youth*
[c] That is *Graves of craving*
[d] Or *devout*

a) to provide this food. God will show that his word is effective. **24–30:** As for burden-sharing, Moses gathers seventy elders; God shares Moses' spirit with them, and *they prophesied*. Such a charisma was given to various leaders (24.2; 27.18; 1 Sam 10.5–10) and was transferable (2 Kings 2.9). Unlike Moses, they prophesy only once. Even two elders who remained in the camp (Eldad and Medad) receive a share of God's spirit. Despite efforts by Joshua, Moses refuses restriction of God's word to himself only; indeed, he wishes that *all the LORD's people* could receive this charisma. **31–35:** Food provision (see vv.18–23) comes in the form of *quails* (see Ex 16.13; Ps 78.26–31), carried into the camp on a wind from *the sea*, the Gulf of Aqaba/Eilat. They cover the ground for miles to a depth of *two cubits* (ca. 3 ft [.9 m]); the least gathered was *ten homers* (65 bu [230 liters])! Before they had finished eating, God's anger was provoked and a plague swept the camp.

12.1–16: Familial challenge to Moses' leadership. 1–2: Moses' status as a unique spokesperson for God is challenged by Miriam (see Ex 15.19–21) and Aaron. Although some sources identify Miriam as Moses' sister (see Num 26.59), in Ex 15.20 she is called "the sister of Aaron," and underlying the challenge may be rivalry between two families. The stated basis for the challenge is that Moses had married a *Cushite woman*. Cush may refer to Ethiopia or to an area in Midian (see Hab 3.7) and hence the woman may be Zipporah (10.29; Ex 2.15–22), in which case Aaron and Miriam may be complaining of Zipporah's leadership role or influence with Moses (see Ex 4.24–26; 18.2). **3–8**: Challenges to Moses' unique relationship with God are not countenanced, stated generally (v. 3) and by God to Aaron and Miriam in Moses' presence. God customarily speaks to prophets in visions and dreams, but Moses is different for two reasons: he is uniquely entrusted with the house of Israel (Ex 40.38); God speaks to him directly (Ex 33.11; Deut 34.10) and he sees *the form of the LORD*, a human form that God assumes (see 14.14; Ex 24.9–11). The issue pertains both to what is heard (clarity) and what is seen (God). God assumes



The route of the spies in chapter 13.

they both came forward. 6 And he said, "Hear my words:

When there are prophets among you,
I the LORD make myself known to them
in visions;
I speak to them in dreams.
7 Not so with my servant Moses;
he is entrusted with all my house.
8 With him I speak face to face— clearly,
not in riddles;
and he beholds the form of the LORD.

Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" 9 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed.

10 When the cloud went away from over the tent, Miriam had become leprous,[a] as white as snow. And Aaron turned towards Miriam and saw that she was leprous. 11 Then Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord, do not punish us[b] for a sin that we have so foolishly committed. 12 Do not let her be like one stillborn, whose flesh is half consumed when it comes out of its mother's womb." 13 And Moses cried to the LORD, "O God, please heal her." 14 But the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp for seven days, and after that she may be brought in again." 15 So Miriam was shut out of the camp for seven days; and the people did not set out on the march until Miriam had been brought in again. 16 After that the people set out from Hazeroth, and camped in the wilderness of Paran.

13 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites; from each of their ancestral tribes you shall send a man, every one a leader among them." 3 So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the LORD, all of them leading men among the Israelites. 4 These were their names: From the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur; 5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori; 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; 7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph; 8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun; 9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu; 10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi; 11 from the tribe of Joseph (that is, from the tribe of Manasseh), Gaddi son of Susi; 12 from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli; 13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael; 14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi; 15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Machi. 16 These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses changed the name of Hoshea son of Nun to Joshua.

17 Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up there into the Negeb, and go up into the hill country, 18 and see what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, 19 and whether the land they live in is good or bad, and whether the towns that they live in are unwalled or fortified, 20 and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be bold, and bring some of the fruit of

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

[b] Heb *do not lay sin upon us*

that Miriam and Aaron were aware of this and is angry (11.33). **10–16**: Miriam becomes *leprous* (an unidentified skin disease); Aaron interprets it as a consequence of their foolish sin and pleads ironically that "*my lord*" Moses spare them. **11–12**: *Do not lay sin upon us* (see textual note *b*) is preferable; the effect is intrinsic to the deed. The whiteness of Miriam's skin occasions the stillborn analogy. Why Aaron does not suffer the same effects is unknown; cf. Ex 32.21–24n. **13–15:** Moses prays on Miriam's behalf; God responds with banishment from the camp *for seven days*, either an external sign of shame, or the period required for purification after skin disease (see Lev 13.4; 14.8). The people honor her by delaying the march until she returns, apparently healed.

13.1–14.45: The spy mission and decision to attack. The setting for chs 13–20 is *Kadesh*(-barnea), 13.26, about 50 mi (80 km) south of Beersheba in the wilderness of Paran (or Zin, 20.1). This rebellion is decisive for Israel's future. Two sources are combined here: in one, only Caleb is righteous, while in the other, both Joshua and Caleb are righteous. **13.1–33:** Twelve scouts, one from each tribe, are chosen to spy on Canaan at God's command (see 32.6–13; Deut 1.22–45); most of those named do not occur elsewhere. **17–20:** Moses gives instructions regarding destination and observations to be made. **17:** *The Negeb* is the semidesert region in southern

the land." Now it was the season of the first ripe grapes.

21 So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath. 22 They went up into the Negeb, and came to Hebron; and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the Anakites, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 And they came to the Wadi Eshcol, and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them. They also brought some pomegranates and figs. 24 That place was called the Wadi Eshcol,[a] because of the cluster that the Israelites cut down from there.

25 At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. 26 And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan."

30 But Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." 31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we." 32 So they brought to the Israelites an unfavorable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. 33 There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

14 Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" 4 So they said to one another, "Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt."

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the Israelites. 6 And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to all the congregation of the Israelites, "The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. 9 Only, do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from

[a] That is *Cluster*

Israel. **20:** *Season of the first ripe grapes,* late summer. **21–24:** They scout the length of the country, to *Rehob, near Lebo-hamath* in the far north (see 34.7–9n.), though vv. 22–24 report only on the Negeb and Judah, from which they bring back fruit; especially noted is a cluster of grapes (hence the name Eshcol, near Hebron; see translators' note *a*). **22:** *The Anakites,* see v. 33n. **25–33:** After forty days the scouts bring back a mixed report. The initial report is realistic (vv. 28–29); the land is bountiful but filled with strong people and fortified cities. The identity and placement of indigenous peoples is not always clear (compare 13.29 with 14.25,45; Gen 15.19–21), reflecting different traditions. **28:** *Anak,* see v. 33n. **29:** The *Amalekites*, a perennial enemy of Israel (Ex 17.8–16). **30–33:** A division occurs among the scouts; Caleb expresses confidence, while others give *an unfavorable report*, voicing alarm at the size of its inhabitants. This report is exaggerated for effect; it succeeds. **33:** *The Anakites* (vv. 22,28,33), a people giant in stature and associated with the *Nephilim* (see Gen 6.4; Josh 15.14). **14.1–45:** Seduced by the negative report, the people despise God's promise of land and complain against Moses and Aaron for fear of their lives and the fate of their dependents (see 31.13–18). **4:** They plot to choose a new leader and reverse the Exodus. **5–10a:** They persist in spite of the leaders' urgent pleas (*fell on their faces*; 16.4,22), expressions of

them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." 10 But the whole congregation threatened to stone them.

Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites. 11 And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? 12 I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

13 But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for in your might you brought up this people from among them, 14 and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people; for you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go in front of them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now if you kill this people all at one time, then the nations who have heard about you will say, 16 'It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them that he has slaughtered them in the wilderness.' 17 And now, therefore, let the power of the LORD be great in the way that you promised when you spoke, saying,

18 'The LORD is slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love,
forgiving iniquity and transgression,
but by no means clearing the guilty,
visiting the iniquity of the parents
upon the children
to the third and the fourth generation.'

19 Forgive the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have pardoned this people, from Egypt even until now."

20 Then the LORD said, "I do forgive, just as you have asked; 21 nevertheless—as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD— 22 none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, 23 shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised me shall see it. 24 But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me wholeheartedly, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it. 25 Now, since the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys, turn tomorrow and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea."[a]

26 And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying: 27 How long shall this wicked congregation complain against me? I have heard the complaints of the Israelites, which they complain against me. 28 Say to them, "As I live," says the LORD, "I will do to you the very things I heard you say: 29 your dead bodies shall fall in this very wilderness; and of all your number, included in the census, from twenty years old and upward, who have

[a] Or *Sea of Reeds*

distress (*tore their clothes*; Gen 37.34), and assurances that the indigenous peoples are but *bread* to eat (compare 13.32; Ps 14.4) and their gods will provide no *protection*, . . . *the LORD is with us*. Rather than rejoice in the report of *an exceedingly good land* and trust that God will see to the promise, the people *rebel against the LORD* and threaten the leaders with death. **10b–38:** To these developments God responds (*glory* is the divine manifestation in a fiery cloud; see 9.15–23n.). This response has several dimensions. **11–12:** God voices a lament (repeated in v. 26), echoing those of the people and Moses (11.11–14). God announces a disastrous judgment (cf. Ex 9.15); God will disown Israel and start over with Moses (cf. Ex 32.9–10). This announcement is preliminary, a point for debate with Moses (see 16.20–21). **13–38:** God engages Moses in conversation. Moses argues (compare Ex 32.11–14) that God's reputation among the nations is at stake; they will conclude that God failed them. Their opinion should count with God. Moses also appeals to God's promise (see Ex 34.6–7), pleading for God to act according to his *steadfast love*: *forgiving* the people as God had done *ten times* (v. 22; cf. Gen 31.7). God forgives Israel (v. 20), but forgiveness does not cut off all consequences; the old generation will die in the wilderness and their children suffer for the adults' infidelity (vv. 27–35; 26.64–65; 32.10–12). *I will do to you the very things I heard you say* (v. 28). In effect: your will, not mine, is granted. Judgment is intrinsic to the deed (*you shall bear your iniquity*, v. 34; 32.23). Yet, the consequences are softened: the children and the clans of Caleb and Joshua (vv. 24,30,38; see Josh 14.6–14) will enter the land. But the rest of the people must continue their wandering for

complained against me, [30] not one of you shall come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. [31] But your little ones, who you said would become booty, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have despised. [32] But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. [33] And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness for forty years, and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. [34] According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day a year, you shall bear your iniquity, forty years, and you shall know my displeasure." [35] I the LORD have spoken; surely I will do thus to all this wicked congregation gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die.

[36] And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a bad report about the land— [37] the men who brought an unfavorable report about the land died by a plague before the LORD. [38] But Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh alone remained alive, of those men who went to spy out the land.

[39] When Moses told these words to all the Israelites, the people mourned greatly. [40] They rose early in the morning and went up to the heights of the hill country, saying, "Here we are. We will go up to the place that the LORD has promised, for we have sinned." [41] But Moses said, "Why do you continue to transgress the command of the LORD? That will not succeed. [42] Do not go up, for the LORD is not with you; do not let yourselves be struck down before your enemies. [43] For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will confront you there, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned back from following the LORD, the LORD will not be with you." [44] But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, even though the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, had not left the camp. [45] Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them, pursuing them as far as Hormah.

15 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: [2] Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When you come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving you, [3] and you make an offering by fire to the LORD from the herd or from the flock—whether a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or at your appointed festivals—to make a pleasing odor for the LORD, [4] then whoever presents such an offering to the LORD shall present also a grain offering, one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour, mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil. [5] Moreover, you shall offer one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering with the burnt offering or the sacrifice, for each lamb. [6] For a ram, you shall offer a grain offering, two-tenths of an ephah of choice flour mixed with one-third of a hin of oil; [7] and as a drink offering you shall offer one-third of a hin of wine, a pleasing odor to the LORD. [8] When you offer a bull as a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as an offering of well-being to the LORD, [9] then you shall present with the bull a grain offering, three-tenths of an ephah of choice flour, mixed with half a hin of oil, [10] and you shall present as a drink offering half a hin of wine, as an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD.

[11] Thus it shall be done for each ox or ram, or for each of the male lambs or the kids. [12] According to the number that you offer, so you shall do with each and every one. [13] Every native Israelite shall do these things in this way, in presenting an offering by fire,

a generation until they die. **39–45:** The people mourn over the loss, confess their sin, and seek to make things right by taking the land on their own; but they are defeated, for neither God (in the ark) nor Moses goes with them. **45:** *Hormah*, a city near Beersheba (see 21.2–3).

15.1–41: Statutes for life in the land. The narrative is interrupted by a series of statutes for *when you come into the land* (15.2,18); God still intends a future for them. The statutes also apply to outsiders, who have equal status before God concerning many issues relating to the land: *you and the alien shall be alike before the LORD* (v. 15). **1–16:** A grain offering (flour mixed with oil) and a drink offering (wine)—agricultural products—shall accompany each *offering by fire* listed in 15.3, rather than selective instances (see Lev 1–7). **3:** *Pleasing odor,* see Gen

a pleasing odor to the LORD. 14 An alien who lives with you, or who takes up permanent residence among you, and wishes to offer an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD, shall do as you do. 15 As for the assembly, there shall be for both you and the resident alien a single statute, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you and the alien shall be alike before the LORD. 16 You and the alien who resides with you shall have the same law and the same ordinance.

17 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 18 Speak to the Israelites and say to them: After you come into the land to which I am bringing you, 19 whenever you eat of the bread of the land, you shall present a donation to the LORD. 20 From your first batch of dough you shall present a loaf as a donation; you shall present it just as you present a donation from the threshing floor. 21 Throughout your generations you shall give to the LORD a donation from the first of your batch of dough.

22 But if you unintentionally fail to observe all these commandments that the LORD has spoken to Moses— 23 everything that the LORD has commanded you by Moses, from the day the LORD gave commandment and thereafter, throughout your generations— 24 then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, the whole congregation shall offer one young bull for a burnt offering, a pleasing odor to the LORD, together with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the ordinance, and one male goat for a sin offering. 25 The priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the Israelites, and they shall be forgiven; it was unintentional, and they have brought their offering, an offering by fire to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their error. 26 All the congregation of the Israelites shall be forgiven, as well as the aliens residing among them, because the whole people was involved in the error.

27 An individual who sins unintentionally shall present a female goat a year old for a sin offering. 28 And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the one who commits an error, when it is unintentional, to make atonement for the person, who then shall be forgiven. 29 For both the native among the Israelites and the alien residing among them—you shall have the same law for anyone who acts in error. 30 But whoever acts high-handedly, whether a native or an alien, affronts the LORD, and shall be cut off from among the people. 31 Because of having despised the word of the LORD and broken his commandment, such a person shall be utterly cut off and bear the guilt.

32 When the Israelites were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the sabbath day. 33 Those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses, Aaron, and to the whole congregation. 34 They put him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. 35 Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him outside the camp." 36 The whole congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

37 The LORD said to Moses: 38 Speak to the Israelites, and tell them to make fringes on

8.21; Ex 29.18; Lev 1.9; etc. **4:** *One-tenth of an ephah,* ca. 2 qts (2.3 liters). *Hin*, ca. 1 gal (3.8 liters). **17–21:** Prescribes a *donation* of one loaf from the first batch of dough to acknowledge that all such gifts come from God. Broadens earlier statutes regarding first fruits to include that produced by humans (see Lev 23.9–14; Num 18.13–18). **22–36:** Sacrifices for atonement for unintentional sins (Lev 4.13–21), for the *whole people* (vv. 22–26) and for the *individual* (vv. 27–29), and penalties for individuals who *act high-handedly*, i.e., who are unrepentant (vv. 30–31). In 5.5–8 (Lev 6.7) intentional sins can be atoned for, apparently because the persons are repentant. Sacrifices are a God-given means through which to obtain forgiveness. **30–31:** *Cut off*, see 9.13n. **32–36:** Intentional sabbath-breaking illustrates such defiance. The man's labor carried the death penalty (Ex 31.14–15; 35.2–3); yet it was not clear how to proceed—perhaps some thought that this was too minor a violation, or it was unclear if the penalty should be enforced by the community or by God. Lev 24.10–23 and Num 9.6–14 narrate other cases requiring a divine oracle to clarify a law's applicability. **37–41:** Pertains to clothing (see Deut 22.12). Tassels, worn in the ancient Near East by royalty, are to be attached to each corner of everyone's garments, with a blue(-purple) cord on each, a public sign of Israel's status as a holy people and a reminder of what that entailed.

the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue cord on the fringe at each corner. 39 You have the fringe so that, when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and not follow the lust of your own heart and your own eyes. 40 So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and you shall be holy to your God. 41 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God.

16 Now Korah son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, along with Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth—descendants of Reuben—took 2 two hundred fifty Israelite men, leaders of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men,[a] and they confronted Moses. 3 They assembled against Moses and against Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone too far! All the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. So why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" 4 When Moses heard it, he fell on his face. 5 Then he said to Korah and all his company, "In the morning the LORD will make known who is his, and who is holy, and who will be allowed to approach him; the one whom he will choose he will allow to approach him. 6 Do this: take censers, Korah and all your[b] company, 7 and tomorrow put fire in them, and lay incense on them before the LORD; and the man whom the LORD chooses shall be the holy one. You Levites have gone too far!" 8 Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you Levites! 9 Is it too little for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to allow you to approach him in order to perform the duties of the LORD's tabernacle, and to stand before the congregation and serve them? 10 He has allowed you to approach him, and all your brother Levites with you; yet you seek the priesthood as well! 11 Therefore you and all your company have gathered together against the LORD. What is Aaron that you rail against him?"

12 Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab; but they said, "We will not come! 13 Is it too little that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness, that you must also lord it over us? 14 It is clear you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Would you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come!"

15 Moses was very angry and said to the LORD, "Pay no attention to their offering. I

[a] Cn: Heb *and they confronted Moses, and two hundred fifty men . . . well-known men*
[b] Heb *his*

The call to be holy (v. 40; Lev 19.2) is a call to be true to the relationship in which they already stand.

16.1–50: The rebellions of Korah and others. Numbers 16–18 focus on issues relating to legitimacy of leadership, especially service in the tabernacle. Two rebellions are reported, one by Korah and others (vv. 1–40); a second by the whole congregation in response to their deaths (vv. 41–50). Conflict between Levites and Aaronides may reflect later controversies among rival priestly groups (see 12.1–16; 17.1–13). The first rebellion is composite, combining separate rebellions by Korah and his band, and of Dathan and Abiram and their followers. **1–21:** Korah belonged to the Levite clan responsible for the tabernacle's most holy things (4.4). **2–3:** He is joined by other Levites, the Reubenites Dathan, Abiram, and On, along with two hundred fifty other leaders; they challenge Moses and Aaron: *You have gone too far . . . you exalt yourselves* (see v. 13). Their claim that *every one* is holy is correct (15.40; Deut 7.6); the problem is the implication that Aaron and Moses are not more holy than they. The issue is not simply priestly status for all Levites (so Moses, v. 10), though this is primary. The presence of the group from Reuben reveals another interest: extending secular leadership prerogatives to representatives from all twelve tribes. **4–21:** After he *fell on his face* (14.5), Moses proposes a test. The antagonists are to bring *censers* (metal trays on which incense is burned, Lev 10.1–2) to the tabernacle and prepare them for offering incense. If God accepts their offerings, priestly status would be recognized. **5–7:** *And who is holy* assumes gradations of holiness. God will decide the identity of *the holy one* who is to *approach him* (i.e., the altar); this entails a holiness that sets him apart from other holy ones. **8–11:** The Levites' challenge to Aaron's leadership is a move *against the LORD*, elevating privilege above service. **12–14:** Speaking to challenges to his own leadership, Moses sends for Dathan and Abiram. They twice refuse, and ironically even call Egypt a land of milk and honey. **15–21:** Reverting to the Korah story of vv. 8–11, Moses tells God to ignore their offerings and repeats his instructions

have not taken one donkey from them, and I have not harmed any one of them." 16 And Moses said to Korah, "As for you and all your company, be present tomorrow before the LORD, you and they and Aaron; 17 and let each one of you take his censer, and put incense on it, and each one of you present his censer before the LORD, two hundred fifty censers; you also, and Aaron, each his censer." 18 So each man took his censer, and they put fire in the censers and laid incense on them, and they stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron. 19 Then Korah assembled the whole congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the LORD appeared to the whole congregation.

20 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying: 21 Separate yourselves from this congregation, so that I may consume them in a moment. 22 They fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one person sin and you become angry with the whole congregation?"

23 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 24 Say to the congregation: Get away from the dwellings of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. 25 So Moses got up and went to Dathan and Abiram; the elders of Israel followed him. 26 He said to the congregation, "Turn away from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, or you will be swept away for all their sins." 27 So they got away from the dwellings of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the entrance of their tents, together with their wives, their children, and their little ones. 28 And Moses said, "This is how you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works; it has not been of my own accord: 29 If these people die a natural death, or if a natural fate comes on them, then the LORD has not sent me. 30 But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD."

31 As soon as he finished speaking all these words, the ground under them was split apart. 32 The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, along with their households—everyone who belonged to Korah and all their goods. 33 So they with all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol; the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. 34 All Israel around them fled at their outcry, for they said, "The earth will swallow us too!" 35 And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred fifty men offering the incense.

36 [a]Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 37 Tell Eleazar son of Aaron the priest to take the censers out of the blaze; then scatter the fire far and wide. 38 For the censers of these sinners have become holy at the cost of their lives. Make them into hammered plates as a covering for the altar, for they presented them before the LORD and they became holy. Thus they shall be a sign to the Israelites. 39 So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers that had been presented by those who were burned; and they were hammered out as a covering for the altar— 40 a reminder to the Israelites that no outsider, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, shall approach to offer incense before the LORD, so as not to become

[a] Ch 17.1 in Heb

to Korah, adding that Aaron is also to appear. Each man stands before the LORD at the tent with their censers prepared. Korah assembles the entire congregation, apparently sympathetic. The glory of the LORD appears (cf. 9.15–16); God determines to destroy the congregation. **22–34:** Moses and Aaron intercede; not all should bear the consequences for *one person*. The phrase *the God of the spirits of all flesh* (see 27.16) appeals to God as creator, who gives breath to all. God responds positively, separating the congregation from the rebels and their families. Moses sets up a test to demonstrate that this is God's decision. **29–30:** If these people die a natural death, then he is wrong; if God *creates something new* (a creation for this moment) and the ground opens up and swallows them, and they descend alive to *Sheol* (the abode of the dead), then they have *despised the LORD*. **32–34:** The latter happens immediately to *everyone who belonged to Korah* (see 26.9–10; Deut 11.6; Ps 106.17). **35–40:** Upon the killing of the two hundred fifty men, attention is given to their censers, which became holy because of the use to which they were put. Gathered from the fire by Eleazar, Aaron's son (see Lev 21.11), they are hammered into

like Korah and his company—just as the LORD had said to him through Moses.

41 On the next day, however, the whole congregation of the Israelites rebelled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the LORD." 42 And when the congregation had assembled against them, Moses and Aaron turned toward the tent of meeting; the cloud had covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared. 43 Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, 44 and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 45 "Get away from this congregation, so that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces. 46 Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer, put fire on it from the altar and lay incense on it, and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them. For wrath has gone out from the LORD; the plague has begun." 47 So Aaron took it as Moses had ordered, and ran into the middle of the assembly, where the plague had already begun among the people. He put on the incense, and made atonement for the people. 48 He stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stopped. 49 Those who died by the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the affair of Korah. 50 When the plague was stopped, Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

17 [a]The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Speak to the Israelites, and get twelve staffs from them, one for each ancestral house, from all the leaders of their ancestral houses. Write each man's name on his staff, 3 and write Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. For there shall be one staff for the head of each ancestral house. 4 Place them in the tent of meeting before the covenant,[b] where I meet with you. 5 And the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout; thus I will put a stop to the complaints of the Israelites that they continually make against you. 6 Moses spoke to the Israelites; and all their leaders gave him staffs, one for each leader, according to their ancestral houses, twelve staffs; and the staff of Aaron was among theirs. 7 So Moses placed the staffs before the LORD in the tent of the covenant.[b]

8 When Moses went into the tent of the covenant[b] on the next day, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted. It put forth buds, produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds. 9 Then Moses brought out all the staffs from before the LORD to all the Israelites; and they looked, and each man took his staff. 10 And the LORD said to Moses, "Put back the staff of Aaron before the covenant,[b] to be kept as a warning to rebels, so that you may make an end of their complaints against me, or else they will die." 11 Moses did so; just as the LORD commanded him, so he did.

12 The Israelites said to Moses, "We are perishing; we are lost, all of us are lost! 13 Everyone who approaches the tabernacle of the LORD will die. Are we all to perish?"

[a] Ch 17.16 in Heb

[b] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

an altar covering, to serve as a reminder that only Aaronides can approach the LORD. **41–50:** The congregation blames Moses and Aaron, threatening them. The glory of the LORD appears and God threatens to annihilate them (see 16.19–22). Moses and Aaron intercede and act to atone for the intentional sins of the people. **48:** They *stood between the dead and the living*, because a plague had already broken out. The action stops the plague, but not before 14,700 died.

17.1–13: Aaron's blossoming staff. God again demonstrates the priestly status of Aaron. Like the bronze covering for the altar (16.38), Aaron's staff serves as an ongoing visual sign of God's choice of Aaron. This story is best designated a legend, with parallels in many cultures. God's effort on Aaron's behalf is settled by another ordeal. **4–7:** Moses places twelve staffs, each inscribed with a leader's name, *before the covenant*, i.e., the ark (10.33–36; Ex 16.33–34; 25.16,21). Aaron's staff, (of the house of Levi) the powers of which have been demonstrated (Ex 7.8–12,19; 8.16–17), was added to them. God set the terms: the staff that sprouts indicates the leader God had chosen for priestly prerogatives. **8–13:** The following morning only Aaron's staff had flowered and it bore ripe almonds (symbolic of life-enhancing capacities of priests). Showing the evidence to the people, Moses puts the staff before the ark, to be kept as a *warning* (sign) to the rebels. God had performed such a sign to *put a stop to the complaints . . . against you* (pl.; v. 5) and *me* (v. 10). For prophetic usage of this image, see Isa 11.1–2.

18 The LORD said to Aaron: You and your sons and your ancestral house with you shall bear responsibility for offenses connected with the sanctuary, while you and your sons alone shall bear responsibility for offenses connected with the priesthood. [2] So bring with you also your brothers of the tribe of Levi, your ancestral tribe, in order that they may be joined to you, and serve you while you and your sons with you are in front of the tent of the covenant.[a] [3] They shall perform duties for you and for the whole tent. But they must not approach either the utensils of the sanctuary or the altar, otherwise both they and you will die. [4] They are attached to you in order to perform the duties of the tent of meeting, for all the service of the tent; no outsider shall approach you. [5] You yourselves shall perform the duties of the sanctuary and the duties of the altar, so that wrath may never again come upon the Israelites. [6] It is I who now take your brother Levites from among the Israelites; they are now yours as a gift, dedicated to the LORD, to perform the service of the tent of meeting. [7] But you and your sons with you shall diligently perform your priestly duties in all that concerns the altar and the area behind the curtain. I give your priesthood as a gift;[b] any outsider who approaches shall be put to death.

[8] The LORD spoke to Aaron: I have given you charge of the offerings made to me, all the holy gifts of the Israelites; I have given them to you and your sons as a priestly portion due you in perpetuity. [9] This shall be yours from the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs that they render to me as a most holy thing, whether grain offering, sin offering, or guilt offering, shall belong to you and your sons. [10] As a most holy thing you shall eat it; every male may eat it; it shall be holy to you. [11] This also is yours: I have given to you, together with your sons and daughters, as a perpetual due, whatever is set aside from the gifts of all the elevation offerings of the Israelites; everyone who is clean in your house may eat them. [12] All the best of the oil and all the best of the wine and of the grain, the choice produce that they give to the LORD, I have given to you. [13] The first fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours; everyone who is clean in your house may eat of it. [14] Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours. [15] The first issue of the womb of all creatures, human and animal, which is offered to the LORD, shall be yours; but the firstborn of human beings you shall redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. [16] Their redemption price, reckoned from one month of age, you shall fix at five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary (that is, twenty gerahs). [17] But the firstborn of a cow, or the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat, you shall not redeem; they are holy. You shall dash their blood on the altar, and shall turn their fat into smoke as an offering by fire for a pleasing odor to the LORD; [18] but their flesh shall be yours, just as the breast that is elevated and as the right thigh are yours. [19] All the holy offerings that the Israelites present to the LORD I have given to you, together with your sons and daughters, as a perpetual due;

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*
[b] Heb *as a service of gift*

18.1–32: Rights and responsibilities of priests and Levites. In response to the people's lament of 17.13, ch 18 is a recapitulation and redefinition of the responsibilities of priests and Levites along with their means of support. **1–7:** Gathers previous material (see 1.50–53; 3.5–10,14–39; 4.1–33; 8.14–19) and delineates the relationship among the various groups regarding their duties at the tent of meeting. The protection of the community (i.e., outsiders, including Levites; vv. 4,7) from wrath (v. 5; see 1.53) is a prime concern (18.1,4–5,7,22). Priesthood is a gift from God as is the sanctuary service of their brother Levites (vv. 2, 6; see 8.19). **8–32:** A review (from Lev 6–7; 27) of the God-commanded portion due the Aaronides from the people (vv. 8–20), and from the Levites (vv. 25–32, a new provision), and that due to the Levites (18.21–24), in *perpetuity* (vv. 8,11,19,23). **8–20:** The *portion* due to the Aaronides consists of those *holy gifts* the people give to God, who in turn gives it to the priests and Levites for their support and for the sanctuary. **9–10:** *The most holy things* are offerings for the priests (parts *reserved from the fire*, not burned). **11–19:** Specifies the *holy offerings*; they are *a covenant of salt forever before the LORD* (v. 19). Salt, a preservative presented with all offerings, becomes a symbol for an everlasting covenant

it is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD for you and your descendants as well. 20 Then the LORD said to Aaron: You shall have no allotment in their land, nor shall you have any share among them; I am your share and your possession among the Israelites.

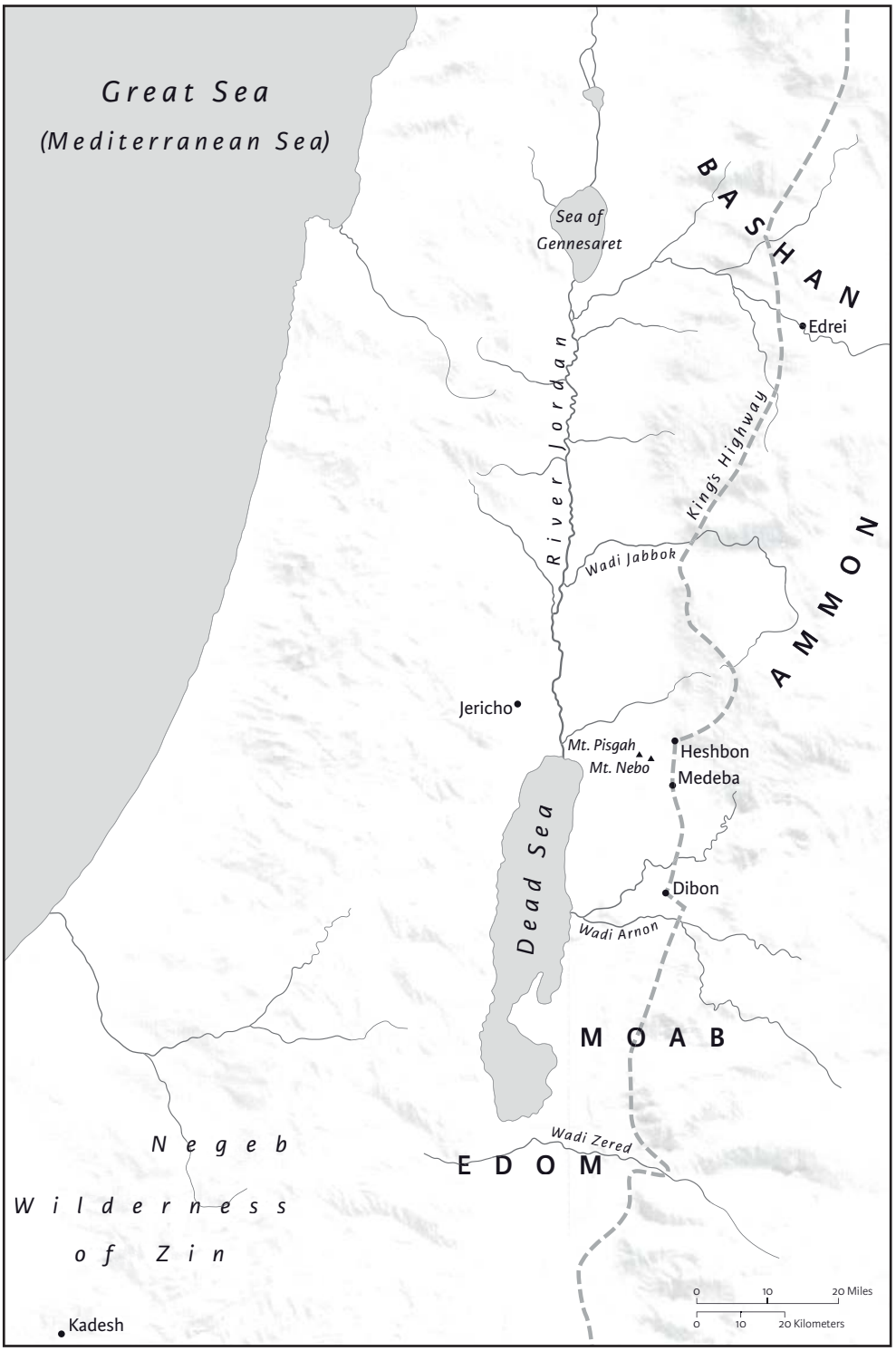
21 To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for a possession in return for the service that they perform, the service in the tent of meeting. 22 From now on the Israelites shall no longer approach the tent of meeting, or else they will incur guilt and die. 23 But the Levites shall perform the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear responsibility for their own offenses; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations. But among the Israelites they shall have no allotment, 24 because I have given to the Levites as their portion the tithe of the Israelites, which they set apart as an offering to the LORD. Therefore I have said of them that they shall have no allotment among the Israelites.

25 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 26 You shall speak to the Levites, saying: When you receive from the Israelites the tithe that I have given you from them for your portion, you shall set apart an offering from it to the LORD, a tithe of the tithe. 27 It shall be reckoned to you as your gift, the same as the grain of the threshing floor and the fullness of the wine press. 28 Thus you also shall set apart an offering to the LORD from all the tithes that you receive from the Israelites; and from them you shall give the LORD's offering to the priest Aaron. 29 Out of all the gifts to you, you shall set apart every offering due to the LORD; the best of all of them is the part to be consecrated. 30 Say also to them: When you have set apart the best of it, then the rest shall be reckoned to the Levites as produce of the threshing floor, and as produce of the wine press. 31 You may eat it in any place, you and your households; for it is your payment for your service in the tent of meeting. 32 You shall incur no guilt by reason of it, when you have offered the best of it. But you shall not profane the holy gifts of the Israelites, on pain of death.

19 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 2 This is a statute of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect, in which there is no blemish and on which no yoke has been laid. 3 You shall give it to the priest Eleazar, and it shall be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. 4 The priest Eleazar shall take some of its blood with his finger and sprinkle it seven times towards the front of the tent of meeting. 5 Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight; its skin, its flesh, and its blood, with its dung, shall be burned. 6 The priest shall take cedarwood, hyssop, and crimson material, and throw them into the fire in which the heifer is burning. 7 Then the priest shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterwards he may come into the camp; but the priest shall remain unclean until evening.

(Lev 2.13; 2 Chr 13.5). *Firstborn*, see Ex 13.11–13. **20:** God's commitment to the Aaronides in perpetuity, for they have no *allotment*, that is, property. *I am your share*; they are dependent for life and health upon the gifts of God, mediated through human beings. **21–24:** The Levites' portion is the Israelites' tithe of agricultural produce. The tithe (one-tenth) belongs to God (v. 24) but is given to the Levites. They also have no tribal territory, but are given forty-eight cities with pasture land (see 35.1–8). **25–32:** The Levites are to give *a tithe of the tithe* they have received (*the best of it*) to the Aaronides, reflecting the highest status of that group. The other nine-tenths is no longer holy and becomes their own—*as your payment for your service*. But, if they do not give their tithe, that will *profane* the holy gifts, and they shall die.

19.1–22: Ritual of the red heifer. Provisions for rituals of purification upon contact with a corpse (expanding 5.1–4). **1–10:** Specifies the procedure by which a cleansing agent was prepared under the supervision of the priest. Eleazar is charged with this duty (Aaron dies at 20.28); he and his assistants must be ritually clean, but they become unclean upon contact with the holy and short-term decontamination rituals are prescribed for each. The unblemished (brown-) red heifer (more precisely, cow) perhaps symbolized blood/life. The burning of the animal (including its blood/life, v. 5, uniquely here) may have concentrated life in the ashes, which, when mixed with water and applied to the unclean person or thing, would counteract the contagious impurity of death. The placement of *cedarwood, hyssop*, and *crimson* yarn (probably symbolizing blood), during the burning



Conflicts in the Negreb and Transjordan.

[8] The one who burns the heifer[a] shall wash his clothes in water and bathe his body in water; he shall remain unclean until evening. [9] Then someone who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and deposit them outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the congregation of the Israelites for the water for cleansing. It is a purification offering. [10] The one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.

This shall be a perpetual statute for the Israelites and for the alien residing among them. [11] Those who touch the dead body of any human being shall be unclean seven days. [12] They shall purify themselves with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be clean; but if they do not purify themselves on the third day and on the seventh day, they will not become clean. [13] All who touch a corpse, the body of a human being who has died, and do not purify themselves, defile the tabernacle of the LORD; such persons shall be cut off from Israel. Since water for cleansing was not dashed on them, they remain unclean; their uncleanness is still on them.

[14] This is the law when someone dies in a tent: everyone who comes into the tent, and everyone who is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. [15] And every open vessel with no cover fastened on it is unclean. [16] Whoever in the open field touches one who has been killed by a sword, or who has died naturally,[b] or a human bone, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days. [17] For the unclean they shall take some ashes of the burnt purification offering, and running water shall be added in a vessel; [18] then a clean person shall take hyssop, dip it in the water, and sprinkle it on the tent, on all the furnishings, on the persons who were there, and on whoever touched the bone, the slain, the corpse, or the grave. [19] The clean person shall sprinkle the unclean ones on the third day and on the seventh day, thus purifying them on the seventh day. Then they shall wash their clothes and bathe themselves in water, and at evening they shall be clean. [20] Any who are unclean but do not purify themselves, those persons shall be cut off from the assembly, for they have defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. Since the water for cleansing has not been dashed on them, they are unclean.

[21] It shall be a perpetual statute for them. The one who sprinkles the water for cleansing shall wash his clothes, and whoever touches the water for cleansing shall be unclean until evening. [22] Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean, and anyone who touches it shall be unclean until evening.

20 The Israelites, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh. Miriam died there, and was buried there.

[2] Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and against Aaron. [3] The people quarreled with Moses and said, "Would that we had died when our kindred died before the LORD! [4] Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness for us and our livestock to die here? [5] Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, to bring us to this wretched place? It is no place for grain, or figs, or vines, or pomegranates; and there is no water to

[a] Heb *it*
[b] Heb lacks *naturally*

intensified the ashes' purifying quality. **11–22:** Verses 11–13, detailed in vv. 14–22, specify the use to which the ashes and *running water* are put for persons and things that have had contact with death. As in other cases (see Lev 12.2) they are unclean for seven days; to become clean, they must twice be sprinkled with this mixture by a clean person (vv. 17–19; 19.9; 5.3–4). Otherwise, they *defile the tabernacle* where God dwells (5.3) and shall be *cut off from Israel* (vv. 13,20; see 9.13) for the sake of the community's wholeness.

20.1–29: The disobedience of Moses and Aaron. Explains why Israel's key leaders did not enter Canaan, marked especially by the *rebellion* of Moses and Aaron (compare Ex 17.1–7, also at Meribah, "quarrel"). **1:** *Kadesh*, see 13.26. God's command to journey back toward Egypt (14.25) was carried out and so they arrive again in Kadesh (setting out again in 20.22). **2–13:** The people again complain about wilderness conditions, this time that *there was no water* (vv. 2,5; compare 14.2–4). Moses and Aaron fall on their faces and turn toward God (14.5; 16.4); again the glory of the LORD appears (9.15–16). The reader expects judgment, but God recognizes that the

drink." 6 Then Moses and Aaron went away from the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting; they fell on their faces, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. 7 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 8 Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and your brother Aaron, and command the rock before their eyes to yield its water. Thus you shall bring water out of the rock for them; thus you shall provide drink for the congregation and their livestock.

9 So Moses took the staff from before the LORD, as he had commanded him. 10 Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Listen, you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" 11 Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank. 12 But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them." 13 These are the waters of Meribah,[a] where the people of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and by which he showed his holiness.

14 Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, "Thus says your brother Israel: You know all the adversity that has befallen us: 15 how our ancestors went down to Egypt, and we lived in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians oppressed us and our ancestors; 16 and when we cried to the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt; and here we are in Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory. 17 Now let us pass through your land. We will not pass through field or vineyard, or drink water from any well; we will go along the King's Highway, not turning aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory."

18 But Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through, or we will come out with the sword against you." 19 The Israelites said to him, "We will stay on the highway; and if we drink of your water, we and our livestock, then we will pay for it. It is only a small matter; just let us pass through on foot." 20 But he said, "You shall not pass through." And Edom came out against them with a large force, heavily armed. 21 Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through their territory; so Israel turned away from them.

22 They set out from Kadesh, and the Israelites, the whole congregation, came to Mount Hor. 23 Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor, on the border of the land of Edom, 24 "Let Aaron be gathered to his people. For he shall not enter the land that I have given to the Israelites, because you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah. 25 Take Aaron and his son Eleazar, and bring them up Mount Hor; 26 strip Aaron of his vestments, and put them on his son Eleazar. But Aaron shall be

[a] That is *Quarrel*

need for water is real. **8–9:** God commands Moses to take *the staff . . . from before the LORD* (in the tent, 17.10–11) and *command* [i.e., speak to] *the rock before their eyes to yield its water.* **10–13:** Moses asks the people: *Shall we bring water for you out of the rock*? With this self-reference rather than God, he strikes (rather than commands) *the rock twice with his staff*, and water flows. God's response is negative: Moses and Aaron did not *trust in* God (Deut 32.51, "broke faith") to *show my holiness* before the people (but see v. 13) and hence they will not lead the people into the land. They *rebelled against my command* or *word* (20.24; 27.14); Deut 1.37; 3.26; 4.21; Ps 106.32–33 qualify Moses' fault. The text is unclear about the precise offense, and the judgment seems not to match the action, but the point seems to be that they compromised God's holiness *before the eyes of the Israelites*. The end result (here, water to drink) is not the only thing that counts as a witness to God, but also the means by which it is achieved. Water does not materialize out of thin air but courses through rock formations. God works in and through the natural to provide (see ch 11). **14–21:** Request to pass through Edom, to enter Canaan from the east (compare 14.39–45). **14:** *King of Edom*, Gen 36.31–39. *Your brother*, Gen 25.24–26. Edom refuses. **16:** *Angel*, Ex 14.19; 23.20–23; 33.2. **17:** *The King's Highway* is the major north-south route through Transjordan. A show of military force convinces Israel to go around Edom (see Judg 11.17–18; Deut 2.4–8). **22–29:** Death of Aaron and installation of Eleazar (see v. 12). **22:** *Mount Hor*'s location is unknown. **26–28:** Aaron's *vestments* (Ex 28) are transferred to Eleazar before *the whole congregation*, signifying continuity (Deut 32.50). Aaron dies (*gathered [to*

gathered to his people,[a] and shall die there." [27] Moses did as the LORD had commanded; they went up Mount Hor in the sight of the whole congregation. [28] Moses stripped Aaron of his vestments, and put them on his son Eleazar; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. [29] When all the congregation saw that Aaron had died, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.

21 When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he fought against Israel and took some of them captive. [2] Then Israel made a vow to the LORD and said, "If you will indeed give this people into our hands, then we will utterly destroy their towns." [3] The LORD listened to the voice of Israel, and handed over the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their towns; so the place was called Hormah.[b]

[4] From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea,[c] to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. [5] The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." [6] Then the LORD sent poisonous[d] serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. [7] The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. [8] And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous[e] serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." [9] So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

[10] The Israelites set out, and camped in Oboth. [11] They set out from Oboth, and camped at Iye-abarim, in the wilderness bordering Moab toward the sunrise. [12] From there they set out, and camped in the Wadi Zered. [13] From there they set out, and camped on the other side of the Arnon, in[f] the wilderness that extends from the boundary of the Amorites; for the Arnon is the boundary of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. [14] Wherefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the LORD,

"Waheb in Suphah and the wadis.
The Arnon [15] and the slopes of the wadis
that extend to the seat of Ar,
and lie along the border of Moab."[g]

[16] From there they continued to Beer;[h] that is the well of which the LORD said to Moses, "Gather the people together, and I will give them water." [17] Then Israel sang this song:

[a] Heb lacks *to his people*
[b] Heb *Destruction*
[c] Or *Sea of Reeds*
[d] Or *fiery*; Heb *seraphim*
[e] Or *fiery*; Heb *seraph*
[f] Gk: Heb *which is in*
[g] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[h] That is *Well*

his people], see Gen 25.8) and is mourned for thirty days (see Deut 34.8) rather than the usual seven.

21.1–35: Victory, complaint, and healing. Positive signs become more frequent. **1–3:** This text functions paradigmatically for other texts concerning the conquest, called holy war texts (compare 11.1–3). Israel makes a vow to wage war against *Hormah* (see 14.45), if God would give victory. Israel's victory at *Arad* (east of Beer-sheba) reverses the failure at Hormah earlier. *Atharim*, unknown. Israel fulfills the vow, destroying people and towns. Such problematic texts (compare ch 31) in which the Canaanite population is killed and dedicated to God are grounded in a concern about danger to Israel's future (Deut 20.16–18). **4–9:** This final complaint is directed for the first time against both God and Moses (see 14.2–3; Ex 16.3); the people confess their sin, and the segment ends on a healing note. **6:** The judgment for the complaining is an infestation of *poisonous serpents* (or *fiery*, because of the burning) resulting in many deaths. **7:** Though the people repent (and are presumably forgiven), the snakes are not removed. The effects of sin may continue beyond forgiveness. **8–9:** God responds to those effects by commanding a means of healing (*serpent of bronze*, a homeopathic Egyptian technique to heal snakebite); those who look to the bronze serpent are healed. According to 2 Kings 18.4, the serpent, placed in the Temple in Jerusalem, was destroyed by the reforming king Hezekiah. **10–20**: Travel in Transjordan, around Edom and Moab (see map on p. 218); several sites are unidentified (see 33.41–49). **13:** *Amorites,* see 13.29. **14–18:** Water is provided at God's initiative and the people sing songs of appreciation (see vv. 27–30). The *Book of the*

"Spring up, O well!—Sing to it!—
18 the well that the leaders sank,
that the nobles of the people dug,
with the scepter, with the staff."
From the wilderness to Mattanah, 19 from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, 20 and from Bamoth to the valley lying in the region of Moab by the top of Pisgah that overlooks the wasteland.[a]

21 Then Israel sent messengers to King Sihon of the Amorites, saying, 22 "Let me pass through your land; we will not turn aside into field or vineyard; we will not drink the water of any well; we will go by the King's Highway until we have passed through your territory." 23 But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel to the wilderness; he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel. 24 Israel put him to the sword, and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as to the Ammonites; for the boundary of the Ammonites was strong. 25 Israel took all these towns, and Israel settled in all the towns of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all its villages. 26 For Heshbon was the city of King Sihon of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and captured all his land as far as the Arnon. 27 Therefore the ballad singers say,

"Come to Heshbon, let it be built;
let the city of Sihon be established.
28 For fire came out from Heshbon,
flame from the city of Sihon.
It devoured Ar of Moab,
and swallowed up[b] the heights of the Arnon.
29 Woe to you, O Moab!
You are undone, O people of Chemosh!
He has made his sons fugitives,
and his daughters captives,
to an Amorite king, Sihon.
30 So their posterity perished
from Heshbon[c] to Dibon,
and we laid waste until fire spread to Medeba."[d]

31 Thus Israel settled in the land of the Amorites. 32 Moses sent to spy out Jazer; and they captured its villages, and dispossessed the Amorites who were there.

33 Then they turned and went up the road to Bashan; and King Og of Bashan came out against them, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. 34 But the LORD said to Moses, "Do not be afraid of him; for I have given him into your hand, with all his people, and all his land. You shall do to him as you did to King Sihon of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon." 35 So they killed him, his sons, and all his people, until there was no survivor left; and they took possession of his land.

22 The Israelites set out, and camped in the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho. 2 Now Balak son of Zippor saw

[a] Or *Jeshimon*
[b] Gk: Heb *and the lords of*
[c] Gk: Heb *we have shot at them; Heshbon has perished*
[d] Compare Sam Gk: Meaning of MT uncertain

Wars of the LORD was apparently an early collection of poems about Israel's conquests (Josh 10.13). **20:** *Pisgah*, a ridge across the Jordan from Jericho (22.1; Deut 34.1). **21–35:** Victories over the Amorites, north of Moab (compare Deut 2.24–3.7). The location of several sites is uncertain. **21–26:** A request of King Sihon for safe passage is denied; Sihon pursues Israel, but Israel defeats him and possesses his lands. **22:** *King's Highway,* see 20.17n. **25:** *Heshbon,* probably Tel Hisban, ca. 20 km (12 mi) south of Amman. **27–30:** These include former Moabite lands, and the taunt song praises the victory of the Amorites over the Moabites and their god Chemosh and the capture of their lands (see ch. 32). **30:** *Dibon,* modern Dhiban, ca. 34 mi (55 km) south of Amman. *Medeba,* between Heshbon (v. 25) and Dibon. **33–35:** The victory over Og's lands (north of Sihon's land and across from Galilee) secures the Transjordan for tribal settlement (32.33); it mirrors 21.1–3 with its stress upon total destruction. **33:** *Edrei,* modern Der'a, ca. 65 mi (105 km) south of Damascus.

22.1–24.25: The story of Balaam. Balaam is a traveling professional seer whom God uses to bring blessing to Israel (some traditions assess him negatively; see 31.18; Josh 13.22; Rev 2.14). This material also functions ironically; a non-Israelite with less than sterling credentials voices God's promises clearly. Coherence issues, the various divine names, and the admixture of prose and poetry may reflect a long history of transmission. An Aramaic inscription from the eighth century BCE, found at Tell Deir 'Alla in Jordan, ascribes its contents to a "seer of the gods" named "Balaam, son of Beor." This text and chs 22–24 probably have common roots in Transjordanian traditions.

all that Israel had done to the Amorites.
3 Moab was in great dread of the people,
because they were so numerous; Moab was
overcome with fear of the people of Israel.
4 And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "This
horde will now lick up all that is around us,
as an ox licks up the grass of the field." Now
Balak son of Zippor was king of Moab at that
time. 5 He sent messengers to Balaam son of
Beor at Pethor, which is on the Euphrates, in
the land of Amaw,[a] to summon him, saying,
"A people has come out of Egypt; they have
spread over the face of the earth, and they
have settled next to me. 6 Come now, curse
this people for me, since they are stronger
than I; perhaps I shall be able to defeat them
and drive them from the land; for I know that
whomever you bless is blessed, and whom-
ever you curse is cursed."

7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of
Midian departed with the fees for divination
in their hand; and they came to Balaam, and
gave him Balak's message. 8 He said to them,
"Stay here tonight, and I will bring back
word to you, just as the LORD speaks to me";
so the officials of Moab stayed with Balaam.
9 God came to Balaam and said, "Who are
these men with you?" 10 Balaam said to God,
"King Balak son of Zippor of Moab, has sent
me this message: 11 'A people has come out
of Egypt and has spread over the face of
the earth; now come, curse them for me;
perhaps I shall be able to fight against them
and drive them out.'" 12 God said to Balaam,
"You shall not go with them; you shall not
curse the people, for they are blessed." 13 So
Balaam rose in the morning, and said to the
officials of Balak, "Go to your own land, for
the LORD has refused to let me go with you."
14 So the officials of Moab rose and went to
Balak, and said, "Balaam refuses to come
with us."

15 Once again Balak sent officials, more
numerous and more distinguished than
these. 16 They came to Balaam and said to
him, "Thus says Balak son of Zippor: 'Do not
let anything hinder you from coming to me;
17 for I will surely do you great honor, and
whatever you say to me I will do; come, curse
this people for me.'" 18 But Balaam replied
to the servants of Balak, "Although Balak
were to give me his house full of silver and
gold, I could not go beyond the command of
the LORD my God, to do less or more. 19 You
remain here, as the others did, so that I may
learn what more the LORD may say to me."
20 That night God came to Balaam and said to
him, "If the men have come to summon you,
get up and go with them; but do only what
I tell you to do." 21 So Balaam got up in the
morning, saddled his donkey, and went with
the officials of Moab.

22 God's anger was kindled because he was
going, and the angel of the LORD took his

[a] Or *land of his kinsfolk*

22.1–40: **Balaam's three encounters with God. 1–6:** *Balak*, king of Moab, fearful of Israel, hires Balaam, a famous mercenary diviner from Syria (*Pethor,* uncertain location; cf. "Aram," 23.7), to *curse this people* to insure their defeat. **7–21:** *Divination* (see 23.23; Deut 18.9–14) was a widely practiced art in that world. Asking for a delay to consult with the *LORD*, Balaam has his first encounter with God. That Balaam refers to *the LORD* (YHWH), that he calls the LORD *my God,* and that the LORD converses with Balaam, is remarkable. God prohibits Balaam from cursing Israel, for they are blessed. **13–17:** Balaam recounts the divine refusal to officials who report back to Balak. Balak makes a more attractive offer—a *great honor*. **18–21:** Balaam again consults with *the LORD my God* and tells officials he is subject exactly (not *less or more*) to the divine command. In view of Balaam's faithfulness, God changes the strategy and commands him to go and *do only what I tell you to do*. Balaam goes. **22–35:** What follows contains disjunctions with what has preceded, and may be from another tradition. The reader (but not Balaam) is told of *God's anger* because he departed; indeed, God has become Balaam's *adversary*. The narrator delays the rationale until v. 32. God's command to Balaam in v. 35 remains essentially as it was in v. 20. To get to that repeated command, the narrator uses fable motifs regarding a talking donkey (see Judg 9.7–15), which God uses in what amounts to a test of Balaam. The *angel* (lit., "messenger") *of the LORD* (see 9.15–23), with *drawn sword* (cf. Josh 5.13; 1 Chr 21.16), confronts Balaam and his donkey three times in increasingly restrictive circumstances. The donkey alone sees the angel and seeks to avoid him; Balaam strikes the animal repeatedly, which signals his *perverse* ways (v. 32; contrast v. 20). With God's aid, the donkey questions Balaam, who thinks he has been *made a fool* and threatens the donkey (vv.

stand in the road as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. 23 The donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand; so the donkey turned off the road, and went into the field; and Balaam struck the donkey, to turn it back onto the road. 24 Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. 25 When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it scraped against the wall, and scraped Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck it again. 26 Then the angel of the LORD went ahead, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. 27 When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it lay down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. 28 Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" 29 Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me! I wish I had a sword in my hand! I would kill you right now!" 30 But the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I been in the habit of treating you this way?" And he said, "No."

31 Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed down, falling on his face. 32 The angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? I have come out as an adversary, because your way is perverse[a] before me. 33 The donkey saw me, and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let it live." 34 Then Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now therefore, if it is displeasing to you, I will return home." 35 The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men; but speak only what I tell you to speak." So Balaam went on with the officials of Balak.

36 When Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him at Ir-moab, on the boundary formed by the Arnon, at the farthest point of the boundary. 37 Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not send to summon you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?" 38 Balaam said to Balak, "I have come to you now, but do I have power to say just anything? The word God puts in my mouth, that is what I must say." 39 Then Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-huzoth. 40 Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and sent them to Balaam and to the officials who were with him.

41 On the next day Balak took Balaam and brought him up to Bamoth-baal; and from there he could see part of the people of

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

28–29). The donkey's appeal to their long history together stops the threat. God opens Balaam's eyes to see as the donkey sees. Balaam responds that, though he did not know of God's opposition, he has sinned. God renews the commission and Balaam proceeds. Through the use of irony and humor, God uses the donkey as Balaam's teacher. **36–40**: Having arrived at the boundary of Moab, Balaam is greeted by a chiding Balak. Balaam responds: what God *puts in my mouth*, as with the prophets (Jer 1.9; Ezek 2.8–3.3; 1 Kings 22.14), *is what I must say* (compare Jer 20.7–9).

22.41–24.13: Balaam's first three oracles. These mirror the three episodes of Balaam with his donkey. The first two oracles follow a pattern (22.41–23.11; 23.13–25), while the third breaks the pattern in some ways (23.27–24.13): (a) Balak brings Balaam to a high point overlooking Israel's camp; (b) Balak builds seven altars and offers bulls and rams. Sacrifices were typical in the diviner's art, perhaps to *look for omens* in the entrails; (c) Balaam twice turns to consult with the LORD; the third time he does not *as at other times . . . look for omens* (24.1), so consulting with the LORD is diviner's language. *Divination* is seen to be a bankrupt means of revelation (23.23);. (d) God twice puts a word in Balaam's mouth and commands him to speak that word. In the third case (24.2), *the spirit of God* comes upon him (see 11.17,25–26); (e) Balaam speaks God's blessings on Israel rather than curses (23.7–10; 23.18–24; 24.3–9); (f) Balak's reactions are increasingly negative, issuing finally in dismissal (24.10–11); (g) Balaam's response to Balak is testimony to God's word. That he *must take care to say* (23.12) what God puts in his mouth indicates that he has other options. That Balaam *falls down, but with eyes uncovered* (is alert; 24.4,16) may refer to a qualified ecstatic reception of God's word. Balaam "sees" Israel's history, moving from past to

23 Israel.[a] [1] Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me." [2] Balak did as Balaam had said; and Balak and Balaam offered a bull and a ram on each altar. [3] Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your burnt offerings while I go aside. Perhaps the LORD will come to meet me. Whatever he shows me I will tell you." And he went to a bare height.

[4] Then God met Balaam; and Balaam said to him, "I have arranged the seven altars, and have offered a bull and a ram on each altar." [5] The LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, "Return to Balak, and this is what you must say." [6] So he returned to Balak,[b] who was standing beside his burnt offerings with all the officials of Moab. [7] Then Balaam[c] uttered his oracle, saying:

"Balak has brought me from Aram,
the king of Moab from the eastern mountains:
'Come, curse Jacob for me;
Come, denounce Israel!'
[8] How can I curse whom God has not cursed?
How can I denounce those whom the LORD has not denounced?
[9] For from the top of the crags I see him,
from the hills I behold him.
Here is a people living alone,
and not reckoning itself among the nations!
[10] Who can count the dust of Jacob,
or number the dust-cloud[d] of Israel?
Let me die the death of the upright,
and let my end be like his!"

[11] Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but now you have done nothing but bless them." [12] He answered, "Must I not take care to say what the LORD puts into my mouth?"

[13] So Balak said to him, "Come with me to another place from which you may see them; you shall see only part of them, and shall not see them all; then curse them for me from there." [14] So he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah. He built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. [15] Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here beside your burnt offerings, while I meet the LORD over there." [16] The LORD met Balaam, put a word into his mouth, and said, "Return to Balak, and this is what you shall say." [17] When he came to him, he was standing beside his burnt offerings with the officials of Moab. Balak said to him, "What has the LORD said?" [18] Then Balaam uttered his oracle, saying:

"Rise, Balak, and hear;
listen to me, O son of Zippor:
[19] God is not a human being, that he should lie,
or a mortal, that he should change his mind.
Has he promised, and will he not do it?
Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?
[20] See, I received a command to bless;
he has blessed, and I cannot revoke it.
[21] He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob;
nor has he seen trouble in Israel.
The LORD their God is with them,
acclaimed as a king among them.
[22] God, who brings them out of Egypt,
is like the horns of a wild ox for them.
[23] Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob,

[a] Heb lacks *of Israel*
[b] Heb *him*
[c] Heb *he*
[d] Or *fourth part*

present to a more and more specific future: election *among the nations* (23.9); promise (and fulfillment) of many descendants, like a *dust-cloud* (23.10; see Gen 13.16); blessing (24.9; see Gen 12.3); Exodus (23.22; 24.8); God's presence and care in the wilderness (23.21; see 24.5–6). He anticipates a successful conquest (23.24; 24.6–9) and the rise of the monarchy (24.7,17–19). The overall scene for Balaam is a blessed people, confident and flourishing. In Balaam's words (23.10): *let my end be like his*! The oracles are highly poetic and often obscure in their current form. **23.14:** *Pisgah,* see 21.20n. **19–22:** Balaam also sees some of Israel's basic convictions about God. God is not a human being, not deceptive, blesses Israel, reveals his word, and makes and keeps promises. That God will not *change his mind* refers to promises and is not a generalization about divine immutability (see Ex 32.14) or prophecy (see Jer 18.7–10). God chooses to dwell among them, is *acclaimed as a king*, and is a deliverer,

no divination against Israel;
now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel,
'See what God has done!'
24 Look, a people rising up like a lioness,
and rousing itself like a lion!
It does not lie down until it has eaten the prey
and drunk the blood of the slain."
25 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Do not curse them at all, and do not bless them at all." 26 But Balaam answered Balak, "Did I not tell you, 'Whatever the LORD says, that is what I must do'?"

27 So Balak said to Balaam, "Come now, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there." 28 So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, which overlooks the wasteland.[a] 29 Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me." 30 So Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

24 Now Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, so he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. 2 Balaam looked up and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. Then the spirit of God came upon him, 3 and he uttered his oracle, saying:

"The oracle of Balaam son of Beor,
the oracle of the man whose eye is clear,[b]
4 the oracle of one who hears the words of God,
who sees the vision of the Almighty,[c]
who falls down, but with eyes uncovered:
5 how fair are your tents, O Jacob,
your encampments, O Israel!
6 Like palm groves that stretch far away,
like gardens beside a river,
like aloes that the LORD has planted,
like cedar trees beside the waters.
7 Water shall flow from his buckets,
and his seed shall have abundant water,
his king shall be higher than Agag,
and his kingdom shall be exalted.
8 God who brings him out of Egypt,
is like the horns of a wild ox for him;
he shall devour the nations that are his foes
and break their bones.
He shall strike with his arrows.[d]
9 He crouched, he lay down like a lion,
and like a lioness; who will rouse him up?
Blessed is everyone who blesses you,
and cursed is everyone who curses you."

10 Then Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together. Balak said to Balaam, "I summoned you to curse my enemies, but instead you have blessed them these three times. 11 Now be off with you! Go home! I said, 'I will reward you richly,' but the LORD has denied you any reward." 12 And Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, 13 'If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the LORD, to do either good or bad of my own will; what the LORD says, that is what I will say'? 14 So now, I am going to my people; let me advise you what this people will do to your people in days to come."

15 So he uttered his oracle, saying:
"The oracle of Balaam son of Beor,

[a] Or *overlooks Jeshimon*
[b] Or *closed* or *open*
[c] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain

depicted as strong animals that will defeat Israel's enemies (23.22; 24.8–9; see Gen 49.9). **28:** *Peor,* cf. Baal-peor, 25.3; 31.16.

24.14–25: Balaam's fourth oracle. 7: *Agag,* the name of a king of Amalek (see 24.20; 13.29) in 1 Sam 15.8. **15–19:** His *eye is clear,* he himself has *the knowledge of the Most High* and can see the future (*see him, but not now . . . not near*). Israel will bring Moab, Edom, and other peoples in the region under their aegis and its God will be exalted among the nations. How this will occur is stated in 24.17 (see 24.7); God will raise up a star and scepter (24.17a; royal images, Gen 49.10) from the tribe of Judah (lion imagery is used in 23.24; 24.9; see Gen 49.9) and Israel will be established among the nations (24.17–24). These images are usually associated with the

the oracle of the man whose eye is clear,[a]
16 the oracle of one who hears the words of God,
and knows the knowledge of the Most High,[b]
who sees the vision of the Almighty,[c]
who falls down, but with his eyes uncovered:
17 I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near—
a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;
it shall crush the borderlands[d] of Moab,
and the territory[e] of all the Shethites.
18 Edom will become a possession,
Seir a possession of its enemies,[f]
while Israel does valiantly.
19 One out of Jacob shall rule,
and destroy the survivors of Ir."
20 Then he looked on Amalek, and uttered his oracle, saying:
"First among the nations was Amalek,
but its end is to perish forever."
21 Then he looked on the Kenite, and uttered his oracle, saying:
"Enduring is your dwelling place,
and your nest is set in the rock;
22 yet Kain is destined for burning.
How long shall Asshur take you away captive?"
23 Again he uttered his oracle, saying:
"Alas, who shall live when God does this?
24 But ships shall come from Kittim
and shall afflict Asshur and Eber;
and he also shall perish forever."
25 Then Balaam got up and went back to his place, and Balak also went his way.

25 While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people began to have sexual relations with the women of Moab. 2 These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 Thus Israel yoked itself to the Baal of Peor, and the LORD's anger was kindled against Israel. 4 The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people, and impale them in the sun before the LORD, in order that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." 5 And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you shall kill any of your people who have yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor."

6 Just then one of the Israelites came and brought a Midianite woman into his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the Israelites, while they were weeping at the entrance of the tent

[a] Or *closed* or *open*
[b] Or *of Elyon*
[c] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[d] Or *forehead*
[e] Some Mss read *skull*
[f] Heb *Seir, its enemies, a possession*

Davidic dynasty and its victories over Moab and Edom (Seir) (2 Sam 8.2,12–14) and have been messianically interpreted. *Shethites*; uncertain; *Ir* is Moab (22.36). **20–25:** Obscure brief oracles against the nations, with God acting (24.23): *Amalek,* see v. 7n.; *Kain,* the Kenites, a subgroup of the Midianites (see 22.4); *Asshur* (Assyria, or an obscure tribal group, Gen 25.3); *Eber* (perhaps Mesopotamia, see Gen 10.25); and the Philistines or other sea people (*Kittim*; see Gen 10.4).

25.1–18: The final rebellion. Two stories about Israelite men and foreign women (vv. 1–5; 6–16) have been interwoven, with the second now providing an illustration of the first (the conclusion assumes both, vv. 16–18; see Ps 106.28–31). The focus is idolatry (vv. 2–3). The old generation will finally die off. **1–5:** *Shittim* (see Josh 2.1; 3.1). The first story (see Deut 4.3–4) involves Moabite women who, through illicit sexual activity, invite Israelite males into idolatrous practices associated with Baal, the Canaanite god of Peor (see 31.16). God tells Moses to *impale* the chiefs of Israel to turn *the fierce anger of the LORD* away (see 1.53). Moses issues another command: kill any idolaters. Because the wrath of God is not turned away by following God's command to execute a few, a plague follows (see 25.8–9; compare 25.18; 31.8–16). **6–15:** Describes a relationship between a Midianite woman and a *Simeonite* (vv.14–15 specify their status and may link the man with v. 4). *Into his family* (v. 6) better reads "to his brothers"; the tabernacle setting suggests something more sinister as does *trickery* in v.18. He did this *in the sight of Moses* and all Israelites as *they were weeping* (probably over the plague). The wrong committed is unclear: marriage to a non-Israelite was not permitted, and according to some scholars the parading before the people near the tabernacle may imply ritual prostitution. Because Moses had married a Midianite (Ex 2.15–22)

of meeting. 7 When Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he got up and left the congregation. Taking a spear in his hand, 8 he went after the Israelite man into the tent, and pierced the two of them, the Israelite and the woman, through the belly. So the plague was stopped among the people of Israel. 9 Nevertheless those that died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.

10 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 11 "Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the Israelites by manifesting such zeal among them on my behalf that in my jealousy I did not consume the Israelites. 12 Therefore say, 'I hereby grant him my covenant of peace. 13 It shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of perpetual priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the Israelites.'"

14 The name of the slain Israelite man, who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri son of Salu, head of an ancestral house belonging to the Simeonites. 15 The name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi daughter of Zur, who was the head of a clan, an ancestral house in Midian.

16 The LORD said to Moses, 17 "Harass the Midianites, and defeat them; 18 for they have harassed you by the trickery with which they deceived you in the affair of Peor, and in the affair of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister; she was killed on the day of the plague that resulted from Peor."

26 After the plague the LORD said to Moses and to Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, 2 "Take a census of the whole congregation of the Israelites, from twenty years old and upward, by their ancestral houses, everyone in Israel able to go to war." 3 Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho, saying, 4 "Take a census of the people,[a] from twenty years old and upward," as the LORD commanded Moses.

The Israelites, who came out of the land of Egypt, were:

5 Reuben, the firstborn of Israel. The descendants of Reuben: of Hanoch, the clan of the Hanochites; of Pallu, the clan of the Palluites; 6 of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Carmi, the clan of the Carmites. 7 These are the clans of the Reubenites; the number of those enrolled was forty-three thousand seven hundred thirty. 8 And the descendants of Pallu: Eliab. 9 The descendants of Eliab:

[a] Heb lacks *take a census of the people*: Compare verse 2

perhaps he had difficulty responding, but the deed called for decisive action. **7–13:** *Phinehas*, grandson of Aaron, does not hesitate. He enters *the tent* (a rare word, occurring only here in the Bible, perhaps implying some ritual function) and pierces them through, apparently in a single thrust, suggesting that they were engaged in sexual intercourse. The effect of his action, called for by God in v. 4, is that he *made atonement for the Israelites* (cf. 16.46–48). God interprets this act as *zeal* exercised on behalf of the divine *jealousy* (the related words show that God's zeal became Phinehas's; see Ex 34.14–16; Hos 9.10). Phinehas's action is the basis for God's establishing with the Aaronides a *covenant of peace* (see Isa 54.10; Ezek 34.25), interpreted to mean a covenant of perpetual priesthood (see Jer 33.17–22; Mal 2.4–8). However, Aaron had already received this commitment (Ex 29.9; 40.15), so this may reflect a different tradition, or formalization of the prior commitment. **16–18:** God's command to *harass* (be an enemy to) *the Midianites* corresponds to *they have harassed you*. The consequence grows out of the sin (see ch 31 for fulfillment). This text may reflect priestly rivalries. Phinehas is elevated over Moses and Aaron's other son Ithamar (see 1 Kings 2.26–27) and God's commitment to Phinehas (see 1 Chr 6.4–10; Ezek 44.15), is eternal.

26.1–36.13: The new generation on the plains of Moab. The balance of Numbers contains little narrative, though enough to provide a framework for the legal material. Various statutes and lists are presented that prepare Israel for life in the land. Balaam's oracles have made clear that God keeps promises and the assumptions of land ownership and allocation in chs 27–36 have a promissory force. Yet, this does not lessen the call to be faithful, and chs 27–36 assist Israel in its faithfulness by new orderings of its life. New experience is drawn into the orbit of the law in the service of the life of the flourishing of community.

26.1–65: Census of the new generation. It begins with military service in mind, Eleazar replacing his father Aaron, and land allotment issues paramount (compare 1.2–3). The twelve-tribe structure remains intact. The

Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. These are the same Dathan and Abiram, chosen from the congregation, who rebelled against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they rebelled against the LORD, 10 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up along with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred fifty men; and they became a warning. 11 Notwithstanding, the sons of Korah did not die.

12 The descendants of Simeon by their clans: of Nemuel, the clan of the Nemuelites; of Jamin, the clan of the Jaminites; of Jachin, the clan of the Jachinites; 13 of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites; of Shaul, the clan of the Shaulites.[a] 14 These are the clans of the Simeonites, twenty-two thousand two hundred.

15 The children of Gad by their clans: of Zephon, the clan of the Zephonites; of Haggi, the clan of the Haggites; of Shuni, the clan of the Shunites; 16 of Ozni, the clan of the Oznites; of Eri, the clan of the Erites; 17 of Arod, the clan of the Arodites; of Areli, the clan of the Arelites. 18 These are the clans of the Gadites: the number of those enrolled was forty thousand five hundred.

19 The sons of Judah: Er and Onan; Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. 20 The descendants of Judah by their clans were: of Shelah, the clan of the Shelanites; of Perez, the clan of the Perezites; of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites. 21 The descendants of Perez were: of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Hamul, the clan of the Hamulites. 22 These are the clans of Judah: the number of those enrolled was seventy-six thousand five hundred.

23 The descendants of Issachar by their clans: of Tola, the clan of the Tolaites; of Puvah, the clan of the Punites; 24 of Jashub, the clan of the Jashubites; of Shimron, the clan of the Shimronites. 25 These are the clans of Issachar: sixty-four thousand three hundred enrolled.

26 The descendants of Zebulun by their clans: of Sered, the clan of the Seredites; of Elon, the clan of the Elonites; of Jahleel, the clan of the Jahleelites. 27 These are the clans of the Zebulunites; the number of those enrolled was sixty thousand five hundred.

28 The sons of Joseph by their clans: Manasseh and Ephraim. 29 The descendants of Manasseh: of Machir, the clan of the Machirites; and Machir was the father of Gilead; of Gilead, the clan of the Gileadites. 30 These are the descendants of Gilead: of Iezer, the clan of the Iezerites; of Helek, the clan of the Helekites; 31 and of Asriel, the clan of the Asrielites; and of Shechem, the clan of the Shechemites; 32 and of Shemida, the clan of the Shemidaites; and of Hepher, the clan of the Hepherites. 33 Now Zelophehad son of Hepher had no sons, but daughters: and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 34 These are the clans of Manasseh; the number of those enrolled was fifty-two thousand seven hundred.

35 These are the descendants of Ephraim according to their clans: of Shuthelah, the clan of the Shuthelahites; of Becher, the clan of the Becherites; of Tahan, the clan of the Tahanites. 36 And these are the descendants of Shuthelah: of Eran, the clan of the Eranites. 37 These are the clans of the Ephraimites: the number of those enrolled was thirty-two thousand five hundred. These are the descendants of Joseph by their clans.

38 The descendants of Benjamin by their clans: of Bela, the clan of the Belaites; of Ashbel, the clan of the Ashbelites; of Ahiram, the clan of the Ahiramites; 39 of Shephupham, the clan of the Shuphamites; of Hupham, the clan of the Huphamites. 40 And the sons of Bela were Ard and Naaman: of Ard, the clan of the Ardites; of Naaman, the clan of the Naamites. 41 These are the descendants of Benjamin by their clans; the number of those enrolled was forty-five thousand six hundred.

42 These are the descendants of Dan by their clans: of Shuham, the clan of the Shuhamites. These are the clans of Dan by their clans. 43 All the clans of the Shuhamites: sixty-four thousand four hundred enrolled.

44 The descendants of Asher by their families: of Imnah, the clan of the Imnites; of

[a] Or *Saul . . . Saulites*

listing focuses on clans rather than individuals (for land allotment); the totals are given for each tribe. **9:** *Dathan and Abiram . . . Korah,* see ch 16. **19:** *Er and Onan,* see Gen 38.1–10. **33:** On *the daughters of Zelophehad,* see 27.1–11;

Ishvi, the clan of the Ishvites; of Beriah, the clan of the Beriites. 45 Of the descendants of Beriah: of Heber, the clan of the Heberites; of Malchiel, the clan of the Malchielites. 46 And the name of the daughter of Asher was Serah. 47 These are the clans of the Asherites: the number of those enrolled was fifty-three thousand four hundred.

48 The descendants of Naphtali by their clans: of Jahzeel, the clan of the Jahzeelites; of Guni, the clan of the Gunites; 49 of Jezer, the clan of the Jezerites; of Shillem, the clan of the Shillemites. 50 These are the Naphtalites[a] by their clans: the number of those enrolled was forty-five thousand four hundred.

51 This was the number of the Israelites enrolled: six hundred and one thousand seven hundred thirty.

52 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 53 To these the land shall be apportioned for inheritance according to the number of names. 54 To a large tribe you shall give a large inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a small inheritance; every tribe shall be given its inheritance according to its enrollment. 55 But the land shall be apportioned by lot; according to the names of their ancestral tribes they shall inherit. 56 Their inheritance shall be apportioned according to lot between the larger and the smaller.

57 This is the enrollment of the Levites by their clans: of Gershon, the clan of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the clan of the Kohathites; of Merari, the clan of the Merarites. 58 These are the clans of Levi: the clan of the Libnites, the clan of the Hebronites, the clan of the Mahlites, the clan of the Mushites, the clan of the Korahites. Now Kohath was the father of Amram. 59 The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and she bore to Amram: Aaron, Moses, and their sister Miriam. 60 To Aaron were born Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 61 But Nadab and Abihu died when they offered unholy fire before the LORD. 62 The number of those enrolled was twenty-three thousand, every male one month old and upward; for they were not enrolled among the Israelites because there was no allotment given to them among the Israelites.

63 These were those enrolled by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who enrolled the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho. 64 Among these there was not one of those enrolled by Moses and Aaron the priest, who had enrolled the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. 65 For the LORD had said of them, "They shall die in the wilderness." Not one of them was left, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

27 Then the daughters of Zelophehad came forward. Zelophehad was son of Hepher son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh son of Joseph, a member of the Manassite clans. The names of his daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 2 They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and all the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and they said, 3 "Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. 4 Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers."

5 Moses brought their case before the LORD. 6 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

[a] Heb *clans of Naphtali*

36.1–12. **51:** The grand total is 601,730 compared to 603,550 in 1.46. **52–56:** A new reason for the census is given in 26.52–56: land apportionment is to be based on tribal size after the conquest is complete; the location of land will be determined *by lot*, a means of eliminating human bias. **57–62:** The Levites are newly and separately enrolled (see 3.14–39, an increase of 1,000), with no tribal allotment (18.23–24). **65:** See 14.20–35.

27.1–11: The daughters of Zelophehad. Because ancestral lands are to be kept within the tribe (see Lev 25.25–34; 1 Kings 21.1–4), a way to pass on the inheritance must be found if a man has no sons. In such cases daughters may inherit, here given Moses' blessing (see Josh 17.3–6). A restriction is added in 36.1–2, providing an inclusio for chs 27–36. **3–4:** The daughters take the initiative with Moses in pursuing inheritance rights inasmuch as their father had no sons (26.33). The allusion to their father not *in the company of Korah* likely refers to the two hundred fifty leaders of 16.2; *his own sin* may reference the old generation (26.64–65). Their father's

7 The daughters of Zelophehad are right in
what they are saying; you shall indeed let
them possess an inheritance among their
father's brothers and pass the inheritance of
their father on to them. 8 You shall also say to
the Israelites, "If a man dies, and has no son,
then you shall pass his inheritance on to his
daughter. 9 If he has no daughter, then you
shall give his inheritance to his brothers. 10 If
he has no brothers, then you shall give his
inheritance to his father's brothers. 11 And if
his father has no brothers, then you shall give
his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his
clan, and he shall possess it. It shall be for the
Israelites a statute and ordinance, as the LORD
commanded Moses."

12 The LORD said to Moses, "Go up this
mountain of the Abarim range, and see
the land that I have given to the Israelites.
13 When you have seen it, you also shall be
gathered to your people, as your brother
Aaron was, 14 because you rebelled against
my word in the wilderness of Zin when
the congregation quarreled with me.[a] You
did not show my holiness before their eyes
at the waters." (These are the waters of
Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.)
15 Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, 16 "Let
the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh,
appoint someone over the congregation
17 who shall go out before them and come
in before them, who shall lead them out
and bring them in, so that the congregation
of the LORD may not be like sheep without
a shepherd." 18 So the LORD said to Moses,
"Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom
is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him;
19 have him stand before Eleazar the priest
and all the congregation, and commission
him in their sight. 20 You shall give him some
of your authority, so that all the congrega-
tion of the Israelites may obey. 21 But he shall
stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall
inquire for him by the decision of the Urim
before the LORD; at his word they shall go
out, and at his word they shall come in, both
he and all the Israelites with him, the whole
congregation." 22 So Moses did as the LORD
commanded him. He took Joshua and had
him stand before Eleazar the priest and the
whole congregation; 23 he laid his hands on
him and commissioned him—as the LORD
had directed through Moses.

28 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:
2 Command the Israelites, and say to
them: My offering, the food for my offerings

[a] Heb lacks *with me*

name would still be associated with this land, for their sons would pass on the name (Ezra 2.61). **6–11:** God agrees with the daughters and decrees other ways in which the inheritance can be transmitted in the absence of sons, with preference given to direct lineage both to ensure the endurance of the family name and to safeguard a just distribution of land among the tribes.

27.12–23: From Moses to Joshua. Authority is transferred to Joshua, one of the good spies in chs 13–14, from Moses, whose earlier rebellion is recalled (see 20.12). Moses is given a glimpse of the promised land from *the Abarim range* (Mount Nebo, Deut 32.49). **16–17:** Moses initiates the issue of succession, appealing to God as Creator, *the God of the spirits of all flesh* (see 16.22; Gen 2.7). This God, who gives breath to all, has given Joshua *the spirit*, a specific charisma for leadership and prophecy (v.18; see 11.17,26; Deut 34.9). Joshua has been Moses' assistant since the Exodus (11.28; Ex 24.13; 33.11). Here his responsibilities are especially associated with military leadership (see Ex 17.8–14), the basic sense of *go out before them and come in before them* (27.17,21; Josh 14.11). Yet, the image of *sheep without a shepherd* suggests a more comprehensive, almost royal leadership role, as Moses had (see 2 Sam 5.2). **18–21:** God commands Moses to *commission* Joshua by laying his *hand upon him*, a symbolic act signifying the transfer of *authority* (cf. 8.10–11). The investiture is public, before *all the congregation*, so it is clear that the people are to *obey* this one. The act is also to take place before *Eleazar the priest* (see 20.22–29), to whom Joshua is responsible with respect to the discernment of the will of God (especially regarding battle) through the use of *Urim* (and Thummim; see Ex 28.29–30; Lev 8.8). The latter responsibility explains why only *some of his authority* was given to Joshua (see Moses' role in 12.6–8; Deut 34.10; Josh 1.7–8).

28.1–29.40: Offerings for life in the land, for various occasions. Building upon other Pentateuchal texts regarding these matters (see Lev 23; Deut 16.1–17), these texts focus on sacrificial offerings through which Israel places itself in tune with God's temporal order in creation. In and through these offerings God acted for the sake of the life and well-being of the community. The totals: thirty days of the year, besides the daily and

by fire, my pleasing odor, you shall take care to offer to me at its appointed time. 3 And you shall say to them, This is the offering by fire that you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs a year old without blemish, daily, as a regular offering. 4 One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight;[a] 5 also one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour for a grain offering, mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil. 6 It is a regular burnt offering, ordained at Mount Sinai for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD. 7 Its drink offering shall be one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in the sanctuary you shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the LORD. 8 The other lamb you shall offer at twilight[a] with a grain offering and a drink offering like the one in the morning; you shall offer it as an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD.

9 On the sabbath day: two male lambs a year old without blemish, and two-tenths of an ephah of choice flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, and its drink offering— 10 this is the burnt offering for every sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.

11 At the beginnings of your months you shall offer a burnt offering to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish; 12 also three-tenths of an ephah of choice flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, for each bull; and two-tenths of choice flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, for the one ram; 13 and one-tenth of choice flour mixed with oil as a grain offering for every lamb—a burnt offering of pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD. 14 Their drink offerings shall be half a hin of wine for a bull, one-third of a hin for a ram, and one-fourth of a hin for a lamb. This is the burnt offering of every month throughout the months of the year. 15 And there shall be one male goat for a sin offering to the LORD; it shall be offered in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.

16 On the fourteenth day of the first month there shall be a passover offering to the LORD. 17 And on the fifteenth day of this month is a festival; seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. 18 On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall not work at your occupations. 19 You shall offer an offering by fire, a burnt offering to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old; see that they are without blemish. 20 Their grain offering shall be of choice flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah shall you offer for a bull, and two-tenths for a ram; 21 one-tenth shall you offer for each of the seven lambs; 22 also one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you. 23 You shall offer these in addition to the burnt offering of the morning, which belongs to the regular burnt offering. 24 In the same way you shall offer daily, for seven days, the food of an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD; it shall be offered in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. 25 And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations.

26 On the day of the first fruits, when you offer a grain offering of new grain to the LORD at your festival of weeks, you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. 27 You shall offer a burnt offering, a pleasing odor to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs a year old.

[a] Heb *between the two evenings*

sabbath offerings. The first three offerings mark the basic temporal frame of days, weeks, and months. The others mark out the festival year: the first month (March-April; Passover and Unleavened Bread), fifty days later (Weeks) , and the seventh month (Rosh Hashanah, Day of Atonement, and Booths). These festivals are timed to Israel's harvests; later they are associated with key events of Israel's history (Exodus; giving of the law; wilderness wanderings). **28.2:** Introduces the offerings (brought by the people) that belong wholly to God (whole burnt offerings; purification or sin offerings; each with meal and drink offerings, see 15.2–16) for the various times. *Pleasing odor*, see 15.3. **3–8:** Daily burnt offering, offered at dawn and dusk (see Ex 29.38–42; Lev 6.9–13). **9–10:** Sabbath offerings relate to the hallowed seventh day of creation. **11–15:** Monthly (new moon) offerings (see 1 Sam 20.5; Isa 1.13; Am 8.5). **16–25:** Passover and, on the seven days following, Unleavened Bread (see 9.1–14; Lev 23.2–8; Ex 12.1–27; 13.3–10; Deut 16.1–8). **26–31**: Festival of First Fruits (Weeks; Harvest; Pentecost;

28 Their grain offering shall be of choice flour
mixed with oil, three-tenths of an ephah for
each bull, two-tenths for one ram, 29 one-
tenth for each of the seven lambs; 30 with one
male goat, to make atonement for you. 31 In
addition to the regular burnt offering with
its grain offering, you shall offer them and
their drink offering. They shall be without
blemish.

29 On the first day of the seventh month
you shall have a holy convocation; you
shall not work at your occupations. It is a day
for you to blow the trumpets, 2 and you shall
offer a burnt offering, a pleasing odor to the
LORD: one young bull, one ram, seven male
lambs a year old without blemish. 3 Their
grain offering shall be of choice flour mixed
with oil, three-tenths of one ephah for the
bull, two-tenths for the ram, 4 and one-tenth
for each of the seven lambs; 5 with one male
goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for
you. 6 These are in addition to the burnt of-
fering of the new moon and its grain offering,
and the regular burnt offering and its grain
offering, and their drink offerings, according
to the ordinance for them, a pleasing odor, an
offering by fire to the LORD.

7 On the tenth day of this seventh month
you shall have a holy convocation, and deny
yourselves;[a] you shall do no work. 8 You shall
offer a burnt offering to the LORD, a pleas-
ing odor: one young bull, one ram, seven
male lambs a year old. They shall be without
blemish. 9 Their grain offering shall be of
choice flour mixed with oil, three-tenths of
an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the one
ram, 10 one-tenth for each of the seven lambs;
11 with one male goat for a sin offering, in
addition to the sin offering of atonement, and
the regular burnt offering and its grain offer-
ing, and their drink offerings.

12 On the fifteenth day of the seventh
month you shall have a holy convocation; you
shall not work at your occupations. You shall
celebrate a festival to the LORD seven days.
13 You shall offer a burnt offering, an offering
by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD: thirteen
young bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs
a year old. They shall be without blemish.
14 Their grain offering shall be of choice flour
mixed with oil, three-tenths of an ephah for
each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each
of the two rams, 15 and one-tenth for each
of the fourteen lambs; 16 also one male goat
for a sin offering, in addition to the regular
burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink
offering.

17 On the second day: twelve young bulls,
two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old
without blemish, 18 with the grain offering
and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the
rams, and for the lambs, as prescribed in
accordance with their number; 19 also one
male goat for a sin offering, in addition to the
regular burnt offering and its grain offering,
and their drink offerings.

20 On the third day: eleven bulls, two rams,
fourteen male lambs a year old without blem-
ish, 21 with the grain offering and the drink of-
ferings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the
lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their
number; 22 also one male goat for a sin offer-
ing, in addition to the regular burnt offering
and its grain offering and its drink offering.

23 On the fourth day: ten bulls, two rams,
fourteen male lambs a year old without blem-
ish, 24 with the grain offering and the drink
offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for
the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with
their number; 25 also one male goat for a sin
offering, in addition to the regular burnt of-
fering, its grain offering and its drink offering.

26 On the fifth day: nine bulls, two rams,
fourteen male lambs a year old without blem-
ish, 27 with the grain offering and the drink of-
ferings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the
lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their
number; 28 also one male goat for a sin offer-
ing, in addition to the regular burnt offering
and its grain offering and its drink offering.

[a] Or *and fast*

see Lev 23.15–21; Deut 16.9–12). **29.1–6:** *The first day of the seventh month* (see Lev 23.23–25), later called Rosh Hashanah (New Year's Day). **7–11:** Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), tenth day of the seventh month (Lev 16.1–34; 23.26–32). **12–38:** Tabernacles (Booths, Sukkot, Ingathering), the autumn harvest festival, from the fifteenth day of the month for seven or eight days (Lev 23.33–36,39–43; Deut 16.13–15). The extensive list of produce and animals anticipates abundance in the promised land.

29 On the sixth day: eight bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, 30 with the grain offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their number; 31 also one male goat for a sin offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offerings.

32 On the seventh day: seven bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, 33 with the grain offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their number; 34 also one male goat for a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering.

35 On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations. 36 You shall offer a burnt offering, an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD: one bull, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish, 37 and the grain offering and the drink offerings for the bull, for the ram, and for the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their number; 38 also one male goat for a sin offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering.

39 These you shall offer to the LORD at your appointed festivals, in addition to your votive offerings and your freewill offerings, as your burnt offerings, your grain offerings, your drink offerings, and your offerings of well-being.

40 [a]So Moses told the Israelites everything just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

30 Then Moses said to the heads of the tribes of the Israelites: This is what the LORD has commanded. 2 When a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

3 When a woman makes a vow to the LORD, or binds herself by a pledge, while within her father's house, in her youth, 4 and her father hears of her vow or her pledge by which she has bound herself, and says nothing to her; then all her vows shall stand, and any pledge by which she has bound herself shall stand. 5 But if her father expresses disapproval to her at the time that he hears of it, no vow of hers, and no pledge by which she has bound herself, shall stand; and the LORD will forgive her, because her father had expressed to her his disapproval.

6 If she marries, while obligated by her vows or any thoughtless utterance of her lips by which she has bound herself, 7 and her husband hears of it and says nothing to her at the time that he hears, then her vows shall stand, and her pledges by which she has bound herself shall stand. 8 But if, at the time that her husband hears of it, he expresses disapproval to her, then he shall nullify the vow by which she was obligated, or the thoughtless utterance of her lips, by which she bound herself; and the LORD will forgive her. 9 (But every vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall be binding upon her.) 10 And if she made a vow in her husband's house, or bound herself by a pledge with an oath, 11 and her husband heard

[a] Ch 30.1 in Heb

30.1–16: Vows and their limits. These statutes concern vows or pledges made by men (30.2) and by women (30.3–15) and the lines of responsibility. Vows are (sworn) promises *to the LORD*, related to service (Nazirite, 6.2) or the (potential) fulfillment of a request, often in crisis (see 21.2–3). The basic concern is to bind persons to their word, though women are bound within limits placed by the actions of father or husband (except widows and divorcees, who are independent, v. 9). Failed promises adversely affect the relationship to God and disrupt the stability of a community. A single case concerning men is followed by three cases concerning women: those still in their father's house and under his authority (vv. 3–5); those under vows at the time they are married (vv. 6–8); those who are married and under their husband's authority (vv. 10–15). Essentially the same patriarchal principles are operative. If the father or husband disapproves, the vow is annulled; *the LORD will forgive her* (vv. 5,8,12) and she is to suffer no consequences. If a father or husband disapproves, he must speak up at the time he hears (of) the vow or the vow stands; then if it is broken, he (not she) will be guilty (3.14–15). These statutes protect both men (from responsibility to fulfill a woman's vow) and, to a lesser extent, women (whose vows remain intact unless there is immediate male response).

it and said nothing to her, and did not express disapproval to her, then all her vows shall stand, and any pledge by which she bound herself shall stand. 12 But if her husband nullifies them at the time that he hears them, then whatever proceeds out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning her pledge of herself, shall not stand. Her husband has nullified them, and the LORD will forgive her. 13 Any vow or any binding oath to deny herself,[a] her husband may allow to stand, or her husband may nullify. 14 But if her husband says nothing to her from day to day,[b] then he validates all her vows, or all her pledges, by which she is obligated; he has validated them, because he said nothing to her at the time that he heard of them. 15 But if he nullifies them some time after he has heard of them, then he shall bear her guilt.

16 These are the statutes that the LORD commanded Moses concerning a husband and his wife, and a father and his daughter while she is still young and in her father's house.

31 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Avenge the Israelites on the Midianites; afterward you shall be gathered to your people." 3 So Moses said to the people, "Arm some of your number for the war, so that they may go against Midian, to execute the LORD's vengeance on Midian. 4 You shall send a thousand from each of the tribes of Israel to the war." 5 So out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe were conscripted, twelve thousand armed for battle. 6 Moses sent them to the war, a thousand from each tribe, along with Phinehas son of Eleazar the priest,[c] with the vessels of the sanctuary and the trumpets for sounding the alarm in his hand. 7 They did battle against Midian, as the LORD had commanded Moses, and killed every male. 8 They killed the kings of Midian: Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian, in addition to others who were slain by them; and they also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword. 9 The Israelites took the women of Midian and their little ones captive; and they took all their cattle, their flocks, and all their goods as booty. 10 All their towns where they had settled, and all their encampments, they burned, 11 but they took all the spoil and all the booty, both people and animals. 12 Then they brought the captives and the booty and the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the Israelites, at the camp on the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.

13 Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the congregation went to meet them outside the camp. 14 Moses became angry with the officers of the army, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. 15 Moses said to them, "Have

[a] Or *to fast*
[b] Or *from that day to the next*
[c] Gk: Heb adds *to the war*

31.1–54: War against the Midianites. This narrative (with ch 32) focuses on traditions associated with Israel's conquests and settlement in Transjordan. The story is idealized (no Israelite is lost in battle, v. 49), enhancing the portrayal of the new generation. **1–2:** Continuing from 25.17–18, God commands Israel to attack the Midianites in response to their attacks on Israel; v. 16 interprets this in terms of women seducing Israelites into idolatry, urged on by Balaam. **3–11:** Israel's military response to God's command is interpreted as *executing the LORD's vengeance*; but the sense of "vindication" (of the honor of God and Israel) is preferable. This battle has the earmarks of a holy war (see 21.1–3,21–35), with the presence of the priest (see Deut 20.2–4; Phinehas rather than Eleazar, see 27.21; Lev 21.11–12) and the sanctuary *vessels* (probably including the ark; see 10.35–36), and the *sounding of alarm* (10.1–10). Only a thousand men from each tribe are engaged, a small percentage of those available (26.51; see Judg 7.2–8). Every male (including Balaam) is killed and their towns destroyed (see Josh 13.21–22). **12–18:** In contrast to ch 21, the women and children (and animals) are not killed but taken captive and (with other booty) brought before Moses, Eleazar, and the congregation. This may reflect the practice of holy war outlined in Deut 20.13–18, where a distinction is made between Canaanites and others more distant (e.g., Midianites). Moses is angry that captives have been taken, or at least that *all the women* have. He isolates *these women here* (perhaps because they are assumed to be involved in the Peor apostasy in ch 25, or may lead the men astray) and commands that *every woman who has known a man* and all male children be killed. But all female virgins can be preserved alive *for yourselves*, as wives or slaves. The text informs the reader only indirectly

you allowed all the women to live? 16 These women here, on Balaam's advice, made the Israelites act treacherously against the LORD in the affair of Peor, so that the plague came among the congregation of the LORD. 17 Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man by sleeping with him. 18 But all the young girls who have not known a man by sleeping with him, keep alive for yourselves. 19 Camp outside the camp seven days; whoever of you has killed any person or touched a corpse, purify yourselves and your captives on the third and on the seventh day. 20 You shall purify every garment, every article of skin, everything made of goats' hair, and every article of wood."

21 Eleazar the priest said to the troops who had gone to battle: "This is the statute of the law that the LORD has commanded Moses: 22 gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, and lead— 23 everything that can withstand fire, shall be passed through fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless it shall also be purified with the water for purification; and whatever cannot withstand fire, shall be passed through the water. 24 You must wash your clothes on the seventh day, and you shall be clean; afterward you may come into the camp."

25 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 26 "You and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the ancestral houses of the congregation make an inventory of the booty captured, both human and animal. 27 Divide the booty into two parts, between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation. 28 From the share of the warriors who went out to battle, set aside as tribute for the LORD, one item out of every five hundred, whether persons, oxen, donkeys, sheep, or goats. 29 Take it from their half and give it to Eleazar the priest as an offering to the LORD. 30 But from the Israelites' half you shall take one out of every fifty, whether persons, oxen, donkeys, sheep, or goats—all the animals—and give them to the Levites who have charge of the tabernacle of the LORD."

31 Then Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the LORD had commanded Moses:

32 The booty remaining from the spoil that the troops had taken totaled six hundred seventy-five thousand sheep, 33 seventy-two thousand oxen, 34 sixty-one thousand donkeys, 35 and thirty-two thousand persons in all, women who had not known a man by sleeping with him.

36 The half-share, the portion of those who had gone out to war, was in number three hundred thirty-seven thousand five hundred sheep and goats, 37 and the LORD's tribute of sheep and goats was six hundred seventy-five. 38 The oxen were thirty-six thousand, of which the LORD's tribute was seventy-two. 39 The donkeys were thirty thousand five hundred, of which the LORD's tribute was sixty-one. 40 The persons were sixteen thousand, of which the LORD's tribute was thirty-two persons. 41 Moses gave the tribute, the offering for the LORD, to Eleazar the priest, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

42 As for the Israelites' half, which Moses separated from that of the troops, 43 the congregation's half was three hundred thirty-seven thousand five hundred sheep and goats, 44 thirty-six thousand oxen, 45 thirty thousand five hundred donkeys, 46 and sixteen thousand persons. 47 From the Israelites' half Moses took one of every fifty, both of persons and of animals, and gave them to the Levites who had charge of the tabernacle of the LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

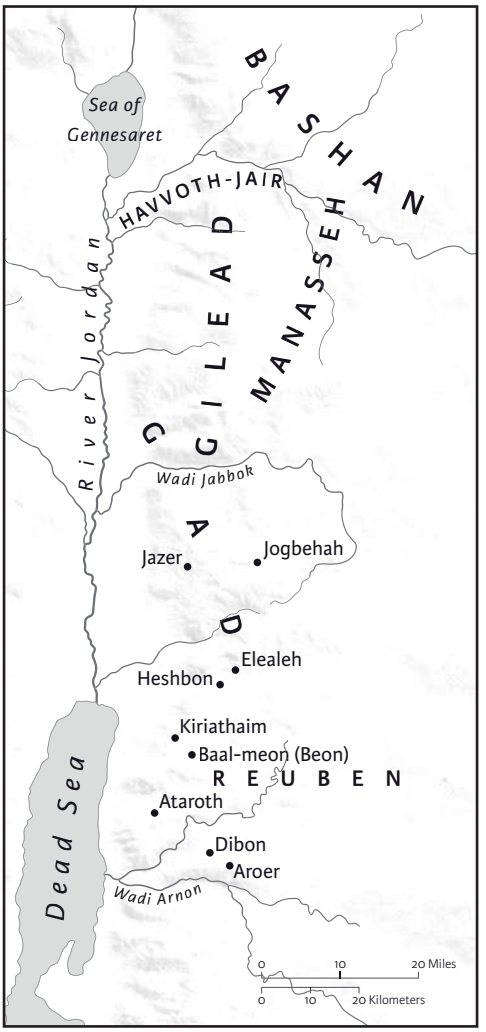
48 Then the officers who were over the thousands of the army, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, approached Moses, 49 and said to Moses, "Your servants have counted the warriors who are under our command, and not one of us is missing. 50 And we have brought the LORD's offering, what each of us found, articles of gold, armlets and bracelets, signet

that these commands of Moses were carried out (31.35). **19–24:** See 19.1–22, with new distinctions between flammable and nonflammable (metal) items. **25–47:** God issues commands regarding the disposition of captives and booty. They are to be divided evenly between the warriors and the rest of the congregation (see 1 Sam 30.24). One in five hundred of the warriors' items is to be given to the priests as *tribute for the LORD*; one in fifty of the congregation's items to the Levites (see 18.8–32). This command is carried out (v. 31) and details follow regarding disposition and quantity of the spoil; the total—just of the officers—is immense and surely exagger-

rings, earrings, and pendants, to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD." [51] Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold from them, all in the form of crafted articles. [52] And all the gold of the offering that they offered to the LORD, from the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred fifty shekels. [53] (The troops had all taken plunder for themselves.) [54] So Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold from the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it into the tent of meeting as a memorial for the Israelites before the LORD.

32 Now the Reubenites and the Gadites owned a very great number of cattle. When they saw that the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead was a good place for cattle, [2] the Gadites and the Reubenites came and spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, [3] "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon— [4] the land that the LORD subdued before the congregation of Israel—is a land for cattle; and your servants have cattle." [5] They continued, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; do not make us cross the Jordan."

[6] But Moses said to the Gadites and to the Reubenites, "Shall your brothers go to war while you sit here? [7] Why will you discourage the hearts of the Israelites from going over into the land that the LORD has given them? [8] Your fathers did this, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. [9] When they went up to the Wadi Eshcol and



The territory of of the Transjordan tribes.

ated: 808,000 animals, 32,000 young women, and 16,750 shekels of gold (v. 52). **52:** A shekel, about .5 oz (11.4 gr). **48–54:** Nonliving booty. The officers approach Moses with their gift to God of the precious metals each soldier had taken. These valuables are brought to *make atonement* for themselves (perhaps because of the taking of human life) and as *a memorial . . . before the* LORD—through tabernacle furnishings made from the metals.

32.1–42: Early land settlement issues. The focus is on tribes who settled east of the Jordan—Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh (see Gen 15.18; Deut 1.7–8; 3.12–20; Josh 13.8–32; 22.1–34). A crisis arises among these members of the new generation, and its resolution by means of compromise stands in sharp contrast to earlier experiences. **3–5:** The cities listed are east of the Jordan, between the Arnon and Jabbok rivers (see vv. 33–38). *The land that the* LORD *subdued*, see 21.21–35. These areas with their pasture lands were now available and attracted the attention of the cattle-rich tribes of Reuben and Gad (later joined by the half-tribe of Manasseh, vv. 33–42). **6–15:** But their words, "Do not make us cross the Jordan," trigger Moses' memories of past disasters associated with reluctance to enter the *land* (Canaan; see chs 13–14). Moses questions their motives; indeed, he considers them *a brood of sinners* who repeat the unfaithfulness of the old generation, the effects of which he rehearses. This could trigger *the* LORD*'s fierce anger* (see 1.53) with even more disastrous conse-

saw the land, they discouraged the hearts of the Israelites from going into the land that the LORD had given them. 10 The LORD's anger was kindled on that day and he swore, saying, 11 'Surely none of the people who came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, because they have not unreservedly followed me— 12 none except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they have unreservedly followed the LORD.' 13 And the LORD's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness for forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the LORD had disappeared. 14 And now you, a brood of sinners, have risen in place of your fathers, to increase the LORD's fierce anger against Israel! 15 If you turn away from following him, he will again abandon them in the wilderness; and you will destroy all this people."

16 Then they came up to him and said, "We will build sheepfolds here for our flocks, and towns for our little ones, 17 but we will take up arms as a vanguard[a] before the Israelites, until we have brought them to their place. Meanwhile our little ones will stay in the fortified towns because of the inhabitants of the land. 18 We will not return to our homes until all the Israelites have obtained their inheritance. 19 We will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has come to us on this side of the Jordan to the east."

20 So Moses said to them, "If you do this—if you take up arms to go before the LORD for the war, 21 and all those of you who bear arms cross the Jordan before the LORD, until he has driven out his enemies from before him 22 and the land is subdued before the LORD—then after that you may return and be free of obligation to the LORD and to Israel, and this land shall be your possession before the LORD. 23 But if you do not do this, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out. 24 Build towns for your little ones, and folds for your flocks; but do what you have promised."

25 Then the Gadites and the Reubenites said to Moses, "Your servants will do as my lord commands. 26 Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our livestock shall remain there in the towns of Gilead; 27 but your servants will cross over, everyone armed for war, to do battle for the LORD, just as my lord orders."

28 So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua son of Nun, and to the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelite tribes. 29 And Moses said to them, "If the Gadites and the Reubenites, everyone armed for battle before the LORD, will cross over the Jordan with you and the land shall be subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession; 30 but if they will not cross over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan." 31 The Gadites and the Reubenites answered, "As the LORD has spoken to your servants, so we will do. 32 We will cross over armed before the LORD into the land of Canaan, but the possession of our inheritance shall remain with us on this side of[b] the Jordan."

33 Moses gave to them—to the Gadites and to the Reubenites and to the half-tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph—the kingdom of King Sihon of the Amorites and the kingdom

[a] Cn: Heb *hurrying*
[b] Heb *beyond*

quences. **16–19:** These tribes propose a compromise: they will settle in the Transjordan, leave their families and animals behind, and proceed to fight *as a vanguard before the Israelites*, in the front line of the assault against Canaan (compare 34.10–12). They will not return to their homes until *all the Israelites* are secure and they will not inherit those lands. **20–24:** Moses responds positively, if cautiously; references to God are especially prominent. They are to go *before the LORD*, that is, before the ark (see Josh 4.12–13; 6.7–8). If they follow through, they are *free of obligation to the LORD,* that is, regarding this matter (see Josh 22.9). If they do not, *your sin will find you out*: the effects of sin have an intrinsic relationship to the deed. **25–32:** Gad and Reuben deferentially (*your servants . . . my lord*) agree with those terms. Eleazar, Joshua, and tribal heads publicly agree to witness this agreement. If these tribes fail, they must move to lands west of the Jordan. They agree, *as the LORD has spoken*: Moses' word seems to be as good as God's. **33–38:** Moses gives the lands to these tribes, who rebuild Amorite cities and rename some

of King Og of Bashan, the land and its towns, with the territories of the surrounding towns.
34 And the Gadites rebuilt Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, 35 Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, 36 Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran, fortified cities, and folds for sheep. 37 And the Reubenites rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, 38 Nebo, and Baal-meon (some names being changed), and Sibmah; and they gave names to the towns that they rebuilt. 39 The descendants of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead, captured it, and dispossessed the Amorites who were there; 40 so Moses gave Gilead to Machir son of Manasseh, and he settled there. 41 Jair son of Manasseh went and captured their villages, and renamed them Havvoth-jair.[a] 42 And Nobah went and captured Kenath and its villages, and renamed it Nobah after himself.

33 These are the stages by which the Israelites went out of the land of Egypt in military formation under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. 2 Moses wrote down their starting points, stage by stage, by command of the LORD; and these are their stages according to their starting places. 3 They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the passover the Israelites went out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians, 4 while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them. The LORD executed judgments even against their gods.

5 So the Israelites set out from Rameses, and camped at Succoth. 6 They set out from Succoth, and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. 7 They set out from Etham, and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which faces Baal-zephon; and they camped before Migdol. 8 They set out from Pi-hahiroth, passed through the sea into the wilderness, went a three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham, and camped at Marah. 9 They set out from Marah and came to Elim; at Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there. 10 They set out from Elim and camped by the Red Sea.[b] 11 They set out from the Red Sea[b] and camped in the wilderness of Sin. 12 They set out from the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah. 13 They set out from Dophkah and camped at Alush. 14 They set out from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink. 15 They set out from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai. 16 They set out from the wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth-hattaavah. 17 They set out from Kibroth-hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth. 18 They set out from Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. 19 They set out from Rithmah and camped at Rimmon-perez. 20 They set out from Rimmon-perez and camped at Libnah. 21 They set out from Libnah and camped at Rissah. 22 They set out from Rissah and camped at Kehelathah. 23 They set out from Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher. 24 They set out from

[a] That is *the villages of Jair*
[b] Or *Sea of Reeds*

(see Josh 13.8–32 for land allotments; for *Sihon* and *Og*, see ch 21). **39–42:** The integration of the half-tribe of Manasseh; their land holdings, on both sides of the Jordan, lie north of Gad's. They oust more Amorites for their lands. The land for two and one-half tribes is thus already in place before the Jordan is crossed.

33.1–49: The wilderness journey remembered. A recollection of the forty-two stages of Israel's journey through the wilderness, from Egypt to their present situation across the Jordan. Its placement recognizes the transition from wilderness journey to land settlement. Represented as Moses' writing at God's command (v. 2), its origin may lie in one or more ancient itineraries circulating in Israel (for another summary, Deut 1.1–3.28). Many sites are not mentioned elsewhere (33.13,18–29); most are not geographically identifiable. The itinerary is surprisingly secular; God's activity is mentioned only at v. 4 and at Aaron's death (v. 38), accentuating the importance of human activity. The reader can recognize two uneven segments, up to and following the death of Aaron (vv. 38–39; see 20.23–29), perhaps betraying priestly interests. Only v. 8 speaks of the travel time. The bare bones character of the description highlights the journey in and of itself. **3–37:** The first segment. **3–4:** Passover is considered a battle among the gods (see v. 52; Ex 12.12; 15.11), while Sinai and the sea crossing are mentioned only in passing. *Rameses,* see Ex 12.37. **5–6:** See Ex 13.20. **7:** See Ex 14.2. **8:** See Ex 15.22–23. **9:** See Ex 15.27. **10:** See Ex 15.22. **11:** See Ex 16.1. **14:** See Ex 17.1. **15:** See Ex 19.1–2. **16–17:** See 11.34–35. **30–34:** Cf. Deut 10.6–7.



The boundaries of the promised land.

Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah. 25 They set out from Haradah and camped at Makheloth. 26 They set out from Makheloth and camped at Tahath. 27 They set out from Tahath and camped at Terah. 28 They set out from Terah and camped at Mithkah. 29 They set out from Mithkah and camped at Hashmonah. 30 They set out from Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth. 31 They set out from Moseroth and camped at Bene-jaakan. 32 They set out from Bene-jaakan and camped at Hor-haggidgad. 33 They set out from Hor-haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah. 34 They set out from Jotbathah and camped at Abronah. 35 They set out from Abronah and camped at Ezion-geber. 36 They set out from Ezion-geber and camped in the wilderness of Zin (that is, Kadesh). 37 They set out from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the edge of the land of Edom.

38 Aaron the priest went up Mount Hor at the command of the LORD and died there in the fortieth year after the Israelites had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month. 39 Aaron was one hundred twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor.

40 The Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the Israelites.

41 They set out from Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah. 42 They set out from Zalmonah and camped at Punon. 43 They set out from Punon and camped at Oboth. 44 They set out from Oboth and camped at Iye-abarim, in the territory of Moab. 45 They set out from Iyim and camped at Dibon-gad. 46 They set out from Dibon-gad and camped at Almon-diblathaim. 47 They set out from Almon-diblathaim and camped in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo. 48 They set out from the mountains of Abarim and camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho; 49 they camped by the Jordan from Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim in the plains of Moab.

50 In the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 51 Speak to the Israelites, and say to them: When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 52 you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their figured stones, destroy all their cast images, and demolish all their high places. 53 You shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. 54 You shall apportion the land by lot according to your clans; to a large one you shall give a large inheritance, and to a small one you shall give a small inheritance; the inheritance shall belong to the person on whom the lot falls; according to your ancestral tribes you shall inherit. 55 But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides; they shall trouble you in the land where you are settling. 56 And I will do to you as I thought to do to them.

34 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Command the Israelites, and say to them: When you enter the land of Canaan

36: Cf. 13.26; 20.1. **37:** *Mount Hor,* see 20.22; *Edom,* see 20.14–21. **38–39:** See 20.23–29. **40:** See 20.1–3. **41–49:** The second segment (compare 21.1–22.1) moves quickly to the present situation (a passing reference to Mount Nebo, the site of Moses' death and burial). **43:** 21.10–11. **45:** *Dibon-gad,* cf. 32.34; 21.30n. **48:** See 22.1. **49:** Cf. 25.1.

33.50–56: Directions for conquest of Canaan. These hortatory instructions from God to Moses specify the nature of the possession of the land and its allotment. Israel is to *drive out* (not exterminate; contrast Ex 23.23; Deut 7.1–6) the present inhabitants, destroy their images and sanctuaries (*high places* are open-air sanctuaries; see Lev 26.30), and apportion the land by lot according to the size of the clans (see 26.54–55). If they do not drive out the inhabitants (which actually happens; see Judg 1.1–2.5; 1 Kings 9.21), those left *shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides*, which is what they prove to be over the years (Josh 23.13; see Ex 23.23–33; 34.11–16; Deut 7.16; 12.2–4; Judg 2.11–3.6).

34.1–29: The apportionment of the land. **1–15:** The boundaries of the promised land are idealized; they do not correspond to the boundaries known from other biblical sources (such as Josh 13–19; Ezek 47.13–20), yet the boundaries correspond well to Canaan as described in Egyptian sources prior to the Israelite settlement and a few other texts (see Josh 13–19; Ezek 47.13–20). Many sites are unknown and so the boundaries cannot be determined with precision. **2–6:** The southern border moves from the southern end of the Dead Sea south and

(this is the land that shall fall to you for an inheritance, the land of Canaan, defined by its boundaries), [3] your south sector shall extend from the wilderness of Zin along the side of Edom. Your southern boundary shall begin from the end of the Dead Sea[a] on the east; [4] your boundary shall turn south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and cross to Zin, and its outer limit shall be south of Kadesh-barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar-addar, and cross to Azmon; [5] the boundary shall turn from Azmon to the Wadi of Egypt, and its termination shall be at the Sea.

[6] For the western boundary, you shall have the Great Sea and its[b] coast; this shall be your western boundary.

[7] This shall be your northern boundary: from the Great Sea you shall mark out your line to Mount Hor; [8] from Mount Hor you shall mark it out to Lebo-hamath, and the outer limit of the boundary shall be at Zedad; [9] then the boundary shall extend to Ziphron, and its end shall be at Hazar-enan; this shall be your northern boundary.

[10] You shall mark out your eastern boundary from Hazar-enan to Shepham; [11] and the boundary shall continue down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; and the boundary shall go down, and reach the eastern slope of the sea of Chinnereth; [12] and the boundary shall go down to the Jordan, and its end shall be at the Dead Sea.[a] This shall be your land with its boundaries all around.

[13] Moses commanded the Israelites, saying: This is the land that you shall inherit by lot, which the LORD has commanded to give to the nine tribes and to the half-tribe; [14] for the tribe of the Reubenites by their ancestral houses and the tribe of the Gadites by their ancestral houses have taken their inheritance, and also the half-tribe of Manasseh; [15] the two tribes and the half-tribe have taken their inheritance beyond the Jordan at Jericho eastward, toward the sunrise.

[16] The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: [17] These are the names of the men who shall apportion the land to you for inheritance: the priest Eleazar and Joshua son of Nun. [18] You shall take one leader of every tribe to apportion the land for inheritance. [19] These are the names of the men: Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh. [20] Of the tribe of the Simeonites, Shemuel son of Ammihud. [21] Of the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad son of Chislon. [22] Of the tribe of the Danites a leader, Bukki son of Jogli. [23] Of the Josephites: of the tribe of the Manassites a leader, Hanniel son of Ephod, [24] and of the tribe of the Ephraimites a leader, Kemuel son of Shiphtan. [25] Of the tribe of the Zebulunites a leader, Eli-zaphan son of Parnach. [26] Of the tribe of the Issacharites a leader, Paltiel son of Azzan. [27] And of the tribe of the Asherites a leader, Ahihud son of Shelomi. [28] Of the tribe of the Naphtalites a leader, Pedahel son of Ammihud. [29] These were the ones whom the LORD commanded to apportion the inheritance for the Israelites in the land of Canaan.

35 In the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: [2] Command the Israelites to give, from

[a] Heb *Salt Sea*
[b] Syr: Heb lacks *its*

west across the wilderness of Zin to south of Kadesh to the Wadi of Egypt to the Mediterranean (*Great Sea*), the western boundary. **7–9:** The northern border is less clear, extending from the Mediterranean to Mount Hor (not the southern mountain of 20.22) into southern Syria (Lebo-hamath). **10–12:** The eastern boundary moves from a line north of the eastern slope of the sea of *Chinnereth* (Galilee) down the Jordan to the Dead Sea. **14–15:** See ch 32. **16–29:** Ten tribal leaders (not Reuben and Gad) are appointed to apportion the land, generally listed from south to north; they are the new generation, different from those listed in 13.2–15 (except for Caleb). Eleazar and Joshua are chosen to supervise the work.

35.1–34: Special cities and refinements in the law. These stipulations are given by God to Moses for the enhancement of life for various persons in the new land. The taking of human life puts the land in special danger. **1–8:** Cities for the Levites (see Lev 25.32–34; for lists, see Josh 21.1–42; 1 Chr 6.54–81). Stipulations for land distribution are continued, with provision for the Levites, who have no territorial rights (see 18.21–24; 26.62). Inasmuch as they will be active throughout the land (unspecified functions beyond care for the tabernacle), they are to be allotted forty-eight cities (six of which are cities of refuge, vv. 9–15). These cities provide for their housing and for grazing lands for their livestock, though not as permanent possessions (and others would

the inheritance that they possess, towns for the Levites to live in; you shall also give to the Levites pasture lands surrounding the towns. [3] The towns shall be theirs to live in, and their pasture lands shall be for their cattle, for their livestock, and for all their animals. [4] The pasture lands of the towns, which you shall give to the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the town outward a thousand cubits all around. [5] You shall measure, outside the town, for the east side two thousand cubits, for the south side two thousand cubits, for the west side two thousand cubits, and for the north side two thousand cubits, with the town in the middle; this shall belong to them as pasture land for their towns.

[6] The towns that you give to the Levites shall include the six cities of refuge, where you shall permit a slayer to flee, and in addition to them you shall give forty-two towns. [7] The towns that you give to the Levites shall total forty-eight, with their pasture lands. [8] And as for the towns that you shall give from the possession of the Israelites, from the larger tribes you shall take many, and from the smaller tribes you shall take few; each, in proportion to the inheritance that it obtains, shall give of its towns to the Levites.

[9] The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: [10] Speak to the Israelites, and say to them: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, [11] then you shall select cities to be cities of refuge for you, so that a slayer who kills a person without intent may flee there. [12] The cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger, so that the slayer may not die until there is a trial before the congregation.

[13] The cities that you designate shall be six cities of refuge for you: [14] you shall designate three cities beyond the Jordan, and three cities in the land of Canaan, to be cities of refuge. [15] These six cities shall serve as refuge for the Israelites, for the resident or transient alien among them, so that anyone who kills a person without intent may flee there.

[16] But anyone who strikes another with an iron object, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. [17] Or anyone who strikes another with a stone in hand that could cause death, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. [18] Or anyone who strikes another with a weapon of wood in hand that could cause death, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. [19] The avenger of blood is the one who shall put the murderer to death; when they meet, the avenger of blood shall execute the sentence. [20] Likewise, if someone pushes another from hatred, or hurls something at another, lying in wait, and death ensues, [21] or in enmity strikes another with the hand, and death ensues, then the one who struck the blow shall be put to death; that person is a murderer; the avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death, when they meet.

[22] But if someone pushes another suddenly without enmity, or hurls any object without

live there). **4–5:** *A thousand cubits* (ca. 433 m [1,457 ft]). The various tribes will contribute cities according to their size. **9–15:** *Cities of refuge* (cf. Deut 4.41–43; 19.1–13; for a list, see Josh 20.1–9). Six well-distributed cities of refuge were set aside as places of asylum for persons (Israelite or alien) who killed someone *without intent* until their case could be properly tried. Their purpose was to prevent blood feuds. **12:** As long as such persons remained within one of these cities they were secure from the *avenger* (or redeemer; see Lev 25.25,47–49), the relative of the deceased charged to ensure proper retribution for the sake of the land (see v. 33). **16–34:** Distinctions in the homicide laws, between murder and unpremeditated killing (on intentional/unintentional distinction, see 15.22–31; Ex 21.13–14). The burden of proof is on the slayer. **16–21:** Those who murder another with intent, regardless of means or motivation (six examples are given), are to be put to death by the *avenger*, after a trial (see supplement, vv. 30–32). The avenger's action is necessary for the sake of the future of the land. **22–29:** In the case of killing without intent and hostility, a trial is to be held, outside the city of refuge, with national judges representing the congregation to decide whether the killing was truly unintentional (see Josh 20.6). If so decided, the slayer was returned to the city where he originally took refuge, where he remained until the death of the high priest. The cities of refuge were a kind of exile. Because they only masked the polluting effects of the murder, expiation was still necessary. This was accomplished through the (natural) death of the high priest, which had expiatory significance, issuing in a kind of general amnesty. Only then was release possible. If the slayer left the city before this occurred, he was not protected from the avenger, whose actions would not incur

lying in wait, 23 or, while handling any stone that could cause death, unintentionally[a] drops it on another and death ensues, though they were not enemies, and no harm was intended, 24 then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the avenger of blood, in accordance with these ordinances; 25 and the congregation shall rescue the slayer from the avenger of blood. Then the congregation shall send the slayer back to the original city of refuge. The slayer shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil. 26 But if the slayer shall at any time go outside the bounds of the original city of refuge, 27 and is found by the avenger of blood outside the bounds of the city of refuge, and is killed by the avenger, no bloodguilt shall be incurred. 28 For the slayer must remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest; but after the death of the high priest the slayer may return home.

29 These things shall be a statute and ordinance for you throughout your generations wherever you live.

30 If anyone kills another, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses; but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of a single witness. 31 Moreover you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer who is subject to the death penalty; a murderer must be put to death. 32 Nor shall you accept ransom for one who has fled to a city of refuge, enabling the fugitive to return to live in the land before the death of the high priest. 33 You shall not pollute the land in which you live; for blood pollutes the land, and no expiation can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. 34 You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the Israelites.

36 The heads of the ancestral houses of the clans of the descendants of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh, of the Josephite clans, came forward and spoke in the presence of Moses and the leaders, the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelites; 2 they said, "The LORD commanded my lord to give the land for inheritance by lot to the Israelites; and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. 3 But if they are married into another Israelite tribe, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestors and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken away from the allotted portion of our inheritance. 4 And when the jubilee of the Israelites comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they have married; and their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestral tribe."

5 Then Moses commanded the Israelites according to the word of the LORD, saying, "The descendants of the tribe of Joseph are right in what they are saying. 6 This is what the LORD commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, 'Let them marry whom they think best; only it must be into a clan of their father's tribe that they are married,

[a] Heb *without seeing*

guilt. **30–32:** A supplement stating that evidence of more than one witness is needed (see Deut 19.15–21) and no monetary ransom is possible. **33–34:** Murder is not simply a matter between two families—it pollutes the land and its wholeness, threatening the divine presence among Israel; only the blood of the killer can make *expiation* for the land (remove the impurity the murder has let loose; compare Deut 21.1–9).

36.1–13: Once again: the daughters of Zelophehad. Issues raised concerning the effects of the decision earlier rendered to the daughters of Zelophehad (27.1–11). They based their case on the continuance of their father's name and his property in their clan (27.4). **1–4:** Members of their tribe Manasseh come to Moses and ask for an interpretation in view of the fact that upon marriage any property held by the wife became that of her husband. Hence, if a daughter were to marry outside of her tribe, the property would transfer to that tribe and Manasseh (in this case) would lose its full original allotment. Even the property transfer in the *jubilee* year (every fiftieth year) would not return it to the family, because only sold, not inherited, property is so returned (see Lev 25.13–34; 27.16–25). **5–9:** Moses agrees and apparently receives a *word of the LORD* on the matter (it may be his interpretation more generally; see Ex 18.23). The daughters may marry within their own tribe (as was common in patrilineal systems) so that the original tribal allotment remains intact. **10–12:** The five daughters of

7 so that no inheritance of the Israelites shall
be transferred from one tribe to another; for
all Israelites shall retain the inheritance of
their ancestral tribes. 8 Every daughter who
possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the
Israelites shall marry one from the clan of
her father's tribe, so that all Israelites may
continue to possess their ancestral inheri-
tance. 9 No inheritance shall be transferred
from one tribe to another; for each of the
tribes of the Israelites shall retain its own
inheritance.'"

10 The daughters of Zelophehad did as
the LORD had commanded Moses. 11 Mahlah,
Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, the
daughters of Zelophehad, married sons of
their father's brothers. 12 They were married
into the clans of the descendants of Manas-
seh son of Joseph, and their inheritance
remained in the tribe of their father's clan.

13 These are the commandments and
the ordinances that the LORD commanded
through Moses to the Israelites in the plains
of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.

Zelophehad actually do marry first cousins within their clan. **13:** The final verse speaks of God's commandments given through Moses since 22.1, when Israel arrived by the Jordan. These commandments have been essentially forward-looking, anticipating Israel's future life in the land.

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DEUTERONOMY

NAME

The English name of the book comes from the ancient Greek translation, the Septuagint, and means "second law" (see 17.18n.). That title reflects the early Jewish perspective that Deuteronomy is Moses' rehearsal of the earlier legal sections of the Torah. The Hebrew name of the book is *Debarim* ("words"), and comes from the book's opening: "These are the words" (1.1).

AUTHORSHIP, DATE, AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Deuteronomy directly addresses the problem of the historical distance between past and present, between tradition and the needs of the contemporary generation, between revelation and interpretation. In that way, it is a remarkably modern text that instructs its audience how to become more thoughtful readers of scripture. In narrative terms, Deuteronomy comes just as the Israelites, encamped on the plains of Moab, finally stand poised to enter the promised land. This entry into Canaan would provide the long-awaited climax of the story that had begun with the promises to the ancestors in Genesis, and whose fulfillment had been delayed by the enslavement in Egypt and the wandering in the wilderness. Now, on the eve both of his death and of the nation's entry into the land without him, Moses, as Deuteronomy's speaker, arrests the narrative action in order to deliver a series of three speeches, grouped together as a long farewell address. He reviews the nation's history, expounds upon their laws, and instructs them about the importance of loyalty to God. He also requires that the nation swear upon oath to uphold this combination of law and theological instruction as a covenant upon the plains of Moab, one that supplements the prior covenant of Horeb (Deuteronomy's name for Sinai; 28.69). Only after the conclusion of these discourses and a following appendix (chs 31–34) does the overall narrative line resume with the account of the nation's entry into Canaan in the books of Joshua and Judges.

Despite this perspective and the text's own self-presentation, however, Deuteronomy is likely not from Moses himself but originates in the seventh century BCE. It has long been recognized that there are striking similarities between the distinctive religious and legal requirements of Deuteronomy and the account of the major religious reform carried out by Josiah, the king of Judah, in 622 BCE (2 Kings 22–23). That reform had been inspired by the discovery in the Temple of a "scroll of the Torah" (2 Kings 22.8; NRSV "book of the law"). Josiah's reform restricted all sacrificial worship of God to Jerusalem and removed foreign elements from the system of worship; it culminated in the celebration of the first nationally centralized Passover at the Temple in Jerusalem (2 Kings 23.21–23). So strongly do these royal initiatives correspond to the distinctive requirements of Deuteronomy that scholars, both traditional and critical, have long identified the "scroll of the Torah" discovered in Josiah's Temple as Deuteronomy.

Josiah's reform, with Deuteronomy as its catalyst, was much more a revolution than a simple return to older forms of worship. Previously, it was entirely legitimate to sacrifice to God throughout the land, as did Abraham at Shechem and near Bethel (Gen 12.7–8); Jacob at Bethel (Gen 35.1–7); Samuel at Mizpah, Ramah, Gilgal, and Bethlehem (1 Sam 7.9,17; 9.11–14; 10.8; 16.1–5); and Elijah upon Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18.20–46). Indeed, earlier biblical law stipulated that God would grant blessing "in every place where I cause my name to be remembered" (Ex 20.24). Deuteronomy challenged that older norm, prohibiting sacrifice "at any place" (lit. "in every place") and restricting it to a single site, implicitly Jerusalem (Deut 12.13–14). In this way, Deuteronomy's self-presentation as a rehearsal or explication of prior law (1.1–5) or as a simple supplement to the prior covenant (29.1) obscures the extent to which Deuteronomy actually challenges and revises earlier law in support of its new religious vision.

A century of Assyrian imperial domination serves as the historical background of Josiah's reforms. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians in 722 BCE (2 Kings 17). Continuing Assyrian incursions down the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean had all but reduced Judah to a rump-state (2 Kings 18.13). In a desperate bid to preserve the nation's autonomy, King Hezekiah of Judah made a pact with Assyria (2 Kings 18.13–18), as had his predecessor Ahaz (2 Kings 16.7–8). The resulting military allegiances led to religious syncretism, as foreign forms of worship were introduced into the Temple (2 Kings 16.10–20; 21.1–6).

By the last quarter of the seventh century BCE, however, Assyria's might was in decline. In this context, Josiah's religious reforms represented an important bid for Judean cultural, political, and religious autonomy. The monarch

extended his reforms into the area of the former Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 23.15–20), territory formerly under Assyrian control. Deuteronomy, apparently written sometime during this historical crisis, likewise reflects the desire to preserve Judean cultural and religious integrity. Its authors were convinced that older conventions of worship and social organization were no longer viable. If the religion of the LORD was to survive the crisis, renewal and adaptation were necessary. The collection of laws that form the core of Deuteronomy (chs 12–26) provides a remarkably comprehensive program for cultural renewal. The laws deal with worship; the festival calendar; the major institutions of public life (justice, kingship, priesthood, prophecy); criminal, family, and civil law; and ethics. These laws are presented as the requirements of a covenant between God and the nation, which the people take an oath to uphold, upon penalty of sanctions, while maintaining unconditional loyalty to their God. That covenant structure closely corresponds to Neo-Assyrian state treaties that have been recovered from this period, the most famous of which is the *Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon* (672 BCE). At a number of points, the authors of Deuteronomy seem consciously to have patterned their covenant after such treaties, treaties that had been repeatedly imposed upon Judah in the late eighth and seventh centuries BCE. From this perspective, Deuteronomy is a countertreaty: Its authors turned the weapon of imperialism into a bid for freedom, shifting its oath of loyalty from the Assyrian overlord to their divine sovereign.

The authors of Deuteronomy were thus tutored in international treaty conventions, and elsewhere reveal their knowledge of the literary traditions of ancient Near Eastern law (see 15.1–18n.; 17.8–13n.,14–20n.; 22.13–30n.) and wisdom literature (1.13n.; 4.2n.). The authors of Deuteronomy made use of another common ancient Near Eastern convention as well. They did not directly attach their names to their compositions or write in their own voices; instead, they attributed their composition to a prestigious figure from the past. By employing Moses as their spokesperson, they established a link with tradition at precisely the time when tradition, for the sake of survival, had to be transformed. This convention of ascribing a text to an ancient personage, technically called "pseudepigraphy," is particularly well known in the later literature of the Second Temple period; examples include *Jubilees*, *4 Ezra*, the *Testament of Abraham*, and (among the Dead Sea Scrolls) the *Temple Scroll*.

LITERARY HISTORY

It is important to note that Deuteronomy has its own internal literary history as well, preserving several layers of tradition within itself—the structure of three different speeches given by Moses, with an appendix, already suggests a process of literary growth. That growth is closely connected to the gradual formation of the Hebrew Bible. To appreciate what is involved, it helps imaginatively to turn the clock back to the time before the Bible achieved its present form.

When Deuteronomy was first promulgated, it would not have been part of any larger whole. Instead, it would have been complete by itself as a "scroll of the Torah" ("book of the law"). It would have consisted of most of the laws of chs 12–26, framed by a relatively simple introduction and conclusion. This form of Deuteronomy presented itself as a treaty concluded between the nation and its God in a formal ceremony whereby each citizen took an oath of under penalty of strict sanctions (28.1–46). This was very likely the preexilic form of Deuteronomy.

At a later stage, presumably sometime during the exile in the mid-sixth century BCE, Deuteronomy would have been incorporated into the Deuteronomistic History (the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) to serve as its introduction. At this point, the Deuteronomistic editors would have given the book its literary frame (1.1–4.40; chs 31–34), while also adding to the collection of laws, selectively tying its promises or expectations to the later historical material. Expansions in Deuteronomy that reflect the Babylonian exile may derive from this stage (see 4.25–31; 28.47–56; 30.1–10).

At a still later point, in the exilic or postexilic period, Priestly editors appended Deuteronomy to the newly formed Pentateuch, to serve as its conclusion. Ironically, the decision to conclude the Pentateuch with Deuteronomy separated the overall narrative plan of Genesis through Numbers from its logical fulfillment in an account of the conquest of the land. This narrative climax was delayed to the books of Joshua and Judges.

In the final chapters of Deuteronomy, these three viewpoints operate simultaneously, creating a complex interplay of perspectives. The legal section is brought to its conclusion with a formal ratification ceremony involving the swearing of an oath to assume the penalties for transgressing the covenant (chs 29–31). At the same time, other editors worked to embed Deuteronomy in the Deuteronomistic History. Still other editors tied the book to Genesis-Numbers and thus make the creation of Torah—no longer the occupation of the land—the climax of the newly created Pentateuch. The three perspectives operate concurrently, spinning like Ezekiel's vision of "a wheel within a wheel" (Ezek 1.16).

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

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GUIDE TO READING

Part of the continuing relevance of Deuteronomy is that it does not permit itself to be read literally or passively. It challenges its readers actively to confront the problem of the relation between revelation and interpretation, and breaks down conventional boundaries between scripture and tradition. It makes paradox central to its structure: The book distinctively narrates the process of its own formation (31.1–12) while also anticipating its existence and completion (17.18; 28.58; 30.10). Interpretation is directly and indirectly a theme of Deuteronomy (see 1.5). At many points, the authors of Deuteronomy reinterpret earlier narratives (see 6.1n.) and laws (particularly from the Covenant Collection or Covenant Code in Ex 20–23). Moreover, the process of the book's editing intentionally preserves conflicting perspectives on a full range of issues central to Israelite religion: on whether the revelation of the Decalogue at Mount Horeb (Deuteronomy's name for Mount Sinai) was direct or required the mediation of Moses (5.5n.); on the stature of Moses relative to other prophets (34.10n.); on the nature of divine punishment for sin (5.9–10n.; 7.10n.); on whether God rules as head of a pantheon or is the only God who exists (4.7–8n., 15–31n., 35n.; 32.8n.); and even on Deuteronomy's own setting in time and place (1.1n.; 2.12n.; 3.11n.). These mutually exclusive positions preserve an ongoing ancient debate about fundamental religious assumptions. The editors of Deuteronomy opted against closure: They preserved these different schools of thought in their full integrity. Accordingly, there is in Deuteronomy no access to God in the covenant without entering into this debate. The modern reader of Deuteronomy must become, like the authors of Deuteronomy, an interpreter.

Bernard M. Levinson

1 These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan—in the wilderness, on the plain opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab. [2] (By the way of Mount Seir it takes eleven days to reach Kadesh-barnea from Horeb.) [3] In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the Israelites just as the LORD had commanded him to speak to them. [4] This was after he had defeated King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and[a] in Edrei. [5] Beyond the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law as follows:

[6] The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, "You have stayed long enough at this mountain. [7] Resume your journey, and go into the hill country of the Amorites as well as into the neighboring regions—the Arabah, the hill country, the Shephelah, the Negeb, and the seacoast—the land of the Canaanites and the Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. [8] See, I have set the land before you; go in and take possession of the land that I[b] swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their descendants after them."

[9] At that time I said to you, "I am unable by myself to bear you. [10] The LORD your God has multiplied you, so that today you are as numerous as the stars of heaven. [11] May the LORD, the God of your ancestors, increase you

[a] Gk Syr Vg Compare Josh 12.4: Heb lacks *and*
[b] Sam Gk: MT *the* LORD

1.1–4.43: The first discourse of Moses has two subsections: a historical retrospective (1.6–3.29) and a sermon on the importance of obeying the teaching of Moses (4.1–40). An editorial heading (1.1–5) and an appendix (4.41–43) frame the discourse. **1.1–5: Editorial heading. 1:** *Beyond the Jordan,* the land east of the Jordan river (Transjordan), "the land of Moab" (v. 5), where the Israelites have stopped, awaiting entry into the land. The reference places the editor west of the Jordan, in Canaan. According to the narrative line, however, the Israelites have not yet reached the promised land, and Moses never does. From this and similar anachronisms, medieval Jewish commentators already recognized that not all of the Pentateuch could be attributed to Moses (see also 2.12; 3.11n.; 20.15; 34.5; Gen 12.6). *The plain* (lit. "the Arabah"), the Rift Valley that includes the Jordan River and stretches south from the Dead Sea through Eilat and the Red Sea into Africa. The places mentioned cannot be identified with certainty. **2:** *Eleven days* implies a scathing indictment of the nation. As a result of their rebellion in the desert (Num 13–14), it actually took them thirty-eight years, eight months, and twenty days to reach this point after they first broke camp (Num 10.11). *Kadesh-barnea*, see Num 13.26n. *Horeb* (Ex 3.1; 17.6; 33.6) is Deuteronomy's term for the mount of revelation. "(Mount) Sinai," in contrast, is the more standard term used by the Yahwistic and Priestly writers (see Ex 19.11; 34.29); it occurs in Deuteronomy only at 33.1, where it refers more generally to a mountainous region in the south. **4:** Num 21.21–35. **5:** *Expound* seems intentionally ambiguous about whether Moses here proclaims new religious teachings or simply explicates material already proclaimed. *This law,* better, "this teaching" (Heb "torah," 4.8,44; 27.3,8,26; 28.58,61; 29.20,28; 30.10; 31.9,11–12; 32.46). The word designates not only the combination of ritual, civil, family, and ethical law found in chs 12–26, but also the religious instruction of chs 5–11. For later editors, as here, the same word seems to refer to the entire book of Deuteronomy.

1.6–3.29: Historical review. Moses rehearses the Exodus, the revelation at Horeb/Sinai, and the rebellion in the desert for the generation who arose after these events, so that they may understand what brought them to the present moment. At a number of points, this narrative diverges from that of Exodus-Numbers. **1.6:** The original of the divine command quoted has not been preserved (cf. Num 10). **7:** *Amorites,* as at Gen 15.16, seems to be used generically for the family of nations who are the original inhabitants of Canaan, rather than technically to designate one of those nations (contrast Gen 15.19–21; Ex 3.8,17). *The Shephelah* is the region of foothills between the hill country on the east and the *seacoast* on the west. *The Negeb* is the semi-arid region south of the hill country. *Great river,* the ideal borders of the Israelite empire extended to the Euphrates (Gen 15.18), the northern limit of David's conquests (2 Sam 8.3). **8:** *See . . . set the land before you,* God symbolically displays the land and transfers its legal title to Israel (similarly, Gen 13.14–15). **9–18:** This account combines and reinterprets two previous accounts of the creation of a military-judicial system to share the burden of leadership (compare vv. 9–12 with Num 11.14–17 and vv. 13–17 with Ex 18.13–27), placing the institutionalization of leadership after the departure from Sinai rather than before it and omitting the advisory role of Jethro, the non-Israelite (con-

a thousand times more and bless you, as he has promised you! 12 But how can I bear the heavy burden of your disputes all by myself? 13 Choose for each of your tribes individuals who are wise, discerning, and reputable to be your leaders." 14 You answered me, "The plan you have proposed is a good one." 15 So I took the leaders of your tribes, wise and reputable individuals, and installed them as leaders over you, commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officials, throughout your tribes. 16 I charged your judges at that time: "Give the members of your community a fair hearing, and judge rightly between one person and another, whether citizen or resident alien. 17 You must not be partial in judging: hear out the small and the great alike; you shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's. Any case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it." 18 So I charged you at that time with all the things that you should do.

19 Then, just as the LORD our God had ordered us, we set out from Horeb and went through all that great and terrible wilderness that you saw, on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, until we reached Kadesh-barnea. 20 I said to you, "You have reached the hill country of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. 21 See, the LORD your God has given the land to you; go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you; do not fear or be dismayed."

22 All of you came to me and said, "Let us send men ahead of us to explore the land for us and bring back a report to us regarding the route by which we should go up and the cities we will come to." 23 The plan seemed good to me, and I selected twelve of you, one from each tribe. 24 They set out and went up into the hill country, and when they reached the Valley of Eshcol they spied it out 25 and gathered some of the land's produce, which they brought down to us. They brought back a report to us, and said, "It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving us."

26 But you were unwilling to go up. You rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; 27 you grumbled in your tents and said, "It is because the LORD hates us that he has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to hand us over to the Amorites to destroy us. 28 Where are we headed? Our kindred have made our hearts melt by reporting, 'The people are stronger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified up to heaven! We actually saw there the offspring of the Anakim!'" 29 I said to you, "Have no dread or fear of them. 30 The LORD your God, who goes before you, is the one who will fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your very eyes, 31 and in the wilderness, where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, just as one carries a child, all the way that you traveled until you reached this place. 32 But in spite of this, you have no trust in the LORD your God, 33 who goes before you on the way to seek out a place for you to camp, in fire by night, and in the cloud by day, to show you the route you should take."

34 When the LORD heard your words, he was wrathful and swore: 35 "Not one of these—not one of this evil generation—shall see the good land that I swore to give to your ancestors, 36 except Caleb son of Jephunneh. He shall see it, and to him and to his descen-

trast Ex 18). **10:** *Stars of heaven,* fulfilling the promises made to the ancestors (Gen 15.5; 22.17; 26.4; Ex 32.13). **11:** *God of your ancestors,* Deuteronomy's normal phrase is "the LORD your/our God" (i.e., vv. 6,10). This departure from that formula ties this new generation to its past by recalling God's earlier promises (Gen 26.24; 32.9; Ex 3.6). **13:** *Wise* (contrast Ex 18.21), an attribute regularly stressed by Deuteronomy (4.6; 16.19; 32.29), suggesting the influence of wisdom literature upon its authors. *Reputable* (lit. "knowing"), continuing the emphasis upon wisdom as a criterion for leadership. **16:** *Resident alien,* the non-Israelite who lives in the community without title to land and who is therefore economically vulnerable; Deuteronomy insists upon a single law that applies to Israelite and non-Israelite alike (5.14; 10.18–19; 14.29; 16.11; 24.14,17,19–21). **17:** Similarly, 16.18–20.

1.19–46: From Horeb to Kadesh. A retelling, with significant variations, of the spies' reconnaissance of the land (Num 13), the people's complaining of God's inability to fulfill the promises made to Israel's ancestors (Num 14.1–38), and the abortive attempt to penetrate Canaan from the south despite the divine command not to do so (Num 14.39–45; cf. 21.1–3). **28:** *Anakim,* see Num 13.22,33n. **30:** Ex 14.14. **33:** *Fire . . . cloud,* see Ex 13.21–22n.



The circuit via Transjordan.

dants I will give the land on which he set foot, because of his complete fidelity to the LORD." [37] Even with me the LORD was angry on your account, saying, "You also shall not enter there. [38] Joshua son of Nun, your assistant, shall enter there; encourage him, for he is the one who will secure Israel's possession of it. [39] And as for your little ones, who you thought would become booty, your children, who today do not yet know right from wrong, they shall enter there; to them I will give it, and they shall take possession of it. [40] But as for you, journey back into the wilderness, in the direction of the Red Sea."[a]

[41] You answered me, "We have sinned against the LORD! We are ready to go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us." So all of you strapped on your battle gear, and thought it easy to go up into the hill country. [42] The LORD said to me, "Say to them, 'Do not go up and do not fight, for I am not in the midst of you; otherwise you will be defeated by your enemies.'" [43] Although I told you, you would not listen. You rebelled against the command of the LORD and presumptuously went up into the hill country. [44] The Amorites who lived in that hill country then came out against you and chased you as bees do. They beat you down in Seir as far as Hormah. [45] When you returned and wept before the LORD, the LORD would neither heed your voice nor pay you any attention.

[46] After you had stayed at Kadesh as many

2 days as you did, [1] we journeyed back into the wilderness, in the direction of the Red Sea,[a] as the LORD had told me and skirted Mount Seir for many days. [2] Then the LORD said to me: [3] "You have been skirting this hill country long enough. Head north, [4] and charge the people as follows: You are about to pass through the territory of your kindred, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you, so, be very careful [5] not to engage in battle with them, for I will not give you even so much as a foot's length of their land, since I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. [6] You shall purchase food from them for money, so that you may eat; and you shall also buy water from them for money, so that you may drink. [7] Surely the LORD your God has blessed you in all your undertakings; he knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing." [8] So we passed by our kin, the descendants of Esau who live in Seir, leaving behind the route of the Arabah, and leaving behind Elath and Ezion-geber.

When we had headed out along the route of the wilderness of Moab, [9] the LORD said to me: "Do not harass Moab or engage them in battle, for I will not give you any of its land as a possession, since I have given Ar as a possession to the descendants of Lot." [10] (The Emim—a large and numerous people, as tall as the Anakim—had formerly inhabited it. [11] Like the Anakim, they are usually reckoned as Rephaim, though the Moabites call them Emim. [12] Moreover, the Horim had formerly inhabited Seir, but the descendants of Esau dispossessed them, destroying them and settling in their place, as Israel has done in the land that the LORD gave them as a possession.) [13] "Now then, proceed to cross over the Wadi Zered."

[a] Or *Sea of Reeds*

34–38: See Num 14.28–30. **37:** Here Moses is not punished for his own sin (contrast 32.51; Num 20.10–13; 27.12–23). Instead, the narrator presents Moses as innocent and as vicariously bearing the punishment due Israel for its sin (see 3.24–28; 4.21).

2.1–3.29: The circuit via Transjordan. 1–8a: Num 20.14–21. From Kadesh, Israel turned south through the Arabah to the Gulf of Aqaba in order to go around *Seir* (Edom; Num 21.4; cf. 33.47–49). **4:** *Descendants of Esau,* see Gen 36.1. **6:** *Money,* silver or gold that was weighed out. **8a:** *Elath,* see 1 Kings 9.26. *Ezion-geber,* see Num 33.35. **8b–25:** Num 21.4–20, significantly revised. Turning along the brook Zered (modern Wadi el-Hasa), which formed Edom's southern boundary, Israel detoured through the wilderness of Moab toward the Amorite kingdom of Sihon. **9:** Moab and Ammon (v. 19) were traditionally related through Lot (Gen 19.36–38). **10–12:** NRSV attempts to mitigate the anachronistic post-conquest perspective by confining it to parentheses (see v. 12n.). **10–11:** *Emim . . . Rephaim* (cf. v. 20; 3.11–13), names reflecting the legendary view that the aboriginal inhabitants of the land were fearsome giants. **12:** *Horim,* see Gen 36.20–30n. *As Israel has done . . . possession,* the conquest is

So we crossed over the Wadi Zered. [14] And the length of time we had traveled from Kadesh-barnea until we crossed the Wadi Zered was thirty-eight years, until the entire generation of warriors had perished from the camp, as the LORD had sworn concerning them. [15] Indeed, the LORD's own hand was against them, to root them out from the camp, until all had perished.

[16] Just as soon as all the warriors had died off from among the people, [17] the LORD spoke to me, saying, [18] "Today you are going to cross the boundary of Moab at Ar. [19] When you approach the frontier of the Ammonites, do not harass them or engage them in battle, for I will not give the land of the Ammonites to you as a possession, because I have given it to the descendants of Lot." [20] (It also is usually reckoned as a land of Rephaim. Rephaim formerly inhabited it, though the Ammonites call them Zamzummim, [21] a strong and numerous people, as tall as the Anakim. But the LORD destroyed them from before the Ammonites so that they could dispossess them and settle in their place. [22] He did the same for the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir, by destroying the Horim before them so that they could dispossess them and settle in their place even to this day. [23] As for the Avvim, who had lived in settlements in the vicinity of Gaza, the Caphtorim, who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and settled in their place.) [24] "Proceed on your journey and cross the Wadi Arnon. See, I have handed over to you King Sihon the Amorite of Heshbon, and his land. Begin to take possession by engaging him in battle. [25] This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the peoples everywhere under heaven; when they hear report of you, they will tremble and be in anguish because of you."

[26] So I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to King Sihon of Heshbon with the following terms of peace: [27] "If you let me pass through your land, I will travel only along the road; I will turn aside neither to the right nor to the left. [28] You shall sell me food for money, so that I may eat, and supply me water for money, so that I may drink. Only allow me to pass through on foot— [29] just as the descendants of Esau who live in Seir have done for me and likewise the Moabites who live in Ar—until I cross the Jordan into the land that the LORD our God is giving us." [30] But King Sihon of Heshbon was not willing to let us pass through, for the LORD your God had hardened his spirit and made his heart defiant in order to hand him over to you, as he has now done.

[31] The LORD said to me, "See, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin now to take possession of his land." [32] So when Sihon came out against us, he and all his people for battle at Jahaz, [33] the LORD our God gave him over to us; and we struck him down, along with his offspring and all his people. [34] At that time we captured all his towns, and in each town we utterly destroyed men, women, and children. We left not a single survivor. [35] Only the livestock we kept as spoil for ourselves, as well as the plunder of the towns that we had captured. [36] From Aroer on the edge of the Wadi Arnon (including the town that is in the wadi itself) as far as Gilead, there was no citadel too high for us. The LORD our God gave everything to us. [37] You did not encroach, however, on the land of the Ammonites, avoiding the whole upper region of the Wadi Jabbok as well as the towns of the hill country, just as[a] the LORD our God had charged.

3 When we headed up the road to Bashan, King Og of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, for battle at Edrei.

[a] Gk Tg: Heb *and all*

represented anachronistically as already having been completed (see 1.1n.; 3.11n.). **13:** *Wadi,* a seasonal stream. **14:** Fulfilling God's angry oath (1.34–35; Num 14.28–30). Without the death of the generation of the Exodus, here marked as accomplished, there can be no entry into the promised land. **15:** *LORD's own hand,* they did not die of natural causes. The imagery reverses the standard idea of holy war: God had turned against Israel rather than fighting on its behalf (see 3.22; 7.1–5; 12.29–31; 20.1–20). **20:** Cf. vv. 10–12n.; Gen 14.5. **23:** *Caphtor,* Crete, referring to the conquest of the coastal plain by "Sea Peoples" such as Philistines shortly after 1200 BCE (see Gen 10.2–5,14; Am 9.7). **24:** *Arnon,* see Num 21.12–13. **26–37:** The victory over Sihon, whose capital was at Heshbon. The earlier source in Num 21.21–32 is here supplemented and revised. **30:** See Ex 4.21n. **34:** *Utterly destroyed,* see

2 The Lord said to me, "Do not fear him, for I
have handed him over to you, along with his
people and his land. Do to him as you did to
King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned in
Heshbon." 3 So the Lord our God also handed
over to us King Og of Bashan and all his peo-
ple. We struck him down until not a single
survivor was left. 4 At that time we captured
all his towns; there was no citadel that we
did not take from them—sixty towns, the
whole region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in
Bashan. 5 All these were fortress towns with
high walls, double gates, and bars, besides a
great many villages. 6 And we utterly de-
stroyed them, as we had done to King Sihon
of Heshbon, in each city utterly destroying
men, women, and children. 7 But all the live-
stock and the plunder of the towns we kept
as spoil for ourselves.

8 So at that time we took from the two
kings of the Amorites the land beyond the
Jordan, from the Wadi Arnon to Mount
Hermon 9 (the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion,
while the Amorites call it Senir), 10 all the
towns of the tableland, the whole of Gilead,
and all of Bashan, as far as Salecah and
Edrei, towns of Og's kingdom in Bashan.
11 (Now only King Og of Bashan was left of the
remnant of the Rephaim. In fact his bed, an
iron bed, can still be seen in Rabbah of the
Ammonites. By the common cubit it is nine
cubits long and four cubits wide.) 12 As for the
land that we took possession of at that time, I
gave to the Reubenites and Gadites the terri-
tory north of Aroer,[a] that is on the edge of the
Wadi Arnon, as well as half the hill country
of Gilead with its towns, 13 and I gave to the
half-tribe of Manasseh the rest of Gilead
and all of Bashan, Og's kingdom. (The whole
region of Argob: all that portion of Bashan
used to be called a land of Rephaim; 14 Jair
the Manassite acquired the whole region of
Argob as far as the border of the Geshurites
and the Maacathites, and he named them—
that is, Bashan—after himself, Havvoth-jair,[b]
as it is to this day.) 15 To Machir I gave Gilead.
16 And to the Reubenites and the Gadites I
gave the territory from Gilead as far as the
Wadi Arnon, with the middle of the wadi as
a boundary, and up to the Jabbok, the wadi
being boundary of the Ammonites; 17 the Ara-
bah also, with the Jordan and its banks, from
Chinnereth down to the sea of the Arabah,
the Dead Sea,[c] with the lower slopes of Pisgah
on the east.

18 At that time, I charged you as follows:
"Although the Lord your God has given you
this land to occupy, all your troops shall
cross over armed as the vanguard of your Is-
raelite kin. 19 Only your wives, your children,
and your livestock—I know that you have
much livestock—shall stay behind in the
towns that I have given to you. 20 When the
Lord gives rest to your kindred, as to you,
and they too have occupied the land that the
Lord your God is giving them beyond the
Jordan, then each of you may return to the
property that I have given to you." 21 And I
charged Joshua as well at that time, saying:
"Your own eyes have seen everything that
the Lord your God has done to these two
kings; so the Lord will do to all the kingdoms
into which you are about to cross. 22 Do not
fear them, for it is the Lord your God who
fights for you."

23 At that time, too, I entreated the Lord,
saying: 24 "O Lord God, you have only begun
to show your servant your greatness and your

[a] Heb *territory from Aroer*
[b] That is *Settlement of Jair*
[c] Heb *Salt Sea*

7.2n. **37:** The river Jabbok makes a wide bend south and thus forms the western border of Ammon (3.16). **3.1–11:** The victory over Bashan (Num 21.33–35). **1:** *Edrei,* on the extreme south border of *Bashan;* see Num 21.33–35n. **11:** The oversized bed of Og, one of the legendary Rephaim (2.10–11), was a "museum piece" in Rabbah, a city on the Ammonite border. The emphasis that this bed *can still be seen* there places the historical perspective of the narrator, and thus of Deuteronomy's composition, long after the events here recounted (1.1n.; 2.12n.). A *cubit* was about 44 cm (17.5 in). **12–22:** The allotment of tribal territories in Transjordan (Num 32; Josh 13). **14:** Num 32.41. **17:** The territory included the eastern part of the Jordan Valley or Arabah. **22:** The whole story of the Exodus, wilderness journey, and invasion of Canaan is governed by the convictions of holy war, whereby God is a divine warrior who engages in battle on behalf of Israel. **23–29:** Num 27.12–23. **24:** *What god . . . can perform,* the assertion of God's superior power, relative to other gods *in heaven,* assumes the existence of other gods

might; what god in heaven or on earth can perform deeds and mighty acts like yours! 25 Let me cross over to see the good land beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and the Lebanon." 26 But the LORD was angry with me on your account and would not heed me. The LORD said to me, "Enough from you! Never speak to me of this matter again! 27 Go up to the top of Pisgah and look around you to the west, to the north, to the south, and to the east. Look well, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. 28 But charge Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, because it is he who shall cross over at the head of this people and who shall secure their possession of the land that you will see." 29 So we remained in the valley opposite Beth-peor.

4 So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. 2 You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the LORD your God with which I am charging you. 3 You have seen for yourselves what the LORD did with regard to the Baal of Peor—how the LORD your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor, 4 while those of you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today.

5 See, just as the LORD my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. 6 You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!" 7 For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him? 8 And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?

9 But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes

(5.7n.; 6.4n.; 32.8n.; Ex 15.11; Ps 89.5–8). For the later perspective of monotheism, see 4.35n. **26:** See 1.37n. **27:** Mount *Pisgah,* see 34.1n.

4.1–40: Exhortation to obey the teachings of Moses. While preceding the Decalogue (5.6–21), this unit provides a later theological reflection upon it, focusing on the second commandment and broadening its significance. Admonitions to obedience (vv. 1,40) frame the unit, which systematically contrasts obedience (vv. 5–24)/disobedience (vv. 25–31); remembering/forgetting (vv. 9,23); the LORD/other gods (vv. 7,34); Israel's revealed Torah/the laws of other nations (vv. 8,28); and God/idols (vv. 12–20). The correct worship of God is aniconic: Images (whether of God or of natural phenomena) should play no role in Israelite religion. This becomes so strong a theme that idolatry by itself is asserted to be the cause of the nation's exile from its land (vv. 25–31). The explicit reference to exile suggests that the unit is a late theological explanation for the Babylonian exile in the early sixth century BCE. The focus on idolatry as the basis for the divine punishment diverges significantly from the perspective elsewhere that views failure to heed "all his [God's] commandments and decrees" as the cause of exile (28.15; cf. 28.1,45,58–59). **1–4:** The incident at Peor (Num 25.1–9) is recalled to emphasize the importance of fidelity to God and the dire consequences of worshiping other gods. **2:** This admonition not to alter the teaching of Moses, whether by addition or subtraction (cf. 12.32), parallels similar admonitions in wisdom literature (Prov 30.6; Eccl 3.14; 12.12–13; Sir 42.21; cf. Rev 22.18–19) and in ancient Near Eastern legal traditions. **5–8:** The author here challenges the prevailing Near Eastern idea that wisdom was a royal prerogative. Whereas, for example, the ancient Babylonian *Laws of Hammurabi* (ca. 1755 BCE) praised the "just decisions" of its "wise" king (cols 47.1; 4.7), here it is the nation Israel who will be internationally renowned as "wise" for its "just" laws (vv. 6,8). See also 29.29n.; 30.11–14n. **7–8:** Israel is distinguished both by its God and by its law: The two ideas are interlocked. God is *near,* both in having entered history on behalf of Israel and in revealing his will as Torah (30.14). The laws are *just* (better, "righteous"), not only in their morality but also as embodying the will of God. **9–14:** The revelation at Sinai/Horeb (Ex 19–20; Deut 5) is recalled in order to instruct this generation, who did not experience it. **9:** The paired injunctions not to *forget* the powerful experience of God's actions and to educate *your children,* so that the past becomes "present" also to them, represent a prominent aim of Deuteronomy: to overcome the distance of the past and maintain it as a source of identity (vv. 23,25; 6.2,7,20–25; 8.11; 9.7; 31.13; 32.18). *Your eyes have seen,* as well as the following "how you once stood" (v. 10), are highly paradoxical assertions. Nei-

have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children—
10 how you once stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, "Assemble the people for me, and I will let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me as long as they live on the earth, and may teach their children so"; 11 you approached and stood at the foot of the mountain while the mountain was blazing up to the very heavens, shrouded in dark clouds. 12 Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. 13 He declared to you his covenant, which he charged you to observe, that is, the ten commandments;[a] and he wrote them on two stone tablets. 14 And the LORD charged me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy.

15 Since you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, 16 so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure—the likeness of male or female, 17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, 18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. 19 And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven. 20 But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron-smelter, out of Egypt, to become a people of his very own possession, as you are now.

21 The LORD was angry with me because of you, and he vowed that I should not cross the Jordan and that I should not enter the good

[a] Heb *the ten words*

ther is literally true: The actual generation of the Exodus had died off (2.14–15n.). This paradoxical structure of thought, whereby Moses addresses those who had not witnessed the events as if they had, while insisting that they inculcate the events to posterity, is central to Deuteronomy's theology of history (5.3–4,23; 11.7; 29.14–15). **10:** *My words,* the Decalogue ("ten commandments"; v. 13; 5.22; 9.10; 10.2,4). Elsewhere, however, the phrase refers comprehensively to the legal corpus of chs 12–26 (12.28). *Fear,* respectful reverence, not intimidation (see Job 28.28; Prov 1.7). **11:** The manifestation of a god ("theophany") was often associated with disturbances of nature in Ugaritic (Canaanite) literature. This motif was taken over by Israelite writers and applied to God (Ex 19.16–19; 20.21; Ps 18.7–15; 29.3–9). **12:** *Form* (also vv. 15–16,23,25), directly alluding to the second commandment of the Decalogue (5.8 = Ex 20.4). **13:** A subtle reinterpretation of Sinai: The specification of that event as one where God proclaimed *ten commandments* occurs only here, at 10.4, and at Ex 34.28. There is no special number of or name for the commandments (lit. "words") in Ex 19–20 or Deut 5. The rationale for *two stone tablets* (as at 5.22) derives from ancient Near Eastern treaties, whereby both sovereign and vassal would retain a separate complete copy of the treaty. **15–31:** Reinterpretation of the second commandment. The Decalogue concedes the existence of other gods, while prohibiting Israel from worshiping them (5.7; cf. 32.8; Ex 15.11; Ps 82.1). It then separately prohibits the making of images (5.8). The distinction between those two commandments is dissolved here. The existence of other gods is no longer conceivable; the sole focus is the prohibition against idols. Here and elsewhere (see v. 19n.) key ideas in Deuteronomy are reinterpreted from a later theological perspective; such passages therefore represent a later textual layer that dates to the exilic period. **16b–19a:** This catalogue follows the order of creation in Gen 1 in reverse order, consistent with ancient scribal practice when quoting an earlier text. **18:** *Water under the earth,* seas, rivers, and lakes. Ancient cosmology conceived the earth to be a disk floating on such waters (cf. Gen 1.9). **19:** *Sun . . . host of heaven* may reflect images derived from the Neo-Assyrian pantheon brought into the Jerusalem Temple by Manasseh but removed by Josiah (2 Kings 21.5; 23.4–5; Jer 8.2). The idea of idols or of celestial phenomena literally being worshiped sharply distorts ancient Near Eastern religion, which regarded such phenomena as visible manifestations or emblems of a deity, not as themselves divine. This polemic, with the idea that God *allotted* the celestial phenomena to other nations while reserving Israel as "his very own possession" (v. 20; cf. 7.6n.; 32.8–9), reinterprets the earlier idea that God, as head of the pantheon, assigned other nations to the supervision of lesser gods but retained Israel as "his allotted share" (lit. "his very own possession"; 32.8–9). The author deanimates those gods, reducing

land that the LORD your God is giving for your possession. 22 For I am going to die in this land without crossing over the Jordan, but you are going to cross over to take possession of that good land. 23 So be careful not to forget the covenant that the LORD your God made with you, and not to make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. 24 For the LORD your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God.

25 When you have had children and children's children, and become complacent in the land, if you act corruptly by making an idol in the form of anything, thus doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, and provoking him to anger, 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to occupy; you will not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. 27 The LORD will scatter you among the peoples; only a few of you will be left among the nations where the LORD will lead you. 28 There you will serve other gods made by human hands, objects of wood and stone that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. 29 From there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul. 30 In your distress, when all these things have happened to you in time to come, you will return to the LORD your God and heed him. 31 Because the LORD your God is a merciful God, he will neither abandon you nor destroy you; he will not forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them.

32 For ask now about former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of heaven to the other: has anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of? 33 Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived? 34 Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? 35 To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. 36 From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, while you heard his words coming out of the fire. 37 And because he loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them. He brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, 38 driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, giving you their land for a possession, as it is still today. 39 So acknowledge today and take to heart that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. 40 Keep his statutes and his commandments, which I am commanding you today for your own well-being and that of your descendants after you, so that you may long remain in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.

41 Then Moses set apart on the east side of the Jordan three cities 42 to which a homicide could flee, someone who unintentionally kills another person, the two not having been

them to lifeless celestial objects. **21:** See 1.37n. **26:** *Heaven . . . witness,* similarly, 30.19; 31.28; 32.1; Isa 1.2; 44.23; Ps 69.34; 96.11. **27–28:** These verses allude to the exile of conquered populations, a policy used effectively by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. **32–40:** Continuation of the double focus on the uniqueness of God's revelation to Israel and of the covenant he made with the nation. Several passages fit best in the historical context of the Babylonian exile (see v. 35n.). **33:** Alludes to the normal expectation that no human can look directly upon God and survive (Gen 16.13; 32.30; Ex 3.6; 19.21; 33.20). **34:** *Attempted,* better, "ventured" (as at 28.56). *Trials . . . wonders* refers to the signs performed by Moses and Aaron in Egypt, including the plagues, to persuade Pharaoh to release Israel (Ex 7.3; 8.23; 10.1–2; 11.9–10). **35:** *There is no other,* this affirmation of full monotheism (contrast v. 7; 5.7) corresponds to the thought of the exilic Second Isaiah (Isa 43.10–13; 44.6–8; 45.6–7,22).

4.41–43: An appendix. The cities of refuge to be established in Transjordan. Since the law concerned with these cities (ch 19) does not refer to this passage, these verses are most likely an editorial appendix composed after the completion of ch 19 (cf. Num 35.9–15; Josh 20.8). Similar disconnected appendixes often appear in the Bible at the conclusion of longer literary units (e.g., Lev 27).

at enmity before; the homicide could flee to one of these cities and live: 43 Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland belonging to the Reubenites, Ramoth in Gilead belonging to the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan belonging to the Manassites.

44 This is the law that Moses set before the Israelites. 45 These are the decrees and the statutes and ordinances that Moses spoke to the Israelites when they had come out of Egypt, 46 beyond the Jordan in the valley opposite Beth-peor, in the land of King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned at Heshbon, whom Moses and the Israelites defeated when they came out of Egypt. 47 They occupied his land and the land of King Og of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorites on the eastern side of the Jordan: 48 from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, as far as Mount Sirion[a] (that is, Hermon), 49 together with all the Arabah on the east side of the Jordan as far as the Sea of the Arabah, under the slopes of Pisgah.

5 Moses convened all Israel, and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently. 2 The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. 3 Not with our ancestors did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. 4 The LORD spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire. 5 (At that time I was standing between the LORD and you to declare to you the words[b] of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said:

6 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 7 you shall have no other gods before[c] me.

8 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that

[a] Syr: Heb *Sion*
[b] Q Mss Sam Gk Syr Vg Tg: MT *word*
[c] Or *besides*

4.44–28.68: The second discourse of Moses.

4.44–49: Introduction. Cf. 1.1–5. **49:** *Sea of the Arabah,* the Dead Sea.

5.1–33: The revelation at Sinai/Horeb. Ostensibly a retelling of Ex 19–20, this version introduces significant changes in both detail and theology. The central idea is that God publicly reveals the law to the entire nation across boundaries of gender, race, and class, including non-Israelites (Ex 12.38). Near Eastern legal collections, in contrast, were attributed to a human monarch and were concerned to preserve class distinctions. Moreover, a deity disclosing himself to an entire nation was unprecedented. The Decalogue has God address each Israelite individually as a grammatically masculine singular "you," rather than the expected plural. In contrast to Near Eastern law, the prohibitions are universal and absolute: The aim of the law is to transform society by creating a moral community in which murder, theft, etc. will no longer exist. Obedience to God's will (vv. 6–16) demands active respect for the integrity of the neighbor (vv. 17–21). The editing drives home the point that there is no access to God or revelation without mediation and interpretation (vv. 5,28–32), preserving two mutually independent viewpoints about whether God spoke directly to the people (v. 4) or only through the mediation of Moses (v. 5n.). Similarly, the editing retains a debate about the terror involved in hearing directly the divine voice (vv. 24–25).

5.1–5: Making the past present. 3: *Not with our ancestors . . . but with us,* inconsistent with the earlier emphasis that the generation who experienced these events has now died off (2.14–15). The aim is to overcome the limits of historical time and place through participation in the covenant, which makes revelation "present" (see 4.9n.; 11.2; 29.14–15n.). *Our ancestors* may refer either to the Exodus generation (2.14–15n.) or to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (1.11n.). **5:** NRSV suggests that the first sentence intends merely to clarify v. 4. More likely, it presents an independent view that challenges the assumption of v. 4. *I was standing between . . . you,* contrast "face to face" (v. 4). *You . . . did not go up the mountain,* contradicting v. 4, "with you . . . at the mountain" (Heb). *And he said,* in Hebrew, the original transition from the end of v. 4 directly to the Decalogue.

5.6–21: The Decalogue. This version differs at several points from that in Ex 20.2–17. **7–10:** See 4.15–31n. **9:** Punishment for sins against God extends across three generations. This principle of vicarious punishment contrasts sharply with the Israelite norm for civil and criminal law, which restricts punishment to the agent alone (24.16). Later layers of tradition challenged this theological principle of divine justice (see 7.10n.; Jer 31.29–30;

The Numbering of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5.6-18

Command	Jewish Tradition	Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and Most Protestant Churches	Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches
1	Self-identification of God as separate command (v. 6)	Other Gods (vv. 6-7)	Other Gods & Idols (vv. 6-10)
2	Other Gods & Idols (vv. 7-10)	Idols (vv. 8-10)	False Oath (v. 11)
3	False Oath (v. 11)	False Oath (v. 11)	Sabbath (vv. 12-15)
4	Sabbath (vv. 12-15)	Sabbath (vv. 12-15)	Parents (v. 16)
5	Parents (v. 16)	Parents (v. 16)	Murder (v. 17)
6	Murder (v. 17)	Murder (v. 17)	Adultery (v. 17)
7	Adultery (v. 17)	Adultery (v. 17)	Theft (v. 17)
8	Theft (v. 17)	Theft (v. 17)	False Witness (v. 17)
9	False Witness (v. 17)	False Witness (v. 17)	Coveting Wife (v. 18)
10	Coveting (v. 18)	Coveting (v. 18)	Coveting Property (v. 18)

is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 9 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, 10 but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation[a] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

11 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

12 Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 14 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. 15 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

16 Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

17 You shall not murder.[b]

18 Neither shall you commit adultery.

19 Neither shall you steal.

[a] Or *to thousands*

[b] Or *kill*

Ezek 18). **10:** *Steadfast love* or "grace," loyalty of action as an expectation of the covenant (2 Sam 7.15; Hos 6.6). *Who love me,* technical language of Near Eastern treaties, whereby "love" refers to the loyalty of action that the vassal owes the sovereign. **11:** The intent is to prohibit careless use of the divine name in the context of swearing an oath ("May God do X to me unless I do Y"); such oaths were viewed as legally binding (see Judg 11.29–40). **12:** *Observe,* contrast Ex 20.8. **14:** The law equally benefits slaves and non-Israelites (1.16n.; 15.15; 16.11; 24.17). **15:** Contrast the rationale provided for the sabbath at Ex 20.11. Deuteronomy here, as elsewhere, emphasizes the Exodus as a central motivation for religious and social practices. **16:** *As . . . commanded you,* the ostensible precise repetition of the Decalogue here diverges from the original (Ex 20.12) by shifting to the perspective of Moses as speaker, whose annotation is now included in the revelation. **17:** *Murder* is correct; text note *b* is an inaccurate translation ("kill," as a global prohibition). **18:** The absolute prohibition of adultery transforms it from the breach of the contractual rights of the woman's husband into an offense against both God and the larger community. Near Eastern law normally granted the husband the sole right of deciding whether to execute or otherwise punish the wife for adultery (see *Laws of Hammurabi* § 129). Biblical law here removes the wife from

20 Neither shall you bear false witness
against your neighbor.
21 Neither shall you covet your neighbor's
wife.

Neither shall you desire your neighbor's
house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox,
or donkey, or anything that belongs to your
neighbor.

22 These words the LORD spoke with a loud
voice to your whole assembly at the moun-
tain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick
darkness, and he added no more. He wrote
them on two stone tablets, and gave them to
me. 23 When you heard the voice out of the
darkness, while the mountain was burning
with fire, you approached me, all the heads of
your tribes and your elders; 24 and you said,
"Look, the LORD our God has shown us his
glory and greatness, and we have heard his
voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that
God may speak to someone and the person
may still live. 25 So now why should we die?
For this great fire will consume us; if we hear
the voice of the LORD our God any longer, we
shall die. 26 For who is there of all flesh that
has heard the voice of the living God speak-
ing out of fire, as we have, and remained
alive? 27 Go near, you yourself, and hear all
that the LORD our God will say. Then tell us
everything that the LORD our God tells you,
and we will listen and do it."

28 The LORD heard your words when you
spoke to me, and the LORD said to me: "I have
heard the words of this people, which they
have spoken to you; they are right in all that
they have spoken. 29 If only they had such
a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all
my commandments always, so that it might
go well with them and with their children
forever! 30 Go say to them, 'Return to your
tents.' 31 But you, stand here by me, and I
will tell you all the commandments, the
statutes and the ordinances, that you shall
teach them, so that they may do them in the
land that I am giving them to possess." 32 You
must therefore be careful to do as the LORD
your God has commanded you; you shall not
turn to the right or to the left. 33 You must
follow exactly the path that the LORD your
God has commanded you, so that you may
live, and that it may go well with you, and
that you may live long in the land that you
are to possess.

6 Now this is the commandment—the stat-
utes and the ordinances—that the LORD
your God charged me to teach you to observe
in the land that you are about to cross into
and occupy, 2 so that you and your children
and your children's children may fear the
LORD your God all the days of your life, and
keep all his decrees and his commandments
that I am commanding you, so that your days
may be long. 3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and
observe them diligently, so that it may go
well with you, and so that you may multiply
greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey,
as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has
promised you.

the disposal of the husband and grants her the status of legal person (see 22.22n.). **21:** *Wife . . . house,* contrast the sequence of Ex 20.17. **22:** *Two . . . tablets*, see 4.12n.

5.22–33: Moses as mediator. While the Decalogue was given directly to the people (v. 4; 4.10–13), the rest of the laws were mediated to the people by Moses, at their plea (v. 27; 4.14). **23–27:** 4.33; cf. Ex 20.18–21. **24–25:** An awkward juxtaposition; v. 24 may be an insertion reflecting 4.33. The anxiety explains the request that Moses serve as mediator. **28–31:** The idea that Moses mediates between God and the people will be used in two ways: to justify the laws that Moses subsequently propounds as revelation (chs 12–26), and to justify the institution of prophecy (18.15–22).

6.1–11.32: The requirement of loyalty to God. A sermonic preamble to the laws of chs 12–26. **6.1–3:** Introduction, stressing the rewards of obedience to the covenant. **1:** *The commandment . . . occupy,* the Hebrew is nearly identical to 5.31. The precise repetition of terminology legitimates the entire second discourse—both *the commandment* (chs 6–11) and *the statutes and the ordinances* (the legal corpus of chs 12–26; see 12.1)—as originating in direct divine revelation from God on Horeb (5.31). The Book of the Covenant Collection (Ex 21–23), with its "ordinances" (Ex 21.1), and the "statutes and the ordinances" of Deuteronomic law (6.1; 12.1), now in implicit tension, are independently presented as God's words to Moses on the mountain immediately following the Decalogue (Ex 20.21; 24.3,12). **2:** *Fear,* better, "revere" (see 4.10n.). **4–25:** A sermon on the first commandment of the Decalogue, incorporating direct allusions to it: vv. 4 and 14 refer to 5.7; vv. 12,21,23 refer to 5.6; v. 15 ("jealous God")

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the
LORD alone.[a] 5 You shall love the LORD your
God with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your might. 6 Keep these words
that I am commanding you today in your
heart. 7 Recite them to your children and talk
about them when you are at home and when
you are away, when you lie down and when
you rise. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand,
fix them as an emblem[b] on your forehead,
9 and write them on the doorposts of your
house and on your gates.

10 When the LORD your God has brought
you into the land that he swore to your ances-
tors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give
you—a land with fine, large cities that you did
not build, 11 houses filled with all sorts of goods
that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did
not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you
did not plant—and when you have eaten your
fill, 12 take care that you do not forget the LORD,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out
of the house of slavery. 13 The LORD your God
you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his
name alone you shall swear. 14 Do not follow
other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who
are all around you, 15 because the LORD your
God, who is present with you, is a jealous God.
The anger of the LORD your God would be
kindled against you and he would destroy you
from the face of the earth.

16 Do not put the LORD your God to the test,
as you tested him at Massah. 17 You must dili-
gently keep the commandments of the LORD
your God, and his decrees, and his statutes
that he has commanded you. 18 Do what is
right and good in the sight of the LORD, so
that it may go well with you, and so that you
may go in and occupy the good land that the
LORD swore to your ancestors to give you,
19 thrusting out all your enemies from before
you, as the LORD has promised.

20 When your children ask you in time to
come, "What is the meaning of the decrees
and the statutes and the ordinances that the
LORD our God has commanded you?" 21 then
you shall say to your children, "We were Phar-
aoh's slaves in Egypt, but the LORD brought us
out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 22 The LORD
displayed before our eyes great and awesome
signs and wonders against Egypt, against
Pharaoh and all his household. 23 He brought
us out from there in order to bring us in, to

[a] Or *The LORD our God is one LORD,* or *The LORD our God, the LORD is one*, or *The LORD is our God, the LORD is one*

[b] Or *as a frontlet*

refers to 5.9; vv. 5,17 refer to 5.10. **4–9:** In Jewish tradition these verses begin the important prayer known as the Shema ("Hear!"). **4–5:** This "first" commandment (Mk 12.29–30) restates the first Decalogue commandment in positive form. *Hear, O Israel* (5.1; 9.1; 20.3; 27.9), an imperative modeled on a wisdom teacher's call for attention (Prov 1.8; 4.1,10; 5.7; 7.24; 23.19). *The LORD . . . alone,* as text note *a* indicates, the Hebrew is difficult; the translation selected makes most sense historically. The focus is not on God's nature in the abstract but on the quality of Israel's relationship to God. The proclamation, like 5.7, does not deny the existence of other gods but is concerned with the exclusivity of Israel's loyalty to God (as in ch 13). This vision is universalized in later prophecy (Zech 14.9). **5:** *Love,* see 5.10n. The paradox of commanding a feeling (as in Lev 19.17–18) is resolved with the recognition that covenantal "love" is not private emotion but loyalty of action toward both deity and neighbor (see 5.1–33n.). **7:** *At home . . . away,* using paired opposites as a merism (28.3–6n.) to indicate totality: One should always *talk about* the commandments. **8:** *Bind them,* based on the wisdom teacher's symbolically urging his students to focus on the lesson (Prov 3.3; 6.21; 7.3). This law, literally interpreted, provides the basis for the Jewish convention of binding phylacteries, containing selected texts from the Torah, upon the arm and forehead. **9:** *Doorposts,* important transitional spaces in which religious-legal ceremonies were performed and where divine images might be stored (see Ex 12.7,21–23; 21.6; Isa 57.8). Perhaps partially reacting against a formerly magical background, this law devotes that space to the teaching of Moses. The law provides the basis for the Jewish convention of placing a small box containing this and related texts upon the upper portion of the right doorpost (Heb "mezuzah"). **10–11:** The list, *land . . . houses . . . cisterns . . . olive groves* (cf. Josh 24.13; Neh 9.24–25), defines the elements of an established civilization, which Israel is about to both inherit and become. **12:** The threat of forgetting and the risk of apostasy are repeatedly stressed (4.9–14n.; 8.11–20; 32.18; cf. 5.29; Hos 2.5–13). **16:** *Test . . . Massah,* for the incident and the Hebrew pun, see Ex 17.2–7; see also Mt 4.7. **20:** The Jewish Passover text ("Haggadah") includes this and similar didactic questions (Ex 12.21–27; 13.1–10,11–16). **22:** See 4.34n.

give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. 24 Then the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. 25 If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right."

7 When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you— 2 and when the LORD your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. 3 Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, 4 for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. 5 But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles,[a] and burn their idols with fire. 6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

[a] Heb *Asherim*

7.1–10.11: Risks to covenantal faith upon entry to the land. The first issue is that Israel enters an already inhabited land, whose greater population and worship apparatus it must confront (ch 7). Thereafter, successful habitation carries its own risks: complacency and loss of historical memory (ch 8).

7.1–26: The war of conquest. Two topics are treated: the command to destroy the original occupants of Canaan (vv. 1–3,6,17–24); and the command not to worship their gods (vv. 4–5,7–15,25–26). The editors join the two themes at v. 16. **1:** An after-the-fact literary compilation more than a historical portrayal: The peoples included in the "table of nations" vary considerably (Gen 15.19–21; Ex 3.8,17; 13.5; 23.23; 33.2; 34.11; Deut 20.17; Josh 3.10; 9.1; 11.3; 12.8; 24.11; Judg 3.5; 1 Kings 9.20; Ezra 9.1; Neh 9.8; 2 Chr 8.7). *Hittites* (Gen 23.10; 25.9; 49.29–30; 50.13; Num 13.29, etc.), the Hittite Empire (ca. 1700–1200 BCE) in fact flourished not in Canaan but in Anatolia, in central Turkey. The *Jebusites,* the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Jerusalem, retained control of the city until conquered by David several centuries after the conquest (2 Sam 5.6–7). The latter narrative implies the nonimplementation of this law. The ideal number *seven,* which signifies completion or totality (28.7; Gen 1; the plague list of Ps 78.44–51 and 105.28–36 in contrast to Ex 7–12), suggests that the enumeration may be artificial. **2:** This requirement for destruction is anomalous: Earlier sources contemplate only expulsion (Ex 23.23–33; cf. 34.11). The definition and requirements of the "ban" vary considerably throughout the Bible: total destruction of people and property (here; 13.15–17; 20.16–17; 1 Sam 15.3); sparing of property (2.34–35; 3.6–7); sparing of women, children, and property (20.10–14). Finally, other narratives more realistically speak of the failure of conquest except in limited areas and the use of conquered populations for labor (Josh 15–17; Judg 1; 3.1–6). These factors suggest that the law of the ban is an anachronistic literary formulation. It first arose centuries after the settlement; it was never implemented because there was no population extant against whom it could be implemented. Its polemic is directed at internal issues of religious purity in postexilic Judah. Often the authors of Deuteronomy stigmatize as "Canaanite" older forms of Israelite religion that they no longer accept (see v. 5n.; 16.22n.; 18.9–14n.). *Utterly destroy,* or "place under the ban," or "devote." That which is "devoted" is set aside for divine use and denied to humans. The war of conquest, as a holy war, should not be one where the individual profits through plunder (see 12.29–31n.; 13.15n.; 20.1–20n.; Josh 7). The law addresses apostasy as opposed to ethnicity; it is directed against apostate Israelites in 8.20; 13.15–17. **3:** This prohibition against intermarriage does not fit easily after v. 2, suggesting several layers of editing. It is also inconsistent with 21.10–14, which seems more likely to reflect the original policy. **5:** See Ex 34.13. *Pillars,* stone monuments that marked places where God appeared and were thus originally legitimate in worship (Gen 35.14; Ex 24.4; Hos 3.4). Only subsequently were they prohibited as alien (Ex 23.24; 34.13; Lev 26.1; Deut 12.3; 16.22; 2 Kings 18.4). *Sacred poles,* or, with text note *a, Asherim.* The singular, "Asherah," preserves the name of an important Canaanite goddess (1 Kings 18.19) known from Ugarit; here the word designates merely the wooden pole, tree, or image that represented her (16.21; Judg 6.25–26,28). **6–16:** The meaning of Israel's covenantal relationship to God. **6:** *For* suggests that the verse (also 14.2) originally continued v. 3, since it provides the rationale for total separation from

7 It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, 10 and who repays in their own person those who reject him. He does not delay but repays in their own person those who reject him. 11 Therefore, observe diligently the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that I am commanding you today.

12 If you heed these ordinances, by diligently observing them, the LORD your God will maintain with you the covenant loyalty that he swore to your ancestors; 13 he will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, in the land that he swore to your ancestors to give you. 14 You shall be the most blessed of peoples, with neither sterility nor barrenness among you or your livestock. 15 The LORD will turn away from you every illness; all the dread diseases of Egypt that you experienced, he will not inflict on you, but he will lay them on all who hate you. 16 You shall devour all the peoples that the LORD your God is giving over to you, showing them no pity; you shall not serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.

17 If you say to yourself, "These nations are more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?" 18 do not be afraid of them. Just remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, 19 the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out. The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. 20 Moreover, the LORD your God will send the pestilence[a] against them, until even the survivors and the fugitives are destroyed. 21 Have no dread of them, for the LORD your God, who is present with you, is a great and awesome God. 22 The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to make a quick end of them, otherwise the wild animals would become too numerous for you. 23 But the LORD your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great panic, until they are destroyed. 24 He will hand their kings over to you and you shall blot out their name from under heaven; no one will be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them. 25 The images of their gods you shall burn with fire. Do not covet the silver or the gold that is on them and take it for yourself, because you could be ensnared by it; for it is abhorrent to the LORD your God. 26 Do not bring an abhorrent thing into your house, or you will be set apart for destruction like it.

[a] Or *hornets*: Meaning of Heb uncertain

the Canaanites, not for the destruction of their cult sites. This verse summarizes Deuteronomy's view of Israel's relation to God. *Holy,* lit. "set aside as separate," as is clear here. *Chosen,* the precondition of Israel's elected status. *His treasured possession* (14.2; 26.18; Ex 19.5; Ps 135.4; Mal 3.17), designating Israel as the exclusive property of God; cf. 4.20n., where a different Heb word is used. Just as the monarch is entitled to private "treasure" not in the public domain (1 Chr 29.3), so does God single Israel out for a special relationship. **9–11:** A discourse on the second commandment that radically revises its meaning. The reuse of key phrases and inversion of the order of punishment and blessing in 5.9–10 mark the citation. **9:** *Covenant loyalty,* NRSV translates the same word as "steadfast love" at 5.10 (see note). **10:** *In their own person,* individually or personally. The repetition of the phrase, bracketing the key idea that God *does not delay,* highlights the rejection of vicarious punishment (5.9n.; Ex 34.7). Instead, the sermon argues for individual retribution, as in criminal law (24.16), while deleting any reference to the transmission of punishment across generations. **12–14:** Natural fertility is here made contingent upon obedience to the covenant. **17–26:** Israel need not fear nations more powerful than it since, according to the idea of the holy war, God "is present with you" in battle (v. 21; 6.15; cf. 20.1–4). These verses echo ideas found in Ex 23.20–33. **20:** *Pestilence,* see Ex 23.27–28n.; Josh 24.12. **22:** Abbreviating Ex 23.29–30; contrast 9.3.

You must utterly detest and abhor it, for it is set apart for destruction.

8 This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors. 2 Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. 3 He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.[a] 4 The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years. 5 Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the LORD your God disciplines you. 6 Therefore keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. 7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, 9 a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. 10 You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you.

11 Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. 12 When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, 13 and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, 14 then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, 15 who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous[b] snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, 16 and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. 17 Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." 18 But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. 19 If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. 20 Like the nations that the LORD is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.

[a] Or *by anything that the* LORD *decrees*
[b] Or *fiery*; Heb *seraph*

8.1–20: The temptation to pride and self-sufficiency in the land. Moses warns the people that success in Canaan will tempt them to forget the wilderness lesson of complete dependence upon God. **1–10:** An appeal to Israel's memory: In the wilderness God sustained the people daily (Ex 12.37–17.16; Num 11–14). **3:** *Manna,* see Ex 16; Num 11.7–8. **5:** Suffering is here interpreted as discipline, as in a parent's correction of a child (Hos 11); this metaphor reflects the influence of wisdom literature (see Prov 3.11–12; cf. 1.13n.; 4.2n.; 4.5–8n.; 4.10n.; 6.4n.; 11.2).

8.11–20: The peril of prosperity. 11: A bold equation between *the* LORD and the legal corpus (*his commandments . . . ordinances . . . statutes . . . today*). Disobedience of Deuteronomy's laws becomes tantamount to forgetting God and transgressing the first commandment (see v. 19n.). **15:** *Poisonous snakes,* Num 21.6–9. *Water . . . from flint rock,* Ex 17.1–7; Num 20.2–13; Ps 114.8. **16:** *Manna,* see v. 3n. **19:** *Other gods . . . serve . . . worship,* citing the first and second commandments (5.7,9). *Worship,* translated "bow down to" at 5.9. **20:** *Like the nations,* here Israel is itself placed under the ban if it commits apostasy (see 7.1–26n.). *Destroying . . . perish,* in Hebrew, the same word is used to underscore the precise "measure for measure" nature of the punishment. Israel's election (7.6n.) grants no exemption from upholding the law. Rightful habitation in the promised land, like its fertility (7.12–14n.), depends upon covenantal obedience, not ethnic identity (7.2n.).

9 Hear, O Israel! You are about to cross the Jordan today, to go in and dispossess nations larger and mightier than you, great cities, fortified to the heavens, **2** a strong and tall people, the offspring of the Anakim, whom you know. You have heard it said of them, "Who can stand up to the Anakim?" **3** Know then today that the LORD your God is the one who crosses over before you as a devouring fire; he will defeat them and subdue them before you, so that you may dispossess and destroy them quickly, as the LORD has promised you.

4 When the LORD your God thrusts them out before you, do not say to yourself, "It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to occupy this land"; it is rather because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you. **5** It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to occupy their land; but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is dispossessing them before you, in order to fulfill the promise that the LORD made on oath to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

6 Know, then, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to occupy because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people. **7** Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness; you have been rebellious against the LORD from the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place.

8 Even at Horeb you provoked the LORD to wrath, and the LORD was so angry with you that he was ready to destroy you. **9** When I went up the mountain to receive the stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water. **10** And the LORD gave me the two stone tablets written with the finger of God; on them were all the words that the LORD had spoken to you at the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly. **11** At the end of forty days and forty nights the LORD gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant. **12** Then the LORD said to me, "Get up, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you have brought from Egypt have acted corruptly. They have been quick to turn from the way that I commanded them; they have cast an image for themselves." **13** Furthermore the LORD said to me, "I have seen that this people is indeed a stubborn people. **14** Let me alone that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and more numerous than they."

15 So I turned and went down from the mountain, while the mountain was ablaze; the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. **16** Then I saw that you had indeed sinned against the LORD your God, by casting for yourselves an image of a calf; you had been quick to turn from the way that the LORD had commanded you. **17** So I took hold of the two tablets and flung them from my two hands, smashing them before your eyes. **18** Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin you had committed, provoking the LORD by doing what was evil in his sight. **19** For I was afraid that the anger that the LORD bore against you was so fierce that he would destroy you. But the LORD listened to me that time also. **20** The LORD was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him, but I interceded also on behalf of Aaron at that same time. **21** Then I took the sinful thing you had made, the calf, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it thoroughly, until it was reduced to dust; and I threw the dust of it into the stream that runs down the mountain.

22 At Taberah also, and at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattaavah, you provoked the LORD to wrath. **23** And when the LORD sent you from

9.1–10.11: The already broken and renewed covenant. God does not give the land to the people as a reward for righteousness, for in the wilderness they acted rebelliously. **9.2:** See 1.28n.; 2.10. **4–5:** Victory will be given in the holy war because (negatively) Canaan has been irrevocably corrupted by the actions of its present occupants and because (positively) of God's enduring commitment to the promises made to Israel's ancestors. **6–24:** The historical record shows that Israel has been rebellious since the Exodus (Ezek 20.5–8; contrast Hos 2.14–20; Jer 2.2–3). **8–10:** Ex 24.12–18; 31.18. **11–21:** Ex 32, revised. **17:** *Smashing them,* not in simple anger but reflecting

Kadesh-barnea, saying, "Go up and occupy the land that I have given you," you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God, neither trusting him nor obeying him. 24 You have been rebellious against the LORD as long as he has[a] known you.

25 Throughout the forty days and forty nights that I lay prostrate before the LORD when the LORD intended to destroy you, 26 I prayed to the LORD and said, "Lord GOD, do not destroy the people who are your very own possession, whom you redeemed in your greatness, whom you brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 27 Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; pay no attention to the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin, 28 otherwise the land from which you have brought us might say, 'Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to let them die in the wilderness.' 29 For they are the people of your very own possession, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm."

10 At that time the LORD said to me, "Carve out two tablets of stone like the former ones, and come up to me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood. 2 I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you smashed, and you shall put them in the ark." 3 So I made an ark of acacia wood, cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and went up the mountain with the two tablets in my hand. 4 Then he wrote on the tablets the same words as before, the ten commandments[b] that the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the LORD gave them to me. 5 So I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark that I had made; and there they are, as the LORD commanded me.

6 (The Israelites journeyed from Beeroth-bene-jaakan[c] to Moserah. There Aaron died, and there he was buried; his son Eleazar succeeded him as priest. 7 From there they journeyed to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land with flowing streams. 8 At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister to him, and to bless in his name, to this day. 9 Therefore Levi has no allotment or inheritance with his kindred; the LORD is his inheritance, as the LORD your God promised him.)

10 I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights, as I had done the first time. And once again the LORD listened to me. The LORD was unwilling to destroy you. 11 The LORD said to me, "Get up, go on your journey at the head of the people, that they may go in and occupy the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them."

12 So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love

[a] Sam Gk: MT *I have*
[b] Heb *the ten words*
[c] Or *the wells of the Bene-jaakan*

a legal ceremony to confirm breach of treaty. **22:** Num 11.1–3; Ex 17.1–7; Num 11.31–34. **23:** Num 13–14. **25–29:** A paraphrase of Ex 32.11–14. Deuteronomy portrays Moses as the ideal prophet (34.10–12); he intercedes for the people and vicariously suffers for them (1.37n.; cf. Isa 53).

10.1–11: The second ascent of the mountain (cf. Ex 34.1–4,27–28). **1–3:** These verses reflect a tradition that Moses made the ark and put the stone tablets in it (1 Kings 8.9). **6–9:** An editorial insertion; vv. 6–7 seem to quote a wilderness itinerary from the Priestly literature (cf. Num 33.30–38). **6:** Num 20.22–29. **8:** Ex 32.25–29. The Levites' role is to bear the ark (Num 4.4–15), to *minister,* i.e., conduct the sacrificial services (Num 18), and to *bless* the people (Num 6.22–27). **9:** See 12.12n.; 18.2n.

10.12–11.32: Obedience as the condition for prosperity in the land. This section provides the climax and conclusion of the historical review found in 8.1–10.11. **10.12–13:** A striking transformation of the Decalogue. Earlier, breach of the first and second commandments, with their focus specifically on God, had been redefined and equated with "failing to keep his commandments . . . ordinances . . . and . . . statutes" (8.11n.). Now obedience to God is similarly redefined as compliance with the fixed *commandments . . . and . . . decrees* (v. 13) of Deuteronomy, i.e., the laws of chs 12–26 (see 28.15,45). For a similar catechism that does not extend the traditional focus upon God to law, see Mic 6.8. *And to keep* (lit. "by keeping") the precise antithesis of 8.11. The

him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, [13] and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God[a] and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. [14] Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the LORD your God, the earth with all that is in it, [15] yet the LORD set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today. [16] Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. [17] For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, [18] who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. [19] You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. [20] You shall fear the LORD your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. [21] He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. [22] Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven.

11 You shall love the LORD your God, therefore, and keep his charge, his decrees, his ordinances, and his commandments always. [2] Remember today that it was not your children (who have not known or seen the discipline of the LORD your God), but it is you who must acknowledge his greatness, his mighty hand and his outstretched arm, [3] his signs and his deeds that he did in Egypt to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and to all his land; [4] what he did to the Egyptian army, to their horses and chariots, how he made the water of the Red Sea[b] flow over them as they pursued you, so that the LORD has destroyed them to this day; [5] what he did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place; [6] and what he did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab son of Reuben, how in the midst of all Israel the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, along with their households, their tents, and every living being in their company; [7] for it is your own eyes that have seen every great deed that the LORD did.

[8] Keep, then, this entire commandment that I am commanding you today, so that you may have strength to go in and occupy the land that you are crossing over to occupy, [9] and so that you may live long in the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors to give them and to their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey. [10] For the land

[a] Q Ms Gk Syr: MT lacks *your God*
[b] Or *Sea of Reeds*

sequence *love . . . keep . . . commandments* cites 5.10. **16:** *Circumcise . . . the . . . heart* means to open oneself to God (Lev 26.41); no distinction is intended between mind, will, and emotion. The metaphorical formulation, which challenges any attempt to reduce Deuteronomy to narrow "legalism," corresponds to prophetic ideals (cf. Jer 4.4; 31.33). **17–18:** Integrity in the administration of court justice (v. 17; cf. 1.17; 16.19) and protection of the marginalized (v. 18) are given a theological foundation, making the remarkable argument that human social ethics amounts to "imitatio dei." Responsibility for ensuring justice in court and for defending the marginalized were conventional royal prerogatives (*Laws of Hammurabi* prologue; Ps 72.4). Deuteronomy contemplates no such role for the monarch (17.14–20n.). Instead, here it is God who protects the rights of the marginalized, entering history to do so (cf. Ex 3.7–10; Phil 2.6–7). Love of neighbor thus originates in divine action. **18–19:** *Strangers . . . stranger,* better, the legal term "resident alien" in both cases. Just as justice must be rendered to Israelite and alien alike (see 1.16n.), so must "love" reach across national or ethnic lines (cf. Lev 19.33–34). **18:** *Loves . . . providing,* note love's concrete expression in action and service (see 5.10n.; 6.5n.). **19:** *For you were,* see Ex 22.21; 23.9. **22:** *Seventy persons* (Gen 46.27; Ex 1.5) comes first in the Hebrew, emphasizing Israel's miraculous transformation into a nation. *Stars in heaven,* see 1.10n.

11.1–32: Loyalty to the covenant provides the condition for life in Canaan. The punishments and rewards noted in this section are predominantly addressed to a plural "you," stressing communal rather than individual responsibility. **2:** The frequent word *today* in Deuteronomy emphasizes the contemporaneity of the covenant (see 5.3n.). *Discipline,* see 8.5n. **4:** See Ex 14. **6:** The address is based upon the early tradition of the revolt of Dathan and Abiram (Num 16). There is no mention of Korah's rebellion (Num 16.3–11), which was very likely

that you are about to enter to occupy is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sow your seed and irrigate by foot like a vegetable garden. 11 But the land that you are crossing over to occupy is a land of hills and valleys, watered by rain from the sky, 12 a land that the LORD your God looks after. The eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

13 If you will only heed his every commandment[a] that I am commanding you today—loving the LORD your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul— 14 then he[b] will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil; 15 and he[b] will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat your fill. 16 Take care, or you will be seduced into turning away, serving other gods and worshiping them, 17 for then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit; then you will perish quickly off the good land that the LORD is giving you.

18 You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem[c] on your forehead. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 20 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

22 If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving the LORD your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, 23 then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves. 24 Every place on which you set foot shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea. 25 No one will be able to stand against you; the LORD your God will put the fear and dread of you on all the land on which you set foot, as he promised you.

26 See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn from the way that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known.

29 When the LORD your God has brought you into the land that you are entering to occupy, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. 30 As you know, they are beyond the Jordan, some distance to the west, in the land of the

[a] Compare Gk: Heb *my commandments*
[b] Sam Gk Vg: MT *I*
[c] Or *as a frontlet*

added by the Priestly school after this abstract was made. **10–12:** The Nile valley must be irrigated through human effort; Canaan depends upon seasonal rainfall. The difference is mentioned to stress Israel's dependence upon God, who gives and withholds rain (Am 4.7–8), as well as the fundamental sanctity of the land of Israel. **14:** The *early rain* comes at the end of the summer drought (October-November); the *later rain* comes in the spring (March-April). **16–17:** See 7.12–14n. **18–21:** See 6.6–9. **24:** *Every place . . . yours,* a legal ritual that effected transfer of title by pacing out the perimeter of the territory (see 25.9n.; Gen 13.17). The territory is described in terms of the ideal limits of David's empire (see 1.7n.). *The Western Sea,* the Mediterranean. **26–32:** The two ways (see ch 28; 30.15–20). **26:** *Curse,* the sanctions for violating a treaty, which a vassal assumes in a sworn oath (see 28.15–68). **29–30:** These verses represent an editorial intrusion. Previously, *blessing . . . and the curse* identify the benefits of covenantal obedience and the sanctions for breach of covenant (vv. 26–28; 28.2,15). That theme is the expected climax of this chapter. Here they are restricted to a series of positive and negative sayings shouted from mounts *Gerizim and . . . Ebal,* in anticipation of ch 27. *Gerizim,* on the south, and *Ebal,* on the north, flank the pass guarded by the city of Shechem in the central hill country. This geographic restriction fits poorly in a chapter otherwise directed to the entire land (vv. 22–25,31–32). **30:** *The oak of Moreh,* at Shechem (see Gen 12.6).

Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oak[a] of Moreh.

31 When you cross the Jordan to go in to occupy the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and when you occupy it and live in it, 32 you must diligently observe all the statutes and ordinances that I am setting before you today.

12 These are the statutes and ordinances that you must diligently observe in the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you to occupy all the days that you live on the earth.

2 You must demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispossess served their gods, on the mountain heights, on the hills, and under every leafy tree. 3 Break down their altars, smash their pillars, burn their sacred poles[b] with fire, and hew down the idols of their gods, and thus blot out their name from their places. 4 You shall not worship the LORD your God in such ways. 5 But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there. You shall go there, 6 bringing there your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, your votive gifts, your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks. 7 And you shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your households together, rejoicing in all the undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

8 You shall not act as we are acting here today, all of us according to our own desires, 9 for you have not yet come into the rest and the possession that the LORD your God is giving you. 10 When you cross over the Jordan and live in the land that the LORD your God is allotting to you, and when he gives you rest from your enemies all around so that you live in safety, 11 then you shall bring everything that I command you to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, and all your choice votive gifts that you vow to the LORD. 12 And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you together with your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites who reside in your towns (since they have no allotment or inheritance with you).

13 Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place you happen to

[a] Gk Syr: Compare Gen 12.6; Heb *oaks* or *terebinths*
[b] Heb *Asherim*

31–32: Transition to the legal corpus. **32:** *Diligently observe . . . statutes and ordinances,* cited in reverse order at 12.1 to effect the transition from the literary frame of Deuteronomy (chs 1–11) into the laws (chs 12–26).

12.1–26.15: The legal corpus: Deuteronomy's transformation of Israelite religion.

12.1–32: Centralization of worship. Centralization and purification of worship, restriction to a single sanctuary, and removal of foreign influence distinguish Deuteronomy. Four paragraphs (vv. 2–7,8–12,13–19,20–28) command centralization; a fifth (vv. 29–31) warns against alien worship. **1:** An editorial superscription. *Earth,* more accurately, "land (of Israel)." **2–7:** Israel must reject the Canaanite precedent of multiple sanctuaries. **2:** *You,* The chapter alternates between plural (vv. 1–12) and singular (vv. 13–31), which, combined with six repetitions of the centralization command (vv. 5,11,14,18,21,26), suggests a long compositional history. *Demolish,* see Ex 23.23–24; 34.11–14; Deut 7.5. *Heights . . . leafy tree,* Canaanite sanctuaries, "high places" (1 Kings 3.2; 2 Kings 16.4), but used to worship God as well (1 Kings 3.4). **3:** See 7.5n. **5:** *The place that the LORD . . . will choose,* Jerusalem played no role in Israel's history until the period of David. Consequently the city cannot be named explicitly without undermining the literary form of Deuteronomy as an address by Moses. *As his habitation,* better, "to establish it" (the divine name), indicating possession and special relationship. *Put his name there,* Deuteronomy rejects the idea that a nation's God would inhabit the Temple (contrast 1 Kings 8.12–13). **6:** *Burnt offerings,* in which all of the flesh was burnt on the altar (v. 27; Lev 1.3–17). *Sacrifices,* other offerings where portions of the animal were assigned to the priests or shared by worshipers (v. 27; 18.1–3; Lev 3; 7.29–36). **8–12:** That worship at multiple sanctuaries was to have limited temporal validity differs from Ex 20.24. **8:** *Our own desires,* a negative judgment, as in Judg 17.6; 21.25. **9–10:** *Rest and . . . possession,* territorial security (Josh 21.44) would allow centralization. This was fulfilled with David's conquest of Jerusalem, which allowed the construction of the Temple (2 Sam 7.1,11; 1 Kings 8.56). **12:** Since *the Levites* were not assigned land (see Josh 13.14; cf. Ezek 44.28), they had to depend upon voluntary offerings (see 10.9; 18.1–2). **13–19:** The earliest of the chapter's five paragraphs is

see. 14 But only at the place that the LORD will choose in one of your tribes—there you shall offer your burnt offerings and there you shall do everything I command you.

15 Yet whenever you desire you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your towns, according to the blessing that the LORD your God has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, as they would of gazelle or deer. 16 The blood, however, you must not eat; you shall pour it out on the ground like water. 17 Nor may you eat within your towns the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, the firstlings of your herds and your flocks, any of your votive gifts that you vow, your freewill offerings, or your donations; 18 these you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God at the place that the LORD your God will choose, you together with your son and your daughter, your male and female slaves, and the Levites resident in your towns, rejoicing in the presence of the LORD your God in all your undertakings. 19 Take care that you do not neglect the Levite as long as you live in your land.

20 When the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as he has promised you, and you say, "I am going to eat some meat," because you wish to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you have the desire. 21 If the place where the LORD your God will choose to put his name is too far from you, and you slaughter as I have commanded you any of your herd or flock that the LORD has given you, then you may eat within your towns whenever you desire. 22 Indeed, just as gazelle or deer is eaten, so you may eat it; the unclean and the clean alike may eat it. 23 Only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the meat. 24 Do not eat it; you shall pour it out on the ground like water. 25 Do not eat it, so that all may go well with you and your children after you, because you do what is right in the sight of the LORD. 26 But the sacred donations that are due from you, and your votive gifts, you shall bring to the place that the LORD will choose. 27 You shall present your burnt offerings, both the meat and the blood, on the altar of the LORD your God; the blood of your other sacrifices shall be poured out beside[a] the altar of the LORD your God, but the meat you may eat.

28 Be careful to obey all these words that I command you today,[b] so that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever, because you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.

29 When the LORD your God has cut off before you the nations whom you are about to enter to dispossess them, when you have dispossessed them and live in their land, 30 take care that you are not snared into imi-

[a] Or *on*
[b] Gk Sam Syr: MT lacks *today*

concentrically arranged in a chiasm to structure diverse material in an ABC:C´B´A´ pattern.

A *Take care that* (13)
B *but only* (Heb "ki 'im") + centralization (14)
C *yet* ("raq") + secular slaughter (15)
C´ *but* ("raq") + secular slaughter (16)
B´ *rather* ("ki 'im" [untranslated in NRSV]) + centralization (18)
A´ *Take care that* (19)

13–16: Two important, revolutionary distinctions: First, between sacrificial worship at random sites, *any place,* rejected as illegitimate, and legitimate sacrifice performed at a single sanctuary, *the place that the LORD will choose.* This contrasts with previous norms, when altars were common throughout the land (Gen 12.7; 35.1–7; 1 Sam 3.1; 7.17; 1 Kings 18.20–46). Second, between ritual sacrifice and secular slaughter of domestic animals for food. Prior to Deuteronomy, all slaughter, even for food, was sacrificial and took place at an altar. With altars throughout the land, that rule imposed no burden upon Israelites. The prohibition of all local altars, however, created a real difficulty for those without easy access to the central sanctuary. The permission granted here for local, secular slaughter answers that need. By analogy to the rules for hunting wild game (*gazelle or deer*), domestic animals may be slaughtered throughout the land, on condition that their blood is poured out *on the ground like water* (cf. Lev 17.13). Blood symbolizes "life" (v. 23; 15.23; Gen 9.4–5; Lev 17.14; 19.26). **17:** *Tithe,* see 14.22–29n. **20–28:** Permission

tating them, after they have been destroyed before you: do not inquire concerning their gods, saying, "How did these nations worship their gods? I also want to do the same." 31 You must not do the same for the LORD your God, because every abhorrent thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods. They would even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. 32 [a]You must diligently observe everything that I command you; do not add to it or take anything from it.

13 [b] If prophets or those who divine by dreams appear among you and promise you omens or portents, 2 and the omens or the portents declared by them take place, and they say, "Let us follow other gods" (whom you have not known) "and let us serve them," 3 you must not heed the words of those prophets or those who divine by dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you indeed love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul. 4 The LORD your God you shall follow, him alone you shall fear, his commandments you shall keep, his voice you shall obey, him you shall serve, and to him you shall hold fast. 5 But those prophets or those who divine by dreams shall be put to death for having spoken treason against the LORD your God—who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery—to turn you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

6 If anyone secretly entices you—even if it is your brother, your father's son or[c] your mother's son, or your own son or daughter, or the wife you embrace, or your most intimate friend—saying, "Let us go worship other gods," whom neither you nor your ancestors have known, 7 any of the gods of the peoples that are around you, whether near you or far away from you, from one end of the earth to the other, 8 you must not yield to or heed any such persons. Show them no pity or compassion and do not shield them. 9 But you shall surely kill them; your own hand shall be first against them to execute them, and afterwards

[a] Ch 13.1 in Heb
[b] Ch 13.2 in Heb
[c] Sam Gk Compare Tg: MT lacks *your father's son or*

for secular slaughter is now justified by the expansion of Israel's boundaries. **30:** Elsewhere, the corruption of Israelite religion is presented as resulting from the attractions of marital contract (7.1–5,25) or political treaty (Ex 23.33; 34.12). **31:** *Burn their sons and their daughters,* the Canaanites are accused of child sacrifice (see 2 Kings 3.27; 23.10; Jer 19.5–6; ch 31), elsewhere associated with the deity Molech (Lev 18.21; 20.2–5). **32:** An exhortation to preserve the law unchanged. *Diligently observe,* the same idiom found at 12.1 (also 11.32) frames the unit with an inclusio. *Do not add to it or take anything from it,* an ancient Near Eastern scribal formula often included in the epilogues of treaties, inscriptions, and law collections to protect them from being defaced, altered, or written over (see 4.2n.).

13.1–18: Unconditional loyalty to God. Various hypothetical situations involving conflict of covenant loyalty to God, treated analogously to ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties, which stipulated absolute loyalty. **1–5:** A prophet or diviner invites listeners to commit idolatry. While Deuteronomy presents Moses as the founder of Israelite prophecy, establishing both its standard (18.15–22) and its pinnacle (34.10–12), Deuteronomy nonetheless regulates prophecy, requiring the execution of the prophet who contravenes Deuteronomy's teaching (vv. 1–5; 18.19–22) and subordinating prophecy to covenantal law. No longer is the power to perform signs the test of a prophet's legitimacy (contrast v. 2 with 34.11–12; Ex 4.1–9,21; 1 Kings 18.20–40). **1:** The religious stature of prophets makes it difficult to resist their incitement to commit apostasy. *Dreams,* the two sources of religious authority correspond to the nearly contemporary Neo-Assyrian *Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon* (672 BCE), which requires loyalty even in the face of conspiracy from "your brothers, your sons, your daughters, or from the mouth of a prophet, an ecstatic, or an inquirer of oracles" (§ 10). *Omens or portents* were used by legitimate prophets to authenticate their proclamations (34.11; Ex 4.1–9,21; 7.9; Judg 6.17). **5:** *Treason,* as betrayal of the divine suzerain. *Purge the evil from your midst,* a formula emphasizing the obligation to eliminate particularly offensive religious transgressions (17.7,12; 19.19; 21.21; etc.). **6–11:** Conflict between family love, marriage, or friendship and covenantal fidelity (cf. Lk 14.26). **6:** *Secretly,* i.e., there are no witnesses. *Father's son,* this addition of the half-brother (see text note *c*) provides a poor reading. The Heb deliberately selects the most intimate of human relations in this verse; thus the full brother (*mother's son*). **9:** *But you shall surely kill them,* i.e., summary execution. The absence of witnesses and a trial conflicts with Deuteronomy's own requirements elsewhere (17.4,6; 19.15), but

the hand of all the people. [10] Stone them to death for trying to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. [11] Then all Israel shall hear and be afraid, and never again do any such wickedness.

[12] If you hear it said about one of the towns that the LORD your God is giving you to live in, [13] that scoundrels from among you have gone out and led the inhabitants of the town astray, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods," whom you have not known, [14] then you shall inquire and make a thorough investigation. If the charge is established that such an abhorrent thing has been done among you, [15] you shall put the inhabitants of that town to the sword, utterly destroying it and everything in it—even putting its livestock to the sword. [16] All of its spoil you shall gather into its public square; then burn the town and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God. It shall remain a perpetual ruin, never to be rebuilt. [17] Do not let anything devoted to destruction stick to your hand, so that the LORD may turn from his fierce anger and show you compassion, and in his compassion multiply you, as he swore to your ancestors, [18] if you obey the voice of the LORD your God by keeping all his commandments that I am commanding you today, doing what is right in the sight of the LORD your God.

14 You are children of the LORD your God. You must not lacerate yourselves or shave your forelocks for the dead. [2] For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; it is you the LORD has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

[3] You shall not eat any abhorrent thing. [4] These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, [5] the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain-sheep. [6] Any animal that divides the hoof and has the hoof cleft in two, and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat. [7] Yet of those that chew the cud or have the hoof cleft you shall not eat these: the camel, the hare, and the rock badger, because they chew the cud but do not divide the hoof; they are unclean for you. [8] And the pig, because it divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. You shall not eat their meat, and you shall not touch their carcasses.

[9] Of all that live in water you may eat these: whatever has fins and scales you may eat. [10] And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.

[11] You may eat any clean birds. [12] But these are the ones that you shall not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, [13] the buzzard, the kite of any kind; [14] every raven of any kind;

arises from the grave threat to the covenant (Ex 32.25–27; Num 25.6–9). **10:** *Stone,* the penalty carried out by the community for violations of its fundamental values or sources of authority: apostasy or treason (see 17.2–7; Lev 20.2; Josh 7.10–26; 1 Kings 21.8–14), blasphemy (Lev 24.13–23), defying parental authority (21.18–21; 22.20–21), and betraying marriage (22.23–24). Each is prohibited by the Decalogue (5.6,11,16,18). **13:** *Scoundrels,* lit. "sons of worthlessness," or "children of Belial" (KJV). **15–17:** The infidelity of the Israelite town requires that its entire population be placed under the same ban as that used for the Canaanites (7.1–6,25–26; 12.29–30; 20.16–18). **16:** Normally new occupants would rebuild cities after destruction right on top of the *ruin* (Heb "tel").

14.1–29: The obligations of holiness. 1–22: Special status entails special obligations, one of which is dietary. The affirmation of holiness (vv. 2,21) therefore frames the list of permitted and prohibited foods. **1:** *Children of the LORD,* the first of three metaphors to emphasize the special relation between God and Israel. The divine parent has special custody for the child (Ex 4.22–23; Hos 1.10) but, equally, special indignation at wrongdoing (32.5–6,19–20; Isa 1.2). *Lacerate . . . shave . . . dead,* laceration and head shaving, common mourning rituals, were associated with Canaanite customs and perhaps with ancestor worship (Lev 19.27–28; 1 Kings 18.28; Jer 16.6–7; 41.4–5; 47.5; Am 8.10). **2:** *Holy,* Israel must distinguish itself from other nations by observing special requirements. *Treasured possession,* see 7.6n. **3–21:** Deuteronomy's dietary restrictions differ from the more detailed list of permitted and prohibited foods provided by the Priestly source (Lev 11.2–23). A binary classification system, permitted vs. forbidden, is systematically applied to each of the three basic divisions of species within creation (Gen 1.20–25; 9.2–3), which are grouped according to their habitat as creatures of the land (vv. 1–8), water (vv. 9–10), or air (vv. 11–20). Animals that do not satisfy the defining characteristics for their group are not to be eaten: the pig (v. 8) and shellfish (v. 10). The terms *unclean* (v. 8) and *clean* (v. 11) do not refer to hygiene. Ritu-

15 the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull,
the hawk of any kind; 16 the little owl and
the great owl, the water hen 17 and the desert
owl,[a] the carrion vulture and the cormorant,
18 the stork, the heron of any kind; the hoopoe
and the bat.[b] 19 And all winged insects are un-
clean for you; they shall not be eaten. 20 You
may eat any clean winged creature.

21 You shall not eat anything that dies of
itself; you may give it to aliens residing in
your towns for them to eat, or you may sell it
to a foreigner. For you are a people holy to the
LORD your God.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's
milk.

22 Set apart a tithe of all the yield of your
seed that is brought in yearly from the field.
23 In the presence of the LORD your God, in
the place that he will choose as a dwelling for
his name, you shall eat the tithe of your grain,
your wine, and your oil, as well as the first-
lings of your herd and flock, so that you may
learn to fear the LORD your God always. 24 But
if, when the LORD your God has blessed you,
the distance is so great that you are unable
to transport it, because the place where the
LORD your God will choose to set his name is
too far away from you, 25 then you may turn it
into money. With the money secure in hand,
go to the place that the LORD your God will
choose; 26 spend the money for whatever you
wish—oxen, sheep, wine, strong drink, or
whatever you desire. And you shall eat there
in the presence of the LORD your God, you
and your household rejoicing together. 27 As
for the Levites resident in your towns, do not
neglect them, because they have no allot-
ment or inheritance with you.

28 Every third year you shall bring out the
full tithe of your produce for that year, and
store it within your towns; 29 the Levites,
because they have no allotment or inherit-
tance with you, as well as the resident aliens,
the orphans, and the widows in your towns,
may come and eat their fill so that the LORD
your God may bless you in all the work that
you undertake.

15 Every seventh year you shall grant a
remission of debts. 2 And this is the
manner of the remission: every creditor
shall remit the claim that is held against a
neighbor, not exacting it of a neighbor who

[a] Or *pelican*
[b] Identification of several of the birds in verses 12-18 is uncertain

ally "impure" and "pure" convey the idea more clearly. Not all of the species mentioned can be identified. **21:** *Anything that dies of itself,* carrion (Ex 22.31) or any animal not slaughtered so that the blood can be drained (12.16,23–25). *Boil a kid,* Deuteronomy extends an older law specifically connected to the pilgrimage festival offerings (Ex 23.19; 34.26) into a general dietary rule. Some view it as directed against Canaanite religious rituals; others view it as concerned to prevent the abuse of animals. **22–29:** An annual *tithe* of ten percent of crops and livestock was a common tax or honorarium paid to a monarch (Gen 14.20; 28.22; 1 Sam 8.15,17). Here the rule signifies that Israel is God's steward, working but not owning the land; see Lev 25.23. **23:** The standard rules of the tithe (Lev 27.30–33; Num 18.21–32; cf. Ex 22.30) are revised to direct offerings to the single sanctuary (12.17). *You shall eat,* whereas Deuteronomy assigns the tithe to the landholder, Lev 27.30 assigns it to the sanctuary and Num 18.21 to the Levites. **24–25:** In light of centralization, the sanctified crops (designated for the sanctuary) may be converted *into money* (see 2.6n.), to facilitate the journey. That "firstlings" (v. 23) may also be sold for cash is at variance with Lev 27.32. *Too far,* as in 12.21. **27:** *Levites,* see 12.12n. **28–29:** One out of every three years the tithe law is shifted away from the central sanctuary to focus on the needs of the disadvantaged and the marginalized in the local community, to ensure they too may *eat their fill.*

15.1–18: Remission of debts (vv. 1–11) **and manumission of slaves** (vv. 12–18). On accession to the throne, ancient Near Eastern rulers would sometimes grant one-time cancellation of debts, return land confiscated by the crown, and free indentured slaves. That custom, Akkadian "duraru," is reflected in the Heb "deror," "jubilee" or "release," of Lev 25.10; Isa 61.1; Jer 34.15,17. Deuteronomy's conception of the covenant between Israel and God entails a similar fresh start as a covenantal obligation that recurs every seven years, adjusting earlier laws in the Covenant Collection (Ex 21–23) to the innovation of centralization of worship. The sequence reflects increasingly severe stages of financial distress: from debt to indentured servitude, an ancient form of bankruptcy (see Lev 25.13–55 for a similar sequence).

15.1–6: Cancellation of debts. 1: *Seventh year,* this law presupposes Ex 23.10–11, which stipulates that ag-

is a member of the community, because the LORD's remission has been proclaimed. 3 Of a foreigner you may exact it, but you must remit your claim on whatever any member of your community owes you. 4 There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the LORD is sure to bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, 5 if only you will obey the LORD your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today. 6 When the LORD your God has blessed you, as he promised you, you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you.

7 If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. 8 You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. 9 Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, "The seventh year, the year of remission, is near," and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt. 10 Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. 11 Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land."

12 If a member of your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold[a] to you and works for you six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free. 13 And when you send a male slave[b] out from you a free person, you shall not send him out empty-handed. 14 Provide liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press, thus giving to him some of the bounty with which the LORD your God has blessed you. 15 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today. 16 But if he says to you, "I will not go out from you," because he loves you and your household, since he is well off with you, 17 then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his earlobe into the door, and he shall be your slave[c] forever.

You shall do the same with regard to your female slave.[d]

18 Do not consider it a hardship when you send them out from you free persons,

[a] Or *sells himself or herself*
[b] Heb *him*
[c] Or *bondman*
[d] Or *bondwoman*

ricultural land should be permitted to lie fallow each "seventh year." **2:** *Remission,* the same verb in Ex 23.11, "lie fallow," now means cancellation of debts. **3:** In not canceling debts of foreigners, the legislator makes a concession to the pragmatic concerns of the creditor. **4:** *There will . . . be no one in need,* or, "no poor." Contrast the pragmatism of v. 7.

15.7–11: An appeal to conscience, anticipating the problem of implementing and enforcing such a law. **9:** *Cry . . . guilt,* the law has no judicial penalty or sanction (similarly 24.15; Ex 22.23–24).

15.12–18: Manumission. This adjusts the older laws regulating male (Ex 21.2–6) and female (Ex 21.7–11) slaves in four ways: (1) A single law applies to both genders, abrogating the older law (contrast v. 17b with Ex 21.7b); (2) the ceremony where the slave relinquishes freedom is secularized (vv. 16–17), so that it now takes place at the house rather than at a local sanctuary (Ex 21.6); (3) the master must now grant the slave a gift (vv. 13–14; contrast Ex 21.2); (4) by conjoining the Covenant Collection's manumission (Ex 21.2–6) and land sabbatical (Ex 23.10–11) laws, Deuteronomy creates a single year of release and transforms manumission, formerly based in the individual household, into a year of universal liberty. The delay of manumission to the fiftieth year by the Holiness Collection may reflect the difficulty of implementing this idealistic law (Lev 25.39–44). **12:** *Hebrew,* see Ex 21.2n. *Is sold* or "sells himself" (see text note *a*); a court might require a thief, unable to repay a theft, to indenture his labor as compensation (Ex 22.1–4); or, overcome by debt, a serf might assign his labor to repay a loan (Lev 25.39–44). **14–15:** The gift provided the manumitted slave recalls and reenacts the nation's own manumission by God from slavery in Egypt. **18:** As in vv. 8–10, an appeal to conscience that anticipates the difficulty of enforcing a law that lacks judicial sanction.

because for six years they have given you services worth the wages of hired laborers; and the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do.

19 Every firstling male born of your herd and flock you shall consecrate to the LORD your God; you shall not do work with your firstling ox nor shear the firstling of your flock. 20 You shall eat it, you together with your household, in the presence of the LORD your God year by year at the place that the LORD will choose. 21 But if it has any defect—any serious defect, such as lameness or blindness—you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God; 22 within your towns you may eat it, the unclean and the clean alike, as you would a gazelle or deer. 23 Its blood, however, you must not eat; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.

16 Observe the month[a] of Abib by keeping the passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night. 2 You shall offer the passover sacrifice to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, at the place that the LORD will choose as a dwelling for his name. 3 You must not eat with it anything leavened. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it—the bread of affliction—because you came out of the land of Egypt in great haste, so that all the days of your life you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt. 4 No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days; and none of the meat of what you slaughter on the evening of the first day shall remain until morning. 5 You are not permitted to offer the passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you. 6 But at the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name, only there shall you offer the passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, the time of day when you departed from Egypt. 7 You shall cook it and eat it at the place that the LORD your God will choose; the next morning you may go back to your tents. 8 For six days you

[a] Or *new moon*

15.19–23: Sacrifice: Older convention required that each firstborn male domestic animal be offered as a sacrifice to God at one of the local sanctuaries (Ex 13.1–2,11–16; 22.29–30; 34.19–20). The author now adjusts that law to the new one stipulating a single sanctuary. **19:** *Not do work,* thereby reserving the animal for God. **20:** *In the presence of the LORD,* at the central sanctuary in Jerusalem. **21–23:** Blemished firstborn livestock need not be taken to the central sanctuary. They may be slaughtered locally, following the requirements for secular slaughter (12.15–16,21–25).

16.1–17: The festival calendar. Previously, each male Israelite was commanded to undertake three pilgrimages to "appear before the LORD": to make an offering at one of the multiple local sanctuaries (v. 16; Ex 23.14–18). These occasions, which Deuteronomy redirects to the central sanctuary, were called "pilgrimage festivals" (v. 16; Ex 23.14). The three festivals were unleavened bread (Heb "mazzot"), harvest, and ingathering (Ex 23.14–17; 34.18,23). Deuteronomy renames the latter two "weeks" (Heb "shavuot," v. 10) and "booths" (Heb "sukkoth," v. 13), their current names. **1–8:** Passover was originally a separate, family observance (Ex 12.1–13,21–23), involving a nighttime slaughter of a sheep or goat in the doorway of the house, where the blood was smeared to mark the house as Israelite. Deuteronomy's centralization of worship necessitated the redirection of the paschal slaughter to the central sanctuary (vv. 2,6–7). The older blood ritual then merges with the festival of unleavened bread, also celebrated in early spring. In contrast to Deuteronomy, the festivals of passover and unleavened bread remain distinct in Lev 23.5–6; Num 28.16,17–25. **1:** *Abib* (lit. "new ear" of grain), in early spring, when ears of barley, the first crop, began to ripen (Ex 13.4; 23.15; 34.18). Originally the first month of the Hebrew calendar (Ex 12.2), later called "Nisan." **2:** *From the flock and the herd,* earlier the offering was restricted to the flock only (Ex 12.4–5,21). **3:** *For seven days,* combining the seven-day observance of the festival of unleavened bread (Ex 12.14–20; 23.15) and the one-day observance of passover (vv. 1–3a,4b–7). **7:** *Cook,* more accurately, "boil," like other standard sacrifices (Ex 29.1; Lev 6.28; 8.31; Num 6.19; Zech 14.21). This provision conflicts with the stipulation that the paschal offering be "roasted over the fire," not "boiled in water" (Ex 12.8–9). The two inconsistent requirements for preparing the Passover are harmonized at 2 Chr 35.13. **8:** The Heb reads simply, "For six days you shall eat unleavened bread." The NRSV's addition, *continue,* results in an eight-day total for the festivals of passover and unleavened bread, modeled after the Priestly version of the calendar: 1 day (Passover) + 6 days

shall continue to eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly for the LORD your God, when you shall do no work.

9 You shall count seven weeks; begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. 10 Then you shall keep the festival of weeks to the LORD your God, contributing a freewill offering in proportion to the blessing that you have received from the LORD your God. 11 Rejoice before the LORD your God—you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you—at the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. 12 Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes.

13 You shall keep the festival of booths[a] for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your wine press. 14 Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. 15 Seven days you shall keep the festival to the LORD your God at the place that the LORD will choose; for the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate.

16 Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths.[a] They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed; 17 all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you.

18 You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people.

[a] Or *tabernacles*; Heb *succoth*

(unleavened bread) + 1 day (the solemn assembly); see Lev 23.3–8. In contrast, Deuteronomy intended to fuse the two holidays into a single seven-day observance. **9–12:** The festival of weeks (Ex 34.22; Lev 23.15–16; Num 28.26), originally a "festival of harvest" (Ex 23.16) celebrated in June. In postbiblical Judaism, the festival came to be associated with the revelation at Mount Sinai (Ex 19–20); in the New Testament it is called Pentecost because it begins on the fiftieth day after Passover (Acts 2.1; 20.16; 1 Cor 16.8). **9:** *Begin to count . . . from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain,* the seven weeks begin when the grain is ripe, delaying the celebration until the conclusion of the harvest. The Holiness Collection offers a slightly different date for this festival (Lev 23.15). **11:** *You and your sons and your daughters,* the command to rejoice specifies the inclusion of women (as v. 14; 12.12,18). *Slaves . . . widows,* the marginalized and the disadvantaged are also included. *Strangers,* better, "resident aliens"; see 1.16n. **13–15:** *The festival of booths,* originally the fall harvest festival, called "ingathering" (Ex 23.16; 34.22; cf. Lev 23.33–43). **16–17:** The formulaic summary ("colophon") reuses the conclusion of the older festival calendar in the Covenant Collection (Ex 23.17). Two elements, however, reflect older assumptions inconsistent with the rest of this chapter: Passover (vv. 1–8) is not mentioned, and the pilgrimage requirement is directed to *all your males* (as Ex 23.17).

16.18–18.22: Laws of public officials. The proposed government has judicial, executive, and religious branches: local and central courts (16.18–17.13), kingship (17.14–20), levitical priesthood (18.1–8), and prophecy (18.9–22). Each relates to the others and is subordinated to the authority of the word of God, the teaching of Deuteronomy. Even institutions that might claim absolute authority, such as king or prophet, are integrated into a comprehensive vision. The continual concern with centralization of worship connects this section with the preceding legislation on the sacrificial system. The ritual laws (16.21–17.1) seem to intrude between two paragraphs each concerned with justice (16.18–20; 17.2–7), but the repetition provides a transition into the new section, while establishing the underlying unity of both areas of community life: (A) worship (12.1–16.17); (B) justice (16.18–20); (A´) worship (16.21–17.1); (B´) justice (17.2–7,8–13).

16.18–17.13: The organization of justice. 16.18–20: Deuteronomy here establishes a professionalized local judiciary. **18:** *Towns* (lit. "gates"), the local sphere (12.15,17,21; 16.5), as distinguished from the central sanctuary; also the traditional place where the village elders dispensed justice (Job 29.7; Ruth 4.1,11; Lam 5.14). By leaving the elders unmentioned, Deuteronomy contracts or eliminates their authority, though they are mentioned

19 You must not distort justice; you must not
show partiality; and you must not accept
bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise
and subverts the cause of those who are in
the right. 20 Justice, and only justice, you shall
pursue, so that you may live and occupy the
land that the LORD your God is giving you.

21 You shall not plant any tree as a sacred
pole[a] beside the altar that you make for the
LORD your God; 22 nor shall you set up a stone
pillar—things that the LORD your God hates.

17 You must not sacrifice to the LORD your
God an ox or a sheep that has a defect,
anything seriously wrong; for that is abhor-
rent to the LORD your God.

2 If there is found among you, in one of
your towns that the LORD your God is giv-
ing you, a man or woman who does what is
evil in the sight of the LORD your God, and
transgresses his covenant 3 by going to serve
other gods and worshiping them—whether
the sun or the moon or any of the host of
heaven, which I have forbidden— 4 and if it
is reported to you or you hear of it, and you
make a thorough inquiry, and the charge is
proved true that such an abhorrent thing
has occurred in Israel, 5 then you shall bring
out to your gates that man or that woman
who has committed this crime and you shall
stone the man or woman to death. 6 On the
evidence of two or three witnesses the death
sentence shall be executed; a person must
not be put to death on the evidence of only
one witness. 7 The hands of the witnesses
shall be the first raised against the person to
execute the death penalty, and afterward the
hands of all the people. So you shall purge
the evil from your midst.

8 If a judicial decision is too difficult for
you to make between one kind of bloodshed
and another, one kind of legal right and an-
other, or one kind of assault and another—
any such matters of dispute in your towns—
then you shall immediately go up to the place
that the LORD your God will choose, 9 where
you shall consult with the levitical priests
and the judge who is in office in those days;
they shall announce to you the decision in
the case. 10 Carry out exactly the decision that
they announce to you from the place that the
LORD will choose, diligently observing every-
thing they instruct you. 11 You must carry out

[a] Heb *Asherah*

elsewhere in older sections of Deuteronomy (e.g., 19.12; 21.2; 22.15). **19:** *You must not distort justice,* an admonition, quoting Ex 23.6a (where the same verb is translated "pervert"). *For a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise,* the older law in Ex 23.8, whose reference to "those with sight" (NRSV's "officials" is not correct) is revised in light of Deuteronomy's stress upon wisdom (see notes on 1.13; 34.9).

16.21–17.1: Prohibitions against Canaanite cultic objects (7.5; 12.3; Ex 34.13). **16.21:** *Sacred pole,* see 7.5n. **22:** *Stone pillar,* see 7.5n. **17.1:** See 15.21, here broadened into a general law of sacrifice.

17.2–7: Local justice. This law overlaps with 13.6–11, but is placed here because it deals with the procedures and jurisdiction of the local courts. The law grants the local courts maximum autonomy (see 16.8), provided that a trial is conducted according to rational standards that assure empirical proof. **2:** *A man or woman,* the law views the woman as a legally responsible individual. The viewpoint in marriage and family law differs, however (see 22.13–29). **3:** Contravening the Decalogue (5.8–9). **6:** *Two or three witnesses,* the condition for establishing proof. The prohibition against execution on the basis of testimony by *one witness* is also found at 19.15–16; Num 35.30.

17.8–13: Justice at the central sanctuary. In the pre-Deuteronomic period, legal cases in which there was an absence of physical evidence or of witnesses were remanded to the local sanctuary, where the parties to the dispute would swear a judicial oath at the altar (19.17; Ex 22.7–11; 1 Kings 8.31–32; note also Ex 21.6). These two laws (17.2–7,8–13) thus fill the judicial void created by Deuteronomy's prohibition of the local sanctuaries (ch 12). Now, any case that requires recourse to the altar is remanded to the central sanctuary; all other cases, even capital ones, may be tried locally (vv. 2–7). **8:** These cases must be referred to the central sanctuary because, in the absence of witnesses or evidence, local officials cannot make a ruling. *Between one kind of bloodshed and another,* the legal distinction between murder and manslaughter (Ex 21.12–14; Num 35.16–23). In each pair, the distinction is between premeditated or unintentional offenses. **9:** The tribunal at the sanctuary includes both priestly and lay members. The account of Jehoshaphat's setting up tribunals throughout Judah composed of lay and clerical judges reflects this law (2 Chr 19.5–11).

fully the law that they interpret for you or the ruling that they announce to you; do not turn aside from the decision that they announce to you, either to the right or to the left. 12 As for anyone who presumes to disobey the priest appointed to minister there to the LORD your God, or the judge, that person shall die. So you shall purge the evil from Israel. 13 All the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again.

14 When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me," 15 you may indeed set over you a king whom the LORD your God will choose. One of your own community you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your own community. 16 Even so, he must not acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire more horses, since the LORD has said to you, "You must never return that way again." 17 And he must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself. 18 When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. 19 It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20 neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel.

18 The levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no allotment or inheritance within Israel. They may eat the sacrifices that are the LORD's portion[a] 2 but they shall have no inheritance among the other members of the community; the LORD is their inheritance, as he promised them.

3 This shall be the priests' due from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the two jowls, and the stomach. 4 The first fruits of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him. 5 For the LORD your God has chosen Levi[b] out of all your tribes, to stand and minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons for all time.

6 If a Levite leaves any of your towns, from wherever he has been residing in Israel, and

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *him*

17.14–20: The law of the king. Deuteronomy greatly restricts royal authority. Generally Near Eastern monarchs promulgated law; here the monarch is subject to the law and required to read it daily (v. 19). Deuteronomy even denies the king his typical judicial role as court of last appeal (cf. Ps 72.1–4; 2 Sam 12.1–14; 14.1–24; 1 Kings 3.16–28). This law far more emphasizes what the king cannot do than what he may do. **14:** *Like all the nations,* see 1 Sam 8.10–18. **16–18:** The offenses parallel warnings against royal autocracy outlined at the very founding of the monarchy (1 Sam 8.10–18). They likely presuppose Solomon's trade in horses (1 Kings 10.26–29) and his wealth (1 Kings 10.14–22). The Deuteronomistic Historian believed those marriages led to idolatry (1 Kings 11.9–13). *A copy of this law,* the Septuagint reads "this repetition of the law" (Gk "to deuteronomion touto"), the source of the book's name. Like later traditional views, it sees Deuteronomy as a reprise of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, ignoring the extent to which it revises and challenges earlier law.

18.1–8: The levitical priesthood. Centralization also affected the Israelite priesthood. A "job description" (vv. 1–5) precedes discussion of this impact (vv. 6–8). **1:** *Levitical priests,* the Deuteronomic conception differs from that of Priestly literature, which speaks of two distinct groups, "the priests" and "the Levites." The Priestly source sees a hierarchy within the tribe of Levi between direct descendants of Aaron and the rest. Only the Aaronide priests officiate at the altar (Num 18.5,7) and receive the priestly share of the offerings (Num 18.8–20). The Levites serve the priests, and are prohibited from officiating (Num 18.3–4,6); they receive tithes and in turn tithe to the priests (Num 18.21–31). Here, in Deuteronomy, all within the tribe are levitical priests and both serve at the altar and receive sacrifices. **2:** *No inheritance,* see 12.12n. *The LORD is their inheritance,* God grants them a share of the sacrificial offerings, making them dependent upon other Israelites for support. In contrast, the priest-prophet Ezekiel allocates land to the priests and the Levites in his vision of the future restoration

comes to the place that the LORD will choose (and he may come whenever he wishes), 7 then he may minister in the name of the LORD his God, like all his fellow-Levites who stand to minister there before the LORD. 8 They shall have equal portions to eat, even though they have income from the sale of family possessions.[a]

9 When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. 10 No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, 11 or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. 12 For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the LORD; it is because of such abhorrent practices that the LORD your God is driving them out before you. 13 You must remain completely loyal to the LORD your God. 14 Although these nations that you are about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, as for you, the LORD your God does not permit you to do so.

15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet[b] like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.[c] 16 This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the LORD my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." 17 Then the LORD replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet[b] like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet,[d] who shall speak to them everything that I command. 19 Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet[e] shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. 20 But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who pre-

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *prophets*
[c] Or *such prophets*
[d] Or *mouths of the prophets*
[e] Heb *he*

of Judah (Ezek 48.10–14). **5:** *Stand and minister,* officiate at the altar. **6–8:** When the local altars throughout the land are outlawed (12.8–12,13–15), the Levites serving there would be unemployed and, owning no land, would become destitute. Accordingly a Levite who *leaves any of your towns . . . and comes* to the central sanctuary in Jerusalem must be provided for (contrast 2 Kings 23.9). This emphasis underscores that the countryside altars were not entirely Canaanite sanctuaries (as 12.2–4 asserts). **8:** *Equal portions,* the choice meats, grains, and oil assigned the tribe in vv. 3–4.

18.9–22: A prophet like Moses. 9–14: Just as the legal corpus prohibits sacrificial worship it condemns as Canaanite (12.1–4,29–31; also 7.1–6,25–26; Ex 23.24; 34.11–16), it prohibits forms of divination it brands as foreign and abhorrent. In each case it requires its own alternative: here, prophecy rather than divination. However, divination is not elsewhere typified as foreign (1 Sam 28.3–25; Isa 8.19–22; 28.4). Thus, describing the practice as foreign may actually cloak a condemnation of Israelite popular religion. **10:** *Pass through fire,* child sacrifice (see 12.31n.), joined with divination for condemnation because each is "abhorrent" (v. 9). *Practices divination, or is a soothsayer,* the most comprehensive compilation of such activities in the Bible (Ex 22.18; Lev 19.30–31; 20.6,27; Isa 8.19; Ezek 21.21). **11:** *Who consults ghosts or spirits . . . dead,* necromancy or conjuring the dead (1 Sam 28.7–15; Isa 8.19–20; 29.4). Popular religion in antiquity devoted extensive attention to communicating with the dead, especially with ancestors. **12:** *Abhorrent,* more commonly "abomination," as at Lev 26.26–27,29. There is no claim that divination is ineffective; it is, however, illegitimate (see 1 Sam 28.7–25). **15–22:** Deuteronomy transforms prophecy, viewing the prophet as the spokesperson of Torah (see 13.1–5n.) and defining Moses as the paradigmatic prophet. **15:** *The LORD . . . will raise up,* prophecy by divine election. That God alone appoints the prophet makes the prophet independent of all institutions and able to challenge them. More than one prophet is clearly intended. *Like me,* at Horeb (5.23–33), Moses established the model of prophecy as mediating God's word to the people. Thus the prophet, like the king (17.15), should be *from among your own people.* **16–17:** See 5.23–31; Ex 20.18–21. **18:** Cf. Jer 1.9; the prophet's oracles do not originate from other deities, from dead spirits, from skilled manipulation of objects, or from the prophet's own reflections. **20–23:** Having established an Israelite model of prophecy, the law provides two criteria to distinguish true from false prophecy. The first is that the prophet should speak exclusively on behalf of God, and report only God's words. The second makes

sumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die." [21] You may say to yourself, "How can we recognize a word that the LORD has not spoken?" [22] If a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it.

19 When the LORD your God has cut off the nations whose land the LORD your God is giving you, and you have dispossessed them and settled in their towns and in their houses, [2] you shall set apart three cities in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess. [3] You shall calculate the distances[a] and divide into three regions the land that the LORD your God gives you as a possession, so that any homicide can flee to one of them.

[4] Now this is the case of a homicide who might flee there and live, that is, someone who has killed another person unintentionally when the two had not been at enmity before: [5] Suppose someone goes into the forest with another to cut wood, and when one of them swings the ax to cut down a tree, the head slips from the handle and strikes the other person who then dies; the killer may flee to one of these cities and live. [6] But if the distance is too great, the avenger of blood in hot anger might pursue and overtake and put the killer to death, although a death sentence was not deserved, since the two had not been at enmity before. [7] Therefore I command you: You shall set apart three cities.

[8] If the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as he swore to your ancestors—and he will give you all the land that he promised your ancestors to give you, [9] provided you diligently observe this entire commandment that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God and walking always in his ways—then you shall add three more cities to these three, [10] so that the blood of an innocent person may not be shed in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, thereby bringing bloodguilt upon you.

[11] But if someone at enmity with another lies in wait and attacks and takes the life of that person, and flees into one of these cities, [12] then the elders of the killer's city shall send to have the culprit taken from there and handed over to the avenger of blood to be put to death. [13] Show no pity; you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, so that it may go well with you.

[14] You must not move your neighbor's boundary marker, set up by former generations, on the property that will be allotted to you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess.

[a] Or *prepare roads to them*

the fulfillment of a prophet's oracle the measure of its truth (Jer 28.9). That approach attempts to solve a critical problem: If two prophets each claim to speak on behalf of God yet make mutually exclusive claims (1 Kings 22.6 versus v. 17; Jer 27.8 versus 28.2), how may one decide which speaks the truth? The solution offered is not free of difficulty. If a false prophet is distinguished by the failure of his oracle to come true, then making a decision in the present about which prophet to obey becomes impossible. Nor can this criterion easily be reconciled with 13.2, which concedes that the oracles of false prophets might come true.

19.1–13: Cities of refuge (see 4.41–43n.). Sanctuary for those who killed unintentionally shielded them from revenge killing by the kin of the dead person (vv. 6,12). In light of centralization, Deuteronomy proscribes the previous site of refuge, the local altar (Ex 21.13), and instead designates three "neutral" cities. **1:** For the formulaic introduction, see 12.29. **4:** *Who might flee there,* more literally, "where he might flee (there)," an exact citation of Ex 21.13b, the older law that requires revision. **5:** *May flee to one of these cities,* explicitly amended to include the city reference. **6:** *But if the distance is too great,* Deuteronomy's updating of older law; see 14.24. *In hot anger,* if the kinsman kills the slayer in hot pursuit, the law is powerless. **8:** *Enlarges your territory,* a means for updating older law to address present realities by casting the provision for change as intended from the beginning (see 12.20; Ex 34.20). **10:** *The blood of an innocent person,* killing someone who has unintentionally committed homicide would constitute murder. *Bloodguilt,* the spilling of innocent blood, which defiles the land (see 21.1–9n.). **12:** Revising Ex 21.14. *Handed over to the avenger,* the law regulates but does not replace the clan-based system of justice. **14:** A transitional verse. The sacrosanct status of a *boundary marker* was a legal tradition in the ancient Near East (see 27.17; Isa 5.8; Hos 5.10; Job 24.2; Prov 22.28).

15 A single witness shall not suffice to convict
a person of any crime or wrongdoing in connection with any offense that may be committed.
Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses
shall a charge be sustained. 16 If a malicious
witness comes forward to accuse someone of
wrongdoing, 17 then both parties to the dispute
shall appear before the LORD, before the priests
and the judges who are in office in those days,
18 and the judges shall make a thorough inquiry.
If the witness is a false witness, having testified
falsely against another, 19 then you shall do to
the false witness just as the false witness had
meant to do to the other. So you shall purge the
evil from your midst. 20 The rest shall hear and
be afraid, and a crime such as this shall never
again be committed among you. 21 Show no pity:
life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for
hand, foot for foot.

20 When you go out to war against your
enemies, and see horses and chariots,
an army larger than your own, you shall not
be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is
with you, who brought you up from the land
of Egypt. 2 Before you engage in battle, the
priest shall come forward and speak to the
troops, 3 and shall say to them: "Hear, O Israel! Today you are drawing near to do battle
against your enemies. Do not lose heart, or
be afraid, or panic, or be in dread of them;
4 for it is the LORD your God who goes with
you, to fight for you against your enemies,
to give you victory." 5 Then the officials shall
address the troops, saying, "Has anyone built
a new house but not dedicated it? He should
go back to his house, or he might die in the
battle and another dedicate it. 6 Has anyone
planted a vineyard but not yet enjoyed its
fruit? He should go back to his house, or he
might die in the battle and another be first to
enjoy its fruit. 7 Has anyone become engaged
to a woman but not yet married her? He
should go back to his house, or he might die
in the battle and another marry her." 8 The

19.15–21: The integrity of the judicial system. A law that requires probity on the part of the newly established judges (16.18) and a law that demands corresponding integrity from witnesses (19.21) form an inclusio around this large unit by emphasizing the honesty required of all participants in the judicial system. **15:** *A single witness,* the same Heb phrase as "only one witness" at 17.6. *On the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be sustained,* broadening the focus of 17.6 on capital crimes and prohibiting hearsay or spurious accusation (one person's word against another's). **17:** *Both parties,* the accuser and the accused. *Before the LORD,* testimony before the altar at the central sanctuary (12.7; 14.23; 17.8–13). **19:** *Do to the false witness . . . meant to do to the other,* reciprocal justice, called "talion," the technical term for "an eye for an eye," elsewhere employed for bodily injury or homicide (Ex 21.23–25; Lev 24.17–21). It distinguishes crimes against the person (requiring talion) from property crimes (where alone financial compensation is permitted). By applying it to crimes against the judicial system, the legislators here seek to ensure the integrity of the law by using the highest sanction available to them.

20.1–20: Rules for waging holy war. In contrast to other legal collections, which include only brief sections concerning military engagement (Ex 23.23–33; 34.11–16; Num 35.50–56), Deuteronomy, reflecting a literary setting of Israel about to enter the land, concerns itself extensively with the laws of holy war. God as divine warrior directly confronts the adversary on behalf of the nation, and God's presence in the camp imposes additional purity requirements on the people (23.10–14). The holy war is fought to extirpate iniquity and to create a covenantal community organized by divine law (Lev 18.24–29; 20.22–24). Accordingly, seizing the spoils of war, including human prisoners, is prohibited; all had to be devoted exclusively to God, like the "whole burnt offering" (13.16). Contemporary inscriptions like the Moabite Stone (ca. 850 BCE) establish that similar theologies of holy war were shared by a number of nations. In Deuteronomy, the conception of the conquest as a holy war represents a highly schematized idealization, formulated half a millennium after the settlement, at a time when ethnic Canaanites would already long have assimilated into the Israelite population. **1:** *Horses and chariots,* the adversary is superior both in numbers and in military equipment (see Ex 14.9; 15.4; Josh 11.4). *Army,* lit. "people." **3–4:** See 9.1–3; 31.3–6; cf. Ex 14.14,25; 15.1–4. **5–9:** A reverse muster, designed to thin the ranks by removing conscripts who have competing priorities because they are in a transitional state. **5:** *Dedicated* (or "inaugurated"), although Solomon's dedication of the Temple is narrated (1 Kings 8), there are no specific rituals of home dedication recorded in the Bible. The parallel curse employs "live" (28.30). **6:** *Enjoyed its fruit,* priestly law required that newly planted fruit trees could only be harvested in the fifth year (Lev 19.23–25). **7:** *Engaged . . . married,* see

officials shall continue to address the troops, saying, "Is anyone afraid or disheartened? He should go back to his house, or he might cause the heart of his comrades to melt like his own." [9] When the officials have finished addressing the troops, then the commanders shall take charge of them.

[10] When you draw near to a town to fight against it, offer it terms of peace. [11] If it accepts your terms of peace and surrenders to you, then all the people in it shall serve you at forced labor. [12] If it does not submit to you peacefully, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it; [13] and when the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword. [14] You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, livestock, and everything else in the town, all its spoil. You may enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the LORD your God has given you. [15] Thus you shall treat all the towns that are very far from you, which are not towns of the nations here. [16] But as for the towns of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. [17] You shall annihilate them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as the LORD your God has commanded, [18] so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the LORD your God.

[19] If you besiege a town for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you must not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them. Although you may take food from them, you must not cut them down. Are trees in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you? [20] You may destroy only the trees that you know do not produce food; you may cut them down for use in building siegeworks against the town that makes war with you, until it falls.

21 If, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess, a body is found lying in open country, and it is not known who struck the person down, [2] then your elders and your judges shall come out to measure the distances to the towns that are near the body. [3] The elders of the town nearest the body shall take a heifer that has never been worked, one that has not pulled in the yoke; [4] the elders of that town shall bring the heifer down to a wadi with running water, which is neither plowed nor sown,

22.13–30n. **8:** *Comrades,* lit. "brothers," to which Deuteronomy frequently, and distinctively, gives the meaning, "fellow citizens" (cf. 24.7); NRSV also translates the same word as "neighbor" (15.7,9,11; 22.1–4; 24.13; 25.3) and "Israelite" (23.19–20; 24.14). **11:** The use of a defeated people for *forced labor* was widespread. Israelites so used the indigenous population of Canaan (Judg 1.27–36). David's cabinet included an official responsible for "forced labor" (2 Sam 20.24). **15–18:** *Thus you shall treat all the towns that are very far from you,* a secondary addition retroactively restricts the preceding rules of engagement (vv. 10–14), which tolerate the taking of captives as "forced labor," so that they apply only to foreign wars. The stipulation that the indigenous population of Canaan should uniformly be exterminated is a literary fiction (see v. 11n.; 7.2n.). **15:** *The nations,* the Canaanites. *Here,* on the anachronism, see 1.1n.; 2.12n. **16:** *But as for the towns of these peoples that the LORD . . . is giving you* refers to the inhabitants of the land (v. 17). **17:** *You shall annihilate them,* the Heb phrase is elsewhere translated as "utterly destroy" (7.2; 13.15); it refers to killing and sanctifying the dead to a deity. **19–20:** Wars often involved the kind of "scorched earth policy" prohibited here (2 Kings 3.19,25). **20:** *Siegeworks* were regularly built against walled cities (1 Sam 20.15; 2 Kings 25.1).

21.1–9: Atonement for an unsolved murder. Since a murder victim's blood tainted the land (Gen 4.10; Num 35.33–34), it was imperative to "purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel" (19.13). This law, which has gone through several stages of reworking, addresses how to do so when the perpetrator cannot be identified. There are similar ancient Near Eastern laws for corpses discovered outside cities; these emphasize financial liability rather than atoning for the spilled blood (*Laws of Hammurabi* §§ 23–24; *Hittite Laws* § 6). The original significance of the law's rituals is difficult to recover. **1:** *Open country,* beyond the legal jurisdiction of any particular town (see 22.23,25), and where witnesses are unlikely. **2:** *Elders . . . judges,* see 16.18n. *Measure the distances* to establish legal jurisdiction, as in the similar *Hittite Laws* § 6. **3:** *Never been worked . . . not pulled in the yoke,* symbolizing the human victim's innocence (similarly, Num 19.2). **4:** *Wadi with running water* (Am 5.24), lit. "with reliable water," in contrast to unreliable seasonal streams (Jer 15.18). *Break the heifer's neck,* nonsacrificial killing;

and shall break the heifer's neck there in the wadi. 5 Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come forward, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to him and to pronounce blessings in the name of the LORD, and by their decision all cases of dispute and assault shall be settled. 6 All the elders of that town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the wadi, 7 and they shall declare: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor were we witnesses to it. 8 Absolve, O LORD, your people Israel, whom you redeemed; do not let the guilt of innocent blood remain in the midst of your people Israel." Then they will be absolved of bloodguilt. 9 So you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from your midst, because you must do what is right in the sight of the LORD.

10 When you go out to war against your enemies, and the LORD your God hands them over to you and you take them captive, 11 suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman whom you desire and want to marry, 12 and so you bring her home to your house: she shall shave her head, pare her nails, 13 discard her captive's garb, and shall remain in your house a full month, mourning for her father and mother; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. 14 But if you are not satisfied with her, you shall let her go free and not sell her for money. You must not treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her.

15 If a man has two wives, one of them loved and the other disliked, and if both the loved and the disliked have borne him sons, the firstborn being the son of the one who is disliked, 16 then on the day when he wills his possessions to his sons, he is not permitted to treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the disliked, who is the firstborn. 17 He must acknowledge as firstborn the son of the one who is disliked, giving him a double portion[a] of all that he has; since he is the first issue of his virility, the right of the firstborn is his.

18 If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and

[a] Heb *two-thirds*

sacrifice requires slitting the throat (see Ex 13.13; 34.20). **5:** *Priests,* not mentioned in v. 2, and likely a later addition. *All cases* contrasts with 17.9, where the levitical priests at the central sanctuary adjudicated only cases that could not be resolved locally. **6:** *Wash their hands over the heifer,* with no laying on of hands, and thus without symbolic transfer of culpability to the animal (contrast Lev 16.21–22). **7:** *Our hands . . . witnesses,* stronger in Heb: "As for our hands, they did not shed this blood nor did our eyes see," covering both direct action and failure to avert or report a crime (cf. Lev 5.1). **8:** *Absolve, O LORD,* the ritual of vv. 3–6 has no intrinsic efficacy; prayer is the means of absolution. *They will be absolved,* better, "that they may be absolved," since absolution ultimately depends upon divine action, not human ritual.

21.10–25.19: Miscellaneous civil and family laws. The following laws are concerned with family, civil, and ethical issues. Laws to extend legal protection to women when they would otherwise be disenfranchised concern female captives (21.10–14), property rights of the less-favored wife (21.15–17), and false charges of infidelity (22.13–19).

21.10–14: Legal obligations toward female captives. This procedure most likely originally applied to the Canaanite population (20.15–18n.). Female war captives routinely became concubines. This law accords such women dignity and protection against enslavement. **12–13:** The rituals provide both captive and captor means to effect a transition from one status to another. **13:** *Full month,* full period of mourning, as for Aaron and Moses (Num 20.29; Deut 34.8). *Mourning,* it is unclear whether the parents actually died in the war or are lost to her because of her captivity. The time to grieve implies legal respect for the female captive as a person. *Go in to her,* approach her sexually; consummation provides the legal means to become *husband, and . . . wife.* **14:** Cf. Ex 21.7–8. *Money*, see 2.6n. *Dishonored,* "violated" sexually (22.24,29; Gen 34.2; Judg 19.24; 2 Sam 13.12).

21.15–17: Legal protection of the less-favored wife. The law uses the norm of primogeniture (Gen 25.29–34; *Laws of Hammurabi* §§ 165–70) to protect the son of the less-favored wife from disinheritance. **17:** *Double portion,* as text note *a* indicates, two-thirds (see Zech 13.8), leaving one-third for the other son. *Right of the firstborn,* ironically, the foundation narratives concerning Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph subvert the legal norm here affirmed (Gen 17.15–22; 21.8–14; 27.1–40; 48.8–22).

21.18–21: The rebellious son. The Decalogue requirement to honor the parents (5.16; Ex 20.12) carries no ex-

mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, [19] then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place. [20] They shall say to the elders of his town, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard." [21] Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death. So you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel will hear, and be afraid.

[22] When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, [23] his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not defile the land that the LORD your God is giving you for possession.

22 You shall not watch your neighbor's ox or sheep straying away and ignore them; you shall take them back to their owner. [2] If the owner does not reside near you or you do not know who the owner is, you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall remain with you until the owner claims it; then you shall return it. [3] You shall do the same with a neighbor's donkey; you shall do the same with a neighbor's garment; and you shall do the same with anything else that your neighbor loses and you find. You may not withhold your help.

[4] You shall not see your neighbor's donkey or ox fallen on the road and ignore it; you shall help to lift it up.

[5] A woman shall not wear a man's apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the LORD your God.

[6] If you come on a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs, with the mother sitting on the fledglings or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. [7] Let the mother go, taking only the young for yourself, in order that it may go well with you and you may live long.

[8] When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof; otherwise you might have bloodguilt on your house, if anyone should fall from it.

[9] You shall not sow your vineyard with a second kind of seed, or the whole yield will have to be forfeited, both the crop that you have sown and the yield of the vineyard itself.

[10] You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together.

plicit sanction; here flagrant and sustained disobedience is a capital offense. **19:** *Elders* were judges of family law and held court at the city *gate,* a public forum (22.15; 25.7; Job 29.7; Ruth 4.1–2,11; Lam 5.14). The professionalized judiciary established at the same site (16.18) may have had jurisdiction specifically over religious and criminal law (17.2–7). **21:** Here, mere parental testimony suffices (contrast 13.14; 17.4). *Stone him,* see 13.10n.

21.22–23: Treatment of the executed. Public exposure of the corpse of an executed criminal, which was not the norm, was a form of reproach directed against enemies of the state (Josh 8.29; 10.26; 1 Sam 31.10; Esth 9.6–14). Out of respect for the body, to prevent it from serving as carrion (2 Sam 21.10), this law sets stringent limits to that procedure. **22:** *Hang . . . on a tree,* the Heb word for "tree" is broader; the law could also refer to suspension from "gallows" (Esth 9.13) or a "pole" (Gen 40.19), or possibly, based upon Neo-Assyrian precedent, impalement upon a stake.

22.1–12: Various moral and religious responsibilities of citizenship. The rationale for the sequence and selection of these laws is often unclear.

22.1–4: Moral duties toward the neighbor. Two laws (vv. 1–3,4) that develop two corresponding laws from the earlier Covenant Collection. **1–3:** The earlier law governing the return of wandering animals (Ex 21.1–3) is here revised and extended. **1:** *Your neighbor's ox,* in contrast to "your enemy's ox" (Ex 23.4). *Neighbor,* lit. "brother"; see 20.8n. **3:** *Anything else,* the earlier law is universalized to apply to any lost property. **4:** Reworking Ex 23.5 to emphasize the neighbor, as in v. 1.

22.5–12: Miscellaneous laws. 5: The prohibition against cross-dressing seeks to maintain gender boundaries; a similar concern for boundaries is evident in vv. 9–11. **6–7:** Avoiding simultaneous consumption of two generations of the same creature is also evident in other laws (14.21; Ex 23.19; 34.26; Lev 22.28). **8:** The *roof* was used as living space (Josh 2.6; Judg 3.20–25; 2 Sam 11.2). *Bloodguilt,* criminal negligence; a capital offense (see 19.10n.). **9–10:** Corresponding to Lev 19.19, these laws attempt to maintain specific boundaries between cat-

11 You shall not wear clothes made of wool
and linen woven together.
12 You shall make tassels on the four
corners of the cloak with which you cover
yourself.
13 Suppose a man marries a woman, but
after going in to her, he dislikes her 14 and
makes up charges against her, slandering
her by saying, "I married this woman; but
when I lay with her, I did not find evidence
of her virginity." 15 The father of the young
woman and her mother shall then submit the
evidence of the young woman's virginity to
the elders of the city at the gate. 16 The father
of the young woman shall say to the elders:
"I gave my daughter in marriage to this man
but he dislikes her; 17 now he has made up
charges against her, saying, 'I did not find
evidence of your daughter's virginity.' But
here is the evidence of my daughter's virgin-
ity." Then they shall spread out the cloth
before the elders of the town. 18 The elders of
that town shall take the man and punish him;
19 they shall fine him one hundred shekels
of silver (which they shall give to the young
woman's father) because he has slandered a
virgin of Israel. She shall remain his wife; he
shall not be permitted to divorce her as long
as he lives.
20 If, however, this charge is true, that
evidence of the young woman's virginity was
not found, 21 then they shall bring the young
woman out to the entrance of her father's
house and the men of her town shall stone
her to death, because she committed a dis-
graceful act in Israel by prostituting herself in
her father's house. So you shall purge the evil
from your midst.
22 If a man is caught lying with the wife of
another man, both of them shall die, the man
who lay with the woman as well as the wom-
an. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.
23 If there is a young woman, a virgin already
engaged to be married, and a man meets her
in the town and lies with her, 24 you shall bring
both of them to the gate of that town and stone
them to death, the young woman because she
did not cry for help in the town and the man
because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you
shall purge the evil from your midst.
25 But if the man meets the engaged
woman in the open country, and the man

egories seen as incompatible (as in v. 5; 14.3–20). **9:** *Forfeited,* not permitted for human consumption. **12:** *Tassels,* this may reflect an application of royal garb, seen, for example, in Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs, to the nation as a whole. Num 15.37–40 gives a theological rationale.

22.13–30: Violations of marriage law. In the ancient Near East, marriage was a contractual relationship. The woman could not act independently: She remained in her father's household until a suitor paid a bride-price (vv. 28–29; Ex 22.16–17) to compensate for the reduction of the household. At that point she became formally "engaged," although still residing with her father (v. 21). Later, at the marriage feast, the union was consummated (Gen 29.22–25) and the woman took up residence in her husband's house.

22.13–21: False accusation of breach of marital contract. 14: *Makes up charges against her,* possibly for mercenary reasons, since nonfulfillment of the marital contract would entail refund of the bride-price and possibly a payment of a penalty for breach of contract. The *evidence,* the bloodstained cloth of v. 17. **15:** *Elders,* see 16.18n.; 21.19n. **17:** *The cloth* upon which husband and wife slept upon consummation of the relationship. It was understood that the cloth should have been bloodstained from the couple's first intercourse; there is scant medical support for this widespread assumption. **19:** *They shall fine him,* the penalty for his slanderous accusation is financial, although the penalty for her infidelity, if proven true, is capital (vv. 20–21); contrast 19.19. *One hundred shekels,* about 1.1 kg (2.5 lb), twice the fine for rape (v. 29). **21:** *Entrance of her father's house,* at the very site of the offense. *Stone her to death,* see 13.10n. *Disgraceful act in Israel,* a violation of basic community sexual and religious norms (Gen 34.7; Josh 7.15; Judg 19.23–34; 20.6,10). *Purge the evil,* see 13.5n.

22.22–30: Adultery and rape. 22: Adultery is a violation of the seventh commandment (5.18) and a capital offense (Lev 18.20; 20.10). *Both of them shall die,* a contrast with ancient Near Eastern norms, which required the male's death but left the wife's fate to her husband. The law removes the wife from her husband's authority and defines her as a legal person accountable for her actions. **23–27:** Two laws to determine culpability (vv. 23–24) or nonculpability (vv. 25–27) in cases of rape. Both laws show detailed points of contact with *Middle Assyrian Laws* (*M.A.L.;* ca. 1076 BCE). **23:** *Engaged to be married,* this legal status permits the transition from adultery to rape: Although the woman still resides with her father, she is contractually bound to her future husband.

seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. 26 You shall do nothing to the young woman; the young woman has not committed an offense punishable by death, because this case is like that of someone who attacks and murders a neighbor. 27 Since he found her in the open country, the engaged woman may have cried for help, but there was no one to rescue her.

28 If a man meets a virgin who is not engaged, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are caught in the act, 29 the man who lay with her shall give fifty shekels of silver to the young woman's father, and she shall become his wife. Because he violated her he shall not be permitted to divorce her as long as he lives.

30 [a]A man shall not marry his father's wife, thereby violating his father's rights.[b]

23 No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.

2 Those born of an illicit union shall not be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.

3 No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD, 4 because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. 5 (Yet the LORD your God refused to heed Balaam; the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you.) 6 You shall never promote their welfare or their prosperity as long as you live.

7 You shall not abhor any of the Edomites, for they are your kin. You shall not abhor any of the Egyptians, because you were an alien residing in their land. 8 The children of the third generation that are born to them may be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.

[a] Ch 23.1 in Heb
[b] Heb *uncovering his father's skirt*

In the town, where there are potential witnesses (*M.A.L.* § A 12). **25:** The assault in *open country,* where there are no likely witnesses, suggests planned malice. **26:** *Like . . . someone who attacks and murders a neighbor,* i.e., premeditated (19.11–13). Rape is a criminal assault rather than a sex crime. **28–29:** These conditions correspond to *M.A.L.* § A 55, which implies forced rape. In contrast, Ex 22.16–17 specifies intercourse with, but not forced rape of, a "virgin who is not engaged." The conflation of these two models in this law leaves it unclear whether or not it refers to consensual intercourse. **28:** *And lies with her,* as in Ex 22.16, placing the woman in a legally ambiguous position, unavailable to others (v. 14). **29:** *Fifty shekels,* presumably the bride-price. In contrast to Ex 22.17, the father's consent is not sought. Postbiblical Jewish law granted both father and daughter the right to refuse. **30:** A transition to the next section. *Father's wife,* i.e., a widowed stepmother (see Lev 18.7–8). *Violating his father's rights,* lit. "uncovering his father's skirt" (text note *b*); i.e., even indirect sexual contact with him must be avoided (Gen 9.23–24; 49.4; Lev 18.8; 20.11).

23.1–8: Restrictions on access to Israel's assembly. *The assembly of the LORD* (v. 1), the national governing body, or popular legislature, was charged with a broad range of judicial, political, and policy matters (Judg 20.2). **1:** *Testicles . . . penis,* the same physiological qualification that the Holiness Collection requires of the priesthood (Lev 21.17–23), now extended to all Israel (see 14.2n.). **2:** *Illicit union,* incestuous marriages (v. 3; 22.30; Lev 18.6–18). *Tenth generation,* see v. 3n. **3–8:** The restrictions do not entail denial of residence rights, and those named would retain the protection afforded by the legal status of "resident alien" (see 1.16; 5.14; Lev 19.10,33–34; 23.22). **3–6:** These laws were reused in the postexilic context to prohibit intermarriage (Ezra 9–10; Neh 13.1–3). **3:** *Ammonite or Moabite,* perhaps introduced after v. 2 because of an older tradition concerning their incestuous origins (Gen 19.30–38). *Tenth generation,* "forever," as explicitly stated in the Hebrew. **4:** The rationale varies from the earlier report that Israel detoured around Ammon without requesting assistance and received food and water from Moab (2.19,29,37). *Balaam,* see Num 22–24. **7:** *Not abhor . . . Edomites,* an extraordinary inclusion, since the Edomites participated in the destruction of Jerusalem (Ps 137.7; Obadiah). *Kin,* through Esau (Gen 25.24–26; 36.1). *Egyptians,* this injunction remarkably overlooks the enslavement (26.6; 28.60,68; Ex 1–15), going back to the provision of sanctuary (Gen 12; 37–50).

[9] When you are encamped against your enemies you shall guard against any impropriety.

[10] If one of you becomes unclean because of a nocturnal emission, then he shall go outside the camp; he must not come within the camp. [11] When evening comes, he shall wash himself with water, and when the sun has set, he may come back into the camp.

[12] You shall have a designated area outside the camp to which you shall go. [13] With your utensils you shall have a trowel; when you relieve yourself outside, you shall dig a hole with it and then cover up your excrement. [14] Because the LORD your God travels along with your camp, to save you and to hand over your enemies to you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that he may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you.

[15] Slaves who have escaped to you from their owners shall not be given back to them. [16] They shall reside with you, in your midst, in any place they choose in any one of your towns, wherever they please; you shall not oppress them.

[17] None of the daughters of Israel shall be a temple prostitute; none of the sons of Israel shall be a temple prostitute. [18] You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a male prostitute[a] into the house of the LORD your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are abhorrent to the LORD your God.

[19] You shall not charge interest on loans to another Israelite, interest on money, interest on provisions, interest on anything that is lent. [20] On loans to a foreigner you may charge interest, but on loans to another Israelite you may not charge interest, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings in the land that you are about to enter and possess.

[21] If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not postpone fulfilling it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you would incur guilt. [22] But if you refrain from vowing, you will not incur guilt. [23] Whatever your lips utter you must diligently perform, just as you have freely vowed to the LORD your God with your own mouth.

[24] If you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish, but you shall not put any in a container.

[a] Heb *a dog*

23.9–14: Special rules for the military camp. The theology of holy war assumes God's direct participation in the campaign (7.17–24; 20.4), creating a demand for heightened purity, like that required of the entire people at Sinai (Ex 19.10,14). Sexual abstinence seems also to have been required (1 Sam 21.4–5; 2 Sam 11.8–11; cf. Ex 19.15). **10–11:** Cf. Lev 15.16–18. **12:** *Designated area,* a latrine. **14:** *Travels along,* see 20.4; 31.6. *Anything indecent,* as in 24.1.

23.15–25.19: The heightened moral responsibilities of the covenant community.

23.15–16: Prohibition of the return of escaped slaves. The law rejects the almost universal stipulation within ancient Near Eastern law that escaped slaves must be returned (*Laws of Hammurabi* §§ 16–20; *Hittite Laws* §§ 22–24). **16:** The extraordinary repetition emphasizes that the entire community must be open to them.

23.17–18: Restrictions on prostitution. These verses presuppose the inevitability of prostitution, while proscribing it for Israelites and regulating it in such a way as to preserve the Temple's sanctity. **17:** *Temple prostitute* (Heb "qedesha"), the translation reflects belief in the existence of sacred prostitution in Israel and the ancient Near East, for which there is scant evidence; more likely "qedesha" is a standard euphemism for the coarser term for prostitute (v. 18). The same alternation between the two terms appears in Gen 38.15,21. The word might better be translated as "one set aside." **18:** *Prostitute,* Heb "zonah," closer to "whore" (Hos 1.2). *Male prostitute* (lit. "dog"), in context, the male counterpart to a common female prostitute. To maintain holiness, the law forbids donating income gained from prostitution to the Temple (cf. Hos 4.14; Mic 1.7).

23.19–25: Financial ethics, vows, gathering by the needy. 19–20: This law builds on Ex 22.25, which clarifies that lending served primarily as a means of social support for "the poor among you" (similarly Lev 25.36–37). Charging interest would amount to profiteering from the misfortunes of others. *Money,* see 2.6n. **20:** *A foreigner,* as distinct from the "resident alien," who fully participated in Israel's social welfare system (see 1.16n.); for similar distinctions, see 15.3; Lev 25.44–45. **21–23:** A *vow* (v. 21) promises payment of something to God (usually a sacrifice at a temple) in exchange for receiving something (see 1 Sam 1.11). This cautious reserve about vows, understandable in light of Judg 11.29–40, closely corresponds to wisdom teachings (Eccl 5.4–6). For a more positive view, see Ps 50.14. **24–25:** These rules prohibit exploitation of Deuteronomy's extensive support system for

25 If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain.

24 Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house 2 and goes off to become another man's wife. 3 Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies); 4 her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the LORD, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession.

5 When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be charged with any related duty. He shall be free at home one year, to be happy with the wife whom he has married.

6 No one shall take a mill or an upper millstone in pledge, for that would be taking a life in pledge.

7 If someone is caught kidnaping another Israelite, enslaving or selling the Israelite, then that kidnaper shall die. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

8 Guard against an outbreak of a leprous[a] skin disease by being very careful; you shall carefully observe whatever the levitical priests instruct you, just as I have commanded them. 9 Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on your journey out of Egypt.

10 When you make your neighbor a loan of any kind, you shall not go into the house to take the pledge. 11 You shall wait outside, while the person to whom you are making the loan brings the pledge out to you. 12 If the person is poor, you shall not sleep in the garment given you as[b] the pledge. 13 You shall give the pledge back by sunset, so that your neighbor may sleep in the cloak and bless you; and it will be to your credit before the LORD your God.

14 You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. 15 You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; other-

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

[b] Heb lacks *the garment given you as*

the needy (14.28–29; 24.19–22; 25.4). **25:** *Pluck . . . hand,* to address immediate hunger (Lk 6.1; cf. Mt 12.1; Mk 2.23).

Chs 24–25: Laws promoting social harmony. 24.1–22: The chapter, like the previous one, begins with a restriction on marriage and concludes stipulating care for those in need (note 22.30 = 23.1 Heb). **1–4:** This complex law, theologically applied by two prophets (Isa 50.1; Jer 3.1,8), addresses only remarriage after divorce to a wife who subsequently married another; it does not prohibit remarriage in general. Biblical law includes no general laws of either marriage or divorce, only special cases that raise particular ethical or religious issues. **1:** Male-initiated divorce was the norm, though there is some evidence in the Near East and in the Jewish papyri from Elephantine in Egypt (fifth century BCE) of contracts permitting either party to initiate proceedings. *He finds . . . about her,* formula for disloyal action or betrayal of trust (1 Sam 29.3,6,8; 2 Kings 17.4; cf. 1 Sam 12.5). *Objectionable,* "indecent" (23.14). It is unclear from the term used what valid criteria for divorce were. *Certificate of divorce,* legally freeing her to remarry. **4:** *After she has been defiled,* not in general, since she is permitted to remarry, but specifically as regards relations with her first husband. **5:** Another of the rules for holy war (20.1–20; 21.10–14; 23.9–14). *Newly married,* contrast the premarital deferral from service in 20.7. *Be happy with,* better, "give happiness to," including conjugal joy. **6:** The law prohibits oppression in economic relations (like vv. 10–15). *Take . . . in pledge,* accept as collateral for a loan. *Mill or an upper millstone,* like the "garment" of v. 12, they are essential to survival, and thus may not be taken. **7:** Restricts the application of Ex 21.16 to kidnapers of fellow Israelites; perhaps also an interpretation of Deut 5.19. **8–9:** *Leprous skin disease,* not leprosy but an unidentified inflammation; see Lev 13.1–14.57. *Remember . . . Miriam,* see Num 12.1–15. **10–13:** Expands upon Ex 22.26–27 (cf. Am 2.8; Prov 20.16; 22.27; 27.13; Job 22.6). The Yavneh Yam inscription (late seventh century BCE) deals with a similar case. **14–15:** See Ex 22.21–24; Lev 19.13. Israel's ethics are based upon the conviction that God identifies with and vindicates the oppressed. **14:** The prohibition against economic exploitation is not contingent upon

wise they might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt.

16 Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents; only for their own crimes may persons be put to death.

17 You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. 18 Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

19 When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. 20 When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.

21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. 22 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.

25 Suppose two persons have a dispute and enter into litigation, and the judges decide between them, declaring one to be in the right and the other to be in the wrong. 2 If the one in the wrong deserves to be flogged, the judge shall make that person lie down and be beaten in his presence with the number of lashes proportionate to the offense. 3 Forty lashes may be given but not more; if more lashes than these are given, your neighbor will be degraded in your sight.

4 You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.

5 When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her, 6 and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. 7 But if the man has no desire to marry his brother's widow, then his brother's widow shall go up to the elders at the gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me." 8 Then the elders of his town shall summon him and speak to him. If he persists, saying, "I have no desire to marry her," 9 then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of

ethnicity or nationality; see 1.16n. **15:** See 15.9n. **16:** This law restricting punishment to the responsible individual, cited in 2 Kings 14.6, applies to both civil and criminal law. Collective responsibility applies to offenses against God (5.9–10; Ex 34.7; Num 16.31–33; Josh 7.24–25; 2 Sam 21.1–9), a theological principle subsequently brought into conformity with the law of individual liability (7.10; Jer 31.29–30; Ezek 18). **17:** *You shall not deprive . . . of justice,* in Hebrew, identical to the comprehensive "You shall not distort justice" (16.19). This law, therefore, ensures protection of the most vulnerable, the *resident alien* or the *orphan. Take . . . in pledge,* better, "seize" to force payment (see Job 24.3). This accords the *widow* special protection; for day laborers, see vv. 10–13. **18:** See 15.15. **19–22:** Lev 19.9–10; 23.22. The story of Ruth, both a widow and an alien, presupposes such laws, which assign harvest gleanings to the needy, allowing them to eat without begging for food. **20:** *Beat,* with poles, so as to harvest the olives (Isa 17.6). **25.1–3:** A double restriction upon judicial flogging, also employed for discipline in nonjudicial contexts (Ex 21.20; Prov 10.13; 26.3; 1 Kings 12.14). **2:** *In his presence,* under the judge's direct supervision, "by [his] count" (the more likely rendering of NRSV *number of lashes*). **3:** *Forty lashes,* a definitive restriction for which there is no parallel in Near Eastern law; the *Middle Assyrian Laws* stipulate floggings of five to one hundred lashes. *Your neighbor,* the criminal, despite his judicial status, retains human dignity. **4:** For similar humane treatment of animals, see 22.6–7; Prov 12.10. **5–10:** Biblical, Near Eastern, and Roman inheritance law assigned special responsibilities to the "husband's brother" (vv. 5–7), for which Hebrew had a special term (cf. Latin "levir," hence "levirate marriage"). See Gen 38.8 and Ruth 4.5–6, which reflect variations of this law. **5:** *Outside the family,* NRSV has added *the family;* more likely, the frame of reference is the larger clan. The widow's marriage outside of the clan would diminish the landholding of her clan and add it to the new husband's, affecting the original equitable division of land among the tribes (Josh 13–21). *Her husband's brother shall go in to her,* possibly the brother's death provided an exception to the incest prohibition of marrying a sister-in-law (Lev 18.16; 20.21); alternatively, the Holiness Collection's incest laws might intend to prohibit levirate marriage

the elders, pull his sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and declare, "This is what is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house." [10] Throughout Israel his family shall be known as "the house of him whose sandal was pulled off."

[11] If men get into a fight with one another, and the wife of one intervenes to rescue her husband from the grip of his opponent by reaching out and seizing his genitals, [12] you shall cut off her hand; show no pity.

[13] You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, large and small. [14] You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, large and small. [15] You shall have only a full and honest weight; you shall have only a full and honest measure, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. [16] For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are abhorrent to the LORD your God.

[17] Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey out of Egypt, [18] how he attacked you on the way, when you were faint and weary, and struck down all who lagged behind you; he did not fear God. [19] Therefore when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your enemies on every hand, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; do not forget.

26 When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, [2] you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. [3] You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." [4] When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, [5] you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. [6] When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, [7] we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. [8] The LORD brought

altogether. **6:** *Firstborn* alone here counts to the brother; cf. Gen 38.8. **9:** Legal title was symbolically claimed by walking over the land (see 11.24n.). Thus, transfer of title entailed passing the *sandal* (Ruth 4.7), while renunciation of title, as here, was symbolized by removal of the *sandal.* The intent of the ceremony is public shaming, since the dereliction of duty makes the brother's wife a widow, abandoning her to the class of the impoverished: "the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows" (14.29n.). **10:** *Known as,* lit. "called by the name of," thus explicitly applying a form of retributive justice (19.19n.). For refusing to build up the deceased's "name" (vv. 6–7) and "house" (v. 9), the brother's own *house* is stigmatized by its new name. **11–12:** An additional law dealing with threats to reproduction (cf. Ex 21.22–25). Physical mutilation (characteristic in the *Middle Assyrian Laws*) is nowhere else prescribed in the Bible, except in the general formula for talion (19.21; Ex 21.23–24; Lev 24.19–20). That rationale does not apply here, however, since there is no symmetry between injury and punishment. The issue may rather be the perceived insult to dignity (cf. *Laws of Hammurabi* §195). **13–16:** Cf. *Laws of Hammurabi* §108; Lev 19.35–36; Am 8.5. **14:** By fraudulently using two different sets of counterweights—small ones to sell grain but large ones to purchase it—a merchant could turn a tidy profit. **17–19:** The tradition presupposes Ex 17.8–16, in which the Amalekites, a fierce desert tribe, attacked Israel (cf. Ps 83.4–8). **18:** These details are not reflected in Ex 17.8–16; they may have been supplied by the Deuteronomic author in order to justify the extirpation of Amalek (v. 19; cf. Ex 17.14; 1 Sam 15.2–3). **19:** *Rest,* see 3.20; 12.9n.

26.1–15: Concluding liturgies. Two already prescribed laws (14.22–29) are given a historical and theological foundation (similarly, 16.12, for the festival of weeks). **1–11:** The context is the festival of weeks (16.9–12), when the Israelite was to make an annual pilgrimage to the central sanctuary, bringing the first fruits of the harvest, to thank God for the land's bounty. **4:** *When the priest,* contrast v. 10. Vv. 3–4 may be a later addition intended to emphasize the role of priests in the ceremony. Thus, v. 5 may have originally continued v. 2. **5:** *Wandering Aramean* suggests the Jacob tradition (Gen 25.20). **6:** *Afflicted . . . hard labor,* see Ex 1.11–14. **8–9:** It is striking that the

us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; [9] and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. [10] So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. [11] Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

[12] When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year (which is the year of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns, [13] then you shall say before the LORD your God: "I have removed the sacred portion from the house, and I have given it to the Levites, the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows, in accordance with your entire commandment that you commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor forgotten any of your commandments: [14] I have not eaten of it while in mourning; I have not removed any of it while I was unclean; and I have not offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the LORD my God, doing just as you commanded me. [15] Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our ancestors—a land flowing with milk and honey."

[16] This very day the LORD your God is commanding you to observe these statutes and ordinances; so observe them diligently with all your heart and with all your soul. [17] Today you have obtained the LORD's agreement: to be your God; and for you to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, and his ordinances, and to obey him. [18] Today the LORD has obtained your agreement: to be his

giving of the law on Horeb is missing here. Perhaps this ancient liturgy did not know of this event. Alternatively, the giving of the law might not be thematically appropriate to a unit that emphasizes God's role as liberator. **11:** *Celebrate,* or "rejoice" (16.11,14–15), specifically in a festive meal consumed at the central sanctuary (12.7,18), which must include *the Levites and the aliens.* The mention of these marginal groups provides a transition to the following law. **12–15:** Produce was tithed annually and consumed by the farmer and his household at the central sanctuary (14.22–27); every third year that tithe was used locally to support the poor (14.28–29). **12:** *Aliens . . . widows,* see 1.16n.; 14.29; 23.3–8,20n. **14:** The formula, containing a triple confession of the donor's ritual purity, probably originated in donations of produce to God at a sanctuary, where purity would be expected. That formula has now been reused for the donation of food to the poor "within your towns" (v. 12). *Offered any of it to the dead,* the duty of the living to care for dead ancestors through food offerings at their place of burial was widely assumed in the ancient Near East (see the Ugaritic Aqhat epic), and continued to be carried out in Second Temple times (Tob 4.17). This practice is not in itself condemned; it is viewed as improper only in relation to sacred donations, because of the impurity associated with death (Lev 22.2–4). **15:** *From your holy habitation, from heaven,* as in 1 Kings 8.30. The double proposition may point to the correction of an older theology in light of a newer one, following Deuteronomy's normal view that only God's name resides in the Temple (12.11; 16.11; 26.2). For the earlier idea, that God himself inhabits the Temple, see 1 Kings 8.13; cf. Deut 12.5. *Bless your people Israel and the ground,* the farmer prays for the blessing of the community and of the land, not directly for fertility or the abundance of his own crops.

26.16–19: Formal conclusion, which presents the legal corpus as a mutually binding relationship between God and Israel. Having just read the law to the people, Moses presents it to them in a formal ratification ceremony (vv. 17–18; cf. 2 Kings 23.1–3). **16:** *Statutes and ordinances . . . observe . . . diligently* forms an inclusio with 12.1, thus providing the laws of chs 12–26 with an elegant frame to mark their conclusion. **17–18:** *Obtained,* the past tense points to a prior action or speech, no record of which survives, in which each party has proclaimed what is here described. Deuteronomy emphasizes that both Israel and God have explicitly assented to the covenant and have affirmed the mutuality of the obligations that each undertakes. This reciprocal model contrasts with the Sinai covenant, which was unilaterally offered by God (Ex 19.3–6) and unilaterally agreed to by Israel (Ex 19.8; 24.3,7). Deuteronomy invokes the language of the Sinai covenant as a model while revising it in the process. **18:** *His treasured people,* see 7.6n. *In praise . . . fame and . . . honor,* NRSV implies that the accolades will be given to Israel. The Hebrew also allows for the possibility that the honors will go to God because of his ac-

treasured people, as he promised you, and to keep his commandments; [19] for him to set you high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honor; and for you to be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.

27 Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged all the people as follows: Keep the entire commandment that I am commanding you today. [2] On the day that you cross over the Jordan into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and cover them with plaster. [3] You shall write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over, to enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you. [4] So when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, about which I am commanding you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall cover them with plaster. [5] And you shall build an altar there to the LORD your God, an altar of stones on which you have not used an iron tool. [6] You must build the altar of the LORD your God of unhewn[a] stones. Then offer up burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God, [7] make sacrifices of well-being, and eat them there, rejoicing before the LORD your God. [8] You shall write on the stones all the words of this law very clearly.

[9] Then Moses and the levitical priests spoke to all Israel, saying: Keep silence and hear, O Israel! This very day you have become the people of the LORD your God. [10] Therefore obey the LORD your God, observing his commandments and his statutes that I am commanding you today.

[11] The same day Moses charged the people as follows: [12] When you have crossed over the

[a] Heb *whole*

tion on Israel's behalf (see Jer 13.11; 33.9). *As he promised you,* Ex 19.5–6. **19:** *High above all nations,* see 28.13–14n. *That he has made,* see Ex 19.5b. *A people holy to the LORD* continues the reference to Ex 19.5–6, while substituting *people* for "nation," which Deuteronomy uses for non-Israelites (12.29).

27.1–26: The ceremonies at Shechem. The injunctions of 11.29–32 are here reiterated and detailed. The laws of chs 12–26 are thus framed with ceremonies that connect entry into the land with obedience to the teaching of Moses. The chapter joins four separate sections that are only loosely connected to one another and to the rest of Deuteronomy. A later editor has aligned the sections with one another, while breaking up the continuity of the speech of chs 26 and 28. The resulting digression preserves several competing traditions about how and where the covenant between God and Israel was concluded: at Sinai; or on the plains of Moab; or at Gilgal immediately upon entering the land; or at the important northern shrine of Shechem (see 11.29n.). **1–8:** This section combines two separate requirements: the raising of plastered stones inscribed with the teaching (vv. 1–4,8) and the construction of a stone altar for sacrifice (vv. 5–7). **1:** Moses is here referred to in the third person, interrupting his first-person address (chs 5–26; 28). *And the elders,* nowhere else in Deuteronomy do they join Moses in addressing the people; this plural subject does not easily fit the following singular *I.* **2:** *On the day . . . large stones,* the Deuteronomistic Historian understands this command to have been fulfilled at Gilgal, just across the Jordan and less than a mile from Jericho (see Josh 4). *Cover them with plaster,* to serve as a surface for inscription. Archaeology attests the use of plaster-covered wall or stele inscriptions. **4:** *Mount Ebal,* at over 1,000 m (3,000 ft), the tallest mountain in the region. It lies in central Canaan, adjacent to the city of Shechem. But that site is inconsistent with v. 2 and the beginning of this verse, which each anticipate that the ceremony will take place immediately upon crossing the river. It would be impossible to reach Shechem in a day. The most logical explanation is that Josh 4 points to the original form of these verses, with Gilgal as the site where Israel complied with this command. That older tradition was then replaced here by the reference to the mountains around Shechem, the chief town of the northern tribes (Josh 24.1,32). **5–7:** These verses are an insertion that reinterprets the plastered stones on which the teaching is to be inscribed as an altar of *unhewn stones,* following Ex 20.25. Such an altar, outside of Jerusalem, conflicts with the centralization requirement of ch 12, and further suggests the antiquity and the independence of this tradition from the rest of Deuteronomy. The fulfillment of this law is narrated in Josh 8.30–35. **9–10:** This is a new paragraph, independent of what precedes it. **9:** *And the levitical priests,* see v. 1n.; here too the plural subject is continued by "I" (v. 10). *This very day,* contrast statements that define the bond as previously formed, either at the time of the Exodus (Ex 6.6–7) or at Sinai (4.20; Ex 19.5–6). **11–13:** A fragment that refers to an ancient covenant ceremony at Shechem, instituted at the

Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim for the blessing of the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. 13 And these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. 14 Then the Levites shall declare in a loud voice to all the Israelites:

15 "Cursed be anyone who makes an idol or casts an image, anything abhorrent to the LORD, the work of an artisan, and sets it up in secret." All the people shall respond, saying, "Amen!"

16 "Cursed be anyone who dishonors father or mother." All the people shall say, "Amen!"

17 "Cursed be anyone who moves a neighbor's boundary marker." All the people shall say, "Amen!"

18 "Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind person on the road." All the people shall say, "Amen!"

19 "Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice." All the people shall say, "Amen!"

20 "Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife, because he has violated his father's rights."[a] All the people shall say, "Amen!"

21 "Cursed be anyone who lies with any animal." All the people shall say, "Amen!"

22 "Cursed be anyone who lies with his sister, whether the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother." All the people shall say, "Amen!"

23 "Cursed be anyone who lies with his mother-in-law." All the people shall say, "Amen!"

24 "Cursed be anyone who strikes down a neighbor in secret." All the people shall say, "Amen!"

25 "Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood." All the people shall say, "Amen!"

26 "Cursed be anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by observing them." All the people shall say, "Amen!"

28 If you will only obey the LORD your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you

[a] Heb *uncovered his father's skirt*

command of Moses (Josh 8.30–35). The antiquity of the tribal list is seen in the facts that Levi is listed as a tribe (Gen 49.5–7) and that the division of the house of Joseph into Manasseh and Ephraim has not yet occurred (Gen 49.22–26; contrast Deut 33.17). The division of the tribes into two groups of six is attested only here. **11:** *The same day,* lit. "on that day," without further specification. **12–13:** *Mount Gerizim for the blessing . . . Mount Ebal for the curse,* see 11.29n. One group of tribes, on Gerizim, proclaims a set of blessings (see 28.1–14); the other, on Ebal, a set of curses (see 28.15–68). **14–26:** Despite the paragraphing in NRSV, v. 14 more likely begins a new section, with a very different conception of the ceremony: The tribe of Levi alone proclaims a set of prohibited actions and *all the people*—acting in unison and not divided into tribes—respond, *Amen* (see Jer 11.3–5). There is no list of blessings (cf. v. 12). Nor is the "curse" intended by v. 13 (a description of divine punishment for wrongful action, as in 28.15–68) provided. The "cursed be" proclamations here stigmatize a summary list of rejected actions while making no references to the consequences of the transgressions. **14:** *Levites,* Deuteronomy's normal term is "levitical priests" (v. 9; 18.1). **15–26:** The twelve curses correspond to the twelve tribes, although this section makes no reference to the tribal division and the people function as a single entity (v. 14). The resulting incongruence points to the many editorial revisions that this chapter has undergone. **15:** See 4.15–31n. **16:** See 5.16. **17:** See 19.14n.

28.1–68: The consequences of obedience or disobedience: blessing or curse. The covenant specifies a series of blessings and curses that follow upon national obedience or disobedience to the law. These are modeled after ancient Near Eastern state treaties, in which the consequences of breach of the treaty are spelled out at its conclusion; this chapter has several close parallels to the *Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon* (*VTE*), a Neo-Assyrian treaty dating to 672 BCE. The disproportion between the sections devoted to blessing (vv. 1–14) and to curse (vv. 15–68) may be a reaction to the Babylonian conquest, deportation, and exile of Judah (597 and 586 BCE), here recast as a prophetic warning. Two appendixes, vv. 47–57 and 58–68, each seek to make theological sense of that catastrophe. The two other legal collections of the Pentateuch (the Covenant Collection of Ex 21–23; the Holiness Collection of Lev 17–26) similarly end with exhortations to obedience, accompanied by blessings and curses (Ex 23.20–33; Lev 26). Here an inclusio frames and defines the blessings section: *if you . . . obey . . . by diligently observing* (vv. 1,13). **1–2:** The proem emphasizes the conditionality of the exalted status of Israel, perhaps

today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth; 2 all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the LORD your God:

3 Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.

4 Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your livestock, both the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock.

5 Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

6 Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

7 The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways. 8 The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns, and in all that you undertake; he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. 9 The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. 10 All the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. 11 The LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your ground in the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors to give you. 12 The LORD will open for you his rich storehouse, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all your undertakings. You will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow. 13 The LORD will make you the head, and not the tail; you shall be only at the top, and not at the bottom—if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today, by diligently observing them, 14 and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I am commanding you today, either to the right or to the left, following other gods to serve them.

15 But if you will not obey the LORD your God by diligently observing all his commandments and decrees, which I am commanding you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you:

16 Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field.

17 Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

18 Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock.

19 Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

20 The LORD will send upon you disaster, panic, and frustration in everything you attempt to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly, on account of the evil of your

because of the exile. *High above all the nations* (see also v. 13), a metaphor for the nation's election, also applied to the Davidic dynasty (Ps 89.27). (Contrast 26.19, where this affirmation is unconditional, fulfilling God's past promises.) **3–6:** The six benedictions have their malediction counterpart at vv. 16–19. The two antonym pairs (vv. 3,6) provide a frame to the unit. The opposites form a merism to stress totality (like "night and day"); see 6.7n. **3:** *City* and *field,* "everywhere," urban and rural. **4:** *Fruit . . . livestock,* fecundity is contingent upon obedience to God; see 7.12–14n. **7:** Military success is conditional upon covenantal obedience, rather than strength of arms (9.1–3; Josh 1.6–8). **9:** *The LORD will establish . . . if you keep,* holiness is conditional upon obedience, a shift from other passages where Israel's holiness is not future but present, and not conditional but unconditional (7.6; 14.2; cf. 26.19). **10:** *Called by the name of the LORD,* relationship with God includes accountability and corresponding divine oversight. The formula can apply to either the nation (here; 2 Chr 7.14; Isa 63.19; Jer 14.9) or an individual (Ex 33.12; Jer 15.16). **12:** *Storehouse,* in Israelite and Near Eastern cosmology, primordial waters above the dome of the sky were released as rain (Gen 1.7; 7.11). *Lend . . . borrow,* see 15.6.

28.15–68: Consequences of disobedience. A broad range of misfortunes, from infertility to military defeat (vv. 15–46), precede a second section (vv. 47–68) on foreign invasion, siege, national defeat, and exile, a reversal of the covenantal promises and of the nation's history of salvation: By disobeying the covenant, the nation undoes its own history. **15–46:** A chiastic inclusio frames the section: the initial sequence AB (*not obey . . . observing . . . curses . . . overtake,* v. 15) is repeated at the end as B′A′ (*curses . . . overtaking . . . not obey . . . observing,* v. 45). **15:** A negation of v. 1. **16–19:** Negating vv. 3–6. **20:** Corresponding to the tripartite blessing for obedience (v. 8) stands the triple threat of *disaster* [better, "curse"], *panic, and frustration.* The threats are spelled out in

deeds, because you have forsaken me. 21 The LORD will make the pestilence cling to you until it has consumed you off the land that you are entering to possess. 22 The LORD will afflict you with consumption, fever, inflammation, with fiery heat and drought, and with blight and mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish. 23 The sky over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you iron. 24 The LORD will change the rain of your land into powder, and only dust shall come down upon you from the sky until you are destroyed.

25 The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out against them one way and flee before them seven ways. You shall become an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. 26 Your corpses shall be food for every bird of the air and animal of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away. 27 The LORD will afflict you with the boils of Egypt, with ulcers, scurvy, and itch, of which you cannot be healed. 28 The LORD will afflict you with madness, blindness, and confusion of mind; 29 you shall grope about at noon as blind people grope in darkness, but you shall be unable to find your way; and you shall be continually abused and robbed, without anyone to help. 30 You shall become engaged to a woman, but another man shall lie with her. You shall build a house, but not live in it. You shall plant a vineyard, but not enjoy its fruit. 31 Your ox shall be butchered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it. Your donkey shall be stolen in front of you, and shall not be restored to you. Your sheep shall be given to your enemies, without anyone to help you. 32 Your sons and daughters shall be given to another people, while you look on; you will strain your eyes looking for them all day but be powerless to do anything. 33 A people whom you do not know shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors; you shall be continually abused and crushed, 34 and driven mad by the sight that your eyes shall see. 35 The LORD will strike you on the knees and on the legs with grievous boils of which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head. 36 The LORD will bring you, and the king whom you set over you, to a nation that neither you nor your ancestors have known, where you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone. 37 You shall become an object of horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you.

38 You shall carry much seed into the field but shall gather little in, for the locust shall consume it. 39 You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm shall eat them. 40 You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off. 41 You shall have sons and daughters, but

vv. 21–44. *Me,* the first-person reference shifts from Moses to God, as at 7.4; 17.3. **21–44:** This section echoes treaties that the Neo-Assyrian empire imposed on its vassal states, suggesting that the curse section of these state treaties, perhaps in Aramaic translation, provided a model for this chapter. Judah was a vassal to the Assyrian empire (2 Kings 18.13–18) and both Neo-Assyrian and Judean officials spoke Aramaic (2 Kings 18.26–27). **23:** *Bronze . . . iron,* see *VTE* §§63–64: "May [the gods] make your ground like iron . . . Just as rain does not fall from a bronze sky . . ." **25:** Negates v. 7. **26:** Even executed criminals must be buried by sundown, lest the corpse become carrion (21.22–23); abrogation of that law underscores the punishment's horror (Jer 7.33). **27–35:** The apparently arbitrary sequence of punishments closely resembles *VTE* §§39–43, where each curse is associated with a particular Neo-Assyrian god: the moon god Sin with leprosy; the sun god Shamash, blindness; and Dilipat (the planet Venus), rape, dispossession, and pillage. **27:** *Boils of Egypt,* inversion of 7.15. See Ex 9.9–11. **28–29:** *Blindness,* Shamash, the Mesopotamian sun god, the god of justice, punishes disobedience by withholding light and vision; this punishment entails the breakdown of civil order and legal standards. **30:** *Woman . . . house . . . vineyard,* contrast 20.7, which provides the same conditions for exemption from conscription, in different order. **32:** The sale of the children to foreigners as slaves guarantees their non-return (Gen 37.25–38). **36:** Both the Neo-Assyrian army (2 Kings 17) and the Neo-Babylonian invaders (2 Kings 24–25) practiced deportation. **37:** *Byword,* the opposite idea was central to God's covenant with Abraham, whose people were to become the paradigm of divine providence (Gen 12.3). **38–42:** Futility curses. The frustration of human labor through infertility of the harvest (caused by invasion from insects or other natural enemies) is punishment for infringement

they shall not remain yours, for they shall go into captivity. [42] All your trees and the fruit of your ground the cicada shall take over. [43] Aliens residing among you shall ascend above you higher and higher, while you shall descend lower and lower. [44] They shall lend to you but you shall not lend to them; they shall be the head and you shall be the tail.

[45] All these curses shall come upon you, pursuing and overtaking you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the LORD your God, by observing the commandments and the decrees that he commanded you. [46] They shall be among you and your descendants as a sign and a portent forever.

[47] Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and with gladness of heart for the abundance of everything, [48] therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and lack of everything. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you. [49] The LORD will bring a nation from far away, from the end of the earth, to swoop down on you like an eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, [50] a grim-faced nation showing no respect to the old or favor to the young. [51] It shall consume the fruit of your livestock and the fruit of your ground until you are destroyed, leaving you neither grain, wine, and oil, nor the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, until it has made you perish. [52] It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout your land; it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout the land that the LORD your God has given you. [53] In the desperate straits to which the enemy siege reduces you, you will eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your own sons and daughters whom the LORD your God has given you. [54] Even the most refined and gentle of men among you will begrudge food to his own brother, to the wife whom he embraces, and to the last of his remaining children, [55] giving to none of them any of the flesh of his children whom he is eating, because nothing else remains to him, in the desperate straits to which the enemy siege will reduce you in all your towns. [56] She who is the most refined and gentle among you, so gentle and refined that she does not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground, will begrudge food to the husband whom she embraces, to her own son, and to her own daughter, [57] begrudging even the afterbirth that comes out from between her thighs, and the children that she bears, because she is eating them in secret for lack of anything else, in the desperate straits to which the enemy siege will reduce you in your towns.

of the covenant (Lev 26.20; Am 4.7–12), reversing the blessings of vv. 7–15. **43–44:** Reversing vv. 12b–13. **46:** *A sign and a portent,* the normal phrase for miracles God performed on behalf of Israel at the time of the Exodus, "signs and wonders" (4.34; 6.22; 7.19; 29.3; 34.11; Ex 7.3; 8.23; 10.1–2; 11.9–10), in the singular here designates the divine punishment of Israel.

28.47–57: Scenario of foreign invasion. A later appendix, outside the frame provided by vv. 45–46. **47:** *Because you did not serve,* the future curse is based upon wrongdoing in the past, in contrast to the conditional, future formulation of v. 15, which presents disobedience as a future possibility. *Abundance,* prosperity in the land will cause Israel to forget its source (see 6.11–12; 8.11–20; 33.15,18). **48:** The punishment corresponds precisely to the offense: *Serve* means both sacrificial worship of God (13.5) and labor as a servant or slave (5.13; 13.12). *Iron yoke,* symbolizing vassal status, as in Jer 27–28. **49–57:** Systematic presentation of foreign conquest, proceeding from invasion (vv. 48–50), to the invaders' plunder and despoiling of the land (v. 51), to crippling siege (v. 52), and culminating in the horrors of starvation that arise from the siege (vv. 53–57). These descriptions of the invader and of the consequences of the siege are based upon the literary model of the *Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon.* **49–52:** Closely parallels Jer 5.15–19. **49:** *Like an eagle,* cf. Ezek 17.3,7; Hab 1.8. **51:** Contrast the idealist war laws of 20.19–20, which prohibit occupiers from despoiling the land. **52:** *It shall besiege you . . . until your . . . walls . . . come down,* the Neo-Assyrian (2 Kings 17.5) and Babylonian armies (2 Kings 24.3; 25.1–7) employed advanced engineering to mount a siege campaign involving ramparts, battering rams, and catapults. **53–57:** The starvation resulting from the siege causes a complete breakdown of the normal social order, as parents become predators of their children and family members compete for food. For cannibalism under siege conditions, see Lev 26.29; 2 Kings 6.28–32; Jer 19.9; Lam 4.10; Ezek 5.10; and *VTE* §§ 47,69,71,75.

58 If you do not diligently observe all the
words of this law that are written in this
book, fearing this glorious and awesome
name, the LORD your God, 59 then the LORD
will overwhelm both you and your offspring
with severe and lasting afflictions and griev-
ous and lasting maladies. 60 He will bring
back upon you all the diseases of Egypt, of
which you were in dread, and they shall cling
to you. 61 Every other malady and affliction,
even though not recorded in the book of this
law, the LORD will inflict on you until you
are destroyed. 62 Although once you were as
numerous as the stars in heaven, you shall
be left few in number, because you did not
obey the LORD your God. 63 And just as the
LORD took delight in making you prosperous
and numerous, so the LORD will take delight
in bringing you to ruin and destruction; you
shall be plucked off the land that you are en-
tering to possess. 64 The LORD will scatter you
among all peoples, from one end of the earth
to the other; and there you shall serve other
gods, of wood and stone, which neither you
nor your ancestors have known. 65 Among
those nations you shall find no ease, no rest-
ing place for the sole of your foot. There the
LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing
eyes, and a languishing spirit. 66 Your life shall
hang in doubt before you; night and day you
shall be in dread, with no assurance of your
life. 67 In the morning you shall say, "If only it
were evening!" and at evening you shall say,
"If only it were morning!"—because of the
dread that your heart shall feel and the sights
that your eyes shall see. 68 The LORD will
bring you back in ships to Egypt, by a route
that I promised you would never see again;
and there you shall offer yourselves for sale
to your enemies as male and female slaves,
but there will be no buyer.

29 [a] These are the words of the covenant
that the LORD commanded Moses to
make with the Israelites in the land of Moab,
in addition to the covenant that he had made
with them at Horeb.

[a] Ch 28.69 in Heb

28.58–68: Undoing the Exodus. This seems to represent a third layer to the chapter. **58:** *This book,* how the commandments have become transformed from oral proclamation to written text is unexplained, since it is not until 31.9,24 that Moses commands that his teaching be put into writing. Moreover, hitherto the required obedience was to the plural "commandments" (vv. 1,9,13,15,45). Here, for the first time in the chapter, Israel must obey a codified, single *law* (Heb "torah" or "teaching"). *This . . . name,* NRSV should have capitalized "Name" to clarify its distinctive use; it stands directly for God (elsewhere in the Pentateuch only Lev 24.11). **59–68:** Consistent with the "book" perspective, the consequences for breach of the written teaching have a different focus: a systematic reversal of the national history, covenantal promises, and theology included in that teaching. The punishment amounts to an anti-Torah that will dissolve the national identity. **59–61:** After the miracle of the Exodus, God had promised, if the people obeyed, "I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians" (Ex 15.26). **62:** *Stars . . . heaven,* God will cancel the promise made to Abraham that his people shall be as numerous as the stars of heaven (Gen 15.5–6). **63:** Dispossession and exile (as in 4.26; Lev 26.33–39) rescind the covenantal promise of the land, contravening even the unconditional divine promises of Gen 12.7; 13.17. **64:** The double loss of Israel's identity: Dispersion of the population dissolves its political identity, and idol worship dissolves its religious identity. **65–67:** In the absence of the national destiny provided by the covenant, historical existence has no meaning. **68:** Forced return to Egypt, where the former taskmasters now spurn Israel's desperate bid to sell itself back into slavery and thus to undo its own history. For selling oneself into slavery under financial hardship to pay off debts or gain support ("indenture"), see Lev 25.39. *Route . . . never see again* (cf. 17.16), reverses the unconditional promise at the time of the Exodus: "the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again" (Ex 14.13).

29.1–30.20: Third discourse of Moses. The ratification ceremony for the covenant of the plains of Moab. Israel is formally adjured to enter the covenant: To swear to obey the laws of chs 12–26 under penalty of the sanctions of ch 28. **29.1–29:** A didactic review of Israel's history (vv. 2–9) precedes an imprecation to ensure loyal adherence to the covenant (vv. 10–29). **1: Editorial heading.** The laws, hitherto plural ("statutes and ordinances," 5.1; 12.1; cf. 4.45), are now a coherent, single tradition: *the covenant. In addition to,* presentation of the laws as a supplement to the Decalogue, in contrast to 4.44–45; 12.1, which mention neither the Decalogue nor the laws' supplementary status. This may be an effort to explain addition of the Decalogue to an earlier form

2 [a]Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, 3 the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. 4 But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear. 5 I have led you forty years in the wilderness. The clothes on your back have not worn out, and the sandals on your feet have not worn out; 6 you have not eaten bread, and you have not drunk wine or strong drink—so that you may know that I am the LORD your God. 7 When you came to this place, King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan came out against us for battle, but we defeated them. 8 We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. 9 Therefore diligently observe the words of this covenant, in order that you may succeed[b] in everything that you do.

10 You stand assembled today, all of you, before the LORD your God—the leaders of your tribes,[c] your elders, and your officials, all the men of Israel, 11 your children, your women, and the aliens who are in your camp, both those who cut your wood and those who draw your water— 12 to enter into the covenant of the LORD your God, sworn by an oath, which the LORD your God is making with you today; 13 in order that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. 14 I am making this covenant, sworn by an oath, not only with you who stand here with us today before the LORD our God, 15 but also with those who are not here with us today. 16 You know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed. 17 You have seen their detestable things, the filthy idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold, that were among them. 18 It may be that there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, whose heart is already turning away from the LORD our God to serve the gods of those nations. It may be that there is among you a root sprouting poisonous and bitter growth. 19 All who hear the words of this oath and bless themselves, thinking in their hearts, "We are safe even though we go our own stubborn ways" (thus bringing

[a] Ch 29.1 in Heb
[b] Or *deal wisely*
[c] Gk Syr: Heb *your leaders, your tribes*

of Deuteronomy. **2:** *You have seen,* as at 5.2–4, the present generation is in reality one generation removed from the miraculous events. **3:** *Signs . . . wonders,* see 28.46n. **4:** *But to this day,* more accurately: "The LORD has not given you . . . until today." The admonition creates a tension with the preceding two verses: The addressees who "have seen" the miraculous events (v. 2), which their own "eyes saw" (v. 3), are accused of having lacked *eyes to see.* The castigation reflects the episodes of rebellion (9.7–24). **5–6:** The speech reinterprets the wilderness wandering, originally intended as divine punishment of Israel (Num 14.13–35), and presents it positively, in didactic terms. **5:** *I,* see 7.4; 17.3; 28.20,68. *Clothes . . . feet,* see 8.4. **6:** *You have not eaten bread . . . not drunk wine,* the sense is, "It was not bread that you ate . . . nor wine that you drank." The manna, quails, and water that Israel consumed were supplied by divine providence (8.2–5; Ex 16; Num 11.4–9,31–33). *Know,* not abstract speculation but the recognition of God's historical actions on behalf of the nation. *I am the LORD your God,* better, "I, Yahweh, am your God" (6.4; Ex 20.2). **7–8:** See 1.4; 2.26–3.22; Num 21.21–35. **10:** *Stand assembled* in formal array for a public legal ceremony (cf. Ps 82.1). *Today,* transition from historical review (vv. 1–8) to present adjuration (similarly, *VTE* § 33). **12:** *Covenant . . . sworn by an oath,* the formula recurs at v. 14, thus framing the central idea, the binding relationship between God and Israel. *Oath,* more accurately, "its imprecation" or "its curse." Neo-Assyrian treaties were validated by means of a concluding imprecation (*VTE* §§37–56,58–106). The partner accepts the consequences of noncompliance. The laws of chs 12–26 represent the stipulations; ch 28, the sanctions; and ch 29, the imprecation. **14–15:** The covenant binds even future generations (as in *VTE*§§ 25,33,34,57); consequently, punishment for infraction extends to the third and fourth generation (5.9; Ex 20.5; 34.7). **17–27:** A stark, two-part warning, showing how the attempt of even a single individual secretly to withdraw from the covenant (vv. 17–19) jeopardizes the entire nation (vv. 20–28). **18:** *Turning away,* transferring loyalty to other gods (13.6–11; 17.2–7). *Poisonous and bitter growth,* Hos 10.4; Am 5.7; 6.12. **19:** *Bless themselves,* rather than proclaim the imprecation, hoping to escape the sanctions of the covenant. *Moist and dry,* probably

disaster on moist and dry alike) [a]—
[20] the LORD will be unwilling to pardon them,
for the LORD's anger and passion will smoke
against them. All the curses written in this
book will descend on them, and the LORD
will blot out their names from under heaven.
[21] The LORD will single them out from all the
tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance
with all the curses of the covenant written in
this book of the law. [22] The next generation,
your children who rise up after you, as well
as the foreigner who comes from a distant
country, will see the devastation of that land
and the afflictions with which the LORD has
afflicted it— [23] all its soil burned out by sulfur
and salt, nothing planted, nothing sprouting,
unable to support any vegetation, like the
destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah
and Zeboiim, which the LORD destroyed in
his fierce anger— [24] they and indeed all the
nations will wonder, "Why has the LORD done
thus to this land? What caused this great
display of anger?" [25] They will conclude, "It
is because they abandoned the covenant of
the LORD, the God of their ancestors, which
he made with them when he brought them
out of the land of Egypt. [26] They turned and
served other gods, worshiping them, gods
whom they had not known and whom he had
not allotted to them; [27] so the anger of the
LORD was kindled against that land, bring-
ing on it every curse written in this book.
[28] The LORD uprooted them from their land in
anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them
into another land, as is now the case." [29] The
secret things belong to the LORD our God, but
the revealed things belong to us and to our
children forever, to observe all the words of
this law.

30 When all these things have happened
to you, the blessings and the curses
that I have set before you, if you call them to
mind among all the nations where the LORD
your God has driven you, [2] and return to the
LORD your God, and you and your children
obey him with all your heart and with all
your soul, just as I am commanding you
today, [3] then the LORD your God will restore
your fortunes and have compassion on you,
gathering you again from all the peoples
among whom the LORD your God has scat-
tered you. [4] Even if you are exiled to the ends
of the world,[b] from there the LORD your God

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *of heaven*

paired antonyms designating totality (see 28.3–6n.). **20:** *Passion,* God's zeal to defend the mutual exclusivity of the covenant relation (5.9; Ex 34.14). *Descend on them,* more literally, "crouch down upon them" (cf. Gen 4.7), an animate image. *Blot out,* the erasure of a tablet or scroll (Num 5.23), given a theological cast: Following Mesopotamian models, the divine decree of human fate is recorded in a heavenly book, with erasure symbolizing punishment (9.14; Gen 6.7; Ex 17.14; 32.32; 2 Kings 14.27; Ps 9.6). **22–28:** The negative instruction. As the wilderness wandering provided an instructional lesson for the nation (vv. 5–6), so will Israel, transformed into a devastation, provide an object lesson. Vv. 24–28 provide a reversal of the Israelite child's inquiry about God's redemptive acts (4.32–38; Ex 12.25–27; 13.8–10). **23:** *Sulfur and salt* were used in antiquity as defoliants by invading armies. *Sodom . . . Zeboiim,* proverbial wicked cities in the arid area around the Dead Sea (cf. Gen 19.24–25; Isa 1.9–10). **25:** *The covenant,* conflating the covenants of Horeb and Moab (29.1). **26:** *Gods . . . not allotted to them,* as at 32.8–9, each nation is allocated its own god, and the LORD is the God of Israel. As at 5.8–9, the existence of other deities is here conceded. Contrast 4.19, where it is rather only inanimate "stars . . . that God has allotted," which reinterprets the polytheistic image from the later perspective of monotheism. **28:** *As is now the case,* reference to the present implies that the chapter was composed subsequent to the Babylonian exile of 586 BCE. **29:** *Secret,* concealed acts that God will punish (vv. 18–19), or future events. More likely, the antithesis with *revealed* rejects religions of esoteric speculation that restrict access to truth to a learned few. This law (Heb "torah"), based upon a public revelation (ch 5) and Moses' instruction (chs 12–26), is accessible to all.

30.1–10: Reassurance of restoration. This section, with its emphasis on restoration, does not logically follow ch 29, and is most likely an insertion that serves the religious needs of a community different from that of the book's original audience (see v. 5n.). The unit employs the Heb word "shub," translated "return," "repent," or "restore," in seven different ways to establish the close bond between human repentance and divine forgiveness: (v. 1) "If you *call* them to mind . . . (v. 2) and *return* . . . (v. 3) then the LORD will *restore your fortunes* . . . and gathering you *again* . . . (v. 8) Then you shall *again* obey . . . (v. 9) For the LORD will *again* take delight . . . (v. 10) because you

will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. [5] The LORD your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors.

[6] Moreover, the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. [7] The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on the adversaries who took advantage of you. [8] Then you shall again obey the LORD, observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, [9] and the LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors, [10] when you obey the LORD your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

[11] Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. [12] It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" [13] Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" [14] No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

[15] See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. [16] If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God[a] that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. [17] But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, [18] I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. [19] I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I

[a] Gk: Heb lacks *If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God*

turn." **1:** *Call them to mind,* lit. "take [them] to heart." **4:** Cf. Am 9.2–3. **5:** *Bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed,* the "you" explicitly refers to the Judean exiles in Babylon, rather than the desert generation whom Moses addresses on the plains of Transjordan. *More . . . numerous,* the covenantal promise (Gen 17.2; 22.17). For similar claims that the future will repeat the past while also surpassing it, see Isa 42.9; 43.6–20; 51.9–11. **6:** *The LORD . . . will circumcise your heart,* God is the agent; previously Israel itself was to "circumcise . . . the foreskin of your heart" (see 10.16n.). The change suggests skepticism about the people's ability to effect such a change of heart independently (see Jer 31.31–34; Ezek 11.19–20; 36.26–27). **7:** The curses are deflected from Israel to the adversary; contrast 28.47,49, where the foreign nation is God's agent to punish Israel. **9:** *Fruit,* blessings upon return conforming to those promised upon initial entry (28.4). **10:** *Obey the LORD . . . by observing . . . this book of the law,* or, more precisely, "this book of the teaching." The reference is to the text of Deuteronomy itself, which replaces the live speech of Moses (12.28,32) or prophetic speech (18.18–9) as revealer of God's word.

30.11–20: The original continuation of ch 29 is composed of two sections, vv. 11–14,15–20. **11–14:** Turning their own imagery against them, the passage challenges the assumptions of Near Eastern wisdom schools about the inaccessibility of divine wisdom and the limits of human knowledge (cf. Job 28). **11:** The accessibility of Moses' teaching. *Surely,* better, "because," logically continuing 29.29 and emphasizing the ready accessibility of the divinely given teaching. (The NRSV translation is an accommodation to the insertion of vv. 1–10.) *This commandment,* the teaching as a whole (as at 6.1). **12:** See Prov 30.4. *That we may hear it,* lit. "so that he may proclaim it to us." **14:** *In your mouth,* in antiquity, texts were normally read, taught, and recited aloud (6.7; 31.19, 21; Josh 1.8). **15–20:** The necessity of choice. Life outside the covenant is *death.* **16:** *Loving . . . walking in his ways,* in Near Eastern treaties, "love" means to act loyally and to honor the commitments of the treaty (6.5n.). **19:** *Heaven and earth to witness,* see 4.26n.; 32.1n. *Choose life,* the didactic use of life and death suggests the influence of wisdom teachings upon the authors (Prov 11.19; 14.27; 18.21; cf. Jer 8.3; 21.8).

have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, 20 loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

31 When Moses had finished speaking all[a] these words to all Israel, 2 he said to them: "I am now one hundred twenty years old. I am no longer able to get about, and the LORD has told me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan.' 3 The LORD your God himself will cross over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua also will cross over before you, as the LORD promised. 4 The LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. 5 The LORD will give them over to you and you shall deal with them in full accord with the command that I have given to you. 6 Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you."

7 Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: "Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this

[a] Q Ms Gk: MT *Moses went and spoke*

31.1–34.14: The death of Moses and the formation of the Torah. With the imprecation of ch 30 concluding the treaty between God and Israel, Deuteronomy now returns to Moses, the mediator of the treaty. His life is ending, and the question of succession is given a two-fold answer, since Moses was both political and religious leader of Israel. Joshua will be his political and military successor (31.1–8,14–15,23; 32.44,48–52; 34.9) and "a book . . . of this law" (31.24) will instruct the nation in religion. Deuteronomy thus ends in paradox: Moses, ostensibly the book's narrator, narrates his own death (ch 34), and the book of the teaching, already presupposed (29.27), nevertheless provides an account of its own formation (31.9–13,24–29). The conclusion of Deuteronomy also ends the Pentateuch. In incorporating Deuteronomy into that larger work, editors with the background of the exile added perspectives on the function of the entire Torah in the people's life. Finally, the Pentateuch's literary precedent of a patriarch's death-bed bequest and blessing (Gen 27; 48–49) led to the incorporation of "The Song of Moses" (32.1–43) and of "The Blessing of Moses" (ch 33), each of which may originally have circulated independently. The resulting text thus blends several viewpoints. Themes like the appointment of Joshua begin, then begin again from a different perspective, and then are continued only after an apparent digression, which marks the insertion of new material.

31.1–29: Moses makes arrangements for his death. Publicly announcing his imminent death, Moses invests Joshua with leadership and initiates the writing of the book of the teaching, which is to be taught regularly to the entire people. These two legacies seem independent of each other and suggest that an earlier narrative about leadership has been expanded with an account of the formation of Deuteronomy. Each tradition, furthermore, is doubled; the chapter thus contains many layers of tradition. First is a double announcement of Moses' imminent death: v. 2 (at his own initiative, citing previous divine commandment, in which he appoints Joshua directly) and vv. 14–15 (with no reference to a previous announcement, and with divine appointment of Joshua). Second is a double tradition of transfer of leadership: Although Moses begins a public ceremony in order himself to appoint the new leader (vv. 7–8), a variant tradition has God commission Joshua directly (vv. 14–15,23). Third is a double tradition of Moses' writing: one of "the book . . . of this law" (v. 24) and one of "this song" (v. 19). Each is a "witness" (vv. 21,26). The first tradition, which refers to Deuteronomy, was supplemented by the second in order to integrate the following "Song of Moses" (32.1–43). Fourth, in the "Song" tradition, Israel's future apostasy is already a foregone conclusion (vv. 16–22,28–29); in the covenant-making tradition, there is yet hope that, by taking the law to heart, Israel might avoid catastrophe (vv. 9–13,24–27). **2:** *One hundred twenty years old,* the Hebrew places the age first, thus immediately announcing the key issue: Moses has reached the maximum age for humans (Gen 6.3), making it urgent to assure continuity of leadership. *I am no longer able to get about,* lit. "to go out and come in," i.e., lead the nation in military campaigns (28.6; Num 27.17; 1 Kings 3.7; cf. 2 Sam 11.1). **2–3:** Resumes 1.37–38; 3.27–28. The death of a key leader and the transfer of his authority mark important turning points within the larger context of the Deuteronomistic History and partially follow a common model (cf. Josh 23.2; 1 Sam 12.2; 1 Kings 2.1–2). **4:** The successful military campaigns in Transjordan provide assurance in the conquest of Canaan; Moses aims to counter Israel's intimidation (1.27–28;

people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. [8] It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

[9] Then Moses wrote down this law, and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. [10] Moses commanded them: "Every seventh year, in the scheduled year of remission, during the festival of booths,[a] [11] when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. [12] Assemble the people—men, women, and children, as well as the aliens residing in your towns—so that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God and to observe diligently all the words of this law, [13] and so that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are crossing over the Jordan to possess."

[14] The LORD said to Moses, "Your time to die is near; call Joshua and present yourselves in the tent of meeting, so that I may commission him." So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the tent of meeting, [15] and the LORD appeared at the tent in a pillar of cloud; the pillar of cloud stood at the entrance to the tent.

[16] The LORD said to Moses, "Soon you will lie down with your ancestors. Then this people will begin to prostitute themselves to the foreign gods in their midst, the gods of the land into which they are going; they will forsake me, breaking my covenant that I have made with them. [17] My anger will be kindled against them in that day. I will forsake them and hide my face from them; they will become easy prey, and many terrible troubles will come upon them. In that day they will say, 'Have not these troubles come upon us because our God is not in our midst?' [18] On that day I will surely hide my face on account of all the evil they have done by turning to other gods. [19] Now therefore write this song, and teach it to the Israelites; put it in their mouths, in order that this song may be a witness for me against the Israelites. [20] For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I promised on oath to their ancestors, and they have eaten their fill and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, despising me and breaking my covenant. [21] And when many terrible troubles come upon them, this song will confront them as a witness, because it will not be lost from the mouths of their descendants. For I know what they are inclined to do even now, before I have brought them into the land that I promised them on oath." [22] That very day Moses wrote this song and taught it to the Israelites.

[23] Then the LORD commissioned Joshua son of Nun and said, "Be strong and bold, for

[a] Or *tabernacles*; Heb *succoth*

Num 13–14). **5:** *Command,* the ban (7.1–7; 12.29–31; 20.16–18). **9–13:** The institution of a covenant ceremony to be held in the sabbatical year (15.1–11), during the *festival of booths* (16.13–15). **12:** Stipulating that the teaching (NRSV "law"; Heb "torah") is taught to women, minors, and aliens, the law does not restrict the responsibility to observe the covenant to males (contrast Ex 19.15). **14:** *Tent of meeting,* in the Yahwistic source (J), the site outside camp where God speaks to Moses, with Joshua in attendance (Ex 33.7–11); contrast the Priestly literature's tabernacle, located in the center of the Israelite encampment, which houses the ark of the covenant and the altar (Ex 26–27; Num 7.1–3; 18.1–7). *So that I may commission him,* the standard tradition involves direct commission by Moses at God's command (3.27–28; 34.9; Num 27.18–23). **15:** The double reference to the *pillar of cloud,* located both *at* [or, "in"] *the tent* (cf. Ex 30.36; 40.34–35; Lev 16.2) and *at the entrance to the tent* (cf. Ex 33.9–10; Num 12.5) blends the traditions associated with each of the two tents (see v. 14n.). **17–18:** *Our God,* better, "our gods": The people will have strayed so far from the covenant that they attribute the resulting divine punishment to other gods, leading to God's angry response. **22–23:** The sequence of *Moses wrote* (v. 22) and . . . *commissioned* (v. 23) uses the same key terms as "When Moses finished writing . . . Moses commanded" (vv. 24–25). The repetition of the paired terms provided a means for editors to insert the section on the song (vv. 16–22). **23:** *The LORD commissioned,* lit. "he commanded," with no subject identified. NRSV has added the divine reference to clarify that the verse does not continue v. 22, but directly resumes vv. 14–15.

you shall bring the Israelites into the land that I promised them; I will be with you."

24 When Moses had finished writing down in a book the words of this law to the very end, 25 Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, 26 "Take this book of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God; let it remain there as a witness against you. 27 For I know well how rebellious and stubborn you are. If you already have been so rebellious toward the LORD while I am still alive among you, how much more after my death! 28 Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officials, so that I may recite these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to witness against them. 29 For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, turning aside from the way that I have commanded you. In time to come trouble will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger through the work of your hands."

30 Then Moses recited the words of this song, to the very end, in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel:

32 Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak;
let the earth hear the words of my mouth.
2 May my teaching drop like the rain,
my speech condense like the dew;
like gentle rain on grass,
like showers on new growth.
3 For I will proclaim the name of the LORD;
ascribe greatness to our God!

4 The Rock, his work is perfect,
and all his ways are just.
A faithful God, without deceit,
just and upright is he;
5 yet his degenerate children have dealt falsely with him,[a]
a perverse and crooked generation.
6 Do you thus repay the LORD,
O foolish and senseless people?
Is not he your father, who created you,
who made you and established you?
7 Remember the days of old,
consider the years long past;
ask your father, and he will inform you;
your elders, and they will tell you.
8 When the Most High[b] apportioned the nations,
when he divided humankind,
he fixed the boundaries of the peoples
according to the number of the gods;[c]
9 the LORD's own portion was his people,
Jacob his allotted share.

10 He sustained[d] him in a desert land,
in a howling wilderness waste;

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Traditional rendering of Heb *Elyon*
[c] Q Ms Compare Gk Tg: MT *the Israelites*
[d] Sam Gk Compare Tg: MT *found*

31.30–32.43: The Song of Moses. The Song is a late insertion that reflects upon Israel's history, probably presupposing the exile. In form it is a revised and expanded prophetic lawsuit (cf. Isa 1; Jer 2; Mic 6; Ps 50) with this structure: introduction and summoning of witnesses (vv. 1–3); accusation (vv. 4–6); recital of God's loving actions (vv. 7–14); indictment (vv. 15–18); declaration of punishment (vv. 19–25). Yet God interrupts his own judicial sentence to recognize a risk to his honor: Other nations might conclude that Israel's God was weak should they see Israel destroyed (vv. 26–27). God reverses himself, cancels the punishment, and decides instead to punish Israel's enemies so as to vindicate Israel (vv. 28–42). The Song concludes with a call for the divine council to praise God for his actions; the call may originate from within the divine council itself (v. 43; similarly Ps 29.1). A prose frame links the Song to Deuteronomy, identifying Moses, otherwise unmentioned, as its speaker (31.30; 32.44). **32.2:** *Teaching,* the original prophetic lawsuit has been combined with wisdom themes (Prov 1.5; 4.2; 17.21). **4:** *Rock,* more accurately, "Mountain," a title applied to the high god of ancient Canaan (see v. 8n.) and to the biblical God (vv. 15,18,30–31,37; Isa 44.8; Ps 78.35). **6:** *Created you,* when God redeemed Israel from Egypt (Ex 15.16, correcting NRSV "acquired"). **8:** *Most High,* or *Elyon* (text note *b*), is the title of El, the senior god who sat at the head of the divine council in the Ugaritic literature of ancient Canaan. The Bible applies El's title to Israel's God (Gen 14.18–22; Num 24.16; Ps 46.4; 47.2; esp. 78.35, where it is parallel to Rock). *Gods,* the lesser gods who make up the divine council (Ps 82.1; 89.6–7), to each of whom Elyon here assigns a foreign nation. **9:** *The LORD's own portion,* NRSV has added *own* in order to identify Yahweh with Elyon and avoid the impression that Yahweh is merely a member of the pantheon; see also 4.19n. **10:** *Sustained,* more

he shielded him, cared for him,
guarded him as the apple of his eye.
11 As an eagle stirs up its nest,
and hovers over its young;
as it spreads its wings, takes them up,
and bears them aloft on its pinions,
12 the LORD alone guided him;
no foreign god was with him.
13 He set him atop the heights of the land,
and fed him with[a] produce of the field;
he nursed him with honey from the crags,
with oil from flinty rock;
14 curds from the herd, and milk from the flock,
with fat of lambs and rams;
Bashan bulls and goats,
together with the choicest wheat—
you drank fine wine from the blood of grapes.
15 Jacob ate his fill;[b]
Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked.
You grew fat, bloated, and gorged!
He abandoned God who made him,
and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.
16 They made him jealous with strange gods,
with abhorrent things they provoked him.
17 They sacrificed to demons, not God,
to deities they had never known,
to new ones recently arrived,
whom your ancestors had not feared.
18 You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you;[c]
you forgot the God who gave you birth.
19 The LORD saw it, and was jealous;[d]
he spurned[e] his sons and daughters.
20 He said: I will hide my face from them,
I will see what their end will be;
for they are a perverse generation,
children in whom there is no faithfulness.
21 They made me jealous with what is no god,
provoked me with their idols.
So I will make them jealous with what is no people,
provoke them with a foolish nation.
22 For a fire is kindled by my anger,
and burns to the depths of Sheol;
it devours the earth and its increase,
and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.
23 I will heap disasters upon them,
spend my arrows against them:
24 wasting hunger,
burning consumption,
bitter pestilence.
The teeth of beasts I will send against them,
with venom of things crawling in the dust.
25 In the street the sword shall bereave,
and in the chambers terror,

[a] Sam Gk Syr Tg: MT *he ate*
[b] Q Mss Sam Gk: MT lacks *Jacob ate his fill*
[c] Or *that begot you*
[d] Q Mss Gk: MT lacks *was jealous*
[e] Cn: Heb *he spurned because of provocation*

likely "found" (Hos 9.10). Overlooking the Egypt traditions, the Song here traces the beginnings of Israel to the wilderness period, romanticizing its ideal purity (similarly Hos 2.14–15; Jer 2.2–3; contrast Deut 9.6–7,22–27; Ezek 20). *Apple of his eye,* lit. the aperture or pupil of the eye. **11:** Israel as God's fledgling; see Ex 19.4. **13:** *Heights,* see Ex 15.17. **14:** *Curds,* symbolic of extravagant hospitality offered to special guests (Gen 18.8; Judg 5.25). *Bashan,* in northern Transjordan, was famous for its cattle. **15:** *Jeshurun,* probably meaning "upright," is a poetic term for Israel (33.5,26; Isa 44.2). **17:** *Demons,* better, "protective spirits" (also Ps 106.37). *Not God,* the language is sarcastic: "a non-god" (see v. 21). *To deities,* better, "to gods." **18:** God is depicted as a woman; *gave you birth* refers specifically to labor pain (Isa 51.2; cf. Isa 42.14). **21:** *Jealous* refers to the covenant's demand for exclusive loyalty to God (5.8; 6.15; Num 25.11). Accordingly, the punishment for breach of the covenant metes out precise retributive justice (see 19.19n.). The Hebrew emphasizes the sarcasm: thus, *with what is no god* and *what is no people,* lit. "with a non-god," "with a non-people." *Their idols,* lit. "their vapors" or "their vanities," even "their vapidities" (Jer 8.19; 10.15; 16.19; Eccl 1.2). **22:** *Sheol,* the underworld (Gen 37.35; 1 Sam 2.6; Ps 139.8); the abode of all the dead, not a place of damnation like the later idea of hell. **23:** *Arrows,* divine punishments (v. 42; Ezek 5.16; Ps 7.13; 18.14; 38.2). **24:** *Burning consumption,* the name of the Ugaritic god of pestilence; thus better, "devoured

for young man and woman alike,
nursing child and old gray head.
[26] I thought to scatter them[a]
and blot out the memory of them from humankind;
[27] but I feared provocation by the enemy,
for their adversaries might misunderstand
and say, "Our hand is triumphant;
it was not the LORD who did all this."

[28] They are a nation void of sense;
there is no understanding in them.
[29] If they were wise, they would understand this;
they would discern what the end would be.
[30] How could one have routed a thousand,
and two put a myriad to flight,
unless their Rock had sold them,
the LORD had given them up?
[31] Indeed their rock is not like our Rock;
our enemies are fools.[a]
[32] Their vine comes from the vinestock of Sodom,
from the vineyards of Gomorrah;
their grapes are grapes of poison,
their clusters are bitter;
[33] their wine is the poison of serpents,
the cruel venom of asps.

[34] Is not this laid up in store with me,
sealed up in my treasuries?
[35] Vengeance is mine, and recompense,
for the time when their foot shall slip;
because the day of their calamity is at hand,
their doom comes swiftly.

[36] Indeed the LORD will vindicate his people,
have compassion on his servants,
when he sees that their power is gone,
neither bond nor free remaining.
[37] Then he will say: Where are their gods,
the rock in which they took refuge,
[38] who ate the fat of their sacrifices,
and drank the wine of their libations?
Let them rise up and help you,
let them be your protection!

[39] See now that I, even I, am he;
there is no god besides me.
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
and no one can deliver from my hand.
[40] For I lift up my hand to heaven,
and swear: As I live forever,
[41] when I whet my flashing sword,
and my hand takes hold on judgment;
I will take vengeance on my adversaries,
and will repay those who hate me.
[42] I will make my arrows drunk with blood,
and my sword shall devour flesh—
with the blood of the slain and the captives,
from the long-haired enemy.

[a] Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain

by Plague." **25:** *Woman,* better, "young woman," to emphasize the double merism (28.3–6n.), which symbolizes the totality of the slaughter. **26–27:** The Song here pivots from judgment of Israel to her vindication at the expense of the foreign invaders. **27:** *I feared,* God has feelings and vulnerabilities (as at Gen 6.6). **28–33:** God's soliloquy is interrupted by another voice, who refers to God in the third person and speaks on behalf of Israel (vv. 30–31). **28–29:** The foreign nation, like Israel, has failed in wisdom, justifying God's judgment (see v. 6). **30:** Ironically inverts the holy war idea (3.22; 20.1): The enemy is reproached for failing to understand that it owes its triumph over Israel to God rather than force of arms. God will thus punish Israel's conquerors to preserve his own honor (see 9.25–29; Num 14.13–16). **32:** *Sodom . . . Gomorrah,* here symbolizing moral corruption more than ruinous devastation (cf. 29.23n.). **34:** *This,* the punishment of the foreign nation, which is about to be announced (vv. 35–42). *Laid up . . . sealed up,* the formal legal procedures for rolling and then sealing a witnessed deed or contract with wax, so that the unaltered document can subsequently be introduced into court as evidence (Isa 8.16; Jer 32.9–15). **35:** *Vengeance,* better, "vindication," since the idea is not revenge but justice. **36:** *Their power is gone, neither bond nor free,* God will act when no one survives who can take charge or provide assistance (2 Kings 14.26; cf. 1 Kings 14.10; 21.21; 2 Kings 9.8). **39:** Similar to exilic Second Isaiah (Isa 41.4; 43.10,13; 44.6; 45.6–7,22; 48.12). **41:** *Takes,* lit. "returns," in retributive justice. Thus, *vengeance* gives the wrong idea (see v. 35n.). *Those who hate me,* treaty language that refers to disloyal action that violates the covenant; thus better

43 Praise, O heavens,[a] his people,
worship him, all you gods![b]
For he will avenge the blood of his children,[c]
and take vengeance on his adversaries;
he will repay those who hate him,[b]
and cleanse the land for his people.[d]

44 Moses came and recited all the words of this song in the hearing of the people, he and Joshua[e] son of Nun. 45 When Moses had finished reciting all these words to all Israel, 46 he said to them: "Take to heart all the words that I am giving in witness against you today; give them as a command to your children, so that they may diligently observe all the words of this law. 47 This is no trifling matter for you, but rather your very life; through it you may live long in the land that you are crossing over the Jordan to possess."

48 On that very day the LORD addressed Moses as follows: 49 "Ascend this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, across from Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites for a possession; 50 you shall die there on the mountain that you ascend and shall be gathered to your kin, as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his kin; 51 because both of you broke faith with me among the Israelites at the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, by failing to maintain my holiness among the Israelites. 52 Although you may view the land from a distance, you shall not enter it—the land that I am giving to the Israelites."

33 This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites before his death. 2 He said:

The LORD came from Sinai,
and dawned from Seir upon us;[f]
he shone forth from Mount Paran.
With him were myriads of holy ones;[g]

a Q Ms Gk: MT *nations*
b Q Ms Gk: MT lacks this line
c Q Ms Gk: MT *his servants*
d Q Ms Sam Gk Vg: MT *his land his people*
e Sam Gk Syr Vg: MT *Hoshea*
f Gk Syr Vg Compare Tg: Heb *upon them*
g Cn Compare Gk Sam Syr Vg: MT *He came from Ribeboth-kodesh,*

translated, "those who reject me" (5.9). **43:** The second, fourth, and fifth lines have been restored in light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. With *heavens* and *land,* the verse forms an inclusio to "heavens . . . earth" (v. 1), thus framing the poem and returning the focus to Israel's impending entry into the promised land. His people, instead, referring to God: "O heavens, rejoice with him!" *All you gods,* the divine council (v. 8n.; Ps 29.1), probably removed from the received Heb text because of the conflict with monotheism (see vv. 8–9n.). *Avenge the blood,* God as divine blood avenger (cf. 19.6), who removes the stain of Israel's blood from the land by requiting the aggressor for having spilled it (19.11–13). *Cleanse,* since the moral stain on the land can only be "wiped clean" (the word's literal meaning) with the blood of the murderer (Num 35.33–34; cf. Deut 21.8): here, the foreign nation. God's position is nonetheless morally ambiguous, since it was he who had sanctioned the foreign invasion as punishment for Israel's wrongdoing (vv. 19–26). *His people,* instead, referring to God: "O heavens, rejoice with him!"

32.44–47: Double conclusion to the Song. Two originally separate conclusions joined by Deuteronomy's editors. **44:** *All the words . . . ,* an inclusio (see 31.30). **45–47:** A separate section, the original continuation of 31.29 prior to the insertion of the Song. **46:** *All the words,* the laws of Deuteronomy (31.24); now, following the insertion of the Song, reinterpreted to refer to both.

32.48–52: Moses commanded to die. This section repeats the announcement of Moses' death (Num 27.12–14) and thus joins it to its logical continuation, the narrative of that death (Deut 34). The original connection between these two Priestly sections was broken by Deuteronomy's insertion into the Pentateuch. **49:** *This mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo,* as in the Priestly narrative (Num 27.12; 33.47); but, according to the Deuteronomistic tradition, Pisgah (3.27). The two traditions are joined at 34.1. **50:** *You shall die,* lit. "Die . . . !" This unusual imperative establishes that Moses both lives and dies at God's command (34.5n.). *Gathered to your kin,* burial in a family tomb, where the bones of the generations would be gathered together (2 Kings 8.24; 22.20; cf. 1 Kings 13.31); here used metaphorically, since Moses' burial place is unknown (34.6). *Mount Hor,* consistent with the Priestly tradition (Num 20.22–29; 33.37–39); but, in the Deuteronomistic tradition, "Moserah" (10.6). **51:** *You broke faith,* see Num 20.1–13; cf. 1.37n.; 4.21.

33.1–29: The Blessing of Moses. In form a father's blessing of his progeny when death is imminent (Gen 27.27–29; 48.15–16; 49.1–28; cf. 1 Kings 2.1–4), Moses' address to the tribes arrayed before him (29.2,10; 31.7,30)

at his right, a host of his own.[a]
[3] Indeed, O favorite among[b] peoples,
all his holy ones were in your charge;
they marched at your heels,
accepted direction from you.
[4] Moses charged us with the law,
as a possession for the assembly of Jacob.
[5] There arose a king in Jeshurun,
when the leaders of the people assembled—
the united tribes of Israel.

[6] May Reuben live, and not die out,
even though his numbers are few.

[7] And this he said of Judah:
O LORD, give heed to Judah,
and bring him to his people;
strengthen his hands for him,[c]
and be a help against his adversaries.

[8] And of Levi he said:
Give to Levi[d] your Thummim,
and your Urim to your loyal one,
whom you tested at Massah,
with whom you contended at the waters of Meribah;
[9] who said of his father and mother,
"I regard them not";
he ignored his kin,
and did not acknowledge his children.

[a] Cn Compare Gk: meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *O lover of the*
[c] Cn: Heb *with his hands he contended*
[d] Q Ms Gk: MT lacks *Give to Levi*

treats all Israel as his own progeny, gathered before the deathbed (Gen 48.2; 49.33). Following the model of other blessings, the speaker addresses the tribes in the singular, as if they were individual sons (contrast v. 19). This poem is clearly an insertion, intruding between God's command to Moses to ascend Nebo to prepare for his death (32.49–50) and Moses' compliance (34.1–5). The literary model of the patriarchal blessing of the twelve tribes (vv. 6–25) has been consciously embedded in a framing poem addressed to a united Israel (vv. 1–5,26–29) that imitates victory hymns to the divine warrior (Judg 5; Ps 18.7–15; Hab 3; cf. Ex 15). That older model has been significantly transformed, however. In vv. 1–4, the expected climax of the divine theophany in the military defeat of the enemy has been totally eclipsed (cf. vv. 26–29), although it is the logical precondition for the proclamation of God as king (v. 5). The new climax is instead Moses' proclamation of Torah (v. 4n.). The reference here to Sinai instead of Deuteronomy's usual Horeb (see 1.2n.) is an attempt to integrate Deuteronomy with the other literary sources of the Pentateuch (Ex 19–20; Lev 25.1; Num 10.12). The editors have used an inclusio pattern to embed the blessing (with its focus upon the individual tribes) into the framing hymn to the divine warrior (where united Israel is the focus). Thus the word symmetry LORD:Jacob:Jeshurun::Jeshurun´:Jacob´:LORD´ (A:B:C::C´:B´:A´; vv. 2,4,5,26,28,29) brackets the inserted blessing. Older hymns to the divine warrior sometimes list the tribes' contributions to the battle (Judg 5.14–18), which facilitates the combination of the two models. Although it draws upon older textual traditions, the poem in its present form is almost certainly exilic or postexilic. The combination of two separate literary models and the emphasis of divinely revealed Torah rather than the divine warrior's manifestation in battle suggest the later literary setting. **1:** *Man of God,* a type of prophet (Josh 14.6; 1 Sam 9.6; 1 Kings 13.1–32; 17.18,24; 2 Kings 4.7–41); this term is not used earlier of Moses in Deuteronomy. **2:** *The LORD . . . dawned,* God's departure from his distant mountain stronghold, dramatically coming to the rescue of his people, closely follows the model of Judg 5.4; Hab 3.3. *Myriads of holy ones,* the divine council who accompany God into battle (32.8n.; Ps 68.17; 89.7). *Sinai . . . Seir,* the parallelism locates *Sinai* near *Seir,* associated with Edom (Judg 5.4), in southern Transjordan. This tradition diverges from the one placing the mountain in the Sinai Peninsula, far to the southwest. **3:** *His holy ones,* originally, the divine council of v. 2, reinterpreted to refer to Israel (7.6; 14.2,21; 26.19; 28.9; Lev 19.2; Num 16.3) to provide a transition to v. 4. **4:** *Moses charged us,* since Moses is himself the speaker (v. 1), this verse is an insertion that presents the promulgation of the Torah (NRSV "law") as the climax of the divine warrior's theophany. **5:** *A king,* almost certainly God as divine king of Israel (Ex 15.18; Num 23.21; Judg 8.22–23; 1 Sam 8.7; Isa 33.22; Ps 29.10). *Jeshurun,* see 32.15n. **6:** *Reuben,* who once had the leadership of the firstborn (see Gen 49.3–4), is apparently threatened with extinction. (Simeon, Jacob's second born, is entirely missing.) **7:** *Judah,* in sore trouble because of an unnamed adversary, should be helped by other tribes. **8–11:** *Levi*, once a warlike tribe (Gen 49.5–7), is to receive the prerogatives of the priesthood: to teach *law,* or Torah (v. 10), and to officiate at the altar. **8:** *Thummim* and

For they observed your word,
and kept your covenant.
10 They teach Jacob your ordinances,
and Israel your law;
they place incense before you,
and whole burnt offerings on your altar.
11 Bless, O LORD, his substance,
and accept the work of his hands;
crush the loins of his adversaries,
of those that hate him, so that they do not rise again.

12 Of Benjamin he said:
The beloved of the LORD rests in safety—
the High God[a] surrounds him all day long—
the beloved[b] rests between his shoulders.

13 And of Joseph he said:
Blessed by the LORD be his land,
with the choice gifts of heaven above,
and of the deep that lies beneath;
14 with the choice fruits of the sun,
and the rich yield of the months;
15 with the finest produce of the ancient mountains,
and the abundance of the everlasting hills;
16 with the choice gifts of the earth and its fullness,
and the favor of the one who dwells on Sinai.[c]
Let these come on the head of Joseph,
on the brow of the prince among his brothers.
17 A firstborn[d] bull—majesty is his!
His horns are the horns of a wild ox;
with them he gores the peoples,
driving them to[e] the ends of the earth;
such are the myriads of Ephraim,
such the thousands of Manasseh.

18 And of Zebulun he said:
Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out;
and Issachar, in your tents.
19 They call peoples to the mountain;
there they offer the right sacrifices;
for they suck the affluence of the seas
and the hidden treasures of the sand.

20 And of Gad he said:
Blessed be the enlargement of Gad!
Gad lives like a lion;
he tears at arm and scalp.
21 He chose the best for himself,
for there a commander's allotment was reserved;
he came at the head of the people,
he executed the justice of the LORD,
and his ordinances for Israel.

22 And of Dan he said:
Dan is a lion's whelp
that leaps forth from Bashan.

[a] Heb *above him*
[b] Heb *he*
[c] Cn: Heb *in the bush*
[d] Q Ms Gk Syr Vg: MT *His firstborn*
[e] Cn: Heb *the peoples, together*

Urim, the priestly divination devices (Ex 28.30; Ezra 2.63). *Massah* and *Meribah,* see Ex 17.1–7; Num 20.2–13. **9:** On Levi's zealous loyalty to the covenant, at the expense of *father and mother . . . kin, and . . . his children,* thus complying with 13.7, see Ex 32.25–29. **13–17:** See Gen 49.25–26. **16–17:** By ascribing primacy of rule and the status of *firstborn* to Joseph, this blessing conflicts with the law affirming the norm of primogeniture (21.15–17). **16:** *Who dwells on Sinai* refers to Ex 3.1–6 (see text note *c*); 19.1–20.21. *Prince,* Joseph (the Northern Kingdom, destroyed in 722 BCE) enjoyed greater prestige than Judah (v. 7). **17:** *Ephraim* and *Manasseh,* the two tribes making up "the house of Joseph" (Gen 48.13–14). **18–19:** *Zebulun* and *Issachar* will enjoy great influence owing to the resources of the Mediterranean and Lake Chinnereth, later known as the Sea of Galilee (Gen 49.13). **20–21:** *Gad* occupied the *best* tableland in Transjordan but aided the other tribes in the occupation of Canaan (Num 32). **22:** *Dan,* vigorous as a *lion's whelp,* must here already have migrated from its original tribal allotment on the coastal

[23] And of Naphtali he said:
O Naphtali, sated with favor,
full of the blessing of the LORD,
possess the west and the south.

[24] And of Asher he said:
Most blessed of sons be Asher;
may he be the favorite of his brothers,
and may he dip his foot in oil.
[25] Your bars are iron and bronze;
and as your days, so is your strength.

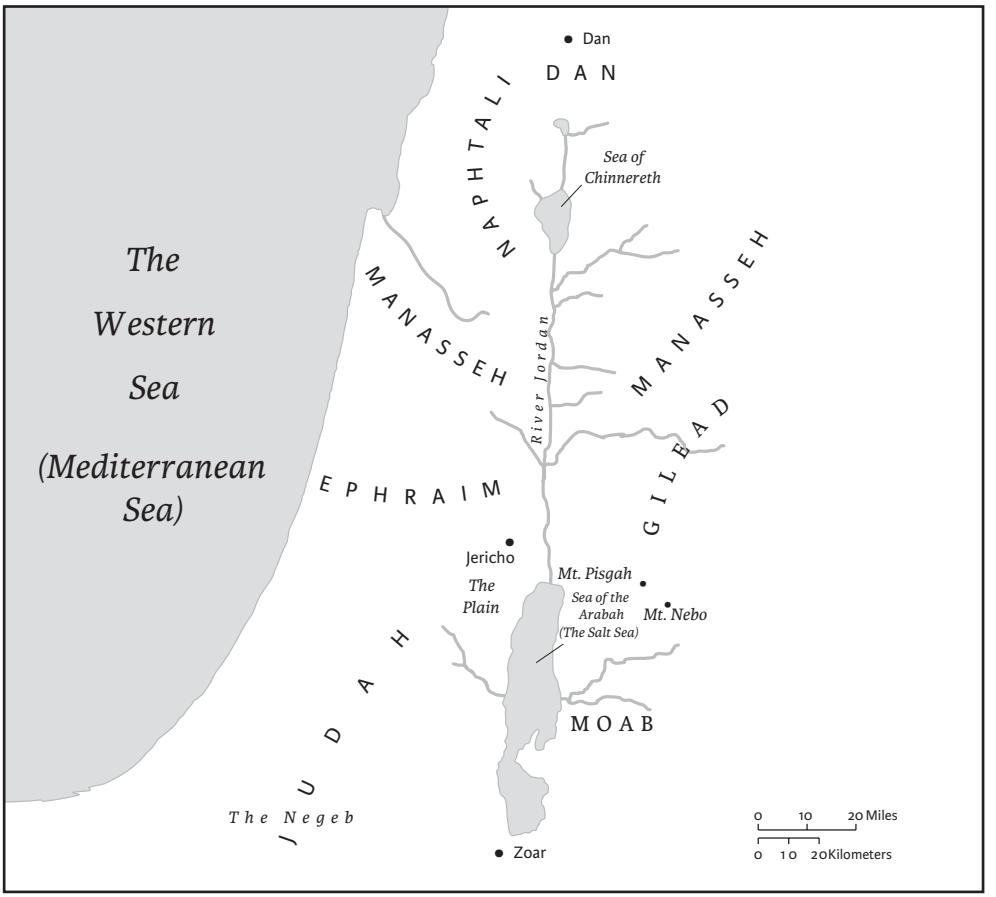
[26] There is none like God, O Jeshurun,
who rides through the heavens to your help,
majestic through the skies.
[27] He subdues the ancient gods,[a]
shatters[b] the forces of old;[c]
he drove out the enemy before you,
and said, "Destroy!"
[28] So Israel lives in safety,
untroubled is Jacob's abode[d]
in a land of grain and wine,
where the heavens drop down dew.
[29] Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you,
a people saved by the LORD,
the shield of your help,
and the sword of your triumph!
Your enemies shall come fawning to you,
and you shall tread on their backs.

34 Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, [2] all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, [3] the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. [4] The LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there." [5] Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the LORD's command. [6] He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day.

[a] Or *The eternal God is a dwelling place*
[b] Cn: Heb *from underneath*
[c] Or *the everlasting arms*
[d] Or *fountain*

plain to the far north at the base of Mount Hermon (Judg 18). *Bashan,* see 32.14n. **23:** *Naphtali,* located in the region of the Sea of Galilee *west* and *south* of Dan. **24–25:** *Asher,* located below Phoenicia, is to be strong and prosperous. **26–29:** The resumption of the hymn to the divine warrior (vv. 2–5), and a return to the focus upon *Jeshurun* (v. 26), meaning all *Israel* (v. 28). **26:** Much like the Canaanite storm god Baal, Israel's divine warrior rides upon the clouds (Ps 18.10; 68.33; Isa 19.1). **27:** NRSV justifiably reinterprets the Hebrew (see text notes *a, b*) in order to continue the mythic imagery of v. 26. **28:** As in Ugaritic epic, the theophany of the divine warrior and his proclamation as king results in the fertility of the land. **29:** *Tread on their backs,* a standard symbol of military triumph (Josh 10.24; Ps 110.1; also attested in Neo-Assyrian reliefs).

34.1–12: The death of Moses. This chapter, the original continuation of ch 31 and 32.48–52, highlights the absence of access to Moses; since his burial site is unknown, it cannot become a venerated shrine. The Torah alone is his enduring bequest. At another level, however, it also continues Num 27, where God had commanded Moses to "go up this mountain" to survey the promised land before his death, and to "lay your hand" upon Joshua, to transfer the mantle of authority to him (vv. 12,18), bracketing Deuteronomy and suggesting that editors interrupted the narrative in order to include Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch. **1:** *Went up,* responding to the command of 32.49; Num 27.12. The verse joins two different traditions about the site of Moses' death: *Mount Nebo,* which is in Transjordan, east of Jericho; and Mount *Pisgah,* which is slightly to its west, and unmentioned in 32.49. Seeking to preserve both traditions, the editor presents them as if they were the same. **2–3:** The lofty vantage point allows Moses to look northward to the Sea of Galilee (area of the tribal allotment of Dan and *Naphtali*), to the *Western Sea* (the Mediterranean), south to the *Negeb* desert and along the Jordan rift valley as far south as *Zoar* (once located at the southern end of the Dead Sea as one of the "cities of the Plain"; Gen 14.2,8; 19.29). **5:** *At the LORD's command,* see 32.50n. The unusual formulation greatly honors Moses, who, despite advanced age, does not die of old age nor succumb to physical or intellectual infirmity. **6:** *He was buried,* the Heb states, "He buried him," a clear indication that God himself buried Moses, as he himself sealed Noah into the ark (Gen 7.16). Instead of Moses' progeny assuming the responsibility of caring for the dead, God



What Moses saw from Mt. Nebo.

7 Moses was one hundred twenty years old
when he died; his sight was unimpaired and
his vigor had not abated. 8 The Israelites wept
for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days;
then the period of mourning for Moses was
ended.

9 Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit
of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands
on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing
as the LORD had commanded Moses.

10 Never since has there arisen a prophet
in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew

undertook it personally. *Beth-peor,* 3.29; 4.46; Josh 13.20. *No one knows his burial place,* thus precluding pilgrimages to the site as a shrine. **7:** *One hundred twenty,* see 31.2n. **8:** *Thirty days,* so also for Aaron (Num 20.29), the full mourning period stipulated for a parent (21.13). **9:** *Full of the spirit of wisdom,* as at 1.13 and 16.18–20, Deuteronomy revises earlier traditions to stress wisdom as the essential qualification of office, and thus what Joshua receives from Moses. In Num 27.18, Joshua already possessed an undefined "spirit" (often associated with prophecy or possession), while Moses was to transfer his "authority" to him. *Laid his hands on him,* as at Num 27.22–23, a means of transfer of attributes (Lev 16.21; Num 8.10–13), here used for investiture into office. **10–12:** Moses as the greatest exemplar of prophecy both in direct access to divine revelation and in power to work miracles. The double elevation, which differs from his more human representation elsewhere in the book, suggests an editor's later, idealizing retrospective, with Deuteronomy now worked into the Pentateuch as a whole. **10:** *Never since,* more correctly, "But there never again arose in Israel a prophet like Moses." NRSV obscures the discrepancy between the perspective of this verse and the divine promise to Moses that the line of

face to face. 11 He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, 12 and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

prophetic succession will continue in the future: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you" (18.18). *Face to face,* rather than through dreams or visions (13.1); similarly, Ex 33.11; Num 12.8–10. Other traditions reject the concept that Moses had such direct access to God (Ex 33.20–23).

INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

THE HISTORICAL BOOKS AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

The Christian bishop Athanasius, in the fourth century CE, first used the term "histories" for this section of the Bible, which now comprises the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. It is a misleading title, since these books cover a wide range of genres and often are not historical in modern senses of the word. Furthermore, there are several books that are similar to some of these "historical books," yet they are found in different sections of the Bible.

Large sections of the preceding books of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers, and much of the opening section of Deuteronomy, contain narratives about the past. Similarly, there are several psalms that survey the past (e.g., Pss 78, 105, 106, 107). Yet, this material is not incorporated into the Historical Books. Thus, this section does not represent the collection of all works of the same genre, and its development as a canonical division is best understood in relation to the broader development of the biblical canon. Moreover, in the traditional Jewish arrangement of the books of the Bible, the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings are called the Former Prophets, thus beginning the second major division of the Hebrew Bible, the Prophets, which follows the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. The books of Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, however, are found in the third major division, the Writings. Given this somewhat artificial nature of the canonical section the Historical Books, the rest of this introduction examines the nature of biblical historical texts, broadly construed, with a focus on the books Joshua through Esther, which now comprise the section of the Bible called Historical Books.

The idea that historical writing should capture the events "as they really were," that historians should attempt to write an objective account of the events of the past, is a notion that developed in European universities in modern times. Before that, history was typically didactic in nature, teaching the readers how to be good citizens or how to lead proper religious lives. Sometimes histories were produced in the royal court, in which case they were apologetic, showing how the king fulfilled his royal duties; elsewhere they were written by religious officials who aimed to show that their particular religious practices were correct. Surviving historical documents from the ancient Near East show similar religious and ideological goals. Thus, it should not be surprising that the biblical writers are not necessarily interested in the accurate recording of real events; rather, they use narratives about the past to illustrate various issues of significance to their audience, the ancient Israelite community.

It is easiest to understand the biblical notion of history by first focusing on works that are outside this canonical division. Exodus 13.3 begins: "Moses said to the people, 'Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'" This would seem to suggest the importance of history for its own sake. However, this unit continues with a set of commandments that directly result from this event: "no leavened bread shall be eaten" (v. 3); "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival to the Lord" (v. 6); "no leavened bread shall be seen in your possession, and no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory" (v. 7); "You shall tell your child on that day" (v. 8); "It shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead" (v. 9); "you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your livestock that are males shall be the Lord's" (v. 12). These laws suggest the Exodus is to be remembered not as a disembodied historical event, as the beginning of v. 3 might suggest; rather, the Exodus is key because it serves as the basis for the observance of a central set of laws or norms.

The use of historical material in Psalms is even more instructive, since in them traditions about the past are typically found in a context that explicitly highlights their theological significance or purpose. For example, in Psalm 78 a particular set of traditions is chosen and shaped so

> "that the next generation might know them,
> the children yet unborn,

and rise up and tell them to their children,
so that they should set their hope in God,
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;
and that they should not be like their ancestors,
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast,
whose spirit was not faithful to God" (vv. 6–8).

Psalm 106 uses "history" quite differently. It tells how God saved Israel time after time, despite their covenant violations, forming an argument to God that they should be rescued again:

"Save us, O LORD our God,
and gather us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and glory in your praise" (v. 47).

Unfortunately, the Historical Books are usually not as explicit about their purposes as these psalms or Exodus 13; for this reason, the Historical Books need to be subjected to internal analysis, in order to see what motivations and interests shaped them.

ORGANIZATION INTO BOOKS AND LARGER UNITS

In pursuing this task, we must be mindful that the division of some biblical writings into separate books is just as arbitrary as the designation of a particular set of books as a single canonical unit, such as Historical Books. The division of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles into two separate books is not original and was first done in the Greek Bible (the Septuagint [LXX]) so that each book would be of more reasonable size. In the formation of the canon, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally considered a single work, and it is possible that the books of Joshua and Judges, which blend together well (see especially Josh 24.29–31 and Judg 2.8–10), were also perceived as a single work at an earlier period. Even the divisions between these larger works are not always certain; the first two chapters of Kings, for example, which narrate events at the end of David's life, fit the book of Samuel better than their current place.

In fact, it has been proposed that since the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, along with the preceding book of Deuteronomy, fit so well together, these five books were edited together as a single work. This work is typically called the Deuteronomistic History, meaning the history written under the influence of ideas found in the book of Deuteronomy. This theory has much to commend it: These five books do read as a unified whole from a chronological perspective, narrating a continuous history from the end of the life of Moses through the Babylonian exile in the early sixth century BCE, and they share many phrases and ideological notions, such as an insistence on exclusive worship of God and the tragic consequences of idolatry, a concern with the centrality of Jerusalem, and a belief in the eternal supremacy of the dynasty founded by King David. If this theory is correct, the size of the Deuteronomistic History, and the long period that it covers, is quite remarkable, especially for an ancient historical work.

Many details of this theory remain debated; some scholars suggest that these books are not unified enough to be the work of a single individual, intellectual school, or movement. For example, the book of Samuel shows remarkably few contacts with the language of Deuteronomy, and the book of Kings contains narratives in which the great prophets Elijah and Elisha are legitimately active outside the Jerusalem Temple (see especially 1 Kings 18, concerning Elijah on Mount Carmel). Thus, various theories have been suggested concerning successive editions of the Deuteronomistic History, which many believe was begun in the seventh century under the Judean King Josiah (640–609 BCE), but completed only in the Babylonian exile (586–538 BCE) or later. Some suggest that the lack of unity is due to non-Deuteronomistic material that has been added at a late stage to an earlier Deuteronomistic History. There have also been attempts to isolate narratives that might have preceded the Deuteronomistic History and other sources used by the Deuteronomistic Historians, and to discern their original purposes before these narratives and sources became integrated into the larger literary work. In the

last decade, some scholars have felt that the many differences outweigh the similarities, and the hypothesis of a Deuteronomistic history should be discarded. All agree that this collection has a long and complicated history, so it is impossible to speak of a unified purpose or interest in the compilation of the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. They reflect at the minimum different interests at the stages of their development, pre-Deuteronomic, Deuteronomistic, and postexilic. The interests of each individual book of the Deuteronomistic History are discussed in the Introductions to those particular books.

Scholars have also found many similarities between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah and have posited that these works belong to a single large history composed by the Chronicler, which parallels the Deuteronomistic History. A closer look at Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, however, shows that they differ from each other in outlook and vocabulary, and that the general similarities between them are best attributed not to common authorship, but to the common time in which they were written, most likely the fourth century BCE.

Chronicles is a retelling with significant variations of the books of Genesis through Kings. It is likely that its author had some access to many external sources not found in our canonical Bibles, but the main feature of Chronicles is the remarkable way in which its author deals with sources, rewriting them to fit a particular notion of historical probability, namely, what really could have happened based on notions of how the world worked. For example, in the book of Kings, which does not have a clear retribution theory (a theory concerning punishment and reward), the Judean King Manasseh (698/687–642 BCE) is depicted as the most evil king of Judah, who is ultimately responsible for the destruction of the Temple in 586 (2 Kings 21). The same source, however, indicates that Manasseh reigned for fifty-five years, longer than any other king. For many biblical writers, a long life was a sign of divine favor. The contradiction between the behavior of Manasseh and his long reign did not bother the Deuteronomistic Historians, who did not believe that each individual king needed to be punished or rewarded for his behavior. The Chronicler, however, did believe in this type of retribution theology, and the Deuteronomistic Historians' depiction of Manasseh in Kings was clearly troublesome. For this reason, the Chronicler rewrote the life of Manasseh, adding 2 Chronicles 33.10–13:

> The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they gave no heed. Therefore the LORD brought against them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him with fetters, and brought him to Babylon. While he was in distress he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD indeed was God.

Thus, Manasseh fits the paradigms that the author of Chronicles believed to be true: All people need to be warned before they are punished; repentance is extremely effective; and individuals may succeed only if their behavior is meritorious. These beliefs forced a revision of the source's account so that Manasseh's life could be properly illustrative. Other examples of this type of revisionism are found throughout Chronicles and are discussed in the Introductions to 1 and 2 Chronicles; since, in the case of Samuel and Kings, we no longer have the sources on which they are based, we can only wonder if this type of radical reworking characterizes all the Historical Books.

SMALLER WORKS

The books of Ruth and Esther are both short stories, historical fictions, which are quite different in nature from the works discussed above, but very similar to the books of Tobit and Judith in the Apocrypha. They are more literary than the larger works of the Deuteronomistic Historians and the Chronicler; that is, their authors self-consciously manipulated their prose for esthetic as well as ideological purposes. For example, part of the structuring of Ruth involves symmetry: an *'eshet ḥayil* ("a worthy woman" [3.11]), meets and marries a *gibbor ḥayil* ("a worthy man"; NRSV "a prominent rich man" [2.1]), and they live happily ever after. The book also opens with an ironic statement that is only apparent in Hebrew: There is a famine in "the house of bread" (Bethlehem). Esther as well is tightly structured, for example, using dinner parties as a major plot device for the book's progress. Despite the literary artistry of these books, however, they are also history in the sense outlined earlier—they narrate a past in order to convey lessons relevant to the community. The particular characteristics of these two

very different books, each set in a distinct country and time, and each reflecting remarkably different ideologies, may be found in the Introduction to each.

The book of Ezra differs from these other Historical Books in its use of extensive quotations of official Persian documents (e.g., 7.12–26), which many scholars believe to be authentic. The book of Nehemiah lacks these documents but is exceptional in its own way: It is the only book in this collection to narrate history extensively from a first-person perspective, as a type of memoir, as in 13.15: "In those days I saw in Judah people treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys; and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day; and I warned them at that time against selling food." In general, Ezra-Nehemiah is closer to the events that it narrates than any other biblical book, and thus it may reflect those events with greater accuracy than other biblical works, which are typically removed by centuries from the events being described. Nevertheless, we must also recognize the strong biases of this book, which is interested in fostering the importance of the Torah as the central document for the postexilic community (see especially Neh 8–9), and in emphasizing the grave dangers of intermarriage (Ezra 9–10; Neh 13). Thus, even Ezra-Nehemiah, which contains archival material and first-person accounts, and is among the latest of the books in this canonical division, should not be seen as straightforward, representative, and accurate history.

THE HISTORICAL BOOKS AND HISTORICITY

The problematic nature of all of these texts as historical documents does not mean that we have no idea of the historical periods that they cover, or that they are entirely useless as historical sources. Each text needs to be weighed individually in terms of its date of composition and its likely goals. Using these criteria, there are reasons to accept the veracity of, for example, the dry notice in 1 Kings 14.25–26 ("In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, King Shishak of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house; he took everything. He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made"), which might even come from an archival source. In contrast, there are good reasons to be suspicious of the historicity of the long, detailed, and embellished story of David slaying Goliath in 1 Sam 17; this story uses late biblical Hebrew language, comes from a different source than the surrounding material in Samuel, and is structured like a fairy-tale, in that the poor, short, unexpected hero gets to marry the tall king's daughter by killing the giant who had vilified God. Additionally, 2 Sam 21.19 reads: "Then there was another battle with the Philistines at Gob; and Elhanan son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam." It is much more likely that a short tradition in which Goliath is killed by a relatively unknown figure (Elhanan) would be the source for the long, elaborate tale attributing the same event to the well-known David, rather than vice versa. Thus, the modern historian must subject each text in these Historical Books to the type of internal analysis used on nonbiblical historical texts.

There are a number of cases where we do have external, ancient Near Eastern written evidence that deals with events depicted in these Historical Books. For example, the events surrounding the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian King Sennacherib in 701 BCE are narrated in several Assyrian sources and are also depicted in the palace reliefs of that king. These sources suggest that part of the terse account in 2 Kings 18.13–16 is quite accurate, while the highly developed continuation of the story in chs 19 and 20, especially the note in 19.35, that the angel of the LORD killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night, is most likely imaginative. Similarly, from various Mesopotamian sources, we know of a "house of Omri," and Omri's name is also mentioned on the Moabite Mesha Stele. This confirms the existence of the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel mentioned in 1 Kings 16.23–28. However, Kings tells little of Omri's achievements during his twelve years as monarch, other than his building of Samaria and the notice that: "Omri did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did more evil than all who were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and in the sins that he caused Israel to commit, provoking the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols" (vv. 25–26). The external sources, however, suggest that Omri was a powerful king who established a significant name for himself through his military activities, information that the Bible lacks. This highlights the extreme selectivity of the biblical sources.

Archaeological evidence confirms the picture suggested above: There may be some truth (or kernel of truth) to some of the biblical stories, but in their current form, they lack historical veracity, because that is not their prime concern. Recent decades, for example, have seen a remarkable re-evaluation of the evidence concerning

the conquest of the land of Canaan by Joshua. As more sites have been excavated, there is a growing consensus that the main story of Joshua, that of a speedy and complete conquest (e.g., Josh 11.23: "So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses"), cannot be upheld by the archaeological record, though there are indications of some destruction and conquest at the appropriate time. Various events and traditions have been reworked very substantially over time and ultimately included in the Bible in order to convey a particular picture of God.

In sum, the title Historical Books must not frame the way we read the following texts; if we read them as we read modern historical accounts, we will misunderstand these texts in the most fundamental way. Many of these texts do contain raw material for a modern historian researching the history of ancient Israel from the late second millennium through the fourth century BCE, but this material can only be teased out using sophisticated and complex tools—and even then, our reconstructions are often extremely tentative. This is because the various biblical historians wrote their accounts, sometimes using sources, to illustrate particular perspectives concerning the relationship between God and Israel. It is these religious and religio-political perspectives that we must try to appreciate as we study these books.

Marc Brettler

JOSHUA

NAME AND LOCATION IN CANON

The book is named after Joshua, depicted as the apprentice and successor to Moses, who was the military commander in the conquest of Canaan and the administrator of the allotment of that land to the Israelite tribes. According to Num 13.16, Moses renamed Hoshea (Heb *hoshe'a*, "salvation") Joshua (Heb *yehoshu'a*, "the LORD is salvation/help"), using a variant form of the divine name Yahweh.

The book of Joshua is the sixth book in both the Jewish and Christian canons, the first book of the Former Prophets or the first book of the so-called Historical Books, respectively (see Introduction to Historical Books, pp. 313–317).

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE OF COMPOSITION

The authorship of the book of Joshua is unknown. Some types of sources for the book's composition are identifiable (for example, the border descriptions and city lists in chs 14-19), though their origin and date are often disputed. The historiographic materials used in the book of Joshua correspond to those found in the ancient Near East as a whole. Thus there are traditional stories, etiologies, boundary and town lists, summary accounts and lists, and accounts patterned after redundant annalistic documents. These have been woven together with ritual and covenantal materials and other matters of priestly interest to communicate the book's messages.

Connections between the book of Joshua and the preceding books led earlier scholars to posit a "Hexateuch" (six books), with the book of Joshua completing the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch—the Hexateuch having as its main theme the promise of the land and its eventual conquest. More recently scholars have viewed Deuteronomy as the introduction to a larger historical work, the Deuteronomistic History, from the books of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings. Some scholars now treat Joshua as a middle book in a still larger composition from Genesis through 2 Kings. The final date of composition of the book of Joshua is unknown; it may be dependent upon the dating of the various editions of the Deuteronomistic History, of which it is now a part. One major edition of the larger work is generally dated to the late seventh century BCE.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

The book of Joshua describes a conquest of Canaan and its allotment to the Israelite tribes. Through well-known traditional stories (e.g., Rahab and the spies, the crossing of the Jordan River, the capture of Jericho) as well as nonnarrative lists and ritual texts, the book portrays the fulfillment of God's covenantal promise to Israel's ancestors that their descendants would possess the land. Moreover, these stories challenge the book's readers to live in obedience to the Deuteronomic covenant so that they also will receive God's blessings in the land.

The book may be outlined as follows:

I. The Conquest	(1.1–12.24)
A. Preparation for the conquest	(1.1–5.12)
Commission of Joshua	(1.1–18)
Story of the spies and Rahab	(2.1–24)
The crossing of the Jordan	(3.1–5.1)
Final preparatory events at Gilgal	(5.2–12)
B. Conquest of the land	(5.13–12.24)
Central campaign	(5.13–8.35)
Jericho	(5.13–6.27)
Achan and Ai	(7.1–8.29)
Covenant renewal as land grant: Shechem	(8.30–35)

	The southern and northern campaigns	(9.1–11.15)
	Introductory statement	(9.1–2)
	Southern campaign	(9.3–10.43)
	Northern campaign	(11.1–15)
	Summary of total conquest	(11.16–23)
	A selective list of defeated cities' kings	(12.1–24)
II.	The allotment of the land	(13.1–24.33)
B.'	Division of the land	(13.1–21.45)
	Land remaining	(13.1–7)
	Transjordanian tribal allotment	(13.8–33)
	Cisjordanian tribal allotment	(14.1–19.51)
	Introduction to the process of allotment	(14.1–5)
	Judah and Joseph allotments	(14.6–17.18)
	Seven other tribal allotments	(18.1–19.51)
	Summary of the process of allotment	(19.51)
	Allotments to persons of marginal status	(20.1–21.42)
	Cities of refuge	(20.1–9)
	Levitical cities	(21.1–42)
	Ironic conclusion	(21.43–45)
A.'	Epilogue to the conquest and allotment	(22.1–24.33)
	Misunderstanding with the Transjordanian tribes	(22.1–34)
	Concluding charges	(23.1–24.28)
	Appendixes	(24.29–33)

INTERPRETATION

The book should not be read as straightforward history—it telescopes and simplifies what was a long and complex process of occupation of the land by the Israelite tribes. Some details are lacking (e.g., how the Israelites came into possession of Shechem, 8.30-35), while the other events narrated in the book are selectively arranged to heighten the book's message. Thus the book's presentation of reality does not necessarily reflect the course of events. For example, a main theme of the book is a swift and complete conquest of the land, while most archaeological evidence suggests its gradual settlement. Consequently, archaeological excavations, together with sociological and anthropological analyses, must be used to understand the early history of Israel in the land.

Several literary devices and themes characterize the book. First, the structure of the book (see outline) has two main divisions: the conquest (1.1–12.24) and the allotment of the land (13.1–24.33). Within each main division, there are two subdivisions: A: preparations for the conquest (1.1–5.12) and B: the conquest's campaigns (5.13–12.24); B': the allotment of the conquered land (13.1–21.45) and A'; epilogue to the conquest and allotment (22.1–24.33). The body of the book (5.13–21.45) is bracketed by specially chosen introductory and concluding materials (1.1–5.12; 22.1–24.33). Each subdivision contains a number of units that contribute to the development of the plot and message of the book.

Second, the book follows a logical geographic arrangement. An east-to-west crossing into Canaan (chs 2-5) is followed by military campaigns directed at the center (chs 6-8), south (chs 9-10), and north (ch 11), concluded by a summary list (ch 12). The division of the land first covers the Transjordanian tribes (ch 13), then the south and central tribes (chs 14-17), then the northern and peripheral tribes (chs 18-19), and finally entities of marginal status (chs 20-21). At times, however, the story backtracks or repeats previously narrated details in a type of flashback. This is especially noticeable in chs 3-4 (the crossing of the Jordan) and ch 10 (the conquest of the south).

Third, typology, representing one character or event as an echo or foreshadowing of another, is utilized to portray Joshua as parallel to Moses. A few examples will illustrate: Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt, Joshua leads the Israelites into Canaan; Moses leads Israel in a miraculous crossing of the Reed Sea, Joshua leads Israel in a miraculous crossing of the Jordan River; Moses sends out spies, Joshua sends out spies; Moses allots land to the tribes east of the Jordan, Joshua allots land to the tribes west of the Jordan. This typology, which depicts Joshua as a new Moses, assures the legitimacy of Joshua.

Fourth, the law or teaching (Heb "torah") of Moses plays a normative role in strategic parts of the book, and Israel's obedience or disobedience to the law determines success or failure. This law, especially prominent in chs 1 and 23, is further specified as "the law of Moses" and refers to some form of the law or teaching of Moses extant at the time that the book of Joshua was written, especially as found in Deuteronomy.

Fifth, ritual concerns dictate some of the narration. For example, the crossing of the Jordan River (chs 3-4), circumcision and Passover (ch 5), the conquest of Jericho (ch 6), and the implementations of the "ḥerem" (chs 6-8) all reflect ritual concerns that undergird the book's land claims.

A subset of these ritual concerns is the concept of the "ḥerem," which plays a significant role in the book (see 5.13–6.27; 7.6–26; 8.1–29; 10.28–39). This noun is usually translated "devoted thing" (7.1) and the related verb "utterly destroy" (10.28). The term is used primarily in contexts of warfare and destruction where the "ḥerem" stories are connected with the notion of obedience or disobedience to the LORD (cf. Deut 7; 20). Its purpose was to "drive out" or "dispossess" the Canaanites in order to carry out divine judgment on them, to protect the Israelites from Canaanite religious influence, and to fulfill the promises concerning the land. This kind of warfare is part of the political ideology that Israel shared with other nations in the ancient Near East, in which wars were dedicated to the glorification of the deity and the extension of the deity's land and reign. While it was considered a ritual category (similar to a concept of interdict or taboo), its use appears to have been linked to the administration of the distribution of war booty. Understanding the "ḥerem" has posed a significant problem throughout the history of interpretation.

Finally, the book utilizes a number of different land ideologies. Some of these may be anchored in historical geography, others are purely idealistic, and some are a mixture of the two. In the book's final form, these produce an abstract, idealized concept of the land, create tensions, and set the stage for irony. The dominant land ideology is the territory of the twelve tribes (both west and east of the Jordan) who completely fill up the land (chs 15-19; cf. Deut 4.45-49). In this view, the two-and-a-half Transjordanian tribes (those settled east of the Jordan) are an integral and vital part of "all Israel." A second, contrasting ideology restricts the true land of inheritance to the territory west of the Jordan (Cisjordan, the land of Canaan) (cf. Deut 12.10). It is this image of the land that lies behind the belief that crossing the Jordan was a step of outstanding significance (chs 3-4). This view also creates ironic tensions in 22.10-34, where the two-and-a-half tribes set up an altar in Transjordan. A third ideology presents the land as claimed but not fully conquered, noting "the land that remains" (13.2-6); and a fourth ideology is an expansionistic, utopian Israel, which claims the distant Euphrates as the northern boundary of Israel's inheritance (1.4; cf. Gen 15.18; Deut 1.7; 11.24). These last two notions instill the book with the flavor of unredeemed promise. The text develops two understandings of Israel's unfulfilled expectations. On the one hand, the incomplete conquest is judged to be the result of Israel's disobedience or military inability (15.63; 16.10; 17.12-13; 19.47); this serves as the basis for future threats to Israel's well-being (7.12; 23.12-13). On the other hand, the last two land ideologies function as hopeful indications of greater land blessings to Israel in the future (13.6b; 17.18; 23.5).

Thus the book of Joshua plays an important role not only in the story of the early history of Israel in the land, but also in the development of the theology of the Hebrew Bible. In many ways, it serves as the prologue for the remainder of the Deuteronomistic Historians' account of Israel's struggles in the land.

GUIDE TO READING

Considering the various literary devices described above, it is clear that reading the book of Joshua demands close attention to its literary complexity. Recognizing the different genres that the book employs is essential to a proper reading. Perhaps the most difficult section of the book for the modern reader is the allotment section (chs 14–19), where border descriptions and city lists overwhelm the reader with geographic detail. At this point, paying close attention to the narrative framework (e.g. 13.1–7; 14.1–15; 15.13–19; 16.1–4; 17.1–6; 17.14–18; 18.1–10; 19.49–51) is helpful in discerning its message and function in the book. Thus it is evident that the allocation of the land proceeds even before its total occupation and that a tension develops within the text between the land conquered and the land promised but not possessed (thus juxtaposing the different land ideologies mentioned earlier). Theologically, the section stresses the LORD's faithfulness in contrast to Israel's wavering obedience. This tension and contrast reaches a climax in the final concluding charges of Joshua (chs 23–24).

K. Lawson Younger, Jr.

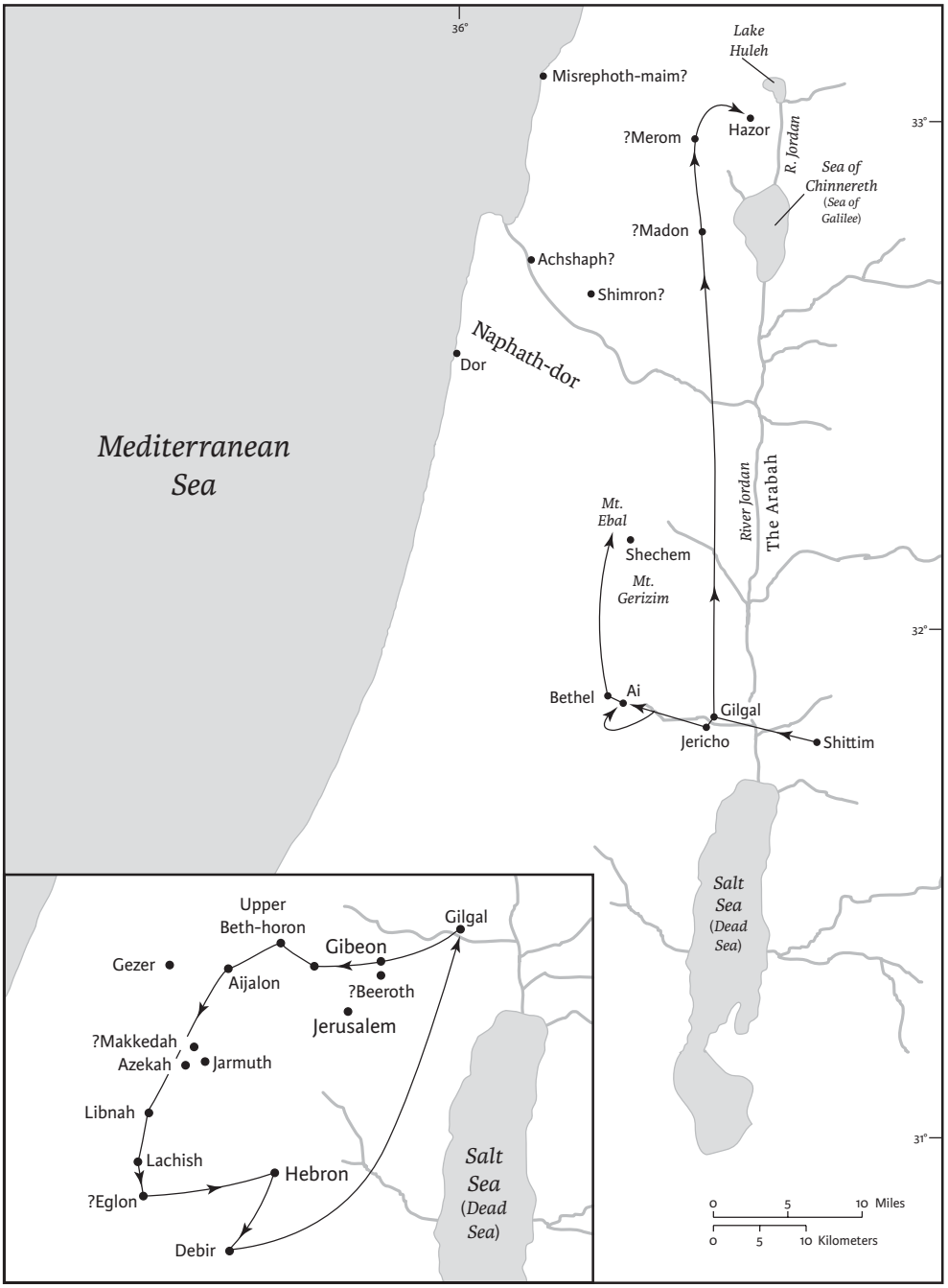
1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, **2** "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. **3** Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. **4** From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. **5** No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. **6** Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. **7** Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. **8** This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. **9** I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

10 Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, **11** "Pass through the camp, and command the people: 'Prepare your provisions; for in three days you are to cross over the Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess.'"

12 To the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh Joshua said, **13** "Remember the word that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest, and will give you this land.' **14** Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan. But all the warriors among you shall cross over armed before your kindred and shall help them, **15** until the LORD gives rest to your kindred as well as to you, and they too take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to your own land and take possession of it, the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan to the east."

16 They answered Joshua: "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. **17** Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you, as he was with Moses! **18** Whoever rebels against your orders and disobeys your words, whatever you command, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous."

1.1–12.24: The Conquest. 1.1–5.12: Preparation for the conquest. 1.1–18: The commission of Joshua. 1: Moses' death (Deut 34) provides the setting for the commission. God did not allow Moses to enter the land (Deut 13.37n.; 32.48–52). **2–18:** The commission contains four speeches (vv. 2–9, 10–11, 12–15, 16–18). **2–9:** The Lord's speech outlines the means of success for Joshua and the Israelites: obedience to the book of the law (Heb "torah"). The Lord's speech also anticipates the main themes of the book: the crossing of the Jordan (1.1–5.12), the conquest (5.13–12.24), the division of the land (13.1–22.34), and obedience to the law of Moses (23.1–24.33). **2–5:** The idealized boundaries of the land, given with the assurance of God's presence, were the *Jordan* River to the east, *the wilderness* or semidesert to the south and east, the *Lebanon* mountain range to the northwest, the *river Euphrates* in the far north, and the *Great Sea,* the Mediterranean Sea, to the west (cf. Deut 11.24–25; Num 34.1–12). **4:** *All the land of the Hittites* is likely a later gloss, probably referring to northern Syria. The Hittite empire was no longer in existence at this time. **5:** An explicit recognition that Joshua is the new Moses; cf. Ex 3.12. **6–9:** As currently formulated, the text emphasizes that military success comes from the law's internalization, spoken of in 1.8 in terms of meditation with consequent obedience (cf. Deut 31.7–8; Ps 1.2–3). **11:** *In three days* reflects ritual concerns (cf. Ex 3.18; 19.11). **12–15:** Joshua's speech to the Transjordanian tribes is suffused with vocabulary that typifies Deuteronomy. Since the other tribes had helped Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh conquer their land, they were to help the other Israelites acquire their land west of the Jordan. *The half-tribe of Manasseh,* according to territorial lists (see 13.29–31; 17) part of Manasseh occupied land east of the Jordan and part west. **13:** See Deut 3.12–20. **16–18:** The reply of the Transjordanian tribes rounds out the chapter by echoing the Lord's assurances of 1.1–9 (cf. Deut 9–10).



The conquest of Canaan according to the book of Joshua.

2 Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there. [2] The king of Jericho was told, "Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land." [3] Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come only to search out the whole land." [4] But the woman took the two men and hid them. Then she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from. [5] And when it was time to close the gate at dark, the men went out. Where the men went I do not know. Pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them." [6] She had, however, brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof. [7] So the men pursued them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. As soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

[8] Before they went to sleep, she came up to them on the roof [9] and said to the men: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. [10] For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea[a] before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. [11] As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. [12] Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the LORD that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith [13] that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." [14] The men said to her, "Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the LORD gives us the land."

[15] Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the outer side of the city wall and she resided within the wall itself. [16] She said to them, "Go toward the hill country, so that the pursuers may not come upon you. Hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers have returned; then afterward you may go your way." [17] The men said to her, "We will be released from this oath that you have made us swear to you [18] if we invade the land and you do not tie this crimson cord in the window through which you let us down, and you do not gather into your house your father and mother,

[a] Or *Sea of Reeds*

2.1–24: The story of the spies and Rahab. Interrupting the narrative (cf. 1.11 and 3.12), ch 2 functions as a type of parenthesis introducing important items that will form the background to the stories of the crossing of the Jordan and the conquest of Jericho. **1:** Joshua commissions two unnamed spies to go and investigate the land (cf. Num 13; Deut 1.21–23; Josh 7.2–3). The spies go to Jericho, west of the Jordan River, but surprisingly enter the house of a prostitute. While the text does not explicitly state that there was a sexual liaison between the spies and their hostess, it provides an undercurrent of ambiguous sexual innuendo. *Shittim* was the site of the Israelite camp, but also was the infamous place where the men of Israel had sexual relations with the women of Moab (Num 25.1). **2–13:** *Rahab* is at the center of the narrative. She is the only character with a name, and without her the spies would have had no success. She protects and delivers the spies and provides them with the information they seek. In Mt 1.5 Rahab is reckoned among the ancestors of Jesus, and in Heb 11.31 Rahab is counted as one of the heroes of faith. Rahab's confession in vv. 9–11 anticipates the "hearing and fearing" expressed in 5.1; 6.1; 9.1–3; 10.1–2; 11.1–5. **6:** *To the roof,* the just harvested (see 3.15n) flax had been laid on the flat roof to dry. **10:** *Dried up . . . the Red Sea,* language used only here and in 4.23; cf. Ex 14.21–29. *Sihon and Og,* see Num 21.21–35; Deut 2.26–3.11. *Utterly destroyed,* the first use of the "ḥerem" terminology (see Introduction, p. 320). **11:** The acknowledgment of the Lord as the God of *heaven* and *earth* is relatively unusual in the Hebrew Bible, but here anticipates the Divine Warrior's mighty actions once at the Jordan (chs 3–4), once at Jericho (ch 6), and twice in the skies over Gibeon (ch 10). **12:** *Family*, lit., "father's house." **14–21:** Ironically, Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute, shows unconditional loyalty toward the spies, risking everything; but the spies show conditioned loyalty to

your brothers, and all your family. 19 If any of you go out of the doors of your house into the street, they shall be responsible for their own death, and we shall be innocent; but if a hand is laid upon any who are with you in the house, we shall bear the responsibility for their death. 20 But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be released from this oath that you made us swear to you." 21 She said, "According to your words, so be it." She sent them away and they departed. Then she tied the crimson cord in the window.

22 They departed and went into the hill country and stayed there three days, until the pursuers returned. The pursuers had searched all along the way and found nothing. 23 Then the two men came down again from the hill country. They crossed over, came to Joshua son of Nun, and told him all that had happened to them. 24 They said to Joshua, "Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands; moreover all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us."

3 Early in the morning Joshua rose and set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. They camped there before crossing over. 2 At the end of three days the officers went through the camp 3 and commanded the people, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place. Follow it, 4 so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, a distance of about two thousand cubits; do not come any nearer to it." 5 Then Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." 6 To the priests Joshua said, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass on in front of the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went in front of the people.

7 The LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. 8 You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" 9 Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the LORD your God." 10 Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from be-

Rahab, minimizing their risks. **16:** *Toward the hill country,* to the west. **22–24:** The report of the spies to Joshua is based on Rahab's words. In contrast to the spies of Num 13, they did not "view the land" as they were told (v. 1). Without Rahab these men would not have returned to give a report on the Canaanite disposition.

3.1–5.1: The crossing of the Jordan. The crossing of the Jordan is narrated in five units (3.1–17; 4.1–10; 4.11–14; 4.15–18; 4.19–5.1) that backtrack and overlap so that a number of events are recounted more than once. The use of anticipatory statements and resumptive repetitions provides a means of linking the units together (e.g., the anticipatory statement in 3.12 is tied to the resumptive repetition in 4.2). In this way a redactor has attempted to meld together different sources.

3.1–17: The initial story of the crossing. This unit notes that the Jordan is in flood (v. 15) because otherwise it is a relatively narrow river. The Jordan functions primarily as a ritual and ideological symbol representing the boundary between landlessness and settled peoplehood. It anticipates the importance of all boundaries in the book, particularly those of the allotments (chs 13–21) and the tribal dispute of ch 22. The fact that the procession begins and ends at early Israelite religious centers ([Abel]-Shittim and Gilgal) reinforces the ritual significance. **2:** Resumptive of 1.11. **3:** *The ark of the covenant* was the container for the text of the law; see Deut 31.26. It also symbolized God's presence among the tribes; it could be carried only by priests. It could be brought into battle, assuring the deity's presence among the nation (see 1 Sam 4.6–7). **4:** The people were to keep their distance because of the presence of God. *Two thousand cubits,* about 885 m (2,900 ft). **5:** *Sanctify yourselves* reflects the ritual background of the story. The Israelites were to purify themselves in preparation for the divine presence (cf. Ex 19.10–15). **10:** A stereotypical listing of the pre-Israelite population of Canaan; it is difficult to identify the individual groups specifically. *Hittites,* apparently a group in the land of Canaan (see Gen 23; Judg 3.5; contrast 1.4n.). The *Jebusites* are associated with Jerusalem (see 15.63). If the chronological setting for these events is approximately the thirteenth century BCE, the Canaan that the Israelite tribes entered was in a state of economic, social, and political turmoil, due in large measure to the collapsing of the Egyptian empire and

fore you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: 11 the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. 12 So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. 13 When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap."

14 When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. 15 Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, 16 the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea,[a] were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. 17 While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

4 When the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua: 2 "Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, 3 and command them, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight.'" 4 Then Joshua summoned the twelve men from the Israelites, whom he had appointed, one from each tribe. 5 Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, one for each of the tribes of the Israelites, 6 so that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' 7 then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever."

8 The Israelites did as Joshua commanded. They took up twelve stones out of the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD told Joshua, carried them over with them to the place where they camped, and laid them down there. 9 (Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day.)

10 The priests who bore the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan, until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. The people crossed over in haste. 11 As soon as all the people had finished crossing over, the ark of the LORD, and the priests, crossed over in front of the people. 12 The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over armed before the Israelites, as Moses had ordered them. 13 About forty thousand armed for war crossed over before the LORD to the plains of Jericho for battle.

[a] Heb *Salt Sea*

many Canaanite city-state structures. **12:** Anticipates 4.2. **13:** *Stand,* cf. 10.13, where the moon is commanded to "stand still." *Heap,* a rare word used elsewhere only of the splitting of the Red Sea (Ex 15.8; Ps 78.13). **15:** *Harvest*, the spring harvest (March-April). **16:** *Adam,* 18 km (12 mi) north of Jericho, is probably Tell ed-Damiyeh. *Zarethan* is farther north. **17:** The continued presence of the priests with the ark in the midst of the dry riverbed anticipates 4.10.

4.1–10: The erecting of the twelve-stone memorial. This unit is repetitive (e.g., cf. vv. 6 and 21), and preserves different traditions. **9:** Another, perhaps later, tradition that locates a memorial of twelve stones in the bed of the Jordan itself; v. 8 narrates the removal of stones from the river bed to the shore, where they are part of the sanctuary of Gilgal (see v. 20). **10:** *In haste,* cf. Ex 12.33–34. **11–14:** The unit backtracks and again narrates again the crossing, emphasizing the role of the Transjordanian tribes and the exaltation of Joshua. **12–13:** A flashback reports that the eastern tribes have done what Moses commanded and Joshua reiterated (1.14; Deut

14 On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in
the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe
of him, as they had stood in awe of Moses, all
the days of his life.

15 The LORD said to Joshua, 16 "Com-
mand the priests who bear the ark of the
covenant,[a] to come up out of the Jordan."
17 Joshua therefore commanded the priests,
"Come up out of the Jordan." 18 When the
priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the
LORD came up from the middle of the Jordan,
and the soles of the priests' feet touched dry
ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to
their place and overflowed all its banks, as
before.

19 The people came up out of the Jordan
on the tenth day of the first month, and they
camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho.
20 Those twelve stones, which they had taken
out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal,
21 saying to the Israelites, "When your children
ask their parents in time to come, 'What do
these stones mean?' 22 then you shall let your
children know, 'Israel crossed over the Jordan
here on dry ground.' 23 For the LORD your God
dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until
you crossed over, as the LORD your God did to
the Red Sea,[b] which he dried up for us until
we crossed over, 24 so that all the peoples of
the earth may know that the hand of the LORD
is mighty, and so that you may fear the LORD
your God forever."

5 When all the kings of the Amorites
beyond the Jordan to the west, and all
the kings of the Canaanites by the sea, heard
that the LORD had dried up the waters of
the Jordan for the Israelites until they had
crossed over, their hearts melted, and there
was no longer any spirit in them, because of
the Israelites.

2 At that time the LORD said to Joshua,
"Make flint knives and circumcise the
Israelites a second time." 3 So Joshua made
flint knives, and circumcised the Israelites at
Gibeath-haaraloth.[c] 4 This is the reason why
Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the
people who came out of Egypt, all the warri-
ors, had died during the journey through the
wilderness after they had come out of Egypt.
5 Although all the people who came out had
been circumcised, yet all the people born on
the journey through the wilderness after they
had come out of Egypt had not been circum-
cised. 6 For the Israelites traveled forty years
in the wilderness, until all the nation, the
warriors who came out of Egypt, perished,
not having listened to the voice of the LORD.
To them the LORD swore that he would not
let them see the land that he had sworn to
their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with

[a] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*
[b] Or *Sea of Reeds*
[c] That is *the Hill of the Foreskins*

3.18). **14:** Resumptive repetition stresses again the fulfillment of the Lord's exaltation of Joshua as with Moses. **15–18:** This unit backtracks and retells the ark's crossing and the unstopping of the river. **18:** An item-by-item reversal of what happened in 3.15–16. In fact, the verse backtracks to *the middle of the Jordan* before reporting that the priests actually leave the water.

4.19–5.1: The final unit emphasizes the instructional value of the memorial through comparison with the Red Sea crossing. **19:** The focus turns from the priests to the people. *The first month* was Abib (March–April), later called Nisan. The preparations for the first Passover began on the tenth day of the first month (Ex 12.3). *Gilgal,* whose precise location is disputed, was an important Israelite shrine. Its name means "circle," perhaps referring to the stone configuration; there are several locations with this name in the Bible. **23:** The connection of this event to the Exodus from Egypt is made explicit. **24:** As with the Exodus, both foreigner and Israelite (v. 22) must learn from this event (Ex 10.1–2). **5.1:** Resuming 2.9–11 and anticipating 9.1; 10.1; 11.1.

5.2–12: Final preparatory events at Gilgal. Three connected rituals are recounted: circumcision (vv. 2–9), Passover (v. 10), and the first consumption of the produce of the land at Gilgal (vv. 11–12). **2–9:** The disobedience of the older generation (those of the first circumcision who came out of Egypt and died in the wilderness) is contrasted to the obedience of the new generation (those participating in this circumcision). Circumcision was a ritual required of all males who were to celebrate the Passover (Ex 12.48). **2:** At one time circumcision was a fairly common practice in the ancient Near East; it became a sign of Israel's relationship with God. *A second time,* probably a later addition to mitigate the failure (see v. 5) to observe the obligation of Gen 17.9–14 or to emphasize Joshua as a parallel to Moses. **6:** To *give us,* an unusual authorial inclusion. The formula *a land flowing with*

milk and honey. 7 So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

8 When the circumcising of all the nation was done, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. 9 The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal[a] to this day.

10 While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. 11 On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12 The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

13 Once when Joshua was by Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?" 14 He replied, "Neither; but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and he said to him, "What do you command your servant, my lord?" 15 The commander of the army of the LORD said to Joshua, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

6 Now Jericho was shut up inside and out because of the Israelites; no one came out and no one went in. 2 The LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers. 3 You shall march around the city, all the warriors circling the city once. Thus you shall do for six days, 4 with seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets. 5 When they make a long blast with the ram's horn, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and all the people shall charge straight ahead." 6 So Joshua son of Nun summoned the priests and said to

[a] Related to Heb *galal* to roll

milk and honey (see Ex 3.8; Deut 6.3; etc.) anticipates the consumption of the land's produce (vv. 10–12). **9:** This is a folk-etymology of *Gilgal,* "the circle" (see 4.19n.). The precise nature of the *disgrace* is unclear; it may refer to Deut 9.28, demonstrating that the crossing and the circumcision are God's graciousness toward Israel in spite of Israel's lack of faithfulness in the wilderness. **10:** The celebration of the Passover reinforces the portrayal of Joshua as parallel to Moses (cf. Ex 12). **11–12:** Land claims are usually presented as a matter of conquests (chs 6–12) and geographic lists (chs 13–21), but here they are set forth in terms of ritual events and diet. The change from manna to the produce of the land signifies Israel's relocation from wilderness to land. Unleavened bread and roasted grain are used in rituals connected to Passover and first fruits (Lev 23.9–14).

5.13–12.24: Conquest of the land. The conquest of the land is recounted as three major campaigns: central (5.13–8.35), southern (9.1–10.43), and northern (11.1–15).

5.13–8.35: Central campaign. The central campaign, which is described in the greatest detail, has three sections: 5.13–6.27; 7.1–8.29; and 8.30–35.

5.13–6.27: Jericho: first application of "ḥerem" (see Introduction, p. 320). Jericho's capture is important because it is the first implementation of the "ḥerem" by the Israelites in the conquest. The interpretation of the archaeological evidence from Tell es-Sultan (ancient Jericho) is disputed, but in the thirteenth century BCE there was at best an unfortified village on the site. Like Moses (see Ex 3.1–4.17), Joshua receives a theophany followed by detailed instructions; 6.2–5 thus continues the scene of 5.13–15, with 6.1 being a parenthetical aside. **5.13–15:** The appearance of the *commander of the army of the LORD* is probably a fragment of a fuller tradition. He is not mentioned in the rest of the book. **14:** The commander is not part of a human army, but rather the commander of the heavenly forces (see Deut 33.2; Judg 5.20; Zech 9.14). **15:** A direct quotation from Ex 3.5, again showing that Joshua was the divinely appointed successor of Moses.

6.6–27: Jericho is captured by following the LORD's instructions. Ritual ceremony plays an important symbolic function, overcoming the walls of Jericho: seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days, seven encirclements on the seventh day, and a seventh-day climactic victory. The preponderance of "sevens" may recall the seven

them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and have seven priests carry seven trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark of the LORD." [7] To the people he said, "Go forward and march around the city; have the armed men pass on before the ark of the LORD."

[8] As Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD following them. [9] And the armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets; the rear guard came after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually. [10] To the people Joshua gave this command: "You shall not shout or let your voice be heard, nor shall you utter a word, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout." [11] So the ark of the LORD went around the city, circling it once; and they came into the camp, and spent the night in the camp.

[12] Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. [13] The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD passed on, blowing the trumpets continually. The armed men went before them, and the rear guard came after the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets blew continually. [14] On the second day they marched around the city once and then returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

[15] On the seventh day they rose early, at dawn, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. [16] And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city. [17] The city and all that is in it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live because she hid the messengers we sent. [18] As for you, keep away from the things devoted to destruction, so as not to covet[a] and take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel an object for destruction, bringing trouble upon it. [19] But all silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are sacred to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD." [20] So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpets, they raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat; so the people charged straight ahead into the city and captured it. [21] Then they devoted to destruction by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys.

[22] Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "Go into the prostitute's house, and bring the woman out of it and all who belong to her, as you swore to her." [23] So the young men who had been spies went in and brought Rahab out, along with her father, her mother, her brothers, and all who belonged to her—they brought all her kindred out—and set them outside the camp of Israel. [24] They burned down the city, and everything in it; only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. [25] But Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, Joshua spared. Her family[b] has lived in Israel ever since. For she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

[26] Joshua then pronounced this oath, saying,
"Cursed before the LORD be anyone who tries
to build this city—this Jericho!

[a] Gk: Heb *devote to destruction* Compare 7.21
[b] Heb *She*

days of creation (Gen 1), implying the creation of a new order in the land and continuing the ritual land claim of 3.1–5.12. This is the first implementation of the "ḥerem," a ritual act. The Canaanite prostitute Rahab and her family are exempted from the "ḥerem" (v. 17, see ch 2). The account of the fall of Jericho is more ritually symbolic than military in its significance, though as a victory in the first battle, it prefigures success in the campaigns that will follow. **18:** *Bringing trouble upon it* anticipates the next story (7.25). **19–24:** Israel's faithfulness in the implementation of the "ḥerem" is emphasized and Achan's unfaithfulness is anticipated. Jericho represents a paradigm for the entire enterprise of conquest (8.2; 10.1; 24.11). **25:** *Ever since* indicates that the descendants of Rahab (i.e., Canaanites) survived and lived among the Israelites. **26:** The fulfillment of this enigmatic curse is

At the cost of his firstborn he shall lay its
foundation,
and at the cost of his youngest he shall
set up its gates!"

27 So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was in all the land.

7 But the Israelites broke faith in regard to the devoted things: Achan son of Carmi son of Zabdi son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things; and the anger of the LORD burned against the Israelites.

2 Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai. 3 Then they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Not all the people need go up; about two or three thousand men should go up and attack Ai. Since they are so few, do not make the whole people toil up there." 4 So about three thousand of the people went up there; and they fled before the men of Ai. 5 The men of Ai killed about thirty-six of them, chasing them from outside the gate as far as Shebarim and killing them on the slope. The hearts of the people melted and turned to water.

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the ground on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. 7 Joshua said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Why have you brought this people across the Jordan at all, to hand us over to the Amorites so as to destroy us? Would that we had been content to settle beyond the Jordan! 8 O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has turned their backs to their enemies! 9 The Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will you do for your great name?"

10 The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! Why have you fallen upon your face? 11 Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I imposed on them. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have acted deceitfully, and they have put them among their own belongings. 12 Therefore the Israelites are unable to stand before their enemies; they turn their backs to their enemies, because they have become a thing devoted for destruction themselves. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. 13 Proceed to sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "There are devoted things among you, O Israel; you will be unable to stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you." 14 In the morning therefore you shall come forward tribe by tribe. The tribe that the LORD takes shall come near by clans, the clan that the LORD takes shall come near by households, and the household that the LORD takes shall come near one by one. 15 And the one who is taken as having the devoted things shall be burned with fire, together with all that he has, for having transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and for having done an outrageous thing in Israel.'"

recorded in 1 Kings 16.34. **27:** The climactic conclusion: The Lord was with Joshua (see 1.5) and his fame was in all the land.

7.1–8.29: Achan and Ai. 7.1–5: First battle of Ai and Achan's sin. In contrast to the climactic conclusion in which Joshua is exalted (6.27), Achan's sin is described. Although only one person was unfaithful, all Israel was liable because the state of being devoted ("ḥerem") is contagious, and the booty would contaminate Israel's camp and put it into a state of devotion ("ḥerem"). **2:** The name *Ai* (modern et-Tell) means "the ruin." The site, 3 km (2 mi) east of Bethel, was uninhabited during the Late Bronze Age. **3–5:** The spies believe that Israel is too strong to worry about such a small fortress (contrast Num 13–14). Overconfidence spells a lack of consultation and of dependence on the Lord. The men of Ai thoroughly repulsed the Israelite contingent (cf. Num 14.42–45).

7.6–26: Second application of "ḥerem": Achan's execution. 6–9: Joshua's prayer of intercession recalls prayers of Moses (e.g., Ex 32.11–13; Num 11.11–15; 14.13–19; Deut 9.26–29). **6:** *Tore his clothes . . . dust on their heads*, traditional expressions of grief. **7:** *Amorites*, here a generic designation of the inhabitants of the land (see 24.15). **10–15:** God's answer to Joshua is a rebuke. **11–13:** There has been a covenant violation: a theft of God's property, the *devoted things* ("ḥerem") from Jericho. Only sanctifying themselves and removing the *devoted things* can prevent Israel from being a *devoted thing*. **14:** *The LORD takes*, by the casting of lots (a device that

16 So Joshua rose early in the morning,
and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and
the tribe of Judah was taken. 17 He brought
near the clans of Judah, and the clan of the
Zerahites was taken; and he brought near
the clan of the Zerahites, family by family,[a]
and Zabdi was taken. 18 And he brought near
his household one by one, and Achan son of
Carmi son of Zabdi son of Zerah, of the tribe
of Judah, was taken. 19 Then Joshua said to
Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD God
of Israel and make confession to him. Tell
me now what you have done; do not hide it
from me." 20 And Achan answered Joshua, "It
is true; I am the one who sinned against the
LORD God of Israel. This is what I did: 21 when
I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from
Shinar, and two hundred shekels of silver,
and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, then
I coveted them and took them. They now lie
hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the
silver underneath."

22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran
to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his
tent with the silver underneath. 23 They took
them out of the tent and brought them to
Joshua and all the Israelites; and they spread
them out before the LORD. 24 Then Joshua and
all Israel with him took Achan son of Zerah,
with the silver, the mantle, and the bar of
gold, with his sons and daughters, with his
oxen, donkeys, and sheep, and his tent and
all that he had; and they brought them up to
the Valley of Achor. 25 Joshua said, "Why did
you bring trouble on us? The LORD is bringing
trouble on you today." And all Israel stoned
him to death; they burned them with fire,
cast stones on them, 26 and raised over him a
great heap of stones that remains to this day.
Then the LORD turned from his burning an-
ger. Therefore that place to this day is called
the Valley of Achor.[b]

8 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not
fear or be dismayed; take all the fighting
men with you, and go up now to Ai. See, I
have handed over to you the king of Ai with
his people, his city, and his land. 2 You shall
do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho
and its king; only its spoil and its livestock
you may take as booty for yourselves. Set an
ambush against the city, behind it."

3 So Joshua and all the fighting men set out
to go up against Ai. Joshua chose thirty thou-
sand warriors and sent them out by night
4 with the command, "You shall lie in ambush
against the city, behind it; do not go very far
from the city, but all of you stay alert. 5 I and
all the people who are with me will approach
the city. When they come out against us, as
before, we shall flee from them. 6 They will
come out after us until we have drawn them
away from the city; for they will say, 'They are
fleeing from us, as before.' While we flee from
them, 7 you shall rise up from the ambush
and seize the city; for the LORD your God will
give it into your hand. 8 And when you have
taken the city, you shall set the city on fire,
doing as the LORD has ordered; see, I have
commanded you." 9 So Joshua sent them out;

[a] Mss Syr: MT *man by man*
[b] That is *Trouble*

when thrown yields the proper yes-or-no answer through divine assistance). **16–21:** The process of selection successfully narrows down the guilty group, finding the guilty party. It also reinforces Achan's guilt. **20–21:** The actual "ḥerem" objects are listed in Achan's admission: a beautiful mantle from Shinar (Babylon), two hundred shekels of silver (about 5 lbs [2.3 kg]), and a fifty-shekel bar of gold (about 1.24 lbs [570 gm]). **22–26:** The resolution of the problem is found in the "ḥerem" of Achan and his family. **25:** This refers to 6.18. *Trouble* (Heb "'akar") is removed from Israel and ritually placed on Achan. **26:** *Valley of Achor,* a name derived from a wordplay on Achan's final state of "trouble" ("'akar"). The valley is probably the Buqeiah, just west of the northern end of the Dead Sea; in 15.7 it is on the border between Benjamin and Judah. The outcome for Achan and his family is an ironic reversal of that for Rahab and her family (6.25).

8.1–29: Third application of "ḥerem": second battle of Ai and Ai's destruction. 1–2: The Lord gives assurance and instructions, making clear that Achan's sin has been removed so that God can once again give Israel the land. Note also the modification of the "ḥerem": They may have the plunder of Ai. **3–8:** Joshua relates the Lord's instructions to the Israelites. The repetitions build suspense. **9–29:** Ai is captured and put under the "ḥerem." **9:** *Bethel,* the modern village of Beitin, is 17 km (11 mi) north of Jerusalem and 3 mi (5 km) northwest of Ai. Later it became one of the principal shrines of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12.28–30; Gen 12.8; 28.11–22). **14–15:**

and they went to the place of ambush, and lay between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai; but Joshua spent that night in the camp.[a]

10 In the morning Joshua rose early and mustered the people, and went up, with the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. 11 All the fighting men who were with him went up, and drew near before the city, and camped on the north side of Ai, with a ravine between them and Ai. 12 Taking about five thousand men, he set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. 13 So they stationed the forces, the main encampment that was north of the city and its rear guard west of the city. But Joshua spent that night in the valley. 14 When the king of Ai saw this, he and all his people, the inhabitants of the city, hurried out early in the morning to the meeting place facing the Arabah to meet Israel in battle; but he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. 15 And Joshua and all Israel made a pretense of being beaten before them, and fled in the direction of the wilderness. 16 So all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and as they pursued Joshua they were drawn away from the city. 17 There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel; they left the city open, and pursued Israel.

18 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Stretch out the sword that is in your hand toward Ai; for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the sword that was in his hand toward the city. 19 As soon as he stretched out his hand, the troops in ambush rose quickly out of their place and rushed forward. They entered the city, took it, and at once set the city on fire. 20 So when the men of Ai looked back, the smoke of the city was rising to the sky. They had no power to flee this way or that, for the people who fled to the wilderness turned back against the pursuers. 21 When Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city was rising, then they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. 22 And the others came out from the city against them; so they were surrounded by Israelites, some on one side, and some on the other; and Israel struck them down until no one was left who survived or escaped. 23 But the king of Ai was taken alive and brought to Joshua.

24 When Israel had finished slaughtering all the inhabitants of Ai in the open wilderness where they pursued them, and when all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword, all Israel returned to Ai, and attacked it with the edge of the sword. 25 The total of those who fell that day, both men and women, was twelve thousand—all the people of Ai. 26 For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the sword, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. 27 Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as their booty, according to the word of the Lord that he had issued to Joshua. 28 So Joshua burned Ai, and made it forever a heap of ruins, as it is to this day. 29 And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening; and at sunset Joshua commanded, and they took his body down from the tree, threw it down at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raised over it a great heap of stones, which stands there to this day.

30 Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, 31 just as

[a] Heb *among the people*

Facing the Arabah . . . in the direction of the wilderness, toward the Rift Valley, to the east. **18–29:** Joshua's stretching out his sword is similar to Moses' actions in Ex 14.15–21,26–27; 17.9–12, again suggesting the continuity between these two leaders, and Joshua's legitimacy. The third implementation of the "ḥerem" is the Canaanite city of Ai, which is depicted as a sacrificial burnt offering. Ironically, God allowed the Israelites to take some of the plunder from Ai that was under the "ḥerem" (v. 27), perhaps to avoid a repeat of the action of Achan. **28:** *Forever a heap of ruins,* lit. "an eternal tell, a devastation," cf. 11.13n.; Deut 13.16. **29:** The hanging of the king of Ai and his stone memorial in the gate of the city are common actions in ancient Near Eastern warfare. This also anticipates the execution of the five kings in 10.26–27 and follows the Deuteronomic injunction (Deut 21.22–23). It also contrasts to 1 Sam 15, where Saul does not put Agag, the Amalekite king, to death, thereby disqualifying himself from leadership.

8.30–35: Covenant renewal as land grant: Shechem. The events narrated in ch 9 are the natural sequel to the story about the fall of Ai (note that 8.29 flows into 9.3). Hence this account of covenant renewal is par-

Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the Israelites, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, "an altar of unhewn[a] stones, on which no iron tool has been used"; and they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and sacrificed offerings of well-being. 32 And there, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua[b] wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. 33 All Israel, alien as well as citizen, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark in front of the levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at the first, that they should bless the people of Israel. 34 And afterward he read all the words of the law, blessings and curses, according to all that is written in the book of the law. 35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the aliens who resided among them.

9 Now when all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon—the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites—heard of this, 2 they gathered together with one accord to fight Joshua and Israel.

3 But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, 4 they on their part acted with cunning: they went and prepared provisions,[c] and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, 5 with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes; and all their provisions were dry and moldy. 6 They went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the Israelites, "We have come from a far country; so now make a treaty with us." 7 But the Israelites said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a treaty with you?" 8 They said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you? And where do you come from?" 9 They said to him, "Your servants have come from a very far country,

[a] Heb *whole*
[b] Heb *he*
[c] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

enthetical to the main action and is connected by many scholars with 24.1–28. Traveling to Ebal would have required the tribes to make a trip of about 50 km (30 mi) by road from Ai to Ebal and then to retrace their steps to encamp at Gilgal (9.6). This narrative serves to portray Joshua as carrying out the command given to Moses in Deut 27.4–7 (cf. Deut 11.29–30). Joshua, who obeyed, is the foil to Achan, who did not (cf. 6.27 and 7.1). The connections between this section and Deuteronomy are especially strong. **30:** *Mount Ebal* is one of the two mountains (Gerizim being the other) that flank the pass of Shechem in central Canaan. **31:** Quoting Deut 27.5. **32:** *On the stones,* not the stones of the altar, but those Moses had commanded to be used; see Deut 27.2–3; cf. Josh 24.26–27. *A copy of the law,* see Deut 17.18. **34:** *Blessings and curses,* see Deut 27.11–13; 28; cf. Lev 26.3–39. **35:** Patterned after the ritual of Deut 31.9–13.

9.1–11.15: The southern and northern campaigns. The conquests of southern and northern Canaan share the same geographic pattern: center to periphery. However, the account of the southern campaign is a much more developed narrative than that of the northern campaign, which can be observed in a comparison of the basic components of 9.3–10.43 and 11.1–15. Thus the region that became Judah's tribal allotment receives the greater emphasis (a pattern also found in chs 13–19 and Judg 1).

9.1–2: Introductory statement. The section recalls the motif of the inhabitants hearing and fearing (2.10 and 5.1; see also 10.1; 11.1), but in this case the reaction is not fear, but aggressive hostility. The exception is Gibeon, narrated first for contrastive reasons.

9.3–10.43: Southern campaign. 9.3–27: Gibeon. Ironically, Israel has just defeated Ai by means of a ruse; now Israel is the victim of a ruse. The Israelites do not turn to God to discern the Gibeonite strategy. As in the case of the first battle of Ai, the Israelites' overconfidence in their ability to discern the situation leads to a lack of dependence on the Lord. **3–15:** The Gibeonites are apparently Hivites. Fearing Israel, they pretend to be *from a far country* so as to take advantage of the more lenient treatment afforded to such people (Deut 20.15). **3:** *Gibeon* is the modern el-Jib, about 4 km (7 mi) southwest of Ai (see map on p. 322). **6:** *Treaty,* Heb "berit," also

because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard a report of him, of all that he did in Egypt, [10] and of all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, King Sihon of Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan who lived in Ashtaroth. [11] So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey; go to meet them, and say to them, "We are your servants; come now, make a treaty with us."' [12] Here is our bread; it was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey, on the day we set out to come to you, but now, see, it is dry and moldy; [13] these wineskins were new when we filled them, and see, they are burst; and these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey." [14] So the leaders[a] partook of their provisions, and did not ask direction from the LORD. [15] And Joshua made peace with them, guaranteeing their lives by a treaty; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them.

[16] But when three days had passed after they had made a treaty with them, they heard that they were their neighbors and were living among them. [17] So the Israelites set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim. [18] But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. [19] But all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we must not touch them. [20] This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath may not come upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them." [21] The leaders said to them, "Let them live." So they became hewers of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, as the leaders had decided concerning them.

[22] Joshua summoned them, and said to them, "Why did you deceive us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' while in fact you are living among us? [23] Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall always be slaves, hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." [24] They answered Joshua, "Because it was told to your servants for a certainty that the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; so we were in great fear for our lives because of you, and did this thing. [25] And now we are in your hand: do as it seems good and right in your sight to do to us." [26] This is what he did for them: he saved them from the Israelites; and they did not kill them. [27] But on that day Joshua made them hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to continue to this day, in the place that he should choose.

10 When King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king,

[a] Gk: Heb *men*

translated "covenant." **10:** See 2.10n. **14:** Although *the leaders* (lit. "the men") of Israel are specifically blamed for not consulting the Lord, Joshua is apparently included. None of Israel's leadership was exempt from blame. **16–27:** Discovery of the ruse and reaction. The Israelites discover the ruse of the Gibeonites, who readily admit their deception (vv. 24–25) because they know that Israel has to honor the pact between them (v. 20). The subservience of the Gibeonites is narrated twice in parallel: The leaders of the people save them and conclude their slave status, and so does Joshua (vv. 18–21 and vv. 22–27). **21:** *Hewers of wood and drawers of water,* according to Deut 29.10–13, the covenant was to erase distinctions between such lower class occupations and others. This designation thus suggests that the Gibeonites are outside the covenantal community. **24:** See Deut 20.16–18. Tensions with the Gibeonites persist into the monarchy (2 Sam 21.1–14). **27:** *The place that he should choose* is Deuteronomy's term for the central place of worship, later identified as Jerusalem (e.g., Deut 12.5–18).

10.1–43: The defeat of the Amorite alliance. This passage contains two scenes (vv. 1–15, vv. 16–43), both of which end with identical statements (vv. 15,43). Both scenes utilize temporal panels that back-track and overlap: Each subsequent panel takes a part of the previous panel and further develops it.

10.1–15: Scene one contains three panels (vv. 1–10,11,12–15). **1–10: The initial circumstances of the battle.** This panel is composed of two parts: the formation of the Amorite alliance headed by Adoni zedek of Jerusalem

and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, 2 he[a] became greatly frightened, because Gibeon was a large city, like one of the royal cities, and was larger than Ai, and all its men were warriors. 3 So King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem sent a message to King Hoham of Hebron, to King Piram of Jarmuth, to King Japhia of Lachish, and to King Debir of Eglon, saying, 4 "Come up and help me, and let us attack Gibeon; for it has made peace with Joshua and with the Israelites." 5 Then the five kings of the Amorites—the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon—gathered their forces, and went up with all their armies and camped against Gibeon, and made war against it.

6 And the Gibeonites sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, "Do not abandon your servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us; for all the kings of the Amorites who live in the hill country are gathered against us." 7 So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the fighting force with him, all the mighty warriors. 8 The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have handed them over to you; not one of them shall stand before you." 9 So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal. 10 And the LORD threw them into a panic before Israel, who inflicted a great slaughter on them at Gibeon, chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah. 11 As they fled before Israel, while they were going down the slope of Beth-horon, the LORD threw down huge stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died because of the hailstones than the Israelites killed with the sword.

12 On the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the Israelites, Joshua spoke to the LORD; and he said in the sight of Israel,

"Sun, stand still at Gibeon,
and Moon, in the valley of Aijalon."
13 And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped,
until the nation took vengeance on their enemies.

Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in midheaven, and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. 14 There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD heeded a human voice; for the LORD fought for Israel.

15 Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.

16 Meanwhile, these five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah. 17 And

[a] Heb *they*

(vv. 1–5), and the initial open-field battle between the Israelites and the Amorite alliance with the slaughter and pursuit to Azekah (vv. 6–10). **1–2:** The treaty between Gibeon and Israel incited the kings of five Amorite city-states to attack Gibeon. Jerusalem, an important Bronze Age city-state, and later the capital of Judah, is the driving force in the alliance. **3:** See inset in map on p. 322 HB. **10:** The reference to *Azekah* and *Makkedah* anticipates the second panel of scene one as well as the first panel of scene two. *Azekah* is identified with Tell Zakariya; *Makkedah* is perhaps Khirbet el-Qom.

10.11: Divine intervention with hailstones. The second panel of scene one backtracks and overlaps the first panel, describing the enemy flight again to Azekah with the further development of the divine intervention with deadly *hailstones* (lit. "large stones from heaven"). Divine interventions are common motifs in ancient war accounts. These large hailstones (Heb "abanim gedolot") anticipate the large stones (Heb "abanim gedolot") that seal the kings in the caves (10.18,27; cf. 7.26).

10.12–15: Joshua's request to the LORD and the divine intervention. The third panel of scene one also backtracks and overlaps, describing Joshua's request to the Lord at the beginning of the battle with the further development of the divine intervention concerning the sun and moon (cf. Heb 3.11; Judg 5.20). The exact meaning of the divine intervention is difficult to ascertain because it is described only in poetry. **13:** *The Book of Jashar,* no longer extant, appears to have been a collection of poetry that extolled Israel's military victories and heroes (see 2 Sam 1.18). **15:** Scene one concludes with Joshua and Israel's return to Gilgal, which is repeated at the chapter's conclusion (v. 43) and need not be taken literally.

10.16–43: Scene two contains two panels (vv. 16–27; 28–39) and a summary (vv. 40–43). **16–27: The capture**

it was told Joshua, "The five kings have been found, hidden in the cave at Makkedah." 18 Joshua said, "Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave, and set men by it to guard them; 19 but do not stay there yourselves; pursue your enemies, and attack them from the rear. Do not let them enter their towns, for the LORD your God has given them into your hand." 20 When Joshua and the Israelites had finished inflicting a very great slaughter on them, until they were wiped out, and when the survivors had entered into the fortified towns, 21 all the people returned safe to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah; no one dared to speak[a] against any of the Israelites.

22 Then Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave, and bring those five kings out to me from the cave." 23 They did so, and brought the five kings out to him from the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. 24 When they brought the kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the Israelites, and said to the chiefs of the warriors who had gone with him, "Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings." Then they came near and put their feet on their necks. 25 And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous; for thus the LORD will do to all the enemies against whom you fight." 26 Afterward Joshua struck them down and put them to death, and he hung them on five trees. And they hung on the trees until evening. 27 At sunset Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves; they set large stones against the mouth of the cave, which remain to this very day.

28 Joshua took Makkedah on that day, and struck it and its king with the edge of the sword; he utterly destroyed every person in it; he left no one remaining. And he did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho.

29 Then Joshua passed on from Makkedah, and all Israel with him, to Libnah, and fought against Libnah. 30 The LORD gave it also and its king into the hand of Israel; and he struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it; he left no one remaining in it; and he did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho.

31 Next Joshua passed on from Libnah, and all Israel with him, to Lachish, and laid siege to it, and assaulted it. 32 The LORD gave Lachish into the hand of Israel, and he took it on the second day, and struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it, as he had done to Libnah.

33 Then King Horam of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua struck him and his people, leaving him no survivors.

34 From Lachish Joshua passed on with all Israel to Eglon; and they laid siege to it, and assaulted it; 35 and they took it that day, and struck it with the edge of the sword; and every person in it he utterly destroyed that day, as he had done to Lachish.

36 Then Joshua went up with all Israel from Eglon to Hebron; they assaulted it, 37 and took

[a] Heb *moved his tongue*

and execution of the kings. The first panel backtracks and overlaps the pursuit, developing the capture and execution of the Amorite kings. The mention of *Makkedah* in v. 16 is resumptive (see v. 10). Ironically, the cave that the kings choose as their hiding place becomes first their prison, then their tomb. **24:** *Feet on their necks,* symbolizing subjugation, as in 1 Kings 5.3; Ps 110.1. **26–27:** In the ancient world, corpses of vanquished enemies were displayed for psychological effect; see 8.29n.

10.28–39: The capture and "ḥerem" of the cities. The second panel backtracks to the pursuit and develops the capture and "ḥerem" of the cities in a stereotyped and redundant manner. (A verbal form of "ḥerem" is translated "utterly destroyed" in vv. 28,35,37,39,40). This typical ancient Near Eastern war account uses hyperbole to emphasize the success of Israel and its God. The king of Gezer, at the center of the seven short episodes, emphasizes that city's importance. While the city is not captured, the defeat of its king and army in open battle crowns the southern campaign. **31–32:** *Lachish* (Tell ed-Duweir) was one of the more important southern cities. **33:** According to other passages, *Gezer* becomes an Israelite city only in the time of Solomon (see 1 Kings 9.16). The Ephraimites had failed to capture it (16.10; Judg 1.29). **34–35:** *Eglon* may be identified with Tell Aitun. **36–39:** *Hebron* and *Debir* (probably Khirbet Rabud) fall to "all" Israel. In 14.6–15 Caleb is credited

it, and struck it with the edge of the sword, and its king and its towns, and every person in it; he left no one remaining, just as he had done to Eglon, and utterly destroyed it with every person in it.

38 Then Joshua, with all Israel, turned back to Debir and assaulted it, 39 and he took it with its king and all its towns; they struck them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed every person in it; he left no one remaining; just as he had done to Hebron, and, as he had done to Libnah and its king, so he did to Debir and its king.

40 So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded. 41 And Joshua defeated them from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. 42 Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel. 43 Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.

11 When King Jabin of Hazor heard of this, he sent to King Jobab of Madon, to the king of Shimron, to the king of Achshaph, 2 and to the kings who were in the northern hill country, and in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, and in the lowland, and in Naphothdor on the west, 3 to the Canaanites in the east and the west, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Hermon in the land of Mizpah. 4 They came out, with all their troops, a great army, in number like the sand on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots. 5 All these kings joined their forces, and came and camped together at the waters of Merom, to fight with Israel.

6 And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will hand over all of them, slain, to Israel; you shall hamstring their horses, and burn their chariots with fire." 7 So Joshua came suddenly upon them with all his fighting force, by the waters of Merom, and fell upon them. 8 And the LORD handed them over to Israel, who attacked them and chased them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim, and eastward as far as the valley of Mizpeh. They struck them down, until they had left no one remaining. 9 And Joshua did to them as the LORD commanded him; he hamstrung their horses, and burned their chariots with fire.

10 Joshua turned back at that time, and took Hazor, and struck its king down with the sword. Before that time Hazor was the head of all those kingdoms. 11 And they put to the

with victory at Hebron (see 15.13–14), but Judah in general gets credit in Judg 1.10. In 15.15–17 and Judg 1.11–13 Othniel is credited with the capture of Debir. These conflicting accounts highlight the perspective of chs 1–12, a conquest by "all Israel."

10.40–43: Summary of the southern campaign. Overstatement emphasizes the greatness of the Israelite victory. Scene two concludes (like scene one) with Joshua and Israel returning to Gilgal (10.43). **40:** *Negeb,* the semidesert region in the south. **41:** *Kadesh-barnea,* Num 13.1–14.45n. and map [OBA, p. 79, D-3]; see Deut 1.19; 9.23. *Goshen,* a designation of the region north of the Negeb (see also 11.16); not the region with the same name in the Egyptian Delta (Gen 45.10; etc.).

11.1–15: Northern campaign. A literary mirror of 10.1–43 both in general structure and vocabulary, though less developed.

11.1–11: Defeat of the Canaanite coalition. A large and powerful Canaanite coalition is organized and headed by Jabin, the king of Hazor. The name *Jabin* occurs here and in Judg 4 and Ps 83.10. Scholars generally see Judg 4–5 as the source for this story. **1:** The final occurrence of the "hearing" motif, see 5.1n. The locations of *Madon, Shimron,* and *Achshaph* are not certain. **2:** The *Arabah* is the Jordan Valley; *Chinneroth,* the Sea of Galilee. **3–5:** This enemy is superior to the Israelite army, both numerically and technologically (they have dreaded horses and chariots). This coalition presents the most significant threat to Israel's success in conquering the land. *Hermon,* the high mountain in the extreme north of Israel. *Merom* is a city in Galilee known from extrabiblical sources; its precise location is not certain. **6:** The Lord's oracle of assurance precedes the victory (cf. 8.1; 10.8). *Hamstring their horses* means cutting a tendon of a rear leg to make them useless (see 2 Sam 8.4). **10–11:** Hazor, the most important northern city, is totally destroyed by burning just like Jericho and Ai (cf. 6.24; 8.8,19). Jericho and Hazor frame the "conquest" of the land of Canaan.

sword all who were in it, utterly destroying them; there was no one left who breathed, and he burned Hazor with fire. 12 And all the towns of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua took, and struck them with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded. 13 But Israel burned none of the towns that stood on mounds except Hazor, which Joshua did burn. 14 All the spoil of these towns, and the livestock, the Israelites took for their booty; but all the people they struck down with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, and they did not leave any who breathed. 15 As the LORD had commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses.

16 So Joshua took all that land: the hill country and all the Negeb and all the land of Goshen and the lowland and the Arabah and the hill country of Israel and its lowland, 17 from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, as far as Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He took all their kings, struck them down, and put them to death. 18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. 19 There was not a town that made peace with the Israelites, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; all were taken in battle. 20 For it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts so that they would come against Israel in battle, in order that they might be utterly destroyed, and might receive no mercy, but be exterminated, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

21 At that time Joshua came and wiped out the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel; Joshua utterly destroyed them with their towns. 22 None of the Anakim was left in the land of the Israelites; some remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod. 23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war.

12 Now these are the kings of the land, whom the Israelites defeated, whose land they occupied beyond the Jordan toward the east, from the Wadi Arnon to Mount Hermon, with all the Arabah eastward: 2 King Sihon of the Amorites who lived at Heshbon, and ruled from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, and from the middle of the valley as far as the river Jabbok, the boundary of the Ammonites, that is, half of Gilead, 3 and the Arabah to the Sea of Chinneroth eastward, and in the direction of Beth-jeshimoth, to the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea,[a] southward to the foot of the slopes of Pisgah; 4 and King Og[b] of Bashan, one of the last of the Rephaim, who lived at Ashtaroth and at Edrei 5 and ruled over Mount Hermon and Salecah and all Bashan to the boundary of the Geshurites and the

[a] Heb *Salt Sea*

[b] Gk: Heb *the boundary of King Og*

11.12–15: Summary of northern campaign. The Israelite conquest in the north is summarized by noting several times that "all" was conquered by Joshua, the worthy successor to Moses, who fulfilled the requirements of Deut 20.16–17. **13:** *Mounds,* translating the Hebrew word for "tells," cf. 8.28n.

11.16–23: Summary of total conquest. 16–19: The word *all* characterizes these verses, emphasizing the totality of the conquest. **18–20:** The depiction here somewhat conflicts with the earlier accounts, suggesting that a protracted war was necessary. **20:** *Harden their hearts,* this phrase is elsewhere used of Pharaoh in Egypt (Ex 4.21; etc.), and suggests that, for the Lord and for the author, the inhabitants of the land were enemies comparable to the Egyptians. **21:** *The Anakim,* a term for pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan renowned for their size and strength (Deut 9.2). **23:** *And the land had rest from war,* a conclusion formula, moving toward a transition from the conquest to the division of land. This declaration recurs in 14.15, forming a literary link between the defeat of the Anakim by Joshua (ch 11) and their defeat by Caleb (ch 14).

12.1–24: A selective list of defeated cities' kings. An additional conclusion to the first section of the book. **1–6: Moses' exploits in Transjordan.** This summary draws from Deut 2–3; (see map on p. 252 in Deut). **2:** The story of *King Sihon* is narrated in Num 21.21–31 and Deut 2.26–37. **4:** The defeat of *Og* is narrated in Num 21.33–35 and Deut 3.1–17. *Bashan,* northern Transjordan. *Rephaim,* here another term for pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan.

Maacathites, and over half of Gilead to the boundary of King Sihon of Heshbon. [6] Moses, the servant of the LORD, and the Israelites defeated them; and Moses the servant of the LORD gave their land for a possession to the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

[7] The following are the kings of the land whom Joshua and the Israelites defeated on the west side of the Jordan, from Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon to Mount Halak, that rises toward Seir (and Joshua gave their land to the tribes of Israel as a possession according to their allotments, [8] in the hill country, in the lowland, in the Arabah, in the slopes, in the wilderness, and in the Negeb, the land of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites):

[9] the king of Jericho	one
the king of Ai, which is next to Bethel	one
[10] the king of Jerusalem	one
the king of Hebron	one
[11] the king of Jarmuth	one
the king of Lachish	one
[12] the king of Eglon	one
the king of Gezer	one
[13] the king of Debir	one
the king of Geder	one
[14] the king of Hormah	one
the king of Arad	one
[15] the king of Libnah	one
the king of Adullam	one
[16] the king of Makkedah	one
the king of Bethel	one
[17] the king of Tappuah	one
the king of Hepher	one
[18] the king of Aphek	one
the king of Lasharon	one
[19] the king of Madon	one
the king of Hazor	one
[20] the king of Shimron-meron	one
the king of Achshaph	one
[21] the king of Taanach	one
the king of Megiddo	one
[22] the king of Kedesh	one
the king of Jokneam in Carmel	one
[23] the king of Dor in Naphath-dor	one
the king of Goiim in Galilee,[a]	one
[24] the king of Tirzah	one

thirty-one kings in all.

13 Now Joshua was old and advanced in years; and the LORD said to him, "You are old and advanced in years, and very much of the land still remains to be possessed. [2] This is the land that still remains: all the regions of the Philistines, and all those of

[a] Gk: Heb *Gilgal*

12.7–24: Joshua's victories west of the Jordan. Previous narratives mention fewer than half of these cities. Vv. 9–13a follow the order of chs 6–10, but after that there is no clear pattern. This section thus seems to be adapted from a different source than the previous chapters. Moreover, the length of this list shows that previous narratives are selective, highlighting particular stories for ideological and theological purposes. For the location of the places, see map 4 at the end of this volume.

13.1–24.33: The allotment of land. Having completed his first task, the conquest (1.2–5), Joshua turns his attention to his second task (1.6): "Put this people in possession of the land" (cf. Deut 4.21; 15.4; 19.10). The concern over allotment or inheritance ("naḥalah") unifies this section (13.6; 14.3,13; 17.4,6,14; 19.49). The section emphasizes that the division follows the divine will, as mediated by Joshua and Eleazar the priest. It utilizes four types of sources: boundary descriptions; town lists integrated into boundary descriptions; town lists; and short narratives that relate incidents of importance within the allotments, providing didactic significance to the division of the land. The cities of refuge and Levitical cities are attached at the end of the section since it is necessary for the tribes to receive their inheritance before they can allocate parts of it to others. For this entire section, see map on p. 347.

13.1–7: Land remaining. The land remaining is defined by those towns and regions inside the borders of Canaan (cf. Num 34.1–12) that are not under Israelite control. This foreshadows other passages in chs 13–21 that contrast with the first half of the book, by documenting Israel's failure to capture all of the land, or by noting that foreigners live among the Israelites. These contrast ironically with the idealistic reports given in the text (cf. 15.63; 16.10; 17.11–13; 18.2; 19.47). The particular areas designated as outside Israelite possession are *the regions of the Philistines* (the southwestern coastal area), *and all those of the Geshurites* (east of the Sea of Galilee) (cf. 13.13), and the land of Phoenicia (northern coastal areas). Philistia and Geshur came under Israelite control during the period of David and Solomon (2 Sam 8.1–2; 3.3).

the Geshurites [3] (from the Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron, it is reckoned as Canaanite; there are five rulers of the Philistines, those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron), and those of the Avvim [4] in the south; all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, to Aphek, to the boundary of the Amorites, [5] and the land of the Gebalites, and all Lebanon, toward the east, from Baal-gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo-hamath, [6] all the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim, even all the Sidonians. I will myself drive them out from before the Israelites; only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you. [7] Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh."

[8] With the other half-tribe of Manasseh[a] the Reubenites and the Gadites received their inheritance, which Moses gave them, beyond the Jordan eastward, as Moses the servant of the LORD gave them: [9] from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, and the town that is in the middle of the valley, and all the tableland from[b] Medeba as far as Dibon; [10] and all the cities of King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, as far as the boundary of the Ammonites; [11] and Gilead, and the region of the Geshurites and Maacathites, and all Mount Hermon, and all Bashan to Salecah; [12] all the kingdom of Og in Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei (he alone was left of the survivors of the Rephaim); these Moses had defeated and driven out. [13] Yet the Israelites did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites; but Geshur and Maacath live within Israel to this day.

[14] To the tribe of Levi alone Moses gave no inheritance; the offerings by fire to the LORD God of Israel are their inheritance, as he said to them.

[15] Moses gave an inheritance to the tribe of the Reubenites according to their clans. [16] Their territory was from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, and the town that is in the middle of the valley, and all the tableland by Medeba; [17] with Heshbon, and all its towns that are in the tableland; Dibon, and Bamoth-baal, and Beth-baal-meon, [18] and Jahaz, and Kedemoth, and Mephaath, [19] and Kiriathaim, and Sibmah, and Zereth-shahar on the hill of the valley, [20] and Beth-peor, and the slopes of Pisgah, and Beth-jeshimoth, [21] that is, all the towns of the tableland, and all the kingdom of King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, whom Moses defeated with the leaders of Midian, Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, as princes of Sihon, who lived in the land. [22] Along with the rest of those they put to death, the Israelites also put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practiced divination. [23] And the border of the Reubenites was the Jordan and its banks. This was the inheritance of the Reubenites according to their families with their towns and villages.

[24] Moses gave an inheritance also to the tribe of the Gadites, according to their families. [25] Their territory was Jazer, and all the towns of Gilead, and half the land of the Ammonites, to Aroer, which is east of Rabbah, [26] and from Heshbon to Ramath-mizpeh and Betonim, and from Mahanaim to the territory of Debir,[c] [27] and in the valley Beth-haram,

[a] Cn: Heb *With it*
[b] Compare Gk: Heb lacks *from*
[c] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *Lidebir*

13.8–33: Transjordanian tribal allotment. Before the allotments west of the Jordan can be described, the Transjordanian allotments that Moses made are recounted: a general description of the extent of the Transjordanian lands (13.8–13), a declaration that the Levites received no inheritance (13.14), a specific description of the Transjordanian territories (13.15–32), and again a declaration that the Levites received no inheritance (13.33). Israel had great difficulties controlling this territory throughout its history, though Deuteronomy considered it part of Israel (see Deut 3.12–17). See map on p. 237 [Num map #3] and map 2 at the end of this volume. **12:** *Rephaim,* see 12.4n. **13:** The first of a number of qualifications about Israelite success in possessing the land. **14:** *Offerings by fire,* as the priestly tribe, the Levites were in charge of worship and shared the offerings; cf. Lev 7.29–36; etc. See also v. 33n. **21:** *Midian,* see Num 31.1–12. **22:** *Balaam,* in contrast to the narrative about him in Num 22–24, here this non-Israelite prophet is presented in a negative light, and only here and in Num 31.8 are the Israelites said to have killed him.

Beth-nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon, the rest of the kingdom of King Sihon of Heshbon, the Jordan and its banks, as far as the lower end of the Sea of Chinnereth, eastward beyond the Jordan. 28 This is the inheritance of the Gadites according to their clans, with their towns and villages.

29 Moses gave an inheritance to the half-tribe of Manasseh; it was allotted to the half-tribe of the Manassites according to their families. 30 Their territory extended from Mahanaim, through all Bashan, the whole kingdom of King Og of Bashan, and all the settlements of Jair, which are in Bashan, sixty towns, 31 and half of Gilead, and Ashtaroth, and Edrei, the towns of the kingdom of Og in Bashan; these were allotted to the people of Machir son of Manasseh according to their clans—for half the Machirites.

32 These are the inheritances that Moses distributed in the plains of Moab, beyond the Jordan east of Jericho. 33 But to the tribe of Levi Moses gave no inheritance; the LORD God of Israel is their inheritance, as he said to them.

14 These are the inheritances that the Israelites received in the land of Canaan, which the priest Eleazar, and Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of the families of the tribes of the Israelites distributed to them. 2 Their inheritance was by lot, as the LORD had commanded Moses for the nine and one-half tribes. 3 For Moses had given an inheritance to the two and one-half tribes beyond the Jordan; but to the Levites he gave no inheritance among them. 4 For the people of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim; and no portion was given to the Levites in the land, but only towns to live in, with their pasture lands for their flocks and herds. 5 The Israelites did as the LORD commanded Moses; they allotted the land.

6 Then the people of Judah came to Joshua at Gilgal; and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the LORD said to Moses the man of God in Kadesh-barnea concerning you and me. 7 I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land; and I brought him an honest report. 8 But my companions who went up with me made the heart of the people melt; yet I wholeheartedly followed the LORD my God. 9 And Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, because you have wholeheartedly followed the LORD my God.' 10 And now, as you see, the LORD has kept me alive, as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the LORD spoke this word to Moses, while Israel was journeying through the wilderness; and here I am today, eighty-five years old. 11 I am still as strong today as I was on the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war, and for going and coming. 12 So now give me

14.1–19.51: Cisjordanian tribal allotment. The story of the allotments to the tribes west of the Jordan is framed by an introduction (14.1–5) and a summary (19.51). The main text is divided into two major sections: the Judah and Joseph allotments (14.6–17.18) and the seven other tribal allotments (18.1–19.51). **33:** A somewhat different formulation from v. 14; cf. Deut 10.9; 18.2; 18.7.

14.1–5: Introduction to the process of allotment. Eleazar (the chief priest, son of Aaron), Joshua, and the heads of the tribal families oversaw this allotment, which was performed by lot (see 7.14n.). **4–5:** See Num 34.13–15; 35.3. To maintain the number of tribes at twelve, the *people of Joseph* were counted as two tribes, *Manasseh and Ephraim,* to make up for Levi's lack of inheritance.

14.6–17.18: Judah and Joseph allotments. Parallel structures are used to describe the allotments to these tribes: narrative frames, boundary descriptions, and town lists, with vignettes in the center.

14.6–15.63: Judah. The tribe to which King David belonged is first.

14.6–15: Caleb's conquest. The success of Judah is specifically illustrated in the narrative frame story of Caleb's conquest of Hebron. *Caleb* was one of the original twelve spies sent into the land of Canaan (Num 13.30; 14.24). Caleb and his clan conquer Hebron, the home of the Anakim. The repetition in v. 15 of the statement *and the land had rest from war* connects this story to 11.21–23. Ironically, it was the fear of these very Anakim that caused Israel's disobedience and failure at Kadesh-barnea, according to Num 13.28 and Deut 1.28. **10:** According to Deut 2.14, thirty-eight years elapsed from the events at Kadesh to the entry into the land; the events of the

this hill country of which the LORD spoke on that day; for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; it may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall drive them out, as the LORD said."

13 Then Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. 14 So Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholeheartedly followed the LORD, the God of Israel. 15 Now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath-arba;[a] this Arba was[b] the greatest man among the Anakim. And the land had rest from war.

15 The lot for the tribe of the people of Judah according to their families reached southward to the boundary of Edom, to the wilderness of Zin at the farthest south. 2 And their south boundary ran from the end of the Dead Sea,[c] from the bay that faces southward; 3 it goes out southward of the ascent of Akrabbim, passes along to Zin, and goes up south of Kadesh-barnea, along by Hezron, up to Addar, makes a turn to Karka, 4 passes along to Azmon, goes out by the Wadi of Egypt, and comes to its end at the sea. This shall be your south boundary. 5 And the east boundary is the Dead Sea,[c] to the mouth of the Jordan. And the boundary on the north side runs from the bay of the sea at the mouth of the Jordan; 6 and the boundary goes up to Beth-hoglah, and passes along north of Beth-arabah; and the boundary goes up to the Stone of Bohan, Reuben's son; 7 and the boundary goes up to Debir from the Valley of Achor, and so northward, turning toward Gilgal, which is opposite the ascent of Adummim, which is on the south side of the valley; and the boundary passes along to the waters of En-shemesh, and ends at En-rogel; 8 then the boundary goes up by the valley of the son of Hinnom at the southern slope of the Jebusites (that is, Jerusalem); and the boundary goes up to the top of the mountain that lies over against the valley of Hinnom, on the west, at the northern end of the valley of Rephaim; 9 then the boundary extends from the top of the mountain to the spring of the Waters of Nephtoah, and from there to the towns of Mount Ephron; then the boundary bends around to Baalah (that is, Kiriath-jearim); 10 and the boundary circles west of Baalah to Mount Seir, passes along to the northern slope of Mount Jearim (that is, Chesalon), and goes down to Beth-shemesh, and passes along by Timnah; 11 the boundary goes out to the slope of the hill north of Ekron, then the boundary bends around to Shikkeron, and passes along to Mount Baalah, and goes out to Jabneel; then the boundary comes to an end at the sea. 12 And the west boundary was the Mediterranean with its coast. This is the boundary surrounding the people of Judah according to their families.

13 According to the commandment of the LORD to Joshua, he gave to Caleb son of Jep-

[a] That is *the city of Arba*
[b] Heb lacks *this Arba was*
[c] Heb *Salt Sea*

preceding chapters thus took seven years. **13:** *Hebron* (Tell Rumeideh) is 31 km (19 mi) south of Jerusalem. **14:** This prime example of Judahite success is accomplished by a non-Israelite: Caleb is a Kenizzite (14.6,14) who is, however, ultimately incorporated into Judah's genealogy (1 Chr 2.9,18). **15:** See 15.13; Gen 23.2.

15.1–12: Judah's boundary description is given in a counterclockwise arrangement: south (vv. 2–4), east (v. 5), north (vv. 6–11), west (v. 12a; cf. 11.21–22; Judg 1.18–19; Josh 15.63), with a concluding boundary description (v. 12b). See map on p. 347 and map 4 at the end of this volume. **1:** *Wilderness of Zin,* the locale of Kadesh-barnea, in the southern Negeb (see 10.41n.; Num 20.1; Deut 32.51). **4:** *Wadi of Egypt,* either the Wadi Besor or the Wadi el-Arish, both south of Gaza. **6:** *Bohan,* means "thumb"; see 18.17. No son of Reuben with this name is mentioned elsewhere, and the location of part of the tribe of Reuben west of the Jordan is unusual. **7–8:** For the geography of Jerusalem, see map 4 at the end of this volume.

15.13–19: Vignettes about Judah's heroes (cf. 10.36–39; Judg 1.9–15): male, Caleb and Othniel (15.13–17), and female, Achsah (15.18–19). In the first vignette, Caleb conquers Hebron (see 14.6–15) and attacks the city of Debir. After recording Caleb's challenge and offer of his daughter in marriage (cf. 1 Sam 17.25), Othniel steps forward as the conquering hero of Debir. In the second, Achsah takes the initiative, urging her husband to ask for a field and then requesting her father to give her springs or pools since land without water is land without

hunneh a portion among the people of Judah, Kiriath-arba,[a] that is, Hebron (Arba was the father of Anak). [14] And Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak. [15] From there he went up against the inhabitants of Debir; now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher. [16] And Caleb said, "Whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife." [17] Othniel son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it; and he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife. [18] When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. As she dismounted from her donkey, Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" [19] She said to him, "Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me springs of water as well." So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

[20] This is the inheritance of the tribe of the people of Judah according to their families. [21] The towns belonging to the tribe of the people of Judah in the extreme south, toward the boundary of Edom, were Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur, [22] Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah, [23] Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan, [24] Ziph, Telem, Bealoth, [25] Hazor-hadattah, Kerioth-hezron (that is, Hazor), [26] Amam, Shema, Moladah, [27] Hazar-gaddah, Heshmon, Beth-pelet, [28] Hazar-shual, Beer-sheba, Biziothiah, [29] Baalah, Iim, Ezem, [30] Eltolad, Chesil, Hormah, [31] Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah, [32] Lebaoth, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon: in all, twenty-nine towns, with their villages.

[33] And in the lowland, Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah, [34] Zanoah, En-gannim, Tappuah, Enam, [35] Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah, [36] Shaaraim, Adithaim, Gederah, Gederothaim: fourteen towns with their villages.

[37] Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal-gad, [38] Dilan, Mizpeh, Jokthe-el, [39] Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon, [40] Cabbon, Lahmam, Chitlish, [41] Gederoth, Beth-dagon, Naamah, and Makkedah: sixteen towns with their villages.

[42] Libnah, Ether, Ashan, [43] Iphtah, Ashnah, Nezib, [44] Keilah, Achzib, and Mareshah: nine towns with their villages.

[45] Ekron, with its dependencies and its villages; [46] from Ekron to the sea, all that were near Ashdod, with their villages.

[47] Ashdod, its towns and its villages; Gaza, its towns and its villages; to the Wadi of Egypt, and the Great Sea with its coast.

[48] And in the hill country, Shamir, Jattir, Socoh, [49] Dannah, Kiriath-sannah (that is, Debir), [50] Anab, Eshtemoh, Anim, [51] Goshen, Holon, and Giloh: eleven towns with their villages.

[52] Arab, Dumah, Eshan, [53] Janim, Beth-tappuah, Aphekah, [54] Humtah, Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), and Zior: nine towns with their villages.

[55] Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttah, [56] Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah, [57] Kain, Gibeah, and Timnah: ten towns with their villages.

[58] Halhul, Beth-zur, Gedor, [59] Maarath, Beth-anoth, and Eltekon: six towns with their villages.

[60] Kiriath-baal (that is, Kiriath-jearim) and Rabbah: two towns with their villages.

[61] In the wilderness, Beth-arabah, Middin, Secacah, [62] Nibshan, the City of Salt, and Engedi: six towns with their villages.

[63] But the people of Judah could not drive out the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so the Jebusites live with the people of Judah in Jerusalem to this day.

16 The allotment of the Josephites went from the Jordan by Jericho, east of the waters of Jericho, into the wilderness, going

[a] That is *the city of Arba*

life. She seeks a sufficient blessing in the land.

15.20–62: A list of Judah's towns according to districts that is generally considered to have originated in the monarchic period. A similar list is found in 1 Kings 4.7–19.

15.63: A narrative postscript noting Judah's failure to conquer Jerusalem. This failure contrasts with Caleb's success in the initial narrative of Judah's allotment (14.6–15). David captures this city (2 Sam 5.6–9). *Jebusites,* Jebus, the name by which Jerusalem was known before its conquest by David.

16.1–17.18: Joseph (Ephraim and Half-Manasseh). As the primary power in the Northern Kingdom, Joseph is mentioned next. See map on p. 347.

16.1–4: A narrative frame that gives the general outline of the southern borders of the Joseph tribes (i.e., the southern boundary of Ephraim). There is ambiguity concerning the people of Joseph. They receive one

up from Jericho into the hill country to Bethel;
2 then going from Bethel to Luz, it passes along
to Ataroth, the territory of the Archites; 3 then
it goes down westward to the territory of the
Japhletites, as far as the territory of Lower Beth-
horon, then to Gezer, and it ends at the sea.

4 The Josephites—Manasseh and
Ephraim—received their inheritance.

5 The territory of the Ephraimites by their
families was as follows: the boundary of their
inheritance on the east was Ataroth-addar as
far as Upper Beth-horon, 6 and the boundary
goes from there to the sea; on the north is
Michmethath; then on the east the bound-
ary makes a turn toward Taanath-shiloh, and
passes along beyond it on the east to Janoah,
7 then it goes down from Janoah to Ataroth
and to Naarah, and touches Jericho, ending
at the Jordan. 8 From Tappuah the bound-
ary goes westward to the Wadi Kanah, and
ends at the sea. Such is the inheritance of
the tribe of the Ephraimites by their families,
9 together with the towns that were set apart
for the Ephraimites within the inheritance
of the Manassites, all those towns with their
villages. 10 They did not, however, drive out
the Canaanites who lived in Gezer: so the
Canaanites have lived within Ephraim to this
day but have been made to do forced labor.

17 Then allotment was made to the
tribe of Manasseh, for he was the
firstborn of Joseph. To Machir the firstborn
of Manasseh, the father of Gilead, were
allotted Gilead and Bashan, because he was
a warrior. 2 And allotments were made to
the rest of the tribe of Manasseh, by their
families, Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem,
Hepher, and Shemida; these were the male
descendants of Manasseh son of Joseph, by
their families.

3 Now Zelophehad son of Hepher son of
Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh had
no sons, but only daughters; and these are
the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah,
Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 4 They came
before the priest Eleazar and Joshua son of
Nun and the leaders, and said, "The LORD
commanded Moses to give us an inheri-
tance along with our male kin." So according
to the commandment of the LORD he gave
them an inheritance among the kinsmen of
their father. 5 Thus there fell to Manasseh
ten portions, besides the land of Gilead and
Bashan, which is on the other side of the
Jordan, 6 because the daughters of Manasseh
received an inheritance along with his sons.
The land of Gilead was allotted to the rest of
the Manassites.

7 The territory of Manasseh reached
from Asher to Michmethath, which is east
of Shechem; then the boundary goes along
southward to the inhabitants of En-tappuah.
8 The land of Tappuah belonged to Manasseh,
but the town of Tappuah on the boundary

allotment (16.1), as if they constitute one tribe, yet they are recognized as two distinct tribal units (Manasseh and Ephraim; 14.4a). In addition, one of the tribes, Manasseh, is further divided. Part of the tribe has already received an allotment in Transjordan, while the remainder receives its allotment in Cisjordan.

16.5–10: Ephraim's boundary description is delineated. The fragmentary description here contrasts with that devoted to Judah (15.1–12). **10:** The Ephraimites failed to dispossess the Canaanites, though putting them under forced labor; cf. 15.63; Judg 1.29.

17.1–6: Ephraim's heroes. This somewhat disjointed section corresponds to Judah's vignettes of heroes. **1–2:** The mighty *warrior* (parallel to Caleb and Othniel in 15.13–17) is Machir, Manasseh's firstborn (cf. Num 32.39–40), who is given Gilead and Bashan, in Transjordan (see map on p. 347). Yet the allotment for *the rest of the tribe of Manasseh* west of the Jordan is given in the form of a town list without any connection to the ancestral hero. Although Ephraim's territory was listed first, Manasseh is considered the firstborn, as in Gen 48.13–20. **3–6:** The tribes' heroic women (corresponding to Achsah in 15.18–19) are the daughters of Zelophehad (see Num 27.1–11; 36.1–12).

17.7–13: Manasseh's boundary description is given. It includes a list of towns that the tribe had within the tribal allotments of Issachar and Asher (v. 11). As in the case of Ephraim, the Canaanites were not driven out, but were put to forced labor (vv. 12–13, cf. Judg 1.27–28). While the description of Judah's borders is related with precision and detail, those of Ephraim and Manasseh are fragmentary, take up much less textual space, and present numerous topographical difficulties. The integrity of Judah's territory is thus contrasted with the broken borders of the Joseph tribes.

of Manasseh belonged to the Ephraimites. [9] Then the boundary went down to the Wadi Kanah. The towns here, to the south of the wadi, among the towns of Manasseh, belong to Ephraim. Then the boundary of Manasseh goes along the north side of the wadi and ends at the sea. [10] The land to the south is Ephraim's and that to the north is Manasseh's, with the sea forming its boundary; on the north Asher is reached, and on the east Issachar. [11] Within Issachar and Asher, Manasseh had Beth-shean and its villages, Ibleam and its villages, the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, the inhabitants of En-dor and its villages, the inhabitants of Taanach and its villages, and the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages (the third is Naphath).[a] [12] Yet the Manassites could not take possession of those towns; but the Canaanites continued to live in that land. [13] But when the Israelites grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out.

[14] The tribe of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, "Why have you given me but one lot and one portion as an inheritance, since we are a numerous people, whom all along the LORD has blessed?" [15] And Joshua said to them, "If you are a numerous people, go up to the forest, and clear ground there for yourselves in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim, since the hill country of Ephraim is too narrow for you." [16] The tribe of Joseph said, "The hill country is not enough for us; yet all the Canaanites who live in the plain have chariots of iron, both those in Beth-shean and its villages and those in the Valley of Jezreel." [17] Then Joshua said to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh, "You are indeed a numerous people, and have great power; you shall not have one lot only, [18] but the hill country shall be yours, for though it is a forest, you shall clear it and possess it to its farthest borders; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong."

18 Then the whole congregation of the Israelites assembled at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting there. The land lay subdued before them.

[2] There remained among the Israelites seven tribes whose inheritance had not yet been apportioned. [3] So Joshua said to the Israelites, "How long will you be slack about going in and taking possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you? [4] Provide three men from each tribe, and I will send them out that they may begin to go throughout the land, writing a description of it with a view to their inheritances. Then come back to me. [5] They shall divide it into seven portions, Judah continuing in its territory on the south, and the house of Joseph in their territory on the north. [6] You shall describe the land in seven divisions and bring the description here to me; and I will cast lots for you here before the LORD our God. [7] The Levites have no portion among you, for the priesthood of the LORD is their heritage; and Gad and Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan eastward, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave them."

[8] So the men started on their way; and Joshua charged those who went to write the description of the land, saying, "Go throughout the land and write a description of it, and come back to me; and I will cast lots for you

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

17.14–18: Joseph's portion. This narrative frame describes the demand of the people of Joseph and the double portion that they receive. This story is an ironic counterbalance to the quest for land by Caleb (14.6–15), and perhaps also by Achsah (15.18–19). The Josephites convey trepidation, contentiousness, and failure.

18.1–19.51: Seven other tribal allotments. The narration of the allotments to the remaining seven tribes. See map on p. 347 and map 4 at the end of this volume.

18.1–10: Assembly of Shiloh. General introduction to the allotments. The boundaries of the tribes in the land are asserted to be the result of the Lord's will and of Israel's obedience, not human will or historical contingency. **1:** *Shiloh,* an important Israelite sanctuary in the period before the monarchy (Judg 18.31; 1 Sam 4.3–4). It is 31 km (19 mi) north of Jerusalem.

6: *Lots*, see 7.14n. **7:** *The Levites*, see 13.14n., 33n.

here before the LORD in Shiloh." [9] So the men went and traversed the land and set down in a book a description of it by towns in seven divisions; then they came back to Joshua in the camp at Shiloh, [10] and Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD; and there Joshua apportioned the land to the Israelites, to each a portion.

[11] The lot of the tribe of Benjamin according to its families came up, and the territory allotted to it fell between the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Joseph. [12] On the north side their boundary began at the Jordan; then the boundary goes up to the slope of Jericho on the north, then up through the hill country westward; and it ends at the wilderness of Beth-aven. [13] From there the boundary passes along southward in the direction of Luz, to the slope of Luz (that is, Bethel), then the boundary goes down to Ataroth-addar, on the mountain that lies south of Lower Beth-horon. [14] Then the boundary goes in another direction, turning on the western side southward from the mountain that lies to the south, opposite Beth-horon, and it ends at Kiriath-baal (that is, Kiriath-jearim), a town belonging to the tribe of Judah. This forms the western side. [15] The southern side begins at the outskirts of Kiriath-jearim; and the boundary goes from there to Ephron,[a] to the spring of the Waters of Nephtoah; [16] then the boundary goes down to the border of the mountain that overlooks the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is at the north end of the valley of Rephaim; and it then goes down the valley of Hinnom, south of the slope of the Jebusites, and downward to En-rogel; [17] then it bends in a northerly direction going on to En-shemesh, and from there goes to Geliloth, which is opposite the ascent of Adummim; then it goes down to the Stone of Bohan, Reuben's son; [18] and passing on to the north of the slope of Beth-arabah[b] it goes down to the Arabah; [19] then the boundary passes on to the north of the slope of Beth-hoglah; and the boundary ends at the northern bay of the Dead Sea,[c] at the south end of the Jordan: this is the southern border. [20] The Jordan forms its boundary on the eastern side. This is the inheritance of the tribe of Benjamin, according to its families, boundary by boundary all around.

[21] Now the towns of the tribe of Benjamin according to their families were Jericho, Beth-hoglah, Emek-keziz, [22] Beth-arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel, [23] Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, [24] Chephar-ammoni, Ophni, and Geba—twelve towns with their villages: [25] Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, [26] Mizpeh, Chephirah, Mozah, [27] Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah, [28] Zela, Haeleph, Jebus[d] (that is, Jerusalem), Gibeah[e] and Kiriath-jearim[f]—fourteen towns with their villages. This is the inheritance of the tribe of Benjamin according to its families.

19 The second lot came out for Simeon, for the tribe of Simeon, according to its families; its inheritance lay within the inheritance of the tribe of Judah. [2] It had for its inheritance Beer-sheba, Sheba, Moladah, [3] Hazar-shual, Balah, Ezem, [4] Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah, [5] Ziklag, Beth-marcaboth, Hazar-susah, [6] Beth-lebaoth, and Sharuhen—thirteen towns with their villages; [7] Ain, Rimmon, Ether, and Ashan—four towns with their villages; [8] together with all the villages all around these towns as far as Baalath-beer, Ramah of the Negeb. This was the inheritance of the tribe of Simeon according to its families. [9] The inheritance of the tribe of Simeon formed part of the territory of Judah; because the portion of the tribe of Judah was too large for them, the tribe of Simeon obtained an inheritance within their inheritance.

[a] Cn See 15.9. Heb *westward*
[b] Gk: Heb *to the slope over against the Arabah*
[c] Heb *Salt Sea*
[d] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *the Jebusite*
[e] Heb *Gibeath*
[f] Gk: Heb *Kiriath*

18.11–28: Benjamin. The territory of Benjamin is immediately north of Judah. **12–20:** A counter-clockwise boundary description is given. **17:** Bohan, see 15.6n. **21–28:** Benjamin's town list follows. Two districts of towns (vv. 21–24 and vv. 25–28) are presented in the same format as those for Judah (many scholars assume from the same source). **28:** *Jerusalem,* assigned to Judah in 15.63.

19.1–9: Simeon. The allotment is described only in terms of a town list (cf. 1 Chr 4.28–33). **9:** A gloss explaining why these do not follow a boundary description. A conjoining of Judah and Simeon is also found in Judg 1.3.

10 The third lot came up for the tribe
of Zebulun, according to its families. The
boundary of its inheritance reached as far as
Sarid; 11 then its boundary goes up westward,
and on to Maralah, and touches Dabbesheth,
then the wadi that is east of Jokneam;
12 from Sarid it goes in the other direction
eastward toward the sunrise to the bound-
ary of Chisloth-tabor; from there it goes to
Daberath, then up to Japhia; 13 from there it
passes along on the east toward the sunrise
to Gath-hepher, to Eth-kazin, and going on to
Rimmon it bends toward Neah; 14 then on the
north the boundary makes a turn to Han-
nathon, and it ends at the valley of Iphtah-el;
15 and Kattath, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah, and
Bethlehem—twelve towns with their villages.
16 This is the inheritance of the tribe of Zebu-
lun, according to its families—these towns
with their villages.

17 The fourth lot came out for Issachar, for
the tribe of Issachar, according to its families.
18 Its territory included Jezreel, Chesulloth,
Shunem, 19 Hapharaim, Shion, Anaharath,
20 Rabbith, Kishion, Ebez, 21 Remeth, En-
gannim, En-haddah, Beth-pazzez; 22 the
boundary also touches Tabor, Shahazumah,
and Beth-shemesh, and its boundary ends
at the Jordan—sixteen towns with their vil-
lages. 23 This is the inheritance of the tribe of
Issachar, according to its families—the towns
with their villages.

24 The fifth lot came out for the tribe of
Asher according to its families. 25 Its bound-
ary included Helkath, Hali, Beten, Ach-
shaph, 26 Allammelech, Amad, and Mishal;
on the west it touches Carmel and Shihor-
libnath, 27 then it turns eastward, goes to
Beth-dagon, and touches Zebulun and the
valley of Iphtah-el northward to Beth-emek
and Neiel; then it continues in the north to
Cabul, 28 Ebron, Rehob, Hammon, Kanah,
as far as Great Sidon; 29 then the boundary
turns to Ramah, reaching to the fortified
city of Tyre; then the boundary turns to
Hosah, and it ends at the sea; Mahalab,[a]
Achzib, 30 Ummah, Aphek, and Rehob—
twenty-two towns with their villages. 31 This
is the inheritance of the tribe of Asher
according to its families—these towns with
their villages.

32 The sixth lot came out for the tribe of
Naphtali, for the tribe of Naphtali, according
to its families. 33 And its boundary ran from
Heleph, from the oak in Zaanannim, and
Adami-nekeb, and Jabneel, as far as Lak-
kum; and it ended at the Jordan; 34 then the
boundary turns westward to Aznoth-tabor,
and goes from there to Hukkok, touching
Zebulun at the south, and Asher on the west,
and Judah on the east at the Jordan. 35 The
fortified towns are Ziddim, Zer, Hammath,
Rakkath, Chinnereth, 36 Adamah, Ramah,
Hazor, 37 Kedesh, Edrei, En-hazor, 38 Iron,
Migdal-el, Horem, Beth-anath, and Beth-
shemesh—nineteen towns with their vil-
lages. 39 This is the inheritance of the tribe of
Naphtali according to its families—the towns
with their villages.

40 The seventh lot came out for the tribe of
Dan, according to its families. 41 The territory
of its inheritance included Zorah, Eshtaol,
Ir-shemesh, 42 Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah,
43 Elon, Timnah, Ekron, 44 Eltekeh, Gibbe-
thon, Baalath, 45 Jehud, Bene-berak, Gath-
rimmon, 46 Me-jarkon, and Rakkon at the

[a] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *Mehebel*

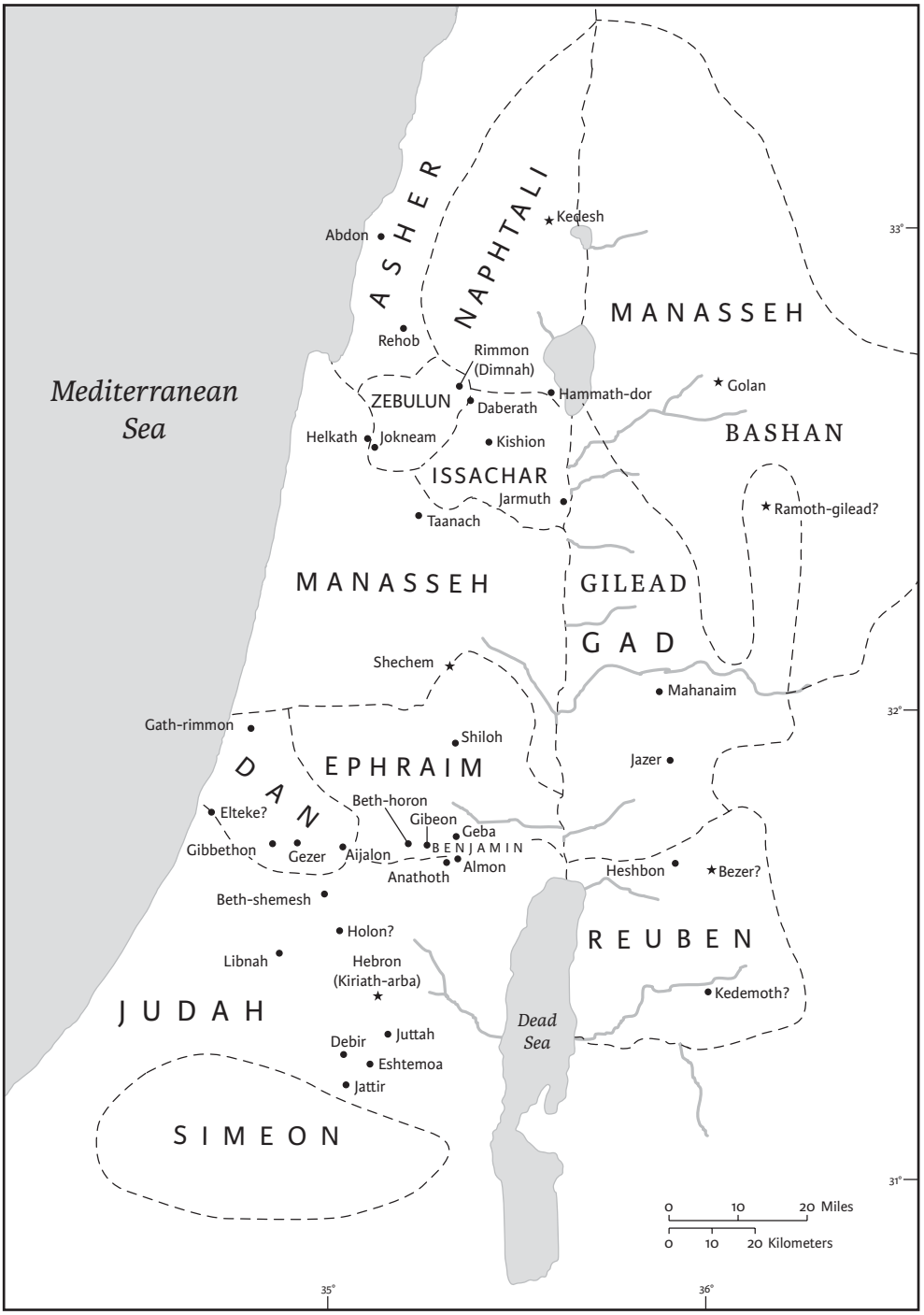
19.10–16: Zebulun. 10–14: Zebulun's boundary description is given. **15:** A town list integrated into a boundary description follows.

19.17–23: Issachar. 18–21: Issachar's town list. **22:** A boundary fragment with v. 17 providing a formulaic introduction. Issachar's boundaries correspond to Solomon's tenth district (1 Kings 4.17). Consequently, there may be some relationship between this data and that administrative unit. Issachar is missing in the outline of Judg 1.

19.24–31: Asher. Asher's allotment is fragmentary, with a boundary description (vv. 26–30) and a town list integrated into a boundary description (vv. 25–26,28,30). The list includes some Phoenician cities such as Tyre (v. 29) that were never under Israelite control, suggesting that idealized elements are found in these lists.

19.32–39: Naphtali. Naphtali's allotment has a boundary description (vv. 33–34) and a town list (vv. 35–38). Vv. 32 and 39 provide the framework. The allotment is missing a northern border.

19.40–48: Dan. Like Simeon (vv. 1–9), the allotment is given only in the form of a town list (vv. 41–47), with



The Levitical cities. Cities of refuge are highlighted with a star. The tribal boundaries are shown by a dashed line.

border opposite Joppa. 47 When the territory of the Danites was lost to them, the Danites went up and fought against Leshem, and after capturing it and putting it to the sword, they took possession of it and settled in it, calling Leshem, Dan, after their ancestor Dan. 48 This is the inheritance of the tribe of Dan, according to their families—these towns with their villages.

49 When they had finished distributing the several territories of the land as inheritances, the Israelites gave an inheritance among them to Joshua son of Nun. 50 By command of the LORD they gave him the town that he asked for, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim; he rebuilt the town, and settled in it.

51 These are the inheritances that the priest Eleazar and Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the families of the tribes of the Israelites distributed by lot at Shiloh before the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. So they finished dividing the land.

20 Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, 2 "Say to the Israelites, 'Appoint the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, 3 so that anyone who kills a person without intent or by mistake may flee there; they shall be for you a refuge from the avenger of blood. 4 The slayer shall flee to one of these cities and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city, and explain the case to the elders of that city; then the fugitive shall be taken into the city, and given a place, and shall remain with them. 5 And if the avenger of blood is in pursuit, they shall not give up the slayer, because the neighbor was killed by mistake, there having been no enmity between them before. 6 The slayer shall remain in that city until there is a trial before the congregation, until the death of the one who is high priest at the time: then the slayer may return home, to the town in which the deed was done.'"

7 So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah. 8 And beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they appointed Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland, from the tribe of Reuben, and

vv. 40 and 48 providing a formulaic framework. Ancient tradition located Dan in the south (cf. Judg 1.34). **47:** Sometime before the time of the monarchy the Danites migrated to the north (see Judg 18.1–31). Judg 18.27 refers to *Leshem* as Laish.

19.49–50: Final allotment. The allotments of two former "spies" (Num 13.6,8) frame the larger unit: Joshua's individual allotment concludes the division of the land, just as Caleb's individual allotment began it (14.6–15). Caleb's success and vigor in capturing Hebron is contrasted to Joshua, who requests a city in the Ephraimite hill country that he (re)builds for himself. The city's name, *Timnath-seraḥ* ("portion of excess") (cf. 24.30), is preserved as Timnath-ḥeres ("portion of the sun") in Judg 2.9. The difference is due to a change in the order of the last three consonants. The difference is not easily resolved. Joshua appears to prefer the sparsely settled hills to fortified cities.

19.51: Summary of the process of allotment. The verse serves as a closing bracket for the structural segments of both 14.1–19.51 (nine and one-half tribes) and 18.1–19.51 (seven tribes).

20.1–21.42: Allotments to persons of marginal status. This section delineates secondary allotments that form a transition to the practical concerns of how life is to be lived in the land. Neither group is bounded by the tribal borders just enumerated in chs 13–19. The establishment of both the cities of refuge and the Levitical cities was on the basis of instructions given by Moses. Both are supplemental land grants.

20.1–9: Cities of refuge. The towns of asylum provided the right of asylum for someone who committed involuntary manslaughter until the case was adjudicated. The passage shows how Joshua fulfilled what God had commanded Moses (Num 35.9–34) and Moses commanded Israel (Deut 19.1–13). The right of asylum helped to limit the social damage of unrestrained blood vengeance or feuding, especially important in a tribal context (see Judg 12.1–5; 19.1–21.25). Three towns were allotted on each side of the Jordan. All six were also Levitical cities (21.1,11,27,32,36,38). **3:** *The avenger* (Heb "go'el") *of blood* was the deceased's nearest relative (cf. 2 Sam 14.2–17). **4:** *The gate of the city* was where *the elders* of the city met to adjudicate disputes (cf. Ruth 4.1–12). **6:** Probably a later addition, incorporating the Priestly perspective of Num 35.25, with trial by the *congregation* (rather than the elders of v. 4), and implying that *the death of the . . . high priest* expiated the victim's death. **7–10:** See map on p. 347.

Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh. [9] These were the cities designated for all the Israelites, and for the aliens residing among them, that anyone who killed a person without intent could flee there, so as not to die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until there was a trial before the congregation.

21 Then the heads of the families of the Levites came to the priest Eleazar and to Joshua son of Nun and to the heads of the families of the tribes of the Israelites; [2] they said to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, "The LORD commanded through Moses that we be given towns to live in, along with their pasture lands for our livestock." [3] So by command of the LORD the Israelites gave to the Levites the following towns and pasture lands out of their inheritance.

[4] The lot came out for the families of the Kohathites. So those Levites who were descendants of Aaron the priest received by lot thirteen towns from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin.

[5] The rest of the Kohathites received by lot ten towns from the families of the tribe of Ephraim, from the tribe of Dan, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

[6] The Gershonites received by lot thirteen towns from the families of the tribe of Issachar, from the tribe of Asher, from the tribe of Naphtali, and from the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan.

[7] The Merarites according to their families received twelve towns from the tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad, and the tribe of Zebulun.

[8] These towns and their pasture lands the Israelites gave by lot to the Levites, as the LORD had commanded through Moses.

[9] Out of the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Simeon they gave the following towns mentioned by name, [10] which went to the descendants of Aaron, one of the families of the Kohathites who belonged to the Levites, since the lot fell to them first. [11] They gave them Kiriath-arba (Arba being the father of Anak), that is Hebron, in the hill country of Judah, along with the pasture lands around it. [12] But the fields of the town and its villages had been given to Caleb son of Jephunneh as his holding.

[13] To the descendants of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron, the city of refuge for the slayer, with its pasture lands, Libnah with its pasture lands, [14] Jattir with its pasture lands, Eshtemoa with its pasture lands, [15] Holon with its pasture lands, Debir with its pasture lands, [16] Ain with its pasture lands, Juttah with its pasture lands, and Beth-shemesh with its pasture lands—nine towns out of these two tribes. [17] Out of the tribe of Benjamin: Gibeon with its pasture lands, Geba with its pasture lands, [18] Anathoth with its pasture lands, and Almon with its pasture lands—four towns. [19] The towns of the descendants of Aaron—the priests—were thirteen in all, with their pasture lands.

[20] As to the rest of the Kohathites belonging to the Kohathite families of the Levites, the towns allotted to them were out of the tribe of Ephraim. [21] To them were given Shechem, the city of refuge for the slayer, with its pasture lands in the hill country of Ephraim, Gezer with its pasture lands, [22] Kibzaim with its pasture lands, and Beth-horon with its pasture lands—four towns. [23] Out of the tribe of Dan: Elteke with its pasture lands, Gibbethon with its pasture lands, [24] Aijalon with its pasture lands, Gath-rimmon with its pasture lands—four towns. [25] Out of the half-tribe of Manasseh: Taanach with its pasture lands, and Gath-rimmon with its pasture lands—two towns. [26] The towns of the families of the rest of the Kohathites were ten in all, with their pasture lands.

[27] To the Gershonites, one of the families of the Levites, were given out of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Golan in Bashan with its pasture lands, the city of refuge for the slayer, and Beeshterah with its pasture

21.1–42: Levitical cities. Elsewhere the Levites have no inheritance (13.14,33; 18.7; Deut 10.8–9); nevertheless, they are integrated into the unity of Israel. As in the delineation of the tribal boundaries, there is some idealization. The total number of Levitical cities (forty-eight) as a multiple of twelve is likely symbolic. But the towns are not equally divided among the tribes. They are allotted to the three clans of the Levites: the Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites. **11–12:** See 14.13–15n.; 15.13–19n. **13–40:** See map on p. 347.

lands—two towns. [28] Out of the tribe of Issachar: Kishion with its pasture lands, Daberath with its pasture lands, [29] Jarmuth with its pasture lands, En-gannim with its pasture lands—four towns. [30] Out of the tribe of Asher: Mishal with its pasture lands, Abdon with its pasture lands, [31] Helkath with its pasture lands, and Rehob with its pasture lands—four towns. [32] Out of the tribe of Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee with its pasture lands, the city of refuge for the slayer, Hammoth-dor with its pasture lands, and Kartan with its pasture lands—three towns. [33] The towns of the several families of the Gershonites were in all thirteen, with their pasture lands.

[34] To the rest of the Levites—the Merarite families—were given out of the tribe of Zebulun: Jokneam with its pasture lands, Kartah with its pasture lands, [35] Dimnah with its pasture lands, Nahalal with its pasture lands—four towns. [36] Out of the tribe of Reuben: Bezer with its pasture lands, Jahzah with its pasture lands, [37] Kedemoth with its pasture lands, and Mephaath with its pasture lands—four towns. [38] Out of the tribe of Gad: Ramoth in Gilead with its pasture lands, the city of refuge for the slayer, Mahanaim with its pasture lands, [39] Heshbon with its pasture lands, Jazer with its pasture lands—four towns in all. [40] As for the towns of the several Merarite families, that is, the remainder of the families of the Levites, those allotted to them were twelve in all.

[41] The towns of the Levites within the holdings of the Israelites were in all forty-eight towns with their pasture lands. [42] Each of these towns had its pasture lands around it; so it was with all these towns.

[43] Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to their ancestors that he would give them; and having taken possession of it, they settled there. [44] And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their ancestors; not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. [45] Not one of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

22 Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, [2] and said to them, "You have observed all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed me in all that I have commanded you; [3] you have not forsaken your kindred these many days, down to this day, but have been careful to keep the charge of the LORD your God. [4] And now the LORD your God has given rest to your kindred, as he promised them; therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. [5] Take good care to observe the commandment and instruction that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to keep his commandments, and to hold fast to him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul." [6] So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.

[7] Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession

21.43–45: Ironic conclusion. This is an ironic conclusion to the conquest and allotment sections of the book. The overstated claims of unmitigated success (note the use of Heb "kol" ["all" or "every"] six times) in these verses seem incongruent with the subtle statements given throughout 13.1–21.42 that there were failures among the tribes—some quite significant—as each attempted to secure its allotment. Nevertheless, the stress on the Lord's faithfulness contrasts with the squabbling over the Transjordanian altar in the next section (22.10–34).

22.1–24.33: Epilogue to the conquest and allotment. Three concluding sections are used to foster Israel's fidelity in the land. These take the form of a warning narrative (22.1–34) and a pair of exhorting addresses (23.1–16; 24.1–28) in which commitments to the covenant are renewed. Originally disparate materials have been selected and arranged to frame the book. In particular, participants and motifs from 1.1–18 recur in this section.

22.1–34: Misunderstanding with the Transjordanian tribes. The ties binding the tribes together were not firm, and conflicts were a continuing problem. The issue here is the place of legitimate worship, a central concern of Deuteronomy. **1–9: The Transjordanian tribes return to their homes on the east bank. 1–5:** Joshua's farewell to the Transjordanian tribes structurally balances the introduction to them in 1.12–18. **5:** To *love the* LORD

in Bashan; but to the other half Joshua had given a possession beside their fellow Israelites in the land west of the Jordan. And when Joshua sent them away to their tents and blessed them, [8] he said to them, "Go back to your tents with much wealth, and with very much livestock, with silver, gold, bronze, and iron, and with a great quantity of clothing; divide the spoil of your enemies with your kindred." [9] So the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned home, parting from the Israelites at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, their own land of which they had taken possession by command of the LORD through Moses.

[10] When they came to the region[a] near the Jordan that lies in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of great size. [11] The Israelites heard that the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh had built an altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region[b] near the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the Israelites. [12] And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh, to make war against them.

[13] Then the Israelites sent the priest Phinehas son of Eleazar to the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, [14] and with him ten chiefs, one from each of the tribal families of Israel, every one of them the head of a family among the clans of Israel. [15] They came to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, and they said to them, [16] "Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD, 'What is this treachery that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away today from following the LORD, by building yourselves an altar today in rebellion against the LORD? [17] Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which a plague came upon the congregation of the LORD, [18] that you must turn away today from following the LORD! If you rebel against the LORD today, he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel tomorrow. [19] But now, if your land is unclean, cross over into the LORD's land where the LORD's tabernacle now stands, and take for yourselves a possession among us; only do not rebel against the LORD, or rebel against us[c] by building yourselves an altar other than the altar of the LORD our God. [20] Did not Achan son of Zerah break faith in the matter of the devoted things, and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel? And he did not perish alone for his iniquity!'"

[21] Then the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh said in answer to the heads of the families of Israel, [22] "The LORD, God of gods! The LORD, God of gods! He knows; and let Israel itself know! If it was in rebellion or in breach of faith toward the LORD, do not spare us today [23] for building an altar to turn away from following the LORD; or if we did so to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or offerings of well-being on it, may the LORD himself take vengeance. [24] No! We did it from fear that in time to come your children might say to our children, 'What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel? [25] For the LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you,

[a] Or *to Geliloth*
[b] Or *at Geliloth*
[c] Or *make rebels of us*

anticipates 23.11; the language is Deuteronomic (see Deut 6.5; 10.12–13; 30.16; etc.). **7:** See Deut 3.13; Josh 17.

22.10–34: The debate over the altar built by the Transjordanian tribes. The central role of *Phinehas* (see Ex 6.25; Num 25) in dealing with this conflict leads some scholars to conclude that priestly circles edited this story. **12:** Holding strictly to the Deuteronomic law that forbade the offering of sacrifice anywhere except in the one central sanctuary (Deut 12.13–14), the other tribes apparently interpret the building of the altar as an act of disloyalty to Israel and to its God, and therefore prepare *to make war against them.* The extent to which the tribal settlement east of the Jordan is or is not part of Israel also stands behind this narrative. **17:** *The sin at Peor,* Num 25.3–5. **19:** Highly charged theological language suggests the superiority of the Cisjordanian tribes. **20:** *Achan,* see ch 7. **24–25:** The motive of the Transjordanian tribes was honorable; they built the altar as a witness to their loyalty to the Lord. They feared that in the future the Israelites west of the Jordan might discriminate against

you Reubenites and Gadites; you have no portion in the LORD.' So your children might make our children cease to worship the LORD. 26 Therefore we said, 'Let us now build an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, 27 but to be a witness between us and you, and between the generations after us, that we do perform the service of the LORD in his presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and offerings of well-being; so that your children may never say to our children in time to come, "You have no portion in the LORD."' 28 And we thought, If this should be said to us or to our descendants in time to come, we could say, 'Look at this copy of the altar of the LORD, which our ancestors made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you.' 29 Far be it from us that we should rebel against the LORD, and turn away this day from following the LORD by building an altar for burnt offering, grain offering, or sacrifice, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle!"

30 When the priest Phinehas and the chiefs of the congregation, the heads of the families of Israel who were with him, heard the words that the Reubenites and the Gadites and the Manassites spoke, they were satisfied. 31 The priest Phinehas son of Eleazar said to the Reubenites and the Gadites and the Manassites, "Today we know that the LORD is among us, because you have not committed this treachery against the LORD; now you have saved the Israelites from the hand of the LORD."

32 Then the priest Phinehas son of Eleazar and the chiefs returned from the Reubenites and the Gadites in the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, to the Israelites, and brought back word to them. 33 The report pleased the Israelites; and the Israelites blessed God and spoke no more of making war against them, to destroy the land where the Reubenites and the Gadites were settled. 34 The Reubenites and the Gadites called the altar Witness;[a] "For," said they, "it is a witness between us that the LORD is God."

23 A long time afterward, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies all around, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, 2 Joshua summoned all Israel, their elders and heads, their judges and officers, and said to them, "I am now old and well advanced in years; 3 and you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you. 4 I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. 5 The LORD your God will push them back before you, and drive them out of your sight; and you shall possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you. 6 Therefore be very steadfast to observe and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right nor to the left, 7 so that you may not be mixed with these nations left here among you, or make mention of the names of their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or bow yourselves down to them, 8 but hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day. 9 For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations; and as for you, no one has been able to withstand you to this day. 10 One of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, as he promised you. 11 Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God. 12 For if you turn back, and join the survivors of these nations

[a] Cn Compare Syr: Heb lacks *Witness*

them—a well-founded fear in light of this story (see Judg 12.1–5). **26–27:** It was not a real sacrificial altar, they claimed, but merely a memorial, *a witness* (cf. Gen 31.47–48; Josh 24.27).

23.1–24.28: Concluding charges. There are a number of similarities between Joshua's speech to the leaders (23.1–16) and his charge to the people (24.1–28). Both resemble the testaments of prior Israelite leaders: Jacob (Gen 48–49), Joseph (Gen 50.22–26), and especially Moses (Deut 32–33). Additionally, both have framing links with 1.2–9.

23.1–16: Covenantal charge to the leaders. Joshua's address to the leaders consists almost entirely of Deuteronomistic reflections. **1–5:** God's mighty acts of conquest. **6–11:** An exhortation to remain faithful to the Lord and his covenant so that the remaining land can be conquered. **12–16:** Warnings of judgments if Israel is

left here among you, and intermarry with them, so that you marry their women and they yours, 13 know assuredly that the LORD your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you; but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge on your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land that the LORD your God has given you.

14 "And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one thing has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you; all have come to pass for you, not one of them has failed. 15 But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the bad things, until he has destroyed you from this good land that the LORD your God has given you. 16 If you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he enjoined on you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land that he has given to you."

24 Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. 2 And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. 3 Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; 4 and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. 5 Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in its midst; and afterwards I brought you out. 6 When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your ancestors with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea.[a] 7 When they cried out to the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did to Egypt. Afterwards you lived in the wilderness a long time. 8 Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan; they fought with you, and I handed them over to you, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. 9 Then King Balak son of Zippor of Moab, set out to fight against Israel. He sent and invited Balaam son of Beor to curse you, 10 but I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he blessed you; so I rescued you out of his hand. 11 When you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I handed them over to you. 12 I sent the hornet[b] ahead of you, which drove out before you the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. 13 I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and oliveyards that you did not plant.

[a] Or *Sea of Reeds*

[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

unfaithful to the covenant, worshiping foreign gods. **14:** *Way of all the earth,* i.e., to die; see 1 Kings 2.2.

24.1–28: Covenant renewal of the people. Joshua fulfills the commands of Moses in Deut 11; 27; 31. All Israel unites under Joshua's leadership in the service of the Lord. Joshua's final meeting with the people takes place at Shechem (cf. 8.30–35). **1:** *Shechem* (Tell Balata) became an important Israelite religious and political center, and was already important in Genesis. The setting of Shechem thus frames the Hexateuch. **2–13:** A historical summary analogous to the prologues of ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties divides into three subdivisions: the ancestral period (vv. 2–4), the Egyptian period (vv. 5–7), and the conquest period (vv. 8–13). **2–4:** A summary of Gen 11.26–46.27. **5–10:** A summary of Exodus and Numbers, omitting any reference to the events at Mount Sinai. **9:** *Balak* and *Balaam,* see Num 22–24; Josh 13.22n. **11:** Perhaps a different tradition about Jericho from that found in ch 6. **12:** *The hornet,* a vivid image; see Ex 23.28; Deut 7.20. **13:** See Deut 6.10–11. **14–24:** A dialogue between Joshua and the people in which the issue of serving the Lord, not other gods, is weighed. The Israelites'

14 "Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve
him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away
the gods that your ancestors served beyond
the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.
15 Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD,
choose this day whom you will serve, whether
the gods your ancestors served in the region
beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites
in whose land you are living; but as for me and
my household, we will serve the LORD."
16 Then the people answered, "Far be it
from us that we should forsake the LORD to
serve other gods; 17 for it is the LORD our God
who brought us and our ancestors up from
the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,
and who did those great signs in our sight. He
protected us along all the way that we went,
and among all the peoples through whom we
passed; 18 and the LORD drove out before us
all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the
land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD,
for he is our God."
19 But Joshua said to the people, "You
cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God.
He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your
transgressions or your sins. 20 If you forsake
the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will
turn and do you harm, and consume you, af-
ter having done you good." 21 And the people
said to Joshua, "No, we will serve the LORD!"
22 Then Joshua said to the people, "You are
witnesses against yourselves that you have
chosen the LORD, to serve him." And they
said, "We are witnesses." 23 He said, "Then
put away the foreign gods that are among
you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the
God of Israel." 24 The people said to Joshua,
"The LORD our God we will serve, and him we
will obey." 25 So Joshua made a covenant with
the people that day, and made statutes and
ordinances for them at Shechem. 26 Joshua
wrote these words in the book of the law of
God; and he took a large stone, and set it up
there under the oak in the sanctuary of the
LORD. 27 Joshua said to all the people, "See,
this stone shall be a witness against us; for it
has heard all the words of the LORD that he
spoke to us; therefore it shall be a witness
against you, if you deal falsely with your
God." 28 So Joshua sent the people away to
their inheritances.
29 After these things Joshua son of Nun,
the servant of the LORD, died, being one
hundred ten years old. 30 They buried him in
his own inheritance at Timnath-serah, which
is in the hill country of Ephraim, north of
Mount Gaash.
31 Israel served the LORD all the days of
Joshua, and all the days of the elders who
outlived Joshua and had known all the work
that the LORD did for Israel.
32 The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites
had brought up from Egypt, were buried at
Shechem, in the portion of ground that Jacob
had bought from the children of Hamor, the
father of Shechem, for one hundred pieces
of money;[a] it became an inheritance of the
descendants of Joseph.
33 Eleazar son of Aaron died; and they
buried him at Gibeah, the town of his son
Phinehas, which had been given him in the
hill country of Ephraim.

[a] Heb *one hundred qesitah*

commitment to the covenant with the Lord is formalized. **14:** *The River,* the Euphrates. *In Egypt,* cf. Ezek 20.5–8; 23.3,8. **23:** See Gen 35.2–4. **26:** *A large stone,* cf. 8.32. *The oak,* see Gen 12.6; 35.4; Deut 11.30; Judg 9.6.

24.29–33: Appendixes. Appendixes are found in several biblical books; here three short notices are given. **29–31:** The death and burial of Joshua, with a comment concerning Israel's faithfulness to the Lord; cf. Judg 2.6–9. **32:** The reburial of the bones of Joseph in Shechem in the patriarchal plot (see Gen 50.25; Ex 13.19). Here again our attention is returned to Genesis. **33:** The death and burial of the priest Eleazar (see 13.1). This is a surprising ending, but it indicates the strength of the priestly interests in the book.

JUDGES

LOCATION IN CANON AND NAME

The book of Judges is the second book of the Former Prophets in the Jewish canon, and in Christian Bibles the second of the Historical Books. Its place was determined chronologically, as it covers the period after Joshua's death and before the establishment of kingship recounted in 1 Samuel.

The book is named after its principal characters, who are called only in the beginning of the book "judges" (2.16-19), meaning chieftains or rulers. The use of this term points to diverse leaders who acted in this period. Some are depicted as military leaders (Othniel, Ehud, Barak, Gideon and Jephthah); some as lone warriors (Shamgar and Samson); others had a religious mission (prophets: Deborah and Samuel; Nazirite: Samson; and priests: Eli and Samuel). Only a few are mentioned as sitting in judgment in the juridical sense (Deborah and Samuel), while there are some whose activities are not specified (Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon). The Hebrew word *shaphat* ("to judge") and its derivative *shophet* ("a judge") can mean "adjudicate" but also "rule" (2 Chr 1.10; Is 51.5) and "vindicate, provide justice for" (Pss 10.18; 82.3). The range of leaders over the entire period produced the sweeping editorial rubric "Judges" (see also Ruth 1.1; 2 Sam 7.11; 2 Kings 23.22; 1 Chr 17.6, 10; Sir 46.11).

AUTHORSHIP AND LITERARY HISTORY

The early rabbis (*b. B. Bat.* 14b) assumed that the book of Judges was written by the prophet Samuel, who lived not long after the events described. Most modern biblical scholars maintain that, like other historiographic books of the Former Prophets, Judges was a compilation of materials edited by Deuteronomistic editors in the late seventh and sixth centuries BCE, with other materials, such as the story of Gibeah (chs 19–21), added later. Other scholars think that, because of stylistic and ideological considerations, the main redaction was completed in a pre-Deuteronomistic stage, in the late eighth or early seventh century BCE, and that it reflected the shocked mood in Judah after the downfall of the kingdom of Israel in 722 (see 18.30). All critical scholars agree, however, that the book was written long after the events depicted, and reflects later Judean goals and perspectives. Thus, even though some of the episodes may contain historical memories of the premonarchic period, it is difficult to speak of "the period of the judges" and to use the stories to reconstruct the history of early Israel.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

The book has three parts: an introduction that explains the background of the judges' rise (1.1–3.6); a central section describing the activities of the judges (3.7–16.31); and a conclusion composed of two episodes: that of Micah and the conquest of Dan (chs 17–18), and the story of the rape in Gibeah with its subsequent civil war (chs 19–21). These last episodes create the impression that monarchy alone could end the chaotic period of the judges, and thus serves, along with the book as a whole, a fitting introduction to the book of Samuel that follows it in the Jewish canon.

The book of Judges does not cover the entire period of the judges, nor is its narrative chronological. It opens in the time of the elders who survived Joshua and concludes with events that took place in the third generation from the Exodus (18.30, 20:28). Moreover, the last two individuals designated as judges—Eli and Samuel—appear in the book of Samuel (1 Sam 4.18; 7.15-17). By closing the book with events from the beginning of the period and creating a circular structure, the author-editor exposes the inefficacy of the judges, who could only save and influence their people for a limited time. As the book states several times, after the death of the delivering judges, the people relapsed, were punished, and cried to the LORD to save them. This recurrent pattern of sin, punishment, appeal to God, rescue and peace results in a series of cyclical narratives of the book, gives the period its cyclic quality and the book its circular structure. Its non-chronological order shows that the author-editors' main purpose was not to record history, but to draw lessons from it.

INTERPRETATION

The book's two principal lessons are the role of God in history, and kingship, especially Judean kingship, as the preferred kind of leadership. The book describes the course of history as an interaction between God and

his people, and its cyclical nature shows how extensively God directs history. But although the judges are the LORD's emissaries, their leadership ultimately fails. Thus, since they were unable to break the cyclical pattern, their rule created an expectation of monarchy, as a consecutive, continuous, and stable leadership, which could prevent anarchy. On the other hand, the book warns that a king may also be a villain, as in the case of Abimelech, symbolized by the bramble (ch 9). Thus, although the book prepares the ground for kingship, it does not depict it as ideal. In particular, by the way it depicts the tribe of Benjamin, it suggests that the kingdom of Saul, who was a Benjaminite, as well as the later Northern Kingdom of Israel, who was the origin of most of the judges (except Othniel from Judah), are not the future solution. The expectations are for a Judean king.

Yairah Amit

1 After the death of Joshua, the Israelites inquired of the LORD, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" **2** The LORD said, "Judah shall go up. I hereby give the land into his hand." **3** Judah said to his brother Simeon, "Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; then I too will go with you into the territory allotted to you." So Simeon went with him. **4** Then Judah went up and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they defeated ten thousand of them at Bezek. **5** They came upon Adoni-bezek at Bezek, and fought against him, and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. **6** Adoni-bezek fled; but they pursued him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes. **7** Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has paid me back." They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.

8 Then the people of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it. They put it to the sword and set the city on fire. **9** Afterward the people of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the Negeb, and in the lowland. **10** Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba); and they defeated Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai.

11 From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir (the name of Debir was formerly Kiriath-sepher). **12** Then Caleb said, "Whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher and takes it, I will give him my daughter Achsah as wife." **13** And Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; and he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife. **14** When she came to him, she

1.1–3.6: Double introduction. The book of Judges opens with two introductions: the first (1.1–2.5) depicts "the days of the elders" (2.7), the second (2.6–3.6) the era of the judges.

1.1–2.5: The days of the elders. A brief period, less than a generation, passes between the death of Joshua and the beginning of the era of the judges. This first introduction explains how the people, who were loyal to the LORD in the days of Joshua (2.7), repeatedly did evil in his eyes; and how most of the tribes, though not Judah and Simeon, preferred to subjugate the nations who remained in the land after Joshua's death rather than to exterminate them; this caused Israel to sin.

1.1–20: The conquests of Judah. The tribe of Judah, accompanied by Simeon, is described as destroying all the Canaanites except the inhabitants of the valley, who had iron chariots. **3:** *His brother*, the connection between Judah and Simeon reflects the historical situation of the tribe of Simeon being part of Judah's inheritance (compare Josh 19.1–9 with 15.26–32). **4:** The *Perizzites* were one of the groups who inhabited Canaan (see Gen 15.20; Deut 7.1; Josh 3.11). *Bezek*, probably Khirbet Ibzik, about 15 mi (24 km) northeast of Shechem. **5–7:** *Adoni-bezek*, the king's name may be a corruption of Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem (see Josh 10.1); his burial in Jerusalem (v. 7 below) supports this. **8:** Here Judah conquered Jerusalem, but contrast v. 21; 19.10–12; and Josh 15.63. According to 2 Sam 5.6–9, Jerusalem remained a Jebusite enclave until the period of David. **9:** Judah's conquests south of Jerusalem. **10:** *Hebron*, only here is its conquest attributed to Judah; contrast Josh 10.36–37; 14.6–14; and v. 20 below. **13:** The representation of Othniel as younger than Caleb means that his clan is less important than Caleb's. The families of Caleb and Kenaz appear here as part of Judah; in Gen 36.15,42 Kenaz is an Edomite descended from Esau, which means that Edomites integrated into the tribe of Judah. **14:** Here Achsah addresses



Tribal conquests in chapter 1. Starred cities are locales where Canaanites continued to live.

urged him to ask her father for a field. As she dismounted from her donkey, Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" [15] She said to him, "Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me also Gulloth-mayim."[a] So Caleb gave her Upper Gulloth and Lower Gulloth.

[16] The descendants of Hobab[b] the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad. Then they went and settled with the Amalekites.[c] [17] Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and devoted it to destruction. So the city was called Hormah. [18] Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. [19] The LORD was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron. [20] Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had said; and he drove out from it the three sons of Anak. [21] But the Benjaminites did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived in Jerusalem among the Benjaminites to this day.

[22] The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel; and the LORD was with them. [23] The house of Joseph sent out spies to Bethel (the name of the city was formerly Luz). [24] When the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, "Show us the way into the city, and we will deal kindly with you." [25] So he showed them the way into the city; and they put the city to the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. [26] So the man went to the land of the Hittites and built a city, and named it Luz; that is its name to this day.

[27] Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; but the Canaanites continued to live in that land. [28] When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not in fact drive them out.

[29] And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer; but the Canaanites lived among them in Gezer.

[30] Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites lived among them, and became subject to forced labor.

[31] Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob; [32] but the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

[33] Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to forced labor for them.

[a] That is *Basins of Water*
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *Hobab*
[c] See 1 Sam 15.6: Heb *people*

Othniel, and the negotiations take place between her and Caleb, but according to the LXX Othniel addresses Achsah. Dismounting from the donkey is a courtesy. **16:** The Kenites, originally a non-Israelite people, were also considered Judean; they are connected to Israel through Moses (Ex 2.16–22). For the *Amalekites,* see Num 13.29. *City of palms*, difficult to identify, because the name is so general and applicable to any settlement with palms. **18:** *Gaza . . . Ashkelon . . .Ekron*, in 14.19; 16.21; 1 Sam 6.17 these cities are still under Philistine control, but here their conquest is attributed to Judah. **20:** Judah gives Hebron to Caleb; see Num 13.28,32–33, but contrast v. 10 above. The mixture of contradictory traditions suggests that the author-editor's intent was not simply to recount the past, but to emphasize the importance of Judah. *Anak,* see Num 13.38; Josh 15.14.

1.21–36: The conquests of the northern tribes. The sequence of the seven northern tribes is from south (Benjamin) to north (Dan), like that of narratives of the individual judges in 3.7–6.31 (from Ehud to Samson). In contrast to Judah, which was depicted positively and as successful, these tribes are presented as responsible for the failure to take possession of the land. **21:** *Jebusites,* see 19.11n. Here Benjamin is responsible for the existence of Jebusites in Jerusalem (but see Josh 15.63). **22–29:** The house of Joseph, like Judah, first conquered their central sacred city, Bethel. **34–35:** The Danites did not succeed in occupying their inheritance. Their brother Joseph, unlike Judah who cooperated with Simeon, did not help them and preferred to subjugate the indig-

34 The Amorites pressed the Danites back
into the hill country; they did not allow them
to come down to the plain. 35 The Amorites
continued to live in Har-heres, in Aijalon,
and in Shaalbim, but the hand of the house
of Joseph rested heavily on them, and they
became subject to forced labor. 36 The border
of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrab-
bim, from Sela and upward.

2 Now the angel of the LORD went up from
Gilgal to Bochim, and said, "I brought
you up from Egypt, and brought you into the
land that I had promised to your ancestors.
I said, 'I will never break my covenant with
you. 2 For your part, do not make a covenant
with the inhabitants of this land; tear down
their altars.' But you have not obeyed my
command. See what you have done! 3 So now
I say, I will not drive them out before you; but
they shall become adversaries[a] to you, and
their gods shall be a snare to you." 4 When the
angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the
Israelites, the people lifted up their voices and
wept. 5 So they named that place Bochim,[b] and
there they sacrificed to the LORD.

6 When Joshua dismissed the people, the
Israelites all went to their own inheritances
to take possession of the land. 7 The people
worshiped the LORD all the days of Joshua,
and all the days of the elders who outlived
Joshua, who had seen all the great work
that the LORD had done for Israel. 8 Joshua
son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at
the age of one hundred ten years. 9 So they
buried him within the bounds of his inherit-
ance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of
Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. 10 Moreover,
that whole generation was gathered to their
ancestors, and another generation grew up
after them, who did not know the LORD or the
work that he had done for Israel.

11 Then the Israelites did what was evil
in the sight of the LORD and worshiped the
Baals; 12 and they abandoned the LORD, the
God of their ancestors, who had brought
them out of the land of Egypt; they followed
other gods, from among the gods of the peo-
ples who were all around them, and bowed
down to them; and they provoked the LORD to
anger. 13 They abandoned the LORD, and wor-
shiped Baal and the Astartes. 14 So the anger
of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he
gave them over to plunderers who plundered
them, and he sold them into the power of
their enemies all around, so that they could
no longer withstand their enemies. 15 When-
ever they marched out, the hand of the LORD
was against them to bring misfortune, as the
LORD had warned them and sworn to them;
and they were in great distress.

16 Then the LORD raised up judges, who
delivered them out of the power of those who
plundered them. 17 Yet they did not listen even
to their judges; for they lusted after other gods
and bowed down to them. They soon turned
aside from the way in which their ancestors
had walked, who had obeyed the command-
ments of the LORD; they did not follow their ex-
ample. 18 Whenever the LORD raised up judges
for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he
delivered them from the hand of their enemies

[a] OL Vg Compare Gk: Heb *sides*
[b] That is *Weepers*

enous Amorites as forced laborers.

2.1–5: The assembly in Bochim. A divine messenger (*angel*) came to Bochim (lit. "Weepers"; see vv. 4–5) to rebuke the northern tribes, who had violated the covenant and sinned by not dispossessing the Canaanites. Bochim is often identified with Bethel (so LXX), as well as the connection of Bethel with weeping (20.23,26; 21.2 and Gen 35.8), and the connection between Gilgal (v.1) and Bethel (Hos 4.15; Am 4.4).

2.11–3.6: Summary characterization of the era of the judges. 2.11–19: A paradigm for the period, comprised of four repeated stages: doing evil (vv. 11–13); punishment by subjugation (vv. 14–15); deliverance by judges (v. 16); and days of calm, during which the judges ruled (vv. 17–19). The people always returned to sin, either during the judge's lifetime or after his death. The stage of crying to the LORD is absent here (cf. 3.9), further emphasizing the negative depiction of the period. This unit is rich in repetitions and Deuteronomistic expressions, suggesting late editing. **11:** *Baals,* Baal, whose name means "master," was one of the heads of the Canaanite pantheon. The use of the plural may indicate multiplicity of shrines, various manifestations of Baal or various idolatries, and is meant to emphasize the polytheistic nature of Israel's worship. **13:** *Astartes*, singular "Ashtoreth," the goddess of love and fertility, and Baal's consort.



The geography of the book of Judges. Square boxes indicate Philistine cities.

all the days of the judge; for the LORD would be moved to pity by their groaning because of those who persecuted and oppressed them. 19 But whenever the judge died, they would relapse and behave worse than their ancestors, following other gods, worshiping them and bowing down to them. They would not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. 20 So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel; and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their ancestors, and have not obeyed my voice, 21 I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died." 22 In order to test Israel, whether or not they would take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their ancestors did, 23 the LORD had left those nations, not driving them out at once, and had not handed them over to Joshua.

3 Now these are the nations that the LORD left to test all those in Israel who had no experience of any war in Canaan 2 (it was only that successive generations of Israelites might know war, to teach those who had no experience of it before): 3 the five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. 4 They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their ancestors by Moses. 5 So the Israelites lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; 6 and they took their daughters as wives for themselves, and their own daughters they gave to their sons; and they worshiped their gods.

7 The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, forgetting the LORD their God, and worshiping the Baals and the Asherahs. 8 Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim; and the Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. 9 But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the Israelites, who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. 10 The spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel; he went out to war, and the LORD gave King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. 11 So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel son of Kenaz died.

12 The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD strengthened King Eglon of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD. 13 In alliance with the Ammonites and the Amalekites, he went and defeated Israel; and they took possession of the city of palms. 14 So the Israelites served King Eglon of Moab eighteen years.

15 But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent tribute by him

2.20–3.6: Three answers regarding why the nations remained. The multiple perspectives here suggest that this section is a composite. **2.20–21:** The first answer: God's punishment for the sins of the people in the period of the judges. **2.22–23; 3.4:** The second answer: God intended to let the nations remain in order to test Israel's loyalty to him. **3.1–3:** The third answer: God planned to leave the nations in order to train Israel in fighting. **5–6:** Not dispossessing the Canaanites resulted in Israel's becoming assimilated among them.

3.7–16.31: Cycles of the judges. 3.7–11: Othniel the Kenizzite. The account of the first judge has typical formulas but no detailed deliverance story. Thus it serves as a transition from the introduction to the specific narratives. Othniel from Judah (see 1.13n.), who fought against an enemy from the far north, is depicted as a national leader and highlights the preeminence of Judah. **7:** *Asherahs,* the plural of Asherah, the consort of El, the chief god in the older Canaanite pantheon; on the plural, see 2.11n. Her name refers also to wooden symbols, trees or poles, which are prohibited in Deuteronomy (e.g., 16.21–22). **8:** *Cushan-rishathaim*, this strange, rhyming name means: "dark double-wickedness." *Aram-naharaim*, a distant place in northeast Syria (cf. Gen 24.10), which rhymes with its king's name. The use of a distant place attributes to the Judahite Othniel not just local but national prominence. **10:** *The spirit of the LORD*, charisma, allowing him to do activities he could not otherwise accomplish.

3.12–30: Ehud. The deliverance story of Ehud is not only the result of human tactics, planned and improvised, but also the result of divine providence. **13:** For the *Amalekites,* see 1.16n. *City of palms,* here as in Dt 34.3

to King Eglon of Moab. 16 Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length; and he fastened it on his right thigh under his clothes. 17 Then he presented the tribute to King Eglon of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. 18 When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent the people who carried the tribute on their way. 19 But he himself turned back at the sculptured stones near Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." So the king said,[a] "Silence!" and all his attendants went out from his presence. 20 Ehud came to him, while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber, and said, "I have a message from God for you." So he rose from his seat. 21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into Eglon's[b] belly; 22 the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the dirt came out.[c] 23 Then Ehud went out into the vestibule,[d] and closed the doors of the roof chamber on him, and locked them.

24 After he had gone, the servants came. When they saw that the doors of the roof chamber were locked, they thought, "He must be relieving himself[e] in the cool chamber." 25 So they waited until they were embarrassed. When he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them. There was their lord lying dead on the floor.

26 Ehud escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the sculptured stones, and escaped to Seirah. 27 When he arrived, he sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites went down with him from the hill country, having him at their head. 28 He said to them, "Follow after me; for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him, and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites, and allowed no one to cross over. 29 At that time they killed about ten thousand of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men; no one escaped. 30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest eighty years.

31 After him came Shamgar son of Anath, who killed six hundred of the Philistines with an oxgoad. He too delivered Israel.

4 The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. 2 So the LORD sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goiim. 3 Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help; for he had nine

[a] Heb *he said*
[b] Heb *his*
[c] With Tg Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[e] Heb *covering his feet*

and 2 Chr 28.15: Jericho. **16:** *A sword . . . a cubit*, Ehud's weapon was a dagger, shorter than ordinary swords (the word translated "cubit" occurs only here), about 12 inches and thus easy to hide, but sharpened on both *edges* in order to efficiently kill this portly king. **18:** This verse creates the impression of an elaborate and long gift-offering ceremony, which enabled Ehud to become familiar with the palace and its tenants. At the end, Ehud sent his people away and remained alone. **19:** Ehud arrived at Eglon's residency after previously visiting a sacred site with statues (Heb "pesilim," "idols") near Gilgal. **20:** *From God*, Ehud mentions God because he wants the stout king to stand up and thus to stretch himself. **25:** *Lying dead*, the servants were unaware of the murder and did not suspect Ehud, who then had time to escape. **26:** *Seirah*, location unknown. **28:** *The fords of the Jordan*, shallow places in the river that served for crossing. **29:** *No one escaped*, unlike a normal war, which usually has survivors; this is also an allusion to divine providence.

3.31: Shamgar. The report about Shamgar is reminiscent of stories of heroism (e.g., 15.15–16 and cf. 2 Sam 23.8). His name is mentioned in 5.6.

4.1–5.31: Deborah. The prose narrative in ch 4 complements the older poetic account in ch 5.

4.1–24: The prose narrative. Deborah the prophetess, Barak the army commander, and Jael wife of Heber the Kenite all contributed to achieving victory over the Canaanites. None of them is called a "deliverer," because in practice the true deliverer was God (vv. 14–15,23). **2:** *King Jabin of Canaan* (lit. "Jabin, king of Canaan"). Canaan, comprised of many city-states with their own rulers, did not have a single king. The use of the term "king of Canaan" reflects the desire to magnify the enemy and thus the deliverance. *Hazor,* a major city in the upper Galilee (see Josh 11.9). The origin of the name of *Sisera,* Jabin's general, is unknown, as is the precise location

hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly twenty years.

4 At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. 5 She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. 6 She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, 'Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. 7 I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.' " 8 Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." 9 And she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. 10 Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and ten thousand warriors went up behind him; and Deborah went up with him.

11 Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites,[a] that is, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had encamped as far away as Elon-bezaanannim, which is near Kedesh.

12 When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, 13 Sisera called out all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the troops who were with him, from Harosheth-ha-goiim to the Wadi Kishon. 14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day on which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. The LORD is indeed going out before you." So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand warriors following him. 15 And the LORD threw Sisera and all his chariots and all his army into a panic[b] before Barak; Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot, 16 while Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-ha-goiim. All the army of Sisera fell by the sword; no one was left.

17 Now Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between King Jabin of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite. 18 Jael came out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; have no fear." So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. 19 Then he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink; for I am thirsty." So she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him. 20 He said to her, "Stand at the entrance of the tent, and if anybody comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No.' " 21 But Jael wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, until it went down into the ground—he was lying fast asleep from weariness—and he died. 22 Then, as Barak came in pursuit of Sisera, Jael went out to meet him, and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." So he went into her tent; and there was Sisera lying dead, with the tent peg in his temple.

23 So on that day God subdued King Jabin of Canaan before the Israelites. 24 Then the hand of the Israelites bore harder and harder

[a] Heb *from the Kain*

[b] Heb adds *to the sword*; compare verse 16

of *Harosheth-ha-goiim*. Harosheth seems to be derived from harish, i.e., a plowed area, referring to the flat area near Taanach and Megiddo, where Sisera's chariots encamped. 4: *Deborah,* whose name means "bee," was a prophetess (compare Ex 15.20; 2 Kings 22.14; Neh 6.14; Isa 8.3. 5). She is the only woman who is a judge too. Deborah's location is in Mount Ephraim. **6:** *Kedesh in Naphtali,* identified with Khirbet Kadish at the foot of today's Poriyah, above Tiberia. *Mount Tabor,* overlooking the Valley of Jezreel from the north. **7:** The *Wadi Kishon,* a branch of Kishon, which flows close to Taanach and Megiddo (see 5.19). **8:** The military leader needs the prophetess at his side, somewhat diminishing his heroic status. **9:** *A woman,* the reader assumes that the woman is Deborah, but at the end will realize that Jael is meant. **11:** The Kenites were a group associated with Judah (see 1.16n.). **14:** Deborah predicts the LORD's direct participation in the battle; *before you,* the Hebrew has double meaning: before Barak's arrival or in front of him. **16:** *No one was left*, this unrealistic detail also indicates divine intervention (cf. 3.29). **17:** Sisera prefers the Kenites' encampment, due to the friendship between them and Jabin. **19:** Although Sisera asked for *water,* Jael gave him *milk,* which has soothing qualities, because she

on King Jabin of Canaan, until they destroyed
King Jabin of Canaan.

5 Then Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam
sang on that day, saying:

[2] "When locks are long in Israel,
when the people offer themselves
willingly—
bless[a] the LORD!

[3] "Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes;
to the LORD I will sing,
I will make melody to the LORD, the God
of Israel.

[4] "LORD, when you went out from Seir,
when you marched from the region of
Edom,
the earth trembled,
and the heavens poured,
the clouds indeed poured water.
[5] The mountains quaked before the LORD,
the One of Sinai,
before the LORD, the God of Israel.

[6] "In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,
in the days of Jael, caravans ceased
and travelers kept to the byways.
[7] The peasantry prospered in Israel,
they grew fat on plunder,
because you arose, Deborah,
arose as a mother in Israel.
[8] When new gods were chosen,
then war was in the gates.
Was shield or spear to be seen
among forty thousand in Israel?
[9] My heart goes out to the commanders of
Israel
who offered themselves willingly
among the people.
Bless the LORD.

[10] "Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys,
you who sit on rich carpets[b]
and you who walk by the way.

[a] Or *You who offer yourselves willingly among the people, bless*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

wanted him to sleep deeply. **23–24:** The conclusion emphasizes that the victory was achieved mainly due to God's intervention; the role of the human heroes was secondary.

5.1–31: The poetic account: the song of Deborah. This is a hymn of praise thanking and extolling God for overcoming the enemies that threatened his people. The "people" here refers only to the northern tribes (Judah, Simon and Levi are not mentioned), which suggest that the poem was composed in the north. Notwithstanding the similarities between the song and the prose story (ch 4) with respect to the main characters and various details, there are also significant differences, such as the names of the tribes who participated in the battle and the absence of Jabin in the song. The prose narrative was likely composed after the song, attempting to resolve some unclear matters. The poem is written in the first person, expressing spontaneous enthusiasm (e.g., vv. 3,12) and using contrasts and extreme transitions (as from Jael to Sisera's mother). Although the text is often unclear, the song reflects the atmosphere of the northern kingdom, which means that it was written before its fall (722 BCE). Between the opening (vv. 2–3) and the closing (v. 31a) the song has three sections that feature contrasts: God's power versus his oppressed people (vv. 4–11c), the Israelites' army versus the Canaanites' (vv. 11d–23), and Jael who killed Sisera versus his expecting mother (vv. 24–30). **1:** According to the editor, the song is the immediate joyous reaction of Deborah and Barak to the victory. **2–3:** An opening that explains the circumstances of reciting the song. **2:** *When locks are long*, the Hebrew is difficult; if this translation is correct, it may refer to Nazirites who dedicated themselves to warfare wearing long hair. Alternatively, the Hebrew may mean "disasters" that confronted Israel. **3:** *I will sing . . . I will make melody*, the poetic parallelism emphasizes the involvement of the speaker, Deborah.

5.4–11c: The strength of God's epiphany versus the difficult situation of his people. 4: *Seir . . . Edom*, synonyms referring to God's epiphany in the southeast of Judah (cf. Deut 33.2), with accompanying manifestations of earthquake and storms. **5:** *Quaked,* lit. "flowed,"as if melted; cf. Am 9.5. **6:** *Shamgar,* see 3.31. **7:** *Peasantry*, the Heb probably means "open (unwalled) cities." People were afraid to live in such places, and fled to fortified cities. **8:** *New gods*, the abandonment of the LORD for the gods of Canaan is the cause of the war and of the lack of weapons. *Then,* repeated five times (vv. 8,11,13,19,22), indicating five stages in the course of the war: danger, gathering together, arrival at the battlefield, war, retreat. *Forty thousand,* an exaggerated typological number, which suggests a comprehensive war. **10:** Riding on donkeys, especially light-haired ones, was a symbol of

11 To the sound of musicians[a] at the
watering places,
there they repeat the triumphs of the
LORD,
the triumphs of his peasantry in Israel.

"Then down to the gates marched the
people of the LORD.

12 "Awake, awake, Deborah!
Awake, awake, utter a song!
Arise, Barak, lead away your captives,
O son of Abinoam.
13 Then down marched the remnant of the
noble;
the people of the LORD marched down
for him[b] against the mighty.
14 From Ephraim they set out[c] into the
valley,[d]
following you, Benjamin, with your kin;
from Machir marched down the
commanders,
and from Zebulun those who bear the
marshal's staff;
15 the chiefs of Issachar came with Deborah,
and Issachar faithful to Barak;
into the valley they rushed out at his
heels.
Among the clans of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.
16 Why did you tarry among the
sheepfolds,
to hear the piping for the flocks?
Among the clans of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.
17 Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan;
and Dan, why did he abide with the
ships?
Asher sat still at the coast of the sea,
settling down by his landings.
18 Zebulun is a people that scorned death;
Naphtali too, on the heights of
the field.

19 "The kings came, they fought;
then fought the kings of Canaan,
at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;
they got no spoils of silver.
20 The stars fought from heaven,
from their courses they fought against
Sisera.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Gk: Heb *me*
[c] Cn: Heb *From Ephraim their root*
[d] Gk: Heb *in Amalek*

wealth (see 10.4). **11:** *Sound of musicians*, the Hebrew may refer to the noise made by the shepherds while driving their flocks to water; the sound of those who tell of God's victories will be louder than this. *His peasantry*, see v.6n. The LORD's deliverance restored confidence.

5.11d–23: The Israelite warriors versus the Canaanite kings. 11: The city gate served as a gathering place. **12:** The *song* here is a prophecy. **13:** The Hebrew is difficult; a preferable translation is: "Then they [the LORD's people] went down to Sarid [a city in the Jezreel Valley] against the mighty ones [the Canaanite kings], the LORD's people with its warriors." **14–18:** Description of the Israelite side. Most commentators think that only six tribes went to war (Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir [= Manasseh], Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali), while the other four (Reuben, Gilead [= Gad and the other half of Manasseh], Dan, and Asher) refused to join. According to the interpretation suggested here, all ten northern tribes participated. **14:** *Set out*, unclear; a better translation is: "From Ephraim chieftains [went down] to the valley." *Kin*, the collective noun here may be interpreted as "kinfolk," thus strengthening the forces of Benjamin. *Machir*, the firstborn son of Manasseh; cf. Josh 17.1. *Marshal's staff,* i.e., commanders who recorded the number of those going to war. **15:** *And Issachar*, Issachar is repeated twice, while Naphtali is absent; probably the second "Issachar" should be emended to "Naphtali." *Heart,* the center of thinking and wisdom (e.g., 1 Kings 3.12). **16:** *Why did you tarry,* here the Hebrew "lamah" is a term of negation with an emphatic "mem": "You did not tarry" (see v. 17). **17:** The depiction of *Gilead* is rhetorical, emphasizing that although they dwelled (NRSV: "stayed") far away, they participated in the war. *And Dan,* "Dan did not abide with the ships.." The tribe of *Asher,* who lived on the northern coastal plain, also joined the war. **18:** Only the tribes of *Zebulun* and *Naphtali* are described as bold warriors; perhaps that is why they alone are mentioned in the prose narrative (4.6,10). *On the heights,* an allusion to Naphtali's inheritance, as the war was in the valley in its territory. **19:** *Taanach,* in the Valley of Jezreel, near the ancient international highway connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia. **20:** Here Sisera rather than Jabin heads the alliance (see 4.2,23). **21:** *The onrushing torrent*, the Hebrew is obscure; a better translation is "the brook Kishon came in front of them." *March on, my soul*, a

21 The torrent Kishon swept them away,
the onrushing torrent, the torrent Kishon.
March on, my soul, with might!

22 "Then loud beat the horses' hoofs
with the galloping, galloping of his steeds.

23 "Curse Meroz, says the angel of the LORD,
curse bitterly its inhabitants,
because they did not come to the help of the LORD,
to the help of the LORD against the mighty.

24 "Most blessed of women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
of tent-dwelling women most blessed.
25 He asked water and she gave him milk,
she brought him curds in a lordly bowl.
26 She put her hand to the tent peg
and her right hand to the workmen's mallet;
she struck Sisera a blow,
she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temple.
27 He sank, he fell,
he lay still at her feet;
at her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell dead.

28 "Out of the window she peered,
the mother of Sisera gazed[a] through the lattice:
'Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?'
29 Her wisest ladies make answer,
indeed, she answers the question herself:
30 'Are they not finding and dividing the spoil?—
A girl or two for every man;
spoil of dyed stuffs for Sisera,
spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered,
two pieces of dyed work embroidered for my neck as spoil?'

31 "So perish all your enemies, O LORD!
But may your friends be like the sun as it rises in its might."

And the land had rest forty years.

6 The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years. 2 The hand of Midian prevailed over Israel; and because of Midian the Israelites provided for themselves hiding places in the mountains, caves and strongholds. 3 For whenever the Israelites put in seed, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east would come up against them. 4 They would encamp against them and destroy the

[a] Gk Compare Tg: Heb *exclaimed*

self-address by the speaker because of the joy of victory. **22:** The noise of the feet of the enemy's horses fleeing from the confusion of the battle. **23:** Only the people of *Meroz,* which has not been identified, are cursed for not joining God and his warriors.

5.24–30: The victory of Jael, who is contrasted with the mother of defeated Sisera.

24–27: Death at the hands of a woman was considered shameful (cf. 9.54). **27:** *At her feet,* lit. "between her feet". Since "feet" can be a euphemism for genitals, there is a suggestion that Jael used her sexuality to entice Sisera, who *lay* with her. **28:** The picture of a woman looking through the window is found elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., 2 Sam 6.16; 2 Kings 9.30) and in the ancient Near East. **30:** *A girl or two,* taking women as captives (cf. Deut 21.10–11), another sexual connotation. *Dyed* and colored clothing were expensive luxury items. *My neck as spoil,* better "the necks of those who took the spoil." **31a:** Conclusion to the Song. *Your friends,* the people of the LORD are compared to the sun, rising with great intensity. **31b**: *And the land had rest forty years*, these words, using the formula for calm, are not part of the song, but the closing frame of Deborah's cycle.

6.1–8.28: Gideon. Gideon's cycle has two parts. The first (6.1–7.23) abounds with miracles, while Gideon is portrayed as excessively fearful and requiring divine support. In contrast, in the second (7.24–8.28), which is concerned with problems of leadership, there are no miracles and Gideon is presented as a charismatic leader. The two sections illustrate the central problem of the book of Judges: what is the preferred type of leadership: divine leadership with abundant miracles, or human rule?

6.1–10: Beginning of the first part of the Gideon cycle. 1–3: Nomadic tribes destroyed all the crops of the land, and the Israelites were forced to hide their grain in the hills. *Midian,* see Num 31.1–12. For the *Amalekites,*

produce of the land, as far as the neighborhood of Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel, and no sheep or ox or donkey. 5 For they and their livestock would come up, and they would even bring their tents, as thick as locusts; neither they nor their camels could be counted; so they wasted the land as they came in. 6 Thus Israel was greatly impoverished because of Midian; and the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help.

7 When the Israelites cried to the LORD on account of the Midianites, 8 the LORD sent a prophet to the Israelites; and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of slavery; 9 and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians, and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you, and gave you their land; 10 and I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not pay reverence to the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not given heed to my voice."

11 Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. 12 The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior." 13 Gideon answered him, "But sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian." 14 Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you." 15 He responded, "But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." 16 The LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them." 17 Then he said to him, "If now I have found favor with you, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. 18 Do not depart from here until I come to you, and bring out my present, and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay until you return."

19 So Gideon went into his house and prepared a kid, and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour; the meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the oak and presented them. 20 The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so. 21 Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes; and the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. 22 Then Gideon perceived that it was the angel of the LORD; and Gideon said,

see 1.16n. **4:** *Gaza*, marks the boundary of the entire land (see 1 Kgs 5.4). **5:** *As locusts*, an image emphasizing large numbers. **7–10:** *The Israelites cried out to the LORD*, but this time he sent a prophet to rebuke them rather than a deliverer to rescue them. These verses are absent in 4Q Judga, a manuscript of the book of Judges in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and are likely a late addition.

6.11–24: Gideon's appointment. This is a stereotypical appointment or call scene composed of seven stages: meeting (vv. 11–13), presentation of the mission (v. 14), refusal (v. 15), encouragement (v. 16), request for a sign (vv. 17–22), acknowledgment and fear (v. 23), and further encouragement (v. 24). The appointment of some prophets has similar elements (e.g., Ex 3–4). **11:** *Ophrah,* location unknown. *Abiezrite*, Abiezer is one of the important families in Manasseh (Josh 17.2), mentioned in the Samaria Ostraca from the mid-eighth century BCE. *Gideon*, his name, which means "hacker," anticipates his cutting down of sacred poles (cf. vv. 25, 30; the same Heb root is used in Deut 7.5 and elsewhere). See also v. 32n. *Wine press,* here a hiding place; see vv. 2–3. **12:** *Angel*, (lit. "messenger"); Gideon is initially unaware of his divine identity (see v. 22). *You mighty warrior,* the angel hints to Gideon's future role, but the hiding Gideon understands it ironically and responds furiously. **15:** *Weakest . . . least* (lit. "smallest, youngest"), although Gideon's family is prosperous (vv. 19,25,27), the choice of an unlikely hero (often the youngest son) is a repeated motif in the Bible (e.g., 1 Sam 9.21; 16.6–13). **18–21:** This assumes that angels do not usually eat (cf. 13.15); the meal is transformed into a burnt offering. **19:** *Ephah*, a large quantity of flour, ca. 21 qts (23 liters). **21:** The appearance of fire from the rock (cf. 13.20; 1 Kings 18.38; etc.) and the sudden disappearance are also signs that this is an angel. **22:** Gideon was afraid to see the divine presence (cf. 13,22; Gen

"Help me, Lord God! For I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face." 23 But the Lord said to him, "Peace be to you; do not fear, you shall not die." 24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it, The Lord is peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

25 That night the Lord said to him, "Take your father's bull, the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father, and cut down the sacred pole[a] that is beside it; 26 and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of the stronghold here, in proper order; then take the second bull, and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the sacred pole[a] that you shall cut down." 27 So Gideon took ten of his servants, and did as the Lord had told him; but because he was too afraid of his family and the townspeople to do it by day, he did it by night.

28 When the townspeople rose early in the morning, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the sacred pole[a] beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built. 29 So they said to one another, "Who has done this?" After searching and inquiring, they were told, "Gideon son of Joash did it." 30 Then the townspeople said to Joash, "Bring out your son, so that he may die, for he has pulled down the altar of Baal and cut down the sacred pole[a] beside it." 31 But Joash said to all who were arrayed against him, "Will you contend for Baal? Or will you defend his cause? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been pulled down." 32 Therefore on that day Gideon[b] was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he pulled down his altar.

33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east came together, and crossing the Jordan they encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. 34 But the spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him. 35 He sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet them.

36 Then Gideon said to God, "In order to see whether you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said, 37 I am going to lay a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said." 38 And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. 39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let your anger burn against me, let me speak one more time; let me, please, make trial with the fleece just once more; let it be dry only on the fleece, and on all the ground let there be dew." 40 And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

7 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the troops that were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod;

[a] Heb *Asherah*
[b] Heb *he*

32.30; Ex 20.19). **24:** The altar's name is related to God's comforting words in v. 23.

6.25–32: Gideon destroys the altar and sacred pillar of Baal. This story indicates the proliferation of Baal worship and explains Gideon's other name, Jerubbaal, which might be the original name (see v. 11b). **25:** *Second bull*, the reference to two bulls (also vv. 26,28) is problematic; a better reading, found in some textual sources, is "the bull that had been fattened for seven years." *Sacred pole,* a symbol of the goddess Asherah (see 3.7n.). **31:** Joash puts Baal to the test in the eyes of his believers (cf. 1 Kings 18.20–40). *By morning* of the next day. Joash left time for Baal to prove himself. **32:** *Jerubbaal,* the original meaning of this name was probably "Baal makes great" or "Baal is a founder", the component "Jeru" appears in the name Jerusalem too; here a folk etymology suggests that it means to content or fight against Baal, referring to Gideon's battle with the worship of Baal.

6.33–7.25: The battle with the Midianites. 6.33–35: The military mustering. Gideon called to his assistance his own tribe and the neighboring tribes. **36–40:** The signs of the fleece. In order to be certain that God is with him, Gideon requested two additional and contradictory signs. **7.1–8:** Another test. In order to convince the people that deliverance comes from God, Gideon's army was gradually reduced from a force of 32,000 warriors

and the camp of Midian was north of them, below[a] the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

2 The LORD said to Gideon, "The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, 'My own hand has delivered me.' 3 Now therefore proclaim this in the hearing of the troops, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home.' " Thus Gideon sifted them out;[b] twenty-two thousand returned, and ten thousand remained.

4 Then the LORD said to Gideon, "The troops are still too many; take them down to the water and I will sift them out for you there. When I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you; and when I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." 5 So he brought the troops down to the water; and the LORD said to Gideon, "All those who lap the water with their tongues, as a dog laps, you shall put to one side; all those who kneel down to drink, putting their hands to their mouths,[c] you shall put to the other side." 6 The number of those that lapped was three hundred; but all the rest of the troops knelt down to drink water. 7 Then the LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hand. Let all the others go to their homes." 8 So he took the jars of the troops from their hands,[d] and their trumpets; and he sent all the rest of Israel back to their own tents, but retained the three hundred. The camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

9 That same night the LORD said to him, "Get up, attack the camp; for I have given it into your hand. 10 But if you fear to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah; 11 and you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to attack the camp." Then he went down with his servant Purah to the outposts of the armed men that were in the camp. 12 The Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the east lay along the valley as thick as locusts; and their camels were without number, countless as the sand on the seashore. 13 When Gideon arrived, there was a man telling a dream to his comrade; and he said, "I had a dream, and in it a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian, and came to the tent, and struck it so that it fell; it turned upside down, and the tent collapsed." 14 And his comrade answered, "This is no other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, a man of Israel; into his hand God has given Midian and all the army."

15 When Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped; and he returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Get up; for the LORD has given the army of Midian into your hand." 16 After he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and put trumpets into the hands of all of them, and empty jars, with torches inside the jars, 17 he said to them, "Look at me, and do the same; when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. 18 When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets around the whole camp, and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon!' "

19 So Gideon and the hundred who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. 20 So the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars, holding

[a] Heb *from*
[b] Cn: Heb *home, and depart from Mount Gilead'* "
[c] Heb places the words *putting their hands to their mouths* after the word *lapped* in verse 6
[d] Cn: Heb *So the people took provisions in their hands*

to a band of 300 who lapped water, thus highlighting God's intervention. **1:** *In the valley,* at the base of Gibeath-moreh, south of modern Afula. **9–15a**: The dream of the Midianite soldier. In order to encourage Gideon, God commanded him to approach the Midianite camp, where he heard a Midianite soldier recounting his dream to his friend about Gideon's victory. **13:** A dream was understood by the ancients as a divine message. The *cake* symbolizes Gideon the farmer, and the *tent* the nomadic Midianites. **15b–23:** The battle. The story emphasizes the passivity of Gideon's army, whose task was to blow the horns, to shout, and mainly to witness God's deliverance. **16:** *Three companies,* in order to surround the camp. **19:** The night is divided into three watches. During *the middle watch,* from approximately 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., sleep is strongest and the soldiers may panic at every sound. **20–23:** Both hands of the soldiers were occupied with horns to blow and jars with torches, so all they could do was to shout. God interfered and the soldiers simply watched how some of the Midianites killed one

in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow; and they cried, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" 21 Every man stood in his place all around the camp, and all the men in camp ran; they cried out and fled. 22 When they blew the three hundred trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow and against all the army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah,[a] as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. 23 And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after the Midianites.

24 Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they seized the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan. 25 They captured the two captains of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the wine press of Zeeb, as they pursued the Midianites. They brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon beyond the Jordan.

8 Then the Ephraimites said to him, "What have you done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against the Midianites?" And they upbraided him violently. 2 So he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? 3 God has given into your hands the captains of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; what have I been able to do in comparison with you?" When he said this, their anger against him subsided.

4 Then Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the three hundred who were with him, exhausted and famished.[b] 5 So he said to the people of Succoth, "Please give some loaves of bread to my followers, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." 6 But the officials of Succoth said, "Do you already have in your possession the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna, that we should give bread to your army?" 7 Gideon replied, "Well then, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will trample your flesh on the thorns of the wilderness and on briers." 8 From there he went up to Penuel, and made the same request of them; and the people of Penuel answered him as the people of Succoth had answered. 9 So he said to the people of Penuel, "When I come back victorious, I will break down this tower."

10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about fifteen thousand men, all who were left of all the army of the people of the east; for one hundred twenty thousand men bearing arms had fallen. 11 So Gideon went up by the caravan route east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and attacked the army; for the army was off its guard. 12 Zebah and Zalmunna fled; and he pursued them and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and threw all the army into a panic.

[a] Another reading is *Zeredah*
[b] Gk: Heb *pursuing*

another and others escaped. Most of the places mentioned are not identifiable. **23:** More fighting units of Israel joined in the chase.

7.24–8.3: The confrontation with Ephraim (beginning of the second part of the Gideon cycle). Gideon prevented a civil war by calming Ephraim's warriors. He is characterized here not as a coward but as a responsible leader with diplomatic talent. **24–25:** Simultaneously or even before the chase : Gideon called on Ephraim's warriors to pursue the Midianites, adjacent to their territory. *Beth-barah,* precise location unknown. **8.1:** Ephraim's warriors were angry that Gideon did not involve them in the battle from the beginning (see 6.35). **2:** *Gleaning of the grapes*, the grapes that remain after the main part of a crop has been harvested. Gideon convinced them that their part, the killing of the two generals, was even more important than the battle itself.

8.4–21: Confrontation with Succoth and Penuel. Gideon's purpose was to smite the camp of the Midianites east of the Jordan River and to capture their leaders. Two Israelite cities in Transjordan refused to give bread to Gideon's exhausted three hundred warriors, so after his victory he acted as a decisive leader, punishing them severely. **5:** *Succoth,* probably Tell Deir 'Alla in the Transjordan Valley. *Kings,* here heads of tribes. **8:** *Penuel* is probably Tell edh-Dhahab esh-Sherqiyeh, east of Succoth (see Gen 32.23-31, 1 Kings 12.25). **10:** *Karkor,* probably a desert oasis in eastern Transjordan. The numbers are exaggerated. **11:** A nomadic route east of Amman.

13 When Gideon son of Joash returned
from the battle by the ascent of Heres, 14 he
caught a young man, one of the people of
Succoth, and questioned him; and he listed
for him the officials and elders of Succoth,
seventy-seven people. 15 Then he came to the
people of Succoth, and said, "Here are Zebah
and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me,
saying, 'Do you already have in your posses-
sion the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna, that
we should give bread to your troops who are
exhausted?' " 16 So he took the elders of the
city and he took thorns of the wilderness and
briers and with them he trampled[a] the people
of Succoth. 17 He also broke down the tower
of Penuel, and killed the men of the city.

18 Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna,
"What about the men whom you killed at
Tabor?" They answered, "As you are, so were
they, every one of them; they resembled
the sons of a king." 19 And he replied, "They
were my brothers, the sons of my mother; as
the LORD lives, if you had saved them alive, I
would not kill you." 20 So he said to Jether his
firstborn, "Go kill them!" But the boy did not
draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he
was still a boy. 21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna
said, "You come and kill us; for as the man is,
so is his strength." So Gideon proceeded to kill
Zebah and Zalmunna; and he took the cres-
cents that were on the necks of their camels.

22 Then the Israelites said to Gideon, "Rule
over us, you and your son and your grand-
son also; for you have delivered us out of the
hand of Midian." 23 Gideon said to them, "I
will not rule over you, and my son will not
rule over you; the LORD will rule over you."
24 Then Gideon said to them, "Let me make a
request of you; each of you give me an earring
he has taken as booty." (For the enemy[b] had
golden earrings, because they were Ishma-
elites.) 25 "We will willingly give them," they
answered. So they spread a garment, and each
threw into it an earring he had taken as booty.
26 The weight of the golden earrings that he
requested was one thousand seven hundred
shekels of gold (apart from the crescents and
the pendants and the purple garments worn
by the kings of Midian, and the collars that
were on the necks of their camels). 27 Gideon
made an ephod of it and put it in his town, in
Ophrah; and all Israel prostituted themselves
to it there, and it became a snare to Gideon
and to his family. 28 So Midian was subdued
before the Israelites, and they lifted up their
heads no more. So the land had rest forty
years in the days of Gideon.

29 Jerubbaal son of Joash went to live in his
own house. 30 Now Gideon had seventy sons,
his own offspring, for he had many wives.
31 His concubine who was in Shechem also
bore him a son, and he named him Abime-
lech. 32 Then Gideon son of Joash died at a

[a] With verse 7, Compare Gk: Heb *he taught*
[b] Heb *they*

18: If this is the familiar *Tabor* (see 4.6n.), no battle between the Midianites and Gibeon's forces there has been reported. *Sons of a king*, they relate to Gideon as to a king. **21:** The Midianite leaders preferred that Gideon, an experienced warrior, and not his young son, should kill them, because of honor and their wish to die quickly.

8.22–27: The offer of kingship to Gideon. Gideon's refusal to rule as king is interpreted in different ways: as connected to the ancient ideology that God alone is king; as a later anti-monarchical interpolation; or as a polite refusal even though he actually acted as a king. It may also reflect the editor's view that Israelite society was not yet ripe for a monarch, because the armies of only some tribes supported Gideon and the results could lead to a civil war (as in ch 9). The establishing of the ephod (a statue) is reminiscent of the calf in Ex 32:2–4. **22:** *The Israelites,* i.e., Gideon's troops. *You and your son . . .* , indicating a dynasty. *You have delivered us*, the army sees Gideon and not the LORD as their deliverer. **24:** *Ishmaelites,* instead of Midianites; the same substitution occurs in Gen 37.25–36. The two groups were likely related. **27:** *Ephod,* usually part of the priestly vestments used in divination, but here apparently a statue intended to commemorate the deliverance that became a ritual object. **27b**: A Deuteronomistic addition, contrasting the view that "he did good for Israel" (8.35; 9.16ff.) and highlighting the dangers of Gideon's actions.

8.29–9.57: Abimelech. Gideon had a concubine at Shechem, perhaps reflecting a political alliance. Their son was Abimelech, who wanted to become king. His brief and bloody reign marks the failure of the first attempt to establish a monarchy. **8.30:** *Seventy,* a typological number signifying multiplicity. **31:** *Concubine,* a woman with a status lower than that of a primary wife. *Shechem,* see 9.1n. *Abimelech*, his name, which means "My (divine)

good old age, and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

33 As soon as Gideon died, the Israelites relapsed and prostituted themselves with the Baals, making Baal-berith their god. 34 The Israelites did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hand of all their enemies on every side; 35 and they did not exhibit loyalty to the house of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.

9 Now Abimelech son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's kinsfolk and said to them and to the whole clan of his mother's family, 2 "Say in the hearing of all the lords of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal rule over you, or that one rule over you?' Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh." 3 So his mother's kinsfolk spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the lords of Shechem; and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." 4 They gave him seventy pieces of silver out of the temple of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, who followed him. 5 He went to his father's house at Ophrah, and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone; but Jotham, the youngest son of Jerubbaal, survived, for he hid himself. 6 Then all the lords of Shechem and all Beth-millo came together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar[a] at Shechem.

7 When it was told to Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and cried aloud and said to them, "Listen to me, you lords of Shechem, so that God may listen to you.

8 The trees once went out
to anoint a king over themselves.
So they said to the olive tree,
'Reign over us.'
9 The olive tree answered them,
'Shall I stop producing my rich oil
by which gods and mortals are
honored,
and go to sway over the trees?'
10 Then the trees said to the fig tree,
'You come and reign over us.'
11 But the fig tree answered them,
'Shall I stop producing my sweetness
and my delicious fruit,
and go to sway over the trees?'
12 Then the trees said to the vine,
'You come and reign over us.'
13 But the vine said to them,
'Shall I stop producing my wine
that cheers gods and mortals,
and go to sway over the trees?'
14 So all the trees said to the bramble,
'You come and reign over us.'

[a] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

father is king," hints at the tension between divine and human kingship. **32:** *Ophrah,* see 6.11. **33:** *Baal-berith,* meaning "Baal (or lord) of the covenant" (also called "El-berith" in 9.46), is a title not mentioned elsewhere. **9.1–6:** Abimelech's enthronement at his own initiative. **1:** *Shechem,* one of the most important political and religious centers in northern Israel; see Gen 12.6, 33.18–35.4; Josh 24.1; 1 Kings 12.1,25. **2:** *All seventy*, Abimelech's first argument for enthronement was false: Gideon's seventy sons could not rule over one city, Shechem. The second argument was family ties. **4:** *Seventy pieces,* corresponding to the number of Gideon's sons (8.30). A *temple* could also function as a treasury (cf. 1 Kings 7.51). *Worthless . . . fellows*, Jephthah (11.3) also utilized such people at the beginning of his road to rule; see also 1 Sam 22.2. **5:** *One stone,* against seventy people. The contrast is intended to shock the reader. *Jotham,* his name means "God acts with integrity." It is likely that some of the names in Gideon-Abimelech episodes are symbolic. **6:** *Beth-millo*, perhaps a quarter in the city built upon a filling of earth (Heb "millo'" means "fill"). *The oak of the pillar,* probably a holy place; see Gen 12.6; 35.4; Josh 24.23–27.

9.7–21: Jotham's fable. The fable (vv. 7–15) and its explication (vv. 16–20) are not consistent with the narrative surrounding it; e.g., Abimelech was not offered the monarchy. The fable was thus probably an independent anti-monarchic text, used here to criticize Abimelech and to emphasize the responsibility of choosing a king. The fable uses the pattern of "three and four," in which the final element is climactic: three refusals of the useful trees and one acceptance by the bramble, which leads to harm. **7:** Uttering from a high place is a literary model (cf. Num 23.14). Actually the Shechemites could not hear Jotham, because *the top of Mount Gerizim* was several hundred feet above Shechem. **9:** *Gods and mortals are honored,* oil and wine (v. 13) were used in worship as well

15 And the bramble said to the trees,
'If in good faith you are anointing me
king over you,
then come and take refuge in my
shade;
but if not, let fire come out of the
bramble
and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'
16 "Now therefore, if you acted in good
faith and honor when you made Abimelech
king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal
and his house, and have done to him as his
actions deserved— 17 for my father fought for
you, and risked his life, and rescued you from
the hand of Midian; 18 but you have risen up
against my father's house this day, and have
killed his sons, seventy men on one stone,
and have made Abimelech, the son of his
slave woman, king over the lords of Shechem,
because he is your kinsman— 19 if, I say, you
have acted in good faith and honor with
Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then
rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice
in you; 20 but if not, let fire come out from
Abimelech, and devour the lords of Shechem,
and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the
lords of Shechem, and from Beth-millo, and
devour Abimelech." 21 Then Jotham ran away
and fled, going to Beer, where he remained for
fear of his brother Abimelech.

22 Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.
23 But God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the lords of Shechem; and the lords
of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech. 24 This happened so that the violence
done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might
be avenged[a] and their blood be laid on their
brother Abimelech, who killed them, and
on the lords of Shechem, who strengthened
his hands to kill his brothers. 25 So, out of
hostility to him, the lords of Shechem set ambushes on the mountain tops. They robbed
all who passed by them along that way; and it
was reported to Abimelech.

26 When Gaal son of Ebed moved into
Shechem with his kinsfolk, the lords of
Shechem put confidence in him. 27 They
went out into the field and gathered the
grapes from their vineyards, trod them, and
celebrated. Then they went into the temple
of their god, ate and drank, and ridiculed
Abimelech. 28 Gaal son of Ebed said, "Who
is Abimelech, and who are we of Shechem,
that we should serve him? Did not the son
of Jerubbaal and Zebul his officer serve the
men of Hamor father of Shechem? Why then
should we serve him? 29 If only this people
were under my command! Then I would
remove Abimelech; I would say[b] to him, 'Increase your army, and come out.' "

30 When Zebul the ruler of the city heard
the words of Gaal son of Ebed, his anger was
kindled. 31 He sent messengers to Abimelech
at Arumah,[c] saying, "Look, Gaal son of Ebed
and his kinsfolk have come to Shechem, and
they are stirring up[d] the city against you.
32 Now therefore, go by night, you and the
troops that are with you, and lie in wait in the
fields. 33 Then early in the morning, as soon
as the sun rises, get up and rush on the city;
and when he and the troops that are with
him come out against you, you may deal with
them as best you can."

34 So Abimelech and all the troops with
him got up by night and lay in wait against
Shechem in four companies. 35 When Gaal
son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city, Abimelech and
the troops with him rose from the ambush.

[a] Heb *might come*
[b] Gk: Heb *and he said*
[c] Cn See 9.41. Heb *Tormah*
[d] Cn: Heb *are besieging*

as in nonreligious activities. **14:** *Bramble,* a useless shrub which offers little shade and whose fruit is inedible. **16:** *Now therefore,* a transitional formula that introduces the explanation. **21:** *Beer*, which means "well," is an unidentified locale.

9.22–57: The end of Abimelech's rule. 22: *Ruled over,* the Hebrew root ("s-r-r") means arbitrary rule (see Num 16.13). *Israel*, in reality, only Shechem and its environs. *Three years,* a typological number indicating a brief reign. **23–41:** The first battle at Shechem. **23–24:** Abimelech's fall and the war in Shechem are explained as a divine punishment, measure for measure (see also vv. 56–57). **25:** Social and economic causes are also mentioned. **26:** *Ebed* may be a name, or a title meaning the status of a "slave." *Kinsfolk,* perhaps not family but mercenaries; cf. 9.4. **28:** Gaal incites the citizens by rhetorical questions, identifying himself as a native Shechemite commit-

36 And when Gaal saw them, he said to Zebul,
"Look, people are coming down from the
mountain tops!" And Zebul said to him, "The
shadows on the mountains look like people
to you." 37 Gaal spoke again and said, "Look,
people are coming down from Tabbur-erez,
and one company is coming from the direc-
tion of Elon-meonenim."[a] 38 Then Zebul said
to him, "Where is your boast[b] now, you who
said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should
serve him?' Are not these the troops you
made light of? Go out now and fight with
them." 39 So Gaal went out at the head of the
lords of Shechem, and fought with Abime-
lech. 40 Abimelech chased him, and he fled
before him. Many fell wounded, up to the
entrance of the gate. 41 So Abimelech resided
at Arumah; and Zebul drove out Gaal and
his kinsfolk, so that they could not live on at
Shechem.

42 On the following day the people went
out into the fields. When Abimelech was told,
43 he took his troops and divided them into
three companies, and lay in wait in the fields.
When he looked and saw the people com-
ing out of the city, he rose against them and
killed them. 44 Abimelech and the company
that was[c] with him rushed forward and stood
at the entrance of the gate of the city, while
the two companies rushed on all who were
in the fields and killed them. 45 Abimelech
fought against the city all that day; he took
the city, and killed the people that were in it;
and he razed the city and sowed it with salt.

46 When all the lords of the Tower of
Shechem heard of it, they entered the strong-
hold of the temple of El-berith. 47 Abime-
lech was told that all the lords of the Tower
of Shechem were gathered together. 48 So
Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and
all the troops that were with him. Abimelech
took an ax in his hand, cut down a bundle
of brushwood, and took it up and laid it on
his shoulder. Then he said to the troops with
him, "What you have seen me do, do quickly,
as I have done." 49 So every one of the troops
cut down a bundle and following Abimelech
put it against the stronghold, and they set the
stronghold on fire over them, so that all the
people of the Tower of Shechem also died,
about a thousand men and women.

50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and
encamped against Thebez, and took it. 51 But
there was a strong tower within the city, and
all the men and women and all the lords of
the city fled to it and shut themselves in; and
they went to the roof of the tower. 52 Abime-
lech came to the tower, and fought against it,
and came near to the entrance of the tower to
burn it with fire. 53 But a certain woman threw
an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, and
crushed his skull. 54 Immediately he called
to the young man who carried his armor and
said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, so
people will not say about me, 'A woman killed
him.' " So the young man thrust him through,
and he died. 55 When the Israelites saw that
Abimelech was dead, they all went home.
56 Thus God repaid Abimelech for the crime
he committed against his father in killing his
seventy brothers; 57 and God also made all
the wickedness of the people of Shechem fall

[a] That is *Diviners' Oak*
[b] Heb *mouth*
[c] Vg and some Gk Mss: Heb *companies that were*

ted to the family of Hamor (Gen 34.2), and portraying Abimelech as a foreigner. **37:** *Tabbur-erez*, (lit. "the navel of the earth"); cf. Ezek 38.12. *Elon-meonenim,* (lit. "oak of the diviners"). The route is named after a holy tree. **42–45:** The second battle at Shechem; its cause is unexplained. **45:** *Sowed it with salt,* a symbolic action signifying a final destruction. **46–49:** The battle at the tower of Shechem; again, no reason for the battle is given. Abimelech is depicted here like the harmful fire in the fable; the image of fire connects this battle with the next one. **46:** *Tower of Shechem*, probably a fortified section of the city, but perhaps a settlement near it. *El-berith,* see 8.33n. **48:** *Zalmon*, a mountain near Shechem; some scholars identify it as Mount Ebal, opposite Mount Gerizim (see v. 7n.). **50–54:** The battle at Thebez and Abimelech's death. This time the fire is stopped, because Abimelech himself died in this war (see the reference to this battle in 2 Sam 11.20–21). **50:** *Thebez*, perhaps a corruption of Tirzah, located seven miles northeast of Shechem. **54:** Even at the point of death Abimelech was concerned for his honor and did not want to be killed by a woman. **55-57:** The Dispersion of the Army and the Cyclical End. **55:** Upon Abimelech's death, his army was dispersed. Gideon's refusal to reign was justified: the situation was not yet ripe for a monarch.

back on their heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham son of Jerubbaal.

10 After Abimelech, Tola son of Puah son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, who lived at Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim, rose to deliver Israel. [2] He judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died, and was buried at Shamir.

[3] After him came Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel twenty-two years. [4] He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; and they had thirty towns, which are in the land of Gilead, and are called Havvoth-jair to this day. [5] Jair died, and was buried in Kamon.

[6] The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, worshiping the Baals and the Astartes, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. Thus they abandoned the LORD, and did not worship him. [7] So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites, [8] and they crushed and oppressed the Israelites that year. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites that were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. [9] The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was greatly distressed.

[10] So the Israelites cried to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against you, because we have abandoned our God and have worshiped the Baals." [11] And the LORD said to the Israelites, "Did I not deliver you[a] from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines? [12] The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, oppressed you; and you cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand. [13] Yet you have abandoned me and worshiped other gods; therefore I will deliver you no more. [14] Go and cry to the gods whom you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress." [15] And the Israelites said to the LORD, "We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you; but deliver us this day!" [16] So they put away the foreign gods from among them and worshiped the LORD; and he could no longer bear to see Israel suffer.

[17] Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead; and the Israelites came together, and they encamped at Mizpah. [18] The commanders of the people

[a] Heb lacks *Did I not deliver you*

10.1–5: First list of consecutive judges. The two judges after Abimelech appear one after another, without the usual pattern of sin and punishment. Their brief and consecutive mention hints that continuity of leadership may prevent return to sin and thus points to the advantages of monarchy in spite of Abimelech's kingship. The descriptions of these judges are short reports: they do not narrate acts of deliverance, but merely list details such as where they lived and were buried, how long they judged, their property and numbers of descendants. For this reason many scholars call these individuals along with those in 12.8–15 "minor judges." **1:** *To deliver*, but the story of deliverance is missing. *Tola* is from the tribe of Issachar, one of whose sons had the same name according to Gen 43.13. *Shamir,* location unknown, situated in Mount Ephraim. **3:** According to Num 32.41; Deut 3.14; and 1 Chr 2.22–23, Jair conquered territory in Gilead. **4:** *Thirty sons . . . thirty donkeys,* the large number of offspring and burros indicates his high status (cf. 8.30; 12.14; see 5.10n.*). Havvoth-jair* means "villages of Jair." **5:** *Kamon,* location unknown.

10.6–12.15: Jephthah. A sense of disappointment accompanies most of the Jephthah stories, suggesting that even as the cycle continues, the judges are getting worse and worse.

10.6–16: Introduction to the Jephthah cycle. The stages of sin (here seven types of idolatry), punishment (Philistines and Ammonites), and crying out (repentance and direct rebuke by God) that precede the Jephthah cycle point to the increased severity of the situation, and suggest the need for a very able leader. **12:** *The Maonites,* a nomadic tribe in southern Judah (1 Chr 4.41; 2 Chr 26.7).

10.17–11.11: Jephthah's appointment. The elders of Gilead could not find someone to lead the army against the Ammonites, so they offered it to Jephthah. As the son of a prostitute, he had been disinherited by his brothers, and he moved to the eastern border area, where he gained military experience as a bandit leader. Jephthah made his appointment conditional: if he led them to victory, he would be appointed their leader after the war too. **17:** *Mizpah* (also 11.11), location unknown. **18:** A situation of despair. The leadership is promised to whoever will dare to go to war. *Head,* a leader whose authority was not only military but also judicial and administrative.

of Gilead said to one another, "Who will begin the fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

11 Now Jephthah the Gileadite, the son of a prostitute, was a mighty warrior. Gilead was the father of Jephthah. [2] Gilead's wife also bore him sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah away, saying to him, "You shall not inherit anything in our father's house; for you are the son of another woman." [3] Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob. Outlaws collected around Jephthah and went raiding with him.

[4] After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel. [5] And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. [6] They said to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander, so that we may fight with the Ammonites." [7] But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Are you not the very ones who rejected me and drove me out of my father's house? So why do you come to me now when you are in trouble?" [8] The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "Nevertheless, we have now turned back to you, so that you may go with us and fight with the Ammonites, and become head over us, over all the inhabitants of Gilead." [9] Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you bring me home again to fight with the Ammonites, and the LORD gives them over to me, I will be your head." [10] And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD will be witness between us; we will surely do as you say." [11] So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah.

[12] Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, "What is there between you and me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?" [13] The king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel, on coming from Egypt, took away my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan; now therefore restore it peaceably." [14] Once again Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites [15] and said to him: "Thus says Jephthah: Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites, [16] but when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea[a] and came to Kadesh. [17] Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, 'Let us pass through your land'; but the king of Edom would not listen. They also sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. [18] Then they journeyed through the wilderness, went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, arrived on the east side of the land of Moab, and camped on the other side of the Arnon. They did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the boundary of Moab. [19] Israel then sent messengers to King Sihon of the Amorites, king of Heshbon; and Israel said to him, 'Let us pass through your land to our country.' [20] But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory; so Sihon gath-

[a] Or *Sea of Reeds*

11.2: Gilead's wife apparently bore him sons after Jephthah's birth. According to some ancient laws, Jephthah was also entitled to an inheritance. **3:** *Tob,* in northeast Gilead. *Outlaws,* see 9.4n. **4:** This verse logically belongs before 10.17. **5:** *The elders* themselves, not emissaries from them. **6:** *Commander,* a military officer whose authority was less than that of a "head" (cf. 10.18). Jephthah begins negotiations in order to be their head (v.9). **11:** *Before the LORD*, at a temple or an altar.

11.12–28: Negotiations with the Ammonite king. Jephthah attempted to prevent war on Israelite territory "from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan" (v. 13) by negotiation. His arguments were historical: the area had never belonged to Ammon, but to Sihon king of the Amorites (vv. 14–19); when Sihon did not allow the Israelites to pass through his land after the Exodus, they were forced to wage war against him (v. 20); their victory was God's will (vv. 21–24); for the past three hundred years the Ammonites had not claimed this area (vv. 25–26). Once the Ammonite king rejected Jephthah's arguments, war was inevitable (cf. Num 20.14–21; 33.37–49; Deut 2–3). Scholars think that this text is a late document concerning Israelite-Moabite relations, since throughout the negotiation Moab rather than Ammon is mentioned. **13:** The borders of Sihon's land are the river *Arnon* in the south, the river *Jabbok* in the north, the river *Jordan* in the west, and the desert in the east. Reuben and Gad settled there. **16:** *Kadesh,* i.e., Kadesh-barnea, a desert oasis in northern Sinai; see Num 13.25; 20.1. **19:** *Heshbon*,

ered all his people together, and encamped at Jahaz, and fought with Israel. 21 Then the LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them; so Israel occupied all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. 22 They occupied all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. 23 So now the LORD, the God of Israel, has conquered the Amorites for the benefit of his people Israel. Do you intend to take their place? 24 Should you not possess what your god Chemosh gives you to possess? And should we not be the ones to possess everything that the LORD our God has conquered for our benefit? 25 Now are you any better than King Balak son of Zippor of Moab? Did he ever enter into conflict with Israel, or did he ever go to war with them? 26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the towns that are along the Arnon, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time? 27 It is not I who have sinned against you, but you are the one who does me wrong by making war on me. Let the LORD, who is judge, decide today for the Israelites or for the Ammonites." 28 But the king of the Ammonites did not heed the message that Jephthah sent him.

29 Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh. He passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, 31 then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the LORD's, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering." 32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. 33 He inflicted a massive defeat on them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty towns, and as far as Abelkeramim. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.

34 Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dancing. She was his only child; he had no son or daughter except her. 35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the LORD, and I cannot take back my vow." 36 She said to him, "My father, if you have opened your mouth to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the LORD has given you vengeance against your enemies, the Ammonites." 37 And she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: Grant me two months, so that I may go and wander[a] on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, my companions and I." 38 "Go," he said and sent her away for two months. So she departed, she and her companions, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. 39 At the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to the vow he had made. She had never slept with a man. So there arose an Israelite custom that 40 for four days every year the daughters of Israel would go out to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

[a] Cn: Heb *go down*

Sihon's royal city, about 14 mi (23 km) southwest of Amman. **20:** *Jahaz*, location uncertain. **24:** *Chemosh,* the national god of Moab; the reference to him, and not to Milcom the god of Ammon, indicates the Moabite context of this document. Chemosh is mentioned in the Mesha inscription. **25:** *Balak*, see Num 22.2–24.5. **26:** *Aroer,* just north of the Arnon. *Three hundred,* a round and inexact number for the time from Joshua's conquest until Jephthah.

11.29–40: The war and the vow. Before the war Jephthah vowed that if the LORD granted him victory, he would offer up to him the first coming out of his house. When he returned home victorious, his only daughter came out to greet him, and he was obliged to fulfill his vow. This story shows Jephthah in a clear negative light, because of human sacrifice. **29:** Jephthah advanced in a northeasterly direction. **31:** The oath suggests a human sacrifice; 2 Kings 3:27 illustrates such a sacrifice at the time of war. **35:** Both Jephthah and his unnamed daughter understand the oath as an unconditional obligation; see Deut 23.21–23. **37:** *Virginity*, see v. 39. **40:** The etiological conclusion explains a preexisting custom.

12 The men of Ephraim were called to arms, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the Ammonites, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down over you!" [2] Jephthah said to them, "My people and I were engaged in conflict with the Ammonites who oppressed us[a] severely. But when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand. [3] When I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hand, and crossed over against the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day, to fight against me?" [4] Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You are fugitives from Ephraim, you Gileadites—in the heart of Ephraim and Manasseh."[b] [5] Then the Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. Whenever one of the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me go over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" When he said, "No," [6] they said to him, "Then say Shibboleth," and he said, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand of the Ephraimites fell at that time.

[7] Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died, and was buried in his town in Gilead.[c]

[8] After him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. [9] He had thirty sons. He gave his thirty daughters in marriage outside his clan and brought in thirty young women from outside for his sons. He judged Israel seven years. [10] Then Ibzan died, and was buried at Bethlehem.

[11] After him Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years. [12] Then Elon the Zebulunite died, and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.

[13] After him Abdon son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel. [14] He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys; he judged Israel eight years. [15] Then Abdon son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

13 The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

[a] Gk OL, Syr H: Heb lacks *who oppressed us*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain: Gk omits *because . . . Manasseh*
[c] Gk: Heb *in the towns of Gilead*

12.1–7: Jephthah's battle with Ephraim and the conclusion of the Jephthah cycle. This conflict, like Gideon's (8.1–3), is a struggle for intertribal hegemony, but since it ends with the death of forty-two thousand Ephraimites, it emphasizes Jephthah's negative characteristics. Another example of his negative behavior is the blocking of the Jordan crossings, a tactic used by Ehud against the Moabites (3.28); Jephthah used it against his own people. **1:** *Zaphon*, in the central Jordan valley, perhaps near Succoth (Josh 13.27). **4:** *Fugitives from Ephraim*, the men of Gilead were insulted by the Ephraimites. Perhaps this phrase relates to the inhabitants of Gilead in Transjordan as refugees who had left the region of Ephraim and Manasseh west of the Jordan River. **5:** The Gileadites prevented the men of Ephraim from escaping westward to the Jordan. **6:** *Shibboleth . . . sibboleth*, the difference in pronunciation shows variation in dialects. *Shibboleth* may mean river currents (Ps 69.3) or sheaves of grain (Gen 41.5–7).

12.8–15: Second list of consecutive judges. Three consecutive judges appear after Jephthah, and therefore there was no room for sin, punishment or deliverance (see 10.1–5n.). **8:** *Bethlehem*, here a city in the territory of Zebulun (Josh 19.15). **9:** Marriage was one of the means of creating foreign alliances (cf. 8.31). **13:** Pirathon is located in the land of Ephraim, see 2 Sam 23.30; 1 Chr 27.14. **14:** See 10.4n.

Chs 13–16: The Samson cycle. Samson differs from the other judges: he fought as an individual rather than a commander, and his miraculous heroic acts were the result of personal involvement with Philistine women. He did not deliver his people but only began the process and then died in enemy captivity. Like Jephthah he is also disappointing and his appearance as the last judge in the book leads toward the conclusion that monarchy is preferable to judges. The stories concerning Samson are filled with remnants of myth, legends, and folk traditions.

13.1–25: Samson's birth. This story is reminiscent of other annunciation stories (Gen 18.1–15; Judg 6.11–24; 1 Sam 1; 2 Kings 4.8–37). **1:** *Forty years* is the longest period of subjugation in the book. There is no statement

[2] There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren, having borne no children. [3] And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Although you are barren, having borne no children, you shall conceive and bear a son. [4] Now be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, or to eat anything unclean, [5] for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite[a] to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." [6] Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like that of an angel[b] of God, most awe-inspiring; I did not ask him where he came from, and he did not tell me his name; [7] but he said to me, 'You shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the boy shall be a nazirite[a] to God from birth to the day of his death.' "

[8] Then Manoah entreated the LORD, and said, "O LORD, I pray, let the man of God whom you sent come to us again and teach us what we are to do concerning the boy who will be born." [9] God listened to Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her. [10] So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, "The man who came to me the other day has appeared to me." [11] Manoah got up and followed his wife, and came to the man and said to him, "Are you the man who spoke to this woman?" And he said, "I am." [12] Then Manoah said, "Now when your words come true, what is to be the boy's rule of life; what is he to do?" [13] The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Let the woman give heed to all that I said to her. [14] She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine. She is not to drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing. She is to observe everything that I commanded her."

[15] Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "Allow us to detain you, and prepare a kid for you." [16] The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "If you detain me, I will not eat your food; but if you want to prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD." (For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD.) [17] Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that we may honor you when your words come true?" [18] But the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name? It is too wonderful."

[19] So Manoah took the kid with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD, to him who works[c] wonders.[d] [20] When the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar while Manoah and his wife looked on; and they fell on their faces to the ground. [21] The an-

[a] That is *one separated* or *one consecrated*
[b] Or *the angel*
[c] Gk Vg: Heb *and working*
[d] Heb *wonders, while Manoah and his wife looked on*

that the Israelites cried out, strengthening the impression of distance from the LORD. **2:** *Zorah* is in the territory of Dan, about 16 mi (25 km) west of Jerusalem. **5:** Samson's status as a *nazirite* is exceptional. It is connected only to his hair, while other prohibitions apply to his mother; see Num 6.1–5. *Begin,* i.e., his deliverance will be partial. **7:** *To the day of his death*, the woman does not repeat the angel's words exactly. She focuses upon her prohibitions and interprets the partial deliverance as alluding to the death of the child. Thus Manoah has a reason to ask for another visit of the messenger for further clarification. **8:** *Us*, Manoah wants to be a full partner in the additional visit. **9:** Due to women's preferred status in birth stories (compare 2 Kings 4.8–17), the angel appears to the woman again, and thereafter Manoah follows his wife. **13–14:** The angel's answer relates to the woman and not to the child. **15:** Like Gideon in 6.18, Manoah invites the angel to a meal in order to ascertain whether he is an angel. **16:** The angel, behaving properly, refuses to eat. The second half of this verse (*For Manoah . . .*) may belong at the end of v. 15. **17–18:** Manoah continues to question the angel and asks for his name, but the angel refuses to disclose it. **19–20:** The angel behaves in a miraculous way and disappears in the flame while the sacrifice is offered. **20:** *Altar,* i.e., the rock. **21–22:** In contrast to his wife who understood early on that the visitor was an angel, Manoah realizes who the visitor was only after the angel disappeared, and he begins to be afraid (cf. 6.22). **23:** Manoah's wife calms him with logical arguments. **24a:** Many scholars connect the name of Samson (Heb "Shimshon") with the word for sun ("shemesh"), finding in it a mythological allusion. **24b–25:** These verses summarize Samson's unique growth and development under divine protection. *Eshtaol,* near Zo-

gel of the LORD did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. Then Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. 22 And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God." 23 But his wife said to him, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these."

24 The woman bore a son, and named him Samson. The boy grew, and the LORD blessed him. 25 The spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

14 Once Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw a Philistine woman. 2 Then he came up, and told his father and mother, "I saw a Philistine woman at Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." 3 But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among your kin, or among all our[a] people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, because she pleases me." 4 His father and mother did not know that this was from the LORD; for he was seeking a pretext to act against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

5 Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah. When he came to the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion roared at him. 6 The spirit of the LORD rushed on him, and he tore the lion apart barehanded as one might tear apart a kid. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. 7 Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she pleased Samson. 8 After a while he returned to marry her, and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. 9 He scraped it out into his hands, and went on, eating as he went. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them, and they ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the carcass of the lion.

10 His father went down to the woman, and Samson made a feast there as the young men were accustomed to do. 11 When the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him. 12 Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments. 13 But if you cannot explain it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments." So they said to him, "Ask your riddle; let us hear it." 14 He said to them,

"Out of the eater came something to eat.
Out of the strong came something sweet."

But for three days they could not explain the riddle.

15 On the fourth[b] day they said to Samson's wife, "Coax your husband to explain the riddle to us, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?" 16 So Samson's wife wept before him, saying, "You hate me; you do not really love me. You have asked a riddle of my people, but you have not explained it to me." He said to her, "Look, I have not told my father or my mother. Why should I tell you?" 17 She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted; and because she nagged him, on the seventh day he told her. Then she explained the riddle to her people. 18 The men of the town said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down,

[a] Cn: Heb *my*
[b] Gk Syr: Heb *seventh*

rah (see v. 1n.).

14.1–15.20: Samson's marriage to the Timnite woman and its consequences. Samson's marriage to a Philistine woman was part of a deliberate divine strategy so that he would have justification for harming the Philistines (see 14.4). **14.1:** *Timnah,* between Beth-shemesh and Ekron, about 18 mi (30 km) west of Jerusalem. **5:** Samson leaves the main road, so his parents do not know of his struggle with the lion (v. 6; also v. 9). Several ancient heroes, such as Babylonian Gilgamesh and Greek Herakles or Hercules, are described as fighting with lions. **8:** The removal of honey from the skeleton of a lion has parallels in other ancient literature. **10:** The mention of the father by himself is difficult; a possible emendation is: "He went down to the woman." **12:** Proposing riddles accompanied by betting was an aspect of the entertainment at a feast. **14:** Samson's riddle is based on chance and personal experience, and is unsolvable without knowledge of his earlier acts. **16:** *My people,* phrasing that

"What is sweeter than honey?
What is stronger than a lion?"
And he said to them,
"If you had not plowed with my heifer,
you would not have found out my riddle."

19 Then the spirit of the LORD rushed on him, and he went down to Ashkelon. He killed thirty men of the town, took their spoil, and gave the festal garments to those who had explained the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house. 20 And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.

15 After a while, at the time of the wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife, bringing along a kid. He said, "I want to go into my wife's room." But her father would not allow him to go in. 2 Her father said, "I was sure that you had rejected her; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister prettier than she? Why not take her instead?" 3 Samson said to them, "This time, when I do mischief to the Philistines, I will be without blame." 4 So Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took some torches; and he turned the foxes[a] tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. 5 When he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and[b] olive groves. 6 Then the Philistines asked, "Who has done this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken Samson's wife and given her to his companion." So the Philistines came up, and burned her and her father. 7 Samson said to them, "If this is what you do, I swear I will not stop until I have taken revenge on you." 8 He struck them down hip and thigh with great slaughter; and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

9 Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah, and made a raid on Lehi. 10 The men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" They said, "We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us." 11 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and they said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then have you done to us?" He replied, "As they did to me, so I have done to them." 12 They said to him, "We have come down to bind you, so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." Samson answered them, "Swear to me that you yourselves will not attack me." 13 They said to him, "No, we will only bind you and give you into their hands; we will not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes, and brought him up from the rock.

14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him; and the spirit of the LORD rushed on him, and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. 15 Then he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached down and took it, and with it he killed a thousand men. 16 And Samson said,

"With the jawbone of a donkey,
heaps upon heaps,
with the jawbone of a donkey
I have slain a thousand men."

17 When he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and that place was called Ramath-lehi.[c]

18 By then he was very thirsty, and he called on the LORD, saying, "You have granted this great victory by the hand of your servant. Am I now to die of thirst, and fall into the

[a] Heb *them*
[b] Gk Tg Vg: Heb lacks *and*
[c] That is *The Hill of the Jawbone*

emphasizes the national confrontation. **18:** Samson responds with another riddle, comparing the woman to a heifer and the method of solution to plowing. Samson hints that he knows how they arrived at the solution. **19:** *Ashkelon,* a Philistine city 25 mi (40 km) west-southwest of Timnah.

15.1–8: Samson continues his acts of violence against the Philistines. **4:** The motif of using foxes to damage fields is also known from ancient literature **8:** *Hip and thigh,* an idiom probably meaning a severe beating. *Etam,* a rock in Judah, near Zorah (see 1 Chr 4.3). **9:** Samson's presence in Judah leads the Philistines to apply further pressure on Judah. *Lehi,* not identified location. **15:** This act is reminiscent of the heroic acts of Shamgar (3.31). **16:** Samson does not mention God in his song of victory. **18:** Samson's thirst teaches him that his might and life

hands of the uncircumcised?" [19] So God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came from it. When he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore it was named En-hakkore,[a] which is at Lehi to this day. [20] And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

16 Once Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute and went in to her. [2] The Gazites were told,[b] "Samson has come here." So they circled around and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They kept quiet all night, thinking, "Let us wait until the light of the morning; then we will kill him." [3] But Samson lay only until midnight. Then at midnight he rose up, took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts, pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

[4] After this he fell in love with a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. [5] The lords of the Philistines came to her and said to her, "Coax him, and find out what makes his strength so great, and how we may overpower him, so that we may bind him in order to subdue him; and we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." [6] So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me what makes your strength so great, and how you could be bound, so that one could subdue you." [7] Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that are not dried out, then I shall become weak, and be like anyone else." [8] Then the lords of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bowstrings that had not dried out, and she bound him with them. [9] While men were lying in wait in an inner chamber, she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the bowstrings, as a strand of fiber snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

[10] Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have mocked me and told me lies; please tell me how you could be bound." [11] He said to her, "If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak, and be like anyone else." [12] So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" (The men lying in wait were in an inner chamber.) But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.

[13] Then Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies; tell me how you could be bound." He said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and make it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak, and be like anyone else." [14] So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web,[c] and made them tight with the pin. Then she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you,

[a] That is *The Spring of the One who Called*
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *were told*
[c] Compare Gk: in verses 13-14, Heb lacks *and make it tight . . . into the web*

are dependent upon God. **19:** The etymology connects the spring's name (see textual note *b*) with Samson's calling on God (v. 18). **20:** The position of the closing formula here indicates that the period of his being judge takes place after his marriage but before the events in ch 16 that will lead to his death.

16.1–21: Samson's downfall. Samson's final acts, which begin and end in the city of Gaza, lead to his death in Philistine captivity. Here too a woman plays a prominent role. **1–3:** *Gaza,* a Philistine city on the southeast coast of the Mediterranean. This story explains the Philistines' readiness to pay Delilah any price in order to catch Samson. **2:** *City gate,* a fortified structure with several rooms. **3:** Against the preparations of the townspeople "all night" (v. 2, twice), the author informs us twice that already *at midnight* Samson had left. *To the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron,* the geographical details emphasize the miracle. Samson walks more than 35 mi (56 km), from the seacoast to the mountains in front of Hebron, carrying on his shoulders the massive structure comprised of the doors, the gateposts, and the bar. **4–21:** Delilah's attempts to uncover the source of Samson's strength are based upon the model of ascending numbers (cf. 9.8–15). Three times she fails (vv. 6–9,10–12,13–14), but at the fourth (vv. 15–21) he reveals her his secret. In so doing he betrays his destiny and is punished. **4:** For the first time we are told that Samson was in love. *Delilah* is not explicitly identified as a Philistine; her name may refer to woven braids of hair, anticipating vv. 13–14 (see Song 7.6). *Valley of Sorek,* near Zorah (see 13.2n.). **5:** As there were five Philistine lords (see 3.3), Delilah was offered the enormous sum of 5,500 shekels. **7:** *Fresh bowstrings,* their freshness assures their flexibility and makes them more difficult to tear. **13:** *The web* and *the pin*

Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web.

15 Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me three times now and have not told me what makes your strength so great." 16 Finally, after she had nagged him with her words day after day, and pestered him, he was tired to death. 17 So he told her his whole secret, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a nazirite[a] to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, then my strength would leave me; I would become weak, and be like anyone else."

18 When Delilah realized that he had told her his whole secret, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "This time come up, for he has told his whole secret to me." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and brought the money in their hands. 19 She let him fall asleep on her lap; and she called a man, and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. He began to weaken,[b] and his strength left him. 20 Then she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" When he awoke from his sleep, he thought, "I will go out as at other times, and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him. 21 So the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles; and he ground at the mill in the prison. 22 But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

23 Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon, and to rejoice; for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand." 24 When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us." 25 And when their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, and let him entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them. They made him stand between the pillars; 26 and Samson said to the attendant who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, so that I may lean against them." 27 Now the house was full of men and women; all the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about three thousand men and women, who looked on while Samson performed.

28 Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "Lord GOD, remember me and strengthen me only this once, O God, so that with this one act of revenge I may pay back the Philistines for my two eyes."[c] 29 And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. 30 Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." He strained with all his might; and the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life. 31 Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.

[a] That is *one separated* or *one consecrated*
[b] Gk: Heb *She began to torment him*
[c] Or *so that I may be avenged upon the Philistines for one of my two eyes*

were parts of a loom. **17:** See 13.5. **19:** *She called a man* to assist her in cutting his hair.

16.22–31: Samson's death and burial. The Philistines gather at the temple of the god Dagon (cf. 1 Sam 5.1) in Gaza to offer him sacrifices and to thank him for catching Samson. **22:** His hair growing back alludes to the connection with the LORD through the nazirite vow (see v. 17) and the renewal of his strength. **25:** The Philistines wish to enjoy the sight of Samson humiliated. **29:** It seems that the pillars were placed close together. **31:** *His brothers,* his compatriots. **31:** *He had judged Israel twenty years* returns to 15.20, to the period before the events of ch 16, and it ends the whole cycle.

17.1–18.31: Micah's house of God and the temple of Dan. This story criticizes the time of the judges by representing it as one of social and religious anarchy. Chronologically, it belongs to the beginning of the period (see 18.30). Its appearance at the end of the book emphasizes the limited influence of the judges' rule and the need for monarchy. Scholars think that Micah's temple is an allusion to Bethel, which is often mentioned along with Dan as one of the central shrines of the northern kingdom of Israel whose worship the narrative is criticizing.

17 There was a man in the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. 2 He said to his mother, "The eleven hundred pieces of silver that were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse, and even spoke it in my hearing,—that silver is in my possession; I took it; but now I will return it to you."[a] And his mother said, "May my son be blessed by the LORD!" 3 Then he returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother; and his mother said, "I consecrate the silver to the LORD from my hand for my son, to make an idol of cast metal." 4 So when he returned the money to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver, and gave it to the silversmith, who made it into an idol of cast metal; and it was in the house of Micah. 5 This man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and teraphim, and installed one of his sons, who became his priest. 6 In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.

7 Now there was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah, of the clan of Judah. He was a Levite residing there. 8 This man left the town of Bethlehem in Judah, to live wherever he could find a place. He came to the house of Micah in the hill country of Ephraim to carry on his work.[b] 9 Micah said to him, "From where do you come?" He replied, "I am a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to live wherever I can find a place." 10 Then Micah said to him, "Stay with me, and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, a set of clothes, and your living."[c] 11 The Levite agreed to stay with the man; and the young man became to him like one of his sons. 12 So Micah installed the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. 13 Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because the Levite has become my priest."

18 In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking for itself a territory to live in; for until then no territory among the tribes of Israel had been allotted to them. 2 So the Danites sent five valiant men from the whole number of their clan, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to explore it; and they said to them, "Go, explore the land." When they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they stayed there. 3 While they were at Micah's house, they recognized the voice of the young Levite; so they went over and asked him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here?" 4 He said to them, "Micah did such and such for me, and he hired me, and I have become his priest." 5 Then they said to him, "Inquire of God that we may know whether the mission we are undertaking will succeed." 6 The priest replied, "Go in peace. The mission you are on is under the eye of the LORD."

[a] The words *but now I will return it to you* are transposed from the end of verse 3 in Heb
[b] Or *Ephraim, continuing his journey*
[c] Heb *living, and the Levite went*

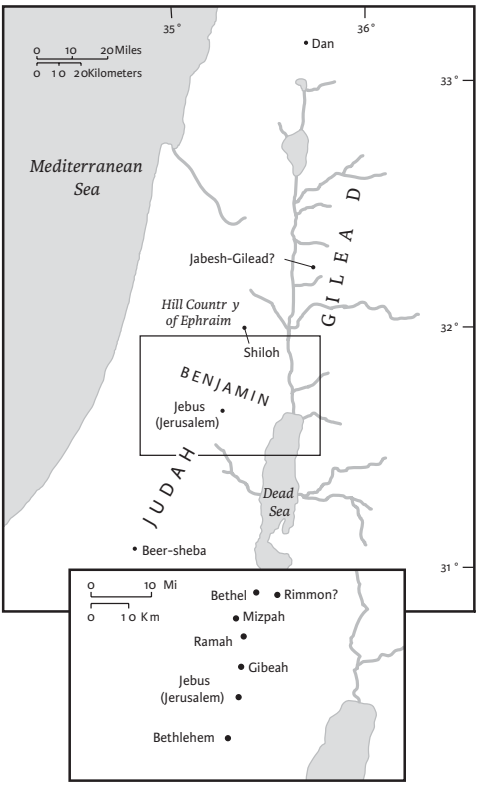
17.1–13: Micah's shrine and its idol. The story reveals how God was worshiped during the period of the judges: a statue could be made by means of stolen silver, and priests were appointed by people like Micah. **1:** *Hill country of Ephraim*, the name of Micah's town is not given. **3–4:** The mother says that she consecrated the silver to God, but in practice she set aside only two hundred of the eleven hundred pieces. *Cast metal,* a reference to a prohibited form of worship (Deut 27.15; Ex 20.3; 34.17; etc.). **5:** *Shrine,* (lit. "house of God"). *Ephod and teraphim,* part of priestly paraphernalia used in divination; see 8.27n. *One of his sons,* an illegitimate appointment, as he was not a Levite. **6:** A criticism of what precedes and what follows. **7:** *Of the clan of Judah*, a Levite could be only a temporary sojourner in Judah. **8:** *A place* to earn a livelihood. **10:** *A father*, Micah promises the Levite a respected position (cf. Gen 45.8).

18.1–31: The conquest of Dan and the establishment of its temple. The Danites' wandering may reflect intertribal relations during the premonarchical period, the difficult situation of the individual, and the character of the worship sites. **1:** On the tribe of Dan, which was forced to leave its territory, see 1.34–35; Josh 19.47. **5:** *Inquire of God,* before carrying out significant tasks, it was customary to inquire of God. **7:** *Laish,* the former name of Dan (v. 29; cf. Josh 19.47 where it is mentioned as Leshem). It was located in the northern Galilee, which is the extreme north of Israel, therefore described as an isolated location. *Sidonians,* Phoenicians, on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel. *Aram,* a common name to the Western Semitic tribes, who settled in Syria and western Mesopotamia, when the Israeli trible settled in Canaan, and established separate kingdoms

7 The five men went on, and when they
came to Laish, they observed the people who
were there living securely, after the manner
of the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting,
lacking[a] nothing on earth, and possessing
wealth.[b] Furthermore, they were far from the
Sidonians and had no dealings with Aram.[c]
8 When they came to their kinsfolk at Zorah
and Eshtaol, they said to them, "What do
you report?" 9 They said, "Come, let us go up
against them; for we have seen the land, and
it is very good. Will you do nothing? Do not
be slow to go, but enter in and possess the
land. 10 When you go, you will come to an
unsuspecting people. The land is broad—God
has indeed given it into your hands—a place
where there is no lack of anything on earth."
11 Six hundred men of the Danite clan,
armed with weapons of war, set out from
Zorah and Eshtaol, 12 and went up and en-
camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. On this
account that place is called Mahaneh-dan[d] to
this day; it is west of Kiriath-jearim. 13 From
there they passed on to the hill country of
Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah.
14 Then the five men who had gone to spy out
the land (that is, Laish) said to their comrades,
"Do you know that in these buildings there are
an ephod, teraphim, and an idol of cast metal?
Now therefore consider what you will do."
15 So they turned in that direction and came
to the house of the young Levite, at the home
of Micah, and greeted him. 16 While the six
hundred men of the Danites, armed with their
weapons of war, stood by the entrance of the
gate, 17 the five men who had gone to spy out the
land proceeded to enter and take the idol of cast
metal, the ephod, and the teraphim.[e] The priest
was standing by the entrance of the gate with
the six hundred men armed with weapons of
war. 18 When the men went into Micah's house
and took the idol of cast metal, the ephod, and
the teraphim, the priest said to them, "What are
you doing?" 19 They said to him, "Keep quiet!
Put your hand over your mouth, and come with
us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better
for you to be priest to the house of one person,
or to be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?"
20 Then the priest accepted the offer. He took
the ephod, the teraphim, and the idol, and went
along with the people.
21 So they resumed their journey, putting the
little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front
of them. 22 When they were some distance
from the home of Micah, the men who were
in the houses near Micah's house were called
out, and they overtook the Danites. 23 They
shouted to the Danites, who turned around
and said to Micah, "What is the matter that
you come with such a company?" 24 He replied,
"You take my gods that I made, and the priest,
and go away, and what have I left? How then
can you ask me, 'What is the matter?' " 25 And
the Danites said to him, "You had better not
let your voice be heard among us or else hot-
tempered fellows will attack you, and you will
lose your life and the lives of your household."
26 Then the Danites went their way. When
Micah saw that they were too strong for him,
he turned and went back to his home.
27 The Danites, having taken what Micah
had made, and the priest who belonged
to him, came to Laish, to a people quiet
and unsuspecting, put them to the sword,
and burned down the city. 28 There was no
deliverer, because it was far from Sidon and
they had no dealings with Aram.[f] It was in
the valley that belongs to Beth-rehob. They
rebuilt the city, and lived in it. 29 They named
the city Dan, after their ancestor Dan, who
was born to Israel; but the name of the city
was formerly Laish. 30 Then the Danites set
up the idol for themselves. Jonathan son of

[a] Cn Compare 18.10: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Symmachus: Heb *with anyone*
[d] That is *Camp of Dan*
[e] Compare 17.4, 5; 18.14: Heb *teraphim and the cast metal*
[f] Compare 17.4, 5; 18.14: Heb *teraphim and the cast metal*

like Aram Damascus, Aram Zoba and others (see v. 28). **9:** Cf. Num 14.7–9. **11:** *Six hundred* probably indicates a military unit (see 1 Sam 30.9). **12:** *Kiriath-jearim*, on the border between Judah and Benjamin, west of Jerusalem. *Mahaneh-dan,* (lit. "the camp of Dan"); location unknown. *To this day*, the time of the author. **21:** In order to protect their property and the weak, they placed them *in front,* so that the fighting men would serve as a buffer against pursuers coming from behind. **23:** The Danites are sarcastic, as they knew the real reason. **24:** Micah's answer indicates the depth of improper worship. **28:** *Beth-rehob,* elsewhere an Aramean kingdom (2 Sam 10.6)



Chs 19–21: The Benjaminite War.

Gershom, son of Moses,[a] and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the time the land went into captivity. **31** So they maintained as their own Micah's idol that he had made, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh.

19 In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite, residing in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. **2** But his concubine became angry with[b] him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months. **3** Then her husband set out after her, to speak tenderly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. When he reached[c] her father's house, the girl's father saw him and came with joy to meet him. **4** His father-in-law, the girl's father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days; so they ate and drank, and he[d] stayed there. **5** On the fourth day they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to go; but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Fortify yourself with a bit of food, and after that you may go." **6** So the two men sat and ate and drank together; and the girl's father said to the man, "Why not spend the night and enjoy yourself?" **7** When the man got up to go, his father-in-law kept urging him until he spent the night there again. **8** On the fifth day he got up early in the morning to leave; and the girl's father said, "Fortify yourself." So they lingered[e] until the day declined, and

[a] Another reading is *son of Manasseh*
[b] Gk OL: Heb *prostituted herself against*
[c] Gk: Heb *she brought him to*
[d] Compare verse 7 and Gk: Heb *they*
[e] Cn: Heb *Linger*

whose precise location is unclear. **30:** *Jonathan* the Levite was the grandson of Moses, belonging to the third generation after the Exodus. To disassociate the name of Moses ("Mosheh") from his grandson's misdeeds, his Hebrew name is turned by the Masoretic scribes into Manasseh by inserting a hanging letter N ("nun"). *Captivity*, when the Galileans were exiled by Assyria, 732 BCE (see 2 Kings 15.29). **31:** This verse is an editorial addition, introduced to connect the story with the book of Samuel (1 Sam 1). Shiloh was destroyed more than three centuries before the Assyrian invasion (see 1 Sam 4–5).

Chs 19–21: The events with Gibeah and Benjamin. A brutal rape in the town Gibeah of Benjamin (ch 19) led to a war between all the tribes of Israel and Benjamin, resulting in Benjamin's near extermination (ch 20). Subsequently the other tribes arranged for the surviving Benjaminites to marry women from Jabesh-gilead (21.1–14) and Shiloh (21.15–24). This exceptional story is dependent on other biblical stories and contains many unclear details. It focuses upon place names; all the individuals involved are anonymous. Through place names and what occurred in those places, the author expresses his preference for David's birthplace, Bethlehem in Judah, a place of hospitality, over Saul's birthplace, Gibeah in Benjamin, a place of rape, and thus hints at the later divine preference of David over Saul (see 1 Sam 15–16).

19.1–30: Between two cities. Gibeah is portrayed by means of plot and style as Sodom (cf. Gen 19). **1:** *Concubine:* A woman with a status lower than that of a primary wife. **3–9:** The generous hospitality offered in Beth-

the two of them ate and drank.[a] 9 When the man with his concubine and his servant got up to leave, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Look, the day has worn on until it is almost evening. Spend the night. See, the day has drawn to a close. Spend the night here and enjoy yourself. Tomorrow you can get up early in the morning for your journey, and go home."

10 But the man would not spend the night; he got up and departed, and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him. 11 When they were near Jebus, the day was far spent, and the servant said to his master, "Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites, and spend the night in it." 12 But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into a city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel; but we will continue on to Gibeah." 13 Then he said to his servant, "Come, let us try to reach one of these places, and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah." 14 So they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. 15 They turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. He went in and sat down in the open square of the city, but no one took them in to spend the night.

16 Then at evening there was an old man coming from his work in the field. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was residing in Gibeah. (The people of the place were Benjaminites.) 17 When the old man looked up and saw the wayfarer in the open square of the city, he said, "Where are you going and where do you come from?" 18 He answered him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; and I am going to my home.[b] Nobody has offered to take me in. 19 We your servants have straw and fodder for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and the woman and the young man along with us. We need nothing more." 20 The old man said, "Peace be to you. I will care for all your wants; only do not spend the night in the square." 21 So he brought him into his house, and fed the donkeys; they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

22 While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the city, a perverse lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may have intercourse with him." 23 And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man is my guest, do not do this vile thing. 24 Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them; but against this man do not do such a vile thing." 25 But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine, and put her out to them. They wantonly raped her, and abused her all through the night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. 26 As morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light.

27 In the morning her master got up, opened the doors of the house, and when he went out to go on his way, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. 28 "Get up," he said to her, "we are going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey; and the man

[a] Gk: Heb lacks *and drank*

[b] Gk Compare 19.29. Heb *to the house of the* LORD

lehem of Judah. **10:** *Jebus*, there is no nonbiblical evidence that Jebus was the previous name of Jerusalem; in the fourteenth-century BCE Amarna letters, it is already called Jerusalem. **12:** Ironically, seeking to avoid the potential inhospitality of a non-Israelite city, the Levite and his party suffer that very fate in an Israelite city. **13:** The mention of Ramah, located 6 mi (10 km) north of Jerusalem, alludes to the birthplace of Samuel (see 1 Sam 1.1), who anointed Saul and David as the first kings of Israel. **14–21:** Like Lot (Gen 19.2–3), the man who was host to the Levite and to those who accompanied him was a stranger in the city. **22–26:** There are many points of similarity between this incident and that of Sodom. The story in Judges is likely based on Genesis, and intends to portray the Israelite inhabitants of Gibeah as being as evil as the inhabitants of Sodom. **25:** The numerous descriptions of time (*all through the night until the morning*, *as the dawn began*) emphasize the brutality. **27:** The Levite's behavior was strange too: upon seeing the concubine's body, he called her to get up and go, as though

set out for his home. 29 When he had entered his house, he took a knife, and grasping his concubine he cut her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. 30 Then he commanded the men whom he sent, saying, "Thus shall you say to all the Israelites, 'Has such a thing ever happened[a] since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out.' "

20 Then all the Israelites came out, from Dan to Beer-sheba, including the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled in one body before the LORD at Mizpah. 2 The chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand foot-soldiers bearing arms. 3 (Now the Benjaminites heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the Israelites said, "Tell us, how did this criminal act come about?" 4 The Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered, "I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. 5 The lords of Gibeah rose up against me, and surrounded the house at night. They intended to kill me, and they raped my concubine until she died. 6 Then I took my concubine and cut her into pieces, and sent her throughout the whole extent of Israel's territory; for they have committed a vile outrage in Israel. 7 So now, you Israelites, all of you, give your advice and counsel here."

8 All the people got up as one, saying, "We will not any of us go to our tents, nor will any of us return to our houses. 9 But now this is what we will do to Gibeah: we will go up[b] against it by lot. 10 We will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred of a thousand, and a thousand of ten thousand, to bring provisions for the troops, who are going to repay[c] Gibeah of Benjamin for all the disgrace that they have done in Israel." 11 So all the men of Israel gathered against the city, united as one.

12 The tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What crime is this that has been committed among you? 13 Now then, hand over those scoundrels in Gibeah, so that we may put them to death, and purge the evil from Israel." But the Benjaminites would not listen to their kinsfolk, the Israelites. 14 The Benjaminites came together out of the towns to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the Israelites. 15 On that day the Benjaminites mustered twenty-six thousand armed men from their towns, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah. 16 Of all this force, there were seven hundred picked men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair, and not miss. 17 And the Israelites, apart from Benjamin, mustered four hundred thousand armed men, all of them warriors.

18 The Israelites proceeded to go up to Bethel, where they inquired of God, "Which of us shall go up first to battle against the

[a] Compare Gk: Heb 30And all who saw it said, "Such a thing has not happened or been seen

[b] Gk: Heb lacks *we will go up*

[c] Compare Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain

nothing had happened. It is even unclear whether or not she was dead. **29:** The cutting up of the concubine's body and sending of the pieces throughout the land are also bizarre. It is based on an episode where Saul cut up a pair of oxen (see 1 Sam 11.7). There, the purpose was to dramatize what would happen to the oxen of those who refused to join the war, but what is its purpose here, and what is someone who receives a piece of human body supposed to think of it? This episode is meant to prefigure Saul, setting his later actions in a negative light.

20.1–48: The war against Benjamin. Benjamin's refusal to turn over the guilty people of Gibeah led to a bloody civil war. **1:** *From Dan to Beersheba,* the traditional northern and southern limits of Israelite territory. *Gilead,* Israelite territory in northern Transjordan. There is no other unified action like this elsewhere in the book of Judges. **2:** The numbers here and elsewhere in chs 20–21 are exaggerated. **3:** It is strange that the examination of the Levite is only performed once the army has been mustered. **4–11:** The Levite's report is brief and not investigated. **9:** The casting of lots determines when to go to war and which of the tribes will go first (v. 18); this also returns us to the beginning of the book (1.2). **10:** Ten percent are responsible for supplying the combatants. **15–17:** The numbers here are inconsistent with those in vv. 35,44–47. **16:** *Left-handed*, see 3.15. 1 Chr 12.2 mentions Benjaminite warriors who were ambidextrous. **18:** *Judah . . . first*. It is strange, but this is

Benjaminites?" And the LORD answered, "Judah shall go up first."

19 Then the Israelites got up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah. 20 The Israelites went out to battle against Benjamin; and the Israelites drew up the battle line against them at Gibeah. 21 The Benjaminites came out of Gibeah, and struck down on that day twenty-two thousand of the Israelites. 23 [a]The Israelites went up and wept before the LORD until the evening; and they inquired of the LORD, "Shall we again draw near to battle against our kinsfolk the Benjaminites?" And the LORD said, "Go up against them." 22 The Israelites took courage, and again formed the battle line in the same place where they had formed it on the first day.

24 So the Israelites advanced against the Benjaminites the second day. 25 Benjamin moved out against them from Gibeah the second day, and struck down eighteen thousand of the Israelites, all of them armed men. 26 Then all the Israelites, the whole army, went back to Bethel and wept, sitting there before the LORD; they fasted that day until evening. Then they offered burnt offerings and sacrifices of well-being before the LORD. 27 And the Israelites inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, 28 and Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, "Shall we go out once more to battle against our kinsfolk the Benjaminites, or shall we desist?" The LORD answered, "Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand."

29 So Israel stationed men in ambush around Gibeah. 30 Then the Israelites went up against the Benjaminites on the third day, and set themselves in array against Gibeah, as before. 31 When the Benjaminites went out against the army, they were drawn away from the city. As before they began to inflict casualties on the troops, along the main roads, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, as well as in the open country, killing about thirty men of Israel. 32 The Benjaminites thought, "They are being routed before us, as previously." But the Israelites said, "Let us retreat and draw them away from the city toward the roads." 33 The main body of the Israelites drew back its battle line to Baal-tamar, while those Israelites who were in ambush rushed out of their place west[b] of Geba. 34 There came against Gibeah ten thousand picked men out of all Israel, and the battle was fierce. But the Benjaminites did not realize that disaster was close upon them.

35 The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel; and the Israelites destroyed twenty-five thousand one hundred men of Benjamin that day, all of them armed.

36 Then the Benjaminites saw that they were defeated.[c]

The Israelites gave ground to Benjamin, because they trusted to the troops in ambush that they had stationed against Gibeah. 37 The troops in ambush rushed quickly upon Gibeah. Then they put the whole city to the sword. 38 Now the agreement between the main body of Israel and the men in ambush

[a] Verses 22 and 23 are transposed
[b] Gk Vg: Heb *in the plain*
[c] This sentence is continued by verse 45.

not mentioned in what follows. **19–25:** It is odd that although Israel went twice to war after asking the LORD and getting his approval, so many of them were killed by the Benjaminites. **26–28:** The army of Israel went up the third time to Bethel, where Phinehas, also belonging to the third generation after the Exodus (see Num 25.7–13; Josh 22), served as priest. God promised that this time he would help them. **29–47:** According to most scholars the description of this war is a combination of two versions, whose reworking into a single text is not smooth. Both versions tell of a strategy of ambush and decoy (cf. Josh 7–8). **29:** According to vv. 33–34, the main force was east of Gibeah, the ambush west of the city, while the decoy force was opposite the city. **30:** This refers to the decoy force alone; see v. 34. **31:** *To Gibeah,* a textual corruption, as they were fleeing from Gibeah. It most likely refers to Geba, located east of Gibeah. The choice of two directions of flight causes the pursuers to divide their forces. *About thirty men*, the small number of the fallen, in comparison to the first two wars, is probably influenced by the story of Ai, where exactly thirty fell (Josh 7.5). **33:** The main Israelite force had been mustered before in Baal-tamar, whose location has not been identified. **35:** See vv. 15–17n. **36b:** The second version begins here. This one emphasizes that the Israelite army, which had relied upon the ambush located to the west of Gibeah, waited for a sign indicating when to enter into battle, thus giving the decoy time to lead the

was that when they sent up a cloud of smoke out of the city [39] the main body of Israel should turn in battle. But Benjamin had begun to inflict casualties on the Israelites, killing about thirty of them; so they thought, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle." [40] But when the cloud, a column of smoke, began to rise out of the city, the Benjaminites looked behind them—and there was the whole city going up in smoke toward the sky! [41] Then the main body of Israel turned, and the Benjaminites were dismayed, for they saw that disaster was close upon them. [42] Therefore they turned away from the Israelites in the direction of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them, and those who came out of the city[a] were slaughtering them in between.[b] [43] Cutting down[c] the Benjaminites, they pursued them from Nohah[d] and trod them down as far as a place east of Gibeah. [44] Eighteen thousand Benjaminites fell, all of them courageous fighters. [45] When they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, five thousand of them were cut down on the main roads, and they were pursued as far as Gidom, and two thousand of them were slain. [46] So all who fell that day of Benjamin were twenty-five thousand arms-bearing men, all of them courageous fighters. [47] But six hundred turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and remained at the rock of Rimmon for four months. [48] Meanwhile, the Israelites turned back against the Benjaminites, and put them to the sword—the city, the people, the animals, and all that remained. Also the remaining towns they set on fire.

21 Now the Israelites had sworn at Mizpah, "No one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin." [2] And the people came to Bethel, and sat there until evening before God, and they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. [3] They said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, why has it come to pass that today there should be one tribe lacking in Israel?" [4] On the next day, the people got up early, and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and sacrifices of well-being. [5] Then the Israelites said, "Which of all the tribes of Israel did not come up in the assembly to the LORD?" For a solemn oath had been taken concerning whoever did not come up to the LORD to Mizpah, saying, "That one shall be put to death." [6] But the Israelites had compassion for Benjamin their kin, and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel this day. [7] What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them any of our daughters as wives?"

[8] Then they said, "Is there anyone from the tribes of Israel who did not come up to the LORD to Mizpah?" It turned out that no one from Jabesh-gilead had come to the camp, to the assembly. [9] For when the roll was called among the people, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there. [10] So the congregation sent twelve thousand soldiers there and commanded them, "Go, put the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead to the sword, including the

[a] Compare Vg and some Gk Mss: Heb *cities*
[b] Compare Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Gk: Heb *Surrounding*
[d] Gk: Heb *pursued them at their resting place*

inhabitants of Gibeah away from their city. **38–39a:** The sign was a great cloud of smoke rising from the city. **43:** The Hebrew is poetic, perhaps a remnant of an epic centered on the victory over Benjamin. *Nohah*, Israel surrounded Benjamin and pursued them from a settlement called Nohah (see 1 Chr 8.2) until Geba, east of Gibeah (v. 31). **47:** Six hundred men of Benjamin found shelter for four months *at the Rock of Rimmon* on the edge of the wilderness to the east. **48:** The Israelites treated Benjamin like an apostate city (cf. Deut 13.13–19), destroying its population, property, and towns.

21.1–14: The war against Jabesh-gilead. This narrative is reminiscent of the story of the war against the Midianites at the time of the wilderness wanderings after the Exodus (Num 31). It is motivated by a desire to denounce Jabesh-gilead, which supported Saul (see 1 Sam 11; 31.11–13; 2 Sam 2.4–7; etc.). **1:** At the gathering in Mizpah (see 20.1) the Israelites took two oaths: not to marry their daughters to the Benjaminites (20.3; 21.1), and to put to death those who did not join the war (21.5). **2:** *Bethel* once again serves as a place for weeping (cf. 2.1–5; 20.23,26). **5:** Those who did not join the war were not committed to the oath. They were subject to the death penalty and their daughters could be given to the Benjaminites. **9:** *Jabesh-gilead* is located east of the Jordan in northern Gilead, but has not been definitively identified. **10–12:** Use of the number *twelve thousand* as well

women and the little ones. [11] This is what you shall do; every male and every woman that has lain with a male you shall devote to destruction." [12] And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins who had never slept with a man and brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

[13] Then the whole congregation sent word to the Benjaminites who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them. [14] Benjamin returned at that time; and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead; but they did not suffice for them.

[15] The people had compassion on Benjamin because the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel. [16] So the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since there are no women left in Benjamin?" [17] And they said, "There must be heirs for the survivors of Benjamin, in order that a tribe may not be blotted out from Israel. [18] Yet we cannot give any of our daughters to them as wives." For the Israelites had sworn, "Cursed be anyone who gives a wife to Benjamin." [19] So they said, "Look, the yearly festival of the LORD is taking place at Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah." [20] And they instructed the Benjaminites, saying, "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, [21] and watch; when the young women of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and each of you carry off a wife for himself from the young women of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. [22] Then if their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, we will say to them, 'Be generous and allow us to have them; because we did not capture in battle a wife for each man. But neither did you incur guilt by giving your daughters to them.' " [23] The Benjaminites did so; they took wives for each of them from the dancers whom they abducted. Then they went and returned to their territory, and rebuilt the towns, and lived in them. [24] So the Israelites departed from there at that time by tribes and families, and they went out from there to their own territories.

[25] In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.

as of the phrase *virgins who had never slept with a man* recalls Num 31. **14:** The six hundred surviving men from Benjamin *returned* from the rock of Rimmon (see 20.47).

21.15–24: The abduction at Shiloh. Killing the people of Jabesh-gilead provided wives for most of the Benjaminites, but there were still two hundred without wives. The motif of stealing women on a festival day is known from Greek and Roman literature. The connection between Benjamin and Shiloh prepares the ground for the decline of the town's status in the book of Samuel. **15:** *A breach,* the blow struck to the Benjaminites harmed the overall structure of the Israelite tribes. **19:** *The yearly festival,* it is not clear what feast this refers to: one of the three pilgrimage festivals, or to the fifteenth of Av (the fifth month) or the Day of Atonement. The two last were auspicious days for finding brides in later rabbinic times (*m. Ta'anit* 4.8). It may also refer to a local grape harvest festival (see 9.27). *Shiloh*, about 9 mi (15 km) north of Bethel.

21.25: Conclusion to the book of Judges. The book concludes with the last occurrence (see 17.6; 18.1; 19.1) of the motto that expresses disappointment in the judges and hope in the monarchy. Coming after the negative depiction of Gibeah, Saul's city, it is clear that the book hints at a monarchy whose roots are not in Benjamin, Saul's tribe. The book thus looks forward to the dynasty founded by David, who was from Bethlehem in Judah. This fits with other positive descriptions of Judah in the beginning of the book: it is Judah who leads the conquest in ch 1.1-20, and the Judean judge Othniel in ch 3.7-11 is idealized as a national leader.

RUTH

NAME AND LOCATION IN CANON

The book is named after its heroine, a young Moabite widow who leaves her land and family to follow her mother-in-law to Bethlehem in Judah, where she will become the great-grandmother of King David.

The book of Ruth is in the third division of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings; it is one of the Megillot, the five scrolls read on different Jewish holidays, with Ruth traditionally read at the late spring harvest festival of Weeks (Shavuot). In the Septuagint, and consequently in Christian Bibles, it comes between the books of Judges and Samuel. That is apparently where the writer of the book of Ruth intended it to be placed, since it begins "In the days when the judges ruled" (1.1), and ends with a list of ten generations from Perez to David, preparing us for David's arrival onto the stage of history in 1 Samuel and supplying the genealogy lacking there. The author's attempt to place Ruth after Judges and before Samuel in the Hebrew Bible was unsuccessful, however, presumably because that division of the Bible, the Prophets, had been closed before the book of Ruth was accepted as canonical, and it was placed in the final division.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

The book of Ruth was written by an unknown author, probably in the Second Temple period, when there was opposition to marriage by Jews with foreign women, particularly Ammonites and Moabites (see Ezra 9–10; Neh 10.29–31; 13.24–27). Nehemiah 13.1 cites Deut 23.4 as the basis for its demand to exclude all foreigners from Israel. Our book voices an alternate view: its heroine is an ideal Moabite woman, a model of righteousness, who altruistically follows her mother-in-law. Formal conversion to Judaism did not exist in this period, but Ruth clings to the God of Israel, and God blesses her and provides her with posterity: David. Boaz is also blessed, like the young Moabite woman whom he redeems.

The language of the book of Ruth supports a Second Temple period dating: its words and expressions, and their spelling, attest to a substantial Aramaic influence. Moreover, it shows no sign of the Deuteronomistic redaction that characterizes the earlier historical books (Joshua–Kings), suggesting that it was written by a later author to be inserted between Judges and Samuel, and not by the main preexilic authors of those books. An alternate view is that the book was written during the period of the monarchy, because of its interest in the ancestry of King David.

STRUCTURE

While Ruth is one of the shortest of the Bible's books, it comprises one of the Bible's longest stories, one of an idyllic-romantic character. Great misfortunes, both national (famine) and personal-familial (the death of Naomi's husband and sons) occur at the outset and propel the narrative forward. The former is resolved at the end of the exposition (1.6), and the bitter pessimism caused by the latter is limited to the first chapter—from here on, the story is bathed in an optimistic light, full of hope for a better future.

The book has no villains, and the protagonists almost compete with their exemplary behavior: all are helpful, considerate, and well intentioned. The absence of conflict also characterizes the relations with God. Apart from Naomi's defiant words in 1.20–21, the book depicts a wonder of harmonious relations with God. Pentateuchal laws also play a role in this harmony: the protagonists are fond of fulfilling the commandments, noticeable in their willingness to go above and beyond what the law requires, and they are rewarded accordingly.

The book is structured symmetrically. The family's history before their return from Moab and following the act of redemption are concentrated at the book's beginning (1.1–6) and end (4.18–22), framing the narrative. Chapters 1 and 4 are parallel, as are chs 2 and 3. Chapter 1 opens with the genealogy of Elimelech, an unknown Ephrathite; ch 4 ends with the genealogy from Perez to David. Chapter 1 opens with an allusion to the period of the judges; ch 4 ends with an allusion to the monarchic period—David. Chapter 1 mentions a direct act of God ending the famine (v. 6); ch 4 mentions God's second intervention, which resolves the personal-familial crisis (v. 13). These are the only direct acts of God in the book, and neither crisis is attributed to God (only Naomi in her suffering interprets her tragedies as God's actions; 1.13, 20–21). A female chorus explains Naomi's

circumstances in both chapters: in ch 1 their reaction is sad astonishment at Naomi's return to Bethlehem (v. 19), in ch 4 their speech is prolonged and buoyant (vv. 14–15). A striking structural parallel is also developed in the conduct of the secondary characters Orpah, who ultimately decides against following Naomi (1.14), and the next-of-kin, who recants his willingness to redeem the field (4.6). Both serve to highlight the exceptional goodness of Ruth and Boaz.

Chapters 2 and 3 are also parallel. Chapter 2 depicts one day in Boaz's field; ch 3 describes a night. The day scene involves many secondary figures working in Boaz's field; the night scene is unobserved—Ruth and Boaz are alone on the threshing floor. Both chapters open with conversations between Naomi and Ruth, but here we are presented with clear oppositions: in ch 2 Ruth initiates, asking Naomi's permission to go to the fields to glean; Naomi is passive and her answer succinct, "Go, my daughter" (v. 2). In ch 3, Naomi initiates, asking Ruth to go to Boaz's field, and Ruth is the passive one who accepts Naomi's proposition, her answer brief: "All that you tell me I will do" (v. 5). The next locale in both chapters—which is the main locale in both—is Boaz's field. In ch 2, Ruth reaches the field before Boaz, whose arrival is marked by the word *wehinneh*, "just then" (v. 4). In ch 3, Boaz arrives before Ruth, whose appearance is also marked by *wehinneh* (v. 8 [NRSV] "and there"). In 2.5, Boaz asks about Ruth's identity; in 3.9 he asks Ruth, "Who are you?" Ruth's answer alludes to the difference between the characters' functioning in the two chapters: in ch 3 Ruth instructs Boaz what he must do (v. 9); in ch 2 she is passive, astonished at Boaz's graciousness toward her. In both chapters Boaz is careful to protect Ruth's honor: in ch 2 he takes care that she will stay with the young women (and not the men; v. 8), and that the men will neither reproach nor rebuke her (vv. 15, 16); in ch 3 he makes sure that no one will see her with him (v. 14). In 2.18 Ruth brings Naomi what was left after she had been satisfied, a sign of her good character, and in 3.17 she delivers barley to Naomi as Boaz had instructed, a sign of his good character. The final locale in both chapters is Naomi's home (2.18–23; 3.16–18).

INTERPRETATION AND GUIDE TO READING

The author of the book knows Pentateuchal law. The heroine's gleaning of the grain fields alludes both to the law of gleanings (Lev 19.9–10) and that concerning overlooking a sheaf in the field (Deut 24.19), laws that are here blended harmoniously. To redeem Ruth (3.9, 12–13) and the field (4.3–4), and to bind them together (4.5, 9–10), the book boldly combines the laws of redeeming a field (Lev 25.25–28) with that of levirate marriage (Deut 25.5–10), a law that does not correspond exactly to the legal situation here. In Ruth, the law regarding the redemption of a woman becomes a logical extension of the law of levirate marriage, as in later rabbinic interpretation in which different laws are combined and their discrepancies reconciled.

Other than laws, Ruth quotes or makes extensive use of earlier, First Temple period texts of all types. Clear ties to the Pentateuch are discernible in Ruth's actions on Boaz's threshing floor (ch 3), where her conduct is implicitly contrasted to that of Lot's daughters (Gen 19.30–38) and she is presented as being even more dignified than Tamar (Gen 38.14–15). The matriarchs Rachel and Leah are mentioned explicitly (4.11; cf. also Gen 12.1 with Ruth 2.11). The influence of the historical books is similarly evident: 1 Sam 1.8 leaves its imprint on Ruth 4.15; 1 Sam 9.9 is reflected in Ruth 4.7. The genealogy in 4.8–22 is constructed from the genealogy of Judah in 1 Chr 2.

This highly skilled narrative should be understood in its historical context, within the debates of the Second Temple period concerning intermarriage. The stance of Ruth is clear and unambiguous: *ḥesed,* kindness and loyalty, are more important than ethnicity.

Yair Zakovitch

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. [2] The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. [3] But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. [4] These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, [5] both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

[6] Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. [7] So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. [8] But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. [9] The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. [10] They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." [11] But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? [12] Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, [13] would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me." [14] Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

[15] So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." [16] But Ruth said,

"Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
[17] Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.
May the LORD do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!"

[18] When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

[19] So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" [20] She said to them,

"Call me no longer Naomi,[a]

[a] That is *Pleasant*

1.1–5: Famine. These verses provide the background for the entire story. The family's prolonged absence from Israel and a string of misfortunes have left Naomi and her daughters-in-law in desperate straits. **1:** *Bethlehem*, 5 mi (8 km) south of Jerusalem, the home of David's family (1 Sam 16.1–5). It means "house of bread," and thus opens the book on an ironic note. *Moab,* the region east of the Dead Sea. According Gen 19.36–37, the Moabites are related to the Israelites: their patriarch, Lot, was Abraham's nephew. **2:** *Mahlon and Chilion*, the names are symbolic in an escalating order of gravity: Mahlon is related to the word for "sickness" (Heb "maḥalah"), and Chilion to the word for "destruction" (Heb "killayon"). *Ephrathites*, the family is from Bethlehem, also called Ephrathah (4.11; see Gen 35.19; 48.7). **3–5:** The legal status of women is determined to some extent by the men they are connected to—a father, husband, or male children. The status of these three women is thus dire.

1.6–19a: The return to Bethlehem. No description of the journey is given. Instead, we find a dialogue between Naomi and her daughters-in-law, during which Naomi fails to convince Ruth to leave her and return to Moab; Orpah returns to Moab, persuaded by the bleak picture Naomi describes. Ruth reveals her nobleminedness, electing to remain with Naomi and follow Naomi's God, without expectation of reward or hope for a better life.

1.19b–22: The arrival at Bethlehem. The narrative focuses on Naomi. **19:** The chorus of women expresses wonder at the change in Naomi and ignores Ruth. In her grief, Naomi blames God for her sorrows. **20:** *Mara*,

call me Mara,[a]
for the Almighty[b] has dealt bitterly with me.
21 I went away full,
but the LORD has brought me back empty;
why call me Naomi
when the LORD has dealt harshly with[c] me,
and the Almighty[b] has brought calamity upon me?"
22 So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

2 Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. 2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor." She said to her, "Go, my daughter." 3 So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. 4 Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you." They answered, "The LORD bless you." 5 Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?" 6 The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7 She said, 'Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment."[d]

8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. 9 Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." 10 Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" 11 But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. 12 May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" 13 Then she said, "May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants."

14 At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. 15 When she

[a] That is *Bitter*
[b] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[c] Or *has testified against*
[d] Compare Gk Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

"bitter," is the opposite of *Naomi,* "pleasant." **22:** The *barley harvest* was the earliest harvest.

2.1–23: Ruth and Boaz's first encounter. 1–7: Ruth, who insisted on remaining with Naomi, again takes the initiative—now on foreign soil—and sets out to glean in order to provide for her mother-in-law and herself. The scene introduces the prosperous Boaz, a member of Elimelech's family. Chance events bring Ruth and Boaz together: Ruth happens to reach Boaz's field, and he happens to arrive while she gleans there. The Bible often suggests that the divine hand is behind such "chance." **8–14:** Boaz and Ruth speak. Boaz guides and dominates the exchange. The conversation secures their connection. He exhibits genuine concern for Ruth, for her food, honor, and drink. Ruth prostrates herself and wonders at his solicitude, since she is a foreigner. In his answer—the heart of the exchange—Boaz expresses admiration for her self-sacrifice and devotion to her mother-in-law, and his hope that God will reward her. Ruth continues to belittle herself, and Boaz proves his interest in her welfare by granting her more than she needs. **15–17:** Ruth returns to glean in Boaz's field, unaware of Boaz's efforts on her behalf. The section ends with an account of Boaz's generosity; the amount of barley Ruth gleaned

got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, "Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. [16] You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."

[17] So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. [18] She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. [19] Her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." [20] Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin."[a] [21] Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest.'" [22] Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field." [23] So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.

3 Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. [2] Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. [3] Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. [4] When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do." [5] She said to her, "All that you tell me I will do."

[6] So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. [7] When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came stealthily and uncovered his feet, and lay down. [8] At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! [9] He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin."[a]

[a] Or *one with the right to redeem*

that day (an *ephah* was about 2/3 bushel or 22 l) would have been sufficient for many days. **18–23**: Naomi and Ruth in Naomi's house. Boaz's opening words in the previous section supply Naomi's closing words here: concern that Ruth will stay with Boaz's young women and so avoid dishonor (vv. 8–9; 22). In the middle of each dialogue, the speaker (Boaz, Naomi) voices esteem for Ruth and a blessing (vv. 11–12; 20). Gaps are filled in the course of the conversation: to the amazed Naomi's question regarding the kindness shown Ruth, Ruth reveals the identity of the field-owner (v. 19). Naomi learns of Boaz's kindness toward Ruth, and Ruth learns that Boaz is one of the redeeming kinsmen (v. 20), a person related to the deceased Elimelech; he can thus allow the women to have access to the field of Elimelech. Ruth does not respond to Naomi's words, but speaks of her intention to glean until the end of the harvest (v. 21). Naomi agrees, remaining hopeful. The *wheat harvest,* in late spring, followed the barley harvest.

3.1–18: Ruth and Boaz's nighttime encounter. 1–5: As in 2.2, Naomi and Ruth again discuss matters in Naomi's home, though the roles are reversed: Naomi is the initiator who slowly intimates her objective. Naomi's instructions suggest that marriage is the aim (cf. Ezek 16.8–10). She expects Boaz to know what to do. **6–15:** Ruth reaches the field unnoticed; she needs to be seen by Boaz, alone. She follows Naomi's instructions but goes even further, making clear to Boaz that her actions refer to the law of redemption. Ruth's discretion as she proceeds to the threshing floor also characterizes her dialogue with Boaz and their subsequent actions. Ruth continues to lie at Boaz's feet until morning. Although "feet" is often a euphemism in the Bible for genitals (e.g., Isaiah 7.20), nothing explicit occurs between them. Both Ruth and Boaz are cautious for her reputation, as were Boaz and Naomi in the previous chapter. With Ruth's return from the threshing floor at dawn, hope reigns: Ruth

10 He said, "May you be blessed by the LORD,
my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty
is better than the first; you have not gone
after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 And
now, my daughter, do not be afraid, I will do
for you all that you ask, for all the assembly
of my people know that you are a worthy
woman. 12 But now, though it is true that I am
a near kinsman, there is another kinsman
more closely related than I. 13 Remain this
night, and in the morning, if he will act as
next-of-kin[a] for you, good; let him do it. If he
is not willing to act as next-of-kin[a] for you,
then, as the LORD lives, I will act as next-of-
kin[a] for you. Lie down until the morning."

14 So she lay at his feet until morning, but
got up before one person could recognize
another; for he said, "It must not be known
that the woman came to the threshing
floor." 15 Then he said, "Bring the cloak you
are wearing and hold it out." So she held it,
and he measured out six measures of barley,
and put it on her back; then he went into
the city. 16 She came to her mother-in-law,
who said, "How did things go with you,[b] my
daughter?" Then she told her all that the
man had done for her, 17 saying, "He gave me
these six measures of barley, for he said, 'Do
not go back to your mother-in-law empty-
handed.'" 18 She replied, "Wait, my daughter,
until you learn how the matter turns out,
for the man will not rest, but will settle the
matter today."

4 No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate
and sat down there than the next-of-kin,[a]
of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by.
So Boaz said, "Come over, friend; sit down
here." And he went over and sat down. 2 Then
Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city,
and said, "Sit down here"; so they sat down.
3 He then said to the next-of-kin,[a] "Naomi,
who has come back from the country of
Moab, is selling the parcel of land that
belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. 4 So I
thought I would tell you of it, and say: Buy it
in the presence of those sitting here, and in
the presence of the elders of my people. If
you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will
not, tell me, so that I may know; for there is
no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come
after you." So he said, "I will redeem it."
5 Then Boaz said, "The day you acquire the
field from the hand of Naomi, you are also
acquiring Ruth[c] the Moabite, the widow of
the dead man, to maintain the dead man's
name on his inheritance." 6 At this, the next-
of-kin[a] said, "I cannot redeem it for myself
without damaging my own inheritance. Take
my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot
redeem it."

7 Now this was the custom in former times
in Israel concerning redeeming and exchang-
ing: to confirm a transaction, the one took off
a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the
manner of attesting in Israel. 8 So when the
next-of-kin[a] said to Boaz, "Acquire it for your-
self," he took off his sandal. 9 Then Boaz said
to the elders and all the people, "Today you
are witnesses that I have acquired from the

[a] Or *one with the right to redeem*
[b] Or *"Who are you,*
[c] OL Vg: Heb *from the hand of Naomi and from Ruth*

knows that she will be redeemed and she carries much barley, a sign of Boaz's favorable intentions. **10:** *Loyalty,* Heb "ḥesed", a key term in the Hebrew Bible, where God is expected to show "ḥesed" to Israel, and those with more power are expected to show "ḥesed" to those who are disadvantaged. **16–18:** Ruth reports to Naomi, and Naomi trusts Boaz that the identity of the redeemer will be known that very day. Here Ruth and Naomi conclude their active role. From now on they are passive, dependent upon the efforts of others.

4.1–22: Ruth is redeemed, Obed is born: the family's name continues. 1–12: Redemption at the city gate. The *gate* was where legal issues were settled (e.g., Deut 25.7). Boaz's authority at the city gate it is as great as it was with his young men: here also Boaz commands, and the city elders follow his instructions. Nevertheless, he does not take advantage of his position, and treats the closest kinsman fairly, allowing him to exercise his legal rights if he so desires. Awareness of the Pentateuch is evident by the rigor with which the law is kept and by repeated allusions to the laws of redeeming and that of levirate marriage (Lev 25.25–28; Deut 25.5–10), and also in the greetings of the people to Boaz and his household, where Ruth is depicted as one of the matriarchs, along with Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob (v. 11). **6:** The exact meaning of *damaging my own inheritance* is uncertain, but likely refers to a requirement that the current field of this redeemer would have to be shared

hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. 10 I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses." 11 Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; 12 and, through the children that the LORD will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son.

14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin;[a] and may his name be renowned in Israel! 15 He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. 17 The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

18 Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, 19 Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, 20 Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, 21 Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, 22 Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David.

[a] Or *one with the right to redeem*

with heirs of Ruth as well as with his current heirs. **12:** By comparing Boaz's house to Perez's house, the most important clan in Judah, Ruth is compared to Tamar, the mother of Perez (Gen 38.29), another foreign woman who although a childless widow was granted illustrious progeny. **13–17:** The marriage of Ruth and Boaz and the birth of Obed. **13:** Just as God intervened to resolve the national crisis at the end of the introduction (1.6), so he intervenes in this final scene to resolve the family's misfortune. **14–15:** The chorus of women reappears, too, and in a change of tone blesses Naomi's good fortune. Whereas they previously ignored Ruth (1.19), now they glorify her. **16–17:** The meaning of the actions here is uncertain; it may reflect her adoption of this baby as her own. **17:** The section ends, illuminating the family's magnificent future.

18–22: The line of Perez. Once the narrative has named Obed as the grandfather of David (v. 17), it recounts the entire genealogy from Perez to David, as in Genesis, combining story with genealogy. Ten is the number of generations from Adam until Noah (Gen 5), and from Noah's son Shem until Abraham (Gen 11.10–26), indicating that the tenth generation, David, is the chosen one. It would appear that Obed has two fathers. Boaz is his biological father (and thus he appears in the list; v. 21), but he will be counted as the seed of Mahlon (4.5, 10).

1 SAMUEL

NAME

First and Second Samuel were originally a single work named after the prophet Samuel, who is the focal character of the first eight chapters of 1 Samuel. The name is not entirely appropriate, however, since Samuel dies before 1 Samuel ends (25.1).

LOCATION IN CANON

The original, single book of Samuel was divided into two books in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Septuagint, abbreviated LXX) and grouped together with the book of Kings (also divided in two) to form 1–4 Reigns or 1–4 Kingdoms. These divisions were later introduced into Hebrew Bibles and subsequently became standard. The books of Samuel are part of the section of the Hebrew Bible known as the Former Prophets. The LXX and most English Bibles place 1 and 2 Samuel in the category of the Historical Books.

AUTHORSHIP

In the Babylonian Talmud (*b. B. Bat.* 14b, ca. sixth century CE) the prophet Samuel is identified as the author of those parts of the book that treat events before his death, with the rest being attributed to the prophets Nathan and Gad based on 1 Chr 29.29. Modern scholars consider 1 and 2 Samuel to have been written by several anonymous authors, and generally view it as part of a larger composition called the Deuteronomistic History. The Deuteronomistic History, encompassing the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, relates Israel's history in the Promised Land, from the conquest under Joshua to the end of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. It was written by one or more nameless authors and editors known as "Deuteronomists," abbreviated "Dtr(s)."

DATE AND CONTEXT OF COMPOSITION

The Deuteronomistic History was probably completed shortly after the Babylonian exile in 586 BCE and sought to offer a theological reason for the demise of Israel and Judah. Some scholars posit an earlier edition that promoted King Josiah (640–609 BCE) as a new David. Others argue for multiple preexilic, exilic, or postexilic editions.

LITERARY HISTORY

The Deuteronomist(s) edited various traditions into a single, running historical account. In 1 Samuel some scholars have posited source documents behind 4.1–7.1 (the "Ark Narrative"), chs 8–15 (the "Saul Cycle"), and chs 16–31 (the "Story of David's Rise"). These documents are theoretical, and the nature of the sources used by the Dtr(s) remains hypothetical. The Dtr(s) also occasionally inserted speeches or commentary in their own distinctive Deuteronomistic style into the narrative. Examples of Deuteronomistic style in 1 Samuel are 8.8 (the Exodus), 8.12 (the people crying out), and 12.14–15 (the review of Israel's history and the command to "heed the voice of the LORD").

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

First Samuel falls readily into three parts, each with a different central character: Samuel as a transitional figure—prophet, priest, and judge (chs 1–7), the emergence of Saul as Israel's first king (chs 8–15), and David's ascent (chs 16–31). David is the main hero not only of 1 and 2 Samuel but of the Deuteronomistic History as well. The pro-Davidic tone of 1 Samuel is evident in the fact that while Saul falters repeatedly, David can do no wrong. God eventually abandons Saul but is constantly with David. God's presence with David, first in Saul's court and then while hiding from Saul, is a major theme in the book.

INTERPRETATION

First Samuel is a literary masterpiece, full of wordplays, intricate plots with subtle twists, and portraits of complex characters. Some parts may also contain or reflect genuine history. While the book was written centuries

after the events it describes, it is based on older source materials. At some stage in its development, the section dealing with David's rise seems to have been designed as an apology or defense of David and his kingship. The charge that David usurped the throne to which he had no hereditary right is effectively addressed in 1 Samuel by the contention that David was the LORD's anointed, who came to prominence as a result of divine election rather than personal ambition. First Samuel thus presents David as the innocent victim of Saul's jealousy, beloved by Israel's public and leading citizens including Saul's own children, and even by Saul at the beginning of their relationship, such that David became a member of the royal family through marriage.

GUIDE TO READING

Since 1 Samuel is a continuous narrative, it is best read from start to finish. This reading will be enriched by attention to details that cultivate an appreciation of the work as literature. For instance, the story is told by an "omniscient narrator" using techniques such as reporting private conversations and personal thoughts. Characters are rarely described, so that descriptions are particularly noteworthy. More often, their inner qualities and motives are revealed by their actions or words, leaving room for ambiguity. Further appreciation will result from recognizing the apologetic, especially pro-Davidic nature of the material. Was Saul really as bad and David as innocent as their portraits in this book indicate? What ulterior motives might David (and other characters) have had for their actions? How might a modern historian reconstruct the events related in 1 Samuel by setting aside the "spin" of the apologist? Some instances of "protesting too much" suggest that the historical reality was quite different, as when all of chs 24–31 seem dedicated to showing that David would not and could not have been involved in any attempt on Saul's life.

Steven L. McKenzie

1 There was a certain man of Ramathaim, a Zuphite[a] from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. **2** He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

3 Now this man used to go up year by year from his town to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD. **4** On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; **5** but to Hannah he gave a double portion,[b] because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. **6** Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. **7** So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. **8** Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

[a] Compare Gk and 1 Chr 6.35-36: Heb *Ramathaim-zophim*

[b] Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain

1.1–28: The birth and consecration of Samuel. The story of a barren woman who bears a child as a favor from God appears several other times in the Bible: Sarah (Gen 17.16–19), Rebekah (Gen 25.21–26), Rachel (Gen 29.31; 30.22–24), the mother of Samson (Judg 13.2–5), and Elizabeth (Lk 1.5–17). Such a child is designated by God for a special purpose. **1:** *Ramathaim,* a town in Ephraim, is called Ramah later in this chapter (v. 19). But in later chapters the Ramah that was Samuel's home seems to be located in Benjamin (7.16–17). **2:** *Peninnah* is "the second" (translated *the other* in the NRSV) wife; *Hannah* is obviously the favored one. Elkanah may have married Peninnah because of Hannah's failure to produce an heir (see Gen 16.1–2). Elkanah, therefore, was probably prosperous. **3:** Elkanah's annual pilgrimage to worship in Shiloh shows him to be a righteous man. The *LORD of hosts* or "armies" (Heb "tseba'ot") is a title describing Yahweh's leadership in war on Israel's behalf. *Hophni and Phinehas* are Egyptian names. **7:** The *house of the LORD* usually refers to a temple (Jer 7.12). But Josh 18.1; Ps 78.60 mention a tent of meeting or tabernacle in Shiloh, and 2 Sam 7.6–7 denies that the LORD dwelt in a "house" before Solomon's Temple. See 2.22. **9:** Eli's *seat beside the doorpost of the temple* (or "sanctuary," Heb "hekal")

9 After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh,
Hannah rose and presented herself before the
LORD.[a] Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat
beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD.
10 She was deeply distressed and prayed to the
LORD, and wept bitterly. 11 She made this vow:
"O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the
misery of your servant, and remember me, and
not forget your servant, but will give to your
servant a male child, then I will set him before
you as a nazirite[b] until the day of his death. He
shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants,[c] and
no razor shall touch his head."

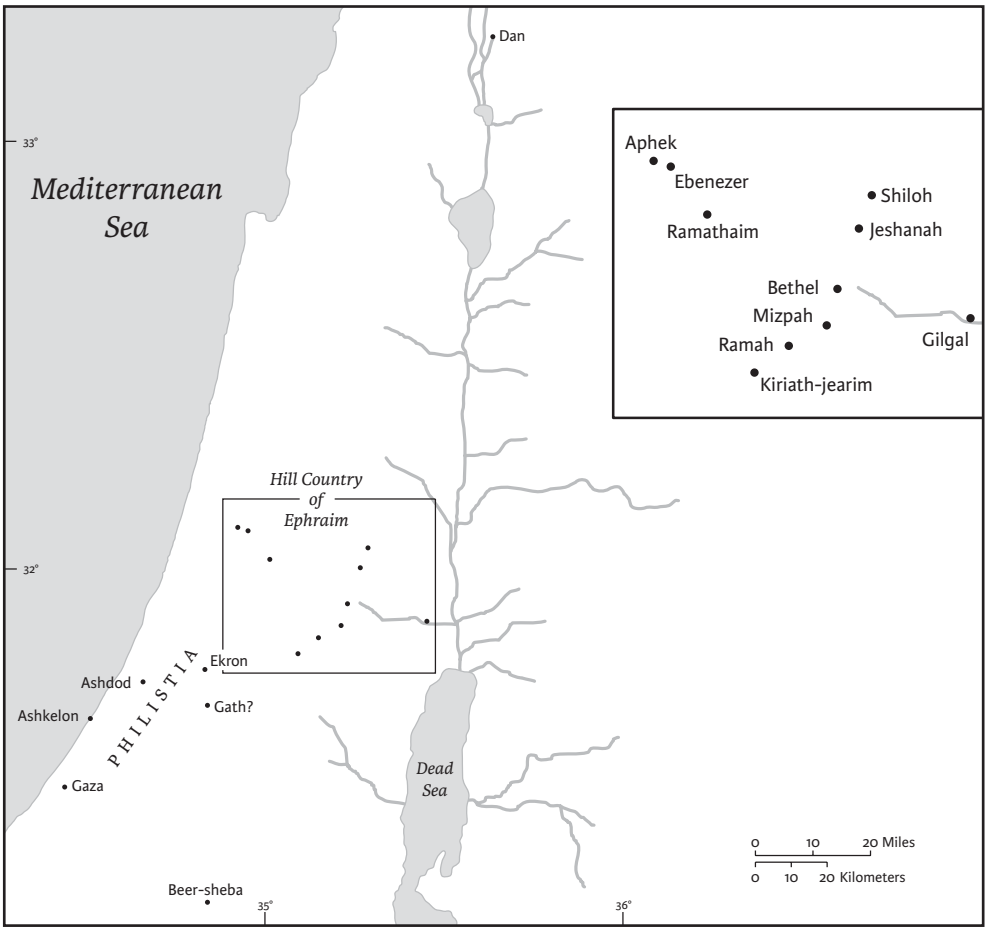
12 As she continued praying before the LORD,
Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying
silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was
not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk.
14 So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a
drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your
wine." 15 But Hannah answered, "No, my lord,
I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk
neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been
pouring out my soul before the LORD. 16 Do not
regard your servant as a worthless woman, for
I have been speaking out of my great anxiety
and vexation all this time." 17 Then Eli an-
swered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant
the petition you have made to him." 18 And she
said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight."
Then the woman went to her quarters,[d] ate and
drank with her husband,[e] and her countenance
was sad no longer.[f]

19 They rose early in the morning and wor-
shiped before the LORD; then they went back
to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his
wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her.
20 In due time Hannah conceived and bore a
son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I
have asked him of the LORD."

21 The man Elkanah and all his house-
hold went up to offer to the LORD the yearly
sacrifice, and to pay his vow. 22 But Hannah
did not go up, for she said to her husband,
"As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring
him, that he may appear in the presence of
the LORD, and remain there forever; I will
offer him as a nazirite[b] for all time."[g] 23 Her
husband Elkanah said to her, "Do what seems
best to you, wait until you have weaned him;
only—may the LORD establish his word."[h] So
the woman remained and nursed her son, un-
til she weaned him. 24 When she had weaned
him, she took him up with her, along with a
three-year-old bull,[i] an ephah of flour, and a
skin of wine. She brought him to the house of
the LORD at Shiloh; and the child was young.
25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and they
brought the child to Eli. 26 And she said, "Oh,
my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman
who was standing here in your presence,
praying to the LORD. 27 For this child I prayed;
and the LORD has granted me the petition
that I made to him. 28 Therefore I have lent
him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is
given to the LORD."

[a] Gk: Heb lacks *and presented herself before the LORD*
[b] That is *one separated* or *one consecrated*
[c] Cn Compare Gk Q Ms 1.22: MT *then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life*
[d] Gk: Heb *went her way*
[e] Gk: Heb lacks *and drank with her husband*
[f] Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[g] Cn Compare Q Ms: MT lacks *I will offer him as a nazirite for all time*
[h] MT: Q Ms Gk Compare Syr *that which goes out of your mouth*
[i] Q Ms Gk Syr: MT *three bulls*

allowed him to see Hannah praying outside of the temple proper (see also 4.18). **11:** *Nazirite*s were "devoted" to the LORD for a set period of time and were prohibited from drinking alcohol or eating grapes, cutting their hair or beards, and approaching a dead body (Num 6.1–21). *Intoxicants,* probably distilled wine or beer. **13:** *Eli thought she was drunk* because prayers were not usually silent. **17:** *The petition you have made,* the first of several word-plays in this chapter on the name of Saul, which sounds like the Hebrew verb for "ask, petition." **19:** *Elkanah knew his wife,* an idiom for sexual relations. **20:** *I have asked him of the LORD,* "asked" (Heb "sha'al") is another pun on the name Saul. **22–24:** *Weaned,* taken off breast milk. Samuel's age is not given, but he is older than an infant or toddler. *An ephah of flour* (v. 24), ca. .6 bu (23 l). **27:** *The petition that I made,* another pun on Saul's name. **28:** *Lent . . . given,* the Heb word for both is yet another pun on Saul's name. *He is given* is exactly the same as Saul's name in Hebrew ("sha'ul") and could be translated, "he is Saul to the LORD." Some scholars think, based on these puns, that this story was originally about Saul's birth rather than Samuel's. Other scholars think they are simply allusions to Saul as Israel's first king.



Chs 1–6: The activity of Samuel.

She left him there for[a] the LORD.

2 Hannah prayed and said,
"My heart exults in the LORD;
my strength is exalted in my God.[b]
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in my[c] victory.

2 "There is no Holy One like the LORD,
no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.
3 Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.
4 The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.

[a] Gk (Compare Q Ms) and Gk at 2.11: MT *And he* (that is, Elkanah) *worshiped there before*
[b] Gk: Heb *the LORD*
[c] Q Ms: MT *your*

2.1–10: The Song of Hannah. Biblical writers sometimes inserted poems into prose books where they seemed appropriate. In this case the poem seems to be considerably later than the surrounding context. It is a psalm of national thanksgiving, but its thankful tone appropriately reflects Hannah's sentiments. It was later used as a model for Lk 1.46–55. **1:** *Strength,* lit. "horn," draws on the image of a proud animal. **2:** *Rock,* a common metaphor for God (2 Sam 22.2–3; Ps 18.2; 28.1; 62.2,6). **3:** The enemies of Israel are addressed. **4:** The reversal of fortune for the downtrodden and oppressed. **5:** *The barren has borne seven,* this line probably suggested

5 Those who were full have hired
themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry are fat with
spoil.
The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.
6 The LORD kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
7 The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.
8 He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.[a]
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,
and on them he has set the world.

9 "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in
darkness;
for not by might does one prevail.
10 The LORD! His adversaries shall be
shattered;
the Most High[b] will thunder in heaven.
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king,
and exalt the power of his anointed."
11 Then Elkanah went home to Ramah,
while the boy remained to minister to the
LORD, in the presence of the priest Eli.

12 Now the sons of Eli were scoundrels;
they had no regard for the LORD 13 or for the
duties of the priests to the people. When
anyone offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling,
with a three-pronged fork in his hand, 14 and
he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or
caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up
the priest would take for himself.[c] This is
what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites
who came there. 15 Moreover, before the fat
was burned, the priest's servant would come
and say to the one who was sacrificing, "Give
meat for the priest to roast; for he will not
accept boiled meat from you, but only raw."
16 And if the man said to him, "Let them burn
the fat first, and then take whatever you
wish," he would say, "No, you must give it
now; if not, I will take it by force." 17 Thus the
sin of the young men was very great in the
sight of the LORD; for they treated the offerings of the LORD with contempt.

18 Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a
boy wearing a linen ephod. 19 His mother used
to make for him a little robe and take it to him
each year, when she went up with her husband
to offer the yearly sacrifice. 20 Then Eli would
bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the
LORD repay[d] you with children by this woman
for the gift that she made to[e] the LORD"; and
then they would return to their home.

[a] Gk (Compare Q Ms) adds *He grants the vow of the one who vows, and blesses the years of the just*
[b] Cn Heb *against him he*
[c] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *with it*
[d] Q Ms Gk: MT *give*
[e] Q Ms Gk: MT *for the petition that she asked of*

the insertion of the poem at this place. *Seven* is symbolic of a sizable family; Hannah will eventually have six children (2.21). **6–7:** *Brings to life* refers to birth, not resurrection from the dead. *Sheol* was the underworld (Isa 14.9–21), where all people were believed to go after death. (The idea of heaven and hell does not exist yet in the Bible.) Sheol may be metaphorical for conditions near death (Ps 86.13; 88.3–7), injuries, or serious trouble. **8:** *He raises up the poor . . . he lifts the needy,* God's concern for the poor and oppressed is a common theme in the Bible. *Pillars of the earth,* the earth is conceived of as a platform resting upon great pillars. **10:** *His king* shows that the psalm was written later than Hannah since there was no king of Israel yet in her time. *Anointed* (Heb "mashiaḥ") was a title for the king and the source of the postbiblical term "messiah," which never means future Davidic ruler in the Hebrew Bible.

2.12–26: The wicked sons of Eli. Samuel's faithful service, in contrast to the evil deeds of Eli's sons, hints that he will replace Eli. **12:** *They had no regard for,* lit. "they did not know." Its meaning here may be that Eli's sons did not have a personal relationship with the LORD. **13–17:** Priests made their living by receiving a portion of the sacrifices. The custom in Shiloh (vv. 13–14) was for the priest to get whatever the fork brought up while the meat was boiling, which is different from that prescribed elsewhere (contrast Lev 7.28–36; Deut 18.3). By demanding the fat portion, which properly belonged to God, and taking it before the sacrifice was made, Eli's sons were sinning against the LORD (v. 25) and treating him with contempt (vv. 12,17). They also threatened violence against worshipers who tried to do right (v. 16). **18:** This *linen ephod* was a kind of apron worn by priests. **20:** *The*

21 And[a] the LORD took note of Hannah;
she conceived and bore three sons and two
daughters. And the boy Samuel grew up in
the presence of the LORD.
22 Now Eli was very old. He heard all that
his sons were doing to all Israel, and how
they lay with the women who served at the
entrance to the tent of meeting. 23 He said
to them, "Why do you do such things? For
I hear of your evil dealings from all these
people. 24 No, my sons; it is not a good report
that I hear the people of the LORD spreading
abroad. 25 If one person sins against another,
someone can intercede for the sinner with
the LORD;[b] but if someone sins against the
LORD, who can make intercession?" But they
would not listen to the voice of their father;
for it was the will of the LORD to kill them.
26 Now the boy Samuel continued to grow
both in stature and in favor with the LORD
and with the people.
27 A man of God came to Eli and said to
him, "Thus the LORD has said, 'I revealed[c]
myself to the family of your ancestor in
Egypt when they were slaves[d] to the house of
Pharaoh. 28 I chose him out of all the tribes
of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar,
to offer incense, to wear an ephod before me;
and I gave to the family of your ancestor all
my offerings by fire from the people of Israel.
29 Why then look with greedy eye[e] at my
sacrifices and my offerings that I command-
ed, and honor your sons more than me by
fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of
every offering of my people Israel?' 30 There-
fore the LORD the God of Israel declares: 'I
promised that your family and the family of
your ancestor should go in and out before
me forever'; but now the LORD declares: 'Far
be it from me; for those who honor me I will
honor, and those who despise me shall be
treated with contempt. 31 See, a time is com-
ing when I will cut off your strength and the
strength of your ancestor's family, so that no
one in your family will live to old age. 32 Then
in distress you will look with greedy eye[f]
on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed
upon Israel; and no one in your family shall
ever live to old age. 33 The only one of you
whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall
be spared to weep out his[g] eyes and grieve
his[h] heart; all the members of your house-
hold shall die by the sword.[i] 34 The fate of
your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall
be the sign to you—both of them shall die

[a] Q Ms Gk: MT *When*
[b] Gk Compare Q Ms: MT *another, God will mediate for him*
[c] Gk Tg Syr: Heb *Did I reveal*
[d] Q Ms Gk: MT lacks *slaves*
[e] Q Ms Gk: MT *then kick*
[f] Q Ms Gk: MT *will kick*
[g] Q Ms Gk: MT *your*
[h] Q Ms Gk: Heb *your*
[i] Q Ms See Gk: MT *die like mortals*

gift that she made, another pun on Saul's name. **22:** *And how they lay with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting,* this line, if original, indicates that the shrine at Shiloh was a portable tent or tabernacle (see 1.7n.). However, this line is not in some of the best witnesses to the text of Samuel and may be borrowed from Ex 38.8. It is unknown exactly how these women *served at the entrance to the tent of meeting*. **25:** *It was the will of the LORD to kill them,* compare God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart in Ex 4–12.

2.27–36: The oracle against Eli. This passage was probably written by the Deuteronomistic author to justify the exclusion of Abiathar and his descendants from the priesthood in favor of Zadok and his descendants (1 Kings 2.27,35), which occurred due to Josiah's centralization of worship in Jerusalem (2 Kings 23.9). **27–28:** *Your ancestor* may refer to Moses, to whom Eli's family traced their ancestry. But the statement that he was chosen *out of all the tribes of Israel* seems to indicate Levi, and Moses was a Levite (Ex 2.1). **28:** *To go up to my altar, to offer incense, to wear an ephod,* three principal duties of priests. Going up to the altar refers to offering sacrifices. **30:** The promise mentioned here is not explicitly found in the Bible but resembles Ex 28.43, which is directed to Aaron. **31–33:** The cutting off of Eli's household probably refers not to the death of Eli and his sons in 4.11,18 but to Saul's annihilation of the priests of Nob in ch 22. *The only one of you* is Abiathar, who alone escaped the slaughter (22.18–23; 1 Kings 2.26–27). The Hebrew of v. 32a is obscure. **35:** The *faithful priest* is Zadok, who came to prominence when Abiathar was banished by Solomon (1 Kings 1–2). The language of this verse is very similar to that of 2 Sam 7.11–16, which promises a dynasty to David. Both were probably written by the Deuteronomistic Historian. See also 1 Sam 25.28; 1 Kings 11.38. *Anointed one*, see 2.10on.

on the same day. 35 I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed one forever. 36 Everyone who is left in your family shall come to implore him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread, and shall say, Please put me in one of the priest's places, that I may eat a morsel of bread.'"

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 3 the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!"[a] and he said, "Here I am!" 5 and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. 6 The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8 The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." 11 Then the LORD said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. 12 On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God,[b] and he did not restrain them. 14 Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever."

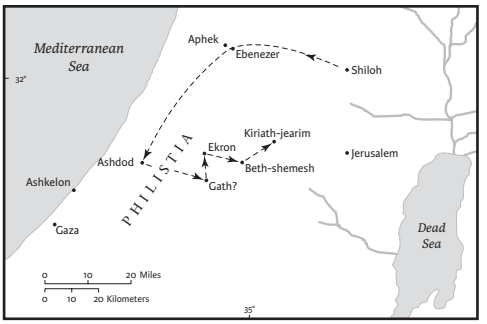
15 Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16 But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." 17 Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." 18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him."

19 As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD. 21 The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of

[a] Q Mss Gk See 3.10: MT *the LORD called Samuel*
[b] Another reading is *for themselves*

3.1–4.1a: Samuel's call. 3.1: *Word of the LORD . . . visions* are means of prophetic revelation. **3:** The lamp in the temple burned at night (see Ex 27.21). *The lamp of God had not yet gone out,* hence it was just before dawn. Samuel's bed was inside the temple near the inner sanctuary where the *ark of God* was kept. The ark was a portable shrine or chest representing God's presence; see 4.4n. **7:** *Samuel did not yet know the LORD,* Samuel's role as a prophet had not yet been established since *the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.* In this story Samuel comes to "know" the LORD by learning to recognize God's revelations. **9–10:** *Your servant,* a polite way of referring to oneself. **14:** Eli's sons profaned the sacrifices that might otherwise have *expiated* or atoned for their sins (2.12–17). **17:** *May God do so to you and more also,* a typical oath formula. Eli places Samuel under oath, forcing him to reveal his conversation with the LORD. **19:** All of Samuel's prophecies come true (none *fall to the ground*). **20:** *Dan to Beer-sheba,* the traditional northern and southern limits of Israel.

4.1b–22: The capture of the ark. Many scholars believe that 4.1–7.1 and possibly 2 Sam 6 are based on an old document called the "Ark Narrative" that described the capture and return of the ark. The ark is the focus of



Chs 4–6: Wanderings of the ark of the covenant.

the LORD. [1] And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

In those days the Philistines mustered for war against Israel,[a] and Israel went out to
4 battle against them;[b] they encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. [2] The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle was joined,[c] Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle. [3] When the troops came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD put us to rout today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, so that he may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies." [4] So the people sent to Shiloh, and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

[5] When the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. [6] When the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp, [7] the Philistines were afraid; for they said, "Gods have[d] come into the camp." They also said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. [8] Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. [9] Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, in order not to become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight."

[10] So the Philistines fought; Israel was defeated, and they fled, everyone to his home. There was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. [11] The ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

[12] A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line, and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn and with earth upon his head. [13] When he arrived, Eli was sitting upon his seat by the road watching, for his heart trem-

[a] Gk: Heb lacks *In those days the Philistines mustered for war against Israel*
[b] Gk: Heb *against the Philistines*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Or *A god has*

this section rather than Samuel, who is not mentioned. **1b:** The *Philistines* came from the northeastern Mediterranean area (including the island of Crete; see Am 9.7) and entered Palestine (which is derived from "Philistine") in approximately 1200 BCE, about the same time the Israelites were emerging in the central highlands. In this period they were Israel's great enemy. **2:** *Four thousand men,* the numbers throughout this account are exaggerated, although some scholars think that the Hebrew word translated "thousand" refers to a military unit of far fewer than a thousand men. **4:** *Cherubim* were mythical griffin-like creatures with body parts from different creatures, especially human heads and wings. They were commonly depicted in palaces and temples. As the throne of "the LORD of hosts who sits *enthroned on the cherubim*" (cf. 3.3), the ark represented the LORD's presence in battle. In some passages the ark is described as simple in form and lacking cherubim (Deut 10.2–3) while in others it is depicted as ornate (Ex 25.10–22; 37.1–9) **6:** *Hebrews* is commonly used to distinguish Israelites ethnically from foreigners (Gen 14.13; Ex 1.15; 2.11,13; 3.18; 1 Sam 14.21; Jon 1.9). Sometimes, however, it seems to designate a broader socioeconomic group (Gen 39.14; 43.32). **8:** *Gods* implies that the Philistines had no conception that the Israelites worshiped only one god (but cf. 5.7–8,10–11). The Philistines also locate the plagues in the *wilderness* rather than in Egypt. In both cases the Israelite writer may be mocking the Philistines. See also 6.6n. **10:** *Thirty thousand,* see v. 2n. **12:** *With his clothes torn and with earth upon his head,* conventional signs of

bled for the ark of God. When the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out. 14 When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, "What is this uproar?" Then the man came quickly and told Eli. 15 Now Eli was ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set, so that he could not see. 16 The man said to Eli, "I have just come from the battle; I fled from the battle today." He said, "How did it go, my son?" 17 The messenger replied, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great slaughter among the troops; your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." 18 When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli[a] fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years.

19 Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. When she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth; for her labor pains overwhelmed her. 20 As she was about to die, the women attending her said to her, "Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer or give heed. 21 She named the child Ichabod, meaning, "The glory has departed from Israel," because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. 22 She said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

5 When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod; 2 then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and placed it beside Dagon. 3 When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. 4 But when they rose early on the next morning, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off upon the threshold; only the trunk of[b] Dagon was left to him. 5 This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not step on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

6 The hand of the LORD was heavy upon the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and struck them with tumors, both in Ashdod and in its territory. 7 And when the inhabitants of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us; for his hand is heavy on us and on our god Dagon." 8 So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" The inhabitants of Gath replied, "Let the ark of God be moved on to us."[c] So they moved the ark of the God of Israel to Gath.[d] 9 But after they had brought it to Gath,[e] the hand of the LORD was against the city, causing a very great panic; he struck the inhabitants of the city,

[a] Heb *he*
[b] Heb lacks *the trunk of*
[c] Gk Compare Q Ms: MT *They answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath."*
[d] Gk: Heb lacks *to Gath*
[e] Q Ms: MT lacks *to Gath*

mourning. **18:** Pious *Eli* is moved by the loss of the ark more than the loss of his wicked sons. *Forty years,* a round number for a generation. **21–22:** *Ichabod,* "Where is the glory?" or "Alas for the glory." "Glory" alludes to the ark.

5.1–12: The ark troubles the Philistines. In the ancient Near East, wars between nations were interpreted as contests between their respective gods. This story explains that although the Philistines defeated Israel, the LORD was superior to Dagon, a Philistine god. Similar ancient Near Eastern battle accounts explain defeat as punishment from the god of the vanquished. **1:** *Ashdod,* one of five principal Philistine cities along with Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza. **2:** *Beside Dagon* means beside the statue of Dagon in his temple. Dagon was a Canaanite god of grain whom the Philistines adopted as a major deity. **3:** *There was Dagon, fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD,* bowing prostrate was a sign of subservience. **4–5:** This is an etiology (a story that explains a custom, name, etc.) for the practice of jumping over thresholds in order to avoid offending the spirits of a particular building or space (see Zeph 1.9). **6–12:** The tumors and mice (in the next chapter) suggest that this outbreak was bubonic plague, which was common in coastlands. According to this story, however, the plague is the LORD's doing. **8:** The *lords of the Philistines* are the rulers of the Philistine pentapolis. The word "lord" ("seren") is Philistine and cognate with Gk "tyrannos" ("tyrant").

both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them. [10] So they sent the ark of the God of Israel[a] to Ekron. But when the ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "Why[b] have they brought around to us[c] the ark of the God of Israel to kill us[c] and our[d] people?" [11] They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people." For there was a deathly panic[e] throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there; [12] those who did not die were stricken with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

6 The ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. [2] Then the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us what we should send with it to its place." [3] They said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty, but by all means return him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed and will be ransomed;[f] will not his hand then turn from you?" [4] And they said, "What is the guilt offering that we shall return to him?" They answered, "Five gold tumors and five gold mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines; for the same plague was upon all of you and upon your lords. [5] So you must make images of your tumors and images of your mice that ravage the land, and give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps he will lighten his hand on you and your gods and your land. [6] Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After he had made fools of them, did they not let the people go, and they departed? [7] Now then, get ready a new cart and two milch cows that have never borne a yoke, and yoke the cows to the cart, but take their calves home, away from them. [8] Take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart, and put in a box at its side the figures of gold, which you are returning to him as a guilt offering. Then send it off, and let it go its way. [9] And watch; if it goes up on the way to its own land, to Beth-shemesh, then it is he who has done us this great harm; but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance."

[10] The men did so; they took two milch cows and yoked them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. [11] They put the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the box with the gold mice and the images of their tumors. [12] The cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went; they turned neither to the right nor to the left, and the lords of the Philistines went after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

[13] Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. When they looked up and saw the ark, they went with rejoicing to meet it.[g] [14] The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh, and stopped there. A large stone was there; so they split up the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. [15] The Levites took down the ark of the LORD and the box that was beside

[a] Q Ms Gk: MT lacks *of Israel*
[b] Q Ms Gk: MT lacks *Why*
[c] Heb *me*
[d] Heb *my*
[e] Q Ms reads *a panic from the LORD*
[f] Q Ms Gk: MT *and it will be known to you*
[g] Gk: Heb *rejoiced to see it*

6.1–7.1: The return of the ark. 6.3: *Guilt offering,* not a sacrifice but compensation for taking the ark and appeasement of the Lord in hopes of avoiding further punishment. **4–5:** There is one gold tumor and one gold mouse for each of the five Philistine rulers (vv. 4,17–18). The images serve as substitutes for the rulers and their cities in order to carry the plague away by magic. **6:** Cf. Ex 8.19,32. A creative enhancement by the author, since the Philistines would not have known the story of the Exodus. **7:** A new cart is ritually pure. The two cows have never been yoked and are therefore fit to be sacrificed (cf. Num 19.2; Deut 21.3). *Milch cows* means that they have young calves. **9:** Unaccustomed to pulling a cart, these two cows would be expected to wander aimlessly in search of their calves. If instead they headed for Israelite territory, the Philistines would know that their sufferings had indeed been sent by the LORD. **12:** The cows take the most direct route into Israelite territory. **15:** This verse is likely a later addition by an editor concerned to have the Levites, the priestly tribe, handle the

it, in which were the gold objects, and set them upon the large stone. Then the people of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and presented sacrifices on that day to the LORD. [16] When the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned that day to Ekron.

[17] These are the gold tumors, which the Philistines returned as a guilt offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron; [18] also the gold mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both fortified cities and unwalled villages. The great stone, beside which they set down the ark of the LORD, is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh.

[19] The descendants of Jeconiah did not rejoice with the people of Beth-shemesh when they greeted[a] the ark of the LORD; and he killed seventy men of them.[b] The people mourned because the LORD had made a great slaughter among the people. [20] Then the people of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? To whom shall he go so that we may be rid of him?" [21] So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to you." **7** [1] And the people of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD, and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. They consecrated his son, Eleazar, to have charge of the ark of the LORD.

[2] From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented[c] after the LORD.

[3] Then Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Astartes from among you. Direct your heart to the LORD, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." [4] So Israel put away the Baals and the Astartes, and they served the LORD only.

[5] Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." [6] So they gathered at Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the LORD. They fasted that day, and said, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.

[7] When the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it they were afraid of the Philistines. [8] The people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, and pray that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines." [9] So Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD; Sam-

[a] Gk: Heb *And he killed some of the people of Beth-shemesh, because they looked into*
[b] Heb *killed seventy men, fifty thousand men*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

ark. **17:** See 5.1n. **19:** It was *seventy* of the people of Beth-shemesh, not seventy of the *descendants of Jeconiah,* who were killed. The reason is uncertain, since nothing else is known about Jeconiah or his family. **20:** *To stand before the LORD* is a technical expression for priestly service, suggesting that the people are asking for a priest to handle the ark. It remains unclear how the absence of a priest relates to Jeconiah. **21:** *Kiriath-jearim* is located ca. 8 mi (13 km) northwest of Jerusalem. **7.1:** *Abinadab* is the father of several important priests (2 Sam 6.3–4,6–8; 1 Chr 13.7,9–11).

7.2–17: Samuel judges Israel. Samuel is depicted as a transitional figure between the judges and the monarchy. He embodies the roles of priest, prophet, and now judge (cf. Judg 10.6–16). **2:** *Twenty years* is a way of designating half a generation. This notice fits Samuel into the structure of the book of Judges where a period of foreign oppression precedes Israel's repentance. **3–4:** *Returning to the LORD with all your heart* is Deuteronomistic language (cf. Deut 30.10; Josh 22.5; 23.14; 24.23; Judg 10.16; 1 Sam 12.20,24; 1 Kings 8.23,48; 14.8; 2 Kings 10.31; 23.25). *Baals* and *Astartes,* the leading male and female gods of Canaan. **5:** *Mizpah,* located ca. 8 mi (13 km) north of Jerusalem, became the administrative and religious capital of Judah after Jerusalem's destruction in 586 BCE (2 Kings 25.23). Hence, the setting of this story in Mizpah may indicate a date of composition after 586 (similarly Judg 19–21). **6:** The elements of this ritual—prayer, libation, fasting, and confession—do not occur together anywhere else in the Bible. Since fasting suggests contrition and pouring out water suggests cleansing, a community purification ritual may be envisioned, perhaps in preparation for war. **8–9:** Samuel is

uel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. [10] As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel; but the LORD thundered with a mighty voice that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion; and they were routed before Israel. [11] And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as beyond Beth-car.

[12] Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah,[a] and named it Ebenezer;[b] for he said, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." [13] So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel; the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. [14] The towns that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath; and Israel recovered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.

[15] Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. [16] He went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah; and he judged Israel in all these places. [17] Then he would come back to Ramah, for his home was there; he administered justice there to Israel, and built there an altar to the LORD.

8 When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. [2] The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beer-sheba. [3] Yet his sons did not follow in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice.

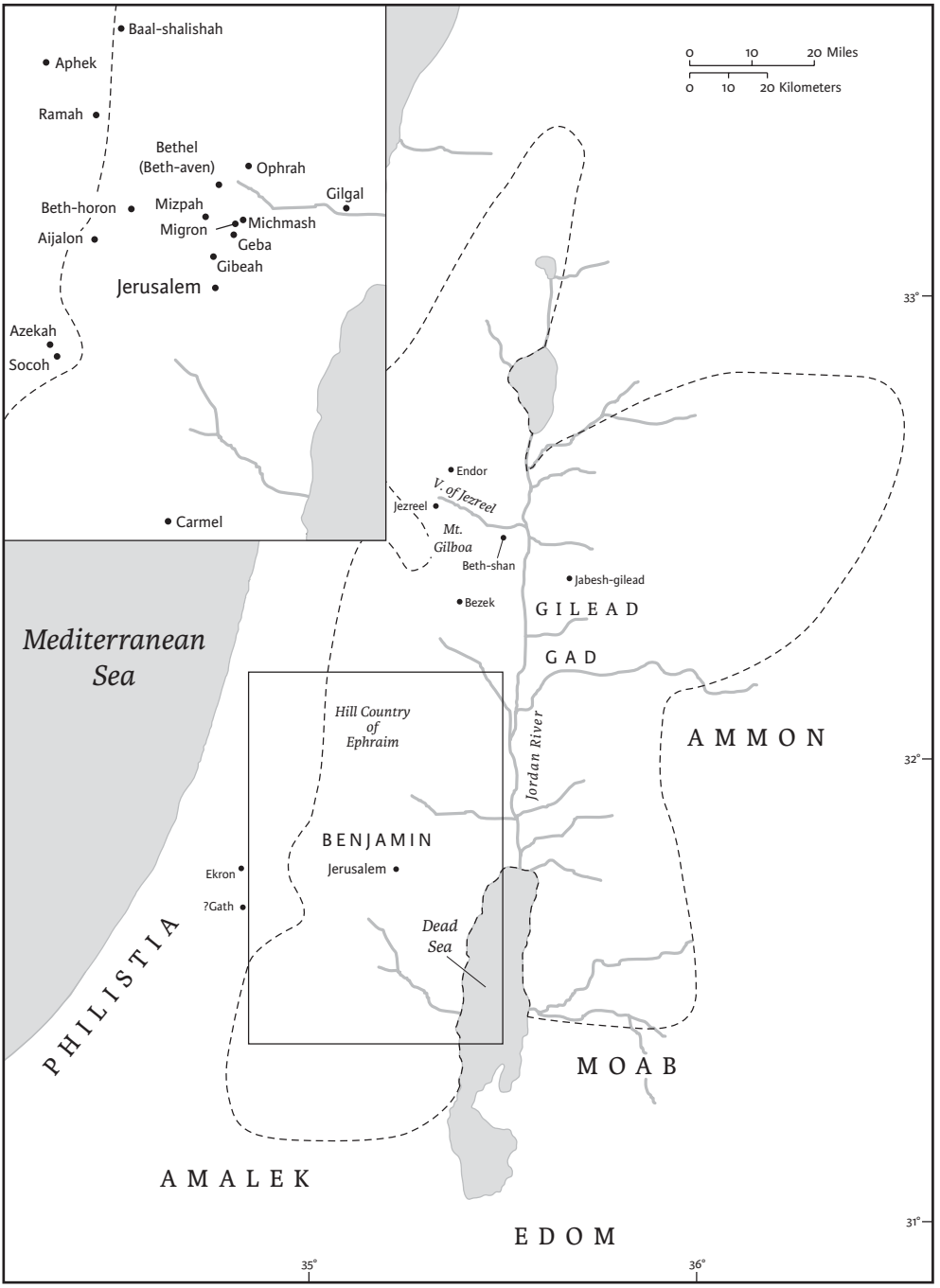
[4] Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, [5] and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations." [6] But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the LORD, [7] and the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. [8] Just as they have done to me,[c] from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *Shen*
[b] That is *Stone of Help*
[c] Gk: Heb lacks *to me*

an intercessor for the people in the tradition of Moses and Jeremiah. *A whole burnt offering,* one that is entirely consumed (Ex 29.18; Lev 8.21; Deut 13.16; 33.10). **10:** Thunder is considered the *voice* of God. **12:** An etiology for the name *Ebenezer,* which means "stone of the helper/warrior (God)." **13–14:** The statement that the Philistines *did not again enter the territory of Israel* is contradicted later in 1 Samuel. It may refer only to Samuel's lifetime. It serves the author's effort to cast Samuel as a judge; compare the Deuteronomistic formulas in Judg 3.30; 8.28; 11.33. *Amorites,* in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic literature the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan. Contrast, e.g., Gen 14.7; 15.20, where "Amorites" refers to one pre-Israelite group. **15–17:** Scholars often identify two types of judges in the book of Judges: military leaders and legal functionaries. This chapter ascribes both roles to Samuel: His intercession brings victory over the Philistines (vv. 10–11), and he rides a circuit judging Israel (vv. 15–17). **16:** *Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah,* and *Ramah* were all within traditional Benjaminite territory. See map on p. 411.

Chs 8–12: The beginning of kingship in Israel. These chapters recount the events in five distinct episodes: the people's request for a king and Samuel's response (ch 8); Saul's search for his father's asses and his anointing (9.1–10.16); the designation of Saul by lot (10.17–27a); Saul's victory over the Ammonites (10.27b–11.15); and Samuel's farewell address (ch 12). The stories in 9.1–10.16 and 10.27b–11.15 are generally recognized as older and neutral or positive in their attitude toward monarchy, while the other three episodes view kingship with suspicion and depict the people's request as a sin. The latter three texts are also widely recognized as Deuteronomistic. In the end, God allows a king but also warns the people against letting their king lead them astray.

8.1–22: The people request a king. 2: *Beer-sheba,* the southernmost city in Judah and far outside Samuel's jurisdiction in 7.15–17. It became an administrative center during Judah's monarchy. **3:** Samuel's sons, like Eli's, are corrupt (Deut 16.19 denounces taking bribes). Their unfitness to rule impels the elders to ask for a king. **4:** The *elders* were the leading and usually senior citizens. **6–7:** Samuel and the LORD are displeased by the request and consider it a rejection of the LORD. But is kingship regarded as inherently evil? Or does the request demonstrate a lack of faith in the LORD? **8:** The review of Israel's history is in typical Deuteronomistic style (cf.



The kingdom of Saul according to the book of Samuel. The dashed line shows the approximate outer boundary of his kingdom.

other gods, so also they are doing to you.
9 Now then, listen to their voice; only—you
shall solemnly warn them, and show them
the ways of the king who shall reign over
them."

10 So Samuel reported all the words of the
LORD to the people who were asking him for
a king. 11 He said, "These will be the ways of
the king who will reign over you: he will take
your sons and appoint them to his chariots
and to be his horsemen, and to run before his
chariots; 12 and he will appoint for himself
commanders of thousands and command-
ers of fifties, and some to plow his ground
and to reap his harvest, and to make his
implements of war and the equipment of his
chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be
perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will
take the best of your fields and vineyards and
olive orchards and give them to his courtiers.
15 He will take one-tenth of your grain and of
your vineyards and give it to his officers and
his courtiers. 16 He will take your male and
female slaves, and the best of your cattle[a] and
donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will
take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall
be his slaves. 18 And in that day you will cry
out because of your king, whom you have
chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not
answer you in that day."

19 But the people refused to listen to the
voice of Samuel; they said, "No! but we are
determined to have a king over us, 20 so that
we also may be like other nations, and that
our king may govern us and go out before us
and fight our battles." 21 When Samuel had
heard all the words of the people, he repeated
them in the ears of the LORD. 22 The LORD
said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice and set
a king over them." Samuel then said to the
people of Israel, "Each of you return home."

9 There was a man of Benjamin whose
name was Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror
son of Becorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite,
a man of wealth. 2 He had a son whose name
was Saul, a handsome young man. There was
not a man among the people of Israel more
handsome than he; he stood head and shoul-
ders above everyone else.

3 Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father,
had strayed. So Kish said to his son Saul,
"Take one of the boys with you; go and look
for the donkeys." 4 He passed through the hill
country of Ephraim and passed through the
land of Shalishah, but they did not find them.
And they passed through the land of Shaalim,
but they were not there. Then he passed
through the land of Benjamin, but they did
not find them.

5 When they came to the land of Zuph,
Saul said to the boy who was with him, "Let
us turn back, or my father will stop worrying
about the donkeys and worry about us." 6 But
he said to him, "There is a man of God in this
town; he is a man held in honor. Whatever he
says always comes true. Let us go there now;
perhaps he will tell us about the journey on
which we have set out." 7 Then Saul replied

[a] Gk: Heb *young men*

2 Kings 21.15). **10:** *Asking* is a play on the name "Saul"; see 1.17n. **11–17:** These verses may preserve an older treaty document that described the rights and privileges of the king. *Ways,* the Hebrew word means "custom" or "judgment." The king to whom the people look for justice will follow the typical ancient Near Eastern practices of taxation and conscription. The items in this list appear to be based on Solomon's reign (cf. 1 Kings 4.7; 5.13). **18:** This verse is in characteristic Deuteronomistic language and resembles that of the framework of Judges, in which the people constantly *cry out* for relief from their oppressors. **19:** True to his name ("listen" in Hebrew sounds like "Samuel"), Samuel listens to God, while the people *refused to listen.* **20:** The desire to *be like other nations* is opposed to the LORD's desire that Israel be his special people. *Govern* is elsewhere translated "judge." *Go out before us* is an idiom for military leadership. The people trust in a king instead of God for protection from their enemies. **22:** The LORD will permit Israel to have a king even though he does not approve of their request. *Each of you return home* is editorial and sets the stage for Samuel to call another assembly in 10.17.

9.1–10.16: Saul's anointing. This is an old story that has been edited by the Deuteronomist. Samuel appears not as a judge but as a "man of God." Both Saul and kingship are depicted positively. **9.2:** *Handsome* (lit. "good"), a description often attributed to leaders (Joseph, Gen 39.6; baby Moses, Ex 2.2; David, 1 Sam 16.12). Saul's height is also an important theme in 1 Samuel, especially for its contrast with David. **3:** *Boys* (better: "servants") need not have been young. **4:** *Shalishah* and *Shaalim* may both be puns on Saul's name. **6–7:** *What can we bring,* a

to the boy, "But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What have we?" 8 The boy answered Saul again, "Here, I have with me a quarter shekel of silver; I will give it to the man of God, to tell us our way." 9 (Formerly in Israel, anyone who went to inquire of God would say, "Come, let us go to the seer"; for the one who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.) 10 Saul said to the boy, "Good; come, let us go." So they went to the town where the man of God was.

11 As they went up the hill to the town, they met some girls coming out to draw water, and said to them, "Is the seer here?" 12 They answered, "Yes, there he is just ahead of you. Hurry; he has come just now to the town, because the people have a sacrifice today at the shrine. 13 As soon as you enter the town, you will find him, before he goes up to the shrine to eat. For the people will not eat until he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those eat who are invited. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately." 14 So they went up to the town. As they were entering the town, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the shrine.

15 Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed to Samuel: 16 "Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be ruler over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have seen the suffering of[a] my people, because their outcry has come to me." 17 When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD told him, "Here is the man of whom I spoke to you. He it is who shall rule over my people." 18 Then Saul approached Samuel inside the gate, and said, "Tell me, please, where is the house of the seer?" 19 Samuel answered Saul, "I am the seer; go up before me to the shrine, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind. 20 As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, give no further thought to them, for they have been found. And on whom is all Israel's desire fixed, if not on you and on all your ancestral house?" 21 Saul answered, "I am only a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel, and my family is the humblest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin. Why then have you spoken to me in this way?"

22 Then Samuel took Saul and his servant-boy and brought them into the hall, and gave them a place at the head of those who had been invited, of whom there were about thirty. 23 And Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the portion I gave you, the one I asked you to put aside." 24 The cook took up the thigh and what went with it[b] and set them before Saul. Samuel said, "See, what was kept is set before you. Eat; for it is set[c] before you at the

[a] Gk: Heb lacks *the suffering of*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Q Ms Gk: MT *it was kept*

single word in Hebrew, spelled exactly like the word "prophet." The *man of God,* a title for a prophet, turns out to be Samuel (v. 14). But the identification is secondary, since Saul and his servant do not initially know who Samuel is. In the original tale, Saul's encounter was with an anonymous seer. The *town,* probably Ramah, Samuel's home. The *present* was a payment to the man of God for divining the whereabouts of the donkeys. **8:** A *quarter shekel* was a measure of weight (ca. .10 oz [3 gm]). **9:** A note by an editor indicating that the word *seer* had gone out of use. **11:** *Draw*ing *water* was done by women, usually in the morning or evening when it was cooler. Hence, it was around sundown. **12:** The *shrine* ("high place") was a hill or raised platform where worship, especially sacrifices, took place. Deuteronomistic literature condemns the high places once the Jerusalem Temple is built. **13:** Sacrifices provided occasions for feasting after the portions of the animal designated for God were burned. **16:** *Ruler,* a special term meaning "king designate." *Their outcry has come to me,* cf. Ex 3.9. **18:** *The gate,* a fortified entryway into a walled city. It was the site of commerce and judicial proceedings. **19–20:** In the original tale, the seer consulted God overnight in order to address Saul's need (v. 19). But in the present, edited version, Samuel has been told to expect Saul (vv. 15–17) and now goes ahead and tells him *all that is on* his *mind,* assuring him that the donkeys have been found (v. 20). The next morning is reserved for Saul's anointing. **21:** Like others called by God (Moses, Ex 3–4; Jeremiah, Jer 1), Saul objects that he is unworthy. **22–24:** Saul is the honored guest. *The thigh* is usually reserved for the deity or priests. These verses are likely editorial, since they

appointed time, so that you might eat with the guests."[a]

So Saul ate with Samuel that day. 25 When they came down from the shrine into the town, a bed was spread for Saul[b] on the roof, and he lay down to sleep.[c] 26 Then at the break of dawn[d] Samuel called to Saul upon the roof, "Get up, so that I may send you on your way." Saul got up, and both he and Samuel went out into the street.

27 As they were going down to the outskirts of the town, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the boy to go on before us, and when he has passed on, stop here yourself for a while, that I may make known to you the word of God."

10 1 Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him; he said, "The LORD has anointed you ruler over his people Israel. You shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their enemies all around. Now this shall be the sign to you that the LORD has anointed you ruler[e] over his heritage: 2 When you depart from me today you will meet two men by Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah; they will say to you, 'The donkeys that you went to seek are found, and now your father has stopped worrying about them and is worrying about you, saying: What shall I do about my son?' 3 Then you shall go on from there further and come to the oak of Tabor; three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there, one carrying three kids, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine. 4 They will greet you and give you two loaves of bread, which you shall accept from them. 5 After that you shall come to Gibeath-elohim,[f] at the place where the Philistine garrison is; there, as you come to the town, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the shrine with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre playing in front of them; they will be in a prophetic frenzy. 6 Then the spirit of the LORD will possess you, and you will be in a prophetic frenzy along with them and be turned into a different person. 7 Now when these signs meet you, do whatever you see fit to do, for God is with you. 8 And you shall go down to Gilgal ahead of me; then I will come down to you to present burnt offerings and offer sacrifices of well-being. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do."

9 As he turned away to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart; and all these signs were fulfilled that day. 10 When they were going from there[g] to Gibeah,[h] a band of prophets met him; and the spirit of God possessed him, and he fell into a prophetic frenzy along with them. 11 When all who knew him before saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, "What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" 12 A man of the place answered, "And who is their father?" Therefore it became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" 13 When his prophetic frenzy had ended, he went home.[i]

[a] Cn: Heb *it was kept for you, saying, I have invited the people*
[b] Gk: Heb *and he spoke with Saul*
[c] Gk: Heb lacks *and he lay down to sleep*
[d] Gk: Heb *and they arose early and at break of dawn*
[e] Gk: Heb lacks *over his people Israel. You shall… anointed you ruler*
[f] Or *the Hill of God*
[g] Gk: Heb *they came there*
[h] Or *the hill*
[i] Cn: Heb *he came to the shrine*

presuppose Samuel's foreknowledge of Saul's arrival. **10.1:** The LORD's *heritage* is the land of Israel. Every nation is understood as the inheritance of the god it worships. The LORD, creator of the world, is envisioned as having chosen Israel as his people (Deut 10.14–15; 32.8–9). **2:** *Zelzah,* location unknown. **3:** The *three men going up to God at Bethel* are carrying items for sacrifice. Tabor is a different place than that in Judg 4.6. **4:** *Greet* is a pun on Saul's name. The men give *two loaves of bread,* one for Saul and one for his servant. The Greek (LXX) reading, "two offerings of bread," suggests that Saul again receives the portion of a priest. **5–7:** Music was used to induce an ecstatic condition in which prophets uttered their oracles (2 Kings 3.15–16); *frenzy* (vv. 5–6,10,13) is a misleadingly pejorative translation. Like the judges, Saul will be moved to action by the spirit of the LORD (see Judg 3.10; 6.34; 11.29; 13.24; etc.). The instruction to *do whatever you see fit to do* is a military commission. **8:** This verse connects this story to 13.7b–15a. **10–13:** An etiology for the proverb, *Is Saul also among the prophets?* Here the proverb has a positive sense, showing that the LORD's spirit empowers Saul to prophesy and rule. A different

14 Saul's uncle said to him and to the boy, "Where did you go?" And he replied, "To seek the donkeys; and when we saw they were not to be found, we went to Samuel." 15 Saul's uncle said, "Tell me what Samuel said to you." 16 Saul said to his uncle, "He told us that the donkeys had been found." But about the matter of the kingship, of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him anything.

17 Samuel summoned the people to the LORD at Mizpah 18 and said to them,[a] "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.' 19 But today you have rejected your God, who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses; and you have said, 'No! but set a king over us.' Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your clans."

20 Then Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. 21 He brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its families, and the family of the Matrites was taken by lot. Finally he brought the family of the Matrites near man by man,[b] and Saul the son of Kish was taken by lot. But when they sought him, he could not be found. 22 So they inquired again of the LORD, "Did the man come here?"[c] and the LORD said, "See, he has hidden himself among the baggage." 23 Then they ran and brought him from there. When he took his stand among the people, he was head and shoulders taller than any of them. 24 Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the one whom the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

25 Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship; and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the LORD. Then Samuel sent all the people back to their homes. 26 Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went warriors whose hearts God had touched. 27 But some worthless fellows said, "How can this man save us?" They despised him and brought him no present. But he held his peace.

Now Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the Gadites and the Reubenites. He would gouge out the right eye of each of them and would not grant Israel a deliverer. No one was left of the Israelites across the Jordan whose right eye Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But there were seven thousand men who had escaped from the Ammonites and had entered Jabesh-gilead.[d]

11 About a month later,[e] Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said

[a] Heb *to the people of Israel*
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *Finally . . . man by man*
[c] Gk: Heb *Is there yet a man to come here?*
[d] Q Ms Compare Josephus, *Antiquities* VI.v.1 (68-71): MT lacks *Now Nahash . . . entered Jabesh-gilead.*
[e] Q Ms Gk: MT lacks *About a month later*

explanation of the proverb occurs in 19.19–24. The *father* of a group of prophets (v. 12) is their leader. **14–16:** It is surprising that Saul's uncle rather than his father questions him, since the uncle has not been mentioned before in the story. These verses are an editorial addition that prepares for the following story (10.17–27a) by pointing out that since Saul's anointing was private, a public proclamation of his kingship is needed.

10.17–27a: Saul chosen by lot. 17: *Mizpah,* see 7.5n. **18–19:** The language of these verses is Deuteronomistic, especially the references to bringing up *Israel out of Egypt* and the accusation that they have *rejected* their God. **20–21:** Israelite society was structured in a descending hierarchy of tribe, clan, family ("house of the father"), and individual. In the Bible (Josh 7.14; 1 Sam 14.41) the lot is used to find by divine assistance a person guilty of breaking a law or vow. Some scholars believe that two stories are combined at this point, one in which Saul was present and chosen by lot and another in which he was chosen by oracle or because of his height. **22:** *Inquired,* another pun on Saul's name. **25:** *The rights and duties of the kingship* probably set out the responsibilities of king and people to each other. The expression here is nearly identical to "the ways of the king" in 8.9,11, although they may not refer to the same document. **26–27a:** Saul's return to Gibeah and the doubts of the *worthless fellows* prepare for the subsequent story in which Saul proves his ability to save Israel. By bringing him *no present* these people refuse to accept him as king.

10.27b–11.15: Saul proves himself able to lead in battle and is publicly made king. 10.27b: This paragraph was lost from the Hebrew text and has been restored from a Dead Sea Scroll fragment of Samuel, as the translators' note indicates. The paragraph explains the reason for the conflict in ch 11. *The Gadites and the Reubenites*

to Nahash, "Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you." 2 But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "On this condition I will make a treaty with you, namely that I gouge out everyone's right eye, and thus put disgrace upon all Israel." 3 The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us seven days' respite that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to save us, we will give ourselves up to you." 4 When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, they reported the matter in the hearing of the people; and all the people wept aloud.

5 Now Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen; and Saul said, "What is the matter with the people, that they are weeping?" So they told him the message from the inhabitants of Jabesh. 6 And the spirit of God came upon Saul in power when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled. 7 He took a yoke of oxen, and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by messengers, saying, "Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!" Then the dread of the LORD fell upon the people, and they came out as one. 8 When he mustered them at Bezek, those from Israel were three hundred thousand, and those from Judah seventy[a] thousand. 9 They said to the messengers who had come, "Thus shall you say to the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead: 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have deliverance.'" When the messengers came and told the inhabitants of Jabesh, they rejoiced. 10 So the inhabitants of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you." 11 The next day Saul put the people in three companies. At the morning watch they came into the camp and cut down the Ammonites until the heat of the day; and those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

12 The people said to Samuel, "Who is it that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Give them to us so that we may put them to death." 13 But Saul said, "No one shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has brought deliverance to Israel."

14 Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship." 15 So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-

[a] Q Ms Gk: MT *thirty*

were Israelites living east of the Jordan in territory that the Ammonite king, Nahash, considered his. The city of Jabesh in Gilead was farther north, outside the disputed area, but Nahash threatened it because some of the Israelites from Gad and Reuben had fled there. **2:** As a visible sign of their subjugation and a punishment for encroaching on his land, *Nahash* had been gouging out *everyone's right eye* among the Gadites and Reubenites (10.27b). **3:** The *elders of Jabesh* are willing to accept Nahash as their overlord. But he insists on the same measure against them as a punishment for their harboring those who fled from him and as a sign of *disgrace upon all Israel.* **3:** The messengers are not sent directly to Saul but *through all the territory of Israel,* thus indicating that this story was independent of preceding ones. **4–5:** Even in Gibeah the messengers do not seek out Saul; he learns of their mission because of the weeping of the people as he returns from the field. The story, then, does not assume that Saul is king. **6:** The *spirit of God* spurs Saul to military action as in the book of Judges (see 1 Sam 10.7n). **7:** Saul's dismembering the oxen represents a threat against those who do not join in the war. Dismemberment was a common curse for breaking a treaty, so that Saul's actions assume a treaty or covenant among the tribes. **8:** The distinction between Israel and Judah either is an anachronism or reflects a differentiation that was always felt if not institutionalized until after Solomon's reign. **10:** *We will give ourselves up to you,* lit. "we will come out to you" as in v. 3, could also be understood as "we will fight against you." **11:** Their day began at sundown, hence *the next day* would be "that evening" in our reckoning. *The morning watch* was in the early hours before sunrise. The Israelites marched all night to attack by surprise before dawn. **12–14:** An editorial addition that links 10.17–27a with 10.27b–11.15. *Samuel* plays no role in the preceding battle account; his name was probably added secondarily to the story. The editor also speaks of *renew*ing *the kingship.* These verses, and the story as a whole, show how Saul succeeded in delivering Israel and thus answering his critics, and thereby present him in a positive light. **15:** The original story did not assume that Saul was already king but explained that the people *made Saul king* as a result of his victory on this occasion.

being before the LORD, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly.

12 Samuel said to all Israel, "I have listened to you in all that you have said to me, and have set a king over you. [2] See, it is the king who leads you now; I am old and gray, but my sons are with you. I have led you from my youth until this day. [3] Here I am; testify against me before the LORD and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me[a] and I will restore it to you." [4] They said, "You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from the hand of anyone." [5] He said to them, "The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." And they said, "He is witness."

[6] Samuel said to the people, "The LORD is witness, who[b] appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors up out of the land of Egypt. [7] Now therefore take your stand, so that I may enter into judgment with you before the LORD, and I will declare to you[c] all the saving deeds of the LORD that he performed for you and for your ancestors. [8] When Jacob went into Egypt and the Egyptians oppressed them,[d] then your ancestors cried to the LORD and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought forth your ancestors out of Egypt, and settled them in this place. [9] But they forgot the LORD their God; and he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of King Jabin of[e] Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab; and they fought against them. [10] Then they cried to the LORD, and said, 'We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD, and have served the Baals and the Astartes; but now rescue us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve you.' [11] And the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Barak,[f] and Jephthah, and Samson,[g] and rescued you out of the hand of your enemies on every side; and you lived in safety. [12] But when you saw that King Nahash of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' though the LORD your God was your king. [13] See, here is the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; see, the LORD has set a king over you. [14] If you will fear the LORD and serve him and heed his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well; [15] but if you will not heed the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king.[h] [16] Now therefore take your stand and see this great thing that the LORD will do before your eyes. [17] Is it not the wheat harvest today? I will call upon the LORD, that he may send thunder and rain; and you shall

[a] Gk: Heb lacks *Testify against me*
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *is witness, who*
[c] Gk: Heb lacks *and I will declare to you*
[d] Gk: Heb lacks *and the Egyptians oppressed them*
[e] Gk: Heb lacks *King Jabin of*
[f] Gk Syr: Heb *Bedan*
[g] Gk: Heb *Samuel*
[h] Gk: Heb *and your ancestors*

12.1–25: Samuel's address. This chapter is a Deuteronomistic composition. Ancient historians often placed speeches, which they themselves composed and considered appropriate to the occasion, into the mouths of their characters. See, e.g., Josh 23–24 and 1 Kings 8. Most of Deuteronomy is cast as a speech of Moses. **2:** *My sons are with you,* Samuel is not putting his sons forward as leaders but mentions them as illustrating his old age; they are fully grown. **3:** Samuel's actions contrast with the "ways of the king" in 8.11–18; cf. Moses' words in Num 16.15. **6–12:** This retrospective on Israel's history is Deuteronomistic in language and orientation. **9:** *Sisera,* see Judg 4.2. *Philistines,* see Judg 13.1. *Moab,* see Judg 3.12. **10:** *Baals and the Astartes,* see 7.3–4. **11:** *Barak,* see Judg 4.6. The Hebrew text reads "Bedan." There is no story about Bedan in the book of Judges. Some scholars think Bedan reflects a distinct tradition; others think it is another name for Jephthah. If Barak is correct, the order here differs from Judges. *Jerubbaal,* see Judg 6.32. *Jephthah,* see Judg 11. *Samson,* see Judg 13–16. The Hebrew has "Samuel"; in either case, the reference is to the last judge. **12:** The mention of *Nahash* differs from ch 8, in which the Philistine threat leads the Israelites to request a king. **13:** *For whom you have asked,* a pun on Saul's name. **16–18:** The *wheat harvest* was in early summer, when rain would be very rare and a threat to the crops.

know and see that the wickedness that you have done in the sight of the LORD is great in demanding a king for yourselves." 18 So Samuel called upon the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.

19 All the people said to Samuel, "Pray to the LORD your God for your servants, so that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of demanding a king for ourselves." 20 And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart; 21 and do not turn aside after useless things that cannot profit or save, for they are useless. 22 For the LORD will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself. 23 Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. 24 Only fear the LORD, and serve him faithfully with all your heart; for consider what great things he has done for you. 25 But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

13 Saul was . . .[a] years old when he began to reign; and he reigned . . . and two[b] years over Israel.

2 Saul chose three thousand out of Israel; two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin; the rest of the people he sent home to their tents. 3 Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba; and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear!" 4 When all Israel heard that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines, the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal.

5 The Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude; they came up and encamped at Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. 6 When the Israelites saw that they were in distress (for the troops were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns. 7 Some Hebrews crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

8 He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people began to slip away from Saul.[c] 9 So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the offerings of well-being." And he offered the burnt offering. 10 As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, Samuel arrived; and Saul went out to meet him and salute him. 11 Samuel said, "What have you done?" Saul replied, "When I saw that the people were slipping away from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines were mustering at Michmash, 12 I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down upon me at Gilgal, and I have not entreated the favor of the LORD'; so I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering." 13 Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which

[a] The number is lacking in the Heb text (the verse is lacking in the Septuagint).
[b] *Two* is not the entire number; something has dropped out.
[c] Heb *him*

Thus, it shows the LORD's response to Samuel and hints at his displeasure with the people. *Demanding* (vv. 17,19) is another pun on "Saul." **22:** *For his great name's sake,* the LORD's reputation might be damaged if he destroyed them too readily; see Num 14.13–16. **24–25:** The theology of divine reward and punishment is Deuteronomistic.

13.1–7a: Saul begins the war with the Philistines. 1: Saul's age and length of reign are uncertain. The Hebrew literally says that he was a year old when he began to reign and reigned two years; see the translators' notes. **3:** *Jonathan,* Saul's son, appears here for the first time, and as a grown man, indicating that this story is much later than 9.1–10.16, in which Saul is a young man. *Geba* and Gibeah are very similar in Hebrew and may be confused here. **4:** Saul, as king, is apparently given credit for his son's victory. **5:** *Beth-aven,* probably an alternative name for Bethel (v. 2). **7:** *Gad and Gilead,* east of the Jordan.

13.7b–15a: Saul's sin and rejection by God. 8: *The time appointed by Samuel* was *seven days* (10.8), but the

he commanded you. The LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, 14 but now your kingdom will not continue; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart; and the LORD has appointed him to be ruler over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." 15 And Samuel left and went on his way from Gilgal.[a] The rest of the people followed Saul to join the army; they went up from Gilgal toward Gibeah of Benjamin.[b]

Saul counted the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. 16 Saul, his son Jonathan, and the people who were present with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin; but the Philistines encamped at Michmash. 17 And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies; one company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual, 18 another company turned toward Beth-horon, and another company turned toward the mountain[c] that looks down upon the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

19 Now there was no smith to be found throughout all the land of Israel; for the Philistines said, "The Hebrews must not make swords or spears for themselves"; 20 so all the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen their plowshares, mattocks, axes, or sickles;[d] 21 The charge was two-thirds of a shekel[e] for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and one-third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads.[f] 22 So on the day of the battle neither sword nor spear was to be found in the possession of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan; but Saul and his son Jonathan had them.

23 Now a garrison of the Philistines had

14 gone out to the pass of Michmash. 1 One day Jonathan son of Saul said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side." But he did not tell his father. 2 Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree that is at Migron; the troops that were with him were about six hundred men, 3 along with Ahijah son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, son of Phinehas son of Eli, the priest of the LORD in Shiloh, carrying an ephod. Now the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. 4 In the pass,[g] by which Jonathan tried to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on one side and a rocky crag on the other; the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. 5 One crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba.

6 Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to

[a] Gk: Heb *went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin*
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *The rest . . . of Benjamin*
[c] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *toward the border*
[d] Gk: Heb *plowshare*
[e] Heb *was a pim*
[f] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[g] Heb *Between the passes*

intervening events in chs 10–12 require a much longer time. **13–14:** The nature of Saul's sin is not clear; perhaps he tried to usurp Samuel's role of religious leadership. But cf. 14.35, where Saul builds an altar to the LORD without being criticized. *Your kingdom,* like David (2 Sam 7.13–16), Saul had a chance to establish a long-lasting dynasty, but his sin prevented this. Another rejection, perhaps of Saul's individual kingship, occurs in ch 15. The *man after* the LORD's *own heart,* an allusion to David, is a way of saying he is chosen by the LORD and does not necessarily imply any special quality on David's part.

13.15b–14.52: Continuation of the Philistine war. 13.15b–23: These verses set the stage for the battle account in the next chapter. *Geba* and *Michmash* (v. 16) were across from each other on opposite sides of a valley. The Philistine domination took two forms: *Raiders* customarily went out from Michmash to attack Israelite settlements (vv. 17–18), and the Philistines controlled metalworking and hence the manufacture of weapons (vv. 19–22). **21:** A shekel (of silver) weighed ca. .4 oz (11.4 gr). **23:** The battle begins with the Philistines moving to the pass on their side of the valley. **14.1:** *The Philistine garrison on the other side* was the one sent as reinforcements (13.23). The Israelites and Philistines were camped on opposite sides of the ravine at Geba and Michmash, respectively (14.5). Jonathan's plan is to defeat this garrison and then perhaps to rally the Israelites who were hiding (vv. 11,22) into joining in and driving the Philistines back. **3:** For *Ichabod* and *Phinehas*, see 4.4,19. *Carrying an ephod,* not the linen ephod of 2.18, but a box whose contents were used to divine the will of God (v. 41; Ex 28.30). It was carried in priestly garments, which may be why the same word was used for both. *The people* often

the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the LORD will act for us; for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few." 7 His armor-bearer said to him, "Do all that your mind inclines to.[a] I am with you; as your mind is, so is mine."[b] 8 Then Jonathan said, "Now we will cross over to those men and will show ourselves to them. 9 If they say to us, 'Wait until we come to you,' then we will stand still in our place, and we will not go up to them. 10 But if they say, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up; for the LORD has given them into our hand. That will be the sign for us." 11 So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines; and the Philistines said, "Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves." 12 The men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor-bearer, saying, "Come up to us, and we will show you something." Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Come up after me; for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel." 13 Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer following after him. The Philistines[c] fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer, coming after him, killed them. 14 In that first slaughter Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed about twenty men within an area about half a furrow long in an acre[d] of land. 15 There was a panic in the camp, in the field, and among all the people; the garrison and even the raiders trembled; the earth quaked; and it became a very great panic.

16 Saul's lookouts in Gibeah of Benjamin were watching as the multitude was surging back and forth.[e] 17 Then Saul said to the troops that were with him, "Call the roll and see who has gone from us." When they had called the roll, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not there. 18 Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark[f] of God here." For at that time the ark[f] of God went with the Israelites. 19 While Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more; and Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand." 20 Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle; and every sword was against the other, so that there was very great confusion. 21 Now the Hebrews who previously had been with the Philistines and had gone up with them into the camp turned and joined the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. 22 Likewise, when all the Israelites who had gone into hiding in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed closely after them in the battle. 23 So the LORD gave Israel the victory that day.

The battle passed beyond Beth-aven, and the troops with Saul numbered altogether about ten thousand men. The battle spread out over the hill country of Ephraim.

24 Now Saul committed a very rash act on that day.[g] He had laid an oath on the troops, saying, "Cursed be anyone who eats food before it is evening and I have been avenged on my enemies." So none of the troops tasted food. 25 All the troops[h] came upon a honeycomb; and there was honey on the ground. 26 When the troops came upon the honeycomb, the honey was dripping out; but they did not put their hands to their mouths, for they feared the oath. 27 But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the troops with the oath; so he extended the staff that was in his hand, and dipped the tip of it in the honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes brightened. 28 Then one of the soldiers said, "Your father strictly charged the troops with an oath, saying, 'Cursed be anyone who eats food this day.' And so the troops

[a] Gk: Heb *Do all that is in your mind. Turn*
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *so is mine*
[c] Heb *They*
[d] Heb *yoke*
[e] Gk: Heb *they went and there*
[f] Gk *the ephod*
[g] Gk: Heb *The Israelites were distressed that day*
[h] Heb *land*

means the army. **6:** *These uncircumcised,* a derogatory term for the Philistines, who, in contrast to the Israelites and Egyptians, did not practice male circumcision. **11:** *Hebrews,* see 4.6n. **18:** *The ark of God,* the Greek reading, "the ephod," is probably better (see v. 3). **19:** *Withdraw your hand,* Saul had called Ahijah the priest in order to consult the LORD through him, but the growing sound of battle made him decide to attack before finishing his inquiry. **21:** The *Hebrews* here are distinguished from the *Israelites.* They are first allied with the Philistines and

are faint." [29] Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land; see how my eyes have brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. [30] How much better if today the troops had eaten freely of the spoil taken from their enemies; for now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great."

[31] After they had struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon, the troops were very faint; [32] so the troops flew upon the spoil, and took sheep and oxen and calves, and slaughtered them on the ground; and the troops ate them with the blood. [33] Then it was reported to Saul, "Look, the troops are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a large stone before me here."[a] [34] Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the troops, and say to them, 'Let all bring their oxen or their sheep, and slaughter them here, and eat; and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.'" So all of the troops brought their oxen with them that night, and slaughtered them there. [35] And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first altar that he built to the LORD.

[36] Then Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and despoil them until the morning light; let us not leave one of them." They said, "Do whatever seems good to you." But the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here." [37] So Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?" But he did not answer him that day. [38] Saul said, "Come here, all you leaders of the people; and let us find out how this sin has arisen today. [39] For as the LORD lives who saves Israel, even if it is in my son Jonathan, he shall surely die!" But there was no one among all the people who answered him. [40] He said to all Israel, "You shall be on one side, and I and my son Jonathan will be on the other side." The people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you." [41] Then Saul said, "O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant today? If this guilt is in me or in my son Jonathan, O LORD God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in your people Israel,[b] give Thummim." And Jonathan and Saul were indicated by the lot, but the people were cleared. [42] Then Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." And Jonathan was taken.

[43] Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." Jonathan told him, "I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand; here I am, I will die." [44] Saul said, "God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan!" [45] Then the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great victory in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground; for he has worked with God today." So the people ransomed Jonathan, and he did not die. [46] Then Saul withdrew from pursuing the Philistines; and the Philistines went to their own place.

[47] When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side—against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines; wherever he turned he routed them. [48] He did valiantly, and struck down the Amalekites, and rescued Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them.

[49] Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchishua; and the names of his

[a] Gk: Heb *me this day*

[b] Vg Compare Gk: Heb [41]*Saul said to the* LORD, the God of Israel

then turn against them; they may have been mercenaries (cf. 4.6). **24–30:** Saul's oath was an expression of piety to attract God's aid in the battle. It was foolish because his troops became faint from hunger. Most *honey* was made from dates; Jonathan has found a true delicacy (cf. Prov 25.16). **31–35:** The soldiers commit a ritual offense by slaughtering animals *on the ground* so that the blood does not drain out and eating meat cooked *with the blood,* contrary to laws such as Lev 19.26; Deut 12.16. Animals slaughtered on the *large stone* could be propped up to allow their blood to drain before cooking. **37:** *Inquired,* a pun on Saul's name. The lack of response indicates divine disfavor and may hint at God's future displeasure with Saul (see 28.6) **41–42:** The *Urim* and *Thummim* (Ex 28.30) answered yes-or-no questions and decided between two alternatives. **45:** It is not clear exactly how *the people ransomed Jonathan.* Perhaps an animal was substituted (Gen 22.13; Ex 13.13; 34.20). The story may foreshadow Jonathan's death in 31.2. **47–48:** This summary of Saul's military successes contrast (see map on p.

two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn was Merab, and the name of the younger, Michal. 50 The name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner son of Ner, Saul's uncle; 51 Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel.

52 There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any strong or valiant warrior, he took him into his service.

15 Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. 2 Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. 3 Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

4 So Saul summoned the people, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers, and ten thousand soldiers of Judah. 5 Saul came to the city of the Amalekites and lay in wait in the valley. 6 Saul said to the Kenites, "Go! Leave! Withdraw from among the Amalekites, or I will destroy you with them; for you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites withdrew from the Amalekites. 7 Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. 8 He took King Agag of the Amalekites alive, but utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. 9 Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep and of the cattle and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was valuable, and would not utterly destroy them; all that was despised and worthless they utterly destroyed.

10 The word of the LORD came to Samuel: 11 "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not carried out my commands." Samuel was angry; and he cried out to the LORD all night. 12 Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, and Samuel was told, "Saul went to Carmel, where he set up a monument for himself, and on returning he passed on down to Gilgal." 13 When Samuel came to Saul, Saul said to him, "May you be blessed by the LORD; I have carried out the command of the LORD." 14 But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of cattle that I hear?" 15 Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the cattle, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed." 16 Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night." He replied, "Speak."

17 Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. 18 And the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' 19 Why then did you

411) with the surrounding negative portrait of Saul. **48:** *Amalekites*, see 15.2n. **49:** *Ishvi,* perhaps another spelling of Ishbaal (2 Sam 2.8). **52:** *Any strong or valiant warrior,* an allusion to David (cf. 16.14–23).

15.1–35: Another story of Saul's rejection. Compare 13.7b–15a. **2:** *Amalekites,* a nomadic people south of Judah. The story mentioned here is recounted in Ex 17.8–16 and Deut 25.17–19. **3:** *Utterly destroy,* the "ban" or "devotion to destruction" (Heb "ḥerem") used by Israel (see Josh 6.17) and other peoples in the ancient Near East. The enemy and their property were exterminated as a kind of sacrifice to the deity. The instructions are given explicitly here in anticipation of Saul's disobedience. **4:** The numbers may be exaggerated or the word "thousand" may refer to a military unit much smaller than a thousand men (see 4.2n). **6:** *Kenites,* a clan in southern Judah; this verse indicates that they had settled with the Amalekites. Their name means "metalworkers." Their *kindness* to the Israelites is unknown. **9:** *Spared,* a direct violation of the order in v. 3. However, Saul claims (v. 15) that his intent was to kill them in sacrifice to the LORD. He may also have intended to execute Agag in some official or ritual way (vv. 32–33). **12:** Carmel, not the famous mount, but a town in Judah (Josh 15.55). **15:** Saul says his troops (*the people*) *spared the best of the sheep and the cattle,* though he is implicated in v. 9. His claim that the animals were spared for sacrifice provides the ground for Samuel's rebuke. *Your God* suggests that Saul has abandoned the LORD. **17–19:** The pronouns and verbs are singular and directed at Saul alone as *the head of*

not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?" 20 Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 But from the spoil the people took sheep and cattle, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." 22 And Samuel said,

"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt
offerings and sacrifices,
as in obedience to the voice of the
LORD?
Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed than the fat of rams.
23 For rebellion is no less a sin than
divination,
and stubbornness is like iniquity and
idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the
LORD,
he has also rejected you from being
king."

24 Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. 25 Now therefore, I pray, pardon my sin, and return with me, so that I may worship the LORD." 26 Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." 27 As Samuel turned to go away, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. 28 And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this very day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. 29 Moreover the Glory of Israel will not recant[a] or change his mind; for he is not a mortal, that he should change his mind." 30 Then Saul[b] said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God." 31 So Samuel turned back after Saul; and Saul worshiped the LORD.

32 Then Samuel said, "Bring Agag king of the Amalekites here to me." And Agag came to him haltingly.[c] Agag said, "Surely this is the bitterness of death."[d] 33 But Samuel said,

"As your sword has made women childless,
so your mother shall be childless
among women."

And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

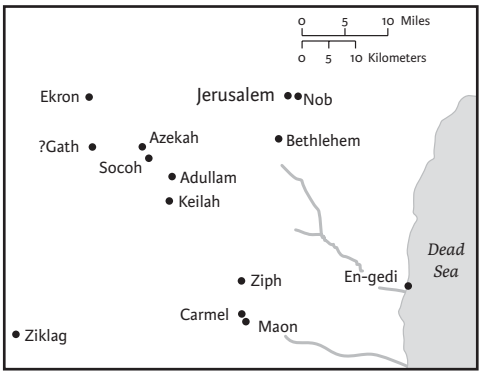
34 Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. 35 Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.

16 The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." 2 Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer

[a] Q Ms Gk: MT *deceive*
[b] Heb *he*
[c] Cn Compare Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Q Ms Gk: MT *Surely the bitterness of death is past*

the tribes of Israel (v. 17). **22:** *The fat of rams,* the part of the animal burned in sacrifices. The poetic form of this verse and the next recalls the oracles of the "writing" prophets (see Hos 6.6; Am 5.21–24; Mic 6.6–8). **23:** The *divination* condemned here is often related to foreign idolatry (see Deut 18.9–14). *Rebellion* and *stubbornness,* like *divination,* involve turning away from the LORD. **26:** This verse illustrates a narrative technique known to later rabbinic writers as "measure for measure"; Saul's punishment corresponds to his sin (both labeled "rejection"). See also v. 33. **27–28:** Grasping the *hem* of a person's garment was a way of submitting or pleading. Samuel uses the torn hem as an object lesson. The *neighbor* is David. Saul's robe is symbolic of his kingdom and becomes a literary motif in 1 Samuel (see ch 24). **29:** *The Glory of Israel,* an epithet for the LORD. The message of the verse seems to contradict the larger context in which the LORD has changed his mind about Saul being king. Some scholars address this contradiction by positing v. 29 as a late pious gloss. **33:** Samuel's dismemberment of Agag *before the LORD* was a ritual execution, perhaps for war crimes or violation of a treaty. **35:** *Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death,* anticipating ch 28 but in tension with 19.18–24.

16.1–13: The anointing of David. 1: *Fill your horn with oil,* fine olive oil carried in a ram's horn was used for



Chs 16–28: David's early career and his flight from Saul.

with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' [3] Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." [4] Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" [5] He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

[6] When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is now before the LORD."[a] [7] But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." [8] Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." [9] Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." [10] Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." [11] Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." [12] He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." [13] Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

[14] Now the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. [15] And Saul's servants said to him, "See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. [16] Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better." [17] So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me." [18] One of the young men answered,

[a] Heb *him*

anointing a new king. **4–5:** Jesse seems to be among the *elders* or civic leaders of Bethlehem. Their *trembling* is perhaps because they suspect the nature of Samuel's mission and fear that his visit will bring consequences from Saul. Or perhaps they are afraid that he has come to condemn them for some wrongdoing. **6–7:** Eliab's height and good looks are reminiscent of Saul, whom the LORD has rejected as king. God is more impressed with inner qualities or the *heart,* which Samuel cannot know. **8–9:** Samuel is likely using some device like the Urim and Thummim to determine whether each of Jesse's sons is the chosen one. **10:** This verse and 17.12 credit Jesse with eight sons, while 1 Chr 2.13–15 mentions only seven. As the seventh son David would have been seen as specially blessed. His description as the eighth son may highlight his humble origins. **11:** *Youngest* may also mean "the smallest" and contrasts David with Saul. *Keeping the sheep,* shepherd was a common metaphor for a king (e.g., 2 Sam 5.2). **12:** *Ruddy* means "reddish" of hair and complexion (see Gen 25.25). *Handsome,* see 9.2n. **13:** *Spirit of the LORD*, see 10.5–7.

16.14–23: David wins a position at Saul's court. 14: The departure of *the spirit of the LORD* from Saul (cf. 10.5–7n) and its replacement by an *evil spirit from the LORD* further contrasts Saul and David (v. 13). The evil spirit may describe mental illness. The theological point is that the LORD abandoned Saul. **16:** *Lyre,* a hand-held stringed instrument. Musicians were thought to ward off evil spirits. **18:** *A man of valor,* a "nobleman" or "man of wealth" (9.1). *Prudent in speech* implies both eloquence and cleverness. *The LORD is with him,* a central theme

"I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him." 19 So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David who is with the sheep." 20 Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul. 21 And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. 22 Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." 23 And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

17 Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. 2 Saul and the Israelites gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks against the Philistines. 3 The Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. 4 And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six[a] cubits and a span. 5 He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. 6 He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. 7 The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him. 8 He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." 10 And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together." 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

12 Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years.[b] 13 The three eldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle; the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. 14 David was the youngest; the three eldest followed Saul, 15 but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. 16 For forty days the

[a] MT: Q Ms Gk *four*
[b] Gk Syr: Heb *among men*

of the David story. **19:** David's role as a shepherd (see v. 11n) again hints at his future as king. **21:** *Armor-bearer* indicates David's skill as a warrior and his closeness to Saul.

17.1–58: David defeats the Philistine champion. An initial version of this story in vv. 1–11,32–49,51–54 has been extensively supplemented in the Hebrew text by vv. 12–31,50,55–58; 18.1–5. The supplementary material is absent from the Greek translation (the Septuagint, or LXX). Its addition has caused inconsistencies relating to David's presence in Saul's army, the way in which the Philistine died, and Saul's acquaintance with David. **4:** *Goliath,* a Philistine name, occurs only here and in v. 23, which is supplemental. Otherwise, David's opponent is called "the Philistine." The name has come into the story from 2 Sam 21.19, which says that a certain Elhanan killed Goliath. *Six cubits and a span,* about 9.5 ft (3 m). The Greek reading, "four cubits and a span," (6.6 ft [2 m]) is more realistic and probably original. The number "six" was mistakenly imported here (in place of "four") from v. 7. David's small stature contrasts with Goliath's as with Saul's. **5–7:** The armor described here reflects items from different armies at different times and is designed to give an imposing picture of the Philistine. **5:** *Five thousand shekels,* ca. 125 lb (57 kg). **6:** *Greaves*, armor for the shins. *Javelin,* better: "scimitar." **7:** The spear's description is borrowed from 2 Sam 21.19. *A weaver's beam* may refer to size or to a leather thong attached to some spears to facilitate hurling. *Six hundred shekels of iron,* ca. 15 lb (7 kg). **12:** *Ephrathite*s, a subgroup within the Calebite clan, which was part of the tribe of Judah. The introduction of David suggests the beginning of a once independent version of the story. **14–15:** Here, David is a shepherd boy running errands rather than a

Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.

17 Jesse said to his son David, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers; 18 also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See how your brothers fare, and bring some token from them."

19 Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. 20 David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, took the provisions, and went as Jesse had commanded him. He came to the encampment as the army was going forth to the battle line, shouting the war cry. 21 Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. 22 David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, ran to the ranks, and went and greeted his brothers. 23 As he talked with them, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.

24 All the Israelites, when they saw the man, fled from him and were very much afraid. 25 The Israelites said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give him his daughter and make his family free in Israel." 26 David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" 27 The people answered him in the same way, "So shall it be done for the man who kills him."

28 His eldest brother Eliab heard him talking to the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David. He said, "Why have you come down? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart; for you have come down just to see the battle." 29 David said, "What have I done now? It was only a question." 30 He turned away from him toward another and spoke in the same way; and the people answered him again as before.

31 When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul; and he sent for him. 32 David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." 33 Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." 34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, 35 I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. 36 Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." 37 David said, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you!"

38 Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. 39 David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them." So David removed them. 40 Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the

warrior as in 16.14–23. **16:** In this supplementary version of the story, the Philistine had been challenging the Israelites *for forty days,* while the initial version had David fight him the first time he comes out. **17:** *An ephah,* ca. .6 bu (23 l). **18:** *Some token,* a personal effect showing that the brothers were well. **25:** *Free in Israel* means exempt from slavery and from taxes and compulsory military service. **31:** *Saul* appears for the first time in the story here. Though king of Israel, he is eclipsed by David. **32:** *Your servant,* a polite term for oneself before a superior. **38–39:** David's inability to move in Saul's armor emphasizes his lack of experience as a soldier. It also shows Saul's failure to understand that David's advantage lay in his mobility. **40:** *His staff,* a shepherd's staff, not a weapon. The Philistine sees it as a stick (v. 43). *Wadi,* a dry streambed. The *sling* was not a toy but a standard weapon of ancient warfare. It consisted of two cords attached to a pouch from which a stone could be hurled a

wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

41 The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. 42 When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. 43 The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44 The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." 45 But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47 and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's and he will give you into our hand."

48 When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. 49 David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. 51 Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. 52 The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath[a] and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. 53 The Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp. 54 David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armor in his tent.

55 When Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this young man?" Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know." 56 The king said, "Inquire whose son the stripling is." 57 On David's return from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with the head of the Philistine in his hand. 58 Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

18 When David[b] had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. 2 Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. 3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. 4 Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *Gai*
[b] Heb *he*

considerable distance with great force and accuracy (Judg 20.16). **41–47:** Ancient warfare included taunting and trying to demoralize one's enemy. David's speech (vv. 45–47) is religious in nature and promises retribution for the Philistine's defiance of the LORD. David says he does not need the Philistine's arms because the LORD fights for him. The Philistine is distracted by David's staff (v. 43) and overlooks his real weapon, the sling. **49:** David's stone strikes the Philistine in the spot where he is vulnerable. David's speech shows that this is understood as God's doing. **50–51:** These verses make it appear as though David killed the Philistine twice, once with the sling stone (v. 50) and once by beheading him with his own sword (v. 51). The repetition results from the combination of two versions of the story, but v. 50 can be read as an overview of the entire episode. **54:** *Jerusalem,* an anachronism, since Jerusalem was conquered after David became king of Israel (2 Sam 5.6–9). *His tent,* perhaps read "the tent (shrine) of Yahweh." Goliath's sword later surfaces with the priests at Nob (21.9). **55:** *Whose son is this young man?,* idiomatic for "Who is this?" It indicates the story's originally independent nature, since according to 16.14–23 Saul and David already had a close relationship.

18.1–30: Saul becomes jealous of David. 1–3: *Loved* implies political loyalty in addition to personal affec-

he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. 5 David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; as a result, Saul set him over the army. And all the people, even the servants of Saul, approved.

6 As they were coming home, when David returned from killing the Philistine, the women came out of all the towns of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments.[a] 7 And the women sang to one another as they made merry,

"Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands."

8 Saul was very angry, for this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; what more can he have but the kingdom?" 9 So Saul eyed David from that day on.

10 The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand; 11 and Saul threw the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice.

12 Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul. 13 So Saul removed him from his presence, and made him a commander of a thousand; and David marched out and came in, leading the army. 14 David had success in all his undertakings; for the LORD was with him. 15 When Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in awe of him. 16 But all Israel and Judah loved David; for it was he who marched out and came in leading them.

17 Then Saul said to David, "Here is my elder daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife; only be valiant for me and fight the LORD's battles." For Saul thought, "I will not raise a hand against him; let the Philistines deal with him." 18 David said to Saul, "Who am I and who are my kinsfolk, my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" 19 But at the time when Saul's daughter Merab should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife.

20 Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. Saul was told, and the thing pleased him. 21 Saul thought, "Let me give her to him that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David a second time,[b] "You shall now be my son-in-law." 22 Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David in private and say, 'See, the king is delighted with you, and all his servants love you; now then, become the king's son-in-law.'" 23 So Saul's servants reported these words to David in private. And David said, "Does it seem to you a little thing to

[a] Or *triangles,* or *three-stringed instruments*
[b] Heb *by two*

tion. **4:** Jonathan's royal robe and armor represent his status as crown prince. David is thus depicted as Saul's true successor, by the initiative of Jonathan himself. But David does not usurp the throne (see 17.38–39 where he does not wear Saul's armor). **6:** *As they were coming home, when David returned from killing the Philistine,* the continuation of ch 17, showing that vv. 1–5 are an interruption of the initial narrative and part of the supplemental material in ch 17 (not found in the LXX). **7:** *David* has slain *his ten thousands,* but David has killed only the single Philistine, Goliath. This is another indication of the interpolation of ch 17's portrait of David as a young shepherd rather than a warrior. **9:** *Saul eyed David* means that Saul was suspicious of David. **10–11:** These verses are also supplemental (and lacking in the LXX); initially, Saul's attempt to kill David with his spear (19.8–10) provided the climax to a series of subtle moves against David. *He raved,* lit. "he prophesied," referring to ecstatic behavior. **13–14:** Saul promotes David because he is afraid to have David nearby and hopes that David will be killed in battle. *Marched out and came in,* an idiom for "went to war." **16:** *All Israel and Judah loved David* expresses political loyalty and anticipates David's rule over both north and south (2 Sam 5.5). The army was devoted to David because of his military success. **17–19:** These verses are supplemental; they are not found in the LXX. If these verses are related to 17.25, Saul has changed the conditions of his promise. David's response in v. 18 shows his humility and lack of ambition to be king. *Son-in-law to the king* was an important political position as a potential heir to the throne. In the end (v. 19), Saul reneges on his promise despite David's heroic deeds. **20:** *Michal,* Saul's younger daughter. **21:** This plan of Saul's is slightly more direct than his hope that David's promotion over the army would lead to his death. *Therefore Saul said to David a second time, "You shall now be my son-in-law,"* an

become the king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man and of no repute?" [24] The servants of Saul told him, "This is what David said." [25] Then Saul said, "Thus shall you say to David, 'The king desires no marriage present except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged on the king's enemies.'" Now Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. [26] When his servants told David these words, David was well pleased to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired, [27] David rose and went, along with his men, and killed one hundred[a] of the Philistines; and David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. Saul gave him his daughter Michal as a wife. [28] But when Saul realized that the LORD was with David, and that Saul's daughter Michal loved him, [29] Saul was still more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy from that time forward.

[30] Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle; and as often as they came out, David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his fame became very great.

19 Saul spoke with his son Jonathan and with all his servants about killing David. But Saul's son Jonathan took great delight in David. [2] Jonathan told David, "My father Saul is trying to kill you; therefore be on guard tomorrow morning; stay in a secret place and hide yourself. [3] I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you; if I learn anything I will tell you." [4] Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul, saying to him, "The king should not sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you; [5] for he took his life in his hand when he attacked the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great victory for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced; why then will you sin against an innocent person by killing David without cause?" [6] Saul heeded the voice of Jonathan; Saul swore, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death." [7] So Jonathan called David and related all these things to him. Jonathan then brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.

[8] Again there was war, and David went out to fight the Philistines. He launched a heavy attack on them, so that they fled before him. [9] Then an evil spirit from the LORD came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand, while David was playing music. [10] Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear; but he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall. David fled and escaped that night.

[11] Saul sent messengers to David's house to keep watch over him, planning to kill him in the morning. David's wife Michal told him, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." [12] So Michal let David down through the window; he fled away and escaped. [13] Michal took an idol[b] and laid it on the bed; she put a net[c] of goats' hair on its head, and covered it with the clothes. [14] When Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick." [15] Then Saul sent the messengers to see David for themselves. He said, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him." [16] When the messengers came in, the idol[d] was in the bed, with the covering[c] of goats'

[a] Gk Compare 2 Sam 3.14: Heb *two hundred*
[b] Heb *took the teraphim*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Heb *the teraphim*

editorial addition explaining vv. 17–19. **23–25:** The *marriage present* ("bride-price") was set by the bride's father and paid by the groom. The use of foreskins as a bride-price plays on the references to the Philistines as uncircumcised (14.6; 31.4). **26:** *David was well pleased to be the king's son-in-law,* despite his claim to lack of ambition. **28:** *Michal loved him,* Michal's affection also entailed political loyalty.

19.1–24: Saul actively seeks David's life. 5: Killing an innocent person could bring God's wrath . Jonathan emphasizes that David is *innocent,* and Saul has no cause to kill him. **6:** *Saul swore,* an oath was a serious matter as it often involved the deity. In 1 Samuel, however, Saul consistently breaks his oaths. **9–10:** Cf. 16.23. **11–17:** This incident follows naturally upon the marriage in 18.20–29. **12:** The house was evidently built into the city wall (see Josh 2.15), so that David went *through the window* and escaped from the city. **13:** *An idol* (lit. "teraphim"), household gods (see Gen. 31.19–35n.; Judg 17.5.). The one used by Michal seems to have been close to life-size.

hair on its head. [17] Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me like this, and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?" Michal answered Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go; why should I kill you?'"

[18] Now David fled and escaped; he came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. He and Samuel went and settled at Naioth. [19] Saul was told, "David is at Naioth in Ramah." [20] Then Saul sent messengers to take David. When they saw the company of the prophets in a frenzy, with Samuel standing in charge of[a] them, the spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also fell into a prophetic frenzy. [21] When Saul was told, he sent other messengers, and they also fell into a frenzy. Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also fell into a frenzy. [22] Then he himself went to Ramah. He came to the great well that is in Secu;[b] he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" And someone said, "They are at Naioth in Ramah." [23] He went there, toward Naioth in Ramah; and the spirit of God came upon him. As he was going, he fell into a prophetic frenzy, until he came to Naioth in Ramah. [24] He too stripped off his clothes, and he too fell into a frenzy before Samuel. He lay naked all that day and all that night. Therefore it is said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

20 David fled from Naioth in Ramah. He came before Jonathan and said, "What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin against your father that he is trying to take my life?" [2] He said to him, "Far from it! You shall not die. My father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me; and why should my father hide this from me? Never!" [3] But David also swore, "Your father knows well that you like me; and he thinks, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, or he will be grieved.' But truly, as the LORD lives and as you yourself live, there is but a step between me and death." [4] Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you." [5] David said to Jonathan, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at the meal; but let me go, so that I may hide in the field until the third evening. [6] If your father misses me at all, then say, 'David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city; for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.' [7] If he says, 'Good!' it will be well with your servant; but if he is angry, then know that evil has been determined by him. [8] Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a sacred covenant[c] with you. But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself; why should you bring me to your father?" [9] Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! If I knew that it was decided by my father that evil should come upon you, would I not tell you?" [10] Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?" [11] Jonathan replied to David, "Come, let us go out into the field." So they both went out into the field.

[12] Jonathan said to David, "By the LORD, the God of Israel! When I have sounded out my father, about this time tomorrow, or on the third day, if he is well disposed toward David, shall I not then send and disclose it to you?

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Gk reads *to the well of the threshing floor on the bare height*
[c] Heb *a covenant of the* LORD

17: Michal lies to protect herself. A threat from David does not explain her trick with the bed after his departure. **18:** *Ramah,* Samuel's hometown, was about 2 mi (3 km) north of Gibeah. It is unlikely that David would have fled there rather than south to his home in Bethlehem; the story is included for literary and theological reasons; it shows that the prophets—and God through them—are on David's side. *Naioth* may be not a proper name but a word meaning "camps" or "huts" where the prophets lived near Ramah. **20–24:** Frenzy, see 10.5–7n. **23:** *Spirit of God,* cf. 10.5–7n; 11.6; 16.14–16. **23–24:** *Is Saul also among the prophets?* here has a negative explanation (contrast 10.10–12). His loss of self-control and his nakedness are degrading. If Saul is among the prophets it is only because God is using prophecy to prevent him from harming David. **24:** *Samuel,* cf. 15.35.

20.1–42: The covenant between David and Jonathan. 2: Jonathan is unaware that Saul has tried to kill David and still believes that his father would not act without first consulting him. **3:** *You like me,* lit. "I have favor in your eyes" (see v. 29). **5:** *New moon,* a day of sacrificing and feasting; see Num 28.11–15; Am 8.5. **8:** David asks Jonathan to *deal kindly* with him. The term implies loyalty to a treaty, and David goes on to mention the cov-

13 But if my father intends to do you harm, the LORD do so to Jonathan, and more also, if I do
not disclose it to you, and send you away, so
that you may go in safety. May the LORD be
with you, as he has been with my father. 14 If I
am still alive, show me the faithful love of the
LORD; but if I die,[a] 15 never cut off your faith-
ful love from my house, even if the LORD were
to cut off every one of the enemies of David
from the face of the earth." 16 Thus Jonathan
made a covenant with the house of David,
saying, "May the LORD seek out the enemies
of David." 17 Jonathan made David swear again
by his love for him; for he loved him as he
loved his own life.

18 Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the
new moon; you will be missed, because your
place will be empty. 19 On the day after tomor-
row, you shall go a long way down; go to the
place where you hid yourself earlier, and
remain beside the stone there.[a] 20 I will shoot
three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot
at a mark. 21 Then I will send the boy, saying,
'Go, find the arrows.' If I say to the boy, 'Look,
the arrows are on this side of you, collect
them,' then you are to come, for, as the LORD
lives, it is safe for you and there is no danger.
22 But if I say to the young man, 'Look, the
arrows are beyond you,' then go; for the LORD
has sent you away. 23 As for the matter about
which you and I have spoken, the LORD is
witness[b] between you and me forever."

24 So David hid himself in the field. When
the new moon came, the king sat at the
feast to eat. 25 The king sat upon his seat, as
at other times, upon the seat by the wall.
Jonathan stood, while Abner sat by Saul's
side; but David's place was empty.

26 Saul did not say anything that day; for
he thought, "Something has befallen him; he
is not clean, surely he is not clean." 27 But on
the second day, the day after the new moon,
David's place was empty. And Saul said to his
son Jonathan, "Why has the son of Jesse not
come to the feast, either yesterday or today?"
28 Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly
asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem; 29 he
said, 'Let me go; for our family is holding
a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has
commanded me to be there. So now, if I have
found favor in your sight, let me get away,
and see my brothers.' For this reason he has
not come to the king's table."

30 Then Saul's anger was kindled against
Jonathan. He said to him, "You son of a
perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know
that you have chosen the son of Jesse to
your own shame, and to the shame of your
mother's nakedness? 31 For as long as the son
of Jesse lives upon the earth, neither you nor
your kingdom shall be established. Now send
and bring him to me, for he shall surely die."
32 Then Jonathan answered his father Saul,
"Why should he be put to death? What has he
done?" 33 But Saul threw his spear at him to
strike him; so Jonathan knew that it was the
decision of his father to put David to death.
34 Jonathan rose from the table in fierce
anger and ate no food on the second day of
the month, for he was grieved for David, and
because his father had disgraced him.

35 In the morning Jonathan went out into
the field to the appointment with David, and

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *witness*

enant between them. **13:** *The LORD do so to Jonathan and more also,* an oath formula. Jonathan swears that he will warn David. Jonathan's wish that the LORD be with David as he was with Saul hints that David will be king. **14–15:** *Faithful love,* "loyalty" (Heb "ḥesed")" the same word as in v. 8. *My house* means Jonathan's descendants. David's oath of loyalty to Jonathan's house explains his treatment of Mephibosheth in 2 Sam 9. **16:** *The enemies of David* include Saul! **17:** *Love* again expresses political loyalty. **18–22:** Jonathan will signal David secretly during his target practice. If Jonathan tells his servant retrieving the arrows that they are back toward Jonathan, it is safe for David to come out of hiding. But if Jonathan tells the servant to go farther, David should flee immediately. **26:** *He is not clean,* ritual impurity, which could be caused by a variety of factors, disqualified a person from participation in some religious ceremonies (Lev 11–15). **27:** *The son of Jesse,* a disdainful reference to David. **30:** *Chosen the son of Jesse,* Saul accuses Jonathan of treason. *Nakedness,* a euphemism for the genitals. **33:** Saul tries to kill Jonathan with his spear, exactly as he had tried to kill David (18.10–11; 19.8–10). **41–42a:** An addition reiterating the affection and loyalty between David and Jonathan. If they could have met openly like this, the previous signal would have been unnecessary.

with him was a little boy. 36 He said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows that I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. 37 When the boy came to the place where Jonathan's arrow had fallen, Jonathan called after the boy and said, "Is the arrow not beyond you?" 38 Jonathan called after the boy, "Hurry, be quick, do not linger." So Jonathan's boy gathered up the arrows and came to his master. 39 But the boy knew nothing; only Jonathan and David knew the arrangement. 40 Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said to him, "Go and carry them to the city." 41 As soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap[a] and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more.[b] 42 Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.'" He got up and left; and Jonathan went into the city.[c]

21 [d] David came to Nob to the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech came trembling to meet David, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one with you?" 2 David said to the priest Ahimelech, "The king has charged me with a matter, and said to me, 'No one must know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.' I have made an appointment[e] with the young men for such and such a place. 3 Now then, what have you at hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here." 4 The priest answered David, "I have no ordinary bread at hand, only holy bread—provided that the young men have kept themselves from women." 5 David answered the priest, "Indeed women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition; the vessels of the young men are holy even when it is a common journey; how much more today will their vessels be holy?" 6 So the priest gave him the holy bread; for there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the LORD, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

7 Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds.

8 David said to Ahimelech, "Is there no spear or sword here with you? I did not bring my sword or my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." 9 The priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you will take that, take it, for there is none here except that one." David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

10 David rose and fled that day from Saul; he went to King Achish of Gath. 11 The servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances,

'Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands'?"

12 David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of King Achish of Gath. 13 So he changed his behavior before them; he pretended to be mad when in their presence.[f] He

[a] Gk: Heb *from beside the south*
[b] Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] This sentence is 21.1 in Heb
[d] Ch 21.2 in Heb
[e] Q Ms Vg Compare Gk: Meaning of MT uncertain
[f] Heb *in their hands*

21.1–15: David escapes to Nob. 1: *Nob* was between Gibeah and Jerusalem. *Ahimelech,* the great-grandson of Eli, *came trembling to meet David* apparently because David was alone, suggesting his fugitive status. **4:** *Provided that the young men have kept themselves from women,* those involved in sacred activities, such as worship and preparing for holy war, were prohibited from engaging in sexual relations (see Ex 19.15). **5:** *Vessels,* probably a euphemism for the sexual organs. **6:** *Bread of the Presence*, see Ex 25.30. **7:** *Detained before the LORD* probably means *Doeg* had a vow to fulfill. The fact that he is an *Edomite* is ominous, because Edomites are often depicted as Israel's hated enemies. **9:** *The sword of Goliath,* see 17.54n. The *ephod* mentioned here seems to be an idol (Judg 8.27) rather than a priestly garment. **10:** *Achish,* a Philistine name. In chs 27–29, David is his trusted vassal. **11:** *The king of the land,* if it is not an anachronism, indicates that the Philistines already recognize David as a

scratched marks on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle run down his beard. 14 Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is mad; why then have you brought him to me? 15 Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"

22 David left there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; when his brothers and all his father's house heard of it, they went down there to him. 2 Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Those who were with him numbered about four hundred.

3 David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. He said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and mother come[a] to you, until I know what God will do for me." 4 He left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. 5 Then the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not remain in the stronghold; leave, and go into the land of Judah." So David left, and went into the forest of Hereth.

6 Saul heard that David and those who were with him had been located. Saul was sitting at Gibeah, under the tamarisk tree on the height, with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing around him. 7 Saul said to his servants who stood around him, "Hear now, you Benjaminites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? 8 Is that why all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a league with the son of Jesse, none of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as he is doing today." 9 Doeg the Edomite, who was in charge of Saul's servants, answered, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech son of Ahitub; 10 he inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

11 The king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and for all his father's house, the priests who were at Nob; and all of them came to the king. 12 Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub." He answered, "Here I am, my lord." 13 Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, by giving him bread and a sword, and by inquiring of God for him, so that he has risen against me, to lie in wait, as he is doing today?"

14 Then Ahimelech answered the king, "Who among all your servants is so faithful as David? He is the king's son-in-law, and is quick[b] to do your bidding, and is honored in your house. 15 Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him? By no means! Do not let the king impute anything to his servant or to any member of my father's house; for your servant has known nothing of all this, much or little." 16 The king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house." 17 The king said to the guard who stood around him, "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because their hand also is with David; they knew that he fled, and did not disclose it to me." But the servants of the king would not raise their hand to attack the priests of the LORD. 18 Then

[a] Syr Vg: Heb *come out*
[b] Heb *and turns aside*

ruler. The Philistines quote the song in 18.7. **13–15:** *To be mad* was to be divinely "touched" (see the references to Saul prophesying in 18.10–11; 19.23–24). Thus, the Philistines, fearing divine wrath, leave David alone. The story ridicules the Philistines, who cannot tell madness from sanity and who admit to having plenty of *madmen.*

22.1–23: David at Adullam; massacre of the priests of Nob. 1: *Cave,* possibly an error for "stronghold" (v. 4). *Adullam* served as David's headquarters. **2:** The wilderness of Judah around Adullam had long been a hideout of fugitives. **3–4:** The book of Ruth indicates that David had a Moabite ancestry. *Stronghold,* probably Adullam. **5:** *The prophet Gad,* see 2 Sam 24.11. **7:** *Son of Jesse,* a disparaging reference to David. Kings commonly rewarded their servants with *fields and vineyards* and military appointments. The *Benjaminites* can expect no such rewards if David becomes king because his native tribe is Judah. **10:** Ch 21 does not mention that Ahimelech *inquired of the LORD for* David, but the accusation (whether true or not) plays an important role in the confrontation to follow. **18:** Only *Doeg* (see 21.7) dares to attack the LORD's priests, because he is an *Edomite. Linen ephod,* a gar-

the king said to Doeg, "You, Doeg, turn and attack the priests." Doeg the Edomite turned and attacked the priests; on that day he killed eighty-five who wore the linen ephod. 19 Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; men and women, children and infants, oxen, donkeys, and sheep, he put to the sword.

20 But one of the sons of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. 21 Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. 22 David said to Abiathar, "I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I am responsible[a] for the lives of all your father's house. 23 Stay with me, and do not be afraid; for the one who seeks my life seeks your life; you will be safe with me."

23 Now they told David, "The Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and are robbing the threshing floors." 2 David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah." 3 But David's men said to him, "Look, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" 4 Then David inquired of the LORD again. The LORD answered him, "Yes, go down to Keilah; for I will give the Philistines into your hand." 5 So David and his men went to Keilah, fought with the Philistines, brought away their livestock, and dealt them a heavy defeat. Thus David rescued the inhabitants of Keilah.

6 When Abiathar son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, he came down with an ephod in his hand. 7 Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah. And Saul said, "God has given[b] him into my hand; for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars." 8 Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. 9 When David learned that Saul was plotting evil against him, he said to the priest Abiathar, "Bring the ephod here." 10 David said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, your servant has heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city on my account. 11 And now, will[c] Saul come down as your servant has heard? O LORD, the God of Israel, I beseech you, tell your servant." The LORD said, "He will come down." 12 Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" The LORD said, "They will surrender you." 13 Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, set out and left Keilah; they wandered wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition. 14 David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but the LORD[d] did not give him into his hand.

15 David was in the Wilderness of Ziph at Horesh when he learned that[e] Saul had come out to seek his life. 16 Saul's son Jonathan set out and came to David at Horesh; there he strengthened his hand through the LORD.[f] 17 He said to him, "Do not be afraid; for the hand of my father Saul shall not find you; you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be second to you; my father Saul also knows that this is so." 18 Then the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.

19 Then some Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and said, "David is hiding among us in the strongholds of Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon. 20 Now,

[a] Gk Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Gk Tg: Heb *made a stranger of*
[c] Q Ms Compare Gk: MT *Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will*
[d] Q Ms Gk: MT *God*
[e] Or *saw that*
[f] Compare Q Ms Gk: MT *God*

ment worn by priests (2.18) **19:** Saul devotes the LORD's priests to destruction. Ironically, this is what he failed to do against the Amalekites in ch 15 (see vv. 8–9,14,19). **20–23:** The one escapee is Abiathar in fulfillment of the oracle in 2.27–36.

23.1–13: David's relief of Keilah. 1: *Keilah,* an independent city within Philistine territory. *Threshing floors,* open-air surfaces where grain was separated from chaff. **2–5:** This episode illustrates the importance of Abiathar's ability to divine. David's inquiries require a yes-or-no answer, which could be determined through the *ephod* (v. 6). **7–13:** David receives forewarning from the ephod, which allows him to escape Saul. Saul, in contrast, has no ephod, and later his efforts to consult the LORD go unanswered (28.6) **17:** It is extraordinary and

O king, whenever you wish to come down, do so; and our part will be to surrender him into the king's hand." 21 Saul said, "May you be blessed by the LORD for showing me compassion! 22 Go and make sure once more; find out exactly where he is, and who has seen him there; for I am told that he is very cunning. 23 Look around and learn all the hiding places where he lurks, and come back to me with sure information. Then I will go with you; and if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah." 24 So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul.

David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. 25 Saul and his men went to search for him. When David was told, he went down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. When Saul heard that, he pursued David into the wilderness of Maon. 26 Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. David was hurrying to get away from Saul, while Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them. 27 Then a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come; for the Philistines have made a raid on the land." 28 So Saul stopped pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape.[a] 29 [b]David then went up from there, and lived in the strongholds of En-gedi.

24 When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the wilderness of En-gedi." 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to look for David and his men in the direction of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. 3 He came to the sheepfolds beside the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself.[c] Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. 4 The men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'" Then David went and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's cloak. 5 Afterward David was stricken to the heart because he had cut off a corner of Saul's cloak. 6 He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to raise my hand against him; for he is the LORD's anointed." 7 So David scolded his men severely and did not permit them to attack Saul. Then Saul got up and left the cave, and went on his way.

8 Afterwards David also rose up and went out of the cave and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground, and did obeisance. 9 David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of those who say, 'David seeks to do you harm'? 10 This very day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you into my hand in the cave; and some urged me to kill you, but I spared[d] you. I said, 'I will not raise my hand against my lord; for he is the LORD's anointed.' 11 See, my father, see the corner of your cloak in my hand; for by the fact that I cut off the corner of your cloak, and did not kill you, you may know for certain that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you are hunting me to take my life. 12 May the LORD judge between me and you! May the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against

[a] Or *Rock of Division*; meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Ch 24.1 in Heb
[c] Heb *to cover his feet*
[d] Gk Syr Tg Vg: Heb *it* (my eye) *spared*

unbelievable that Jonathan would admit that David would be king in his place. **18:** Cf. 20.16. **25–29:** This story illustrates the LORD's protection of David, even though the LORD is not mentioned. Saul's withdrawal just at the moment he has David trapped hints at divine intervention. The name of this place (v. 28) means either "rock of escape" or "rock of division." Both are appropriate to the story.

24.1–22: David spares Saul's life (cf. ch. 25). 2: *Three thousand,* see 4.2n. **3:** *To relieve himself,* lit. "to cover his feet," a denigrating portrayal of a king. **4a:** The prophecy cited by David's men is not recorded and could be their own invention. **4b–5:** These verses originally may have belonged after v. 7a. David's cutting off Saul's hem is symbolic for emasculation or usurpation of Saul's kingdom, which is why David's conscience bothers him. **6:** To attack *the Lord's anointed* (Saul) was to attack the LORD. **8:** *David bowed with his face to the ground, and did obeisance,* David thus shows the proper respect toward Saul as the LORD's anointed. **11:** *My father* is a respectful

you. [13] As the ancient proverb says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you. [14] Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A single flea? [15] May the LORD therefore be judge, and give sentence between me and you. May he see to it, and plead my cause, and vindicate me against you."

[16] When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Saul lifted up his voice and wept. [17] He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. [18] Today you have explained how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. [19] For who has ever found an enemy, and sent the enemy safely away? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. [20] Now I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. [21] Swear to me therefore by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not wipe out my name from my father's house." [22] So David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home; but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

25 Now Samuel died; and all Israel assembled and mourned for him. They buried him at his home in Ramah.

Then David got up and went down to the wilderness of Paran.

[2] There was a man in Maon, whose property was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. [3] Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was clever and beautiful, but the man was surly and mean; he was a Calebite. [4] David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. [5] So David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. [6] Thus you shall salute him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. [7] I hear that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing, all the time they were in Carmel. [8] Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your sight; for we have come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.'"

[9] When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David; and then they waited. [10] But Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today

address from the younger David; it may also imply David's right to inherit Saul's kingdom. **14:** *A dead dog? A single flea?* Deliberately ambiguous. David could be disparaging himself as insignificant, or he could be saying that Saul is mistaken if he thinks David is insignificant. **16:** Saul's reference to David as *my son* recalls their once close relationship and hints that David will be Saul's successor. **20:** Saul recognizes that David will succeed him. **21–22:** A new king commonly killed all the descendants of the previous king in order to be rid of potential rivals. David's oath not to wipe out Saul's descendants anticipates his treatment of Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9); see further 20.14–15n.

25.1a: The death of Samuel. An editor's note that prepares for ch 28.

25.1b–43: Nabal and Abigail. In chs 24 and 26 David refuses to kill Saul, but in ch 25 he is almost guilty of killing many innocent people in Nabal's household. **2:** Carmel, see 15.12n. Nabal, like Saul, is a rich and powerful man. **3:** *Calebite,* lit. "as his heart," possibly an allusion to vv. 36–37. The Calebites were the leading clan of Judah. "Calebite" is also very similar to the word for "dog," which may be significant in view of the idiom for males in v. 22 as those who urinate on walls. *Nabal,* meaning "fool" (v. 25), is an unlikely name for parents to give to a child. Either the name "Nabal" was invented as appropriate to this man's character, or it originally meant something different (there are several other possible meanings). Nabal is also similar to the Heb words for "wine bottle" and "corpse," and so may allude to Nabal's later death following his drunkenness (vv. 36–38). Nabal's wife, *Abigail,* is his complete opposite. The only other Abigail in the Bible is David's sister (1 Chr 2.16). **4–8:** *Shearing his sheep,* a time of celebration. David hopes that Nabal, in the spirit of the festival, will give a generous gift. This gift is more or less obligatory as payment for not harming Nabal's shepherds. Hence, David's request can be read as a kind of extortion. The *ten young men* give Nabal an idea of the size of gift David is ex-

who are breaking away from their masters.
11 Shall I take my bread and my water and the
meat that I have butchered for my shearers,
and give it to men who come from I do not
know where?" 12 So David's young men turned
away, and came back and told him all this.
13 David said to his men, "Every man strap on
his sword!" And every one of them strapped
on his sword; David also strapped on his
sword; and about four hundred men went
up after David, while two hundred remained
with the baggage.

14 But one of the young men told Abigail,
Nabal's wife, "David sent messengers out of
the wilderness to salute our master; and he
shouted insults at them. 15 Yet the men were
very good to us, and we suffered no harm,
and we never missed anything when we were
in the fields, as long as we were with them;
16 they were a wall to us both by night and by
day, all the while we were with them keeping
the sheep. 17 Now therefore know this and
consider what you should do; for evil has
been decided against our master and against
all his house; he is so ill-natured that no one
can speak to him."

18 Then Abigail hurried and took two
hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five sheep
ready dressed, five measures of parched
grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and
two hundred cakes of figs. She loaded them
on donkeys 19 and said to her young men, "Go
on ahead of me; I am coming after you." But
she did not tell her husband Nabal. 20 As she
rode on the donkey and came down under
cover of the mountain, David and his men
came down toward her; and she met them.
21 Now David had said, "Surely it was in vain
that I protected all that this fellow has in the
wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all
that belonged to him; but he has returned me
evil for good. 22 God do so to David[a] and more
also, if by morning I leave so much as one
male of all who belong to him."

23 When Abigail saw David, she hurried
and alighted from the donkey, and fell before
David on her face, bowing to the ground.
24 She fell at his feet and said, "Upon me
alone, my lord, be the guilt; please let your
servant speak in your ears, and hear the
words of your servant. 25 My lord, do not take
seriously this ill-natured fellow, Nabal; for
as his name is, so is he; Nabal[b] is his name,
and folly is with him; but I, your servant, did
not see the young men of my lord, whom you
sent.

26 "Now then, my lord, as the LORD lives,
and as you yourself live, since the LORD has
restrained you from bloodguilt and from tak-
ing vengeance with your own hand, now let
your enemies and those who seek to do evil
to my lord be like Nabal. 27 And now let this
present that your servant has brought to my
lord be given to the young men who follow
my lord. 28 Please forgive the trespass of your
servant; for the LORD will certainly make my
lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting
the battles of the LORD; and evil shall not be
found in you so long as you live. 29 If anyone
should rise up to pursue you and to seek
your life, the life of my lord shall be bound
in the bundle of the living under the care
of the LORD your God; but the lives of your
enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow
of a sling. 30 When the LORD has done to my

[a] Gk Compare Syr: Heb *the enemies of David*
[b] That is *Fool*

pecting—whatever ten men can carry; they may also be meant to intimidate Nabal. **10–11:** *Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse?* demean David as insignificant. Nabal goes on to call David a runaway slave and a vagabond. **14:** Nabal's own servants go to Abigail because they recognize him as ill-natured and untrustworthy. **18:** *Five measures* (Heb "se'ah"), about 1 bu (38 l). *Cakes,* clumps of dried *figs* rather than a baked product. **22:** David vows to annihilate every *male* (see v. 3n) in Nabal's household. Only the woman, Abigail, can prevent the tragedy. **23:** Abigail bows to David as before a king. **24:** Abigail is eloquent and tactful, calling herself David's *servant* (v. 24). **26:** This verse anticipates the conclusion of the story, according to which Nabal dies but not by David's hand. It may be out of place. **27:** Abigail diplomatically refers to the supplies she brings as a *present* for David's men. **28:** *Sure house* (see 2.35n.) suggests that Abigail knows David will be king. **29:** *If anyone should rise up to pursue you and to seek your life* alludes to Saul. The *bundle of the living,* the list of those who are alive. *Sling out* recalls David's victory in ch 17 and anticipates Nabal's death in 25.37. **30–31:** Abigail points out that shedding innocent blood would be an obstacle to David's kingship. *Prince,* the one designated as king. *When the LORD has dealt well with*

lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you prince over Israel, 31 my lord shall have no cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood without cause or for having saved himself. And when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant."

32 David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! 33 Blessed be your good sense, and blessed be you, who have kept me today from bloodguilt and from avenging myself by my own hand! 34 For as surely as the LORD the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there would not have been left to Nabal so much as one male." 35 Then David received from her hand what she had brought him; he said to her, "Go up to your house in peace; see, I have heeded your voice, and I have granted your petition."

36 Abigail came to Nabal; he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; so she told him nothing at all until the morning light. 37 In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him; he became like a stone. 38 About ten days later the LORD struck Nabal, and he died.

39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the LORD who has judged the case of Nabal's insult to me, and has kept back his servant from evil; the LORD has returned the evildoing of Nabal upon his own head." Then David sent and wooed Abigail, to make her his wife. 40 When David's servants came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, "David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife." 41 She rose and bowed down, with her face to the ground, and said, "Your servant is a slave to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." 42 Abigail got up hurriedly and rode away on a donkey; her five maids attended her. She went after the messengers of David and became his wife.

43 David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel; both of them became his wives. 44 Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Palti son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

26 Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "David is in hiding on the hill of Hachilah, which is opposite Jeshimon."[a] 2 So Saul rose and went down to the Wilderness of Ziph, with three thousand chosen men of Israel, to seek David in the Wilderness of Ziph. 3 Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is opposite Jeshimon[a] beside the road. But David remained in the wilderness. When he learned that Saul had come after him into the wilderness, 4 David sent out spies, and learned that Saul had indeed arrived. 5 Then David set out and came to the place where Saul had encamped; and David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner son of Ner, the commander of his army. Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him.

6 Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah,

[a] Or *opposite the wasteland*

my lord may refer to David's becoming king or ironically to Nabal's death. *Remember your servant* is a marriage proposal. **32–33:** David praises *the LORD* for sending Abigail because she saved him from committing murder and thus incurring *bloodguilt.* **35:** *I have granted your petition,* David already speaks as a king. **36:** The Heb word for *feast* is related to the root for "to drink," suggesting that drinking was the primary activity. *Like the feast of a king,* Nabal is again compared to a king. **37:** *When the wine had gone out of Nabal,* the name "Nabal" is similar to the word for wineskin in v. 18. *He became like a stone,* perhaps a coma, and another allusion to David's sling (ch 17). **43:** Saul's wife was also named *Ahinoam* (14.50). *Jezreel,* apparently a town near Carmel (Josh 15.56) rather than the northern valley of that name. **44:** *Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Palti son of Laish,* this notice illustrates Saul's enmity toward David and prepares for the story of Michal's return in 2 Sam 3.13–16.

26.1–25: David spares Saul's life again. This story is similar to the one in ch 24, and the two may be variants of a single original. In both, Saul is unknowingly defenseless before David, who is urged by his men to kill Saul but refuses because of Saul's status as the LORD's anointed. David then reveals to Saul that he could have killed him, and Saul expresses remorse for persecuting David and hints or states that David will succeed him as king.

"Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?" Abishai said, "I will go down with you." [7] So David and Abishai went to the army by night; there Saul lay sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the army lay around him. [8] Abishai said to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand today; now therefore let me pin him to the ground with one stroke of the spear; I will not strike him twice." [9] But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can raise his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?" [10] David said, "As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him down; or his day will come to die; or he will go down into battle and perish. [11] The LORD forbid that I should raise my hand against the LORD's anointed; but now take the spear that is at his head, and the water jar, and let us go." [12] So David took the spear that was at Saul's head and the water jar, and they went away. No one saw it, or knew it, nor did anyone awake; for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.

[13] Then David went over to the other side, and stood on top of a hill far away, with a great distance between them. [14] David called to the army and to Abner son of Ner, saying, "Abner! Will you not answer?" Then Abner replied, "Who are you that calls to the king?" [15] David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy your lord the king. [16] This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the LORD's anointed. See now, where is the king's spear, or the water jar that was at his head?"

[17] Saul recognized David's voice, and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king." [18] And he added, "Why does my lord pursue his servant? For what have I done? What guilt is on my hands? [19] Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the LORD who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering; but if it is mortals, may they be cursed before the LORD, for they have driven me out today from my share in the heritage of the LORD, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' [20] Now therefore, do not let my blood fall to the ground, away from the presence of the LORD; for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea, like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains."

[21] Then Saul said, "I have done wrong; come back, my son David, for I will never harm you again, because my life was precious in your sight today; I have been a fool, and have made a great mistake." [22] David replied, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and get it. [23] The LORD rewards everyone for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the LORD gave you into my hand today, but I would not raise my hand against the LORD's anointed. [24] As your life was precious today in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the LORD, and may he rescue me from all tribulation." [25] Then Saul said to David, "Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them." So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place.

27 David said in his heart, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than to escape to the land of the Philistines; then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand." [2] So David set out and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with

5: The army sleeps around the king in order to protect him. **6:** *Joab,* David's nephew (1 Chr 2.16), later the commander of his army. **8:** Ironically, the same *spear* that Saul used to try to kill David is now available for David to use against Saul. **9:** See 24.6n. **13:** *David went over to the other side,* if Saul pursues him he can lead Saul's army away from his own men. **19:** David curses anyone who caused Saul to pursue him, because this has driven him from the land of Israel, which is the LORD's *heritage.* Each god was believed to have his own nation and each nation its god. *Other gods,* the gods of countries outside Israel where David says he has been driven. **20:** *A partridge,* lit. "the caller." David calls to Saul from a mountain; cf. 24.14n. **25:** Saul's blessing hints that David will be king (cf. 24.20).

27.1–28.2: David becomes a vassal of the Philistines. This chapter is in tension with 21.10–15, in which

him, to King Achish son of Maoch of Gath.
3 David stayed with Achish at Gath, he and his
troops, every man with his household, and
David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel,
and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. 4 When
Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he
no longer sought for him.

5 Then David said to Achish, "If I have
found favor in your sight, let a place be given
me in one of the country towns, so that I
may live there; for why should your servant
live in the royal city with you?" 6 So that day
Achish gave him Ziklag; therefore Ziklag has
belonged to the kings of Judah to this day.
7 The length of time that David lived in the
country of the Philistines was one year and
four months.

8 Now David and his men went up and
made raids on the Geshurites, the Girzites,
and the Amalekites; for these were the
landed settlements from Telam[a] on the way
to Shur and on to the land of Egypt. 9 David
struck the land, leaving neither man nor
woman alive, but took away the sheep, the
oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the cloth-
ing, and came back to Achish. 10 When Achish
asked, "Against whom[b] have you made a
raid today?" David would say, "Against the
Negeb of Judah," or "Against the Negeb of the
Jerahmeelites," or, "Against the Negeb of the
Kenites." 11 David left neither man nor woman
alive to be brought back to Gath, thinking,
"They might tell about us, and say, 'David
has done so and so.'" Such was his practice
all the time he lived in the country of the
Philistines. 12 Achish trusted David, thinking,
"He has made himself utterly abhorrent to
his people Israel; therefore he shall always be
my servant."

28 In those days the Philistines gathered
their forces for war, to fight against
Israel. Achish said to David, "You know, of
course, that you and your men are to go out
with me in the army." 2 David said to Achish,
"Very well, then you shall know what your
servant can do." Achish said to David, "Very
well, I will make you my bodyguard for life."

3 Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had
mourned for him and buried him in Ramah,
his own city. Saul had expelled the mediums
and the wizards from the land. 4 The Philis-
tines assembled, and came and encamped at
Shunem. Saul gathered all Israel, and they en-
camped at Gilboa. 5 When Saul saw the army
of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart
trembled greatly. 6 When Saul inquired of the
LORD, the LORD did not answer him, not by
dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. 7 Then
Saul said to his servants, "Seek out for me a
woman who is a medium, so that I may go to
her and inquire of her." His servants said to
him, "There is a medium at Endor."

8 So Saul disguised himself and put on
other clothes and went there, he and two
men with him. They came to the woman by

[a] Compare Gk 15.4: Heb *from of old*
[b] Q Ms Gk Vg: MT lacks *whom*

David escapes from *Achish* by pretending to be mad. **27.3:** *Gath,* Goliath's home (17.4). **6:** Kings commonly gave land grants to faithful servants. *Ziklag* also guarded the southern frontier of Achish's territory. **8–12:** *The Negeb,* the southern wilderness area of Palestine. David conducts raids against non-Israelite peoples (v. 8). The mention of *Amalekites* is inconsistent with ch 15, in which they are all killed. David fools Achish by claiming to attack clans within Judah such as the "Kenizzites" (a better reading than *Kenites*) and *Jerahmeelites.* Thus, while Achish felt confident of David's loyalty because he thought David had betrayed his own people, the writer asserts that David's loyalty remained with Israel. **28.2:** *Then you shall know what your servant can do,* the statement is ambiguous. Achish thinks David is saying that he will show his potential against Israel. The reader knows that David is actually saying that in the heat of battle Achish will find out how David remains loyal to Israel.

28.3–25: Saul consults a spirit. 3: *Mediums* and *wizards* refer to persons who communicated with the dead; this is forbidden in Lev 19.31; 20.6,27; Deut 18.10. Ironically, Saul, who had *expelled* them, now seeks one out. **4:** *Shunem* and *Gilboa,* near the Jezreel Valley, far north of the Negeb where the previous stories were set. **6:** Three means of divining were *dreams,* or incubation, in which one slept at a holy place anticipating the answer to an inquiry; *Urim* or lots, used earlier in 14.41; and *prophets* like the man of God in 9.1–10.16. **7:** *A woman who is a medium,* lit. "a woman of spirits," using the word translated "medium" in v. 3. **11–12a:** An insertion identifying Samuel as the ghost. Originally, the woman recognized Saul because of his oath not to punish her in v. 10, a

night. And he said, "Consult a spirit for me, and bring up for me the one whom I name to you." 9 The woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the wizards from the land. Why then are you laying a snare for my life to bring about my death?" 10 But Saul swore to her by the LORD, "As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing." 11 Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He answered, "Bring up Samuel for me." 12 When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice; and the woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" 13 The king said to her, "Have no fear; what do you see?" The woman said to Saul, "I see a divine being[a] coming up out of the ground." 14 He said to her, "What is his appearance?" She said, "An old man is coming up; he is wrapped in a robe." So Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground, and did obeisance.

15 Then Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" Saul answered, "I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams; so I have summoned you to tell me what I should do." 16 Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy? 17 The LORD has done to you just as he spoke by me; for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbor, David. 18 Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD, and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you today. 19 Moreover the LORD will give Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me; the LORD will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines."

20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of the words of Samuel; and there was no strength in him, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night. 21 The woman came to Saul, and when she saw that he was terrified, she said to him, "Your servant has listened to you; I have taken my life in my hand, and have listened to what you have said to me. 22 Now therefore, you also listen to your servant; let me set a morsel of bread before you. Eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way." 23 He refused, and said, "I will not eat." But his servants, together with the woman, urged him; and he listened to their words. So he got up from the ground and sat on the bed. 24 Now the woman had a fatted calf in the house. She quickly slaughtered it, and she took flour, kneaded it, and baked unleavened cakes. 25 She put them before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

29 Now the Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, while the Israelites were encamped by the fountain that is in Jezreel. 2 As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, 3 the commanders of the Philistines said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, "Is this not David, the servant of King Saul of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years? Since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day." 4 But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him; and the commanders of the Philistines said to him, "Send the man back, so that he may return to the place that you have assigned to him; he shall not go down with us to battle, or else he may become an

[a] Or *a god*; or *gods*

promise that could only have been made by Saul. **13:** *Divine being,* a god or a ghost or spirit. *The ground,* better: "the underworld." **14:** *Robe,* Samuel's characteristic garment by which Saul recognizes him. **15:** *Disturbed me,* the spirits in the underworld were viewed as sleeping. **17–18:** See ch 15. **19:** *Tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me,* they will be dead. **20:** Saul's being *filled with fear* is unbecoming of the king and suggests that he is unfit for the role. **21:** *The woman* who is the medium is calmer and stronger than the *terrified* Saul. **24:** *A fatted calf in the house,* livestock were kept on the ground floor of houses with people's sleeping quarters on a second story.

29.1–11: The Philistines reject David. 2: *The lords of the Philistines,* the rulers of the five main Philistine cities. **3:** It is the *commanders* of the Philistine army who will actually be in battle, rather than the Philistine lords, who

adversary to us in the battle. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? 5 Is this not David, of whom they sing to one another in dances,

'Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands'?"

6 Then Achish called David and said to him, "As the LORD lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign; for I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me until today. Nevertheless the lords do not approve of you. 7 So go back now; and go peaceably; do nothing to displease the lords of the Philistines." 8 David said to Achish, "But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I should not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" 9 Achish replied to David, "I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God; nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, 'He shall not go up with us to the battle.' 10 Now then rise early in the morning, you and the servants of your lord who came with you, and go to the place that I appointed for you. As for the evil report, do not take it to heart, for you have done well before me.[a] Start early in the morning, and leave as soon as you have light." 11 So David set out with his men early in the morning, to return to the land of the Philistines. But the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

30 Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negeb and on Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag, burned it down, 2 and taken captive the women and all[b] who were in it, both small and great; they killed none of them, but carried them off, and went their way. 3 When David and his men came to the city, they found it burned down, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. 4 Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept, until they had no more strength to weep. 5 David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. 6 David was in great danger; for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in spirit for their sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

7 David said to the priest Abiathar son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. 8 David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" He answered him, "Pursue; for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue." 9 So David set out, he and the six hundred men who were with him. They came to the Wadi Besor, where those stayed who were left behind. 10 But David went on with the pursuit, he and four hundred men; two hundred stayed behind, too exhausted to cross the Wadi Besor.

11 In the open country they found an Egyptian, and brought him to David. They gave him bread and he ate; they gave him water to drink; 12 they also gave him a piece of

[a] Gk: Heb lacks *and go to the place… done well before me*
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *and all*

object to the presence of David and his men. *Hebrews,* see 4.6n. **5:** The same song as in 18.7. **6:** *As the LORD lives,* Achish, the Philistine, swears by Yahweh, the God of Israel! **8:** *The enemies of my lord the king,* Achish takes this as a reference to himself, but David means Saul. **10:** *The place that I appointed for you,* Ziklag. **11:** David and the Philistines separate and go in opposite directions. Thus the writer shows that David is far away from the battle and had nothing to do with Saul's death.

30.1–31: The burning of Ziklag and David's pursuit of the Amalekites. 1: *On the third day.* Ziklag was about 50 mi (80 km) south of Aphek (v. 1). Again the writer emphasizes David's distance from the battle where Saul was killed. The Amalekite *raid* on Ziklag may have been in retaliation for David's raids against them (27.8). This story is inconsistent with ch 15, in which the Amalekites were all destroyed. **2:** *Both small and great,* poor or unimportant and wealthy or socially prominent, a figure of speech (a merism) meaning "everyone." **6:** *Strengthened himself* may mean summoning courage as well as gathering support within the army. David is here depicted as an ideal ruler. **7–8:** *Ephod,* a device (see 23.2–5n) used by priests to divine the answers to yes-or-no questions. David's access to God through the ephod contrasts with Saul's lack of response from God in 28.6 and highlights the theme: "the LORD was with him (David)." **9:** *Wadi Besor,* a major watercourse south of Gaza,

fig cake and two clusters of raisins. When he had eaten, his spirit revived; for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. 13 Then David said to him, "To whom do you belong? Where are you from?" He said, "I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite. My master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago. 14 We had made a raid on the Negeb of the Cherethites and on that which belongs to Judah and on the Negeb of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag down." 15 David said to him, "Will you take me down to this raiding party?" He said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me, or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them."

16 When he had taken him down, they were spread out all over the ground, eating and drinking and dancing, because of the great amount of spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. 17 David attacked them from twilight until the evening of the next day. Not one of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled. 18 David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken; and David rescued his two wives. 19 Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken; David brought back everything. 20 David also captured all the flocks and herds, which were driven ahead of the other cattle; people said, "This is David's spoil."

21 Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the Wadi Besor. They went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. When David drew near to the people he saluted them. 22 Then all the corrupt and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may take his wife and children, and leave." 23 But David said, "You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given us; he has preserved us and handed over to us the raiding party that attacked us. 24 Who would listen to you in this matter? For the share of the one who goes down into the battle shall be the same as the share of the one who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike." 25 From that day forward he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel; it continues to the present day.

26 When David came to Ziklag, he sent part of the spoil to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, "Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD"; 27 it was for those in Bethel, in Ramoth of the Negeb, in Jattir, 28 in Aroer, in Siphmoth, in Eshtemoa, 29 in Racal, in the towns of the Jerahmeelites, in the towns of the Kenites, 30 in Hormah, in Bor-ashan, in Athach, 31 in Hebron, all the places where David and his men had roamed.

31 Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and many fell[a] on Mount Gilboa. 2 The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchishua, the sons of Saul. 3 The battle pressed hard upon Saul; the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by them. 4 Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, so that these uncircumcised may not come and thrust me through, and make sport of me." But his armor-bearer was unwilling; for he was terrified. So Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. 5 When his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him. 6 So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together on the same day.

[a] Heb *and they fell slain*

not far north of Egypt. **12:** *Fig cake,* see 25.18n. **14:** *Cherethites,* probably "Cretans," mercenaries from Crete, associated with the Philistines. **19:** *Small or great,* see v. 2n. **23–25:** An etiology for a custom in the writer's day. *A statute and an ordinance for Israel,* an illustration of David's kingly decisiveness and authority. **26–31:** David's gifts to the *elders* of these cities, all in southern Judah, would cause them to look favorably upon him when the time came to choose a king over Judah (2 Sam 2.4).

31.1–13: Saul's death. Compare 1 Chr 10 and 2 Sam 1. For the locations, see map on p. 452. **4:** *These uncircumcised,* a deprecating term for the Philistines. **5:** Although not condemned, suicide is rare in the Bible; see 2 Sam

7 When the men of Israel who were on the
other side of the valley and those beyond the
Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and
that Saul and his sons were dead, they for-
sook their towns and fled; and the Philistines
came and occupied them.

8 The next day, when the Philistines came
to strip the dead, they found Saul and his
three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. 9 They cut
off his head, stripped off his armor, and sent
messengers throughout the land of the Phi-
listines to carry the good news to the houses
of their idols and to the people. 10 They put
his armor in the temple of Astarte;[a] and they
fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan.
11 But when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead
heard what the Philistines had done to Saul,
12 all the valiant men set out, traveled all night
long, and took the body of Saul and the bod-
ies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan.
They came to Jabesh and burned them there.
13 Then they took their bones and buried
them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and
fasted seven days.

[a] Heb plural

17.23; 1 Kings 16.18; Mt 27.5. **9–10:** The Philistines humiliate Saul's corpse and credit their gods with the victory. *Astarte,* a Canaanite goddess. **11–13:** The men of Jabesh are likely moved to rescue Saul's body because of his rescue of their city at the beginning of his reign (10.27b–11.15). Cremation (vv. 12–13) was not practiced by the Israelites. They may have burned the bodies in this case to avoid further desecration of them by the Philistines. They *fasted seven days* apparently in mourning for Saul and his sons.

2 SAMUEL

NAME AND LOCATION IN CANON

First and Second Samuel were originally a single work, so that much of the information in the Introduction to 1 Samuel (pp. 399–400) pertains to 2 Samuel as well. The name of the book (as relating to the prophet Samuel) is even less appropriate for 2 Samuel, since Samuel dies before 1 Samuel ends and is never mentioned in 2 Samuel.

The division between 1 and 2 Samuel is artificial and was apparently based on considerations of length when it was first made in the LXX, where 2 Samuel bears the title 2 Kingdoms or 2 Reigns.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE OF COMPOSITION

Since Samuel dies in 1 Sam 25.1, 2 Samuel was traditionally ascribed to Nathan and Gad based on the mention in 1 Chr 29.29 of the "records" of these two prophets. Modern scholars typically regard the Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible (Joshua through 2 Kings, without Ruth) as the work of the Deuteronomistic Historian(s) or Dtr(s).

Scholars disagree about the number of editions and their dates for the Deuteronomistic History, though it is clear that the work was not completed before the Babylonian exile (586 BCE).

LITERARY HISTORY

The major critical issues in 2 Samuel revolve around chs 9–20. These chapters (or in some views chs 13–20), together with 1 Kings 1–2, have been dubbed the "Court History" or "Succession Narrative" (after their perceived intention of dealing with the question of who would succeed David as king). Many scholars have viewed this proposed source document as almost contemporaneous with the events it narrates. However, the extent and early date of this hypothetical source have been called into question because it is impossible to extract these chapters cleanly from the surrounding narrative and to see them as a separate source; there are, for example, ties between chs 9–20 and chs 2–4, such as the description of Mephibosheth's injury in 4.4 and 9.3 and the importance of the "sons of Zeruiah," Joab and his brothers. Questions of literary history also loom large in the consideration of ch 7, with its unconditional promise of a dynasty made to David. While scholars generally recognize this as a Deuteronomistic composition as it now stands, many of them think that underlying it is an older version of God's promise to David.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

Second Samuel can be divided into four sections.

Section one (1.1–5.5) describes how, after Saul's death (ch 1), David becomes king first of Judah (2.1–4a) and then, after a civil war that included the assassinations of Abner (ch 3) and Ishbaal (ch 4), of all Israel (5.1–5).

Section two (5.6–12.31) tells of David's annexation of Jerusalem (5.5–6.23), his interest in building a temple there resulting in the divine promise of a dynasty (ch 7), and his victories over surrounding peoples (chs 8–12), which are interrupted by the story of his affair with Bathsheba (11.2–12.25).

Section three (chs 13–20) recounts Absalom's revolt and that led by Sheba (ch 20).

Section four (chs 21–24), often considered an appendix, is a miscellaneous collection of narratives, military lists, and poems.

INTERPRETATION

Scholars and other readers disagree about the perspective on David in these chapters. Some contend that the pro-Davidic, apologetic character of 1 Samuel continues, as those who stand in David's way perish, though never by his own hand or order. Joab and the "sons of Zeruiah" are often blamed for the murders of David's enemies—Abner (3.26–30), Absalom (18.1–15), and Amasa (20.4–10)—while David is too tender for such deeds (3.39; 16.10; 19.22) and is deeply grieved by their deaths (3.31–37; 18.22–19.8). In this reading, the annihilation of Saul's line (recounted apologetically in 21.1–14, which once preceded ch 9) secures David's hold on the throne. Only Mephibosheth, Jonathan's crippled son, remains alive, and David keeps a watchful eye on him by bringing him to the royal court (ch 9). Even when David commits adultery with Bathsheba and arranges for the death of her husband, it has been argued, David's repentance is exemplary and is immedi-

ately accepted (12.13). However, other readers point precisely to David's adultery and his inability to control his children as evidence that the Court History paints both David and the monarchy in a very negative light. It is fair to say that 2 Samuel in its current form depicts David as a complex, highly ambiguous character who is blessed by the LORD.

GUIDE TO READING

As with 1 Samuel, the story in 2 Samuel is best read sequentially. Characterization exemplified by deeds and speeches is even more significant in 2 Samuel than in 1 Samuel. The array of characters can bewilder new readers, so that keeping tabs on the identities of characters and their relationship to David can be useful. Minute, seemingly insignificant details in the narrative are worthy of note as they often signal points of historical or literary significance beneath the surface. Readers do well to ask which characters—especially David—benefit from events that are reported and whether those characters may have been responsible for bringing them about. As in 1 Samuel, a narrative that "protests too much" may lead the critical reader to question whether apologetic interest has replaced historical accuracy. For example, David benefits from Abner's death (3.20–39), and the narrative's repeated assertion that David dismissed Abner in peace and knew nothing about Joab's plan to murder him may lead one to suspect that the narrator is trying to counter just such a charge and even to speculate that David had some role in Abner's death.

The final four chapters of 2 Samuel contain six passages arranged in symmetrical order: narrative, list, poem, poem, list, narrative. The list (23.1–7) provides David's "last words," in the tradition of other leading biblical characters.

Steven L. McKenzie

1 After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. [2] On the third day, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. When he came to David, he fell to the ground and did obeisance. [3] David said to him, "Where have you come from?" He said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." [4] David said to him, "How did things go? Tell me!" He answered, "The army fled from the battle, but also many of the army fell and died; and Saul and his son Jonathan also died." [5] Then David asked the young man who was reporting to him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan died?" [6] The young man reporting to him said, "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa; and there was Saul leaning on his spear, while the chariots and the horsemen drew close to him. [7] When he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. I answered, 'Here sir.' [8] And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' [9] He said to me, 'Come, stand over me and kill me; for convulsions have seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' [10] So I stood over him, and killed him, for I knew that he could not live after he had fallen. I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord."

[11] Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them; and all the men who were with him did the same. [12] They mourned and wept, and fasted until evening for Saul and for his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. [13] David said to the young man who had reported to him, "Where do you come from?" He answered, "I am the son of a resident alien, an Amalekite." [14] David

1.1–16: David learns of the death of Saul and Jonathan. Some scholars think this is a separate tradition of the account in 1 Sam 31, with which it disagrees. Another possibility is that the man who brings the news to David changes the story for his own benefit. **1.2:** Tearing clothes and scattering dust on the head were conventional signs of mourning. **6:** *The young man*'s claim that he *happened to be on Mount Gilboa* in the heat of battle is probably a lie (see v. 10). **8:** *Amalekite,* David has just come from successfully pursuing Amalekites (1 Sam 30), who are depicted as scavengers. It is ironic that an Amalekite killed Saul, who (according to 1 Sam 15) lost his kingship because he did not kill off the Amalekites. **10:** The Amalekite stripped Saul's corpse and brought the *crown* and

said to him, "Were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?" 15 Then David called one of the young men and said, "Come here and strike him down." So he struck him down and he died. 16 David said to him, "Your blood be on your head; for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the LORD's anointed.'"

17 David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. 18 (He ordered that The Song of the Bow[a] be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said:

19 Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places!
How the mighty have fallen!
20 Tell it not in Gath,
proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon;
or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice,
the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult.

21 You mountains of Gilboa,
let there be no dew or rain upon you,
nor bounteous fields![b]
For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,
the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more.

22 From the blood of the slain,
from the fat of the mighty,
the bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
nor the sword of Saul return empty.

23 Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
In life and in death they were not divided;
they were swifter than eagles,
they were stronger than lions.

24 O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
who clothed you with crimson, in luxury,
who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

25 How the mighty have fallen
in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan lies slain upon your high places.
26 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
greatly beloved were you to me;
your love to me was wonderful,
passing the love of women.

27 How the mighty have fallen,
and the weapons of war perished!

2 After this David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" The LORD said to him, "Go up." David said, "To which shall I go up?" He said, "To Hebron." 2 So David went up there, along with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. 3 David brought up the men who were with

[a] Heb *that The Bow*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

armlet, symbols of kingship, to David hoping for a reward. **12:** Fasting was another sign of mourning. **13–16:** As a *resident alien*, the Amalekite was subject to the same laws as an Israelite citizen, and therefore David holds him responsible for killing *the LORD's anointed.*

1.17–27: David's elegy over Saul and Jonathan. Many scholars consider plausible the text's attribution of authorship to David himself. **18:** *Song of the Bow,* the Hebrew has simply "bow." If not a copyist's mistake, this may refer to a type of song or a title. *Book of Jashar,* a lost collection of poems (see Josh 10.13). **19:** *Your glory*, an allusion to Saul and Jonathan. **20:** *Gath, Ashkelon,* Philistine cities. *Uncircumcised,* a disparaging term for the Philistines. **21:** *Mountains of Gilboa,* the site of the battle where Saul and Jonathan were killed. *Shield*s were made of leather and were *anointed with oil* to keep them battle-ready. **24:** Saul's reign brought prosperity to Israel. **26:** *Passing the love of women* expresses the closeness of David's relationship to Jonathan but does not necessarily imply a sexual relationship.

2.1–11: David becomes king of Judah. 1: *Inquired,* probably by means of the ephod and Urim and Thummim (1 Sam 14.3,41; 28.6; 30.7–8). *Hebron,* principal city of the Calebites (see Josh 14.13; Judg 1.20), the leading clan in Judah and also the traditional site of the tombs of Israel's ancestors (Gen 23.19; 25.9; 49.29–32). **2:** *Ahinoam of Jezreel, Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel,* see 1 Sam 25, esp. v. 43. Both women were from the Calebite region.

him, every one with his household; and they settled in the towns of Hebron. 4 Then the people of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

When they told David, "It was the people of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul," 5 David sent messengers to the people of Jabesh-gilead, and said to them, "May you be blessed by the LORD, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your lord, and buried him! 6 Now may the LORD show steadfast love and faithfulness to you! And I too will reward you because you have done this thing. 7 Therefore let your hands be strong, and be valiant; for Saul your lord is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."

8 But Abner son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, had taken Ishbaal[a] son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim. 9 He made him king over Gilead, the Ashurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, and over all Israel. 10 Ishbaal,[a] Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David. 11 The time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

12 Abner son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbaal[a] son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. 13 Joab son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. One group sat on one side of the pool, while the other sat on the other side of the pool. 14 Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men come forward and have a contest before us." Joab said, "Let them come forward." 15 So they came forward and were counted as they passed by, twelve for Benjamin and Ishbaal[a] son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. 16 Each grasped his opponent by the head, and thrust his sword in his opponent's side; so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim,[b] which is at Gibeon. 17 The battle was very fierce that day; and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten by the servants of David.

18 The three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Now Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle. 19 Asahel pursued Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left as he followed him. 20 Then Abner looked back and said, "Is it you, Asahel?" He answered, "Yes, it is." 21 Abner said to him, "Turn to your right or to your left, and seize one of the young men, and take his spoil." But Asahel would not turn away from following him. 22 Abner said again to Asahel, "Turn away from following me; why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I show my face to your brother Joab?" 23 But he refused to turn away. So Abner struck him in the stomach with the butt of his spear, so that the spear came out at his back. He fell there, and died where he lay. And all those who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died, stood still.

[a] Gk Compare 1 Chr 8.33; 9.39: Heb *Ish-bosheth*, "man of shame"

[b] That is *Field of Sword-edges*

Nabal had been a leading Calebite, and marriage to his wife strengthened David's claims to the throne of Judah. **4:** David's gifts to the elders of Judah (1 Sam 30.26–31) further helped his bid to be their king. *Jabesh-gilead,* see 1 Sam 11; 31.11–13. **5–7:** In wooing Jabesh-gilead, David is seeking to win over the strongest enclave of support for Saul. His overture to Jabesh is likely what sparked the military response by Abner (v. 12). **8:** *Ishbaal* (Heb "Ish-bosheth"), pious scribes substituted the word "boshet," meaning "shame," for the name of the Canaanite god Baal. But Heb "ba'al" can also simply mean "lord" and might have been an epithet for Yahweh. The original form of the name, Ishbaal (a difference of a single letter in Heb), is preserved in 1 Chr 8.33; 9.39 and in some early Greek translations. *Mahanaim* was east of the Jordan in Gilead. Abner was forced to go there because the Philistines controlled the territory west of the Jordan. **9:** This list of Ishbaal's domains is idealistic at best considering the Philistine domination. "Ashurites" should probably read "Geshurites." Geshur was the region north of Gilead.

2.12–32: War between Israel and Judah. 14–17: This contest, the exact nature of which is unclear, quickly turned to war. **18:** *Zeruiah,* David's sister, according to 1 Chr 2.16. **19–23:** Asahel's death provides the motive for

24 But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner. As
the sun was going down they came to the hill of
Ammah, which lies before Giah on the way to
the wilderness of Gibeon. 25 The Benjaminites
rallied around Abner and formed a single band;
they took their stand on the top of a hill. 26 Then
Abner called to Joab, "Is the sword to keep de-
vouring forever? Do you not know that the end
will be bitter? How long will it be before you
order your people to turn from the pursuit of
their kinsmen?" 27 Joab said, "As God lives, if you
had not spoken, the people would have contin-
ued to pursue their kinsmen, not stopping until
morning." 28 Joab sounded the trumpet and all
the people stopped; they no longer pursued
Israel or engaged in battle any further.

29 Abner and his men traveled all that night
through the Arabah; they crossed the Jordan,
and, marching the whole forenoon,[a] they
came to Mahanaim. 30 Joab returned from the
pursuit of Abner; and when he had gathered
all the people together, there were missing
of David's servants nineteen men besides
Asahel. 31 But the servants of David had killed
of Benjamin three hundred sixty of Abner's
men. 32 They took up Asahel and buried him
in the tomb of his father, which was at Beth-
lehem. Joab and his men marched all night,
and the day broke upon them at Hebron.

3 There was a long war between the house
of Saul and the house of David; David
grew stronger and stronger, while the house
of Saul became weaker and weaker.

2 Sons were born to David at Hebron: his
firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel;
3 his second, Chileab, of Abigail the widow of
Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom son of
Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur;
4 the fourth, Adonijah son of Haggith; the
fifth, Shephatiah son of Abital; 5 and the
sixth, Ithream, of David's wife Eglah. These
were born to David in Hebron.

6 While there was war between the house
of Saul and the house of David, Abner was
making himself strong in the house of Saul.
7 Now Saul had a concubine whose name
was Rizpah daughter of Aiah. And Ishbaal[b]
said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to
my father's concubine?" 8 The words of
Ishbaal[c] made Abner very angry; he said,
"Am I a dog's head for Judah? Today I keep
showing loyalty to the house of your father
Saul, to his brothers, and to his friends, and
have not given you into the hand of David;
and yet you charge me now with a crime
concerning this woman. 9 So may God do
to Abner and so may he add to it! For just
what the LORD has sworn to David, that
will I accomplish for him, 10 to transfer the
kingdom from the house of Saul, and set
up the throne of David over Israel and over
Judah, from Dan to Beer-sheba." 11 And Ish-
baal[b] could not answer Abner another word,
because he feared him.

12 Abner sent messengers to David at
Hebron,[d] saying, "To whom does the land be-

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *And he*
[c] Gk Compare 1 Chr 8.33; 9.39: Heb *Ish-bosheth*, "man of shame"
[d] Gk: Heb *where he was*

Joab's murder of Abner in 3.26–30. **29:** *Arabah,* the rift valley of which the Jordan valley is a part.

3.1–5: David's sons. 1: The suggestion that there was *a long war* indicates that Saul and his family received more popular support than the book of 1 Samuel might imply. **2:** *Amnon,* see ch 13. *Ahinoam,* see 1 Sam 25.43; 2 Sam 2.2. **3:** Nothing more is known of *Chileab,* who apparently died young; in the LXX his name is Dalouia, and in 1 Chr 3.1 he is called Daniel. *Abigail,* see 1 Sam 25. *Absalom,* see chs 13–18. *Geshur,* see 2.9n. David's marriage to *Maacah* indicates that he had a political alliance with her father, *King Talmai.* **4–5:** *Adonijah,* see 1 Kings 1. *Shephatiah* and *Ithream* are mentioned only here and in 1 Chr 3.3.

3.6–39: Abner's death. 7: *Concubine,* a woman (usually a slave) acquired for sexual purposes. To sleep with a member of the royal harem was to claim the throne (see 16.21–22; 1 Kings 2.13–25). Hence, Ishbaal's question is tantamount to an accusation of treason. **8:** *Dog's head,* used only here in the Bible, this expression is obviously reproachful, but its origin is unknown, although comparison to a dog or a dead dog is a frequent form of self-deprecation (see 9.8; 2 Kings 18.3). Abner does not deny Ishbaal's accusation but is contemptuous. Although the power is his (2.8–9), he has been loyal to Ishbaal. **10:** *From Dan to Beer-sheba,* the traditional northern and southern limits of Israel. **12:** Abner offers to join David and bring the army with him. The author thereby shows that David had no motive for killing Abner. **13:** David demands the return of *Saul's daughter Michal* because

long? Make your covenant with me, and I will give you my support to bring all Israel over to you." [13] He said, "Good; I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you: you shall never appear in my presence unless you bring Saul's daughter Michal when you come to see me." [14] Then David sent messengers to Saul's son Ishbaal,[a] saying, "Give me my wife Michal, to whom I became engaged at the price of one hundred foreskins of the Philistines." [15] Ishbaal[a] sent and took her from her husband Paltiel the son of Laish. [16] But her husband went with her, weeping as he walked behind her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go back home!" So he went back.

[17] Abner sent word to the elders of Israel, saying, "For some time past you have been seeking David as king over you. [18] Now then bring it about; for the LORD has promised David: Through my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from all their enemies." [19] Abner also spoke directly to the Benjaminites; then Abner went to tell David at Hebron all that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin were ready to do.

[20] When Abner came with twenty men to David at Hebron, David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. [21] Abner said to David, "Let me go and rally all Israel to my lord the king, in order that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires." So David dismissed Abner, and he went away in peace.

[22] Just then the servants of David arrived with Joab from a raid, bringing much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David at Hebron, for David[b] had dismissed him, and he had gone away in peace. [23] When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was told Joab, "Abner son of Ner came to the king, and he has dismissed him, and he has gone away in peace." [24] Then Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Abner came to you; why did you dismiss him, so that he got away? [25] You know that Abner son of Ner came to deceive you, and to learn your comings and goings and to learn all that you are doing."

[26] When Joab came out from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah; but David did not know about it. [27] When Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gateway to speak with him privately, and there he stabbed him in the stomach. So he died for shedding[c] the blood of Asahel, Joab's[d] brother. [28] Afterward, when David heard of it, he said, "I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the LORD for the blood of Abner son of Ner. [29] May the guilt[e] fall on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house; and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge, or who is leprous,[f] or who holds a spindle, or who falls by the sword, or who lacks food!" [30] So Joab and his brother Abishai murdered Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.

[31] Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, "Tear your clothes, and put on sackcloth, and mourn over Abner." And King David followed the

[a] Heb *Ish-bosheth*
[b] Heb *he*
[c] Heb lacks *shedding*
[d] Heb *his*
[e] Heb *May it*
[f] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

it is through her that he claims a right to Saul's kingdom. **14:** See 1 Sam 18.20–29. **15:** It is not clear why *Ish-baal* returns Michal to David. Some scholars have suggested that he was under legal obligation. *Paltiel,* or Palti (1 Sam 25.44). **17:** *The elders of Israel,* the tribal leaders. **18:** *The Philistines,* Israel's principal enemy in 1 Samuel, whose defeat of Saul (1 Sam 31) meant that they were still a problem for David, which he will resolve in 5.17–25; cf. 21.15–22. **19:** *Benjamin,* the tribe of both Saul and Abner; they would be the most reluctant to make David, a non-Benjaminite, king. **21:** *In peace,* repeated in the following verses; the writer emphasizes (perhaps too much) David's noninvolvement in Abner's death. **25:** *Comings and goings,* military maneuvers. Joab accuses Abner of spying. **26–27:** The writer stresses that Joab, seeking to avenge his brother (2.18–23), acted alone. Some have suggested that Joab also feared losing his position as army commander to Abner (see 19.13; 20.8–10). **29:** While David curses Joab, he does not now punish him (but see 1 Kings 2.5–6). *Spindle,* better: "crutch." **30:** *Abishai* is not mentioned in the story but may have helped Joab plan Abner's murder. **31:** *Sackcloth,* material worn by

bier. 32 They buried Abner at Hebron. The king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. 33 The king lamented for Abner, saying,

"Should Abner die as a fool dies?
34 Your hands were not bound,
your feet were not fettered;
as one falls before the wicked
you have fallen."

And all the people wept over him again. 35 Then all the people came to persuade David to eat something while it was still day; but David swore, saying, "So may God do to me, and more, if I taste bread or anything else before the sun goes down!" 36 All the people took notice of it, and it pleased them; just as everything the king did pleased all the people. 37 So all the people and all Israel understood that day that the king had no part in the killing of Abner son of Ner. 38 And the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? 39 Today I am powerless, even though anointed king; these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too violent for me. The LORD pay back the one who does wickedly in accordance with his wickedness!"

4 When Saul's son Ishbaal[a] heard that Abner had died at Hebron, his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed. 2 Saul's son had two captains of raiding bands; the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab. They were sons of Rimmon a Benjaminite from Beeroth—for Beeroth is considered to belong to Benjamin. 3 (Now the people of Beeroth had fled to Gittaim and are there as resident aliens to this day).

4 Saul's son Jonathan had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled; and, in her haste to flee, it happened that he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth.[b]

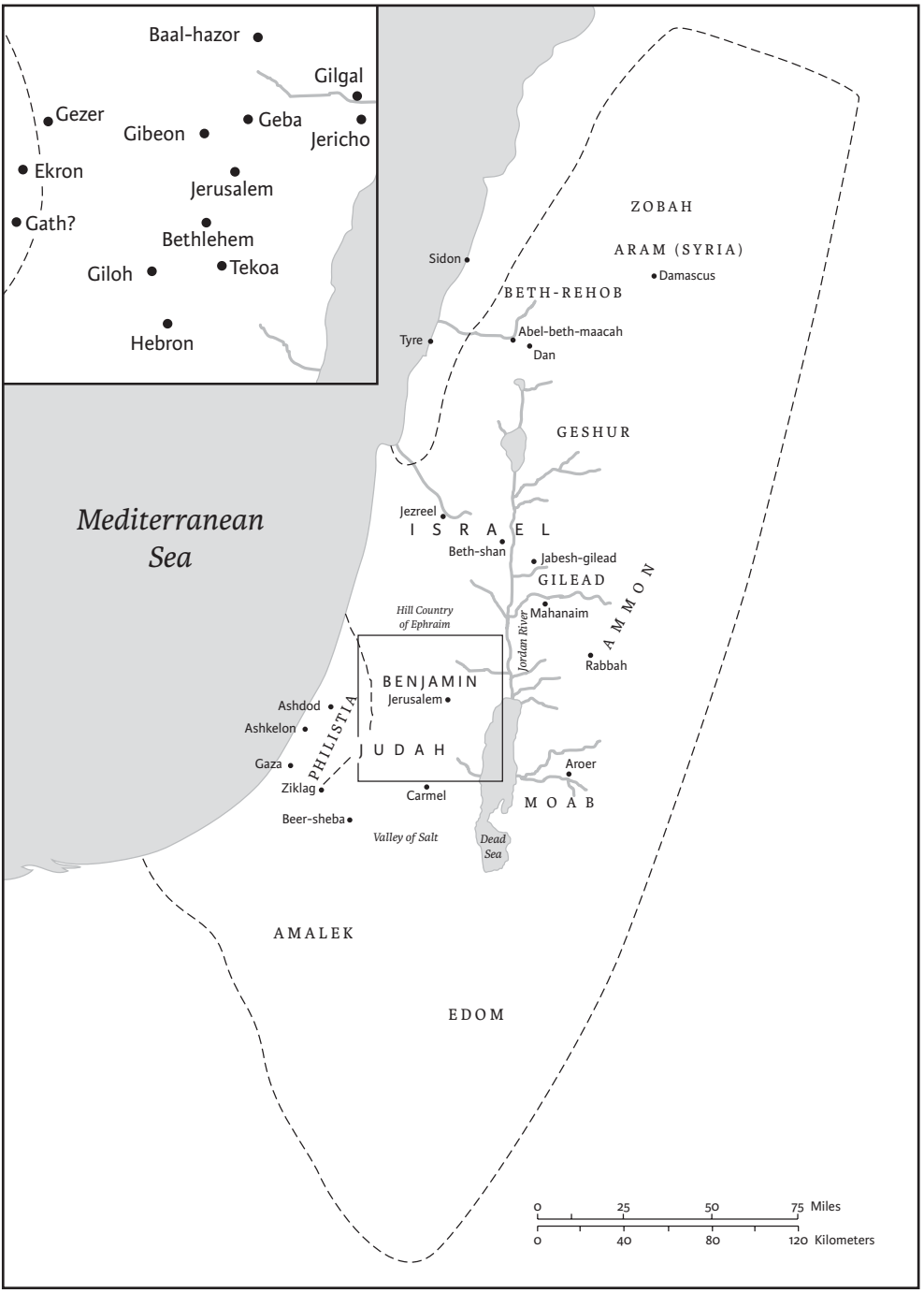
5 Now the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, set out, and about the heat of the day they came to the house of Ishbaal,[c] while he was taking his noonday rest. 6 They came inside the house as though to take wheat, and they struck him in the stomach; then Rechab and his brother Baanah escaped.[d] 7 Now they had come into the house while he was lying on his couch in his bedchamber; they attacked him, killed him, and beheaded him. Then they took his head and traveled by way of the Arabah all night long. 8 They brought the head of Ishbaal[c] to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Here is the head of Ishbaal,[c] son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; the LORD has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring."

9 David answered Rechab and his brother Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity, 10 when the one who told me, 'See, Saul is dead,' thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag—this was the reward I gave him for his news. 11 How much more then, when wicked men have killed a righteous man on his bed in his own house! And now shall I not require his blood at your hand, and destroy you from the earth?" 12 So David commanded the young men, and they killed them; they cut off their hands and feet, and hung their bodies beside the pool at Hebron. But the head of Ishbaal[c] they took and buried in the tomb of Abner at Hebron.

[a] Heb lacks *Ishbaal*
[b] In 1 Chr 8.34 and 9.40, *Merib-baal*
[c] Heb *Ish-bosheth*
[d] Meaning of Heb of verse 6 uncertain

mourners. **33:** *Fool* (Heb "nabal") recalls the story in 1 Sam 25. **35–39:** These verses continue to stress (perhaps too strongly) David's lack of involvement in Abner's death.

4.1–12: The assassination of Ishbaal. Here too the author stresses that David was in no way involved in the death of his enemy. **3:** An explanation of how *Beeroth* came to be considered a Benjaminite city; the event referred to here is otherwise unknown. **4:** *Mephibosheth,* the original form of the name was Merib-baal (1 Chr 8.34; 9.40), cf. 2.8n. **7:** *Arabah,* see 2.29n. **8:** The assassins bring Ishbaal's head to David, expecting a reward for killing his enemy. **9–10:** See 1.1–16. **11:** *A righteous man,* David does not recognize Ishbaal's kingship and therefore does not call him the LORD's anointed. **12:** Execution of this nature was reserved for traitors.



The kingdom of David according to Second Samuel. The dashed line shows the approximate boundary of the kingdom at its greatest extent.

5 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. 2 For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." 3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. 4 David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. 5 At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

6 The king and his men marched to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, "You will not come in here, even the blind and the lame will turn you back"—thinking, "David cannot come in here." 7 Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, which is now the city of David. 8 David had said on that day, "Whoever would strike down the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind, those whom David hates."[a] Therefore it is said, "The blind and the lame shall not come into the house." 9 David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. 10 And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

11 King Hiram of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with cedar trees, and carpenters and masons who built David a house. 12 David then perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.

13 In Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron, David took more concubines and wives; and more sons and daughters were born to David. 14 These are the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, 15 Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, 16 Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

17 When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up in search of David; but David heard about it and went down to the stronghold. 18 Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the valley of Rephaim. 19 David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand?" The LORD said to David, "Go up; for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand." 20 So David came to Baal-perazim, and David defeated them there. He

[a] Another reading is *those who hate David*

5.1–16: David becomes king of all Israel and conquers Jerusalem. 1: *All the tribes of Israel,* the northern tribes, excluding Judah where David is already king (2.4). **2:** *Led out* and *brought . . . in* are idioms for military leadership. *Shepherd,* a common metaphor for kings. *Ruler,* "king designate" (translated "prince" in 7.8). **3:** *Elders,* senior tribal leaders. **4:** *Forty years,* a round number for a generation. The actual length of David's reign is not certain, but scholars have proposed ca. 1005–965 BCE as likely dates. **6–8:** Exactly how David conquered Jerusalem is not clear. The parallel in 1 Chr 11.5–6 leaves out these verses, perhaps indicating that the Chronicler found them confusing. The account may be an etiology for the saying in v. 8. **6:** *Jebusites,* one group of pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land; see Gen 15.21; Ex 3.8; etc. **7:** *Zion,* one of the hills on which Jerusalem stood; it becomes a name for the city as a whole. **8:** One scholar has argued that *get up the water shaft* means "strike at the wind pipe" so as to kill the enemy rather than leaving any wounded (blind and lame). The saying may refer to the prohibition in Lev 21.18. **9:** *City of David,* Jerusalem's location between Israel and Judah was ideal for a neutral capital in David's effort to unite the two. *Millo,* meaning "fill," apparently refers to a landfill or artificial platform created near the *stronghold.* **11:** *Tyre,* the capital of Phoenicia, the country north of Israel. *Cedar,* a luxury item for which Lebanon in Phoenician territory was renowned. **13–16:** A large harem was a sign of royal prestige. Marriages were also a way of sealing treaties with foreign powers. *Solomon* is born later (12.24); these verses are an anticipatory summary. Alternatively, the mention of Solomon here may suggest that the material has been organized thematically rather than chronologically. A list of sons born to David in Hebron was given in 2 Sam 3.2–5.

5.17–25: War with the Philistines. 17: David's defeat of the Philistines (see 3.18n.) probably preceded his conquest of Jerusalem, since they stood between Hebron and Jerusalem and would have resisted the unification of Israel and Judah. *The stronghold,* probably Adullam (see 1 Sam 22.1), not Jerusalem. **18:** *The valley of Rephaim,*

said, "The LORD has burst forth against[a] my enemies before me, like a bursting flood." Therefore that place is called Baal-perazim.[b] 21 The Philistines abandoned their idols there, and David and his men carried them away.

22 Once again the Philistines came up, and were spread out in the valley of Rephaim. 23 When David inquired of the LORD, he said, "You shall not go up; go around to their rear, and come upon them opposite the balsam trees. 24 When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then be on the alert; for then the LORD has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines." 25 David did just as the LORD had commanded him; and he struck down the Philistines from Geba all the way to Gezer.

6 David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. 2 David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. 3 They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio,[c] the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart 4 with the ark of God;[d] and Ahio[c] went in front of the ark. 5 David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs[e] and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. 7 The anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God struck him there because he reached out his hand to the ark;[f] and he died there beside the ark of God. 8 David was angry because the LORD had burst forth with an outburst upon Uzzah; so that place is called Perez-uzzah,[g] to this day. 9 David was afraid of the LORD that day; he said, "How can the ark of the LORD come into my care?" 10 So David was unwilling to take the ark of the LORD into his care in the city of David; instead David took it to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. 11 The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months; and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household.

12 It was told King David, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; 13 and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. 14 David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. 15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

[a] Heb *paraz*
[b] That is *Lord of Bursting Forth*
[c] Or *and his brother*
[d] Compare Gk: Heb *and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill with the ark of God*
[e] Q Ms Gk 1 Chr 13.8: Heb *fir trees*
[f] 1 Chr 13.10 Compare Q Ms: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[g] That is *Bursting Out Against Uzzah*

probably located southwest of Jerusalem. **19:** *David inquired,* see 2.1n. **20:** An etiology explaining the name *Baal-perazim* (see note *b*); Yahweh and Baal are here equated. **21:** A victorious army typically captured the religious symbols that its opponent brought to the battlefield to show the superiority of its own gods; this is an ironic reversal of 1 Sam 4.5–11. **24:** The one *marching* is the Divine Warrior—the LORD—coming out to fight on Israel's behalf. **25:** *From Geba* near Jerusalem *all the way to Gezer* near the border of Philistine territory.

6.1–23: David brings the ark to Jerusalem. 1: *Thousand* probably designates a military unit of much smaller size. **2:** *Baale-judah,* another name for Kiriath-jearim, according to Josh 15.9, where the ark was left in 1 Sam 7.1. The *ark of God* was viewed as the throne of the LORD. Having it in Jerusalem would make the city the religious as well as the political capital. *Cherubim,* mythical griffins that often guarded temples and palaces (see 1 Sam 4.4n.). **6–8:** *Uzzah*'s death shows the awesome holiness of the ark, which was not to be touched, even with the best intentions. The story is also an etiology explaining the name *Perez-uzzah* ("Uzzah's breach"). **10:** *Obed-edom the Gittite* (i.e., from Gath) was apparently among the Philistines who followed David from his days with Achish (1 Sam 27; 29). **13–14:** *He sacrificed,* David officiates as a priest here, which was not unusual for kings in the ancient Near East (8.18; 1 Kings 3.15; 9.25; Gen 14.18). *Linen ephod,* an apron typically worn by priests (1 Sam

16 As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

17 They brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the LORD. 18 When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts, 19 and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat,[a] and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

20 David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!" 21 David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD, that I have danced before the LORD. 22 I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor." 23 And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

7 Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2 the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." 3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

4 But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: 5 Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. 7 Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders[b] of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" 8 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; 9 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for

[a] Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *any of the tribes*

2.18). Apparently David is wearing little else (see v. 20). **20:** Michal accuses David of fraternizing with the lowest element of society, implying that he is not dignified enough to be king. **21–22:** David replies that he has been humbling himself before the LORD and that the LORD was pleased enough with him to make him king in place of her father, Saul. **23:** *Michal . . . had no child,* probably because David had no relations with her since her children would have been Saul's heirs and a threat to David's rule.

7.1–29: A dynasty for David. This chapter with the LORD's promise to David of an eternal dynasty is a key passage in the Deuteronomistic History. It combines the themes of Jerusalem as the divinely chosen center for worship and the Davidic line as the chosen dynasty in Judah. God's promise of an eternal dynasty (vv. 13–16) explains Judah's survival beyond the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE. The language and style of the chapter are thoroughly Deuteronomistic, although many scholars believe one or more older oracles underlie vv. 1–7. This promise is reflected in various forms in the Deuteronomistic History and in Pss 89 and 132, as well as in Chronicles. Some of these texts temper the unconditional, eternal nature of the promise. **1:** *The LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him,* this statement is inconsistent with the accounts of David's wars in chs 8–20 and with 1 Kings 5.3–4, which says that rest came only to Solomon. It is also inconsistent with v. 11, which indicates that the "rest" lies in the future. It is not in the parallel in 1 Chr 17.1. **2:** *In a tent*, the tabernacle. **4–17:** The LORD's promise to David. **5–7:** The *house* ("bayit") David proposes to build is a temple. The LORD says instead (v. 11) that he will build David a house ("bayit"), that is, a dynasty. The claim in vv. 6–7 that the LORD has never had a *house* (i.e., temple) seems to overlook the temple in Shiloh (1 Sam 1–3). **8:** *Following the sheep,* see 1 Sam 17.15, 34. Kings in the ancient Near East were often described as shepherds; see 24.17;

you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. [10] And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, [11] from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. [12] When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. [13] He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. [14] I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. [15] But I will not take[a] my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. [16] Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me;[b] your throne shall be established forever. [17] In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

[18] Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? [19] And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD; you have spoken also of your servant's house for a great while to come. May this be instruction for the people,[c] O Lord GOD! [20] And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord GOD! [21] Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have wrought all this greatness, so that your servant may know it. [22] Therefore you are great, O LORD God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. [23] Who is like your people, like Israel? Is there another[d] nation on earth whose God went to redeem it as a people, and to make a name for himself, doing great and awesome things for them,[e] by driving out[f] before his people nations and their gods?[g] [24] And you established your people Israel for yourself to be your people forever; and you, O LORD, became their God. [25] And now, O LORD God, as for the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, confirm it forever; do as you have promised. [26] Thus your name will be magnified forever in the saying, 'The LORD of hosts is God over Israel'; and the house of your servant David will be established before you. [27] For you, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house'; therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. [28] And now, O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant; [29] now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you; for you, O Lord GOD, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever."

8 Some time afterward, David attacked the Philistines and subdued them; David took Metheg-ammah out of the hand of the Philistines.

[a] Gk Syr Vg 1 Chr 17.13: Heb *shall not depart*
[b] Gk Heb Mss: MT *before you*; Compare 2 Sam 7.26, 29
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Gk: Heb *one*
[e] Heb *you*
[f] Gk 1 Chr 17.21: Heb *for your land*
[g] Cn: Heb *before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, nations and its gods*

1 Chr 11.2; Ps 78.70; Isa 44.28. *Prince,* "king designate" (translated "ruler" in 5.2). **10:** *Place* in Hebrew may mean a shrine or place of worship. Here it refers to the Jerusalem Temple. **11–12:** See vv. 5–7n. **13:** David's son, Solomon, will build the temple. *Forever* here (and in v. 16) characterizes the dynasty as enduring but does not necessarily mean for all eternity. **14:** *Father . . . son,* a king was often described as the (adopted) "son" of God; see, e.g., Pss 2.7; 89.26–27. **15:** *Steadfast love,* another form of the promise; see Ps 89.1,24. **16:** Cf. 1 Sam 25.28. **18–29:** David's prayer to the LORD. Compare Solomon's prayers in 1 Kings 3.6–9 and 8.22–53. **23:** *Redeem . . . driving out* refer to the Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan. The language is Deuteronomistic. **24:** Cf. Ex 6.7; Deut 29.10–15. **27–29:** *Your servant,* a way of referring to oneself before a superior.

8.1–18: David's wars. 1: This verse represents David's decisive defeat of the Philistines, the archenemies of

[2] He also defeated the Moabites and, making them lie down on the ground, measured them off with a cord; he measured two lengths of cord for those who were to be put to death, and one length[a] for those who were to be spared. And the Moabites became servants to David and brought tribute.

[3] David also struck down King Hadadezer son of Rehob of Zobah, as he went to restore his monument[b] at the river Euphrates. [4] David took from him one thousand seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. David hamstrung all the chariot horses, but left enough for a hundred chariots. [5] When the Arameans of Damascus came to help King Hadadezer of Zobah, David killed twenty-two thousand men of the Arameans. [6] Then David put garrisons among the Arameans of Damascus; and the Arameans became servants to David and brought tribute. The LORD gave victory to David wherever he went. [7] David took the gold shields that were carried by the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. [8] From Betah and from Berothai, towns of Hadadezer, King David took a great amount of bronze.

[9] When King Toi of Hamath heard that David had defeated the whole army of Hadadezer, [10] Toi sent his son Joram to King David, to greet him and to congratulate him because he had fought against Hadadezer and defeated him. Now Hadadezer had often been at war with Toi. Joram brought with him articles of silver, gold, and bronze; [11] these also King David dedicated to the LORD, together with the silver and gold that he dedicated from all the nations he subdued, [12] from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, and from the spoil of King Hadadezer son of Rehob of Zobah.

[13] David won a name for himself. When he returned, he killed eighteen thousand Edomites[c] in the Valley of Salt. [14] He put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants. And the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went.

[15] So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and equity to all his people. [16] Joab son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; [17] Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiathar were priests; Seraiah was secretary; [18] Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over[d] the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were priests.

9 David asked, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" [2] Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and he was summoned to David. The king said to him, "Are

[a] Heb *one full length*
[b] Compare 1 Sam 15.12 and 2 Sam 18.18
[c] Gk: Heb *returned from striking down eighteen thousand Arameans*
[d] Syr Tg Vg 20.23; 1 Chr 18.17: Heb lacks *was over*

Saul. They never surface again as enemies during his reign. **2:** The *Moabites* lived on the other side of the Dead Sea from Israel. **3:** *Zobah* was an Aramean (Syrian) city-state. *Restore* may also mean "leave," so that David, rather than Hadadezer, was traveling to the Euphrates to erect a monument. **4:** *Hamstrung,* David crippled the hind legs of the horses he could not use to keep someone else from using them against him (see Josh 11.6). Thus the Israelites probably did not yet make extensive use of chariots. **5:** *Twenty-two thousand* probably means twenty-two military units (see 6.1n.). **9:** *Hamath,* modern Hama, an important city-state in central Syria north of Zobah. **10:** *Joram* is an Israelite (Yahwistic) name; 1 Chr 18.18 calls him "Hadoram," an Aramaic name. **12:** *Edom* was the country east of the Jordan, south of Moab and, at times, Judah. *Ammonites,* the ancient residents in the vicinity of the modern city of Amman, Jordan. **13:** *Eighteen thousand,* see v. 5n. **15:** It was viewed as the responsibility of kings in the ancient Near East to ensure the just and equitable treatment of all subjects, especially the poor and disadvantaged. **16–18:** Cf. the similar list of David's cabinet in 20.23–26. *Cherethites and the Pelethites,* perhaps "Cretans" and "Philistines" who composed the royal bodyguard (23.23), probably mercenaries. *David's sons were priests,* the restriction of priesthood to the Levites had apparently not yet arisen. **17:** *Ahimelech son of Abiathar* should probably be changed to "Abiathar son of Ahimelech" as indicated in 20.25 and also throughout 2 Sam.

9.1–13: Jonathan's son. 1: *Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul?* David's execution of Saul's sons and grandsons in 21.1–14 provides background to this question, and the story in 21.1–14 probably originally preceded ch 9. *Kindness* is covenant faithfulness. David wants to keep the promise of loyalty he made to Jonathan

you Ziba?" And he said, "At your service!" [3] The king said, "Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?" Ziba said to the king, "There remains a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet." [4] The king said to him, "Where is he?" Ziba said to the king, "He is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar." [5] Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. [6] Mephibosheth[a] son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance. David said, "Mephibosheth!"[a] He answered, "I am your servant." [7] David said to him, "Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you yourself shall eat at my table always." [8] He did obeisance and said, "What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I?"

[9] Then the king summoned Saul's servant Ziba, and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. [10] You and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him, and shall bring in the produce, so that your master's grandson may have food to eat; but your master's grandson Mephibosheth[a] shall always eat at my table." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. [11] Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so your servant will do." Mephibosheth[a] ate at David's[b] table, like one of the king's sons. [12] Mephibosheth[a] had a young son whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's[c] servants. [13] Mephibosheth[a] lived in Jerusalem, for he always ate at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet.

10 Some time afterward, the king of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun succeeded him. [2] David said, "I will deal loyally with Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father dealt loyally with me." So David sent envoys to console him concerning his father. When David's envoys came into the land of the Ammonites, [3] the princes of the Ammonites said to their lord Hanun, "Do you really think that David is honoring your father just because he has sent messengers with condolences to you? Has not David sent his envoys to you to search the city, to spy it out, and to overthrow it?" [4] So Hanun seized David's envoys, shaved off half the beard of each, cut off their garments in the middle at their hips, and sent them away. [5] When David was told, he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly ashamed. The king said, "Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return."

[6] When the Ammonites saw that they had become odious to David, the Ammonites sent and hired the Arameans of Beth-rehob and the Arameans of Zobah, twenty thousand foot soldiers, as well as the king of Maacah,

[a] Or *Merib-baal*: See 4.4 note
[b] Gk: Heb *my*
[c] Or *Merib-baal's*: See 4.4 note

(1 Sam 18.1–4; 20.14–17). **3:** *Crippled in his feet,* see 4.4. This handicap made Mephibosheth unable to go to war and therefore unsuitable to be king. **4:** *Machir* became a loyal supporter of David (17.27). *Lo-debar,* a northern Israelite city east of the Jordan. **6:** *Fell on his face and did obeisance,* prostrating oneself was a sign of submission to God or the king. *Mephibosheth,* the name was originally Merib-baal; see 4.4n. **7:** Eating at the king's *table* was a sign of favor. In this case it allowed David to keep a close watch on Merib-baal, who was still heir to Saul's kingdom and therefore a potential rival (see 16.1–4; 19.24–30). **8:** *Dead dog,* a term of self-reproach (see 3.8n.). **9–13:** Merib-baal was to receive the income from Saul's lands, which Ziba and his family would work.

10.1–19: David defeats the Ammonites and Arameans. 2: *Nahash,* Saul's enemy in 1 Sam 10.27b–11.15. *Ammonites,* see 8.12n. *Deal loyally . . . dealt loyally,* indicate that David and Nahash had a treaty. *Hanun*'s actions in the following verses indicate that Israel was the superior partner in the treaty or that David was trying to make Israel the superior partner, and Hanun resisted. **4:** *The beard* was a symbol of masculinity, and cutting off half of it was symbolic emasculation. According to the Lachish reliefs, ancient Israelite and Judean men were typically bearded. Cutting off *their garments* below the waist was symbolic castration. **5:** *Jericho,* the closest Israelite city west of the Jordan opposite Ammon. **6:** *Beth-rehob, Zobah,* Aramean (Syrian) city-states. *Thousand,* probably

one thousand men, and the men of Tob, twelve thousand men. 7 When David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the army with the warriors. 8 The Ammonites came out and drew up in battle array at the entrance of the gate; but the Arameans of Zobah and of Rehob, and the men of Tob and Maacah, were by themselves in the open country.

9 When Joab saw that the battle was set against him both in front and in the rear, he chose some of the picked men of Israel, and arrayed them against the Arameans; 10 the rest of his men he put in the charge of his brother Abishai, and he arrayed them against the Ammonites. 11 He said, "If the Arameans are too strong for me, then you shall help me; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. 12 Be strong, and let us be courageous for the sake of our people, and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what seems good to him." 13 So Joab and the people who were with him moved forward into battle against the Arameans; and they fled before him. 14 When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans fled, they likewise fled before Abishai, and entered the city. Then Joab returned from fighting against the Ammonites, and came to Jerusalem.

15 But when the Arameans saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered themselves together. 16 Hadadezer sent and brought out the Arameans who were beyond the Euphrates; and they came to Helam, with Shobach the commander of the army of Hadadezer at their head. 17 When it was told David, he gathered all Israel together, and crossed the Jordan, and came to Helam. The Arameans arrayed themselves against David and fought with him. 18 The Arameans fled before Israel; and David killed of the Arameans seven hundred chariot teams, and forty thousand horsemen,[a] and wounded Shobach the commander of their army, so that he died there. 19 When all the kings who were servants of Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel, and became subject to them. So the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites any more.

11 In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

2 It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. 3 David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." 4 So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. 5 The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

[a] 1 Chr 19.18 and some Gk Mss read *foot soldiers*

used for a military unit of far fewer than 1,000 men. *Maacah, Tob,* small states in northern Transjordan. **8:** *The gate,* the city in question is Rabbah, capital of the Ammonites (see 12.26). *Rehob,* another Aramean city-state. **12:** *The cities of our God* were the cities Israel claimed east of the Jordan. Joab is rousing the army for "holy war." **18:** *Forty thousand,* see v. 6.

11.1–27: David and Bathsheba. 1: *In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle,* an alternate translation is: "A year after the kings had gone out to battle." The story is set a year after the events in ch 10 and does not necessarily imply that kings were supposed to go to war each spring. *David remained at Jerusalem,* perhaps at the insistence of his army to avoid danger to himself (see 21.15–17), although here this may be a possible disparagement of David. **2:** *The roof of the king's house* was breezy and cool in the late afternoon, the ideal place for a nap. From there he was able to look down into the courtyard of surrounding houses, where he saw the *woman bathing.* **3:** *Inquire about the woman,* David wants to know whether she is married; if not, he can add her to his harem. *Eliam,* perhaps the son of Ahithophel, David's adviser (see 23.34; 16.15–17.23). *Uriah,* one of the "thirty" best soldiers of David, according to 23.39. Thus, Bathsheba was well-married and came from a distinguished family. The name "Uriah" is Israelite, but his epithet "the Hittite" indicated his non-Israelite heritage. He may have been a resident alien, a class whose rights kings were especially charged to guard. **4:** Bathsheba *was purifying herself after her period;* hence her bath (see Lev 15.19–28). She was at the most fertile time of her

6 So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7 When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. 8 Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. 9 But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. 10 When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" 11 Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths;[a] and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing." 12 Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, 13 David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 15 In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die." 16 As Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant warriors. 17 The men of the city came out and fought with Joab; and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite was killed as well. 18 Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting; 19 and he instructed the messenger, "When you have finished telling the king all the news about the fighting, 20 then, if the king's anger rises, and if he says to you, 'Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? 21 Who killed Abimelech son of Jerubbaal?[b] Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?' then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too.'"

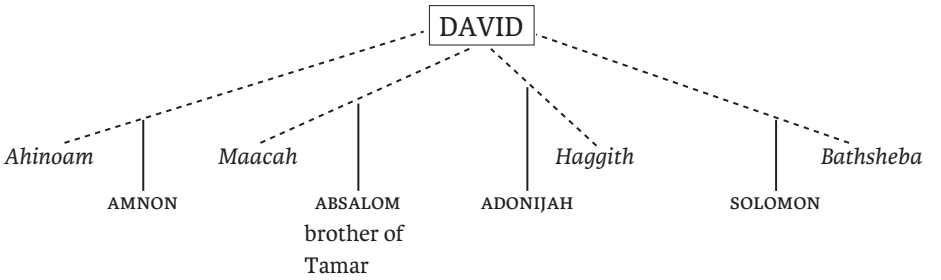
22 So the messenger went, and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. 23 The messenger said to David, "The men gained an advantage over us, and came out against us in the field; but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. 24 Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall; some of the king's servants are dead; and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also." 25 David said to the messenger, "Thus you shall say to Joab, 'Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another; press your attack on the city, and overthrow it.' And encourage him."

26 When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. 27 When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

[a] Or *at Succoth*

[b] Gk Syr Judg 7.1: Heb *Jerubbesheth*

cycle when she slept with David. It is clear that David must be her child's father. **6–7:** It was unusual for a soldier to be called back from battle for a personal audience. Since David asked Uriah only the most general questions, Uriah may have thought he was being tested, which in turn motivated him to demonstrate his loyalty to David and the army in the following verses. The *people,* the army. **8:** *Wash your feet,* a euphemism for sexual intercourse. *Feet* can refer to the genitals (see Isa 6.2; 7.20). **9–13:** As a pious soldier consecrated for war (see 1 Sam 21.4), Uriah refuses to have sexual relations with his wife, even when David gets him drunk. **14:** David trusts Uriah's loyalty enough to send his death warrant by his own hand, knowing that Uriah, if he could read, would not open it. **16–17:** Joab places Uriah in a dangerous place but does not have time to implement David's order fully. Uriah is killed along with other soldiers because of a tactical error by Joab. **18–21:** Joab uses Uriah's death to cover up his mistake in allowing the troops to come too close to the city wall. The story of *Abimelech son of Jerubbaal* (v. 21) is in Judg 9. *An upper millstone,* a large stone used for grinding grain. **25:** David's attitude toward Joab changes when he learns of Uriah's death. **27b:** *David . . . displeased the* LORD, the author's moral condemnation links the account of David's offense in ch 11 with the judgment in ch 12.



The sons of David. According to 2 Sam 3.2–5 (see also 1 Chr 3.1–4) and 2 Sam 5.13–14 (1 Chr 3.5–9; 14.3–7), David had many children, at least twenty of whom are named. In the narrative of the struggle for succession in 2 Samuel 13–18 and 1 Kings 1–2, the principal sons in the order of their birth are: Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah, and Solomon. Dashed lines show wives; solid lines show sons.

12 But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD, [1] and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. [2] The rich man had very many flocks and herds; [3] but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. [4] Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." [5] Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; [6] he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

[7] Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; [8] I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. [9] Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. [10] Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. [11] Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. [12] For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." [13] David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan said to David, "Now the LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die. [14] Nevertheless, because by

12.1–25: David's punishment. 1–6: The prophet Nathan couches his parable as a legal case to get David to pronounce judgment on himself. As king he was responsible for protecting the rights of the poor. However, the vagueness of the case ("*Two men in a certain city*" hints that it is contained by Nathan. *Fourfold* (v. 6), as prescribed in Ex 22.1; other textual witnesses have "sevenfold." **8:** There is some textual support for reading "daughter(s)" (Heb "bat") instead of *house* (Heb "bayit" or "beyt") both times in this verse. "Daughter(s)" would fit the point of the verse better — that David had many women as wives and concubines, including Saul's daughter Michal, but like the rich man in Nathan's parable, he stole what belonged to his poor neighbor. *Your master's wives,* David took over Saul's harem. **10:** *The sword,* a metaphor for violence, alluding to the events in chs 13–20. **11–12:** An allusion to Absalom's future revolt, specifically his deed in 16.20–23. **13–18:** David's sin is transferred (not *put away*) to his newborn son, who dies because of it. This is the clearest indication in the Hebrew Bible of the application of intergenerational punishment by God (see Ex 20.5; 34.7; Deut 5.9), where the

this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD,[a] the child that is born to you shall die." [15] Then Nathan went to his house.

The LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became very ill. [16] David therefore pleaded with God for the child; David fasted, and went in and lay all night on the ground. [17] The elders of his house stood beside him, urging him to rise from the ground; but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. [18] On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead; for they said, "While the child was still alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us; how then can we tell him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm." [19] But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, he perceived that the child was dead; and David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead."

[20] Then David rose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes. He went into the house of the LORD, and worshiped; he then went to his own house; and when he asked, they set food before him and he ate. [21] Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but when the child died, you rose and ate food." [22] He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me, and the child may live.' [23] But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

[24] Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba, and went to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he named him Solomon. The LORD loved him, [25] and sent a message by the prophet Nathan; so he named him Jedidiah,[b] because of the LORD.

[26] Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites, and took the royal city. [27] Joab sent messengers to David, and said, "I have fought against Rabbah; moreover, I have taken the water city. [28] Now, then, gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it; or I myself will take the city, and it will be called by my name." [29] So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah, and fought against it and took it. [30] He took the crown of Milcom[c] from his head; the weight of it was a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone; and it was placed on David's head. He also brought forth the spoil of the city, a very great amount. [31] He brought out the people who were in it, and set them to work with saws and iron picks and iron axes, or sent them to the brickworks. Thus he did to all the cities of the Ammonites. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

13 Some time passed. David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar; and David's son Amnon fell in love with her. [2] Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. [3] But Amnon had a friend whose name was

[a] Ancient scribal tradition: Compare 1 Sam 25.22 note: Heb *scorned the enemies of the* LORD
[b] That is *Beloved of the* LORD
[c] Gk See 1 Kings 11.5, 33: Heb *their kings*

sin is perceived as property that may be inherited. **20:** *House of the* LORD, an anachronism, since the Temple in Jerusalem had not yet been built. **24–25:** *Solomon* means "his replacement"; he was a replacement for the dead child. *Jedidiah* ("beloved of Yahweh"), which does not occur elsewhere for Solomon, hints that he will replace David (whose name means "beloved") as king.

12.26–31: The conclusion of the Ammonite war. 26–29: Joab captured the citadel and the water supply of Rabbah, the Ammonite capital, so that conquering the rest of the city was fairly simple. This Joab left for David, as the king, to complete. **30:** *Milcom,* the national Ammonite god. *A talent,* about 75 lb (34 kg).

13.1–39: The rape of Tamar and the murder of Amnon. In its current context, this and the following chapter reflect a measure-for-measure punishment of David. He appropriated Bathsheba and arranged for Uriah's death, so rape and death are unleashed against his house. Originally, though, this story may have been unconnected to the Bathsheba event and served to introduce Absalom's revolt. **1:** Tamar was Absalom's full *sister,* Amnon's half-sister. *Amnon* was David's oldest son and the crown prince. The next oldest had apparently died (perhaps as a child), leaving Absalom as second in line of succession to the throne (cf. 3.2–3). **2:** *It seemed impos-*

Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimeah; and Jonadab was a very crafty man. 4 He said to him, "O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." 5 Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed, and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, so that I may see it and eat it from her hand.'" 6 So Amnon lay down, and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, so that I may eat from her hand."

7 Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, "Go to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him." 8 So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house, where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. 9 Then she took the pan and set them[a] out before him, but he refused to eat. Amnon said, "Send out everyone from me." So everyone went out from him. 10 Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand." So Tamar took the cakes she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. 11 But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." 12 She answered him, "No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! 13 As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you." 14 But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her.

15 Then Amnon was seized with a very great loathing for her; indeed, his loathing was even greater than the lust he had felt for her. Amnon said to her, "Get out!" 16 But she said to him, "No, my brother;[b] for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me." But he would not listen to her. 17 He called the young man who served him and said, "Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her." 18 (Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times.[c]) So his servant put her out, and bolted the door after her. 19 But Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went.

20 Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart." So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house. 21 When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved

[a] Heb *and poured*
[b] Cn Compare Gk Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Cn: Heb *were clothed in robes*

sible to Amnon to do anything to her, as the king's virgin daughter Tamar may have been guarded. However, the verb translated "seemed impossible" might be translated "seemed wonderful." **6:** *Cakes,* the Hebrew word is similar to the word for "heart" and may indicate their shape and hints at the erotic nature of the story. **10:** *The chamber,* Amnon's bedroom where he is feigning illness. **11:** *My sister* not only reflects the kinship of Amnon to Tamar but is also a term of endearment and sexual desire in ancient love poetry (i.e., Song 4.9–10; 5.1). **12:** *Such a thing* may refer to incest or rape or both. **13:** *He will not withhold me from you,* Tamar suggests that David would allow their marriage despite its incestuous nature. Perhaps she is just trying to buy time. **16:** Ex 22.16 and Deut 22.28–29 required marriage in such cases. Tamar may have such laws in mind when she says that in sending her away Amnon is committing a *greater* wrong than the rape itself. **17:** *This woman,* a contemptuous reference. The word "woman" is not in the Heb, so that it might be translated "this thing." Having robbed Tamar of her virginity, Amnon takes her identity as well. **18:** *A long robe with sleeves,* used also for Joseph's garment in Gen 37.3; the exact nature of this garment is unknown. **19:** Putting ashes on the head and tearing clothes were signs of grief, though Tamar may also have torn *the long robe* worn by the king's virgin daughters because it was no longer appropriate. **20:** *Desolate,* because she is unmarried and childless. **21:** *Because he loved him* may be the

him, for he was his firstborn.[a] 22 But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had raped his sister Tamar.

23 After two full years Absalom had sheepshearers at Baal-hazor, which is near Ephraim, and Absalom invited all the king's sons. 24 Absalom came to the king, and said, "Your servant has sheepshearers; will the king and his servants please go with your servant?" 25 But the king said to Absalom, "No, my son, let us not all go, or else we will be burdensome to you." He pressed him, but he would not go but gave him his blessing. 26 Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon go with us." The king said to him, "Why should he go with you?" 27 But Absalom pressed him until he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him. Absalom made a feast like a king's feast.[b] 28 Then Absalom commanded his servants, "Watch when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then kill him. Do not be afraid; have I not myself commanded you? Be courageous and valiant." 29 So the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons rose, and each mounted his mule and fled.

30 While they were on the way, the report came to David that Absalom had killed all the king's sons, and not one of them was left. 31 The king rose, tore his garments, and lay on the ground; and all his servants who were standing by tore their garments. 32 But Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimeah, said, "Let not my lord suppose that they have killed all the young men the king's sons; Amnon alone is dead. This has been determined by Absalom from the day Amnon[c] raped his sister Tamar. 33 Now therefore, do not let my lord the king take it to heart, as if all the king's sons were dead; for Amnon alone is dead."

34 But Absalom fled. When the young man who kept watch looked up, he saw many people coming from the Horonaim road[d] by the side of the mountain. 35 Jonadab said to the king, "See, the king's sons have come; as your servant said, so it has come about." 36 As soon as he had finished speaking, the king's sons arrived, and raised their voices and wept; and the king and all his servants also wept very bitterly.

37 But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. David mourned for his son day after day. 38 Absalom, having fled to Geshur, stayed there three years. 39 And the heart of [e] the king went out, yearning for Absalom; for he was now consoled over the death of Amnon.

14 Now Joab son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's mind was on Absalom. 2 Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman. He said to her, "Pretend to be a mourner; put on mourning garments, do not anoint yourself with oil, but behave like a woman who has been mourning many days for the dead. 3 Go to the king and speak to

[a] Q Ms Gk: MT lacks *but he would not punish . . . firstborn*
[b] Gk Compare Q Ms: MT lacks *Absalom made a feast like a king's feast*
[c] Heb *he*
[d] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *the road behind him*
[e] Q Ms Gk: MT *And David*

writer's way of assuring the reader that David had nothing to do with Amnon's death. **22:** *Neither good nor bad* means not at all. **23:** Sheepshearing was a time of celebration. **24–25:** In light of what follows, Absalom's invitation to David makes the reader wonder whether he already intended to kill his father and assume the throne. **27:** The *feast* was a drinking bout, as indicated by the word's etymology and the next verse. **29:** David and his sons rode on *mules* (18.9; 1 Kings 1.33). **30–33:** David initially thought that Absalom had killed all the king's sons, which would make sense if he were attempting a coup. But his intention at this point is purely revenge against Amnon. *Jonadab* appears as a false friend to Amnon (cf. vv. 3–5). **36:** *The king . . . wept very bitterly,* David's great love for Amnon and his noninvolvement in Amnon's death are stressed. **37:** *Talmai . . . king of Geshur,* Absalom's maternal grandfather with whom David apparently has a treaty (see 2.9n.). **39:** *And the heart of the king went out, yearning for Absalom,* better: "The king's spirit for marching out against Absalom was exhausted." David did not yearn for Absalom but was tired of going out after him; hence David's reluctance in the next chapter to allow Absalom back into his presence.

14.1–33: Absalom's return. 1: *The king's mind was on Absalom* does not mean that David was now favorably inclined toward Absalom, as this story makes clear. **2:** *Tekoa,* a village south of Bethlehem where the prophet

him as follows." And Joab put the words into her mouth.

4 When the woman of Tekoa came to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and did obeisance, and said, "Help, O king!" 5 The king asked her, "What is your trouble?" She answered, "Alas, I am a widow; my husband is dead. 6 Your servant had two sons, and they fought with one another in the field; there was no one to part them, and one struck the other and killed him. 7 Now the whole family has risen against your servant. They say, 'Give up the man who struck his brother, so that we may kill him for the life of his brother whom he murdered, even if we destroy the heir as well.' Thus they would quench my one remaining ember, and leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the face of the earth."

8 Then the king said to the woman, "Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you." 9 The woman of Tekoa said to the king, "On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father's house; let the king and his throne be guiltless." 10 The king said, "If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall never touch you again." 11 Then she said, "Please, may the king keep the LORD your God in mind, so that the avenger of blood may kill no more, and my son not be destroyed." He said, "As the LORD lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground."

12 Then the woman said, "Please let your servant speak a word to my lord the king." He said, "Speak." 13 The woman said, "Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again. 14 We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up. But God will not take away a life; he will devise plans so as not to keep an outcast banished forever from his presence.[a] 15 Now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid; your servant thought, 'I will speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his servant. 16 For the king will hear, and deliver his servant from the hand of the man who would cut both me and my son off from the heritage of God.' 17 Your servant thought, 'The word of my lord the king will set me at rest'; for my lord the king is like the angel of God, discerning good and evil. The LORD your God be with you!"

18 Then the king answered the woman, "Do not withhold from me anything I ask you." The woman said, "Let my lord the king speak." 19 The king said, "Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?" The woman answered and said, "As surely as you live, my lord the king, one cannot turn right or left from anything that my lord the king has said. For it was your servant Joab who commanded me; it was he who put all these words into the mouth of your servant. 20 In order to change the course of affairs your servant Joab did this. But my lord has wisdom like the wisdom

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

Amos was from (see Am 1.1). Perhaps David took an interest in this case because the woman was from his home territory. *Wise* in the Hebrew Bible often means skilled as well as clever (see Ex 28.3). This woman was a skilled actress. **4:** *Fell . . . to the ground and did obeisance,* prostration was the proper way of bowing before a king. **5–7:** As in ch 12, a fictional legal case is presented to David in order to get him to pronounce judgment on a matter concerning himself. *Two sons* (v. 6), one of whom kills the other, like Amnon and Absalom. *Leave to my husband neither name nor remnant* (v. 7). This part of the woman's case is not paralleled in David's family since he has many other sons. It is crucial to the woman's place, yet does not figure into David's decision or the outcome of the story. **8–11:** David grants the woman's request and swears by the LORD that her one remaining son will not be harmed. The woman will urge David to apply this oath to his situation with Absalom. Since David's ruling is contrary to the customary punishment, the woman accepts any guilt that David may incur (v. 9). *Avenger of blood,* one charged with taking vengeance for the death of a relative. **13:** *The woman* now applies David's decree to the situation with Absalom. It is not clear how David's refusal to bring Absalom back is *a thing against the people of God.* **14:** Amnon is dead and cannot be brought to life again, but David can accept Absalom, who is still alive. **15–17:** These verses seem out of place and may originally have gone after v. 7. The woman continues to plead for her son, but David has already rendered his decision. *The man who would cut both me and my son off,* the avenger of blood (see v. 11). *The heritage of God,* the land of Israel and its people. **19:** *Your servant,* a polite

of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth."

21 Then the king said to Joab, "Very well, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom." 22 Joab prostrated himself with his face to the ground and did obeisance, and blessed the king; and Joab said, "Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant." 23 So Joab set off, went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. 24 The king said, "Let him go to his own house; he is not to come into my presence." So Absalom went to his own house, and did not come into the king's presence.

25 Now in all Israel there was no one to be praised so much for his beauty as Absalom; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. 26 When he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it; when it was heavy on him, he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king's weight. 27 There were born to Absalom three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar; she was a beautiful woman.

28 So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king's presence. 29 Then Absalom sent for Joab to send him to the king; but Joab would not come to him. He sent a second time, but Joab would not come. 30 Then he said to his servants, "Look, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire." So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. 31 Then Joab rose and went to Absalom at his house, and said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" 32 Absalom answered Joab, "Look, I sent word to you: Come here, that I may send you to the king with the question, 'Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.' Now let me go into the king's presence; if there is guilt in me, let him kill me!" 33 Then Joab went to the king and told him; and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and prostrated himself with his face to the ground before the king; and the king kissed Absalom.

15 After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run ahead of him. 2 Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the road into the gate; and when anyone brought a suit before the king for judgment, Absalom would call out and say, "From what city are you?" When the person said, "Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel," 3 Absalom would say, "See, your claims are good and right; but there is no one deputed by the king to hear you." 4 Absalom said moreover, "If only I were judge in the land! Then all who had a suit or cause might come to me, and I would give them justice." 5 Whenever people came near to do obeisance to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of them, and kiss them. 6 Thus Absalom did to every Israelite who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel.

7 At the end of four[a] years Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go to Hebron and pay the vow that I have made to the LORD. 8 For your servant made a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram: If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will worship the LORD in Hebron."[b] 9 The king said to him, "Go

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *forty*
[b] Gk Mss: Heb lacks *in Hebron*

form of self-reference. **21–24:** David allows Absalom to return but refuses to see him personally. **26:** *Two hundred shekels,* ca. 5 lb (2.3 kg), an extraordinary amount of hair. The reference to his hair foreshadows Absalom's mode of death (18.9–15). **27:** Absalom named his daughter after his sister, *Tamar* (ch 13). The reference to his three sons is contradicted in 18.18, where he says he had no son. **28–33:** This episode further shows Absalom's violent nature and suggests that Joab may have held a grudge against him. *The king kissed Absalom,* a gesture of recognition and reconciliation, performed only after Absalom did his obeisance to David. This subservience, however, did not last long.

15.1–12: Absalom revolts. 1: *Chariot and horses, and fifty men to run ahead,* parts of the king's entourage (1 Kings 1.5). The fifty men were probably a royal bodyguard. Absalom is making a claim to be king. **2:** *When anyone brought a suit before the king for judgment,* one of the king's roles in the ancient world was to serve as a judge in special cases. David may have been weak in this role, and Absalom took advantage. **5:** *Do obeisance to him,* the proper attitude before a king, but Absalom presented himself as a man of the people. **6:** *Stole the*

in peace." So he got up, and went to Hebron.
10 But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then shout: Absalom has become king at Hebron!" 11 Two hundred men from Jerusalem went with Absalom; they were invited guests, and they went in their innocence, knowing nothing of the matter. 12 While Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for[a] Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. The conspiracy grew in strength, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.

13 A messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the Israelites have gone after Absalom." 14 Then David said to all his officials who were with him at Jerusalem, "Get up! Let us flee, or there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Hurry, or he will soon overtake us, and bring disaster down upon us, and attack the city with the edge of the sword." 15 The king's officials said to the king, "Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king decides." 16 So the king left, followed by all his household, except ten concubines whom he left behind to look after the house. 17 The king left, followed by all the people; and they stopped at the last house. 18 All his officials passed by him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king.

19 Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why are you also coming with us? Go back, and stay with the king; for you are a foreigner, and also an exile from your home. 20 You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, while I go wherever I can? Go back, and take your kinsfolk with you; and may the LORD show[b] steadfast love and faithfulness to you." 21 But Ittai answered the king, "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be." 22 David said to Ittai, "Go then, march on." So Ittai the Gittite marched on, with all his men and all the little ones who were with him. 23 The whole country wept aloud as all the people passed by; the king crossed the Wadi Kidron, and all the people moved on toward the wilderness.

24 Abiathar came up, and Zadok also, with all the Levites, carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, until the people had all passed out of the city. 25 Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me back and let me see both it and the place where it stays. 26 But if he says, 'I take no pleasure in you,' here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him." 27 The king also said to the priest Zadok, "Look,[c] go back to the city in peace, you and Abiathar,[d] with your two

[a] Or *he sent*
[b] Gk Compare 2.6: Heb lacks *may the LORD show*
[c] Gk: Heb *Are you a seer* or *Do you see?*
[d] Cn: Heb lacks *and Abiathar*

hearts or "deceived" (cf. Gen 31.20). **7–10:** Absalom has made a vow to worship at the local shrine of *the LORD in Hebron* (v. 8) and must go there to fulfill it. But he has ulterior motives for choosing Hebron. He is deliberately recalling his father's rise by declaring himself king in Hebron, the capital of Judah, where David had been made king of both Judah and Israel and had ruled Judah for seven years (5.1–7). Absalom probably found supporters in Hebron among those discontented that David had moved the capital. His revolt, however, spread *throughout all the tribes of Israel* (v. 10). *Geshur in Aram* (v. 8), where Absalom fled after killing Amnon (13.37–39). **12:** *Ahithophel* was renowned as *David's counselor* (see 16.15–23). His presence with Absalom meant that *the conspiracy grew in strength.*

15.13–16.14: David flees Jerusalem. 15.13: *Israelites,* perhaps only the residents of the north. But since Absalom began the revolt in Hebron, it has now spread through the entire country. **16:** *Concubines,* see 3.7n. **17:** *The last house,* on the outskirts of Jerusalem. **18:** *Cherethites* and *Pelethites,* see 8.18n. *Gittites,* Philistines from Gath. All these groups had followed David from his days with the Philistines (1 Sam 27; 29). **19:** *Ittai,* commander of the Gittites. **20:** *Yesterday,* an idiom for "recently." David is amazed that these Philistines who only recently joined him are more loyal than his own people. **21:** It is striking that Ittai, the Philistine, swears by the LORD (Yahweh) the God of Israel. **23:** *The Wadi Kidron,* the valley between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. David heads east toward the Jordan River. **24:** *Abiathar* and *Zadok,* David's two priests. **25–29:** Caring for the ark properly would

sons, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan son of Abiathar. 28 See, I will wait at the fords of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me." 29 So Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they remained there.

30 But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, with his head covered and walking barefoot; and all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went. 31 David was told that Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, "O LORD, I pray you, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."

32 When David came to the summit, where God was worshiped, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat torn and earth on his head. 33 David said to him, "If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me. 34 But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father's servant in time past, so now I will be your servant,' then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel. 35 The priests Zadok and Abiathar will be with you there. So whatever you hear from the king's house, tell it to the priests Zadok and Abiathar. 36 Their two sons are with them there, Zadok's son Ahimaaz and Abiathar's son Jonathan; and by them you shall report to me everything you hear." 37 So Hushai, David's friend, came into the city, just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.

16 When David had passed a little beyond the summit, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth[a] met him, with a couple of donkeys saddled, carrying two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred bunches of raisins, one hundred of summer fruits, and one skin of wine. 2 The king said to Ziba, "Why have you brought these?" Ziba answered, "The donkeys are for the king's household to ride, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine is for those to drink who faint in the wilderness." 3 The king said, "And where is your master's son?" Ziba said to the king, "He remains in Jerusalem; for he said, 'Today the house of Israel will give me back my grandfather's kingdom.'" 4 Then the king said to Ziba, "All that belonged to Mephibosheth[a] is now yours." Ziba said, "I do obeisance; let me find favor in your sight, my lord the king."

5 When King David came to Bahurim, a man of the family of the house of Saul came out whose name was Shimei son of Gera; he came out cursing. 6 He threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David; now all the people and all the warriors were on his right and on his left. 7 Shimei shouted while he cursed, "Out! Out! Murderer! Scoundrel! 8 The LORD has avenged on all of you the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, disaster has overtaken you; for you are a man of blood."

9 Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head." 10 But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he

[a] Or *Merib-baal*: See 4.4 note

slow David's retreat (see 6.1–11). Besides, the priests could serve as David's spies in Jerusalem. **30:** *His head covered and walking barefoot,* conventional signs of mourning. **31–37:** David was disheartened to learn that his wise adviser, Ahithophel (see 16.23), had joined Absalom. As he walked up the Mount of Olives (v. 31), he prayed for help against Ahithophel. His prayer was answered at the *summit* when he met Hushai, who would help him defeat Ahithophel's advice. *Where God was worshiped* (v. 32), a shrine at the top of the Mount of Olives; such "high places" are outlawed in the Deuteronomistic History once the Temple is built. **37:** *David's friend* (v. 37), perhaps a title for an intimate adviser. **16.2:** *Young men,* soldiers. **3–4:** *Your master's son,* Merib-baal (Mephibosheth), Saul's grandson (see ch 9). Ziba claims that Merib-baal is planning to take over his grandfather's place as king. But Ziba may be lying (19.24–30). David rewards Ziba by giving him Saul's property. There is some question about whether David has the legal right to do this. **5:** *Shimei* belonged not only to Saul's tribe (Benjamin) but also to his *family* or clan. **6–8:** Shimei accused David of murdering members of Saul's family and usurping the throne. This indicates that David's execution of Saul's sons and grandsons (21.1–14) preceded Absalom's revolt. **9–10:** *Abishai,* the brother of Joab and Asahel (see 2.18–23). Called the *sons of Zeruiah* (David's sister) in 2 Samuel and

is cursing because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" 11 David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "My own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD has bidden him. 12 It may be that the LORD will look on my distress,[a] and the LORD will repay me with good for this cursing of me today." 13 So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along on the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, throwing stones and flinging dust at him. 14 The king and all the people who were with him arrived weary at the Jordan;[b] and there he refreshed himself.

15 Now Absalom and all the Israelites[c] came to Jerusalem; Ahithophel was with him. 16 When Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, Hushai said to Absalom, "Long live the king! Long live the king!" 17 Absalom said to Hushai, "Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?" 18 Hushai said to Absalom, "No; but the one whom the LORD and this people and all the Israelites have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain. 19 Moreover, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? Just as I have served your father, so I will serve you."

20 Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give us your counsel; what shall we do?" 21 Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, the ones he has left to look after the house; and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself odious to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened." 22 So they pitched a tent for Absalom upon the roof; and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. 23 Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the oracle[d] of God; so all the counsel of Ahithophel was esteemed, both by David and by Absalom.

17 Moreover Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will set out and pursue David tonight. 2 I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged, and throw him into a panic; and all the people who are with him will flee. I will strike down only the king, 3 and I will bring all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband. You seek the life of only one man,[e] and all the people will be at peace." 4 The advice pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

5 Then Absalom said, "Call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear too what he has to say." 6 When Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom said to him, "This is what Ahithophel

[a] Gk Vg: Heb *iniquity*
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *at the Jordan*
[c] Gk: Heb *all the people, the men of Israel*
[d] Heb *word*
[e] Gk: Heb *like the return of the whole (is) the man whom you seek*

portrayed as violent men in contrast to gentle David. *Dead dog,* see 3.8n.; 9.8n. **11:** *This Benjaminite,* a demeaning reference to Shimei.

16.15–17.29: Overcoming Ahithophel. 16.16: *David's friend,* see 15.37n. *Long live the king,* the utterance is duplicitous; for Hushai, David is still king. **18:** *The one whom the LORD and this people and all the Israelites have chosen,* again, Hushai means David. **19:** Hushai's duplicity continues. *Should it not be his son?* For Hushai, the answer is no. *Just as I have served your father, so I will serve you,* Hushai is saying that by serving Absalom he is actually serving David. In all cases (vv. 16–19), Absalom is unaware of Hushai's true meaning. **20–22:** To sleep with a member of the harem is to claim the throne. Hence, by having relations with David's concubines, Absalom makes his claim to kingship emphatic. He also fulfills Nathan's prophecy (12.12), which was likely written with Absalom's act in view. **23:** *Ahithophel* may have been Bathsheba's grandfather (cf. 11.3 and 23.34) and may have held a grudge against David for his treatment of Bathsheba and Uriah. **17.1–4:** *Ahithophel's* sensible advice is to attack while David's forces are weak from fleeing. Once David is dead, he says, all who followed him will turn to Absalom. **5–14:** *Hushai* says that David will not be so easy to find or his troops so easy to defeat (vv. 8–10). He advises Absalom to wait, gather the full force of Israel, then attack (vv. 11–13). Hushai is trying to buy time for David to reorganize his forces. Hushai also plays on Absalom's ego, saying that all the people will follow him, and he can lead them into battle (v. 12). Even though Ahithophel's advice is better than Hushai's *the LORD had ordained* that Absalom would be persuaded to follow Hushai. **15:** *Hushai* sends word to

has said; shall we do as he advises? If not, you tell us." 7 Then Hushai said to Absalom, "This time the counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good." 8 Hushai continued, "You know that your father and his men are warriors, and that they are enraged, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. Besides, your father is expert in war; he will not spend the night with the troops. 9 Even now he has hidden himself in one of the pits, or in some other place. And when some of our troops[a] fall at the first attack, whoever hears it will say, 'There has been a slaughter among the troops who follow Absalom.' 10 Then even the valiant warrior, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will utterly melt with fear; for all Israel knows that your father is a warrior, and that those who are with him are valiant warriors. 11 But my counsel is that all Israel be gathered to you, from Dan to Beer-sheba, like the sand by the sea for multitude, and that you go to battle in person. 12 So we shall come upon him in whatever place he may be found, and we shall light on him as the dew falls on the ground; and he will not survive, nor will any of those with him. 13 If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we shall drag it into the valley, until not even a pebble is to be found there." 14 Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel." For the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring ruin on Absalom.

15 Then Hushai said to the priests Zadok and Abiathar, "Thus and so did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel; and thus and so I have counseled. 16 Therefore send quickly and tell David, 'Do not lodge tonight at the fords of the wilderness, but by all means cross over; otherwise the king and all the people who are with him will be swallowed up.'" 17 Jonathan and Ahimaaz were waiting at En-rogel; a servant-girl used to go and tell them, and they would go and tell King David; for they could not risk being seen entering the city. 18 But a boy saw them, and told Absalom; so both of them went away quickly, and came to the house of a man at Bahurim, who had a well in his courtyard; and they went down into it. 19 The man's wife took a covering, stretched it over the well's mouth, and spread out grain on it; and nothing was known of it. 20 When Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house, they said, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" The woman said to them, "They have crossed over the brook[b] of water." And when they had searched and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem.

21 After they had gone, the men came up out of the well, and went and told King David. They said to David, "Go and cross the water quickly; for thus and so has Ahithophel counseled against you." 22 So David and all the people who were with him set out and crossed the Jordan; by daybreak not one was left who had not crossed the Jordan.

23 When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and went off home to his own city. He set his house in order, and hanged himself; he died and was buried in the tomb of his father.

24 Then David came to Mahanaim, while Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel. 25 Now Absalom had set Amasa over the army in the place of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Ithra the Ishmaelite,[c] who had married Abigal daughter of Na-

[a] Gk Mss: Heb *some of them*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] 1 Chr 2.17: Heb *Israelite*

David through *the priests Zadok and Abiathar* and their sons (see 15:24–29). **16:** Hushai has bought David some time but urges him to cross the Jordan quickly and escape. **17:** *Jonathan and Ahimaaz*, the sons of Zadok and Abiathar. En-rogel, "the spring of the fuller," in the Kidron Valley south of Jerusalem. **18–19:** *Well,* a simple pit whose opening could be covered with a blanket and *grain* spread over it for camouflage. **23:** *Ahithophel . . . hanged himself,* perhaps because he knew that the end of Absalom's reign was imminent. There is no stigma associated with suicide in the Bible; see 1 Sam 31.5n. **24:** *Mahanaim,* the site east of the Jordan where Abner had conducted Ishbaal after making him king (2.8); it was easily defensible. **25:** *Amasa,* David's nephew, the son of his sister *Zeruiah* (see 1 Chr 2.16). Zeruiah is called the daughter of *Nahash* here rather than the daughter of Jesse. This may be a scribal error (note that Nahash occurs in v. 27), or *Abigal* may have been David's half sister.

hash, sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother. [26] The Israelites and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead.

[27] When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Machir son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, [28] brought beds, basins, and earthen vessels, wheat, barley, meal, parched grain, beans and lentils,[a] [29] honey and curds, sheep, and cheese from the herd, for David and the people with him to eat; for they said, "The troops are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."

18 Then David mustered the men who were with him, and set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. [2] And David divided the army into three groups:[b] one third under the command of Joab, one third under the command of Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third under the command of Ittai the Gittite. The king said to the men, "I myself will also go out with you." [3] But the men said, "You shall not go out. For if we flee, they will not care about us. If half of us die, they will not care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us;[c] therefore it is better that you send us help from the city." [4] The king said to them, "Whatever seems best to you I will do." So the king stood at the side of the gate, while all the army marched out by hundreds and by thousands. [5] The king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom.

[6] So the army went out into the field against Israel; and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. [7] The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. [8] The battle spread over the face of all the country; and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword.

[9] Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging[d] between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on. [10] A man saw it, and told Joab, "I saw Absalom hanging in an oak." [11] Joab said to the man who told him, "What, you saw him! Why then did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have been glad to give you ten pieces of silver and a belt." [12] But the man said to Joab, "Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not raise my hand against the king's son; for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, saying: For my sake protect the young man Absalom! [13] On the other hand, if I had dealt treacherously against his life[e] (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof." [14] Joab said, "I will not waste time like this with you." He took three spears in his hand, and thrust them into the heart of Absalom, while he was still alive in the oak. [15] And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him.

[16] Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops came back from pursuing Israel,

[a] Heb *and lentils and parched grain*
[b] Gk: Heb *sent forth the army*
[c] Gk Vg Symmachus: Heb *for now there are ten thousand such as we*
[d] Gk Syr Tg: Heb *was put*
[e] Another reading is *at the risk of my life*

27: *Nahash,* the Ammonite king with whom David had a treaty (10.1–2). His son, *Shobi,* loyal to the treaty, now helps David in exile. *Machir,* see 9.4.

18.1–19.10: The defeat and death of Absalom. 18.3: *You shall not go out,* cf. the story in 21.15–17. **5:** Through David's order concerning Absalom, the writer shows that David was not responsible for Absalom's death. **6–8:** David chooses the rugged *forest of Ephraim* as the battle site, thereby countering the larger numbers of Absalom's army. This is another benefit afforded him by the delay that Hushai achieved. **9:** *Mule,* the royal mount for King David and his sons (see 13.29; 1 Kings 1.38). Thus, Absalom's unseating from the mule symbolizes his loss of the kingdom. His being caught by the head recalls his glorious hair (14.26) and suggests that his pride was his downfall. **12:** *In our hearing the king commanded,* see v. 5. **14:** *Spears* may also be translated "sticks." Apparently, Joab stabbed or struck Absalom with them in order to dislodge him from the tree and finish him off

for Joab restrained the troops. 17 They took Absalom, threw him into a great pit in the forest, and raised over him a very great heap of stones. Meanwhile all the Israelites fled to their homes. 18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself a pillar that is in the King's Valley, for he said, "I have no son to keep my name in remembrance"; he called the pillar by his own name. It is called Absalom's Monument to this day.

19 Then Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, "Let me run, and carry tidings to the king that the LORD has delivered him from the power of his enemies." 20 Joab said to him, "You are not to carry tidings today; you may carry tidings another day, but today you shall not do so, because the king's son is dead." 21 Then Joab said to a Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed before Joab, and ran. 22 Then Ahimaaz son of Zadok said again to Joab, "Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite." And Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, seeing that you have no reward[a] for the tidings?" 23 "Come what may," he said, "I will run." So he said to him, "Run." Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the Plain, and outran the Cushite.

24 Now David was sitting between the two gates. The sentinel went up to the roof of the gate by the wall, and when he looked up, he saw a man running alone. 25 The sentinel shouted and told the king. The king said, "If he is alone, there are tidings in his mouth." He kept coming, and drew near. 26 Then the sentinel saw another man running; and the sentinel called to the gatekeeper and said, "See, another man running alone!" The king said, "He also is bringing tidings." 27 The sentinel said, "I think the running of the first one is like the running of Ahimaaz son of Zadok." The king said, "He is a good man, and comes with good tidings."

28 Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "All is well!" He prostrated himself before the king with his face to the ground, and said, "Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king." 29 The king said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent your servant,[b] I saw a great tumult, but I do not know what it was." 30 The king said, "Turn aside, and stand here." So he turned aside, and stood still.

31 Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said, "Good tidings for my lord the king! For the LORD has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you." 32 The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" The Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man."

33 [c] The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

19 It was told Joab, "The king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." 2 So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the troops; for the troops heard that day, "The king is grieving for his son." 3 The troops stole into the city that day as soldiers steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle. 4 The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" 5 Then

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *the king's servant, your servant*
[c] Ch 19.1 in Heb

(v. 15). **15:** *Ten young men,* hence, no individual could be blamed for the actual killing. **17:** *A very great heap of stones,* this kind of burial was reserved for a cursed person (Josh 7.26). **18:** *No son,* cf. 14.27. *Absalom's Monument,* later identified with the late Hellenistic or Roman-period tomb in the Kidron valley. **19–20:** *Ahimaaz* wants to deliver the good news of the victory to David, but Joab refuses because he knows that Absalom's death will not be welcome news to David. *Because the king's son* was *dead* may be the narrator's words rather than Joab's (see v. 29). **21:** *Cushite,* a Nubian or Ethiopian. **27:** *Good tidings,* victory usually constitutes good news. But the writer goes on to depict David as focused on Absalom, whose death will be bad news to David despite the victory. **29:** *Ahimaaz* apparently does not know that Absalom is dead. **32:** The *Cushite* thinks that Absalom's death is also good news. **18.33–19.8:** David is portrayed as very distraught at his son's death, despite the political gain it means for him. Compare David's laments over Saul and Jonathan (1.11–27) and Abner (3.31–39), whose deaths

Joab came into the house to the king, and said, "Today you have covered with shame the faces of all your officers who have saved your life today, and the lives of your sons and your daughters, and the lives of your wives and your concubines, [6] for love of those who hate you and for hatred of those who love you. You have made it clear today that commanders and officers are nothing to you; for I perceive that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. [7] So go out at once and speak kindly to your servants; for I swear by the LORD, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night; and this will be worse for you than any disaster that has come upon you from your youth until now." [8] Then the king got up and took his seat in the gate. The troops were all told, "See, the king is sitting in the gate"; and all the troops came before the king.

Meanwhile, all the Israelites had fled to their homes. [9] All the people were disputing throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies, and saved us from the hand of the Philistines; and now he has fled out of the land because of Absalom. [10] But Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?"

[11] King David sent this message to the priests Zadok and Abiathar, "Say to the elders of Judah, 'Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house? The talk of all Israel has come to the king.[a] [12] You are my kin, you are my bone and my flesh; why then should you be the last to bring back the king?' [13] And say to Amasa, 'Are you not my bone and my flesh? So may God do to me, and more, if you are not the commander of my army from now on, in place of Joab.'" [14] Amasa[b] swayed the hearts of all the people of Judah as one, and they sent word to the king, "Return, both you and all your servants." [15] So the king came back to the Jordan; and Judah came to Gilgal to meet the king and to bring him over the Jordan.

[16] Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite, from Bahurim, hurried to come down with the people of Judah to meet King David; [17] with him were a thousand people from Benjamin. And Ziba, the servant of the house of Saul, with his fifteen sons and his twenty servants, rushed down to the Jordan ahead of the king, [18] while the crossing was taking place,[c] to bring over the king's household, and to do his pleasure.

Shimei son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was about to cross the Jordan, [19] and said to the king, "May my lord not hold me guilty or remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem; may the king not bear it in mind. [20] For your servant knows that I have sinned; therefore, see, I have come this day, the first of all the house of Joseph to come down to meet my lord the king." [21] Abishai son of Zeruiah answered, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed?" [22] But David said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should today become an adversary to me? Shall anyone be put to death in Israel this day? For do I not know that I am this day

[a] Gk: Heb *to the king, to his house*
[b] Heb *He*
[c] Cn: Heb *the ford crossed*

also benefited him. **19.6:** *Love* and *hate* can be political terms for loyalty and disloyalty. Joab's point is that David shows love to those who are disloyal to him (Absalom) while failing to show love or appreciation toward his loyal subjects. **9:** *All the tribes of Israel* may refer to the northern tribes, not Judah, which is the focus of the subsequent narrative.

19.11–43: David returns to Jerusalem. 11–12: David contacts the tribal leaders or *elders* of Judah to encourage them to welcome him back as king before *all Israel* (i.e., the northern tribes) does so. **13:** David appoints *Amasa* as his army commander in place of Joab because of Amasa's influence in Judah's army (see 17.25), and perhaps also because David shrewdly calculated that this would gain favor with the troops who had been loyal to Absalom, since Amasa was Absalom's commander. It may also be intended to express David's anger at Joab for having disobeyed his instructions regarding Absalom. All of these factors may provide motivation for Joab's murder of Amasa (20.10). *My bone and my flesh,* David was Amasa's uncle (see 17.25). **14:** Amasa, in turn, persuades the *people* (i.e., army) of Judah to return to David. **15:** *Gilgal,* west of the Jordan River, was an ancient Israelite shrine

king over Israel?" [23] The king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And the king gave him his oath.

[24] Mephibosheth[a] grandson of Saul came down to meet the king; he had not taken care of his feet, or trimmed his beard, or washed his clothes, from the day the king left until the day he came back in safety. [25] When he came from Jerusalem to meet the king, the king said to him, "Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?"[a] [26] He answered, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me; for your servant said to him, 'Saddle a donkey for me,[b] so that I may ride on it and go with the king.' For your servant is lame. [27] He has slandered your servant to my lord the king. But my lord the king is like the angel of God; do therefore what seems good to you. [28] For all my father's house were doomed to death before my lord the king; but you set your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right have I, then, to appeal to the king?" [29] The king said to him, "Why speak any more of your affairs? I have decided: you and Ziba shall divide the land." [30] Mephibosheth[a] said to the king, "Let him take it all, since my lord the king has arrived home safely."

[31] Now Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim; he went on with the king to the Jordan, to escort him over the Jordan. [32] Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. He had provided the king with food while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. [33] The king said to Barzillai, "Come over with me, and I will provide for you in Jerusalem at my side." [34] But Barzillai said to the king, "How many years have I still to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? [35] Today I am eighty years old; can I discern what is pleasant and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats or what he drinks? Can I still listen to the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? [36] Your servant will go a little way over the Jordan with the king. Why should the king recompense me with such a reward? [37] Please let your servant return, so that I may die in my own town, near the graves of my father and my mother. But here is your servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do for him whatever seems good to you." [38] The king answered, "Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do for him whatever seems good to you; and all that you desire of me I will do for you." [39] Then all the people crossed over the Jordan, and the king crossed over; the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own home. [40] The king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him; all the people of Judah, and also half the people of Israel, brought the king on his way.

[a] Or *Merib-baal*: See 4.4 note
[b] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *said, 'I will saddle a donkey for myself*

where Saul had been made king (1 Sam 11.15). **16–23:** *Shimei* and those with him were from the tribe of *Benjamin,* Saul's tribe. Shimei had ridiculed David when he fled from Jerusalem (16.5–13). Now that David is victorious, he asks forgiveness. David grants it, perhaps in part because of the *thousand people* (soldiers) *from Benjamin* with Shimei. *House of Joseph* (v. 20), the northern tribes, Israel as opposed to Judah. *Abishai* still wants to kill Shimei (16.9), but David refuses. This is part of the author's portrayal of David as gentle, in contrast to the violent *sons of Zeruiah* (v. 22). It may also have been customary for a new king to pardon criminals on the day of his coronation (see 1 Sam 11.13). **24:** *Taken care of his feet* may mean trimmed his toenails, since the writer cites it as evidence that Merib-baal (*Mephibosheth*) had been mourning David's exile. **25–30:** *Ziba* had accused Merib-baal of plotting to take the throne (16.1–4). Merib-baal here defends himself, saying that Ziba refused to help him to flee with David, and he could not leave on his own accord because of his physical condition. David's decision (v. 29) indicates that he does not know which of them is telling the truth. *All my father's house were doomed to death before my lord the king,* a new king often executed all the heirs of his predecessor in order to have no rival for the throne. **31–40:** *Barzillai* had helped to provide for David in exile (17.27). David now invites him to come live in his palace in Jerusalem. Barzillai replies that he is too old to enjoy it, but he arranges for the king to take his son Chimham instead. **35:** *Can I discern . . . ,* lit. "Can I know between good and evil?" likely a reference to sexual pleasure. Cf. Gen 2.9; Isa 7.15. **41:** Barzillai says that he is too old to enjoy the pleasures of taste, music,

41 Then all the people of Israel came to the king, and said to him, "Why have our kindred the people of Judah stolen you away, and brought the king and his household over the Jordan, and all David's men with him?" 42 All the people of Judah answered the people of Israel, "Because the king is near of kin to us. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we eaten at all at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?" 43 But the people of Israel answered the people of Judah, "We have ten shares in the king, and in David also we have more than you. Why then did you despise us? Were we not the first to speak of bringing back our king?" But the words of the people of Judah were fiercer than the words of the people of Israel.

20 Now a scoundrel named Sheba son of Bichri, a Benjaminite, happened to be there. He sounded the trumpet and cried out,

"We have no portion in David,
no share in the son of Jesse!
Everyone to your tents, O Israel!"

2 So all the people of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba son of Bichri; but the people of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

3 David came to his house at Jerusalem; and the king took the ten concubines whom he had left to look after the house, and put them in a house under guard, and provided for them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood.

4 Then the king said to Amasa, "Call the men of Judah together to me within three days, and be here yourself." 5 So Amasa went to summon Judah; but he delayed beyond the set time that had been appointed him. 6 David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom; take your lord's servants and pursue him, or he will find fortified cities for himself, and escape from us." 7 Joab's men went out after him, along with the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and all the warriors; they went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba son of Bichri. 8 When they were at the large stone that is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing a soldier's garment and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened at his waist; as he went forward it fell out. 9 Joab said to Amasa, "Is it well with you, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. 10 But Amasa did not notice the sword in Joab's hand; Joab struck him in the belly so that his entrails poured out on the ground, and he died. He did not strike a second blow.

Then Joab and his brother Abishai pursued Sheba son of Bichri. 11 And one of Joab's men took his stand by Amasa, and said, "Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab." 12 Amasa lay wallowing in his blood on the highway, and the man saw that all the people were stopping. Since he saw that all who came by him were stopping, he carried Amasa from the highway into a field, and threw a garment over him. 13 Once he was removed from the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba son of Bichri.

14 Sheba[a] passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-maacah;[b] and all the Bichrites[c] assembled, and followed him

[a] Heb *He*
[b] Compare 20.15: Heb *and Beth-maacah*
[c] Compare Gk Vg: Heb *Berites*

or sex that are available at David's court. But his son is not too old. The army (*people*) of Judah welcomes David back before the army of Israel. **42:** The army of Judah denies that it has received any special favors or bribes from David. **43:** *Ten shares,* the ten northern tribes of Israel.

20.1–26: Sheba's revolt. 1: *Happened to be there,* at the scene in Gilgal described in 19.41–43. Ch 20 continues that story. *Everyone to your tents,* an idiom for military demobilization; Sheba is calling for the army of Israel to withdraw from David; cf. 1 Kings 12.16. **2:** *All the people of Israel,* the northern tribes. The phrase exaggerates the extent of the northern disaffection with David (see v. 21). **3:** David no longer had sexual relations with the *ten concubines* he had left behind, because Absalom had slept with them (16.20–22). **7:** *The Cherethites* and *Pelethites,* perhaps "Cretans" and "Philistines," who composed the royal bodyguard (8.19). **8–10:** *Joab*'s assassination of *Amasa* is similar to his murder of Abner (3.26–39). His implied motive had to do with the fact that Amasa had taken Joab's place as army commander (19.13). His actual motive was more likely political: to rid David of a powerful rival for the leadership of Judah. **13:** *The people,* the army. **14:** *Abel of Beth-maacah* is in the extreme

inside. 15 Joab's forces[a] came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maacah; they threw up a siege ramp against the city, and it stood against the rampart. Joab's forces were battering the wall to break it down. 16 Then a wise woman called from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab, 'Come here, I want to speak to you.'" 17 He came near her; and the woman said, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your servant." He answered, "I am listening." 18 Then she said, "They used to say in the old days, 'Let them inquire at Abel'; and so they would settle a matter. 19 I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel; you seek to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel; why will you swallow up the heritage of the LORD?" 20 Joab answered, "Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy! 21 That is not the case! But a man of the hill country of Ephraim, called Sheba son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against King David; give him up alone, and I will withdraw from the city." The woman said to Joab, "His head shall be thrown over the wall to you." 22 Then the woman went to all the people with her wise plan. And they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bichri, and threw it out to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they dispersed from the city, and all went to their homes, while Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king.

23 Now Joab was in command of all the army of Israel;[b] Benaiah son of Jehoiada was in command of the Cherethites and the Pelethites; 24 Adoram was in charge of the forced labor; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the recorder; 25 Sheva was secretary; Zadok and Abiathar were priests; 26 and Ira the Jairite was also David's priest.

21 Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. The LORD said, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." 2 So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel, but of the remnant

[a] Heb *They*

[b] Cn: Heb *Joab to all the army, Israel*

northern part of Israel. **15:** Ancient Israelite cities were surrounded by thick walls that had to be broken through with battering rams. **16:** *Wise woman* (cf. ch 14) in this case could be a title for a city official. She is certainly intelligent and eloquent and acts on behalf of her city. **18:** *Let them inquire at Abel* implies that Abel was a central city for settling legal disputes or for divination. **19:** *A mother in Israel,* a large city, a metropolis. *The heritage of the LORD,* the land and people of Israel; see 1 Sam 10.1. **20:** The woman pleads for her city based on its antiquity and historical value to Israel. **21:** The woman apparently does not know about Sheba, indicating that his revolt did not reach to all Israel but included only part of Benjamin and *the hill country of Ephraim.* **23–26:** This cabinet list is similar to the one in 8.16–18. It probably came to this location by attachment to 21.1–14, which originally stood directly before 9.1. Alternatively, the two lists are used to frame the section, sometimes called "David under the curse." The two lists are probably variants, although according to some scholars they reflect different periods in David's reign. *The Cherethites and the Pelethites,* see v. 7n. *Forced labor,* conscripted from the northern tribes by David and Solomon. *Adoram* or Adoniram (1 Kings 4.6) was later stoned when the Israelites rebelled against the Davidic dynasty (1 Kings 12.18).

Chs 21–24: An appendix of miscellaneous stories and poems. The final four chapters of 2 Samuel contain six passages arranged in chiastic order: narrative (21.1–14), list (21.15–22), poem (22.1–51), poem (23.1–7), list (23.8–38), narrative (24.1–25). The accumulation of these passages may have come about as follows. 21.1–14 was moved from its original place before ch 9. The motive was likely to lessen the impression that David had Saul's heirs killed for political reasons. The story in 24.1–25 was added to 21.1–14 (see 24.1) and placed as the final episode in David's life before the account of his death in 1 Kings 1–2 because it anticipated the founding of the Temple under Solomon. The lists may have been added next, separating the two narratives. The two psalms were then inserted. Ch 22 is a song of deliverance and praise for victory. It is appropriate following the list of victories in 21.15–22. Then 23.1–7 provides David's "last words," in the tradition of other leading biblical characters.

21.1–14: The execution of Saul's heirs. 1–2: The *Gibeonites* had a special treaty with Israel (Josh 9). This story assumes that the violation of that treaty brought divine wrath. The Bible nowhere recounts Saul's attempted extermination of the Gibeonites. *Amorites,* one of several groups of pre-Israelite residents of the land of Ca-

of the Amorites; although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had tried to wipe them out in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.) 3 David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? How shall I make expiation, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?" 4 The Gibeonites said to him, "It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put anyone to death in Israel." He said, "What do you say that I should do for you?" 5 They said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel— 6 let seven of his sons be handed over to us, and we will impale them before the LORD at Gibeon on the mountain of the LORD."[a] The king said, "I will hand them over."

7 But the king spared Mephibosheth,[b] the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan son of Saul. 8 The king took the two sons of Rizpah daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth;[b] and the five sons of Merab[c] daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite; 9 he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they impaled them on the mountain before the LORD. The seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest.

10 Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it on a rock for herself, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell on them from the heavens; she did not allow the birds of the air to come on the bodies[d] by day, or the wild animals by night. 11 When David was told what Rizpah daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, 12 David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the people of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hung them up, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. 13 He brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who had been impaled. 14 They buried the bones of Saul and of his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of his father Kish; they did all that the king commanded. After that, God heeded supplications for the land.

15 The Philistines went to war again with Israel, and David went down together with his servants. They fought against the Philistines, and David grew weary. 16 Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was fitted out with new weapons,[e] said he would kill David. 17 But Abishai son of Zeruiah came to his aid, and attacked the Philistine and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, "You shall not go out with us to battle any longer, so that you do not quench the lamp of Israel."

[a] Cn Compare Gk and 21.9: Heb *at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the* LORD
[b] Or *Merib-baal*: See 4.4 note
[c] Two Heb Mss Syr Compare Gk: MT *Michal*
[d] Heb *them*
[e] Heb *was belted anew*

naan, often used in the Deuteronomistic History for all of them. **3:** *The heritage of the* LORD, the land and people of Israel; see 1 Sam 10.1n. **4:** The Gibeonites regard this as a matter for blood vengeance, but as resident aliens in Israel they do not have that right. **5–9:** Typically, the founder of a new dynasty annihilated the potential claimants from the previous dynasty as David does here. Saul's alleged offense provides a religious legitimation for this political act. Only Merib-baal is spared (v. 7), probably because he is crippled and therefore cannot be king, though this may also reflect David's relationship with Jonathan (see 1 Sam 18.1–3; 20.17,41–42). On the other hand, the theme of David's affection for and covenant with Jonathan may have been developed by the author from the historical fact of David's preservation of Merib-baal. This event took place early in David's reign over Israel and originally came before 9.1, where David asks if anyone is left in Saul's house. *Sons* (v. 6) also includes grandsons. *Mephibosheth* (v. 8), not Jonathan's son, Merib-baal, who was spared. The *barley harvest* was in April-May. **10:** *Rizpah* was Saul's concubine (3.7–11). **11–14:** As a result of Rizpah's courageous action, David tries to honor the memory of Saul and Jonathan; see 1 Sam 31.12–13.

21.15–22: Stories from the Philistine wars. The stories recounted here come from the battles with the Philistines earlier in David's reign. **16:** *Three hundred shekels* was about 8 lb (3.5 kg). **17:** The insistence of David's men

18 After this a battle took place with
the Philistines, at Gob; then Sibbecai the
Hushathite killed Saph, who was one of the
descendants of the giants. 19 Then there was
another battle with the Philistines at Gob;
and Elhanan son of Jaare-oregim, the Beth-
lehemite, killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft
of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.
20 There was again war at Gath, where there
was a man of great size, who had six fingers
on each hand, and six toes on each foot,
twenty-four in number; he too was descend-
ed from the giants. 21 When he taunted Israel,
Jonathan son of David's brother Shimei, killed
him. 22 These four were descended from the
giants in Gath; they fell by the hands of David
and his servants.

22 David spoke to the LORD the words of
this song on the day when the LORD
delivered him from the hand of all his en-
emies, and from the hand of Saul. 2 He said:

The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my
deliverer,
3 my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation,
my stronghold and my refuge,
my savior; you save me from violence.
4 I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be
praised,
and I am saved from my enemies.

5 For the waves of death encompassed me,
the torrents of perdition assailed me;
6 the cords of Sheol entangled me,
the snares of death confronted me.

7 In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I called.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry came to his ears.

8 Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations of the heavens
trembled
and quaked, because he was angry.
9 Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him.
10 He bowed the heavens, and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet.
11 He rode on a cherub, and flew;
he was seen upon the wings of the
wind.
12 He made darkness around him a canopy,
thick clouds, a gathering of water.
13 Out of the brightness before him
coals of fire flamed forth.
14 The LORD thundered from heaven;
the Most High uttered his voice.
15 He sent out arrows, and scattered them
—lightning, and routed them.
16 Then the channels of the sea were seen,
the foundations of the world were laid
bare
at the rebuke of the LORD,
at the blast of the breath of his nostrils.

17 He reached from on high, he took me,
he drew me out of mighty waters.
18 He delivered me from my strong enemy,
from those who hated me;
for they were too mighty for me.

that he not go to battle may lie behind 11.1; 18.3. **19:** This represents an earlier tradition than 1 Sam 17 concerning the death of Goliath; the otherwise unknown Elhanan, rather than David, slays him. The story in 1 Sam 17 is an elaboration and reworking of this tradition, attributing the victory to the better-known David, cf. 1 Chr 20.5.

22.1–51: A psalm of praise. This psalm, which is essentially the same as Psalm 18, was written long after David's time but is inserted here as appropriate to his sentiments. The psalm praises the LORD for appearing to rescue the psalmist (vv. 1–20) and for continued support of the psalmist's military activities (vv. 21–51). Its placement following the exploits of David's heroes in 21.15–22 and David's own rescue (vv. 15–17) is appropriate. **2–3:** *Rock,* a metaphor for the LORD as protector. **5–6:** *Perdition,* the underworld, the abode of the dead, known in the Bible as *Sheol.* **7:** *Temple* suggests that this psalm was written after David, since the Temple was built by Solomon, although it may refer to God's heavenly abode (see Ps 11.4). **8:** The LORD's appearance is accompanied by earthquake. **9:** The LORD is pictured here as a fire-breathing dragon. **11–16:** The LORD is depicted here as a storm god. **11:** *Cherub*, a mythical, griffinlike creature. **14–15:** God's *voice* is thunder (Job 40.9; Ps 29.3), and he throws *lightning* bolts at his enemies. *Most High*, a title of El, head of the Canaanite pantheon. The title is later appropriated for the LORD. **16:** The psalmist envisions the world as flat; he is trapped in the underworld beneath *the foundations of the world,* which the LORD's roar uncovers. **32:** This is a monotheistic claim; the LORD (Yahweh)

19 They came upon me in the day of my calamity,
but the LORD was my stay.
20 He brought me out into a broad place;
he delivered me, because he delighted in me.

21 The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he recompensed me.
22 For I have kept the ways of the LORD,
and have not wickedly departed from my God.
23 For all his ordinances were before me,
and from his statutes I did not turn aside.
24 I was blameless before him,
and I kept myself from guilt.
25 Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness,
according to my cleanness in his sight.

26 With the loyal you show yourself loyal;
with the blameless you show yourself blameless;
27 with the pure you show yourself pure,
and with the crooked you show yourself perverse.
28 You deliver a humble people,
but your eyes are upon the haughty to bring them down.
29 Indeed, you are my lamp, O LORD,
the LORD lightens my darkness.
30 By you I can crush a troop,
and by my God I can leap over a wall.
31 This God—his way is perfect;
the promise of the LORD proves true;
he is a shield for all who take refuge in him.

32 For who is God, but the LORD?
And who is a rock, except our God?
33 The God who has girded me with strength[a]
has opened wide my path.[b]
34 He made my[c] feet like the feet of deer,
and set me secure on the heights.
35 He trains my hands for war,
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
36 You have given me the shield of your salvation,
and your help[d] has made me great.
37 You have made me stride freely,
and my feet do not slip;
38 I pursued my enemies and destroyed them,
and did not turn back until they were consumed.
39 I consumed them; I struck them down,
so that they did not rise;
they fell under my feet.
40 For you girded me with strength for the battle;
you made my assailants sink under me.
41 You made my enemies turn their backs to me,
those who hated me, and I destroyed them.
42 They looked, but there was no one to save them;
they cried to the LORD, but he did not answer them.
43 I beat them fine like the dust of the earth,
I crushed them and stamped them down like the mire of the streets.

44 You delivered me from strife with the peoples;[e]
you kept me as the head of the nations;
people whom I had not known served me.
45 Foreigners came cringing to me;
as soon as they heard of me, they obeyed me.
46 Foreigners lost heart,
and came trembling out of their strongholds.

47 The LORD lives! Blessed be my rock,
and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation,

[a] Q Ms Gk Syr Vg Compare Ps 18.32: MT *God is my strong refuge*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Another reading is *his*
[d] Q Ms: MT *your answering*
[e] Gk: Heb *from strife with my people*

48 the God who gave me vengeance
and brought down peoples under me,
49 who brought me out from my enemies;
you exalted me above my adversaries,
you delivered me from the violent.

50 For this I will extol you, O LORD, among the nations,
and sing praises to your name.
51 He is a tower of salvation for his king,
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his descendants forever.

23 Now these are the last words of David:
The oracle of David, son of Jesse,
the oracle of the man whom God exalted,[a]
the anointed of the God of Jacob,
the favorite of the Strong One of Israel:

2 The spirit of the LORD speaks through me,
his word is upon my tongue.
3 The God of Israel has spoken,
the Rock of Israel has said to me:
One who rules over people justly,
ruling in the fear of God,
4 is like the light of morning,
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

5 Is not my house like this with God?
For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,
ordered in all things and secure.
Will he not cause to prosper
all my help and my desire?
6 But the godless are[b] all like thorns that are thrown away;
for they cannot be picked up with the hand;
7 to touch them one uses an iron bar
or the shaft of a spear.
And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.[c]

8 These are the names of the warriors whom David had: Josheb-basshebeth a Tahchemonite; he was chief of the Three;[d] he wielded his spear[e] against eight hundred whom he killed at one time.

9 Next to him among the three warriors was Eleazar son of Dodo son of Ahohi. He was with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there for battle. The Israelites withdrew, 10 but he stood his ground. He struck down the Philistines until his arm grew weary, though his hand clung to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. Then the people came back to him—but only to strip the dead.

11 Next to him was Shammah son of Agee, the Hararite. The Philistines gathered together at Lehi, where there was a plot of ground full of lentils; and the army fled from

[a] Q Ms: MT *who was raised on high*
[b] Heb *But worthlessness*
[c] Heb *in sitting*
[d] Gk Vg Compare 1 Chr 11.11: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[e] 1 Chr 11.11: Meaning of Heb uncertain

alone is God. **33–43:** The LORD equips the psalmist for battle. **47:** *Rock,* see vv. 2–3n. **51:** *Steadfast love,* loyalty. This verse alludes to the LORD's promise to David of an enduring dynasty (2 Sam 7). *Anointed,* Heb "mashiaḥ" ("messiah"), a royal title appropriate for any king (see 1 Sam 2.10n). *David and his descendants,* if original, suggests that the psalm comes from royal circles in Judah.

23.1–7: The last words of David. There may have been a literary tradition in the Bible of ascribing poems to leading characters as their "last words." Compare the poems attributed to Jacob in Gen 49 and to Moses in Deut 32–33. David's last words, though, do not consist of a blessing of Israel. Like Moses, however, David is portrayed as a prophet pronouncing an oracle (23.1–2). The actual date of David's "last words" is uncertain. In contrast to ch 22, 23.1–7 has no parallel in Psalms. **1:** *Anointed,* a royal title, here referring to David, echoing the end of ch 22. *Strong One of Israel,* an epithet for the LORD. **3:** *Rock,* see 22.3,47. **4:** The image of the king as the sun was common in the ancient Near East, especially in Egypt, although less so in Israel. **5:** *House,* the king's (David's) dynasty. *Everlasting covenant,* the LORD's promise of a dynasty for David in 7.16; cf. Ps 89.28–29. **6–7:** These verses continue the image of vv. 3–4. The *godless* are like *thorns* consumed by the sun's heat.

23.8–39: David's heroes. 8–12: Nothing more is known about *the Three* greatest warriors in David's army.

the Philistines. [12] But he took his stand in the middle of the plot, defended it, and killed the Philistines; and the LORD brought about a great victory.

[13] Towards the beginning of harvest three of the thirty[a] chiefs went down to join David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim. [14] David was then in the stronghold; and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. [15] David said longingly, "O that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!" [16] Then the three warriors broke through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it; he poured it out to the LORD, [17] for he said, "The LORD forbid that I should do this. Can I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?" Therefore he would not drink it. The three warriors did these things.

[18] Now Abishai son of Zeruiah, the brother of Joab, was chief of the Thirty.[b] With his spear he fought against three hundred men and killed them, and won a name beside the Three. [19] He was the most renowned of the Thirty,[c] and became their commander; but he did not attain to the Three.

[20] Benaiah son of Jehoiada was a valiant warrior[d] from Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds; he struck down two sons of Ariel[e] of Moab. He also went down and killed a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. [21] And he killed an Egyptian, a handsome man. The Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but Benaiah went against him with a staff, snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with his own spear. [22] Such were the things Benaiah son of Jehoiada did, and won a name beside the three warriors. [23] He was renowned among the Thirty, but he did not attain to the Three. And David put him in charge of his bodyguard.

[24] Among the Thirty were Asahel brother of Joab; Elhanan son of Dodo of Bethlehem; [25] Shammah of Harod; Elika of Harod; [26] Helez the Paltite; Ira son of Ikkesh of Tekoa; [27] Abiezer of Anathoth; Mebunnai the Hushathite; [28] Zalmon the Ahohite; Maharai of Netophah; [29] Heleb son of Baanah of Netophah; Ittai son of Ribai of Gibeah of the Benjaminites; [30] Benaiah of Pirathon; Hiddai of the torrents of Gaash; [31] Abi-albon the Arbathite; Azmaveth of Bahurim; [32] Eliahba of Shaalbon; the sons of Jashen: Jonathan [33] son of [f]Shammah the Hararite; Ahiam son of Sharar the Hararite; [34] Eliphelet son of Ahasbai of Maacah; Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite; [35] Hezro[g] of Carmel; Paarai the Arbite; [36] Igal son of Nathan of Zobah; Bani the Gadite; [37] Zelek the Ammonite; Naharai of Beeroth, the armor-bearer of Joab son of Zeruiah; [38] Ira the Ithrite; Gareb the Ithrite; [39] Uriah the Hittite—thirty-seven in all.

[a] Heb adds *head*
[b] Two Heb Mss Syr: MT *Three*
[c] Syr Compare 1 Chr 11.25: Heb *Was he the most renowned of the Three?*
[d] Another reading is *the son of Ish-hai*
[e] Gk: Heb lacks *sons of*
[f] Gk: Heb lacks *son of*
[g] Another reading is *Hezrai*

13–17: This story is not about the three warriors just listed but about three anonymous members of the honor guard of *the thirty.* **13:** *The beginning of harvest,* the weather was hot and dry, which is why David became thirsty. *The cave of Adullam,* "cave" may be an error for "stronghold"; the two words differ by one letter in Hebrew. *Adullam* was David's headquarters and hideout when he fled from Saul (cf. 1 Sam 22.1–4). **14:** *Stronghold,* the fortress at Adullam. Since a *garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem,* this must have been early in David's reign or even before he became king. *Bethlehem,* David's hometown, hence his fond remembrance of the water there. **16–17:** *He poured it out to the LORD,* there are different interpretations of David's actions here. Some think he is angry that the men risked their lives foolishly. Others suggest that this was a libation or sacrifice to God, a great honor to the three men. **20–23:** *Benaiah,* the commander of David's bodyguard and later of the army under Solomon. **24:** *Asahel* seems to be a young warrior aspiring to greatness in the story of his death (2.18–23). It is surprising to find his name in this list of soldiers who distinguished themselves in David's army. This may indicate that the story in 2 Sam 2 was invented to give Joab a personal motive, rather than the political one of following David's order, for killing Abner. *Elhanan* killed Goliath (21.19). **30:** *Benaiah,* a different man from the Benaiah in vv. 20–23. **39:** *Uriah,* Bathsheba's husband (ch 11). It is uncertain how the count of *thirty-seven*

24 Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, count the people of Israel and Judah." [2] So the king said to Joab and the commanders of the army,[a] who were with him, "Go through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, and take a census of the people, so that I may know how many there are." [3] But Joab said to the king, "May the LORD your God increase the number of the people a hundredfold, while the eyes of my lord the king can still see it! But why does my lord the king want to do this?" [4] But the king's word prevailed against Joab and the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to take a census of the people of Israel. [5] They crossed the Jordan, and began from[b] Aroer and from the city that is in the middle of the valley, toward Gad and on to Jazer. [6] Then they came to Gilead, and to Kadesh in the land of the Hittites;[c] and they came to Dan, and from Dan[d] they went around to Sidon, [7] and came to the fortress of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites; and they went out to the Negeb of Judah at Beer-sheba. [8] So when they had gone through all the land, they came back to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. [9] Joab reported to the king the number of those who had been recorded: in Israel there were eight hundred thousand soldiers able to draw the sword, and those of Judah were five hundred thousand.

[10] But afterward, David was stricken to the heart because he had numbered the people. David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, I pray you, take away the guilt of your servant; for I have done very foolishly." [11] When David rose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, [12] "Go and say to David: Thus says the LORD: Three things I offer[e] you; choose one of them, and I will do it to you." [13] So Gad came to David and told him; he asked him, "Shall three[f] years of famine come to you on your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to the one who sent me." [14] Then David said to Gad, "I

[a] 1 Chr 21.2 Gk: Heb *to Joab the commander of the army*
[b] Gk Mss: Heb *encamped in Aroer south of*
[c] Gk: Heb *to the land of Tahtim-hodshi*
[d] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *they came to Dan-jaan and*
[e] Or *hold over*
[f] 1 Chr 21.12 Gk: Heb *seven*

is achieved. The list in vv. 24–39 has thirty names in it. The addition of the "Three" plus Abishai and Benaiah brings the number to thirty-five. Joab may have been counted as a member of this elite group, though his name is not specifically mentioned. There are textual variations in vv. 24–39 where an additional name may have been read.

24.1–25: David's census. The final narrative in 2 Samuel. It must be remembered that 2 Samuel and 1 Kings were originally part of a larger work and not separate books. This chapter, then, was not written as a conclusion to 2 Samuel. Rather, it anticipates the building of the Temple under Solomon (vv. 18–25; see 1 Kings chs 5–6; 8) and thus looks forward to the important results of David's reign. **1:** *Again* implies that this story is the sequel to an earlier one, perhaps 21.1–14. This same story is found in 1 Chr 21, which says that Satan rather than the anger of the LORD *incited* David. It is only in postexilic texts that (the) Satan becomes important in biblical literature. Both reflect the belief that natural calamity is the result of human sin. It is not clear why taking a census was sinful; some scholars suggest it was a sign of David's inordinate pride or that the census was meant to bring about unacceptable changes in Israelite society. (A census usually provided the basis for conscription and taxation.) Another possibility is that all men enrolled in the census were required to be ritually pure as when they went to battle, and this requirement was easily broken. **2:** *From Dan to Beer-sheba,* the traditional northern and southern limits of Israel. **3–4:** These potential dangers may explain Joab's reluctance to carry out the census. **5–7:** The census takers began at *Aroer* east of the Dead Sea and moved north as far as *Dan,* then crossed over the Jordan and went south through traditional Israel until they reached *Beer-sheba.* **9:** The count is limited to men of military age. *Thousand* may refer to a much smaller military unit. Israel and Judah are numbered separately because Judah, as David's native tribe, was exempted from taxation. **10–14:** *Stricken to the heart,* conscience-stricken; the language David uses is similar to 2 Sam 12.13. David is given a choice of three punishments. He chooses *the*

am in great distress; let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into human hands."

15 So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel from that morning until the appointed time; and seventy thousand of the people died, from Dan to Beer-sheba. 16 But when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented concerning the evil, and said to the angel who was bringing destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." The angel of the LORD was then by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. 17 When David saw the angel who was destroying the people, he said to the LORD, "I alone have sinned, and I alone have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house."

18 That day Gad came to David and said to him, "Go up and erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." 19 Following Gad's instructions, David went up, as the LORD had commanded. 20 When Araunah looked down, he saw the king and his servants coming toward him; and Araunah went out and prostrated himself before the king with his face to the ground. 21 Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you in order to build an altar to the LORD, so that the plague may be averted from the people." 22 Then Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him; here are the oxen for the burnt offering, and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. 23 All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God respond favorably to you."

24 But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy them from you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. 25 David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being. So the LORD answered his supplication for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.

hand of the LORD, an idiom for plague, trusting in the LORD's mercy. **15–16:** David's strategy works. The plague is stopped after only one day and Jerusalem is spared. *The appointed time* (v. 15) may be the time of the evening meal. *Thousand* may be a military unit of much fewer than 1,000. *Evil* (v. 16), not moral evil but destruction. *Araunah,* called Ornan in 1 Chr 21. *Jebusite,* a pre-Israelite native of Jerusalem (5.6–10). *Threshing floor,* a flat, high area where grain was separated from the chaff. God also appears to people at threshing floors elsewhere in the Bible (Judg 6.11–12). **17:** *Sheep,* the people of Jerusalem with David, as king, imagined as their shepherd; see 7.8n. **18–25:** These verses indicate that the plague was stopped after David built his altar and made his offerings rather than by the LORD's free will as in v. 16. The site of David's altar is the location of the later altar of burnt offering of Solomon's Temple. *Fifty shekels* was about 1.25 lb (.57 kg).

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1 KINGS

NAME

In the Greek Bible, the Septuagint (LXX), this book is called *Basileion 3* ("reigns" or "dynasties"). The Greek translators linked the two books of Samuel with the two books of Kings (the books of Samuel are labeled *Basileion 1* and *2*) because they narrate the story of the Israelite and Judean monarchy from its beginning until its end; indeed, 1 Kings opens with the death of David, the main character of the book of Samuel. In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Kings were originally a single book called Kings; it was divided into two, in the fifteenth century, under the influence of the Greek and Latin translations. This division originated in the Greek Bible for practical reasons: one long scroll of Kings was difficult to handle. This division artificially splits up the stories of the Israelite king Ahaziah and those of the prophet Elijah. It is probably based on a view of 2 Kings 1.1 ("after the death of Ahab") as patterned on the opening of the books of Joshua ("after the death of Moses"), Judges ("after the death of Joshua"), and 2 Samuel ("after the death of Saul").

CANONICAL STATUS AND LOCATION

In the Christian canon, 1 and 2 Kings belong to the "Historical Books" and are followed by the books of Chronicles, which offer an alternative account of the period of the monarchy. In the Jewish canon, the books of Kings close the first part of the Prophets, the "Former Prophets" comprised of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The exact meaning of this term is unclear since although prophets play some role in these books, it is not a major one. The Former Prophets do, however, provide the necessary background for the oracles of doom and of restoration that follow in the books of the "Latter Prophets."

AUTHORSHIP

Jewish tradition (*b. B. Bat.* 14b–15a) regards the prophet Jeremiah, a contemporary of the last kings of Judah, as the author of the book of Kings, perhaps because of the stylistic similarities between the books of Kings and Jeremiah. Kings and Jeremiah are both written in a style, which contemporary scholars call "Deuteronomistic"; they also share with Deuteronomy and the other books of the Former Prophets key vocabulary and theological concepts. For this reason, most scholars call the books of Deuteronomy through Kings the "Deuteronomistic History." In fact, the last episodes in the Former Prophets, the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the people, related at the end of 2 Kings, are already alluded to in Deuteronomy (see Deut 6.15 and 28.47–68). For these reasons, modern scholars posit that scribes who belonged to the same social and ideological group edited the books from Deuteronomy to Kings.

DATES OF COMPOSITION AND LITERARY HISTORY

There are some indications that the first Deuteronomistic edition of the book of Kings as well as of the book of Deuteronomy was written in approximately 620 BCE, during the reign of the Judean king Josiah. According to 2 Kings 22–23, Josiah undertook a religious reform aimed at making Jerusalem the only legitimate sanctuary for the worship of the LORD. This reform follows the main theological ideas expressed in Deuteronomy, namely the centralization of worship and the exclusive veneration of the LORD, the God who had chosen Israel as his special property. The Josianic edition's conclusion was probably 2 Kings 23.25: "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might." This ideal description of Josiah corresponds exactly to the central exhortation of the book of Deuteronomy: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut 6.5). The aim of the Josianic edition of Kings would then have been to demonstrate that Josiah fulfilled God's will by his religious and political acts. This quite optimistic work was revised anew after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE; it attempted to explain the reasons for the end of the Judean monarchy and the exile to Babylon. The last event related in 2 Kings is the alleviation of the status of king Jehoiachin, which occurred under the Babylonian king Evil-merodach (Amel-Marduk) who reigned briefly in 562–561 BCE. Therefore many scholars think that the book of Kings in its present form was written shortly after this date. Scholars have more recently pointed to evidence suggesting that the books underwent further revision during the Persian period.

The Deuteronomistic authors and editors integrated several older sources or independent documents into their work. The "Book of the Acts of Solomon" (1 Kings 11.41) may have been one such work. Later, Kings refers to "the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel" (e.g., 1 Kings 14.19) and "the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah" (e.g., 1 Kings 14.29). Such annals probably existed in the courts of Samaria and Jerusalem and were known by the authors and editors of Kings. Most of the prophetic stories about Elijah and Elisha, as well as other prophetic stories, may have existed as independent scrolls before they were incorporated at a late stage into the book of Kings. We can thus say that much of the book of Kings was produced by authors and editors that we can label as "Deuteronomists," though they incorporated some earlier sources, and the editing of the book continued into the first half of the Persian period, the late sixth and fifth centuries BCE.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

The book of Kings tells the story of the Judean and Israelite monarchies from the "United Monarchy" under Solomon (1 Kings 1–11) and its division after his death into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12), until the end of Israel (2 Kings 17) and of Judah (2 Kings 24–25). First Kings covers the time from Solomon until King Jehoshaphat of Judah and King Ahaziah of Israel. The story of Solomon can be divided into three parts: chs 1–2; 3.1–9.9; and 9.10–11.43. Chapters 1–2 relate his rise to power. The narrative of his reign is bookmarked by two divine manifestations in chs 3 and 9. Chapters 3–8 present the positive part of Solomon's activity: his wisdom and especially the construction of the Jerusalem Temple, followed by a long prayer. God's second speech to Solomon is forward-looking, evoking the possibility of his downfall, and ultimately the destruction of the Temple and the exile. First Kings 9.10–11.43 reviews Solomon negatively: he imposes forced labor upon the people, loves many foreign women, and worships their divinities. The last chapter prepares the reader for ch 12, where the kingdom is divided, and Jeroboam becomes the first king of Israel, and Rehoboam the first king of Judah. After the account of Jeroboam's reign the story of both kingdoms is narrated (until 2 Kings 17) in a synchronistic way, where the reign of each king is framed by introductory and final formulas. The information about Judean kings is more extensive, indicating that the Judean scribes likely had more information about their own kings. The formulas have the following pattern:

JUDEAN KINGS	ISRAELITE KINGS
Introductory synchronism	Introductory synchronism
The king's age at his enthronement	–
Length of reign	Length of reign
Name of his mother	–
Theological judgment	Theological judgment
Final reference to the annals of the kings of Judah	Final reference to the annals of the kings of Israel
Death of the king	Death of the king
Burial	–
Name of the successor	Name of the successor

After the story of Jeroboam and Rehoboam (chs 12–14), the narrative continues with two Judean kings (Abijam and Asa in 15.1–24) before describing the chaotic situation in the Northern Kingdom, which after several coups sees the rise of King Omri, the founder of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom (15.25–16.28). The last quarter of 1 Kings is devoted to the story of Omri's son Ahab and his Phoenician wife Jezebel (16.29–22.40). Their worship of the god Baal provokes a dramatic conflict with the LORD's prophet Elijah, which culminates in a public competition between the many prophets of Baal and the lone prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel (ch 18). First Kings concludes with short notices about Jehoshaphat of Judah and Ahaziah of Israel (22.41–53); the final verse reporting the ongoing veneration of Baal in the Northern Kingdom, which provoked the LORD's anger (22.53) hints at the end of Israel (2 Kings 17) and Judah (2 Kings 24–25).

INTERPRETATION

The book of Kings is historiography in the sense that it presents a chronological succession from the beginning of the Israelite monarchy until its end, covering roughly a time span from 970 to 560 BCE, but it is not histori-

ography in the ancient Greek or modern meaning of the term. First of all, the book of King is an anonymous work; in contrast to the ancient Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides, there is no author who speaks in the first person and who presents sources and evaluates information. There is no inquiry at all about "how things really happened." For the author(s) of Kings, the LORD is the major actor in the history of the Judean and Israelite kings. The kings whose reigns are positively evaluated are monarchs who conform themselves to God's will, whereas the unfaithful kings provoke God's punishment and in some cases, are ultimately responsible for the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem. There is no interest in an objective comprehensive and complete recounting of the past. Kings such as Josiah, whose hazardous geopolitical policies may appear strange to modern readers, are presented very positively, whereas kings with a long, apparently peaceful reign, such as Manasseh, are judged very negatively. The main interest of the authors of Kings is not the political, economical, and military achievements of kings, but their religious attitude, especially as expressed through exclusive worship of the LORD in the Temple of Jerusalem, the only legitimate sanctuary, which plays a central role throughout the book of Kings. Jeroboam, the first king of the Northern Kingdom after its separation from Judah, is described as the founder of two sanctuaries in Dan and Bethel, which appear as illegitimate competitors with the Temple of Jerusalem (1 Kings 12). Consequently, all subsequent northern kings are systematically blamed for "Jeroboam's sin." The southern kings are compared to their "father" David (1 Kings 15.3,11; 2 Kings 14.3; 16.2; 18.3; 22.2) and are evaluated based on their loyalty to the Jerusalem Temple and their condemnation of the other places of worship (the "high places").

Several narratives describe attempts by kings of Judah to reform the Jerusalem Temple (Joash, 2 Kings 12; Hezekiah, 2 Kings 18; Josiah, 2 Kings 23); these are generally followed by a return to previous idolatry (Ahaz, 2 Kings 16:10–18; Manasseh, 2 Kings 21). Only Josiah accomplishes a full restoration of the Temple, establishing an implicit parallel between Josiah, the reformer king, and Solomon, the founder of the Temple. This suggests that the first edition of Kings was an attempt to glorify Josiah as the ideal descendant of David and Solomon. The destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in 586 BCE caused a thoroughgoing revision of Kings, which was transformed into an explanation of that exile. These editors, working during the Babylonian exile or during the first decades of the Persian period, offered a "theodicy," an explanation of how a good God could cause such evil: the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple are not due to the LORD's inability to defend his nation against its enemies; on the contrary, the LORD himself had ordered the Babylonians to invade Judah in order to punish it because it did not conform to divine law as expressed in the book of Deuteronomy.

Kings concludes with the release of King Jehoiachin from Babylonian prison (2 Kings 25.27–30). The purpose of these verses is debated: Are they a theological justification of the end of monarchy and the exile or do they express hope for the renewal of the Davidic dynasty? It is difficult to decide, and the following book of Isaiah, where oracles of doom alternate with oracles of restoration and the announcement of an ideal king, has the same ambivalence.

An early form of the books of Samuel and Kings triggered an interpretative rewriting, namely the books of Chronicles. Chronicles offers an alternative, less ambiguous account of the Judean monarchy. It omits almost all of the story of the Northern Kingdom, and ends with the decree of the Persian king allowing the Judeans to return from exile and to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple.

GUIDE TO READING

The best way to understand the meaning of Kings is to read the whole story starting with Solomon (or even better with David in the books of Samuel) until its end. The reader should pay attention to the way in which the different kings are presented and also to the importance of the prophets and the prophetic stories, which alternate with the narratives about good and bad kings. It is worth asking questions concerning the theology of Kings, specifically the manner in which it attempts to give sense to a national disaster and to affirm that the LORD is the God of Israel and of Judah and also the master of all other nations.

Thomas Römer

1 King David was old and advanced in
years; and although they covered him
with clothes, he could not get warm. 2 So his
servants said to him, "Let a young virgin be
sought for my lord the king, and let her wait
on the king, and be his attendant; let her lie
in your bosom, so that my lord the king may
be warm." 3 So they searched for a beautiful
girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and
found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought
her to the king. 4 The girl was very beautiful.
She became the king's attendant and served
him, but the king did not know her sexually.

5 Now Adonijah son of Haggith exalted
himself, saying, "I will be king"; he prepared
for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty
men to run before him. 6 His father had never
at any time displeased him by asking, "Why
have you done thus and so?" He was also a
very handsome man, and he was born next
after Absalom. 7 He conferred with Joab son
of Zeruiah and with the priest Abiathar, and
they supported Adonijah. 8 But the priest
Zadok, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and
the prophet Nathan, and Shimei, and Rei,
and David's own warriors did not side with
Adonijah.

9 Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and
fatted cattle by the stone Zoheleth, which is
beside En-rogel, and he invited all his broth-
ers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials
of Judah, 10 but he did not invite the prophet
Nathan or Benaiah or the warriors or his
brother Solomon.

11 Then Nathan said to Bathsheba, Solo-
mon's mother, "Have you not heard that
Adonijah son of Haggith has become king
and our lord David does not know it? 12 Now
therefore come, let me give you advice, so
that you may save your own life and the
life of your son Solomon. 13 Go in at once to
King David, and say to him, 'Did you not, my
lord the king, swear to your servant, saying:
Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king,
and he shall sit on my throne? Why then is
Adonijah king?' 14 Then while you are still
there speaking with the king, I will come in
after you and confirm your words."

15 So Bathsheba went to the king in his
room. The king was very old; Abishag the
Shunammite was attending the king. 16 Bath-
sheba bowed and did obeisance to the king,
and the king said, "What do you wish?" 17 She
said to him, "My lord, you swore to your
servant by the LORD your God, saying: Your
son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and
he shall sit on my throne. 18 But now sud-
denly Adonijah has become king, though
you, my lord the king, do not know it. 19 He
has sacrificed oxen, fatted cattle, and sheep

1.1–53: Solomon's rise to the throne. The opening chapters of 1 Kings continue the account of the succession to David, which begins in 2 Samuel (see Introduction to 2 Samuel). The first chapter of Kings shows that Solomon was not the expected successor, but became king after a court intrigue, a well-attested motif in Assyrian and Babylonian literature. **1–4:** Virility and the ability to govern were connected in antiquity (see 1 Sam 16.22 where Absalom sleeps in public with David's wives to show that he is the new king). The strategy of David's servants to revive his vigor fails. The question of his successor has thus become unavoidable. **3:** *Abishag* is from Shunem, a town in the Jezreel valley in northern Israel. **4:** Despite Abishag's integration into David's harem, the old king is unable to have sexual relations with her. **5–8:** After the deaths of Amnon and Absalom (Chileab is mentioned only in 2 Sam 3.4), Adonijah, the next oldest son, thinks he should succeed his father to the throne. The narrator also suggests his suitability because he is *very handsome*, a royal attribute. Adonijah tries to gain support for his claim, and two important members of the court are on his side: *Joab*, David's nephew (his sister's son, according to 1 Chr 2.16) and head of the army, and *Abiathar*, David's priest, who had escaped Saul's slaughter of the priests of Nob (1 Sam 22.20–23). The opposing group (v. 8) includes members of the Jerusalemite aristocracy: the priest *Zadok* and the prophet *Nathan*, *Benaiah*, a chief of foreign mercenaries, and *Shimei*, whose identity is not clear. Perhaps one may identify him with the one mentioned in 2 Sam 16.5–14. The Zadok-Nathan party is also supported by *David's own warriors*, David's bodyguard. **9–10:** Adonijah's abundant sacrifices by the stone *Zoheleth* (the "snake stone") at *En-rogel* (the "fuller's spring," in the Kidron Valley southeast of Jerusalem) are meant to foster unity among his party. **11–14:** There is no mention in the previous story of an oath sworn by David in favor of Solomon, so it may be an invention of Nathan and Bathsheba to manipulate the ailing king. **15–31:** Bathsheba and Nathan's strategy is successful in convincing David to proclaim Solomon his successor. According to v. 22 Bathsheba is present while Nathan is speaking to David, whereas according to v. 28 she

in abundance, and has invited all the children of the king, the priest Abiathar, and Joab the commander of the army; but your servant Solomon he has not invited. 20 But you, my lord the king—the eyes of all Israel are on you to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21 Otherwise it will come to pass, when my lord the king sleeps with his ancestors, that my son Solomon and I will be counted offenders."

22 While she was still speaking with the king, the prophet Nathan came in. 23 The king was told, "Here is the prophet Nathan." When he came in before the king, he did obeisance to the king, with his face to the ground. 24 Nathan said, "My lord the king, have you said, 'Adonijah shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne'? 25 For today he has gone down and has sacrificed oxen, fatted cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's children, Joab the commander[a] of the army, and the priest Abiathar, who are now eating and drinking before him, and saying, 'Long live King Adonijah!' 26 But he did not invite me, your servant, and the priest Zadok, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon. 27 Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king and you have not let your servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?"

28 King David answered, "Summon Bathsheba to me." So she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. 29 The king swore, saying, "As the Lord lives, who has saved my life from every adversity, 30 as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,' so will I do this day." 31 Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground, and did obeisance to the king, and said, "May my lord King David live forever!"

32 King David said, "Summon to me the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada." When they came before the king, 33 the king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. 34 There let the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet, and say, 'Long live King Solomon!' 35 You shall go up following him. Let him enter and sit on my throne; he shall be king in my place; for I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah." 36 Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, "Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, so ordain. 37 As the Lord has been with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David."

38 So the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule, and led him to Gihon. 39 There the priest Zadok took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!" 40 And all the people went up following him, playing on pipes and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth quaked at their noise.

41 Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they finished feasting. When Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, "Why is the city in an uproar?" 42 While he was still speaking, Jonathan son of the priest Abiathar arrived. Adonijah said, "Come in, for you are a worthy man and surely you bring good news." 43 Jonathan answered Adonijah, "No, for our lord King David has made Solomon king; 44 the king has sent with him the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan,

[a] Gk: Heb *the commanders*

seems to have left the audience, suggesting that the story has undergone revision. **32–40:** The anointing of Solomon takes place at *Gihon*, the main spring of Jerusalem located in the Kidron Valley. **38:** Whereas Saul and David were anointed only by the prophet Samuel, but following the Lord's instructions, Solomon is anointed by a prophet and by a priest, but without explicit divine authorization. The *Cherethites* and *Pelethites*, who participate in the ritual, are David's personal troops; the names may allude to their Cretan and Philistine origin. **39:** *Tent*, the mobile sanctuary, which David transferred to Jerusalem, will be replaced by the Temple built by Solomon. **40:** After the anointing a solemn procession to the throne begins the new king's rule. **41–53:** *Jonathan*, son of Abiathar, who supported David during Absalom's revolt (2 Sam 15.36; 17.17) informs Adonijah that he will

and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and they had him ride on the king's mule; [45] the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan have anointed him king at Gihon; and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you heard. [46] Solomon now sits on the royal throne. [47] Moreover the king's servants came to congratulate our lord King David, saying, 'May God make the name of Solomon more famous than yours, and make his throne greater than your throne.' The king bowed in worship on the bed [48] and went on to pray thus, 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who today has granted one of my offspring[a] to sit on my throne and permitted me to witness it.'"

[49] Then all the guests of Adonijah got up trembling and went their own ways. [50] Adonijah, fearing Solomon, got up and went to grasp the horns of the altar. [51] Solomon was informed, "Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon; see, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not kill his servant with the sword.'" [52] So Solomon responded, "If he proves to be a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the ground; but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die." [53] Then King Solomon sent to have him brought down from the altar. He came to do obeisance to King Solomon; and Solomon said to him, "Go home."

2 When David's time to die drew near, he charged his son Solomon, saying: [2] "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, [3] and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. [4] Then the LORD will establish his word that he spoke concerning me: 'If your heirs take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel.'

[5] "Moreover you know also what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner son of Ner, and Amasa son of Jether, whom he murdered, retaliating in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist, and on the sandals on his feet. [6] Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace. [7] Deal loyally, however, with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table; for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from your brother Absalom. [8] There is also with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite

[a] Gk: Heb *one*

not become king over Israel. **50:** Adonijah fears revenge and grasps *the horns of the altar*. The altar with four horns (see Ex 29.12; 30,3; Lev 4.7), quarter-round stones on each corner, was understood in some traditions as offering a place of asylum. **52:** Solomon promises that he will not harm Adonijah if he proves to be a *worthy man*, behaving loyally to the new king (but see 2.29–30).

2.1–12: David's last words and his death. 1–4: David's exhortations recall God's words to Joshua, Israel's leader after Moses' death (Josh 1.2–9). Solomon, like every king in Israel, must abide by God's commandments as written in the *law of Moses* (see Deut 17.18–20), particularly Deuteronomy; many of David's exhortations are taken from that book (see Deut 4.29,40; 8.6; 10.12; 11.1; 29.9). **4:** A summary and interpretation of the dynastic promise of 2 Sam 7.12–16. The unconditional promise of an eternal dynasty in 2 Sam 7 is here transformed into a conditional promise, stating that the Davidic dynasty will last only if his successors respect God's will as expressed in Deuteronomy. **5–9:** David's order legitimates Solomon's killing of *Joab* and *Shimei* (vv. 28–46). **5–6:** *Joab*, a supporter of Adonijah, was formerly a loyal follower of David, who had carried out several murders, some at David's request. David accuses him of killing Abner (2 Sam 3.6–39) and Amasa (2 Sam 20.9–10). **8–9:** *Shimei*, who did not support Adonijah (1.8), has to die because he cursed David; David had sworn to him that he would not harm him (2 Sam 19.23), but David now asks Solomon to kill his former antagonist. **6:** Solomon's wisdom, which will be a main feature of his reign, is first alluded to here. *Sheol*, the underworld where all the dead go. David asks Solomon to hasten Joab's and Shimei's descent there. **7:** In contrast, Barzillai is a model of dutiful service to the king (2 Sam 17.27–29; 19.32–39). He is therefore to be allowed to eat at the king's

from Bahurim, who cursed me with a terrible curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim; but when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the LORD, 'I will not put you to death with the sword.' [9] Therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man; you will know what you ought to do to him, and you must bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol."

[10] Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. [11] The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. [12] So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

[13] Then Adonijah son of Haggith came to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. She asked, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably." [14] Then he said, "May I have a word with you?" She said, "Go on." [15] He said, "You know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel expected me to reign; however, the kingdom has turned about and become my brother's, for it was his from the LORD. [16] And now I have one request to make of you; do not refuse me." She said to him, "Go on." [17] He said, "Please ask King Solomon—he will not refuse you—to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife." [18] Bathsheba said, "Very well; I will speak to the king on your behalf."

[19] So Bathsheba went to King Solomon, to speak to him on behalf of Adonijah. The king rose to meet her, and bowed down to her; then he sat on his throne, and had a throne brought for the king's mother, and she sat on his right. [20] Then she said, "I have one small request to make of you; do not refuse me." And the king said to her, "Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you." [21] She said, "Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to your brother Adonijah as his wife." [22] King Solomon answered his mother, "And why do you ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Ask for him the kingdom as well! For he is my elder brother; ask not only for him but also for the priest Abiathar and for Joab son of Zeruiah!" [23] Then King Solomon swore by the LORD, "So may God do to me, and more also, for Adonijah has devised this scheme at the risk of his life! [24] Now therefore as the LORD lives, who has established me and placed me on the throne of my father David, and who has made me a house as he promised, today Adonijah shall be put to death." [25] So King Solomon sent Benaiah son of Jehoiada; he struck him down, and he died.

[26] The king said to the priest Abiathar, "Go to Anathoth, to your estate; for you deserve death. But I will not at this time put you to death, because you carried the ark of the Lord GOD before my father David, and because you shared in all the hardships my father endured." [27] So Solomon banished Abiathar from being priest to the LORD, thus fulfilling the word of the LORD that he had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.

[28] When the news came to Joab—for Joab had supported Adonijah though he had not supported Absalom—Joab fled to the tent of the LORD and grasped the horns of the altar. [29] When it was told King Solomon, "Joab has fled to the tent of the LORD and now is

table, a high distinction. **10:** *David slept with his ancestors,* this standard formula occurs for kings who died a natural death and expresses the idea of being united with one's ancestors in Sheol, as well as being buried in the family tomb. **11:** The *forty-year* reign of David should be understood symbolically as a reign of a complete, perfect period. In general, it is difficult to reconstruct historical dates for this period, but the first half of the tenth century BCE is probably correct; see Chronological Table of Rulers on p. 486. **12:** The notice about the establishment of Solomon's kingdom is repeated in v. 46. Between these two verses the narrator tells us how this was accomplished.

2.13–46: Solomon's elimination of his enemies and consolidation of his kingship. The fates of Adonijah, Abiathar, Joab, and Shimei. **13–25:** *Adonijah*'s request, which is relayed by Bathsheba, to marry David's last concubine Abishag is ambiguous since it can be understood as legitimating a claim to the throne (see 2 Sam 16.20–22). In Solomon's eyes Adonijah is still a rival who has to die. **26–27:** Adonijah's death is followed by the banishing of his supporter, the priest *Abiathar*. Abiathar's exile to *Anathoth* (ca. 4 mi [6 km] northeast of Jerusalem), the hometown of the prophet Jeremiah, fulfils the divine oracle against the descendants of the priest Eli in 1 Sam 2.27–36. **28–35:** The death of *Joab* may cast a negative light on

beside the altar," Solomon sent Benaiah son of Jehoiada, saying, "Go, strike him down." 30 So Benaiah came to the tent of the LORD and said to him, "The king commands, 'Come out.'" But he said, "No, I will die here." Then Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, "Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me." 31 The king replied to him, "Do as he has said, strike him down and bury him; and thus take away from me and from my father's house the guilt for the blood that Joab shed without cause. 32 The LORD will bring back his bloody deeds on his own head, because, without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and killed with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself, Abner son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah. 33 So shall their blood come back on the head of Joab and on the head of his descendants forever; but to David, and to his descendants, and to his house, and to his throne, there shall be peace from the LORD forevermore." 34 Then Benaiah son of Jehoiada went up and struck him down and killed him; and he was buried at his own house near the wilderness. 35 The king put Benaiah son of Jehoiada over the army in his place, and the king put the priest Zadok in the place of Abiathar.

36 Then the king sent and summoned Shimei, and said to him, "Build yourself a house in Jerusalem, and live there, and do not go out from there to any place whatever. 37 For on the day you go out, and cross the Wadi Kidron, know for certain that you shall die; your blood shall be on your own head." 38 And Shimei said to the king, "The sentence is fair; as my lord the king has said, so will your servant do." So Shimei lived in Jerusalem many days.

39 But it happened at the end of three years that two of Shimei's slaves ran away to King Achish son of Maacah of Gath. When it was told Shimei, "Your slaves are in Gath," 40 Shimei arose and saddled a donkey, and went to Achish in Gath, to search for his slaves; Shimei went and brought his slaves from Gath. 41 When Solomon was told that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath and returned, 42 the king sent and summoned Shimei, and said to him, "Did I not make you swear by the LORD, and solemnly adjure you, saying, 'Know for certain that on the day you go out and go to any place whatever, you shall die'? And you said to me, 'The sentence is fair; I accept.' 43 Why then have you not kept your oath to the LORD and the commandment with which I charged you?" 44 The king also said to Shimei, "You know in your own heart all the evil that you did to my father David; so the LORD will bring back your evil on your own head. 45 But King Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the LORD forever." 46 Then the king commanded Benaiah son of Jehoiada; and he went out and struck him down, and he died.

So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.

3 Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt; he took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her into the city of David, until he had finished building his own house and the house of the LORD and the wall around Jerusalem. 2 The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no

Solomon since he has Benaiah (who also killed Adonijah) kill him inside the holy tent where Joab grasped the horns of the altar (see 1.50). **36–46:** *Shimei* is first put under house arrest in Jerusalem in order to prevent him from crossing the *Wadi Kidron* (to enter the territory of Benjamin, King Saul's home) in order to instigate a revolt from his power base. But when three of his slaves run away, Shimei goes westward to the Philistine town of Gath. Solomon takes this opportunity to have him executed. In this passage the murders of Joab and Shimei are not related as fulfillment of David's order; they are presented as Solomon's own initiative. His kingdom is therefore established by violence, but this need not be seen as a negative value-judgment by our author: Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian texts tell similar stories about the rise to power of important kings.

3.1–28: Solomon's wisdom. 1: The story of Solomon's reign starts with a note about his marriage with *Pharaoh's daughter*. This marriage is also mentioned in the Masoretic Text (MT) in 7.8 and 9.16–17,24, while the LXX reports it in different places (2.35c.f.; 5.14; 7.45). The Pharaoh's name is not noted, and the historicity of this information is difficult to establish. Deut 17.16; 26.28 warns against too-close relations with Egypt, so this text

house had yet been built for the name of the LORD.

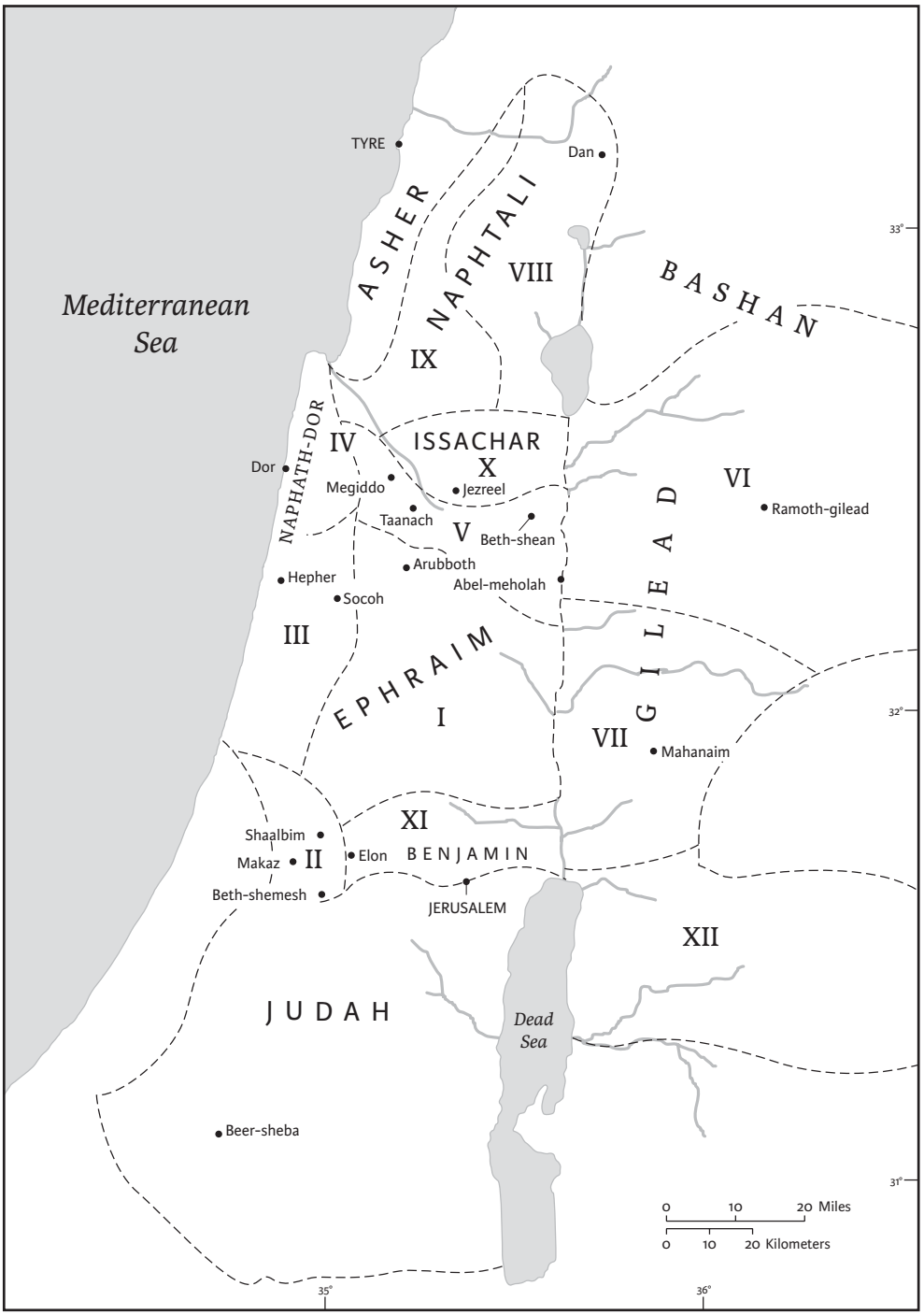
3 Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. 4 The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." 6 And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. 7 And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. 9 Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

10 It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. 11 God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, 12 I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. 13 I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. 14 If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

15 Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. He offered up burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants.

16 Later, two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. 17 The one woman said, "Please, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house. 18 Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. We were together; there was no one else with us in the house, only the two of us were in the house. 19 Then this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. 20 She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your servant slept. She laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son

may hint that Solomon was not an ideal king. **2–3:** In a description of other less-than-ideal behavior, the people and Solomon, in contradiction to Deuteronomic law (Deut 12) worship at the *high places*, local open-air sanctuaries, which are often condemned as idolatrous. They are regularly mentioned in the accusations against the "bad kings." Here, however, Solomon is somewhat exonerated, since the Temple for the God of Israel, the only legitimate sanctuary, has not yet been built. **4–15:** The divine vision organizes the story of Solomon's rule in two parts (see also 9.1–9). 3.4–8.66 relate mostly the positive aspects of his reign, which culminates with the building of the Temple; chs 9.10–11.43 underline Solomon's problematic behavior, which led to disaster. **4:** *Gibeon*, 5.6 mi (9 km) northwest of Jerusalem, was an important religious and political center during the monarchy. Solomon honors the place by seeking there, through sacrifices and an incubation dream, a divine oracle at the beginning of his reign. **5–9:** God tests Solomon and he behaves rightly in asking for wisdom in order to accomplish his royal task. **7:** Solomon's self-presentation as a *little child* or a young boy is not a reference to his age, but a conventional expression that expresses incapacity to accomplish an important task (see Judg 6.15; Jer 1.6). *To go out or come in* concerns military experience (see Num 27.15–17). **12–13:** God is pleased by Solomon's quest for wisdom and also promises him outstanding wealth. Both themes are developed in the following account of Solomon's reign. **14:** The divine promise is offered conditionally. **15:** The correct place for the LORD's worship is Jerusalem and not Gibeon. **16–28:** The "judgment of Solomon" is the first illustration of the king's newly acquired wisdom, since administration of justice is an important royal function. The name of Solomon is not mentioned in this story, which may have been originally an independent folktale. Its incorporation in the Solomon narrative contrasts with ch 2 where Solomon uses his wisdom to kill his enemies by the sword.



4.7–19: Solomon's twelve administrative districts.

at my breast. 21 When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, I saw that he was dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, clearly it was not the son I had borne." 22 But the other woman said, "No, the living son is mine, and the dead son is yours." The first said, "No, the dead son is yours, and the living son is mine." So they argued before the king.

23 Then the king said, "The one says, 'This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead'; while the other says, 'Not so! Your son is dead, and my son is the living one.'" 24 So the king said, "Bring me a sword," and they brought a sword before the king. 25 The king said, "Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other." 26 But the woman whose son was alive said to the king—because compassion for her son burned within her—"Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!" The other said, "It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it." 27 Then the king responded: "Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother." 28 All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice.

4 King Solomon was king over all Israel, 2 and these were his high officials: Azariah son of Zadok was the priest; 3 Elihoreph and Ahijah sons of Shisha were secretaries; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; 4 Benaiah son of Jehoiada was in command of the army; Zadok and Abiathar were priests; 5 Azariah son of Nathan was over the officials; Zabud son of Nathan was priest and king's friend; 6 Ahishar was in charge of the palace; and Adoniram son of Abda was in charge of the forced labor.

7 Solomon had twelve officials over all Israel, who provided food for the king and his household; each one had to make provision for one month in the year. 8 These were their names: Ben-hur, in the hill country of Ephraim; 9 Ben-deker, in Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth-shemesh, and Elon-beth-hanan; 10 Ben-hesed, in Arubboth (to him belonged Socoh and all the land of Hepher); 11 Ben-abinadab, in all Naphath-dor (he had Taphath, Solomon's daughter, as his wife); 12 Baana son of Ahilud, in Taanach, Megiddo, and all Beth-shean, which is beside Zarethan below Jezreel, and from Beth-shean to Abel-meholah, as far as the other side of Jokmeam; 13 Ben-geber, in Ramoth-gilead (he had the villages of Jair son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead, and he had the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, sixty great cities with walls and bronze bars); 14 Ahinadab son of Iddo, in Mahanaim; 15 Ahimaaz, in Naphtali (he had taken Basemath, Solomon's daughter, as his wife); 16 Baana son of Hushai, in Asher and Bealoth; 17 Jehoshaphat son of Paruah, in Issachar; 18 Shimei son of Ela, in Benjamin; 19 Geber son of Uri, in the land of Gilead, the country of King Sihon of the Amorites and of King Og of Bashan. And there was one official in the land of Judah.

20 Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. 21 [a] Solomon was sovereign over

[a] Ch 5.1 in Heb

24–27: The royal sword is used in order to preserve life and establish justice.

4.1–34: The organization of Solomon's kingdom. 1–6: A list of Solomon's high officials. The most important positions at the royal court were the priest (surprisingly v. 4 mentions Abiathar, who according to 2.27 had been banished); the state-secretary or "scribe" and spokesman; the chief commander of the army; the chief of the officials (see vv. 7–19); the king's friend, a title for the king's confidant; the prime minister, called the one who *was in charge of the palace*; and the supervisor of the forced labor, a new institution that will play an important role during Solomon's reign. **7–19:** Twelve officials who functioned as governors in charge of twelve regions in northern Israel, only partially based on traditional tribal areas (see map on p. 494). They organized taxes and provisions for the king and the Jerusalem court, with each region responsible for the provision for one month of the year. **19:** The text is uncertain here. The NRSV reference to *Judah* is found in some Greek manuscripts but not in the Hebrew. A later copyist probably missed a reference to Judah and inserted it here. The Hebrew reads: "there was one official in the land," probably the governor mentioned in v. 5 to whom the twelve officials were responsible. **20:** The concluding remark suggests that under Solomon's reign God's promise to the patriarchs (Gen 22.17; 32.12) that Israel would be *as numerous as the sand by the sea* had been fulfilled. **21–28:** Solomon is

all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines, even to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.

22 Solomon's provision for one day was thirty cors of choice flour, and sixty cors of meal, 23 ten fat oxen, and twenty pasture-fed cattle, one hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fatted fowl. 24 For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates from Tiphsah to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates; and he had peace on all sides. 25 During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees. 26 Solomon also had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. 27 Those officials supplied provisions for King Solomon and for all who came to King Solomon's table, each one in his month; they let nothing be lacking. 28 They also brought to the required place barley and straw for the horses and swift steeds, each according to his charge.

29 God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment, and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore, 30 so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 He was wiser than anyone else, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, children of Mahol; his fame spread throughout all the surrounding nations. 32 He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. 33 He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish. 34 People came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon; they came from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

5 [a] Now King Hiram of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father; for Hiram had always been a friend to David. 2 Solomon sent word to Hiram, saying, 3 "You know that my father David could not build a house for the name of the LORD his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet.[b] 4 But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune. 5 So I intend to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD said to my father David, 'Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name.' 6 Therefore command that cedars from the Lebanon be cut for me. My servants will join your servants, and I will give you whatever wages you set for your servants; for you know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians."

7 When Hiram heard the words of Solomon, he rejoiced greatly, and said, "Blessed be

[a] Ch 5.15 in Heb

[b] Gk Tg Vg: Heb *my feet* or *his feet*

described as dominating all kingdoms in the ancient Near East, an idealized description based on the borders of the land promised to Abraham in Gen 15.18. More realistic boundaries of Israel are found in v. 25, *from Dan . . . to Beer-sheba* (the traditional northern and southern limits of Israel and Judah). **22–23,27–28:** Additional information (see 4.7) about the royal provisions, which are incredibly high. **26:** For Solomon's *horses* see 10.26–29. **29–34:** Solomon surpasses the other nations also in wisdom. He is wiser than the great nations of wisdom, *Egypt* and *the people of the east* (probably Assyria and Babylon) and wiser than the great men known for their wisdom: *Ethan*, *Heman*, *Calcol,* and *Darda* (mentioned in 1 Chr 2.6; 6.18–28). **32:** Solomon's reputation as a maker of *proverbs* is reflected in Prov 1.1; 10.1; 25.1, where he is considered to be the author of different collections of proverbs. For the attribution of *songs* to Solomon, see Pss 72; 127; Song 1.1.

5.1–18: Solomon's relation with Hiram of Tyre and the preparations for building the Temple. According to 2 Sam 5.11, King *Hiram of Tyre* was an ally of David. After Solomon's rise to the throne he sends a goodwill embassy to him, to show that he wanted to continue the good relationship between the two kingdoms. **2–6:** Solomon's request to Hiram. **3–4:** The divine gift of *rest* from all enemies is a prominent theme in the Deuteronomistic History (e.g., Deut 12.10; Josh 21.44; 23.1; 2 Sam 7.1). Here this rest is a necessary condition for the building of the Temple. **6:** The Phoenicians were famous for their *cedars*, one of their chief exports. *Sidonians*, here probably a general term for the Phoenicians. Sidon, like Tyre, is a city on the

the LORD today, who has given to David a wise son to be over this great people." [8] Hiram sent word to Solomon, "I have heard the message that you have sent to me; I will fulfill all your needs in the matter of cedar and cypress timber. [9] My servants shall bring it down to the sea from the Lebanon; I will make it into rafts to go by sea to the place you indicate. I will have them broken up there for you to take away. And you shall meet my needs by providing food for my household." [10] So Hiram supplied Solomon's every need for timber of cedar and cypress. [11] Solomon in turn gave Hiram twenty thousand cors of wheat as food for his household, and twenty cors of fine oil. Solomon gave this to Hiram year by year. [12] So the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him. There was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and the two of them made a treaty.

[13] King Solomon conscripted forced labor out of all Israel; the levy numbered thirty thousand men. [14] He sent them to the Lebanon, ten thousand a month in shifts; they would be a month in the Lebanon and two months at home; Adoniram was in charge of the forced labor. [15] Solomon also had seventy thousand laborers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hill country, [16] besides Solomon's three thousand three hundred supervisors who were over the work, having charge of the people who did the work. [17] At the king's command, they quarried out great, costly stones in order to lay the foundation of the house with dressed stones. [18] So Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders and the Gebalites did the stonecutting and prepared the timber and the stone to build the house.

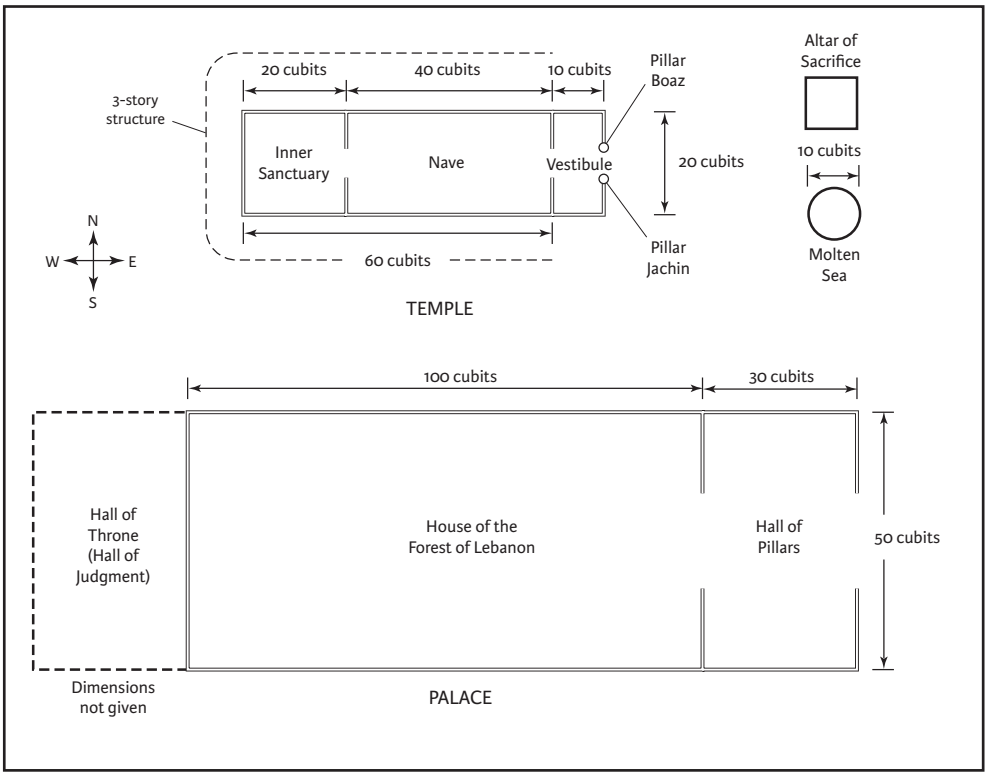
6 In the four hundred eightieth year after the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the LORD. [2] The house that King Solomon built for the LORD was sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. [3] The vestibule in front of the nave of the house was twenty cubits wide, across the width of the house. Its depth was ten cubits in front of the house. [4] For the house he made windows with recessed frames.[a] [5] He also built a structure against the wall of the house, running around the walls of the house, both the nave and the inner sanctuary; and he made side chambers all around. [6] The lowest story[b] was five cubits wide, the middle one was six cubits wide, and the third was seven cubits wide; for around the outside of the house he made offsets on the wall in order that the supporting beams should not be inserted into the walls of the house.

[7] The house was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor ax nor any tool of iron was heard in the temple while it was being built.

[a] Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Gk: Heb *structure*

Phoenician cost, south of Beirut. **7–12:** Hiram transports the wood in *rafts* and Solomon pays with very large amounts of *wheat* and *oil*. **12:** There is a wordplay in Hebrew between *peace* (Heb "shalom") and the name of Solomon ("shelomoh"). **13–18:** Contrary to 9.20–22, this passage states that Solomon compelled the Israelites to *forced labor* in order to build the Temple. **18:** The *Gebalites*, the inhabitants of Byblos, a Phoenician city north of Tyre, are mentioned here as a separate group. From early times Byblos was an important timber port, and later was a major shipping center of papyrus; the term "Bible" is derived from the city's name.

6.1–38: The building of the Temple. The Temple and its fittings are described in detail, whereas the palace complex is described more briefly (7.1–12), suggesting that the writer was more interested in the Temple than the palace. The Temple is foreshadowed in Ex 25–31; 35–40, and is similar in design to sanctuaries found in Assyria, Syria, and Israel. The closest parallels can be found at Hazor in Israel, Tell Tayinat in southeastern Turkey, and Ain Dara in Syria. **1:** The *four hundred eightieth year* after the Exodus is not historical fact and likely belongs to a late, typological chronological system. The Hebrew month *Ziv*, which is numbered second according to the Babylonian system from the spring New Year, falls in April-May. **2–10:** A *cubit* is the distance from the tip of the elbow to the tip of the middle finger (ca. 17.5 in [45 cm]). The Temple's form is tripartite, comprising the *vestibule* or entrance hall, the *nave* or main hall, and the *inner sanctuary*, the "most holy place" (v. 16) of the sanctuary, to which access was severely restricted. A complex structure is built around the Temple. **7:** No iron tools were used



The Temple and palace of Solomon according to First Kings.

[8] The entrance for the middle story was on the south side of the house: one went up by winding stairs to the middle story, and from the middle story to the third. [9] So he built the house, and finished it; he roofed the house with beams and planks of cedar. [10] He built the structure against the whole house, each story[a] five cubits high, and it was joined to the house with timbers of cedar.

[11] Now the word of the LORD came to Solomon, [12] "Concerning this house that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes, obey my ordinances, and keep all my commandments by walking in them, then I will establish my promise with you, which I made to your father David. [13] I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel."

[14] So Solomon built the house, and finished it. [15] He lined the walls of the house on the inside with boards of cedar; from the floor of the house to the rafters of the ceiling, he covered them on the inside with wood; and he covered the floor of the house with boards of cypress. [16] He built twenty cubits of the rear of the house with boards of cedar from the floor to the rafters, and he built this within as an inner sanctuary, as the most holy place. [17] The house, that is, the nave in front of the inner sanctuary, was forty cubits long. [18] The cedar within the house had carvings of gourds and open flowers; all was cedar, no stone was seen. [19] The inner sanctuary he prepared in the innermost part of the

[a] Heb lacks *each story*

at the Temple site; cf. Ex 20.25; Deut 27.5. **11–13:** God's speech to Solomon interrupts the building report and insists that the divine presence will inhabit the sanctuary only if Solomon observes the divine *commandments* (see also Jer 7.1–15). **14–36:** After the building of the external structure is concluded, the construction of the inside of the Temple is described. **15–18:** The interior walls, floors, and ceilings are covered with wood, so that all stones are covered. **19–28:** Particular attention is paid to the inner sanctuary, the holiest part of the Temple

house, to set there the ark of the covenant of the LORD. 20 The interior of the inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high; he overlaid it with pure gold. He also overlaid the altar with cedar.[a] 21 Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold, then he drew chains of gold across, in front of the inner sanctuary, and overlaid it with gold. 22 Next he overlaid the whole house with gold, in order that the whole house might be perfect; even the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary he overlaid with gold.

23 In the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olivewood, each ten cubits high. 24 Five cubits was the length of one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the length of the other wing of the cherub; it was ten cubits from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other. 25 The other cherub also measured ten cubits; both cherubim had the same measure and the same form. 26 The height of one cherub was ten cubits, and so was that of the other cherub. 27 He put the cherubim in the innermost part of the house; the wings of the cherubim were spread out so that a wing of one was touching the one wall, and a wing of the other cherub was touching the other wall; their other wings toward the center of the house were touching wing to wing. 28 He also overlaid the cherubim with gold.

29 He carved the walls of the house all around about with carved engravings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, in the inner and outer rooms. 30 The floor of the house he overlaid with gold, in the inner and outer rooms.

31 For the entrance to the inner sanctuary he made doors of olivewood; the lintel and the doorposts were five-sided.[a] 32 He covered the two doors of olivewood with carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers; he overlaid them with gold, and spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees.

33 So also he made for the entrance to the nave doorposts of olivewood, four-sided each, 34 and two doors of cypress wood; the two leaves of the one door were folding, and the two leaves of the other door were folding. 35 He carved cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, overlaying them with gold evenly applied upon the carved work. 36 He built the inner court with three courses of dressed stone to one course of cedar beams.

37 In the fourth year the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid, in the month of Ziv. 38 In the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its parts, and according to all its specifications. He was seven years in building it.

7 Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished his entire house.

2 He built the House of the Forest of the Lebanon one hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high, built on four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams on the pillars. 3 It was roofed with cedar on the forty-five rafters, fifteen in each row, which were on the pillars. 4 There were window frames in the three rows, facing each other in the

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

where the *ark of the covenant*, a component of God's throne, is placed. **23–28:** The *cherubim* are winged, composite creatures well known in the ancient Near East. They may be guardians of the ark (see Gen 3.24, where they are guardians of the garden of Eden). In Assyria and Babylon winged sphinxes stood at the entrance of temples and palaces. In Phoenician art, winged human-faced creatures support the throne of a king, a function they likely had in the Temple here (see Ps 99.1; 2 Kings 19.15). **29–36:** The authors highlight the splendor of the decoration: everything was overlaid with gold, and there were special carvings, with the *cherubim* symbolizing divine protection, and *open flowers* and *palm trees* for fertility. The different, richly decorated *doors* separate the three parts of the Temple. **36–38:** Building the Temple took seven years and six months.

7.1–12: Building the palace. In the ancient Near East the palace and the (royal) sanctuary often belong to the same complex. Here the Temple is relatively modest compared to the palace. **1:** Therefore it is not astonishing that Solomon spent thirteen years, almost twice as long on his palace as he did on the Temple. This remark can also be understood as a discreet criticism of Solomon's priorities. **2–5:** *House of the Forest of the Lebanon,* the rows of cedar pillars suggest the idea of a forest. Such a structure may show Egyptian influence. It was perhaps a treasury and armory (see 1 Kings 10.17 and Isa 22.8). For the author, this was the most important building of

three rows. 5 All the doorways and doorposts had four-sided frames, opposite, facing each other in the three rows.

6 He made the Hall of Pillars fifty cubits long and thirty cubits wide. There was a porch in front with pillars, and a canopy in front of them.

7 He made the Hall of the Throne where he was to pronounce judgment, the Hall of Justice, covered with cedar from floor to floor.

8 His own house where he would reside, in the other court back of the hall, was of the same construction. Solomon also made a house like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken in marriage.

9 All these were made of costly stones, cut according to measure, sawed with saws, back and front, from the foundation to the coping, and from outside to the great court. 10 The foundation was of costly stones, huge stones, stones of eight and ten cubits. 11 There were costly stones above, cut to measure, and cedarwood. 12 The great court had three courses of dressed stone to one layer of cedar beams all around; so had the inner court of the house of the LORD, and the vestibule of the house.

13 Now King Solomon invited and received Hiram from Tyre. 14 He was the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali, whose father, a man of Tyre, had been an artisan in bronze; he was full of skill, intelligence, and knowledge in working bronze. He came to King Solomon, and did all his work.

15 He cast two pillars of bronze. Eighteen cubits was the height of the one, and a cord of twelve cubits would encircle it; the second pillar was the same.[a] 16 He also made two capitals of molten bronze, to set on the tops of the pillars; the height of the one capital was five cubits, and the height of the other capital was five cubits. 17 There were nets of checker work with wreaths of chain work for the capitals on the tops of the pillars; seven[b] for the one capital, and seven[b] for the other capital. 18 He made the columns with two rows around each latticework to cover the capitals that were above the pomegranates; he did the same with the other capital. 19 Now the capitals that were on the tops of the pillars in the vestibule were of lily-work, four cubits high. 20 The capitals were on the two pillars and also above the rounded projection that was beside the latticework; there were two hundred pomegranates in rows all around; and so with the other capital. 21 He set up the pillars at the vestibule of the temple; he set up the pillar on the south and called it Jachin; and he set up the pillar on the north and called it Boaz. 22 On the tops of the pillars was lily-work. Thus the work of the pillars was finished.

23 Then he made the molten sea; it was round, ten cubits from brim to brim, and

[a] Cn: Heb *and a cord of twelve cubits encircled the second pillar*; Compare Jer 52.21

[b] Heb: Gk *a net*

the palace complex. **6–7:** The *Hall of Pillars* could have been the waiting hall for the *Hall of the Throne*, where the king dispensed justice. **8:** The private quarters comprise Solomon's residence and a residence for the daughter of Pharaoh (see 3.1 and 9.24). The author does not tell us about the harem for Solomon's other wives. **9–12:** The foundations were built with huge quarry blocks.

7.13–51: Hiram and the furnishings of the Temple. 13–14: The *Hiram* who appears here as craftsman is called Huram-abi in 2 Chr 2.12–13 and should not be confused with King Hiram of ch 5. The detail about his Israelite mother (according to 2 Chr 2.12, his mother is not from the tribe of Naphtali but from Dan) was provided to reassure the reader that the main craftsman of the Temple was not a foreigner (cf. Ezra 4.1–3 for a similar sensitivity to the question of involvement in the Temple building). His skills are like those of Bezalel, who constructed the Tabernacle (Ex 31.3; 35.31). **15–22:** The two huge pillars (more than 26 ft [8 m] high) at the entry of the vestibule symbolize the LORD's presence in the Temple and his protection of the royal dynasty. This is also symbolized in their names: *Jachin* (which also occurs in the name of King Jehoiachin) means "he will establish" and refers to God's initiative to establish the throne of the king (2 Sam 7.13); *Boaz* ("by him he is mighty") expresses the king's dependence on the divine favor. **23–26:** *Molten*, molded or cast. The *molten sea* was a large metal basin filled with water (*two thousand baths*: a *bath* equals ca. 6 gal [23 l]) representing the primeval watery chaos subdued by the LORD, creator of the world (see Ps 74). The twelve *oxen* or bulls that supported the basin represented divine strength (see 1 Kings 12.28). According to 2 Chr 4.6 the molten sea was used for

five cubits high. A line of thirty cubits would encircle it completely. 24 Under its brim were panels all around it, each of ten cubits, surrounding the sea; there were two rows of panels, cast when it was cast. 25 It stood on twelve oxen, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east; the sea was set on them. The hindquarters of each were toward the inside. 26 Its thickness was a handbreadth; its brim was made like the brim of a cup, like the flower of a lily; it held two thousand baths.[a]

27 He also made the ten stands of bronze; each stand was four cubits long, four cubits wide, and three cubits high. 28 This was the construction of the stands: they had borders; the borders were within the frames; 29 on the borders that were set in the frames were lions, oxen, and cherubim. On the frames, both above and below the lions and oxen, there were wreaths of beveled work. 30 Each stand had four bronze wheels and axles of bronze; at the four corners were supports for a basin. The supports were cast with wreaths at the side of each. 31 Its opening was within the crown whose height was one cubit; its opening was round, as a pedestal is made; it was a cubit and a half wide. At its opening there were carvings; its borders were four-sided, not round. 32 The four wheels were underneath the borders; the axles of the wheels were in the stands; and the height of a wheel was a cubit and a half. 33 The wheels were made like a chariot wheel; their axles, their rims, their spokes, and their hubs were all cast. 34 There were four supports at the four corners of each stand; the supports were of one piece with the stands. 35 On the top of the stand there was a round band half a cubit high; on the top of the stand, its stays and its borders were of one piece with it. 36 On the surfaces of its stays and on its borders he carved cherubim, lions, and palm trees, where each had space, with wreaths all around. 37 In this way he made the ten stands; all of them were cast alike, with the same size and the same form.

38 He made ten basins of bronze; each basin held forty baths,[a] each basin measured four cubits; there was a basin for each of the ten stands. 39 He set five of the stands on the south side of the house, and five on the north side of the house; he set the sea on the southeast corner of the house.

40 Hiram also made the pots, the shovels, and the basins. So Hiram finished all the work that he did for King Solomon on the house of the Lord: 41 the two pillars, the two bowls of the capitals that were on the tops of the pillars, the two latticeworks to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the tops of the pillars; 42 the four hundred pomegranates for the two latticeworks, two rows of pomegranates for each latticework, to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the pillars; 43 the ten stands, the ten basins on the stands; 44 the one sea, and the twelve oxen underneath the sea.

45 The pots, the shovels, and the basins, all these vessels that Hiram made for King Solomon for the house of the Lord were of burnished bronze. 46 In the plain of the Jordan the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarethan. 47 Solomon left all the vessels unweighed, because there were so many of them; the weight of the bronze was not determined.

48 So Solomon made all the vessels that were in the house of the Lord: the golden altar, the golden table for the bread of the Presence, 49 the lampstands of pure gold, five on the south side and five on the north, in front of the inner sanctuary; the flowers, the lamps, and the tongs, of gold; 50 the cups, snuffers, basins, dishes for incense, and firepans, of pure gold; the sockets for the

[a] A Heb measure of volume

the ritual washings of the priest. **27–39:** The wheeled stands and their bases may have originally symbolized God's power to provide water and rain, but later they were understood to provide the water necessary for the performance of sacrificial worship. **40–51:** The division of work between Hiram and Solomon: Hiram made the objects of *bronze*, whereas Solomon made the more prestigious vessels of *gold*. **46:** Hiram did his work in the *Jordan* valley, where appropriate clay is to be found. *Succoth,* probably Deir Alla, and *Zarethan*, were in Transjordan near the Jabbok River. **48–50:** Solomon himself is responsible for all objects related directly to

doors of the innermost part of the house, the most holy place, and for the doors of the nave of the temple, of gold.

51 Thus all the work that King Solomon did on the house of the LORD was finished. Solomon brought in the things that his father David had dedicated, the silver, the gold, and the vessels, and stored them in the treasuries of the house of the LORD.

8 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. 2 All the people of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the festival in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. 3 And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests carried the ark. 4 So they brought up the ark of the LORD, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. 5 King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. 6 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. 7 For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles. 8 The poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside; they are there to this day. 9 There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites, when they came out of the land of Egypt. 10 And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, 11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

12 Then Solomon said,

"The LORD has said that he would dwell in
thick darkness.
13 I have built you an exalted house,
a place for you to dwell in forever."

14 Then the king turned around and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel stood. 15 He said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to my father David, saying, 16 'Since the day that I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city from any of the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, that my name might be there; but I chose David to be over my people Israel.' 17 My father David had it in mind to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. 18 But the LORD said to my father David, 'You did well to consider building a house for my name; 19 nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name.' 20 Now the LORD has upheld the promise that he made; for I have risen in the place of my father David; I sit on the throne of Israel, as

sacrificial worship. *Bread of the Presence,* see Ex 25.30; Lev 24.5–9. **51:** See 2 Sam 8.9–12, where David *dedicates* his booty to the LORD.

8.1–66: The inauguration of the Temple. 1–13: The ark is now transferred from the tent sanctuary into the inner sanctuary of the Temple. **2:** The Temple was finished in the eighth month (6.38), so the inauguration took place in the following year in the *seventh month* (September-October), after the end of the harvest seasons, at the festival of booths (tabernacles); see v. 66. **3–4:** As in Josh 3–4, the ark is carried by the *priests* and *Levites*, because touching it is dangerous for lay people. **9:** The statement that nothing was in the ark but the *tablets of stone that Moses had placed* (see Deut 10.1–5) is meant to counter the popular idea that God is present in the ark. **10–11:** A cloud is often associated with divine appearances (e.g., Ex 13.21–22; 16.10; 19.9) and covers the earlier tent sanctuary upon its completion in Ex 40.34–38. **12–13:** An independent poetic statement, which in the LXX has different wording and follows v. 53. It suggests that the God of Israel was considered to be a weather-god who wants to dwell in *darkness*, in a cloud. **14–66:** Solomon pronounces three prayers that provide important clues to the later authors' theological understanding of the Temple. **14–21:** The first prayer, in front of the assembly, builds on the promise to David of an eternal dynasty in 2 Sam 7 and highlights that Solomon is David's

the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. 21 There I have provided a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with our ancestors when he brought them out of the land of Egypt."

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. 23 He said, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, 24 the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. 25 Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, 'There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.' 26 Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! 28 Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; 29 that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. 30 Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

31 "If someone sins against a neighbor and is given an oath to swear, and comes and swears before your altar in this house, 32 then hear in heaven, and act, and judge your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing their conduct on their own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding them according to their righteousness.

33 "When your people Israel, having sinned against you, are defeated before an enemy but turn again to you, confess your name, pray and plead with you in this house, 34 then hear in heaven, forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them again to the land that you gave to their ancestors.

35 "When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, and then they pray toward this place, confess your name, and turn from their sin, because you punish[a] them, 36 then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, when you teach them the good way in which they should walk; and grant rain on your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance.

37 "If there is famine in the land, if there is plague, blight, mildew, locust, or caterpillar; if their enemy besieges them in any[b] of their cities; whatever plague, whatever sickness there is; 38 whatever prayer, whatever plea there is from any individual or from all your people Israel, all knowing the afflictions of their own hearts so that they stretch out their hands toward this house; 39 then hear in heaven your dwelling place, forgive, act, and render to all whose hearts you know—according to all their ways, for only you know what is in every human heart— 40 so that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our ancestors.

41 "Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name 42 —for they shall hear

[a] Or *when you answer*
[b] Gk Syr: Heb *in the land*

legitimate successor and the proper Temple builder. **22–53:** The second prayer, in front of the altar, is the central piece of the dedication. The authors reassert seven times that the LORD does not *dwell* in the Temple (contrast v. 13), but in *heaven* (vv. 32,34,36,39,43,45,49). The Temple is the place to pray to God. But as Solomon enumerates seven different occasions for prayer—sin of an individual (vv. 31–32); defeat in battle (vv. 33–34); drought (vv. 35–36); famine and plagues (vv. 37–40); a foreigner who comes to pray (vv. 41–43); war (vv. 44–45); sin of the people and deportation (vv. 46–51)—the scene changes. Prayer is initially located in the Temple, then it is in the direction of the sanctuary, and finally, the praying individuals are in another country and pray *toward* the city and the Temple. This presupposes the situation after the Babylonian exile. **33–40,46–51:** These occasions

of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, 43 then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

44 "If your people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to the LORD toward the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, 45 then hear in heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause.

46 "If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near; 47 yet if they come to their senses in the land to which they have been taken captive, and repent, and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, 'We have sinned, and have done wrong; we have acted wickedly'; 48 if they repent with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies, who took them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their ancestors, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name; 49 then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, maintain their cause 50 and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you; and grant them compassion in the sight of their captors, so that they may have compassion on them 51 (for they are your people and heritage, which you brought out of Egypt, from the midst of the iron-smelter). 52 Let your eyes be open to the plea of your servant, and to the plea of your people Israel, listening to them whenever they call to you. 53 For you have separated them from among all the peoples of the earth, to be your heritage, just as you promised through Moses, your servant, when you brought our ancestors out of Egypt, O Lord GOD."

54 Now when Solomon finished offering all this prayer and this plea to the LORD, he arose from facing the altar of the LORD, where he had knelt with hands outstretched toward heaven; 55 he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice:

56 "Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel according to all that he promised; not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke through his servant Moses. 57 The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our ancestors; may he not leave us or abandon us, 58 but incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his ordinances, which he commanded our ancestors. 59 Let these words of mine, with which I pleaded before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, and may he maintain the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel, as each day requires; 60 so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other. 61 Therefore devote yourselves completely to the LORD our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day."

62 Then the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the LORD. 63 Solomon offered as sacrifices of well-being to the LORD twenty-two thousand oxen and one hundred twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD. 64 The same day the king consecrated the middle of the court that was in front of the house of the LORD; for there he offered the burnt offerings and the grain offerings and the fat pieces of the sacrifices of well-being, because the bronze altar that was before the LORD was too small to receive the burnt offerings and the grain offerings and the fat pieces of the sacrifices of well-being.

65 So Solomon held the festival at that time, and all Israel with him—a great assem-

for prayer are parallel to the curses in Deut 28.21–25,38,64–65. **51:** *Iron-smelter,* see Deut 4.20. **54–61:** The last prayer, spoken again in front of the people, reasserts, like Josh 21.43–45, that the LORD has fulfilled all his promises. It repeats the Deuteronomistic exhortation to respond to this gift by the observance of the divine commandments. **62–64:** The number of the *sacrifices* is highly exaggerated, symbolizing Solomon's and the peo-

bly, people from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt—before the LORD our God, seven days.[a] 66 On the eighth day he sent the people away; and they blessed the king, and went to their tents, joyful and in good spirits because of all the goodness that the LORD had shown to his servant David and to his people Israel.

9 When Solomon had finished building the house of the LORD and the king's house and all that Solomon desired to build, 2 the LORD appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. 3 The LORD said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you made before me; I have consecrated this house that you have built, and put my name there forever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time. 4 As for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, 5 then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised your father David, saying, 'There shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel.'

6 "If you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, 7 then I will cut Israel off from the land that I have given them; and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a taunt among all peoples. 8 This house will become a heap of ruins;[b] everyone passing by it will be astonished, and will hiss; and they will say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this house?' 9 Then they will say, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their ancestors out of the land of Egypt, and embraced other gods, worshiping them and serving them; therefore the LORD has brought this disaster upon them.'"

10 At the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD and the king's house, 11 King Hiram of Tyre having supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress timber and gold, as much as he desired, King Solomon gave to Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. 12 But when Hiram came from Tyre to see the cities that Solomon had given him, they did not please him. 13 Therefore he said, "What kind of cities are these that you have given me, my brother?" So they are called the land of Cabul[c] to this day. 14 But Hiram had sent to the king one hundred twenty talents of gold.

15 This is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon conscripted to build the house of the LORD and his own house, the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer 16 (Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up and captured Gezer and burned it down, had killed the Canaanites who lived

[a] Compare Gk: Heb *seven days and seven days, fourteen days*
[b] Syr Old Latin: Heb *will become high*
[c] Perhaps meaning *a land good for nothing*

ple's attachment to the new sanctuary. **65–66:** The dedication of the Temple took place during the festival of Tabernacles. According to Deut 16.13–15 the participants are sent home on the eighth day. The limits of the land are defined here (less extensively than in 4.21,24) in the north by *Lebo-hamath* (in the southern Orontes valley in Lebanon) and in the south by the *Wadi of Egypt* (the Wadi el-Arish or the Wadi Besor, both south of Gaza).

9.1–9: God's second appearance to Solomon. This text recalls 3.4–15 and hints at the king's dark side, which will appear more and more clearly. **3–5:** God's loyalty to Solomon depends on his behavior regarding the divine law. **6–9:** The disobedience of Solomon and his successor is suggested; this disobedience will lead to the exile. **8–9:** Cf. Deut 29.23–24.

9.10–28: The ambiguity of Solomon's wealth (see also 10.14–29). **10–14:** The text reports that Solomon paid a heavy price to the king of Tyre, *twenty cities*; this almost makes Solomon into Hiram's vassal. In order to correct this idea, the text states that Hiram had paid Solomon 120 talents of gold (a *talent* is ca. 75 lb [34 kg]). **13:** The name of the town of *Cabul* (8 mi [14 km] southeast of Acco) is explained with a play on the Heb verb "to waste away." **15–24:** The many building projects attributed to Solomon are executed through *forced labor*. **15:** *Millo* (lit. "fill") refers to terraces to stabilize the wall and the official buildings of Jerusalem. **15–19:** The *cities* that Solomon built are located in strategic places, and are enumerated from north to south. The note about *Gezer* interrupts the list. This town is presented as Pharaoh's dowry to Solomon: see also 3.1; 9.24;

in the city, and had given it as dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife; [17] so Solomon rebuilt Gezer), Lower Beth-horon, [18] Baalath, Tamar in the wilderness, within the land, [19] as well as all of Solomon's storage cities, the cities for his chariots, the cities for his cavalry, and whatever Solomon desired to build, in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion. [20] All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel— [21] their descendants who were still left in the land, whom the Israelites were unable to destroy completely—these Solomon conscripted for slave labor, and so they are to this day. [22] But of the Israelites Solomon made no slaves; they were the soldiers, they were his officials, his commanders, his captains, and the commanders of his chariotry and cavalry.

[23] These were the chief officers who were over Solomon's work: five hundred fifty, who had charge of the people who carried on the work.

[24] But Pharaoh's daughter went up from the city of David to her own house that Solomon had built for her; then he built the Millo.

[25] Three times a year Solomon used to offer up burnt offerings and sacrifices of well-being on the altar that he built for the LORD, offering incense[a] before the LORD. So he completed the house.

[26] King Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber, which is near Eloth on the shore of the Red Sea,[b] in the land of Edom. [27] Hiram sent his servants with the fleet, sailors who were familiar with the sea, together with the servants of Solomon. [28] They went to Ophir, and imported from there four hundred twenty talents of gold, which they delivered to King Solomon.

10 When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon (fame due to[c] the name of the LORD), she came to test him with hard questions. [2] She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. [3] Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. [4] When the queen of Sheba had observed all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, [5] the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his valets, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more spirit in her.

[6] So she said to the king, "The report was true that I heard in my own land of your accomplishments and of your wisdom, [7] but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. Not even half had been told me; your wisdom and prosperity far surpass the report that I had heard. [8] Happy are your wives![d] Happy are these your servants, who continually attend you and hear your wisdom! [9] Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king to execute justice and righteousness." [10] Then she gave the king one hundred twenty talents of gold, a great quantity of spices, and precious stones; never again did spices come in such quantity as that which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

[a] Gk: Heb *offering incense with it that was*
[b] Or *Sea of Reeds*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Gk Syr: Heb *men*

11.1. **20–23:** This passage modifies 5.13 and 11.26–28, stating that only the former inhabitants of the land were conscripted for forced labor. **24–28:** In this summary of Solomon's wealth we are told of his naval enterprises. **26:** *Ezion-geber,* perhaps a small island in the Gulf of Aqaba. *Eloth,* also spelled "Elath," is at the northern tip of the same body of water. **28:** The location of *Ophir* is uncertain. For the biblical writers it probably designated southern Arabia (Gen 10.29; Isa 13.12; Job 28.16).

10.1–13: The visit of the queen of Sheba. This story, which resembles a tale from *A Thousand and One Nights*, interrupts the enumeration of Solomon's wealth. *Sheba* is in Arabia. **4–5:** The queen of Sheba is overwhelmed by Solomon's wealth and wisdom. **6–13:** According to an Ethiopian tradition, all Ethiopian emperors descended from the union between Solomon and the queen of Sheba. **10:** The queen offers more than two tons of gold.

11 Moreover, the fleet of Hiram, which carried gold from Ophir, brought from Ophir a great quantity of almug wood and precious stones. 12 From the almug wood the king made supports for the house of the LORD, and for the king's house, lyres also and harps for the singers; no such almug wood has come or been seen to this day.

13 Meanwhile King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba every desire that she expressed, as well as what he gave her out of Solomon's royal bounty. Then she returned to her own land, with her servants.

14 The weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred sixty-six talents of gold, 15 besides that which came from the traders and from the business of the merchants, and from all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land. 16 King Solomon made two hundred large shields of beaten gold; six hundred shekels of gold went into each large shield. 17 He made three hundred shields of beaten gold; three minas of gold went into each shield; and the king put them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon. 18 The king also made a great ivory throne, and overlaid it with the finest gold. 19 The throne had six steps. The top of the throne was rounded in the back, and on each side of the seat were arm rests and two lions standing beside the arm rests, 20 while twelve lions were standing, one on each end of a step on the six steps. Nothing like it was ever made in any kingdom. 21 All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver—it was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon. 22 For the king had a fleet of ships of Tarshish at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.[a]

23 Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. 24 The whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. 25 Every one of them brought a present, objects of silver and gold, garments, weaponry, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year.

26 Solomon gathered together chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem. 27 The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars as numerous as the sycamores of the Shephelah. 28 Solomon's import of horses was from Egypt and Kue, and the king's traders received them from Kue at a price. 29 A chariot could be imported from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for one hundred fifty; so through the king's traders they were exported to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram.

11 King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, 2 from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the Israelites, "You shall not enter into marriage

[a] Or *baboons*

11–12: The verses belong to 9.26–28. *Almug wood*, a precious wood of uncertain species (traditionally sandalwood).

10.14–29: The ambiguity of Solomon's wealth, continued (see also 9.10–28). **14–22:** Contrary to Deut 17.17, Solomon has almost an obsession for *gold*. **14–15:** A *talent* is ca. 75 lb (34 kg). The number of *six hundred sixty-six*, Solomon's income, symbolizes totality (see also Ezra 2.13; contrast Rev 13.18). **16:** A *shekel* is ca. .4 oz (11.5 g). **17:** A *mina* is ca. 20 oz (570 g). **18–20:** Solomon's *throne*, which symbolizes the divine cosmos of which the king was the guarantor, has many parallels in ancient Near Eastern art. **21–22:** The location of *Tarshish* is uncertain; it may be Tarsus in southern Turkey or Tartessus in southern Spain. **23–29:** Contrary to Deut 17.16, Solomon accumulates many *horses*. **27:** *The Shephelah,* the foothills between the Mediterranean coastal plain and the Judean hill country. **28–29:** According to this translation, Solomon was the intermediary in horse-trading between Egypt and Asia Minor. **28:** *Kue*, Cilicia, in southern Asia Minor. **29:** *Hittites,* a non-Semitic population in northern Syria and southern Turkey; *Aram,* southern Syria.

11.1–43: The troublesome end of Solomon's reign. 1–8: Contrary to Deut 17.17, Solomon introduces a thousand foreign wives and concubines into his harem. **2:** A quotation from Deut 7.3–4, which prohibited intermar-

with them, neither shall they with you; for they will surely incline your heart to follow their gods"; Solomon clung to these in love. [3] Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. [4] For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. [5] For Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. [6] So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not completely follow the LORD, as his father David had done. [7] Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. [8] He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrificed to their gods.

[9] Then the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, [10] and had commanded him concerning this matter, that he should not follow other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD commanded. [11] Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant. [12] Yet for the sake of your father David I will not do it in your lifetime; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. [13] I will not, however, tear away the entire kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."

[14] Then the LORD raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was of the royal house in Edom. [15] For when David was in Edom, and Joab the commander of the army went up to bury the dead, he killed every male in Edom [16] (for Joab and all Israel remained there six months, until he had eliminated every male in Edom); [17] but Hadad fled to Egypt with some Edomites who were servants of his father. He was a young boy at that time. [18] They set out from Midian and came to Paran; they took people with them from Paran and came to Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who gave him a house, assigned him an allowance of food, and gave him land. [19] Hadad found great favor in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him his sister-in-law for a wife, the sister of Queen Tahpenes. [20] The sister of Tahpenes gave birth by him to his son Genubath, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh's house; Genubath was in Pharaoh's house among the children of Pharaoh. [21] When Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his ancestors and that Joab the commander of the army was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, "Let me depart, that I may go to my own country." [22] But Pharaoh said to him, "What do you lack with me that you now seek to go to your own country?" And he said, "No, do let me go."

[23] God raised up another adversary against Solomon,[a] Rezon son of Eliada, who had fled from his master, King Hadadezer of Zobah. [24] He gathered followers around him and became leader of a marauding band, after the slaughter by David; they went to Damascus, settled there, and made him king in Damascus. [25] He was an adversary of Israel all the days of Solomon, making trouble as Hadad did; he despised Israel and reigned over Aram.

[a] Heb *him*

riage with the Canaanite population. **4:** The note about Solomon's old age recalls the aging David, who was manipulated by his wife Bathsheba. Now the foreign wives lead Solomon to worship their foreign deities. **5–8:** *Astarte* was a popular Canaanite goddess and was especially venerated in Sidon; *Milcom* was the national god of the Ammonites. The *mountain east of Jerusalem* is the Mount of Olives. **9–13:** In his last speech to Solomon, the LORD announces the splitting up of the kingdom during the reign of Solomon's son. **14–40:** Solomon is also punished during his own lifetime by three enemies that God raises up. **14–22:** *Hadad*, an Edomite prince who fled to Egypt during David's campaign against Edom (2 Sam 8.14). **19–22:** His integration into Pharaoh's house recalls the story of the young Moses. Pharaoh, whom Solomon considered an ally, offers asylum to his enemies. **19:** *Tahpenes,* not a proper name, but a transcription of the Egyptian title "wife of the king." **20:** *Genubath,* perhaps an Arabic word meaning "guest." **23–25:** *Rezon son of Eliada*, a mercenary who served king *Hadadezer of Zobah*, an Aramean city-state northeast of Israel. After a revolt he became king of *Damascus*, the capital of

[26] Jeroboam son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, a servant of Solomon, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, rebelled against the king. [27] The following was the reason he rebelled against the king. Solomon built the Millo, and closed up the gap in the wall[a] of the city of his father David. [28] The man Jeroboam was very able, and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious he gave him charge over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph. [29] About that time, when Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Ahijah had clothed himself with a new garment. The two of them were alone in the open country [30] when Ahijah laid hold of the new garment he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. [31] He then said to Jeroboam: Take for yourself ten pieces; for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "See, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon, and will give you ten tribes. [32] One tribe will remain his, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel. [33] This is because he has[b] forsaken me, worshiped Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and has[b] not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, as his father David did. [34] Nevertheless I will not take the whole kingdom away from him but will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of my servant David whom I chose and who did keep my commandments and my statutes; [35] but I will take the kingdom away from his son and give it to you—that is, the ten tribes. [36] Yet to his son I will give one tribe, so that my servant David may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. [37] I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires; you shall be king over Israel. [38] If you will listen to all that I command you, walk in my ways, and do what is right in my sight by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you, and will build you an enduring house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. [39] For this reason I will punish the descendants of David, but not forever." [40] Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam; but Jeroboam promptly fled to Egypt, to King Shishak of Egypt, and remained in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

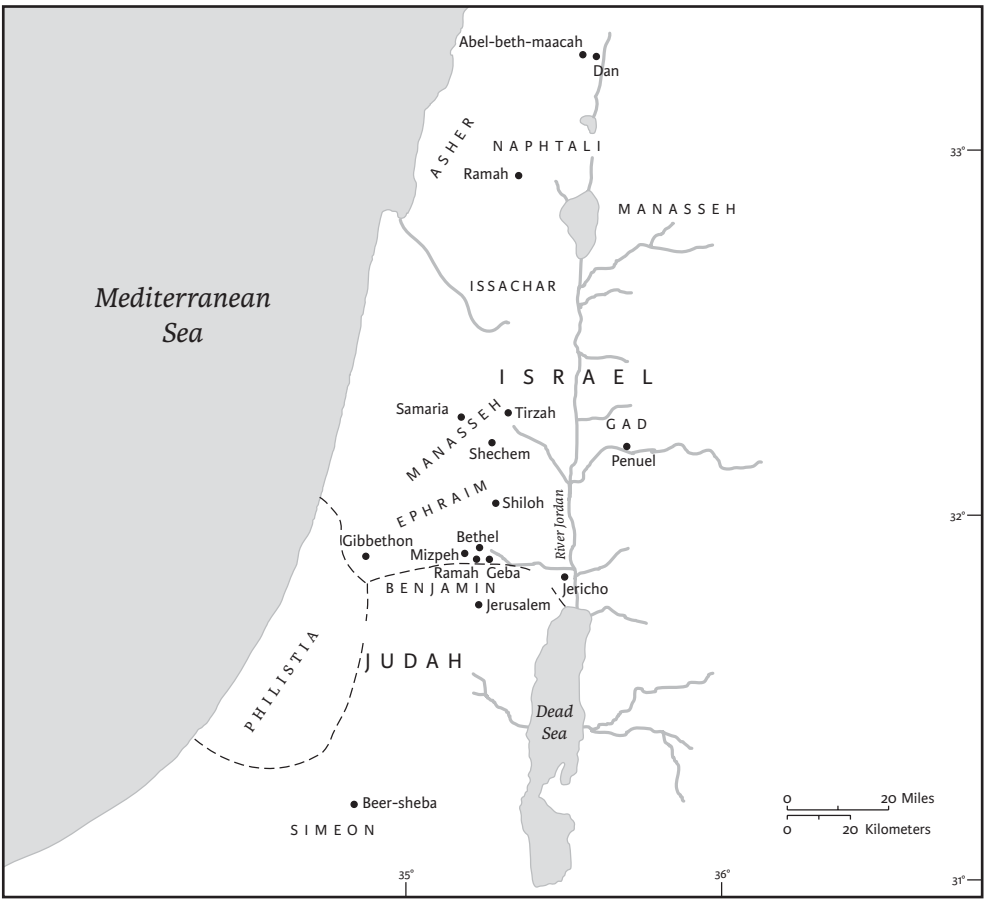
[41] Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, all that he did as well as his wisdom, are they not written in the Book of the Acts of Solomon? [42] The time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. [43] Solomon slept with his ancestors and was buried in the city of his father David; and his son Rehoboam succeeded him.

12 Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. [2] When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it (for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned

[a] Heb lacks *in the wall*
[b] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *they have*

southern Syria. **26–40:** *Jeroboam son of Nebat*, an Ephraimite; *Zeredah* is an important town in the hill country of Ephraim. He had been a supervisor of the labor force of the *house of Joseph*, which designates northern tribes, especially Ephraim and Manasseh. The name of the queen mother is typically mentioned only for Judean kings. *Zeruah* means "leper"; scribes may have modified her original name to vilify the first ruler of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. **29–39:** The encounter between Jeroboam and the prophet *Ahijah* from Shiloh, an important sanctuary in Ephraim (see 1 Sam 1.3), has many parallels with the scene of Saul's rejection in 1 Sam 15.27–28. **29–33:** After the prophet tore his mantle into twelve pieces, it is surprising that ten parts (symbolizing ten tribes) are given to Jeroboam and only one tribe (Judah) is given to the Davidic dynasty. The missing tribe may be Benjamin (see 12.21), sometimes belonging to the Northern Kingdom, and finally, perhaps under King Josiah, annexed by Judah. **34–39:** Because of the promise related in 2 Sam 7.11–16, God will not bring David's dynasty to a total end. **40:** Like Hadad, Jeroboam seeks asylum in *Egypt*. The Pharaoh *Shishak* is Shoshenq I, who ruled Egypt ca. 945–924 BCE; he is the first Pharaoh named in the Bible. **41–43:** The concluding formula for Solomon, who like David reigned for forty years, a typological number. The *Book of the Acts of Solomon* may have been a source for the authors of 1 Kings 1–11. Solomon's son *Rehoboam* succeeded him in Jerusalem, and ruled ca. 928–911 BCE.

12.1–33: The disruption of Solomon's kingdom. 1–5: In order to rally the northern tribes, Rehoboam goes



The geography of chs. 12–16. The dashed line shows the approximate boundaries between Israel, Judah and Philistia.

from[a] Egypt. [3] And they sent and called him; and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, [4] "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you." [5] He said to them, "Go away for three days, then come again to me." So the people went away.

[6] Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the older men who had attended his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, "How do you advise me to answer this people?" [7] They answered him, "If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever." [8] But he disregarded the advice that the older men gave him, and consulted with the young men who had grown up with him and now attended him. [9] He said to them, "What do you advise that

[a] Gk Vg Compare 2 Chr 10.2: Heb *lived in*

to *Shechem*, located at the end of the pass between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim (near modern Nablus). Shechem was one of the most important places in the north (see Deut 27; Josh 24). For David, the northern tribes had come to Hebron in the south (2 Sam 5.3); now Solomon's successor Rehoboam is obliged to go north. **2–5:** His rival *Jeroboam* is depicted as a second Moses who has come back from Egypt to liberate the people, who suffer under forced labor. **6–15:** Rehoboam is patterned after the Pharaoh of the Exodus story,

we answer this people who have said to me, 'Lighten the yoke that your father put on us'?" [10] The young men who had grown up with him said to him, "Thus you should say to this people who spoke to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you must lighten it for us'; thus you should say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. [11] Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'"

[12] So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had said, "Come to me again the third day." [13] The king answered the people harshly. He disregarded the advice that the older men had given him [14] and spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." [15] So the king did not listen to the people, because it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which the LORD had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

[16] When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king,

"What share do we have in David?
We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.
To your tents, O Israel!
Look now to your own house, O David."

So Israel went away to their tents. [17] But Rehoboam reigned over the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah. [18] When King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labor, all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam then hurriedly mounted his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. [19] So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

[20] When all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. There was no one who followed the house of David, except the tribe of Judah alone.

[21] When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred eighty thousand chosen troops to fight against the house of Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam son of Solomon. [22] But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: [23] Say to King Rehoboam of Judah, son of Solomon, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, [24] "Thus says the LORD, You shall not go up or fight against your kindred the people of Israel. Let everyone go home, for this thing is from me." So they heeded the word of the LORD and went home again, according to the word of the LORD.

[25] Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and resided there; he went out from there and built Penuel. [26] Then Jeroboam said to himself, "Now the kingdom may well revert to the house of David. [27] If this people continues to go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, the heart of this people will turn again to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah; they will kill me and return to King Rehoboam of Judah." [28] So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the people,[a] "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you

[a] Gk: Heb *to them*

increasing oppression (the *yoke*) in response to complaints and hardening his heart. **10:** NRSV *my little finger* follows LXX; MT has "my small one," probably an expression for the penis. Rehoboam and his young counselors think that they are much more manly than their ancestors. **11:** *Scorpions,* perhaps a whip embedded with thorns. **16–20:** The tribes of the north refuse to follow Rehoboam. **16:** The cry "*To your tents, O Israel!*" was a traditional exclamation (see 2 Sam 20.1) of the northern tribes, perhaps used as an appeal to return home after a battle. **18:** *Adoram*, see 4.6. **20:** Jeroboam ruled ca. 928–907 BCE. **21–24:** Rehoboam, who wants to wage war against the northern tribes, is forbidden to do so by the otherwise unknown prophet *Shemaiah*. LXX has a second (shorter and different) version of 12.1–33, labeled 12.24.a–z. **25–33:** Jeroboam constructs national sanctuaries at northern and southern cities in his kingdom, *Dan* and *Bethel*. This act is referred to as a refrain throughout Kings as "the sin of Jeroboam." **28–29:** According to the Deuteronomistic Historians, Jeroboam worshiped the LORD there in the form of a calf; the plural in v. 28 refers to the two statues at Dan and Bethel.

up out of the land of Egypt." 29 He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 And this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one at Bethel and before the other as far as Dan.[a] 31 He also made houses[b] on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not Levites. 32 Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the festival that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar; so he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. 33 He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he alone had devised; he appointed a festival for the people of Israel, and he went up to the altar to offer incense.

13 While Jeroboam was standing by the altar to offer incense, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the LORD to Bethel 2 and proclaimed against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: 'A son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who offer incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'" 3 He gave a sign the same day, saying, "This is the sign that the LORD has spoken: 'The altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out.'" 4 When the king heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Seize him!" But the hand that he stretched out against him withered so that he could not draw it back to himself. 5 The altar also was torn down, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. 6 The king said to the man of God, "Entreat now the favor of the LORD your God, and pray for me, so that my hand may be restored to me." So the man of God entreated the LORD; and the king's hand was restored to him, and became as it was before. 7 Then the king said to the man of God, "Come home with me and dine, and I will give you a gift." 8 But the man of God said to the king, "If you give me half your kingdom, I will not go in with you; nor will I eat food or drink water in this place. 9 For thus I was commanded by the word of the LORD: You shall not eat food, or drink water, or return by the way that you came." 10 So he went another way, and did not return by the way that he had come to Bethel.

11 Now there lived an old prophet in Bethel. One of his sons came and told him all that the man of God had done that day in Bethel; the words also that he had spoken to the king, they told to their father. 12 Their father said to them, "Which way did he go?" And his sons showed him the way that the man of God who came from Judah had gone. 13 Then he said to his sons, "Saddle a donkey for me." So they saddled a donkey for him, and he mounted it. 14 He went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak tree. He said to him, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" He answered, "I am." 15 Then he said to him, "Come home with me and eat some food." 16 But he said, "I cannot return with you, or go in with you; nor will I eat food or drink water with you in this place; 17 for it was said to me by the word of the LORD: You shall not eat food or drink water there, or return by the way that

[a] Compare Gk: Heb *went to the one as far as Dan*
[b] Gk Vg Compare 13.32: Heb *a house*

The wording is almost identical to the people's comment when Aaron made the golden calf in the desert (Ex 32.4). **31–33:** The Judean authors relate further transgressions of Jeroboam: high places, illegitimate priests, and a different festival calendar.

13.1–34: Jeroboam and the man of God from Judah. 1–10: As Jeroboam stands *by the altar*, that is, on the steps leading to it, he is confronted by an anonymous *man of God*, a prophet, who announces the end of the kingdom of Israel and the profanation of the sanctuary of Bethel by the Judean king *Josiah* (see 2 Kings 23.15–19). Such prophecies that connect distant parts of this work are typical of the Deuteronomistic History. **4:** The *withered* (lit. "dried") *hand* of Jeroboam demonstrates the prophet's power over the king. **6–10:** Having restored the king's hand, the prophet obeys the LORD's order and refuses any compensation. **11–32:** But in the following story the man of God acts differently and follows a prophet from Bethel who claims that God has spoken to him

you came." [18] Then the other[a] said to him, "I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD: Bring him back with you into your house so that he may eat food and drink water." But he was deceiving him. [19] Then the man of God[a] went back with him, and ate food and drank water in his house.

[20] As they were sitting at the table, the word of the LORD came to the prophet who had brought him back; [21] and he proclaimed to the man of God who came from Judah, "Thus says the LORD: Because you have disobeyed the word of the LORD, and have not kept the commandment that the LORD your God commanded you, [22] but have come back and have eaten food and drunk water in the place of which he said to you, 'Eat no food, and drink no water,' your body shall not come to your ancestral tomb." [23] After the man of God[a] had eaten food and had drunk, they saddled for him a donkey belonging to the prophet who had brought him back. [24] Then as he went away, a lion met him on the road and killed him. His body was thrown in the road, and the donkey stood beside it; the lion also stood beside the body. [25] People passed by and saw the body thrown in the road, with the lion standing by the body. And they came and told it in the town where the old prophet lived.

[26] When the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard of it, he said, "It is the man of God who disobeyed the word of the LORD; therefore the LORD has given him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him according to the word that the LORD spoke to him." [27] Then he said to his sons, "Saddle a donkey for me." So they saddled one, [28] and he went and found the body thrown in the road, with the donkey and the lion standing beside the body. The lion had not eaten the body or attacked the donkey. [29] The prophet took up the body of the man of God, laid it on the donkey, and brought it back to the city,[b] to mourn and to bury him. [30] He laid the body in his own grave; and they mourned over him, saying, "Alas, my brother!" [31] After he had buried him, he said to his sons, "When I die, bury me in the grave in which the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones. [32] For the saying that he proclaimed by the word of the LORD against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places that are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass."

[33] Even after this event Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but made priests for the high places again from among all the people; any who wanted to be priests he consecrated for the high places. [34] This matter became sin to the house of Jeroboam, so as to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth.

14 At that time Abijah son of Jeroboam fell sick. [2] Jeroboam said to his wife, "Go, disguise yourself, so that it will not be known that you are the wife of Jeroboam, and go to Shiloh; for the prophet Ahijah is there, who said of me that I should be king over this people. [3] Take with you ten loaves, some cakes, and a jar of honey, and go to him; he will tell you what shall happen to the child."

[4] Jeroboam's wife did so; she set out and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. Now Ahijah could not see, for his eyes were dim because of his age. [5] But the LORD said to Ahijah, "The wife of Jeroboam is coming to inquire of you concerning her son; for he is sick. Thus and thus you shall say to her."

When she came, she pretended to be another woman. [6] But when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam;

[a] Heb *he*

[b] Gk: Heb *he came to the town of the old prophet*

in another way; together, the stories illustrate that God's word must be heeded precisely. **24–28:** A *lion* would not normally be expected to kill a man and then simply stand over the body beside an uneaten donkey. This stresses the holiness of the man of God, which was acknowledged even by the lion. **32:** *Samaria* became the capital of the Northern Kingdom under Omri (16.24); here it means the entire Northern Kingdom. **33–34:** The concluding passage about Jeroboam's ongoing sin also introduces the following story.

14.1–31: The deaths of Jeroboam of Israel and Rehoboam of Judah. 1–18: The story of the illness of Jeroboam's son leads to an encounter between Jeroboam's wife and the prophet Ahijah, who had invested Jeroboam

why do you pretend to be another? For I am charged with heavy tidings for you. 7 Go, tell Jeroboam, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Because I exalted you from among the people, made you leader over my people Israel, 8 and tore the kingdom away from the house of David to give it to you; yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my sight, 9 but you have done evil above all those who were before you and have gone and made for yourself other gods, and cast images, provoking me to anger, and have thrust me behind your back; 10 therefore, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will consume the house of Jeroboam, just as one burns up dung until it is all gone. 11 Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat; and anyone who dies in the open country, the birds of the air shall eat; for the LORD has spoken.' 12 Therefore set out, go to your house. When your feet enter the city, the child shall die. 13 All Israel shall mourn for him and bury him; for he alone of Jeroboam's family shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something pleasing to the LORD, the God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam. 14 Moreover the LORD will raise up for himself a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam today, even right now![a]

15 "The LORD will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; he will root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their ancestors, and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their sacred poles,[b] provoking the LORD to anger. 16 He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and which he caused Israel to commit."

17 Then Jeroboam's wife got up and went away, and she came to Tirzah. As she came to the threshold of the house, the child died. 18 All Israel buried him and mourned for him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by his servant the prophet Ahijah.

19 Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred and how he reigned, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. 20 The time that Jeroboam reigned was twenty-two years; then he slept with his ancestors, and his son Nadab succeeded him.

21 Now Rehoboam son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite. 22 Judah did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, more than all that their ancestors had done. 23 For they also built for themselves high places, pillars, and sacred poles[b] on every high hill and under every green tree; 24 there were also male temple prostitutes in the land. They committed all the abominations of the nations that the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.

25 In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, King Shishak of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; 26 he took away the treasures of the house

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *Asherim*

as ruler over Israel (11.29–31). **6–11:** Ahijah first delivers an oracle about the fall of Jeroboam's dynasty. **14:** An allusion to the conspiracy of Baasha (15.27–30). **15–16:** A prophecy of the fall of the Northern Kingdom. **15:** *Ancestors*, lit. "fathers," the generation of the entry into the land; *beyond the Euphrates*, allusion to the Assyrian empire, which annexed the Northern Kingdom and deported parts of its population in 722 BCE. The *sacred poles* are symbols of the goddess Asherah, who may have also been venerated as the consort of the God of Israel. **16:** The *sins* of Jeroboam, see 12.25–33n. **17–18:** The mention of *Tirzah* (probably Tell el-Far'ah, ca. 6 mi [10 km] north-northeast of Shechem) suggests that it had become Jeroboam's city of residence. According to 15.21 it became Israel's capital (for a short time) under Baasha. **19–20:** A standard conclusion for the reign of each king (see Introduction). **21–31:** The reign of *Rehoboam* is not much better than that of Jeroboam; the description of the disorder in worship is very close to what is reported from the north. **23:** *Pillars* are phallus-shaped standing stones, used in fertility rituals. These rituals were celebrated on *high hills* and under *green trees* (see also Jer 2.20), which also symbolized fertility. **24:** *Temple prostitutes*, "lit. "holy person." The term is probably a

of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house; he took everything. He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made; 27 so King Rehoboam made shields of bronze instead, and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house. 28 As often as the king went into the house of the LORD, the guard carried them and brought them back to the guardroom.

29 Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? 30 There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually. 31 Rehoboam slept with his ancestors and was buried with his ancestors in the city of David. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite. His son Abijam succeeded him.

15 Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah. 2 He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom. 3 He committed all the sins that his father did before him; his heart was not true to the LORD his God, like the heart of his father David. 4 Nevertheless for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem; 5 because David did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. 6 The war begun between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continued all the days of his life. 7 The rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? There was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. 8 Abijam slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in the city of David. Then his son Asa succeeded him.

9 In the twentieth year of King Jeroboam of Israel, Asa began to reign over Judah; 10 he reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom. 11 Asa did what was right in the sight of the LORD, as his father David had done. 12 He put away the male temple prostitutes out of the land, and removed all the idols that his ancestors had made. 13 He also removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother, because she had made an abominable image for Asherah; Asa cut down her image and burned it at the Wadi Kidron. 14 But the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was true to the LORD all his days. 15 He brought into the house of the LORD the votive gifts of his father and his own votive gifts—silver, gold, and utensils.

16 There was war between Asa and King Baasha of Israel all their days. 17 King Baasha of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, to prevent anyone from going out or

euphemism for a prostitute; scholars debate whether some form of ritual prostitution is meant. **25–28:** Pharaoh *Shishak*'s (see 11.40) campaign to the north is also attested in Egyptian sources that mention many locations in the Northern Kingdom but not Jerusalem. **30:** *Wars* will frequently occur between Israel and Judah.

15.1–24: Abijam and Asa, kings of Judah. From this point until the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the accession year of each Judean king is dated with respect to the year of reign of the northern king. **1–8:** *Abijam* (called Abijah in the books of Chronicles), a king who reigned for a short time (ca. 911–908 BCE) is said to be as bad as Rehoboam. **2:** His mother was probably the daughter or granddaughter of David's son Absalom, whose mother's name was Maacah. (See 2 Sam 3.3; 2 Chr 11.20. 2 Chr 13.2 gives a different name). **4:** The LORD maintains the dynasty only because of David; the *lamp* (see 11.36) or "light" symbolizes the living representative of the house of David. **5:** *The matter of Uriah the Hittite,* see 2 Sam 11–12. **9–24:** In contrast to Abijam, *Asa* is depicted as a good king with one of the longest reigns (ca. 907–867 BCE). **10–15:** If the *Maacah* here is identical with the one mentioned in 15.2, then Asa would be Abijam's brother, and not his son (v. 8). Perhaps *mother* is a title for queen mother, who would remain in power as long as she lived; Maacah's removal from that office strengthens this hypothesis. According to the Deuteronomistic authors of Kings, *Asa* is the first reforming king, who acts against the syncretistic and idolatrous worship in Jerusalem. **12:** *Male temple prostitutes,* see 14.24n. **14:** Nevertheless he does not remove the *high places*, although he favored the Jerusalem Temple by transferring to it votive gifts presumably offered at other sanctuaries. **16–22:** Military hostilities between Asa and the northern usurper *Baasha*, whose reign is related later in 15.27–30 and 15.33–16.7. **17:** Baasha conquered *Ramah* (6 mi [10

coming in to King Asa of Judah. 18 Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house, and gave them into the hands of his servants. King Asa sent them to King Ben-hadad son of Tabrimmon son of Hezion of Aram, who resided in Damascus, saying, 19 "Let there be an alliance between me and you, like that between my father and your father: I am sending you a present of silver and gold; go, break your alliance with King Baasha of Israel, so that he may withdraw from me." 20 Ben-hadad listened to King Asa, and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel. He conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah, and all Chinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali. 21 When Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah and lived in Tirzah. 22 Then King Asa made a proclamation to all Judah, none was exempt: they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building; with them King Asa built Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah. 23 Now the rest of all the acts of Asa, all his power, all that he did, and the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? But in his old age he was diseased in his feet. 24 Then Asa slept with his ancestors, and was buried with his ancestors in the city of his father David; his son Jehoshaphat succeeded him.

25 Nadab son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of King Asa of Judah; he reigned over Israel two years. 26 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, walking in the way of his ancestor and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit.

27 Baasha son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha struck him down at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel were laying siege to Gibbethon. 28 So Baasha killed Nadab[a] in the third year of King Asa of Judah, and succeeded him. 29 As soon as he was king, he killed all the house of Jeroboam; he left to the house of Jeroboam not one that breathed, until he had destroyed it, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite— 30 because of the sins of Jeroboam that he committed and that he caused Israel to commit, and because of the anger to which he provoked the LORD, the God of Israel.

31 Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? 32 There was war between Asa and King Baasha of Israel all their days.

33 In the third year of King Asa of Judah, Baasha son of Ahijah began to reign over all Israel at Tirzah; he reigned twenty-four years. 34 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, walking in the way of Jeroboam and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit.

16 The word of the LORD came to Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, 2 "Since I exalted you out of the dust and

[a] Heb *him*

km] north of Jerusalem) located in the territory of Benjamin and fortified it in order to use it as a border citadel against Judah. **18–19:** Asa is forced to make an alliance against Baasha with *King Ben-hadad* of *Damascus*. **20–21:** Ben-hadad is convinced by the important gifts and conquers important locations in the north of Israel. *Ijon*, *Dan*, at the headwaters of Jordan; *Abel-beth-maacah*, 5 mi (8 km) west of Dan. *Chinneroth*, the land between the mountains and the lake of Galilee. All these territories belonged to *Naphtali*. **22–24:** Asa uses the material that Baasha had brought to Ramah and builds two border fortresses in the north of Benjamin because he wants to stress that it belongs to Judah: *Geba* and *Mizpah*. The latter means "look-out post"; it designates a town 8 mi (13 km) north of Jerusalem, which became an important administrative center after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE (see 2 Kings 25.22). **23–24:** The note about the king's disease of the *feet*, perhaps a euphemism for the genitals, may come from the royal archives. This could mean that his son Jehoshaphat (22.41) governed during the last years of Asa's life.

15.25–16.34: The northern kings from Nadab to Ahab. 15.25–32: The authors provide little precise information about *Nadab* (ca. 907–906 BCE) and make him as evil as Jeroboam. **27–28:** He is killed by *Baasha*, an officer from the tribe of *Issachar*, during the siege of the Philistine town *Gibbethon*, just west of Gezer. **29–30:** The extermination of the whole family of Jeroboam fulfills the prophetic oracle against the house of Jeroboam in 14.7–14. **15.33–16.7:** *Baasha* (ca. 906–883 BCE) established *Tirzah* (see 14.17) as the capital of the Northern King-

made you leader over my people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam, and have caused my people Israel to sin, provoking me to anger with their sins, 3 therefore, I will consume Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat. 4 Anyone belonging to Baasha who dies in the city the dogs shall eat; and anyone of his who dies in the field the birds of the air shall eat."

5 Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, what he did, and his power, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? 6 Baasha slept with his ancestors, and was buried at Tirzah; and his son Elah succeeded him. 7 Moreover the word of the LORD came by the prophet Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha and his house, both because of all the evil that he did in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam, and also because he destroyed it.

8 In the twenty-sixth year of King Asa of Judah, Elah son of Baasha began to reign over Israel in Tirzah; he reigned two years. 9 But his servant Zimri, commander of half his chariots, conspired against him. When he was at Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, who was in charge of the palace at Tirzah, 10 Zimri came in and struck him down and killed him, in the twenty-seventh year of King Asa of Judah, and succeeded him.

11 When he began to reign, as soon as he had seated himself on his throne, he killed all the house of Baasha; he did not leave him a single male of his kindred or his friends. 12 Thus Zimri destroyed all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke against Baasha by the prophet Jehu— 13 because of all the sins of Baasha and the sins of his son Elah that they committed, and that they caused Israel to commit, provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their idols. 14 Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

15 In the twenty-seventh year of King Asa of Judah, Zimri reigned seven days in Tirzah. Now the troops were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, 16 and the troops who were encamped heard it said, "Zimri has conspired, and he has killed the king"; therefore all Israel made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that day in the camp. 17 So Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. 18 When Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the king's house; he burned down the king's house over himself with fire, and died— 19 because of the sins that he committed, doing evil in the sight of the LORD, walking in the way of Jeroboam, and for the sin that he committed, causing Israel to sin. 20 Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and the conspiracy that he made, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

21 Then the people of Israel were divided into two parts; half of the people followed Tibni son of Ginath, to make him king, and half followed Omri. 22 But the people who followed Omri overcame the people who followed Tibni son of Ginath; so Tibni died, and Omri became king. 23 In the thirty-first year of King Asa of Judah, Omri began to reign over

dom, until Omri moved it to Samaria (16.24). **16.1–4:** The divine oracle by the otherwise unknown prophet *Jehu* (not to be confused with the later King Jehu) announces to Baasha, who *walked in the way of Jeroboam* (15.34), the end of his dynasty, as did the prophet Ahijah to Jeroboam (14.7–14). **8–14:** Baasha's son Elah (ca. 883–882 BCE) has a very short reign since he is murdered by his officer Zimri during a banquet in the house of Arza, the royal chamberlain (for the title, see 4.6), who participated in the conspiracy. Like Nadab (15.29–30), Zimri exterminates all the descendants of the murdered king. **15–22:** The chaotic and anarchic situation in the Northern Kingdom culminates with the reign of Zimri, which lasted only a week. During the siege of Gibbethon (see 15.27–28n.), Omri, supported by an important part of the army ("all Israel" in v. 17 is a rhetorical exaggeration) besieged Tirzah, and Zimri committed suicide to avoid the humiliation of being killed by his enemy. This section emphasizes the instability of the northern kingship, in contrast to that of Judah. **21–22:** For five years there is a civil war. Omri's claim to kingship is challenged by *Tibni*, who finally *died*—in all likelihood, he was killed. There were apparently two competing factions in the Israelite army. **23–28:** The biblical authors describe *Omri*'s reign (ca. 882–871) briefly. The Assyrians considered Omri as one of Israel's most important kings, referring to

Israel; he reigned for twelve years, six of them in Tirzah.

24 He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; he fortified the hill, and called the city that he built, Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill.

25 Omri did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did more evil than all who were before him. 26 For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and in the sins that he caused Israel to commit, provoking the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols. 27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri that he did, and the power that he showed, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? 28 Omri slept with his ancestors, and was buried in Samaria; his son Ahab succeeded him.

29 In the thirty-eighth year of King Asa of Judah, Ahab son of Omri began to reign over Israel; Ahab son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. 30 Ahab son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him.

31 And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, he took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him. 32 He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. 33 Ahab also made a sacred pole.[a] Ahab did more to provoke the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than had all the kings of Israel who were before him. 34 In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua son of Nun.

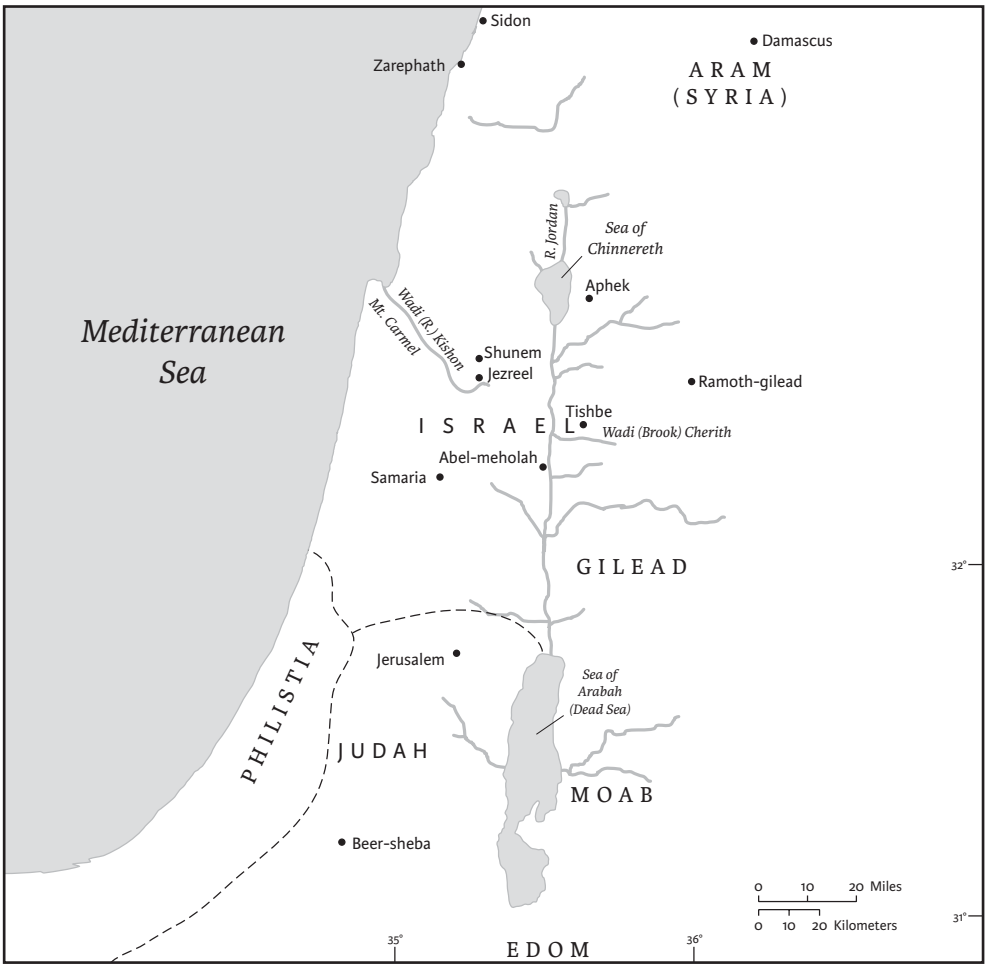
17 Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe[b] in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." 2 The word of the LORD came to him, saying, 3 "Go from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. 4 You shall drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." 5 So he went and did according to the word of the LORD; he went and lived by the Wadi

[a] Heb *Asherah*
[b] Gk: Heb *of the settlers*

Israel as "the land of the house of Omri" long after Omri's descendants had ceased to rule. The name Omri is unique in Israel and may be of Amorite or Arabic origin (like Omar). **24:** The only reported event of his reign is his purchase of the hill of *Samaria*, which became the capital of the Northern Kingdom until its fall in 722 (cf. David's purchase of Araunah's threshing floor in 2 Sam 24.18–25). **25–28:** The rest consists of stereotypical expressions, presenting Omri as a sinner, worse than his predecessors. **29–34:** The sinfulness of Israel's kings culminates with *Ahab* (ca. 873–852 BCE). His name may signify "the brother of the father"; it is perhaps a throne-name indicating a coregency of the prince with his father. **31:** The authors sharply condemn his marriage with Jezebel, a Phoenician princess. Her name includes a title of the Canaanite god Baal ("zebul"), revocalized to hint at dung ("zebel"). Her father *Ethbaal* is documented by nonbiblical sources as king of Tyre (for *Sidon* as a general term, see 6.6n.). **32–33:** Ahab introduces the worship of Baal into the Northern Kingdom. *Baal* is not a proper name but a title ("lord, master") given in the Levant to the weather-god who brought rain and fertility to the land. Nevertheless the names of his children all contain the name of the god of Israel. **34:** See Josh 6.26. Archeological evidence for an occupation of *Jericho* during the monarchic period points to the seventh century BCE. *At the cost of . . . his firstborn . . . his youngest son* may mean human sacrifices at the occasion of the foundation of an important building. Another possibility is to see the death of *Hiel*'s children as the consequence of Joshua's curse upon the rebuilding of the ruins of Jericho.

17–21. Elijah. Most of the narratives about the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17–21) are inserted in account of the reign of Ahab, whose death is related in 22.37–40. The final Elijah narratives take place during the reign of Ahaziah (2 Kings 1–2).

17.1–18.46: The prophet Elijah and the drought. 17.1–6: *Elijah* comes from *Tishbe*, a town north of the Jabbok River in *Gilead* in Transjordan. Elijah's name (which means "My god is the LORD") may reflect his theological program, since he will fight against the worship of Baal. **1:** The LORD's bringing a drought upon the land shows that he is the real weather-god instead of Baal. **2–5:** Following a divine order Elijah escapes the famine and dwells



Places associated with the Elijah narratives. The dashed line shows the approximate boundaries between Israel, Judah and Philistia.

Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. [6] The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the wadi. [7] But after a while the wadi dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

[8] Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, [9] "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." [10] So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." [11] As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." [12] But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." [13] Elijah said to her,

at the *Wadi Cherith*, an unidentified brook *east of the Jordan*. **6:** The feeding of the hero by animals is a frequent motif in folktales. *Ravens* are known as always hungry and eating rotten flesh. Paradoxically, they provide meat for Elijah. **7–16:** Elijah has to go north. **9:** *Zarephath* (10 mi [16 km] south of Sidon) is in Phoenician territory, the heartland of Baal-worship. Elijah's miracle shows that the God of Israel alone can provide food and life. **12:** *Meal*

"Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." 15 She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. 16 The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

17 After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. 18 She then said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!" 19 But he said to her, "Give me your son." He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. 20 He cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?" 21 Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." 22 The LORD listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. 23 Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." 24 So the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

18 After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year of the drought,[a] saying, "Go, present yourself to Ahab; I will send rain on the earth." 2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. The famine was severe in Samaria. 3 Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace. (Now Obadiah revered the LORD greatly; 4 when Jezebel was killing off the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets, hid them fifty to a cave, and provided them with bread and water.) 5 Then Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the wadis; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive, and not lose some of the animals." 6 So they divided the land between them to pass through it; Ahab went in one direction by himself, and Obadiah went in another direction by himself.

7 As Obadiah was on the way, Elijah met him; Obadiah recognized him, fell on his face, and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?" 8 He answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your lord that Elijah is here." 9 And he said, "How have I sinned, that you would hand your servant over to Ahab, to kill me? 10 As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom to which my lord has not sent to seek you; and when they would say, 'He is not here,' he would require an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you. 11 But now you say, 'Go, tell your lord that Elijah is here.' 12 As soon as I have gone from you, the spirit of the LORD will carry you I know not where; so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have revered the LORD from my youth. 13 Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred of the LORD's prophets fifty to a cave, and provided them

[a] Heb lacks *of the drought*

and *oil* are the basic ingredients for bread. **17–24:** Elijah's revival of the widow's son manifests again the LORD's power. The Ugaritic Baal epic tells that during the dry summer Baal dies and comes back to life in autumn by the help of his sister. The God of Israel is not a dying God; on the contrary, his prophet is able to bring the dead back to life. **18:** The woman understands the death of her son as punishment for some obscure *sin*. **19–23:** Elijah's lying on the dead boy has a parallel in a similar story about Elisha in 2 Kings 4.34. It reflects a magical conception of transferring life into a dead body. The story emphasizes that this magic can work only if God pays attention to the *voice* of his prophet. **24:** A foreign woman acknowledges the power of the God of Israel. **18.1–46:** Now Elijah, the prophet of the LORD, directly confronts the prophets of Baal. **1–16:** This confrontation is introduced by an encounter between Elijah and *Obadiah*, Ahab's chamberlain. This encounter prepares the meeting between Elijah and Ahab. As Obadiah's name ("servant of the LORD") indicates, he is a faithful worshiper of the

with bread and water? 14 Yet now you say, 'Go, tell your lord that Elijah is here'; he will surely kill me." 15 Elijah said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today." 16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

17 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" 18 He answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father's house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. 19 Now therefore have all Israel assemble for me at Mount Carmel, with the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

20 So Ahab sent to all the Israelites, and assembled the prophets at Mount Carmel. 21 Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people did not answer him a word. 22 Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets number four hundred fifty. 23 Let two bulls be given to us; let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. 24 Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the LORD; the god who answers by fire is indeed God." All the people answered, "Well spoken!" 25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many; then call on the name of your god, but put no fire to it." 26 So they took the bull that was given them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, crying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no answer. They limped about the altar that they had made. 27 At noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." 28 Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them. 29 As midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice, no answer, and no response.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come closer to me"; and all the people came closer to him. First he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down; 31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, "Israel shall be your name"; 32 with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. Then he made a trench around the altar, large enough to contain two measures of seed. 33 Next he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. He said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." 34 Then he said, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time. Again he said, "Do it a third time"; and they did it a third time, 35 so that the water ran all around the altar, and filled the trench also with water.

God of Israel and protects God's prophets from Ahab's vengeful wife Jezebel. **17–20:** The encounter between Ahab and Elijah prepares the way for the competition between the many prophets of Baal and the one prophet of the LORD. **17:** *Troubler*, this word may also mean "sorcerer." **19:** The high number of the prophets of Baal (*four hundred fifty*) emphasizes the disproportion of forces. The *four hundred prophets of Asherah*, who do not appear again in the following story, have been inserted here to emphasize Ahab's and Jezebel's Canaanite religion. The competition is on *Mount Carmel*, on the coast above modern Haifa. **20:** *All the Israelites,* a rhetorical expression, meaning the people as represented by its elders and other dignitaries. **20–24:** In his harangue Elijah pretends to be the only prophet of the LORD; but see 18.4. **24:** The LORD's association with *fire* and lightning is well attested (Ex 19; Lev 9.24); Baal was also venerated as a god of fire and lightning. **25–29:** Baal's prophets are unsuccessful, in spite of engaging in self-laceration until the evening (*the time of the offering of the oblation*). Elijah's mockery recalls the critique of idols in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40–55). **27:** *He has wandered away*, a disrespectful euphemism meaning that Baal has to relieve himself. **29:** *They raved,* lit. "they prophesied." **30–40:** Elijah prepares the revelation of the LORD by restoring or building an altar. **30–32:** A sacrifice to the LORD needs to be offered on an *altar*. The author of these verses knows the Jacob story in Genesis and quotes Gen 35.10. **32–35:** The large *trench*

36 At the time of the offering of the oblation, the prophet Elijah came near and said,
"O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,
let it be known this day that you are God
in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I
have done all these things at your bidding.
37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so that this
people may know that you, O LORD, are God,
and that you have turned their hearts back."
38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed
the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and
the dust, and even licked up the water that
was in the trench. 39 When all the people saw
it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD
indeed is God; the LORD indeed is God." 40 Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal;
do not let one of them escape." Then they
seized them; and Elijah brought them down
to the Wadi Kishon, and killed them there.

41 Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and
drink; for there is a sound of rushing rain."
42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. Elijah
went up to the top of Carmel; there he bowed
himself down upon the earth and put his
face between his knees. 43 He said to his
servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea."
He went up and looked, and said, "There
is nothing." Then he said, "Go again seven
times." 44 At the seventh time he said, "Look,
a little cloud no bigger than a person's hand
is rising out of the sea." Then he said, "Go
say to Ahab, 'Harness your chariot and go
down before the rain stops you.'" 45 In a little
while the heavens grew black with clouds
and wind; there was a heavy rain. Ahab rode
off and went to Jezreel. 46 But the hand of the
LORD was on Elijah; he girded up his loins
and ran in front of Ahab to the entrance of
Jezreel.

19 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had
done, and how he had killed all the
prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel
sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may
the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not
make your life like the life of one of them by
this time tomorrow." 3 Then he was afraid;
he got up and fled for his life, and came to
Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left
his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day's journey
into the wilderness, and came and sat down
under a solitary broom tree. He asked that
he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD,
take away my life, for I am no better than
my ancestors." 5 Then he lay down under
the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an
angel touched him and said to him, "Get up
and eat." 6 He looked, and there at his head
was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar
of water. He ate and drank, and lay down
again. 7 The angel of the LORD came a second
time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat,
otherwise the journey will be too much for
you." 8 He got up, and ate and drank; then he
went in the strength of that food forty days
and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.
9 At that place he came to a cave, and spent
the night there.

filled with water prevents any human manipulation. **36–37:** Elijah's prayer contrasts with the ecstatic behavior of the prophets of Baal. **38–39:** The LORD's manifestation through fire leads to the people's recognition that he is the only god. The cry "*The LORD indeed is God*" echoes the name of Elijah (see 17.1–6n.). **40:** The killing of the prophets of Baal at *Wadi Kishon*, a seasonal stream at the eastern base of Mount Carmel, is shocking to modern readers (cf. the Levites killing the idolatrous people in Ex 32.27–28). **41–46:** These verses conclude the drought narrative. **45:** *Jezreel*, located in a valley ca. 25 mi (40 km) southeast of Mount Carmel, was where Ahab and Jezebel had a palace (21.1). **46:** The LORD orders Elijah to go there, for the next confrontation. Miraculously, Elijah *ran* as fast as Ahab's chariot.

19.1–18: Elijah at the mountain of God. 1–3: Elijah's violence against the prophets of Baal provokes Jezebel's violence against him, and he flees until he reaches Beer-sheba, in the very south, at the border of the Judean desert. **4–8:** He goes to the *wilderness*, the place of death, because he wishes to *die*, but again the LORD nourishes him miraculously (see 17.5–6) and orders him on a long journey to Mount *Horeb*, an alternate name, especially in Deuteronomy, for Mount Sinai. In the following narrative Elijah is depicted as a new Moses. This is already indicated by the mention of the *forty days and forty nights*, which recall Moses' sojourn on the mountain of God. **9–14:** Elijah's encounter with the LORD takes place at the cave where Moses had stood to meet the God of Israel (Ex 33.21–23). The encounter is framed by Elijah's statement that he has been *zealous* for the LORD, that is, enthusiastic and exclusive in devotion to the LORD. The same word (sometimes translated "jealous") is used

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 10 He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

11 He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14 He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." 15 Then the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. 16 Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. 17 Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. 18 Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

19 So he set out from there, and found Elisha son of Shaphat, who was plowing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. 20 He left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." Then Elijah[a] said to him, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" 21 He returned from following him, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them; using the equipment from the oxen, he boiled their flesh, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

20 King Ben-hadad of Aram gathered all his army together; thirty-two kings were with him, along with horses and chariots. He marched against Samaria, laid siege to it, and attacked it. 2 Then he sent messengers into the city to King Ahab of Israel, and said to him: "Thus says Ben-hadad: 3 Your silver and gold are mine; your fairest wives and children also are mine." 4 The king of Israel answered, "As you say, my lord, O king, I am yours, and all that I have." 5 The messengers came again and said: "Thus says Ben-hadad: I

[a] Heb *he*

to describe God. **10–13:** This unexpected divine manifestation can be understood as a critique of the common idea that God has to reveal himself spectacularly by *wind*, *earthquake,* and *fire* (see Ex 19.16–18; Deut 4.36 and also 1 Kings 18). Here God comes to Elijah in *sheer silence*, in a barely audible whisper. The author of this narrative was probably polemicizing against the previous Carmel narrative. **15–18:** The order given to Elijah to *anoint Hazael as king over Aram* (see 2 Kings 8.7–15), *Jehu as king over Israel* (2 Kings 9–10), and the prophet *Elisha* as his successor hints ahead to the narratives about the time after Ahab, which will also be characterized by violence. Anointing of kings by a prophet is common; a prophet anointing another prophet is unique. **15:** *Wilderness of Damascus*, missing in the LXX, probably means the desert east of the Lake of Tiberias.

19.19–21: Elisha becomes Elijah's servant and successor. Elisha is the first of the three persons mentioned in vv. 15–18 to enter the scene. In fact, he and not Elijah will anoint Hazael and Jehu. **19:** *Twelve yoke of oxen*: likely an allusion to the twelve tribes of Israel. *Threw his mantle over him*, a symbolic act, transferring Elijah's power and abilities to his successor. **21:** The burning of the yoke symbolizes Elisha's break with his former life.

20.1–43: Wars between the Israelites and the Arameans. Elijah does not appear in this narrative. Ahab is hardly mentioned (see vv. 2,13–14), suggesting to some scholars that this story originally belonged to a later time of Israel's history. **1–12:** *Ben-hadad*, head of an impressive alliance (thirty-two kings, or chiefs of various tribes), besieges Samaria and tries to convince the king of Israel to become his vassal and to surrender.

sent to you, saying, 'Deliver to me your silver and gold, your wives and children'; [6] nevertheless I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house and the houses of your servants, and lay hands on whatever pleases them,[a] and take it away."

[7] Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, "Look now! See how this man is seeking trouble; for he sent to me for my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold; and I did not refuse him." [8] Then all the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen or consent." [9] So he said to the messengers of Ben-hadad, "Tell my lord the king: All that you first demanded of your servant I will do; but this thing I cannot do." The messengers left and brought him word again. [10] Ben-hadad sent to him and said, "The gods do so to me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria will provide a handful for each of the people who follow me." [11] The king of Israel answered, "Tell him: One who puts on armor should not brag like one who takes it off." [12] When Ben-hadad heard this message—now he had been drinking with the kings in the booths—he said to his men, "Take your positions!" And they took their positions against the city.

[13] Then a certain prophet came up to King Ahab of Israel and said, "Thus says the LORD, Have you seen all this great multitude? Look, I will give it into your hand today; and you shall know that I am the LORD." [14] Ahab said, "By whom?" He said, "Thus says the LORD, By the young men who serve the district governors." Then he said, "Who shall begin the battle?" He answered, "You." [15] Then he mustered the young men who served the district governors, two hundred thirty-two; after them he mustered all the people of Israel, seven thousand.

[16] They went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the booths, he and the thirty-two kings allied with him. [17] The young men who served the district governors went out first. Ben-hadad had sent out scouts,[b] and they reported to him, "Men have come out from Samaria." [18] He said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; if they have come out for war, take them alive."

[19] But these had already come out of the city: the young men who served the district governors, and the army that followed them. [20] Each killed his man; the Arameans fled and Israel pursued them, but King Ben-hadad of Aram escaped on a horse with the cavalry. [21] The king of Israel went out, attacked the horses and chariots, and defeated the Arameans with a great slaughter.

[22] Then the prophet approached the king of Israel and said to him, "Come, strengthen yourself, and consider well what you have to do; for in the spring the king of Aram will come up against you."

[23] The servants of the king of Aram said to him, "Their gods are gods of the hills, and so they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. [24] Also do this: remove the kings, each from his post, and put commanders in place of them; [25] and muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot; then we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they." He heeded their voice, and did so.

[26] In the spring Ben-hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. [27] After the Israelites had been mustered

[a] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *you*
[b] Heb lacks *scouts*

11: Ahab quotes a popular aphorism, warning Ben-hadad against too much confidence about his power. **13–15:** Through an anonymous prophet, the LORD announces to the king of Israel that he will provide for the victory against the Arameans. **13:** *I will give it into your hand,* a common expression to express divine assistance in war. **14–15:** *Young men,* unmarried soldiers. *District,* a word normally used of the provinces of the Persian Empire (e.g., Ezra 2.1; Dan 8.2). **16–21:** Attacking at an unexpected time, at *noon*, when the besiegers were relaxing and even *drunk*, the Israelite army defeats the Arameans. **22–34:** Ben-hadad does not give up. **22–25:** He reorganizes his army in order to attack Israel in the *spring* (after his autumn defeat). **23:** *Their gods are gods of the hills,* or "their god is a god of the hills." It is not clear if the Arameans think that the Israelites worship several mountain gods, or only the LORD. The origin of the Israelites is indeed in the mountains of Israel. **26–30:** The battle takes place at *Aphek*, probably situated east of the Lake of Galilee. **28:** An anony-

and provisioned, they went out to engage them; the people of Israel encamped opposite them like two little flocks of goats, while the Arameans filled the country. 28 A man of God approached and said to the king of Israel, "Thus says the LORD: Because the Arameans have said, 'The LORD is a god of the hills but he is not a god of the valleys,' therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the LORD." 29 They encamped opposite one another seven days. Then on the seventh day the battle began; the Israelites killed one hundred thousand Aramean foot soldiers in one day. 30 The rest fled into the city of Aphek; and the wall fell on twenty-seven thousand men that were left.

Ben-hadad also fled, and entered the city to hide. 31 His servants said to him, "Look, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings; let us put sackcloth around our waists and ropes on our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will spare your life." 32 So they tied sackcloth around their waists, put ropes on their heads, went to the king of Israel, and said, "Your servant Ben-hadad says, 'Please let me live.'" And he said, "Is he still alive? He is my brother." 33 Now the men were watching for an omen; they quickly took it up from him and said, "Yes, Ben-hadad is your brother." Then he said, "Go and bring him." So Ben-hadad came out to him; and he had him come up into the chariot. 34 Ben-hadad[a] said to him, "I will restore the towns that my father took from your father; and you may establish bazaars for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." The king of Israel responded,[b] "I will let you go on those terms." So he made a treaty with him and let him go.

35 At the command of the LORD a certain member of a company of prophets[c] said to another, "Strike me!" But the man refused to strike him. 36 Then he said to him, "Because you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD, as soon as you have left me, a lion will kill you." And when he had left him, a lion met him and killed him. 37 Then he found another man and said, "Strike me!" So the man hit him, striking and wounding him. 38 Then the prophet departed, and waited for the king along the road, disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes. 39 As the king passed by, he cried to the king and said, "Your servant went out into the thick of the battle; then a soldier turned and brought a man to me, and said, 'Guard this man; if he is missing, your life shall be given for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.' 40 While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." The king of Israel said to him, "So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it." 41 Then he quickly took the bandage away from his eyes. The king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. 42 Then he said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because you have let the man go whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall be for his life, and your people for his people.'" 43 The king of Israel set out toward home, resentful and sullen, and came to Samaria.

21 Later the following events took place: Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. 2 And Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my

[a] Heb *He*
[b] Heb lacks *The king of Israel responded*
[c] Heb *of the sons of the prophets*

mous prophet confirms the saying of the Arameans: the LORD is a god of the hills (see v. 23). **29–30:** The outcome recalls the battle of Jericho in Josh 6: on the *seventh* day the Israelites win the battle, and the *wall* of Aphek, where the Arameans have fled, *falls* down. **30–34:** Ben-hadad has no other choice than to offer a treaty to the king of Israel. **32–33:** *Brother* here connotes an equal treaty partner. **34:** *Bazaars* allow the Israelites free trade in Damascus. **35–43:** This story criticizes the treaty that the king of Israel concluded with Ben-hadad. A member of a prophetic guild, who pretends to have been wounded during the war, confounds the king with an invented case (like Nathan in 2 Sam 12.1–7) in order to denounce the king's action as contrary to God's will. **36:** *A lion . . . killed him,* recalling the prophetic story in 13.24. **39:** *A talent of silver* (about 75 lb [34 kg]) was an exorbitant price and impossible to pay unless one was very wealthy. **42:** Cf. 1 Sam 15.

21.1–29: Naboth's vineyard. 1–4: *Naboth* of *Jezreel,* where Ahab had a winter palace, refuses to sell his land to the king, because he does not want to alienate the property of his clan (cf. Lev 25.8–34). The story shows how

house; I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money." [3] But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance." [4] Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him; for he had said, "I will not give you my ancestral inheritance." He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat.

[5] His wife Jezebel came to him and said, "Why are you so depressed that you will not eat?" [6] He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it'; but he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" [7] His wife Jezebel said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

[8] So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal; she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city. [9] She wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth at the head of the assembly; [10] seat two scoundrels opposite him, and have them bring a charge against him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out, and stone him to death." [11] The men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. Just as it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, [12] they proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly. [13] The two scoundrels came in and sat opposite him; and the scoundrels brought a charge against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the city, and stoned him to death. [14] Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned; he is dead."

[15] As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, "Go, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." [16] As soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab set out to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

[17] Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: [18] Go down to meet King Ahab of Israel, who rules[a] in Samaria; he is now in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. [19] You shall say to him, "Thus says the LORD: Have you killed, and also taken possession?" You shall say to him, "Thus says the LORD: In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood."

[20] Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you. Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, [21] I will bring disaster on you; I will consume you, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel; [22] and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have provoked me to anger and have caused Israel to sin. [23] Also concerning Jezebel the LORD said, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the bounds of Jezreel.' [24] Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat; and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the air shall eat."

[25] (Indeed, there was no one like Ahab, who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD, urged on by his wife Jezebel. [26] He acted most abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had

[a] Heb *who is*

a free man is able to resist the king. **5–14:** Like David, who sent a letter to his commander in order to get rid of Uriah (2 Sam 11.14–15), Jezebel sends *letters* to the *elders* and *nobles* in order to have Naboth executed with a false accusation. **10:** *Scoundrels,* lit. "sons of worthlessness." **15–16:** Apparently the king could claim the possessions of a man who had been condemned to death. **17–29:** Despite the fact that it was Jezebel who took the initiative to kill Naboth, the LORD sends Elijah to confront Ahab. **18:** According to this verse the incident transpired in *Samaria* and not in Jezreel. **23–24:** *The dogs shall eat . . .* , dogs were considered unclean animals. The absence of a proper burial place is one of the worst curses in the Bible (e.g., Deut 28.26; Jer 34.20) and other ancient

done, whom the LORD drove out before the Israelites.)

27 When Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth over his bare flesh; he fasted, lay in the sackcloth, and went about dejectedly. 28 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: 29 "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster on his house."

22 For three years Aram and Israel continued without war. 2 But in the third year King Jehoshaphat of Judah came down to the king of Israel. 3 The king of Israel said to his servants, "Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, yet we are doing nothing to take it out of the hand of the king of Aram?" 4 He said to Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?" Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, "I am as you are; my people are your people, my horses are your horses."

5 But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, "Inquire first for the word of the LORD." 6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred of them, and said to them, "Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?" They said, "Go up; for the LORD will give it into the hand of the king." 7 But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no other prophet of the LORD here of whom we may inquire?" 8 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is still one other by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster." Jehoshaphat said, "Let the king not say such a thing." 9 Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, "Bring quickly Micaiah son of Imlah." 10 Now the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them. 11 Zedekiah son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron, and he said, "Thus says the LORD: With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are destroyed." 12 All the prophets were prophesying the same and saying, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king."

13 The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king; let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably." 14 But Micaiah said, "As the LORD lives, whatever the LORD says to me, that I will speak."

15 When he had come to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?" He answered him, "Go up and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king." 16 But the king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?" 17 Then Mi-

texts. **27–29:** In reaction to the prophetic word Ahab adopts the traditional mourning rites so the punishment is transferred to his son Joram.

22.1–40: The campaign of Ramoth-gilead and the death of Ahab. 1–36: In this battle story, continuing ch 20, Ahab is mentioned by name only in v. 20 (see 20.1–43n.). **1–4:** The beginning of the story suggests that king *Jehoshaphat* of Judah (see vv. 41–50) is a vassal of the Israelite king, since he has to participate in a war against the *king of Aram* to retrieve the fortress of *Ramoth-gilead* in Transjordan. **5–28:** The story about the prophetic counsel interrupts the battle report that is continued in v. 29. **6:** The *four hundred* prophets are part of the royal entourage. **7–9:** Jehoshaphat asks for an independent prophet of the LORD. *Micaiah son of Imlah*, a prophet of doom, is not the same as the prophet Micah of the book of that name in the Twelve Minor Prophets. 1 Kings 22 (and its parallel in 2 Chr 18) is the only biblical story in which he is mentioned. It is surprising that the king of Israel does not mention the prophet Elijah in this context. **10–16:** *Zedekiah* is the chief of the official court prophets. His symbolic action (*horns of iron*) is meant to bring about the king's victory. *Horns* are symbols of power and strength (cf. the similar narrative in Jer 28). Micaiah's first answer, repeating the favorable oracle, reflects either irony or that he is afraid of punishment in case of a negative oracle (see v. 24). **17–18:** The second oracle describes a vision of a flock without a *shepherd*, namely the king, who in the ancient Near East was the shepherd of his people. **19–23:** Micaiah's second vision describes the heavenly court (see also Job

caiah[a] said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd; and the LORD said, 'These have no master; let each one go home in peace.'" [18] The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy anything favorable about me, but only disaster?"

[19] Then Micaiah[a] said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him. [20] And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' Then one said one thing, and another said another, [21] until a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, 'I will entice him.' [22] 'How?' the LORD asked him. He replied, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then the LORD[a] said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do it.' [23] So you see, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has decreed disaster for you."

[24] Then Zedekiah son of Chenaanah came up to Micaiah, slapped him on the cheek, and said, "Which way did the spirit of the LORD pass from me to speak to you?" [25] Micaiah replied, "You will find out on that day when you go in to hide in an inner chamber." [26] The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son, [27] and say, 'Thus says the king: Put this fellow in prison, and feed him on reduced rations of bread and water until I come in peace.'" [28] Micaiah said, "If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me." And he said, "Hear, you peoples, all of you!"

[29] So the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. [30] The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. [31] Now the king of Aram had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, "Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel." [32] When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is surely the king of Israel." So they turned to fight against him; and Jehoshaphat cried out. [33] When the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. [34] But a certain man drew his bow and unknowingly struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate; so he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around, and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded." [35] The battle grew hot that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans, until at evening he died; the blood from the wound had flowed into the bottom of the chariot. [36] Then about sunset a shout went through the army, "Every man to his city, and every man to his country!"

[37] So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; they buried the king in Samaria. [38] They washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria; the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it,[b] according to the word of the LORD that he had spoken. [39] Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? [40] So Ahab slept with his ancestors; and his son Ahaziah succeeded him.

[41] Jehoshaphat son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of King Ahab of Israel. [42] Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned

[a] Heb *he*
[b] Heb lacks *in it*

1–2). **22:** The *lying spirit* is a member of the divine council. **24–28:** The king prefers the majority view. **26:** Like Jeremiah (Jer 37.15), Micaiah is kept in prison, in the house of the *king's son*. **29–36:** The *disguise* of the king of Israel indicates that he is lacking faith in the victory and that he tries to avert the first vision of Micaiah. **34:** But he cannot oppose God's decision and is killed in spite of his disguise. **37–40:** The conclusion of Ahab's reign is described in stereotypical expressions known from other kings, except for v. 38, which alludes to Elijah's prophecy in 21.19 in which *the dogs licked up his blood*. The reference to the *prostitutes* exceeds what Elijah announced. Their obscene action makes Ahab's death even more infamous.

22.41–53: Jehoshaphat of Judah and Ahaziah of Israel. 41–50: For the redactors of the book of Kings *Je-*

twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah daughter of Shilhi. [43] He walked in all the way of his father Asa; he did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the LORD; yet the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and offered incense on the high places. [44] Jehoshaphat also made peace with the king of Israel.

[45] Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his power that he showed, and how he waged war, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? [46] The remnant of the male temple prostitutes who were still in the land in the days of his father Asa, he exterminated.

[47] There was no king in Edom; a deputy was king. [48] Jehoshaphat made ships of the Tarshish type to go to Ophir for gold; but they did not go, for the ships were wrecked at Ezion-geber. [49] Then Ahaziah son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "Let my servants go with your servants in the ships," but Jehoshaphat was not willing. [50] Jehoshaphat slept with his ancestors and was buried with his ancestors in the city of his father David; his son Jehoram succeeded him.

[51] Ahaziah son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of King Jehoshaphat of Judah; he reigned two years over Israel. [52] He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father and mother, and in the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. [53] He served Baal and worshiped him; he provoked the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger, just as his father had done.

hoshaphat (ca. 870–846 BCE) was a good king, except that he tolerated sanctuaries outside the Jerusalem Temple. **46:** *Male temple prostitutes,* see 14.24n. **47–50:** Like Solomon, Jehoshaphat built *ships of the Tarshish type* in order to continue his ancestor's exotic expeditions, but he did not succeed; see 10.22n. **51–53:** This introduces the reign of the Israelite king *Ahaziah* (ca. 852–851 BCE), which is continued in 2 Kings 1. Originally, the two books of Kings were a single book (see Introduction).

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2 KINGS

For a discussion of the composition and character of 1–2 Kings, see the Introduction to 1 Kings (pp. 485–486).

NAME

In the Hebrew Bible the book of 2 Kings is called *Kings 2,* in the Greek Bible *Basileion 4* ("reigns" or "dynasties"). Originally 2 Kings was joined with 1 Kings as a single book.

CANONICAL STATUS AND LOCATION

In the Hebrew Bible, *Kings 2* is the last book of the "Former Prophets" (Josh, Judg, 1–2 Sam, 1–2 Kings). This book, which ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Judeans to Babylon (others flee to Egypt), is followed by the book of Isaiah, which opens the "Latter Prophets." Thus 2 Kings offers background to the prophetic oracles of doom and restoration in the following prophetic books. In Christian Bibles 2 Kings is followed by 1–2 Chronicles, which has an alternate history of the period of the monarchy.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE OF COMPOSITION

The authors and redactors of 2 Kings are the same as those of 1 Kings. Scholars often label them "Deuteronomists," because their language, style, and theological perspective are largely inspired by the book of Deuteronomy. The final episode in 2 Kings mentions the Babylonian king Evil-merodach, who ruled around 562 BCE, so the last redactor of the books must have lived after that.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

Second Kings starts during the short reign of Ahaziah king of Israel, with a formula ("after the death of Ahab") that recalls the beginnings of the preceding books of Joshua, Judges, and 2 Samuel. The book is divided thematically into two parts: chs 1–17 continue the synchronic history of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel until the fall of Samaria in the late eighth century; and chs 18–25 relate the last century and a half of the Judean kingdom until the Babylonian exile of 586. The first part contains several stories about the prophet Elisha (chs 2–8). After he is installed as Elijah's successor, he performs many miracles, several of which parallel tales told about Elijah: restoration of a spring in Jericho (Elisha provides water); punishment of jeering boys (Elisha provokes death); the everlasting oil; the purifying of a stew; the feeding of a hundred men (Elisha provides food); the revival of the Shunamite woman's son (Elisha provides life). Elisha also heals a leprous Aramean officer and recovers an ax head from the Jordan. But he appears also involved in high politics when he legitimates two coups d'état: he anoints the Aramean Hazael, and Jehu, who will exterminate the house of Ahab; the story of Jehu's revolution is told in chs 9–10.

The reign of queen Athaliah over Judah in ch 11 interrupts the Davidic dynasty, and is presented as illegitimate. The Davidic line continues with King Joash (ch 12), who escaped from Athaliah's massacre. Chapters 13–17 continue the parallel history of the two kingdoms, which is told from a clearly Judean perspective: the northern kings Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menachem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea are altogether bad kings, since they continue the "sins of Jeroboam" (see 1 Kings 12), venerating the LORD outside Jerusalem and worshiping other deities. Among the Judean kings Jehoash, Amaziah, Azariah, and Jotham are considered good kings, although they are criticized for tolerating the high places outside Jerusalem. The Judean king Ahaz, however, is presented as walking in the way of the kings of Israel. Throughout this presentation parallels are drawn between Israel and Judah. The fall of Israel related in 2 Kings 17 does not mean that Judah will be safe forever. Chapter 17 provides a long commentary in typical Deuteronomistic style, which indicates the reasons that led to the end of the Northern Kingdom and its transformation into an Assyrian province; it also hints ahead at the destruction of Judah (vv. 19–20).

In the second part of 2 Kings (chs 18–25), which relates the story of the kingdom of Judah until its end, two kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, are presented in a very positive way. Hezekiah (chs 18–20) abolishes the illegitimate religious practices; under his reign the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem fails because of the LORD's intervention. His son Manasseh (ch 21) is presented as the worst of all kings of Judah, although he reigned for

fifty-five years. He is explicitly compared to the worst Israelite king, Ahab, reintroducing forbidden religious practices; the redactor presents him as responsible for the later destruction of Jerusalem. He is succeeded by the wicked Amon, who is followed by Josiah, who undertakes a sweeping religious reform, making Jerusalem the only legitimate sanctuary for the worship of the LORD and destroying all symbols of unorthodox worship (chs 22–23). But Josiah is killed by the Egyptian king, and his four successors Jeoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (chs 23–24), act in a jarring contrast to him. The Deuteronomistic redactors judge them each with the same formula: "he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, just as his father(s) had done." They hasten the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, who are presented as the tool of divine punishment (chs 24–25). The story ends with a short note about the release of the Judean king Jehoiachin from his Babylonian prison: he stays in Babylon but becomes a privileged guest at the table of the king of Babylon (25.27–30).

INTERPRETATION

Because 2 Kings is part of a single composition with 1 Kings, it is not surprising that it shares the same view of history that is presented there, offering not necessarily complete and accurate history but a theological explanation of the double failure of the northern and southern monarchies. For the authors of Kings, the north had been condemned from its very beginnings. For the Judean, Davidic kings the issue was more complicated. The LORD had promised to David an eternal dynasty (2 Sam 7), but Jerusalem had been destroyed and Judah had come under Babylonian domination. Did this mean that God did not stand by his word? The authors of Kings gave a double answer. First, they understood the promise as conditional: only if the kings behave according to God's commandments, as written down in the book of Deuteronomy, would there be always a Davidic king in Jerusalem (see, e.g., 1 Kings 9.4–7). Second, the mention of Jehoiachin's release out of his prison (2 Kings 25.27–30) may indicate hope for the future restoration of the Davidic monarchy. But the end of 2 Kings may also be understood otherwise (see 25.27–30n.).

GUIDE FOR READING

Since 2 Kings is not a self-contained book, the reader should start with 1 Kings or, even better, with the books of Samuel. The role played by the "good kings" Hezekiah and Josiah, and how their deeds cannot prevent the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile, deserve particular attention, as do the parallels between the miracles of Elisha and Elijah.

Thomas Römer

1 After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel.

[2] Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay injured; so he sent messengers, telling them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury." [3] But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Get up, go to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?' [4] Now therefore thus says the LORD, 'You shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die.'" So Elijah went.

[5] The messengers returned to the king, who said to them, "Why have you returned?" [6] They answered him, "There came a man to meet us, who said to us, 'Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him: Thus says the LORD: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but shall surely die.'" [7] He said to them, "What sort of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?" [8] They answered him, "A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist." He said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

[9] Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. He went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'" [10] But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

[11] Again the king sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty. He went up[a] and said to him, "O man of God, this is the king's order: Come down quickly!" [12] But Elijah answered them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

[13] Again the king sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. So the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and entreated him, "O man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty servants of yours, be precious in your sight. [14] Look, fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former captains of fifty men with their fifties; but now let my life be precious in your sight." [15] Then the angel of the LORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So he set out and went down with him to the king, [16] and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron,—is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word?—therefore you shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die."

[a] Gk Compare verses 9, 13: Heb *He answered*

1.1–17: The encounter between King Ahaziah and the prophet Elijah. 1: The notice *After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel* also appears in 3.5 where it stands at a better place. **2–9:** Ahaziah, who falls through the *lattice* on the flat roof of his house, on part of which was built the *upper chamber*, perhaps a bedroom, wants to consult a local manifestation of the god Baal and is confronted by the prophet Elijah. **2:** *Baal-zebub* means "lord of the flies"; the second word is probably a parody by the biblical writers on a more original "zebul" ("prince"; cf. 1 Kings 16.31n.; Mk 3.22). *Ekron* is the northernmost of the Philistine cities, ca. 25 mi (40 km) west of Jerusalem. **3:** The *angel* (Heb "mal'ak," lit. "messenger") *of the LORD* is juxtaposed to Ahaziah's messengers. The word "mal'ak" may denote a human person or a supernatural being. **4–6:** The king's messengers receive their oracle not from Baal of Ekron but from Elijah, who speaks in the name of the LORD. **7–8:** The king identifies Elijah through his description as a *hairy man, with a leather belt*. This outfit may have been typical of prophetic groups that were hostile to urban culture (cf. Mk 1.6). **9–16:** This scene, where the king sends other messengers, contains a play on words: when the officer harshly asks the *man of God* (Heb "'ish 'elohim") to descend, Elijah instead sends down the *fire of God* ("'esh 'elohim"). **10:** *Fire* is often a tool of divine punishment (e.g., Gen 19.24; Lev 10.2; Num 16.35). **13–16:** The third officer behaves respectfully and Elijah comes down, but his oracle of death for the king is not altered. **17–18:** The notice that *Jehoram* of Israel becomes Ahaziah's successor in the second year of Jehoram of Judah disagrees with 3.1, where Jehoram of Israel becomes king in the eighteenth



The geography of chs. 1–14. The dashed line shows the approximate boundaries between Israel, Judah and Philistia.

17 So he died according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken. His brother,[a] Jehoram succeeded him as king in the second year of King Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat of Judah, because Ahaziah had no son. 18 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

2 Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2 Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live,

[a] Gk Syr: Heb lacks *His brother*

year of Jehoshaphat of Judah. There may have been a coregency in Judah between Jehoshaphat and his son Jehoram, or there may be some textual or historical confusion because both kings in Judah and Israel had the same name.

2.1–18: Elisha succeeds Elijah. This narrative marks the transition between the narratives about Elijah and those about Elisha. **1:** This verse anticipates v. 11. *Gilgal*, located between Jericho and the Jordan, is Elisha's home, according to 4.38. **2–6:** The *company of prophets* designates a prophetic community near Bethel that has been informed about Elijah's imminent ascension. The supposed journey from Gilgal to Bethel and then

I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. 3 The company of prophets[a] who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

4 Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5 The company of prophets[a] who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."

6 Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. 7 Fifty men of the company of prophets[a] also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. 8 Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." 10 He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." 11 As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. 12 Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

13 He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 14 He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

15 When the company of prophets[a] who were at Jericho saw him at a distance, they declared, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." They came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. 16 They said to him, "See now, we have fifty strong men among your servants; please let them go and seek your master; it may be that the spirit of the LORD has caught him up and thrown him down on some mountain or into some valley." He responded, "No, do not send them." 17 But when they urged him until he was ashamed, he said, "Send them." So they sent fifty men who searched for three days but did not find him. 18 When they came back to him (he had remained at Jericho), he said to them, "Did I not say to you, Do not go?"

19 Now the people of the city said to Elisha, "The location of this city is good, as my lord

[a] Heb *sons of the prophets*

back to Jericho is confusing, and may be a later element in the story. **7–8:** Elijah's *mantle,* already mentioned in 1 Kings 19.19. The parting of the waters of the Jordan recalls the crossing of that river by the Israelites under Joshua (Josh 3–4) and Moses' parting of the Sea of Reeds (Ex 14). **9–10:** Elisha is asking Elijah for a *double share of your spirit*, which according to Deut 21.17 was the share of the eldest son, who received twice as much as his brothers. With his request Elisha appears as Elijah's "eldest son" and successor. **11–12:** The *chariot of fire and horses* symbolize the divine army. Elijah goes to heaven in a *whirlwind*, or in a storm, which is one of the LORD's manifestations (Nah 1.3; Job 38.1; Ps 50.3) thereby integrating Elijah into the divine sphere. Such ascension is unique to Elijah in the Bible and explains Elijah's importance in Jewish tradition (see Mal 4.5–6). The phrase *the chariots of Israel and its horsemen* suggests that prophetic power equals the strength of cavalry; see also 13.14. **13–14:** Elisha's ability to repeat Elijah's parting of the water shows that he has received his master's spirit. **15–18:** The prophetic community (the "sons of the prophets"; see textual note *a*) near Jericho is aware that Elisha has become Elijah's successor, but they do not know that Elijah has been taken to heaven. Only Elisha has seen what happened in the whirlwind.

2.19–25: Elisha's first miracles. These miracles demonstrate that Elisha can either bless or curse in the name of God. **19–22:** He purifies an infected *spring* near Jericho, throwing salt in it. *Salt* was considered to have cleans-

sees; but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful." 20 He said, "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it." So they brought it to him. 21 Then he went to the spring of water and threw the salt into it, and said, "Thus says the LORD, I have made this water wholesome; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it." 22 So the water has been wholesome to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke.

23 He went up from there to Bethel; and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, "Go away, baldhead! Go away, baldhead!" 24 When he turned around and saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. Then two she-bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys. 25 From there he went on to Mount Carmel, and then returned to Samaria.

3 In the eighteenth year of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, Jehoram son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria; he reigned twelve years. 2 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, though not like his father and mother, for he removed the pillar of Baal that his father had made. 3 Nevertheless he clung to the sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to commit; he did not depart from it.

4 Now King Mesha of Moab was a sheep breeder, who used to deliver to the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs, and the wool of one hundred thousand rams. 5 But when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. 6 So King Jehoram marched out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel. 7 As he went he sent word to King Jehoshaphat of Judah, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me; will you go with me to battle against Moab?" He answered, "I will; I am with you, my people are your people, my horses are your horses." 8 Then he asked, "By which way shall we march?" Jehoram answered, "By the way of the wilderness of Edom."

9 So the king of Israel, the king of Judah, and the king of Edom set out; and when they had made a roundabout march of seven days, there was no water for the army or for the animals that were with them. 10 Then the king of Israel said, "Alas! The LORD has summoned us, three kings, only to be handed over to Moab." 11 But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no prophet of the LORD here, through whom we may inquire of the LORD?" Then one of the servants of the king of Israel answered, "Elisha son of Shaphat, who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah, is here." 12 Jehoshaphat said, "The word of the LORD is with him." So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

13 Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What have I to do with you? Go to your father's

ing and protective capacities. **23–25:** The episode of the cursing of the boys of Bethel who jeered at the prophet seems shocking to modern readers. For the ancient reader it demonstrated that it was dangerous to behave disrespectfully toward a man of God. **24:** The narrator does not tell the content of Elisha's *curse*, and whether or not he intended to kill the boys. *Forty-two boys,* "forty-two" is a number sometimes associated with death: Jehu kills forty-two victims (10.14), and the Egyptian Book of the Dead mentions forty-two judges of the dead. **25:** Elisha's travel to *Mount Carmel* recalls Elijah's victory against the prophets of Baal, and helps establish Elisha as a new Elijah.

3.1–27: Jehoram of Israel, Elisha and the war against Moab. 1–3: *Jehoram*'s behavior is less wicked that that of his father *Ahab*. For the chronological problem see 1.17–18n. **3:** The *sin of Jeroboam* designates illicit worship outside of Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 12). **4–8:** The campaign against Moab echoes the war report of 1 Kings 22. *Jehoshaphat*, previously allied to Ahab, is now an ally, or even vassal, of Ahab's son (cf. v. 7 and 1 Kings 22.4). **4–5:** King *Mesha* of Moab is also known from the Moabite Stone discovered in 1868, a stela with an inscription celebrating Mesha's victory over Israel, which may allude to the revolt mentioned in v. 5. **8:** The descent to *Edom* in the south is necessary because of the Moabite fortifications in the north. **9:** The mention of *the king of Edom* may be inaccurate (see 1 Kings 22.47). **10–12:** Unlike the Israelite king, who is afraid that the LORD may have gathered the allies for their demise, the pious Judean king asks for a prophet of the LORD. **11:** Elisha pouring *water on the hands of Elijah* recalls his relationship to his prophetic predecessor; this is a gesture of deference, as of a servant to his master or of a son to his father. The mention of *water* also alludes to the water miracle that follows. **13–14:** Elisha represents the position of the Judean redactors of the book of Kings that only

prophets or to your mother's." But the king of Israel said to him, "No; it is the LORD who has summoned us, three kings, only to be handed over to Moab." 14 Elisha said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, whom I serve, were it not that I have regard for King Jehoshaphat of Judah, I would give you neither a look nor a glance. 15 But get me a musician." And then, while the musician was playing, the power of the LORD came on him. 16 And he said, "Thus says the LORD, 'I will make this wadi full of pools.' 17 For thus says the LORD, 'You shall see neither wind nor rain, but the wadi shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, you, your cattle, and your animals.' 18 This is only a trifle in the sight of the LORD, for he will also hand Moab over to you. 19 You shall conquer every fortified city and every choice city; every good tree you shall fell, all springs of water you shall stop up, and every good piece of land you shall ruin with stones." 20 The next day, about the time of the morning offering, suddenly water began to flow from the direction of Edom, until the country was filled with water.

21 When all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, all who were able to put on armor, from the youngest to the oldest, were called out and were drawn up at the frontier. 22 When they rose early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, the Moabites saw the water opposite them as red as blood. 23 They said, "This is blood; the kings must have fought together, and killed one another. Now then, Moab, to the spoil!" 24 But when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and attacked the Moabites, who fled before them; as they entered Moab they continued the attack.[a] 25 The cities they overturned, and on every good piece of land everyone threw a stone, until it was covered; every spring of water they stopped up, and every good tree they felled. Only at Kir-hareseth did the stone walls remain, until the slingers surrounded and attacked it. 26 When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom; but they could not. 27 Then he took his firstborn son who was to succeed him, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. And great wrath came upon Israel, so they withdrew from him and returned to their own land.

4 Now the wife of a member of the company of prophets[b] cried to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead; and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but a creditor has come to take my two children as slaves." 2 Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" She answered, "Your servant has nothing in the house, except a jar of oil." 3 He said, "Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not just a few. 4 Then go in, and shut the door behind you and your children, and start pouring into all these vessels; when each is full, set it aside." 5 So she left him and shut the

[a] Compare Gk Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *the sons of the prophets*

Judean kings are worthy of divine help. **15:** Music induced ecstasy through which the prophet prophesied (cf. 1 Sam 10.5–6). *The power of the LORD,* lit. "the hand of the LORD." **16–19:** Elisha predicts water and a (first) victory over Moab. **16:** *Pools,* or ditches. Groundwater can be obtained in a desert terrain by tapping the water table, but according to Elisha's oracle the gift of water is a miracle. **20–25:** After the fulfillment of the water miracle (v. 20), the allies are successful in their war against Moab. **22–23:** The red light of the rising sun on the water deceives the Moabites, who think it is the *blood* of the allies' armies. **24–25:** Large parts of the Moabite territory were destroyed, but not *Kir-hareseth* ("Fortress of the guard," modern Kerak). **26–27:** The king of Moab, seeing no chance to escape, sacrifices his *firstborn son* to his god Chemosh. The *great wrath* originally referred to the wrath of Chemosh, who responded positively to this human offering by decimating the Israelite army. The biblical redactors probably understood it as a kind of disgust that repelled the Israelites.

4.1–44: Further miracles by Elisha. Elisha is more of a miracle worker than Elijah; some miracles that are told of both belonged originally to the Elisha traditions. **1–7:** The oil miracle is similar to the story in 1 Kings 17.7–16. **1:** A widow of one of the prophetic groups over which Elisha apparently exercises leadership (the dead prophet is called *servant* of Elisha) is obliged to sell her *children as slaves* in order to pay her debts (see Ex 21.7; Neh 5.5). **2–7:** Elisha does not play an active role in the production of abundant oil; he only tells the woman what she has

door behind her and her children; they kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring. 6 When the vessels were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." But he said to her, "There are no more." Then the oil stopped flowing. 7 She came and told the man of God, and he said, "Go sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your children can live on the rest."

8 One day Elisha was passing through Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to have a meal. So whenever he passed that way, he would stop there for a meal. 9 She said to her husband, "Look, I am sure that this man who regularly passes our way is a holy man of God. 10 Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

11 One day when he came there, he went up to the chamber and lay down there. 12 He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite woman." When he had called her, she stood before him. 13 He said to him, "Say to her, Since you have taken all this trouble for us, what may be done for you? Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?" She answered, "I live among my own people." 14 He said, "What then may be done for her?" Gehazi answered, "Well, she has no son, and her husband is old." 15 He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood at the door. 16 He said, "At this season, in due time, you shall embrace a son." She replied, "No, my lord, O man of God; do not deceive your servant."

17 The woman conceived and bore a son at that season, in due time, as Elisha had declared to her.

18 When the child was older, he went out one day to his father among the reapers. 19 He complained to his father, "Oh, my head, my head!" The father said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother." 20 He carried him and brought him to his mother; the child sat on her lap until noon, and he died. 21 She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, closed the door on him, and left. 22 Then she called to her husband, and said, "Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, so that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again." 23 He said, "Why go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath." She said, "It will be all right." 24 Then she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Urge the animal on; do not hold back for me unless I tell you." 25 So she set out, and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When the man of God saw her coming, he said to Gehazi his servant, "Look, there is the Shunammite woman; 26 run at once to meet her, and say to her, Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is the child all right?" She answered, "It is all right." 27 When she came to the man of God at the mountain, she caught hold of his feet. Gehazi approached to push her away. But the man of God said, "Let her alone, for she is in bitter distress; the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me." 28 Then she said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, Do not mislead me?" 29 He said to Gehazi, "Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet anyone, give no greeting, and if anyone greets you, do not answer; and lay my staff on the face of the child." 30 Then the mother of the child said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave without you." So he rose up and followed her. 31 Gehazi went

to do. **8–37:** The boy's revival is reminiscent of 1 Kings 17.17–24. **8:** *Shunem,* a town in the Jezreel Valley ca. 10 mi (16 km) east of Megiddo. **9–17:** Elisha's visit to the house of a childless and aged couple and his promise of a son that shall be born to them because of their hospitality recalls Gen 18.1–15. **12:** *Gehazi* is Elisha's personal servant and mediator between him and the hosts. **18–31:** After her son dies unexpectedly the mother travels to *Mount Carmel,* where Elisha resides (see v. 25). **21:** The placing of the dead son in the chamber that was reserved for Elisha can be understood either as a reproach to Elisha (see also v. 28) or as an attempt to retain the "soul," the life-essence of the boy. **23:** *It is neither new moon nor Sabbath,* it was apparently the custom to consult prophets on such holy days. **24–25:** The story highlights the woman's initiative (she *saddled* and rode *the donkey*), whereas her husband appears to be passive and resigned. **29–31:** The dispatch of Gehazi with Elisha's *staff* (see Moses' staff in Ex 4.1–4; 17.8–13) was meant to allay the mother's impatience, since Gehazi is able to reach Shunem quicker than Elisha. In other ancient Near Eastern texts, prophets also send items that belong to them

on ahead and laid the staff on the face of the child, but there was no sound or sign of life. He came back to meet him and told him, "The child has not awakened."

32 When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. 33 So he went in and closed the door on the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. 34 Then he got up on the bed[a] and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and while he lay bent over him, the flesh of the child became warm. 35 He got down, walked once to and fro in the room, then got up again and bent over him; the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. 36 Elisha[b] summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite woman." So he called her. When she came to him, he said, "Take your son." 37 She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground; then she took her son and left.

38 When Elisha returned to Gilgal, there was a famine in the land. As the company of prophets was[c] sitting before him, he said to his servant, "Put the large pot on, and make some stew for the company of prophets."[d] 39 One of them went out into the field to gather herbs; he found a wild vine and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and cut them up into the pot of stew, not knowing what they were. 40 They served some for the men to eat. But while they were eating the stew, they cried out, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" They could not eat it. 41 He said, "Then bring some flour." He threw it into the pot, and said, "Serve the people and let them eat." And there was nothing harmful in the pot.

42 A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the people and let them eat." 43 But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" So he repeated, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" 44 He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

5 Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy.[e] 2 Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."[e] 4 So Naaman[b] went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. 5 And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel."

[a] Heb lacks *on the bed*
[b] Heb *he*
[c] Heb *sons of the prophets were*
[d] Heb *sons of the prophets*
[e] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

in order to accomplish a miracle. **32–37:** Gehazi's failure highlights the effect of Elisha's personal appearance and success. **33:** Elisha's prayer to the LORD precedes his mysterious actions. **34–35:** Crouching over the boy's body suggests a magic ritual in which the properties of the living party were transferred to the dead. *The child sneezed seven times*, the sneezing signifies that life has returned. Seven is the number of perfection. **38–41:** Elisha appears again as providing food. He makes a poisoned meal edible by adding some *flour*. **42–44:** Elisha's multiplication of food provides the pattern for the stories about Jesus doing the same in the Gospels. **42:** *Baal-shalishah*, located in the hills of Ephraim ca. 11 mi (18 km) southwest of Samaria.

5.1–27: Elisha heals an Aramean officer. This story teaches that the LORD is not only the god of the Israelites but also the god of the foreigners. **1:** *Naaman,* a name meaning "gracious," which is attested in the ancient Near East as a proper name as well as an epithet of royal personages. His *leprosy* (see textual note *e*) was not contagious and did not exclude him from society. **2–7:** Informed by an Israelite maidservant about Elisha's power, the contact is established by a *letter* of the Aramean king to the king of Israel. **3:** *The prophet who is in Samaria* refers to Elisha, who in this story is not associated with a prophetic community but lives alone in Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom. **5–7:** Despite the excessive gifts (*ten talents*, ca. 340 kg [755 lb], *of silver* and *six thousand shekels,* ca. 70 kg [150 lb] *of gold*), the Israelite king suspects that the Aramean king is seeking an occasion

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. 6 He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy."[a] 7 When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?[a] Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

8 But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." 11 But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy![a] 12 Are not Abana[b] and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. 13 But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" 14 So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

15 Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant." 16 But he said, "As the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!" He urged him to accept, but he refused. 17 Then Naaman said, "If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the LORD. 18 But may the LORD pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant on this one count." 19 He said to him, "Go in peace."

But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, 20 Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, thought, "My master has let that Aramean Naaman off too lightly by not accepting from him what he offered. As the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something out of him." 21 So Gehazi went after Naaman. When Naaman saw someone running after him, he jumped down from the chariot to meet him and said, "Is everything all right?" 22 He replied, "Yes, but my master has sent me to say, 'Two members of a company of prophets[c] have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim; please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing.'" 23 Naaman said, "Please accept two talents." He urged him, and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing, and gave them to two of his servants, who carried them in front of Gehazi.[d]

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain
[b] Another reading is *Amana*
[c] Heb *sons of the prophets*
[d] Heb *him*

for war. **8–13:** Elisha's laconic advice to Naaman to *wash seven times* (see 4.35n.) *in the Jordan* is taken by Naaman as insulting. **13:** His servants persuade him to reconsider his hasty interpretation of Elisha's words. *Father,* a title of respect referring to a superior. **14–15:** After his healing, Naaman proclaims a monotheistic confession, which recalls Rahab's confession (Josh 2.11): the LORD is not only the God of Israel, but of *all the earth*. **16–17:** In order to worship the LORD outside of Israel, Naaman wants to take with him Israelite *earth,* i.e., "soil." **18:** After Naaman's conversion, he cannot offend his king who venerates *Rimmon*, so he will only pretend to worship this "false" god. The vocalization Rimmon (which means "pomegranate") may be a parody of the name of the Aramean weather-god Hadad Ramanu ("the Thunderer"). **19–27:** Whereas Elisha had refused any payment (v.

24 When he came to the citadel, he took the bags[a] from them, and stored them inside; he dismissed the men, and they left.

25 He went in and stood before his master; and Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" He answered, "Your servant has not gone anywhere at all." 26 But he said to him, "Did I not go with you in spirit when someone left his chariot to meet you? Is this a time to accept money and to accept clothing, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves? 27 Therefore the leprosy[b] of Naaman shall cling to you, and to your descendants forever." So he left his presence leprous,[b] as white as snow.

6 Now the company of prophets[c] said to Elisha, "As you see, the place where we live under your charge is too small for us. 2 Let us go to the Jordan, and let us collect logs there, one for each of us, and build a place there for us to live." He answered, "Do so." 3 Then one of them said, "Please come with your servants." And he answered, "I will." 4 So he went with them. When they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. 5 But as one was felling a log, his ax head fell into the water; he cried out, "Alas, master! It was borrowed." 6 Then the man of God said, "Where did it fall?" When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick, and threw it in there, and made the iron float. 7 He said, "Pick it up." So he reached out his hand and took it.

8 Once when the king of Aram was at war with Israel, he took counsel with his officers. He said, "At such and such a place shall be my camp." 9 But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, "Take care not to pass this place, because the Arameans are going down there." 10 The king of Israel sent word to the place of which the man of God spoke. More than once or twice he warned such a place[d] so that it was on the alert.

11 The mind of the king of Aram was greatly perturbed because of this; he called his officers and said to them, "Now tell me who among us sides with the king of Israel?" 12 Then one of his officers said, "No one, my lord king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber." 13 He said, "Go and find where he is; I will send and seize him." He was told, "He is in Dothan." 14 So he sent horses and chariots there and a great army; they came by night, and surrounded the city.

15 When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, "Alas, master! What shall we do?" 16 He replied, "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." 17 Then Elisha prayed: "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 18 When the Arameans[e] came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, "Strike this people, please, with blindness." So he struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked.

[a] Heb lacks *the bags*
[b] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain
[c] Heb *sons of the prophets*
[d] Heb *warned it*
[e] Heb *they*

16) his servant *Gehazi* is eager for profit and is punished for that. **27:** Gehazi, who pursued profit from the healed Naaman, is now afflicted with his disease. *Leprous, as white as snow,* the same punishment happened to Miriam, who had criticized Moses (Num 12.10).

6.1–7: Elisha makes iron float. Another miracle story that illustrates the prophetic community's dependence on its master. **5:** *It was borrowed,* the community could not afford to have its own ax, so Elisha's help is vital.

6.8–23: Elisha and the Aramean invasion. 8–10: Elisha forewarns the king of Israel about an Aramean attack. **8:** *At war*, refers probably to border raids as in 5.2. *The king of Aram*, his name is not mentioned, which may indicate the episode's legendary character. **11–14:** The Aramean king suspects betrayal, but he is told that Elisha knows everything, even the words spoken in the king's *bedchamber* (v. 12), the most intimate part of the royal palace. **13:** Now Elisha is in *Dothan* (see Gen 37.17), located ca. 11 mi (18 km) north of Samaria. **15–23:** The two scenes are connected by the motif of *blindness*. **15–17:** When the LORD opens the eyes of Elisha's servant, he sees the celestial army, *horses and chariots of fire* (see 2.11–12n.). **18–23:** When the LORD opens the eyes of

19 Elisha said to them, "This is not the way,
and this is not the city; follow me, and I will
bring you to the man whom you seek." And
he led them to Samaria.
20 As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha
said, "O LORD, open the eyes of these men so
that they may see." The LORD opened their
eyes, and they saw that they were inside
Samaria. 21 When the king of Israel saw them
he said to Elisha, "Father, shall I kill them?
Shall I kill them?" 22 He answered, "No! Did
you capture with your sword and your bow
those whom you want to kill? Set food and
water before them so that they may eat and
drink; and let them go to their master." 23 So
he prepared for them a great feast; after they
ate and drank, he sent them on their way, and
they went to their master. And the Arameans
no longer came raiding into the land of Israel.
24 Some time later King Ben-hadad of Aram
mustered his entire army; he marched against
Samaria and laid siege to it. 25 As the siege
continued, famine in Samaria became so
great that a donkey's head was sold for eighty
shekels of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of
dove's dung for five shekels of silver. 26 Now
as the king of Israel was walking on the city
wall, a woman cried out to him, "Help, my
lord king!" 27 He said, "No! Let the LORD help
you. How can I help you? From the threshing
floor or from the wine press?" 28 But then the
king asked her, "What is your complaint?"
She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give
up your son; we will eat him today, and we
will eat my son tomorrow.' 29 So we cooked
my son and ate him. The next day I said to
her, 'Give up your son and we will eat him.'
But she has hidden her son." 30 When the
king heard the words of the woman he tore
his clothes—now since he was walking on
the city wall, the people could see that he had
sackcloth on his body underneath— 31 and
he said, "So may God do to me, and more, if
the head of Elisha son of Shaphat stays on his
shoulders today." 32 So he dispatched a man
from his presence.
Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the
elders were sitting with him. Before the mes-
senger arrived, Elisha said to the elders, "Are
you aware that this murderer has sent some-
one to take off my head? When the messenger
comes, see that you shut the door and hold
it closed against him. Is not the sound of his
master's feet behind him?" 33 While he was still
speaking with them, the king[a] came down to
him and said, "This trouble is from the LORD!
Why should I hope in the LORD any longer?"
7 1 But Elisha said, "Hear the word of the
LORD: thus says the LORD, Tomorrow
about this time a measure of choice meal
shall be sold for a shekel, and two measures
of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria."
2 Then the captain on whose hand the king
leaned said to the man of God, "Even if the
LORD were to make windows in the sky, could
such a thing happen?" But he said, "You shall
see it with your own eyes, but you shall not
eat from it."
3 Now there were four leprous[b] men out-
side the city gate, who said to one another,
"Why should we sit here until we die? 4 If we
say, 'Let us enter the city,' the famine is in the

[a] See 7.2: Heb *messenger*
[b] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

the Arameans they discover that they have been captured. **21–23:** Elisha prevents the Israelite king from killing them so that they can report the power of the God of Israel to their king. **21:** *Father*, see 5.13n.

6.24–7.20: Elisha and the siege of Samaria. This story, which relates a second siege of the capital of the Northern Kingdom (for the first, see 1 Kings 20.1) by *Ben-hadad of Aram*, incorporates several originally independent anecdotes. **24–30:** Two examples are given in order to illustrate the severity of the famine during the siege. **25:** First, the exorbitant prices for the little remaining barely edible food: *eighty shekels of silver* (2 lb [900 gr]) for *a donkey's head*; *five shekels* (ca. 2 oz [57 gr]) for a *kab* (ca 1.1 qt [1.3 liters] *of dove's dung*. **26–29:** Second, an episode about women eating their children. Cannibalism is mentioned as a consequence of siege elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Deut 28.53–57; Ezek 5.10; Lam 2.20; 4.10) and in nonbiblical texts. **30–31:** The Israelite king, who has been wearing *sackcloth*, as a sign of humiliation and repentance, sees no way to help his people and irrationally seeks vengeance on the prophet Elisha. **6.32–7.2:** Elisha however is under the protection of the local elders (v. 32) and announces that the following day food will be available in Samaria at normal prices. **7.1:** *A measure* (Heb "se'ah"), ca. 7.7 liters (7 qt). **3–5:** The *four leprous men* are ritually impure so they have to reside

city, and we shall die there; but if we sit here, we shall also die. Therefore, let us desert to the Aramean camp; if they spare our lives, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die." [5] So they arose at twilight to go to the Aramean camp; but when they came to the edge of the Aramean camp, there was no one there at all. [6] For the Lord had caused the Aramean army to hear the sound of chariots, and of horses, the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, "The king of Israel has hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to fight against us." [7] So they fled away in the twilight and abandoned their tents, their horses, and their donkeys leaving the camp just as it was, and fled for their lives. [8] When these leprous[a] men had come to the edge of the camp, they went into a tent, ate and drank, carried off silver, gold, and clothing, and went and hid them. Then they came back, entered another tent, carried off things from it, and went and hid them.

[9] Then they said to one another, "What we are doing is wrong. This is a day of good news; if we are silent and wait until the morning light, we will be found guilty; therefore let us go and tell the king's household." [10] So they came and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and told them, "We went to the Aramean camp, but there was no one to be seen or heard there, nothing but the horses tied, the donkeys tied, and the tents as they were." [11] Then the gatekeepers called out and proclaimed it to the king's household. [12] The king got up in the night, and said to his servants, "I will tell you what the Arameans have prepared against us. They know that we are starving; so they have left the camp to hide themselves in the open country, thinking, 'When they come out of the city, we shall take them alive and get into the city.'" [13] One of his servants said, "Let some men take five of the remaining horses, since those left here will suffer the fate of the whole multitude of Israel that have perished already;[b] let us send and find out." [14] So they took two mounted men, and the king sent them after the Aramean army, saying, "Go and find out." [15] So they went after them as far as the Jordan; the whole way was littered with garments and equipment that the Arameans had thrown away in their haste. So the messengers returned, and told the king.

[16] Then the people went out, and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a measure of choice meal was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord. [17] Now the king had appointed the captain on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate; the people trampled him to death in the gate, just as the man of God had said when the king came down to him. [18] For when the man of God had said to the king, "Two measures of barley shall be sold for a shekel, and a measure of choice meal for a shekel, about this time tomorrow in the gate of Samaria," [19] the captain had answered the man of God, "Even if the Lord were to make windows in the sky, could such a thing happen?" And he had answered, "You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat from it." [20] It did indeed happen to him; the people trampled him to death in the gate.

8 Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, "Get up and go with your household, and settle wherever

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

[b] Compare Gk Syr Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

outside the city (see Lev 13.46). Deserting to the Arameans, they find their camp empty. **6–7:** The narrator tells why the camp was abandoned: the Lord has made the Arameans hear the sound of a great army, which they interpreted as the army of the *Hittites* and the *Egyptians*, frequent rivals for control of the Levant. **8–20:** The Israelite king interprets the emptiness of the Aramean camp as military strategy; he is finally convinced that the Lord has intervened in favor of Israel. **14:** *Two mounted men,* better "two chariot teams." **18–19:** This verbatim repetition of Elisha's oracle and the answer of the skeptical officer in vv. 1–2 shows that the prophetic word has been fulfilled. **17,20:** Standing at the gate of Samaria where he had asserted that there would be no food available (vv. 1–2), the officer is trampled to death in the scramble to acquire food.

8.1–6: Elisha saves the life of the Shunammite woman. This story is related to the preceding one by the theme of *famine*. **1–3:** Warned by the prophet, the woman, whose son Elisha has brought back to life (4.32–37), escapes a famine with her son (see v. 5) by sojourning as an immigrant in the land of the Philistines. Her long

you can; for the LORD has called for a famine, and it will come on the land for seven years." 2 So the woman got up and did according to the word of the man of God; she went with her household and settled in the land of the Philistines seven years. 3 At the end of the seven years, when the woman returned from the land of the Philistines, she set out to appeal to the king for her house and her land. 4 Now the king was talking with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, "Tell me all the great things that Elisha has done." 5 While he was telling the king how Elisha had restored a dead person to life, the woman whose son he had restored to life appealed to the king for her house and her land. Gehazi said, "My lord king, here is the woman, and here is her son whom Elisha restored to life." 6 When the king questioned the woman, she told him. So the king appointed an official for her, saying, "Restore all that was hers, together with all the revenue of the fields from the day that she left the land until now."

7 Elisha went to Damascus while King Ben-hadad of Aram was ill. When it was told him, "The man of God has come here," 8 the king said to Hazael, "Take a present with you and go to meet the man of God. Inquire of the LORD through him, whether I shall recover from this illness." 9 So Hazael went to meet him, taking a present with him, all kinds of goods of Damascus, forty camel loads. When he entered and stood before him, he said, "Your son King Ben-hadad of Aram has sent me to you, saying, 'Shall I recover from this illness?'" 10 Elisha said to him, "Go, say to him, 'You shall certainly recover'; but the LORD has shown me that he shall certainly die." 11 He fixed his gaze and stared at him, until he was ashamed. Then the man of God wept. 12 Hazael asked, "Why does my lord weep?" He answered, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the people of Israel; you will set their fortresses on fire, you will kill their young men with the sword, dash in pieces their little ones, and rip up their pregnant women." 13 Hazael said, "What is your servant, who is a mere dog, that he should do this great thing?" Elisha answered, "The LORD has shown me that you are to be king over Aram." 14 Then he left Elisha, and went to his master Ben-hadad,[a] who said to him, "What did Elisha say to you?" And he answered, "He told me that you would certainly recover." 15 But the next day he took the bed-cover and dipped it in water and spread it over the king's face, until he died. And Hazael succeeded him.

16 In the fifth year of King Joram son of Ahab of Israel,[b] Jehoram son of King Jehoshaphat of Judah began to reign. 17 He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 18 He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of

[a] Heb lacks *Ben-hadad*

[b] Gk Syr: Heb adds *Jehoshaphat being king of Judah,*

absence (*seven years*) makes her lose her estate; it may have become crown property. **4–6:** Her appeal to the king succeeds because of her close relationship with Elisha.

8.7–15: Elisha and the Aramean kings Ben-hadad and Hazael. This story is difficult to understand, in part because of later redactors who connected it to 1 Kings 19.15, where Elijah is told to anoint Hazael king of Aram. **7–10:** Elisha's response to Hazael, who has been sent by Ben-hadad to *inquire of the LORD* about his illness, appears as a deliberate misleading of the Aramean king. Hazael should tell the king that he will recover (see v. 14), but in fact he will die through Hazael's hands (v. 15). Elisha's behavior was absent in the older story, which reported only an oracle of healing. The killing of the king was Hazael's own initiative. **9:** *Your son*, an expression of deference. **11–15:** Elisha foresees the sufferings and cruelties that Hazael will inflict on Israel, which are not explicitly related in the Bible (see however 10.32; 13.3,22; 15.16n.; Am 1.3–4). **13:** *A mere dog*, self-designation of deference. Elisha does not anoint Hazael but only reveals that he will be king. **15:** *Bed-cover*, the translation of this word is uncertain (perhaps "grating"). In Assyrian inscriptions Hazael is designated as a "son of a nobody," a standard expression for usurpers. Verse 15 may be understood as referring to Hazael's murdering Ben-hadad by suffocation, but the sense of *spread it over the king's face* is not absolutely clear. It could also refer to an attempt to lower the king's fever with a cold blanket.

8.16–29: Jehoram and Ahaziah of Judah. Both these Judean kings are evaluated negatively. **16–24:** *Jehoram* or *Joram* (see vv. 21,23–24), who reigned ca. 851–843 BCE, had to face revolts from *Edom* and *Libnah* (vv. 20–22),

Ahab was his wife. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. 19 Yet the LORD would not destroy Judah, for the sake of his servant David, since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his descendants forever.

20 In his days Edom revolted against the rule of Judah, and set up a king of their own. 21 Then Joram crossed over to Zair with all his chariots. He set out by night and attacked the Edomites and their chariot commanders who had surrounded him;[a] but his army fled home. 22 So Edom has been in revolt against the rule of Judah to this day. Libnah also revolted at the same time. 23 Now the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? 24 So Joram slept with his ancestors, and was buried with them in the city of David; his son Ahaziah succeeded him.

25 In the twelfth year of King Joram son of Ahab of Israel, Ahaziah son of King Jehoram of Judah began to reign. 26 Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of King Omri of Israel. 27 He also walked in the way of the house of Ahab, doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was son-in-law to the house of Ahab.

28 He went with Joram son of Ahab to wage war against King Hazael of Aram at Ramoth-gilead, where the Arameans wounded Joram. 29 King Joram returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds that the Arameans had inflicted on him at Ramah, when he fought against King Hazael of Aram. King Ahaziah son of Jehoram of Judah went down to see Joram son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was wounded.

9 Then the prophet Elisha called a member of the company of prophets[b] and said to him, "Gird up your loins; take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead. 2 When you arrive, look there for Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi; go in and get him to leave his companions, and take him into an inner chamber. 3 Then take the flask of oil, pour it on his head, and say, 'Thus says the LORD: I anoint you king over Israel.' Then open the door and flee; do not linger."

4 So the young man, the young prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead. 5 He arrived while the commanders of the army were in council, and he announced, "I have a message for you, commander." "For which one of us?" asked Jehu. "For you, commander." 6 So Jehu[c] got up and went inside; the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, "Thus says the LORD the God of Israel: I anoint you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. 7 You shall strike down the house of your master Ahab, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD. 8 For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. 9 I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah. 10 The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and no one shall bury her." Then he opened the door and fled.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *sons of the prophets*
[c] Heb *he*

which was a border town next to Philistine territory and perhaps never really part of Judah. **25–29:** *Ahaziah* (ca. 843–842 BCE) was murdered by Jehu after one year of reign. **26:** *Athaliah, a granddaughter of King Omri*, lit. "daughter of Omri." Scholars disagree about whether this illegitimate queen of Judah (ch 11) was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 17.31) or of Omri, Ahab's father. **28–29:** *Ramoth-gilead* was already the site of a military confrontation between Israel and Aram in 1 Kings 22.29–36. The report about the wounded Joram of Israel who needs to recover from his battle-wounds provides the introduction for the following account of Jehu's revolt.

9.1–10.36: Jehu's revolt and reign. The long account of Jehu's revolt describes the end of Omri's dynasty. The redactors of Kings have a mixed opinion of Jehu: they appreciate him because he tries to eradicate Baal worship in the Northern Kingdom, but since he is a northern king they are obliged to condemn him. **9.1–9:** The anointing of Jehu (fulfilling the divine order given to Elijah in 1 Kings 19.16) is performed by a young member of Elisha's prophetic group. **2:** *Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi*, the name of Jehu (in 1 Kings 16.1 a prophet's name) corresponds to Jehu's religious conviction; it means: "The LORD is God." His father's name also refers to the god of Israel ("The LORD will judge"); *Nimshi* means "weasel." **7–10:** These words recall 1 Kings 14.10–11

11 When Jehu came back to his master's
officers, they said to him, "Is everything all
right? Why did that madman come to you?"
He answered them, "You know the sort and
how they babble." 12 They said, "Liar! Come
on, tell us!" So he said, "This is just what he
said to me: 'Thus says the LORD, I anoint you
king over Israel.'" 13 Then hurriedly they all
took their cloaks and spread them for him on
the bare[a] steps; and they blew the trumpet,
and proclaimed, "Jehu is king."

14 Thus Jehu son of Jehoshaphat son of
Nimshi conspired against Joram. Joram with
all Israel had been on guard at Ramoth-gilead
against King Hazael of Aram; 15 but King
Joram had returned to be healed in Jezreel of
the wounds that the Arameans had inflicted
on him, when he fought against King Hazael
of Aram. So Jehu said, "If this is your wish,
then let no one slip out of the city to go and
tell the news in Jezreel." 16 Then Jehu mount-
ed his chariot and went to Jezreel, where
Joram was lying ill. King Ahaziah of Judah
had come down to visit Joram.

17 In Jezreel, the sentinel standing on the
tower spied the company of Jehu arriving,
and said, "I see a company." Joram said, "Take
a horseman; send him to meet them, and
let him say, 'Is it peace?'" 18 So the horseman
went to meet him; he said, "Thus says the
king, 'Is it peace?'" Jehu responded, "What
have you to do with peace? Fall in behind
me." The sentinel reported, saying, "The mes-
senger reached them, but he is not coming
back." 19 Then he sent out a second horse-
man, who came to them and said, "Thus says
the king, 'Is it peace?'" Jehu answered, "What
have you to do with peace? Fall in behind
me." 20 Again the sentinel reported, "He
reached them, but he is not coming back. It
looks like the driving of Jehu son of Nimshi;
for he drives like a maniac."

21 Joram said, "Get ready." And they got
his chariot ready. Then King Joram of Israel
and King Ahaziah of Judah set out, each in
his chariot, and went to meet Jehu; they met
him at the property of Naboth the Jezreelite.
22 When Joram saw Jehu, he said, "Is it peace,
Jehu?" He answered, "What peace can there
be, so long as the many whoredoms and
sorceries of your mother Jezebel continue?"
23 Then Joram reined about and fled, saying
to Ahaziah, "Treason, Ahaziah!" 24 Jehu drew
his bow with all his strength, and shot Joram
between the shoulders, so that the arrow
pierced his heart; and he sank in his chariot.
25 Jehu said to his aide Bidkar, "Lift him out,
and throw him on the plot of ground belong-
ing to Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember,
when you and I rode side by side behind his
father Ahab how the LORD uttered this oracle
against him: 26 'For the blood of Naboth and
for the blood of his children that I saw yester-
day, says the LORD, I swear I will repay you on
this very plot of ground.' Now therefore lift
him out and throw him on the plot of ground,
in accordance with the word of the LORD."

27 When King Ahaziah of Judah saw this, he
fled in the direction of Beth-haggan. Jehu pur-
sued him, saying, "Shoot him also!" And they
shot him[b] in the chariot at the ascent to Gur,
which is by Ibleam. Then he fled to Megiddo,
and died there. 28 His officers carried him in
a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his
tomb with his ancestors in the city of David.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Syr Vg Compare Gk: Heb lacks *and they shot him*

and 21.21–24. **7:** *Jezebel,* see 1 Kings 16.31n. **11–13:** Jehu's anointing was secret (as was Saul's in 1 Sam 9.27–10.1), but it becomes immediately public. **11:** *Madman*, a demeaning reference to the apparently well-known young prophet, perhaps referring to his ecstatic behavior. **13:** *They blew the trumpet*, see 1 Kings 1.34. **14–28:** The report of Jehu's coup sums up the situation described in 8.28–29. Joram of Israel and Ahaziah are together in Jezreel, so Jehu kills them both. **20:** *Like a maniac,* better "with madness." Jehu's chariot driving is described with a word from the same root as the "madman" in v. 11. **21:** The kings meet Jehu at the former *property of Naboth*. They belong to Ahab's family, and their end will start at the site of Ahab and Jezebel's hideous act (see 1 Kings 21). **22:** *Whoredoms and sorceries* of *Jezebel*, both terms refer to the worship of Baal and his female counterpart, in which religious prostitution and magic activities may have occurred. **27:** Ahaziah's death was motivated by his relation to Joram (he was either his nephew or his cousin, see 8.26n.). *Beth-haggan* is identified with Engannin (Josh 19.21), modern Jenin. *Ibleam* is nearby, at the southern end of the Jezreel valley. **28:** Ahaziah is killed in *Megiddo*, as King Josiah will be (see 23.29–30); both kings are *carried in a chariot to Jerusalem* to be buried there.

29 In the eleventh year of Joram son of
Ahab, Ahaziah began to reign over Judah.
30 When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel
heard of it; she painted her eyes, and adorned
her head, and looked out of the window.
31 As Jehu entered the gate, she said, "Is it
peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?" 32 He
looked up to the window and said, "Who is
on my side? Who?" Two or three eunuchs
looked out at him. 33 He said, "Throw her
down." So they threw her down; some of
her blood spattered on the wall and on the
horses, which trampled on her. 34 Then he
went in and ate and drank; he said, "See to
that cursed woman and bury her; for she is
a king's daughter." 35 But when they went to
bury her, they found no more of her than
the skull and the feet and the palms of her
hands. 36 When they came back and told him,
he said, "This is the word of the LORD, which
he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite,
'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat
the flesh of Jezebel; 37 the corpse of Jezebel
shall be like dung on the field in the terri-
tory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is
Jezebel.'"

10 Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samar-
ia. So Jehu wrote letters and sent them
to Samaria, to the rulers of Jezreel,[a] to the
elders, and to the guardians of the sons of[b]
Ahab, saying, 2 "Since your master's sons are
with you and you have at your disposal chari-
ots and horses, a fortified city, and weapons,
3 select the son of your master who is the best
qualified, set him on his father's throne, and
fight for your master's house." 4 But they were
utterly terrified and said, "Look, two kings
could not withstand him; how then can we
stand?" 5 So the steward of the palace, and
the governor of the city, along with the elders
and the guardians, sent word to Jehu: "We are
your servants; we will do anything you say.
We will not make anyone king; do whatever
you think right." 6 Then he wrote them a sec-
ond letter, saying, "If you are on my side, and
if you are ready to obey me, take the heads of
your master's sons and come to me at Jezreel
tomorrow at this time." Now the king's sons,
seventy persons, were with the leaders of the
city, who were charged with their upbringing.
7 When the letter reached them, they took the
king's sons and killed them, seventy persons;
they put their heads in baskets and sent
them to him at Jezreel. 8 When the messen-
ger came and told him, "They have brought
the heads of the king's sons," he said, "Lay
them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate
until the morning." 9 Then in the morning
when he went out, he stood and said to all
the people, "You are innocent. It was I who
conspired against my master and killed him;
but who struck down all these? 10 Know then
that there shall fall to the earth nothing of
the word of the LORD, which the LORD spoke
concerning the house of Ahab; for the LORD
has done what he said through his servant
Elijah." 11 So Jehu killed all who were left of
the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his leaders,
close friends, and priests, until he left him no
survivor.

12 Then he set out and went to Samaria.
On the way, when he was at Beth-eked of
the Shepherds, 13 Jehu met relatives of King
Ahaziah of Judah and said, "Who are you?"
They answered, "We are kin of Ahaziah; we
have come down to visit the royal princes
and the sons of the queen mother." 14 He said,

[a] Or *of the city*; Vg Compare Gk
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *of the sons of*

29: The report about the beginning of Ahaziah's reign, with a chronology that differs from previous notes (8.25), is probably a correction placed at an odd place. **30–37:** The murder of *Jezebel* is presented as the accomplishment of Elijah's oracle (compare vv. 36–37 with 1 Kings 21.23). **30:** Jezebel appears as "woman at the window," a frequent motif in ancient Near Eastern art, representing prostitutes or fertility goddesses and suggesting sexual availability. **31:** She identifies Jehu with *Zimri*, who killed King Baasha (1 Kings 16.9–20), but reigned only a week. **33:** Jezebel is killed by the *eunuchs* who were at her service. **10.1–11:** Jehu massacres the remnant of the house of Ahab. **1:** *Seventy sons*, seventy is a round number in the Bible (see Judg 8.30; Deut 10.22) and in many other texts from the ancient Near East. It is unclear why Jehu should write letters to the governors or *rulers of Jezreel*, since he is already in the city (9.30). LXX suggests "Samaria" instead of Jezreel (see textual note *a*). **10:** Such a reference to a former prophetic oracle (1 Kings 21.21–24) is typical for the Deuteronomistic redactors of Kings (see also v. 17). **12–14:** Jehu's slaughtering continues with the relatives of the Judean king. **12:** *Beth-eked*,

"Take them alive." They took them alive, and slaughtered them at the pit of Beth-eked, forty-two in all; he spared none of them.

15 When he left there, he met Jehonadab son of Rechab coming to meet him; he greeted him, and said to him, "Is your heart as true to mine as mine is to yours?"[a] Jehonadab answered, "It is." Jehu said,[b] "If it is, give me your hand." So he gave him his hand. Jehu took him up with him into the chariot. 16 He said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD." So he[c] had him ride in his chariot. 17 When he came to Samaria, he killed all who were left to Ahab in Samaria, until he had wiped them out, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke to Elijah.

18 Then Jehu assembled all the people and said to them, "Ahab offered Baal small service; but Jehu will offer much more. 19 Now therefore summon to me all the prophets of Baal, all his worshipers, and all his priests; let none be missing, for I have a great sacrifice to offer to Baal; whoever is missing shall not live." But Jehu was acting with cunning in order to destroy the worshipers of Baal. 20 Jehu decreed, "Sanctify a solemn assembly for Baal." So they proclaimed it. 21 Jehu sent word throughout all Israel; all the worshipers of Baal came, so that there was no one left who did not come. They entered the temple of Baal, until the temple of Baal was filled from wall to wall. 22 He said to the keeper of the wardrobe, "Bring out the vestments for all the worshipers of Baal." So he brought out the vestments for them. 23 Then Jehu entered the temple of Baal with Jehonadab son of Rechab; he said to the worshipers of Baal, "Search and see that there is no worshiper of the LORD here among you, but only worshipers of Baal." 24 Then they proceeded to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings.

Now Jehu had stationed eighty men outside, saying, "Whoever allows any of those to escape whom I deliver into your hands shall forfeit his life." 25 As soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, Jehu said to the guards and to the officers, "Come in and kill them; let no one escape." So they put them to the sword. The guards and the officers threw them out, and then went into the citadel of the temple of Baal. 26 They brought out the pillar[d] that was in the temple of Baal, and burned it. 27 Then they demolished the pillar of Baal, and destroyed the temple of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day.

28 Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel. 29 But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to commit—the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan. 30 The LORD said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in carrying out what I consider right, and in accordance with all that was in my heart have dealt with the house of Ahab, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." 31 But Jehu was not careful to follow the law of the LORD the God of Israel with all his heart; he did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he caused Israel to commit.

32 In those days the LORD began to trim off parts of Israel. Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel: 33 from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, the Reubenites, and the Manassites,

[a] Gk: Heb *Is it right with your heart, as my heart is with your heart?*
[b] Gk: Heb lacks *Jehu said*
[c] Gk Syr Tg: Heb *they*
[d] Gk Vg Syr Tg: Heb *pillars*

an unidentified place, apparently a gathering-place for shepherds. **14:** *Forty-two*, see 2.24n. **15–17:** *Jehonadab son of Rechab* is mentioned in Jer 35 as the founder of a small religious group committed to a life-style that rejected urban culture. Here he is portrayed as an ally of Jehu. **16:** *Chariot,* Heb "rekeb," recalling the name Rechab ("rekab"). Jehonadab was perhaps a rider, like Jehu (see 9.25). **18–27:** To a modern reader Jehu's massacre of all worshipers of Baal appears as religious fanaticism, surpassing even Elijah's killing of the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18.40. The narrator was absolutely hostile to the worship of Baal, so that he did not have such reservations. **28–31:** Nevertheless, the evaluation of Jehu is ambivalent. **30:** Like David, he receives a dynastic promise, which is however limited to the fourth generation. **29, 31:** For the redactors of Kings, Jehu's worship of the LORD was wrong, because he venerated him outside of Jerusalem, continuing *the sins of Jeroboam* (see 1 Kings 12). **32–33:** During Jehu's reign, the Northern Kingdom declined and Jehu eventually lost its Transjordanian territory to the Arameans. An Assyrian stele reports that Jehu had become a vassal of King Shalmaneser III (ruled ca.

from Aroer, which is by the Wadi Arnon, that is, Gilead and Bashan. 34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, all that he did, and all his power, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? 35 So Jehu slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in Samaria. His son Jehoahaz succeeded him. 36 The time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty-eight years.

11 Now when Athaliah, Ahaziah's mother, saw that her son was dead, she set about to destroy all the royal family. 2 But Jehosheba, King Joram's daughter, Ahaziah's sister, took Joash son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's children who were about to be killed; she put[a] him and his nurse in a bedroom. Thus she[b] hid him from Athaliah, so that he was not killed; 3 he remained with her six years, hidden in the house of the LORD, while Athaliah reigned over the land.

4 But in the seventh year Jehoiada summoned the captains of the Carites and of the guards and had them come to him in the house of the LORD. He made a covenant with them and put them under oath in the house of the LORD; then he showed them the king's son. 5 He commanded them, "This is what you are to do: one-third of you, those who go off duty on the sabbath and guard the king's house 6 (another third being at the gate Sur and a third at the gate behind the guards), shall guard the palace; 7 and your two divisions that come on duty in force on the sabbath and guard the house of the LORD[c] 8 shall surround the king, each with weapons in hand; and whoever approaches the ranks is to be killed. Be with the king in his comings and goings."

9 The captains did according to all that the priest Jehoiada commanded; each brought his men who were to go off duty on the sabbath, with those who were to come on duty on the sabbath, and came to the priest Jehoiada. 10 The priest delivered to the captains the spears and shields that had been King David's, which were in the house of the LORD; 11 the guards stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, from the south side of the house to the north side of the house, around the altar and the house, to guard the king on every side. 12 Then he brought out the king's son, put the crown on him, and gave him the covenant;[d] they proclaimed him king, and anointed him; they clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!"

13 When Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she went into the house of the LORD to the people; 14 when she

[a] With 2 Chr 22.11: Heb lacks *she put*
[b] Gk Syr Vg Compare 2 Chr 22.11: Heb *they*
[c] Heb *the LORD to the king*
[d] Or *treaty* or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

859–824 BCE), a fact not mentioned in the Bible. **34–36:** Very little of the *twenty-eight years* of Jehu's reign (ca. 842–814 BCE) is recorded.

11.1–21: The reign of Athaliah in Judah. The reign of *Athaliah* (ca. 842–836 BCE), *Ahaziah's* mother, interrupts the Davidic line, since she is from the north (see 8.26n.). For the redactors of the book of Kings, she was considered an illegitimate ruler; therefore her reign lacks the typical introductory and concluding formulas. Athaliah's name means "the LORD is exalted," but she seems to have sponsored Baal worship (see v. 18). **1–3:** Like Jehu in the north, Athaliah tries to massacre all potential heirs to the throne, but one member of the royal family escapes (for the same literary motif see Judg 9.5): *Joash* is hidden by Ahaziah's sister *Jehosheba*. **4–12:** The priest *Jehoiada*, who according to 2 Chr 22.11 was Jehosheba's husband, organizes the rebellion in the *seventh year* (the number may be typological or symbolic). **4:** The *Carites* (Carians) are either a bodyguard from Cilicia or the same as the Cherethites (1 Kings 1.38). **5–11:** The details of the deployment of the troops are unclear. Apparently three companies should stand on different strategic positions (the location of the *gate Sur* is unknown), and two other groups (or two of the three previous ones?) should protect the new king. **12:** *Crown,* cf. 2 Sam 1.10; Ex 28.36–38. The *covenant* may refer to the divine promise to the Davidic dynasty (2 Sam 7) or to a list of regulations for the conduct of kingship (like Deut 17.18–20). *Long live the king,* the same exclamation as in 1 Kings 1.25. **13–16:** The story moves now to the end of Athaliah, who will be executed along with her followers outside the Temple. **14:** *Pillar*, or podium, a place of royal appearance (see 23.3). The parallel account in 2 Chr 23.13 interprets this as the pillars Jachin and Boaz (see 1 Kings 7.21) at the Temple entrance. The *people of the land* designates here, as elsewhere in the book of Kings, the rural aristocracy that intervened in critical situations in order to

looked, there was the king standing by the pillar, according to custom, with the captains and the trumpeters beside the king, and all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Athaliah tore her clothes and cried, "Treason! Treason!" 15 Then the priest Jehoiada commanded the captains who were set over the army, "Bring her out between the ranks, and kill with the sword anyone who follows her." For the priest said, "Let her not be killed in the house of the LORD." 16 So they laid hands on her; she went through the horses' entrance to the king's house, and there she was put to death.

17 Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and people, that they should be the LORD's people; also between the king and the people. 18 Then all the people of the land went to the house of Baal, and tore it down; his altars and his images they broke in pieces, and they killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, before the altars. The priest posted guards over the house of the LORD. 19 He took the captains, the Carites, the guards, and all the people of the land; then they brought the king down from the house of the LORD, marching through the gate of the guards to the king's house. He took his seat on the throne of the kings. 20 So all the people of the land rejoiced; and the city was quiet after Athaliah had been killed with the sword at the king's house.

21 [a]Jehoash[b] was seven years old when he began to reign.

12 In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash began to reign; he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. 2 Jehoash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all his days, because the priest Jehoiada instructed him. 3 Nevertheless the high places were not taken away; the people continued to sacrifice and make offerings on the high places.

4 Jehoash said to the priests, "All the money offered as sacred donations that is brought into the house of the LORD, the money for which each person is assessed—the money from the assessment of persons—and the money from the voluntary offerings brought into the house of the LORD, 5 let the priests receive from each of the donors; and let them repair the house wherever any need of repairs is discovered." 6 But by the twenty-third year of King Jehoash the priests had made no repairs on the house. 7 Therefore King Jehoash summoned the priest Jehoiada with the other priests and said to them, "Why are you not repairing the house? Now therefore do not accept any more money from your donors but hand it over for the repair of the house." 8 So the priests agreed that they would neither accept more money from the people nor repair the house.

9 Then the priest Jehoiada took a chest, made a hole in its lid, and set it beside the altar on the right side as one entered the house of the LORD; the priests who guarded the threshold put in it all the money that was brought into the house of the LORD. 10 Whenever they saw that there was a great deal of

[a] Ch 12.1 in Heb

[b] Another spelling is *Joash*; see verse 19

defend the traditional worship of the God of Israel. **16:** *The horses' entrance*, perhaps the Horse Gate mentioned in Jer 31.40 and Neh 3.28. **17–20:** The unusual threefold *covenant between the LORD and the king and people* mediated by a priest has become necessary because Athaliah's reign had interrupted the Davidic succession. The covenant would then be the renewal of the Davidic dynasty as chosen by God and accepted by the people (see 2 Sam 5.3). **18:** There is no other mention of Athaliah being a fervent worshiper of Baal. The Baal priest *Mattan* appears only here and in the parallel account in 2 Chr 23.17.

12.1–21: The reign of Jehoash (or Joash), king of Judah (ca. 836–798 BCE). **1–3:** In the Deuteronomistic introduction, Jehoash is said to have ruled *forty* years. This may well be a symbolic number, and may include the six years of Athaliah. **2–3:** For the redactors Jehoash was a good king, although he tolerated worship of the LORD in places other than the Temple in Jerusalem. **4–16:** The repair of the Temple foreshadows King Josiah's repairs (see 22.3–7). But unlike Josiah's reform, Jehoash's will fail. **4:** *Money . . . sacred donations,* money that replaced the traditional sacrifices (see Lev 27.1–8). **6–8:** The priests were unwilling to spend the money they received to repair the Temple. **6:** *The twenty-third year*, this is the year Jehoahaz of Israel acceded to the throne (13.1). **9–12:** The priest Jehoiada is centralizing and supervising the money for the restoration, as does the priest Hilkiah in 22.4–6. **10:** *High priest,* this title is used only from the Persian period onward, when this episode may have been

money in the chest, the king's secretary and the high priest went up, counted the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and tied it up in bags. [11] They would give the money that was weighed out into the hands of the workers who had the oversight of the house of the LORD; then they paid it out to the carpenters and the builders who worked on the house of the LORD, [12] to the masons and the stonecutters, as well as to buy timber and quarried stone for making repairs on the house of the LORD, as well as for any outlay for repairs of the house. [13] But for the house of the LORD no basins of silver, snuffers, bowls, trumpets, or any vessels of gold, or of silver, were made from the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, [14] for that was given to the workers who were repairing the house of the LORD with it. [15] They did not ask an accounting from those into whose hand they delivered the money to pay out to the workers, for they dealt honestly. [16] The money from the guilt offerings and the money from the sin offerings was not brought into the house of the LORD; it belonged to the priests.

[17] At that time King Hazael of Aram went up, fought against Gath, and took it. But when Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem, [18] King Jehoash of Judah took all the votive gifts that Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Ahaziah, his ancestors, the kings of Judah, had dedicated, as well as his own votive gifts, all the gold that was found in the treasuries of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent these to King Hazael of Aram. Then Hazael withdrew from Jerusalem.

[19] Now the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? [20] His servants arose, devised a conspiracy, and killed Joash in the house of Millo, on the way that goes down to Silla. [21] It was Jozacar son of Shimeath and Jehozabad son of Shomer, his servants, who struck him down, so that he died. He was buried with his ancestors in the city of David; then his son Amaziah succeeded him.

13 In the twenty-third year of King Joash son of Ahaziah of Judah, Jehoahaz son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned seventeen years. [2] He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin; he did not depart from them. [3] The anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that he gave them repeatedly into the hand of King Hazael of Aram, then into the hand of Ben-hadad son of Hazael. [4] But Jehoahaz entreated the LORD, and the LORD heeded him; for he saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Aram oppressed them. [5] Therefore the LORD gave Israel a savior, so that they escaped from the hand of the Arameans; and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly. [6] Nevertheless they did not depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, which he caused Israel to sin, but walked[a] in them; the sacred pole[b] also remained in Samaria. [7] So Jehoahaz was left with an army of not more than fifty horse-

[a] Gk Syr Tg Vg: Heb *he walked*
[b] Heb *Asherah*

composed. **13:** The meaning of the verse is unclear. It may refer to lack of adequate silver, causing a very modest restoration, or that the priests were not allowed to use the money for their Temple vessels. **16:** There was apparently some dispute about the silver, which belonged directly to the priests (see Lev 7.7–10). **17–18:** After Israel (see 10.32–33), Hazael of Aram is now attacking the Philistine coast (the city of *Gath*) and *Jerusalem*. He was more interested in controlling the trade routes in the south than in occupying the capital of Judah. Therefore he accepts the tribute that Jehoash is immediately willing to pay. **19–21:** The parallel account in 2 Chr 24.24–27 gives a different explanation of the death of Joash. **20:** *Millo*, see 1 Kings 9.15n. **21:** *Jozacar* . . . and *Jehozabad*, NRSV follows the LXX. In the MT both murderers are named Jehozabad.

13.1–25: Jehoahaz and Jehoash (Joash) of Israel and the death of Elisha. The chronological data offered in chs 13–15 are confusing and do not allow for a reconstruction of a coherent chronological system. All dates given in parentheses are hypothetical. **1–9:** *Jehoahaz* (ca. 817–800 BCE), evaluated as a bad king who nevertheless has the LORD on his side, faces renewed Aramean oppression. **5:** The identity of the *savior* sent by God is not specified, and some think he was the Assyrian king, who fought the Arameans, and others suggest an Israelite general (the term *savior* is sometimes used in Judges for a judge functioning as a military leader). **6:** *Sacred pole*

men, ten chariots and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Aram had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing. [8] Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz and all that he did, including his might, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? [9] So Jehoahaz slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in Samaria; then his son Joash succeeded him.

[10] In the thirty-seventh year of King Joash of Judah, Jehoash son of Jehoahaz began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned sixteen years. [11] He also did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin, but he walked in them. [12] Now the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, as well as the might with which he fought against King Amaziah of Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? [13] So Joash slept with his ancestors, and Jeroboam sat upon his throne; Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

[14] Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die, King Joash of Israel went down to him, and wept before him, crying, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" [15] Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and arrows"; so he took a bow and arrows. [16] Then he said to the king of Israel, "Draw the bow"; and he drew it. Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands. [17] Then he said, "Open the window eastward"; and he opened it. Elisha said, "Shoot"; and he shot. Then he said, "The LORD's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram! For you shall fight the Arameans in Aphek until you have made an end of them." [18] He continued, "Take the arrows"; and he took them. He said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground with them"; he struck three times, and stopped. [19] Then the man of God was angry with him, and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Aram until you had made an end of it, but now you will strike down Aram only three times."

[20] So Elisha died, and they buried him. Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year. [21] As a man was being buried, a marauding band was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha; as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he came to life and stood on his feet.

[22] Now King Hazael of Aram oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. [23] But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them; he turned toward them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them; nor has he banished them from his presence until now.

[24] When King Hazael of Aram died, his son Ben-hadad succeeded him. [25] Then Jehoash son of Jehoahaz took again from Ben-hadad son of Hazael the towns that he had taken from his father Jehoahaz in war. Three times Joash defeated him and recovered the towns of Israel.

14 In the second year of King Joash son of Joahaz of Israel, King Amaziah son of Joash of Judah, began to reign. [2] He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign,

(Heb "'asherah"), a symbol of the goddess Asherah. **7–8:** As in the book of Judges (e.g., 2.18; 3.9,15), the sending of a savior does not provoke a return to the LORD; therefore the Israelite *army* is drastically reduced. **10–21:** The redactors do not tell much about the wicked *Jehoash*, whose name is identical to that of his Judean colleague. His reign (ca. 800–784 BCE) provides the context for the story about Elisha's death. **11–13:** The concluding formula of his reign already appears here and is repeated in 14.15–16. **14:** *Elisha* has not been mentioned since the anointing of Jehu, some fifty years before (9.1–3). He is now an old man about to die. *Chariots of Israel . . . ,* see 2.11–12n. **15–19:** Elisha has the king perform two symbolic actions, which foretell his incomplete victory against the Arameans. *Arrows* were used in the ancient Near East as tools of divination. **17:** *Aphek,* see 1 Kings 20.26n. **20–21:** Even after his death, Elisha is still able to perform a miracle. **22–23:** These verses return to the reign of Jehoahaz; they were inserted by a later redactor to connect with vv. 4–5, and they give another reason for God's help against the Arameans: his *covenant* with the patriarchs. **24–25:** A reference to the encounter between Elisha and Jehoahaz, stating that his son Jehoash defeated the Arameans *three times* (see v. 19).

14.1–29: Amaziah of Judah and Jeroboam (II) of Israel. 1–22: *Amaziah* (ca. 798–769 BCE) waged war against Edom and Israel and was severely defeated by the Israelite king. **1–6:** At the beginning of his reign he executes the conspirators who had murdered his father. Described as a bad king, he nevertheless follows the Deutero-

and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddin of Jerusalem. 3 He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like his ancestor David; in all things he did as his father Joash had done. 4 But the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. 5 As soon as the royal power was firmly in his hand he killed his servants who had murdered his father the king. 6 But he did not put to death the children of the murderers; according to what is written in the book of the law of Moses, where the LORD commanded, "The parents shall not be put to death for the children, or the children be put to death for the parents; but all shall be put to death for their own sins."

7 He killed ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt and took Sela by storm; he called it Jokthe-el, which is its name to this day.

8 Then Amaziah sent messengers to King Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, of Israel, saying, "Come, let us look one another in the face." 9 King Jehoash of Israel sent word to King Amaziah of Judah, "A thornbush on Lebanon sent to a cedar on Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son for a wife'; but a wild animal of Lebanon passed by and trampled down the thornbush. 10 You have indeed defeated Edom, and your heart has lifted you up. Be content with your glory, and stay at home; for why should you provoke trouble so that you fall, you and Judah with you?"

11 But Amaziah would not listen. So King Jehoash of Israel went up; he and King Amaziah of Judah faced one another in battle at Beth-shemesh, which belongs to Judah. 12 Judah was defeated by Israel; everyone fled home. 13 King Jehoash of Israel captured King Amaziah of Judah son of Jehoash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh; he came to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate, a distance of four hundred cubits. 14 He seized all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house, as well as hostages; then he returned to Samaria.

15 Now the rest of the acts that Jehoash did, his might, and how he fought with King Amaziah of Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? 16 Jehoash slept with his ancestors, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; then his son Jeroboam succeeded him.

17 King Amaziah son of Joash of Judah lived fifteen years after the death of King Jehoash son of Jehoahaz of Israel. 18 Now the rest of the deeds of Amaziah, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? 19 They made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish. But they sent after him to Lachish, and killed him there. 20 They brought him on horses; he was buried in Jerusalem with his ancestors in the city of David. 21 All the people of Judah took Azariah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king to succeed his father Amaziah. 22 He rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah, after King Amaziah[a] slept with his ancestors.

23 In the fifteenth year of King Amaziah son of Joash of Judah, King Jeroboam son of

[a] Heb *the king*

nomic law. **6:** See Deut 24.16. **7–14:** After a successful campaign against the Edomites he defeats the much stronger king of Israel. **7:** The *Valley of Salt* (see 2 Sam 8.13) probably refers to the area south of the Dead Sea. *Sela* ("rock") is a common noun, which is also employed as a proper name to designate several rocky places, including the capital of Edom. **9:** The Israelite king compares Amaziah of Judah to a *thornbush* easily trampled down by any *wild animal* (for another fable about trees and the thornbush, see Judg 9.7–15). **11:** *Beth-shemesh*, ca. 16 mi (25 km) west of Jerusalem, a city that Israel and Judah both claimed as belonging to their territory. **13:** *Four hundred cubits*, ca. 583 ft (177 m). **14:** The deportation of the *vessels* from the Temple foreshadows its destruction and the deportation of its precious objects by the Babylonians in 25.14–15. **15–16:** see 13.10–13. **17–22:** The names and the motives of the movers of the conspiracy against Amaziah are not mentioned. **19:** The king's unsuccessful flight to *Lachish*, Judah's second city, ca. 28 mi (45 km) southwest of Jerusalem, suggests that the conspirators controlled the capital. **21–22:** *The people of Judah* may also be translated as the "army of Judah," which would suggest that the king's young son *Azariah* (see 15.1–7) was brought to the throne by the military. **22:** Azariah continues to exercise control over Edom by reintegrating the port of *Elath* (1 Kings 9.26) into Judean

Joash of Israel began to reign in Samaria; he reigned forty-one years. [24] He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin. [25] He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. [26] For the LORD saw that the distress of Israel was very bitter; there was no one left, bond or free, and no one to help Israel. [27] But the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Joash.

[28] Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he fought, and how he recovered for Israel Damascus and Hamath, which had belonged to Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? [29] Jeroboam slept with his ancestors, the kings of Israel; his son Zechariah succeeded him.

15 In the twenty-seventh year of King Jeroboam of Israel King Azariah son of Amaziah of Judah began to reign. [2] He was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. [3] He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, just as his father Amaziah had done. [4] Nevertheless the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. [5] The LORD struck the king, so that he was leprous[a] to the day of his death, and lived in a separate house. Jotham the king's son was in charge of the palace, governing the people of the land. [6] Now the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? [7] Azariah slept with his ancestors; they buried him with his ancestors in the city of David; his son Jotham succeeded him.

[8] In the thirty-eighth year of King Azariah of Judah, Zechariah son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months. [9] He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his ancestors had done. He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin. [10] Shallum son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck him down in public and killed him, and reigned in place of him. [11] Now the rest of the deeds of Zechariah are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. [12] This was the promise of the LORD that he gave to Jehu, "Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation." And so it happened.

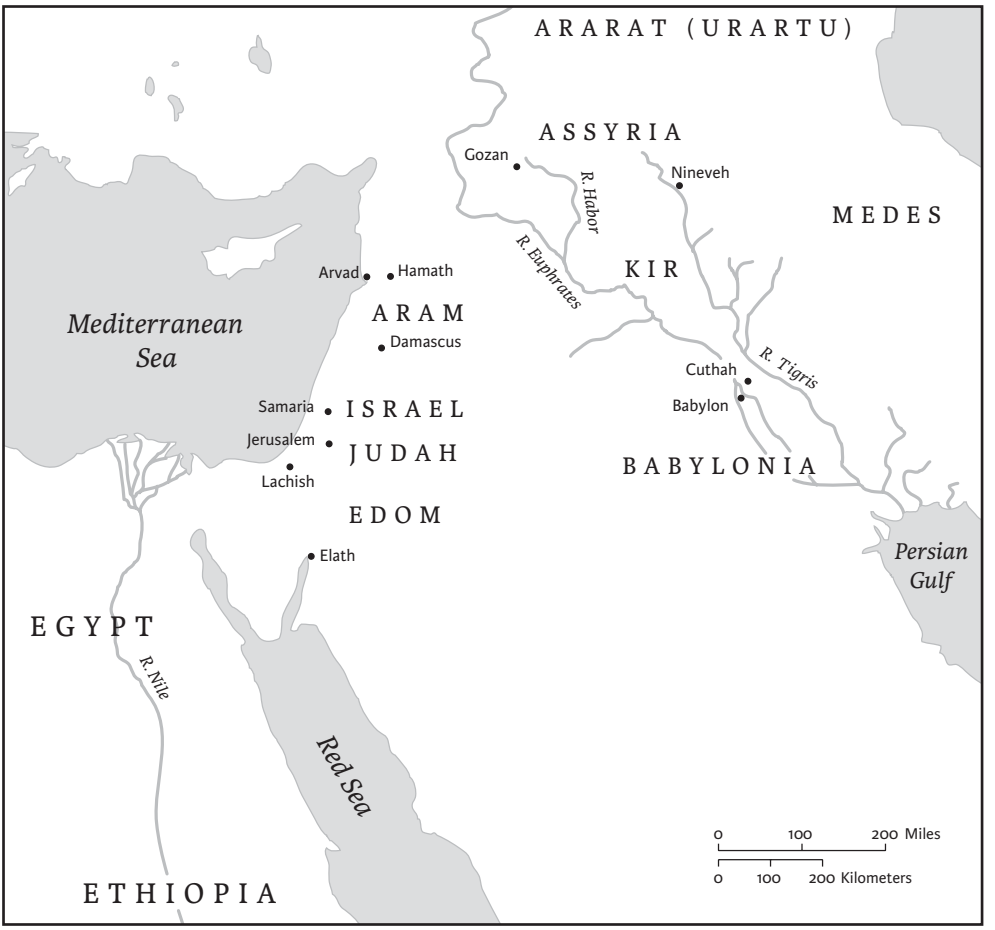
[13] Shallum son of Jabesh began to reign in the thirty-ninth year of King Uzziah of Judah; he reigned one month in Samaria. [14] Then Menahem son of Gadi came up from Tirzah and came to Samaria; he struck down Shallum son of Jabesh in Samaria and killed him; he reigned in place of him. [15] Now the rest of the deeds of Shallum, including the con-

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

territory. **23–29:** *Jeroboam* II, who had an exceptionally long reign (ca. 788–747 BCE, probably including a coregency with his father), and who brought Israel to power and wealth, is treated very briefly in the book of Kings; the books of Hosea and Amos also refer to his rule. **25:** *Lebo-hamath*, see 1 Kings 8.65n. The prophecy to which this verse refers is not found elsewhere in the Bible and is attributed to a nationalistic prophet named *Jonah son of Amittai*, whose name is given to the protagonist of the book of Jonah (see Jon 1.1). *Gath-hepher* is in southern Galilee about 14 mi (23 km) northeast of Megiddo. **26:** That the LORD sees Israel's *distress* recalls 13.4 as well as Ex 3.7 and Deut 26.7. God cares for Israel in spite of its bad kings. **28:** Jeroboam *recovered . . . Damascus and Hamath*, this assertion of territorial expansion is puzzling, since neither city ever belonged to Israel.

15.1–7: Azariah of Judah. Also called Uzziah, which may be his throne name, this Judean king is presented positively but very briefly. Many scholars think that some of his long reign of *fifty-two years* (ca. 792–740) included a coregency with his son. **5:** He was struck with a skin disease (leprosy; see textual note *a)* and due to his ritual impurity had to live in a *separate house*, in quarantine, and had to hand over regency to his son *Jotham* during his lifetime. **5:** *People of the land,* see 11.14n.

15.8–31: Israel's last kings. 8–12: The assassination of *Zechariah* after a brief reign (ca. 747 BCE) is presented as the fulfillment of God's oracle that Jehu's dynasty would last four generations (compare v. 12 with 10.30). **13–16:** *Shallum*, Zechariah's murderer, holds power for only *one month* (747 BCE), when he is killed by *Menahem.*



Chs 15–21: Assyria and Israel and Judah.

spiracy that he made, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. [16] At that time Menahem sacked Tiphsah, all who were in it and its territory from Tirzah on; because they did not open it to him, he sacked it. He ripped open all the pregnant women in it.

[17] In the thirty-ninth year of King Azariah of Judah, Menahem son of Gadi began to reign over Israel; he reigned ten years in Samaria. [18] He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart all his days from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin. [19] King Pul of Assyria came against the land; Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, so that he might help him confirm his hold on the royal power. [20] Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy, fifty

14: *Tirzah* was the former capital of the Northern Kingdom; see 1 Kings 14.17–18n. **16:** This verse, which stands between the concluding formula of Shallum's reign and the beginning of Menahem's rule, reports the new king's atrocities. *Tiphsah* is probably to be identified, as suggested by the LXX, with Tappuah, ca. 9 mi (15 km) south of Shechem. The only Tiphsah known otherwise is located on the Euphrates (see 1 Kings 4.24). *He ripped open all the pregnant women*, such horrific action was a common feature of warfare in the ancient Near East (see 8.12; Am 1.13). **17–22:** *Menahem* (ca. 747–737 BCE) had to submit to the Assyrians. **19:** *King Pul*, another name for the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III (see v. 29); with the reign of this king (ca. 745–727 BCE) Assyrian domination in the west was firmly established. *A thousand talents of silver*, ca. 75,000 lb (34,000 kg). **20:** In order to pay this

shekels of silver from each one, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land.
21 Now the rest of the deeds of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?
22 Menahem slept with his ancestors, and his son Pekahiah succeeded him.

23 In the fiftieth year of King Azariah of Judah, Pekahiah son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned two years. 24 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin. 25 Pekah son of Remaliah, his captain, conspired against him with fifty of the Gileadites, and attacked him in Samaria, in the citadel of the palace along with Argob and Arieh; he killed him, and reigned in place of him. 26 Now the rest of the deeds of Pekahiah, and all that he did, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.

27 In the fifty-second year of King Azariah of Judah, Pekah son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned twenty years. 28 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin.

29 In the days of King Pekah of Israel, King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried the people captive to Assyria. 30 Then Hoshea son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah son of Remaliah, attacked him, and killed him; he reigned in place of him, in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah. 31 Now the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.

32 In the second year of King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel, King Jotham son of Uzziah of Judah began to reign. 33 He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok. 34 He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, just as his father Uzziah had done. 35 Nevertheless the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD. 36 Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? 37 In those days the LORD began to send King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah. 38 Jotham slept with his ancestors, and was buried with his ancestors in the city of David, his ancestor; his son Ahaz succeeded him.

16 In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, King Ahaz son of Jotham of Judah began to reign. 2 Ahaz was twenty

tribute and to prevent the annexation of his kingdom, Menahem raises special taxes. *Fifty shekels,* ca. 20 oz (570 gr). **23–26:** *Pekahiah* (737–735 BCE), too, is the victim of conspiracy, which illustrates the chaotic situation. His murderer, *Pekah*, has a shortened form of the same name. **25:** The usurper is supported by fifty *Gileadites*, which suggests intertribal rivalry. *Argob and Arieh* ("lion") may be place names transferred from v. 29; another view is that these are the names of two sphinxlike statues at the entrance of the palace. **27–31:** There are several problems concerning Pekah's reign, and some scholars wonder if this king really existed (see also the lack of chronological precision in v. 29). If so, his reign must have been much shorter (ca. 735–732). **29:** The localities mentioned here probably refer to different campaigns of *Tiglath-pileser* III. Important territories in the north and the east of Israel were transformed into Assyrian provinces, and deportation of some of the population also took place. **30:** According to Assyrian sources, Hoshea conspired against Pekah with Assyrian support. *In the twentieth year of Jotham*, this indication for Pekah's assassination is clumsy. According to 16.1 it was during Pekah's reign that Jotham's son acceded to the throne.

15.32–16.20: Jotham and Ahaz, kings of Judah. 15.32–38: *Jotham* (ca. 759–743 BCE) had already been exercising power in Judah during his father's illness (15.5); the *sixteen years* of reign include this coregency. **33:** His mother was a *daughter of Zadok*, which may indicate a priestly lineage; see 1 Kings 1.38–39; 2 Sam 8.17. **35:** *He built the upper gate*, it is not clear if this is a new construction or a rebuilding of a formerly damaged gate (see 14.13–14; the upper gate is also mentioned in Ezek 9.2). 2 Chr 27 adds much more building activity during Jotham's reign. **37:** The attacks by the kings *Rezin of Aram and Pekah* of Israel (see 16.5–9) are the context of Isa 7–9. **16.1–20:** *Ahaz* (ca. 743/735–727/715 BCE; the exact chronology of his reign is much debated) is described as

years old when he began to reign; he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his ancestor David had done, 3 but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even made his son pass through fire, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. 4 He sacrificed and made offerings on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

5 Then King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel came up to wage war on Jerusalem; they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him. 6 At that time the king of Edom[a] recovered Elath for Edom,[b] and drove the Judeans from Elath; and the Edomites came to Elath, where they live to this day. 7 Ahaz sent messengers to King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up, and rescue me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me." 8 Ahaz also took the silver and gold found in the house of the LORD and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria. 9 The king of Assyria listened to him; the king of Assyria marched up against Damascus, and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir; then he killed Rezin.

10 When King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus. King Ahaz sent to the priest Uriah a model of the altar, and its pattern, exact in all its details. 11 The priest Uriah built the altar; in accordance with all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus, just so did the priest Uriah build it, before King Ahaz arrived from Damascus. 12 When the king came from Damascus, the king viewed the altar. Then the king drew near to the altar, went up on it, 13 and offered his burnt offering and his grain offering, poured his drink offering, and dashed the blood of his offerings of well-being against the altar. 14 The bronze altar that was before the LORD he removed from the front of the house, from the place between his altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of his altar. 15 King Ahaz commanded the priest Uriah, saying, "Upon the great altar offer the morning burnt offering, and the evening grain offering, and the king's burnt offering, and his grain offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, their grain offering, and their drink offering; then dash against it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice; but the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by." 16 The priest Uriah did everything that King Ahaz commanded.

17 Then King Ahaz cut off the frames of the stands, and removed the laver from them; he removed the sea from the bronze oxen that were under it, and put it on a pediment of stone. 18 The covered portal for use on the sabbath that had been built inside the palace, and the outer entrance for the king he removed from[c] the house of the LORD. He did

[a] Cn: Heb *King Rezin of Aram*
[b] Cn: Heb *Aram*
[c] Cn: Heb lacks *from*

one of Judah's worst kings. **3:** He is compared to the northern kings and accused of making *his son pass through fire*, which may allude to human sacrifice (see 3.27; Jer. 7.31; 19.5). According to Lev 18.21 and Jer 32.35 such sacrifices were offered to a god Molech, whose identity is unclear. **5–9:** The reason for the attack of *Rezin* and *Pekah* was to force Ahaz to join an anti-Assyrian coalition. **6:** During this military crisis Ahaz loses *Elath* (see 14.22) to the *Edomites*. **7–8:** Ahaz's behavior is similar to that of Menahem of Israel (15.20); he becomes a vassal of the Assyrian king *Tiglath-pileser*. **9:** Tiglath-pileser deports the population of *Damascus* to *Kir* (its location is unknown; in Aramaic it can also mean "city"), which according to Am 9.7 is the original Aramean homeland. **10–16:** This episode reports the introduction of a new Aramean-style altar to replace the former altar of the Jerusalemite Temple (see 1 Kings 8.64). **10–11:** The altar is built by the *priest Uriah*, also mentioned in Isa 8.2, according to a model of an altar that Ahaz had seen in Damascus. **15:** The old bronze altar will serve from now on *to inquire by*, perhaps by divination (such as reading the entrails of animals sacrificed); see also 2 Chr 28.23. **17:** Ahaz apparently removes precious elements of the Temple furnishings, like the *bronze oxen* supporting the *sea* (1 Kings 7.23–29). **18:** *Because of the king of Assyria* suggests that Ahaz needed these objects in order to pay tribute to his suzerain.

this because of the king of Assyria. 19 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? 20 Ahaz slept with his ancestors, and was buried with his ancestors in the city of David; his son Hezekiah succeeded him.

17 In the twelfth year of King Ahaz of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel; he reigned nine years. 2 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, yet not like the kings of Israel who were before him. 3 King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against him; Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute. 4 But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to King So of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year; therefore the king of Assyria confined him and imprisoned him.

5 Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria; for three years he besieged it. 6 In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria. He placed them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

7 This occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They had worshiped other gods 8 and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had introduced.[a] 9 The people of Israel secretly did things that were not right against the LORD their God. They built for themselves high places at all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city; 10 they set up for themselves pillars and sacred poles[b] on every high hill and under every green tree; 11 there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the LORD carried away before them. They did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger; 12 they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this." 13 Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law that I commanded your ancestors and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets." 14 They would not listen but were stubborn, as their ancestors had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. 15 They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their ancestors, and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false; they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do as they did. 16 They rejected all the commandments of the LORD their God and made for themselves cast images of two calves; they made a sacred pole,[c] worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. 17 They made their sons and their daughters pass through fire; they used divination and augury; and they sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. 18 Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone.

19 Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God but walked in

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *Asherim*
[c] Heb *Asherah*

17.1–41: The end of the kingdom of Israel. 1–4: *Hoshea*, the last king of Israel (ca. 732–722 BCE) is not considered as bad as his predecessors (see v. 2), probably because of his anti-Assyrian politics. **3–4:** Although at the beginning of his reign he is a loyal vassal of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V (ca. 727–722 BCE), later he tries to find Egyptian support against the Assyrians. **4:** *King So of Egypt*: no Pharaoh with this name is known. *So* could be a reference to the Egyptian town of Sais, or an incorrect transcription of the Egyptian word for "king." **5–6:** Samaria was taken in 722 BCE, and parts of the population deported to *Halah* and *Habor* in northwestern Mesopotamia and to *the cities of the Medes* farther east. **7–23:** This passage is a theological commentary from the Deuteronomistic perspective explaining the reasons for the collapse of Israel. The main reason for the catastrophe is the worship of other gods and the rejection of the LORD and his messengers, the prophets. **16–17:** For the *two calves,* see 1 Kings 12.28–30; *sacred pole,* see 13.6n. The veneration of the *host of heaven* (the planets and stars) and the practice of *divination and augury* will reappear under the reign of the Judean king Manasseh

the customs that Israel had introduced. 20 The LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel; he punished them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had banished them from his presence.

21 When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam son of Nebat king. Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD and made them commit great sin. 22 The people of Israel continued in all the sins that Jeroboam committed; they did not depart from them 23 until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had foretold through all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.

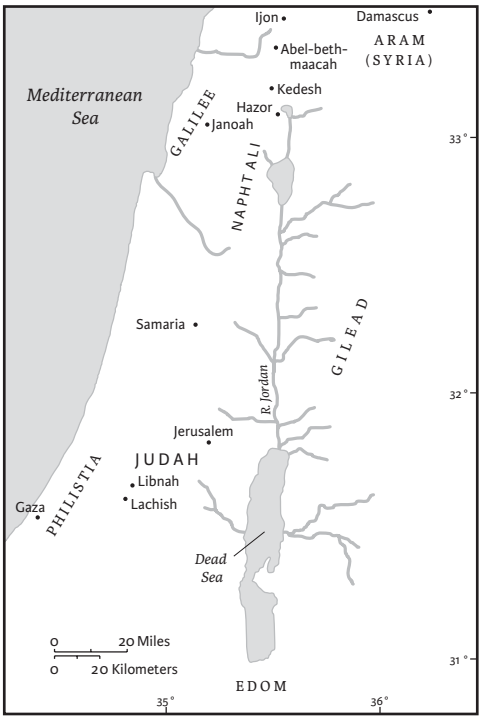
24 The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria in place of the people of Israel; they took possession of Samaria, and settled in its cities. 25 When they first settled there, they did not worship the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them. 26 So the king of Assyria was told, "The nations that you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land; therefore he has sent lions among them; they are killing them, because they do not know the law of the god of the land." 27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, "Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there; let him[a] go and live there, and teach them the law of the god of the land." 28 So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel; he taught them how they should worship the LORD.

29 But every nation still made gods of its own and put them in the shrines of the high places that the people of Samaria had made, every nation in the cities in which they lived; 30 the people of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the people of Cuth made Nergal, the people of Hamath made Ashima; 31 the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. 32 They also worshiped the LORD and appointed from among themselves all sorts of people as priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. 33 So they worshiped the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away. 34 To this day they continue to practice their former customs.

They do not worship the LORD and they do not follow the statutes or the ordinances or the law or the commandment that the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel. 35 The LORD had made a covenant with them and commanded them, "You shall not worship other gods or bow yourselves to them or serve them or sacrifice to them, 36 but you shall worship the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm; you shall bow yourselves to him, and to him you shall sacrifice. 37 The statutes and the ordinances and the law and the commandment that he wrote for you, you shall always be careful to observe. You shall not

[a] Syr Vg: Heb *them*

(21.3–6). *Pass through fire*, see 16.3n. **19:** *Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD,* a later addition informing the reader that Judah will finally have the same destiny as Israel. **21–23:** A summary of the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel from the Deuteronomistic perspective. **23:** *So Israel was exiled . . . until this day,* probably the original conclusion to the chapter. **24–28:** Assyrian policy was to mix conquered populations. **24:** These populations are said to come from *Babylon*; *Cuthah,* ca. 12 mi (20 km) northeast of Babylon; *Avva*, probably close to *Hamath* on the Orontes; and *Sepharvaim*, probably also in Syria. (See also 18.34; 19.13.) **25:** *The LORD sent lions*, this may either refer to a lion plague (such plagues are also attested in an Assyrian document) or is perhaps a narrative motif (see 1 Kings 13.24; 20.36), which explains how the non-Israelite population adopted the worship of the LORD. **28:** After the destruction of Samaria, *Bethel* continued to be an important religious center for the inhabitants of the former kingdom of Israel (see 1 Kings 12.29–30). **29–40:** This passage denounces a syncretistic religion of the "people of Samaria" (now the name of the Assyrian province that replaced the former Northern Kingdom) and is an origin of the Judean polemics against its inhabitants, who will later be called "Samaritans." **30–31:** *Nergal* was the Babylonian god of the underworld; little is known about the other



Chs 18–20: Places associated with Sennacherib's invasion of Judah.

worship other gods; [38] you shall not forget the covenant that I have made with you. You shall not worship other gods, [39] but you shall worship the LORD your God; he will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies." [40] They would not listen, however, but they continued to practice their former custom.

[41] So these nations worshiped the LORD, but also served their carved images; to this day their children and their children's children continue to do as their ancestors did.

18 In the third year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, Hezekiah son of King Ahaz of Judah began to reign. [2] He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi daughter of Zechariah. [3] He did what was right in the sight of the LORD just as his ancestor David had done. [4] He removed the high places, broke down the pillars, and cut down the sacred pole.[a] He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan. [5] He trusted in the LORD the God of Israel; so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him. [6] For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following him but kept the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses. [7] The LORD was with him; wherever he went, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. [8] He attacked the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.

[9] In the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against Samaria, besieged it, [10] and at the end of three years, took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of King Hoshea of Israel, Samaria was taken. [11] The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria, settled them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, [12] because

[a] Heb *Asherah*

deities mentioned. **41:** This concluding verse resumes v. 33 and introduces the anti-Samaritan polemics into the reader's present (*to this day*).

18.1–19.37: King Hezekiah and the siege of Jerusalem. Together with David and Josiah, *Hezekiah* is one of the most praised kings. The exact chronology of his reign is unclear (ca. 727/715–698/687 BCE are the most widely accepted possibilities; perhaps he began as coregent in 729, and reigned alone in 715). The decisive event of his reign is the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE, an event also described in Assyrian sources. **1–6:** In the introduction, Hezekiah is described as a religious reformer. **4:** He is the first Judean king to remove the *high places*, which had existed in Judah since the beginnings of the monarchy. He also removed from the Temple the *sacred pole* (Heb "'asherah"), a symbol of the goddess Asherah, who had been venerated as a consort of the LORD. *Nehushtan*, a bronze serpent associated with Moses (see Num 21.1–9), which may be linked either to the veneration of Asherah or to the Egyptian worship of a snake goddess. **5:** This verse ranks Hezekiah even higher than Josiah (but see 23.25) and David. **7–18:** Hezekiah's revolt against the Assyrians provokes the siege of Jerusalem by King Sennacherib (ruled ca. 705–681 BCE). The narrative in 18.13–20.19 also appears with some differences in

they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God but transgressed his covenant—all that Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded; they neither listened nor obeyed.

13 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. 14 King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear." The king of Assyria demanded of King Hezekiah of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. 15 Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house. 16 At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the doorposts that King Hezekiah of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria. 17 The king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. They went up and came to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the Fuller's Field. 18 When they called for the king, there came out to them Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebnah the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder.

19 The Rabshakeh said to them, "Say to Hezekiah: Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you base this confidence of yours? 20 Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? On whom do you now rely, that you have rebelled against me? 21 See, you are relying now on Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of anyone who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him. 22 But if you say to me, 'We rely on the LORD our God,' is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem'? 23 Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. 24 How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants, when you rely on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? 25 Moreover, is it without the LORD that I have come up against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it."

26 Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and Shebnah, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in the Aramaic language, for we understand it; do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall." 27 But the Rabshakeh said to them, "Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine?"

28 Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! 29 Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be

Isa 36–39. **9–12:** The summary of the fall of Samaria (see 17.1–6) is background to the siege of Jerusalem. **13–16:** Astonishingly Hezekiah submits immediately to the Assyrian king, promising that he would be a loyal vassal, and paying a tribute for which he has to plunder the Temple. **14:** *Lachish* (see 14.19) had become the Assyrian headquarters. **17:** In spite of the payment of tribute the Assyrian king wants to take on Jerusalem. This discrepancy with vv. 13–16 may indicate that this verse starts an alternative version of the Assyrian siege. The *Tartan* (chief commander), the *Rabsaris* (lit. "chief eunuch"), and the *Rabshakeh* (lit. "chief butler") are high Assyrian officials. Only the *Rabshakeh* plays a role in the following narrative. *The upper pool*, for the problem of its location see Isa 7.3n. **18:** The three Assyrians are faced by three high Judean officials (for the titles see 1 Kings 4.2–6). **19–25:** The Rabshakeh's speech is an example of psychological warfare in the first millennium BCE. In the first part of this speech he alludes to Hezekiah's reform (v. 22) and claims that the LORD is on the Assyrian side (v. 25). **26–27:** These verses provide a transition between the two parts of the Rabshakeh's speech. The Judean officials do not want him to speak in Hebrew (*the language of Judah*), but in *Aramaic*, the principal language of diplomacy in the Assyrian empire, which was not understood by the ordinary people. **27:** *Eat their own dung*, a crude description of the consequences of a long siege. **28–35:** Now the Rabshakeh insists on the impotence of Hezekiah

able to deliver you out of my hand. 30 Do not let Hezekiah make you rely on the LORD by saying, The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' 31 Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make your peace with me and come out to me; then every one of you will eat from your own vine and your own fig tree, and drink water from your own cistern, 32 until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive oil and honey, that you may live and not die. Do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, The LORD will deliver us. 33 Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered its land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 34 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? 35 Who among all the gods of the countries have delivered their countries out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?'"

36 But the people were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was, "Do not answer him." 37 Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him the words of the Rabshakeh.

19 When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. 2 And he sent Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. 3 They said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. 4 It may be that the LORD your God heard all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left." 5 When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, 6 Isaiah said to them, "Say to your master, 'Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. 7 I myself will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.'"

8 The Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah; for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. 9 When the king[a] heard concerning King Tirhakah of Ethiopia,[b] "See, he has set out to fight against you," he sent messengers again to Hezekiah, saying, 10 "Thus shall you speak to King Hezekiah of Judah: Do not let your God on whom you rely deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. 11 See, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, destroying them utterly. Shall you be delivered? 12 Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my predecessors destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? 13 Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?"

14 Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; then

[a] Heb *he*

[b] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*

and the LORD, claiming that no god of any country was able to resist the Assyrians and their gods (v. 33). **32:** Cf. Deut 8.7–9. **34:** A list of cities conquered by the Assyrians; see 17.24. *Arpad*, the capital of an Aramean state, which had joined an anti-Assyrian coalition. **36–37:** The people and the officials do not react to these words. The action now moves to Hezekiah. **37:** *Clothes torn* (see also 19.1), an act of remorse. **19.1–7:** Hezekiah consults the prophet *Isaiah* who announces to the king's messengers an oracle of salvation. **7:** The LORD will put a *spirit* into the mind of the Assyrian king in order to entice him, ultimately to his death (cf. 1 Kings 22.20–23). **8–13:** The withdrawal of the Assyrian army at this stage seems odd. Verses 8–9 may belong to a source older than the surrounding verses. **8:** *Libnah*, see 8.22n. **9:** *Tirhakah of Ethiopia* became the ruler of Egypt in 689 BCE and was only a young boy during the siege of Jerusalem in 701—this suggests that this section is not historically accurate but

Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD
and spread it before the LORD. 15 And Hezekiah
prayed before the LORD, and said: "O LORD the
God of Israel, who are enthroned above the
cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the
kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven
and earth. 16 Incline your ear, O LORD, and
hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; hear
the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent
to mock the living God. 17 Truly, O LORD, the
kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations
and their lands, 18 and have hurled their gods
into the fire, though they were no gods but the
work of human hands—wood and stone—
and so they were destroyed. 19 So now, O LORD
our God, save us, I pray you, from his hand, so
that all the kingdoms of the earth may know
that you, O LORD, are God alone."

20 Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of
Israel: I have heard your prayer to me about
King Sennacherib of Assyria. 21 This is the
word that the LORD has spoken concerning
him:

She despises you, she scorns you—
virgin daughter Zion;
she tosses her head—behind your back,
daughter Jerusalem.

22 "Whom have you mocked and reviled?
Against whom have you raised your
voice
and haughtily lifted your eyes?
Against the Holy One of Israel!
23 By your messengers you have mocked
the Lord,
and you have said, 'With my many
chariots
I have gone up the heights of the
mountains,
to the far recesses of Lebanon;
I felled its tallest cedars,
its choicest cypresses;
I entered its farthest retreat,
its densest forest.
24 I dug wells
and drank foreign waters,
I dried up with the sole of my foot
all the streams of Egypt.'

25 "Have you not heard
that I determined it long ago?
I planned from days of old
what now I bring to pass,
that you should make fortified cities
crash into heaps of ruins,
26 while their inhabitants, shorn of
strength,
are dismayed and confounded;
they have become like plants of the field
and like tender grass,
like grass on the housetops,
blighted before it is grown.

27 "But I know your rising[a] and your sitting,
your going out and coming in,
and your raging against me.
28 Because you have raged against me
and your arrogance has come to my
ears,
I will put my hook in your nose
and my bit in your mouth;
I will turn you back on the way
by which you came.

29 "And this shall be the sign for you: This
year you shall eat what grows of itself, and in
the second year what springs from that; then
in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards,
and eat their fruit. 30 The surviving remnant

[a] Gk Compare Isa 37.27 Q Ms: MT lacks *rising*

is legendary. **10–13:** This new Assyrian propaganda repeats the arguments of 18.32–35. **14:** Hezekiah is informed of this by a *letter*, a small scroll that he could *spread* out. **15–19:** Hezekiah's prayer depicts him as a pious king who affirms that the LORD is the only true God. **15:** *Cherubim*: see 1 Kings 6.23–28. **18:** *Have hurled their gods into fire*, the Assyrians did indeed capture and sometimes destroy divine statues, not by burning them however, but by breaking them into pieces. **20–34:** A second prophecy of Isaiah brings God's response to Hezekiah's prayer. **21–28:** These verses contain an oracle against the Assyrian king Sennacherib, whose word (vv. 10–13) is now opposed to the LORD's word. **21:** *Virgin daughter Zion,* both Israelite and foreign cities are often represented as female, especially in poetry. **28:** *I will put my hook in your nose,* it was Assyrian practice to humiliate vassals and prisoners; here the LORD does this to Assyria. **29–31:** The second response is directed to Hezekiah. The theme of a *sign* is often linked with the prophet Isaiah (20.9; Isa 7.11; 8.1), as is the theme of a surviving *remnant* (Isa

of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; 31 for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

32 "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, shoot an arrow there, come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege ramp against it. 33 By the way that he came, by the same he shall return; he shall not come into this city, says the LORD. 34 For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David."

35 That very night the angel of the LORD set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies. 36 Then King Sennacherib of Assyria left, went home, and lived at Nineveh. 37 As he was worshiping in the house of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped into the land of Ararat. His son Esar-haddon succeeded him.

20 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover." 2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD: 3 "Remember now, O LORD, I implore you, how I have walked before you in faithfulness with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: 5 "Turn back, and say to Hezekiah prince of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed, I will heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. 6 I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake." 7 Then Isaiah said, "Bring a lump of figs. Let them take it and apply it to the boil, so that he may recover."

8 Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD on the third day?" 9 Isaiah said, "This is the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he has promised: the shadow has now advanced ten intervals; shall it retreat ten intervals?" 10 Hezekiah answered, "It is normal for the shadow to lengthen ten intervals; rather let the shadow retreat ten intervals." 11 The prophet Isaiah cried to the LORD; and he brought the shadow back the ten intervals, by which the sun[a] had declined on the dial of Ahaz.

12 At that time King Merodach-baladan son of Baladan of Babylon sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he had

[a] Syr See Isa 38.8 and Tg: Heb *it*

10.21–22). **32–34:** The LORD reaffirms that he will *defend* Jerusalem, which is his home and the capital city of the kingdom ruled by the dynasty founded by David, his *servant*; see 38.6; Ps 132.11,13–18. **35–37:** The prophetic word is fulfilled, and the Assyrian army abandons the siege. **35:** The LORD's *angel* striking Israel's enemies recalls Ex 12. *One hundred eighty-five thousand*, an exaggerated number emphasizing the strength of the Assyrian army and the LORD's great power. **36:** Assyrian records are silent about the circumstances under which the assault of Jerusalem concluded. **37:** The assassination of Sennacherib (in approximately 681 BCE, twenty years later) is corroborated by Assyrian documents, which, however, do not give clear details. His successor *Esar-haddon* ruled ca. 681–669 BCE. *Ararat* is in Armenia.

20.1–21: Isaiah heals Hezekiah and announces the Babylonian exile. The last story about Hezekiah brings some ambiguity to his portrait because his actions appear to hasten the end of Judah. **1–7:** Struck with a life-threatening illness, Hezekiah's prayer receives a favorable response through Isaiah. **6:** *I will add fifteen years*, this oracle led the redactors to date the siege of Jerusalem in the fourteenth year (18.13) of Hezekiah's twenty-nine year reign (18.2). The verse also suggests that Hezekiah's illness happened during the Assyrian siege. **7:** Isaiah also has medical skills and heals the king's disease with a *fig*-poultice. **8–11:** Hezekiah seems to doubt that he will recover complete health. He is given a *sign*: a *shadow*'s movement is reversed. **11:** *The dial of Ahaz*, lit. "the steps of Ahaz." The expression may allude to an otherwise unknown construction with steps, perhaps used as

heard that Hezekiah had been sick. 13 Hezekiah welcomed them;[a] he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses; there was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them. 14 Then the prophet Isaiah came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say? From where did they come to you?" Hezekiah answered, "They have come from a far country, from Babylon." 15 He said, "What have they seen in your house?" Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them."

16 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD: 17 Days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your ancestors have stored up until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the LORD. 18 Some of your own sons who are born to you shall be taken away; they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." 19 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?"

20 The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah, all his power, how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? 21 Hezekiah slept with his ancestors; and his son Manasseh succeeded him.

21 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. 2 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, following the abominable practices of the nations that the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. 3 For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he erected altars for Baal, made a sacred pole,[b] as King Ahab of Israel had done, worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them. 4 He built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put my name." 5 He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. 6 He made his son pass through fire; he practiced soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. 7 The carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house of which the LORD said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever; 8 I will not cause the feet of Israel to wander any more out of the land that I gave to their ancestors, if only they will be careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them." 9 But they did not listen; Manasseh misled them to do more evil than the nations had done that the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel.

10 The LORD said by his servants the prophets, 11 "Because King Manasseh of Judah has committed these abominations,

[a] Gk Vg Syr: Heb *When Hezekiah heard about them*
[b] Heb *Asherah*

a sanctuary for the sun-god and as a sundial. **12–15:** The strange episode about a Babylonian embassy recalls the visit of the queen of Sheba to Solomon and thus establishes a parallel between Hezekiah and Solomon. **12:** *Merodach-baladan,* a Babylonian king who ruled 721–710 BCE, and then briefly in 703 (see Isa 39.1). **16–19:** Isaiah's oracle attributes to this embassy a negative meaning, since he predicts the deportation of the Temple's treasures to Babylon, anticipating chs 24–25. **19:** *Why not,* Hezekiah receives the oracle ambiguously. **20–21:** The short conclusion of Hezekiah's reign mentions a pool and a conduit. The so-called "Hezekiah's Tunnel" (the Siloam Tunnel) is still extant under the city of David in Jerusalem.

21.1–26: The reigns of Manasseh and Amon. 1–18: For the redactors of the book of Kings, *Manasseh* is the worst of all Judean kings and is explicitly compared to the northern king Ahab (v. 3). **1:** His reign is said to have lasted fifty-five years, which does not exactly fit the probable dates of his reign (698/687–642 BCE). **2–16:** Although he had a long reign, the only thing we are told about him is his religious counterreform. He reintroduces the worship of other deities into the Temple, as well as the "sacred pole" (see v. 7; 18.4n.). The long enumeration of his religious failures shows that Manasseh contravened all the important laws of the book of Deuteronomy (v. 2=Deut 18.9; vv. 3,7=Deut 16.21; v. 5=Deut 17.3; v. 6=Deut 18.10–11; v. 16=Deut 19.10). **10–15:** In this anony-

has done things more wicked than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has caused Judah also to sin with his idols; 12 therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such evil that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. 13 I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line for Samaria, and the plummet for the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. 14 I will cast off the remnant of my heritage, and give them into the hand of their enemies; they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies, 15 because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their ancestors came out of Egypt, even to this day."

16 Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he caused Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.

17 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, all that he did, and the sin that he committed, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? 18 Manasseh slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the garden of his house, in the garden of Uzza. His son Amon succeeded him.

19 Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. 20 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done. 21 He walked in all the way in which his father walked, served the idols that his father served, and worshiped them; 22 he abandoned the LORD, the God of his ancestors, and did not walk in the way of the LORD. 23 The servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his house. 24 But the people of the land killed all those who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made his son Josiah king in place of him. 25 Now the rest of the acts of Amon that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? 26 He was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza; then his son Josiah succeeded him.

22 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. 2 He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

3 In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, son

mous prophetic oracle, Manasseh is presented as the main culprit responsible for the fall of Jerusalem and the exile. **11:** *Amorites,* traditional inhabitants of the land of Canaan before the Israelites' arrival. **13:** Jerusalem will therefore be assessed by the divine architect (cf. Isa 34.11; Lam 2.8; Am 7.7–9), and, like a dangerous building, condemned. It will be emptied of all that is in it, wiped clean like a dish after a meal. This divine judgment parallels that on Samaria (ch 17; Am 7.7–9) and *the house of Ahab* (1 Kings 21.21–22; 2 Kings 9–10). **17–18:** One may reasonably guess that during Manasseh's long reign some important events took place and that his reign was a peaceful time. But the redactors of the book of Kings are not interested in these aspects. **18:** *Garden of Uzza,* see also v. 26; its precise location and significance are debated. **19–26:** *Amon*'s short reign (ca. 641–640 BCE) ended with his murder by his court officials. **23:** The only other information about his reign has to do with his religious activities: he continued the syncretism of his father. **24:** *The people of the land* (see 11.14n.), probably some of the free landowners, opposed the rebellion and put Amon's son Josiah on the throne.

22.1–23.30: Josiah's reign and reform. For the authors of the book of Kings *Josiah* (ca. 640–609 BCE) is the perfect king, a new David, but also a new Moses and a new Joshua. In contrast to Hezekiah, Josiah is presented entirely positively. He launches a religious, political, and economic reform and declares the Temple in Jerusalem to be the only legitimate place to worship the LORD. The story contains two different narratives, which are intermingled: the discovery of the "book of the law," and the religious reform. **22.1:** Josiah was *eight years old* when he came to the throne, which means that Judah was then governed by high officials, probably those mentioned in the following narrative. **2:** *He did not turn aside to the right or to the left,* see Deut 5.32; 17.20; Josh 1.7; etc. **3–10:** The report about Josiah repairing the Temple recalls 12.10–16. **3–4:** *Shaphan* and *Hilkiah* are the main actors in the discovery of the book. *Shaphan* was a high official, ancestor of an important family of civil servants at the Judean court (see Jer 36). *Hilkiah* (probably not to be identified with the father of the prophet Jeremiah)

of Meshullam, the secretary, to the house of the LORD, saying, [4] "Go up to the high priest Hilkiah, and have him count the entire sum of the money that has been brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people; [5] let it be given into the hand of the workers who have the oversight of the house of the LORD; let them give it to the workers who are at the house of the LORD, repairing the house, [6] that is, to the carpenters, to the builders, to the masons; and let them use it to buy timber and quarried stone to repair the house. [7] But no accounting shall be asked from them for the money that is delivered into their hand, for they deal honestly."

[8] The high priest Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD." When Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, he read it. [9] Then Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, "Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workers who have oversight of the house of the LORD." [10] Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "The priest Hilkiah has given me a book." Shaphan then read it aloud to the king.

[11] When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. [12] Then the king commanded the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary, and the king's servant Asaiah, saying, [13] "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

[14] So the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; she resided in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter, where they consulted her. [15] She declared to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me, [16] Thus says the LORD, I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. [17] Because they have abandoned me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. [18] But as to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, [19] because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place, and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the LORD. [20] Therefore, I will gather you to your ancestors, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place." They took the message back to the king.

23 Then the king directed that all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem should be gathered to him. [2] The king went up to the house of the LORD, and with him went

is the *high priest*, an anachronistic expression (see 12.10n.). **8–10:** The *book*, which reaches the king through Shaphan and Hilkiah is meant to be some form of the book of Deuteronomy. **11:** This becomes clear in the king's reaction of despair and repentance (*he tore his clothes*), which is provoked by curses like Deut 28.61 and 29.21. **12–20:** The king's consultation of a prophetess through high officials (v. 12) may seem surprising, since he had understood already what the book was about (v. 13). **14:** *The prophetess Huldah* was married to a Temple or court officer, the *keeper of the wardrobe* (see 10.22) and she lived in the *Second Quarter*, which refers to a new quarter in the north, built when Jerusalem expanded at the end of the eighth or during the seventh century BCE. **15–18:** Huldah's word confirms the oracle of the unnamed prophets in 21.10–15 (see also Jer 19.14–15). **19–20:** Her oracle concerning Josiah is inconsistent with what is reported later, since he did not die *in peace* but was killed by the Egyptian king (23.29). Perhaps her prophecy meant that Josiah would be spared the agony of Judah's destruction and exile. **23.1–3:** The king himself reads the book to *all the people* and renews the covenant with the LORD. The "book of the law" can therefore also be called *the book of the covenant*. This ceremony begins the religious

all the people of Judah, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets, and all the people, both small and great; he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. 3 The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. All the people joined in the covenant.

4 The king commanded the high priest Hilkiah, the priests of the second order, and the guardians of the threshold, to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel. 5 He deposed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to make offerings in the high places at the cities of Judah and around Jerusalem; those also who made offerings to Baal, to the sun, the moon, the constellations, and all the host of the heavens. 6 He brought out the image of[a] Asherah from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, to the Wadi Kidron, burned it at the Wadi Kidron, beat it to dust and threw the dust of it upon the graves of the common people. 7 He broke down the houses of the male temple prostitutes that were in the house of the LORD, where the women did weaving for Asherah. 8 He brought all the priests out of the towns of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had made offerings, from Geba to Beer-sheba; he broke down the high places of the gates that were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on the left at the gate of the city. 9 The priests of the high places, however, did not come up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but ate unleavened bread among their kindred. 10 He defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of Ben-hinnom, so that no one would make a son or a daughter pass through fire as an offering to Molech. 11 He removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the LORD, by the chamber of the eunuch Nathan-melech, which was in the precincts;[b] then he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. 12 The altars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars that Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, he pulled down from there and broke in pieces, and threw the rubble into the Wadi Kidron. 13 The king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the Mount of Destruction, which King Solomon of Israel had built for Astarte the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 14 He broke the pillars in pieces, cut down the sacred poles,[c] and covered the sites with human bones.

15 Moreover, the altar at Bethel, the high place erected by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who

[a] Heb lacks *image of*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Heb *Asherim*

reforms, which are described in vv. 4–20. **4–6:** All symbols and statues of other deities are removed from the Temple and destroyed. **4:** The *Kidron* area, which is the valley to the east of the city of David, was used as a burial and burning place (v. 6; see 1 Kings 15.13). **5:** *Idolatrous priests,* a term borrowed from Assyrian where it designates a special type of priests. *Host of the heavens*, see 17.16–17n. **7–9:** This passage relates actions against the religious personnel. **7:** *Male temple prostitutes,* see 1 Kings 22.46n. **8:** The *priests* of the local sanctuaries outside Jerusalem (*the towns of Judah*) were expelled and the sanctuaries were defiled, so that they could no longer be used for the worship of the LORD. *Geba,* ca. 6 mi (10 km) north of Jerusalem, in Benjamin, which may indicate that the Benjaminite territory had become part of the kingdom of Judah. **9:** The priests of the *high places* (1 Kings 3.2–4) were not integrated into the personnel of the Temple in Jerusalem. **10–14:** Further destructions are reported. **10:** *Topheth*, a place used for human sacrifices (see Jer 7.31). *Molech*, see 16.3n. **11:** *Horses*, see 2.11n. *Precincts* (see textual note *b*), perhaps a Persian word, which indicates that this passage was written during the Persian period. **13:** See 1 Kings 11.5–8n. *Mount of Destruction,* probably a sarcastic wordplay on "mount of oil," since it refers to the Mount of Olives, where the worship of other deities was practiced. **14:** The sites were covered *with human bones* (see also vv. 16 and 20) in order to make them ritually impure. **15–20:** The destruc-



Important cities in Judah in the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE.

caused Israel to sin—he pulled down that altar along with the high place. He burned the high place, crushing it to dust; he also burned the sacred pole.[a] 16 As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs there on the mount; and he sent and took the bones out of the tombs, and burned them on the altar, and defiled it, according to the word of the LORD that the man of God proclaimed,[b] when Jeroboam stood by the altar at the festival; he turned and looked up at the tomb of the man of God who had predicted these things. 17 Then he said, "What is that monument that I see?" The people of the city told him, "It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and predicted these things that you have done against the altar at Bethel." 18 He said, "Let him rest; let no one move his bones." So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came out of Samaria. 19 Moreover, Josiah removed all the shrines of the high places that were in the towns of Samaria, which kings of Israel had made, provoking the LORD to anger; he did to them just as he had done at Bethel. 20 He slaughtered on the altars all the priests of the high places who were there, and burned human bones on them. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

21 The king commanded all the people, "Keep the passover to the LORD your God as prescribed in this book of the covenant." 22 No such passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, even during all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah; 23 but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem.

24 Moreover Josiah put away the mediums, wizards, teraphim,[c] idols, and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, so that he established the words of the law that were written in the book that the priest Hilkiah had found in the house of the LORD. 25 Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

26 Still the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. 27 The LORD said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and I will reject this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there."

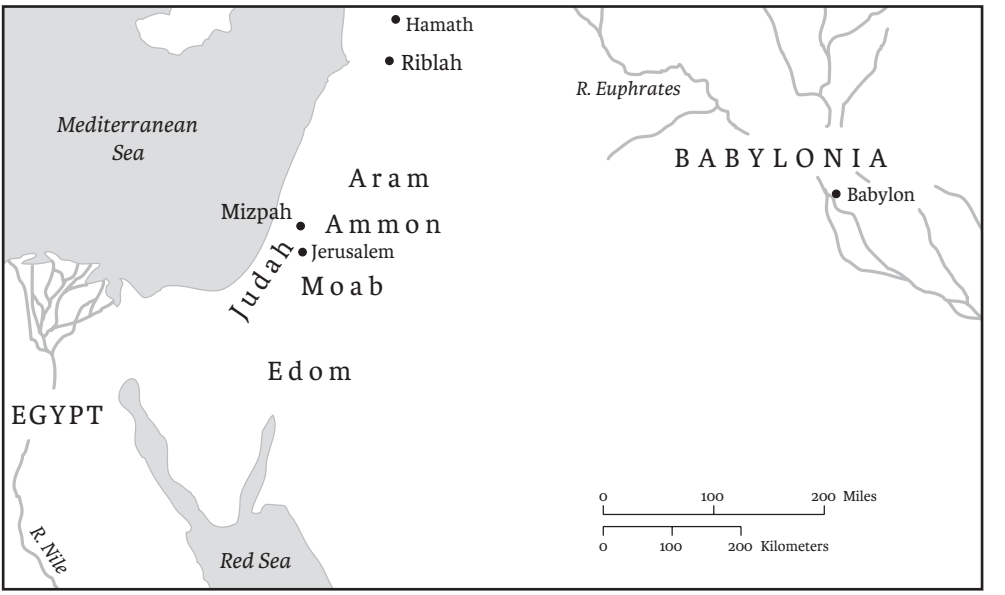
28 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? 29 In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went to meet him; but when Pharaoh Neco met him at Megiddo, he killed him. 30 His servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo, brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. The people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in place of his father.

31 Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign; he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was

[a] Heb *Asherah*
[b] Gk: Heb *proclaimed, who had predicted these things*
[c] Or *household gods*

tion of the sanctuary of *Bethel* puts an end to the "sin of Jeroboam" (1 Kings 12.29–30). **17–18:** Cf. 1 Kings 13.2, 30–31. **21–23:** In celebrating the Passover according to the stipulations of Deut 16.1–8, Josiah not only surpasses Hezekiah in faithfulness to the LORD, but even David himself, for such a Passover had not been observed *since the days of the judges who judged Israel*. **24–25:** This outstanding praise continues in the following verses. Josiah is the only king who turned to the LORD *with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might,* a quotation of Deut 6.4–5: Josiah was the only one who stood exactly by this law. **26–27:** But even Josiah cannot stop the divine punishment, which is here seen as provoked by *Manasseh*. **28–30:** The laconic report of Josiah's death at *Megiddo* (like Ahaziah in 9.27–28) in 609 BCE does not really explain why he was killed by Pharaoh *Neco* (ruled 610–595 BCE). Either Josiah wanted to prevent Neco from supporting Assyria in its struggle against Babylon, or he had already become a vassal of the Egyptian king, who considered him to be disloyal.

23.30–25.30: The end of Judah. The last four kings are a jarring contrast to Josiah and are all judged with the same negative formula (23.32,37; 24.9,19), but no details about their religious faults are given. **30–33:** *Jehoahaz*, anointed by *the people of the land* (see 11.14n.), ruled for *three* months in 609 BCE. He was unacceptable to *Neco*,



Chs 24–25: Babylon and Judah in the early sixth century BCE.

Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. [32] He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, just as his ancestors had done. [33] Pharaoh Neco confined him at Riblah in the land of Hamath, so that he might not reign in Jerusalem, and imposed tribute on the land of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. [34] Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But he took Jehoahaz away; he came to Egypt, and died there. [35] Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh, but he taxed the land in order to meet Pharaoh's demand for money. He exacted the silver and the gold from the people of the land, from all according to their assessment, to give it to Pharaoh Neco.

[36] Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zebidah daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. [37] He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, just as all his ancestors had done.

24 In his days King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up; Jehoiakim became his servant for three years; then he turned and rebelled against him. [2] The LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldeans, bands of the Arameans, bands of the Moabites, and bands of the Ammonites; he sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by his servants the prophets. [3] Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the LORD, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, for all that he had committed, [4] and also for the innocent blood that he had shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD was not willing to pardon.

[5] Now the rest of the deeds of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? [6] So Jehoiakim slept with his ancestors; then his son Jehoiachin succeeded him. [7] The king of Egypt did not come again out of his land, for the king of Babylon had taken over all that

for a short time Judah's new overlord, who deported him temporarily to *Riblah,* an important town in northern Syria, which later became headquarters of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (25.6). **34–35:** When making *Eliakim* the new king, Neco changes his name to *Jehoiakim*. **36–37:** *Jehoiakim* reigned ca. 608–597 BCE. **24.1:** He initially submits to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (ruled 605–562 BCE), who had defeated the Assyrians in 605, but then he rebels. **2–7:** This rebellion provoked even more military pressure from the neighbors of Judah. **3–4:** *Sins of Manasseh,* see 23.26–27. **7:** There is no escape from the king of Babylon who controls the Levant

belonged to the king of Egypt from the Wadi of Egypt to the River Euphrates.

8 Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign; he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Nehushta daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. 9 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, just as his father had done.

10 At that time the servants of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. 11 King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it; 12 King Jehoiachin of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon, himself, his mother, his servants, his officers, and his palace officials. The king of Babylon took him prisoner in the eighth year of his reign.

13 He carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the LORD, which King Solomon of Israel had made, all this as the LORD had foretold. 14 He carried away all Jerusalem, all the officials, all the warriors, ten thousand captives, all the artisans and the smiths; no one remained, except the poorest people of the land. 15 He carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon; the king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the elite of the land, he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. 16 The king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon all the men of valor, seven thousand, the artisans and the smiths, one thousand, all of them strong and fit for war. 17 The king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

18 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 19 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, just as Jehoiakim had done. 20 Indeed, Jerusalem and Judah so angered the LORD that he expelled them from his presence.

25 Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.[1] And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it; they built siegeworks against it all around. 2 So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. 3 On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. 4 Then a breach was made in the city wall;[a] the king with all the soldiers fled[b] by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. They went in the direction of the Arabah. 5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; all his army was scattered, deserting him. 6 Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, who passed sentence on him. 7 They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah; they bound him in fetters and took him to Babylon.

8 In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month—which was the nineteenth year

[a] Heb lacks *wall*

[b] Gk Compare Jer 39.4; 52.7: Heb lacks *the king* and lacks *fled*

and Mesopotamia (*from the Wadi of Egypt to the River Euphrates*). **8–17:** *Jehoiachin* has to pay the price for his father's rebellion, a siege of Jerusalem in 597 BCE and his and the court's exile to Babylon. **12:** Jehoiachin's quick surrender avoids the destruction of Jerusalem. **13:** The Temple and the palace treasures are usually the primary target for booty. **14–16:** The numbers of the deported population are probably not based on historical records. Instead of *ten thousand*, Jer 52.28 has 3,023. **17:** The Babylonian king establishes Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, as king and changes his name to Zedekiah. **18–20:** *Zedekiah* is the last Judean ruler (597–586 BCE). His rebellion provokes the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Judean kingdom. **Chapter 25:** Most of ch 25 is also found, with variations, in Jer 52. **1–7:** The result of Zedekiah's disloyal behavior, most likely an alliance with Egypt, was another siege of Jerusalem. **4–5:** The king tries to flee with the soldiers (his bodyguard) and is captured *in the plains of Jericho*. The place of Israel's first victory when conquering the land becomes now a place of defeat. **6–7:** His breaking of the loyalty oath is sanctioned with harsh punishment. His sons are killed in order to exterminate the Davidic dynasty. *Riblah*, see 23.33n. **8–12:** *Nebuzaradan*, a high Babylonian officer, whose

of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 9 He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. 10 All the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. 11 Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylon—all the rest of the population. 12 But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest people of the land to be vinedressers and tillers of the soil.

13 The bronze pillars that were in the house of the LORD, as well as the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried the bronze to Babylon. 14 They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the dishes for incense, and all the bronze vessels used in the temple service, 15 as well as the firepans and the basins. What was made of gold the captain of the guard took away for the gold, and what was made of silver, for the silver. 16 As for the two pillars, the one sea, and the stands, which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weighing. 17 The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and on it was a bronze capital; the height of the capital was three cubits; latticework and pomegranates, all of bronze, were on the capital all around. The second pillar had the same, with the latticework.

18 The captain of the guard took the chief priest Seraiah, the second priest Zephaniah, and the three guardians of the threshold; 19 from the city he took an officer who had been in command of the soldiers, and five men of the king's council who were found in the city; the secretary who was the commander of the army who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the city. 20 Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. 21 The king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah went into exile out of its land.

22 He appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan as governor over the people who remained in the land of Judah, whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had left. 23 Now when all the captains of the forces and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah as governor, they came with their men to Gedaliah at Mizpah, namely, Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah son of the Maacathite. 24 Gedaliah swore to them and their men, saying, "Do not be afraid because of the Chaldean officials; live in the land, serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you." 25 But in the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men; they struck down Gedaliah so that he died, along with the Judeans and Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. 26 Then all the people, high and low,[a] and the captains of the forces set out and went to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.

27 In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth

[a] Or *young and old*

title means literally "chief of the butchers," destroys the Temple, the palace, and the city and its walls. He also organizes a second deportation to Babylon, which does not affect the whole population. **13–17:** The authors take great interest in the detailed description of the deported Temple furnishings (see 1 Kings 7.15–51). **18–21:** Some of the royal officials are executed at *Riblah*, probably because they belonged to the anti-Babylonian party. **21:** *So Judah went into exile out of its land*, this was perhaps the original conclusion of the edition of the book of Kings in the Babylonian period. **22–26:** The episode of Gedaliah's appointment as a governor and his assassination by the nationalistic party is related in greater detail in Jer 40–43. **22:** *Gedaliah*, the grandson of Josiah's secretary Shaphan (23.12). **23:** *Mizpah*, ca. 7 mi (2 km) north of Jerusalem become the administrative center during Babylonian occupation. **25:** *Ishmael*, who kills Gedaliah, is said to be member of *the royal family*. He fails however to reestablish the Davidic dynasty. **26:** The remaining people fled to *Egypt*. This conclusion seems to wipe out Israel's whole history, which started with the Exodus out of Egypt and now ends with a return to

month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison; [28] he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the other seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. [29] So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes. Every day of his life he dined regularly in the king's presence. [30] For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion every day, as long as he lived.

Egypt. **27–30:** This epilogue relates the rehabilitation of Jehoiachin under the Babylonian king *Evil-merodach* (Amel-marduk, 562–560 BCE), which may be understood as a faint hope for the renewal of the Davidic dynasty. What happens to Jehoiachin also recalls such heroes of Diaspora narratives as Joseph, Mordecai, and Daniel: all are exiles who are liberated from prison (see Gen 41.40: Dan 2.48; Esth 10.3) and become part of the court of the foreign king. The accession to new status is symbolized by the changing of clothes (see Gen 41.24; Dan 5.29; Esth 6.10–11). Jehoiachin could therefore symbolize all the Jews who accepted that their "exile" had become "Diaspora," a place outside the land of Israel, where they could live their lives.

1 CHRONICLES

NAME AND LOCATION IN CANON

Like other books in the Bible, Chronicles was originally untitled. The title given to it by the early rabbis, "the book of the events of the days" (*seper dibre hayyamim*), suggests that the book is a history, addressing past events in chronological order; the same phrase is used often in Kings (e.g., 1 Kings 14.19) for one of the sources of the books of Kings. The name of Chronicles in the ancient Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures, the Septuagint, is *Paraleipomena*, meaning "the things left out"; this name suggests that Chronicles records the events left out of earlier biblical history. These understandings of Chronicles are contested by most modern scholars. It was the church father Jerome's description of the book as a "chronicle," a summary of divine history, that has proven to be most influential in the history of modern interpretation.

Like the books of Samuel and Kings, Chronicles was originally one book. It was probably divided by the Greek translators, perhaps because of its length. The break between the two books, however, comes at a natural point, with the notice of the death of King David at the end of 1 Chronicles, and the account of the reign of his successor Solomon at the beginning of 2 Chronicles.

In printed Jewish Bibles, Chronicles is the last book in the third and final division of the canon, the Writings ("Ketubim"), although in some manuscripts it occurs earlier, either as the first of the Writings, or before Ezra-Nehemiah, that is, in chronological order. In Christian Bibles, Chronicles is one of the Historical Books and follows the books of Kings.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE OF COMPOSITION

Most likely the anonymous author lived in Jerusalem and had great familiarity with the Temple and its assorted traditions. Since the book of Ezra begins where Chronicles ends, with the decree of the Persian king Cyrus the Great that allowed the exiled Jews to return home and rebuild the Temple (538 BCE), some scholars have suggested that Chronicles, Ezra, and its continuation in Nehemiah, had a single author or editor. Other scholars think that the linguistic, thematic, and historiographic differences between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah are too great to posit a common author. In this view, which is followed here, the Chronicler's history, which begins with the first person (Adam) and ends with the Babylonian exile in 586 BCE and Cyrus's summons to the exiled Jews to return home (2 Chr 36.21–23), should be separated from the postexilic history of Ezra-Nehemiah. Although there are significant similarities between the Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the differences outweigh the similarities, and one individual is unlikely to have written all three works. Hence, in the following pages, "the Chronicler" designates the author of Chronicles.

The Chronicler wrote after much of the Hebrew Bible had already been written, and he draws extensively upon this rich literary tradition. The dependence of Chronicles upon Genesis is evident in the genealogies (1 Chr 1–9); the dependence upon Samuel is clear in the narration of Saul's demise and David's reign (1 Chr 10–29); and the dependence upon Kings is unmistakable in the narration of Solomon and the Judahite kingdom (2 Chr 1–36). The Chronicler's work is also informed by a variety of other biblical texts. Citations from or allusions to the Torah and the books of Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Psalms, and Ruth all appear in Chronicles. Scholars generally agree that the Chronicler also had access to sources that did not become part of the Bible, but their nature and extent are disputed.

It is difficult to date Chronicles precisely, beyond noting that it must be postexilic, since it begins with Cyrus's decree. A range of over three hundred and fifty years, from the late sixth to the mid-second century BCE, has been suggested for its time of composition. A date in the fourth century seems most plausible, because it would account both for the author's references to other biblical writings and for literary features within the work that anticipate similar features in Jewish Hellenistic writings. But there are no specific references, no absolute synchronisms, and no extrabiblical citations that definitively date the book to a given decade or quarter-century.

STRUCTURE, CONTENTS, AND INTERPRETATION

Chronicles has three major sections: the genealogies (1 Chr 1–9), the history of the United Monarchy (1 Chr 10–2 Chr 9), and the history of the Judahite monarchy (2 Chr 10–36). The first section, which forms the introduction

to the work, begins with Adam (1 Chr 1), but focuses upon the identity, interrelationships, and location of Israel's many tribes (1 Chr 2–9). In traditional societies such genealogies explain and justify the place and function of various individuals, people, and institutions. In the case of 1 Chr 1–8, the Chronicler stresses the ties between Israel and the land. The very scope and structure of the Chronicler's genealogical system underscore the indivisibility of Israel. Within this larger structure, Judah, Levi, and Benjamin receive by far the most extensive genealogies. In the Chronicler's view, these three tribes are critical to preserving Israel's distinctive legacy. The list of those Jews who returned from exile (1 Chr 9) concludes these chapters by highlighting the continuity between earlier Israel and postexilic Judah (the Persian province of Yehud). In the second section, after briefly addressing and condemning the reign of Saul (1 Chr 10), the Chronicler devotes most of his attention to the highly successful reigns of David (1 Chr 11–29) and Solomon (2 Chr 1–9), which clearly represent a high point of the history. The rest of the book relates the emergence, continuation, and fall of the kingdom of Judah (2 Chr 10–36). Because Chronicles begins with the first person (Adam) and ends with the aftermath of the Babylonian exile (2 Chr 36), it forms a parallel story of Israel's past—albeit much shorter and later—to the story of Israel's past found in Genesis through Kings.

It is no accident that the Chronicler places David and Solomon's achievements at the center of Israelite history. The author thereby underscores the prominence of those Israelite institutions he believed developed, were consolidated, or were transformed during this period—the priesthood, descended from Aaron; the Levites in all their responsibilities as singers, teachers, administrators, and ancillaries to the priests; the Davidic dynasty; and, last but not least, the Temple itself. Having set the establishment of Israel's normative political and religious institutions in the time of David and Solomon, the Chronicler never reneges on their pertinence to the lives of all Israelites in later centuries.

Following the death of Solomon and the ascension of his son Rehoboam, the ten northern tribes secede from southern rule (2 Chr 11.1–17). Whereas the author of Kings follows the course of both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms, the Chronicler concentrates on the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, who make up the Southern Kingdom of Judah (2 Chr 11.5–6,12,13–17,23). In Chronicles the course of the Judahite monarchy is characterized by both defeats and successes. The Chronicler consistently documents the achievements of Judah's best kings—Abijah (2 Chr 13.2–21), Asa (2 Chr 14.1–6; 15.8–15), Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17.1–9; 19.4–11), Hezekiah (2 Chr 29–31), and Josiah (2 Chr 34.1–7)—to institute reforms, reunite the people, and recover lost territories. Major regressions occur in the reigns of Ahaz (2 Chr 28), Manasseh (2 Chr 33.1–11), and the final kings of Judah (2 Chr 36.1–13). In depicting their history, the Chronicler is largely dependent on Kings, but as the episode concerning Manasseh's repentance and restoration (2 Chr 33.12–19; cf. 2 Kings 21.1–16) demonstrates, he may revise these sources to fit his theology, making both major and minor changes, additions, and deletions.

Throughout the work, God sends prophets to warn monarchs, leaders, and people alike about the consequences of their actions, imploring them to repent. Whereas in Kings, prophets are most often a fixture of life in the Northern Kingdom (e.g., Elijah and Elisha) and are rare in the life of the Southern Kingdom (Isaiah being a notable exception), in Chronicles prophets and prophetic figures, such as Shemaiah (2 Chr 12.5–6), Azariah (2 Chr 15.1–7), Hanani (2 Chr 16.7–9), Jehu (2 Chr 19.2–3) and Zechariah (2 Chr 24.20), appear in the reign of virtually every significant southern king. In this way, the Chronicler stresses that Moses' promise that the Lord would create a prophetic succession, patterned after the prophetic ministry of Moses himself (Deut 18.15–22), was fulfilled in the history of Judah. In his commentary on the defeat and exile of the Southern Kingdom, the Chronicler adds that Judah was exiled only after the Lord sent a steady supply of prophets to stir the people and priestly leaders to reform, but their warnings went unheeded (2 Chr 36.14–16).

Both Kings and Chronicles end by describing the Babylonian invasion and exile in the sixth century BCE, but Chronicles also includes Cyrus's decree allowing the exiles to return to Judah (2 Chr 36.22–23), offering a clearer hope for the future than does the conclusion of Kings. In this way Chronicles contains and relativizes the tremendous tragedy of the Babylonian deportations soberly depicted in 2 Kings 24–25. Thus Chronicles, with its positive ending and emphasis on the power of repentance, may be seen as more optimistic than the history of Samuel-Kings, which it has rewritten. As the beginning of Chronicles introduces the people of Israel and charts their emergence in the land, the ending of the book anticipates their return.

GUIDE TO READING CHRONICLES

If one begins to read Chronicles as one would any other book from beginning to end, one encounters some formidable challenges. Because the first nine chapters comprise lists and genealogies, they make for difficult

reading. In order to keep the overall structure in mind, note how the work starts with a universal genealogy beginning with the first person (Adam) and ending with the ancestor of Israel (Jacob) and his twelve sons (1 Chr 1.1–2.1). The rest of the genealogies deal with the descendants of Jacob's sons, giving pride of place to Judah, Levi, and Benjamin, the three tribes that dominated life in postexilic Judah. The rest of the book contains mostly narratives about the history of the Davidic monarchy. Note also how much space the biblical author devotes to the united monarchy of David and Solomon (1 Chr 11.1–2 Chr 9.31), presenting this period as the apex of Israelite history. Because this material and that dealing with the history of the Judahite kingdom (2 Chr 10.1–36:23) both draw upon and differ from Samuel-Kings (with many deletions and additions), readers may find it helpful not only to read Chronicles on its own terms as a distinct literary work, but also to compare its presentation of the past with that found in the older writing of Samuel-Kings.

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1 Adam, Seth, Enosh; [2] Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared; [3] Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech; [4] Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

[5] The descendants of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. [6] The descendants of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Diphath,[a] and Togarmah. [7] The descendants of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim.[b]

[8] The descendants of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. [9] The descendants of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabta, Raama, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. [10] Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first to be a mighty one on the earth.

[11] Egypt became the father of Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, [12] Pathrusim, Casluhim, and Caphtorim, from whom the Philistines come.[c]

[13] Canaan became the father of Sidon his firstborn, and Heth, [14] and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, [15] the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, [16] the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites.

[17] The descendants of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, Aram, Uz, Hul, Gether, and Meshech.[d] [18] Arpachshad became the father

[a] Gen 10.3 *Ripath*; See Gk Vg
[b] Gen 10.4 *Dodanim*; See Syr Vg
[c] Heb *Casluhim, from which the Philistines come, Caphtorim*; See Am 9.7, Jer 47.4
[d] *Mash* in Gen 10.23

1.1–22: From the first person to Israel: a universal genealogy. Drawing upon numerous lineages in Genesis, the author traces the development of and interrelationships among a variety of nations, ending with Israel—the focal point of his interest. **1–4:** The ten names represent ten generations, beginning with Adam and ending with Noah. The Chronicler's tally is a marvel of condensation, having been culled from the much longer and more detailed narrative lineage of Adam in Gen 5.1–32. **4:** Each of Noah's three sons can be associated with a relatively large geographic area: Shem (peoples to the east of ancient Israel); Ham (peoples to the south and southwest); Japheth (peoples to the north and west). Although most modern scholars believe that Canaan was ethnically and linguistically Semitic, and thus should be descended from Shem, in the Bible Canaan is descended from Ham, perhaps because of Canaan's long political relationship to Egypt.

1.5–23: Descendants of Noah. These verses are largely drawn from Gen 10.1–29, the "Table of Nations," which enumerates some seventy descendants of Noah's sons, symbolizing seventy peoples of the world. This creates both a genealogical tree and map by which all the world's nations are related to each other through a common ancestor, Noah. See map on p. 23. **5–7:** The sons of Japheth represent Anatolia (e.g., Togarmah, Tubal, Meshech), including Greek settlements (Javan) and islands in the Mediterranean Sea, such as Elishah (Cyprus), Kittim (Caphtor and other isles), and Rodanim (Rhodes). **5:** Ham's children represent peoples and areas in the Egyptian political sphere: Cush to the south of Egypt (Sudan or Ethiopia), Egypt, Put to the west (Libya), and Canaan to the north. **11–16:** These lists of Egypt's and Canaan's descendants closely follow Gen 10.13–18. **11:** *Philistines,* see Jer 47.4; Am 9.7. **13–15:** The sons of Canaan inhabit Sidon (the Phoenician coast) and include the traditional inhabitants of the land of Canaan (*Heth* [the Hittites] and those in v. 14), and those of coastal (*Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites*) and inland (*Hamathites*) Syria. **17:** Located in Mesopotamia (*Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad*), Asia Minor (*Lud* and *Meshech*), Syria (*Aram*); others cannot be identified. **17–18:** Although in v. 8

of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. 19 To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg (for in his days the earth was divided), and the name of his brother Joktan. 20 Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, 21 Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 22 Ebal, Abimael, Sheba, 23 Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the descendants of Joktan.

24 Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah; 25 Eber, Peleg, Reu; 26 Serug, Nahor, Terah; 27 Abram, that is, Abraham.

28 The sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael. 29 These are their genealogies: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebaioth; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 30 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, 31 Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael. 32 The sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine: she bore Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. The sons of Jokshan: Sheba and Dedan. 33 The sons of Midian: Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the descendants of Keturah.

34 Abraham became the father of Isaac. The sons of Isaac: Esau and Israel. 35 The sons of Esau: Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. 36 The sons of Eliphaz: Teman, Omar, Zephi, Gatam, Kenaz, Timna, and Amalek. 37 The sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah.

38 The sons of Seir: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. 39 The sons of Lotan: Hori and Homam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. 40 The sons of Shobal: Alian, Manahath, Ebal, Shephi, and Onam. The sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah. 41 The sons of Anah: Dishon. The sons of Dishon: Hamran, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. 42 The sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Jaakan.[a] The sons of Dishan:[b] Uz and Aran.

43 These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites: Bela son of Beor, whose city was called Dinhabah. 44 When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah of Bozrah succeeded him. 45 When Jobab died, Husham of the land of the Temanites succeeded him. 46 When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab, succeeded him; and the name of his city was Avith. 47 When Hadad died, Samlah of Masrekah succeeded him. 48 When Samlah died, Shaul[c] of Rehoboth on the Euphrates succeeded him. 49 When Shaul[c] died, Baal-hanan son of Achbor succeeded him. 50 When Baal-hanan died, Hadad succeeded him; the name of his city was Pai, and his wife's name Mehetabel daughter of Matred, daughter of Me-zahab. 51 And Hadad died.

The clans[d] of Edom were: clans[d] Timna, Aliah,[e] Jetheth, 52 Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, 53 Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, 54 Magdiel, and Iram; these are the clans[d] of Edom.

[a] Or *and Akan*; See Gen 36.27
[b] See 1.38: Heb *Dishon*
[c] Or *Saul*
[d] Or *chiefs*
[e] Or *Alvah*; See Gen 36.40

Canaan is descended from Ham, Eber, after whom the Hebrews (gentilic "'ibri") are named, is a descendant of Shem, indicating Israelite feelings of kinship to the Semitic peoples of the east. **19:** *The earth was divided,* the Hebrew puns on Peleg's name, which is derived from a verb meaning "to divide, split." **20:** *Joktan*'s descendants inhabit the Arabian peninsula.

1.24–27: Shem's genealogy is extracted from Gen 11.10–26. **27:** *Abram,* this begins the second major unit in the Chronicler's universal genealogy; the first was dominated by the descendants of Noah (1 Chr 1.4b–23). **28:** For *Isaac and Ishmael,* the Chronicler fashions a very brief genealogy from narrative materials in Genesis (16.11; 17.18–19; 25.9); their mothers, Sarah and Hagar, are not mentioned. Ishmael is associated with the northern part of the Sinai peninsula and northwestern Arabia (Gen 16.10–12; 17.20; 21.13), as are the descendants of Keturah (vv. 32–33). **29–31:** Drawn from the Ishmaelite genealogy in Gen 25.12–18. **32–33:** In the source text (Gen 25.1–13), *Keturah* appears as Abraham's second wife, taken sometime after the death of Sarah (Gen 25.1–3). The Chronicler's reference to her as a concubine may be based on his reading of Gen 25.1–2 in light of Gen 25.5–6. **34–37:** The genealogy of Sarah and Abraham draws upon Gen 25.19–26 and Gen 36.2–14. The Chronicler always refers to Jacob as *Israel* (see Gen 32.22–32). **38–42:** *The sons of Seir,* abridged and adapted from Gen 36.20–28. **43–54:** The lists of Edomite monarchs (1.43–51a) and Edomite chieftains (1.51b–54) are adapted and slightly abridged

2 These are the sons of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, 2 Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. 3 The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, and Shelah; these three the Canaanite woman Bath-shua bore to him. Now Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death. 4 His daughter-in-law Tamar also bore him Perez and Zerah. Judah had five sons in all.

5 The sons of Perez: Hezron and Hamul. 6 The sons of Zerah: Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Dara,[a] five in all. 7 The sons of Carmi: Achar, the troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the matter of the devoted thing; 8 and Ethan's son was Azariah.

9 The sons of Hezron, who were born to him: Jerahmeel, Ram, and Chelubai. 10 Ram became the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, prince of the sons of Judah. 11 Nahshon became the father of Salma, Salma of Boaz, 12 Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse. 13 Jesse became the father of Eliab his firstborn, Abinadab the second, Shimea the third, 14 Nethanel the fourth, Raddai the fifth, 15 Ozem the sixth, David the seventh; 16 and their sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail. The sons of Zeruiah: Abishai, Joab, and Asahel, three. 17 Abigail bore Amasa, and the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmaelite.

18 Caleb son of Hezron had children by his wife Azubah, and by Jerioth; these were her sons: Jesher, Shobab, and Ardon. 19 When Azubah died, Caleb married Ephrath, who bore him Hur. 20 Hur became the father of Uri, and Uri became the father of Bezalel.

21 Afterward Hezron went in to the daughter of Machir father of Gilead, whom he married when he was sixty years old; and she bore him Segub; 22 and Segub became the father of Jair, who had twenty-three towns in the land of Gilead. 23 But Geshur and Aram took from them Havvoth-jair, Kenath and its villages, sixty towns. All these were descendants of Machir, father of Gilead. 24 After the death of Hezron, in Caleb-ephrathah, Abijah wife of Hezron bore him Ashhur, father of Tekoa.

25 The sons of Jerahmeel, the firstborn of Hezron: Ram his firstborn, Bunah, Oren, Ozem, and Ahijah. 26 Jerahmeel also had another wife, whose name was Atarah; she was the mother of Onam. 27 The sons of Ram, the firstborn of Jerahmeel: Maaz, Jamin, and Eker. 28 The sons of Onam: Shammai and Jada. The sons of Shammai: Nadab and Abishur. 29 The name of

[a] Or *Darda*; Compare Syr Tg some Gk Mss; See 1 Kings 4.31

from Gen 36.31–39 and Gen 36.40–43, respectively. The Chronicler presents the history of Edom, Israel's neighbor to the southeast, in capsule form up to the time of the inception of the Israelite monarchy, the beginning of his own narrative history (ch 10). **2.1–2:** This list of Israel's descendants is the natural continuation of the progeny of Abraham (1.28–33) and Isaac (1.34–37) and serves as the introduction to the lineages of Israel's many sons, which follows in 2.3–9.1. The order of the sons is largely arranged according to mother—Leah (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun); Rachel (Joseph, Benjamin); Bilhah (Dan, Naphtali); and Zilpah (Gad, Asher).

2.3–4.23: The descendants of Judah. The Chronicler first offers a long genealogy of Judah, demonstrating Judah's importance to the Chronicler's History. **2.4:** *Daughter-in-law,* an allusion to the sexual relationship between Judah and Tamar (Gen 38.12–26). Having earlier referred to the Canaanite status of Bath-shua (v. 3; cf. Gen 38.1–5), the Chronicler presents another unusual feature of Judah's lineage, which did not disqualify it from preeminence. **6–8:** Drawn from two sources: Josh 7.1 (2.6a,7) and 1 Kings 5.11 (2.6b). **7:** *Achar,* called Achan in Josh 7, but cf. Josh 7.24–25. **10:** *Amminadab,* as the father of Nahshon, see Num 2.3. **11:** Taken from Ruth 4.20–21. **13–17:** The lineages of Jesse's sons and daughters have been drawn, in part, from 1 Sam 16.1–23; 17.1–51; 2 Sam 2.18. **18–20:** The descendants of Caleb are a major interest of the Chronicler, taking up a sizable portion of Judah's lineages (2.18–20,42–50a,50b–55; 4.1–7). This may be because some earlier sources suggest that he was a Kenizzite (e.g., Num 32.12), and thus not part of Israel (the Chronicler is correcting this tradition). **21:** *Machir* is sometimes associated with Manasseh, most often as Manasseh's son (Gen 50.23; Num 32.39–40; Deut 3.14–15; cf. Judg 5.14). The connection with Manasseh is affirmed in 7.14–17. **22–23:** The subject shifts back to Hezron, last mentioned in v. 9. **22:** *Jair* is a son of Manasseh in Num 32.41 and Deut 3.14, but he appears here as the grandson of Hezron. **24:** *Father of Tekoa,* Tekoa in earlier books is the name of a Judean city, but in genealogies,

Abishur's wife was Abihail, and she bore him Ahban and Molid. 30 The sons of Nadab: Seled and Appaim; and Seled died childless. 31 The son[a] of Appaim: Ishi. The son[a] of Ishi: Sheshan. The son[a] of Sheshan: Ahlai. 32 The sons of Jada, Shammai's brother: Jether and Jonathan; and Jether died childless. 33 The sons of Jonathan: Peleth and Zaza. These were the descendants of Jerahmeel. 34 Now Sheshan had no sons, only daughters; but Sheshan had an Egyptian slave, whose name was Jarha. 35 So Sheshan gave his daughter in marriage to his slave Jarha; and she bore him Attai. 36 Attai became the father of Nathan, and Nathan of Zabad. 37 Zabad became the father of Ephlal, and Ephlal of Obed. 38 Obed became the father of Jehu, and Jehu of Azariah. 39 Azariah became the father of Helez, and Helez of Eleasah. 40 Eleasah became the father of Sismai, and Sismai of Shallum. 41 Shallum became the father of Jekamiah, and Jekamiah of Elishama.

42 The sons of Caleb brother of Jerahmeel: Mesha[b] his firstborn, who was father of Ziph. The sons of Mareshah father of Hebron. 43 The sons of Hebron: Korah, Tappuah, Rekem, and Shema. 44 Shema became father of Raham, father of Jorkeam; and Rekem became the father of Shammai. 45 The son of Shammai: Maon; and Maon was the father of Beth-zur. 46 Ephah also, Caleb's concubine, bore Haran, Moza, and Gazez; and Haran became the father of Gazez. 47 The sons of Jahdai: Regem, Jotham, Geshan, Pelet, Ephah, and Shaaph. 48 Maacah, Caleb's concubine, bore Sheber and Tirhanah. 49 She also bore Shaaph father of Madmannah, Sheva father of Machbenah and father of Gibea; and the daughter of Caleb was Achsah. 50 These were the descendants of Caleb.

The sons[c] of Hur the firstborn of Ephrathah: Shobal father of Kiriath-jearim, 51 Salma father of Bethlehem, and Hareph father of Beth-gader. 52 Shobal father of Kiriath-jearim had other sons: Haroeh, half of the Menuhoth. 53 And the families of Kiriath-jearim: the Ithrites, the Puthites, the Shumathites, and the Mishraites; from these came the Zorathites and the Eshtaolites. 54 The sons of Salma: Bethlehem, the Netophathites, Atroth-beth-joab, and half of the Manahathites, the Zorites. 55 The families also of the scribes that lived at Jabez: the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and the Sucathites. These are the Kenites who came from Hammath, father of the house of Rechab.

3 These are the sons of David who were born to him in Hebron: the firstborn Amnon, by Ahinoam the Jezreelite; the second Daniel, by Abigail the Carmelite; 2 the third Absalom, son of Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur; the fourth Adonijah, son of Haggith; 3 the fifth Shephatiah, by Abital; the sixth Ithream, by his wife Eglah; 4 six were born to him in Hebron, where he reigned for seven years and six months. And he reigned thirty-three years in Jerusalem. 5 These were born to him in Jerusalem: Shimea, Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon, four by Bath-shua, daughter of Ammiel; 6 then Ibhar, Elishama, Eliphelet, 7 Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, 8 Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet, nine. 9 All these were David's sons, besides the sons of the concubines; and Tamar was their sister.

[a] Heb *sons*
[b] Gk reads *Mareshah*
[c] Gk Vg: Heb *son*

ethnic and geographic dimensions of names can overlap. **25–41:** Both the genealogy of Jerahmeel (vv. 25–33), the first-born of Hezron (vv. 9,25) and the genealogy of Sheshan (vv. 34–41) are unique to Chronicles. **42–50:** The second of the genealogies for Caleb's descendants (see vv. 18–20n.). Many of the names listed also occur in the Judahite town list of Josh 15. **50b–55:** Largely without parallel, this genealogy reverts to the line of Hur (v. 19). Each of Hur's three sons is depicted as a founder (lit. "father") of a town. The *Kenites* (Num 24.20–22; Judg 4.11,17–21; 5.24–27; 1 Sam 15.6; 30.29) ultimately descend from their eponymous ancestor, Cain (Gen 4.1–25).

3.1–24: The descendants of David. 1–9: Some names of David's sons, and their order, are different in the present text of 2 Samuel. **1–3:** These verses are based on 2 Sam 3.2–4. David's lineage follows naturally 2.9–17, which enumerates the descendants of Ram, including David and the children of David's two sisters Zeruiah and Abigail. **4:** This verse draws upon and reworks 2 Sam 5.5. Consistent with David's rule over all Israel in chs 11–29, the writer avoids the distinction between Israel and Judah found in his source. **5–9:** These verses are

10 The descendants of Solomon: Rehoboam, Abijah his son, Asa his son, Jehoshaphat
his son, 11 Joram his son, Ahaziah his son,
Joash his son, 12 Amaziah his son, Azariah
his son, Jotham his son, 13 Ahaz his son,
Hezekiah his son, Manasseh his son, 14 Amon
his son, Josiah his son. 15 The sons of Josiah:
Johanan the firstborn, the second Jehoiakim,
the third Zedekiah, the fourth Shallum. 16 The
descendants of Jehoiakim: Jeconiah his son,
Zedekiah his son; 17 and the sons of Jeconiah,
the captive: Shealtiel his son, 18 Malchiram,
Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama, and
Nedabiah; 19 The sons of Pedaiah: Zerubbabel and Shimei; and the sons of Zerubbabel:
Meshullam and Hananiah, and Shelomith
was their sister; 20 and Hashubah, Ohel,
Berechiah, Hasadiah, and Jushab-hesed, five.
21 The sons of Hananiah: Pelatiah and Jeshaiah, his son[a] Rephaiah, his son[a] Arnan, his
son[a] Obadiah, his son[a] Shecaniah. 22 The son[b]
of Shecaniah: Shemaiah. And the sons of
Shemaiah: Hattush, Igal, Bariah, Neariah, and
Shaphat, six. 23 The sons of Neariah: Elioenai,
Hizkiah, and Azrikam, three. 24 The sons of
Elioenai: Hodaviah, Eliashib, Pelaiah, Akkub,
Johanan, Delaiah, and Anani, seven.

4 The sons of Judah: Perez, Hezron,
Carmi, Hur, and Shobal. 2 Reaiah son
of Shobal became the father of Jahath,
and Jahath became the father of Ahumai
and Lahad. These were the families of the
Zorathites. 3 These were the sons[c] of Etam:
Jezreel, Ishma, and Idbash; and the name of
their sister was Hazzelelponi, 4 and Penuel
was the father of Gedor, and Ezer the father
of Hushah. These were the sons of Hur,
the firstborn of Ephrathah, the father of
Bethlehem. 5 Ashhur father of Tekoa had
two wives, Helah and Naarah; 6 Naarah
bore him Ahuzzam, Hepher, Temeni, and
Haahashtari.[d] These were the sons of Naarah. 7 The sons of Helah: Zereth, Izhar,[e] and
Ethnan. 8 Koz became the father of Anub,
Zobebah, and the families of Aharhel son
of Harum. 9 Jabez was honored more than
his brothers; and his mother named him
Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain."
10 Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying,
"Oh that you would bless me and enlarge
my border, and that your hand might be
with me, and that you would keep me from
hurt and harm!" And God granted what
he asked. 11 Chelub the brother of Shuhah
became the father of Mehir, who was the
father of Eshton. 12 Eshton became the
father of Beth-rapha, Paseah, and Tehinnah
the father of Ir-nahash. These are the men
of Recah. 13 The sons of Kenaz: Othniel and
Seraiah; and the sons of Othniel: Hathath
and Meonothai.[f] 14 Meonothai became the
father of Ophrah; and Seraiah became the
father of Joab father of Ge-harashim,[g] so-
called because they were artisans. 15 The
sons of Caleb son of Jephunneh: Iru, Elah,
and Naam; and the son[b] of Elah: Kenaz.
16 The sons of Jehallelel: Ziph, Ziphah, Tiria,
and Asarel. 17 The sons of Ezrah: Jether,
Mered, Epher, and Jalon. These are the sons
of Bithiah, daughter of Pharaoh, whom

[a] Gk Compare Syr Vg: Heb *sons of*
[b] Heb *sons*
[c] Gk Compare Vg: Heb *the father*
[d] Or *Ahashtari*
[e] Another reading is *Zohar*
[f] Gk Vg: Heb lacks *and Meonothai*
[g] That is *Valley of artisans*

largely dependent upon 2 Sam 5.13–16. **10–14:** A fifteen-generation genealogy from Solomon to Josiah, noting only the Davidic king in each generation. **15–18:** A largely unparalleled genealogy from Josiah to Pedaiah. The second half of ch 3 gives special attention to Josiah and his various offspring. **18:** *Shenazzar,* some identify him with Sheshbazzar of Ezra 1.8, who led a group of early returnees from exile. **19–24:** The list of Davidic descendants from *Pedaiah* to *the sons of Elioenai* is unique to the Chronicler and likely reflects aspirations for a renewed Davidic monarchy in the postexilic period. **19:** *Zerubbabel* was a leader of the postexilic Judean community in the late sixth century BCE; see Ezra 3.2; Hag 1.1. **22:** *Hattush* returned from exile in Babylon (Ezra 8.2).

4.1–23: Descendants of Judah. *The sons of Judah,* in contrast to the largely linear genealogy of David (ch 3), this chapter describes several unconnected branches of Judeans. It also narrates several short anecdotes about individual Judeans (e.g., vv. 9–10,23). As in other genealogies, names of individuals here occur as place names elsewhere. **1:** The sequence *Perez . . . Shobal* signifies a line of descent; these persons are not brothers. **4b–7:** Return to the genealogy of Caleb; see 2.18–20n. **9–10:** There is a wordplay in Hebrew: "ya'bets" (Jabez), "'otseb"

Mered married;[a] and she conceived and bore[b] Miriam, Shammai, and Ishbah father of Eshtemoa. 18 And his Judean wife bore Jered father of Gedor, Heber father of Soco, and Jekuthiel father of Zanoah. 19 The sons of the wife of Hodiah, the sister of Naham, were the fathers of Keilah the Garmite and Eshtemoa the Maacathite. 20 The sons of Shimon: Amnon, Rinnah, Ben-hanan, and Tilon. The sons of Ishi: Zoheth and Ben-zoheth. 21 The sons of Shelah son of Judah: Er father of Lecah, Laadah father of Mareshah, and the families of the guild of linen workers at Beth-ashbea; 22 and Jokim, and the men of Cozeba, and Joash, and Saraph, who married into Moab but returned to Lehem[c] (now the records[d] are ancient). 23 These were the potters and inhabitants of Netaim and Gederah; they lived there with the king in his service.

24 The sons of Simeon: Nemuel, Jamin, Jarib, Zerah, Shaul;[e] 25 Shallum was his son, Mibsam his son, Mishma his son. 26 The sons of Mishma: Hammuel his son, Zaccur his son, Shimei his son. 27 Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters; but his brothers did not have many children, nor did all their family multiply like the Judeans. 28 They lived in Beer-sheba, Moladah, Hazar-shual, 29 Bilhah, Ezem, Tolad, 30 Bethuel, Hormah, Ziklag, 31 Beth-marcaboth, Hazar-susim, Beth-biri, and Shaaraim. These were their towns until David became king. 32 And their villages were Etam, Ain, Rimmon, Tochen, and Ashan, five towns, 33 along with all their villages that were around these towns as far as Baal. These were their settlements. And they kept a genealogical record.

34 Meshobab, Jamlech, Joshah son of Amaziah, 35 Joel, Jehu son of Joshibiah son of Seraiah son of Asiel, 36 Elioenai, Jaakobah, Jeshohaiah, Asaiah, Adiel, Jesimiel, Benaiah, 37 Ziza son of Shiphi son of Allon son of Jedaiah son of Shimri son of Shemaiah— 38 these mentioned by name were leaders in their families, and their clans increased greatly. 39 They journeyed to the entrance of Gedor, to the east side of the valley, to seek pasture for their flocks, 40 where they found rich, good pasture, and the land was very broad, quiet, and peaceful; for the former inhabitants there belonged to Ham. 41 These, registered by name, came in the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, and attacked their tents and the Meunim who were found there, and exterminated them to this day, and settled in their place, because there was pasture there for their flocks. 42 And some of them, five hundred men of the Simeonites, went to Mount Seir, having as their leaders Pelatiah, Neariah, Rephaiah, and Uzziel, sons of Ishi; 43 they destroyed the remnant of the Amalekites that had escaped, and they have lived there to this day.

5 The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel. (He was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed his birthright was

[a] The clause: *These are . . . married* is transposed from verse 18
[b] Heb lacks *and bore*
[c] Vg Compare Gk: Heb *and Jashubi-lahem*
[d] Or *matters*
[e] Or *Saul*

(pain), and "'otsbi" (harm). **21:** In referring to Shelah, the text returns to the original sons of Judah (2.3–4). **22:** *Married into Moab,* the Chronicler again posits some close links between Judah and its neighbors. Possible links may be hinted at in Ezra 2.6; 8.4; 10.30. Intermarriage with Moabites in the postexilic period is also attested (Ezra 9.1; Neh 13.23; Ruth), but in contrast to Chronicles, in Ezra and Nehemiah such marriages are banned.

4.24–43: The descendants of Simeon. Here too, the Chronicler punctuates his genealogical prologue with anecdotes about geography, migrations, and wars (vv. 27–33,38–43). The genealogy of Simeon immediately follows that of its neighbor, Judah. **24–27:** The lineage of Simeon is traced through his son Shaul. The names listed in v. 24 (Nemuel, Jamin, Jarib, Zerah, and Shaul) are derived from Gen 46.10; Ex 6.15; and esp. Num 26.12–14. The rest of the genealogy (vv. 26–27) is unique to the Chronicler. **28–33:** Taken, with some changes, from Josh 19.2–8. **33–43:** A list of Simeonite leaders (v. 38) is followed by a description of the expansion of the tribe demographically and geographically. The ruthlessness displayed by the Simeonites recalls the intemperate behavior of their eponymous ancestor (Gen 34.25–29; 49.5–7). **41:** *Hezekiah,* see 2 Chr 29–32.

5.1–10: The descendants of Reuben. Reuben was firstborn (Gen 29.31–30.21; 35.23–26; 46.8–9; Ex 1.2; 6.14; Num 26.5; Ezek 48.31–35), but he does not appear first in the Chronicler's genealogies. **1:** Joseph, firstborn of Rachel, rather than Reuben, firstborn of Leah, attained to the birthright because Reuben had sexual relations

given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel,
so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy
according to the birthright; [2] though Judah
became prominent among his brothers and
a ruler came from him, yet the birthright be-
longed to Joseph.) [3] The sons of Reuben, the
firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron,
and Carmi. [4] The sons of Joel: Shemaiah his
son, Gog his son, Shimei his son, [5] Micah his
son, Reaiah his son, Baal his son, [6] Beerah
his son, whom King Tilgath-pilneser of As-
syria carried away into exile; he was a chief-
tain of the Reubenites. [7] And his kindred by
their families, when the genealogy of their
generations was reckoned: the chief, Jeiel,
and Zechariah, [8] and Bela son of Azaz, son
of Shema, son of Joel, who lived in Aroer, as
far as Nebo and Baal-meon. [9] He also lived to
the east as far as the beginning of the desert
this side of the Euphrates, because their
cattle had multiplied in the land of Gilead.
[10] And in the days of Saul they made war on
the Hagrites, who fell by their hand; and
they lived in their tents throughout all the
region east of Gilead.

[11] The sons of Gad lived beside them in
the land of Bashan as far as Salecah: [12] Joel
the chief, Shapham the second, Janai, and
Shaphat in Bashan. [13] And their kindred
according to their clans: Michael, Meshul-
lam, Sheba, Jorai, Jacan, Zia, and Eber, seven.
[14] These were the sons of Abihail son of Huri,
son of Jaroah, son of Gilead, son of Michael,
son of Jeshishai, son of Jahdo, son of Buz;
[15] Ahi son of Abdiel, son of Guni, was chief
in their clan; [16] and they lived in Gilead,
in Bashan and in its towns, and in all the
pasture lands of Sharon to their limits. [17] All
of these were enrolled by genealogies in the
days of King Jotham of Judah, and in the days
of King Jeroboam of Israel.

[18] The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the
half-tribe of Manasseh had valiant warriors,
who carried shield and sword, and drew
the bow, expert in war, forty-four thousand
seven hundred sixty, ready for service. [19] They
made war on the Hagrites, Jetur, Naphish,
and Nodab; [20] and when they received help
against them, the Hagrites and all who were
with them were given into their hands,
for they cried to God in the battle, and he
granted their entreaty because they trusted
in him. [21] They captured their livestock: fifty
thousand of their camels, two hundred fifty
thousand sheep, two thousand donkeys, and
one hundred thousand captives. [22] Many fell
slain, because the war was of God. And they
lived in their territory until the exile.

[23] The members of the half-tribe of
Manasseh lived in the land; they were very

with Jacob's concubine Bilhah (Gen 35.22; 49.4). **2:** *A ruler came from him,* the writer alludes to David's kingship, which eventually encompassed all twelve tribes (28.4; 1 Sam 13.14; 25.30; Mic 5.2). **3:** The Chronicler derives this list from Num 26.5–6. *Carmi* is one of the Reubenite clans with possible ties to Judah (Gen 46.9; Ex 6.14; Num 26.6; Josh 7.1,18,24,26; 1 Chr 2.7; 4.1). **6:** In contrast to Kings, which largely loses its concentration upon individual tribes in its coverage of the dual monarchies, the Chronicler's history maintains a continuous interest in the fate of individual tribes. *Tilgath-pilneser,* the Chronicler's spelling (5.26; 2 Chr 28.20) of Tiglath-pileser (III), King of Assyria (745–727 BCE); cf. 2 Kings 15.29. **9:** In this case, *Gilead* refers to the territory east of the Jordan, which is south of the Jabbok and north of the Arnon. There is some overlap with Gad's territorial holdings in Josh 13. **10:** *The days of Saul,* who was the first king of Israel, in the late eleventh century BCE.

5.11–17: The descendants of Gad. Like the Reubenites, the Gadites were located east of the Jordan River. **16:** Rather than signifying a *pasture land,* Heb "migrash" means the belt of land or open space outside a town or a sanctuary. *Sharon* refers here not to the (coastal) Sharon plain, the common designation of Sharon in the Bible, but to the town of Sharon in Transjordan, a place also mentioned in the Moabite Mesha inscription (line 13). **17:** *King Jotham of Judah* (759–743 BCE) and *King Jeroboam* (II) *of Israel* (788–747 BCE).

5.18–22: The wars of the Transjordan tribes. In some traditions (Num 32.1–42; Deut 3.12–16; 29.6–7; Josh 13.8–31) and once elsewhere in Chronicles (1 Chr 12.38), Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh are treated as a larger entity. These two and a half tribes join forces, share a common muster, partake in the spoils gained by fighting a collective enemy, and experience a common fate (vv. 22,25–26). The number *forty-four thousand seven hundred sixty* (v. 18) is notable for its specificity, not for its magnitude.

5.23–24: The descendants of Half-Manasseh. This part of the tribe of Manasseh was located east of the Jordan River, to the north of Gad.

numerous from Bashan to Baal-hermon, Senir, and Mount Hermon. 24 These were the heads of their clans: Epher,[a] Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah, and Jahdiel, mighty warriors, famous men, heads of their clans. 25 But they transgressed against the God of their ancestors, and prostituted themselves to the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God had destroyed before them. 26 So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of King Pul of Assyria, the spirit of King Tilgath-pilneser of Assyria, and he carried them away, namely, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river Gozan, to this day.

6 [b] The sons of Levi: Gershom,[c] Kohath, and Merari. 2 The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. 3 The children of Amram: Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. The sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 4 Eleazar became the father of Phinehas, Phinehas of Abishua, 5 Abishua of Bukki, Bukki of Uzzi, 6 Uzzi of Zerahiah, Zerahiah of Meraioth, 7 Meraioth of Amariah, Amariah of Ahitub, 8 Ahitub of Zadok, Zadok of Ahimaaz, 9 Ahimaaz of Azariah, Azariah of Johanan, 10 and Johanan of Azariah (it was he who served as priest in the house that Solomon built in Jerusalem). 11 Azariah became the father of Amariah, Amariah of Ahitub, 12 Ahitub of Zadok, Zadok of Shallum, 13 Shallum of Hilkiah, Hilkiah of Azariah, 14 Azariah of Seraiah, Seraiah of Jehozadak; 15 and Jehozadak went into exile when the LORD sent Judah and Jerusalem into exile by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

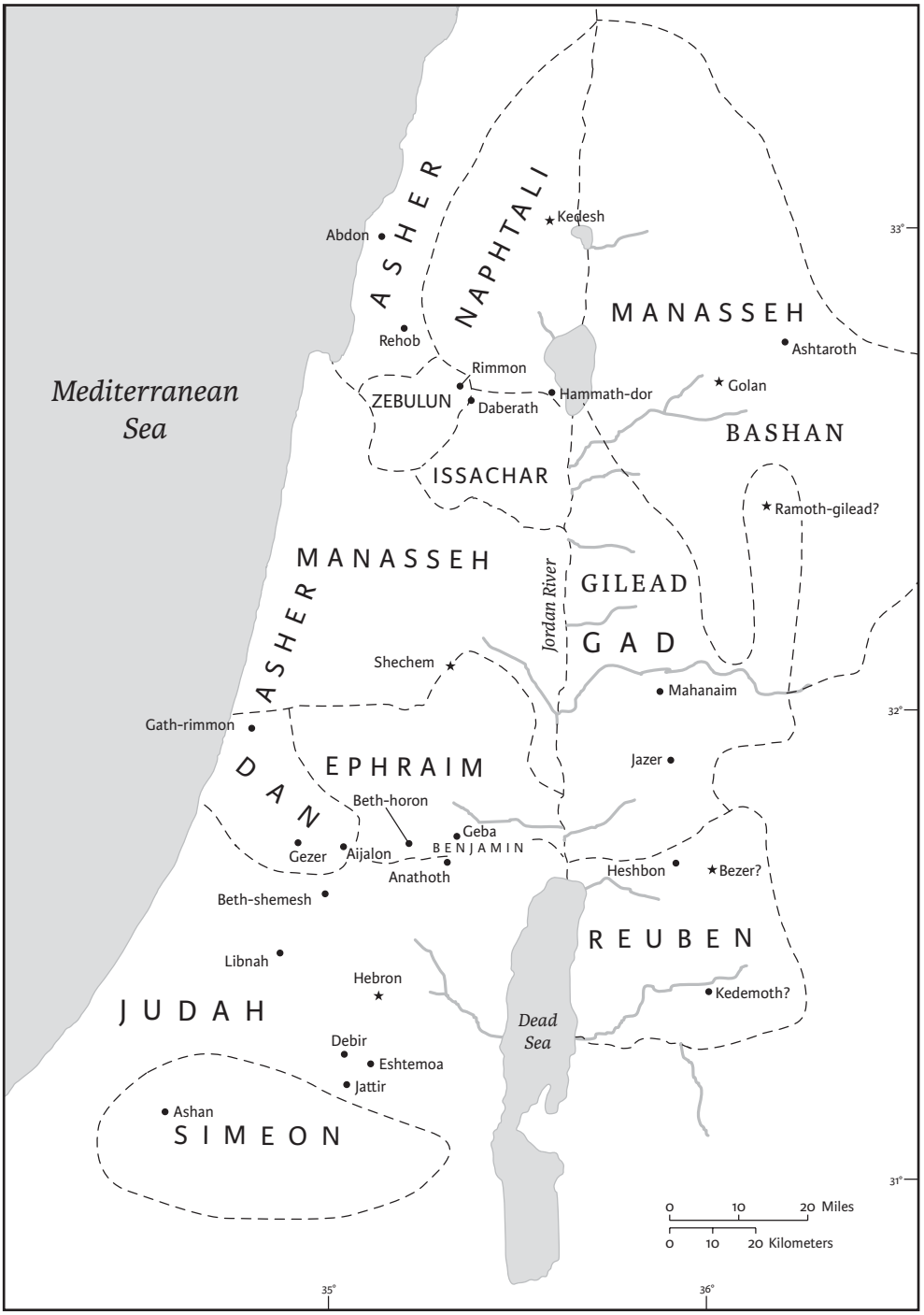
16 [d] The sons of Levi: Gershom, Kohath, and Merari. 17 These are the names of the sons of Gershom: Libni and Shimei. 18 The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. 19 The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites according to their ancestry. 20 Of Gershom: Libni his son, Jahath his son, Zimmah his son, 21 Joah his son, Iddo his son, Zerah his son, Jeatherai his son. 22 The sons of Kohath: Amminadab his son, Korah his son, Assir his son, 23 Elkanah his son, Ebiasaph his son, Assir his son, 24 Tahath his son, Uriel his son, Uzziah his son, and Shaul his son. 25 The sons of Elkanah: Amasai and Ahimoth, 26 Elkanah his son, Zophai his son, Nahath his son, 27 Eliab his son, Jeroham his son, Elkanah his son. 28 The sons of Samuel: Joel[e] his firstborn, the second Abijah.[f] 29 The sons of Merari: Mahli, Libni his son, Shimei his son, Uzzah his son, 30 Shimea his son, Haggiah his son, and Asaiah his son.

31 These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house

[a] Gk Vg: Heb *and Epher*
[b] Ch 5.27 in Heb
[c] Heb *Gershon*, variant of *Gershom*; See 6.16
[d] Ch 6.1 in Heb
[e] Gk Syr Compare verse 33 and 1 Sam 8.2: Heb lacks *Joel*
[f] Heb reads *Vashni, and Abijah* for *the second Abijah*, taking *the second* as a proper name

5.25–26: The exile of the Transjordanian tribes. The campaigns of 733–732 BCE by *Tilgath-pilneser* III (also known as *Pul*), were primarily directed against King Rezin of Damascus, but also resulted in the capture of Gilead and Galilee (2 Kings 15.29). The list of sites in v. 26 is borrowed, however, from 2 Kings 17.6 (parallel 2 Kings 18.11), which details the destinations of the later Samarian deportees in the Assyrian exile of 722 BCE.

6.1–81: The descendants of Levi take center stage in the genealogies of Chronicles. For the Chronicler, the Levites are second in importance only to the Judeans, so their genealogy is especially long and detailed. As with other tribes, attention is paid to issues of identity and location: who the Levites are (vv. 1–53) and where they live (vv. 54–81). **1–15:** A priestly line is traced from Levi in the ancestral period (cf. Gen 46.11; Ex 6.16–25; Num 3.17–20) all the way to Jehozadak (v. 15), who was taken to Babylon in the exile of 586 BCE. **8:** Scholars debate the origin of David's main priest Zadok with some suggesting that he was originally Canaanite; this genealogy in Chronicles is the first source to explicitly connect him to the line of Aaron and Levi. Twelve generations of priests precede Zadok and twelve generations of priests succeed him, hence the era of Zadok, which coincides with the construction of the Temple, marks the halfway point between the ancestral era and the exile. **10:** *Azariah,* cf. 1 Kings 4.2. **14:** *Seraiah,* see 2 Kings 25.18. **16–48:** Lineages for three major groups within the Levites—the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the Merarites (vv. 16–30)—preface lineages of levitical singers from the same three groups (vv. 31–48). Levitical choirs are an intrinsic component of the Chronicler's system of worship, appearing some thirty times in his history. The genealogies thus are not purely antiquarian, but in places justify the institutions of postexilic Judah. **28:** *Samuel,* cf. 1 Sam 1.1; 8.2. **31–32:** Referring back to the three levitical clans, the writer



The Levitical towns. Cities of refuge are highlighted with a star. The tribal boundaries are shown by a dashed line.

of the LORD, after the ark came to rest there. 32 They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, until Solomon had built the house of the LORD in Jerusalem; and they performed their service in due order. 33 These are the men who served; and their sons were: Of the Kohathites: Heman, the singer, son of Joel, son of Samuel, 34 son of Elkanah, son of Jeroham, son of Eliel, son of Toah, 35 son of Zuph, son of Elkanah, son of Mahath, son of Amasai, 36 son of Elkanah, son of Joel, son of Azariah, son of Zephaniah, 37 son of Tahath, son of Assir, son of Ebiasaph, son of Korah, 38 son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, son of Israel; 39 and his brother Asaph, who stood on his right, namely, Asaph son of Berechiah, son of Shimea, 40 son of Michael, son of Baaseiah, son of Malchijah, 41 son of Ethni, son of Zerah, son of Adaiah, 42 son of Ethan, son of Zimmah, son of Shimei, 43 son of Jahath, son of Gershom, son of Levi. 44 On the left were their kindred the sons of Merari: Ethan son of Kishi, son of Abdi, son of Malluch, 45 son of Hashabiah, son of Amaziah, son of Hilkiah, 46 son of Amzi, son of Bani, son of Shemer, 47 son of Mahli, son of Mushi, son of Merari, son of Levi; 48 and their kindred the Levites were appointed for all the service of the tabernacle of the house of God.

49 But Aaron and his sons made offerings on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense, doing all the work of the most holy place, to make atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded. 50 These are the sons of Aaron: Eleazar his son, Phinehas his son, Abishua his son, 51 Bukki his son, Uzzi his son, Zerahiah his son, 52 Meraioth his son, Amariah his son, Ahitub his son, 53 Zadok his son, Ahimaaz his son.

54 These are their dwelling places according to their settlements within their borders: to the sons of Aaron of the families of Kohathites—for the lot fell to them first— 55 to them they gave Hebron in the land of Judah and its surrounding pasture lands, 56 but the fields of the city and its villages they gave to Caleb son of Jephunneh. 57 To the sons of Aaron they gave the cities of refuge: Hebron, Libnah with its pasture lands, Jattir, Eshtemoa with its pasture lands, 58 Hilen[a] with its pasture lands, Debir with its pasture lands, 59 Ashan with its pasture lands, and Beth-shemesh with its pasture lands. 60 From the tribe of Benjamin, Geba with its pasture lands, Alemeth with its pasture lands, and Anathoth with its pasture lands. All their towns throughout their families were thirteen.

61 To the rest of the Kohathites were given by lot out of the family of the tribe, out of the half-tribe, the half of Manasseh, ten towns. 62 To the Gershomites according to their families were allotted thirteen towns out of the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and

[a] Other readings *Hilez*, *Holon*; See Josh 21.15

summarizes the duties of the Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites adopted during the United Monarchy of David and Solomon, the time in which the Temple was built. Three specific descendants—Asaph from Gershon (vv. 39–43), Heman from Kohath (vv. 33–38), and Ethan from Merari (vv. 44–47)—took on official roles in the state religion. **33:** *Heman,* "Asaph" (v. 39), and "Ethan" (v. 42) represent three classes or guilds of singers. Because David's reign is definitive for the levitical singers, the patronyms Asaph, Heman, and Ethan serve as organizing principles for them (2 Chr 5.12; 29.14; 35.15). **44:** *Ethan* represents the Merarites (6.18,29; 15.17), but in many other instances Jeduthun serves this role (16.41; 25.1,3,6; 2 Chr 5.12; 29.14; 35.15). **49–53:** The Aaronic priests officiate within the sanctuary and make offerings (23.30–32; Ex 38–42; 30.1–10; Lev 8.1–9.24; 18.8–20; Ezek 44.13). **49:** *The most holy place* (lit. "holy of holies") is the exclusive domain of the priests (Ex 26.33–34; Num 18.1–5; Ezek 44.15–16; 2 Chr 5.11; 29.7). Other members of the tribe of Levi may serve as Temple staff, but the priests alone officiate at the inner sanctuary. *To make atonement for Israel* refers to the Day of Atonement ritual of Lev 16. This festival, mentioned only in Priestly sources in the Torah, probably became especially significant during the time of the Chronicler. **54–81:** The list of levitical towns is drawn from an earlier version of Josh 21.3–42. **55–60:** The location of Aaronide settlements is limited to the traditional domains of three tribes: Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. On *pasture lands,* see 5.16n. **57:** The creation of *cities of refuge* or asylum was demanded in Deuteronomic (Deut 4.41–43; 19.1–13) and Priestly law (Num 35.6–15,25–28,32). Most, if not all, of the towns designated for asylum (Josh 20.7–8) doubled as levitical settlements.

Manasseh in Bashan. 63 To the Merarites according to their families were allotted twelve towns out of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. 64 So the people of Israel gave the Levites the towns with their pasture lands. 65 They also gave them by lot out of the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin these towns that are mentioned by name.

66 And some of the families of the sons of Kohath had towns of their territory out of the tribe of Ephraim. 67 They were given the cities of refuge: Shechem with its pasture lands in the hill country of Ephraim, Gezer with its pasture lands, 68 Jokmeam with its pasture lands, Beth-horon with its pasture lands, 69 Aijalon with its pasture lands, Gath-rimmon with its pasture lands; 70 and out of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Aner with its pasture lands, and Bileam with its pasture lands, for the rest of the families of the Kohathites.

71 To the Gershomites: out of the half-tribe of Manasseh: Golan in Bashan with its pasture lands and Ashtaroth with its pasture lands; 72 and out of the tribe of Issachar: Kedesh with its pasture lands, Daberath[a] with its pasture lands, 73 Ramoth with its pasture lands, and Anem with its pasture lands; 74 out of the tribe of Asher: Mashal with its pasture lands, Abdon with its pasture lands, 75 Hukok with its pasture lands, and Rehob with its pasture lands; 76 and out of the tribe of Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee with its pasture lands, Hammon with its pasture lands, and Kiriathaim with its pasture lands. 77 To the rest of the Merarites out of the tribe of Zebulun: Rimmono with its pasture lands, Tabor with its pasture lands, 78 and across the Jordan from Jericho, on the east side of the Jordan, out of the tribe of Reuben: Bezer in the steppe with its pasture lands, Jahzah with its pasture lands, 79 Kedemoth with its pasture lands, and Mephaath with its pasture lands; 80 and out of the tribe of Gad: Ramoth in Gilead with its pasture lands, Mahanaim with its pasture lands, 81 Heshbon with its pasture lands, and Jazer with its pasture lands.

7 The sons[b] of Issachar: Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron, four. 2 The sons of Tola: Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jahmai, Ibsam, and Shemuel, heads of their ancestral houses, namely of Tola, mighty warriors of their generations, their number in the days of David being twenty-two thousand six hundred. 3 The son[c] of Uzzi: Izrahiah. And the sons of Izrahiah: Michael, Obadiah, Joel, and Isshiah, five, all of them chiefs; 4 and along with them, by their generations, according to their ancestral houses, were units of the fighting force, thirty-six thousand, for they had many wives and sons. 5 Their kindred belonging to all the families of Issachar were in all eighty-seven thousand mighty warriors, enrolled by genealogy.

6 The sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, and Jediael, three. 7 The sons of Bela: Ezbon, Uzzi, Uzziel, Jerimoth, and Iri, five, heads of ancestral houses, mighty warriors; and their enrollment by genealogies was twenty-two thousand thirty-four. 8 The sons of Becher: Zemirah, Joash, Eliezer, Elioenai, Omri, Jeremoth, Abijah, Anathoth, and Alemeth. All these were the sons of Becher; 9 and their enrollment by genealogies, according to their generations, as heads of their ancestral houses, mighty warriors, was twenty thousand two hundred. 10 The sons of Jediael: Bilhan. And the sons of Bilhan: Jeush, Benjamin, Ehud, Chenaanah, Zethan, Tarshish, and Ahishahar. 11 All these were the sons of Jediael according to the heads of their ancestral houses, mighty warriors, seventeen thousand two hundred, ready for service in war. 12 And Shuppim and Hup-

[a] Or *Dobrath*
[b] Syr Compare Vg: Heb *And to the sons*
[c] Heb *sons*

7.1–5: The descendants of Issachar. Issachar's progeny are traced through his eldest son Tola (Gen 46.13; Num 26.23–25; Judg 5.15). As in some other genealogies (4.42–43; 5.7–10,18–22; 7.9–12,40), large numbers, growth, and military prowess are stressed.

7.6–12: The descendants of Benjamin. A genealogy of Zebulun may be missing here (Gen 46.17–27; Num 26.23–50), as another genealogy of Benjamin is found in 8.1–40. **12:** Some commentators emend *sons of Ir* to "sons of Dan" on the supposition that this verse contains a fragment of the apparently missing genealogy of Dan (Gen 46.13; Num 26.42; Judg 5.17).

pim were the sons of Ir, Hushim the son[a] of Aher.

13 The descendants of Naphtali: Jahziel, Guni, Jezer, and Shallum, the descendants of Bilhah.

14 The sons of Manasseh: Asriel, whom his Aramean concubine bore; she bore Machir the father of Gilead. 15 And Machir took a wife for Huppim and for Shuppim. The name of his sister was Maacah. And the name of the second was Zelophehad; and Zelophehad had daughters. 16 Maacah the wife of Machir bore a son, and she named him Peresh; the name of his brother was Sheresh; and his sons were Ulam and Rekem. 17 The son[a] of Ulam: Bedan. These were the sons of Gilead son of Machir, son of Manasseh. 18 And his sister Hammolecheth bore Ishhod, Abiezer, and Mahlah. 19 The sons of Shemida were Ahian, Shechem, Likhi, and Aniam.

20 The sons of Ephraim: Shuthelah, and Bered his son, Tahath his son, Eleadah his son, Tahath his son, 21 Zabad his son, Shuthelah his son, and Ezer and Elead. Now the people of Gath, who were born in the land, killed them, because they came down to raid their cattle. 22 And their father Ephraim mourned many days, and his brothers came to comfort him. 23 Ephraim[b] went in to his wife, and she conceived and bore a son; and he named him Beriah, because disaster[c] had befallen his house. 24 His daughter was Sheerah, who built both Lower and Upper Beth-horon, and Uzzen-sheerah. 25 Rephah was his son, Resheph his son, Telah his son, Tahan his son, 26 Ladan his son, Ammihud his son, Elishama his son, 27 Nun[d] his son, Joshua his son. 28 Their possessions and settlements were Bethel and its towns, and eastward Naaran, and westward Gezer and its towns, Shechem and its towns, as far as Ayyah and its towns; 29 also along the borders of the Manassites, Beth-shean and its towns, Taanach and its towns, Megiddo and its towns, Dor and its towns. In these lived the sons of Joseph son of Israel.

30 The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah. 31 The sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel, who was the father of Birzaith. 32 Heber became the father of Japhlet, Shomer, Hotham, and their sister Shua. 33 The sons of Japhlet: Pasach, Bimhal, and Ashvath. These are the sons of Japhlet. 34 The sons of Shemer: Ahi, Rohgah, Hubbah, and Aram. 35 The sons of Helem[e] his brother: Zophah, Imna, Shelesh, and Amal. 36 The sons of Zophah: Suah, Harnepher, Shual, Beri, Imrah, 37 Bezer, Hod, Shamma, Shilshah, Ithran, and Beera. 38 The sons of Jether: Jephunneh, Pispa, and Ara. 39 The sons of Ulla: Arah, Hanniel, and Rizia. 40 All of these were men of Asher, heads of ancestral houses, select mighty warriors, chief of the princes. Their number enrolled by genealogies, for service in war, was twenty-six thousand men.

8 Benjamin became the father of Bela his firstborn, Ashbel the second, Aharah the third, 2 Nohah the fourth, and Rapha the fifth.

[a] Heb *sons*
[b] Heb *He*
[c] Heb *beraah*
[d] Here spelled *Non*; see Ex 33.11
[e] Or *Hotham*; see 7.32

7.13: The descendants of Naphtali. As in Gen 46.23–25, *Bilhah* is the mother of *Naphtali* (where she is also the mother of Dan).

7.14–19: The descendants of Manasseh (cf. Num 26.29–34). For the progeny of Manasseh east of the Jordan, see 5.23–24. **15:** On the daughters of *Zelophehad,* see Num 27.1–11; 36.1–12; Josh 17.3.

7.20–29: The descendants of Ephraim. Tradition (Gen 48.8–22; Deut 33.17) posits a close relationship between the two sons of Joseph—Manasseh and Ephraim. This is why the Chronicler treats them sequentially and considers their settlements (vv. 28–29; cf. Josh 16–18) together. **21–24:** In depicting Ephraim, his wife, and his sons living in the land, this short tale conflicts with Genesis (chs 41–50; cf. Ex 12.40) in which Ephraim is born in Egypt and never enters the land. Here too the Chronicler emphasizes Israel's long-term connection to the land. **27:** *Joshua,* the hero of the book of Joshua; see Josh 1.1; 24.29–30.

7.30–40: The descendants of Asher. The genealogy may be compared with Gen 46.17 and Num 26.44–47, but much of its information is unparalleled elsewhere in the Bible.

8.1–9.1: The descendants of Benjamin. Another genealogy, fuller than that in 7.6–12. Along with Judah and Levi, Benjamin receives substantial attention from the Chronicler. The great coverage these three tribes receive

3 And Bela had sons: Addar, Gera, Abihud,[a]
4 Abishua, Naaman, Ahoah, 5 Gera, Shephuphan, and Huram. 6 These are the sons of
Ehud (they were heads of ancestral houses
of the inhabitants of Geba, and they were
carried into exile to Manahath): 7 Naaman,[b]
Ahijah, and Gera, that is, Heglam,[c] who
became the father of Uzza and Ahihud. 8 And
Shaharaim had sons in the country of Moab
after he had sent away his wives Hushim
and Baara. 9 He had sons by his wife Hodesh:
Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malcam, 10 Jeuz, Sachia,
and Mirmah. These were his sons, heads
of ancestral houses. 11 He also had sons by
Hushim: Abitub and Elpaal. 12 The sons of
Elpaal: Eber, Misham, and Shemed, who built
Ono and Lod with its towns, 13 and Beriah
and Shema (they were heads of ancestral
houses of the inhabitants of Aijalon, who
put to flight the inhabitants of Gath); 14 and
Ahio, Shashak, and Jeremoth. 15 Zebadiah,
Arad, Eder, 16 Michael, Ishpah, and Joha were
sons of Beriah. 17 Zebadiah, Meshullam, Hizki,
Heber, 18 Ishmerai, Izliah, and Jobab were the
sons of Elpaal. 19 Jakim, Zichri, Zabdi, 20 Elienai, Zillethai, Eliel, 21 Adaiah, Beraiah, and
Shimrath were the sons of Shimei. 22 Ishpan,
Eber, Eliel, 23 Abdon, Zichri, Hanan, 24 Hananiah, Elam, Anthothijah, 25 Iphdeiah, and
Penuel were the sons of Shashak. 26 Shamsherai, Shehariah, Athaliah, 27 Jaareshiah, Elijah,
and Zichri were the sons of Jeroham. 28 These
were the heads of ancestral houses, according to their generations, chiefs. These lived in
Jerusalem.

29 Jeiel[d] the father of Gibeon lived in
Gibeon, and the name of his wife was Maacah. 30 His firstborn son: Abdon, then Zur,
Kish, Baal,[e] Nadab, 31 Gedor, Ahio, Zecher,
32 and Mikloth, who became the father of
Shimeah. Now these also lived opposite their
kindred in Jerusalem, with their kindred.
33 Ner became the father of Kish, Kish of
Saul,[f] Saul[f] of Jonathan, Malchishua, Abinadab, and Esh-baal; 34 and the son of Jonathan
was Merib-baal; and Merib-baal became the
father of Micah. 35 The sons of Micah: Pithon,
Melech, Tarea, and Ahaz. 36 Ahaz became the
father of Jehoaddah; and Jehoaddah became
the father of Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri;
Zimri became the father of Moza. 37 Moza
became the father of Binea; Raphah was his
son, Eleasah his son, Azel his son. 38 Azel had
six sons, and these are their names: Azrikam,
Bocheru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah, and
Hanan; all these were the sons of Azel. 39 The
sons of his brother Eshek: Ulam his firstborn,
Jeush the second, and Eliphelet the third.
40 The sons of Ulam were mighty warriors,
archers, having many children and grandchildren, one hundred fifty. All these were
Benjaminites.

9 So all Israel was enrolled by genealogies;
and these are written in the Book of the
Kings of Israel. And Judah was taken into
exile in Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. 2 Now the first to live again in their
possessions in their towns were Israelites,
priests, Levites, and temple servants.

3 And some of the people of Judah,
Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh lived in

[a] Or *father of Ehud*; see 8.6
[b] Heb *and Naaman*
[c] Or *he carried them into exile*
[d] Compare 9.35: Heb lacks *Jeiel*
[e] Gk Ms adds *Ner*; Compare 8.33 and 9.36
[f] Or *Shaul*

reflects both the author's interests and circumstances in postexilic Judah, into which sections of Benjamin were incorporated. The author's interest in Benjamin is also reflected in the narrative portions of the Chronicler's work (2 Chr 11.1,3,12,23). **8.33–40:** Saul's genealogy is followed for eleven generations (cf. 10.1–14). **33–34:** *Esh-baal* and *Merib-baal* are probably earlier forms of "Ishbosheth" (2 Sam 2.8) and "Mephibosheth" (2 Sam 4.4). **9.1:** The reference to genealogical registrations concludes the Chronicler's introductions to Israel's twelve tribes, begun in 2.1–2. In the Chronicler's theology, the exile marks an important dividing line between monarchic Israel and Judah in the Persian period. *Unfaithfulness* is a Priestly term. Its use here, as the cause for exile, reflects the significance of Priestly material to this author. The same term is also used in 1 Chr 10.13 (the death of Saul) and 2 Chr 36.14 (the exile of Judah).

9.2–34: The genealogies of Jerusalem families in postexilic Judah. This first section of this passage (vv. 2–18) is partially paralleled in Neh 11.3–19. By mentioning these families, officials, and their interrelationships, the author establishes links between the Israel of old (outlined in chs 2–8) and the Jerusalem community of

Jerusalem: [4] Uthai son of Ammihud, son of Omri, son of Imri, son of Bani, from the sons of Perez son of Judah. [5] And of the Shilonites: Asaiah the firstborn, and his sons. [6] Of the sons of Zerah: Jeuel and their kin, six hundred ninety. [7] Of the Benjaminites: Sallu son of Meshullam, son of Hodaviah, son of Hassenuah, [8] Ibneiah son of Jeroham, Elah son of Uzzi, son of Michri, and Meshullam son of Shephatiah, son of Reuel, son of Ibnijah; [9] and their kindred according to their generations, nine hundred fifty-six. All these were heads of families according to their ancestral houses.

[10] Of the priests: Jedaiah, Jehoiarib, Jachin, [11] and Azariah son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, the chief officer of the house of God; [12] and Adaiah son of Jeroham, son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah, and Maasai son of Adiel, son of Jahzerah, son of Meshullam, son of Meshillemith, son of Immer; [13] besides their kindred, heads of their ancestral houses, one thousand seven hundred sixty, qualified for the work of the service of the house of God.

[14] Of the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, of the sons of Merari; [15] and Bakbakkar, Heresh, Galal, and Mattaniah son of Mica, son of Zichri, son of Asaph; [16] and Obadiah son of Shemaiah, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun, and Berechiah son of Asa, son of Elkanah, who lived in the villages of the Netophathites.

[17] The gatekeepers were: Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman; and their kindred Shallum was the chief, [18] stationed previously in the king's gate on the east side. These were the gatekeepers of the camp of the Levites. [19] Shallum son of Kore, son of Ebiasaph, son of Korah, and his kindred of his ancestral house, the Korahites, were in charge of the work of the service, guardians of the thresholds of the tent, as their ancestors had been in charge of the camp of the LORD, guardians of the entrance. [20] And Phinehas son of Eleazar was chief over them in former times; the LORD was with him. [21] Zechariah son of Meshelemiah was gatekeeper at the entrance of the tent of meeting. [22] All these, who were chosen as gatekeepers at the thresholds, were two hundred twelve. They were enrolled by genealogies in their villages. David and the seer Samuel established them in their office of trust. [23] So they and their descendants were in charge of the gates of the house of the LORD, that is, the house of the tent, as guards. [24] The gatekeepers were on the four sides, east, west, north, and south; [25] and their kindred who were in their villages were obliged to come in every seven days, in turn, to be with them; [26] for the four chief gatekeepers, who were Levites, were in charge of the chambers and the treasures of the house of God. [27] And they would spend the night near the house of God; for on them lay the duty of watching, and they had charge of opening it every morning.

[28] Some of them had charge of the utensils of service, for they were required to count them when they were brought in and taken out. [29] Others of them were appointed over the furniture, and over all the holy utensils, also over the choice flour, the wine, the oil, the incense, and the spices. [30] Others, of the sons of the priests, prepared the mixing of the spices, [31] and Mattithiah, one of the Levites, the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite, was in charge of making the flat cakes. [32] Also some of their kindred of the Kohathites had charge of the rows of bread, to prepare them for each sabbath.

[33] Now these are the singers, the heads of ancestral houses of the Levites, living in the chambers of the temple free from other service, for they were on duty day and night. [34] These were heads of ancestral houses of the Levites, according to their generations; these leaders lived in Jerusalem.

his own time. **3:** The detail of people of *Ephraim and Manasseh* living in Jerusalem is not found in Nehemiah, and reflects the Chronicler's interest in all of Israel. **10–11:** The list of priests should be read in light of the preexilic succession of priests found in 6.1–15. **17–34:** The list of levitical gatekeepers and singers, as well as the description of their duties, is unparalleled in the list of Neh 11. The passage illustrates the Chronicler's interest in continuity by insisting that the arrangements David (and here Samuel, v. 22) made on their behalf (chs 15–17; 26) were followed when the Jewish exiles returned from Babylon. The gatekeepers perform multiple functions: not only guard duty, but also administration and even baking. **20:** *Phinehas,* cf. Num 25.11–13. **32:** *Rows of bread,*

35 In Gibeon lived the father of Gibeon,
Jeiel, and the name of his wife was Maacah.
36 His firstborn son was Abdon, then Zur,
Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, 37 Gedor, Ahio, Zecha-
riah, and Mikloth; 38 and Mikloth became the
father of Shimeam; and these also lived op-
posite their kindred in Jerusalem, with their
kindred. 39 Ner became the father of Kish,
Kish of Saul, Saul of Jonathan, Malchishua,
Abinadab, and Esh-baal; 40 and the son of
Jonathan was Merib-baal; and Merib-baal
became the father of Micah. 41 The sons of
Micah: Pithon, Melech, Tahrea, and Ahaz;[a]
42 and Ahaz became the father of Jarah, and
Jarah of Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri; and
Zimri became the father of Moza. 43 Moza be-
came the father of Binea; and Rephaiah was
his son, Eleasah his son, Azel his son. 44 Azel
had six sons, and these are their names: Azri-
kam, Bocheru, Ishmael, Shearíah, Obadiah,
and Hanan; these were the sons of Azel.

10 Now the Philistines fought against
Israel; and the men of Israel fled
before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount
Gilboa. 2 The Philistines overtook Saul and
his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan
and Abinadab and Malchishua, sons of Saul.
3 The battle pressed hard on Saul; and the
archers found him, and he was wounded by
the archers. 4 Then Saul said to his armor-
bearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me
through with it, so that these uncircumcised
may not come and make sport of me." But
his armor-bearer was unwilling, for he was
terrified. So Saul took his own sword and fell
on it. 5 When his armor-bearer saw that Saul
was dead, he also fell on his sword and died.
6 Thus Saul died; he and his three sons and all
his house died together. 7 When all the men
of Israel who were in the valley saw that the
army[b] had fled and that Saul and his sons
were dead, they abandoned their towns and
fled; and the Philistines came and occupied
them.

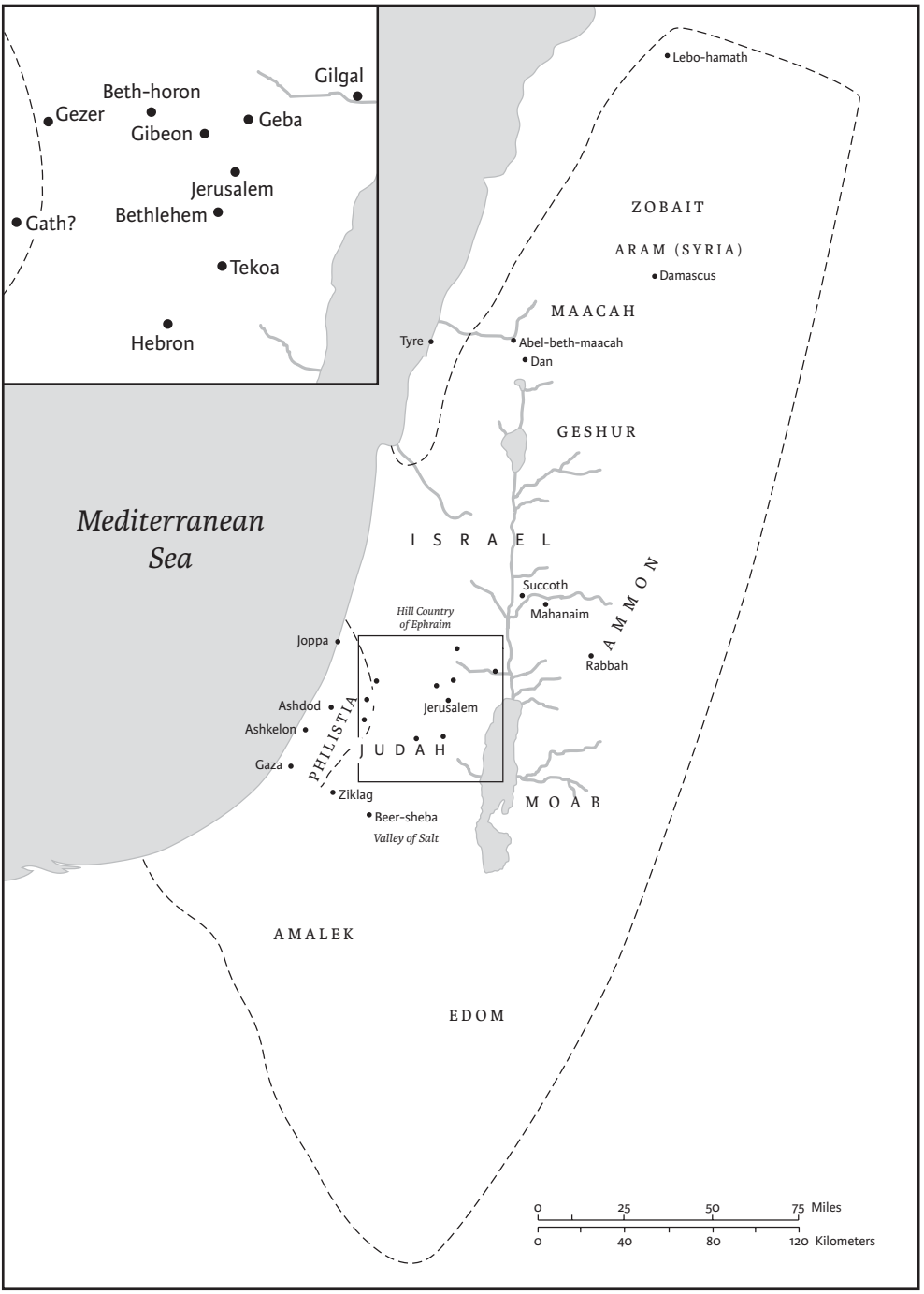
8 The next day when the Philistines came
to strip the dead, they found Saul and his
sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. 9 They stripped
him and took his head and his armor, and
sent messengers throughout the land of the
Philistines to carry the good news to their
idols and to the people. 10 They put his armor
in the temple of their gods, and fastened
his head in the temple of Dagon. 11 But when
all Jabesh-gilead heard everything that the
Philistines had done to Saul, 12 all the valiant
warriors got up and took away the body of
Saul and the bodies of his sons, and brought
them to Jabesh. Then they buried their bones
under the oak in Jabesh, and fasted seven
days.

13 So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he
was unfaithful to the LORD in that he did not
keep the command of the LORD; moreover,
he had consulted a medium, seeking guid-
ance, 14 and did not seek guidance from the
LORD. Therefore the LORD[c] put him to death

[a] Compare 8.35: Heb lacks *and Ahaz*
[b] Heb *they*
[c] Heb *he*

cf. Lev 24.5–9. **35–44:** A transition, repeating the genealogy of Saul from 8.29–38 to introduce the first king of the United Monarchy (10.1–14).

10.1–14: The demise of Saul. Verses 1–12 are parallel to 1 Sam 31.1–13. Of the many incidents in Saul's career, the Chronicler presents only the last—the story of Saul's death, assuming that the reader is generally familiar with the earlier part of the story from 1 Samuel. The evaluation of Saul's reign—the Chronicler's own addition—plays on both the Heb roots "m'l" ("to be unfaithful, disobedient"; see 1.9) and "drš" ("to seek out, consult"), which are key terms in Chronicles. Saul dies because of his infidelity, even consulting a necromancer (1 Sam 28.3,7–25). Consultation with mediums to obtain contact with the dead is forbidden in legal texts (Lev 19.31; 20.6,27; Deut 18.11) and condemned in at least one prophetic text (Isa 8.18–19). This addition typifies the work of the Chronicler, who often searches his sources to find a clear theological cause for national disaster. **4–5:** *Uncircumcised,* unlike most of their contemporaries in the Near East, the Philistines did not practice circumcision. *Fell on his sword,* suicide is infrequent, but not condemned, in the Bible; see 2 Sam 17.23; 1 Kings 16.18; and, in the New Testament, Mt 27.5. **6:** *All his house died,* a generalization, ignoring the continuing genealogy of Saul (cf. 8.33–40; 9.35–44). **10:** *Dagon,* a Canaanite god of grain, adopted by the Philistines as one of their principal deities. **11–12:** *Jabesh-gilead,* in 1 Sam 11, Saul is acclaimed king after his rescue of this city east of the Jordan from Ammonite oppression. **14:** As elsewhere in Chronicles, the choice of kings belongs to God (e.g., 28.2–5; 29.10–12).



The kingdom of David according to Firsth Chronicles. The dashed line shows the approximate boundary of the kingdom at its greatest extent.

and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.

11 Then all Israel gathered together to David at Hebron and said, "See, we are your bone and flesh. [2] For some time now, even while Saul was king, it was you who commanded the army of Israel. The LORD your God said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over my people Israel." [3] So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD. And they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the LORD by Samuel.

[4] David and all Israel marched to Jerusalem, that is Jebus, where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land. [5] The inhabitants of Jebus said to David, "You will not come in here." Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, now the city of David. [6] David had said, "Whoever attacks the Jebusites first shall be chief and commander." And Joab son of Zeruiah went up first, so he became chief. [7] David resided in the stronghold; therefore it was called the city of David. [8] He built the city all around, from the Millo in complete circuit; and Joab repaired the rest of the city. [9] And David became greater and greater, for the LORD of hosts was with him.

[10] Now these are the chiefs of David's warriors, who gave him strong support in his kingdom, together with all Israel, to make him king, according to the word of the LORD concerning Israel. [11] This is an account of David's mighty warriors: Jashobeam, son of Hachmoni,[a] was chief of the Three;[b] he wielded his spear against three hundred whom he killed at one time.

[12] And next to him among the three warriors was Eleazar son of Dodo, the Ahohite. [13] He was with David at Pas-dammim when the Philistines were gathered there for battle. There was a plot of ground full of barley. Now the people had fled from the Philistines, [14] but he and David took their stand in the middle of the plot, defended it, and killed the Philistines; and the LORD saved them by a great victory.

[15] Three of the thirty chiefs went down to the rock to David at the cave of Adullam, while the army of Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim. [16] David was then in the stronghold; and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. [17] David said longingly, "O that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!" [18] Then the Three broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water from the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and they brought it to David.

[a] Or *a Hachmonite*
[b] Compare 2 Sam 23.8: Heb *Thirty* or *captains*

11.1–47: The impressive beginnings of David's reign. David does not seek out the kingship; the Israelites *gathered together to David* to make him king (v. 1). Pan-Israelite assemblies are regular occurrences in Chronicles (13.2; 2 Chr 15.9; 20.4; 23.2; 24.5; 25.5; 32.4,6). In this case, the consequences are clear. David immediately becomes king over all of Israel's tribes. In 2 Samuel David first becomes king over two tribes and only after considerable struggle becomes king over the northern tribes as well (2 Sam 2–5), but this information, which casts doubt on the greatness of David, is omitted by the Chronicler. **4–9:** David, leading *all Israel* (v. 4; cf. 2 Sam 5.6), captures Jerusalem as his first public act upon being made king. Such reorganizing of chronology typifies the Chronicler. By situating the capture of Jerusalem (borrowed from 2 Sam 5.6–10) at this point in the narrative, the author underscores the primacy of Jerusalem. **6:** *Joab* became the head of the army (see 18.15); his role in the capture of Jerusalem is not reported in 2 Sam 5 (cf. v. 8, another mention of Joab not in 2 Sam). **8:** David's building projects consisted essentially of a palace and fortifications in Jerusalem. The Chronicler attributes more building activity to David than do the authors of 2 Samuel (2 Sam 5.9,11; 7.2; 1 Chr 17.1; 2 Chr 2.2). *Millo,* probably "fill" for artificial terraces. **10–47:** The list of *the chiefs of David's warriors* largely follows an appendix to 2 Samuel (23.8–39). It is moved here, early in David's reign, to illustrate the consolidation of David's kingship. Israel's call to David to serve as king is followed by a visible demonstration of military support from various commanders, *together with all Israel* (v. 10). Little is otherwise known about these heroes. **18:** *He poured it out to the LORD* as a libation (1 Sam 7.6; Jer 44.16–18); such water libations became especially important in the later Second Temple period, especially in connection with the festival of

But David would not drink of it; he poured it out to the LORD, 19 and said, "My God forbid that I should do this. Can I drink the blood of these men? For at the risk of their lives they brought it." Therefore he would not drink it. The three warriors did these things.

20 Now Abishai,[a] the brother of Joab, was chief of the Thirty.[b] With his spear he fought against three hundred and killed them, and won a name beside the Three. 21 He was the most renowned[c] of the Thirty,[b] and became their commander; but he did not attain to the Three.

22 Benaiah son of Jehoiada was a valiant man[d] of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds; he struck down two sons of[e] Ariel of Moab. He also went down and killed a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. 23 And he killed an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits tall. The Egyptian had in his hand a spear like a weaver's beam; but Benaiah went against him with a staff, snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with his own spear. 24 Such were the things Benaiah son of Jehoiada did, and he won a name beside the three warriors. 25 He was renowned among the Thirty, but he did not attain to the Three. And David put him in charge of his bodyguard.

26 The warriors of the armies were Asahel brother of Joab, Elhanan son of Dodo of Bethlehem, 27 Shammoth of Harod,[f] Helez the Pelonite, 28 Ira son of Ikkesh of Tekoa, Abiezer of Anathoth, 29 Sibbecai the Hushathite, Ilai the Ahohite, 30 Maharai of Netophah, Heled son of Baanah of Netophah, 31 Ithai son of Ribai of Gibeah of the Benjaminites, Benaiah of Pirathon, 32 Hurai of the wadis of Gaash, Abiel the Arbathite, 33 Azmaveth of Baharum, Eliahba of Shaalbon, 34 Hashem[g] the Gizonite, Jonathan son of Shagee the Hararite, 35 Ahiam son of Sachar the Hararite, Eliphal son of Ur, 36 Hepher the Mecherathite, Ahijah the Pelonite, 37 Hezro of Carmel, Naarai son of Ezbai, 38 Joel the brother of Nathan, Mibhar son of Hagri, 39 Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai of Beeroth, the armor-bearer of Joab son of Zeruiah, 40 Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite, 41 Uriah the Hittite, Zabad son of Ahlai, 42 Adina son of Shiza the Reubenite, a leader of the Reubenites, and thirty with him, 43 Hanan son of Maacah, and Joshaphat the Mithnite, 44 Uzzia the Ashterathite, Shama and Jeiel sons of Hotham the Aroerite, 45 Jediael son of Shimri, and his brother Joha the Tizite, 46 Eliel the Mahavite, and Jeribai and Joshaviah sons of Elnaam, and Ithmah the Moabite, 47 Eliel, and Obed, and Jaasiel the Mezobaite.

12 The following are those who came to David at Ziklag, while he could not move about freely because of Saul son of Kish; they were among the mighty warriors who helped him in war. 2 They were archers, and could shoot arrows and sling stones with either the right hand or the left; they were Benjaminites, Saul's kindred. 3 The chief was Ahiezer, then Joash, both sons of Shemaah of Gibeah; also Jeziel and Pelet sons of Azmaveth; Beracah, Jehu of Anathoth, 4 Ishmaiah of Gibeon, a warrior among the Thirty and a leader over the Thirty; Jeremiah,[h] Jahaziel, Johanan, Jozabad of Gederah, 5 Eluzai,[i] Jerimoth, Bealiah, Shemariah, Shephatiah the Haruphite; 6 Elkanah, Isshiah, Azarel, Joezer, and Jashobeam, the Korahites; 7 and Joelah and Zebadiah, sons of Jeroham of Gedor.

8 From the Gadites there went over to David at the stronghold in the wilderness

[a] Gk Vg Tg Compare 2 Sam 23.18: Heb *Abshai*
[b] Syr: Heb *Three*
[c] Compare 2 Sam 23.19: Heb *more renowned among the two*
[d] Syr: Heb *the son of a valiant man*
[e] See 2 Sam 23.20: Heb lacks *sons of*
[f] Compare 2 Sam 23.25: Heb *the Harorite*
[g] Compare Gk and 2 Sam 23.32: Heb *the sons of Hashem*
[h] Heb verse 5
[i] Heb verse 6

booths (Sukkot). **41a:** *Uriah,* the only reference in Chronicles to the man known in 2 Sam 11–12 as the husband of Bathsheba before David. **41b–47:** These verses are unparalleled in 2 Sam 23.8–39.

12.1–40: David's national prestige and power grow. Warriors from Benjamin (vv. 1–8), Gad (vv. 9–16), Benjamin and Judah (vv. 17–19), and Manasseh (vv. 20–23) rally to David, consolidating his rule. This is set during an early stage of David's career (v. 1), suggesting that the Benjaminites defected to David while Saul was still alive (cf. 2 Sam 2.12–32). This material has few parallels in 2 Samuel, and scholars debate whether it is based on

mighty and experienced warriors, expert with shield and spear, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and who were swift as gazelles on the mountains: [9] Ezer the chief, Obadiah second, Eliab third, [10] Mishmannah fourth, Jeremiah fifth, [11] Attai sixth, Eliel seventh, [12] Johanan eighth, Elzabad ninth, [13] Jeremiah tenth, Machbannai eleventh. [14] These Gadites were officers of the army, the least equal to a hundred and the greatest to a thousand. [15] These are the men who crossed the Jordan in the first month, when it was overflowing all its banks, and put to flight all those in the valleys, to the east and to the west.

[16] Some Benjaminites and Judahites came to the stronghold to David. [17] David went out to meet them and said to them, "If you have come to me in friendship, to help me, then my heart will be knit to you; but if you have come to betray me to my adversaries, though my hands have done no wrong, then may the God of our ancestors see and give judgment." [18] Then the spirit came upon Amasai, chief of the Thirty, and he said,

"We are yours, O David;
and with you, O son of Jesse!
Peace, peace to you,
and peace to the one who helps you!
For your God is the one who helps you."

Then David received them, and made them officers of his troops.

[19] Some of the Manassites deserted to David when he came with the Philistines for the battle against Saul. (Yet he did not help them, for the rulers of the Philistines took counsel and sent him away, saying, "He will desert to his master Saul at the cost of our heads.") [20] As he went to Ziklag these Manassites deserted to him: Adnah, Jozabad, Jediael, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu, and Zillethai, chiefs of the thousands in Manasseh. [21] They helped David against the band of raiders,[a] for they were all warriors and commanders in the army. [22] Indeed from day to day people kept coming to David to help him, until there was a great army, like an army of God.

[23] These are the numbers of the divisions of the armed troops who came to David in Hebron to turn the kingdom of Saul over to him, according to the word of the LORD. [24] The people of Judah bearing shield and spear numbered six thousand eight hundred armed troops. [25] Of the Simeonites, mighty warriors, seven thousand one hundred. [26] Of the Levites four thousand six hundred. [27] Jehoiada, leader of the house of Aaron, and with him three thousand seven hundred. [28] Zadok, a young warrior, and twenty-two commanders from his own ancestral house. [29] Of the Benjaminites, the kindred of Saul, three thousand, of whom the majority had continued to keep their allegiance to the house of Saul. [30] Of the Ephraimites, twenty thousand eight hundred, mighty warriors, notables in their ancestral houses. [31] Of the half-tribe of Manasseh, eighteen thousand, who were expressly named to come and make David king. [32] Of Issachar, those who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, two hundred chiefs, and all their kindred

[a] Or *as officers of his troops*

other sources or is an imaginative composition of the Chronicler. **1:** *Ziklag,* see 1 Sam 27.6; 30. **2:** Cf. Judg 20.16. **8:** *Like . . . lions,* cf. Deut 33.20. **15:** *The first month,* in the spring. **18:** *The spirit came upon,* lit. "a spirit clothed"; cf. Judg 6.34; 2 Chr 24.20. The acclamation of Amasai, *peace, peace to you,* contrasts with the anti-David sentiment sometimes found in 2 Samuel (e.g., 2 Sam 20.1). Because of the divine support for David, those who support David may also be blessed. The language is reminiscent of the blessing bestowed on Abram (Gen 12.3) except that there is no curse. **19–20:** *The battle against Saul,* this is the battle referred to in ch 10. The Chronicler here summarizes 1 Sam 29.1–30.1. **22:** *An army* (lit. "camp") *of God,* either expressing the superlative (i.e., "a very great army"), or referring to the heavenly armies (e.g., see Deut 33.2; Josh 5.14). **23:** *In Hebron,* see 11.1. **23–39a:** The beginning of v. 23, *these are the numbers,* introduces a long stylized list (vv. 25–38) of David's armed forces. The tribal muster, totaling thirteen, is the most complete tally of the Israelite tribes in the Bible. The active allegiance shown by Israelite military officials to David accords with divine will and results in a smooth transfer of power (10.14; 11.3,10). The heroic portrayal of intertribal solidarity (v. 38) contrasts with the tribal disorganization and civil strife found in Judges. **28:** *Zadok, a young warrior,* probably to be identified as the priest who served with Abiathar at the court of David (15.11; 2 Sam 8.17) and who subsequently enjoyed Solomon's exclu-

under their command. 33 Of Zebulun, fifty thousand seasoned troops, equipped for battle with all the weapons of war, to help David[a] with singleness of purpose. 34 Of Naphtali, a thousand commanders, with whom there were thirty-seven thousand armed with shield and spear. 35 Of the Danites, twenty-eight thousand six hundred equipped for battle. 36 Of Asher, forty thousand seasoned troops ready for battle. 37 Of the Reubenites and Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh from beyond the Jordan, one hundred twenty thousand armed with all the weapons of war.

38 All these, warriors arrayed in battle order, came to Hebron with full intent to make David king over all Israel; likewise all the rest of Israel were of a single mind to make David king. 39 They were there with David for three days, eating and drinking, for their kindred had provided for them. 40 And also their neighbors, from as far away as Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, came bringing food on donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen—abundant provisions of meal, cakes of figs, clusters of raisins, wine, oil, oxen, and sheep, for there was joy in Israel.

13 David consulted with the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, with every leader. 2 David said to the whole assembly of Israel, "If it seems good to you, and if it is the will of the LORD our God, let us send abroad to our kindred who remain in all the land of Israel, including the priests and Levites in the cities that have pasture lands, that they may come together to us. 3 Then let us bring again the ark of our God to us; for we did not turn to it in the days of Saul." 4 The whole assembly agreed to do so, for the thing pleased all the people.

5 So David assembled all Israel from the Shihor of Egypt to Lebo-hamath, to bring the ark of God from Kiriath-jearim. 6 And David and all Israel went up to Baalah, that is, to Kiriath-jearim, which belongs to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, the LORD, who is enthroned on the cherubim, which is called by his[b] name. 7 They carried the ark of God on a new cart, from the house of Abinadab, and Uzzah and Ahio[c] were driving the cart. 8 David and all Israel were dancing before God with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets.

9 When they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzzah put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen shook it. 10 The anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; he struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark; and he died there before God. 11 David was angry because the LORD had burst out against Uzzah; so that place is called Perez-uzzah[d] to this day. 12 David was afraid of God that day; he said, "How can I bring the ark of God into my care?" 13 So David did not take the ark into his care into the city of David; he

[a] Gk: Heb lacks *David*
[b] Heb lacks *his*
[c] Or *and his brother*
[d] That is *Bursting Out Against Uzzah*

sive patronage following Solomon's purge of Abiathar (1 Kings 2.35; cf. 29.22). **39–40:** Elaborate feasts, like the one celebrated by David and representatives from the various Israelite tribes, punctuate high points in Israelite and Judean history (15.25–16.3; 29.20–22; 2 Chr 7.8–10; 20.27–28; 29.30–36; 30.21–27) and also play a crucial role in Esther, also from the Persian period. This nationwide celebration concludes the initial phase of David's reign.

13.1–14: David and the ark, Part 1. Having been firmly and unanimously established as king, David leads all Israel in the attempt to retrieve a national symbol of Israel's religion and bring it to the new capital. **2:** The Chronicler's Levites live at various sites within Israel's tribal territories (6.54–81). Because this priestly tribe is an essential component of Israel and Israel's most sacred symbol to Jerusalem must be transferred properly to Jerusalem, the Chronicler adds to his source participation of the priests and Levites, along with an emphasis on all Israel. **3:** No reference is made to the capture of the ark by the Philistines (cf. 1 Sam 4.11–7.1); here its neglect is implicitly another example of Saul's unfaithfulness (see 10.13–14). **5:** *From the Shihor of Egypt* (probably the easternmost branch of the Nile) *to Lebo-hamath* (in Syria), the northern and southern limits of Israel (cf. 2 Chr 7.8). **6–14:** This material is largely drawn from 2 Sam 6.2–11. **6:** *The ark,* a portable box, was a unifying religious symbol in the premonarchic period (Josh 3.1–17; 4.1–18; 1 Sam 4.1–7.1). According to Ex 25.10–21; 37.1–9, its construction was ordained by God and implemented by Moses. *Enthroned on the cherubim,* see 1 Sam 4.4n. **11:** *Burst out,* see note *d.* **13:** The *city of David* refers to Mount Zion, the section of Jerusalem fortified by David

took it instead to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. 14 The ark of God remained with the household of Obed-edom in his house three months, and the LORD blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that he had.

14 King Hiram of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with cedar logs, and masons and carpenters to build a house for him. 2 David then perceived that the LORD had established him as king over Israel, and that his kingdom was highly exalted for the sake of his people Israel.

3 David took more wives in Jerusalem, and David became the father of more sons and daughters. 4 These are the names of the children whom he had in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, and Nathan; Solomon, 5 Ibhar, Elishua, and Elpelet; 6 Nogah, Nepheg, and Japhia; 7 Elishama, Beeliada, and Eliphelet.

8 When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over all Israel, all the Philistines went up in search of David; and David heard of it and went out against them. 9 Now the Philistines had come and made a raid in the valley of Rephaim. 10 David inquired of God, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand?" The LORD said to him, "Go up, and I will give them into your hand." 11 So he went up to Baal-perazim, and David defeated them there. David said, "God has burst out[a] against my enemies by my hand, like a bursting flood." Therefore that place is called Baal-perazim.[b] 12 They abandoned their gods there, and at David's command they were burned.

13 Once again the Philistines made a raid in the valley. 14 When David again inquired of God, God said to him, "You shall not go up after them; go around and come on them opposite the balsam trees. 15 When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then go out to battle; for God has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines." 16 David did as God had commanded him, and they struck down the Philistine army from Gibeon to Gezer. 17 The fame of David went out into all lands, and the LORD brought the fear of him on all nations.

15 David[c] built houses for himself in the city of David, and he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it. 2 Then David commanded that no one but the Levites were to carry the ark of God, for the LORD had chosen them to carry the ark

a Heb *paraz*
b That is *Lord of Bursting Out*
c Heb *He*

and renamed in his honor (11.7). In Chronicles *Obed-edom* is a Levite, who functions as a gatekeeper (15.18,24) and a musician (15.21; 16.5; 26.4–8). **14:** The blessing on Obed-edom's house hints that the setback suffered by David is only temporary.

14.1–7: David's success in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam 5.11–16). According to 1 Kings 5.15–26 (cf. 2 Chr 2.2–15), Hiram (called Huram in Chronicles) had very good relations with David. The link between blessings for David and blessings for Israel anticipates Nathan's dynastic oracle (17.1–17). **3:** Accumulating wives and progeny is consistently a positive sign of stature in Chronicles (25.5; 26.4–5; 2 Chr 11.18–23; 13.21; 14.3–7). For David's sons, see 3.1–9.

14.8–17: Philistine attacks (cf. 2 Sam 5.17–25). If the mishandling of the ark (13.9–11) represented an internal challenge to the establishment of Jerusalem's worship, the Philistine aggressions were an external threat to the viability of David's rule. The two narratives detailing David's exploits against the Philistines are replete with "holy-war" phraseology, reflecting the notion that the LORD fights on behalf of his people and secures victory for them (Ex 14.4,18; Josh 11.2,24; Judg 3.28; 4.7,17; 18.10; 20.28; 1 Sam 14.12,23; 23.4). **12:** In 2 Sam 5.21, David carries these images home. In having the images consigned to fire, the Chronicler has David act in accordance with Deuteronomic law (Deut 7.25; 12.3). **16:** *From Gibeon to Gezer,* about 28 km (18 mi), a limited area. **17:** International respect denotes divine blessing (2 Chr 9.5–8,23; 17.10; 26.8,15; 32.23).

15.1–16.3: David and the ark, Part 2. Having been successful in war and blessed by God, David turns his attention again to the matter of the ark. In the ancient Near East successful kings were expected to honor the deities who led them by supporting and endowing places of worship. Much of chs 15–16, which supplements material from 2 Sam 6 with original material concerning the Levites, elaborates on this very point. **15.1:** The houses David builds for himself most likely refer to domiciles in addition to the palace built by Huram of Tyre (14.1). David's construction activity establishes a positive pattern for other kings to follow (2 Chr 11.5–12; 14.6;

of the LORD and to minister to him forever.
3 David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem
to bring up the ark of the LORD to its place,
which he had prepared for it. 4 Then David
gathered together the descendants of Aaron
and the Levites: 5 of the sons of Kohath, Uriel
the chief, with one hundred twenty of his
kindred; 6 of the sons of Merari, Asaiah the
chief, with two hundred twenty of his kin-
dred; 7 of the sons of Gershom, Joel the chief,
with one hundred thirty of his kindred; 8 of
the sons of Elizaphan, Shemaiah the chief,
with two hundred of his kindred; 9 of the
sons of Hebron, Eliel the chief, with eighty of
his kindred; 10 of the sons of Uzziel, Ammin-
adab the chief, with one hundred twelve of
his kindred.

11 David summoned the priests Zadok
and Abiathar, and the Levites Uriel, Asaiah,
Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab. 12 He
said to them, "You are the heads of families
of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, you and
your kindred, so that you may bring up the
ark of the LORD, the God of Israel, to the
place that I have prepared for it. 13 Because
you did not carry it the first time,[a] the LORD
our God burst out against us, because we
did not give it proper care." 14 So the priests
and the Levites sanctified themselves to
bring up the ark of the LORD, the God of
Israel. 15 And the Levites carried the ark of
God on their shoulders with the poles, as
Moses had commanded according to the
word of the LORD.

16 David also commanded the chiefs of the
Levites to appoint their kindred as the singers
to play on musical instruments, on harps and
lyres and cymbals, to raise loud sounds of joy.
17 So the Levites appointed Heman son of Joel;
and of his kindred Asaph son of Berechiah;
and of the sons of Merari, their kindred,
Ethan son of Kushaiah; 18 and with them
their kindred of the second order, Zechariah,
Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab,
Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu,
and Mikneiah, and the gatekeepers Obed-
edom and Jeiel. 19 The singers Heman, Asaph,
and Ethan were to sound bronze cymbals;
20 Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel,
Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah were to
play harps according to Alamoth; 21 but Mat-
tithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom,
Jeiel, and Azaziah were to lead with lyres
according to the Sheminith. 22 Chenaniah,
leader of the Levites in music, was to direct
the music, for he understood it. 23 Berechiah
and Elkanah were to be gatekeepers for the
ark. 24 Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel,
Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer, the
priests, were to blow the trumpets before the
ark of God. Obed-edom and Jehiah also were
to be gatekeepers for the ark.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

26.2; 32.27–30). **2:** David's command that *no one but the Levites* carry the ark responds to Uzzah's unfortunate death (13.10) through the lens of the Priestly material (Num 4.4–15; 7.9), the implication being that the proper personnel had not been involved in the first attempt to bring the ark into the City of David (v. 13). The following verses detail what personnel and actions David deems necessary to install the ark successfully. **3:** The reference to a *place* for the ark of God implies a sacred precinct or sanctuary (Deut 12.5,11; 14.23–25; 15.20; Josh 9.27; 1 Chr 21.22,25; 2 Chr 3.1). **11:** The two priests *Zadok and Abiathar* appear together during the first part of the reign of David (15.29,35; 18.16; 19.11; 20.25). Each of these priests headed or represented major priestly houses. See further 6.8n. **13:** The Chronicler plays on Hebrew roots "prṣ," "to break out" (13.3,11; 14.11; 15.13) and "drš," "to seek." The earlier attempt to redress neglect of the ark—"for we did not seek (drš) it in the days of Saul" (13.3)—was brought to a swift end by the divine outbreak (burst out, Heb "prṣ"; 13.10–11) against Uzzah. As later events made clear, the problem was not Israel's communal decision "to seek" the ark, but the manner in which the people involved handled the arrangements. In the new attempt David insists on the intimate involvement of the priests and Levites to rectify the deficiency. **15:** *On their shoulders with the poles,* the Chronicler asserts that the law of Moses was followed (Num 7.9). **16:** *Musical instruments* figure prominently in the Chronicler's ritual liturgies (16.42; 2 Chr 5.13; 7.6; 23.13; 34.12). In some texts the instruments are associated with David himself (2 Chr 29.24,26–27; Neh 12.36; cf. Am 6.5). Though David could not build the Temple (ch 17, 2 Sam 7), the Chronicler emphasizes here and elsewhere that David initiated the project, in their case by establishing the guilds of levitical Temple singers. **18:** Many of these singers are mentioned again in vv. 20–21 and 16.5–6. **20–21:** *Alamoth* and *Sheminith* are obscure musical terms found in Psalms (6.1; 12.1; 46.1). **25–28:** The Chronicler re-

25 So David and the elders of Israel, and
the commanders of the thousands, went to
bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD
from the house of Obed-edom with rejoicing.
26 And because God helped the Levites who
were carrying the ark of the covenant of the
LORD, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven
rams. 27 David was clothed with a robe of fine
linen, as also were all the Levites who were
carrying the ark, and the singers, and Chen-
aniah the leader of the music of the singers;
and David wore a linen ephod. 28 So all Israel
brought up the ark of the covenant of the
LORD with shouting, to the sound of the horn,
trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music
on harps and lyres.

29 As the ark of the covenant of the LORD
came to the city of David, Michal daughter of
Saul looked out of the window, and saw King
David leaping and dancing; and she despised
him in her heart.

16 They brought in the ark of God, and
set it inside the tent that David had
pitched for it; and they offered burnt offer-
ings and offerings of well-being before God.
2 When David had finished offering the burnt
offerings and the offerings of well-being,
he blessed the people in the name of the
LORD; 3 and he distributed to every person
in Israel—man and woman alike—to each a
loaf of bread, a portion of meat,[a] and a cake
of raisins.

4 He appointed certain of the Levites
as ministers before the ark of the LORD, to
invoke, to thank, and to praise the LORD, the
God of Israel. 5 Asaph was the chief, and sec-
ond to him Zechariah, Jeiel, Shemiramoth,
Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-
edom, and Jeiel, with harps and lyres; Asaph
was to sound the cymbals, 6 and the priests
Benaiah and Jahaziel were to blow trumpets
regularly, before the ark of the covenant of
God.

7 Then on that day David first appointed
the singing of praises to the LORD by Asaph
and his kindred.

8 O give thanks to the LORD, call on his
name,
make known his deeds among the
peoples.
9 Sing to him, sing praises to him,
tell of all his wonderful works.
10 Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the
LORD rejoice.
11 Seek the LORD and his strength,
seek his presence continually.
12 Remember the wonderful works he has
done,
his miracles, and the judgments he
uttered,
13 O offspring of his servant Israel,[b]
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

14 He is the LORD our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.
15 Remember his covenant forever,
the word that he commanded, for a
thousand generations,
16 the covenant that he made with
Abraham,
his sworn promise to Isaac,
17 which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,
18 saying, "To you I will give the land of
Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance."

[a] Compare Gk Syr Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Another reading is *Abraham* (compare Ps 105.6)

writes 2 Sam 6.12–15 to underscore the broad support for David's campaign to complete the transfer of the ark. The elaborate apparel worn by the Levites in Chronicles contrasts markedly with that depicted in Samuel (see Ex 28.6–14,39–43; Sir 45.8).

15.29–16.3: Michal and all Israel. A significant abridgment of 2 Sam 6.16–23, omitting the details of how Michal mocked David.

16.4–43: Staffing the national sanctuaries. With the ark successfully elevated to the place David prepared for it, David designates certain Levites and priests to officiate there. He also staffs the tabernacle at the *high place* in Gibeon (vv. 39–42). **7–36:** The *praises* David instructs the Levites to sing are a medley of extracts, with some variations, from the Psalms: vv. 8–22, cf. Ps 105.1–15; vv. 23–33, cf. Ps 96; vv. 34–36, cf. Ps 106.1,47–48. By the period of the Chronicler, some form of the book of Psalms probably already existed as a liturgical collec-

19 When they were few in number,
of little account, and strangers in the land,[a]
20 wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another people,
21 he allowed no one to oppress them;
he rebuked kings on their account,
22 saying, "Do not touch my anointed ones;
do my prophets no harm."

23 Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Tell of his salvation from day to day.
24 Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples.
25 For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.
26 For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
27 Honor and majesty are before him;
strength and joy are in his place.

28 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
29 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come before him.
Worship the LORD in holy splendor;
30 tremble before him, all the earth.
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
31 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice,
and let them say among the nations,
"The LORD is king!"
32 Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it.
33 Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth.
34 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.

35 Say also:
"Save us, O God of our salvation,
and gather and rescue us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name,
and glory in your praise.
36 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting."
Then all the people said "Amen!" and praised the LORD.

37 David left Asaph and his kinsfolk there before the ark of the covenant of the LORD to minister regularly before the ark as each day required, 38 and also Obed-edom and his[b] sixty-eight kinsfolk; while Obed-edom son of Jeduthun and Hosah were to be gatekeepers. 39 And he left the priest Zadok and his kindred the priests before the tabernacle of the LORD in the high place that was at Gibeon, 40 to offer burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of burnt offering regularly, morning and evening, according to all that is written in the law of the LORD that he commanded Israel. 41 With them were Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest of those chosen and expressly named to render thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever. 42 Heman and Jeduthun had with them trumpets and cymbals for the music, and instruments for sacred song. The sons of Jeduthun were appointed to the gate.

43 Then all the people departed to their homes, and David went home to bless his household.

17 Now when David settled in his house, David said to the prophet Nathan, "I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of

[a] Heb *in it*
[b] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *their*

tion, and possibly was already attributed to David. **37–43:** David provides for both the ark in Jerusalem and the tabernacle at Gibeon. The Chronicler does not deem the Gibeon shrine to be inherently illicit. The sacrifices performed there by Zadok and his priests accorded with *all that is written in the law of the* LORD (v. 40). Like the newly dedicated ministry of praise associated with the ark in Jerusalem, the Gibeon precinct has its own singers and musicians, authorized to praise God (v. 42). Two guilds of singers, represented by Heman and Jeduthun, serve at Gibeon, while the third guild of singers, represented by Asaph (v. 37) serves in Jerusalem. Only after the construction of the long-awaited Temple will worship outside Jerusalem be prohibited (2 Chr 1.3–6; 5.5). **43:** Taken from 2 Sam 6.19–20, a continuation of v. 3.

17.1–15: The promises to David. The narration largely follows 2 Sam 7.1–16. *Under a tent,* see Ex 26.1–2,7; Num

the covenant of the LORD is under a tent."
2 Nathan said to David, "Do all that you have
in mind, for God is with you."

3 But that same night the word of the LORD
came to Nathan, saying: 4 Go and tell my
servant David: Thus says the LORD: You shall
not build me a house to live in. 5 For I have
not lived in a house since the day I brought
out Israel to this very day, but I have lived in
a tent and a tabernacle.[a] 6 Wherever I have
moved about among all Israel, did I ever
speak a word with any of the judges of Israel,
whom I commanded to shepherd my people,
saying, Why have you not built me a house
of cedar? 7 Now therefore thus you shall say
to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of
hosts: I took you from the pasture, from fol-
lowing the sheep, to be ruler over my people
Israel; 8 and I have been with you wherever
you went, and have cut off all your enemies
before you; and I will make for you a name,
like the name of the great ones of the earth.
9 I will appoint a place for my people Israel,
and will plant them, so that they may live in
their own place, and be disturbed no more;
and evildoers shall wear them down no more,
as they did formerly, 10 from the time that I
appointed judges over my people Israel; and I
will subdue all your enemies.

Moreover I declare to you that the LORD
will build you a house. 11 When your days are
fulfilled to go to be with your ancestors, I will
raise up your offspring after you, one of your
own sons, and I will establish his kingdom.
12 He shall build a house for me, and I will es-
tablish his throne forever. 13 I will be a father
to him, and he shall be a son to me. I will not
take my steadfast love from him, as I took it
from him who was before you, 14 but I will
confirm him in my house and in my kingdom
forever, and his throne shall be established
forever. 15 In accordance with all these words
and all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

16 Then King David went in and sat before
the LORD, and said, "Who am I, O LORD God,
and what is my house, that you have brought
me thus far? 17 And even this was a small
thing in your sight, O God; you have also spo-
ken of your servant's house for a great while
to come. You regard me as someone of high
rank,[b] O LORD God! 18 And what more can
David say to you for honoring your servant?
You know your servant. 19 For your servant's
sake, O LORD, and according to your own
heart, you have done all these great deeds,
making known all these great things. 20 There
is no one like you, O LORD, and there is no
God besides you, according to all that we have
heard with our ears. 21 Who is like your people
Israel, one nation on the earth whom God
went to redeem to be his people, making for
yourself a name for great and terrible things,
in driving out nations before your people
whom you redeemed from Egypt? 22 And you
made your people Israel to be your people
forever; and you, O LORD, became their God.

[a] Gk 2 Sam 7.6: Heb *but I have been from tent to tent and from tabernacle*

[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

4.21–28. **2:** Nathan here is offering his personal opinion, which is corrected by God in the revelation that follows. David's lack of suitability for this project is explained later in 22.7–10. **5:** After the Exodus, Israel's system of worship was mobile. The roving nature of God's presence with Israel was consistent with the mobility of Israel itself. **8–9:** The Chronicler, like the Deuteronomist (1 Kings 5.17–18), associates national stability and peace with the establishment of a permanent sanctuary in the land. In this manner, Nathan's oracle points forward to the reign of Solomon, which according to biblical text is an unprecedented age of peace, prosperity, and international prestige (1 Kings 4.20; 5.4; 8.66; 1 Chr 22.9,18; 2 Chr 1.7–18; 8.1–9,31). **10:** In speaking of the LORD building a house for David, the text develops a wordplay on the different connotations of Heb "bayit" ("house," "temple," "dynasty"). **13:** *I will be a father to him,* a formula of adoption (2 Sam 7.14; Ps 2.7–8; Isa 9.6; cf. Ps 89.26). *I will not take my steadfast love from him,* the guarantee of succession is not predicated upon the loyalty of the sons. In fact, the second part of 2 Sam 7.14, which stresses that the individual Davidic king may be punished, is lacking here, further highlighting the Chronicler's positive vision of Davidic kingship. **14:** *In my kingdom forever,* God manifests his kingship through the kingdom of David and his heirs (17.14; 28.5; 29.11; 2 Chr 13.8; cf. 2 Sam 7.16).

17.16–27: David's prayer. The narration largely follows 2 Sam 7.17–29. **21:** God's incomparability and unique status are linked to Israel's unique status. **23–24:** David's only petitions focus on the promises directed toward his dynasty (cf. vv. 8b–14).

23 "And now, O LORD, as for the word that
you have spoken concerning your servant
and concerning his house, let it be estab-
lished forever, and do as you have promised.
24 Thus your name will be established and
magnified forever in the saying, 'The LORD
of hosts, the God of Israel, is Israel's God';
and the house of your servant David will be
established in your presence. 25 For you, my
God, have revealed to your servant that you
will build a house for him; therefore your
servant has found it possible to pray before
you. 26 And now, O LORD, you are God, and
you have promised this good thing to your
servant; 27 therefore may it please you to
bless the house of your servant, that it may
continue forever before you. For you, O LORD,
have blessed and are blessed[a] forever."

18 Some time afterward, David attacked
the Philistines and subdued them; he
took Gath and its villages from the Philis-
tines.

2 He defeated Moab, and the Moabites
became subject to David and brought tribute.

3 David also struck down King Hadadezer
of Zobah, toward Hamath,[b] as he went to
set up a monument at the river Euphrates.
4 David took from him one thousand chari-
ots, seven thousand cavalry, and twenty
thousand foot soldiers. David hamstrung all
the chariot horses, but left one hundred of
them. 5 When the Arameans of Damascus
came to help King Hadadezer of Zobah,
David killed twenty-two thousand Ara-
means. 6 Then David put garrisons[c] in Aram
of Damascus; and the Arameans became
subject to David, and brought tribute. The
LORD gave victory to David wherever he
went. 7 David took the gold shields that were
carried by the servants of Hadadezer, and
brought them to Jerusalem. 8 From Tibhath
and from Cun, cities of Hadadezer, David
took a vast quantity of bronze; with it Solo-
mon made the bronze sea and the pillars
and the vessels of bronze.

9 When King Tou of Hamath heard that
David had defeated the whole army of King
Hadadezer of Zobah, 10 he sent his son
Hadoram to King David, to greet him and
to congratulate him, because he had fought
against Hadadezer and defeated him. Now
Hadadezer had often been at war with Tou.
He sent all sorts of articles of gold, of silver,
and of bronze; 11 these also King David dedi-
cated to the LORD, together with the silver
and gold that he had carried off from all the
nations, from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites,
the Philistines, and Amalek.

12 Abishai son of Zeruiah killed eighteen
thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.
13 He put garrisons in Edom; and all the
Edomites became subject to David. And
the LORD gave victory to David wherever he
went.

14 So David reigned over all Israel; and he
administered justice and equity to all his peo-
ple. 15 Joab son of Zeruiah was over the army;
Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder;

[a] Or *and it is blessed*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Gk Vg 2 Sam 8.6 Compare Syr: Heb lacks *garrisons*

18.1–20.8: The kingdom expanded. A new phase in David's reign begins, one dominated by foreign military campaigns. David's success in war is evident in all directions: to the west against the Philistines (18.1; 20.4–8), to the southeast against Edom (18.12–13), to the east against Moab (18.2) and Ammon (19.1–19; 20.1–3), and to the northeast against a variety of Aramean states (18.3–8; 19.6–19). (See map on p. 585.) In this way, David uses the fulfillment of one of Nathan's promises—the subjugation of all his enemies—to lay the foundations for the fulfillment of another—the construction of a temple by David's son. The juxtaposition suggests that David's hands were bloodied by war, so he could not build the Temple (22.7–10). **18.1–13:** Drawn from 2 Sam 8.1–14. **5:** *The Arameans of Damascus,* the defeat of one state by an invading power could upset the balance of power in the entire region, especially affecting neighboring states of the defeated kingdom. **7–11:** It was customary for pious kings in the ancient world to dedicate war spoils to the temples of the deities who granted them victory. In this instance, David's plunder, which according to 2 Sam 8.7 was merely brought to Jerusalem, is incorporated into the Temple built by Solomon (1 Kings 7.13–47; 2 Chr 3.15–4.22; Josephus, *Ant.* 7.106). **8:** *Tibhath* and *Cun* occur only here in the Bible; their exact locations are uncertain. **9:** *Tou,* Toi in 2 Sam 8.9. **12:** In 2 Sam 8.13 this victory is attributed to David himself. **14–17:** Taken from 2 Sam 8.15–18, the list of officials reflects the growth of the bureaucracy as the kingdom expanded. **16:** *Ahimelech* probably became one of David's priests as the replace-

16 Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of
Abiathar were priests; Shavsha was secre-
tary; 17 Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the
Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's
sons were the chief officials in the service of
the king.

19 Some time afterward, King Nahash
of the Ammonites died, and his son
succeeded him. 2 David said, "I will deal loy-
ally with Hanun son of Nahash, for his father
dealt loyally with me." So David sent mes-
sengers to console him concerning his father.
When David's servants came to Hanun in the
land of the Ammonites, to console him, 3 the
officials of the Ammonites said to Hanun,
"Do you think, because David has sent con-
solers to you, that he is honoring your father?
Have not his servants come to you to search
and to overthrow and to spy out the land?"
4 So Hanun seized David's servants, shaved
them, cut off their garments in the middle at
their hips, and sent them away; 5 and they de-
parted. When David was told about the men,
he sent messengers to them, for they felt
greatly humiliated. The king said, "Remain
at Jericho until your beards have grown, and
then return."

6 When the Ammonites saw that they had
made themselves odious to David, Hanun
and the Ammonites sent a thousand talents
of silver to hire chariots and cavalry from
Mesopotamia, from Aram-maacah and from
Zobah. 7 They hired thirty-two thousand
chariots and the king of Maacah with his
army, who came and camped before Medeba.
And the Ammonites were mustered from
their cities and came to battle. 8 When David
heard of it, he sent Joab and all the army of
the warriors. 9 The Ammonites came out and
drew up in battle array at the entrance of the
city, and the kings who had come were by
themselves in the open country.

10 When Joab saw that the line of battle was
set against him both in front and in the rear,
he chose some of the picked men of Israel
and arrayed them against the Arameans;
11 the rest of his troops he put in the charge of
his brother Abishai, and they were arrayed
against the Ammonites. 12 He said, "If the Ara-
means are too strong for me, then you shall
help me; but if the Ammonites are too strong
for you, then I will help you. 13 Be strong, and
let us be courageous for our people and for
the cities of our God; and may the LORD do
what seems good to him." 14 So Joab and the
troops who were with him advanced toward
the Arameans for battle; and they fled before
him. 15 When the Ammonites saw that the
Arameans fled, they likewise fled before
Abishai, Joab's brother, and entered the city.
Then Joab came to Jerusalem.

16 But when the Arameans saw that they
had been defeated by Israel, they sent mes-
sengers and brought out the Arameans who
were beyond the Euphrates, with Shophach
the commander of the army of Hadadezer
at their head. 17 When David was informed,
he gathered all Israel together, crossed the
Jordan, came to them, and drew up his forces
against them. When David set the battle in
array against the Arameans, they fought with
him. 18 The Arameans fled before Israel; and
David killed seven thousand Aramean chari-
oteers and forty thousand foot soldiers, and
also killed Shophach the commander of their
army. 19 When the servants of Hadadezer saw
that they had been defeated by Israel, they
made peace with David, and became subject

ment for his father Abiathar (15.11). **17:** David employs his sons as high-ranking officials in his cabinet instead of as priests (2 Sam 8.18); two other kings make use of princes in managing state affairs (2 Chr 11.22–23; 21.3). **19.1:** The death of a king could usher in a period of instability and uncertainty for his people. Because international arrangements were made between the leaders of nations, and not between the nations themselves, the death of a leader could signal the end of such agreements. **3:** *To spy out the land,* to Hanun's counselors, David's string of victories against the Philistines, Moabites, Edomites, and Arameans establish an imperialistic pattern that they could ignore only at their own peril. **5:** The quarantine furnishes David's aides with the requisite time to recover and regain their dignity. **7:** *Medeba,* ca. 20 mi (30 km) south-southwest of the Ammonite capital of Rabbah; not mentioned in 2 Sam 10, the source for this chapter. **16:** *The Euphrates,* lit. "the river." In biblical narratives, "the river" usually designates the Euphrates (e.g., Gen 2.14; 15.18; Deut 1.7; 2 Kings 23.29; 24.7; 1 Chr 5.9), but the Jordan and the Yarmuk are also possibilities. **19:** The new balance of power in the region, tilted in Israel's favor, leaves the Ammonites isolated from their former allies. The victories of Joab and David succeed

to him. So the Arameans were not willing to help the Ammonites any more.

20 In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, Joab led out the army, ravaged the country of the Ammonites, and came and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. Joab attacked Rabbah, and overthrew it. [2] David took the crown of Milcom[a] from his head; he found that it weighed a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone; and it was placed on David's head. He also brought out the booty of the city, a very great amount. [3] He brought out the people who were in it, and set them to work[b] with saws and iron picks and axes.[c] Thus David did to all the cities of the Ammonites. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

[4] After this, war broke out with the Philistines at Gezer; then Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Sippai, who was one of the descendants of the giants; and the Philistines were subdued. [5] Again there was war with the Philistines; and Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. [6] Again there was war at Gath, where there was a man of great size, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number; he also was descended from the giants. [7] When he taunted Israel, Jonathan son of Shimea, David's brother, killed him. [8] These were descended from the giants in Gath; they fell by the hand of David and his servants.

21 Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to count the people of Israel. [2] So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, "Go, number Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan, and bring me a report, so that I may know their number." [3] But Joab said, "May the LORD increase the number of his people a hundredfold! Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord's servants? Why then should my lord require this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?" [4] But the king's word prevailed against Joab. So Joab departed and went throughout all Israel, and came back to Jerusalem. [5] Joab gave the total count of the people to David. In all Israel there were one million one hundred thousand men who drew the sword, and in Judah four hundred seventy thousand who drew the sword. [6] But he did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, for the king's command was abhorrent to Joab.

[a] Gk Vg See 1 Kings 11.5, 33: MT *of their king*
[b] Compare 2 Sam 12.31: Heb *and he sawed*
[c] Compare 2 Sam 12.31: Heb *saws*

in disrupting the traditional military ties between the Ammonites and the Arameans. **20.1–3:** Verse 1 is taken from 2 Sam 11.1, while vv. 2–3 are taken from 2 Sam 12.26a,30–31. In Samuel the reference to David's staying in Jerusalem provides the background to the troubling story of David's affair with Bathsheba. But in Chronicles, the same notice is incidental, providing the reader an explanation as to David's whereabouts. The Chronicler omits completely the story of David's liaison with Bathsheba and its aftermath (2 Sam 11.2–12.25), which casts David in a negative light. *Milcom* was the national deity of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11.5,7,33; 2 Kings 23.13). **4–8:** The final exploits of David and his soldiers are taken from 2 Sam 21.18–22. The stories in 2 Samuel about the rape of Tamar, Absalom's rebellion, the execution of Saul's descendants, and the disaffection of the northern tribes, which cast David in a negative light, do not appear in Chronicles. **5:** The text may harmonize two different claims found in Samuel: In 1 Sam 17.50 David kills the Philistine giant, identified earlier as Goliath of Gath (1 Sam 17.4), but in 2 Sam 21.19 Elhanan kills Goliath the Gittite. By having Elhanan kill the brother of Goliath the Gittite, and not Goliath himself, the Chronicler accommodates both claims.

21.1–22.1: David the repentant sinner. The Chronicler recasts and supplements a story also found in 2 Sam 24. The guilt of David is pronounced in Chronicles (vv. 1–7), in which Joab warns David that it is sinful to count Israel in a casual fashion (cf. Ex 31.11–16); but so are his repentance and his efforts to intercede on behalf of Israel (vv. 8–17). David is thus forewarned before he is punished, reflecting a major tendency of the Chronicler. **21.1:** *Satan,* Heb "satan" should be translated as "an adversary" rather than "Satan" (cf. 2 Sam 24.1; see Job 1.6n.; Zech 3.1n.). Significantly, it replaces "the anger of the LORD" of 2 Sam 24.1. Having just experienced a string of impressive military victories against the Ammonites, Syrians, and Philistines (chs 18–20), David uncritically falls prey to the designs of one of his opponents. **2:** *From Beer-sheba to Dan,* the southern and northern limits of Israel proper. **5:** The total is lower in 2 Sam 24.9, but the number for Judah is higher there. In both cases the figures are improb-

7 But God was displeased with this thing,
and he struck Israel. 8 David said to God, "I
have sinned greatly in that I have done this
thing. But now, I pray you, take away the guilt
of your servant; for I have done very foolishly." 9 The LORD spoke to Gad, David's seer,
saying, 10 "Go and say to David, 'Thus says the
LORD: Three things I offer you; choose one
of them, so that I may do it to you.'" 11 So Gad
came to David and said to him, "Thus says the
LORD, 'Take your choice: 12 either three years
of famine; or three months of devastation by
your foes, while the sword of your enemies
overtakes you; or three days of the sword of
the LORD, pestilence on the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the
territory of Israel.' Now decide what answer I
shall return to the one who sent me." 13 Then
David said to Gad, "I am in great distress;
let me fall into the hand of the LORD, for his
mercy is very great; but let me not fall into
human hands."

14 So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel;
and seventy thousand persons fell in Israel.
15 And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; but when he was about to destroy it,
the LORD took note and relented concerning
the calamity; he said to the destroying angel,
"Enough! Stay your hand." The angel of the
LORD was then standing by the threshing floor
of Ornan the Jebusite. 16 David looked up and
saw the angel of the LORD standing between
earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn
sword stretched out over Jerusalem. Then
David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell
on their faces. 17 And David said to God, "Was
it not I who gave the command to count the
people? It is I who have sinned and done very
wickedly. But these sheep, what have they
done? Let your hand, I pray, O LORD my God,
be against me and against my father's house;
but do not let your people be plagued!"

18 Then the angel of the LORD commanded
Gad to tell David that he should go up and
erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing
floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 19 So David went
up following Gad's instructions, which he
had spoken in the name of the LORD. 20 Ornan
turned and saw the angel; and while his four
sons who were with him hid themselves,
Ornan continued to thresh wheat. 21 As David
came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David;
he went out from the threshing floor, and
did obeisance to David with his face to the
ground. 22 David said to Ornan, "Give me the
site of the threshing floor that I may build
on it an altar to the LORD—give it to me at
its full price—so that the plague may be
averted from the people." 23 Then Ornan said
to David, "Take it; and let my lord the king do
what seems good to him; see, I present the
oxen for burnt offerings, and the threshing
sledges for the wood, and the wheat for a
grain offering. I give it all." 24 But King David
said to Ornan, "No; I will buy them for the
full price. I will not take for the LORD what is
yours, nor offer burnt offerings that cost me
nothing." 25 So David paid Ornan six hundred
shekels of gold by weight for the site. 26 David
built there an altar to the LORD and presented
burnt offerings and offerings of well-being.
He called upon the LORD, and he answered
him with fire from heaven on the altar of
burnt offering. 27 Then the LORD commanded
the angel, and he put his sword back into its
sheath.

28 At that time, when David saw that the
LORD had answered him at the threshing floor
of Ornan the Jebusite, he made his sacrifices
there. 29 For the tabernacle of the LORD, which
Moses had made in the wilderness, and the
altar of burnt offering were at that time in
the high place at Gibeon; 30 but David could
not go before it to inquire of God, for he was
afraid of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

22 1 Then David said, "Here shall be the
house of the LORD God and here the
altar of burnt offering for Israel."

able. **8:** *Take away,* better "transfer," as in 2 Sam 12.13. In both cases, the sin of David is transferred elsewhere. **15:** *Ornan,* called Araunah in 2 Sam 24. **17:** Along with the authors of Deut 7.9–10; 24.16; Jer 31.28–30; Ezek 18; 33.12–20, David argues for limiting the scope of divinely administered punishment of humans to the guilty parties themselves. **26:** The addition of a divine confirmation of David's sacrifices by fire, following the pattern of Lev 9.24 and 1 Kings 18.36–39, establishes David's altar as an enduring fixture in Israelite worship. **22.1:** David ratifies the divine action (21.26–27) by declaring the site to be the home of the future Temple. Here and elsewhere (2 Chr 3.1), the Chronicler shows unusual interest in offering explanations why the Temple was built on its current site.

2 David gave orders to gather together the
aliens who were residing in the land of Israel,
and he set stonecutters to prepare dressed
stones for building the house of God. 3 David
also provided great stores of iron for nails
for the doors of the gates and for clamps, as
well as bronze in quantities beyond weighing,
4 and cedar logs without number—for the
Sidonians and Tyrians brought great quanti-
ties of cedar to David. 5 For David said, "My
son Solomon is young and inexperienced,
and the house that is to be built for the LORD
must be exceedingly magnificent, famous and
glorified throughout all lands; I will therefore
make preparation for it." So David provided
materials in great quantity before his death.

6 Then he called for his son Solomon and
charged him to build a house for the LORD,
the God of Israel. 7 David said to Solomon,
"My son, I had planned to build a house to
the name of the LORD my God. 8 But the word
of the LORD came to me, saying, 'You have
shed much blood and have waged great wars;
you shall not build a house to my name,
because you have shed so much blood in my
sight on the earth. 9 See, a son shall be born
to you; he shall be a man of peace. I will give
him peace from all his enemies on every side;
for his name shall be Solomon,[a] and I will
give peace[b] and quiet to Israel in his days.
10 He shall build a house for my name. He
shall be a son to me, and I will be a father to
him, and I will establish his royal throne in Is-
rael forever.' 11 Now, my son, the LORD be with
you, so that you may succeed in building the
house of the LORD your God, as he has spoken
concerning you. 12 Only, may the LORD grant
you discretion and understanding, so that
when he gives you charge over Israel you may
keep the law of the LORD your God. 13 Then
you will prosper if you are careful to observe
the statutes and the ordinances that the LORD
commanded Moses for Israel. Be strong and
of good courage. Do not be afraid or dis-
mayed. 14 With great pains I have provided for
the house of the LORD one hundred thousand
talents of gold, one million talents of silver,
and bronze and iron beyond weighing, for
there is so much of it; timber and stone too I
have provided. To these you must add more.
15 You have an abundance of workers: stone-
cutters, masons, carpenters, and all kinds of
artisans without number, skilled in working
16 gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Now begin
the work, and the LORD be with you."

17 David also commanded all the leaders of
Israel to help his son Solomon, saying, 18 "Is
not the LORD your God with you? Has he not
given you peace on every side? For he has
delivered the inhabitants of the land into
my hand; and the land is subdued before the
LORD and his people. 19 Now set your mind
and heart to seek the LORD your God. Go and
build the sanctuary of the LORD God so that
the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the
holy vessels of God may be brought into a
house built for the name of the LORD."

23 When David was old and full of days, he
made his son Solomon king over Israel.

[a] Heb *Shelomoh*
[b] Heb *shalom*

22.2–19: David prepares for the construction of the Temple. David wants the future Temple to be *famous and glorified throughout all the lands;* palace-temple complexes communicated the power of a god and his king to the god(s), populace, vassals, and foreign emissaries. But Solomon is *young and inexperienced,* so David undertakes the preparations himself. Of David's many sons (see 3.1–4; 14.3–7), Solomon was one of the youngest (1 Sam 20.31; 2 Sam 13.21b [LXX; 4QSama]; 1 Kings 1.12,17; 2.22). **7–16:** This learned passage, which quotes from the dynastic promise (ch 17; cf. 2 Sam 7) and other texts, explains David's inability to build the Temple, suggesting that only Solomon (Heb "shelomoh"), understood as a man of peace ("shalom"), may build it, an issue not addressed by the books of Samuel and Kings. David, however, both here and in the following chapters, does much preparation for the project. **8:** *Much blood*, referring either to the plague (1 Chr 21.11–14) or to David's various wars. **14:** *One hundred thousand talents of gold* and *one million talents of silver,* the point is not realism but extravagance; a talent weighed ca. 75 lb (34 kg). David's gifts are deliberately excessive. **17–19:** Following the norms of Deut 12.8–14, only when peace is established may the Temple be built. **18:** *Inhabitants of the land*, the Canaanites are in view (Num 32.22,29; Josh 2.24; 18.1; 23.3–5,9–13; 24.11,18).

23.1–32: Establishing a national administration. David attains a venerable stage in his life (v. 1), *full of days,*

2 David assembled all the leaders of Israel
and the priests and the Levites. 3 The Levites,
thirty years old and upward, were counted,
and the total was thirty-eight thousand.
4 "Twenty-four thousand of these," David
said, "shall have charge of the work in the
house of the LORD, six thousand shall be
officers and judges, 5 four thousand gatekeep-
ers, and four thousand shall offer praises to
the LORD with the instruments that I have
made for praise." 6 And David organized them
in divisions corresponding to the sons of
Levi: Gershon,[a] Kohath, and Merari.

7 The sons of Gershon[b] were Ladan and
Shimei. 8 The sons of Ladan: Jehiel the chief,
Zetham, and Joel, three. 9 The sons of Shimei:
Shelomoth, Haziel, and Haran, three. These
were the heads of families of Ladan. 10 And
the sons of Shimei: Jahath, Zina, Jeush, and
Beriah. These four were the sons of Shimei.
11 Jahath was the chief, and Zizah the second;
but Jeush and Beriah did not have many sons,
so they were enrolled as a single family.

12 The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar,
Hebron, and Uzziel, four. 13 The sons of Am-
ram: Aaron and Moses. Aaron was set apart
to consecrate the most holy things, so that he
and his sons forever should make offerings
before the LORD, and minister to him and pro-
nounce blessings in his name forever; 14 but
as for Moses the man of God, his sons were
to be reckoned among the tribe of Levi. 15 The
sons of Moses: Gershom and Eliezer. 16 The
sons of Gershom: Shebuel the chief. 17 The
sons of Eliezer: Rehabiah the chief; Eliezer
had no other sons, but the sons of Rehabiah
were very numerous. 18 The sons of Izhar:
Shelomith the chief. 19 The sons of Hebron:
Jeriah the chief, Amariah the second, Jahaziel
the third, and Jekameam the fourth. 20 The
sons of Uzziel: Micah the chief and Isshiah
the second.

21 The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi.
The sons of Mahli: Eleazar and Kish. 22 Elea-
zar died having no sons, but only daughters;
their kindred, the sons of Kish, married
them. 23 The sons of Mushi: Mahli, Eder, and
Jeremoth, three.

24 These were the sons of Levi by their an-
cestral houses, the heads of families as they
were enrolled according to the number of the
names of the individuals from twenty years
old and upward who were to do the work for
the service of the house of the LORD. 25 For
David said, "The LORD, the God of Israel, has
given rest to his people; and he resides in
Jerusalem forever. 26 And so the Levites no
longer need to carry the tabernacle or any
of the things for its service"— 27 for accord-
ing to the last words of David these were the
number of the Levites from twenty years old
and upward— 28 "but their duty shall be to as-
sist the descendants of Aaron for the service

[a] Or *Gershom*; See 1 Chr 6.1, note, and 23.15
[b] Vg Compare Gk Syr: Heb *to the Gershonite*

much like Abraham (Gen 25.8), Isaac (Gen 35.29), and Job (42.17) before him. He begins preparing for his death and the reign of his son by convening his administrative leadership. This transition is smooth, in contrast to 2 Sam 15–1 Kings 2, much of which the Chronicler omits. The Chronicler will eventually return to the issue of Solomon's accession, but his first priority is to detail David's appointment of and instructions to *the leaders of Israel, the priests, and the Levites* (v. 2), who will help Solomon to succeed in his various tasks, especially completing the Temple. The summit of select leaders forms the background of David's major administrative initiatives, outlined in the narratives and the lists of 23.3–27.34. **5:** The divisions and responsibilities of the gatekeepers are outlined in ch 26. **6:** The tripartite segmentation of the Levites in vv. 6–23 resembles that of earlier Priestly sources (Ex 6.16–19; Num 3.17–39; cf. 1 Chr 6.1,16–47). **7–23:** The advent of the Temple, and the centralized worship that it represents, leads to the establishment of a system of divisions or courses among the Levites and priests. Each division was to work its appointed turn in rotation until a round was completed and a new round was begun. Although attributed to David's initiative, this development, unattested in preexilic texts, is known only in the Second Temple period. It persists to the Roman period (see Lk 1.5). Thus, here the Chronicler is legitimating worship as he knew it by attributing it to David. **13:** The mandate for the sons of Aaron to *make offerings before the LORD* is detailed in a number of contexts (Ex 29.38–42; 30.1–10; Lev 8.1–9.24; 18.8–20). **18:** Although included in the earlier genealogy (6.37), the line of Korah is not mentioned here; this is probably connected with the tradition of Korah's rebellion narrated in Num 16. **25–32:** The levitical job description is revised in light of the move toward one permanent, stationary sanctuary. **28:** The Heb means "stand at the side of," rather than

of the house of the LORD, having the care of the courts and the chambers, the cleansing of all that is holy, and any work for the service of the house of God; [29] to assist also with the rows of bread, the choice flour for the grain offering, the wafers of unleavened bread, the baked offering, the offering mixed with oil, and all measures of quantity or size. [30] And they shall stand every morning, thanking and praising the LORD, and likewise at evening, [31] and whenever burnt offerings are offered to the LORD on sabbaths, new moons, and appointed festivals, according to the number required of them, regularly before the LORD. [32] Thus they shall keep charge of the tent of meeting and the sanctuary, and shall attend the descendants of Aaron, their kindred, for the service of the house of the LORD."

24 The divisions of the descendants of Aaron were these. The sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. [2] But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no sons; so Eleazar and Ithamar became the priests. [3] Along with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, David organized them according to the appointed duties in their service. [4] Since more chief men were found among the sons of Eleazar than among the sons of Ithamar, they organized them under sixteen heads of ancestral houses of the sons of Eleazar, and eight of the sons of Ithamar. [5] They organized them by lot, all alike, for there were officers of the sanctuary and officers of God among both the sons of Eleazar and the sons of Ithamar. [6] The scribe Shemaiah son of Nethanel, a Levite, recorded them in the presence of the king, and the officers, and Zadok the priest, and Ahimelech son of Abiathar, and the heads of ancestral houses of the priests and of the Levites; one ancestral house being chosen for Eleazar and one chosen for Ithamar.

[7] The first lot fell to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah, [8] the third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim, [9] the fifth to Malchijah, the sixth to Mijamin, [10] the seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah, [11] the ninth to Jeshua, the tenth to Shecaniah, [12] the eleventh to Eliashib, the twelfth to Jakim, [13] the thirteenth to Huppah, the fourteenth to Jeshebeab, [14] the fifteenth to Bilgah, the sixteenth to Immer, [15] the seventeenth to Hezir, the eighteenth to Happizzez, [16] the nineteenth to Pethahiah, the twentieth to Jehezkel, [17] the twenty-first to Jachin, the twenty-second to Gamul, [18] the twenty-third to Delaiah, the twenty-fourth to Maaziah. [19] These had as their appointed duty in their service to enter the house of the LORD according to the procedure established for them by their ancestor Aaron, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded him.

[20] And of the rest of the sons of Levi: of the sons of Amram, Shubael; of the sons of Shubael, Jehdeiah. [21] Of Rehabiah: of the sons of Rehabiah, Isshiah the chief. [22] Of the Izharites, Shelomoth; of the sons of Shelomoth, Jahath. [23] The sons of Hebron:[a] Jeriah the chief,[b] Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, Jekameam the fourth. [24] The sons of Uzziel, Micah; of the sons of Micah, Shamir. [25] The brother of Micah, Isshiah; of the sons of Isshiah, Zechariah. [26] The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. The sons of Jaaziah: Beno.[c] [27] The sons of Merari: of Jaaziah, Beno,[c] Shoham, Zaccur, and Ibri. [28] Of Mahli: Eleazar, who had no sons. [29] Of Kish, the sons of Kish: Jerahmeel. [30] The sons of Mushi: Mahli, Eder, and Jerimoth. These were the sons of the Levites according to their ancestral houses. [31] These also cast lots corresponding to their kindred, the descendants of Aaron, in the

[a] See 23.19: Heb lacks *Hebron*
[b] See 23.19: Heb lacks *the chief*
[c] Or *his son*: Meaning of Heb uncertain

to assist the descendants of Aaron. In Chronicles the Levites and the priests have different but complementary responsibilities (see also Neh 12.45). **29:** *Rows of bread,* cf. Lev 25.4–9; 2 Chr 13.11. **30–31:** The Levites are to praise the LORD *whenever burnt offerings are offered* by the priests (16.4,7–38; 23.5). This contrasts with descriptions of Tabernacle worship in the Torah, which depict a sanctuary of silence.

24.1–19: David's priestly appointments. David organizes the priests into twenty-four divisions, which cast lots for places. **3:** *The sons of Eleazar, and . . . Ithamar* represent the two major priestly families (15.11; 18.16–17; 25.1; cf. 2 Sam 8.16–18). **20–31:** This list of Levites overlaps with that of 23.7–23. **31:** The Levites rotate by courses just as the priests do.

presence of King David, Zadok, Ahimelech, and the heads of ancestral houses of the priests and of the Levites, the chief as well as the youngest brother.

25 David and the officers of the army also set apart for the service the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with lyres, harps, and cymbals. The list of those who did the work and of their duties was: [2] Of the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asarelah, sons of Asaph, under the direction of Asaph, who prophesied under the direction of the king. [3] Of Jeduthun, the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiah, Shimei,[a] Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the direction of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied with the lyre in thanksgiving and praise to the LORD. [4] Of Heman, the sons of Heman: Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, and Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, and Romamti-ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, Mahazioth. [5] All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer, according to the promise of God to exalt him; for God had given Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. [6] They were all under the direction of their father for the music in the house of the LORD with cymbals, harps, and lyres for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the order of the king. [7] They and their kindred, who were trained in singing to the LORD, all of whom were skillful, numbered two hundred eighty-eight. [8] And they cast lots for their duties, small and great, teacher and pupil alike.

[9] The first lot fell for Asaph to Joseph; the second to Gedaliah, to him and his brothers and his sons, twelve; [10] the third to Zaccur, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [11] the fourth to Izri, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [12] the fifth to Nethaniah, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [13] the sixth to Bukkiah, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [14] the seventh to Jesarelah,[b] his sons and his brothers, twelve; [15] the eighth to Jeshaiah, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [16] the ninth to Mattaniah, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [17] the tenth to Shimei, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [18] the eleventh to Azarel, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [19] the twelfth to Hashabiah, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [20] to the thirteenth, Shubael, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [21] to the fourteenth, Mattithiah, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [22] to the fifteenth, to Jeremoth, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [23] to the sixteenth, to Hananiah, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [24] to the seventeenth, to Joshbekashah, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [25] to the eighteenth, to Hanani, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [26] to the nineteenth, to Mallothi, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [27] to the twentieth, to Eliathah, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [28] to the twenty-first, to Hothir, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [29] to the twenty-second, to Giddalti, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [30] to the twenty-third, to Mahazioth, his sons and his brothers, twelve; [31] to the twenty-fourth, to Romamti-ezer, his sons and his brothers, twelve.

26 As for the divisions of the gatekeepers: of the Korahites, Meshelemiah son of Kore, of the sons of Asaph. [2] Meshelemiah had sons: Zechariah the firstborn, Jediael

[a] One Ms: Gk: MT lacks *Shimei*
[b] Or *Asarelah*; see 25.2

25.1–31: The singers. Speaking of the singers as being *set apart* (v. 1) establishes a parallelism between David's choice and investiture of the singers, the Levites, and the priests (cf. 23.13; Num 8.14; 16.9,21; Deut 10.8; Ezra 10.8,16). On *the sons of Asaph, Heman,* and *Jeduthun,* see 6.33,44n. The allusion to music and song as a kind of prophecy (vv. 1–3; cf. 2 Chr 24.19–22) is striking and may be connected to the later tradition of David as a prophet who composed the psalms through divine inspiration; cf. 2 Kings 3.15. **1:** The *officers of the army,* as part of David's governmental apparatus, have a say in the establishment of courses for the singers. **8:** As with the priests (24.5) and other Levites (24.31), a lottery is held to determine the twenty-four divisions for the singers.

26.1–19: The gatekeepers. Part of David's administrative organization involves the gatekeepers, whom the Chronicler counts as Levites (cf. Ezra 2.42,70; Neh 11.19). Sanctuary guards were active in David's earlier reign when David transported the ark (15.18,23–24; 16.38,42; 23.5). Along with performing guard duty, the gatekeepers open the Temple in the morning; administer the use of the vessels, including the holy utensils; take charge of the flour, wine, spices, and oil (9.17–32); and perform administrative service on behalf of the king (2 Chr 31.14;

the second, Zebadiah the third, Jathniel the fourth, [3] Elam the fifth, Jehohanan the sixth, Eliehoenai the seventh. [4] Obed-edom had sons: Shemaiah the firstborn, Jehozabad the second, Joah the third, Sachar the fourth, Nethanel the fifth, [5] Ammiel the sixth, Issachar the seventh, Peullethai the eighth; for God blessed him. [6] Also to his son Shemaiah sons were born who exercised authority in their ancestral houses, for they were men of great ability. [7] The sons of Shemaiah: Othni, Rephael, Obed, and Elzabad, whose brothers were able men, Elihu and Semachiah. [8] All these, sons of Obed-edom with their sons and brothers, were able men qualified for the service; sixty-two of Obed-edom. [9] Meshelemiah had sons and brothers, able men, eighteen. [10] Hosah, of the sons of Merari, had sons: Shimri the chief (for though he was not the firstborn, his father made him chief), [11] Hilkiah the second, Tebaliah the third, Zechariah the fourth: all the sons and brothers of Hosah totaled thirteen.

[12] These divisions of the gatekeepers, corresponding to their leaders, had duties, just as their kindred did, ministering in the house of the LORD; [13] and they cast lots by ancestral houses, small and great alike, for their gates. [14] The lot for the east fell to Shelemiah. They cast lots also for his son Zechariah, a prudent counselor, and his lot came out for the north. [15] Obed-edom's came out for the south, and to his sons was allotted the storehouse. [16] For Shuppim and Hosah it came out for the west, at the gate of Shallecheth on the ascending road. Guard corresponded to guard. [17] On the east there were six Levites each day,[a] on the north four each day, on the south four each day, as well as two and two at the storehouse; [18] and for the colonnade[b] on the west there were four at the road and two at the colonnade.[b] [19] These were the divisions of the gatekeepers among the Korahites and the sons of Merari.

[20] And of the Levites, Ahijah had charge of the treasuries of the house of God and the treasuries of the dedicated gifts. [21] The sons of Ladan, the sons of the Gershonites belonging to Ladan, the heads of families belonging to Ladan the Gershonite: Jehieli.[c]

[22] The sons of Jehieli, Zetham and his brother Joel, were in charge of the treasuries of the house of the LORD. [23] Of the Amramites, the Izharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites: [24] Shebuel son of Gershom, son of Moses, was chief officer in charge of the treasuries. [25] His brothers: from Eliezer were his son Rehabiah, his son Jeshaiah, his son Joram, his son Zichri, and his son Shelomoth. [26] This Shelomoth and his brothers were in charge of all the treasuries of the dedicated gifts that King David, and the heads of families, and the officers of the thousands and the hundreds, and the commanders of the army, had dedicated. [27] From booty won in battles they dedicated gifts for the maintenance of the house of the LORD. [28] Also all that Samuel the seer, and Saul son of Kish, and Abner son of Ner, and Joab son of Zeruiah had dedicated—all dedicated gifts were in the care of Shelomoth[d] and his brothers.

[29] Of the Izharites, Chenaniah and his sons were appointed to outside duties for Israel, as officers and judges. [30] Of the Hebronites, Hashabiah and his brothers, one thousand seven hundred men of ability, had the oversight of Israel west of the Jordan for all the work of the LORD and for the service of the king. [31] Of the Hebronites, Jerijah was chief of the Hebronites. (In the fortieth year of David's reign search was made, of whatever genealogy or family, and men of great ability

[a] Gk: Heb lacks *each day*
[b] Heb *parbar*: meaning uncertain
[c] The Hebrew text of verse 21 is confused
[d] Gk Compare 26.28: Heb *Shelomith*

34.13). **13:** Because the lottery was held to determine which family was to serve at which gate, the number of members within a particular family did not determine or affect the process of selection. **16:** *Shuppim,* perhaps a scribal error, repeating the previous word. *Gate of Shallecheth,* the name occurs only here, and may also be a scribal error.

26.20–32: Treasurers, regional officials, and judges. Israel's leadership makes the task of Solomon easier by endowing the Temple and organizing its finances. The Levites also take on broad responsibilities, such as *oversight of Israel west of the Jordan* as *officers and judges* (vv. 29–30; cf. 23.3–5; 2 Chr 17.2; 19.5). **31:** *Fortieth year,* i.e.,

among them were found at Jazer in Gilead.)
32 King David appointed him and his brothers,
two thousand seven hundred men of ability,
heads of families, to have the oversight of the
Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of
the Manassites for everything pertaining to
God and for the affairs of the king.

27 This is the list of the people of Israel,
the heads of families, the commanders
of the thousands and the hundreds, and their
officers who served the king in all matters
concerning the divisions that came and went,
month after month throughout the year, each
division numbering twenty-four thousand:

2 Jashobeam son of Zabdiel was in charge
of the first division in the first month; in his
division were twenty-four thousand. 3 He
was a descendant of Perez, and was chief of
all the commanders of the army for the first
month. 4 Dodai the Ahohite was in charge of
the division of the second month; Mikloth
was the chief officer of his division. In his
division were twenty-four thousand. 5 The
third commander, for the third month, was
Benaiah son of the priest Jehoiada, as chief;
in his division were twenty-four thousand.
6 This is the Benaiah who was a mighty man
of the Thirty and in command of the Thirty;
his son Ammizabad was in charge of his
division.[a] 7 Asahel brother of Joab was fourth,
for the fourth month, and his son Zebadiah
after him; in his division were twenty-four
thousand. 8 The fifth commander, for the fifth
month, was Shamhuth, the Izrahite; in his
division were twenty-four thousand. 9 Sixth,
for the sixth month, was Ira son of Ikkesh
the Tekoite; in his division were twenty-four
thousand. 10 Seventh, for the seventh month,
was Helez the Pelonite, of the Ephraimites;
in his division were twenty-four thousand.
11 Eighth, for the eighth month, was Sibbecai
the Hushathite, of the Zerahites; in his division were twenty-four thousand. 12 Ninth, for
the ninth month, was Abiezer of Anathoth,
a Benjaminite; in his division were twenty-four thousand. 13 Tenth, for the tenth month,
was Maharai of Netophah, of the Zerahites;
in his division were twenty-four thousand.
14 Eleventh, for the eleventh month, was
Benaiah of Pirathon, of the Ephraimites;
in his division were twenty-four thousand.
15 Twelfth, for the twelfth month, was Heldai
the Netophathite, of Othniel; in his division
were twenty-four thousand.

16 Over the tribes of Israel, for the Reubenites, Eliezer son of Zichri was chief officer; for
the Simeonites, Shephatiah son of Maacah;
17 for Levi, Hashabiah son of Kemuel; for Aaron, Zadok; 18 for Judah, Elihu, one of David's
brothers; for Issachar, Omri son of Michael;
19 for Zebulun, Ishmaiah son of Obadiah;
for Naphtali, Jerimoth son of Azriel; 20 for
the Ephraimites, Hoshea son of Azaziah;
for the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joel son of
Pedaiah; 21 for the half-tribe of Manasseh in
Gilead, Iddo son of Zechariah; for Benjamin,
Jaasiel son of Abner; 22 for Dan, Azarel son
of Jeroham. These were the leaders of the
tribes of Israel. 23 David did not count those
below twenty years of age, for the LORD had
promised to make Israel as numerous as the
stars of heaven. 24 Joab son of Zeruiah began
to count them, but did not finish; yet wrath
came upon Israel for this, and the number
was not entered into the account of the Annals of King David.

25 Over the king's treasuries was Azmaveth son of Adiel. Over the treasuries in

[a] Gk Vg: Heb *Ammizabad was his division*

David's last; see 29.27. **32:** The Persian-period distinction between matters pertaining to the king and matters pertaining to God is found only in Chronicles (26.30,32; 2 Chr 19.11) and Ezra (7.26).

27.1–24: Military leaders. The orderly organization of the military, no less than the organization of the priests and the Levites, is part of David's legacy in Chronicles. The system established—twelve monthly relays of 24,000, each headed by a divisional leader (vv. 2–16)—reflects his standard administrative procedure (23.6–23; 24.1–19; 25.8–31; 26.1–12). **1:** The noun "mispar" may be translated as "census" (rather than as *list*) both here and in vv. 23–24 (cf. 23.3). **2–15:** Many of the names in this list are also found in 11.11–47; 2 Sam 23.8–39. **16–22:** Each of the tribes has its own "chief officer" participate in the national government. See 5.6n. **23:** The enumeration of twelve military divisions (288,000) leads the writer to explain why no general census of Israel is included (cf. Num 1.3,45). By counting Israelite males who were less than twenty years of age, David would be casting aspersions on the validity of one of God's solemn promises to Abraham (Gen 22.17). **24:** See ch 21.

the country, in the cities, in the villages and in the towers, was Jonathan son of Uzziah. 26 Over those who did the work of the field, tilling the soil, was Ezri son of Chelub. 27 Over the vineyards was Shimei the Ramathite. Over the produce of the vineyards for the wine cellars was Zabdi the Shiphmite. 28 Over the olive and sycamore trees in the Shephelah was Baal-hanan the Gederite. Over the stores of oil was Joash. 29 Over the herds that pastured in Sharon was Shitrai the Sharonite. Over the herds in the valleys was Shaphat son of Adlai. 30 Over the camels was Obil the Ishmaelite. Over the donkeys was Jehdeiah the Meronothite. Over the flocks was Jaziz the Hagrite. 31 All these were stewards of King David's property.

32 Jonathan, David's uncle, was a counselor, being a man of understanding and a scribe; Jehiel son of Hachmoni attended the king's sons. 33 Ahithophel was the king's counselor, and Hushai the Archite was the king's friend. 34 After Ahithophel came Jehoiada son of Benaiah, and Abiathar. Joab was commander of the king's army.

28 David assembled at Jerusalem all the officials of Israel, the officials of the tribes, the officers of the divisions that served the king, the commanders of the thousands, the commanders of the hundreds, the stewards of all the property and cattle of the king and his sons, together with the palace officials, the mighty warriors, and all the warriors. 2 Then King David rose to his feet and said: "Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had planned to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God; and I made preparations for building. 3 But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for my name, for you are a warrior and have shed blood.' 4 Yet the LORD God of Israel chose me from all my ancestral house to be king over Israel forever; for he chose Judah as leader, and in the house of Judah my father's house, and among my father's sons he took delight in making me king over all Israel. 5 And of all my sons, for the LORD has given me many, he has chosen my son Solomon to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. 6 He said to me, 'It is your son Solomon who shall build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be a son to me, and I will be a father to him. 7 I will establish his kingdom forever if he continues resolute in keeping my commandments and my ordinances, as he is today.' 8 Now therefore in the sight of all Israel, the assembly of the LORD, and in the hearing of our God, observe and search out all the commandments of the LORD your God; that you may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children after you forever.

9 "And you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve him with single mind and willing heart; for the LORD searches

27.25–32: Other administrators. The Davidic state is multifaceted. The king owns agricultural estates (v. 27), operates storehouses in both urban and rural areas for agricultural produce (vv. 27–28), and has an investment in, if not some control over, trade (v. 30). The king employs a variety of high officials who supervise his estates, fieldworkers, and storage facilities. The king also has advisers and officers (vv. 32–34) at his disposal. Some aspects of this complicated system may be anachronistic, but they are consistent with ancient Near Eastern royal practice. **30:** The *camels* and *donkeys* (or she-asses) are related directly not to agriculture, but to trade. Because the major trade routes of the ancient Near East passed through the region, trade was an important sector of the Israelite economy. **33:** On *Ahithophel* and *Hushai,* see 2 Sam 15.12,23–37.

28.1–10: All Israel ratifies accession. Having concluded his administrative organization, David assembles a large national convocation to prepare the way for Solomon's rule. **1:** Assemblies are common in the Chronicler's history (13.5; 15.3; 2 Chr 5.2–3; 11.1; 20.26). In this case, David convokes all of his nation's dignitaries to Jerusalem to witness his charge to Solomon and to enlist their support for Solomon. **2:** On the ark as God's footstool, cf. Pss 99.5; 132.7. **3:** See 22.6–8. **4:** *Chose me,* in Chronicles the Levites (15.2; 2 Chr 29.11), the tribe of Judah, and more specifically David and Solomon are all elect of God. Emphasis on Solomon's election contrasts sharply with 1 Kings 1–2. **6–7:** Cf. 17.11–14; 22.9–10. **7:** The perdurability of Davidic kingship is contingent on Solomon's obedience (cf. 17.11; 1 Kings 3.14; 8.61; 9.4), which the duty to build the Temple exemplifies (v. 10). **8:** The addressee is Israel. Much like the authors of Deuteronomy (4.23–28; 28.58–64; 30.18), the Chronicler conditions Israel's possession of the land upon its obedience to God.

every mind, and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will abandon you forever. 10 Take heed now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house as the sanctuary; be strong, and act."

11 Then David gave his son Solomon the plan of the vestibule of the temple, and of its houses, its treasuries, its upper rooms, and its inner chambers, and of the room for the mercy seat;[a] 12 and the plan of all that he had in mind: for the courts of the house of the LORD, all the surrounding chambers, the treasuries of the house of God, and the treasuries for dedicated gifts; 13 for the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, and all the work of the service in the house of the LORD; for all the vessels for the service in the house of the LORD, 14 the weight of gold for all golden vessels for each service, the weight of silver vessels for each service, 15 the weight of the golden lampstands and their lamps, the weight of gold for each lampstand and its lamps, the weight of silver for a lampstand and its lamps, according to the use of each in the service, 16 the weight of gold for each table for the rows of bread, the silver for the silver tables, 17 and pure gold for the forks, the basins, and the cups; for the golden bowls and the weight of each; for the silver bowls and the weight of each; 18 for the altar of incense made of refined gold, and its weight; also his plan for the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD.

19 "All this, in writing at the LORD's direction, he made clear to me—the plan of all the works."

20 David said further to his son Solomon, "Be strong and of good courage, and act. Do not be afraid or dismayed; for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you, until all the work for the service of the house of the LORD is finished. 21 Here are the divisions of the priests and the Levites for all the service of the house of God; and with you in all the work will be every volunteer who has skill for any kind of service; also the officers and all the people will be wholly at your command."

29 King David said to the whole assembly, "My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced, and the work is great; for the temple[b] will not be for mortals but for the LORD God. 2 So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones, and marble in abundance. 3 Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God: 4 three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for overlaying the walls of the house, 5 and for all the work to be done by artisans, gold for the things of gold and silver for the things of silver. Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the LORD?"

6 Then the leaders of ancestral houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. 7 They gave for the service of the house of God five thousand

[a] Or *the cover*
[b] Heb *fortress*

28.11–21: A plan for the Temple. Much as Moses received plans for the tabernacle (Ex 25.9), David has a divinely composed written plan for the Temple (v. 19), which he presents to Solomon. **20:** The transition from David to Solomon is patterned after Moses and Joshua; note especially *Be strong and of good courage* (Deut 31.7; 31.23; Josh 1.6–18).

29.1–9: Endowments for the Temple. To explain his own copious preparations, David contrasts young Solomon's youthful vulnerability with the tremendous task that lies ahead (cf. 22.5). David's generosity sets the stage for Israel's leadership to show similar benevolence (vv. 6–9). There are parallels with Israel's gifts to the tabernacle (Ex 25.1–7; 35.4–9,20–29). **4:** *Ophir,* probably in southern Arabia, was famous for its gold; see Isa 13.12. On the quantities, see 22.14n. **7:** The *daric* was a Persian coin, generally thought to be 8.4 gr, minted

talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. [8] Whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the LORD, into the care of Jehiel the Gershonite. [9] Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with single mind they had offered freely to the LORD; King David also rejoiced greatly.

[10] Then David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly; David said: "Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. [11] Yours, O LORD, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. [12] Riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. [13] And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name.

[14] "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. [15] For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. [16] O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. [17] I know, my God, that you search the heart, and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. [18] O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you. [19] Grant to my son Solomon that with single mind he may keep your commandments, your decrees, and your statutes, performing all of them, and that he may build the temple[a] for which I have made provision."

[20] Then David said to the whole assembly, "Bless the LORD your God." And all the assembly blessed the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before the LORD and the king. [21] On the next day they offered sacrifices and burnt offerings to the LORD, a thousand bulls, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs, with their libations, and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel; [22] and they ate and drank before the LORD on that day with great joy.

They made David's son Solomon king a second time; they anointed him as the LORD's prince, and Zadok as priest. [23] Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD, succeeding his father David as king; he prospered, and all Israel obeyed him. [24] All the leaders and the mighty warriors, and also all the sons of King David, pledged their allegiance to King Solomon. [25] The LORD highly exalted Solomon in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel.

[26] Thus David son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. [27] The period that he reigned over

[a] Heb *fortress*

sometime after 515 BCE (cf. Ezra 8.27).

29.10–19: David's farewell prayer. The Chronicler follows a paradigm in which final addresses are made by great leaders—Jacob (Gen 49.1–28), Moses (Deut 32.1–44,45–47; 33.1–29), Joshua (23.1–16; 24.1–28), Samuel (1 Sam 12.1–25), and David (2 Sam 23.1–7; 1 Kings 2.1–10). David's acclamation of the LORD's sovereignty (vv. 10–13) resonates with sentiments expressed earlier in the Psalm anthology (16.24–26) and with the prayer that he offered following Nathan's dynastic oracle (17.16–27). From David's point of view, all that he and the people donate to God ultimately stems from God himself (v. 14). Thus, following earlier biblical norms, these gifts serve as acknowledgments of God's sovereignty. **15:** *Aliens and transients*, cf. Lev 25.23.

29.20–30: David's death and the transition to Solomon. David's final blessing of Israel is coupled with the anointing of Solomon as his chosen successor. In contrast to Samuel and Kings, the transition is smooth and without incident. **22:** Another all-Israelite feast (see 12.39n.). *A second time,* whereas David earlier designated Solomon king over Israel (23.1), all of Israel's leaders now publicly endorse Solomon's enthronement. **24:** Even *all the sons of King David* acclaim Solomon, a clear polemic against the account in Samuel-Kings (2 Sam 15.1–

Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. [28] He died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor; and his son Solomon succeeded him. [29] Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the records of the seer Samuel, and in the records of the prophet Nathan, and in the records of the seer Gad, [30] with accounts of all his rule and his might and of the events that befell him and Israel and all the kingdoms of the earth.

16.14; 1 Kings 1.9–10,25–26; 2.15). **25:** In *royal majesty* Solomon's reign is unparalleled. **27:** David's reign is dated to ca. 1005–965 BCE. **28:** David enjoys a long, productive, and respected life. Security and longevity are marks of divine blessing (2 Chr 24.15; Deut 4.40; 5.16; Isa 52.10; 65.17–19). *Full of days,* see 23.1n. **29:** In the Chronicler's time, Judeans thought of the prophets not only as great figures from Israel's past but also authors of historical writings about that past. That David's reign is the subject of these three otherwise unknown accounts written by prophets during his reign, is one more indication of the Chronicler's desire to enhance David's legacy.

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2 CHRONICLES

Second Chronicles is a continuation of First Chronicles, and the two originally formed one book, as they still do in the traditional Hebrew text. (For an introduction to this work, see the Introduction to 1 Chronicles.)

The organization of 2 Chronicles falls into two major parts: the reign of Solomon (chs 1–9) and the kingdom of Judah (chs 10–36). In Chronicles the tenure of Solomon represents the apex of Israelite history, a time of unprecedented glory, prosperity, and peace. If David's reign was highly successful because David consolidated Israel's international position and prepared for the long-awaited Temple, Solomon's reign was even more successful because he brought these plans to fruition. Accordingly, much space is devoted in chs 2–7 to the construction, furnishings, and dedication of this national edifice. As the home of the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle, the Temple represents the continuation and fulfillment of earlier Israelite religious institutions. The careful attention given to the Temple and its worship reflects the importance that the Chronicler ascribed to this institution in the postexilic era. For the author, the Temple is the divinely sanctioned place for both sacrifice and prayer (6.1–7.22), a view also present in the book of Kings.

The Chronicler's account of the divided monarchy differs in many respects from that found in 1 and 2 Kings, even though he draws heavily from Kings to write his own work. The writer excludes the independent history of the Northern Kingdom because he regards both the kingship and the sanctuaries of this new state as an affront to God (13.4–12). The choice not to recount the record of northern Israel also means that the stories of northern prophets such as Elijah and Elisha are not found in Chronicles. The author does add, however, much coverage to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, including a letter from Elijah to a southern king (2 Chr 21.12–15). Some of the material unique to Chronicles reflects well on the reigns of major Judahite monarchs, such as Asa (chs 14–16), Jehoshaphat (chs 17–20), and Hezekiah (chs 29–32). Throughout his presentation, the Chronicler exhibits a keen concern for all Israelite tribes. The Chronicler criticizes the Northern Kingdom and its monarchs, but he still considers the northern tribes as Israelite and shows a sustained interest in their contacts with Judah. In the latter part of its history, Judah lost ground to its enemies and was exiled from its land to Babylon (586 BCE). A major concern of the Chronicler is not only to trace this decline, but also to explain it and to commend the reforms aimed at reversing it. On the whole, he presents a more optimistic version of this period than do the authors of Kings. (See further the Introduction to 1 Chronicles, pp. 575-577 HB.)

Gary N. Knoppers

1 Solomon son of David established himself
in his kingdom; the LORD his God was with
him and made him exceedingly great.

2 Solomon summoned all Israel, the
commanders of the thousands and of the
hundreds, the judges, and all the leaders of all
Israel, the heads of families. 3 Then Solomon,
and the whole assembly with him, went to
the high place that was at Gibeon; for God's
tent of meeting, which Moses the servant of
the LORD had made in the wilderness, was
there. 4 (But David had brought the ark of God
up from Kiriath-jearim to the place that David
had prepared for it; for he had pitched a tent
for it in Jerusalem.) 5 Moreover the bronze
altar that Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, had
made, was there in front of the tabernacle
of the LORD. And Solomon and the assembly
inquired at it. 6 Solomon went up there to the
bronze altar before the LORD, which was at
the tent of meeting, and offered a thousand
burnt offerings on it.

7 That night God appeared to Solomon,
and said to him, "Ask what I should give you."
8 Solomon said to God, "You have shown great
and steadfast love to my father David, and
have made me succeed him as king. 9 O LORD
God, let your promise to my father David now
be fulfilled, for you have made me king over a
people as numerous as the dust of the earth.
10 Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go
out and come in before this people, for who
can rule this great people of yours?" 11 God
answered Solomon, "Because this was in your
heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who
hate you, and have not even asked for long
life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may rule my people
over whom I have made you king, 12 wisdom
and knowledge are granted to you. I will also
give you riches, possessions, and honor, such
as none of the kings had who were before
you, and none after you shall have the like."
13 So Solomon came from[a] the high place at
Gibeon, from the tent of meeting, to Jerusalem. And he reigned over Israel.

14 Solomon gathered together chariots and
horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots
and twelve thousand horses, which he
stationed in the chariot cities and with the
king in Jerusalem. 15 The king made silver and
gold as common in Jerusalem as stone, and
he made cedar as plentiful as the sycamore
of the Shephelah. 16 Solomon's horses were
imported from Egypt and Kue; the king's traders received them from Kue at the prevailing
price. 17 They imported from Egypt, and then

[a] Gk Vg: Heb *to*

1.1–17: Solomon takes charge, journeys to Gibeon, and prospers. Solomon rules an Israel unified and unhampered by internal factions or strife. Solomon's legitimacy is stressed by repeated references to him as David's rightful successor and king by divine choice (1 Chr 17.11; 23.1; 28.6; 29.23–25; 2 Chr 1.1; 6.10; 7.17–18). The Chronicler presents the United Monarchy as the time when Israel's authoritative institutions took shape. The idealized presentation of David and Solomon effectively establishes a model by which later periods are judged. **1:** Solomon ruled ca. 968–928 BCE. When Solomon took office, he immediately *established himself in his kingdom* and enjoyed the LORD's blessings (v. 1). There was no need to pacify, eliminate, or exile his domestic foes (1 Kings 1–2) because David had already consolidated support for Solomon (1 Chr 23–29). **2–13:** The support of military, local, and civil officials enables the nation to embark on major new initiatives in a harmonious fashion (1 Chr 11.1–3; 13.1–4; 23.1–2; 28.1; 29.1–25). In this case, the author transforms a story about Solomon's private pilgrimage to the high place at Gibeon (1 Kings 3.3–15) into a national pilgrimage, adding that the tent of meeting (see Ex 38–39) was located at Gibeon (1 Chr 16.39–42). This type of addition, which harmonizes a variety of earlier texts, typifies Chronicles. **4:** See 1 Chr 13; 15. **5:** On *Bezalel* and the *bronze altar,* cf. Ex 27.1–2; 31.1; 1 Chr 2.20. The emphasis here is on continuity. **11–12:** The divine gifts of unprecedented *wisdom and knowledge,* as well as *possessions, wealth* and *honor* set the tone and tenor of Solomon's reign. Nevertheless, the theme of Solomon's wisdom is not as pronounced in Chronicles as it is in Kings. **14–17:** These verses, drawn from 1 Kings 10.26–29, illustrate that God's promises to Solomon at Gibeon are being realized. The rearrangement of earlier sources is typical of the Chronicler. **15:** *The Shephelah,* the foothills between the coastal plain and the Judean hill country. **16:** *Kue,* in Cilicia, in southern Asia Minor. **17:** A *shekel* weighed about 11.5 gr (.4 oz). The *kings of the Hittites* ruled over northern Syria; *Aram* was southern Syria.

2.1–18: Solomon prepares to build the Temple. As David's appointed successor, Solomon brings his father's

exported, a chariot for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for one hundred fifty; so through them these were exported to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram.

2 [a] Solomon decided to build a temple for the name of the LORD, and a royal palace for himself. [2] [b]Solomon conscripted seventy thousand laborers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hill country, with three thousand six hundred to oversee them.

[3] Solomon sent word to King Huram of Tyre: "Once you dealt with my father David and sent him cedar to build himself a house to live in. [4] I am now about to build a house for the name of the LORD my God and dedicate it to him for offering fragrant incense before him, and for the regular offering of the rows of bread, and for burnt offerings morning and evening, on the sabbaths and the new moons and the appointed festivals of the LORD our God, as ordained forever for Israel. [5] The house that I am about to build will be great, for our God is greater than other gods. [6] But who is able to build him a house, since heaven, even highest heaven, cannot contain him? Who am I to build a house for him, except as a place to make offerings before him? [7] So now send me an artisan skilled to work in gold, silver, bronze, and iron, and in purple, crimson, and blue fabrics, trained also in engraving, to join the skilled workers who are with me in Judah and Jerusalem, whom my father David provided. [8] Send me also cedar, cypress, and algum timber from Lebanon, for I know that your servants are skilled in cutting Lebanon timber. My servants will work with your servants [9] to prepare timber for me in abundance, for the house I am about to build will be great and wonderful. [10] I will provide for your servants, those who cut the timber, twenty thousand cors of crushed wheat, twenty thousand cors of barley, twenty thousand baths[c] of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil."

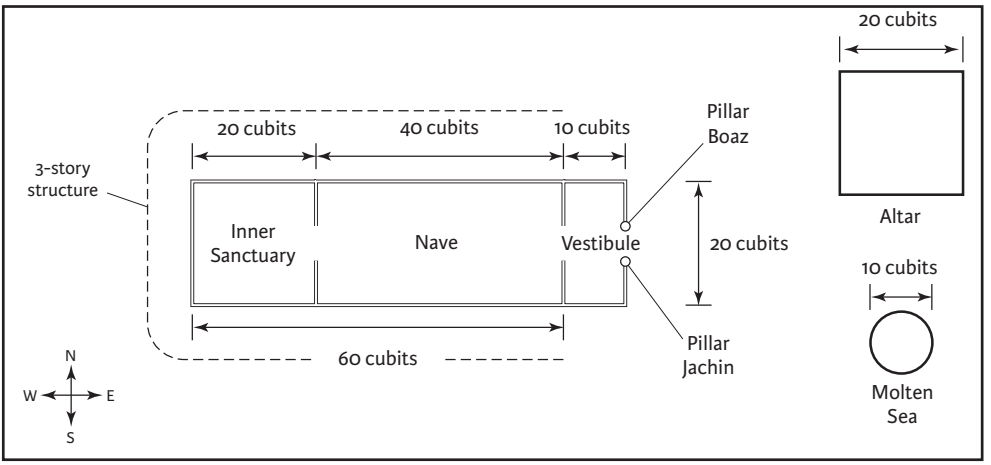
[11] Then King Huram of Tyre answered in a letter that he sent to Solomon, "Because the LORD loves his people he has made you king over them." [12] Huram also said, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who made heaven and earth, who has given King David a wise son, endowed with discretion and understanding, who will build a temple for the LORD, and a royal palace for himself.

[13] "I have dispatched Huram-abi, a skilled artisan, endowed with understanding, [14] the son of one of the Danite women, his father a Tyrian. He is trained to work in gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, and wood, and in purple, blue, and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and to do all sorts of engraving and execute any design that may be assigned him, with your artisans, the artisans of my lord, your father David. [15] Now, as for the wheat, barley, oil, and wine, of which my lord has spoken, let him send them to his servants. [16] We will cut whatever timber you need from Lebanon, and bring it to you as rafts by sea to Joppa; you will take it up to Jerusalem."

[17] Then Solomon took a census of all the aliens who were residing in the land of Israel, after the census that his father David had taken; and there were found to be one hundred fifty-three thousand six hundred. [18] Seventy thousand of them he assigned as laborers, eighty thousand as stonecutters in the hill

[a] Ch 1.18 in Heb
[b] Ch 2.1 in Heb
[c] A Hebrew measure of volume

hopes and designs to fruition by focusing much of his energy on constructing, equipping, and staffing the Temple. Like David, Solomon is a devoted patron of his nation's worship and makes this the first priority of his reign. **1–10:** These verses, largely drawn from 1 Kings 5.1–6,11, provide external confirmation of both Solomon's gifts and the planto build a temple. Vv. 4–5, however, have no source in Kings, and reflect later theological notions. **3:** *Huram* (called Hiram in 1 Kings) had been an ally of David (see 2 Sam 5.11), sending him materials to build his palace. **4:** *Rows of bread,* see 1 Chr 9.32; Lev 24.5–9. *Burnt offerings,* see 1 Chr 16.40; Ex 29.38–42; Lev 6.20. **8:** *Algum* ("almug" in 1 Kings), an unidentified species of tree. **10:** A *cor* was about 230 l (6.5 bu); a *bath* about 23 l (6 gal). **11–12:** An elaborated version of 1 Kings 5.7. **13–16:** Cf. 1 Kings 7.13–14. There *Huram-abi* is called Hiram and hails from Naphtali. **17–18:** The census of *aliens* is a prelude to conscription for the Temple's construction (1 Kings 9.22). In Chronicles Solomon does not conscript Israelites to build the Temple and other public buildings as he does in Kings (1 Kings 5.13–18; 12.4).



The Temple of Solomon according to Second Chronicles.

country, and three thousand six hundred as overseers to make the people work.

3 Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had designated, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. [2] He began to build on the second day of the second month of the fourth year of his reign. [3] These are Solomon's measurements[a] for building the house of God: the length, in cubits of the old standard, was sixty cubits, and the width twenty cubits. [4] The vestibule in front of the nave of the house was twenty cubits long, across the width of the house;[b] and its height was one hundred twenty cubits. He overlaid it on the inside with pure gold. [5] The nave he lined with cypress, covered it with fine gold, and made palms and chains on it. [6] He adorned the house with settings of precious stones. The gold was gold from Parvaim. [7] So he lined the house with gold—its beams, its thresholds, its walls, and its doors; and he carved cherubim on the walls.

[8] He made the most holy place; its length, corresponding to the width of the house, was twenty cubits, and its width was twenty cubits; he overlaid it with six hundred talents of fine gold. [9] The weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold. He overlaid the upper chambers with gold.

[a] Syr: Heb *foundations*

[b] Compare 1 Kings 6.3: Meaning of Heb uncertain

3.1–17: Temple construction (see map above). A condensed and rewritten version of 1 Kings 6; 7.15–22 (see also the notes there). **1:** Only here is *Mount Moriah,* the site of the binding of Isaac (Gen 22.2), explicitly identified with the Temple site. According to the Chronicler, it is also the location where David was instructed to build an altar to God (1 Chr 21.15–22.1) following his calamitous census (1 Chr 21.1–14). **3:** *House of God,* like the Tabernacle described in Exodus, Solomon's Temple had three major sections, though some of these sections have different names: a "vestibule" (v. 4), a "nave" (vv. 4–5), and a "most holy place" (v. 8). Of these "the most holy place" was the most exclusive and sacred, but the "nave" (or sanctuary) was the largest and contained an incense altar, the "ten golden lampstands" (v. 7), and the "ten tables" (v. 8). Archaeology has revealed a variety of ancient Near Eastern parallels to the tripartite design depicted here. A *cubit* was about 45 cm (18 in); the cubit of *the old standard* may have been slightly longer. **4:** The measurement of *one hundred twenty cubits* for the height of the main part of the building dwarfs the thirty cubits measurement of Solomon's Temple in 1 Kings 6.2. **6:** The location of *Parvaim* is unknown. **8–9:** The Chronicler portrays Solomon, like David (1 Chr 29.1–5), as deliberately excessive in providing for the Temple. The *six hundred talents of fine gold* is the equivalent of over 20,000 kg (45,000 lbs). 1 Kings 6.19–22 simply speaks of "pure gold." **10–14:** Largely abridged from 1 Kings 6.23–28. **10:** *Cherubim* were winged, sphinxlike creatures with human faces (cf. Gen 3.24; 1 Kings 6.23; Ezek 41.18–19). In the ancient Near East, kings were sometimes represented as sitting on a throne supported by

10 In the most holy place he made two carved cherubim and overlaid[a] them with gold. 11 The wings of the cherubim together extended twenty cubits: one wing of the one, five cubits long, touched the wall of the house, and its other wing, five cubits long, touched the wing of the other cherub; 12 and of this cherub, one wing, five cubits long, touched the wall of the house, and the other wing, also five cubits long, was joined to the wing of the first cherub. 13 The wings of these cherubim extended twenty cubits; the cherubim[b] stood on their feet, facing the nave. 14 And Solomon[c] made the curtain of blue and purple and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and worked cherubim into it.

15 In front of the house he made two pillars thirty-five cubits high, with a capital of five cubits on the top of each. 16 He made encircling[d] chains and put them on the tops of the pillars; and he made one hundred pomegranates, and put them on the chains. 17 He set up the pillars in front of the temple, one on the right, the other on the left; the one on the right he called Jachin, and the one on the left, Boaz.

4 He made an altar of bronze, twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and ten cubits high. 2 Then he made the molten sea; it was round, ten cubits from rim to rim, and five cubits high. A line of thirty cubits would encircle it completely. 3 Under it were panels all around, each of ten cubits, surrounding the sea; there were two rows of panels, cast when it was cast. 4 It stood on twelve oxen, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east; the sea was set on them. The hindquarters of each were toward the inside. 5 Its thickness was a handbreadth; its rim was made like the rim of a cup, like the flower of a lily; it held three thousand baths.[e] 6 He also made ten basins in which to wash, and set five on the right side, and five on the left. In these they were to rinse what was used for the burnt offering. The sea was for the priests to wash in.

7 He made ten golden lampstands as prescribed, and set them in the temple, five on the south side and five on the north. 8 He also made ten tables and placed them in the temple, five on the right side and five on the left. And he made one hundred basins of gold. 9 He made the court of the priests, and

[a] Heb *they overlaid*
[b] Heb *they*
[c] Heb *he*
[d] Cn: Heb *in the inner sanctuary*
[e] A Hebrew measure of volume

cherubim. In this case, however, the "cherubim" symbolized the invisible LORD's enthronement in *the most holy place.* **14:** The reference to the *curtain* draws a parallel between the tabernacle (Ex 26.31) and the Temple. 1 Kings 6.31 instead mentions doors. The Chronicler often buttresses the antiquity of the Jerusalem Temple by stressing the continuity between it and older religious institutions such as the tabernacle. **15–17:** On *Jachin* and *Boaz,* see 1 Kings 7.15–22n. **15:** *Pillars,* one pillar stood on each side of the Temple's entrance. Their height of *thirty-five cubits* is nearly double that registered in 1 Kings 7.15.

4.1–22: The Temple furnishings. Largely taken from 1 Kings 7.23–51 (excepting vv. 27–37). **1:** The reference to the *altar of bronze* may have been drawn from 1 Kings 8.64 (cf. 2 Kings 16.14). See also 2 Chr 1.5 and Ezek 43.13–17. **2–6:** *The molten sea*, made from cast bronze, rested upon a foundation of twelve oxen or bulls, which were traditionally associated with strength and fertility in ancient Canaan. Given that one bath measured approximately 6 gal (23 l), this Temple furnishing was of monumental size. 1 Kings 7.23–26 also describes the *molten sea,* but does not mention that it was used for priestly ablutions. **4:** The *twelve oxen* supporting the molten sea are grouped in threes and face outward in each of the four directions of the compass. **6:** *Ten basins,* see 1 Kings 7.38–39. The tabernacle had only one basin (Ex 30.17). *To wash,* the explanation is not found in Kings. It has been drawn from the Priestly description of the tent of meeting (Ex 30.17–21). **7:** *Ten golden lampstands,* Chronicles, in conformity with Kings, mentions multiple lampstands in the Temple (1 Chr 28.15; 2 Chr 4.20 || 1 Kings 7.49). In contrast, the tabernacle has one lampstand (Ex 25.31–40; 31.8; Lev 24.1–4; Num 8.2–4). As "a statute forever throughout your generations" (Lev 24.3), the candelabrum's lamps were to burn every evening (Ex 25.37; 30.7–8; Lev 24.3; Num 8.2; 2 Chr 13.11). **8:** *Ten tables,* in contrast with the one table in the tabernacle (Ex 25.23–30; 26.35; Lev 24.5–9; 2 Chr 13.11) and the one table in the Temple described by 1 Kings 7.48, the Chronicler's Temple had ten. On these tables the "bread of the Presence" would be laid. **9:** The reference to the *court of the priests* likely reflects the Temple of the Chronicler's own day in which the inner court (1 Kings 6.36; 7.12) was reserved for priests and the outer

the great court, and doors for the court; he overlaid their doors with bronze. 10 He set the sea at the southeast corner of the house.

11 And Huram made the pots, the shovels, and the basins. Thus Huram finished the work that he did for King Solomon on the house of God: 12 the two pillars, the bowls, and the two capitals on the top of the pillars; and the two latticeworks to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the top of the pillars; 13 the four hundred pomegranates for the two latticeworks, two rows of pomegranates for each latticework, to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the pillars. 14 He made the stands, the basins on the stands, 15 the one sea, and the twelve oxen underneath it. 16 The pots, the shovels, the forks, and all the equipment for these Huram-abi made of burnished bronze for King Solomon for the house of the Lord. 17 In the plain of the Jordan the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredah. 18 Solomon made all these things in great quantities, so that the weight of the bronze was not determined.

19 So Solomon made all the things that were in the house of God: the golden altar, the tables for the bread of the Presence, 20 the lampstands and their lamps of pure gold to burn before the inner sanctuary, as prescribed; 21 the flowers, the lamps, and the tongs, of purest gold; 22 the snuffers, basins, ladles, and firepans, of pure gold. As for the entrance to the temple: the inner doors to the most holy place and the doors of the nave of the temple were of gold.

5 Thus all the work that Solomon did for the house of the Lord was finished. Solomon brought in the things that his father David had dedicated, and stored the silver, the gold, and all the vessels in the treasuries of the house of God.

2 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the people of Israel, in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion. 3 And all the Israelites assembled before the king at the festival that is in the seventh month. 4 And all the elders of Israel came, and the Levites carried the ark. 5 So they brought up the ark, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. 6 King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be numbered or counted. 7 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. 8 For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles. 9 The poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside; they are there to this day. 10 There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets that Moses put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant[a] with the people of Israel after they came out of Egypt.

11 Now when the priests came out of the holy place (for all the priests who were

[a] Heb lacks *a covenant*

court was for laity, at least on some occasions (1 Chr 28.12; 2 Chr 7.7; 29.16; Neh 8.16). See also Ezekiel's restored temple (Ezek 41.15; 42.7–14; 44.19; 45.19; 46.1). **11:** *Huram,* see 2.13–16n. The *pots, the shovels, and the basins* were employed in sacrificial rituals (Ex 27.3; 1 Kings 7.40). **17:** *Succoth and Zeredah* (Zarethan in 1 Kings 7.46) were towns situated east of the Jordan River. **19:** *Bread of the Presence,* see Ex 25.30; Lev 24.5–9.

5.1–14: The ark and the tent of meeting ascend into the Temple. These verses, except vv. 11b–13a, are largely drawn from 1 Kings 8.1–13. The incorporation of both the tabernacle and the ark into the Temple means that both of these older religious institutions find their fulfillment in the Jerusalem sanctuary. Like the authors of Deuteronomy (ch 12) and the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua–2 Kings), the Chronicler commends the centralization of Yahwistic worship and the abolition of all other sanctuaries. Sacrifices are to be carried out only at the Jerusalem Temple and prayers are to be offered at or toward this site (5.5–6.42), making the Temple the focal point of national life. **2:** On the importance of assemblies in Chronicles, see 1.2–13n. **4:** That the Levites carry the ark conforms to David's instructions (1 Chr 15.2) and Deuteronomic law (Deut 10.8). In 1 Kings 8.3, the

present had sanctified themselves, without regard to their divisions), [12] all the levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kindred, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with one hundred twenty priests who were trumpeters. [13] It was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD,

"For he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever,"

the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, [14] so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

6 Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he would reside in thick darkness. [2] I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to reside in forever."

[3] Then the king turned around and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel stood. [4] And he said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to my father David, saying, [5] 'Since the day that I brought my people out of the land of Egypt, I have not chosen a city from any of the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, so that my name might be there, and I chose no one as ruler over my people Israel; [6] but I have chosen Jerusalem in order that my name may be there, and I have chosen David to be over my people Israel.' [7] My father David had it in mind to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. [8] But the LORD said to my father David, 'You did well to consider building a house for my name; [9] nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name.' [10] Now the LORD has fulfilled his promise that he made; for I have succeeded my father David, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. [11] There I have set the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with the people of Israel."

[12] Then Solomon[a] stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands. [13] Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the court; and he stood on it. Then he knelt on his knees in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven. [14] He said, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant in steadfast love with your servants who walk before you with all their heart— [15] you who have kept for your servant, my father David, what you promised to him. Indeed, you promised with your mouth and this day have fulfilled with your hand. [16] Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant, my father David, that which you promised

[a] Heb *he*

"priests" do so. **10:** *Two tablets,* see Deut 10.1–5. *Horeb* is another name for Sinai. **11–13:** The Chronicler's addition to the Kings narrative points out that David's levitical and priestly arrangements (1 Chr 15–16; 25–26) were broadly implemented. *Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun,* see 1 Chr 6.33n.,44n. **13:** For the hymnic excerpt, see 7.3n. *Cloud,* see 1 Kings 8.10–11n.

6.1–42: Solomon's blessing and Temple dedication prayer. With the exception of vv. 13 and 41–42, this entire chapter is reproduced, with some significant modifications, from the author's version of 1 Kings 8.12–52. Solomon's public speeches situate the Temple's construction in Israel's national life—past, present, and future. **4–11:** In his blessing, Solomon praises God that a number of the promises to David (1 Chr 17.1–15) have been fulfilled. **12–40:** The pattern of divine fidelity recounted in Solomon's blessing becomes the occasion for Solomon to request that other divine promises be realized (vv. 14–17). The heart of the prayer of dedication (vv. 22–40) consists of seven petitions detailing a variety of predicaments in which the nation may find itself, including defeat by the enemy (vv. 24–25), drought (vv. 26–27), open pitched battles (vv. 34–35), and even exile (vv. 36–39). In each case Solomon prays that God might listen from his heavenly dwelling and be attentive to the prayers of his people. **13:** The *bronze platform* is found only here. **16:** *My law* (Heb "torah"), replacing "before me" of 1 Kings 8.25. This small change likely reflects the new importance of the Torah-book in the postexilic commu-

him, saying, 'There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children keep to their way, to walk in my law as you have walked before me.' 17 Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant David.

18 "But will God indeed reside with mortals on earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built! 19 Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you. 20 May your eyes be open day and night toward this house, the place where you promised to set your name, and may you heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. 21 And hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; may you hear from heaven your dwelling place; hear and forgive.

22 "If someone sins against another and is required to take an oath and comes and swears before your altar in this house, 23 may you hear from heaven, and act, and judge your servants, repaying the guilty by bringing their conduct on their own head, and vindicating those who are in the right by rewarding them in accordance with their righteousness.

24 "When your people Israel, having sinned against you, are defeated before an enemy but turn again to you, confess your name, pray and plead with you in this house, 25 may you hear from heaven, and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them again to the land that you gave to them and to their ancestors.

26 "When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, and then they pray toward this place, confess your name, and turn from their sin, because you punish them, 27 may you hear in heaven, forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, when you teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send down rain upon your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance.

28 "If there is famine in the land, if there is plague, blight, mildew, locust, or caterpillar; if their enemies besiege them in any of the settlements of the lands; whatever suffering, whatever sickness there is; 29 whatever prayer, whatever plea from any individual or from all your people Israel, all knowing their own suffering and their own sorrows so that they stretch out their hands toward this house; 30 may you hear from heaven, your dwelling place, forgive, and render to all whose heart you know, according to all their ways, for only you know the human heart. 31 Thus may they fear you and walk in your ways all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our ancestors.

32 "Likewise when foreigners, who are not of your people Israel, come from a distant land because of your great name, and your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm, when they come and pray toward this house, 33 may you hear from heaven your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigners ask of you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

34 "If your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to you toward this city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, 35 then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause.

36 "If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to a land far or near; 37 then if they come to their senses in the land to which they have been taken captive, and repent, and plead with you in the land of their captivity, saying, 'We have sinned, and have done wrong; we have acted wickedly'; 38 if they repent with all their heart and soul in the land of their captivity, to which they were taken captive, and pray toward their land, which you gave to their ancestors, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, 39 then hear from heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their pleas, maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you. 40 Now, O my God, let your eyes be open and your ears attentive to prayer from this place.

41 "Now rise up, O LORD God, and go to
your resting place,
you and the ark of your might.
Let your priests, O LORD God, be clothed
with salvation,
and let your faithful rejoice in your
goodness.
42 O LORD God, do not reject your anointed
one.
Remember your steadfast love for your
servant David."

7 When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. 2 The priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house. 3 When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying,

"For he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever."

4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before the LORD. 5 King Solomon offered as a sacrifice twenty-two thousand oxen and one hundred twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. 6 The priests stood at their posts; the Levites also, with the instruments for music to the LORD that King David had made for giving thanks to the LORD—for his steadfast love endures forever—whenever David offered praises by their ministry. Opposite them the priests sounded trumpets; and all Israel stood.

7 Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that was in front of the house of the LORD; for there he offered the burnt offerings and the fat of the offerings of well-being because the bronze altar Solomon had made could not hold the burnt offering and the grain offering and the fat parts.

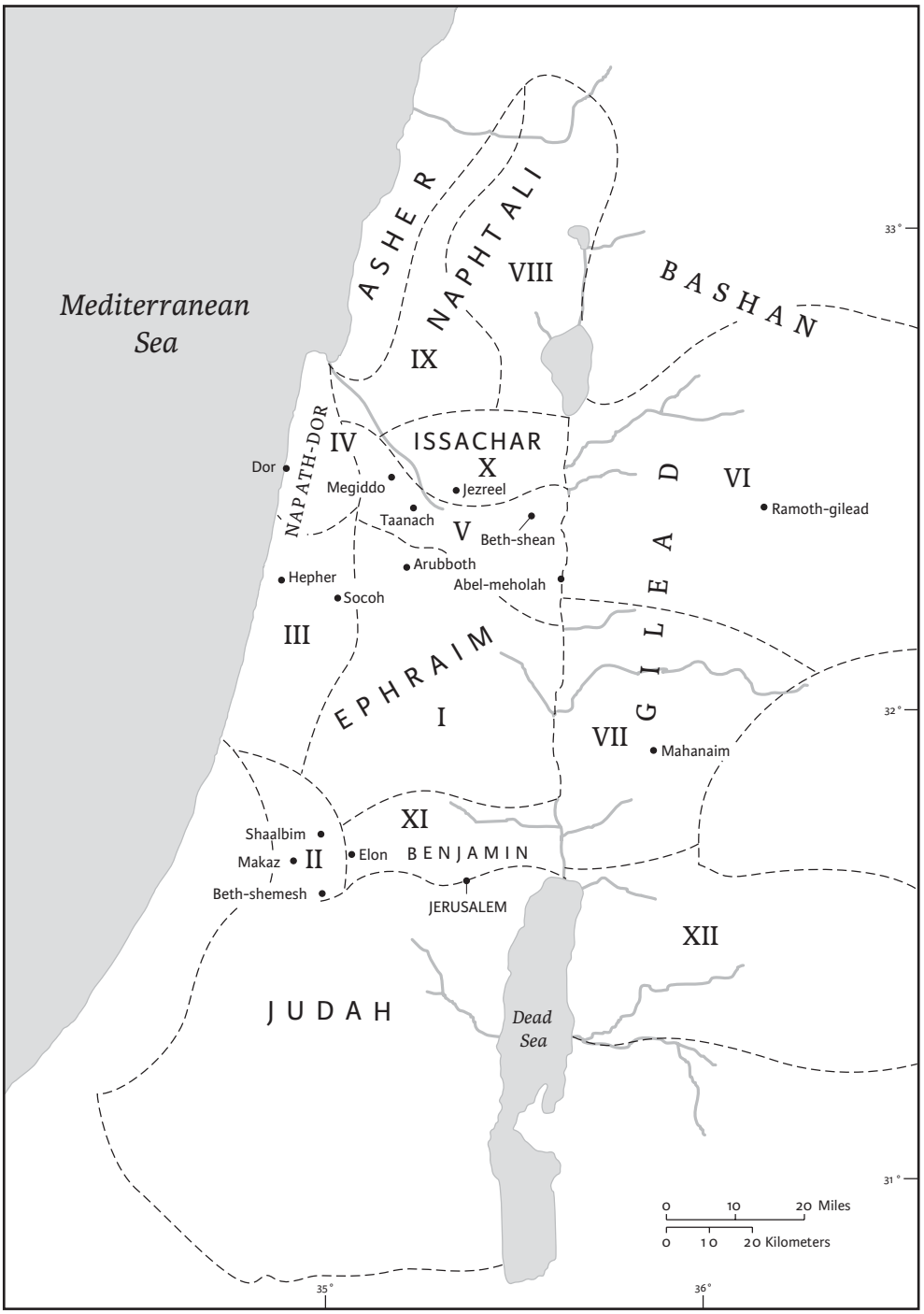
8 At that time Solomon held the festival for seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. 9 On the eighth day they held a solemn assembly; for they had observed the dedication of the altar seven days and the festival seven days. 10 On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their homes, joyful and in good spirits because of the goodness that the LORD had shown to David and to Solomon and to his people Israel.

11 Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD and the king's house; all that Solomon had planned to do in the house of the LORD and in his own house he successfully accomplished.

12 Then the LORD appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. 13 When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, 14 if my people who are called by my name humble

nity. **41–42:** Solomon's prayer of 1 Kings 8 is given a new conclusion from Ps 132.8–10.

7.1–22: Divine consecration, national thanksgiving, and a warning. Both the Deuteronomist (1 Kings 9.1–9) and the Chronicler mention a divine response to Solomon's prayer (vv. 16–22), but the Chronicler also includes other material affirming both the Temple (vv. 1–3,11) and King Solomon's petitions (vv. 13–15). The divine response to Solomon therefore explicitly validates Jerusalem as the site of Israel's central sanctuary. **1:** The divine consecration of *the burnt offering and the sacrifices* by *fire,* not found in 1 Kings 8–9, dramatically legitimates the Jerusalem Temple as an enduring fixture of Israelite life (Lev 9.24; 1 Kings 18.36–39; 1 Chr 21.26). **3:** The people's liturgical refrain—*"For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever"*—also found in Ps 136 (and 1 Chr 16.34; 2 Chr 5.13; 7.6; 20.21; Ezra 3.11), was likely a significant element of the postexilic Temple liturgy. **7–8:** Taken in part from 1 Kings 8.65–66. *From Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt,* the northern and southern limits of Solomon's rule. *Lebo-hamath* is probably in the southern Orontes valley in Lebanon. *The Wadi of Egypt,* either the Wadi Besor or the Wadi el-Arish, both south of Gaza. See map on p. 592 HB. **9–10:** The festivities last far longer than in 1 Kings 8.66, in which the Priestly legislation is not a consideration (cf. Lev 23.36; Num 29.35–38; Neh 8.18). **13–14:** The Temple is approved as an appropriate means of divine-human communications. Should king or people find themselves in duress, they may respond in four ways: *humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways.* For his part, the LORD will *hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land*



Chs 8–9. The kingdom of Solomon.

themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. 16 For now I have chosen and consecrated this house so that my name may be there forever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time. 17 As for you, if you walk before me, as your father David walked, doing according to all that I have commanded you and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, 18 then I will establish your royal throne, as I made covenant with your father David saying, 'You shall never lack a successor to rule over Israel.'

19 "But if you[a] turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, 20 then I will pluck you[b] up from the land that I have given you;[b] and this house, which I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. 21 And regarding this house, now exalted, everyone passing by will be astonished, and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this house?' 22 Then they will say, 'Because they abandoned the LORD the God of their ancestors who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and they adopted other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore he has brought all this calamity upon them.'"

8 At the end of twenty years, during which Solomon had built the house of the LORD and his own house, 2 Solomon rebuilt the cities that Huram had given to him, and settled the people of Israel in them.

3 Solomon went to Hamath-zobah, and captured it. 4 He built Tadmor in the wilderness and all the storage towns that he built in Hamath. 5 He also built Upper Beth-horon and Lower Beth-horon, fortified cities, with walls, gates, and bars, 6 and Baalath, as well as all Solomon's storage towns, and all the towns for his chariots, the towns for his cavalry, and whatever Solomon desired to build, in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion. 7 All the people who were left of the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of Israel, 8 from their descendants who were still left in the land, whom the people of Israel had not destroyed—these Solomon conscripted for forced labor, as is still the case today. 9 But of the people of Israel Solomon made no slaves for his work; they were soldiers, and his officers, the commanders of his chariotry and cavalry. 10 These were the chief officers of King Solomon, two hundred fifty of them, who exercised authority over the people.

11 Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter from the city of David to the house that he had built for her, for he said, "My wife shall not live in the house of King David of Israel, for the places to which the ark of the LORD has come are holy."

[a] The word *you* in this verse is plural
[b] Heb *them*

(v. 14). **19–22:** Israel's possession of the land, as well as the longevity of the Temple itself, are keyed to national obedience (cf. 1 Chr 28.7).

8.1–18: Solomon the successful king. Following the Temple's dedication, Solomon advances his program of public works (vv. 3–6,11), continues his patronage of the nation's worship (vv. 12–15), employs the tribute from a foreign king to good advantage (v. 2; cf. 1 Kings 9.10–14), and engages in international trade (vv. 17–18). **2:** This reflects a remarkable reversal of the tradition recorded in 1 Kings 9.11–13. **3:** An otherwise unattested campaign. Although in Chronicles Solomon (Heb "shelomoh") is a man of peace ("shalom"; 1 Chr 22.9), he here expands his kingdom through military means. No place named *Hamath-zobah* is known; elsewhere Hamath and Zobah are separate kingdoms in Syria. **4:** Solomon's control reaches to Syria (see map on p. 626 HB). The system of twelve prefects and the districts they governed (1 Kings 4.7–19) is not found in Chronicles, possibly because these districts did not follow traditional tribal boundaries. *Tadmor* is later Palmyra, an important oasis in the desert ca. 225 km (140 mi) northeast of Damascus. Some Hebrew texts of 1 Kings 9.18 read "Tamar," a small place in Judah, while others read "Tadmor," as in Chronicles. **7–10:** Largely derived from 1 Kings 9.20–23. **7:** These are some of the traditional inhabitants of the land of Canaan; see Gen 15.20; Deut 20.17. **11:** Compare 1 Kings 3.1;

12 Then Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of the LORD
that he had built in front of the vestibule,
13 as the duty of each day required, offering
according to the commandment of Moses for
the sabbaths, the new moons, and the three
annual festivals—the festival of unleavened
bread, the festival of weeks, and the festival
of booths. 14 According to the ordinance of his
father David, he appointed the divisions of
the priests for their service, and the Levites
for their offices of praise and ministry alongside the priests as the duty of each day required, and the gatekeepers in their divisions
for the several gates; for so David the man of
God had commanded. 15 They did not turn
away from what the king had commanded the
priests and Levites regarding anything at all,
or regarding the treasuries.

16 Thus all the work of Solomon was accomplished from[a] the day the foundation
of the house of the LORD was laid until the
house of the LORD was finished completely.

17 Then Solomon went to Ezion-geber and
Eloth on the shore of the sea, in the land of
Edom. 18 Huram sent him, in the care of his
servants, ships and servants familiar with
the sea. They went to Ophir, together with
the servants of Solomon, and imported from
there four hundred fifty talents of gold and
brought it to King Solomon.

9 When the queen of Sheba heard of the
fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem
to test him with hard questions, having a very
great retinue and camels bearing spices and
very much gold and precious stones. When
she came to Solomon, she discussed with him
all that was on her mind. 2 Solomon answered
all her questions; there was nothing hidden
from Solomon that he could not explain to
her. 3 When the queen of Sheba had observed
the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he
had built, 4 the food of his table, the seating
of his officials, and the attendance of his
servants, and their clothing, his valets, and
their clothing, and his burnt offerings[b] that
he offered at the house of the LORD, there was
no more spirit left in her.

5 So she said to the king, "The report was
true that I heard in my own land of your accomplishments and of your wisdom, 6 but I
did not believe the[c] reports until I came and
my own eyes saw it. Not even half of the greatness of your wisdom had been told to me;
you far surpass the report that I had heard.
7 Happy are your people! Happy are these
your servants, who continually attend you
and hear your wisdom! 8 Blessed be the LORD
your God, who has delighted in you and set
you on his throne as king for the LORD your
God. Because your God loved Israel and would
establish them forever, he has made you king
over them, that you may execute justice and
righteousness." 9 Then she gave the king one
hundred twenty talents of gold, a very great
quantity of spices, and precious stones: there
were no spices such as those that the queen of
Sheba gave to King Solomon.

10 Moreover the servants of Huram and the
servants of Solomon who brought gold from

[a] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *to*
[b] Gk Syr Vg 1 Kings 10.5: Heb *ascent*
[c] Heb *their*

7.8; 9.24; Ezek 44.9. **12–15:** Solomon keeps the commandments of Moses in his offerings and keeps all of the ordinances of his father David in his appointments of priests and Levites (1 Chr 22.7–16; 28.6–10,20–21). **17–18:** Largely taken from 1 Kings 9.26–28. **17:** *Ezion-geber* and *Eloth* (Eliat) are at the northern tip of the west arm of *the sea* (the Red Sea). **18:** *Ophir,* see 1 Chr 29.4n.

9.1–31: Solomon in all of his glory. The earlier divine promise of unmatched wealth and wisdom (1.11–12) is realized. Solomon receives unprecedented international recognition (vv. 1–8,23–24), continues his endowments of palace and Temple (vv. 15–20), enjoys unsurpassed riches (vv. 22,27), shares in the benefits of international trade (vv. 10–11,13–14,21,28), and presides over a substantial kingdom (vv. 25–26). In Chronicles, the era of David and Solomon (the United Monarchy) is the epitome in the history of Israel, the model of unity and orthodoxy by which both earlier and later leaders, officials, and people will be judged (7.10; 11.17; 30.26; 35.3–4). **1–12:** Taken from 1 Kings 10.1–13. **1:** *Sheba* is in Arabia. **4:** *No more spirit left,* that is, she was breathless. **8:** Solomon sits on *his throne*, that is, the LORD's throne. The Chronicler draws a close link between God's kingdom, kingship, and throne and those of the two major kings of the United Monarchy—David and Solomon, who discharge their responsibilities well as the LORD's appointees (1 Chr 17.14; 28.5; 29.11; 2 Chr 13.8). **9:** A *talent*

Ophir brought algum wood and precious stones. 11 From the algum wood, the king made steps[a] for the house of the LORD and for the king's house, lyres also and harps for the singers; there never was seen the like of them before in the land of Judah.

12 Meanwhile King Solomon granted the queen of Sheba every desire that she expressed, well beyond what she had brought to the king. Then she returned to her own land, with her servants.

13 The weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred sixty-six talents of gold, 14 besides that which the traders and merchants brought; and all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land brought gold and silver to Solomon. 15 King Solomon made two hundred large shields of beaten gold; six hundred shekels of beaten gold went into each large shield. 16 He made three hundred shields of beaten gold; three hundred shekels of gold went into each shield; and the king put them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon. 17 The king also made a great ivory throne, and overlaid it with pure gold. 18 The throne had six steps and a footstool of gold, which were attached to the throne, and on each side of the seat were arm rests and two lions standing beside the arm rests, 19 while twelve lions were standing, one on each end of a step on the six steps. The like of it was never made in any kingdom.

20 All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; silver was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon. 21 For the king's ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Huram; once every three years the ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.[b]

22 Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. 23 All the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. 24 Every one of them brought a present, objects of silver and gold, garments, weaponry, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year. 25 Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horses, which he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem. 26 He ruled over all the kings from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt. 27 The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the Shephelah. 28 Horses were imported for Solomon from Egypt and from all lands.

29 Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, from first to last, are they not written in the

[a] Gk Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *baboons*

weighed about 75 lb (34 kg). **11:** *Algum,* see 2.8n. **13–28:** Largely drawn from 1 Kings 10.14–28a. **15:** *Large shield*s, these ornamental objects of great value were later taken by King Shishak of Egypt during his campaign through parts of Canaan (12.9–11). **16:** *The House of the Forest of Lebanon,* perhaps named because of the extensive use of Lebanon cedar inside. This complex, which was probably located south of the Temple, actually contained five buildings. Being most interested in the Temple, the Chronicler does not elaborate on the description and functions of this building (cf. 1 Kings 7.1–12). **17:** *Great ivory throne,* both Solomon's official seat and a symbol of his prestige, wealth, and power (cf. Ex 11.5; 2 Sam 3.10). **18:** *Footstool,* another royal symbol (cf. 1 Kings 10.18–20). The term is also used to represent defeated enemies (Ps 110.1), the ark (1 Chr 28.2), Zion (Lam 2.1), and the earth itself (Isa 66.1). **21:** *Tarshish,* probably the city of Tarsus on the southern coast of Turkey, or perhaps Tartessus in southern Spain. **25–29:** Cf. 1.14–16n. Verse 26 is drawn from 1 Kings 4.21; Solomon is the dominant ruler of the region from northern Syria to the border of Egypt (cf. 7.8). **29:** *Nathan,* see 1 Chr 17.1–15; *Ahijah,* see 1 Kings 11.29–39; *Iddo* is not known apart from notices such as this (see 12.15; 13.22). **29–31:** Solomon's reign ends as it began with a unified nation under an exemplary king. Israel is unhampered by internal factions or strife. The nation enjoys unparalleled glory. Solomon's tenure is untainted by sin or misadventure. Any information found in Kings that would potentially tarnish Solomon's reputation has been omitted (1 Kings 9.11–16; 11.1–38). Solomon is not blamed for the later division of the kingdom (cf. 1 Kings 11.1–13,31–38). Because the Chronicler heightens the great benefit of Davidic-Solomonic leadership for the people, those who might deviate from this norm (10.3) will be suspect. It is unclear if the sources mentioned in v. 29 and elsewhere are nonbiblical sources, refer to other sections of the Bible, or never existed. Some scholars believe that they are cited here as a way of justi-



Chs 10–12: The divided monarchy. The dashed line shows the approximate boundaries between Israel, Judah, and Philistia.

history of the prophet Nathan, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of the seer Iddo concerning Jeroboam son of Nebat? 30 Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. 31 Solomon slept with his ancestors and was buried in the city of his father David; and his son Rehoboam succeeded him.

10 Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. 2 When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it (for he was in Egypt, where he

fying the Chronicler's history, which differs in such significant ways from Kings. In any case, it is a credit to Solomon that his reign is the subject of no less than three prophetic works. This is one indication of the high esteem in which prophets and writings associated with prophets were held in the postexilic period (cf. 1 Chr 29.29n.).

10.1–18: The difficult beginning to Rehoboam's reign (928–911 BCE). Compared with 1 Kings 12.1–24; 14.21–31, Chronicles almost doubles the amount of coverage devoted to *Rehoboam* and presents a much more complex narration of his reign (10.1–12.16). Rehoboam's accession is not characterized by the unanimity that both David (1 Chr 11) and Solomon (2 Chr 1) enjoyed. **1:** Rehoboam ascends to the throne and immediately finds himself thrust into a national assembly at *Shechem* bargaining for the future of his nation with disaffected representatives of the northern tribes (cf. 1 Kings 12.1–24). *Shechem,* in the later Northern Kingdom, was located in the hill country of Ephraim between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. The national convocation was likely held here because Shechem was an important and historic town in ancient Israel (Josh 8.30–35; 20.7; 17.7; 21.21; 24.1–28; 1 Kings

had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. 3 They sent and called him; and Jeroboam and all Israel came and said to Rehoboam, 4 "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you." 5 He said to them, "Come to me again in three days." So the people went away.

6 Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the older men who had attended his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, "How do you advise me to answer this people?" 7 They answered him, "If you will be kind to this people and please them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever." 8 But he rejected the advice that the older men gave him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and now attended him. 9 He said to them, "What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, 'Lighten the yoke that your father put on us'?" 10 The young men who had grown up with him said to him, "Thus should you speak to the people who said to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you must lighten it for us'; tell them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. 11 Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'"

12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had said, "Come to me again the third day." 13 The king answered them harshly. King Rehoboam rejected the advice of the older men; 14 he spoke to them in accordance with the advice of the young men, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." 15 So the king did not listen to the people, because it was a turn of affairs brought about by God so that the LORD might fulfill his word, which he had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

16 When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king,

"What share do we have in David?
We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.
Each of you to your tents, O Israel!
Look now to your own house, O David."

So all Israel departed to their tents. 17 But Rehoboam reigned over the people of Israel who were living in the cities of Judah. 18 When King Rehoboam sent Hadoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labor, the people of Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam hurriedly mounted his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. 19 So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

11 When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled one hundred eighty thousand chosen troops of the house of Judah and Benjamin to fight against Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam. 2 But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God: 3 Say to King Rehoboam of Judah, son of Solomon, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, 4 "Thus says the LORD: You shall not go up or

12.1–17; 1 Chr 6.52; 7.28). **2–3:** Jeroboam, the head of the northern tribes (1 Kings 11.26–43), is both present and an active protagonist in the proceedings (also v. 12). In Chronicles both Jeroboam and Rehoboam are personally responsible for the events of the secession (13.4–12). **15:** *His word . . . by Ahijah,* see 1 Kings 11.29–39. Ultimately, the division is a *turn of affairs* that could not have occurred without divine assent. This verse assumes familiarity on the part of the reader with 1 Kings 11.29–39, even though the Chronicler, by means of omissions, allusions, rearrangements, and additions, creates his own distinctive version of the division. **16:** In Chronicles, the northern Israelites' cry of secession (1 Kings 12.16) constitutes an abrupt about-face from the allegiance they had displayed since early in David's reign (1 Chr 12.1–40). Because the Chronicler views both the kingship and the worship of the northern realm as illegitimate, he—unlike the author of Kings—does not recount the independent history of the Northern Kingdom.

11.1–23: Rehoboam's recovery. The Chronicler enumerates in great detail the fidelity he ascribes to the first three years of Rehoboam's reign (11.17). The obedience before a prophet (11.1–4) and the fortification of various cities (vv. 5–12) are two steps in this process of renewal. **1–4:** Drawn from 1 Kings 12.21–24. **3:** The Chronicler does not restrict the use of *Israel* strictly to the northern tribes (cf. 2 Sam 2.9; 1 Kings 12.18,20). He also regularly

fight against your kindred. Let everyone return home, for this thing is from me." So they heeded the word of the LORD and turned back from the expedition against Jeroboam.

5 Rehoboam resided in Jerusalem, and he built cities for defense in Judah. 6 He built up Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, 7 Beth-zur, Soco, Adullam, 8 Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, 9 Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, 10 Zorah, Aijalon, and Hebron, fortified cities that are in Judah and in Benjamin. 11 He made the fortresses strong, and put commanders in them, and stores of food, oil, and wine. 12 He also put large shields and spears in all the cities, and made them very strong. So he held Judah and Benjamin.

13 The priests and the Levites who were in all Israel presented themselves to him from all their territories. 14 The Levites had left their common lands and their holdings and had come to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons had prevented them from serving as priests of the LORD, 15 and had appointed his own priests for the high places, and for the goat-demons, and for the calves that he had made. 16 Those who had set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came after them from all the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their ancestors. 17 They strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and for three years they made Rehoboam son of Solomon secure, for they walked for three years in the way of David and Solomon.

18 Rehoboam took as his wife Mahalath daughter of Jerimoth son of David, and of Abihail daughter of Eliab son of Jesse. 19 She bore him sons: Jeush, Shemariah, and Zaham. 20 After her he took Maacah daughter of Absalom, who bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza, and Shelomith. 21 Rehoboam loved Maacah daughter of Absalom more than all his other wives and concubines (he took eighteen wives and sixty concubines, and became the father of twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters). 22 Rehoboam appointed Abijah son of Maacah as chief prince among his brothers, for he intended to make him king. 23 He dealt wisely, and distributed some of his sons through all the districts of Judah and Benjamin, in all the fortified cities; he gave them abundant provisions, and found many wives for them.

12 When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he grew strong, he abandoned the law of the LORD, he and all Israel with him. 2 In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, King Shishak of Egypt came up against Jerusalem 3 with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand cavalry. A countless army came with him from Egypt—Libyans, Sukkiim, and Ethiopians.[a] 4 He took the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem. 5 Then the prophet Shemaiah came to Rehoboam and to the officers of Judah, who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, "Thus says the LORD: You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak." 6 Then the officers of Israel and the king humbled themselves and

[a] Or *Nubians*; Heb *Cushites*

uses *Israel* to refer to those Israelites who reside in *Judah and Benjamin.* **5–12:** These verses likely draw upon an unknown source. See map on p. 630 HB. **13–17:** The wholesale exodus of priests and Levites from Israel to Judah simultaneously strengthens Judah and indicts Jeroboam, who *prevented them from serving as priests of the LORD.* On Jeroboam's religious innovations, see 1 Kings 12.28; 13.33; 14.8–9. **15:** *Goat-demons,* an obscure and polemical reference not found in the source text depicting Jeroboam's religious innovations (1 Kings 12.28). Worship of goat-demons is outlawed in Priestly legislation (Lev 17.7). **18–21:** Large families signify stature in Chronicles (1 Chr 14.3; 2 Chr 11.18–23; 13.21; 14.3–7; cf. Gen 1.28). **22–23:** Like his grandfather David, Rehoboam appoints his sons to positions in his administration (1 Chr 18.17).

12.1–16: National decline and a reprieve. After a short recovery (11.1–23), Rehoboam and Judah abandon *the law of the LORD* and therefore Egypt invades (cf. 1 Kings 14.25). The outlines of the Egyptian invasion are found in 1 Kings 14.25–28, but the Chronicler has elaborated them significantly, especially in his addition of v. 1, which suggests that the invasion was punishment for apostasy. **2:** *Shishak* (Shoshenq I) ruled Egypt 945–924 BCE. **3:** *Sukkiim,* unknown. **5:** The prophet's speech, like many other biblical texts, invokes the principle of measure for measure: Those who abandon God will be abandoned by God. **6–8:** Because of their repentance (cf. 11.1–4), Rehoboam and the people stave off complete disaster. Hence, Rehoboam is the first of many kings to benefit

said, "The LORD is in the right." 7 When the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying: "They have humbled themselves; I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance, and my wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. 8 Nevertheless they shall be his servants, so that they may know the difference between serving me and serving the kingdoms of other lands."

9 So King Shishak of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house; he took everything. He also took away the shields of gold that Solomon had made; 10 but King Rehoboam made in place of them shields of bronze, and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house. 11 Whenever the king went into the house of the LORD, the guard would come along bearing them, and would then bring them back to the guardroom. 12 Because he humbled himself the wrath of the LORD turned from him, so as not to destroy them completely; moreover, conditions were good in Judah.

13 So King Rehoboam established himself in Jerusalem and reigned. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to put his name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite. 14 He did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the LORD.

15 Now the acts of Rehoboam, from first to last, are they not written in the records of the prophet Shemaiah and of the seer Iddo, recorded by genealogy? There were continual wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. 16 Rehoboam slept with his ancestors and was buried in the city of David; and his son Abijah succeeded him.

13 In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, Abijah began to reign over Judah. 2 He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Micaiah daughter of Uriel of Gibeah.

Now there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. 3 Abijah engaged in battle, having an army of valiant warriors, four hundred thousand picked men; and Jeroboam drew up his line of battle against him with eight hundred thousand picked mighty warriors. 4 Then Abijah stood on the slope of Mount Zemaraim that is in the hill country of Ephraim, and said, "Listen to me, Jeroboam and all Israel! 5 Do you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt? 6 Yet Jeroboam son of Nebat,

from God's promises in response to Solomon's Temple prayer (7.12–15). **13–16:** Cf. 1 Kings 14.21–24,29–31. **15:** *Iddo,* see 9.29n.

13.1–22: The successful reign of Abijah (911–908 BCE). In Chronicles, as opposed to 1 Kings 15.1–8, Abijah (called Abijam in 1 Kings) is one of Judah's better monarchs. In a war against *Jeroboam and all Israel,* he defends the standards established by David and Solomon as normative for all Israelites. Much of the chapter is an original composition of the Chronicler, elaborating on 1 Kings 15.6. The fundamental principle illustrated through this narrative is "the people of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the LORD, the God of their ancestors" (v. 8). **2:** *Micaiah,* there is a text-critical issue here. The Hebrew gives Abijah's mother a Yahwistic name (meaning "Who is like the LORD"), whereas the ancient versions name her "Maacah" in conformity with 1 Kings 15.2 and 2 Chr 11.20. **3:** Developing a theme of earlier holy-war narratives (Judg 7.2–8; 1 Sam 14.6; 17.45–47), the Chronicler here and elsewhere stresses that great numbers do not guarantee victory (14.7–14; 20.1–30; 24.24; cf. Zech 4.6). *Eight hundred thousand,* the Chronicler's numbers here and elsewhere are sometimes stupendous (e.g., 1 Chr 5.18; 23.3–5; 27.1–15; 2 Chr 14.8–9; 17.14–18; 25.5–6; 26.12–13; 28.6–8). Some scholars have thought that the Hebrew word for "thousand" refers simply to one military unit, meaning that the actual numbers involved would be far less. But it is more likely that the incredible numbers are a literary convention or scribal embellishment to mark off (what is for the Chronicler) Israel's classical past. The use of large, round numbers is also sometimes found in earlier biblical sources (e.g., 1 Kings 8.5,62–64). **5:** In speaking to *Jeroboam and all Israel* (v. 4) of *the kingship over Israel* as belonging to the Davidic dynasty, Abijah plays on the different connotations of Israel. *Covenant of salt,* the reference to "salt" indicates that the kingship that has been covenanted to David will be enduring (Lev 2.13; Num 18.19). In v. 8, the kingdom of the LORD is itself said to be in the hands of David

a servant of Solomon son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord; 7 and certain worthless scoundrels gathered around him and defied Rehoboam son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and irresolute and could not withstand them.

8 "And now you think that you can withstand the kingdom of the LORD in the hand of the sons of David, because you are a great multitude and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made as gods for you. 9 Have you not driven out the priests of the LORD, the descendants of Aaron, and the Levites, and made priests for yourselves like the peoples of other lands? Whoever comes to be consecrated with a young bull or seven rams becomes a priest of what are no gods. 10 But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not abandoned him. We have priests ministering to the LORD who are descendants of Aaron, and Levites for their service. 11 They offer to the LORD every morning and every evening burnt offerings and fragrant incense, set out the rows of bread on the table of pure gold, and care for the golden lampstand so that its lamps may burn every evening; for we keep the charge of the LORD our God, but you have abandoned him. 12 See, God is with us at our head, and his priests have their battle trumpets to sound the call to battle against you. O Israelites, do not fight against the LORD, the God of your ancestors; for you cannot succeed."

13 Jeroboam had sent an ambush around to come on them from behind; thus his troops[a] were in front of Judah, and the ambush was behind them. 14 When Judah turned, the battle was in front of them and behind them. They cried out to the LORD, and the priests blew the trumpets. 15 Then the people of Judah raised the battle shout. And when the people of Judah shouted, God defeated Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. 16 The Israelites fled before Judah, and God gave them into their hands. 17 Abijah and his army defeated them with great slaughter; five hundred thousand picked men of Israel fell slain. 18 Thus the Israelites were subdued at that time, and the people of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the LORD, the God of their ancestors. 19 Abijah pursued Jeroboam, and took cities from him: Bethel with its villages and Jeshanah with its villages and Ephron[b] with its villages. 20 Jeroboam did not recover his power in the days of Abijah; the LORD struck him down, and he died. 21 But Abijah grew strong. He took fourteen wives, and became the father of twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. 22 The rest of the acts of Abijah, his behavior and his deeds, are written in the story of the prophet Iddo.

[a] Heb *they*
[b] Another reading is *Ephrain*

and his descendants (cf. 1 Chr 17.14; 28.5; 2 Chr 9.8n). **6–7:** Disunion occurred when Jeroboam and *worthless scoundrels* exploited a young and inexperienced Rehoboam. This polemicizes against 1 Kings 11.11–13,29–38. **8–11:** Abijah's enumeration of the proper religious practices of Judah is heavily indebted to the descriptions of Temple worship during the United Monarchy (1 Chr 15–16; 23–29; 2 Chr 2–4) and the descriptions of tabernacle worship during the era of Moses (Ex 25.30–40; 29.1–9,38–42; 30.7–10; Lev 24.3–9; Num 8.2–4; 28.3–8). **19:** Judah recaptures some of the territory it presumably lost in the secession. The Chronicler commends Judean kings who exercise influence in the northern realm (15.8–9; 17.2; 30.5–12; 34.6–7,33). **20:** Here God himself struck Jeroboam *and he died;* cf. 1 Kings 14.19–20. **21:** See 11.18–21n. **22:** The Hebrew word for *story* ("midrash") can also be translated as exposition, study, or "commentary" (24.27; cf. Sir 51.23). The reference thus designates a writing or commentary of *Iddo* (rather than an annalistic account) on the early monarchy. See also 9.29n.; 12.15.

14.1–15.19: Reforms, victory, and expansion: the first period of Asa's reign (908–867 BCE). The Chronicler's treatment of Asa (14.1–16.14), almost three times longer than that of 1 Kings 15.9–24, presents two distinct phases in Asa's reign: a long thirty-four-year period of fidelity and a short seven-year period of infidelity (16.1–12). The shorter text of Kings is supplemented significantly. Kings has a pattern of piety followed by lack of trust in God. The Chronicler subsumes elements of Kings to his retribution theology, creating a pattern of piety and its reward, then impiety and its punishment. Prophetic figures play a significant role in these elaborations. **14.1:** In Chronicles *rest* from war is a sign of divine blessing (1 Chr 17.8–9; 22.9; 2 Chr 14.6; 32.22). **2–8:** At the beginning of his reign Asa takes advantage of peaceful conditions to institute religious reforms (cf. 1 Kings 15.12–15) and

14 [a] So Abijah slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in the city of David. His son Asa succeeded him. In his days the land had rest for ten years. [2] [b]Asa did what was good and right in the sight of the LORD his God. [3] He took away the foreign altars and the high places, broke down the pillars, hewed down the sacred poles,[c] [4] and commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and to keep the law and the commandment. [5] He also removed from all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars. And the kingdom had rest under him. [6] He built fortified cities in Judah while the land had rest. He had no war in those years, for the LORD gave him peace. [7] He said to Judah, "Let us build these cities, and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars; the land is still ours because we have sought the LORD our God; we have sought him, and he has given us peace on every side." So they built and prospered. [8] Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah, armed with large shields and spears, and two hundred eighty thousand troops from Benjamin who carried shields and drew bows; all these were mighty warriors.

[9] Zerah the Ethiopian[d] came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. [10] Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. [11] Asa cried to the LORD his God, "O LORD, there is no difference for you between helping the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let no mortal prevail against you." [12] So the LORD defeated the Ethiopians[e] before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians[e] fled. [13] Asa and the army with him pursued them as far as Gerar, and the Ethiopians[e] fell until no one remained alive; for they were broken before the LORD and his army. The people of Judah[f] carried away a great quantity of booty. [14] They defeated all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the LORD was on them. They plundered all the cities; for there was much plunder in them. [15] They also attacked the tents of those who had livestock,[g] and carried away sheep and goats in abundance, and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

15 The spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded. [2] He went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The LORD is with you, while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you abandon him, he will abandon you. [3] For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law; [4] but when in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them. [5] In those times it was not safe for anyone to go or come, for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. [6] They were broken in pieces, nation against nation and city against city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress. [7] But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded."

[8] When Asa heard these words, the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded,[h] he took

[a] Ch 13.23 in Heb
[b] Ch 14.1 in Heb
[c] Heb *Asherim*
[d] Or *Nubian*; Heb *Cushite*
[e] Or *Nubians*; Heb *Cushites*
[f] Heb *They*
[g] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[h] Compare Syr Vg: Heb *the prophecy, the prophet Obed*

embark on a series of public works. **8–9:** On the large numbers, see 13.3n. **9–15:** Another holy-war narrative (cf. 13.2–20) in which an outnumbered Judah confronts a much more powerful foe (Zerah, who is otherwise unknown). In the midst of battle, Asa calls out to the LORD for deliverance in accordance with the petitions of Solomon's prayer (6.34–35). When king and people rely on God, they are able to achieve a major victory and take enormous booty (vv. 12–15). **9:** *Ethiopian,* the Hebrew speaks of a Cushite. Cush was an area to the south of Egypt. Sudan, Nubia, and Ethiopia are all possibilities. **10:** *Mareshah,* ca. 40 km (25 mi) southwest of Jerusalem, one of the southern cities fortified by Rehoboam (see 11.5–10). See map on p. 630 HB. **15.1–7:** The prophet Azariah (whose name means "the LORD has helped") appears only in this chapter. His oracle speaks of reciprocity in divine-human relations. *The LORD is with you, while you are with him* (15.2), the corollary of the measure-for-measure principle articulated earlier by Shemaiah (12.5). Pointing to the chaos of the distant past, the prophet

courage, and put away the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns that he had taken in the hill country of Ephraim. He repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the vestibule of the house of the LORD.[a] 9 He gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were residing as aliens with them, for great numbers had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him. 10 They were gathered at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. 11 They sacrificed to the LORD on that day, from the booty that they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep. 12 They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and with all their soul. 13 Whoever would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman. 14 They took an oath to the LORD with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with horns. 15 All Judah rejoiced over the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around.

16 King Asa even removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother because she had made an abominable image for Asherah. Asa cut down her image, crushed it, and burned it at the Wadi Kidron. 17 But the high places were not taken out of Israel. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was true all his days. 18 He brought into the house of God the votive gifts of his father and his own votive gifts—silver, gold, and utensils. 19 And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa.

16 In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, King Baasha of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, to prevent anyone from going out or coming into the territory of[b] King Asa of Judah. 2 Then Asa took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the LORD and the king's house, and sent them to King Ben-hadad of Aram, who resided in Damascus, saying, 3 "Let there be an alliance between me and you, like that between my father and your father; I am sending to you silver and gold; go, break your alliance with King Baasha of Israel, so that he may withdraw from me." 4 Ben-hadad listened to King Asa, and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel. They conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim, and all the store-cities of Naphtali. 5 When Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah, and let his work cease. 6 Then King Asa brought all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building, and with them he built up Geba and Mizpah.

7 At that time the seer Hanani came to King Asa of Judah, and said to him, "Because you relied on the king of Aram, and did not rely on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped you. 8 Were not

[a] Heb *the vestibule of the* LORD
[b] Heb lacks *the territory of*

warns Asa about the perils of abandoning God. **8–19:** In response to Azariah's admonitions, Asa initiates a covenant renewal (vv. 8–15; cf. Ex 19.3–8) and institutes further religious reforms (vv. 16–18; cf. 1 Kings 15.13–15). **9:** *From Ephriam, Manasseh, and Simeon.* Even though Simeon is located south of Judah, it is often counted among the northern tribes in earlier biblical literature (Gen 29.33; 34.25,30; 35.23; 46.10). That members of these tribes had defected to Asa is an indication of diving blessing.

16.1–14: Asa's decline. The war with Baasha (cf. 1 Kings 15.16–22) marks a turning point in Asa's tenure because he enters an alliance with *Ben-hadad of Aram* to counter an invasion by *Baasha of Israel.* Even though Asa enters this treaty in self-defense, the Chronicler considers such alliances as compromising Judah's commitment to God, who can defend the powerless from the mighty. Opposition to pacts with foreign powers is also found in earlier biblical literature (Deut 7.2; Hos 7.10–13; 8.9–10; Isa 20; 28.14–28; 30.1–5; Jer 2.14–19,33–37). **1:** *Ramah* was located just 9 km (6 mi) north of Jerusalem. **7–9:** The judgment oracle of *the seer Hanani* (apparently the father of the prophet Jehu; 19.2) heightens the disparity between the two periods of Asa's rule. Whereas Asa formerly relied on God and was able to defeat the vast armies of *Ethiopia* and *Libya* (14.7–14; 15.8), Asa's reliance on Ben-hadad is tantamount to nonreliance on the LORD (16.7). Ironically, Asa will now always be plagued by

the Ethiopians[a] and the Libyans a huge army with exceedingly many chariots and cavalry? Yet because you relied on the LORD, he gave them into your hand. 9 For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the entire earth, to strengthen those whose heart is true to him. You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars." 10 Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in the stocks, in prison, for he was in a rage with him because of this. And Asa inflicted cruelties on some of the people at the same time.

11 The acts of Asa, from first to last, are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. 12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe; yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians. 13 Then Asa slept with his ancestors, dying in the forty-first year of his reign. 14 They buried him in the tomb that he had hewn out for himself in the city of David. They laid him on a bier that had been filled with various kinds of spices prepared by the perfumer's art; and they made a very great fire in his honor.

17 His son Jehoshaphat succeeded him, and strengthened himself against Israel. 2 He placed forces in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim that his father Asa had taken. 3 The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father;[b] he did not seek the Baals, 4 but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the ways of Israel. 5 Therefore the LORD established the kingdom in his hand. All Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honor. 6 His heart was courageous in the ways of the LORD; and furthermore he removed the high places and the sacred poles[c] from Judah.

7 In the third year of his reign he sent his officials, Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. 8 With them were the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah; and with these Levites, the priests Elishama and Jehoram. 9 They taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the LORD with them; they went around through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.

10 The fear of the LORD fell on all the kingdoms of the lands around Judah, and they did not make war against Jehoshaphat. 11 Some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and silver for tribute; and the Arabs also brought him seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred male goats. 12 Jehoshaphat grew steadily greater. He built fortresses and storage cities in Judah. 13 He carried out great works in the cities of Judah. He had soldiers, mighty warriors, in Jerusalem. 14 This was the muster of them by ancestral houses: Of Judah, the

[a] Or *Nubians*; Heb *Cushites*
[b] Another reading is *his father David*
[c] Heb *Asherim*

wars (cf. 1 Kings 15.16). **12:** The infirmity in Asa's feet (1 Kings 15.23) becomes another indication of Asa's unfaithfulness, because *in his disease he did not seek the LORD.* The comment that he relied on physicians reflects an ironic pun on Asa's name, which the Chronicler likely construed (based on Aramaic) as "healer" or "physician."

17.1–19: The promising beginning to the reign of Jehoshaphat (870–846 BCE). Both Kings and Chronicles commend Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22.43–44; 2 Chr 17.3–4; 20.32–33), but the Chronicler's depiction of Jehoshaphat's reign is much more extensive and includes major events not recorded in Kings. Scholars continue to debate whether these events were based on the additional sources that the Chronicler had, or were freely composed. Most of the new material, such as Jehoshaphat's civil, military, and judicial reforms (17.1–19; 19.4–11) and his war against the eastern coalition (20.1–30), reflects well on Jehoshaphat. Upon taking office, Jehoshaphat immediately takes charge of his kingdom. As he institutes reforms, deploys troops, and fortifies cities, Jehoshaphat only grows stronger and more widely respected. Prophetic material concerning the northern prophet Elijah, which is embedded in Jehoshaphat's reign in Kings, is absent here. **2:** *Cities of Ephraim,* probably referring to 13.19. **7–9:** Jehoshaphat initiates a campaign to educate the Judean people in *the book of the law of the LORD* (cf. Deut 17.18–20; 2 Kings 22.8–13) by sending officers, Levites, and priests throughout the cities of Judah. This addition reflects the growing importance in the postexilic era of the Torah-book, and of the Levites as teachers (see esp. Neh 8). **11:** Tribute from the nations is a sign of divine favor (1 Chr 18.6; 2 Chr 8.2; 9.1–9;

commanders of the thousands: Adnah the commander, with three hundred thousand mighty warriors, [15] and next to him Jehohanan the commander, with two hundred eighty thousand, [16] and next to him Amasiah son of Zichri, a volunteer for the service of the LORD, with two hundred thousand mighty warriors. [17] Of Benjamin: Eliada, a mighty warrior, with two hundred thousand armed with bow and shield, [18] and next to him Jehozabad with one hundred eighty thousand armed for war. [19] These were in the service of the king, besides those whom the king had placed in the fortified cities throughout all Judah.

18 Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor; and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab. [2] After some years he went down to Ahab in Samaria. Ahab slaughtered an abundance of sheep and oxen for him and for the people who were with him, and induced him to go up against Ramoth-gilead. [3] King Ahab of Israel said to King Jehoshaphat of Judah, "Will you go with me to Ramoth-gilead?" He answered him, "I am with you, my people are your people. We will be with you in the war."

[4] But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, "Inquire first for the word of the LORD." [5] Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, four hundred of them, and said to them, "Shall we go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?" They said, "Go up; for God will give it into the hand of the king." [6] But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no other prophet of the LORD here of whom we may inquire?" [7] The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is still one other by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster." Jehoshaphat said, "Let the king not say such a thing." [8] Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, "Bring quickly Micaiah son of Imlah." [9] Now the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes; and they were sitting at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them. [10] Zedekiah son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron, and he said, "Thus says the LORD: With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are destroyed." [11] All the prophets were prophesying the same and saying, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king."

[12] The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king; let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably." [13] But Micaiah said, "As the LORD lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak."

[14] When he had come to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" He answered, "Go up and triumph; they will be given into your hand." [15] But the king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?" [16] Then Micaiah[a] said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep without a shepherd; and the LORD said, 'These have no master; let each one go home in peace.'" [17] The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy anything favorable about me, but only disaster?"

[a] Heb *he*

26.8). **14–18:** On the large numbers, see 13.3n.

18.1–19.3: Jehoshaphat's first misstep. The Chronicler relates two shortcomings of Jehoshaphat, both involving his relations with northern Israel. The first involves Jehoshaphat's ill-fated treaty with the king of Israel, Ahab, in 1 Kings 22.1–40, which is reproduced with very few changes. **18.1:** Presumably this *marriage alliance* involved Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, and Ahab's daughter, Athaliah (21.6; 22.2; cf. 2 Kings 8.18). In the reign of Jehoshaphat's successors, the relationship with Ahab's dynasty becomes the conduit for Judah's royalty to adopt ill-advised and iniquitous policies (21.6; 22.3–5). **2:** The lavish feast, during which Ahab incites his Judean counterpart, does not appear in 1 Kings 22. **2–3:** *Ramoth-gilead* was an Israelite city in northern Jordan that had apparently been captured by the Arameans. **3:** *I am with you,* the Chronicler depicts Jehoshaphat as a willing and equal partner to his northern counterpart, Ahab. In Kings, Jehoshaphat appears as the junior partner in the coa-

18 Then Micaiah[a] said, "Therefore hear
the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting
on his throne, with all the host of heaven
standing to the right and to the left of him.
19 And the LORD said, 'Who will entice King
Ahab of Israel, so that he may go up and fall
at Ramoth-gilead?' Then one said one thing,
and another said another, 20 until a spirit
came forward and stood before the LORD,
saying, 'I will entice him.' The LORD asked
him, 'How?' 21 He replied, 'I will go out and be
a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.'
Then the LORD[a] said, 'You are to entice him,
and you shall succeed; go out and do it.' 22 So
you see, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the
mouth of these your prophets; the LORD has
decreed disaster for you."

23 Then Zedekiah son of Chenaanah came
up to Micaiah, slapped him on the cheek, and
said, "Which way did the spirit of the LORD
pass from me to speak to you?" 24 Micaiah
replied, "You will find out on that day when
you go in to hide in an inner chamber." 25 The
king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah,
and return him to Amon the governor of the
city and to Joash the king's son; 26 and say,
'Thus says the king: Put this fellow in prison,
and feed him on reduced rations of bread and
water until I return in peace.'" 27 Micaiah said,
"If you return in peace, the LORD has not spo-
ken by me." And he said, "Hear, you peoples,
all of you!"

28 So the king of Israel and King Jehosh-
aphat of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead.
29 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I
will disguise myself and go into battle, but
you wear your robes." So the king of Israel
disguised himself, and they went into battle.
30 Now the king of Aram had commanded
the captains of his chariots, "Fight with no
one small or great, but only with the king of
Israel." 31 When the captains of the chariots
saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is the king of
Israel." So they turned to fight against him;
and Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD
helped him. God drew them away from him,
32 for when the captains of the chariots saw
that it was not the king of Israel, they turned
back from pursuing him. 33 But a certain man
drew his bow and unknowingly struck the
king of Israel between the scale armor and
the breastplate; so he said to the driver of his
chariot, "Turn around, and carry me out of
the battle, for I am wounded." 34 The bat-
tle grew hot that day, and the king of Israel
propped himself up in his chariot facing the
Arameans until evening; then at sunset he
died.

19 King Jehoshaphat of Judah returned in
safety to his house in Jerusalem. 2 Jehu
son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him
and said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should you
help the wicked and love those who hate the
LORD? Because of this, wrath has gone out
against you from the LORD. 3 Nevertheless,
some good is found in you, for you destroyed
the sacred poles[b] out of the land, and have set
your heart to seek God."

4 Jehoshaphat resided at Jerusalem; then
he went out again among the people, from
Beer-sheba to the hill country of Ephraim,

[a] Heb *he*
[b] Heb *Asheroth*

lition. **10:** A symbolic action, as elsewhere in the prophetic repertoire. **18:** The LORD is meeting with his heavenly council (see Job 1.6; 2.1; Ps 82.1), and the prophet is a witness to the proceedings (see Jer 23.18,22). **21–22:** The revelation that the prophets have received is itself false; cf. Deut 13.3. **31:** *The LORD helped him,* this phrase, which does not appear in 1 Kings 22, resonates with the divine promises of 7.12–15. The Chronicler adds this phrase to reinforce his theology: God, who is fair and compassionate, is in control of events.

19.1–20.30: In contrast to the previous Jehoshaphat material, this has no parallel in Kings. **19.1–3:** This rebuke by the prophet *Jehu son of Hanani* (see 16.7–9n.) chastises Jehoshaphat for entering into a coalition with Ahab of Israel (see ch 18). Jehoshaphat was disloyal to God in that he proposed to *help the wicked* and was loyal to *those who hate the LORD.* Fidelity to one precludes fidelity to the other.

19.4–11: Recovery and further reforms. Jehoshaphat returns to and develops policies he instituted at the beginning of his reign (17.1–19). The geographic scope of the restoration (v. 4) is extensive, reclaiming Jehoshaphat's entire realm, including sections of the Northern Kingdom over which he held sway (17.1–2). Other texts depict the juridical responsibilities of monarchs (e.g., 2 Sam 8.15–18; 1 Kings 3.16–28), but only with Jehoshaphat in Chronicles do we find a full-blown judicial reform. He appoints *judges . . . in all the fortified cities of*

and brought them back to the LORD, the God of their ancestors. 5 He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, 6 and said to the judges, "Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of human beings but on the LORD's behalf; he is with you in giving judgment. 7 Now, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the LORD our God, or partiality, or taking of bribes."

8 Moreover in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed certain Levites and priests and heads of families of Israel, to give judgment for the LORD and to decide disputed cases. They had their seat at Jerusalem. 9 He charged them: "This is how you shall act: in the fear of the LORD, in faithfulness, and with your whole heart; 10 whenever a case comes to you from your kindred who live in their cities, concerning bloodshed, law or commandment, statutes or ordinances, then you shall instruct them, so that they may not incur guilt before the LORD and wrath may not come on you and your kindred. Do so, and you will not incur guilt. 11 See, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the LORD; and Zebadiah son of Ishmael, the governor of the house of Judah, in all the king's matters; and the Levites will serve you as officers. Deal courageously, and may the LORD be with the good!"

20 After this the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites,[a] came against Jehoshaphat for battle. 2 Messengers[b] came and told Jehoshaphat, "A great multitude is coming against you from Edom,[c] from beyond the sea; already they are at Hazazon-tamar" (that is, En-gedi). 3 Jehoshaphat was afraid; he set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. 4 Judah assembled to seek help from the LORD; from all the towns of Judah they came to seek the LORD.

5 Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, 6 and said, "O LORD, God of our ancestors, are you not God in heaven? Do you not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations? In your hand are power and might, so that no one is able to withstand you. 7 Did you not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of your friend Abraham? 8 They have lived in it, and in it have built you a sanctuary for your name, saying, 9 'If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment,[d] or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house, and before

[a] Compare 26.7: Heb *Ammonites*
[b] Heb *They*
[c] One Ms: MT *Aram*
[d] Or *the sword of judgment*

Judah and established a court of appeals in the capital city of Jerusalem. Some see this as reflecting the creativity of the Chronicler, who derived this reform from the Heb word "shaphat," "to judge," in the king's name (cf. 16.12n.). **11:** The distinction between *matters of the LORD* and *the king's matters* is found only in Chronicles (1 Chr 26.30,32; 2 Chr 19.11) and Ezra (7.26), suggesting that the contours of this reform reflect Persian-period realities during which the Judeans were subject to a foreign king.

20.1–30: Dramatic triumph in holy war. Sometime after his judicial reformation, Jehoshaphat is confronted with an international crisis that threatens to overwhelm his people, the invasion of Judah (see v. 2) by a southeastern coalition of powers. **1:** *Meunites,* a textually difficult term. The Meunites are a group of disputed origin, who are mentioned only in late biblical texts (1 Chr 4.41; 2 Chr 20.2; 26.7). In one theory the Meunites were a Transjordanian or Arabian group, while in another the Meunites were from one of several sites or areas called Maon—most likely either Maon 12 mi (20 km) south of Gaza or the Maon region of southwestern Edom. Given the existence of another Maon in Judah (e.g., 1 Chr 2.45), more than one entity with the name "Meunites" may be meant (see Ezra 2.50 || Neh 7.52). **3–4:** Afraid, Jehoshaphat *set himself to seek the LORD* and proclaimed a national *fast* (cf. Judg 20.26 and 1 Sam 7.6; Jer 36.6,9; Zech 8.19; Joel 2.12; 2 Chr 1.5; 25.20). In resorting to Jerusalem, the people honor the divine directive given at Solomon's Temple dedication to seek the LORD in times of need (7.14). **6–12:** Jehoshaphat's prayer, which laments Judah's plight and solicits a divine response, recalls specific features of previous royal prayers (1 Chr 14.9,14; 29.10–19; 2 Chr 14.10–11). By contrasting divine omnipotence with human helplessness, the king lays the foundation for the petition that follows (v. 12). **8–9:** Echoing Solomon's prayer (see 6.28,34), Jehoshaphat's appeal is based on the existence of the Temple, because

you, for your name is in this house, and cry to you in our distress, and you will hear and save.' [10] See now, the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy— [11] they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession that you have given us to inherit. [12] O our God, will you not execute judgment upon them? For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

[13] Meanwhile all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children. [14] Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the middle of the assembly. [15] He said, "Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you: 'Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's. [16] Tomorrow go down against them; they will come up by the ascent of Ziz; you will find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Jeruel. [17] This battle is not for you to fight; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, and the LORD will be with you."

[18] Then Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the LORD, worshiping the LORD. [19] And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

[20] They rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the LORD your God and you will be established; believe his prophets." [21] When he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy splendor, as they went before the army, saying,

"Give thanks to the LORD,
for his steadfast love endures forever."

[22] As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set an ambush against the Ammonites, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed. [23] For the Ammonites and Moab attacked the inhabitants of Mount Seir, destroying them utterly; and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they all helped to destroy one another.

[24] When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; they were corpses lying on the ground; no one had escaped. [25] When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take the booty from them, they found livestock[a] in great numbers, goods, clothing, and precious things, which they took for themselves until they could carry no more. They spent three days taking the booty, because of its abundance. [26] On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah, for there they blessed the LORD; therefore that place has been called the Valley of Beracah[b] to this day. [27] Then all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat at their head, returned to Jerusalem with joy, for the LORD had enabled them to rejoice over their enemies. [28] They came to Jerusalem, with harps and lyres and trumpets, to the house of the LORD. [29] The fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when

[a] Gk: Heb *among them*
[b] That is *Blessing*

this sanctuary was accepted by God as the place where efficacious prayers could be offered (7.1–2,14). **11–12:** The very nations spared by the LORD when the Israelites entered the land (Deut 2.1–22) are now threatening Judah's existence within it. **14–15:** The levitical singer *Jahaziel* serves as a prophet and as the designate priest, as in other sacral wars (cf. Deut 20.2–4; 1 Chr 25.1–8). His assurance of victory, evoked as elsewhere by faith in God, quotes both Moses (Ex 14.13–14) and David (1 Sam 17.47). **16:** *Ziz . . . Jeruel,* occurring only here and precise location unknown. **17:** The residents of Jerusalem and Judah are to play the role of onlookers. **20:** Cf. Isa 7.9. **22–23:** The divine warrior throws Israel's enemies into a panic (cf. Judg 7.22; 1 Sam 14.20) so that they attack each other. **29:** As in other holy wars, *the fear of God* descends upon *all the kingdoms of the countries* (Ex 15.14–16; Deut 2.25;

they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. 30 And the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.

31 So Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah. He was thirty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah daughter of Shilhi. 32 He walked in the way of his father Asa and did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the LORD. 33 Yet the high places were not removed; the people had not yet set their hearts upon the God of their ancestors.

34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, from first to last, are written in the Annals of Jehu son of Hanani, which are recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel.

35 After this King Jehoshaphat of Judah joined with King Ahaziah of Israel, who did wickedly. 36 He joined him in building ships to go to Tarshish; they built the ships in Ezion-geber. 37 Then Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have joined with Ahaziah, the LORD will destroy what you have made." And the ships were wrecked and were not able to go to Tarshish.

21 Jehoshaphat slept with his ancestors and was buried with his ancestors in the city of David; his son Jehoram succeeded him. 2 He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariah, Michael, and Shephatiah; all these were the sons of King Jehoshaphat of Judah.[a] 3 Their father gave them many gifts, of silver, gold, and valuable possessions, together with fortified cities in Judah; but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn. 4 When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he put all his brothers to the sword, and also some of the officials of Israel. 5 Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 6 He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done; for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. 7 Yet the LORD would not destroy the house of David because of the covenant that he had made with David, and since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his descendants forever.

8 In his days Edom revolted against the rule of Judah and set up a king of their own. 9 Then Jehoram crossed over with his commanders and all his chariots. He set out by night and attacked the Edomites, who had surrounded him and his chariot commanders. 10 So Edom has been in revolt against the rule of Judah to this day. At that time Libnah also revolted against his rule, because he had forsaken the LORD, the God of his ancestors.

11 Moreover he made high places in the hill country of Judah, and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness, and made Judah go astray. 12 A letter came to him from the prophet Elijah, saying: "Thus says the LORD, the

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *Israel*

11.25; Josh 2.9,11,24; 5.1; 10.1–2; 1 Sam 4.7–8; 14.15; 1 Chr 14.7; 2 Chr 14.13).

20.31–37: Jehoshaphat's second misstep. Following the concluding notices to Jehoshaphat's reign (vv. 31–34; on *Jehu* see 16.7n.; cf. 1 Kings 22.41–45), the author narrates a failure. Again (18.1–19.3), a pact with Israel (vv. 35–37) marks a regression in Jehoshaphat's rule. Here, after the covenant is condemned by a prophet, *the ships were wrecked* (cf. 1 Kings 22.48–49). **36:** *Tarshish,* see 9.21n. *Ezion-geber* was a port city on the Red Sea.

21.1–20: Decline under Jehoram (851–843 BCE). Like the Elijah material, the Elisha material, found in Kings as part of the account of Jehoram's reign, is lacking in Chronicles. Jehoram appears as a more wicked king in Chronicles than in the briefer, but also negative, account of 2 Kings 8.16–24. Jehoram intensifies the pattern of close cooperation with the Northern Kingdom begun by his father (21.6; cf. 18.1–34; 20.35–37). **2–4:** Jehoram's *brothers,* who had possessions and administrative responsibilities in their own right (cf. 11.22–23n.), are eliminated by the new king. **5–7:** The divine promises (1 Chr 17.1–15) restrain the exercise of divine wrath against *the house of David* (cf. 2 Kings 8.17–19). **7:** *Lamp,* fief or territorial dominion might be a better translation of the Hebrew. The promises are interpreted as involving continued rule for David's descendants in Jerusalem. **8–10:** Largely taken from 2 Kings 8.20–22. **10:** The revolt of Libnah (see 2 Kings 8.22) is explained by the Chronicler as another divine punishment. **12–15:** Elijah's letter, unparalleled in Kings, is remarkable. Elijah has not previously been mentioned in Chronicles and, according to the chronology in Kings, may have already ascended at this

God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of your father Jehoshaphat or in the ways of King Asa of Judah, [13] but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness, as the house of Ahab led Israel into unfaithfulness, and because you also have killed your brothers, members of your father's house, who were better than yourself, [14] see, the LORD will bring a great plague on your people, your children, your wives, and all your possessions, [15] and you yourself will have a severe sickness with a disease of your bowels, until your bowels come out, day after day, because of the disease."

[16] The LORD aroused against Jehoram the anger of the Philistines and of the Arabs who are near the Ethiopians.[a] [17] They came up against Judah, invaded it, and carried away all the possessions they found that belonged to the king's house, along with his sons and his wives, so that no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, his youngest son.

[18] After all this the LORD struck him in his bowels with an incurable disease. [19] In course of time, at the end of two years, his bowels came out because of the disease, and he died in great agony. His people made no fire in his honor, like the fires made for his ancestors. [20] He was thirty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. He departed with no one's regret. They buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.

22 The inhabitants of Jerusalem made his youngest son Ahaziah king as his successor; for the troops who came with the Arabs to the camp had killed all the older sons. So Ahaziah son of Jehoram reigned as king of Judah. [2] Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri. [3] He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor in doing wickedly. [4] He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done; for after the death of his father they were his counselors, to his ruin. [5] He even followed their advice, and went with Jehoram son of King Ahab of Israel to make war against King Hazael of Aram at Ramoth-gilead. The Arameans wounded Joram, [6] and he returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds that he had received at Ramah, when he fought King Hazael of Aram. And Ahaziah son of King Jehoram of Judah went down to see Joram son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick.

[7] But it was ordained by God that the downfall of Ahaziah should come about through his going to visit Joram. For when he came there he went out with Jehoram to meet Jehu son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to destroy the house of Ahab. [8] When Jehu was executing judgment on the

[a] Or *Nubians*; Heb *Cushites*

point. Furthermore, early prophecy was primarily oral. The letter might be used as a way for a northern prophet to communicate with a southern king, but it also reflects the increasing significance of a written book-culture in the Chronicler's time. **16–17:** A foreign invasion plunders Judah and leaves Jehoram with only his youngest son still living in Jerusalem (cf. v. 14). On the *Ethiopians,* see 14.9n. **17:** *Jehoahaz*, see 22.1–9n. **18–19:** A fulfillment of Elijah's prediction (v. 15). *Disease*, cf. 16.12. *Fire,* cf. 16.14. **20:** Cf. 2 Kings 8.23–24.

22.1–9: The brief and ill-fated reign of Ahaziah (843–842 BCE). Following the premature death of Jehoram (21.18–20), the inhabitants of Jerusalem install young Ahaziah (also called Jehoahaz in 21.17) as king (v. 1), but this effort at restoration soon fails. The effects of Ahaziah's collaboration with the Northern Kingdom and emulation of northern practices threaten to topple both the Davidic dynasty and the traditional pattern of Temple worship in Jerusalem (23.18; 24.7). **2:** *Forty-two years,* there is a text-critical issue here. The more likely figure is "twenty-two years," as in 2 Kings 8.26. Ahaziah's father died at age forty (21.20). **3–4:** The expansion of Ahaziah's evaluation in 2 Kings 8.27 draws attention to the intimate involvement of *the house of Ahab* from the Northern Kingdom in Judean royal affairs. Athaliah was the daughter of Ahab (18.1n.), son of Omri. Here too the Chronicler assumes familiarity with the book of Kings. **5–9:** The failure of the alliance with Joram (2 Kings 8.28–29), the death of Ahaziah's kinsmen (2 Kings 10.12–14), and the death of Ahaziah himself (2 Kings 9.27) leaves a vacuum in Davidic leadership (v. 9). In Chronicles Ahaziah's demise is attributed to divine purpose (v. 7a). On the anointing of Jehu and the assassination of Joram, see 2 Kings 9.1–26.

house of Ahab, he met the officials of Judah and the sons of Ahaziah's brothers, who attended Ahaziah, and he killed them. [9] He searched for Ahaziah, who was captured while hiding in Samaria and was brought to Jehu, and put to death. They buried him, for they said, "He is the grandson of Jehoshaphat, who sought the LORD with all his heart." And the house of Ahaziah had no one able to rule the kingdom.

[10] Now when Athaliah, Ahaziah's mother, saw that her son was dead, she set about to destroy all the royal family of the house of Judah. [11] But Jehoshabeath, the king's daughter, took Joash son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's children who were about to be killed; she put him and his nurse in a bedroom. Thus Jehoshabeath, daughter of King Jehoram and wife of the priest Jehoiada—because she was a sister of Ahaziah—hid him from Athaliah, so that she did not kill him; [12] he remained with them six years, hidden in the house of God, while Athaliah reigned over the land.

23 But in the seventh year Jehoiada took courage, and entered into a compact with the commanders of the hundreds, Azariah son of Jeroham, Ishmael son of Jehohanan, Azariah son of Obed, Maaseiah son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat son of Zichri. [2] They went around through Judah and gathered the Levites from all the towns of Judah, and the heads of families of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. [3] Then the whole assembly made a covenant with the king in the house of God. Jehoiada[a] said to them, "Here is the king's son! Let him reign, as the LORD promised concerning the sons of David. [4] This is what you are to do: one-third of you, priests and Levites, who come on duty on the sabbath, shall be gatekeepers, [5] one-third shall be at the king's house, and one-third at the Gate of the Foundation; and all the people shall be in the courts of the house of the LORD. [6] Do not let anyone enter the house of the LORD except the priests and ministering Levites; they may enter, for they are holy, but all the other[b] people shall observe the instructions of the LORD. [7] The Levites shall surround the king, each with his weapons in his hand; and whoever enters the house shall be killed. Stay with the king in his comings and goings."

[8] The Levites and all Judah did according to all that the priest Jehoiada commanded; each brought his men, who were to come on duty on the sabbath, with those who were to go off duty on the sabbath; for the priest Jehoiada did not dismiss the divisions. [9] The priest Jehoiada delivered to the captains the spears and the large and small shields that had been King David's, which were in the house of God; [10] and he set all the people as a guard for the king, everyone with weapon in hand, from the south side of the house to the north side of the house, around the altar and the house. [11] Then he brought out the king's son, put the crown on him, and gave him the covenant;[c] they proclaimed him king, and Jehoiada and his sons anointed him; and they shouted, "Long live the king!"

[12] When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she went into the house of the LORD to the people; [13] and when she looked, there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance, and the captains and the trumpeters beside

[a] Heb *He*
[b] Heb lacks *other*
[c] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

22.10–23.15: The tenure and fall of Athaliah. Athaliah's reign (842–836 BCE; cf. 2 Kings 11.1–16) marks the point of gravest threat in a long sequence of repeated blows to the Davidic dynasty. Her plan to eliminate all potential heirs is thwarted, however, by *Jehoshabeath, daughter of King Jehoram* (vv. 11–12; called Jehosheba in Kings). **23.1–7:** The first steps in the plot against Athaliah (2 Kings 11.4–8) are rewritten according to the Chronicler's characteristic interests in the Levites, priests, gatekeepers, *the heads of* the *families of Israel,* and the people at large (cf. 1 Chr 15–16; 23–27). From the outset, the coup is the work of all the people, not just select military officers. **1:** *Compact,* Heb "berit," usually translated "covenant." **3:** The restoration honors the enduring political standards bequeathed to Israel during the United Monarchy. A return to normalcy after a period of apostasy or upheaval includes the restoration of the Davidic dynasty (22.1; 23.20–21; 26.1; 33.25; 36.1). **7:** On the military dimension of levitical duties, see 1 Chr 26.1–19n. **11:** *The covenant,* Heb "'edut", probably a list of divinely given laws. **13:** The *pillar,* probably Jachin or Boaz; see 3.15–17. On *the people of the land* see 2 Kings 11.14n.

the king, and all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets, and the singers with their musical instruments leading in the celebration. Athaliah tore her clothes, and cried, "Treason! Treason!" [14] Then the priest Jehoiada brought out the captains who were set over the army, saying to them, "Bring her out between the ranks; anyone who follows her is to be put to the sword." For the priest said, "Do not put her to death in the house of the LORD." [15] So they laid hands on her; she went into the entrance of the Horse Gate of the king's house, and there they put her to death.

[16] Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people and the king that they should be the LORD's people. [17] Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and tore it down; his altars and his images they broke in pieces, and they killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, in front of the altars. [18] Jehoiada assigned the care of the house of the LORD to the levitical priests whom David had organized to be in charge of the house of the LORD, to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, according to the order of David. [19] He stationed the gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the LORD so that no one should enter who was in any way unclean. [20] And he took the captains, the nobles, the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and they brought the king down from the house of the LORD, marching through the upper gate to the king's house. They set the king on the royal throne. [21] So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet after Athaliah had been killed with the sword.

24 Joash was seven years old when he began to reign; he reigned forty years in Jerusalem; his mother's name was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. [2] Joash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of the priest Jehoiada. [3] Jehoiada got two wives for him, and he became the father of sons and daughters.

[4] Some time afterward Joash decided to restore the house of the LORD. [5] He assembled the priests and the Levites and said to them, "Go out to the cities of Judah and gather money from all Israel to repair the house of your God, year by year; and see that you act quickly." But the Levites did not act quickly. [6] So the king summoned Jehoiada the chief, and said to him, "Why have you not required the Levites to bring in from Judah and Jerusalem the tax levied by Moses, the servant of the LORD, on[a] the congregation of Israel for the tent of the covenant?"[b] [7] For the children of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken into the house of God, and had even used all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD for the Baals.

[8] So the king gave command, and they made a chest, and set it outside the gate of the house of the LORD. [9] A proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to bring in for the LORD the tax that Moses the servant of God laid on Israel in the wilder-

[a] Compare Vg: Heb *and*
[b] Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

23.16–21: The reformation of Jehoiada. This priest leads *the people* in undoing the damage inflicted by Athaliah and her predecessors (cf. 2 Kings 11.17–20). His efforts result in the destruction of the temple of Baal, the reinstitution of proper personnel at the Temple, and the enthronement of young Joah. **16:** As in Asa's reign, a national covenant (Heb "berit") is made or renewed (15.8–19). **18–19:** These verses are an addition by the Chronicler in the middle of a narrative that otherwise largely follows Kings. They emphasize two issues that are key to the Chronicler: the role of *the law of Moses* and the role of *David* in organizing the Temple service. **21:** The *quiet* that descends on Jerusalem is a sign of divine blessing (1 Chr 4.40; 22.9; 2 Chr 14.1,6; 20.30).

24.1–27: The Temple restoration of Joash (836–798 BCE) and his later regression. Following Kings, where the king's name is Jehoash, the Chronicler devotes considerable attention to Joash's restoration of the Temple, but in contrast to his source, limits it to the life of Jehoiada (cf. 2 Kings 12). After the good priest dies (vv. 15–16), Joash falls under the influence of his officers and backslides (vv. 17–22). He subsequently confronts a disastrous foreign invasion (vv. 23–24) and a successful conspiracy (vv. 25–26). **3:** On large families, see 11.18–21n. **4–14:** Joash expends great effort to rebuild the neglected Temple. He displays strong leadership in ensuring that the renovations proceed rapidly (vv. 5–6). The Chronicler, in an attempt to bolster the significance of the Temple, adds to his source, insisting that all donated funds were given with great enthusiasm (v. 10). **6:** *The tax levied by*

ness. 10 All the leaders and all the people rejoiced and brought their tax and dropped it into the chest until it was full. 11 Whenever the chest was brought to the king's officers by the Levites, when they saw that there was a large amount of money in it, the king's secretary and the officer of the chief priest would come and empty the chest and take it and return it to its place. So they did day after day, and collected money in abundance. 12 The king and Jehoiada gave it to those who had charge of the work of the house of the LORD, and they hired masons and carpenters to restore the house of the LORD, and also workers in iron and bronze to repair the house of the LORD. 13 So those who were engaged in the work labored, and the repairing went forward at their hands, and they restored the house of God to its proper condition and strengthened it. 14 When they had finished, they brought the rest of the money to the king and Jehoiada, and with it were made utensils for the house of the LORD, utensils for the service and for the burnt offerings, and ladles, and vessels of gold and silver. They offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD regularly all the days of Jehoiada.

15 But Jehoiada grew old and full of days, and died; he was one hundred thirty years old at his death. 16 And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, and for God and his house.

17 Now after the death of Jehoiada the officials of Judah came and did obeisance to the king; then the king listened to them. 18 They abandoned the house of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and served the sacred poles[a] and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs. 19 Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the LORD; they testified against them, but they would not listen.

20 Then the spirit of God took possession of[b] Zechariah son of the priest Jehoiada; he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus says God: Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has also forsaken you." 21 But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD. 22 King Joash did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. As he was dying, he said, "May the LORD see and avenge!"

23 At the end of the year the army of Aram came up against Joash. They came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the officials of the people from among them, and sent all the booty they took to the king of Damascus. 24 Although the army of Aram had come with few men, the LORD delivered into their hand a very great army, because they had abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors. Thus they executed judgment on Joash.

25 When they had withdrawn, leaving him severely wounded, his servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son[c] of the priest Jehoiada, and they killed him on his bed. So he died; and they buried him in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings. 26 Those who conspired against him were Zabad son of Shimeath the Ammonite, and Jehozabad son of Shimrith the Moabite. 27 Accounts of his sons, and of the many oracles against him, and of the rebuilding[d] of the house of God are written in the Commentary on the Book of the Kings. And his son Amaziah succeeded him.

[a] Heb *Asherim*
[b] Heb *clothed itself with*
[c] Gk Vg: Heb *sons*
[d] Heb *founding*

Moses, see Ex 30.11–16; Lev 27.1–8. **13–14:** The collections for Temple renovation are so successful that funds are left to fashion new *utensils, ladles,* and *vessels.* In this respect, the peoples' generosity recalls that displayed in the reign of David (1 Chr 29.11–19). **15–16:** The highly positive evaluation of the priest Jehoiada's tenure resembles those written about Judah's better kings. **17–22:** These episodes, not found in Kings, detail the extent of Joash's regression. They follow typical patterns of the Chronicler: apostasy, prophet's warning, lack of repentance, (a second warning,) and punishment. **20–21:** The assassination of the prophet *Zechariah* is the work of both Joash and his officials. **25–26:** Joash himself falls victim to assassination in retaliation for the murder of Jehoiada's son(s) (v. 22; cf. 2 Kings 12.19–21). **27:** *Commentary,* see 13.22n.

25 Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. 2 He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not with a true heart. 3 As soon as the royal power was firmly in his hand he killed his servants who had murdered his father the king. 4 But he did not put their children to death, according to what is written in the law, in the book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, "The parents shall not be put to death for the children, or the children be put to death for the parents; but all shall be put to death for their own sins."

5 Amaziah assembled the people of Judah, and set them by ancestral houses under commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds for all Judah and Benjamin. He mustered those twenty years old and upward, and found that they were three hundred thousand picked troops fit for war, able to handle spear and shield. 6 He also hired one hundred thousand mighty warriors from Israel for one hundred talents of silver. 7 But a man of God came to him and said, "O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD is not with Israel—all these Ephraimites. 8 Rather, go by yourself and act; be strong in battle, or God will fling you down before the enemy; for God has power to help or to overthrow." 9 Amaziah said to the man of God, "But what shall we do about the hundred talents that I have given to the army of Israel?" The man of God answered, "The LORD is able to give you much more than this." 10 Then Amaziah discharged the army that had come to him from Ephraim, letting them go home again. But they became very angry with Judah, and returned home in fierce anger.

11 Amaziah took courage, and led out his people; he went to the Valley of Salt, and struck down ten thousand men of Seir. 12 The people of Judah captured another ten thousand alive, took them to the top of Sela, and threw them down from the top of Sela, so that all of them were dashed to pieces. 13 But the men of the army whom Amaziah sent back, not letting them go with him to battle, fell on the cities of Judah from Samaria to Beth-horon; they killed three thousand people in them, and took much booty.

14 Now after Amaziah came from the slaughter of the Edomites, he brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up as his gods, and worshiped them, making offerings to them. 15 The LORD was angry with Amaziah and sent to him a prophet, who said to him, "Why have you resorted to a people's gods who could not deliver their own people from your hand?" 16 But as he was speaking the king[a] said to him, "Have we made you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you be put to death?" So the prophet stopped, but said, "I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my advice."

17 Then King Amaziah of Judah took counsel and sent to King Joash son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu of Israel, saying, "Come, let us look one another in the face." 18 King Joash of Israel sent word to King Amaziah of Judah, "A thornbush on Lebanon sent to a cedar on Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son for a wife'; but a wild animal of Lebanon passed by and trampled down the thornbush. 19 You say, 'See, I have defeated Edom,' and your heart has lifted you up in boastfulness. Now stay at home; why should you provoke

[a] Heb *he*

25.1–28: The mixed record of Amaziah (789–769 BCE). The Chronicler expands the coverage devoted to Amaziah (2 Kings 14.2–14,17–20) through the addition of two sections (vv. 5–10 and vv. 12–16), each of which contains a prophetic figure. His reign is divided into two periods similar to other kings: In the first half of his tenure (vv. 1–13) Amaziah proves obedient to the prophetic word and enjoys success, while in the second half of his reign Amaziah engages in idolatry and suffers defeat (vv. 14–28). **3–4:** Amaziah avenges his father's death but does not violate Deut 24.16. **5–10:** The king's attempt to supplement his country's muster by hiring Israelite mercenaries encounters a prophetic reprimand. **5–6:** On the large numbers, see 13.3n. A *hundred talents* weighed about 3,400 kg (7,000 lb). The Chronicler regards any military alliance, whether with foreign powers or with northern Israel, as illicit (see 16.1–14n.). **11–13:** The prophet's counsel of complete reliance on God results in Judah's victory (cf. 13.13–21; 14.7–14; 20.1–30), but the alienated mercenaries wreak some havoc in Judah and

trouble so that you fall, you and Judah with you?"

20 But Amaziah would not listen—it was God's doing, in order to hand them over, because they had sought the gods of Edom. 21 So King Joash of Israel went up; he and King Amaziah of Judah faced one another in battle at Beth-shemesh, which belongs to Judah. 22 Judah was defeated by Israel; everyone fled home. 23 King Joash of Israel captured King Amaziah of Judah, son of Joash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh; he brought him to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate, a distance of four hundred cubits. 24 He seized all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of God, and Obed-edom with them; he seized also the treasuries of the king's house, also hostages; then he returned to Samaria.

25 King Amaziah son of Joash of Judah, lived fifteen years after the death of King Joash son of Jehoahaz of Israel. 26 Now the rest of the deeds of Amaziah, from first to last, are they not written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel? 27 From the time that Amaziah turned away from the LORD they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish. But they sent after him to Lachish, and killed him there. 28 They brought him back on horses; he was buried with his ancestors in the city of David.

26 Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king to succeed his father Amaziah. 2 He rebuilt Eloth and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his ancestors. 3 Uzziah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. 4 He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, just as his father Amaziah had done. 5 He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.

6 He went out and made war against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod; he built cities in the territory of Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines. 7 God helped him against the Philistines, against the Arabs who lived in Gur-baal, and against the Meunites. 8 The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong. 9 Moreover Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate, at the Valley Gate, and at the Angle, and fortified them. 10 He built towers in the wilderness and hewed out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Shephelah and in the plain, and he had farmers and vinedressers in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil. 11 Moreover Uzziah had an army of soldiers, fit for war, in divisions according to the numbers in the muster made by the secretary Jeiel and the officer Maaseiah, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the king's commanders. 12 The whole number of the heads of ancestral houses of mighty warriors was two thousand six hundred. 13 Under their command was an army of three hundred seven thousand five hundred, who could make war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. 14 Uzziah provided for all the army the

Samaria. **20:** The second part of the verse is an expansion of the Chronicler's source (2 Kings 14.11), emphasizing that this was not a whim, but the fair punishment of God. **22–24:** Amaziah and his kingdom suffer further defeat and humiliation. As the people experience military loss, some destruction to Jerusalem, the plunder of the temples and royal palace, and the capture of some of their soldiers as prisoners of war, they enter into a type of exilic situation (cf. 36.1–21) from which they need to be restored.

26.1–15: The builder and reformer, Uzziah (785–733 BCE). In Kings Uzziah (Azariah) is a minor figure (2 Kings 14.21–22; 15.1–7), but the much longer account in Chronicles presents this monarch as a major reformer whose fame extended all the way to Egypt (26.8). The additional material is of various types; some may be based on sources, while other pieces are likely composed by the Chronicler. **1–4:** Cf. 2 Kings 14.21–22; 15.2–3. **5:** The Chronicler links Uzziah's good conduct to the influence of Zechariah, an otherwise unattested prophet; cf. 24.22. **6–15:** Uzziah's achievements include territorial expansion, victory in war, rebuilding towns, and amassing a large, well-equipped army. Like David (1 Chr 27.25–31), Uzziah also enhances the condition of his royal estates. **7:** *Meunites,* see 20.2n. **12–13:** On the large numbers, see 13.3n.

shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows, and stones for slinging. [15] In Jerusalem he set up machines, invented by skilled workers, on the towers and the corners for shooting arrows and large stones. And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped until he became strong.

[16] But when he had become strong he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was false to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to make offering on the altar of incense. [17] But the priest Azariah went in after him, with eighty priests of the LORD who were men of valor; [18] they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to make offering to the LORD, but for the priests the descendants of Aaron, who are consecrated to make offering. Go out of the sanctuary; for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God." [19] Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to make offering, and when he became angry with the priests a leprous[a] disease broke out on his forehead, in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD, by the altar of incense. [20] When the chief priest Azariah, and all the priests, looked at him, he was leprous[a] in his forehead. They hurried him out, and he himself hurried to get out, because the LORD had struck him. [21] King Uzziah was leprous[a] to the day of his death, and being leprous[a] lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD. His son Jotham was in charge of the palace of the king, governing the people of the land.

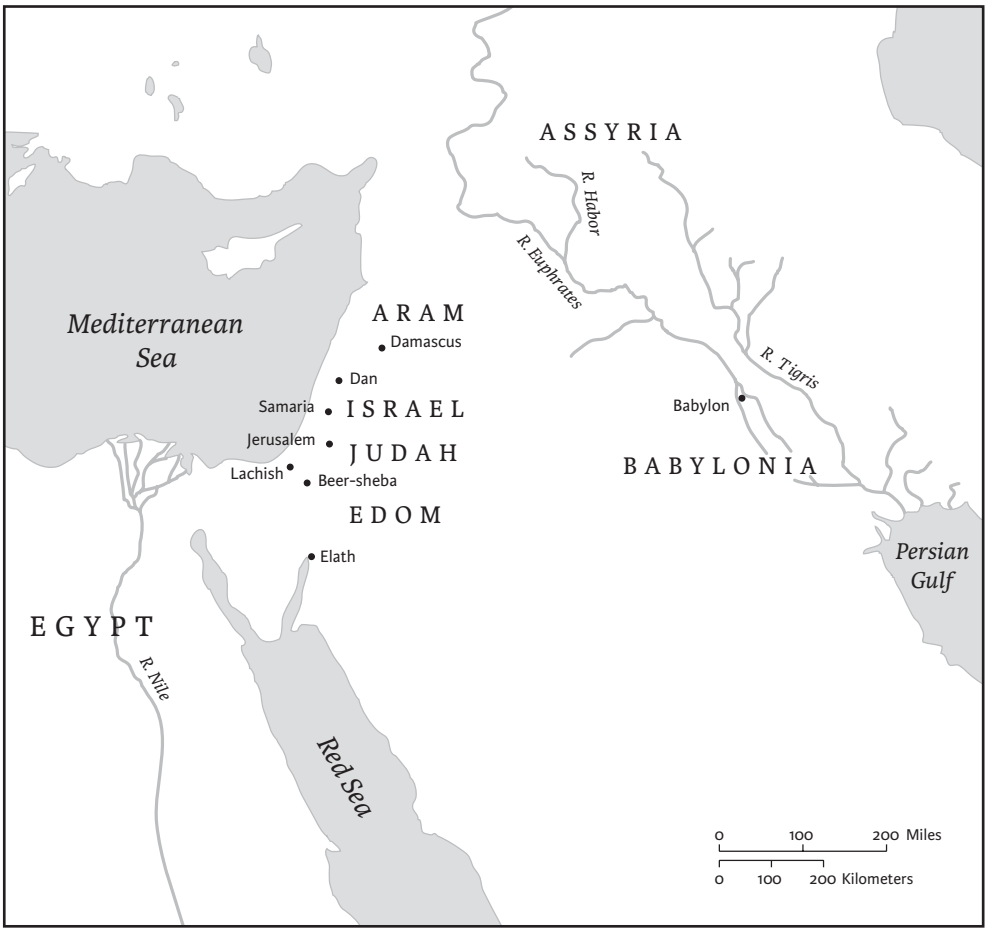
[22] Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from first to last, the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz wrote. [23] Uzziah slept with his ancestors; they buried him near his ancestors in the burial field that belonged to the kings, for they said, "He is leprous."[a] His son Jotham succeeded him.

27 Jotham was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerushah daughter of Zadok. [2] He did what was right in the sight of the LORD just as his father Uzziah had done—only he did not invade the temple of the LORD. But the people still followed corrupt practices. [3] He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD, and did extensive building on the wall of Ophel. [4] Moreover he built cities in the hill country of Judah, and forts and towers on the wooded hills. [5] He fought with the king of the Ammonites and prevailed against them. The Ammonites gave him that year one hundred talents of silver, ten thousand cors of wheat and ten thousand of barley. The Ammonites paid him the same amount in the second and the third years. [6] So Jotham became strong because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God. [7] Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars and his ways, are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. [8] He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem.

[a] A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

26.16–23: Uzziah's hubris. Having consolidated his rule and realm (1.1; 11.12; 17.1), Uzziah overreaches by turning against God and encroaching on the sacrificial duties of the priests. Most of this material is lacking in Kings, and it is likely a clever composition of the Chronicler, who imagined that the leprosy resulted from assuming Priestly prerogatives and entering the sanctuary with incense. Leprosy caused serious impurity (Lev 13–14), and thus Uzziah could never enter the Temple again. **16:** *False to the* LORD, lit. "acted faithlessly (Heb "m'l") against the LORD." **21–23:** Except for the reference to Isaiah, this material is taken from 2 Kings 15.5–7. The attribution to Isaiah means that the Chronicler can lay claim to prophetic authority for at least some of the material in his narration of Uzziah's reign (cf. 1 Chr 29.29; 2 Chr 9.29; 13.22). **22:** *Isaiah*, on the prophets as ancestors of written works, see 1 Chr 29.29n.

27.1–9: The accomplishments of Jotham (759–743 BCE). As in Kings, Jotham is rated positively (2 Kings 15.32–38), but the Chronicler adds more material about his reign, especially about his public works and military might. **4:** Like Uzziah (26.6–10), Jotham does not confine his building initiatives to Jerusalem. He establishes towns in the hill country of Judah, and he builds fortresses and towers in the wooded areas. **5:** *Ammonites*, some scholars emend to "Meunites" (20.1n), but no king of the Meunites is mentioned in other biblical texts. A *talent* weighed about 75 lb (34 kg), and a *cor* was about 6.5 bu (230 l).



Chs 28–33: Assyria and Israel and Judah.

[9] Jotham slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in the city of David; and his son Ahaz succeeded him.

28 Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign; he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD, as his ancestor David had done, [2] but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made cast images for the Baals; [3] and he made offerings in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and made his sons pass through fire, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. [4] He sacrificed and made offerings on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

[5] Therefore the LORD his God gave him into the hand of the king of Aram, who defeated him and took captive a great number of his people and brought them to Damascus. He was also given into the hand of the

28.1–27: Unending failure under Ahaz (743/753–727/715 BCE; the data are inconsistent). Unlike the reigns of almost all monarchs in Chronicles, the reign of Ahaz is one of unmitigated disaster. The author draws on 2 Kings 16, but his own presentation is substantially longer and different. Ahaz's refusal to turn from his wicked ways affords him the dubious distinction of being Judah's worst king (cf. 33.12–17). **3:** *Pass through fire,* see 2 Kings 16.1–4n. **5–7:** The Chronicler directly attributes the onslaughts by Assyria and Israel (2 Kings 16.5) to divine retribution for Ahaz's religious transgressions (2 Kings 16.2–4; 2 Chr 28.2–4). Chronicles depicts two

king of Israel, who defeated him with great slaughter. 6 Pekah son of Remaliah killed one hundred twenty thousand in Judah in one day, all of them valiant warriors, because they had abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors. 7 And Zichri, a mighty warrior of Ephraim, killed the king's son Maaseiah, Azrikam the commander of the palace, and Elkanah the next in authority to the king.

8 The people of Israel took captive two hundred thousand of their kin, women, sons, and daughters; they also took much booty from them and brought the booty to Samaria. 9 But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded; he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria, and said to them, "Because the LORD, the God of your ancestors, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven. 10 Now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. But what have you except sins against the LORD your God? 11 Now hear me, and send back the captives whom you have taken from your kindred, for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you." 12 Moreover, certain chiefs of the Ephraimites, Azariah son of Johanan, Berechiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum, and Amasa son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war, 13 and said to them, "You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring on us guilt against the LORD in addition to our present sins and guilt. For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel." 14 So the warriors left the captives and the booty before the officials and all the assembly. 15 Then those who were mentioned by name got up and took the captives, and with the booty they clothed all that were naked among them; they clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them; and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kindred at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria.

16 At that time King Ahaz sent to the king[a] of Assyria for help. 17 For the Edomites had again invaded and defeated Judah, and carried away captives. 18 And the Philistines had made raids on the cities in the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages; and they settled there. 19 For the LORD brought Judah low because of King Ahaz of Israel, for he had behaved without restraint in Judah and had been faithless to the LORD. 20 So King Tilgath-pilneser of Assyria came against him, and oppressed him instead of strengthening him. 21 For Ahaz plundered the house of the LORD and the houses of the king and of the officials, and gave tribute to the king of Assyria; but it did not help him.

22 In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the LORD—this same King Ahaz. 23 For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus, which had defeated him, and said, "Because the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them so that they may help me." But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. 24 Ahaz gathered togeth-

[a] Gk Syr Vg Compare 2 Kings 16.7: Heb *kings*

separate and distinct invasions, whereas Kings presents Syria and Israel as acting in consort (2 Kings 16.5–6). **8–15:** The people of Israel seize a vast number of captives, but this act brings a strong prophetic censure and the prisoners are compassionately released. This section, most likely a free composition of the Chronicler, illustrates some of his basic concerns, including the need for prophetic warning before punishment, and the complete efficacy of repentance. That the prophet was a northern Israelite and the Israelites themselves repented indicates that the Northern and Southern Kingdoms still had an essential unity as "kin" (vv. 8,11). **16–20:** Invasions by the Edomites and the Philistines prompted Ahaz to send Temple tribute to the king of Assyria (Tiglath-pileser III, 745–727 BCE; here called *Tilgath-pilneser*) for *help* (cf. 2 Kings 16.7–8), but the Assyrian king *oppressed him* instead. On the opposition to alliances, see 16.1–14n. **21:** One more sign of Ahaz's desperate state—he plunders his own temple, palace, and official residences in an unsuccessful campaign to win relief from the pressure exerted by the Assyrian king. **22–25:** Ahaz's foreign policy disasters lead him to abandon his own religious institutions and worship the gods of the lands who defeated him. In Chronicles this is but one more indication of the ignominy that characterizes Ahaz's rule.

er the utensils of the house of God, and cut in pieces the utensils of the house of God. He shut up the doors of the house of the LORD and made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. 25 In every city of Judah he made high places to make offerings to other gods, provoking to anger the LORD, the God of his ancestors. 26 Now the rest of his acts and all his ways, from first to last, are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. 27 Ahaz slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem; but they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel. His son Hezekiah succeeded him.

29 Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old; he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. 2 He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, just as his ancestor David had done.

3 In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. 4 He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east. 5 He said to them, "Listen to me, Levites! Sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD, the God of your ancestors, and carry out the filth from the holy place. 6 For our ancestors have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God; they have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the dwelling of the LORD, and turned their backs. 7 They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps, and have not offered incense or made burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. 8 Therefore the wrath of the LORD came upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. 9 Our fathers have fallen by the sword and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. 10 Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger may turn away from us. 11 My sons, do not now be negligent, for the LORD has chosen you to stand in his presence to minister to him, and to be his ministers and make offerings to him."

12 Then the Levites arose, Mahath son of Amasai, and Joel son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; and of the sons of Merari, Kish son of Abdi, and Azariah son of Jehallelel; and of the Gershonites, Joah son of Zimmah, and Eden son of Joah; 13 and of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeuel; and of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; 14 and of the sons of Heman, Jehuel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel. 15 They gathered their brothers, sanctified themselves, and went in as the king had commanded, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD. 16 The priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD to cleanse it, and they brought out all the unclean things that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD; and the Levites took them and carried them out to the Wadi Kidron. 17 They began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the LORD; then for eight days they sanctified the house of the LORD, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished. 18 Then they went inside to King Hezekiah and said, "We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the table for the rows of bread and all

29.1–36: Restoring the Temple: the beginning of Hezekiah's rule. The Chronicler devotes more attention to Hezekiah (ruled 727/715–698/687 BCE; the data are inconsistent) than to any other king except David and Solomon (29.1–32.33); the Chronicler views Hezekiah as an "ideal" king of the post Davidic-Solomonic era, much like Josiah in Kings. Sennacherib's invasion, which dominates the coverage of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18.9–19.37, thus appears in condensed form (32.1–23). Instead, the Chronicler focuses on Hezekiah's reforms and restoration of the Temple, which are described in much greater detail than in his sources (29.1–31.21; cf. 2 Kings 18.4,16,22). **3–11:** Hezekiah begins by engaging a domestic policy crisis—the sorry legacy left by his predecessor (28.24). He oversees the repair of the Temple (vv. 3–4) and encourages the Levites to resume their traditional tasks (vv. 5–11). He makes a covenant with the LORD (v. 10; cf. 15.8–19) to move the nation from a state of wrath (v. 8) to one of blessing. He does this immediately upon assuming the throne (v. 3), reflecting his great righteousness. **12–19:** The priests and Levites complete the Temple purification (cf. 13.10–11). **18:** *Rows of bread,* see 2.4n.

its utensils. 19 All the utensils that King Ahaz repudiated during his reign when he was faithless, we have made ready and sanctified; see, they are in front of the altar of the LORD."

20 Then King Hezekiah rose early, assembled the officials of the city, and went up to the house of the LORD. 21 They brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah. He commanded the priests the descendants of Aaron to offer them on the altar of the LORD. 22 So they slaughtered the bulls, and the priests received the blood and dashed it against the altar; they slaughtered the rams and their blood was dashed against the altar; they also slaughtered the lambs and their blood was dashed against the altar. 23 Then the male goats for the sin offering were brought to the king and the assembly; they laid their hands on them, 24 and the priests slaughtered them and made a sin offering with their blood at the altar, to make atonement for all Israel. For the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel.

25 He stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king's seer and of the prophet Nathan, for the commandment was from the LORD through his prophets. 26 The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. 27 Then Hezekiah commanded that the burnt offering be offered on the altar. When the burnt offering began, the song to the LORD began also, and the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of King David of Israel. 28 The whole assembly worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. 29 When the offering was finished, the king and all who were present with him bowed down and worshiped. 30 King Hezekiah and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and of the seer Asaph. They sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshiped.

31 Then Hezekiah said, "You have now consecrated yourselves to the LORD; come near, bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the LORD." The assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings; and all who were of a willing heart brought burnt offerings. 32 The number of the burnt offerings that the assembly brought was seventy bulls, one hundred rams, and two hundred lambs; all these were for a burnt offering to the LORD. 33 The consecrated offerings were six hundred bulls and three thousand sheep. 34 But the priests were too few and could not skin all the burnt offerings, so, until other priests had sanctified themselves, their kindred, the Levites, helped them until the work was finished—for the Levites were more conscientious[a] than the priests in sanctifying themselves. 35 Besides the great number of burnt offerings there was the fat of the offerings of well-being, and there were the drink offerings for the burnt offerings. Thus the service of the house of the LORD was restored. 36 And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because of what God had done for the people; for the thing had come about suddenly.

30 Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should

[a] Heb *upright in heart*

20–36: As in the time of Solomon's Temple dedication (5.2–7.6), the praises of the Levites follow the offering of sacrifices. The swift (re)establishment of *the service of the house of the LORD* (vv. 35–36) effectively reverses the neglect of the Temple in Ahaz's reign. The restoration of the proper Temple service results in great joy (cf. 30.25–26). **22:** Cf. Num 18.17; Lev 17.6. **27:** The coordination of Temple hymns and Temple sacrifices is a consistent theme in Chronicles (1 Chr 23.30–31n.). **34:** *Levites,* the Chronicler has a special sympathy for the plight of the Levites, even though he normally maintains a distinction between their roles and responsibilities and those of the priests. The Chronicler stresses cooperation and complimentarity between the priests and Levites, not competition and hierarchy (1 Chr 23.28–32; 28.12–13,21; 2 Chr 5.4–14; 13.9–12; 23.1–11; 35.3). In Chronicles, the priests and Levites share a common genealogy (1 Chr 6.1–81).

30.1–31.1: National Passover and further religious reforms. The consecration and rededication of the Temple complete, Hezekiah leads the people in celebrating a national Passover. The restoration of proper worship

come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover to the LORD the God of Israel. 2 For the king and his officials and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the passover in the second month 3 (for they could not keep it at its proper time because the priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem). 4 The plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly. 5 So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the passover to the LORD the God of Israel, at Jerusalem; for they had not kept it in great numbers as prescribed. 6 So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his officials, as the king had commanded, saying, "O people of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, so that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. 7 Do not be like your ancestors and your kindred, who were faithless to the LORD God of their ancestors, so that he made them a desolation, as you see. 8 Do not now be stiff-necked as your ancestors were, but yield yourselves to the LORD and come to his sanctuary, which he has sanctified forever, and serve the LORD your God, so that his fierce anger may turn away from you. 9 For as you return to the LORD, your kindred and your children will find compassion with their captors, and return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him."

10 So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun; but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. 11 Only a few from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. 12 The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the officials commanded by the word of the LORD.

13 Many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the festival of unleavened bread in the second month, a very large assembly. 14 They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for offering incense they took away and threw into the Wadi Kidron. 15 They slaughtered the passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed, and they sanctified themselves and brought burnt offerings into the house of the LORD. 16 They took their accustomed posts according to the law of Moses the man of God; the priests dashed the blood that they received[a] from the hands of the Levites. 17 For there were many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves;

[a] Heb lacks *that they received*

moves from the Passover offering, to destroying illicit altars in Jerusalem (vv. 13–14), to celebrating the Festival of Unleavened Bread (vv. 13,21; cf. Ex 23.14–17; Deut 16.16–17), to shattering *the pillars,* hacking apart *the sacred poles,* and tearing down *the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh* (31.1). The alternation in Hezekiah's reforms is significant—from reestablishing ritual purity at the Temple to enforcing ritual unity in both Judah and the former Northern Kingdom. **30.1:** *Wrote letters*. The distribution of royal declarations by missives was common in the Persian period. The Persian empire was renowned for its international postal system. **2:** A somewhat similar delay in observing the Passover is legislated in Num 9.9–13. **5–9:** Hezekiah appeals to the remnant of the northern tribes and invites them to participate in the Passover. In spite of the Assyrian exile (v. 6; cf. 2 Kings 18.9–12), the northerners are still Israelites, and their positive response may elicit compassion for their relatives in exile (v. 9). **5:** *From Beer-sheba to Dan,* the traditional southern and northern limits of Israel; see 1 Chr 21.2. **10–14:** Hezekiah's offer meets with an enthusiastic response from Judah and a mixed response from the northern tribes. **15–27:** The national celebration is reminiscent of the heady days of the United Monarchy. **18–20:** These verses suggest that the stereotypical view of postexilic Judaism as legalistic and inflexible is incorrect. **25:** *Resident aliens,* cf. Num 9.14.

31.2–19: The priestly and levitical divisions reestablished. Hezekiah continues his reforms by reinstituting the priestly and levitical divisions first set out by David (1 Chr 23–26; 28.13,21) and implemented by Solomon (2 Chr 8.14). **4–10:** Like David (1 Chr 22.14–16; 29.2–5), the king contributes toward the support of the Temple and its staff. As in David's time (1 Chr 29.6–9), the people respond with their own generous gifts. **11–20:** Heze-

therefore the Levites had to slaughter the passover lamb for everyone who was not clean, to make it holy to the LORD. 18 For a multitude of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the passover otherwise than as prescribed. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "The good LORD pardon all 19 who set their hearts to seek God, the LORD the God of their ancestors, even though not in accordance with the sanctuary's rules of cleanness." 20 The LORD heard Hezekiah, and healed the people. 21 The people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the festival of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, accompanied by loud instruments for the LORD. 22 Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the LORD. So the people ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing offerings of well-being and giving thanks to the LORD the God of their ancestors.

23 Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the festival for another seven days; so they kept it for another seven days with gladness. 24 For King Hezekiah of Judah gave the assembly a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep for offerings, and the officials gave the assembly a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep. The priests sanctified themselves in great numbers. 25 The whole assembly of Judah, the priests and the Levites, and the whole assembly that came out of Israel, and the resident aliens who came out of the land of Israel, and the resident aliens who lived in Judah, rejoiced. 26 There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon son of King David of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. 27 Then the priests and the Levites stood up and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; their prayer came to his holy dwelling in heaven.

31 Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke down the pillars, hewed down the sacred poles,[a] and pulled down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all. Then all the people of Israel returned to their cities, all to their individual properties.

2 Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, division by division, everyone according to his service, the priests and the Levites, for burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, to minister in the gates of the camp of the LORD and to give thanks and praise. 3 The contribution of the king from his own possessions was for the burnt offerings: the burnt offerings of morning and evening, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the appointed festivals, as it is written in the law of the LORD. 4 He commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, so that they might devote themselves to the law of the LORD. 5 As soon as the word spread, the people of Israel gave in abundance the first fruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything. 6 The people of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of the dedicated things that had been consecrated to the LORD their God, and laid them in heaps. 7 In the third month they began to pile up the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month. 8 When Hezekiah and the officials came and saw the heaps, they blessed the LORD and his people Israel. 9 Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites about the heaps. 10 The chief priest Azariah, who was of the house of Zadok, answered him, "Since they began to bring the contributions into the house of the LORD, we have had enough to eat and have plenty to spare; for the LORD has blessed his people, so that we have this great supply left over."

11 Then Hezekiah commanded them to prepare store-chambers in the house of the LORD; and they prepared them. 12 Faithfully they brought in the contributions, the tithes and the dedicated things. The chief officer in charge of them was Conaniah the Levite, with his brother Shimei as second; 13 while Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath, and Benaiah were overseers assisting Conaniah and his brother

[a] Heb *Asherim*

Shimei, by the appointment of King Hezekiah and of Azariah the chief officer of the house of God. 14 Kore son of Imnah the Levite, keeper of the east gate, was in charge of the freewill offerings to God, to apportion the contribution reserved for the LORD and the most holy offerings. 15 Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah were faithfully assisting him in the cities of the priests, to distribute the portions to their kindred, old and young alike, by divisions, 16 except those enrolled by genealogy, males from three years old and upwards, all who entered the house of the LORD as the duty of each day required, for their service according to their offices, by their divisions. 17 The enrollment of the priests was according to their ancestral houses; that of the Levites from twenty years old and upwards was according to their offices, by their divisions. 18 The priests were enrolled with all their little children, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, the whole multitude; for they were faithful in keeping themselves holy. 19 And for the descendants of Aaron, the priests, who were in the fields of common land belonging to their towns, town by town, the people designated by name were to distribute portions to every male among the priests and to everyone among the Levites who was enrolled.

20 Hezekiah did this throughout all Judah; he did what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. 21 And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God, and in accordance with the law and the commandments, to seek his God, he did with all his heart; and he prospered.

32 After these things and these acts of faithfulness, King Sennacherib of Assyria came and invaded Judah and encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them for himself. 2 When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and intended to fight against Jerusalem, 3 he planned with his officers and his warriors to stop the flow of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him. 4 A great many people were gathered, and they stopped all the springs and the wadi that flowed through the land, saying, "Why should the Assyrian kings come and find water in abundance?" 5 Hezekiah[a] set to work resolutely and built up the entire wall that was broken down, and raised towers on it,[b] and outside it he built another wall; he also strengthened the Millo in the city of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance. 6 He appointed combat commanders over the people, and gathered them together to him in the square at the gate of the city and spoke encouragingly to them, saying, 7 "Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him; for there is one greater with us than with him. 8 With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles." The people were encouraged by the words of King Hezekiah of Judah.

9 After this, while King Sennacherib of Assyria was at Lachish with all his forces, he sent his servants to Jerusalem to King Hezeki-

[a] Heb *He*

[b] Vg: Heb *and raised on the towers*

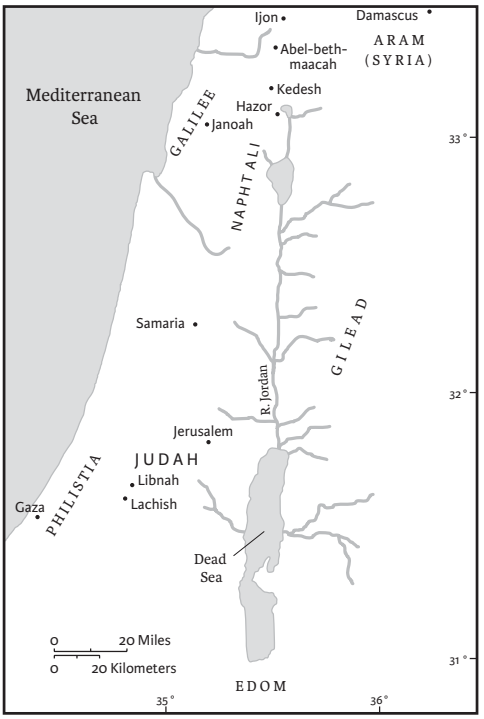
kiah ensures that the contributions and tithes will be properly cared for and stored. **20–21:** A summation and commendation of Hezekiah's reforms, which emphasize that anyone who serves God *in accordance with the law and the commandments . . . with all his heart* will *prosper.*

32.1–23: Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and threat to Jerusalem. The Chronicler borrows from and abbreviates 2 Kings 18.13–19.13, omitting Hezekiah's stripping of the Temple and his tribute to Sennacherib (2 Kings 18.13–16), which might reflect negatively on Hezekiah. The complex account of Kings is simplified, and some parallel texts from the source have been conflated to create a smoother depiction of the events. **1:** *After these . . . acts of faithfulness*, in Chronicles, Sennacherib's invasion is a complete shock. Some scholars explain this massive foreign invasion as a divinely administered test of Hezekiah (cf. Gen 22.1). It is a test of Hezekiah and Judah, but the Chronicler never maintains that the LORD initiated this war (contrast 12.2; 21.16; 28.5; 33.11–36.17). **2–8:** Sennacherib's campaign took place in 701 BCE. Repairs to Jerusalem's infrastructure, including the construction of the Siloam water tunnel (see 32.30), are made to prepare for the eventuality of an attack by Sennacherib. To this end, Hezekiah also initiates a program of urban mobilization. **5:** *Millo,* see 1 Chr 11.8n. **9–19:** As in Kings, the Assyrians try to convince the Jerusalemites that their God is no different from the defeated deities of other

ah of Judah and to all the people of Judah that were in Jerusalem, saying, [10] "Thus says King Sennacherib of Assyria: On what are you relying, that you undergo the siege of Jerusalem? [11] Is not Hezekiah misleading you, handing you over to die by famine and by thirst, when he tells you, 'The LORD our God will save us from the hand of the king of Assyria'? [12] Was it not this same Hezekiah who took away his high places and his altars and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, 'Before one altar you shall worship, and upon it you shall make your offerings'? [13] Do you not know what I and my ancestors have done to all the peoples of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands at all able to save their lands out of my hand? [14] Who among all the gods of those nations that my ancestors utterly destroyed was able to save his people from my hand, that your God should be able to save you from my hand? [15] Now therefore do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you in this fashion, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to save his people from my hand or from the hand of my ancestors. How much less will your God save you out of my hand!"

[16] His servants said still more against the Lord GOD and against his servant Hezekiah. [17] He also wrote letters to throw contempt on the LORD the God of Israel and to speak against him, saying, "Just as the gods of the nations in other lands did not rescue their people from my hands, so the God of Hezekiah will not rescue his people from my hand." [18] They shouted it with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten and terrify them, in order that they might take the city. [19] They spoke of the God of Jerusalem as if he were like the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of human hands.

[20] Then King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz prayed because of this



Ch 32: Places associated with Sennacherib's invasion of Judah.

and cried to heaven. [21] And the LORD sent an angel who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned in disgrace to his own land. When he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword. [22] So the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of King Sennacherib of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies; he gave them rest[a] on every side. [23] Many brought gifts to the LORD in Jerusalem and precious things to King Hezekiah of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward.

[a] Gk Vg: Heb *guided them*

peoples. From the perspective of the Chronicler, this is blasphemy because the deities of other nations are *the work of human hands* (cf. 2 Kings 18.17–35). **18:** *The language of Judah,* later called Hebrew. **20:** Like other pious kings before him, Hezekiah appeals to God in conformity with the precedent established by David (1 Chr 17.16–27; 29.10–19) and Solomon (2 Chr 5.13–6.42); cf. 2 Kings 19.1–34. **21:** The LORD's dramatic deliverance of Hezekiah and Jerusalem responds directly to the prayer uttered by Hezekiah and Isaiah (v. 20; cf. 2 Kings 19.1–14) and accords with the LORD's earlier promises to Solomon (7.12–15; cf. 6.28–30). **22–23:** *Rest on every side* is a sign of divine favor (14.1n.), as is tribute from the nations (1 Chr 18.6; 2 Chr 8.2; 17.5,11).

24 In those days Hezekiah became sick
and was at the point of death. He prayed to
the LORD, and he answered him and gave
him a sign. 25 But Hezekiah did not respond
according to the benefit done to him, for his
heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon
him and upon Judah and Jerusalem. 26 Then
Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of
his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jeru-
salem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not
come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.
27 Hezekiah had very great riches and
honor; and he made for himself treasuries
for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for
spices, for shields, and for all kinds of costly
objects; 28 storehouses also for the yield of
grain, wine, and oil; and stalls for all kinds
of cattle, and sheepfolds.[a] 29 He likewise
provided cities for himself, and flocks and
herds in abundance; for God had given him
very great possessions. 30 This same Heze-
kiah closed the upper outlet of the waters of
Gihon and directed them down to the west
side of the city of David. Hezekiah prospered
in all his works. 31 So also in the matter of the
envoys of the officials of Babylon, who had
been sent to him to inquire about the sign
that had been done in the land, God left him
to himself, in order to test him and to know
all that was in his heart.
32 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and
his good deeds, are written in the vision of
the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz in the Book
of the Kings of Judah and Israel. 33 Hezekiah
slept with his ancestors, and they buried him
on the ascent to the tombs of the descen-
dants of David; and all Judah and the inhabi-
tants of Jerusalem did him honor at his death.
His son Manasseh succeeded him.

33 Manasseh was twelve years old when
he began to reign; he reigned fifty-five
years in Jerusalem. 2 He did what was evil in
the sight of the LORD, according to the abomi-
nable practices of the nations whom the
LORD drove out before the people of Israel.
3 For he rebuilt the high places that his father
Hezekiah had pulled down, and erected altars
to the Baals, made sacred poles,[b] worshiped
all the host of heaven, and served them. 4 He
built altars in the house of the LORD, of which
the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem shall my
name be forever." 5 He built altars for all the
host of heaven in the two courts of the house
of the LORD. 6 He made his son pass through
fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom, prac-
ticed soothsaying and augury and sorcery,
and dealt with mediums and with wizards.
He did much evil in the sight of the LORD,
provoking him to anger. 7 The carved image of
the idol that he had made he set in the house
of God, of which God said to David and to his
son Solomon, "In this house, and in Jerusa-
lem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes
of Israel, I will put my name forever; 8 I will
never again remove the feet of Israel from the
land that I appointed for your ancestors, if
only they will be careful to do all that I have
commanded them, all the law, the statutes,
and the ordinances given through Moses."
9 Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants
of Jerusalem, so that they did more evil than
the nations whom the LORD had destroyed
before the people of Israel.
10 The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his
people, but they gave no heed. 11 Therefore

[a] Gk Vg: Heb *flocks for folds*
[b] Heb *Asheroth*

32.24–33: Hezekiah's sickness, recovery, and wealth. Even this pious king was not without his faults (32.24–26; cf. 2 Kings 20.1–19; Isa 38–39); see 2 Chr 6.36. But like David (1 Chr 21.8,17) and Rehoboam (2 Chr 12.7) before him, Hezekiah *humbled himself* before God (see 7.14). **27–30:** Most of these economic and political initiatives are focused outside Jerusalem (cf. vv. 2–8). **27:** Royal wealth indicates divine blessing in Chronicles, and Hezekiah's assets rival those of Solomon (1.11–12,14–17; 9.1–8,23–24). **31:** Cf. 2 Kings 20.12–19.

33.1–20: Manasseh: regression and repentance. As in Kings, for the Chronicler, Manasseh (ruled 698/687–642 BCE; the data are inconsistent) is a wicked king (vv. 2–9). Nevertheless, after Manasseh suffers divine punishment in the form of exile (v. 11), he repents, changes course, and is forgiven (vv. 12–19). In so doing, Manasseh is presented as a model for Judean deportees living in other lands. These events have no source in Kings. **2–9:** Drawn from 2 Kings 21.2–9. **6:** *Pass through fire,* see 2 Kings 16.3n. **10:** The long-range prophecy of terrible disaster in 2 Kings 21.10–15 becomes a summons to repent, which temporarily goes unheeded. **11–13:** The exile of Manasseh, which does not appear in Kings, leads the Judean king to entreat the favor of the LORD and humble

the LORD brought against them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him with fetters, and brought him to Babylon. [12] While he was in distress he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. [13] He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD indeed was God.

[14] Afterward he built an outer wall for the city of David west of Gihon, in the valley, reaching the entrance at the Fish Gate; he carried it around Ophel, and raised it to a very great height. He also put commanders of the army in all the fortified cities in Judah. [15] He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built on the mountain of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem, and he threw them out of the city. [16] He also restored the altar of the LORD and offered on it sacrifices of well-being and of thanksgiving; and he commanded Judah to serve the LORD the God of Israel. [17] The people, however, still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the LORD their God.

[18] Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, these are in the Annals of the Kings of Israel. [19] His prayer, and how God received his entreaty, all his sin and his faithlessness, the sites on which he built high places and set up the sacred poles[a] and the images, before he humbled himself, these are written in the records of the seers.[b] [20] So Manasseh slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in his house. His son Amon succeeded him.

[21] Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned two years in Jerusalem. [22] He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done. Amon sacrificed to all the images that his father Manasseh had made, and served them. [23] He did not humble himself before the LORD, as his father Manasseh had humbled himself, but this Amon incurred more and more guilt. [24] His servants conspired against him and killed him in his house. [25] But the people of the land killed all those who had conspired against King Amon; and the people of the land made his son Josiah king to succeed him.

34 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. [2] He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of his ancestor David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left. [3] For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a boy, he began

[a] Heb *Asherim*
[b] One Ms Gk: MT *of Hozai*

himself. **11:** *Babylon,* the reference is not impossible, because the Assyrians maintained a major presence in Babylon at this time. Nevertheless, Assyrian records mention that Manasseh was a loyal vassal. Whether historical or not, the story demonstrates how even one of Judah's worst kings, with God's help, could reverse course in exile, be brought back to his land, institute reforms, and make a new beginning. In this respect, the entire episode offered hope and confirmation to members of the Judean postexilic community, some of whom had ancestors who returned from the Babylonian exile. **13:** Going beyond his earlier pledge to Solomon (7.14), God restores Manasseh to his land. Manasseh becomes a model of how to deal with self-made adversity (6.36–39). **14–17:** Like other reformer kings (11.5–12; 14.3–7; 17.1–19; 32.27–30), Manasseh constructs fortifications and enforces religious centralization. **18–20:** Cf. 2 Kings 21.17–18. **18–19:** *His prayer,* this is the basis for the later composition "The Prayer of Manasseh," now a book of the Apocrypha and a similar psalm in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

33.21–25: Degeneracy under Amon (641–640 BCE). This monarch follows the model of the earlier, rather than the later, Manasseh, who *humbled himself* (33.2–9). The account is adapted from 2 Kings 21.19–26. **23–25:** In refusing to correct his policies, Amon follows the obstinate course set by Ahaz (28.1–27), worsens Judah's plight, and is punished. **25:** *People of the land,* see 2 Kings 11.14n.

34.1–33: Josiah (640–609 BCE): the champion of centralization. Both Kings (2 Kings 22.1–23.30) and Chronicles (34.1–35.27) acclaim Josiah's many reforms throughout Jerusalem and the land of Israel and Judah, but the Chronicler makes these reforms the work of all the people and not simply Josiah himself. **3–7:** The Chronicler restructures the account of the reform found in Kings in several ways, including the idea that Josiah began to

to seek the God of his ancestor David, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the sacred poles,[a] and the carved and the cast images. [4] In his presence they pulled down the altars of the Baals; he demolished the incense altars that stood above them. He broke down the sacred poles[a] and the carved and the cast images; he made dust of them and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. [5] He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and purged Judah and Jerusalem. [6] In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins[b] all around, [7] he broke down the altars, beat the sacred poles[a] and the images into powder, and demolished all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

[8] In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God. [9] They came to the high priest Hilkiah and delivered the money that had been brought into the house of God, which the Levites, the keepers of the threshold, had collected from Manasseh and Ephraim and from all the remnant of Israel and from all Judah and Benjamin and from the inhabitants of Jerusalem. [10] They delivered it to the workers who had the oversight of the house of the LORD, and the workers who were working in the house of the LORD gave it for repairing and restoring the house. [11] They gave it to the carpenters and the builders to buy quarried stone, and timber for binders, and beams for the buildings that the kings of Judah had let go to ruin. [12] The people did the work faithfully. Over them were appointed the Levites Jahath and Obadiah, of the sons of Merari, along with Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to have oversight. Other Levites, all skillful with instruments of music, [13] were over the burden bearers and directed all who did work in every kind of service; and some of the Levites were scribes, and officials, and gatekeepers.

[14] While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the LORD, the priest Hilkiah found the book of the law of the LORD given through Moses. [15] Hilkiah said to the secretary Shaphan, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD"; and Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan. [16] Shaphan brought the book to the king, and further reported to the king, "All that was committed to your servants they are doing. [17] They have emptied out the money that was found in the house of the LORD and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers and the workers." [18] The secretary Shaphan informed the king, "The priest Hilkiah has given me a book." Shaphan then read it aloud to the king.

[19] When the king heard the words of the law he tore his clothes. [20] Then the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, the secretary Shaphan, and the king's servant Asaiah: [21] "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found; for the wrath of the LORD that is poured out on us is great, because our ancestors did not keep the word of the LORD, to act in accordance with all that is written in this book."

[a] Heb *Asherim*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

see the LORD in the eighth year of his reign, rather than later, as in Kings (2 Kings 22.3). In the twelfth year he initiates a number of national expeditions, which *purge Judah and Jerusalem* of all rival religious shrines to the Temple. **6:** The geographic extent of Josiah's interventions, from Simeon to Naphtali, are an addition to the Kings source material. Josiah restores proper religious observance throughout all Israel. **8–21:** Adapted in part from 2 Kings 22.3–13. The discovery of *the book of the law of the LORD,* while Temple repairs are underway (vv. 8–14), becomes a matter of grave concern to Josiah because its contents bode ill for Judah. **9:** Since Josiah has already implemented reforms in North and South, it is no great surprise that funds for the Temple restoration project do not merely stem from the people in Judah (2 Kings 22.4), but also from *Manasseh and Ephraim and from all the remnant of Israel.* **14:** Most scholars think that *the book of the law of the LORD* refers to Deuteronomy in 2 Kings 22, but in Chronicles it may refer to the entire Pentateuch (or an earlier version of it). The Passover

22 So Hilkiah and those whom the king had sent went to the prophet Huldah, the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe (who lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter) and spoke to her to that effect. 23 She declared to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me, 24 Thus says the LORD: I will indeed bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book that was read before the king of Judah. 25 Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked me to anger with all the works of their hands, my wrath will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched. 26 But as to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, 27 because your heart was penitent and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me, and have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the LORD. 28 I will gather you to your ancestors and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place and its inhabitants." They took the message back to the king.

29 Then the king sent word and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 30 The king went up to the house of the LORD, with all the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites, all the people both great and small; he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. 31 The king stood in his place and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. 32 Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin pledge themselves to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem acted according to the covenant of God, the God of their ancestors. 33 Josiah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel, and made all who were in Israel worship the LORD their God. All his days they did not turn away from following the LORD the God of their ancestors.

35 Josiah kept a passover to the LORD in Jerusalem; they slaughtered the passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month. 2 He appointed the priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of the LORD. 3 He said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the LORD, "Put the holy ark in the house that Solomon son of David, king of Israel, built; you need no longer carry it on your shoulders. Now serve the LORD your God and his people Israel. 4 Make preparations by your ancestral houses by your divisions, following the written directions of King David of Israel and the written directions of his son Solomon. 5 Take position in the holy place according to the groupings of the ancestral houses of your kindred the people, and let there be Levites for each division of an ancestral house.[a] 6 Slaughter the passover lamb, sanctify yourselves, and on behalf of your kindred make preparations, acting according to the word of the LORD by Moses."

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

celebration (35.1–19) draws on more than one collection of earlier biblical law. **22–28:** Huldah's oracle, drawn from 2 Kings 22.14–20, portrays a bleak future for Judah. **29–33:** Like other noted Judean leaders who wish to avoid or counter a period of decline (15.8–19; 23.16; 29.10), Josiah leads the nation in covenant renewal (cf. 2 Kings 23.1–3). The ratification of the covenant leads to the implementation of reforms throughout his land (cf. 2 Kings 23.4–10). The result is religious unity for the nation *all his days*.

35.1–19: Passover celebration. As in 2 Kings (23.4–20), national reforms (34.33) lead to a national Passover (2 Kings 23.21–23). Josiah's Passover offering is described in much more detail than in Kings. **3:** The only reference to the ark during the Judahite monarchy (chs 10–36). The pedagogical responsibility of the Levites, who *taught all Israel,* is found elsewhere (Deut 33.8–11) but is more frequent in postexilic texts (e.g., 17.7–9; Neh 8.7–8). **4–6:** The provisions made during the United Monarchy are the model for the levitical and priestly divisions (31.2–

7 Then Josiah contributed to the people, as passover offerings for all that were present, lambs and kids from the flock to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bulls; these were from the king's possessions. 8 His officials contributed willingly to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, the chief officers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the passover offerings two thousand six hundred lambs and kids and three hundred bulls. 9 Conaniah also, and his brothers Shemaiah and Nethanel, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the chiefs of the Levites, gave to the Levites for the passover offerings five thousand lambs and kids and five hundred bulls.

10 When the service had been prepared for, the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their divisions according to the king's command. 11 They slaughtered the passover lamb, and the priests dashed the blood that they received[a] from them, while the Levites did the skinning. 12 They set aside the burnt offerings so that they might distribute them according to the groupings of the ancestral houses of the people, to offer to the LORD, as it is written in the book of Moses. And they did the same with the bulls. 13 They roasted the passover lamb with fire according to the ordinance; and they boiled the holy offerings in pots, in caldrons, and in pans, and carried them quickly to all the people. 14 Afterward they made preparations for themselves and for the priests, because the priests the descendants of Aaron were occupied in offering the burnt offerings and the fat parts until night; so the Levites made preparations for themselves and for the priests, the descendants of Aaron. 15 The singers, the descendants of Asaph, were in their place according to the command of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and the king's seer Jeduthun. The gatekeepers were at each gate; they did not need to interrupt their service, for their kindred the Levites made preparations for them.

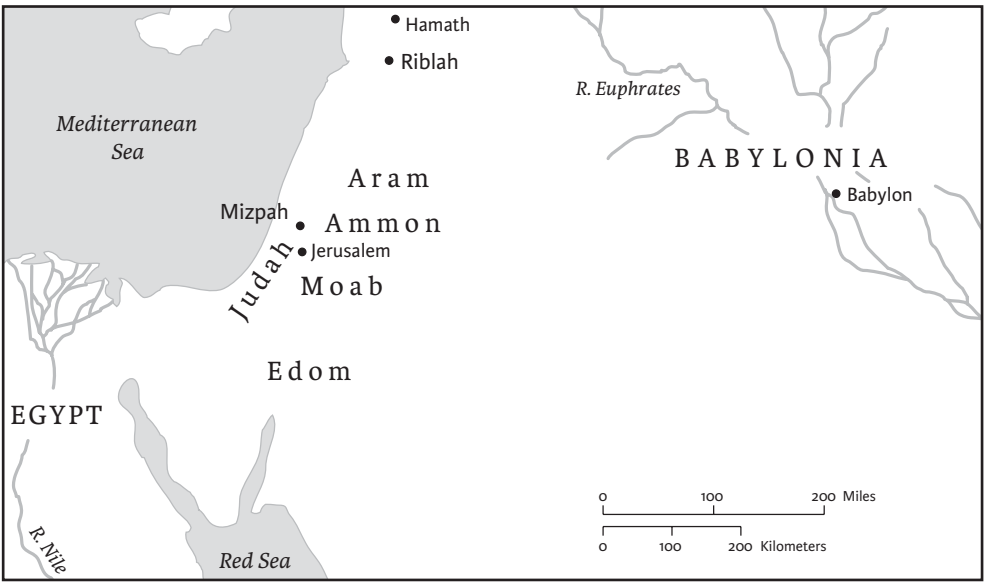
16 So all the service of the LORD was prepared that day, to keep the passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD, according to the command of King Josiah. 17 The people of Israel who were present kept the passover at that time, and the festival of unleavened bread seven days. 18 No passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; none of the kings of Israel had kept such a passover as was kept by Josiah, by the priests and the Levites, by all Judah and Israel who were present, and by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 19 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this passover was kept.

20 After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, King Neco of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out against him. 21 But Neco[b] sent envoys to him, saying, "What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I am not coming against you today, but against the house with which I am at war; and God has commanded me to hurry. Cease opposing God, who is with me, so that he will not destroy you." 22 But Josiah would not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to fight with him. He did not listen to the words of Neco

[a] Heb lacks *that they received*
[b] Heb *he*

19n.). **7–9:** The contributions of king, officials, and Levites (cf. 34.9) help make the Passover a civic event. **13:** The preparations of the Passover lamb are said to accord with the ordinance (cf. vv. 6,12). The beginning of the verse, properly translated, reads, "They boiled the Passover lamb with fire." This difficult idea reflects a combination of Ex 12.8, which prescribes that the lamb must be broiled on a fire, and Deut 16.7, which prescribes that it must be boiled. These reflect different customs, which ultimately came into conflict when the Torah was canonized. Chronicles and later rabbinic texts often dealt with such problems through harmonization, thus "boiling with fire." **18:** The national Passover is unparalleled since the days of Samuel (cf. 2 Kings 23.22). Chronicles, like 2 Kings 23.21–22, attributes to Josiah an incomparably successful Passover celebration. The Passover of Hezekiah (30.1–22) was also important, but enjoyed more limited participation than Josiah's Passover, which was attended by the *priests and the Levites, by all Judah and Israel,* and *the inhabitants of Jerusalem* (cf. 30.10–11).

35.20–27: Josiah's defeat and death by Pharaoh Neco. Unlike 2 Kings 23.29–30, in Chronicles Neco acts explicitly as a messenger and agent of God. The addition justifies the death of the otherwise righteous Josiah; he did not heed the prophetic voice. **20:** *Neco,* it is unclear why Josiah intervened against one of the superpow-



Ch 36: Babylon and Judah in the early sixth century BCE.

from the mouth of God, but joined battle in the plain of Megiddo. [23] The archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, "Take me away, for I am badly wounded." [24] So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in his second chariot[a] and brought him to Jerusalem. There he died, and was buried in the tombs of his ancestors. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. [25] Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah, and all the singing men and singing women have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day. They made these a custom in Israel; they are recorded in the Laments. [26] Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and his faithful deeds in accordance with what is written in the law of the LORD, [27] and his acts, first and last, are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

36 The people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah and made him king to succeed his father in Jerusalem. [2] Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign; he reigned three months in Jerusalem. [3] Then the king of Egypt deposed him in Jerusalem and laid on the land a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold. [4] The king of Egypt made his brother Eliakim king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim; but Neco took his brother Jehoahaz and carried him to Egypt.

[5] Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. [6] Against him

[a] Or *the chariot of his deputy*

ers of his day. Josiah may have been in an alliance with Neco's enemies (cf. 2 Kings 23.29). **23:** *Archers shot,* in conformity with Huldah's prophecy (34.24–28), Josiah is gathered to his fathers (v. 24) and does not see great calamity come to Jerusalem (36.17–21). The Chronicler may understand Huldah's prophecy to mean that Josiah would die in a time of peace for Judah, rathen that to mean the type of death Josiah would suffer himself (cf. 2 Kings 22.20 || 2 Chr 34.28).

36.1–14: Judah's last four kings. The Chronicler's history of Judah's final decades is much briefer and less gruesome than that of 2 Kings 24–25. Either the Chronicler had a shorter version of our book of Kings, or living in the postexilic restoration community, he felt no need to dwell on the details of the disaster of the exile. **1–4:** The account of the reign of Jehoahaz (609 BCE) is largely taken from 2 Kings 23.30–34. In Chronicles Jehoahaz receives no evaluation. **5–8:** The reign of Jehoiakim (608–598) is much abridged and adapted from

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up, and bound him with fetters to take him to Babylon. [7] Nebuchadnezzar also carried some of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon and put them in his palace in Babylon. [8] Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and the abominations that he did, and what was found against him, are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah; and his son Jehoiachin succeeded him.

[9] Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. [10] In the spring of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon, along with the precious vessels of the house of the LORD, and made his brother Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem.

[11] Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. [12] He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. He did not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. [13] He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel. [14] All the leading priests and the people also were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the LORD that he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

[15] The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; [16] but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD against his people became so great that there was no remedy.

[17] Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their youths with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or young woman, the aged or the feeble; he gave them all into his hand. [18] All the vessels of the house of God, large and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officials, all these he brought to Babylon. [19] They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. [20] He took into exile in Babylon those

2 Kings 23.36–24.6. See also Dan 1.1–2. **6:** *Nebuchadnezzar* II who ruled Babylon from 605 to 562 BCE, was one of its most powerful and successful kings. Among his foreign policy accomplishments were the conquest of Tyre (Ezek 27.12) and the invasion of Egypt (Ezek 29.19–21). Both Chronicles and 2 Kings 24.1–17 mention a Babylonian invasion, which affected both Jehoiakim and his son Jehoiachin (598/7 BCE). But only Chronicles claims that the Babylonian king came to Jerusalem to bring both *Jehoiakim* and later his son Jehoiachin, along with various precious Temple *vessels,* to Babylon (v. 10). **9–10:** Jehoiachin (597) was eighteen years old, not *eight years old* (see 2 Kings 24.8). He suffers a personal exile, along with *the precious vessels of the house of the LORD,* but in 2 Kings 24.8–17 the exile of 597 BCE is a much more widespread deportation. **11–14:** Taken in part from 2 Kings 25.18–20. Like Ahaz (ch 28) and Amon (33.23), Zedekiah (597–586) refused to *humble himself.* The Chronicler criticizes Zedekiah, *the leading priests,* and *the people* for being *exceedingly unfaithful* (see 1 Chr 10.1–14n.). Thus, the Chronicler, unlike the author of Kings, offers a specific reason for why the exile occurred under Zedekiah. **13:** *Rebelled,* the Babylonians under *Nebuchadnezzar* II took swift reprisal against vassals who chose to revolt. In this case, the Chronicler finds fault with Zedekiah himself for violating his oath to God and refusing to reverse his course. **14:** *The leading priests*, the Chronicler blames not only royalty but also higher echelon priests and *the people* themselves for the exile. **17–22:** The fall of Jerusalem took place in 586 BCE.

36.15–23: Exile and the call to return. The Deuteronomist places a great deal of blame for Judah's fall on the sins of Manasseh (2 Kings 21.10–15; 23.26–27; 24.3–4), but this is impossible for the Chronicler, who narrated Manasseh's repentance (33.12–13). Instead, the references to the gradual rise in divine wrath, the repeated lack of repentance, and the succession of unheeded messengers and prophets (cf. 15.1–8; 21.12–15; 25.15–17) suggest that the Chronicler attributes the exile to a preponderance of unrequited sins during the last generations of Judah's independence (cf. 2 Kings 24.20). **17–21:** The record of Judah's exile in 586 BCE is partially drawn from 2 Kings 25.1–21. This author does not depict an Egyptian exile of 582 BCE (2 Kings 25.22–26). **17:** *The Chaldeans,* the Babylonians. **20:** The *kingdom of Persia,* under Cyrus the Great (v. 22), defeated the kingdoms of Media,

who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia,
21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

22 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: 23 "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him! Let him go up."

Lydia, and Babylon, thus becoming one of the ancient world's great empires. At the height of its power, Persia ruled a vast territory stretching from Greece in the west to India in the east. **21:** On the prophecies of Jeremiah, see Jer 25.11–12; 29.10, which are here conflated with Lev 26.34–35,43. **22–23:** Kings ends with the mercies shown to Jehoiachin in exile (2 Kings 25.27–30), but Chronicles offers a clearer hope for the future: King Cyrus's decree in 538 BCE of an end to exile. As Chronicles repeatedly demonstrates, exile need not be a final conclusion, but a condition from which it is possible to return (6.36–39; 7.12–15; 33.12–13). Indeed, from the perspective of the books of Ezra-Nehemiah, Cyrus's decree marks the beginning of Persian-period Judah (Ezra 1.1–3). The return is *in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah,* emphasizing one last time, at the book's conclusion, the power of the prophetic word. Some manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible end with Chronicles, in which case the scriptures conclude with an optimistic note of anticipation.

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EZRA

NAME AND LOCATION IN CANON

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah form a single book in early Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible, but are separated into two in later Christian tradition. The books are named for their principal characters, both Jewish leaders of the fifth century BCE. Ezra is featured in chs 7–10 of the book that bears his name, and in Neh 8–9; Nehemiah is prominent in the book that bears his name.

In the traditional order of books in the Hebrew Bible, Ezra-Nehemiah is found in the third division of the canon, the Writings. In modern printed Jewish Bibles, following some ancient manuscripts, Ezra-Nehemiah is near the end and comes just before the last book, Chronicles. In other ancient sources, Ezra-Nehemiah is the last book in the Writings. In most Christian canons, Ezra-Nehemiah is located among the historical books and immediately follows Chronicles. The Greek book of 1 Esdras, which includes sections of both Ezra and Nehemiah, is part of the Apocrypha; in Eastern Orthodox canons it precedes Ezra-Nehemiah. (See further Introduction to 1 Esdras.)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The unified book of Ezra-Nehemiah (Esdras b in Greek manuscripts) describes the return of exiles from Babylonia in 538 BCE, and the reconstruction of Jewish life in Judah under Persian imperial rule between 538 and approximately 420. According to its account, the return, authorized by the edict of the Persian king Cyrus, marked the beginning of a lengthy process of rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple. During this period Israel reconstituted itself as the "people of the Book," with scripture, specifically the first five books of the Bible (the Torah, also known as the Law of Moses, or as the Pentateuch), becoming authoritative for communal and personal life. These developments took place during the reign of several Persian kings and under the Jewish leadership of Zerubbabel, Joshua, Ezra, and Nehemiah. While the Temple and its personnel gained unprecedented powers, the community developed new criteria for identity and membership.

Cyrus's edict permitting the return to Judah sets the agenda for the entire book of Ezra-Nehemiah, launching a national and religious rebirth and reconstruction that includes rebuilding the Temple, the community, and Jerusalem. The edict also establishes official Persian legitimation of Jewish life in the Persian province of Yehud (the name for Judah in Aramaic and other sources), claiming harmony between Persian imperial policies and the will of Israel's God, a position that pervades Ezra-Nehemiah.

It is difficult to reconstruct the actual history of this period. Based on additional information from the books of Haggai and Zechariah, many scholars think that the return and rebuilding took place in four or more steps, though this is uncertain. First, the earliest returnees, led by Sheshbazzar in 538, began to rebuild the Temple but for some reason abandoned the project. Second, a later group of exiles, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, resumed rebuilding during the reign of the Persian king Darius I (522–486) and completed the Temple reconstruction in 515. Third, a group led by Ezra in 458 during the reign of Artaxerxes I (465–424) reestablished the Torah, the law of Moses, as the authority for Jews in Yehud. Finally, a group led by Nehemiah beginning in 445, later in the reign of Artaxerxes I, restored Jerusalem's walls and repopulated Jerusalem. Some scholars have suggested that Ezra's return, with its religious innovations, took place only after Nehemiah's political improvements. Most scholars favor the reconstruction given above, which follows the biblical sequence and which will be used in the annotations. Archaeological studies suggest only limited development in the province of Judah during the Persian period. This raises questions about the extent and effectiveness of the reconstruction that Ezra-Nehemiah describes.

DATE OF COMPOSITION, LITERARY HISTORY, AND STRUCTURE

Ezra-Nehemiah was probably composed in Judah after 400 BCE. It shares some themes and vocabulary with Chronicles, another Persian-period book, and Ezra 1.1–3 overlaps the end of Chronicles, 2 Chr 36.22–23. However, the books use different vocabulary and have different ideologies, and were most likely composed by different authors (see Introduction to 1 Chronicles, pp. 575-577). Ezra-Nehemiah also shares elements with several later books in antiquity under the name of Ezra that are preserved in the Apocry-

pha and Pseudepigrapha, including 1 Esdras, which contains all of Ezra 1–10 as well as Nehemiah 8, and 2 Esdras.

Ezra-Nehemiah has a complicated literary history. It incorporates what are presented as contemporary sources into its account. These include first-person memoirs of both Ezra (Ezra 7.27–9.15) and Nehemiah (Neh 1.1–7.5; 12.27–13.31); letters of various officials, often written in Aramaic, the lingua franca of the Persian empire; and assorted lists. Moreover, although most of Ezra-Nehemiah is written in Hebrew, Ezra 4.6–6.18 and 7.12–26 are in Aramaic, including not only official documents but also the narrative in which they are quoted.

Despite this composite appearance, however, the final form of Ezra-Nehemiah has a carefully developed structure. The work opens with God's promise and Cyrus's decree allowing the Temple to be rebuilt (Ezra 1.1–4), and continues with exiled Israel's response (Ezra 1.5–Neh 7.73), culminating in celebration of reconstruction (Neh 8–13). After an anticipatory summary of enthusiastic reaction (Ezra 1.5–11) and a framing section of the list of returnees (Ezra 2), the response takes place in three stages: Stage One describes the reconstruction of the Temple in 538–515 BCE (Ezra 3–6); Stage Two describes the mission of Ezra and the formation of the community according to Torah in 458 (Ezra 7–10); and Stage Three describes the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership in 445–444 (Neh 1.1–7.5). These stages close with another framing section, the repeated list of returnees (Neh 7.6–73). The work concludes with celebration of renewal and reconstruction (Neh 8–13). This last section describes the reading and implementation of the Torah (Neh 8); the confession and commitment of the people (Neh 9–10); the repopulation of the city and review of the people (Neh 11.1–12.26); and a service of dedication, including celebration, purification, procession, and separation (Neh 12.27–13.3). The very end is a coda in which Nehemiah recounts some of his reforms and invokes God's remembrance (Neh 13.4–31).

INTERPRETATION AND GUIDE TO READING

Because it has a continuous chronology, Ezra-Nehemiah should be read from beginning to end as a unified narrative. According to this narrative, the returned exiles were not only concerned with restoring preexilic institutions, such as the altar and the Temple, and restoring the city. They also adapted to changed circumstances by establishing religious practices that conformed to their understanding of the book of the Torah, which likely reached its final form in the late postexilic period. To the author, the returned exiles were a godly remnant with a renewed commitment to perpetuate the covenantal teachings that kept them distinct. The returned exiles were also a minority within the vast, polytheistic, and multicultural Persian empire. Consequently, they sought to protect their ethnic and religious identity by establishing rigorous religious boundaries between themselves and their neighbors. The author was especially worried that the community might repeat the mistakes that caused the exile, such as intermarriage, and a new destruction would follow.

Through its structure and narrative, Ezra-Nehemiah emphasizes the role of the people themselves in rebuilding, as well as the power of authoritative documents.

Tamara Cohn Eskenazi

1 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom, and also in a written edict declared:

[2] "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. [3] Any of those among you who are of his people—may their God be with them!—are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem; [4] and let all survivors, in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem."

[5] The heads of the families of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites—everyone whose spirit God had stirred—got ready to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. [6] All their neighbors aided them with silver vessels, with gold, with goods, with animals, and with valuable gifts, besides all that was freely offered. [7] King Cyrus himself brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. [8] King Cyrus of Persia had them released into the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. [9] And this was the inventory: gold basins, thirty; silver basins, one thousand; knives,[a] twenty-nine; [10] gold bowls, thirty; other silver bowls, four hundred ten; other vessels, one thousand; [11] the total of the gold and silver vessels was five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar brought up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.

2 Now these were the people of the province who came from those captive exiles whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia; they returned to

[a] Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

1.1–4: God's promise and Cyrus's decree. The decree by the Persian king authorizes return to Judah and rebuilding God's house in Jerusalem, after its destruction by the Babylonians and the deportation to Babylonia in the early sixth century BCE. The rest of the book describes three stages of return and rebuilding. Most of this decree appears in 2 Chr 36.22–23, and in a different form in Ezra 6.2–5. **1:** *King Cyrus*, the Persian king (559–530 BCE) who conquered Babylon in 539 BCE. This *edict* in 538 (the *first year* of the text) is consistent with Persian religious and political policy: ancient inscriptions depict Cyrus as restorer of several temples. *Jeremiah,* a sixth-century BCE prophet who lived through the destruction of Judah and repeatedly promised a restoration; see, e.g., Jer 29.10. **2:** *God of heaven,* a typical postexilic title (e.g., Neh 1.5; Dan 2.18). **3:** *His people,* i.e., worshipers of Israel's God. *Are now permitted,* better translated as a command to go up (see 2 Chr 36.23; 1 Esd 2.5). *Rebuild the house of the LORD*, the Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE (see 2 Kings 25). But in Ezra-Nehemiah, the notion of the house of the LORD encompasses more than the Temple and includes eventually the city itself and its dedicated inhabitants. **4:** *Survivors,* primarily referring to Jews still in exile and perhaps those in the land who survived the crisis.

1.5–Neh 7.73: The three stages of return and reconstruction.

1.5–8: These verses sum up the enthusiastic response by the people to the decree, a response that leads to the reconstruction described in Ezra 2–Neh 7. **5:** *Judah and Benjamin* formerly constituted the kingdom of Judah (destroyed by Babylon); the other tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (destroyed and exiled by Assyria in 722 BCE; see 2 Kings 17) did not return. *The Levites* were religious functionaries; *the priests* were a subgroup of Levites who according to tradition were descended from Aaron, the first priest (see Ex 28.1) with unique responsibilities for the sanctuary. **7–11:** The return of the sacred vessels symbolizes continuity with the destroyed Temple, whose looting is described in 2 Kings 25:13–17. The number of itemized vessels is smaller than the total given of 5,400. **7:** *Nebuchadnezzar,* the Babylonian king who destroyed the first Temple in 586 BCE (see 2 Kings 25.1). **8:** *Sheshbazzar,* a leader of the early return (see also 5.14–16); some scholars think that he was descended from King David.

2.1–70: The list of returnees. With its repetition in Neh 7.6–73a, the list frames the three stages of reconstruction. It also reflects combined waves of immigration, and is thus anachronistic here. It was expanded over

Jerusalem and Judah, all to their own towns.
2 They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

The number of the Israelite people: 3 the descendants of Parosh, two thousand one hundred seventy-two. 4 Of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy-two. 5 Of Arah, seven hundred seventy-five. 6 Of Pahath-moab, namely the descendants of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred twelve. 7 Of Elam, one thousand two hundred fifty-four. 8 Of Zattu, nine hundred forty-five. 9 Of Zaccai, seven hundred sixty. 10 Of Bani, six hundred forty-two. 11 Of Bebai, six hundred twenty-three. 12 Of Azgad, one thousand two hundred twenty-two. 13 Of Adonikam, six hundred sixty-six. 14 Of Bigvai, two thousand fifty-six. 15 Of Adin, four hundred fifty-four. 16 Of Ater, namely of Hezekiah, ninety-eight. 17 Of Bezai, three hundred twenty-three. 18 Of Jorah, one hundred twelve. 19 Of Hashum, two hundred twenty-three. 20 Of Gibbar, ninety-five. 21 Of Bethlehem, one hundred twenty-three. 22 The people of Netophah, fifty-six. 23 Of Anathoth, one hundred twenty-eight. 24 The descendants of Azmaveth, forty-two. 25 Of Kiriatharim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty-three. 26 Of Ramah and Geba, six hundred twenty-one. 27 The people of Michmas, one hundred twenty-two. 28 Of Bethel and Ai, two hundred twenty-three. 29 The descendants of Nebo, fifty-two. 30 Of Magbish, one hundred fifty-six. 31 Of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred fifty-four. 32 Of Harim, three hundred twenty. 33 Of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty-five. 34 Of Jericho, three hundred forty-five. 35 Of Senaah, three thousand six hundred thirty.

36 The priests: the descendants of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy-three. 37 Of Immer, one thousand fifty-two. 38 Of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred forty-seven. 39 Of Harim, one thousand seventeen.

40 The Levites: the descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the descendants of Hodaviah, seventy-four. 41 The singers: the descendants of Asaph, one hundred twenty-eight. 42 The descendants of the gatekeepers: of Shallum, of Ater, of Talmon, of Akkub, of Hatita, and of Shobai, in all one hundred thirty-nine.

43 The temple servants: the descendants of Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, 44 Keros, Siaha, Padon, 45 Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, 46 Hagab, Shamlai, Hanan, 47 Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, 48 Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, 49 Uzza, Paseah, Besai, 50 Asnah, Meunim, Nephisim, 51 Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, 52 Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, 53 Barkos, Sisera, Temah, 54 Neziah, and Hatipha.

55 The descendants of Solomon's servants: Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, 56 Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, 57 Shephatiah, Hattil, Pochereth-hazzebaim, and Ami.

58 All the temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants were three hundred ninety-two.

59 The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer, though they could not prove their families or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel: 60 the descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda, six hundred fifty-two. 61 Also, of the descendants of the priests: the descendants of Habaiah, Hak-

decades and includes other members of the restored Judean community between 538 and 444 BCE. The list is organized according to three groups: Israelites (laity), Levites, and priests. **1–2:** *Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah,* of the list of leaders, only these three (if this Nehemiah is identical with the governor of Neh 1.1) will play a role in Ezra-Nehemiah. Zerubbabel is among the last known descendants of David in the Hebrew Bible (see 1 Chr 3.19) and is elsewhere called "governor" (e.g., Hag 1.1). He is one of the two major leaders of Stage One of the return and reconstruction. Jeshua the priest is elsewhere called "high priest" (e.g., Hag 1.1). He is the other major leader of Stage One. **2b–35**: Lay Israelites are listed by family ancestral names (vv. 2b–20) and towns of origin (vv. 21–35). Archaeology provides evidence of increased population during the Persian period at many of the sites mentioned here. **36–39:** *Priests* include four families claiming descent from Aaron (cf. 1 Chr 24). **40–42:** *Levites* are listed according to their Temple functions in the postexilic period. **43–58:** Other Temple personnel and miscellaneous groups. **59–63**: As a result of the book's concern with communal identity, uncertain genealogies jeopardize membership in the community. Several of these names, however, are later included as community members. Some of the listed towns (like Tel Melah in v. 59) are in Babylonia. **61–63**: Priestly legitimacy depends

koz, and Barzillai (who had married one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name). 62 These looked for their entries in the genealogical records, but they were not found there, and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean; 63 the governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.

64 The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred sixty, 65 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty-seven; and they had two hundred male and female singers. 66 They had seven hundred thirty-six horses, two hundred forty-five mules, 67 four hundred thirty-five camels, and six thousand seven hundred twenty donkeys.

68 As soon as they came to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, some of the heads of families made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site. 69 According to their resources they gave to the building fund sixty-one thousand darics of gold, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly robes.

70 The priests, the Levites, and some of the people lived in Jerusalem and its vicinity;[a] and the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all Israel in their towns.

3 When the seventh month came, and the Israelites were in the towns, the people gathered together in Jerusalem. 2 Then Jeshua son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his kin set out to build the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as prescribed in the law of Moses the man of God. 3 They set up the altar on its foundation, because they were in dread of the neighboring peoples, and they offered burnt offerings upon it to the LORD, morning and evening. 4 And they kept the festival of booths,[b] as prescribed, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the ordinance, as required for each day, 5 and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the sacred festivals of the LORD, and the

[a] 1 Esdras 5.46: Heb lacks *lived in Jerusalem and its vicinity*

[b] Or *tabernacles*; Heb *succoth*

on descent from Aaron. Illegitimate priests threaten the sanctity of the Temple. **61:** *Barzillai the Gileadite,* see 2 Sam 17.27; 19.31. The adoption of the father-in-law's name suggests that Barzillai did not have a male heir. **63:** *Urim and Thummim* were a device, like casting lots, that priests used to ascertain divine guidance in certain situations (Ex 28.30; Lev 8.8; Deut 33.8). *Governor,* Heb "tirshata," a Persian title. **64:** The total listed, 42,360, exceeds the sum of the enumerated groups (around 30,000), one of several signs of the list's expansion or an indication that the total includes women. **65–67**: The number of servants, as well as of singers and livestock, suggests relatively modest economic means. **69:** The precise monetary value of this contribution to the Temple is uncertain because the value of the daric and the mina fluctuated. Nevertheless, the passage suggests that the community invested a great deal in restoring its Temple. The *priestly robes* are specialized garments for official service. **70:** *All Israel in their towns,* Ezra-Nehemiah emphasizes continuity, suggesting a return to pre-exilic settlements. In reality, however, the Persian province of Yehud was considerably smaller than the earlier kingdom of Judah.

3.1–6.22: Stage One of reconstruction: building the Temple. Ezra 3 emphasizes the determination of the returnees to rebuild the Temple as soon as possible.

3.1–7: First step: rebuilding the altar. The restoration of the altar and a functioning priesthood indicates the resumption of sacrificial worship, a central means of religious expression in the ancient world. **1:** *The seventh month,* Tishri (September-October). **2:** *Jeshua . . . and Zerubbabel*, Ezra-Nehemiah assumes a pattern of dual leadership by a priest and a secular leader. *The law* (Heb "torah") *of Moses,* most likely some form of the Pentateuch (see notes to Neh 8). Ezra-Nehemiah is keen on describing conformity to the "torah", or teaching, of Moses (hence to God's teachings) as the guiding principle in reconstruction. **3–6:** The detailed catalogue of sacrifices confirms the resumption of worship according to authoritative traditions. **3:** *Dread of the neighboring peoples*, tension with local inhabitants and neighboring peoples is a major theme in Ezra-Nehemiah. Some scholars see in this tension a debate between returning Judeans and those Judeans who remained in the land over who can represent postexilic "Israel"; others suggest that surrounding cultures saw Jewish renewal as a

offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the LORD. [6] From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. [7] So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from King Cyrus of Persia.

[8] In the second year after their arrival at the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their people, the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to have the oversight of the work on the house of the LORD. [9] And Jeshua with his sons and his kin, and Kadmiel and his sons, Binnui and Hodaviah[a] along with the sons of Henadad, the Levites, their sons and kin, together took charge of the workers in the house of God.

[10] When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the LORD with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; [11] and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD,

"For he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever
toward Israel."

And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. [12] But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy, [13] so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away.

4 When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the LORD, the God of Israel, [2] they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of families and said to them, "Let

[a] Compare 2.40; Neh 7.43; 1 Esdras 5.58: Heb *sons of Judah*

threat, as Ezra 4 indicates. **4:** *The festival of booths*, see Lev 23.34. **5:** *Offerings at the new moon,* see Num 29.6. **7:** Sidon and Tyre helped build Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 5–7).

3.8–13: Second step: founding the Second Temple. The laying of the foundation of the Temple provokes opposition from the people in the land and causes a delay in building the Temple itself. According to Ezra-Nehemiah, this explains why the Temple was rebuilt only in the time of King Darius. The historical reality was likely more complex; see the description of the people's loss of interest depicted in the books of Haggai and Zechariah. **8:** *Second year,* 537 or 536. Hag 2.18 dates the founding differently, to 520 BCE. Ezra 5.16 credits Sheshbazzar, not Zerubbabel and Jeshua, with laying the foundations. Ezra-Nehemiah thus compresses various events in its thematic presentation. **10–13:** Celebration of temple-foundings is a common ancient Near Eastern practice. **10:** *David*'s crowning achievement for Ezra-Nehemiah (as for Chronicles) is the development of liturgy. **11:** The quoted words are a frequently occurring refrain in late Psalms (e.g., 106.1; 107.1; 118.1; 136.1). **12:** *The first house,* Solomon's Temple, destroyed in 586. *Old people . . . wept*, postexilic sources contrast the splendor of Solomon's Temple with the less glorious, postexilic Second Temple. King Herod renovated this Temple magnificently in the first century BCE. **13:** *The sound was heard far away*, the rejoicing alerts the neighbors and triggers the opposition.

4.1–6.22: Opposition and support (including Aramaic documents). The edict of Cyrus authorized rebuilding the Temple, which according to several biblical sources was completed in 515 BCE, during the reign of Darius I. Ezra 4–6 explains the delay in building by describing opposition from neighbors to the building project.

4.1–24: Opposition from neighbors halts rebuilding. The opposition reflects competition for political and perhaps economic privileges within the Persian empire, as well as the definition of religious legitimacy. This section uses material out of chronological order to explain persistent hostilities and thus to account for the delay in rebuilding. **1–6: Initial opposition.** Ezra 4 presents the would-be supporters, soon to become adversaries, as self-proclaimed foreigners, which accounts for their exclusion from this particular sacred project. **2:** *We*

us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of King Esar-haddon of Assyria who brought us here." [3] But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of families in Israel said to them, "You shall have no part with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus of Persia has commanded us."

[4] Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build, [5] and they bribed officials to frustrate their plan throughout the reign of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia.

[6] In the reign of Ahasuerus, in his accession year, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

[7] And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam and Mithredath and Tabeel and the rest of their associates wrote to King Artaxerxes of Persia; the letter was written in Aramaic and translated.[a] [8] Rehum the royal deputy and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes as follows [9] (then Rehum the royal deputy, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their associates, the judges, the envoys, the officials, the Persians, the people of Erech, the Babylonians, the people of Susa, that is, the Elamites, [10] and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River wrote—and now [11] this is a copy of the letter that they sent):

"To King Artaxerxes: Your servants, the people of the province Beyond the River, send greeting. And now [12] may it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. [13] Now may it be known to the

[a] Heb adds *in Aramaic,* indicating that 4.8–6.18 is in Aramaic. Another interpretation is *The letter was written in the Aramaic script and set forth in the Aramaic language*

worship your God, according to 2 Kings 17, Assyria forcibly repopulated Samaria after deporting the Israelites, and these foreigners developed a syncretistic religion (2 Kings 17.41). *Esar-haddon,* king of Assyria (681–669). According to 2 Kings 17.3; 18.9, the king who resettled foreigners in northern Israel in 722 BCE was Shalmaneser (727–722); see 2 Kings 17.24. **3:** *We alone will build . . . as King Cyrus . . . commanded us,* the rebuilders claim that Cyrus's decree applies only to them, the sole legitimate remnant of Judah. Seeking to preserve ethnic and religious boundaries in the multicultural milieu of the Persian empire, as well as to protect the Temple's sanctity, the returnees initially refuse partnership with other groups. Once the Temple is built, however, Ezra-Nehemiah shows some readiness to include outsiders (see 6.21). **4:** *The people of the land,* local inhabitants. Although Ezra-Nehemiah implies that these people were all of foreign descent, the groups may have included Judeans who had not been in exile and did not share the ideology or practices of those who repatriated. Tension with the people of the land is later expressed in the crisis of mixed marriages (Ezra 9–10). **5:** *King Darius of Persia* ruled 522–486 BCE. The Temple was rebuilt in his time (see 6.15). **6:** *Ahasuerus,* or Xerxes I (486–465 BCE), prominent in the book of Esther. This document is not preserved. **7–24:** Further opposition during the reign of Artaxerxes, who reigned in the fifth century BCE, after King Darius. The record of this opposition, which focuses on the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, is out of chronological order and serves to document how foreign adversaries (e.g., 4.10) repeatedly sabotaged Jewish rebuilding. **7a:** *Artaxerxes* I, king of Persia (465–424). According to Ezra 7–Neh 2, the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah took place during his reign. **7b–11:** The report to the king comes from Persian officials located around Judah and local inhabitants. **7b:** *Aramaic,* the lingua franca of the Persian period. The text continues in Aramaic until 6:18, suggesting a distinct Aramaic source for this information. **8–10:** Various explanatory material. The letter begins only in v. 11. **10:** *Osnappar,* Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria (669–627). *Samaria,* a designation for the northern Israelite region, named after its capital. In the Persian period Samaria emerged as a center of provincial administration as well. *Province Beyond the River,* the Persian satrapy west of the Euphrates River, including Yehud (Judah) and Samaria. By the fifth century BCE, Samaria and Yehud were separate provinces, each with its own governor.

4.11–16: The opponents' letter. 12: *Rebuilding that . . . city,* Neh 1–7 records the rebuilding of the city in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (444 BCE). **13–14:** The opponents warn that Judean rebuilding will result in sedition and loss of income to the king. Ironically, however, their letter proves the antiquity of the city and of Jewish claims to it. *Share the salt of the palace,* an idiomatic expression of loyalty to the palace as well as of mutual

king that, if this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be reduced. [14] Now because we share the salt of the palace and it is not fitting for us to witness the king's dishonor, therefore we send and inform the king, [15] so that a search may be made in the annals of your ancestors. You will discover in the annals that this is a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces, and that sedition was stirred up in it from long ago. On that account this city was laid waste. [16] We make known to the king that, if this city is rebuilt and its walls finished, you will then have no possession in the province Beyond the River."

[17] The king sent an answer: "To Rehum the royal deputy and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their associates who live in Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River, greeting. And now [18] the letter that you sent to us has been read in translation before me. [19] So I made a decree, and someone searched and discovered that this city has risen against kings from long ago, and that rebellion and sedition have been made in it. [20] Jerusalem has had mighty kings who ruled over the whole province Beyond the River, to whom tribute, custom, and toll were paid. [21] Therefore issue an order that these people be made to cease, and that this city not be rebuilt, until I make a decree. [22] Moreover, take care not to be slack in this matter; why should damage grow to the hurt of the king?"

[23] Then when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum and the scribe Shimshai and their associates, they hurried to the Jews in Jerusalem and by force and power made them cease. [24] At that time the work on the house of God in Jerusalem stopped and was discontinued until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.

5 Now the prophets, Haggai[a] and Zechariah son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. [2] Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set out to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them.

[3] At the same time Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shetharbozenai and their associates came to them and spoke to them thus, "Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?" [4] They[b] also asked them this, "What are the names of the men who are building this building?" [5] But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until a report reached Darius and then answer was returned by letter in reply to it.

[a] Aram adds *the prophet*
[b] Gk Syr: Aram *We*

interests. **15:** *Annals of your ancestors,* the Assyrians and Babylonians kept careful records, and the Persians inherited and enlarged their bureaucracy. Here, as elsewhere in Ezra-Nehemiah, written records play a crucial role in establishing authority. **16:** *No possession,* revolt in Jerusalem will endanger Persian rule throughout the western region of the empire.

4.17–24: Royal response, prohibiting building. This correspondence in Artaxerxes' time in the fifth century BCE anachronistically explains the delay in rebuilding. **19:** *Rebellion and sedition,* presumably a reference to earlier rebellions against Assyria and Babylonia. **21:** *Until I make a decree,* this loophole will enable Nehemiah to secure a new decree. **24:** *At that time,* the narrative resumes the story about the Temple that was interrupted after 4.5. *The second year of . . . Darius,* i.e., 520 BCE, when rebuilding resumes, as also in the books of Haggai and Zechariah.

5.1–6.12: Third step: resumption of rebuilding of the Temple. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah inspire the people to resume rebuilding, and the Temple is finally completed at the time of Darius, in 515 BCE, after King Darius supports and extends King Cyrus's permission. **5.1–2:** Resumption of building begins with the urging of two prophets. **1:** *Haggai . . . and Zechariah,* in the books of Haggai and Zechariah, these prophets exhort leaders and community to build, starting in the second year of Darius (520 BCE). **2:** *Then Zerubbabel . . . and Jeshua,* see 2.1–2n.

5.3–17: New official Persian inquiry and correspondence lead to renewal of building permit. **3:** *Tattenai,* a Persian official mentioned in nonbiblical sources as governor of the entire province Beyond the River, of which Yehud is a subunit (see 4.10n.).

6 The copy of the letter that Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and his associates the envoys who were in the province Beyond the River sent to King Darius; 7 they sent him a report, in which was written as follows: "To Darius the king, all peace! 8 May it be known to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God. It is being built of hewn stone, and timber is laid in the walls; this work is being done diligently and prospers in their hands. 9 Then we spoke to those elders and asked them, 'Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?' 10 We also asked them their names, for your information, so that we might write down the names of the men at their head. 11 This was their reply to us: 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished. 12 But because our ancestors had angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house and carried away the people to Babylonia. 13 However, King Cyrus of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt. 14 Moreover, the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem and had brought into the temple of Babylon, these King Cyrus took out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor. 15 He said to him, "Take these vessels; go and put them in the temple in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site." 16 Then this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem; and from that time until now it has been under construction, and it is not yet finished.' 17 And now, if it seems good to the king, have a search made in the royal archives there in Babylon, to see whether a decree was issued by King Cyrus for the rebuilding of this house of God in Jerusalem. Let the king send us his pleasure in this matter."

6 Then King Darius made a decree, and they searched the archives where the documents were stored in Babylon. 2 But it was in Ecbatana, the capital in the province of Media, that a scroll was found on which this was written: "A record. 3 In the first year of his reign, King Cyrus issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices are offered and burnt offerings are brought;[a] its height shall be sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits, 4 with three courses of hewn stones and one course of timber; let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. 5 Moreover, let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple in Jerusalem, each to its place; you shall put them in the house of God."

[a] Meaning of Aram uncertain

5.6–17: New correspondence from sympathetic officials reverses the letters of 4.7–16. Tattenai the governor does not stop the builders while waiting for further instructions from King Darius. **8:** *Judah,* Yehud in the Aramaic text, is the name of the province in the Persian period, as is evident in extant seals and seal impressions. Tattenai's report indicates building activities well in progress. **11–16:** This report generally parallels Ezra 1, but emphasizes Sheshbazzar's role as governor and does not mention Zerubbabel. **11:** *A great king,* Solomon; see 2 Chr 3–4. **12:** *Nebuchadnezzar,* see 1.7n. *Chaldean,* a late biblical term for the Babylonians. **13:** *King Cyrus of Babylon,* the Persian king who controlled Babylon, where the Temple treasures were stored; see Ezra 1. **14:** *Sheshbazzar,* see 1.7n. 1 Esdras 6.18, which parallels this account, also mentions Zerubbabel. **17:** Tattenai seeks to ascertain both whether Cyrus authorized building, and if Darius wishes it to continue.

6.1–12: Darius's edict in support of the Temple. A discovery of Cyrus's memorandum confirms the legitimacy of the Temple in Jerusalem and brings additional support from King Darius. **2:** *Ecbatana,* the summer residence of Persian kings, now Hamadan in Iran. **3–5:** This archival version of Cyrus's decree emphasizes building size and funding; it is more generous than the public version (Ezra 1.1–4), explicitly offering royal financial support (v. 4). The relation between the two versions is uncertain. **3:** *Sixty cubits,* a cubit is about 18 in (45 cm). The measurements are incomplete, not mentioning length (unless a square building is intended). **6–12:** Darius's support of

6 "Now you, Tattenai, governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and you, their associates, the envoys in the province Beyond the River, keep away; 7 let the work on this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. 8 Moreover I make a decree regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of this house of God: the cost is to be paid to these people, in full and without delay, from the royal revenue, the tribute of the province Beyond the River. 9 Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, or sheep for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, or oil, as the priests in Jerusalem require—let that be given to them day by day without fail, 10 so that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his children. 11 Furthermore I decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of the house of the perpetrator, who then shall be impaled on it. The house shall be made a dunghill. 12 May the God who has established his name there overthrow any king or people that shall put forth a hand to alter this, or to destroy this house of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, make a decree; let it be done with all diligence."

13 Then, according to the word sent by King Darius, Tattenai, the governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates did with all diligence what King Darius had ordered. 14 So the elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of the prophet Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo. They finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes of Persia; 15 and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

16 The people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. 17 They offered at the dedication of this house of God one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18 Then they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their courses for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses.

the Temple is extremely generous. If the information is reliable, it might indicate Persia's attempt to stabilize its hold in the Mediterranean area by securing the goodwill of the people of Yehud. Nonbiblical sources show that Darius also supported Egypt's religious institutions. **7:** *Governor,* Tattenai does not name a contemporary governor of Yehud itself (presumably Zerubbabel). **8:** *The cost,* Darius designates provincial revenue for the Temple, although this may antagonize other local, taxpaying districts.

6.13–18: The completion of the Temple. The Temple is finally completed, an accomplishment credited to the Judeans guided by God and authorized by three Persian kings. This concludes Stage One of the return and reconstruction. It will be followed by Stage Two, reconstructing the community in Ezra 7–10, and by Stage Three, rebuilding Jerusalem's walls in Neh 1–7. **14:** The conclusion highlights the elders and prophetic inspiration. *Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes,* according to Ezra 1–6, the Temple itself was rebuilt during Cyrus's and Darius's reigns, and completed in 515 BCE, before the time of Artaxerxes (464–424 BCE); hence his name in the list is at first puzzling. It can be explained in terms of Ezra-Nehemiah's larger understanding that the fuller restoration of the house of God goes beyond the Temple to include the rebuilding of the community by Ezra and the city by Nehemiah, culminating in Neh 7 under Artaxerxes. Ezra 6.14 thus suggests the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah. The joint authorization, first by God and then by kings, is crucial to Ezra-Nehemiah's historical and theological understanding. **15:** *Finished on the third day . . . of Adar . . . sixth year,* March 12, 515 BCE.

6.16–22: The concluding dedication. The dedication of the Temple is described briefly. A more extensive celebration in Ezra-Nehemiah will follow the rebuilding of the city's walls as the completion of the entire "house of God" (Neh 8–13).**16:** *People of Israel,* i.e., *the returned exiles* (lit. "sons of exile") who now represent the fullness of Israel. **17:** *Sin offering,* or purification offering; see Num 7. *Twelve male goats . . . the number of the tribes,* the remnant that includes only Judah, Benjamin, and the Levites nevertheless worships on behalf of the full house of Israel, which it now represents. **18:** *Written in the book of Moses,* Ex 29; Lev 8; and Num 3; 4; and 8 designate priestly and levitical tasks. Ezra-Nehemiah stresses the religious legitimacy of the Temple, which

19 On the fourteenth day of the first month
the returned exiles kept the passover. 20 For
both the priests and the Levites had purified
themselves; all of them were clean. So they
killed the passover lamb for all the returned ex-
iles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves.
21 It was eaten by the people of Israel who had
returned from exile, and also by all who had
joined them and separated themselves from
the pollutions of the nations of the land to
worship the Lord, the God of Israel. 22 With
joy they celebrated the festival of unleavened
bread seven days; for the Lord had made them
joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of
Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the
work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

7 After this, in the reign of King Artaxerxes
of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, son of
Azariah, son of Hilkiah, 2 son of Shallum, son
of Zadok, son of Ahitub, 3 son of Amariah,
son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, 4 son of
Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, 5 son of
Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son
of the chief priest Aaron— 6 this Ezra went
up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled
in the law of Moses that the Lord the God of
Israel had given; and the king granted him all
that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his
God was upon him.

7 Some of the people of Israel, and some of
the priests and Levites, the singers and gate-
keepers, and the temple servants also went
up to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of King
Artaxerxes. 8 They came to Jerusalem in the
fifth month, which was in the seventh year of
the king. 9 On the first day of the first month
the journey up from Babylon was begun, and
on the first day of the fifth month he came to
Jerusalem, for the gracious hand of his God
was upon him. 10 For Ezra had set his heart to
study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to
teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel.

11 This is a copy of the letter that King
Artaxerxes gave to the priest Ezra, the scribe,
a scholar of the text of the commandments of
the Lord and his statutes for Israel: 12 "Arta-

complements the political legitimacy granted by Cyrus and Darius. **19–22:** Celebrating the passover and the festival of unleavened bread (some five weeks after the Temple's dedication) has special significance for the reconstruction because the return from exile was viewed by some as a second Exodus (cf. Isa 52.11–12). **20:** *They killed,* the priestly laws of Lev 23.4–6 are followed here. **21:** *All who had joined them,* whereas the returnees excluded others from the act of rebuilding, reserving the task to "God's people" explicitly commissioned by Cyrus (Ezra 1:2–4 and 4:3), others may join once the Temple is rebuilt, following Ex 12.48, which notes that circumcised non-Israelites may participate in the Passover offering. **22:** *King of Assyria,* an anachronistic reference to the Persian king, alluding to the earliest exile by Assyria, which is now reversed.

7.1–10.44: Stage Two of reconstruction: the mission of Ezra and the reformation of the community according to the Torah. Ezra's mission focuses on the processes by which the community restructures itself to conform to an interpretation of the law that requires a separation from the people of the land. The implicit chronology in Ezra-Nehemiah places this event in 458 BCE, during the reign of Artaxerxes I, though some scholars believe that the date should be 398 BCE, during the reign of Artaxerxes II.

7.1–10: The narrator's introduction of Ezra. 1–6: Ezra's long pedigree establishes his impeccable credentials both as priest of the most distinguished line and as scribe—the two roles that will account for his stature and acceptance within the Jewish community. **1:** *Artaxerxes,* probably Artaxerxes I (465–424 BCE); see Introduction. **5:** *Chief priest,* Ezra is identified as one qualified to serve as a chief or high priest, even though he never undertakes this role in Ezra-Nehemiah. **6:** *Scribe,* a highly educated person, often in an important advisory position to kings. *Skilled in the law of Moses,* knowledgeable about the Torah. **7:** *Israel . . . priests . . . Levites,* Ezra's caravan includes the same basic groups as Ezra 2. *The seventh year of king Artaxerxes,* 458 BCE. **8:** *The fifth month,* Ab (July-August). **9:** *The first day of the first month,* i.e., Nisan (March-April), two weeks before Passover. The dates may be symbolic, reflecting the Exodus from Egypt in the first month (Ex 12.2; Num 33.3) and the destruction of the Temple in the fifth (2 Kings 25.8). However, five months would be a reasonable time for a journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. **10:** Ezra's goals of studying, teaching, and practicing God's law account for his subsequent actions and model Jewish aspirations. These add to his credentials as priest and establish his qualifications as an authoritative teacher of God's law.

7.11–26: Royal introduction of Ezra and his mission. This Aramaic royal letter establishes Ezra's credentials within the Persian bureaucracy. It reauthorizes immigration to Judah (v. 13) and royal subsidy for the Temple (vv.

xerxes, king of kings, to the priest Ezra, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven: Peace.[a] And now [13] I decree that any of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom who freely offers to go to Jerusalem may go with you. [14] For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your hand, [15] and also to convey the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, [16] with all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, given willingly for the house of their God in Jerusalem. [17] With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs, and their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. [18] Whatever seems good to you and your colleagues to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God. [19] The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem. [20] And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which you are responsible for providing, you may provide out of the king's treasury.

[21] "I, King Artaxerxes, decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever the priest Ezra, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence, [22] up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred cors of wheat, one hundred baths[b] of wine, one hundred baths[b] of oil, and unlimited salt. [23] Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of the God of heaven, or wrath will come upon the realm of the king and his heirs. [24] We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on any of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.

[25] "And you, Ezra, according to the God-given wisdom you possess, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River who know the laws of your God; and you shall teach those who do not know them. [26] All who will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on them, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of their goods or for imprisonment."

[27] Blessed be the LORD, the God of our ancestors, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king to glorify the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, [28] and who extended to me steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

[a] Syr Vg 1 Esdras 8.9: Aram *Perfect*
[b] A Heb measure of volume

14–24). It seems to place the Torah on equal footing with royal law (v. 26). **14:** *Seven counselors*, Persian royal advisers (see Esth 1.14 and Herodotus, *Histories* 3.84). *The law of your God,* referring in Ezra-Nehemiah to the book of the Torah. **15–19:** The royal privileges include financial support for the Temple by the king himself, voluntary contributions from Babylonian Jews for the Temple, and a free hand to use the surplus. **20:** Artaxerxes virtually gives Ezra a blank check, showing great trust in Ezra. **21–24:** Artaxerxes assures a generous year's supply of provisions for the Temple. **21:** Additional support is to come from local officials. **22:** A *talent* was 75 lb (34 kg); a *cor* 6.5 bushels (230 l); and a *bath* about 6 gal (23 l). **24:** Tax exemption for Temple personnel is unusual. **25:** *All the people* probably means Jews in the province. **26:** The king affirms Ezra's comprehensive authority, as well as the Torah's. *The law of your God and the law of the king,* this crucial phrase sets the Torah as legally authoritative for the Jewish community in Yehud. It implies something akin to autonomy and self-rule in matters of religion and the Temple. For some scholars, it suggests that the Torah was compiled by Ezra as a result of Persian authorization and encouragement, but this is not stated.

7.27–9.15: Ezra's memoirs. The text resumes in Hebrew, with Ezra as narrator. He will describe the journey and the crisis of mixed marriages.

7.27–8.36: Ezra's journey and arrival. 7.27–28: Ezra expresses gratitude to God, rather than to the king.

8 These are their family heads, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylonia, in the reign of King Artaxerxes: 2 Of the descendants of Phinehas, Gershom. Of Ithamar, Daniel. Of David, Hattush, 3 of the descendants of Shecaniah. Of Parosh, Zechariah, with whom were registered one hundred fifty males. 4 Of the descendants of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males. 5 Of the descendants of Zattu,[a] Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males. 6 Of the descendants of Adin, Ebed son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males. 7 Of the descendants of Elam, Jeshaiah son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males. 8 Of the descendants of Shephatiah, Zebadiah son of Michael, and with him eighty males. 9 Of the descendants of Joab, Obadiah son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred eighteen males. 10 Of the descendants of Bani,[b] Shelomith son of Josiphiah, and with him one hundred sixty males. 11 Of the descendants of Bebai, Zechariah son of Bebai, and with him twenty-eight males. 12 Of the descendants of Azgad, Johanan son of Hakkatan, and with him one hundred ten males. 13 Of the descendants of Adonikam, those who came later, their names being Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them sixty males. 14 Of the descendants of Bigvai, Uthai and Zaccur, and with them seventy males.

15 I gathered them by the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the descendants of Levi. 16 Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were leaders, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, who were wise, 17 and sent them to Iddo, the leader at the place called Casiphia, telling them what to say to Iddo and his colleagues the temple servants at Casiphia, namely, to send us ministers for the house of our God. 18 Since the gracious hand of our God was upon us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the descendants of Mahli son of Levi son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, with his sons and kin, eighteen; 19 also Hashabiah and with him Jeshaiah of the descendants of Merari, with his kin and their sons, twenty; 20 besides two hundred twenty of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites. These were all mentioned by name.

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might deny ourselves[c] before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions. 22 For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and cavalry to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king that the hand of our God is gracious to all who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all who forsake him. 23 So we fasted and petitioned our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

24 Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kin with them. 25 And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king, his counselors, his lords, and all Israel there present had offered; 26 I weighed out into their hand six hundred fifty talents of silver, and one hundred silver vessels worth . . .

[a] Gk 1 Esdras 8.32: Heb lacks *of Zattu*
[b] Gk 1 Esdras 8.36: Heb lacks *Bani*
[c] Or *might fast*

8.1–20: Ezra's caravan numbers about 1,500 men (women are not mentioned); like Ezra 2, the list mingles clan names and place names, although some important individuals are also singled out. **2:** *Hattush,* 1 Chr 3.22 mentions a descendant of David with this name, although nothing further is reported about him. Apparently some Davidic descendants remained in Babylonia after the return to Judah had begun. **4–20:** The additional members and clans in Ezra's caravan include names that already appeared in Ezra 2 (e.g., Pahath-moab in Ezra 2.6 and 8.4). **15:** *Ahava,* an unknown location along one of the canals of the river Euphrates. *None of . . . Levi,* Ezra demonstrates concern for the proper maintenance of the Temple and broadens the scope of its personnel to include the lesser officials. **21–30:** Ezra requires of the community spiritual as well as physical preparations. **21:** *Fast,* a common preparation for beseeching God. *All our possessions,* even with the well-guarded royal roads, a long journey was hazardous, especially when transporting gold and silver. **22:** *I was ashamed,* Ezra's timidity and trust indicate that God's power is ultimately greater than that of the Persian king's army. **24–30:** Further

talents,[a] and one hundred talents of gold,
27 twenty gold bowls worth a thousand darics,
and two vessels of fine polished bronze as
precious as gold. 28 And I said to them, "You
are holy to the LORD, and the vessels are holy;
and the silver and the gold are a freewill
offering to the LORD, the God of your ances-
tors. 29 Guard them and keep them until you
weigh them before the chief priests and the
Levites and the heads of families in Israel at
Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house
of the LORD." 30 So the priests and the Levites
took over the silver, the gold, and the vessels
as they were weighed out, to bring them to
Jerusalem, to the house of our God.

31 Then we left the river Ahava on the
twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jeru-
salem; the hand of our God was upon us, and
he delivered us from the hand of the enemy
and from ambushes along the way. 32 We
came to Jerusalem and remained there three
days. 33 On the fourth day, within the house of
our God, the silver, the gold, and the vessels
were weighed into the hands of the priest
Meremoth son of Uriah, and with him was
Eleazar son of Phinehas, and with them were
the Levites, Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noa-
diah son of Binnui. 34 The total was counted
and weighed, and the weight of everything
was recorded.

35 At that time those who had come from
captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt of-
ferings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all
Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs,
and as a sin offering twelve male goats; all this
was a burnt offering to the LORD. 36 They also
delivered the king's commissions to the king's
satraps and to the governors of the province
Beyond the River; and they supported the
people and the house of God.

9 After these things had been done, the
officials approached me and said, "The
people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites
have not separated themselves from the
peoples of the lands with their abomina-
tions, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the
Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the
Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.
2 For they have taken some of their daughters
as wives for themselves and for their sons.
Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the
peoples of the lands, and in this faithlessness
the officials and leaders have led the way."
3 When I heard this, I tore my garment and

[a] The number of talents is lacking

preparations that empower the clergy. **26:** *Talents* weigh about 75 lbs (34 kg) each. **27:** *Darics,* see 2.69n. **28:** *The vessels are holy,* holiness is derived from their dedication to God; these are not vessels from the First Temple. **31–36:** Arrival and celebration. **31:** *Twelfth day of the first month* (Nisan [March-April]), two days before the Passover commemorating the Exodus. A new Exodus may be implicit; however, for reasons of weather, spring was the season for expeditions (see 2 Sam 11.1). **33:** Ezra ensures that the gifts are transferred to both priests and Levites. **35:** *Returned exiles,* the restored community. **36:** *Satraps,* high officials in the Persian government, usually provincial governors.

9.1–15: The crisis of mixed marriages. The crisis in Stage Two of the reconstruction comes when men, including Jewish leaders, marry foreign women. To ensure survival as a small (see Ezra 9.8) minority in the midst of surrounding cultures, Ezra-Nehemiah advocates separatist policies. In this section, it calls for excluding foreign wives and their children from the community. The concern with intermarriages resembles the Athenian laws of 451 BCE, which demanded that both parents be Athenian if a person was to be considered a citizen. The similar concern in Ezra-Nehemiah may, therefore, be also related to the greater power bestowed upon community members. **1:** *Have not separated,* Deut 7.1–5 prohibits any relation with the people of Canaan, and Deut 20.15-18 further demands their annihilation on the ground that they lead to religious defection. Ezra-Nehemiah substitutes separation for destruction. *Their abominations, from the Canaanites,* more accurately, "their abominations like the Canaanites." The informants equate the religious practices of the present inhabitants with those of the earlier nations at the time of Joshua. *Canaanites . . . Amorites,* Deut 7 specifically prohibits relations with Canaanites, Perizzites, Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites. Deut 23.3–8 specifically excludes Ammonites and Moabites from the congregation, but permits the incorporation of Egyptians at some point. This verse has thus extended the range of the earlier prohibition. The targeted prohibited families probably include Judeans who had not gone into exile. **2:** *Holy seed* is progeny dedicated through birth to God. The term probably reflects Isa 6.13, in reference to the purified remnant.

my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled. [4] Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.

[5] At the evening sacrifice I got up from my fasting, with my garments and my mantle torn, and fell on my knees, spread out my hands to the LORD my God, [6] and said,

"O my God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. [7] From the days of our ancestors to this day we have been deep in guilt, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been handed over to the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as is now the case. [8] But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, who has left us a remnant, and given us a stake in his holy place, in order that he[a] may brighten our eyes and grant us a little sustenance in our slavery. [9] For we are slaves; yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to give us new life to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judea and Jerusalem.

[10] "And now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, [11] which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land that you are entering to possess is a land unclean with the pollutions of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations. They have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness. [12] Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, so that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.' [13] After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this, [14] shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you destroy us without remnant or survivor? [15] O LORD, God of Israel, you are just, but we have escaped as a remnant, as is now the case. Here we are before you in our guilt, though no one can face you because of this."

10 While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him out of Israel; the people also wept bitterly. [2] Shecaniah son of Jehiel, of the

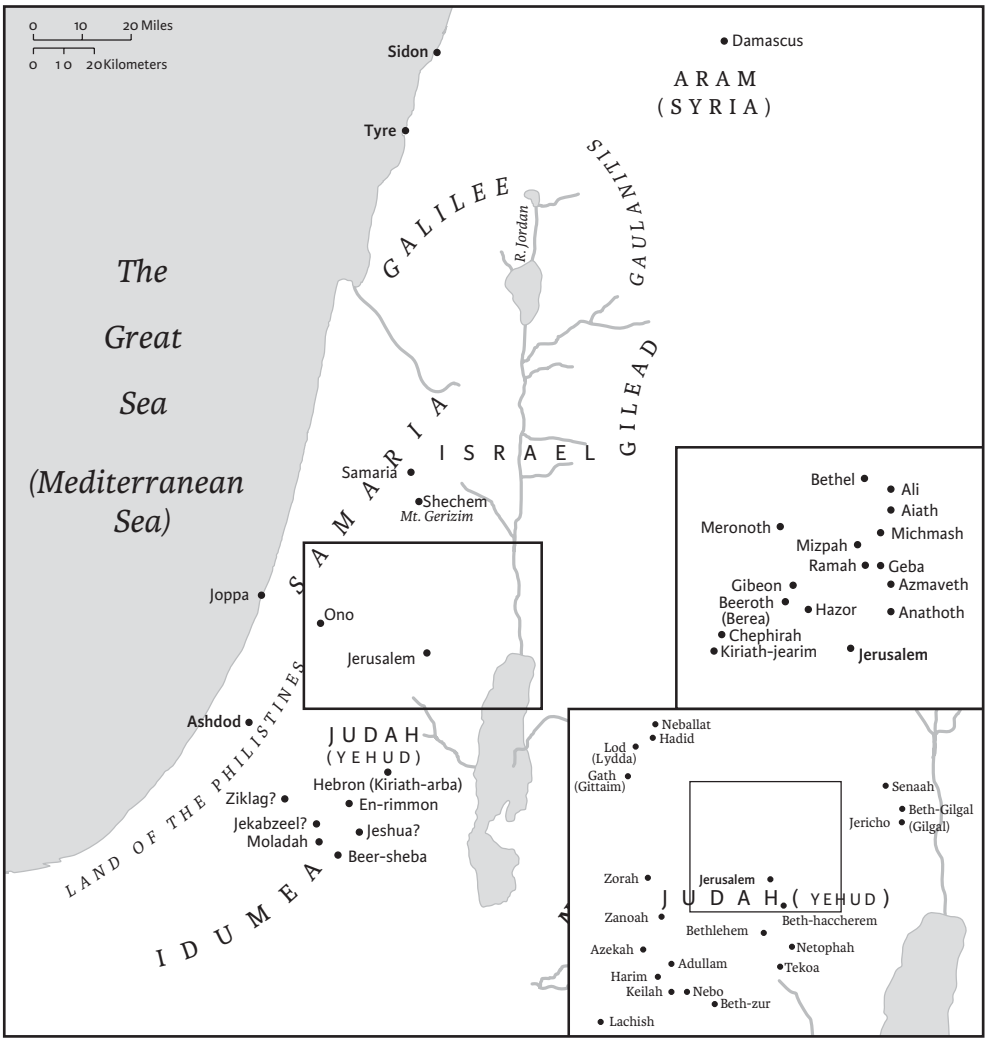
[a] Heb *our God*

9.3–4: Ezra reacts with mourning and prayer. His penitence produces remorse and generates communal action.

9.5–15: Ezra's prayer. More a sermon than a confession, the prayer rehearses events of the past in order to alter community behavior. Like the prophets and the Deuteronomistic History, Ezra interprets Israel's political devastation as the consequence of religious and moral failings by Israel, and uses the fear of a recurrence to motivate the community to separate from the other inhabitants of the land. **7:** *As is now the case,* the end of exile is understood as a result of divine forgiveness, not Israel's changed behavior. **8:** *Little sustenance,* Ezra's confession expresses the vulnerability of a small remnant. **9:** *For we are slaves,* i.e., a colonized people under Persian control. *Repair its ruins,* i.e., physical and spiritual reconstruction. *A wall,* actually "a fence," a metaphor for a weak protective barrier. **11–12:** This paraphrase and blending of Priestly (Lev 18.24–30) and Deuteronomic (Deut 7.3–4) material is characteristic of this period, when the Torah as a book became authoritative.

10.1–44: Resolution of crisis. The crisis is resolved through communal consensus to reinterpret earlier laws and apply them to present circumstances, and therefore to oppose mixed marriages within the covenant community.

10.1–6: The impact of Ezra's prayer. Ezra's prayer (see the similar later prayer in Dan 9) attracts a crowd and inspires remorse and repentance. **2:** *Have married*, (lit. "have settled"), i.e., established on the land. Inheritance of land is a concern (see Ezra 9.12; Deut 7). The proposal to exclude foreign wives comes from Shecaniah, a community member (his father's name, Jehiel, appears in 10.26 among the transgressors). The resolution will be



Judah and its neighbors in Ezra-Nehemia.

descendants of Elam, addressed Ezra, saying, "We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. [3] So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. [4] Take action, for it is your duty, and we are with you; be strong, and do it." [5] Then Ezra stood up and made the leading priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear that they would do as had been said. So they swore.

[6] Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God, and went to the chamber of Jehohanan son of Eliashib, where he spent the

determined by consensus. **3:** The children of such marriages are to be sent away as well, thereby not separated from their mothers. *Let it be done according to the law,* the Pentateuch does not include a law that demands dissolving mixed marriages. The reference implies an interpretation, applying a prohibition against such marriages to these new circumstances. **4-5:** The people authorize Ezra to act. Although authorized by the Persian king, Ezra only assumes a leadership role when the community invites him to do so. **6:** *The chamber,* an office

night.[a] He did not eat bread or drink water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles. 7 They made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, 8 and that if any did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all their property should be forfeited, and they themselves banned from the congregation of the exiles.

9 Then all the people of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days; it was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month. All the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain. 10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have trespassed and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. 11 Now make confession to the LORD the God of your ancestors, and do his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives." 12 Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, "It is so; we must do as you have said. 13 But the people are many, and it is a time of heavy rain; we cannot stand in the open. Nor is this a task for one day or for two, for many of us have transgressed in this matter. 14 Let our officials represent the whole assembly, and let all in our towns who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them the elders and judges of every town, until the fierce wrath of our God on this account is averted from us." 15 Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levites supported them.

16 Then the returned exiles did so. Ezra the priest selected men,[b] heads of families, according to their families, each of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to examine the matter. 17 By the first day of the first month they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.

18 There were found of the descendants of the priests who had married foreign women, of the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19 They pledged themselves to send away their wives, and their guilt offering

[a] 1 Esdras 9.2: Heb *where he went*

[b] 1 Esdras 9.16: Syr: Heb *And there were selected Ezra,*

within the Temple complex that as a priest, Ezra may use. *Jehohanan son of Eliashib* appears in the priestly lists (Neh 12.23), although both names are common in the postexilic period.

10.7–8: Steps toward resolution. These include an invitation to an assembly for the purpose of communal decision, and a threat in case of noncompliance. Although Artaxerxes' letter authorizes Ezra to issue decrees, Ezra resorts to a communal process instead (see 10.5,16). Threats of confiscation apply to those who refuse to participate in the general assembly, not those who offer a different opinion as to what should be done.

10.9–15: A communal process for resolution. The report focuses on the process in which the entire community participates in deciding and enforcing criteria for membership. **9:** *Heavy rain*s are typical of the cold ninth month, Chislev (November-December). **10–11:** *Married* (lit. "settled"); see 10.2n. This is Ezra's first directive; he commands only at the invitation of the community. **12–14:** The community assents and offers the mechanism for resolution. **14:** *Have taken* (lit. "have settled"); see 10.2n. Again, the community is responsible for action, devising a representative form ("our officials") of government. **15:** A minority opposition is registered, establishing that majority decision carries even without unanimity. *Meshullam* could be Ezra's companion in 8.16.

10.16–44: Results: compliance with communal decision. The issue of mixed marriages constitutes the first test of the new, legal status of the Torah, illustrating how an ancient book may shape the present and future through communal interpretive process. **16:** *The returned exiles did so* on the basis of a democratic process. *Ezra . . . selected men,* the Hebrew text states that the community selects the committee, with Ezra serving as a member. This is consistent with the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah where the broader community plays a crucial role. **17:** *By the first day of the first month,* the commission's deliberations began in December 458 (v. 16) and concluded three months later in March 457 BCE, about one year after Ezra's caravan first set out for Jerusalem (7.9). **18:** *Had married* (lit. "had settled"); see 10.2n. *Jeshua son of Jozadak,* the high priest in the early return. See 2.1–2n. **18–19:** The explicit report that the high priest's family fully complied with the communal decision is crucial to the book's reforms. It affirms the ultimate status of the Torah, as the priests, who have the most power, submit

was a ram of the flock for their guilt. [20] Of the descendants of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah. [21] Of the descendants of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziah. [22] Of the descendants of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

[23] Of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. [24] Of the singers: Eliashib. Of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

[25] And of Israel: of the descendants of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Hashabiah,[a] and Benaiah. [26] Of the descendants of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah. [27] Of the descendants of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza. [28] Of the descendants of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. [29] Of the descendants of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth. [30] Of the descendants of Pahath-moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh. [31] Of the descendants of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, [32] Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. [33] Of the descendants of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. [34] Of the descendants of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, [35] Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi, [36] Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, [37] Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu. [38] Of the descendants of Binnui:[b] Shimei, [39] Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, [40] Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, [41] Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, [42] Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. [43] Of the descendants of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah. [44] All these had married foreign women, and they sent them away with their children.[c]

[a] 1 Esdras 9.26 Gk: Heb *Malchijah*
[b] Gk: Heb *Bani, Binnui*
[c] 1 Esdras 9.36; meaning of Heb uncertain

to its teachings. **20–44:** List of other offenders. There are more than a hundred offenders (the names are not always distinct), including members of the high priest's family (v. 18). **44:** *They sent them away with their children,* this sentence does not appear in Ezra 10, which ends abruptly, but comes from the later 1 Esdras. The Hebrew in Ezra 10.44 states: "Some had wives with whom they had sons." Ezra 10.44 thus does not report that the women and children of nonpriestly families were expelled. The conclusion of Stage Two (Ezra 7–10) focuses, rather, on establishing boundaries based on the Torah without resorting to military force (with emotional casualties that are not reported).

NEHEMIAH

The book of Nehemiah was originally the second section of a single book (Ezra-Nehemiah, preserved as Esdras b in the ancient Greek versions of the Bible); see further the Introduction to Ezra (pp. 667–668).

The Nehemiah section of Ezra-Nehemiah depicts the final stage of Jewish reconstruction after exile, featuring Nehemiah as the Jewish governor under Persian rule, who rebuilds Jerusalem's walls (1.1–7.5) and oversees many reforms. Large portions of this book are called the Nehemiah memoir, a first-person account of his activities. The book's structure continues the narrative that began with Ezra 1. Nehemiah 1 begins with Stage Three of the return from exile, when Nehemiah rebuilds Jerusalem's walls (Neh 1.1–7.5). This is followed by the repetition of the list of returnees (7.6–73; see Ezra 2) that frames the three stages of return and reconstruction. The book concludes with the grand celebration of the reconstruction by the rededicated community, now organized according to the Torah, the "law of Moses" (chs 8–13), with rebuilt Jerusalem as its holy city.

Nehemiah is presented as a dynamic, enterprising man who achieves his goal of rebuilding despite repeated interference from other leaders such as the governor of Samaria (see 2.9–10). Although he does not appear elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, Nehemiah is mentioned in 2 Macc 1.19–36 and Sirach 49.13.

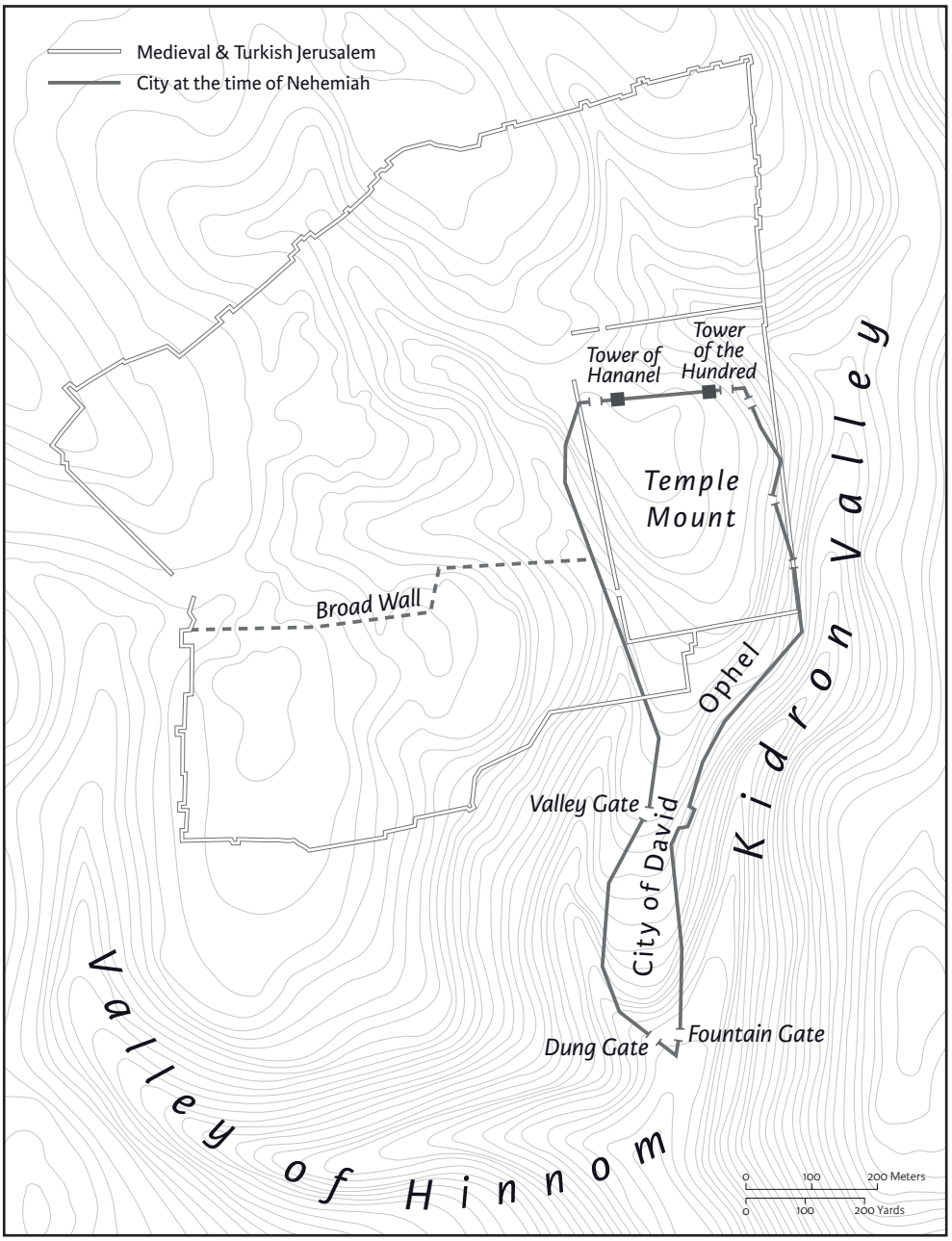
Tamara Cohn Eskenazi

1 The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah.
In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth
year, while I was in Susa the capital, **2** one of
my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men
from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews
that survived, those who had escaped the
captivity, and about Jerusalem. **3** They replied,
"The survivors there in the province who
escaped captivity are in great trouble and
shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down,
and its gates have been destroyed by fire."
4 When I heard these words I sat down
and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and
praying before the God of heaven. **5** I said,
"O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast
love with those who love him and keep his
commandments; **6** let your ear be attentive
and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your
servant that I now pray before you day and
night for your servants, the people of Israel,
confessing the sins of the people of Israel,
which we have sinned against you. Both I and
my family have sinned. **7** We have offended
you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that
you commanded your servant Moses. **8** Remember the word that you commanded your
servant Moses, 'If you are unfaithful, I will
scatter you among the peoples; **9** but if you

1.1–7.5: Stage Three of reconstruction: rebuilding Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership. These chapters come from what scholars call "the Nehemiah memoir," first-person material in the name of Nehemiah (also found in chs 12–13). This section describes how Nehemiah, the king's cupbearer, becomes the governor of Judah and rebuilds Jerusalem's walls.

1:1-2:10: Nehemiah's commission. While serving the Persian king in Persia, Nehemiah learns about his people's plight in Judah and asks permission to go and help them. **1.1:** *Nehemiah,* a cupbearer (see 1.11n.) to King Artaxerxes I (465–424 BCE). *Words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah*, this is the beginning of the Nehemiah Memoir. His father's name and his family are otherwise unknown. *Chislev* (November-December). *In the twentieth year,* most likely of Artaxerxes I (2.1), namely 445 BCE. *Susa,* the winter residence of Persian kings in Persia (modern Iran). Excavations have uncovered a magnificent palace there. **2–3:** *Jews that survived,* this includes those who remained in the land after 586 BCE, as well as those who had returned since (see Ezra 1.1–4). *The wall of Jerusalem* was *broken down* by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and apparently suffered further deterioration, possibly due to later unrecorded conflicts.

1.4–11: Nehemiah's prayer. The prayer incorporates themes from Deuteronomy about reasons for the dispersion and the possibility of restoration. It reflects Nehemiah's piety and expresses postexilic hope for restoration. **5:** *God of heaven,* a typical postexilic title (e.g., Ezra 1.2; Dan 2.18). **8–9:** A paraphrase of ideas about God



Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah.

return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.' [10] They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. [11] O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!"

At the time, I was cupbearer to the king.

2 In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was served him, I carried the wine and gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before. [2] So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This can only be sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. [3] I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors' graves, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" [4] Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. [5] Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors' graves, so that I may rebuild it." [6] The king said to me (the queen also was sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a date. [7] Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may grant me passage until I arrive in Judah; [8] and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, directing him to give me timber to make beams for the gates of the temple fortress, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the gracious hand of my God was upon me.

[9] Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent officers of the army and cavalry with me. [10] When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

[11] So I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days. [12] Then I got up during the night,

from Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 30.1–5). **11:** *This man,* Artaxerxes I. *Cupbearer,* a trusted high royal courtier who sampled wine for quality and safety (see 2.1).

2.1–8: Nehemiah's commission. Nehemiah uses an opportunity to propose a daring request, risking the king's disapproval. **1:** *Nisan*, March-April, the month of the Exodus from Egypt. The chronology of 1.1 (November-December) and 2.1 (March-April), both in the twentieth year, makes sense if Nehemiah's reckoning begins the year in the fall. (Both a spring and a fall new year are found in the Bible.) **2:** *I was… afraid,* because his request could imply divided loyalties, even treason. **3:** *My ancestors' graves,* depicting Jerusalem as graveyard dramatizes the importance of honoring ancestors and minimizes the threat that rebuilding Jerusalem might otherwise suggest. Ezra 4.21 indicates that this king had prohibited rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls until further notice. **6:** The *queen*'s presence may indicate an intimate setting of the conversation, perhaps accounting for the king's benevolence. She is not named; according to Greek sources, Artaxerxes' queen was Damaspia. *I set him a date,* 5.14 and 13.6 indicate that Nehemiah's mission as governor lasted twelve years. **8:** *Temple fortress,* Nehemiah explicitly mentions plans for the Temple's gates and fortifications, including the city's walls, only after securing the king's consent.

2.9–10: Journey and opposition. Nehemiah's military escort visibly testifies to royal support for his mission. His arrival is met with opposition perhaps because it unsettles the political and economic equilibrium, such as control by Samaria or members of the aristocracy. Sanballat and Tobiah head the opposition against Nehemiah's renewal efforts. **10:** *Sanballat* is mentioned in the Aramaic Elephantine documents from fifth-century BCE Egypt as a governor of Samaria, Judah's northern neighbor, the former Israelite state now a province named after its chief city; see Ezra 4.10. He was apparently also related by marriage to Jerusalem's high priest (see 13.28n). *Tobiah the Ammonite official,* probably a Jew. Nehemiah discredits him because of a connection to Ammon, Judah's eastern neighbor and a group excluded from membership in Israel according to Deut 23.4–7. His name is a compound Hebrew word for "good" ("tob") and "Yah", a reference to Israel's God (see also 6.18 and 13.4–9n).

I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was the animal I rode. 13 I went out by night by the Valley Gate past the Dragon's Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool; but there was no place for the animal I was riding to continue. 15 So I went up by way of the valley by night and inspected the wall. Then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest that were to do the work.

17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace." 18 I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us start building!" So they committed themselves to the common good. 19 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they mocked and ridiculed us, saying, "What is this that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" 20 Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven is the one who will give us success, and we his servants are going to start building; but you have no share or claim or historic right in Jerusalem."

3 Then the high priest Eliashib set to work with his fellow priests and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set up its doors; they consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred and as far as the Tower of Hananel. 2 And the men of Jericho built next to him. And next to them[a] Zaccur son of Imri built.

3 The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and set up its

[a] Heb *him*

2.11–18: Nehemiah's initial work in Jerusalem. Nehemiah undertakes a nighttime inspection of the walls, assessing the damage. **12:** *I told no one* (see v. 16), to avoid interference with his plans, Nehemiah keeps his initial inspection secret. **13–15:** Nehemiah's circuit of the walls confirms their dilapidated condition. Many of the landmarks can no longer be identified. **13:** *The Valley Gate* is in the western wall, the *Dragon's Spring* is unknown, and the *Dung Gate* is at the southern end of the wall (in a different location from the present Dung Gate in Jerusalem). **14:** The location of the *Fountain Gate* is uncertain; the *King's Pool* is probably the Pool of Siloam (3.15). *No place . . . to continue,* earlier structures and pathways of the eastern slope have collapsed beyond repair, making passage difficult. The damage on this side of the city seems beyond repair, which accounts for why the rebuilt Jerusalem will be smaller. **17–18:** Nehemiah galvanizes the Jews of Judah to rebuild by appealing to communal pride and disclosing divine and royal support.

2.19–20: Opposition. Sanballat and his associates attempt to stop Nehemiah by implying that he is a rebel, a charge that would antagonize Persian authorities. **19:** *Sanballat . . . and Tobiah,* see 2.10n. *Geshem,* known from nonbiblical sources as king of Qedar in Arabia, controlled territory south-southeast of Judah. *Rebelling,* a trumped-up charge to arouse Persian authorities' suspicion; cf. Ezra 4. **20:** *You have no share . . . in Jerusalem,* Nehemiah seeks to protect Judah from Samaria's control and interference. At stake may be the status of Yehud as a separate Persian province under Judean control. Like Zerubbabel earlier (Ezra 4), Nehemiah restricts non-Jewish participation in rebuilding.

3.1–32: Building the walls despite opposition. Rebuilding Jerusalem's walls reinforces the religious, political, and commercial power of Jerusalem. The list of participants offers important information for discerning the scope of Jerusalem, showing that it was considerably smaller than it had been before its destruction. The list of builders (some of whom probably subsidized the project rather than physically participating in the building) indicates strong communal support. In Ezra-Nehemiah, the rebuilding of the walls is presented as an extension of rebuilding the Temple in accordance with King Cyrus's edict in Ezra 1.

3.1–5: Restoring Jerusalem's northern boundary. 1: *The high priest Eliashib,* grandson of the priest Jeshua (12.10; Ezra 3.2). *They consecrated it,* consecrating the gates marks the project as a holy task: The city as a whole is by extension as holy as a house of God (see Neh 11:1). *The Tower of Hananel,* a boundary in Zech 14.10 for a

doors, its bolts, and its bars. [4] Next to them Meremoth son of Uriah son of Hakkoz made repairs. Next to them Meshullam son of Berechiah son of Meshezabel made repairs. Next to them Zadok son of Baana made repairs. [5] Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.[a]

[6] Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars. [7] Next to them repairs were made by Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite—the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah—who were under the jurisdiction of[b] the governor of the province Beyond the River. [8] Next to them Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs; and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. [9] Next to them Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of half the district of[c] Jerusalem, made repairs. [10] Next to them Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house; and next to him Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs. [11] Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. [12] Next to him Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of[c] Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters.

[13] Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate; they rebuilt it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate.

[14] Malchijah son of Rechab, ruler of the district of[d] Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate; he rebuilt it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

[15] And Shallum son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of[d] Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he rebuilt it and covered it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars; and he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David. [16] After him Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of[c] Beth-zur, repaired from a point opposite the graves of David, as far as the artificial pool and the house of the warriors. [17] After him the Levites made repairs: Rehum son of Bani; next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of[c] Keilah, made repairs for his district. [18] After him their kin made repairs: Binnui,[e] son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of[c] Keilah; [19] next to him Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler[f] of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the Angle. [20] After him Baruch son of Zabbai repaired another section from the Angle to the door of the

[a] Or *lords*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Or *supervisor of half the portion assigned to*
[d] Or *supervisor of the portion assigned to*
[e] Gk Syr Compare verse 24, 10.9: Heb *Bavvai*
[f] Or *supervisor*

newly sanctified Jerusalem. Most of the gates and other places named in the chapter cannot be located with certainty; see 2.13–14n. **2:** *Men of Jericho,* here and in vv. 9–11 volunteers from various districts of Yehud take responsibility for specific segments of the wall. **4:** *Hakkoz,* one of the families whose genealogy had been suspect initially (Ezra 2.61; Neh 7:63), but which has now been integrated. **5:** *The Tekoites,* residents of Tekoa, 10 mi (16 km) south of Jerusalem. Their efforts, despite abstention by leaders, underscore the popular nature of rebuilding.

3.6–14: Restoring Jerusalem's western boundary. The individuals named here are otherwise unknown. **8:** *Goldsmiths . . . perfumers,* traders in luxury items offer evidence of growing commerce and urbanization. *They restored,* more accurately "they left out," suggesting that the rebuilt city was smaller than earlier Jerusalem. *The Broad Wall* was probably originally built by King Hezekiah in the late eighth century BCE (see 2 Chr 32.5) to enlarge the city's defenses. An excavated portion of it can be seen in today's Jerusalem. **9–12:** The task is divided among leaders of five districts, some outside Jerusalem. **12:** *His daughters,* their role, like the men's, may have entailed physical participation and financial sponsorship.

3.15–32: Restoring Jerusalem's southern and eastern boundaries. 16: *Graves of David,* see 2 Chr 33.33. **23–24:** Jerusalemites take charge of areas adjacent to their dwellings.

house of the high priest Eliashib. 21 After him Meremoth son of Uriah son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. 22 After him the priests, the men of the surrounding area, made repairs. 23 After them Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs opposite their house. After them Azariah son of Maaseiah son of Ananiah made repairs beside his own house. 24 After him Binnui son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the Angle and to the corner. 25 Palal son of Uzai repaired opposite the Angle and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah son of Parosh 26 and the temple servants living[a] on Ophel made repairs up to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and the projecting tower. 27 After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

28 Above the Horse Gate the priests made repairs, each one opposite his own house. 29 After them Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, made repairs. 30 After him Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam son of Berechiah made repairs opposite his living quarters. 31 After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate,[b] and to the upper room of the corner. 32 And between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.

4 [c] Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he mocked the Jews. 2 He said in the presence of his associates and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore things? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish it in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish—and burned ones at that?" 3 Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "That stone wall they are building—any fox going up on it would break it down!" 4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their taunt back on their own heads, and give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. 5 Do not cover their guilt, and do not let their sin be blotted out from your sight; for they have hurled insults in the face of the builders.

6 So we rebuilt the wall, and all the wall was joined together to half its height; for the people had a mind to work.

7 [d] But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and the gaps were beginning to be closed, they were very angry, 8 and all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. 9 So we prayed to our God, and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.

10 But Judah said, "The strength of the burden bearers is failing, and there is too much rubbish so that we are unable to work on the wall." 11 And our enemies said, "They will not know or see anything before we come upon them and kill them and stop the work." 12 When the Jews who lived near them came, they said to us ten times, "From all the places where they live[e] they will come up against

[a] Cn: Heb *were living*
[b] Or *Hammiphkad Gate*
[c] Ch 3.33 in Heb
[d] Ch 4.1 in Heb
[e] Cn: Heb *you return*

4.1–6.14: Obstacles to reconstruction. Nehemiah's memoir about Sanballat's opposition (2.19) resumes. Nehemiah, like the earlier returnees (Ezra 3–6 and Ezra 7–10), encounters problems that hamper progress. Three types of threats to building activities are mentioned: intimidation by outsiders (4.1–23), economic hardships (5.1–19), and plots against Nehemiah (6.1–14).

4.1–23: First obstacle: intimidation. The neighboring people under Sanballat of Samaria (see 2.10n.) use taunts and threats. The tension with Samaria reproduces ancient competition between the two preexilic capital cities, Samaria of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Jerusalem, of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, both now under Persian control. **4–5:** Nehemiah punctuates his report with several invocations of God, often with a formulaic "remember me" (see 5.19n.). **10–12:** The builders temporarily succumb to the difficulties of the work

us."[a] 13 So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people according to their families,[b] with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 After I looked these things over, I stood up and said to the nobles and the officials and the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, who is great and awesome, and fight for your kin, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

15 When our enemies heard that their plot was known to us, and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. 16 From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and body-armor; and the leaders posted themselves behind the whole house of Judah, 17 who were building the wall. The burden bearers carried their loads in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and with the other held a weapon. 18 And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. 19 And I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread out, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. 20 Rally to us wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet. Our God will fight for us."

21 So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from break of dawn until the stars came out. 22 I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night inside Jerusalem, so that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day." 23 So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me ever took off our clothes; each kept his weapon in his right hand.[c]

5 Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish kin. 2 For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many; we must get grain, so that we may eat and stay alive." 3 There were also those who said, "We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards, and our houses in order to get grain during the famine." 4 And there were those who said, "We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king's tax. 5 Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others."

6 I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints. 7 After thinking

[a] Compare Gk Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Cn: Heb *each his weapon the water*

and their opponents' intimidation. **10:** *Judah,* the Jewish community. **13–14:** Nehemiah reorganizes the builders and provides them with military protection; he demonstrates readiness for physical combat, confident in God's help. **15–23:** Nehemiah attributes successful rallying of the Jewish builders to improved security measures as well as to God's support.

5.1–19: Second obstacle: economic hardships. The people's burden of heavy taxes to the Persian king (5.4) is aggravated by the wealthier Jews who exploit the situation for their own profit. To redress the balance, Nehemiah initiates economic reforms. He attempts to convince the wealthy that their Judean poor are also their kin, thus creating a community despite class and economic differences (see further at 6:17–19n). The poor Judeans describe their decline into slavery. Biblical laws about slavery are inconsistent (compare Ex 21.2–10 and Deut 15.12–18 with Lev 25.35–43) although they all provide for the release of Israelite slaves at some point. **2:** *We are many,* better emended to "we pledge" (see v. 3), suggesting that sons and daughters are pledged as security for loans and become slaves when loans are defaulted. **3:** The problem is the default on loans during famine and the consequent loss of property and family. **4:** *The king's tax,* the heavy levy from the provinces extracted by the Persian government. **5:** Results: Farmers are reduced to indentured slavery and lose their land and home (the basic necessity for economic survival) to wealthier compatriots. *Ravished*, daughters were particularly vulnerable at times of economic hardship. Moreover, unlike males, daughters (according to Ex 21:7–10) cannot be redeemed when they become sexually attached to the master's household.

5.6–19: Nehemiah's response. Nehemiah combats economic hardships by reforming the practices of the

it over, I brought charges against the nobles and the officials; I said to them, "You are all taking interest from your own people." And I called a great assembly to deal with them, 8 and said to them, "As far as we were able, we have bought back our Jewish kindred who had been sold to other nations; but now you are selling your own kin, who must then be bought back by us!" They were silent, and could not find a word to say. 9 So I said, "The thing that you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God, to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies? 10 Moreover I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us stop this taking of interest. 11 Restore to them, this very day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the interest on money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them." 12 Then they said, "We will restore everything and demand nothing more from them. We will do as you say." And I called the priests, and made them take an oath to do as they had promised. 13 I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out everyone from house and from property who does not perform this promise. Thus may they be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen," and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.

14 Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. 15 The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people, and took food and wine from them, besides forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. 16 Indeed, I devoted myself to the work on this wall, and acquired no land; and all my servants were gathered there for the work. 17 Moreover there were at my table one hundred fifty people, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. 18 Now that which was prepared for one day was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and every ten days skins of wine in abundance; yet with all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because of the heavy burden of labor on the people. 19 Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.

6 Now when it was reported to Sanballat and Tobiah and to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had built the wall and that there was no gap left in it (though up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), 2 Sanballat and Geshem

wealthy and contributing personally to the economy from his own funds. **7:** *The nobles and the officials,* upper-class members exploiting the economic instability. *Taking interest,* more accurately, "taking pledges," i.e., keeping items used as pledges (family members, fields, and houses); this practice is prohibited in Ex 22.24–26; Deut 24.10. **8:** *We have bought back*, the reference is to redeeming Israelite sold as slaves to foreigners (as in Lev 25:47–48). **10:** Nehemiah shows some sympathy for the nobles by admitting a measure of his own culpability at an earlier stage but urges that the time has come for reform, and leads them by example. Nehemiah's measures resemble the remission of debts in the jubilee year (Lev 25). **12:** Like Ezra (see Ezra 10), Nehemiah extracts a public oath from leaders. The priests administer a religiously binding oath to ensure the efficacy of the appended curses. **13:** Symbolic actions could accompany curses in the ancient Near East. *Fold,* the equivalent of a pocket. The gesture connotes removing all excessive matter (including wealth). **14–19:** The Persian government expected local populations to support the governors. Nehemiah foregoes such privileges and subsidizes the office with his own personal funds. He uses this generosity as model for the Jewish aristocracy. **14:** *Governor,* this is the first we hear about Nehemiah's official position as governor, a title for several different ranks of officials. *Twentieth year,* see 1.1n. **15:** The Bible does not preserve names of other governors after Zerubbabel, although some, possibly from the intervening period, have been found in archaeological discoveries. *Forty shekels,* about 1 lb (456 gr). **17:** *Those who to us came from the nations,* the reference is to officials and guests from the rest of the empire. **19:** *Remember for my good,* such prayers are typical of Nehemiah (e.g., 4.4–5; 6.14; 13.14,31).

6.1–14: Third obstacle: plots against Nehemiah. Nehemiah describes several attempts to harm him personally. **1–4:** Attempts to harm Nehemiah in an unprotected place. **1:** *Sanballat and Tobiah and . . . Geshem,* see

sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm. [3] So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it to come down to you?" [4] They sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. [5] In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. [6] In it was written, "It is reported among the nations—and Geshem[a] also says it—that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall; and according to this report you wish to become their king. [7] You have also set up prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, 'There is a king in Judah!' And now it will be reported to the king according to these words. So come, therefore, and let us confer together." [8] Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say have been done; you are inventing them out of your own mind" [9] —for they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

[10] One day when I went into the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his house, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, tonight they are coming to kill you." [11] But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Would a man like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" [12] Then I perceived and saw that God had not sent him at all, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. [13] He was hired for this purpose, to intimidate me and make me sin by acting in this way, and so they could give me a bad name, in order to taunt me. [14] Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

[15] So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. [16] And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid[b] and fell greatly in their own esteem; for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. [17] Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. [18] For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah. [19] Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence, and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

[a] Heb *Gashmu*
[b] Another reading is *saw*

2.10n.,19n. The opposition comes from several different groups. **2:** *Plain of Ono,* in the northwest of the province of Yehud, far from the safety of Jerusalem. **5–7:** Attempts to frighten Nehemiah by threatening to report his alleged rebellion to the king. **7:** *Prophets* in Israel anointed kings (e.g., 1 Kings 1.34; 19.15–16); such an act could imply sedition on Nehemiah's part. **10–13:** Attempts to entice Nehemiah to discredit himself with religious authorities by entering the inner part of the Temple. **10:** *Shemaiah* is a suspected enemy within the community. **13:** Entering sections of the Temple reserved for priests would cast Nehemiah as a sinful usurper violating the priestly domain and the Temple's sanctity. **14:** Nehemiah's repeated plea for divine remembrance (cf. 5.19). *The prophetess Noadiah*, otherwise unknown, she is one of four named prophetesses in the Hebrew Bible (the others are Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah).

6.15–19: The completion of the walls. The extraordinarily short time ("fifty-two days") it took to restore the wall reflects the zeal of the community and Nehemiah's leadership abilities. **15:** *Elul,* August-September. *Fifty-two days,* excavated remnants of Nehemiah's wall reflect the haste of the builders. **17–19:** The opposition does not fall silent, but only changes its tactics, unsuccessfully. Tobiah's family ties with distinguished Jerusalemites, like Sanballat's (see Neh 13.28n.) suggest a conflict in Judah about the nature of the restored community. Nehemiah envisions a community based on Jewish kinship regardless of class; his opponents seek alliances along economic position, with the upper classes uniting across ethnic boundaries. **17:** *Tobiah,* see 2.10n. **19:** Some Jerusalemites seek rapprochement or compromise between Nehemiah and Tobiah.

7 Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, 2 I gave my brother Hanani charge over Jerusalem, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel—for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many. 3 And I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot; while the gatekeepers[a] are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their watch posts, and others before their own houses." 4 The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few and no houses had been built.

5 Then my God put it into my mind to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who were the first to come back, and I found the following written in it:

6 These are the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had carried into exile; they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his town. 7 They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah.

The number of the Israelite people: 8 the descendants of Parosh, two thousand one hundred seventy-two. 9 Of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy-two. 10 Of Arah, six hundred fifty-two. 11 Of Pahath-moab, namely the descendants of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred eighteen. 12 Of Elam, one thousand two hundred fifty-four. 13 Of Zattu, eight hundred forty-five. 14 Of Zaccai, seven hundred sixty. 15 Of Binnui, six hundred forty-eight. 16 Of Bebai, six hundred twenty-eight. 17 Of Azgad, two thousand three hundred twenty-two. 18 Of Adonikam, six hundred sixty-seven. 19 Of Bigvai, two thousand sixty-seven. 20 Of Adin, six hundred fifty-five. 21 Of Ater, namely of Hezekiah, ninety-eight. 22 Of Hashum, three hundred twenty-eight. 23 Of Bezai, three hundred twenty-four. 24 Of Hariph, one hundred twelve. 25 Of Gibeon, ninety-five. 26 The people of Bethlehem and Netophah, one hundred eighty-eight. 27 Of Anathoth, one hundred twenty-eight. 28 Of Beth-azmaveth, forty-two. 29 Of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty-three. 30 Of Ramah and Geba, six hundred twenty-one. 31 Of Michmas, one hundred twenty-two. 32 Of Bethel and Ai, one hundred twenty-three. 33 Of the other Nebo, fifty-two. 34 The descendants of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred fifty-four. 35 Of Harim, three hundred twenty. 36 Of Jericho, three hundred forty-five. 37 Of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty-one. 38 Of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred thirty.

39 The priests: the descendants of Jedaiah, namely the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy-three. 40 Of Immer, one thousand fifty-two. 41 Of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred forty-seven. 42 Of Harim, one thousand seventeen.

[a] Heb *while they*

7.1–5: Setting up guards. Nehemiah places religious functionaries to guard the city gates, thereby establishing Jewish control as well as indicating that the city, like the Temple, is now under religious supervision. **1:** *Gatekeepers . . . singers . . . Levites* ordinarily officiated at the Temple. As guards of the city's gates, they symbolize the new sanctity of the city as a whole (see 11.1). **2:** *Hanani,* see 1.2. *Citadel,* fortress (see 2.8). **3:** For reasons of safety, the gates are to be open only during broad daylight. Although foreigners are not thereby excluded, their coming and going is subject to Jewish control. **4:** *The people within it were few,* most returnees had resumed a largely agrarian life in the surrounding countryside. Nehemiah's measures encourage greater urbanization, which is facilitated further in ch 11. **5:** The sparse population of Jerusalem is used as an editorial device to repeat this list from Ezra 2.

7.6–73: Frame: repeated list of returnees. Reproducing Ezra 2.1–70 with insignificant variations, the list serves a twofold purpose here. First, it connects the last stage of reconstruction with the successful efforts of the previous generations, as a continuous response to Cyrus's original decree (Ezra 1). By repeating the list from Ezra 2, Ezra-Nehemiah melds the three stages of return and reconstruction (Temple, community, city) into a single, unified event, spanning nearly a century (538–444 BCE). Second, it identifies who now legitimately belongs to the restored community and is subject to the legal and religious practices, privileges, and respon-

43 The Levites: the descendants of Jeshua,
namely of Kadmiel of the descendants of
Hodevah, seventy-four. 44 The singers: the de-
scendants of Asaph, one hundred forty-eight.
45 The gatekeepers: the descendants of Shal-
lum, of Ater, of Talmon, of Akkub, of Hatita,
of Shobai, one hundred thirty-eight.
46 The temple servants: the descen-
dants of Ziha, of Hasupha, of Tabbaoth,
47 of Keros, of Sia, of Padon, 48 of Lebana, of
Hagaba, of Shalmai, 49 of Hanan, of Giddel,
of Gahar, 50 of Reaiah, of Rezin, of Nekoda,
51 of Gazzam, of Uzza, of Paseah, 52 of Besai,
of Meunim, of Nephushesim, 53 of Bakbuk, of
Hakupha, of Harhur, 54 of Bazlith, of Mehida,
of Harsha, 55 of Barkos, of Sisera, of Temah,
56 of Neziah, of Hatipha.
57 The descendants of Solomon's servants:
of Sotai, of Sophereth, of Perida, 58 of Jaala, of
Darkon, of Giddel, 59 of Shephatiah, of Hattil,
of Pochereth-hazzebaim, of Amon.
60 All the temple servants and the de-
scendants of Solomon's servants were three
hundred ninety-two.
61 The following were those who came up
from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon,
and Immer, but they could not prove their
ancestral houses or their descent, whether
they belonged to Israel: 62 the descen-
dants of Delaiah, of Tobiah, of Nekoda, six
hundred forty-two. 63 Also, of the priests:
the descendants of Hobaiah, of Hakkoz,
of Barzillai (who had married one of the
daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was
called by their name). 64 These sought their
registration among those enrolled in the
genealogies, but it was not found there, so
they were excluded from the priesthood
as unclean; 65 the governor told them that
they were not to partake of the most holy
food, until a priest with Urim and Thummim
should come.
66 The whole assembly together was forty-
two thousand three hundred sixty, 67 besides
their male and female slaves, of whom there
were seven thousand three hundred thirty-
seven; and they had two hundred forty-five
singers, male and female. 68 They had seven
hundred thirty-six horses, two hundred
forty-five mules,[a] 69 four hundred thirty-five
camels, and six thousand seven hundred
twenty donkeys.
70 Now some of the heads of ancestral
houses contributed to the work. The gover-
nor gave to the treasury one thousand darics
of gold, fifty basins, and five hundred thirty
priestly robes. 71 And some of the heads of
ancestral houses gave into the building fund
twenty thousand darics of gold and two
thousand two hundred minas of silver. 72 And
what the rest of the people gave was twenty
thousand darics of gold, two thousand minas
of silver, and sixty-seven priestly robes.
73 So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeep-
ers, the singers, some of the people, the
temple servants, and all Israel settled in their
towns.
When the seventh month came—the peo-
ple of Israel being settled in their towns—

[a] Ezra 2.66 and the margins of some Hebrew Mss: MT lacks *They had . . . forty-five mules*

sibilities that follow. On the list itself, see the notes to Ezra 2. **66:** *Forty-two thousand three hundred sixty,* same total for the population as Ezra 2.64, although some numbers within the two lists do not match. **70–72:** The parallel in Ezra 2.68–69 differs. For the value of such contributions, see note there. **73:** *The seventh month,* Tishri (September-October; see Ezra 3.1), designated as a beginning of the new year in later Judaism. Lev 23.23–24 and Num 29.1–6 specify practices for this date without mention of reading the Torah (see ch 8).

8.1–13.31: Celebration of renewal and reconstruction. The celebration represents the completion of the restoration that began in the time of King Cyrus nearly a century before. The reconstructed "house of God" encompasses the rebuilt Temple (Ezra 3–6), the reformed community (Ezra 7–10), and Jerusalem as a holy city (11.1), surrounded by a wall (Nehemiah 1–7). The rededication and celebration that this chapter inaugurates extend over several weeks, at least from the first day of the seventh month (8.2) to the twenty-fourth (9.1), longer than any other celebration in the Bible.

8.1–18: Celebrating by reading and implementing the Torah. The reconstruction culminates when the community summons Ezra to bring "the book of the law of Moses" (8.1), i.e., the Torah. Neh 8 signals the historical moment when the Torah, probably most of the Pentateuch, is publicly (re)introduced and receives communal sanction. Thus the ceremony in Neh 8 recalls Sinai as the receiving of God's teachings by the entire people,

8 [1] all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. [2] Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. [3] He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. [4] The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. [5] And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. [6] Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. [7] Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites,[a] helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. [8] So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

[9] And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. [10] Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." [11] So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." [12] And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

[a] 1 Esdras 9.48 Vg: Heb *and the Levites*

transforming them into "the people of the Book." The account is no longer Nehemiah's memoir but an anonymous, third-person report. Some scholars argue that this section was originally attached to the Ezra material, either before or after Ezra 9–10.

8.1–12: The first public reading of the book of Torah. This public reading of scriptures initiates a practice that will continue in Jewish and Christian traditions. The narrative emphasizes through repetition the special bond between the people and the "book." Only in this and in the following section does Ezra appear as a contemporary of Nehemiah. **1:** *The water gate,* this area is outside the Temple. Neither the Temple nor the priests (except for Ezra) are mentioned in these celebrations until ch. 10. *They told the scribe Ezra,* the people, not Ezra, initiate the ceremony. *The book of the law of Moses*, i.e., the Torah. From the people's reaction and other details in Ezra-Nehemiah, scholars conclude that some form of today's Pentateuch, especially Deuteronomy, is being used. **2:** Both men and women participate in this ceremony of hearing and receiving the Torah (see Deut 31.12). The implicit date for the reading is September 444 (or perhaps 443). **4:** *Beside him stood . . .,* Ezra's assistants include laity, as well as Levites, who are elsewhere connected to the study of the law. Their participation expresses broadened access to the authoritative teachings, a move away from exclusive control by priests (see Jer 18.18). **5:** *When he opened it,* i.e., unrolled the scroll. *All the people stood up,* in veneration of God's presence reflected in the book. This signals a dramatic relocation of divine presence authority away from the Temple. **7:** *Helped the people to understand,* they either translate the Hebrew into the more familiar Aramaic or explain the content for greater clarity. **9:** *Nehemiah . . . and Ezra,* representing political and religious leadership, working harmoniously. This is the only verse that mentions both together. *The people wept,* either because of the warnings in the Torah or because they were overwhelmed by the moment. Ezra and Nehemiah emphasize that God's law is ultimately a source of joy.

8.13–18: Implementing Torah: the festival of booths. The people now take initiative to study and implement the Torah, in this case celebrating the festival commanded in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (see

13 On the second day the heads of ancestral houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to the scribe Ezra in order to study the words of the law. 14 And they found it written in the law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the people of Israel should live in booths[a] during the festival of the seventh month, 15 and that they should publish and proclaim in all their towns and in Jerusalem as follows, "Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths,[a] as it is written." 16 So the people went out and brought them, and made booths[a] for themselves, each on the roofs of their houses, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. 17 And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths[a] and lived in them; for from the days of Jeshua son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing. 18 And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the book of the law of God. They kept the festival seven days; and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance.

9 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads.[b] 2 Then those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors. 3 They stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth part of the day, and for another fourth they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God. 4 Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God. 5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise."

[a] Or *tabernacles*; Heb *succoth*
[b] Heb *on them*

v. 18). **14:** *They found it written,* reading the Torah made them aware of the regulations for the festival. *They . . . should live in booths* (Heb "sukkot"), see Lev 23.42–43. The fast of the Day of Atonement (set for the tenth of the month in Lev 23.26–32) is not mentioned. **15:** Lev 23.40 specifies types of tree branches, though it is not clear that these were to be used for building booths. **17:** Ezra-Nehemiah identifies the community as those who had returned from the captivity and links it with the first settlement of the land. *Jeshua son of Nun*, the leader of conquest of the land after the Exodus, and the hero of the book of Joshua. Josh 1.7–8 attributes ultimate successful survival to the study of the Torah, a practice that the restored community seeks to emulate. **18:** Deut 31.10–13 demands public readings of the Torah on the feast of booths (Sukkot) only every seventh year. As a result of rabbinic interpretation of chs 8–9, public reading became a weekly feature of Jewish worship. *The ordinance,* in Lev 23.36.

9.1–10.39: Celebration through confession and commitment. The lengthy prayer that follows restates Israelite history as a tale of divine faithfulness and Israelite faithlessness (Neh 9). To show their difference from their disloyal ancestors and in the hope of reversing the current plight, the postexilic community binds itself to God's Torah in oath and undertakes additional responsibilities to keep God's teachings (Neh 10).

9.1–37: The great communal confession rehearses Israel's history. The people's prayer illustrates their awareness of their tradition and their commitment to repair damage done to Israel's relationship with God by earlier generations. The historical review also functions as a pedagogical tool for a new generation, emphasizing important moments in that history. The Temple is never mentioned. **1–5:** The preparations for prayer. **1:** Fasting as spiritual preparation is undertaken *on the twenty-fourth day,* a date elsewhere not specified for special worship. **2:** The recitation of shared history and confession of ancestral sins apply only to the Israelites. This may account for the separation; alternatively, this separation may be part of retaining ethnic boundaries and excluding foreigners from participating in any joint worship. **3:** The combination of prayer and Torah reading will later characterize synagogue worship. **4–5:** Some of the Levites who shared the platform with Ezra earlier (8.4,7) now lead the congregation without him.

6 And Ezra said:[a] "You are the LORD, you
alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of
heavens, with all their host, the earth and all
that is on it, the seas and all that is in them.
To all of them you give life, and the host of
heaven worships you. 7 You are the LORD,
the God who chose Abram and brought him
out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the
name Abraham; 8 and you found his heart
faithful before you, and made with him a
covenant to give to his descendants the land
of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite,
the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite;
and you have fulfilled your promise, for you
are righteous.

9 "And you saw the distress of our ancestors in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea.[b] 10 You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted insolently against our ancestors. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. 11 And you divided the sea before them, so that they passed through the sea on dry land, but you threw their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. 12 Moreover, you led them by day with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire, to give them light on the way in which they should go. 13 You came down also upon Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments, 14 and you made known your holy sabbath to them and gave them commandments and statutes and a law through your servant Moses. 15 For their hunger you gave them bread from heaven, and for their thirst you brought water for them out of the rock, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you swore to give them.

16 "But they and our ancestors acted presumptuously and stiffened their necks and did not obey your commandments; 17 they refused to obey, and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them; but they stiffened their necks and determined to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them. 18 Even when they had cast an image of a calf for themselves and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies, 19 you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness; the pillar of cloud that led them in the way did not leave them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night that gave them light on the way by which they should go. 20 You gave your good spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and gave them water for their thirst. 21 Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness so that they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. 22 And you gave them kingdoms and peoples, and allotted to them every corner,[c] so they took possession of the land of King Sihon of Heshbon and the

[a] Gk: Heb lacks *And Ezra said*
[b] Or *Sea of Reeds*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

9.6–37: The communal prayer. This communal profession of faith articulates shared history and leads to renewed formal commitment to God's teaching (in ch 10). The community recalls the cycles of God's forbearance despite Israel's earlier infidelities (vv. 6–31) and hopes to be worthy of it in the present dire circumstances (vv. 32–37). As in the historical psalms, history is not invoked for its own sake (e.g., Pss 105–106). **6:** *And Ezra said*, Ezra's name does not appear in the Hebrew text but is inserted into the early Greek versions. Ezra's role in the Hebrew Bible concluded when he placed the Torah into the care of the community and trained others to guide the community accordingly (8:13). The great prayer in the Hebrew Bible is thus assigned to the community and its representatives.

9.7–31: Recitation of historical experience. A summary of traditions preserved in Genesis–2 Kings in which the Israelites repeatedly fail to honor God. **7–8:** See Gen 12–26. **8:** *Made with him a covenant,* Abraham appears as the paradigm of faithfulness.

9–23: Highlights of events in Exodus–Deuteronomy describing God's actions on behalf of Israel. **13:** Unlike some of the earlier historical summaries (e.g., Deut 26.5–9; Josh 24.2–13), this one mentions the revelation at Sinai. **19:** *Pillar,* see Ex 13.21. **20:** *Good spirit,* perhaps a reference to the appointment of elders (Num 11.17–29).

land of King Og of Bashan. 23 You multiplied their descendants like the stars of heaven, and brought them into the land that you had told their ancestors to enter and possess. 24 So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands, with their kings and the peoples of the land, to do with them as they pleased. 25 And they captured fortress cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses filled with all sorts of goods, hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive orchards, and fruit trees in abundance; so they ate, and were filled and became fat, and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

26 "Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their backs and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. 27 Therefore you gave them into the hands of their enemies, who made them suffer. Then in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hands of their enemies. 28 But after they had rest, they again did evil before you, and you abandoned them to the hands of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you rescued them according to your mercies. 29 And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your ordinances, by the observance of which a person shall live. They turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. 30 Many years you were patient with them, and warned them by your spirit through your prophets; yet they would not listen. Therefore you handed them over to the peoples of the lands. 31 Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

32 "Now therefore, our God—the great and mighty and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love—do not treat lightly all the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings, our officials, our priests, our prophets, our ancestors, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until today. 33 You have been just in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly; 34 our kings, our officials, our priests, and our ancestors have not kept your law or heeded the commandments and the warnings that you gave them. 35 Even in their own kingdom, and in the great goodness you bestowed on them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you and did not turn from their wicked works. 36 Here we are, slaves to this day—slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts. 37 Its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins; they have power also over our bodies and over our livestock at their pleasure, and we are in great distress."

38 [a]Because of all this we make a firm agreement in writing, and on that sealed

[a] Ch 10.1 in Heb

22: *Sihon . . . Og,* kings defeated in the battles for the land of Canaan (Num 21.21–35). **24–25:** This conquest is described in Joshua. **26–31:** A summary interpretation of the period from Joshua to the destruction of Jerusalem (see Judges–2 Kings) in which Israelites repeatedly spurned God when they were prosperous. **27:** *Saviors,* the same Heb word is translated "deliverer" in Judg 3.9,15.

9.32–37: The present distress. The community now contrasts its circumstances with those of past generations, hoping for God's compassion. **32:** *Now therefore,* after reciting a history of God's loyalty and Israel's disobedience, the community affirms God's righteousness. *The time of the kings of Assyria,* Assyria controlled the land from the mid-eighth to the late seventh centuries BCE, destroying the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE. **36:** *Here we are, slaves to this day,* still subject to foreign rulers. In Ezra-Nehemiah, this criticism of Persian rule is unique; elsewhere the book presents Persian rulers as benevolent.

9.38–10.39: Commitment: the communal pledge. Notwithstanding its plight, the community pledges loyalty to Israel's God and to God's teachings, namely the Torah. **9.38:** *Because of all this,* because of this history

document are inscribed the names of our officials, our Levites, and our priests.

10 [a] Upon the sealed document are the names of Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah; [2] Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, [3] Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, [4] Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, [5] Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, [6] Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, [7] Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, [8] Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah; these are the priests. [9] And the Levites: Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; [10] and their associates, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, [11] Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, [12] Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, [13] Hodiah, Bani, Beninu. [14] The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, [15] Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, [16] Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, [17] Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, [18] Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, [19] Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, [20] Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, [21] Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, [22] Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, [23] Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, [24] Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, [25] Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, [26] Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, [27] Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

[28] The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to adhere to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, [29] join with their kin, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his ordinances and his statutes. [30] We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons; [31] and if the peoples of the land bring in merchandise or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy it from them on the sabbath or on a holy day; and we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

[32] We also lay on ourselves the obligation to charge ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: [33] for the rows of bread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed festivals, the sacred donations, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. [34] We have also cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, by ancestral houses, at appointed times, year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law. [35] We obligate

[a] Ch 10.2 in Heb

the community commits itself unilaterally by a binding pledge to obedience. **10.1–27:** Signatories on behalf of the entire community include persons and clan names from several previous lists (Ezra 2–Neh 7; Ezra 8), but also reflects a broader religious and social participation. **28:** *The rest of the people,* the entire people affirm their voluntary commitment to the pledge. *Separated themselves,* see 9.2; 13.3. **29:** The purpose of the pledge is to have all members bind themselves to God's Torah. **30–39:** This section lists voluntarily assumed obligations that reflect practices important for Jewish identity in the fifth century BCE. They express the seriousness with which the community vows to uphold the Torah, and they combine various laws from the Pentateuch/Torah as it now exists.

10.30–31: Protecting religious and ethnic boundaries, an important theme throughout Ezra-Nehemiah. **30:** *We will not give our daughters,* see Ezra 9–10. **31:** *Buy . . . on the sabbath,* sabbath laws prohibit work on this day (e.g., Ex 31.12–17); the pledge classifies buying as work. The sabbath may have become especially important during the Babylonian exile. *Forego the crops,* see Ex 23.11. *Debt,* see Deut 15.1–3 (although the vocabulary differs).

10.32–39: Securing religious and social institutions. 32: *We also lay on ourselves the obligation,* the voluntary Temple tax reflects the commitment to undertake support of the Temple. *One-third of a shekel,* the Torah does not require annual Temple tax (Ex 30.13 is a one-time requirement). This self-imposed tax endures throughout the Second Temple period (see Mt 17.24). **33–38:** Provisions for regular Temple sacrifices and worship. **33:** *Rows of bread* are placed on a special table at the sanctuary on the sabbath (Ex 25.29; Lev 24.5–9). *Sin offerings,* or purification offerings, regular sacrifices in the Temple for public or personal transgression (Lev 4.13–21). **34:** *Wood,* for the altar's fires. This obligation is also not prescribed by the Pentateuch/Torah. **35:** *First fruits,* see Ex 22.29;

ourselves to bring the first fruits of our soil and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the LORD; [36] also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our livestock, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks; [37] and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our soil, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our rural towns. [38] And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. [39] For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the storerooms where the vessels of the sanctuary are, and where the priests that minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers are. We will not neglect the house of our God.

11 Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem; and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in the holy city Jerusalem, while nine-tenths remained in the other towns. [2] And the people blessed all those who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.

[3] These are the leaders of the province who lived in Jerusalem; but in the towns of Judah all lived on their property in their towns: Israel, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants, and the descendants of Solomon's servants. [4] And in Jerusalem lived some of the Judahites and of the Benjaminites. Of the Judahites: Athaiah son of Uzziah son of Zechariah son of Amariah son of Shephatiah son of Mahalalel, of the descendants of Perez; [5] and Maaseiah son of Baruch son of Colhozeh son of Hazaiah son of Adaiah son of Joiarib son of Zechariah son of the Shilonite. [6] All the descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were four hundred sixty-eight valiant warriors.

[7] And these are the Benjaminites: Sallu son of Meshullam son of Joed son of Pedaiah son of Kolaiah son of Maaseiah son of Ithiel son of Jeshaiah. [8] And his brothers[a] Gabbai, Sallai: nine hundred twenty-eight. [9] Joel son of Zichri was their overseer; and Judah son of Hassenuah was second in charge of the city.

[10] Of the priests: Jedaiah son of Joiarib, Jachin, [11] Seraiah son of Hilkiah son of Meshullam son of Zadok son of Meraioth son of Ahitub, officer of the house of God, [12] and their associates who did the work of the house, eight hundred twenty-two; and Adaiah son of Jeroham son of Pelaliah son of Amzi son of Zechariah son of Pashhur son of Malchijah, [13] and his associates, heads of ancestral houses, two hundred forty-two; and Amashsai son of Azarel son of Ahzai son of Meshillemoth son of Immer, [14] and their associates, valiant warriors, one hundred

[a] Gk Mss: Heb *And after him*

23.19; Num 18.15–18. **36:** *Firstborn,* see Ex 22.29. **37:** *Tithes,* see Lev 27.30; Num 18.25–32. *The chambers* were the Temple storerooms (13.13; Ezra 8.29; 10.6). **38:** The Levites and priests depended on contributions.

11.1–12.26: The repopulation of Jerusalem and a review. This section reviews the genealogical and geographical extent of the community as part of repopulating Jerusalem.

11.1–36: Repopulation. After identifying the various groups, the restored community requires ten percent of its members to dwell in Jerusalem. The lists of chs 11–12 are compiled from different sources. **1:** *Holy city,* for Ezra-Nehemiah, the entire city, not only the Temple, is now holy (see also Ezek 48.35). *Nine-tenths remained,* see 11.3–24n.

11.3–24: Census of repopulated Jerusalem. The total of enumerated residents of Jerusalem's population in 11.1–24 is slightly over 3,000. Taking this to represent 10 percent of the population indicates about 30,000 residents for the entire province. This number is considerably smaller than the number of returnees (42,360) in Ezra 2.64 and Neh 7.66, but conforms to estimates reached by archaeologists on the basis of nonbiblical data. It also roughly corresponds to the sum total of numbers in the lists of Ezra 2 and Neh 7. See Ezra 2:64n. **4–6:** *Judahites* are traced back to their ancestor Judah through his three sons: *Perez* (11.4; cf. Gen 38.29); the *Shilonite* (11.5), probably Shelah (Gen 38.4); and Zerah (11.24; Gen 38.30). **7–9:** *Benjaminites.* The individual names are otherwise unknown. **10–14:** *Priests.* The group includes three families. Some of these names appear also in Ezra's pedigree

twenty-eight; their overseer was Zabdiel son of Haggedolim.

15 And of the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub son of Azrikam son of Hashabiah son of Bunni; 16 and Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the leaders of the Levites, who were over the outside work of the house of God; 17 and Mattaniah son of Mica son of Zabdi son of Asaph, who was the leader to begin the thanksgiving in prayer, and Bakbukiah, the second among his associates; and Abda son of Shammua son of Galal son of Jeduthun. 18 All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred eighty-four.

19 The gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon and their associates, who kept watch at the gates, were one hundred seventy-two. 20 And the rest of Israel, and of the priests and the Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, all of them in their inheritance. 21 But the temple servants lived on Ophel; and Ziha and Gishpa were over the temple servants.

22 The overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani son of Hashabiah son of Mattaniah son of Mica, of the descendants of Asaph, the singers, in charge of the work of the house of God. 23 For there was a command from the king concerning them, and a settled provision for the singers, as was required every day. 24 And Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, of the descendants of Zerah son of Judah, was at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people.

25 And as for the villages, with their fields, some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath-arba and its villages, and in Dibon and its villages, and in Jekabzeel and its villages, 26 and in Jeshua and in Moladah and Beth-pelet, 27 in Hazar-shual, in Beer-sheba and its villages, 28 in Ziklag, in Meconah and its villages, 29 in En-rimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth, 30 Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages, Lachish and its fields, and Azekah and its villages. So they camped from Beer-sheba to the valley of Hinnom. 31 The people of Benjamin also lived from Geba onward, at Michmash, Aija, Bethel and its villages, 32 Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, 33 Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, 34 Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, 35 Lod, and Ono, the valley of artisans. 36 And certain divisions of the Levites in Judah were joined to Benjamin.

12 These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, 2 Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, 3 Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, 4 Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, 5 Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, 6 Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, 7 Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, Jedaiah. These were the leaders of the priests and of their associates in the days of Jeshua.

8 And the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who with his associates was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. 9 And Bakbukiah and Unno their associates stood opposite them in the service. 10 Jeshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim the father of Eliashib, Eliashib the father of Joiada, 11 Joiada the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan the father of Jaddua.

12 In the days of Joiakim the priests, heads of ancestral houses, were: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; 13 of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; 14 of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; 15 of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; 16 of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; 17 of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai; 18 of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; 19 of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; 20 of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; 21 of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

(Ezra 7.1–5). **19:** *Gatekeepers,* see Ezra 2.42 Neh 7.45. **24:** *At the king's hand,* i.e., directly accountable to the king.

11.25–36: Census of other Jewish settlements. The geographical area spanned by the villages extends beyond the known boundaries of the Persian province of Yehud (Judah). The list, then, is either an ideal echoing Josh 15, envisioning a greater province, or (more likely) a register of Jews also in towns outside Yehud proper or an expanded list from a considerably later time. (For the location of sites that can be identified, see the map on p. 686.)

12.1–26: Review of priestly and levitical genealogies. The reconstituted community again (cf. ch 7) reviews its Temple personnel, spanning the entire era of reconstruction (520–444 BCE). The list is artificial and problematic, but its existence reflects the importance of priests and Levites in this period, a concern also reflected in the books of Chronicles. Although many names are familiar from other lists, the information resists clear chronological schematization. **1:** *Came up with Zerubbabel . . . and Jeshua,* i.e., the governor and priest leading Stage

22 As for the Levites, in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, there were recorded the heads of ancestral houses; also the priests until the reign of Darius the Persian. 23 The Levites, heads of ancestral houses, were recorded in the Book of the Annals until the days of Johanan son of Eliashib. 24 And the leaders of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua son of Kadmiel, with their associates over against them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, section opposite to section. 25 Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers standing guard at the storehouses of the gates. 26 These were in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and in the days of the governor Nehemiah and of the priest Ezra, the scribe.

27 Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with rejoicing, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. 28 The companies of the singers gathered together from the circuit around Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites; 29 also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. 30 And the priests and the Levites purified themselves; and they purified the people and the gates and the wall.

31 Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall, and appointed two great companies that gave thanks and went in procession. One went to the right on the wall to the Dung Gate; 32 and after them went Hoshaiah and half the officials of Judah, 33 and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, 34 Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, 35 and some of the young priests with trumpets: Zechariah son of Jonathan son of Shemaiah son of Mattaniah son of Micaiah son of Zaccur son of Asaph; 36 and his kindred, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God; and the scribe Ezra went in front of them. 37 At the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went straight up by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east.

38 The other company of those who gave thanks went to the left,[a] and I followed them with half of the people on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall, 39 and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Old Gate, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard. 40 So both companies of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; 41 and the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; 42 and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. 43 They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. The joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

44 On that day men were appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contribu-

[a] Cn: Heb *opposite*

One of the return (see Ezra 2.1–2n.). **22:** *Until the reign of Darius the Persian,* Darius I (522–486). Some scholars suggest that the reference is to Darius II (423–404 BCE). **24:** *David,* see Ezra 3.10n. **26:** *Joiakim . . . Nehemiah . . . Ezra,* the three figures—the officiating priest, the governor, and the priest Ezra in his capacity as scribe—mark the period of completion of the task. Now all is ready for the grand finale.

12.27–13.3: Grand finale: a service of dedication: celebration, purification, procession, and separation. 12.27: The initiative again comes from the community (cf. 8.1). **30:** This unique ceremony of purification signals that the people are sanctified and Jerusalem is "the holy city" (11.1).

12.31–42: The procession. Two groups circled the city on the wall and alongside it. On the gates named, see 2.13–14n.; 3.1n. **31:** *Then I,* Nehemiah. *Two great companies,* the groups marched in opposite directions and met at the Temple. **36:** *The scribe Ezra,* this final appearance by Ezra is striking; as a priest (Ezra 7.1–5), he leads the priests. **42:** Antiphonal singing by the professional liturgical singers.

12.43–13.3: Final communal actions on the day of dedication. These include sacrifices and separation in

tions, the first fruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the law for the priests and for the Levites from the fields belonging to the towns; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered. [45] They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon. [46] For in the days of David and Asaph long ago there was a leader of the singers, and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. [47] In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers. They set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the descendants of Aaron.

13 On that day they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, [2] because they did not meet the Israelites with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. [3] When the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.

[4] Now before this, the priest Eliashib, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, [5] prepared for Tobiah a large room where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. [6] While this was taking place I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes of Babylon I went to the king. After some time I asked leave of the king [7] and returned to Jerusalem. I then discovered the wrong that Eliashib had done on behalf of Tobiah, preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. [8] And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the room. [9] Then I gave orders and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

[10] I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them; so that the Levites and the singers, who had conducted the service, had gone back to their fields. [11] So I remonstrated with the officials and said, "Why is the house of God

accordance with the Torah. **12.46:** *Asaph,* see 7.44; 1 Chr 16.5. **47:** *The days of Zerubbabel and . . . Nehemiah,* the description of the celebration reckons from the beginning of the return (Ezra 2) to Nehemiah, the period covered by the unified Ezra-Nehemiah. **13.1–3:** The final action on that day implements the Torah by separating from foreigners. Although distinct from the issues of intermarriage (Ezra 9–10 and Neh 13.23–28), the separation is part of the social and religious boundaries that the restored community seeks to maintain within the multicultural setting of the Persian empire. The virtual quotation from Deut 23.4–7 indicates that Deuteronomy was available to the postexilic community as part of its Torah or "law of Moses." **1.** *No Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter,* see Deut 23.3. **2:** *Balaam,* see Num 22–24 and Deut 23.5-6.

13.4–31: Coda. Nehemiah's memoir (interrupted in 7.5) resumes with a retrospective from a time after 433 BCE, after Nehemiah had served twelve years as governor (13.6; 5.14). At some point after returning to King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem, discovered violations of the communal pledge of ch 10, and took steps to restore order. These violations pertain to the purity of the Temple, observance of the sabbath, and intermarriage. **4–9:** Nehemiah evicts Tobiah from the desecrated Temple precinct. Nehemiah first referred to Tobiah as an "Ammonite official" (2.10), a national connection that may justify his expulsion (see 13.1–3). Apparently other Judeans considered Tobiah (whose name refers to Israel's God; see 2.10n) a legitimate member of the community. His connection with the priests and installation at the Temple support this conclusion. On Tobiah's priestly relations, see 6.18. **4:** *The priest Eliashib,* possibly, but not necessarily the high priest (of 3.1 and 13.28); the name was common in this era. *Appointed over the chambers,* hence controlling the storage and distribution of Temple resources). **6:** *The thirty-second year,* 433 BCE. **9:** *Cleansed,* for Nehemiah, Tobiah's illegitimate presence ritually contaminated the room.

13.10–13: Nehemiah rectifies violations regarding Levites and singers (cf. 10.37–39). **10:** *Levites . . . had gone,* Nehemiah may imply that Tobiah's presence hastened the departure of Levites who had not been paid. **11:**

forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. 12 Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. 13 And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses the priest Shelemiah, the scribe Zadok, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan son of Zaccur son of Mattaniah, for they were considered faithful; and their duty was to distribute to their associates. 14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.

15 In those days I saw in Judah people treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys; and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day; and I warned them at that time against selling food. 16 Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of merchandise and sold them on the sabbath to the people of Judah, and in Jerusalem. 17 Then I remonstrated with the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the sabbath day? 18 Did not your ancestors act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring more wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath."

19 When it began to be dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the sabbath. And I set some of my servants over the gates, to prevent any burden from being brought in on the sabbath day. 20 Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem once or twice. 21 But I warned them and said to them, "Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they did not come on the sabbath. 22 And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.

23 In those days also I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; 24 and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples. 25 And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. 26 Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. 27 Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?"

Gathered them, i.e., the dispersed Levites. **12:** The opening words should be translated "All Judah had brought." Nehemiah alleges that the desertion of Levites resulted less from lack of contributions than from mismanagement, possibly by Tobiah. **13:** *And I appointed,* Nehemiah's chooses new supervisors. *Considered faithful,* an important trait because of previous corruption under Tobiah and Eliashib. **14:** Conclusion: Nehemiah's plea for remembrance for these restoration efforts.

13.15–22: Nehemiah rectifies sabbath violations (cf. 10.31). The sabbath constitutes another cultural and religious boundary, one that gains importance in the postexilic period. **15:** *In those days,* when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem for the second time, after 433 BCE. **16:** *Tyrians,* merchants from Tyre, in modern Lebanon. **19–22:** Shutting the gates during the sabbath prevented foreign trading in the city during the sabbath. **22:** *They should purify themselves,* purified Levites guard the gates (7.1–3; 11.1) to secure sanctity, especially on the holy sabbath. Such measures are unique to the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, underscoring the holiness of the entire city.

13.23–29: Intermarriage problems (cf. 10.30). On marriage with foreigners in Ezra-Nehemiah, see Ezra 9–10, especially Ezra 9.1–15n. The problem, as Nehemiah presents it, is different from Ezra 9.2; it concerns loss of Jewish identity exemplified by the disappearance of Hebrew among children of mixed marriages. Intermarriage also signals for him turning away from Israel's God. **23:** *Ashdod,* a Philistine city on the southeast coast of the Mediterranean. **26:** *King Solomon*'s marriages corrupted his relations with God (1 Kings 11.1–8) and thus

[28] And one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of the high priest Eliashib, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; I chased him away from me. [29] Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, the covenant of the priests and the Levites.

[30] Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; [31] and I provided for the wood offering, at appointed times, and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

exemplify the danger to the present community. **28:** *Son of the high priest Eliashib, was the son-in-law of Sanballat,* evidently, some Jews, including the high priest's family, considered contracting marriage with Sanballat's family as appropriate. Eliashib consecrated the gates in 3.1. *Sanballat,* the family of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria (see 2.10n.). His sons had Hebrew names. 2 Kings 17 describes the residents of Samaria as foreigners who accepted some aspects of Yahwistic worship. Samarians, like the later Samaritans, may have claimed, instead, that they were a remnant of the northern kingdom of Israel and true offspring of Abraham through Jacob. Like Ezra, Nehemiah vehemently objects to what he construes as intermarriage. *I chased him away,* Nehemiah acts firmly to protect the Temple's purity from illegitimate behavior by a priest. The Jewish historian Josephus reports that the Samaritan Temple near Shechem was built in the fourth century BCE for a priest expelled from Jerusalem *Ant.* 11.8.2).

13.30–31: Conclusion. The purification of the priesthood and Temple administration was difficult because of the status of the opposing priests. Therefore, Nehemiah presents restoring order and sanctity to the worship system as the crown of his achievement. **31:** *I provided for the wood offering . . . and for the first fruits,* see 10.34–35, in which the community pledges to provide these. *For good,* with "good" as the last word, Nehemiah invokes a final blessing.

ESTHER

NAME

The book of Esther takes its name from its heroine, the Jewish woman of the Diaspora who becomes queen of Persia, saves her people from genocide, and with her guardian, Mordecai, inaugurates the new Jewish festival of Purim. This title first appears in the Greek translation (the Septuagint, LXX) of the story and thus may not belong to the Hebrew original. According to 2.7, Esther has a Hebrew name, Hadassah, but is otherwise called Esther, a name that is cognate with Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love and war, or with the Persian word *stara*, "star." The Latin (Vulgate) translation calls her Hester.

CANONICAL STATUS

Esther is the only book of the Hebrew Bible unattested among the Dead Sea Scrolls (third century BCE to first century CE), nor does the New Testament ever allude to it. Like The Song of Solomon (on which the New Testament is similarly mute), the book of Esther provoked debate among rabbis and church fathers over its scriptural status for reasons that were not always spelled out. Neither book so much as mentions God or such key Jewish concepts as covenant, temple, sacrifice, or prayer. Furthermore, both Esther and Song of Solomon celebrate, albeit in different contexts, the power of feminine sexuality. Another factor in its late admission to the biblical canon may have been the book's enthusiastic account of the Jewish communities' slaughter of their enemies, an aspect of Esther that continues to trouble readers today.

Only by the third or fourth centuries CE does the scroll appear to have successfully overcome all rabbinical reservations about its canonicity. Early Christians harbored similar doubts; as late as the fourth century when the Western church had accepted Esther in its Bible, some Eastern Church authorities continued to question it. The sixteenth-century Protestant reformer Martin Luther wished it had never been written.

In the Jewish scriptures ("Tanakh"), the book of Esther appears in the third section, the Writings ("Ketubim"); coming after Ecclesiastes, it is the last of the five festal scrolls ("Megillot"). Esther is read twice through on the Jewish festival Purim. In Christian Bibles the book is grouped with the Historical Books, after Ezra and Nehemiah, in recognition of the story's setting in the Persian period (550–333 BCE).

Complicating Esther's place in the biblical canon are more than a hundred additional verses in the Greek (Septuagint) version that do not appear in surviving Hebrew manuscripts. These verses are excluded from their Bibles by Jews and Protestants, while Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians accept them. A translation of the full Greek text of Esther, including these additions, is part of the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books in most editions of this Bible.

AUTHORSHIP, DATE, AND LITERARY HISTORY

Esther contains some folktale motifs, but its many allusions to other biblical texts, most notably the Joseph story (Gen 37–48), suggest a literate and cultured author, probably from a socially prominent Jewish family in Persia. The anonymous author makes a case for living a full Jewish life within the strictures imposed by the alien Diaspora environment. The version of Esther contained in the Hebrew Bible was probably composed in the early Hellenistic period (late fourth or early third century BCE).

In light of the extra Greek verses mentioned above, as well as a slightly different version of Esther preserved in a few Greek manuscripts, the existing biblical (canonical) version of Esther clearly evolved over time; many scholars, for example, doubt that the Purim festival figured in earlier versions of the Esther story.

CONTENTS AND INTERPRETATION

Although the action of Esther takes place over a period of ten years in the reign of the Persian King Ahasuerus, the ten chapters of the story progress swiftly. The narrative relates how Esther came to be queen (in place of the disgraced Vashti) and how a rivalry between her uncle Mordecai and his enemy Haman threatened the entire Jewish community. Through Esther's cleverness and boldness the plot was foiled, and the Jews were given permission to defend themselves. The story serves, perhaps secondarily, as the background for the Jewish holiday of Purim.

Despite the setting and the author's familiarity with Persian customs, vocabulary, and names, Esther is not a work of history but a historical novella, that is, a fictional story within a historical framework. Ahasuerus is probably meant to be Xerxes I of Persia (486–465 BCE), but there is no historical evidence for a Queen Vashti or for a Jewish queen, much less a Queen Esther. The concept of immutable "laws of the Persians and the Medes" (1.19) appears only in Esther. The story's purpose is to entertain, but more importantly to demonstrate the inevitability of retributive justice and, paradoxically, the need for oppressed minorities to act shrewdly and boldly for that justice to prevail. In addition, the book's historical tone legitimates the festival of Purim, which was probably a Babylonian or Persian holiday adopted by Diaspora Jews. Purim is not mentioned in the rest of the Bible.

As a woman, Esther herself mirrors the marginal and sometimes precarious status of Diaspora Jews. The author, in fact, may be advocating a measure of accommodation with the larger Gentile world by ignoring the question of how a good Jew like Esther can justify marrying a Gentile and inevitably violating Jewish dietary rules.

The most intractable interpretive problem of Esther centers on God. Because God is never explicitly named in Esther, scholars are divided as to whether the author excluded divine participation altogether or intended to imply that God was active behind the scenes. The ambiguous reference in 4.14 to help "from another quarter" has been invoked to argue both positions. The Greek additions to Esther took care to mention God frequently, thereby resolving this interpretive dilemma and, incidentally, providing an instance of early Jewish biblical interpretation at work.

GUIDE TO READING

For the fullest appreciation of the story, readers should keep in mind that Esther's narrative style overflows with exaggeration and hyperbole: the duration of royal feasts, the silliness of the king's first decree, Esther's excessive beauty regimen, and the body count of the Jews' victims. Furthermore, in Esther one encounters a surprisingly modern tension between various forms of comedy—such as satire, irony, and farce—and tragedy. The author has adroitly bound these together and balanced them within the narrative by complex patterns of symmetries, reversals, foreshadowing, and recurring motifs. For example, the story begins and ends with a feast, while additional banquets punctuate the narrative at key moments. Royal edicts, often highly ironic, similarly mark the course of the action. At different moments leading characters mirror each other directly or in reverse. The disobedient queen Vashti is deposed, but new queen Esther triumphantly defies royal law. Esther successfully begs the king for the lives of her people whom Haman has doomed; Haman in vain supplicates Esther for his own life. The most cleverly constructed moment of the story occurs in ch 6 when Haman suddenly finds himself in the humiliating position of presenting the royal reward he expected himself to his nemesis, Mordecai, instead.

While the main characters in Esther are essentially stereotypes without distinctive personalities, one character does change over the course of the story. Esther begins as a passive figure, notable only for her beauty and obedient nature. Since all the women in the harem are beautiful, presumably it is her exceptional sexual skills that win her the crown. However, after Mordecai's challenge to Esther in 4.13–14, Esther seems to embrace her Jewishness; with this self-recognition, Esther becomes the decisive actor in the story, risking her life, issuing orders to Mordecai, and, later, to the king himself. Ultimately, it is on Esther's authority, albeit in concert with Mordecai, that Purim is established, making Esther the only woman to authorize a Jewish religious tradition.

Mary Joan Winn Leith

1 This happened in the days of Ahasuerus, the same Ahasuerus who ruled over one hundred twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia.[a] [2] In those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, [3] in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his officials and ministers. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were present, [4] while he displayed the great wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and pomp of his majesty for many days, one hundred eighty days in all.

[5] When these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in the citadel of Susa, both great and small, a banquet lasting for seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. [6] There were white cotton curtains and blue hangings tied with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings[b] and marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and colored stones. [7] Drinks were served in golden goblets, goblets of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. [8] Drinking was by flagons, without restraint; for the king had given orders to all the officials of his palace to do as each one desired. [9] Furthermore, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women in the palace of King Ahasuerus.

[10] On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who attended him, [11] to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing the royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the officials her beauty; for she was fair to behold. [12] But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs. At this the king was enraged, and his anger burned within him.

[13] Then the king consulted the sages who knew the laws[c] (for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and custom, [14] and those next to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven officials of Persia and Media, who had access to the king, and sat first in the kingdom): [15] "According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus conveyed by the eunuchs?" [16] Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, "Not only has Queen Vashti done wrong to the king, but also to all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. [17] For this deed of the queen will

[a] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*
[b] Or *rods*
[c] Cn: Heb *times*

1.1–9: King Ahasuerus holds a feast. 1: *Ahasuerus* (Ezra 4.6; not the same as in Dan 9.1 or Tob 14.15) is probably Xerxes I (486–465 BCE) whose Persian Empire from *India* (Indus Valley) to *Ethiopia* (Heb "Cush," modern Sudan and Ethiopia) included some twenty satrapies (Herodotus 3.89) subdivided into *provinces*. **2:** *Susa*, Ahasuerus's winter capital in northwestern Iran, 180 mi (400 km) east of ancient Babylon. The *citadel* was a fortified section of the palace. **3–4:** Greek writers mention sumptuous feasts held by Persian kings. The *banquet*, with its exaggerated length of *one hundred and eighty days* (see Jdt 1.16), is the first of several that occur at key moments in the story. **5–6:** *Garden . . . curtains . . . couches*, the extravagance emphasizes power and wealth. **8:** *Drinking was . . . without restraint*, demonstrating the king's characteristic permissiveness, excess, and lack of control over his court (cf. 3.11; 5.6; 7.2), which foreshadows his later inability to control Queen Vashti. **9:** *Vashti*, a Persian name meaning "beloved." Xerxes I's queen was Amestris (Herodotus 7.61); no *Vashti* appears in any ancient records. Vashti's *banquet for the women* emphasizes the separate, gendered spheres of king and queen, a factor in Esther's later bravery.

1.10–22: Queen Vashti's downfall. 10: A person *merry with wine* (Prov 15.15) may come to grief (see 5.9; 1 Sam 25.36; 2 Sam 13.28; Dan 5.2). *Eunuchs* were castrated males who served in the Persian court. The list of their names lends the story an air of authenticity. **12:** This episode occurs in reverse in 5.2 when Esther comes uninvited into the king's presence. **13–18:** A satirical moment: the king's *sages who knew the laws* inflate a domestic dispute into a national crisis. **14:** Only the closest royal advisers enjoyed free *access to the king* (see 4.11). The seven *officials* have Persian names. The fear of a feminine insurrection against patriarchal order lies just below the surface of many ancient myths and legends. Contrary to Memucan's dire imaginings, the real danger will

be made known to all women, causing them to look with contempt on their husbands, since they will say, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.' [18] This very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will rebel against[a] the king's officials, and there will be no end of contempt and wrath! [19] If it pleases the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be altered, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. [20] So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, vast as it is, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike."

[21] This advice pleased the king and the officials, and the king did as Memucan proposed; [22] he sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, declaring that every man should be master in his own house.[b]

2 After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her. [2] Then the king's servants who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. [3] And let the king appoint commissioners in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in the citadel of Susa under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; let their cosmetic treatments be given them. [4] And let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This pleased the king, and he did so.

[5] Now there was a Jew in the citadel of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite. [6] Kish[c] had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with King Jeconiah of Judah, whom King Nebuchadnezzar of

[a] Cn: Heb *will tell*
[b] Heb adds *and speak according to the language of his people*
[c] Heb *a Benjaminite* [6]*who*

come in the form of a conspiracy by palace bodyguards (2.21). **19:** *To another who is better than she* uses the same words as Samuel's rejection of Saul in favor of David (1 Sam 15.28). No sources outside the Bible indicate that the *laws of the Persians and the Medes* could *not be altered* (8.8; Dan 6.8,12), but here the phrase subtly contrasts excessive legalism with true justice. This *royal order* is the first in a series of edicts by the king. **20:** An instance of narrative irony: by decreeing that *all women* must *give honor to their husbands*, the king draws attention to his own failure to control his wife. **22:** Persian royal pronouncements were issued in Aramaic, the official language of Persian diplomacy, as well as in the *language*s of subject peoples (see Ezra 4.7,17). *Letters*, the Persian postal system was renowned (Herodotus 8.98).

2.1–18: Esther becomes queen. 1–4: The king agrees to seek a new queen. 1: *Remembered* (i.e., positively; see Gen 40.14); the king may be regretting his treatment of Vashti but cannot risk losing face by reversing his earlier decision (1.19). **2:** Patriarchal societies insist on a *virgin* bride to ensure the paternity of children within the marriage (see Ex 22.16; Lev 21.13). In fact, Persian kings could marry women only from certain noble Persian families. **3:** *Let the king appoint commissioners* echoes the Joseph story (see Gen 41.34–35), a biblical text to which the book of Esther often alludes. *Eunuch*, see 1.10n. Eunuchs were especially needed as overseers of the king's *harem* (lit. "house of women"). *Cosmetic treatments* (see vv. 9,12).

2.5–11: Introducing two Jewish heroes: Mordecai and Esther. 5–6: *Mordecai*, a name derived from the Babylonian god Marduk. Mordecai's Benjaminite ancestry includes King Saul (1 Sam 9.1–2), while Haman's genealogy (3.1) connects him to Saul's enemy, the Amalekite King Agag (1 Sam 15). *Jew* (Heb "yehudi"), originally anyone from the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 16.6), is used here in its usual later sense of an adherent to Judaism. Mordecai's presence *in the citadel* (see 1.2n.) probably means he was a minor court official (see 2.19). The Hebrew wording implies it was Mordecai who was exiled with *Judah*'s last king, Jehoiachin (here called *Jeconiah*), when the Babylonian king *Nebuchadnezzar* conquered Judah in 597 BCE (2 Kings 24), over a hundred years earlier. To avoid an unlikely century-old Mordecai, translators have often emended the text to make Mordecai's great-grandfather, Kish, part of the original exile. *Susa*, see 1.2n. **7:** Esther's Hebrew name *Hadassah* means "myrtle." Her Gentile name, *Esther*, derives from Ishtar, Babylonian goddess of sexual allure and war, or from the Persian

Babylon had carried away. 7 Mordecai[a] had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his cousin, for she had neither father nor mother; the girl was fair and beautiful, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter. 8 So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in the citadel of Susa in custody of Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Hegai, who had charge of the women. 9 The girl pleased him and won his favor, and he quickly provided her with her cosmetic treatments and her portion of food, and with seven chosen maids from the king's palace, and advanced her and her maids to the best place in the harem. 10 Esther did not reveal her people or kindred, for Mordecai had charged her not to tell. 11 Every day Mordecai would walk around in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was and how she fared.

12 The turn came for each girl to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their cosmetic treatment, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics for women. 13 When the girl went in to the king she was given whatever she asked for to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. 14 In the evening she went in; then in the morning she came back to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines; she did not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

15 When the turn came for Esther daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had adopted her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther was admired by all who saw her. 16 When Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus in his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, 17 the king loved Esther more than all the other women; of all the virgins she won his favor and devotion, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 Then the king gave a great banquet to all his officials and ministers—"Esther's banquet." He also granted a holiday[b] to the provinces, and gave gifts with royal liberality.

19 When the virgins were being gathered together,[c] Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. 20 Now Esther had not revealed her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had charged her; for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. 21 In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and conspired to assassinate[d] King Ahasuerus. 22 But the matter came to

[a] Heb *He*
[b] Or *an amnesty*
[c] Heb adds *a second time*
[d] Heb *to lay hands on*

word for "star," or both. Like other Jewish exiles (Dan 1.6–7) Esther has both a Hebrew and a Babylonian name. **9:** In winning the *favor* of Hegai, Esther resembles Joseph in the house of Potiphar (Gen 39.2–6) and Daniel at the Babylonian court (Dan 1.9). Unlike Daniel (1.8), Esther appears unconcerned with Jewish dietary rules.

2.12–18: Esther becomes queen. 14: The impossibility of seeing the king again unless *summoned by name* foreshadows Esther's dilemma in 4.11–16. **15:** As Esther takes her fateful step toward queenship, her father's name (*Abihail*) is supplied in the manner of preexilic queens of Judah (see 1 Kings 15.2; 22.42; 2 Kings 15.33). In asking only for what Hegai *advised*, Esther demonstrates the characteristic prudence that will continue to serve her well. **16:** *Tebeth*, December-January. *In the seventh year of his reign*, Ahasuerus has been testing queen candidates now for about four years. **17:** Cf. Gen 37.3. **18:** *Esther's banquet*, probably a wedding feast, foreshadows the two she gives later (5.5; 6.14–7.1), as well as the feast of Purim (9.22). A *holiday*, declared by a king on special occasions, was primarily economic (see Jer 34.8–11), often involving relief from tribute obligations, taxes, debt-slavery, and military service (see Lev 25.10–11). *Gifts* foreshadows 9.22.

2.19–23: Mordecai and Esther save the king's life. 19: *The king's gate*, the gathering place for royal officials. **20:** Esther's silence about *her kindred or her people* indicates her compliant nature and heightens suspense. **21:** Some interpreters of Esther have seen divine intervention in this and later mysterious coincidences (see

the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. 23 When the affair was investigated and found to be so, both the men were hanged on the gallows. It was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

3 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the officials who were with him. 2 And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and did obeisance to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance. 3 Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" 4 When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would avail; for he had told them that he was a Jew. 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance to him, Haman was infuriated. 6 But he thought it beneath him to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, having been told who Mordecai's people were, Haman plotted to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur—which means "the lot"—before Haman for the day and for the month, and the lot fell on the thirteenth day[a] of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. 8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and separated among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not appropriate for the king to tolerate them. 9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, so that they may put it into the king's treasuries." 10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 The king said to Haman, "The money is given to you, and the people as well, to do with them as it seems good to you."

12 Then the king's secretaries were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language; it was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's ring. 13 Letters were sent by couri-

[a] Cn Compare Gk and verse 13 below: Heb *the twelfth month*

4.14; 6.1–3). *Conspired to assassinate*, see 3.6n. **23:** *Hanged on the gallows* (lit. "on a tree"), i.e., by impalement, a disgraceful death, a foreshadowing of 5.14; 7.9–10; 9.13–14. *The book of the annals*, an official record of royal acts (cf. 10.2; 1 Kings 14.19,29; 2 Chr 25.26; 32.32).

3.1–15: Haman plots to annihilate the Jews. 1: *Agagite*, descended from King Agag the Amalekite (see 2.5n.). **2:** Suggestions for why *Mordecai did not bow down* include ancestral enmity between Mordecai and Haman (see 2.5n.) or that Mordecai, like contemporary Greeks, abhorred as dishonorable the Persian custom of abasing oneself on the ground to superiors. **4:** *Day after day* echoes Joseph's rejection of Potiphar's wife (Gen 39.10). **6:** In 2.21 the Heb verb *to destroy* is translated "assassinate" and *plotted* as "conspired." The identical wording sets up a parallel between Haman's plot and that of the conspirators in 2.21–23. **7:** *The twelfth year*, Esther has been queen for five years. The reference to *pur*, a Babylonian loanword for "lot," may have been inserted by a later editor to connect the plot of Esther more closely with the Purim festival (see 9.20–32n.). Passover occurs in *Nisan* (March-April), the first month of the Babylonian and Jewish year. Traditional Jewish interpretation drew elaborate parallels between the Esther story and Passover. *Adar*, February-March. **8:** Haman begins with the truth: the Jews were indeed *scattered and separated* (Zech 7.14) and, like other subject peoples, their statutes (Deut 4.5–6) were different. He slides into falsehood in asserting that Jews *do not keep the king's laws*. **9:** *Ten thousand talents of silver* is an astronomical sum, the equivalent of hundreds of millions of US dollars. **10:** The *signet ring* authorizes Haman to sign documents in the king's name (3.12; 8.2,8; cf. Gen 41.41–42; 1 Kings 21.8–9). The first appearance of Haman's epithet, *enemy of the Jews* (8.1; 9.10,24). **12:** Another irony: the deadly *edict* goes

ers to all the king's provinces, giving orders to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. [14] A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation, calling on all the peoples to be ready for that day. [15] The couriers went quickly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.

4 When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; [2] he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. [3] In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

[4] When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them. [5] Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. [6] Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, [7] and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. [8] Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people.

[9] Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. [10] Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, [11] "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days." [12] When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, [13] Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. [14] For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." [15] Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, [16] "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." [17] Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

5 On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, opposite the king's hall. The

out on the day before Passover (v. 7n.; Ex 12.6; Lev 23.5). It is issued in various *languages*; see 1.22n. **13:** *Couriers*, see 1.22n. **15:** *Citadel of Susa,* see 1.2n.

4.1–17: Mordecai persuades Esther to risk her life to save her people. 1: *Sackcloth and ashes* and torn clothing were traditional signs of mourning and repentance (2 Sam 3.31; Job 42.6; Dan 9.3; Jon 3.6). **2:** No one rendered ritually unclean by mourning could *enter the king's gate*. **3:** *Fasting* was believed to influence the deity (Lev 16.29–31; Judg 20.26; 2 Sam 12.16; 1 Kings 21.27; Jon 3.5,8; Ezra 8.21–23; Joel 1.14; 2.12–14; 1 Macc 3.47). **4–10:** Esther, her Jewish identity still secret, is unaware of the edict. **6:** The city *square* is a traditional place of public mourning (Amos 5.16; Isa 15.3; Jer 48.38). **8:** *Susa*, see 1.2n. **11:** Like other biblical heroes called upon to save their people (Ex 3.11; 4.10; Judg 6.15; Jer 1.6), Esther initially objects. *I myself have not been called to come in to the king,* see 2.14. **14:** *From another quarter*, perhaps a reference to divine providence (see 2.21n.). *Who knows?* Often precedes an expression of hope for divine mercy (2 Sam 12.22; Joel 2.14; Jon 3.9). **16–17:** Esther's request for a community fast foreshadows her religious authority in 9.29. *If I perish*, Esther voices resignation or selfless dedication (see Gen 43.14).

king was sitting on his royal throne inside the palace opposite the entrance to the palace. 2 As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favor and he held out to her the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the top of the scepter. 3 The king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom." 4 Then Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet that I have prepared for the king." 5 Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther desires." So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. 6 While they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, "What is your petition? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." 7 Then Esther said, "This is my petition and request: 8 If I have won the king's favor, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet that I will prepare for them, and then I will do as the king has said."

9 Haman went out that day happy and in good spirits. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and observed that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was infuriated with Mordecai; 10 nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home. Then he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh, 11 and Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the ministers of the king. 12 Haman added, "Even Queen Esther let no one but myself come with the king to the banquet that she prepared. Tomorrow also I am invited by her, together with the king. 13 Yet all this does me no good so long as I see the Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate." 14 Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged on it; then go with the king to the banquet in good spirits." This advice pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.

6 On that night the king could not sleep, and he gave orders to bring the book of records, the annals, and they were read to the king. 2 It was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had conspired to assassinate[a] King Ahasuerus. 3 Then the king said, "What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." 4 The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. 5 So the king's servants told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." The king said, "Let him come in." 6 So Haman

[a] Heb *to lay hands on*

5.1–8: Esther before the king. 2: Esther resembles women who plead on another's behalf (1 Sam 25.24–31; 2 Sam 14.4–17). *Favor*, see 2.9,17 (Ex 12.36). **3:** Three times the king will offer *half of my kingdom* (v. 6; 7.2), exaggeration for emphasis. Typical of folktales, the third offer (7.2) succeeds. **4:** *Banquet*, see 1.3–4n. Food, reassuring and nurturing, is a common motif in stories of women confronting powerful men; Esther works indirectly to achieve her goal (Judg 5.25; Prov 9.1–5; see Jdt 10.5; 12.1,17–20).

5.9–14: Haman's happiness is spoiled. 9: *Good spirits*, the same term is used of Ahasuerus ("merry") in 1.10. **10–14:** *Zeresh* is an exemplary son-bearing wife (5.11; 9.7–10); as Esther's negative counterpart, Zeresh loyally counsels her husband. Haman's boasting sets him up as an arrogant fool ripe for a fall, a theme also found in wisdom literature (Prov 11.28; 13.3; 16.5,18; 27.1; 29.20). *Gallows*, see 2.23n. *Fifty cubits*, ca. 72 ft (22 m), an exaggerated height. Only *the king* can order an execution.

6.1–13: Mordecai's triumph. This masterpiece of ironic narrative uses alliteration, repetition, understatement, and reversal. **1–2:** The king's insomnia, a traditional folktale device (Dan 6.18; 1 Esd 3.3), is not explained and is another instance of opportune fate in Esther (see 2.9,15,17,21; 3.7; 4.14; 5.2; 6.13). *Annals*, see 2.23n. Herodotus (8.85,90) notes that Persian kings kept records of courtiers' noble deeds. **6:** *Whom the king wishes to*

came in, and the king said to him, "What shall be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor?" Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king wish to honor more than me?" 7 So Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king wishes to honor, 8 let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and a horse that the king has ridden, with a royal crown on its head. 9 Let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials; let him[a] robe the man whom the king wishes to honor, and let him[a] conduct the man on horseback through the open square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor.'" 10 Then the king said to Haman, "Quickly, take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to the Jew Mordecai who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned." 11 So Haman took the robes and the horse and robed Mordecai and led him riding through the open square of the city, proclaiming, "Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor."

12 Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate, but Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. 13 When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom your downfall has begun, is of the Jewish people, you will not prevail against him, but will surely fall before him."

14 While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman off to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

7 1 So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. 2 On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." 3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. 4 For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king."[b] 5 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?" 6 Esther said, "A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. 7 The king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that the king had determined to destroy him. 8 When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman had thrown himself on the couch where Esther was reclining; and the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my

[a] Heb *them*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

honor, the phrase is repeated six times in vv. 6–11. The king's omission of the name parallels Haman's concealment of the identity of those he intended to annihilate (3.8). **8:** *Royal robes*, a gesture of favor (Gen 37.3; 41.42; 1 Sam 18.4; 1 Kings 1.33). *Crown*, an ornament for the horse's head depicted on Mesopotamian and Persian reliefs. **11:** The *open square,* previously the site of Mordecai's mourning (4.6), now witnesses his honor. **12:** *Head covered*, a sign of grief (2 Sam 15.30; 19.4; Jer 14.4), which foreshadows Haman's own downfall.

6.14–7.10: Esther's second banquet and Haman's fall. 7.2: *Half of my kingdom*, see 5.3n. **3:** No longer self-effacing (see 2.20n.; 5.4n.) Esther seizes the right moment to speak directly of herself and of her people. **4:** *Sold*, probably a reference to Haman's bribe in 3.11 (see 4.7; but note the metaphorical use of the verb in Deut 32.30; Judg 2.14; 3.8; 4.2,9; 10.7). *To be destroyed*, etc., Esther quotes from the royal edict (3.13). *Damage to the king*, perhaps the king would be shamed if his queen were dishonored. **6:** Like Esther before the king in 15.5, now Haman is *terrified before the king and the queen*. **8:** Following common custom (8.3; 1 Sam 25.23–24; 2 Kings 4.27), Haman tries to supplicate the queen by falling at her feet. His gesture contrasts with Mordecai's in 3.2. *Assault the queen*, Ahasuerus mistakes Haman's posture as a sexual assault, an unpardonable affront to both male and royal honor and, as such, a capital offense. *They covered Haman's face* probably to protect the king from ritual pollution by association with a condemned criminal; access to the Persian king (1.14; 4.11) was restricted for

own house?" As the words left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. [9] Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." [10] So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

8 On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews; and Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her. [2] Then the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. So Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

[3] Then Esther spoke again to the king; she fell at his feet, weeping and pleading with him to avert the evil design of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews. [4] The king held out the golden scepter to Esther, [5] and Esther rose and stood before the king. She said, "If it pleases the king, and if I have won his favor, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I have his approval, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote giving orders to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king. [6] For how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming on my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?" [7] Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to the Jew Mordecai, "See, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows, because he plotted to lay hands on the Jews. [8] You may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring; for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked."

[9] The king's secretaries were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews and to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia,[a] one hundred twenty-seven provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language. [10] He wrote letters in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed them with the king's ring, and sent them by mounted couriers riding on fast steeds bred from the royal herd.[b] [11] By these letters the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to assemble and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, with their children and women, and to plunder their goods [12] on a single day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. [13] A copy of the writ was to be issued as a decree in every province and published to all peoples, and the Jews were to be ready on that day to take revenge on their enemies. [14] So the couriers, mounted on their swift royal steeds, hurried out, urged by the king's command. The decree was issued in the citadel of Susa.

[15] Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king, wearing royal robes of blue

[a] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

religious as well as political reasons. **9–10:** *Gallows*, see 2.23n. Poetic justice prevails (cf. Prov 26.27).

8.1–17: Mordecai rises to power and counteracts the anti-Jewish edict. Reversals abound in this chapter (see 1 Sam 2.1–10). **1:** In 3.9, Haman offered the king money; now the king gives Haman's wealth to Esther. **2:** Haman's exalted position becomes Mordecai's with the transfer of the king's signet ring (see v. 8; 3.10n). **3:** The edict against the Jews still stands. **5:** *Devised by Haman*, Esther diplomatically dissociates the king from the royal edict. **8:** The king's earlier edict *cannot be revoked* (see 1.19n.), but a new edict can neutralize the former's intent. **9:** The verse follows the same general structure as 3.12–13 (see 1.19–22) while reversing the effect. *Sivan*, May-June. *Language,* see 1.22n. **11:** *Allowed*, not commanded. *Destroy . . . annihilate* (the same wording appears in 3.13). The hyperbolic style and the pattern of reversals and retribution, rather than any real historical event, account for the excess of bloodshed to come (9.5–16). **12:** The date of the intended extermination (3.7,13) becomes a day of triumph and relates to the Purim festival (see 9.21). *Adar*, February-March. **14:** See 1.22n. *Citadel*

and white, with a great golden crown and a mantle of fine linen and purple, while the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. 16 For the Jews there was light and gladness, joy and honor. 17 In every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict came, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a festival and a holiday. Furthermore, many of the peoples of the country professed to be Jews, because the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

9 Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, when the king's command and edict were about to be executed, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain power over them, but which had been changed to a day when the Jews would gain power over their foes, 2 the Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who had sought their ruin; and no one could withstand them, because the fear of them had fallen upon all peoples. 3 All the officials of the provinces, the satraps and the governors, and the royal officials were supporting the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them. 4 For Mordecai was powerful in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces as the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful. 5 So the Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, slaughtering, and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them. 6 In the citadel of Susa the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred people. 7 They killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, 8 Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, 9 Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, Vaizatha, 10 the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews; but they did not touch the plunder.

11 That very day the number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king. 12 The king said to Queen Esther, "In the citadel of Susa the Jews have killed five hundred people and also the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled." 13 Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day's edict, and let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows." 14 So the king commanded this to be done; a decree was issued in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. 15 The Jews who were in Susa gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and they killed three hundred persons in Susa; but they did not touch the plunder.

16 Now the other Jews who were in the king's provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and gained relief from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them; but they laid no hands on the plunder. 17 This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness.

of Susa, see 1.2n. **15–17:** Mordecai's attire contrasts with 4.1, as the Jews' mourning in 4.1–4 turns to joy. **16:** *Light and gladness, joy and honor* contrast with 4.3. **17:** *Professed to be Jews*, this translation is possible, but the Heb may simply mean that Gentiles joined the Jews in their resistance (see 9.3), not that they converted to Judaism. An earlier version of the book may have ended here with no mention of the festival.

9.1–10.3: The origins of Purim. 9.1–19: The Jews triumph over their enemies. 1: A reminder that the king's edict against the Jews still stands; the terms of the second edict allow the Jews to defend themselves. *Adar,* February-March. **2–4:** The Jews' victory is described in language reminiscent of holy war, the Exodus, and the conquest of Canaan. Opposition to the Jews is implied by *no one could withstand them* (Josh 23.9). *The fear of them*, a supernatural terror common in holy war (Ex 15.14–16; Josh 2.8–12; Ps 105.38). **4:** Mordecai's power resembles that of Moses (Ex 11.3). **6:** *Citadel of Susa*, see 1.2n. **7–10:** Haman boasted unwisely about his many sons (5.11). Hebrew manuscripts arrange the names of Haman's ten sons in unusual formations. The names are recited in a single breath during Purim synagogue services. **10:** The note that the Jews did not *plunder* (as in vv. 15,16; contrast 3.13 and 8.11) is a reminder of the Agag story (see 2.5; 3.1) where the Jews plundered to their own hurt (1 Sam 15.9). **12–15:** At Esther's *request* (5.3,6; 7.2) the king grants the Jews of Susa (as distinct from the *citadel of Susa*) a second day of revenge and allows them to dishonor Haman further by hanging (impaling, see 2.23n.) the corpses of his sons in public (Josh 8.29; 10.26; 1 Sam 17.54; 31.10). Notice of the extra day is probably

18 But the Jews who were in Susa gathered
on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth,
and rested on the fifteenth day, making that
a day of feasting and gladness. 19 Therefore
the Jews of the villages, who live in the open
towns, hold the fourteenth day of the month
of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting, a
holiday on which they send gifts of food to
one another.

20 Mordecai recorded these things, and
sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the
provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and
far, 21 enjoining them that they should keep
the fourteenth day of the month Adar and
also the fifteenth day of the same month,
year by year, 22 as the days on which the Jews
gained relief from their enemies, and as the
month that had been turned for them from
sorrow into gladness and from mourning into
a holiday; that they should make them days
of feasting and gladness, days for sending
gifts of food to one another and presents to
the poor. 23 So the Jews adopted as a custom
what they had begun to do, as Mordecai had
written to them.

24 Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite,
the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against
the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur—
that is "the lot"—to crush and destroy them;
25 but when Esther came before the king, he
gave orders in writing that the wicked plot
that he had devised against the Jews should
come upon his own head, and that he and
his sons should be hanged on the gallows.
26 Therefore these days are called Purim, from
the word Pur. Thus because of all that was
written in this letter, and of what they had
faced in this matter, and of what had hap-
pened to them, 27 the Jews established and ac-
cepted as a custom for themselves and their
descendants and all who joined them, that
without fail they would continue to observe
these two days every year, as it was writ-
ten and at the time appointed. 28 These days
should be remembered and kept throughout
every generation, in every family, province,
and city; and these days of Purim should
never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor
should the commemoration of these days
cease among their descendants.

29 Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along
with the Jew Mordecai, gave full written
authority, confirming this second letter about
Purim. 30 Letters were sent wishing peace and
security to all the Jews, to the one hundred
twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of
Ahasuerus, 31 and giving orders that these
days of Purim should be observed at their
appointed seasons, as the Jew Mordecai and
Queen Esther enjoined on the Jews, just as
they had laid down for themselves and for
their descendants regulations concerning
their fasts and their lamentations. 32 The
command of Queen Esther fixed these prac-
tices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing.

10 King Ahasuerus laid tribute on the land
and on the islands of the sea. 2 All the
acts of his power and might, and the full ac-

a device to explain why city Jews celebrated Purim for two days and country Jews only one (see vv. 18–19). **18–19:** Jews today observe Purim with *feasting* and *gifts of food* (see 2.9, "portion of food"; Neh 8.10).

9.20–32: The inauguration of the feast of Purim. The emphasis upon the written word, a particular concern in postexilic Judaism, was probably intended to legitimize a festival not mentioned in the Torah (cf. the origin of Hanukkah: 1 Macc 4.56–59; 2 Macc 1.1–2.28; 10.1–8). **20:** *Near and far*, Isa 57.19. **22:** Purim occurs not on the day of the Jews' military triumph but on the day they obtained their *relief. Sorrow into gladness*, Isa 61.3; Jer 31.13. **23:** Ex 24.3. **24–26:** A plot summary that differs slightly from the book. Esther's name does not appear in the Heb text of v. 25 and has been added by the translator. The festival came to be called Purim for the lot, Heb "pur" (pl. "purim"), which Haman cast (see 3.7n.). **24:** *Crush* (Heb "hummam"), a wordplay on Haman's name. **28:** *Remembered; commemoration*, see Ex 13.3; 20.8. **29–32:** Probably added later. The Heb text is extremely corrupt and the verses do not appear in some ancient versions. **30:** *Peace and security*, the wording suggests Purim fulfills the prophecy of Zech 8.19 (see Isa 39.8; Jer 33.6) and therefore the humanly inaugurated festival is legitimate. **31:** *Fasts*, not the Jewish Fast of Esther, which came to be universally observed on the thirteenth of Adar only beginning in the ninth century CE. **32:** Queen Esther is the only woman in the Bible credited with establishing a religious observance.

10.1–3: Postscript: the greatness of Ahasuerus and Mordecai. 1: This seemingly irrelevant comment may imply that the king prospered with Mordecai's assistance (see Gen 47.1–26). **2:** *Written in the annals*, a standard

count of the high honor of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the annals of the kings of Media and Persia?
3 For Mordecai the Jew was next in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was powerful among the Jews and popular with his many kindred, for he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his descendants.

formula for historical reports in Kings and Chronicles (1 Kings 14.19,29; 2 Chr 25.26; 32.32). **3:** The book ends without reference to Esther. Rather, Mordecai is the model of a successful Diaspora Jew and of Jews living harmoniously in the Gentile world.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE POETICAL AND WISDOM BOOKS

PLACEMENT AND CONTENTS

The poetical and wisdom books are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. The creation of a canonical division called the "Poetical Books" is a relatively late development. In Jewish tradition these five books are included in the Writings, the third division of the canon; their order varies in different sources. The earliest evidence for seeing these five books as a unit comes from the second century CE, though it took many centuries for these five books, in the arrangement found here, to be recognized as the third section of the Bible. The order of these books was variable, and some traditions placed them at the end of the Christian Old Testament, while others put them as the second part of that book immediately following the Torah or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Its current placement in English Bibles follows some manuscript traditions, which most likely sought to organize the first section of the Bible by placing the Torah, the most authoritative section, first, followed by works about the past (the Historical Books), books about the present (the Poetical Books), and books about the future (the Prophetic Books). This arrangement, which places the prophets last, would be especially significant once the Hebrew Bible became the Old Testament and was seen as an introduction to the New Testament. The Prophetic Books would then immediately precede the Gospels as prophecy followed by fulfillment.

The five Poetical Books were written or collected at widely different times and consist of a number of literary types: love poetry (the Song of Solomon), Temple liturgy (most of Psalms), and wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes). It is also likely that they entered the canon for quite different reasons: Psalms was used for prayers; the Song of Solomon was probably first canonized as an ancient love poem used in wedding ceremonies; while Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes may have been placed together in the canon because all three belong to a category of writings known as wisdom literature. These books thus do not form a coherent unit, especially when compared to other canonical divisions, such as the Historical Books or the Prophetic Books.

"Wisdom literature" describes works that share, as their focus, reflection on universal human concerns, especially the understanding of individual experiences and the maintenance of ordered relationships that lead both to success on the human plane and to divine approval. Books classified by scholars as "wisdom literature" are thus in some ways a departure from the concerns of other biblical books. They do not focus primarily on the nation of Israel and on its great formative historical memories, such as the Exodus from Egypt, on Jerusalem and the Temple. They do not mention covenant, as the central theological notion that elsewhere in the Bible binds together God, the people of Israel, and the land of Israel. In more recent scholarship, the concept of "wisdom" has been criticized as too elastic and amorphous. Indeed, the three wisdom books in this collection are remarkably different from one another: Proverbs suggests that the righteous are rewarded and do not suffer; the book of Job profoundly challenges this view; while Ecclesiastes, in contrast to both Job and Proverbs, is deeply skeptical of the utility of wisdom. We must recognize that "wisdom" is a modern category, deriving from the beginning of the twentieth century, and thus Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes were not originally grouped together on generic grounds. On the other hand, they share a thematic interdependence. Proverbs is representative of a type of ancient Near Eastern thought that looked for pattern and repetition in nature and in the moral life. In this tradition, the regular recurrence of natural phenomena could provide an analogy to guide human beings in their social interactions:

> As charcoal is to hot embers and wood to fire,
> so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife (Prov 26.21).

The inevitability of the natural occurrence is mirrored in the inevitability of the social one. This kind of thinking then was extended to moral behavior, with the argument that good behavior, like good farming practice, will be rewarded:

Anyone who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit,
and anyone who takes care of a master will be honored (Prov 27.18).

Job and Ecclesiastes relate to this widespread ancient Near Eastern tradition in different ways. Job denies the inevitability of rewards for living an upright life and decisively refutes the idea that human suffering is always deserved. Ecclesiastes treats the idea of inevitability in a different way: The natural repetitions of seasons, tasks, and occupations become an image of futility, in which people are "like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare" (9.12), powerless to understand their own destiny. The themes of the wisdom tradition are continued in the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books of the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), both of which combine didactic themes and style familiar especially from the book of Proverbs with retrospective summaries of Israel's history.

Although these five books are loosely described as Poetical Books, they are not all poetry, nor are all biblical poetic works found in this canonical section. Although Ecclesiastes contains some poetical sections, such as the poem of 3.1–8 ("For everything there is a season"), or quoted poetic proverbs (e.g., 7.1–6), the book is predominantly prose. Additionally, the nature of the poetry in these books is very different, ranging from the highly structured, largely static poetry of Proverbs, to the intensely erotic, more free-flowing poetry of Song of Solomon.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BIBLICAL POETRY

These books do, as noted above, incorporate a large amount of poetry, so it is appropriate to here examine the basic structures of biblical poetry. Poetry is a cross-cultural phenomenon: Most cultures distinguish between an everyday type of discourse (prose), and heightened discourse (poetry). This heightening may be accomplished in a number of different ways, including the use of figuration (e.g., metaphor, simile), meter, and certain types of sound patterning, such as alliteration and rhyme. Yet there is no cross-cultural pattern for poetry. Thus Hebrew poetry, unlike its classical English counterpart, has neither (true) rhythm nor rhyme; nevertheless, it is poetic in that it uses certain devices in significant enough concentration to distinguish it from everyday speech, or prose. The prose-poetry distinction is relative rather than absolute; as in English, we may speak of poetic prose and prosaic poetry. Thus, "pure prose" and "pure poetry" should be seen as opposites on a continuum, within which a large variety of possibilities occur in the Bible as in other literary traditions.

The main shared characteristic between typical English poetry and biblical poetry is the use of figuration. This may be seen, for example, in Ps 23. The central image of this psalm is introduced by the metaphor, "The Lord is my shepherd" (v. 1). The following verses unpack or detail the meaning of this metaphor, noting in vv. 2–3 how God, the ideal shepherd, tends his people/sheep:

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

Psalm 1 is characterized by a set of two contrasting similes: the righteous

. . . are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither (v. 3),

while the wicked "are like chaff that the wind drives away" (v. 4). The Song of Solomon is especially rich in similes and metaphors, as in the beginning of ch 2:

I am a rose of Sharon,
a lily of the valleys.

As a lily among brambles,
so is my love among maidens.
As an apple tree among the trees of the wood,
so is my beloved among young men.
With great delight I sat in his shadow,
and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

The main characteristic of biblical poetry, nevertheless, is not figuration, but parallelism, in which most poetic lines may be divided into two (or sometimes three) parts; the second part of the line is intimately connected to the first part, and typically seconds it in some way. For example, Ps 6.2 reads:

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.

The verse clearly divides into two more or less equal sections, and each element in the first part is mirrored, seconded, or paralleled in the second: Be gracious to me || heal me; O Lord || O Lord; for I am languishing || for my bones are shaking with terror. This parallelism, which is not typical of biblical prose, serves as the backbone of biblical poetry.

Since the eighteenth century, it has been customary to see three main types of parallelism in the Bible: synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic. The quotation above from Ps 6.2 is an example of synonymous parallelism. Antithetical parallelism can be seen in Prov 10.1:

A wise child makes a glad father,
but a foolish child is a mother's grief.

In this balanced, two-part line, "a wise child" is antithetical, or opposite, to "a foolish child," and "makes a glad father" is antithetical to "is a mother's grief." In synthetic parallelism, the second part of the line completes the thought of the first part, and is neither the same nor the opposite—both parts are needed to complete the thought. For example, Song 1.9 reads:

I compare you, my love,
to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots.

Here the second part concludes the idea of the first.

The appropriateness of the three labels—synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic—which were accepted in biblical scholarship for two centuries, has been called into question on several grounds. First, some have noted that languages have no true synonyms; thus "synonymous parallelism" is a misleading term. Furthermore, very often two parallel words can be similar, but are not truly synonymous, as may be seen in the example from Ps 6.2: "I am languishing" || "my bones are shaking with terror." The term antithetical parallelism has been questioned because not all elements of part B are the antithesis of part A. This may be seen in the example from Prov 10.1, where "child" is used in both parts A and B; a true antithesis might contrast a "wise child" with a "foolish parent." Finally, "synthetic" has been criticized as too vague a term. These criticisms are fair. Nevertheless, the three terms, if understood as ideal types from which actual lines may deviate to a greater or lesser extent, remain useful.

A much more serious criticism of the classical model emerged in the middle 1980s. Before that, many scholars believed that parallelism is formulaic, and the second half of the poetic line typically adds little to the line, but merely seconds it. Several scholars have suggested just the opposite, that the second part heightens or extends the first. Thus, the typical biblical verse should be read "A, and even more so, B." According to this model, which has gained substantial support in the last three decades, we would not read Ps 6.2b, "O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror" as a type of filler that merely restates "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing." Rather we would understand the verse as a whole as: "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing," and moreover, "O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror," where the claim

"for my bones are shaking with terror" is a more vivid description that intensifies the verse's opening "for I am languishing." Sometimes it is quite clear that the second part of the verse does not merely parallel the first but does go beyond it in some significant fashion, and thus justifies this newer model. Yet there are cases in which the second part actually does seem to function as a filler, carrying little if any semantic weight, let alone intensifying the first. For example, the major image of Ps 121 is the ability of God to protect the individual. This is expressed at the psalm's center, where God is imagined metaphorically as a "shade" (v. 5) from the intense Mediterranean sun. The psalm continues (v. 6): "The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night." Clearly, the second part, "nor the moon by night" is not an intensification; in fact, it makes no sense, since no one in ancient Israel was afflicted with moonburn or moonstroke. The second part here is a(n antithetical) filler and carries no semantic weight. It should be seen as part of an ancient Near Eastern and biblical pattern of word pairs, where a particular word (e.g., "sun" or "father") automatically evokes a related ("synonymous" or "antithetical") word (e.g., "moon" or "mother").

Thus, parallelism is much more complicated than would appear on the surface. Clearly it is characterized by sets of lines, each of which may be divided into two parts, typically of the same length and mirroring each other on the semantic, syntactic, and phonological levels. It is unclear if the second should typically be read as an intensification of the first, or as a filler that carries little or no semantic value. This uncertainty is extremely frustrating, not only because it leaves us unsure how to read much of biblical poetry, especially the extent to which we do or do not need to pay close attention to the second half of the line, but also because our understanding of biblical poetry will affect our reconstruction of many Israelite institutions. To return to Prov 10.1—"A wise child makes a glad father, but a foolish child is a mother's grief"—if we follow the older understanding of parallelism, the second half is largely a filler, indicating that the father had the major role in the child's upbringing in ancient Israel, while if we follow the newer understanding, where the second intensifies the first, the mother was primarily responsible for the child.

Another area that has engendered significant controversy over the last few decades concerns the extent to which meter or rhythm existed in biblical poetry. Much of this debate concerns the definition of meter. In English and other modern Western languages, meter is generally understood as a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables; if this is how we should understand it in biblical poetic texts, these texts in their current form lack meter or rhythm. Metrical patterns can only be found in biblical texts if they are emended or reconstructed extensively. There is, however, a tendency for the parts of each line, in most poetic works, to be approximately the same length. There is some possibility that this reflects the remnant of some metrical system, and that at an earlier time, each part had not only the same length, but the same meter, but this pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables has been lost as a result of changes in the pronunciation of ancient Hebrew over time. More likely, the similarity of length is part of the larger system of parallelism, which encouraged each part to mirror its counterpart in length, as well as in semantic, syntactic, and phonological structure.

Scholars have until recently been primarily concerned with the line as the main unit of biblical poetry. This is not really surprising, given how foreign biblical parallelism is to the modern Western (but not the ancient Near Eastern) ear. This interest in the line has obscured the significance of the strophe or stanza and of the poem as a whole. But the last few decades have seen a legitimate return to these larger units. For example, it had become a habit when studying passages like Job 3 to concentrate solely on the parallelism of lines like v. 5:

> Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
> Let clouds settle upon it;
> let the blackness of the day terrify it.

Now, in addition to this type of analysis, scholars study how the poet uses images of day and night, light and darkness, throughout the chapter, in order to create this exquisite poem. This is not, however, an either/or proposition: By studying how the individual line functions as poetry and how these lines join together (sometimes) into stanzas, which combine into complete poems, we gain a much fuller appreciation and understanding of these Poetical Books.

AUTHORSHIP

At least four of the five Poetical Books cohere in terms of their traditional authorship. Many of the Psalms contain superscriptions or titles incorporating "of David," and many early Jewish and Christian traditions attribute

all 150 of the Psalms to David. Proverbs 1.1 ("The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel"), 10.1, and 25.1 explicitly attribute (sections of) that book to Solomon. Ecclesiastes, in its opening chapter, presents itself as the work of "the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem" (1.12; cf. 1.1); premodern Jewish and Christian tradition understood this royal teacher to be Solomon, who is described in 1 Kings as being exceedingly rich, just like the protagonist of Ecclesiastes. Finally, the Song of Solomon opens with an explicit (but secondary) note concerning its author: "the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's." Given the clear connection of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon to David and Solomon, it is not surprising that some early Christian interpreters connected Job as well to the period of Solomon. This canonical division of five books thus likely came into being as the compilations connected to the early kings David and his son Solomon, and was only secondarily labeled the "Poetical Books." The traditional attributions of authorship, however, have been rejected by modern scholars; see the Introduction to each book for a detailed discussion.

JOB

NAME AND LOCATION IN CANON

The book bears the name of its principal character, Job, a righteous man who is afflicted by God, apparently unjustly, and who demands restitution. In Jewish tradition the book of Job belongs with the poetical books in the division called the Writings (Ketubim). Printed Hebrew Bibles place Job after Psalms and Proverbs, although other positions are found in earlier Hebrew manuscripts and lists. In older Christian Bibles, Job was sometimes placed with the historical books and sometimes with the poetical books; but its consistent place now is as the first of the poetical books, preceding Psalms.

AUTHORSHIP, DATE OF COMPOSITION, AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The book is anonymous, and it offers few clues to its historical context or date of composition. Most scholars would date it between the seventh and fourth centuries BCE, but its story is set in much older times.

LITERARY HISTORY, STRUCTURE, AND CONTENTS

Many scholars have proposed that the prose prologue and epilogue reflect a tale about Job older than the poetic dialogues. In the sixth century BCE the prophet Ezekiel mentions Job, along with Noah, the hero of the Flood story (Gen 6–9), and Dan'el, as heroes who saved others by their righteousness (Ezek 14.14,20).

The frame of the book is the prose prologue and epilogue (chs 1–2; 42.7–17). Within that frame are the poetic dialogues: first, three cycles of speeches by Job and his friends (chs 3–31) plus the Elihu speeches (chs 32–37), and second, two speeches by the LORD, each followed by a response from Job (38.1–42.6). The third cycle of speeches by Job and his friends presents many problems, and it is possible that the original order of the book is no longer correctly preserved. It has also commonly been thought that the speeches of Elihu (chs 32–37) and the poem on wisdom (ch 28) are later additions to the book's first edition, but a tendency among scholars to regard the book as a unified whole is becoming noticeable.

INTERPRETATION

The book of Job is perhaps the most sustained piece of theological writing in the Hebrew Bible, and it is unique in the Bible for its sympathetic portrayal of differing theological points of view. The theme of the book is often described as the problem of suffering, but it is rather that of the injustice of undeserved suffering. By the standards of his day, Job's suffering can only be a sign that he is a great sinner; resisting that implication, he demands that God explain why he, a righteous man, is being so badly treated. More than that, he reasons that his case shows that God is not governing the world in justice, and he argues that the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous in general are further evidence of God's neglect of justice. When he replies to Job, God speaks only of his designs in creating the universe and does not mention the issue of justice, no doubt implying that Job is right, that justice is not a primary divine concern.

Among the books of the Bible, Job is highly unusual, and, unsurprisingly, its force has often been misunderstood or evaded. In the older history of interpretation, the book was commonly viewed as a repository of wise sayings, and its overall theme was little appreciated. In our own time, it is recognized as a major work of world literature, capable of diverse interpretations.

GUIDE TO READING

The chapters most essential for understanding the narrative and the argument are: chs 1–2 (the prologue); 3–11 (the first cycle of dialogues between Job and the friends); 29–31 (Job's final speech); 38.1–42.6 (the divine speeches, with Job's responses); 42.7–17 (the epilogue).

David J. A. Clines

1 There was once a man in the land of
Uz whose name was Job. That man was
blameless and upright, one who feared God
and turned away from evil. [2] There were born
to him seven sons and three daughters. [3] He
had seven thousand sheep, three thousand
camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hun-
dred donkeys, and very many servants; so
that this man was the greatest of all the peo-
ple of the east. [4] His sons used to go and hold
feasts in one another's houses in turn; and
they would send and invite their three sisters
to eat and drink with them. [5] And when the
feast days had run their course, Job would
send and sanctify them, and he would rise
early in the morning and offer burnt offerings
according to the number of them all; for Job
said, "It may be that my children have sinned,
and cursed God in their hearts." This is what
Job always did.

[6] One day the heavenly beings[a] came to
present themselves before the LORD, and
Satan[b] also came among them. [7] The LORD
said to Satan,[b] "Where have you come
from?" Satan[b] answered the LORD, "From
going to and fro on the earth, and from
walking up and down on it." [8] The LORD said
to Satan,[b] "Have you considered my servant
Job? There is no one like him on the earth,
a blameless and upright man who fears God
and turns away from evil." [9] Then Satan[b]
answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for
nothing? [10] Have you not put a fence around
him and his house and all that he has, on
every side? You have blessed the work of his
hands, and his possessions have increased
in the land. [11] But stretch out your hand
now, and touch all that he has, and he will
curse you to your face." [12] The LORD said to
Satan,[b] "Very well, all that he has is in your
power; only do not stretch out your hand
against him!" So Satan[b] went out from the
presence of the LORD.

[13] One day when his sons and daughters
were eating and drinking wine in the eldest
brother's house, [14] a messenger came to Job
and said, "The oxen were plowing and the
donkeys were feeding beside them, [15] and
the Sabeans fell on them and carried them
off, and killed the servants with the edge of
the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you."
[16] While he was still speaking, another came
and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven
and burned up the sheep and the servants,
and consumed them; I alone have escaped
to tell you." [17] While he was still speaking,
another came and said, "The Chaldeans
formed three columns, made a raid on the
camels and carried them off, and killed
the servants with the edge of the sword;
I alone have escaped to tell you." [18] While
he was still speaking, another came and
said, "Your sons and daughters were eating
and drinking wine in their eldest brother's
house, [19] and suddenly a great wind came
across the desert, struck the four corners of
the house, and it fell on the young people,

[a] Heb *sons of God*
[b] Or *the Accuser*; Heb *ha-satan*

1.1–2.13: Prologue. The prose prologue contains five scenes, artistically arranged: the first, third, and fifth scenes (1.1–5,13–22; 2.7–13) take place on earth, the second and fourth (1.6–12; 2.1–6) in heaven. All the earthly characters, including Job, remain ignorant throughout the book of what takes place on the heavenly plane. **1.1–5:** The naïve language, in the style of a folktale, evokes a distant past. *The land of Uz* is Edom, southeast of Israel (cf. Jer 25.20; Lam 4.21). Job is not an Israelite; but he is a worshiper of the true God, although he, along with his friends, calls him "El," "Eloah," and "Elohim" (all meaning "God"), and "Shadday" ("the Almighty"), not "Yahweh" ("the LORD"). **2:** *Seven sons*, a perfect number. **4:** *Hold feasts . . . in turn*, lit. "each on his day," presumably on birthdays. **5:** *Cursed*, the Heb text has the word "blessed" here, apparently as a euphemism or pious scribal correction (so also in 1.11; 2.5,9; see also 1 Kings 21.13). **6–12:** The gathering of the divine council in heaven (cf. 1 Kings 22.19–22; Ps 82.1) includes "the Satan," i.e., "the adversary" of Job and other humans (cf. Zech 3.1), not of God; he is not the "devil" of later Jewish and Christian literature (see textual note *b*). Here he acts as God's eyes and ears on earth. He questions whether Job's righteousness is for its own sake or for the sake of its reward. **13–22:** Four messengers announce four disasters, from all directions: *Sabeans* come from the south (Sheba), *Chaldeans* from the north, the lightning (*fire of God*) from the west, with storms sweeping

and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you."

20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. 21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing.

2 One day the heavenly beings[a] came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan[b] also came among them to present himself before the LORD. 2 The LORD said to Satan,[b] "Where have you come from?" Satan[c] answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." 3 The LORD said to Satan,[b] "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." 4 Then Satan[b] answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives.[d] 5 But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." 6 The LORD said to Satan,[b] "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

7 So Satan[b] went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 Job[e] took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse[f] God, and die." 10 But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. 12 When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. 13 They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

[a] Heb *sons of God*
[b] Or *the Accuser*; Heb *ha-satan*
[c] Or *The Accuser*; Heb *ha-satan*
[d] Or *All that the man has he will give for his life*
[e] Heb *He*
[f] Heb *Bless*

in from the Mediterranean, the *great wind* from the eastern desert. **21:** Job praises the LORD for both good and evil, proving God's confidence in him justified. The *mother's womb* to which Job will return is that of mother earth (cf. Gen 3.19). **2.1–6:** Now again in the heavenly council, the LORD remarks that Job *still persists in his integrity*, i.e., continues blameless as ever. **4:** *Skin for skin!* Job has saved his own skin by piously accepting the death of his children; if God now attacks Job himself, Job will attack God, by cursing him (see 1.5n.). **7–13:** The fourth scene dissolves into the fifth: God authorizes the suffering, and immediately the Satan afflicts Job. **7:** *Loathsome sores*, some unspecified skin disease (cf. 7.5; 30.30). **8:** To express his sense of desolation and isolation, Job removes himself from society and sits on the rubbish heap outside his city, performing rituals of mourning (cf. Ezek 27.30; Jon 3.6). He uses broken pieces of pottery he finds there to scratch himself to relieve the itchiness. **9:** The outcome of all Job's piety has been to rob his wife of her ten children, her social standing, and her livelihood. When she urges him to *curse God* (see 1.5n.), and so bring his misery to an end with death, he mildly replies that she is speaking like *any foolish woman*, i.e., low-class, irreligious women, abandoning their family's standards of formal and proper behavior. *Job did not sin with his lips*, it is not implied that he sinned in what he thought. Job has disproved the Satan's claim that Job would sin with his lips by cursing God. **11–13:** Job, being a chieftain of great importance (1.3), has other high-ranking friends. These three, all apparently from other towns in Edom, have kindly intentions toward him, but when they see how badly he is suffering they do not offer him any consolation, but treat him as if he were already dead, throwing *dust . . . upon their heads*, a mourning ritual (see Josh 7.6; Lam 2.10), and silently mourning him *seven days and seven nights* (see Gen 50.10; Sir 22.12).

3 After this Job opened his mouth and
cursed the day of his birth. [2] Job said:
[3] "Let the day perish in which I was born,
and the night that said,
'A man-child is conceived.'
[4] Let that day be darkness!
May God above not seek it,
or light shine on it.
[5] Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
Let clouds settle upon it;
let the blackness of the day terrify it.
[6] That night—let thick darkness seize it!
let it not rejoice among the days of the
year;
let it not come into the number of the
months.
[7] Yes, let that night be barren;
let no joyful cry be heard[a] in it.
[8] Let those curse it who curse the Sea,[b]
those who are skilled to rouse up
Leviathan.
[9] Let the stars of its dawn be dark;
let it hope for light, but have none;
may it not see the eyelids of the
morning—
[10] because it did not shut the doors of my
mother's womb,
and hide trouble from my eyes.

[11] "Why did I not die at birth,
come forth from the womb and expire?
[12] Why were there knees to receive me,
or breasts for me to suck?
[13] Now I would be lying down and quiet;
I would be asleep; then I would be at
rest
[14] with kings and counselors of the earth
who rebuild ruins for themselves,
[15] or with princes who have gold,
who fill their houses with silver.
[16] Or why was I not buried like a stillborn
child,
like an infant that never sees the light?
[17] There the wicked cease from troubling,
and there the weary are at rest.
[18] There the prisoners are at ease together;
they do not hear the voice of the
taskmaster.
[19] The small and the great are there,
and the slaves are free from their
masters.

[20] "Why is light given to one in misery,
and life to the bitter in soul,
[21] who long for death, but it does not come,
and dig for it more than for hidden
treasures;
[22] who rejoice exceedingly,
and are glad when they find the grave?
[23] Why is light given to one who cannot see
the way,

[a] Heb *come*
[b] Cn: Heb *day*

3.1–42.6: The dialogues.

3.1–11.20: First cycle of speeches.

3.1–26: Job's first speech. After the grandeur and deliberateness of the prologue (chs 1–2), the reader is suddenly plunged into the dramatic turmoil of the poem (3.1–42.6); the external description of suffering gives way to Job's inner experience. Its three strophes express a wish he had never been born (vv. 3–10); failing that, a wish he had died at birth (vv. 11–19); failing that, a wish that he, and people suffering as he does, could simply die when they are ready (vv. 20–26). **3–10:** A curse naturally concerns the future, and a curse on the day of his birth (cf. Jer 20.14–18) is a futile curse, for the past cannot be changed. Job wishes that the day of his birth and conception (viewed poetically as one event) could have been blacked out (vv. 4–6a) so that it would not have entered into the calendar of the year (vv. 6b,c); he wishes that the sorcerers who put a curse on days could have made it one of the unlucky days, in which it would have been impossible for his parents to have conceived him or for his mother to have given birth to him (vv. 8a,10a). **8:** Some ancient magicians obviously believed they could *rouse up Leviathan*, the sea-monster (cf. Ps 104.26; Isa 27.1) and dragon of chaos (see 7.12; Ps 74.13–14), who would perhaps swallow up the sun, so causing the darkness of eclipse. **11–19:** If he had to be born, why could he not have died at birth (v. 11a) or, at least, have been stillborn (v. 16)? Death has for him now become sweeter than life, and he compares the quiet peacefulness of the underworld (Sheol; cf. Eccl 6.3–5; Sir 30.3) to his present troubled and anxious lot (vv. 13–19). **14.** Near Eastern kings frequently boasted that they had rebuilt famous ruined cities. **20–26:** Now Job not only asks why he himself has to go on living, but why people in general cannot simply die when they want to (vv. 20–23). **23:** Previously, God's hedge of protection about his life (cf.

whom God has fenced in?
24 For my sighing comes like[a] my bread,
and my groanings are poured out like water.
25 Truly the thing that I fear comes upon me,
and what I dread befalls me.
26 I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
I have no rest; but trouble comes."

4 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:
2 "If one ventures a word with you, will you be offended?
But who can keep from speaking?
3 See, you have instructed many;
you have strengthened the weak hands.
4 Your words have supported those who were stumbling,
and you have made firm the feeble knees.
5 But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;
it touches you, and you are dismayed.
6 Is not your fear of God your confidence,
and the integrity of your ways your hope?

7 "Think now, who that was innocent ever perished?
Or where were the upright cut off?
8 As I have seen, those who plow iniquity
and sow trouble reap the same.
9 By the breath of God they perish,
and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.
10 The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion,
and the teeth of the young lions are broken.
11 The strong lion perishes for lack of prey,
and the whelps of the lioness are scattered.

12 "Now a word came stealing to me,
my ear received the whisper of it.
13 Amid thoughts from visions of the night,
when deep sleep falls on mortals,
14 dread came upon me, and trembling,
which made all my bones shake.
15 A spirit glided past my face;
the hair of my flesh bristled.
16 It stood still,
but I could not discern its appearance.
A form was before my eyes;
there was silence, then I heard a voice:
17 'Can mortals be righteous before[b] God?
Can human beings be pure before[b] their Maker?
18 Even in his servants he puts no trust,
and his angels he charges with error;
19 how much more those who live in houses of clay,
whose foundation is in the dust,
who are crushed like a moth.
20 Between morning and evening they are destroyed;
they perish forever without any regarding it.
21 Their tent-cord is plucked up within them,
and they die devoid of wisdom.'

[a] Heb *before*
[b] Or *more than*

1.10) had ensured his well-being; but now that he wants to die, God's preservation of his life seems an artificial prolongation of his misery, and the hedge has become a prison wall rather than a wall of defense. **26:** Unlike the restfulness of the underworld, which is what he desires, his life has no *rest*, but only *trouble*.

4.1–5.27: Eliphaz's first speech. Eliphaz regards Job as a pious man and urges him not to lose heart, since the innocent never finally suffer. Even the pious are not perfect, however, and may experience reproof and discipline (5.17); but they will soon come to an end (4.6). **4.2–6:** Eliphaz is not scornful in reminding Job how he has comforted others; he believes that Job's good deeds are a reason why God will soon restore him. **7–11:** Eliphaz describes the fate of the wicked, as a contrast to what Job can expect since he is not one of them. **8:** Cf. Hos 10.13; Gal 6.7. **10:** Cf. Ps 58.6. **12–21:** However, not even the angels are perfect (v. 18), still less the righteous (v. 17; cf. 15.14–16; 25.4–6). They are mere mortals, who, unlike the angels, can expire within a single day (v. 20a) and be so insignificant that they can die without anyone noticing (v. 20b) and without their ever attaining wisdom (v. 21b). Eliphaz's dream or waking vision terrified him because of its supernatural source, but the message it

5 "Call now; is there anyone who will
answer you?
To which of the holy ones will you turn?
2 Surely vexation kills the fool,
and jealousy slays the simple.
3 I have seen fools taking root,
but suddenly I cursed their dwelling.
4 Their children are far from safety,
they are crushed in the gate,
and there is no one to deliver them.
5 The hungry eat their harvest,
and they take it even out of the thorns;[a]
and the thirsty[b] pant after their wealth.
6 For misery does not come from the earth,
nor does trouble sprout from the
ground;
7 but human beings are born to trouble
just as sparks[c] fly upward.

8 "As for me, I would seek God,
and to God I would commit my cause.
9 He does great things and unsearchable,
marvelous things without number.
10 He gives rain on the earth
and sends waters on the fields;
11 he sets on high those who are lowly,
and those who mourn are lifted to
safety.
12 He frustrates the devices of the crafty,
so that their hands achieve no success.
13 He takes the wise in their own craftiness;
and the schemes of the wily are brought
to a quick end.
14 They meet with darkness in the daytime,
and grope at noonday as in the night.
15 But he saves the needy from the sword of
their mouth,
from the hand of the mighty.
16 So the poor have hope,
and injustice shuts its mouth.

17 "How happy is the one whom God
reproves;
therefore do not despise the discipline
of the Almighty.[d]
18 For he wounds, but he binds up;
he strikes, but his hands heal.
19 He will deliver you from six troubles;
in seven no harm shall touch you.
20 In famine he will redeem you from
death,
and in war from the power of the
sword.
21 You shall be hidden from the scourge of
the tongue,
and shall not fear destruction when it
comes.
22 At destruction and famine you shall
laugh,
and shall not fear the wild animals of
the earth.
23 For you shall be in league with the
stones of the field,
and the wild animals shall be at peace
with you.
24 You shall know that your tent is safe,
you shall inspect your fold and miss
nothing.
25 You shall know that your descendants
will be many,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Aquila Symmachus Syr Vg: Heb *snare*
[c] Or *birds*; Heb *sons of Resheph*
[d] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*

brought was obvious. Appeals to revelatory experience are unusual in wisdom books, but see 33.15–18. **5.1–7:** Suffering, in fact, has to be expected. Not believing that Job really wants to die (as in ch 3), Eliphaz assumes Job is hoping to escape his suffering. But that is wishful thinking, for suffering is natural for humans; they always bring trouble upon themselves (v. 7 may be better translated "Humans beget suffering for themselves"). Even the angels (*the holy ones*, v. 1) cannot prevent the cycle of cause and effect when humans sin and bring punishment upon themselves. The fools whose *vexation* or resentment and *jealousy* bring them to ruin are a case in point (cf. Prov 12.16; 14.30; Sir 30.24). **8–16:** As in 4.2–6, Eliphaz regards Job as an essentially pious man, who should patiently leave his *cause*, or case, in divine hands (v. 8), since God is a great reverser of fortunes (vv. 11–16). **10–15:** The destructive acts of God (vv. 12–14) are enclosed within the frame of his saving acts (vv. 10–11,15), so the chief effect of this picture of God's working is to give *hope* to the poor (v. 16; contrast Lk 1.51–53). **17–27:** Eliphaz interprets Job's suffering as God's disciplining (cf. Ps 94.12; Prov 3.11–12; Hos 6.1), which is a blessing in itself (v. 17) and that "he who wounds is he who soothes the sore" (v. 18, JB). Job must only recognize and not reject (*despise*, v. 17) God's discipline, and "apply it to yourself" (v. 27, NIV).

and your offspring like the grass of the earth.
[26] You shall come to your grave in ripe old age,
as a shock of grain comes up to the threshing floor in its season.
[27] See, we have searched this out; it is true.
Hear, and know it for yourself."

6 Then Job answered:
[2] "O that my vexation were weighed,
and all my calamity laid in the balances!
[3] For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea;
therefore my words have been rash.
[4] For the arrows of the Almighty[a] are in me;
my spirit drinks their poison;
the terrors of God are arrayed against me.
[5] Does the wild ass bray over its grass,
or the ox low over its fodder?
[6] Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt,
or is there any flavor in the juice of mallows?[b]
[7] My appetite refuses to touch them;
they are like food that is loathsome to me.[b]

[8] "O that I might have my request,
and that God would grant my desire;
[9] that it would please God to crush me,
that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!
[10] This would be my consolation;
I would even exult[b] in unrelenting pain;
for I have not denied the words of the Holy One.
[11] What is my strength, that I should wait?
And what is my end, that I should be patient?
[12] Is my strength the strength of stones,
or is my flesh bronze?
[13] In truth I have no help in me,
and any resource is driven from me.

[14] "Those who withhold[c] kindness from a friend
forsake the fear of the Almighty.[a]
[15] My companions are treacherous like a torrent-bed,
like freshets that pass away,
[16] that run dark with ice,
turbid with melting snow.
[17] In time of heat they disappear;
when it is hot, they vanish from their place.
[18] The caravans turn aside from their course;
they go up into the waste, and perish.
[19] The caravans of Tema look,
the travelers of Sheba hope.
[20] They are disappointed because they were confident;
they come there and are confounded.
[21] Such you have now become to me;[d]
you see my calamity, and are afraid.
[22] Have I said, 'Make me a gift'?
Or, 'From your wealth offer a bribe for me'?
[23] Or, 'Save me from an opponent's hand'?
Or, 'Ransom me from the hand of oppressors'?

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Syr Vg Compare Tg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Cn Compare Gk Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain

6.1–7.21: Job's second speech. 6.1–13: A soliloquy, addressed to no one. In ch 3 Job had only asked why sufferers like him must go on living; but here he actively yearns for immediate death (vv. 8–9). If he could die now, before his suffering leads him into blasphemy, he could at least have the *consolation* of not having *denied the words*, the commandments, of the *Holy One*. Eliphaz has called on Job to be *patient*, but patience needs a *strength* that Job does not have (vv. 11–13). He begins to think of God as his enemy, armed with poisoned *arrows* and with *terrors* as his army (v. 4; cf. Deut 32.23; Lam 2.4). **14–30:** Turning now to the friends, Job accuses them of defrauding him of friendship's debt of *kindness* or, rather, "loyalty" (v. 14), *afraid* that if they identify themselves too closely with Job they too will come under God's judgment (v. 21). **15–17:** The *torrent-bed* and *freshets* are the wadis that are full of water during the rainy seasons but are dry during the summer when water is most needed (cf. Jer 15.18). **18–20:** *Tema* and *Sheba,* areas in northern and southwestern Arabia, respectively.

24 "Teach me, and I will be silent;
make me understand how I have gone wrong.
25 How forceful are honest words!
But your reproof, what does it reprove?
26 Do you think that you can reprove words,
as if the speech of the desperate were wind?
27 You would even cast lots over the orphan,
and bargain over your friend.

28 "But now, be pleased to look at me;
for I will not lie to your face.
29 Turn, I pray, let no wrong be done.
Turn now, my vindication is at stake.
30 Is there any wrong on my tongue?
Cannot my taste discern calamity?

7 "Do not human beings have a hard service on earth,
and are not their days like the days of a laborer?
2 Like a slave who longs for the shadow,
and like laborers who look for their wages,
3 so I am allotted months of emptiness,
and nights of misery are apportioned to me.
4 When I lie down I say, 'When shall I rise?'
But the night is long,
and I am full of tossing until dawn.
5 My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt;
my skin hardens, then breaks out again.
6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
and come to their end without hope.[a]

7 "Remember that my life is a breath;
my eye will never again see good.
8 The eye that beholds me will see me no more;
while your eyes are upon me, I shall be gone.
9 As the cloud fades and vanishes,
so those who go down to Sheol do not come up;
10 they return no more to their houses,
nor do their places know them any more.

11 "Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.
12 Am I the Sea, or the Dragon,
that you set a guard over me?
13 When I say, 'My bed will comfort me,
my couch will ease my complaint,'
14 then you scare me with dreams
and terrify me with visions,
15 so that I would choose strangling
and death rather than this body.
16 I loathe my life; I would not live forever.
Let me alone, for my days are a breath.
17 What are human beings, that you make so much of them,
that you set your mind on them,
18 visit them every morning,
test them every moment?
19 Will you not look away from me for a while,
let me alone until I swallow my spittle?
20 If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of humanity?
Why have you made me your target?
Why have I become a burden to you?
21 Why do you not pardon my transgression
and take away my iniquity?

[a] Or *as the thread runs out*

7.1–21: Turning now to God, Job interweaves his own death-wish with his experience of the futility and misery of human life generally. **9:** *Sheol,* the abode of the dead. **12:** God, far from letting him alone, treats him like one of the legendary monsters of the deep, Yam (*the Sea*) or Tannin (*the Dragon*), who had to be muzzled by God at creation (cf. 3.8n.; 38.8–11; Isa 51.9). **17–18:** A bitter parody of Ps 8.4. The psalm expresses wonder at the high status humans have been given as rulers of the earth despite their apparent insignificance on the cosmic scale. Job's language is a reproof of God for the disproportionate attention God gives to mortals, subjecting them to perpetual hostile scrutiny.

For now I shall lie in the earth;
you will seek me, but I shall not be."

8 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:
2 "How long will you say these things,
and the words of your mouth be a great wind?
3 Does God pervert justice?
Or does the Almighty[a] pervert the right?
4 If your children sinned against him,
he delivered them into the power of their transgression.
5 If you will seek God
and make supplication to the Almighty,[a]
6 if you are pure and upright,
surely then he will rouse himself for you
and restore to you your rightful place.
7 Though your beginning was small,
your latter days will be very great.

8 "For inquire now of bygone generations,
and consider what their ancestors have found;
9 for we are but of yesterday, and we know nothing,
for our days on earth are but a shadow.
10 Will they not teach you and tell you
and utter words out of their understanding?

11 "Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh?
Can reeds flourish where there is no water?
12 While yet in flower and not cut down,
they wither before any other plant.
13 Such are the paths of all who forget God;
the hope of the godless shall perish.
14 Their confidence is gossamer,
a spider's house their trust.
15 If one leans against its house, it will not stand;
if one lays hold of it, it will not endure.
16 The wicked thrive[b] before the sun,
and their shoots spread over the garden.
17 Their roots twine around the stoneheap;
they live among the rocks.[c]
18 If they are destroyed from their place,
then it will deny them, saying, 'I have never seen you.'
19 See, these are their happy ways,[d]
and out of the earth still others will spring.

20 "See, God will not reject a blameless person,
nor take the hand of evildoers.
21 He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,
and your lips with shouts of joy.
22 Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
and the tent of the wicked will be no more."

9 Then Job answered:
2 "Indeed I know that this is so;
but how can a mortal be just before God?

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[b] Heb *He thrives*
[c] Gk Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain

8.1–22: Bildad's first speech. Like all the friends, Bildad believes that suffering is punishment, and that the death of Job's children is proof of their sin. Bildad has less confidence in Job's righteousness than Eliphaz did, and his encouragement to Job depends on a condition, *if you are pure and upright* (v. 6). **2–7:** Job's children are dead, so they must have sinned (v. 4). By contrast, Job himself is not dead, so he must be innocent of anything deserving of death. He has only to *seek God* in prayer (v. 5), and if he is *pure and upright* his prayer will be heard. **8–19:** No effect without a cause, as the case of the wicked shows. **8–10:** Bildad's trust in the wisdom of *bygone generations* instead of *we* [who] *know nothing* is contrasted with Job's reliance on his own experience (6.4–7,30). **20–22:** Bildad believes Job may yet prove to be a *blameless person* (v. 20).

9.1–10.22: Job's third speech. Here is Job's strongest statement so far of his feeling of powerlessness (e.g. 9.3–4,14–20,30–31), his sense of being trapped (9.15,20,27–31), and his belief that God's apparent concern for him throughout his life has not really been for his benefit, but in order to fasten guilt upon him (10.13–14). Novel in this speech is the question of how Job is to be vindicated, that is, shown publicly to be in the right after all. It is a hopeless task to make God declare him innocent (9.2), which eventually throws Job into despair (10.15–16).

3 If one wished to contend with him,
one could not answer him once in a thousand.
4 He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength
—who has resisted him, and succeeded?—
5 he who removes mountains, and they do not know it,
when he overturns them in his anger;
6 who shakes the earth out of its place,
and its pillars tremble;
7 who commands the sun, and it does not rise;
who seals up the stars;
8 who alone stretched out the heavens
and trampled the waves of the Sea;[a]
9 who made the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the chambers of the south;
10 who does great things beyond understanding,
and marvelous things without number.
11 Look, he passes by me, and I do not see him;
he moves on, but I do not perceive him.
12 He snatches away; who can stop him?
Who will say to him, 'What are you doing?'

13 "God will not turn back his anger;
the helpers of Rahab bowed beneath him.
14 How then can I answer him,
choosing my words with him?
15 Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him;
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser.[b]
16 If I summoned him and he answered me,
I do not believe that he would listen to my voice.
17 For he crushes me with a tempest,
and multiplies my wounds without cause;
18 he will not let me get my breath,
but fills me with bitterness.
19 If it is a contest of strength, he is the strong one!
If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?[c]
20 Though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me;
though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.
21 I am blameless; I do not know myself;
I loathe my life.
22 It is all one; therefore I say,
he destroys both the blameless and the wicked.
23 When disaster brings sudden death,
he mocks at the calamity[d] of the innocent.
24 The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
he covers the eyes of its judges—
if it is not he, who then is it?

25 "My days are swifter than a runner;
they flee away, they see no good.

[a] Or *trampled the back of the sea dragon*
[b] Or *for my right*
[c] Compare Gk: Heb *me*
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain

But it has become an ambition that will only grow in attraction for him as the book progresses (cf. 13.13–23; 16.18–21; 19.23–27; 23.2–14). **9.2:** Job is not saying that no one can actually be *just* in the sight of God, but complaining that because God has such power and wisdom he can defeat any human's attempt to be declared righteous or "win his case" (REB) against God; God will not give humans the satisfaction of hearing their innocence affirmed. **5–13:** Job focuses upon the more negative aspects of God's power (vv. 5–7) not in order to picture him as a God of chaos but to emphasize his freedom to act, whether for good or ill. His freedom makes him incomprehensible (v. 10), unaccountable (v. 12), and uncontrollable (v. 13). **9:** *Bear, Orion, Pleiades*, in the translation the familiar names of the star groups in Greek tradition are substituted for the Heb terms; cf. 38.31–33; Am 5.8. **13:** *Rahab*, the legendary sea-monster of chaos, similar to or identical with Leviathan, with whom God did battle at creation (see also 26.12; Ps 89.10; Isa 51.9). **14–24:** Job believes that even if he could bring God to court he would not get vindication. **15:** Job is not going to *appeal for mercy* for that might sound like an admission of guilt. What he wants is vindication, not relief from his sufferings. **17:** *Tempest,* better "storm." **22:** God *destroys both the blameless and the wicked* because he is determined upon hostility to humans. **25–35:** The monologue has turned

[26] They go by like skiffs of reed,
like an eagle swooping on the prey.
[27] If I say, 'I will forget my complaint;
I will put off my sad countenance and
be of good cheer,'
[28] I become afraid of all my suffering,
for I know you will not hold me
innocent.
[29] I shall be condemned;
why then do I labor in vain?
[30] If I wash myself with soap
and cleanse my hands with lye,
[31] yet you will plunge me into filth,
and my own clothes will abhor me.
[32] For he is not a mortal, as I am, that I
might answer him,
that we should come to trial together.
[33] There is no umpire[a] between us,
who might lay his hand on us both.
[34] If he would take his rod away from me,
and not let dread of him terrify me,
[35] then I would speak without fear of him,
for I know I am not what I am thought
to be.[b]

10 "I loathe my life;
I will give free utterance to my
complaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.
[2] I will say to God, Do not condemn me;
let me know why you contend against me.
[3] Does it seem good to you to oppress,
to despise the work of your hands
and favor the schemes of the wicked?
[4] Do you have eyes of flesh?
Do you see as humans see?
[5] Are your days like the days of mortals,
or your years like human years,
[6] that you seek out my iniquity
and search for my sin,
[7] although you know that I am not guilty,
and there is no one to deliver out of
your hand?
[8] Your hands fashioned and made me;
and now you turn and destroy me.[c]
[9] Remember that you fashioned me like
clay;
and will you turn me to dust again?
[10] Did you not pour me out like milk
and curdle me like cheese?
[11] You clothed me with skin and flesh,
and knit me together with bones and
sinews.
[12] You have granted me life and steadfast
love,
and your care has preserved my
spirit.
[13] Yet these things you hid in your heart;
I know that this was your purpose.
[14] If I sin, you watch me,
and do not acquit me of my iniquity.
[15] If I am wicked, woe to me!
If I am righteous, I cannot lift up my
head,
for I am filled with disgrace
and look upon my affliction.
[16] Bold as a lion you hunt me;
you repeat your exploits against me.
[17] You renew your witnesses against me,
and increase your vexation toward me;
you bring fresh troops against me.[d]

[18] "Why did you bring me forth from the
womb?
Would that I had died before any eye
had seen me,
[19] and were as though I had not been,
carried from the womb to the grave.

[a] Another reading is *Would that there were an umpire*
[b] Cn: Heb *for I am not so in myself*
[c] Cn Compare Gk Syr: Heb *made me together all around, and you destroy me*
[d] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *toward me; changes and a troop are with me*

into an address to God. **32–35:** A legal confrontation with God is doomed because the two parties cannot be on the same level (v. 32). Job needs an *umpire* or arbitrator, one who would *lay his hand* upon both parties as a gesture of reconciliation. Since there is no such umpire, Job will have to conduct his lawsuit himself. **10.1–2:** Job's intention to begin a legal controversy with God. **3–7:** Speculation about God's motives for his treatment of Job. **8–17:** The contradiction between God's real and apparent purposes in creating Job and keeping him alive. **9:** Cf. 33.6; Gen 2.7; 3.19; Isa 64.8. **10:** Human conception is pictured as cheese-making: semen, a milk-like substance, is poured into the womb, where, like cheese, it coagulates into the embryo (cf. Ps 139.13–16; Wis 7.2). **18–22:** An appeal for release from God's oppressive presence.

20 Are not the days of my life few?[a]
Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort[b]
21 before I go, never to return,
to the land of gloom and deep darkness,
22 the land of gloom[c] and chaos,
where light is like darkness."

11 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered:
2 "Should a multitude of words go unanswered,
and should one full of talk be vindicated?
3 Should your babble put others to silence,
and when you mock, shall no one shame you?
4 For you say, 'My conduct[d] is pure,
and I am clean in God's[e] sight.'
5 But O that God would speak,
and open his lips to you,
6 and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom!
For wisdom is many-sided.[f]
Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.

7 "Can you find out the deep things of God?
Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?[g]
8 It is higher than heaven[h]—what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?
9 Its measure is longer than the earth,
and broader than the sea.
10 If he passes through, and imprisons,
and assembles for judgment, who can hinder him?
11 For he knows those who are worthless;
when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it?
12 But a stupid person will get understanding,
when a wild ass is born human.[f]

13 "If you direct your heart rightly,
you will stretch out your hands toward him.
14 If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away,
and do not let wickedness reside in your tents.
15 Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish;
you will be secure, and will not fear.
16 You will forget your misery;
you will remember it as waters that have passed away.
17 And your life will be brighter than the noonday;
its darkness will be like the morning.
18 And you will have confidence, because there is hope;
you will be protected[i] and take your rest in safety.
19 You will lie down, and no one will make you afraid;
many will entreat your favor.
20 But the eyes of the wicked will fail;
all way of escape will be lost to them,
and their hope is to breathe their last."

12 Then Job answered:
2 "No doubt you are the people,
and wisdom will die with you.

a Cn Compare Gk Syr: Heb *Are not my days few? Let him cease!*
b Heb *that I may brighten up a little*
c Heb *gloom as darkness, deep darkness*
d Gk: Heb *teaching*
e Heb *your*
f Meaning of Heb uncertain
g Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
h Heb *The heights of heaven*
i Or *you will look around*

11.1–20: Zophar's first speech. Zophar is the least sympathetic of the three friends. His message to Job is simple: you are suffering because God knows that you are a secret sinner (v. 6); therefore repent (vv. 13–14)! **4–6:** Zophar agrees with Job that the real issue is the question of sin. Since it is not obvious that Job is a sinner, his sin must be secret. So bad a sinner is Job that even with all his punishment God is letting Job off lightly (v. 6). **7–12:** God's wisdom is focused on the detection of wrongdoing. **8:** *Sheol,* the abode of the dead. **13–20:** Restoration depends entirely on Job's complete repentance. He must *stretch out* his *hands* in prayer and renounce his present sinfulness. The result will be a clear conscience (*you will lift up your face*) and a sense of security (v. 15).

12.1–20.29: Second cycle of speeches.

3 But I have understanding as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.
Who does not know such things as these?
4 I am a laughingstock to my friends;
I, who called upon God and he answered me,
a just and blameless man, I am a laughingstock.
5 Those at ease have contempt for misfortune,[a]
but it is ready for those whose feet are unstable.
6 The tents of robbers are at peace,
and those who provoke God are secure,
who bring their god in their hands.[b]

7 "But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
8 ask the plants of the earth,[c] and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
9 Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the LORD has done this?
10 In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.
11 Does not the ear test words
as the palate tastes food?
12 Is wisdom with the aged,
and understanding in length of days?

13 "With God[d] are wisdom and strength;
he has counsel and understanding.
14 If he tears down, no one can rebuild;
if he shuts someone in, no one can open up.
15 If he withholds the waters, they dry up;
if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land.
16 With him are strength and wisdom;
the deceived and the deceiver are his.
17 He leads counselors away stripped,
and makes fools of judges.
18 He looses the sash of kings,
and binds a waistcloth on their loins.
19 He leads priests away stripped,
and overthrows the mighty.
20 He deprives of speech those who are trusted,
and takes away the discernment of the elders.
21 He pours contempt on princes,
and looses the belt of the strong.
22 He uncovers the deeps out of darkness,
and brings deep darkness to light.
23 He makes nations great, then destroys them;
he enlarges nations, then leads them away.
24 He strips understanding from the leaders[e] of the earth,
and makes them wander in a pathless waste.
25 They grope in the dark without light;
he makes them stagger like a drunkard.

13 "Look, my eye has seen all this,
my ear has heard and understood it.
2 What you know, I also know;
I am not inferior to you.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *whom God brought forth by his hand*; Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Or *speak to the earth*
[d] Heb *him*
[e] Heb adds *of the people*

12.1–14.22: Job's fourth speech. In the first part, Job addresses his friends (12.2–13.19) and in the second, God (13.20–14.22). The essence of the whole speech is: I want nothing to do with you *worthless physicians* (13.4); I desire to *speak to the Almighty* (13.3). **12.2–13.19:** For the first time Job shows himself contemptuous of the friends. He believes his wisdom is superior to theirs (12.2), for he knows something they do not: that it is possible for a righteous person to be afflicted and, equally, that the deeds of the wicked can go unpunished (vv. 4–6). **7–12:** Job is not addressing the friends, but ironically imagining what they might say to him. **13–25:** This hymn to the destructive power of the Almighty presents Job's new wisdom: God is no calm governor of a well-ordered universe, but an eccentric deity who cannot be comprehended or tamed. His chief characteristic is his upsetting of stable order. **13.1–3:** Nevertheless, Job is determined to argue a lawsuit with God. **4–12:** The friends have been speaking as false witnesses on behalf of God. Although Job has many doubts about God's justice, he does not doubt that God will

3 But I would speak to the Almighty,[a]
and I desire to argue my case with God.
4 As for you, you whitewash with lies;
all of you are worthless physicians.
5 If you would only keep silent,
that would be your wisdom!
6 Hear now my reasoning,
and listen to the pleadings of my lips.
7 Will you speak falsely for God,
and speak deceitfully for him?
8 Will you show partiality toward him,
will you plead the case for God?
9 Will it be well with you when he searches you out?
Or can you deceive him, as one person deceives another?
10 He will surely rebuke you
if in secret you show partiality.
11 Will not his majesty terrify you,
and the dread of him fall upon you?
12 Your maxims are proverbs of ashes,
your defenses are defenses of clay.

13 "Let me have silence, and I will speak,
and let come on me what may.
14 I will take my flesh in my teeth,
and put my life in my hand.[b]
15 See, he will kill me; I have no hope;[c]
but I will defend my ways to his face.
16 This will be my salvation,
that the godless shall not come before him.
17 Listen carefully to my words,
and let my declaration be in your ears.
18 I have indeed prepared my case;
I know that I shall be vindicated.
19 Who is there that will contend with me?
For then I would be silent and die.
20 Only grant two things to me,
then I will not hide myself from your face:
21 withdraw your hand far from me,
and do not let dread of you terrify me.
22 Then call, and I will answer;
or let me speak, and you reply to me.
23 How many are my iniquities and my sins?
Make me know my transgression and my sin.
24 Why do you hide your face,
and count me as your enemy?
25 Will you frighten a windblown leaf
and pursue dry chaff?
26 For you write bitter things against me,
and make me reap[d] the iniquities of my youth.
27 You put my feet in the stocks,
and watch all my paths;
you set a bound to the soles of my feet.
28 One wastes away like a rotten thing,
like a garment that is moth-eaten.

14 "A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble,
2 comes up like a flower and withers,
flees like a shadow and does not last.
3 Do you fix your eyes on such a one?
Do you bring me into judgment with you?
4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?
No one can.
5 Since their days are determined,
and the number of their months is known to you,
and you have appointed the bounds that they cannot pass,

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[b] Gk: Heb *Why should I take . . . in my hand?*
[c] Or *Though he kill me, yet I will trust in him*
[d] Heb *inherit*

punish the friends for their *partiality* toward himself (v. 10) and their lack of objectivity. **13–19:** Ending his address to the friends, Job explains what he will ask of God. Unlike chs 7 and 9–10, where he asked God to stop paying attention to him, he now deliberately calls God into disputation with him (v. 22). It is dangerous (v. 14), suicidal in fact (v. 15); but Job is sure that right is on his side (v. 18). **15:** The traditional translation of the verse (see textual note *c*) is based on an alternate reading of the Hebrew. **20–27:** Job first insists that God bring out in the open what he has against Job, but with two conditions for fairness (v. 20): God must *withdraw* his *hand* of punishment from him, and he must not *terrify* him (v. 21). **24:** *Enemy* (Heb "'oyeb," possibly a wordplay on Job's name ("'iyyob"). **14.1–22:** The focus changes from Job himself to the lot of humanity. Humans are too unimportant for God to scrutinize them as he does Job; he could reasonably overlook their sins. **1:** The expression *born of woman* is simply a synonym for any human being (see 15.14). **7–12:** The hopes of a tree and of humankind are contrasted. A tree that is cut down can

6 look away from them, and desist,[a]
that they may enjoy, like laborers, their days.

7 "For there is hope for a tree,
if it is cut down, that it will sprout again,
and that its shoots will not cease.
8 Though its root grows old in the earth,
and its stump dies in the ground,
9 yet at the scent of water it will bud
and put forth branches like a young plant.
10 But mortals die, and are laid low;
humans expire, and where are they?
11 As waters fail from a lake,
and a river wastes away and dries up,
12 so mortals lie down and do not rise again;
until the heavens are no more, they will not awake
or be roused out of their sleep.
13 O that you would hide me in Sheol,
that you would conceal me until your wrath is past,
that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me!
14 If mortals die, will they live again?
All the days of my service I would wait
until my release should come.
15 You would call, and I would answer you;
you would long for the work of your hands.
16 For then you would not[b] number my steps,
you would not keep watch over my sin;
17 my transgression would be sealed up in a bag,
and you would cover over my iniquity.
18 "But the mountain falls and crumbles away,
and the rock is removed from its place;
19 the waters wear away the stones;
the torrents wash away the soil of the earth;
so you destroy the hope of mortals.
20 You prevail forever against them, and they pass away;
you change their countenance, and send them away.
21 Their children come to honor, and they do not know it;
they are brought low, and it goes unnoticed.
22 They feel only the pain of their own bodies,
and mourn only for themselves."

15 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:
2 "Should the wise answer with windy knowledge,
and fill themselves with the east wind?
3 Should they argue in unprofitable talk,
or in words with which they can do no good?
4 But you are doing away with the fear of God,
and hindering meditation before God.
5 For your iniquity teaches your mouth,
and you choose the tongue of the crafty.
6 Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;
your own lips testify against you.

7 "Are you the firstborn of the human race?
Were you brought forth before the hills?

[a] Cn: Heb *that they may desist*
[b] Syr: Heb lacks *not*

hope for new life; for humans there is none *until the heavens are no more*, i.e., never. If only Sheol, the underworld, could be, not a final resting place without an exit, but a temporary hiding-place from God's scrutiny and anger (v. 13). **14:** A rhetorical question, expecting the answer No! **18–19:** The only expectation humans can have is that God will final. **18-19:** The only expectation humans can have is that God will finally *prevail against them*.

15.1–35: Eliphaz's second speech. 2–16: Eliphaz regards Job's faults as both intellectual and moral. His intellectual mistake is not to realize that even the most perfect human is tainted in God's sight (vv. 14–16). His moral fault is not to bear his suffering with bravery and patience. Whatever Job's original fault, it was minor compared with the sin of his present behavior; it is a sin against himself (v. 6) and against God (v. 13) to speak so one-sidedly and bitterly about God. The very passion of Job's speech is proof that he is in the wrong (vv. 12–13). **2:** *East wind,* the oppressively hot wind from the desert. **4:** *Fear of God* is the emotion of fear proper to a human being in the presence of God. Job's charges against God imply he has lost his due sense of creatureliness. **7:**

8 Have you listened in the council of God?
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?
9 What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that is not clear to us?
10 The gray-haired and the aged are on our side,
those older than your father.
11 Are the consolations of God too small for you,
or the word that deals gently with you?
12 Why does your heart carry you away,
and why do your eyes flash,[a]
13 so that you turn your spirit against God,
and let such words go out of your mouth?
14 What are mortals, that they can be clean?
Or those born of woman, that they can be righteous?
15 God puts no trust even in his holy ones,
and the heavens are not clean in his sight;
16 how much less one who is abominable and corrupt,
one who drinks iniquity like water!

17 "I will show you; listen to me;
what I have seen I will declare—
18 what sages have told,
and their ancestors have not hidden,
19 to whom alone the land was given,
and no stranger passed among them.
20 The wicked writhe in pain all their days,
through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless.
21 Terrifying sounds are in their ears;
in prosperity the destroyer will come upon them.
22 They despair of returning from darkness,
and they are destined for the sword.
23 They wander abroad for bread, saying,
'Where is it?'
They know that a day of darkness is ready at hand;
24 distress and anguish terrify them;
they prevail against them, like a king prepared for battle.
25 Because they stretched out their hands against God,
and bid defiance to the Almighty,[b]
26 running stubbornly against him
with a thick-bossed shield;
27 because they have covered their faces with their fat,
and gathered fat upon their loins,
28 they will live in desolate cities,
in houses that no one should inhabit,
houses destined to become heaps of ruins;
29 they will not be rich, and their wealth will not endure,
nor will they strike root in the earth;[c]
30 they will not escape from darkness;
the flame will dry up their shoots,
and their blossom[d] will be swept away[e] by the wind.
31 Let them not trust in emptiness, deceiving themselves;
for emptiness will be their recompense.
32 It will be paid in full before their time,
and their branch will not be green.
33 They will shake off their unripe grape, like the vine,
and cast off their blossoms, like the olive tree.
34 For the company of the godless is barren,
and fire consumes the tents of bribery.
35 They conceive mischief and bring forth evil
and their heart prepares deceit."

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[c] Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Gk: Heb *mouth*
[e] Cn: Heb *will depart*

Council of God, see 1.6–12n. **14:** *Born of woman,* see 14.1n. **16:** An extreme generalization about humans as compared with God's purity (cf. 25.4–6). **17–35:** This depiction of the miserable life and fearsome fate of the wicked (cf. 18.5–21; 20.4–29) concerns, first, their life-long fear of death (vv. 20–26), and, second, their final destiny (vv. 27–35), that they will die prematurely (vv. 31–33). As always, Eliphaz believes Job is not one of the truly wicked, so this is a depiction of what does not apply to him. But he had better take care that he does not join them in his hostility toward God (v. 25).

16 Then Job answered:
2 "I have heard many such things;
miserable comforters are you all.
3 Have windy words no limit?
Or what provokes you that you keep on talking?
4 I also could talk as you do,
if you were in my place;
I could join words together against you,
and shake my head at you.
5 I could encourage you with my mouth,
and the solace of my lips would assuage your pain.

6 "If I speak, my pain is not assuaged,
and if I forbear, how much of it leaves me?
7 Surely now God has worn me out;
he has[a] made desolate all my company.
8 And he has[a] shriveled me up,
which is a witness against me;
my leanness has risen up against me,
and it testifies to my face.
9 He has torn me in his wrath, and hated me;
he has gnashed his teeth at me;
my adversary sharpens his eyes against me.
10 They have gaped at me with their mouths;
they have struck me insolently on the cheek;
they mass themselves together against me.
11 God gives me up to the ungodly,
and casts me into the hands of the wicked.
12 I was at ease, and he broke me in two;
he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces;
he set me up as his target;
13 his archers surround me.
He slashes open my kidneys, and shows no mercy;
he pours out my gall on the ground.
14 He bursts upon me again and again;
he rushes at me like a warrior.
15 I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin,
and have laid my strength in the dust.
16 My face is red with weeping,
and deep darkness is on my eyelids,
17 though there is no violence in my hands,
and my prayer is pure.

18 "O earth, do not cover my blood;
let my outcry find no resting place.
19 Even now, in fact, my witness is in heaven,
and he that vouches for me is on high.
20 My friends scorn me;
my eye pours out tears to God,
21 that he would maintain the right of a mortal with God,
as[b] one does for a neighbor.
22 For when a few years have come,
I shall go the way from which I shall not return.

17 My spirit is broken, my days are extinct,
the grave is ready for me.
2 Surely there are mockers around me,
and my eye dwells on their provocation.

[a] Heb *you have*
[b] Syr Vg Tg: Heb *and*

16.1–17.16: Job's fifth speech. This is the most disjointed of Job's speeches so far. Several earlier themes recur: he criticizes the friends (16.2–6); he then soliloquizes, lamenting the attacks of God (vv. 7–17); he imagines his possible vindication (vv. 18–22); he makes a lament about the friends (17.1–10); he fears that he will die without being vindicated (vv. 11–16). Unlike his previous speech (chs 12–14), the subject here is always Job himself and not humanity in general. **16.7–17:** Job depicts God's assaults as if they were the attacks by various kinds of opponents, a wild animal (vv. 9–10), a traitor (v. 11), a wrestler (v. 12), an archer (vv. 12c–13a), a swordsman (vv. 13b–14). Cf. Lam 3.1–20. **18–22:** God's wrongful attack on Job will probably lead to Job's death. So he appeals to the earth to take blood revenge for him once he is dead—upon God! **18:** *O earth, do not cover my blood*, is the same kind of cry as Abel's who was unlawfully killed (Gen 4.10). **19:** Even now, while he is still alive, he has a *witness . . . in heaven*, which cannot be God, since God has been nothing but his enemy (vv. 7–14). His witness is his own innocence. **20:** *My friends scorn me*, better translated "It is my cry that is my spokesman." **17.1–16:** Job is confident that he is in the right, but he does not expect he will live to see his innocence vindicated. **1:** He is

3 "Lay down a pledge for me with yourself;
who is there that will give surety for me?
4 Since you have closed their minds to understanding,
therefore you will not let them triumph.
5 Those who denounce friends for reward—
the eyes of their children will fail.

6 "He has made me a byword of the peoples,
and I am one before whom people spit.
7 My eye has grown dim from grief,
and all my members are like a shadow.
8 The upright are appalled at this,
and the innocent stir themselves up against the godless.
9 Yet the righteous hold to their way,
and they that have clean hands grow stronger and stronger.
10 But you, come back now, all of you,
and I shall not find a sensible person among you.
11 My days are past, my plans are broken off,
the desires of my heart.
12 They make night into day;
'The light,' they say, 'is near to the darkness.'[a]
13 If I look for Sheol as my house,
if I spread my couch in darkness,
14 if I say to the Pit, 'You are my father,'
and to the worm, 'My mother,' or 'My sister,'
15 where then is my hope?
Who will see my hope?
16 Will it go down to the bars of Sheol?
Shall we descend together into the dust?"

18 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:
2 "How long will you hunt for words?
Consider, and then we shall speak.
3 Why are we counted as cattle?
Why are we stupid in your sight?
4 You who tear yourself in your anger—
shall the earth be forsaken because of you,
or the rock be removed out of its place?

5 "Surely the light of the wicked is put out,
and the flame of their fire does not shine.
6 The light is dark in their tent,
and the lamp above them is put out.
7 Their strong steps are shortened,
and their own schemes throw them down.
8 For they are thrust into a net by their own feet,
and they walk into a pitfall.
9 A trap seizes them by the heel;
a snare lays hold of them.
10 A rope is hid for them in the ground,
a trap for them in the path.
11 Terrors frighten them on every side,
and chase them at their heels.
12 Their strength is consumed by hunger,[b]
and calamity is ready for their stumbling.
13 By disease their skin is consumed,[c]

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *Disaster is hungry for them*
[c] Cn: Heb *It consumes the limbs of his skin*

not literally at death's door (cf. 16:22) but psychologically he is already in the grip of death. **3:** Since no one will guarantee his innocence, he must ask God to accept his own person as his *pledge.* **8–9:** Job adopts the point of view of the friends. **11–16:** Job falls again into despair, not a despair that robs him of his belief in his own innocence; but a despair that he can ever be shown to be innocent. **13–14:** *The Pit,* another term for Sheol. Job has lost his family and can only expect to join the family of worms in the underworld.

18.1–21: Bildad's second speech. After an opening address to Job (vv. 2–4), this speech contains nothing but a description of the fate of the wicked. This is probably not Bildad's prediction of Job's future but a description of the kind of fate that does not await him (as in his first speech, Bildad does not think Job one of the wicked). Yet he does see in Job, who is fighting a battle between doctrine and experience, someone who is tearing himself to pieces. And he finds Job's demand for a new theology deeply disturbing: *shall . . . the rock be removed out of its place?* (v. 4). **5–21:** Eliphaz's picture of the fate of the wicked in ch 15 focused on how they experience terror and insecurity all their life; but Bildad concentrates on the final days of the wicked, describing how they are trapped by death (vv. 8–10), torn from their dwellings (v. 14), and brought before the lord of the underworld (v.

the firstborn of Death consumes their limbs.
14 They are torn from the tent in which they trusted,
and are brought to the king of terrors.
15 In their tents nothing remains;
sulfur is scattered upon their habitations.
16 Their roots dry up beneath,
and their branches wither above.
17 Their memory perishes from the earth,
and they have no name in the street.
18 They are thrust from light into darkness,
and driven out of the world.
19 They have no offspring or descendant among their people,
and no survivor where they used to live.
20 They of the west are appalled at their fate,
and horror seizes those of the east.
21 Surely such are the dwellings of the ungodly,
such is the place of those who do not know God."

19 Then Job answered:
2 "How long will you torment me,
and break me in pieces with words?
3 These ten times you have cast reproach upon me;
are you not ashamed to wrong me?
4 And even if it is true that I have erred,
my error remains with me.
5 If indeed you magnify yourselves against me,
and make my humiliation an argument against me,
6 know then that God has put me in the wrong,
and closed his net around me.
7 Even when I cry out, 'Violence!' I am not answered;
I call aloud, but there is no justice.
8 He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass,
and he has set darkness upon my paths.
9 He has stripped my glory from me,
and taken the crown from my head.
10 He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone,
he has uprooted my hope like a tree.
11 He has kindled his wrath against me,
and counts me as his adversary.
12 His troops come on together;
they have thrown up siegeworks[a] against me,
and encamp around my tent.

13 "He has put my family far from me,
and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me.
14 My relatives and my close friends have failed me;
15 the guests in my house have forgotten me;
my serving girls count me as a stranger;
I have become an alien in their eyes.
16 I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer;
I must myself plead with him.
17 My breath is repulsive to my wife;
I am loathsome to my own family.
18 Even young children despise me;

[a] Cn: Heb *their way*

14). **13–14:** *Death* was represented in ancient mythology as a king ruling over the underworld; Death's *firstborn* will be one of his offspring, such as disease, and the *terrors* are his agents who drag people from life down into his kingdom.

19.1–29: Job's sixth speech. In this speech there is an address to the friends at beginning, middle, and end (vv. 2–6,21–22,28–29). Between these addresses there is a complaint (vv. 7–20) and an expression of wish, knowledge, and desire (vv. 23–27). **2–6:** Job begins to recognize the friends as his enemies. **3:** *Ten times*, i.e., many times. **4:** Job does not admit to any sin. But if he had sinned, it would not have been a sin against the friends; so it is unfair of them to attack him. **7–12:** To depict the wrongs God has done him, Job deploys a range of images of assault (cf. 16.9,12–14): he is like a townsman who has been robbed (v. 7), a traveler who finds his path blocked and nightfall overtaking him (v. 8), a prince humiliated by a foreign ruler (v. 9), a tree pulled out of the ground (v. 10), a person who finds his friend has become his enemy (v. 11), a city besieged by enemies (v. 12). **13–20:** Here is the literal truth of what Job is experiencing, as distinct from the feelings his experience provoked

when I rise, they talk against me.
19 All my intimate friends abhor me,
and those whom I loved have turned against me.
20 My bones cling to my skin and to my flesh,
and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.
21 Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me!
22 Why do you, like God, pursue me,
never satisfied with my flesh?

23 "O that my words were written down!
O that they were inscribed in a book!
24 O that with an iron pen and with lead
they were engraved on a rock forever!
25 For I know that my Redeemer[a] lives,
and that at the last he[b] will stand upon the earth;[c]
26 and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in[d] my flesh I shall see God,[e]
27 whom I shall see on my side,[f]
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me!
28 If you say, 'How we will persecute him!'
and, 'The root of the matter is found in him';
29 be afraid of the sword,
for wrath brings the punishment of the sword,
so that you may know there is a judgment."

20 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered:
2 "Pay attention! My thoughts urge me to answer,
because of the agitation within me.
3 I hear censure that insults me,
and a spirit beyond my understanding answers me.
4 Do you not know this from of old,
ever since mortals were placed on earth,
5 that the exulting of the wicked is short,
and the joy of the godless is but for a moment?
6 Even though they mount up high as the heavens,
and their head reaches to the clouds,
7 they will perish forever like their own dung;
those who have seen them will say, 'Where are they?'
8 They will fly away like a dream, and not be found;

a Or *Vindicator*
b Or *that he the Last*
c Heb *dust*
d Or *without*
e Meaning of Heb of this verse uncertain
f Or *for myself*

in vv. 7–12. He is isolated and alienated, because his suffering is understood as punishment for sin. **20:** Normally bones are the body's framework, and the flesh and skin cling to them; Job feels so weak that it seems his bones need support. *Escaped by the skin of my teeth*, or rather, with the skin of my teeth, means that Job feels he has been flayed alive, his skin being stripped from every part of his body except his teeth, which of course have no skin. **21:** *Have pity on me*, i.e., stop persecuting me. **23–27:** If his *words*, his claim to innocence, could be chiseled in stone in an inscription (not a *book*, v. 23), God would eventually rise last (rather than *at the last*, v. 25) in the court case to deliver his verdict that would clear Job, even after his death (v. 26a). Nevertheless, what Job really desires is to see his name cleared while he is still alive (v. 26b should probably be translated "Yet, to behold God while still in my flesh—that is my desire, to see him with my own eyes"). **25:** The word *Redeemer* or *Vindicator* should not be capitalized, since the kinsman or champion (as the Heb "go'el" means) is not God (God is his enemy). The only champion Job has is his own innocence, which he has spoken of in 16.18–21 as his witness, his advocate ("he that vouches for me"), and his spokesman. **28–29:** Job turns to the friends again. They say *the root of the matter is found in him*, i.e., he is the author of his own misfortunes; he says they should *be afraid of the sword*, since they have accused him unjustly, and that is a crime.

20.1–29: Zophar's second speech. It is mostly devoted to the theme of the doom of the wicked. But unlike Eliphaz (ch 15), for whom the fate of the wicked is a picture of what Job is not, or Bildad (ch 18), for whom it is a picture of what Job may become, for Zophar it is a picture of what Job will not avoid unless he changes radically.

they will be chased away like a vision of the night.
9 The eye that saw them will see them no more,
nor will their place behold them any longer.
10 Their children will seek the favor of the poor,
and their hands will give back their wealth.
11 Their bodies, once full of youth,
will lie down in the dust with them.

12 "Though wickedness is sweet in their mouth,
though they hide it under their tongues,
13 though they are loath to let it go,
and hold it in their mouths,
14 yet their food is turned in their stomachs;
it is the venom of asps within them.
15 They swallow down riches and vomit them up again;
God casts them out of their bellies.
16 They will suck the poison of asps;
the tongue of a viper will kill them.
17 They will not look on the rivers,
the streams flowing with honey and curds.
18 They will give back the fruit of their toil,
and will not swallow it down;
from the profit of their trading
they will get no enjoyment.
19 For they have crushed and abandoned the poor,
they have seized a house that they did not build.

20 "They knew no quiet in their bellies;
in their greed they let nothing escape.
21 There was nothing left after they had eaten;
therefore their prosperity will not endure.
22 In full sufficiency they will be in distress;
all the force of misery will come upon them.
23 To fill their belly to the full
God[a] will send his fierce anger into them,
and rain it upon them as their food.[b]
24 They will flee from an iron weapon;
a bronze arrow will strike them through.
25 It is drawn forth and comes out of their body,
and the glittering point comes out of their gall;
terrors come upon them.
26 Utter darkness is laid up for their treasures;
a fire fanned by no one will devour them;
what is left in their tent will be consumed.
27 The heavens will reveal their iniquity,
and the earth will rise up against them.
28 The possessions of their house will be carried away,
dragged off in the day of God's[c] wrath.
29 This is the portion of the wicked from God,
the heritage decreed for them by God."

21 Then Job answered:
2 "Listen carefully to my words,
and let this be your consolation.
3 Bear with me, and I will speak;
then after I have spoken, mock on.
4 As for me, is my complaint addressed to mortals?
Why should I not be impatient?
5 Look at me, and be appalled,
and lay your hand upon your mouth.
6 When I think of it I am dismayed,

[a] Heb *he*
[b] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Heb *his*

4–11: The key image here is the disappearance of the wicked. **12–23:** The key image here is eating: nothing the wicked eat brings them lasting benefit. **24–29:** A nightmarish collection of images (weapons, law court, fire, flood) of how inescapable is the final doom of the wicked.

21.1–27.23: Third cycle of speeches.

21.1–34: Job's seventh speech. Job denies the friends' belief that the wicked do not prosper but come to an early grave. **6–16:** The wicked prosper; why is that so? Within three verses Job contradicts Zophar (v. 7; cf. 20.11),

and shuddering seizes my flesh.
7 Why do the wicked live on,
reach old age, and grow mighty in power?
8 Their children are established in their presence,
and their offspring before their eyes.
9 Their houses are safe from fear,
and no rod of God is upon them.
10 Their bull breeds without fail;
their cow calves and never miscarries.
11 They send out their little ones like a flock,
and their children dance around.
12 They sing to the tambourine and the lyre,
and rejoice to the sound of the pipe.
13 They spend their days in prosperity,
and in peace they go down to Sheol.
14 They say to God, 'Leave us alone!
We do not desire to know your ways.
15 What is the Almighty,[a] that we should serve him?
And what profit do we get if we pray to him?'
16 Is not their prosperity indeed their own achievement?[b]
The plans of the wicked are repugnant to me.

17 "How often is the lamp of the wicked put out?
How often does calamity come upon them?
How often does God[c] distribute pains in his anger?
18 How often are they like straw before the wind,
and like chaff that the storm carries away?
19 You say, 'God stores up their iniquity for their children.'
Let it be paid back to them, so that they may know it.
20 Let their own eyes see their destruction,
and let them drink of the wrath of the Almighty.[a]
21 For what do they care for their household after them,
when the number of their months is cut off?
22 Will any teach God knowledge,
seeing that he judges those that are on high?
23 One dies in full prosperity,
being wholly at ease and secure,
24 his loins full of milk
and the marrow of his bones moist.
25 Another dies in bitterness of soul,
never having tasted of good.
26 They lie down alike in the dust,
and the worms cover them.

27 "Oh, I know your thoughts,
and your schemes to wrong me.
28 For you say, 'Where is the house of the prince?
Where is the tent in which the wicked lived?'
29 Have you not asked those who travel the roads,
and do you not accept their testimony,
30 that the wicked are spared in the day of calamity,
and are rescued in the day of wrath?
31 Who declares their way to their face,
and who repays them for what they have done?

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[b] Heb *in their hand*
[c] Heb *he*

Bildad (v. 8; cf. 18.19), and Eliphaz (v. 9; cf. 5.24). **13:** *Sheol*, the abode of the dead. **17–21:** Only rarely do the wicked suffer. If the friends say, Well, their children suffer (v. 19), Job replies: Retribution should strike the people who deserve it! **17:** Job challenges the notion that the wicked do not live long (cf. 18.5; Prov 13.9; 24.20). **18:** Job disputes the axiom that the wicked are *straw before the wind* (cf. Ps 35.5) or *like chaff that the storm carries away* (cf. Ps 1.4). **19–21:** *You say* is not in the Hebrew; alternatively, the sentence may be translated, "Is God storing up punishment for their children?" **22–26:** Being good or bad makes no difference; the same fate happens to all. **27–34:** *I know your thoughts,* the friends have been thinking: the wicked suffer, Job is suffering, therefore Job belongs with the wicked. But the wicked do not suffer, says Job; ask any traveler, who will tell tales of famous wicked persons who are spared retribution (v. 30), are never denounced (v. 31), and whose tombs are watched over to protect them from grave robbers (v. 32).

32 When they are carried to the grave,
a watch is kept over their tomb.
33 The clods of the valley are sweet to them;
everyone will follow after,
and those who went before are innumerable.
34 How then will you comfort me with empty nothings?
There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood."

22 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:
2 "Can a mortal be of use to God?
Can even the wisest be of service to him?
3 Is it any pleasure to the Almighty[a] if you are righteous,
or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?
4 Is it for your piety that he reproves you,
and enters into judgment with you?
5 Is not your wickedness great?
There is no end to your iniquities.
6 For you have exacted pledges from your family for no reason,
and stripped the naked of their clothing.
7 You have given no water to the weary to drink,
and you have withheld bread from the hungry.
8 The powerful possess the land,
and the favored live in it.
9 You have sent widows away empty-handed,
and the arms of the orphans you have crushed.[b]
10 Therefore snares are around you,
and sudden terror overwhelms you,
11 or darkness so that you cannot see;
a flood of water covers you.
12 "Is not God high in the heavens?
See the highest stars, how lofty they are!
13 Therefore you say, 'What does God know?
Can he judge through the deep darkness?
14 Thick clouds enwrap him, so that he does not see,
and he walks on the dome of heaven.'
15 Will you keep to the old way
that the wicked have trod?
16 They were snatched away before their time;
their foundation was washed away by a flood.
17 They said to God, 'Leave us alone,'
and 'What can the Almighty[a] do to us?'[c]
18 Yet he filled their houses with good things—
but the plans of the wicked are repugnant to me.
19 The righteous see it and are glad;
the innocent laugh them to scorn,
20 saying, 'Surely our adversaries are cut off,
and what they left, the fire has consumed.'

21 "Agree with God,[d] and be at peace;
in this way good will come to you.
22 Receive instruction from his mouth,
and lay up his words in your heart.

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[b] Gk Syr Tg Vg: Heb *were crushed*
[c] Gk Syr: Heb *them*
[d] Heb *him*

22.1–30: Eliphaz's third speech. 2–11: As in his first speech (chs 4–5), Eliphaz believes that Job will be delivered *because of the cleanness of your hands* (v. 30). Surprisingly, however, he here apparently accuses Job of untold wickedness (v. 5), mainly social injustice (vv. 6–9). But he cannot believe that Job has actually *exacted pledges . . . for no reason, and stripped the naked of their clothing* (v. 6), withheld *water* and *bread*, i.e., food, *from the hungry* (v. 7), and rejected the pleas of *widows* and *orphans* (v. 9). He must mean that, since Job is suffering for some cause, and since the cause cannot be found in any wrong that Job has done, his sin must lie in what he has failed to do. **12–20:** God can see Job's secret sins; they are sins of omission. **21–30:** How Job can be delivered. The speech ends on an uplifting note: Job has only to *return* to God (v. 23), *pray* and fulfil his vows (v. 27); then

23 If you return to the Almighty,[a] you will
be restored,
if you remove unrighteousness from
your tents,
24 if you treat gold like dust,
and gold of Ophir like the stones of the
torrent-bed,
25 and if the Almighty[a] is your gold
and your precious silver,
26 then you will delight yourself in the
Almighty,[a]
and lift up your face to God.
27 You will pray to him, and he will hear
you,
and you will pay your vows.
28 You will decide on a matter, and it will be
established for you,
and light will shine on your ways.
29 When others are humiliated, you say it
is pride;
for he saves the humble.
30 He will deliver even those who are
guilty;
they will escape because of the
cleanness of your hands."[b]

23 Then Job answered:
2 "Today also my complaint is bitter;[c]
his[d] hand is heavy despite my groaning.
3 Oh, that I knew where I might find him,
that I might come even to his dwelling!
4 I would lay my case before him,
and fill my mouth with arguments.
5 I would learn what he would answer me,
and understand what he would say to me.
6 Would he contend with me in the
greatness of his power?
No; but he would give heed to me.
7 There an upright person could reason
with him,
and I should be acquitted forever by my
judge.

8 "If I go forward, he is not there;
or backward, I cannot perceive him;
9 on the left he hides, and I cannot behold
him;
I turn[e] to the right, but I cannot see
him.
10 But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tested me, I shall come out
like gold.
11 My foot has held fast to his steps;
I have kept his way and have not turned
aside.
12 I have not departed from the
commandment of his lips;
I have treasured in[f] my bosom the
words of his mouth.
13 But he stands alone and who can
dissuade him?

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Syr Vg Tg: Heb *rebellious*
[d] Gk Syr: Heb *my*
[e] Syr Vg: Heb *he turns*
[f] Gk Vg: Heb *from*

everything he does will prosper (v. 28). Cf. Zophar's advice in 11:13–20. **24:** There is a pun involving the words for *gold* (Heb "batser") and *like the stones* (Heb "betsur") and the words *dust* (Heb "'apar") and *Ophir* (Heb "'opir"). *Ophir* was an Arabian city famous for its high-quality gold (Gen 10.29; 1 Kings 9.28; 1 Chr 29.4).

23.1–24.25: Job's eighth speech. This speech is a soliloquy, addressed neither to the friends nor to God. In ch 23 Job is concerned mainly with himself and his sense of how inaccessible God is to him. In ch 24 his concern is with others, especially the innocent poor, who seem to be neglected by God. If he could gain access to God, he would be vindicated; but he despairs of ever receiving such vindication, since God plainly does not hold regular *times* for judgment when wrongs are righted (24.1). **23.3–17:** *Oh, that I knew where I might find him . . . !* God is plainly not entering into the lawsuit that Job desires (cf. 19.26), so Job must search him out. But his quest is a failure (vv. 8–9). God is not acting fairly or legally; *what he desires, that he does* (v. 13), and that is only to harm Job. **4–7:** When Job first imagined a lawsuit with God (9.3–4), he immediately recognized that he could not succeed. But the more he considers the idea, the more it becomes a reality. In a later speech, even though he has no hope of success (13.15), he craves to enter into dispute with him (13.3). In his next speech he announces that he already has a "witness" stationed in heaven, his "cry" that is his spokesman (16.19–20). Still later, he expresses his conviction that his case will be heard, even if after his death (19.27). Now he believes that he would get justice from God if only he could locate him. **8–9:** *Forward, backward, left,* and *right* designate the four cardinal

What he desires, that he does.
14 For he will complete what he appoints for me;
and many such things are in his mind.
15 Therefore I am terrified at his presence;
when I consider, I am in dread of him.
16 God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty[a] has terrified me;
17 If only I could vanish in darkness,
and thick darkness would cover my face![b]

24 "Why are times not kept by the Almighty,[a]
and why do those who know him never see his days?
2 The wicked[c] remove landmarks;
they seize flocks and pasture them.
3 They drive away the donkey of the orphan;
they take the widow's ox for a pledge.
4 They thrust the needy off the road;
the poor of the earth all hide themselves.
5 Like wild asses in the desert
they go out to their toil,
scavenging in the wasteland
food for their young.
6 They reap in a field not their own
and they glean in the vineyard of the wicked.
7 They lie all night naked, without clothing,
and have no covering in the cold.
8 They are wet with the rain of the mountains,
and cling to the rock for want of shelter.

9 "There are those who snatch the orphan child from the breast,
and take as a pledge the infant of the poor.
10 They go about naked, without clothing;
though hungry, they carry the sheaves;
11 between their terraces[d] they press out oil;
they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst.
12 From the city the dying groan,
and the throat of the wounded cries for help;
yet God pays no attention to their prayer.

13 "There are those who rebel against the light,
who are not acquainted with its ways,
and do not stay in its paths.
14 The murderer rises at dusk
to kill the poor and needy,
and in the night is like a thief.
15 The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight,
saying, 'No eye will see me';
and he disguises his face.
16 In the dark they dig through houses;
by day they shut themselves up;
they do not know the light.
17 For deep darkness is morning to all of them;
for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness.

18 "Swift are they on the face of the waters;
their portion in the land is cursed;

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[b] Or *But I am not destroyed by the darkness; he has concealed the thick darkness from me*
[c] Gk: Heb *they*
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain

directions: east, west, south, and north. **24.1–25:** Why does God not hold regular assize days, i.e., judicial proceedings (*times*, v. 1), during which the injustices in the world's government could be cleared up? **2–12:** Why is the injustice of the suffering of the innocent poor allowed to go on for so long? God *pays no attention to their prayer* (v. 12). **2:** *Landmarks*, i.e., boundary stones; removing a neighbor's landmarks in order to increase the size of one's own property is prohibited (cf. Deut 9.14; 27.17; Prov 22.28; 23.10; Hos 5.10). **3:** The orphan, i.e., the fatherless, and the widow are examples of the poor and underprivileged. Those pictured here are not as poor as the homeless daylaborers of vv. 5–6. **6:** *Glean*, those who owned fields and vineyards were supposed to leave some produce for the poor to gather (Lev 19.9–10; 23.22; Deut 24.1; Ruth 2.1–10). **9:** Children could be taken as slaves until parents paid debts to creditors (2 Kings 4:1–7; Neh 5.1–5). **10–11:** See v.6n. **13–17:** Why is the injustice of the successful evildoer allowed to continue? Three typical rebels *against the light* (v. 13)—the murderer, the adulterer, and the thief—are allowed to live, though their friends are *the terrors of deep darkness* (v. 17) and they

no treader turns toward their vineyards.
19 Drought and heat snatch away the snow
waters;
so does Sheol those who have sinned.
20 The womb forgets them;
the worm finds them sweet;
they are no longer remembered;
so wickedness is broken like a tree.

21 "They harm[a] the childless woman,
and do no good to the widow.
22 Yet God[b] prolongs the life of the mighty
by his power;
they rise up when they despair of life.
23 He gives them security, and they are
supported;
his eyes are upon their ways.
24 They are exalted a little while, and then
are gone;
they wither and fade like the mallow;[c]
they are cut off like the heads of grain.
25 If it is not so, who will prove me a liar,
and show that there is nothing in what
I say?"

25 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:
2 "Dominion and fear are with God;[d]
he makes peace in his high heaven.
3 Is there any number to his armies?
Upon whom does his light not arise?
4 How then can a mortal be righteous
before God?
How can one born of woman be pure?
5 If even the moon is not bright
and the stars are not pure in his
sight,
6 how much less a mortal, who is a maggot,
and a human being, who is a worm!"

26 Then Job answered:
2 "How you have helped one who has
no power!
How you have assisted the arm that has
no strength!
3 How you have counseled one who has no
wisdom,
and given much good advice!
4 With whose help have you uttered words,
and whose spirit has come forth from
you?
5 The shades below tremble,
the waters and their inhabitants.
6 Sheol is naked before God,
and Abaddon has no covering.
7 He stretches out Zaphon[e] over the void,
and hangs the earth upon nothing.
8 He binds up the waters in his thick
clouds,
and the cloud is not torn open by them.
9 He covers the face of the full moon,
and spreads over it his cloud.
10 He has described a circle on the face of
the waters,

[a] Gk Tg: Heb *feed on* or *associate with*
[b] Heb *he*
[c] Gk: Heb *like all others*
[d] Heb *him*
[e] Or *the North*

should by rights be with them in the underworld. **18–25:** These verses about the early death of the wicked are so unlike Job's views that they must be either a quotation by Job of the friends (RSV adds "You say" at the beginning of v. 16), or, possibly part of the missing third speech of Zophar. See also 27.7–10n.

25.1–26.14: Bildad's third speech. As it stands, Bildad's speech is uncommonly short (25.2–6) but although 26.1–14 is now assigned to Job, it was probably originally part of Bildad's speech. Such a rearrangement would help remove the problem of having three speeches of Job in a row (chaps. 26, 27–28, 29–31) without any intervening words from the friends. The theme of Bildad's speech would then be the power of God, in three spheres: in the heavens (25.2–6), in the underworld (26.5–6), and in creation (26.7–13). The speech is an address to Job (cf. 25.4,6; 26.14), belittling him (26.2–4), denying his claim to innocence (25.2–6), and putting him in his place by focusing exclusively on God's untrammeled power (26.5–14). **25.2–3:** *He makes peace in his high heaven*, probably an allusion to God's defeat at creation of the powers of chaos (cf. 9.13; 26.11–13; Isa 51.9). Peace through terror is God's style, according to Bildad. **26.5:** *Shades*, i.e., the inhabitants of the underworld. **6:** *Abaddon* (meaning "destruction"), another name for Sheol, the abode of the dead. **7:** At creation, God stretched out the heavens (here called *Zaphon*, "the north") like a tent without a center pole and suspended the earth from *nothing*. **8:** The *clouds* are conceived as waterskins (cf. 38.37). **10:** The *circle on the face of the waters* appears to be both the

at the boundary between light and
darkness.
11 The pillars of heaven tremble,
and are astounded at his rebuke.
12 By his power he stilled the Sea;
by his understanding he struck down
Rahab.
13 By his wind the heavens were made fair;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.
14 These are indeed but the outskirts of his
ways;
and how small a whisper do we hear of
him!
But the thunder of his power who can
understand?"

27 Job again took up his discourse and said:
2 "As God lives, who has taken away my
right,
and the Almighty,[a] who has made my
soul bitter,
3 as long as my breath is in me
and the spirit of God is in my nostrils,
4 my lips will not speak falsehood,
and my tongue will not utter deceit.
5 Far be it from me to say that you are right;
until I die I will not put away my
integrity from me.
6 I hold fast my righteousness, and will not
let it go;
my heart does not reproach me for any
of my days.

7 "May my enemy be like the wicked,
and may my opponent be like the
unrighteous.
8 For what is the hope of the godless when
God cuts them off,
when God takes away their lives?
9 Will God hear their cry
when trouble comes upon them?
10 Will they take delight in the Almighty?[a]
Will they call upon God at all times?
11 I will teach you concerning the hand of
God;
that which is with the Almighty[a] I will
not conceal.
12 All of you have seen it yourselves;
why then have you become altogether
vain?

13 "This is the portion of the wicked with
God,
and the heritage that oppressors receive
from the Almighty:[a]
14 If their children are multiplied, it is for
the sword;

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*

horizon where the sky meets the earth and the boundary between day and night. **11:** The *pillars of heaven* are envisaged as supporting the solid canopy of heaven; they are the same as the "foundations of the heavens" (2 Sam 22.8). **12:** The depiction is still of the creation of the world, when according to some biblical myths God waged a battle against a monster known as *Sea* or *Rahab* (cf. 9.13n.; Ps 89.11; Isa 51.9). **13:** The *fleeing serpent* is another of God's primordial enemies, called Leviathan in 3.8 and Isa 27.1. **14:** These visible and reputed proofs of God's greatness are but the *outskirts of his ways*, and convey only a faint *whisper* of the *thunder* of his actual power. Humans cannot hope to comprehend the real God, but can catch only a glimpse of him.

27.1–6,11–12: Job's ninth speech. Although chs 27–28 are traditionally ascribed to Job, some of their contents seem more natural in the mouths of other speakers. Chs 27.7–10,11–23 should probably be assigned to Zophar (who otherwise does not have a third speech), and ch 28 may well be the conclusion of Elihu's speeches displaced from this point (see notes on 32.1–37.24), although many think it is an independent poem, not spoken by any of the characters in the book of Job. **1–6:** Job's speech here is short and to the point: for the first time, he swears an oath to his innocence. **2:** Job swears by the life of God—a bold move, for to do so is effectively a curse upon God if the oath is not true. **5:** If he were to accept the friends' reproaches, he would be denying what he knows to be true about himself. **11–12:** Job himself, not the stories of the slaying of the dragon at creation, is the best testimony to the power of God and to his intentions.

27.7–10,13–17; 24.18–24; 27.18–23: Zophar's third speech. The remainder of ch 27 is similar to Zophar's second speech in ch 20, except that here the focus is on the fact of the destiny of the wicked, whereas there it had been on the behavior that marks them out as wicked. He does not mean that Job is one of the wicked; rather, he paints this picture of their destiny to frighten Job into amendment of life so as to avoid the fate of the wicked.

and their offspring have not enough to eat.
15 Those who survive them the pestilence buries,
and their widows make no lamentation.
16 Though they heap up silver like dust,
and pile up clothing like clay—
17 they may pile it up, but the just will wear it,
and the innocent will divide the silver.
18 They build their houses like nests,
like booths made by sentinels of the vineyard.
19 They go to bed with wealth, but will do so no more;
they open their eyes, and it is gone.
20 Terrors overtake them like a flood;
in the night a whirlwind carries them off.
21 The east wind lifts them up and they are gone;
it sweeps them out of their place.
22 It[a] hurls at them without pity;
they flee from its[b] power in headlong flight.
23 It[a] claps its[b] hands at them,
and hisses at them from its[b] place.

28 "Surely there is a mine for silver,
and a place for gold to be refined.
2 Iron is taken out of the earth,
and copper is smelted from ore.
3 Miners put[c] an end to darkness,
and search out to the farthest bound
the ore in gloom and deep darkness.
4 They open shafts in a valley away from human habitation;
they are forgotten by travelers,
they sway suspended, remote from people.
5 As for the earth, out of it comes bread;
but underneath it is turned up as by fire.
6 Its stones are the place of sapphires,[d]
and its dust contains gold.

7 "That path no bird of prey knows,
and the falcon's eye has not seen it.
8 The proud wild animals have not trodden it;
the lion has not passed over it.

9 "They put their hand to the flinty rock,
and overturn mountains by the roots.
10 They cut out channels in the rocks,
and their eyes see every precious thing.
11 The sources of the rivers they probe;[e]
hidden things they bring to light.

12 "But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?

[a] Or *He* (that is God)
[b] Or *his*
[c] Heb *He puts*
[d] Or *lapis lazuli*
[e] Gk Vg: Heb *bind*

Ironically, much of the fate of the wicked has already befallen Job. **27.18:** *Nests* and *booths* are fragile, temporary structures. **21:** *The east wind* is the sirocco, the hot, violent wind that blew down the house of Job's children (1.19).

28.1–28: A poem on wisdom, or conclusion of Elihu's speeches. Although as it stands ch 28 is part of a speech of Job, it is hard to see why Job, who is focused on the question of justice, should be interested in the issue of how wisdom is to be acquired. Most scholars therefore regard the chapter as an independent poem, not spoken by any of the characters in the book of Job, which has found its way into it. Alternatively, its theme of the desirability of wisdom might be seen as most suitable in the mouth of Elihu (and its final sentence is very like 37.24, the final sentence of Elihu's other speeches). Quite possibly, the speeches of Elihu, now in chs 32–37, originally preceded this poem in ch 28. **1–11:** The poem begins, in the fashion of a riddle, with a topic far different from the actual subject of the poem, which is the acquisition of wisdom. The opening topic is that of mining minerals, its theme being the extreme efforts humans will go to in order to acquire things that are precious. In remote places (*forgotten by travelers*, v. 4) miners dig *shafts* where they dangle from ropes (*sway suspended*). Their lamps *put an end to darkness* underground (v. 3). Their tunnels are a *path no bird of prey knows*

13 Mortals do not know the way to it,[a]
and it is not found in the land of the living.
14 The deep says, 'It is not in me,'
and the sea says, 'It is not with me.'
15 It cannot be gotten for gold,
and silver cannot be weighed out as its price.
16 It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
in precious onyx or sapphire.[b]
17 Gold and glass cannot equal it,
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.
18 No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;
the price of wisdom is above pearls.
19 The chrysolite of Ethiopia[c] cannot compare with it,
nor can it be valued in pure gold.

20 "Where then does wisdom come from?
And where is the place of understanding?
21 It is hidden from the eyes of all living,
and concealed from the birds of the air.
22 Abaddon and Death say,
'We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.'

23 "God understands the way to it,
and he knows its place.
24 For he looks to the ends of the earth,
and sees everything under the heavens.
25 When he gave to the wind its weight,
and apportioned out the waters by measure;
26 when he made a decree for the rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt;
27 then he saw it and declared it;
he established it, and searched it out.
28 And he said to humankind,
'Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
and to depart from evil is understanding.'"

29 Job again took up his discourse and said:

2 "O that I were as in the months of old,
as in the days when God watched over me;
3 when his lamp shone over my head,
and by his light I walked through darkness;
4 when I was in my prime,
when the friendship of God was upon my tent;
5 when the Almighty[d] was still with me,
when my children were around me;
6 when my steps were washed with milk,
and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!

[a] Gk: Heb *its price*
[b] Or *lapis lazuli*
[c] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*
[d] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*

(v. 7). **12:** Wisdom is even more desirable, but harder to get at than the precious metals. **13–19:** Wisdom is apparently impossible to find or to buy (but see v. 28!). **14:** The Deep and the Sea are, unusually, personified, as ancient powers that might know the location of valuable objects like wisdom. **15–19:** Even if it could be found, wisdom could not be bought, being more valuable than the most expensive items, gold, silver, precious stones, and glass. **16:** *Ophir*, known as a source of gold; see 22.24n. **17:** *Glass* in pre-Roman times was as expensive as precious stones; it was used in jewelry and inlays. **20–27:** Wisdom is apparently inaccessible to humans, its place being known only to God (v. 23), who determined its nature at creation (vv. 24–27). **20–22:** *Abaddon and Death*, see 26.6n. **28:** Surprisingly, it turns out, although wisdom is desirable and precious, and cannot be found in any place or bought for any price, there is no secret about its essence. It consists of *the fear of the Lord*, i.e., the emotion of fear in the presence of God, and of shunning evil—that is, a proper attitude both to religion and to ethics. It is the attitude of Job in 1.1.

29.1–31.40: Job's tenth speech. The speech consists of three sections: in the first Job surveys, in nostalgic mood, his happy former life (ch 29); in the second he portrays, in pathetic mood, his present isolation and degradation (ch 30); in the third, he utters, in defiant mood, a series of self-curses that climax with a desperate appeal to be heard and vindicated (ch 31). The presence of the friends is ignored completely, and, except for 30.20–23, God is not addressed: the focus is entirely on Job's own experience. **29.2–25:** Job wishes he were still living his former life. **2–6:** A picture of his domestic bliss, realistic description mingling with metaphors like *my*

7 When I went out to the gate of the city,
when I took my seat in the square,
8 the young men saw me and withdrew,
and the aged rose up and stood;
9 the nobles refrained from talking,
and laid their hands on their mouths;
10 the voices of princes were hushed,
and their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths.
11 When the ear heard, it commended me,
and when the eye saw, it approved;
12 because I delivered the poor who cried,
and the orphan who had no helper.
13 The blessing of the wretched came upon me,
and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.
14 I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
my justice was like a robe and a turban.
15 I was eyes to the blind,
and feet to the lame.
16 I was a father to the needy,
and I championed the cause of the stranger.
17 I broke the fangs of the unrighteous,
and made them drop their prey from their teeth.
18 Then I thought, 'I shall die in my nest,
and I shall multiply my days like the phoenix;[a]
19 my roots spread out to the waters,
with the dew all night on my branches;
20 my glory was fresh with me,
and my bow ever new in my hand.'
21 "They listened to me, and waited,
and kept silence for my counsel.
22 After I spoke they did not speak again,
and my word dropped upon them like dew.[b]
23 They waited for me as for the rain;
they opened their mouths as for the spring rain.
24 I smiled on them when they had no confidence;
and the light of my countenance they did not extinguish.[c]
25 I chose their way, and sat as chief,
and I lived like a king among his troops,
like one who comforts mourners.

30 "But now they make sport of me,
those who are younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to set with the dogs of my flock.
2 What could I gain from the strength of their hands?
All their vigor is gone.
3 Through want and hard hunger
they gnaw the dry and desolate ground,
4 they pick mallow and the leaves of bushes,
and to warm themselves the roots of broom.
5 They are driven out from society;
people shout after them as after a thief.
6 In the gullies of wadis they must live,
in holes in the ground, and in the rocks.
7 Among the bushes they bray;
under the nettles they huddle together.
8 A senseless, disreputable brood,
they have been whipped out of the land.

[a] Or *like sand*
[b] Heb lacks *like dew*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

steps were washed with milk (v. 6), signifying a superabundance of wealth. **7–25:** A picture of his social worth, its principal ingredient being the honor accorded by his fellow citizens. **7:** The town *square* at the *gate of the city* was the place where men would transact business and settle matters of law (cf. Ruth 4.1–12). **8:** *Young men saw me and withdrew* as a mark of deference. **12–17:** Job remembers his main role as protector of the underprivileged: the poor, orphans, the dying, widows, the blind, the lame, strangers. **14:** *Righteousness* adorned him, bringing him honor as a costly garment would. **17:** Enemies of the underprivileged, *the unrighteous*, are pictured as wild animals. **18:** *Phoenix*, a mythical bird that lives for 500 years or more and thought to be reborn from its ashes. **25:** Job claims to have held an almost royal status. **30.1–31:** Job depicts his present situation—his dishonor (vv. 1–15) and his inner suffering (vv. 16–23)—and concludes with an address to God (vv. 20–23), and a lament (vv. 24–31). **1:** The young men who despise him are scorned as low-born. Contrast Job's words in 24.1–12. **2–8:** Their fathers are imagined by Job as without honor (*disreputable*, v. 8), excluded from ordinary society (v. 5) and living rough in the wild (v. 6), and with only leaves and roots to eat (v. 4). **4:** *Mallow,* or "saltwort," a leafy plant eaten by the

9 "And now they mock me in song;
I am a byword to them.
10 They abhor me, they keep aloof from me;
they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me.
11 Because God has loosed my bowstring and humbled me,
they have cast off restraint in my presence.
12 On my right hand the rabble rise up;
they send me sprawling,
and build roads for my ruin.
13 They break up my path,
they promote my calamity;
no one restrains[a] them.
14 As through a wide breach they come;
amid the crash they roll on.
15 Terrors are turned upon me;
my honor is pursued as by the wind,
and my prosperity has passed away like a cloud.

16 "And now my soul is poured out within me;
days of affliction have taken hold of me.
17 The night racks my bones,
and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest.
18 With violence he seizes my garment;[b]
he grasps me by[c] the collar of my tunic.
19 He has cast me into the mire,
and I have become like dust and ashes.
20 I cry to you and you do not answer me;
I stand, and you merely look at me.
21 You have turned cruel to me;
with the might of your hand you persecute me.
22 You lift me up on the wind, you make me ride on it,
and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.
23 I know that you will bring me to death,
and to the house appointed for all living.

24 "Surely one does not turn against the needy,[d]
when in disaster they cry for help.[e]
25 Did I not weep for those whose day was hard?
Was not my soul grieved for the poor?
26 But when I looked for good, evil came;
and when I waited for light, darkness came.
27 My inward parts are in turmoil, and are never still;
days of affliction come to meet me.
28 I go about in sunless gloom;
I stand up in the assembly and cry for help.
29 I am a brother of jackals,
and a companion of ostriches.
30 My skin turns black and falls from me,
and my bones burn with heat.
31 My lyre is turned to mourning,
and my pipe to the voice of those who weep.

31 "I have made a covenant with my eyes;
how then could I look upon a virgin?
2 What would be my portion from God above,
and my heritage from the Almighty[f] on high?

a Cn: Heb *helps*
b Gk: Heb *my garment is disfigured*
c Heb *like*
d Heb *ruin*
e Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain
f Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*

very poor. *Broom*, the largest bush in the desert; its roots made good charcoal. **9–15:** The same young men as in v. 1, who in happier days would have deferred to him (29.6), now scorn Job as a sinner suffering God's punishment. **11–14:** He depicts them as military enemies, attacking him like a besieged city (cf. 16.12–14; 19.12). **16–23:** Worse even than his loss of honor is his sense that God has become his torturer, who intends his death (v. 23). **16:** *My soul is poured out within me*, i.e., his life force is running away like liquid from a vessel. **24–31:** Job's misery is a compound of his loss of former dignity, inner turmoil, physical pain. He is in *mourning* for the loss of what he once had. **29:** Job's miserable cries are like those of *jackals* and *ostriches*, creatures that inhabit desolate places. **31.1–40:** For the last time, Job summons God to a lawsuit, demanding he state what the charges against him are (v. 35). He imagines himself composing a document affirming his innocence, an oath of clearance, in the form of a curse upon himself that is meant to come into effect if he is lying. He declares his innocence against seven

3 Does not calamity befall the
unrighteous,
and disaster the workers of iniquity?
4 Does he not see my ways,
and number all my steps?

5 "If I have walked with falsehood,
and my foot has hurried to
deceit—
6 let me be weighed in a just balance,
and let God know my
integrity!—
7 if my step has turned aside from the way,
and my heart has followed my eyes,
and if any spot has clung to my hands;
8 then let me sow, and another eat;
and let what grows for me be rooted
out.

9 "If my heart has been enticed by a
woman,
and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's
door;
10 then let my wife grind for another,
and let other men kneel over her.
11 For that would be a heinous crime;
that would be a criminal
offense;
12 for that would be a fire consuming down
to Abaddon,
and it would burn to the root all my
harvest.

13 "If I have rejected the cause of my male
or female slaves,
when they brought a complaint against
me;
14 what then shall I do when God rises up?
When he makes inquiry, what shall I
answer him?
15 Did not he who made me in the womb
make them?
And did not one fashion us in the
womb?

16 "If I have withheld anything that the
poor desired,
or have caused the eyes of the widow
to fail,
17 or have eaten my morsel alone,
and the orphan has not eaten from it—
18 for from my youth I reared the orphan[a]
like a father,
and from my mother's womb I guided
the widow[b]—
19 if I have seen anyone perish for lack of
clothing,
or a poor person without covering,
20 whose loins have not blessed me,
and who was not warmed with the
fleece of my sheep;
21 if I have raised my hand against the
orphan,
because I saw I had supporters at the
gate;
22 then let my shoulder blade fall from my
shoulder,
and let my arm be broken from its
socket.
23 For I was in terror of calamity from God,
and I could not have faced his
majesty.

24 "If I have made gold my trust,
or called fine gold my confidence;
25 if I have rejoiced because my wealth was
great,
or because my hand had gotten much;
26 if I have looked at the sun[c] when it
shone,

[a] Heb *him*
[b] Heb *her*
[c] Heb *the light*

possible charges: deceit (vv. 5–8), adultery (vv. 9–12), disregard of servants (vv. 13–15), disregard of the poor (vv. 16–23), trust in wealth (vv. 24–28), rejoicing at the misfortune of others (vv. 29–34), and assault on the land (vv. 38–40b). **1:** He has kept himself so far from sexual misconduct that he has even forbidden his desires. **9–10:** In Job's world, a man's adultery with a married woman is an offense against the woman's husband, so the punishment he would deserve is to suffer the multiple adultery of other men with his wife after she had become a prostitute. The verb *kneel* has a sexual overtone. **12:** *Abaddon*, the abode of the dead (see 26.6n). **13–15:** Job goes far beyond the obligations of his time in admitting that slaves have any rights and in affirming their common humanity with him. **16–23:** Job's humanitarian deeds are implicitly a rebuttal of Eliphaz's claims (24.6–9). Cf. 29.12–17. **21:** *At the gate*, see 29.7n. **24–28:** Confidence in one's wealth and the devotion paid to heavenly bodies

or the moon moving in splendor,
27 and my heart has been secretly enticed,
and my mouth has kissed my hand;
28 this also would be an iniquity to be
punished by the judges,
for I should have been false to God
above.

29 "If I have rejoiced at the ruin of those
who hated me,
or exulted when evil overtook them—
30 I have not let my mouth sin
by asking for their lives with a curse—
31 if those of my tent ever said,
'O that we might be sated with his
flesh!'[a]—
32 the stranger has not lodged in the street;
I have opened my doors to the
traveler—
33 if I have concealed my transgressions as
others do,[b]
by hiding my iniquity in my bosom,
34 because I stood in great fear of the
multitude,
and the contempt of families terrified
me,
so that I kept silence, and did not go out
of doors—
35 O that I had one to hear me!
(Here is my signature! Let the Almighty[c]
answer me!)
O that I had the indictment written by
my adversary!
36 Surely I would carry it on my shoulder;
I would bind it on me like a crown;
37 I would give him an account of all my
steps;
like a prince I would approach him.

38 "If my land has cried out against me,
and its furrows have wept together;
39 if I have eaten its yield without payment,
and caused the death of its owners;
40 let thorns grow instead of wheat,
and foul weeds instead of barley."

The words of Job are ended.

32 So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. 2 Then Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became angry. He was angry at Job because he justified himself rather than God; 3 he was angry also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, though they had declared Job to be in the wrong.[d] 4 Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job, because they were older than he. 5 But when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouths of these three men, he became angry.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *as Adam did*
[c] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[d] Another ancient tradition reads *answer, and had put God in the wrong*

are two forms of false worship. **27:** *My mouth has kissed my hand*, to throw a kiss as a gesture of worship. **31:** *O that we might be sated with his flesh!*, or better, "O that there were someone not yet satisfied with his meat!" There is no chance of finding anyone who has not benefited from Job's hospitality. **35–37:** These verses are the climax to the speech, and it is strange that they are not at the end; perhaps vv. 38–40 have been misplaced and should follow v. 34. **35:** *One to hear me,* i.e., God. **36:** Job would be proud to display the sheet of charges God has against him, for it would be blank (or else filled with falsehoods).

32.1–37.24: Elihu's speeches. Many scholars think that the Elihu speeches (chs. 32–37) are a later addition to the book, partly because Elihu is not mentioned in the prologue or epilogue. It may be, however, that the Elihu speeches originally followed directly after the last of the friends' third speeches, i.e., after chap. 27, and that chap. 28 was the last of Elihu's speeches. This rearrangement would make better sense of the phrase *these three men* in 32.1, and it would also mean that the LORD addresses Job immediately after Job's last speech (chaps. 29–31) is concluded. In any case, the Elihu speeches are part of the book we now have, and Elihu has a distinctive contribution to make to its argument. Elihu, who professes himself opposed both to Job and to his friends (32.2–3,10–12; 33.1–12) is offering a middle way between them. Against the friends, he argues that suffering is not necessarily the penalty for sin already committed, but may be a warning, to keep a person back from sin; it is better understood as discipline or education.

32.1–33.33: Elihu's first speech. 32.6–14: Elihu has hitherto deferred to the other friends on account of their greater age, but he realizes that all humans have an equal access to wisdom, since all have in them the *breath of the Almighty* (v. 8; cf. Gen 2.7). He feels he must speak because the friends have not answered Job adequately (vv.

6 Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite answered:
"I am young in years,
and you are aged;
therefore I was timid and afraid
to declare my opinion to you.
7 I said, 'Let days speak,
and many years teach wisdom.'
8 But truly it is the spirit in a mortal,
the breath of the Almighty,[a] that makes for understanding.
9 It is not the old[b] that are wise,
nor the aged that understand what is right.
10 Therefore I say, 'Listen to me;
let me also declare my opinion.'

11 "See, I waited for your words,
I listened for your wise sayings,
while you searched out what to say.
12 I gave you my attention,
but there was in fact no one that confuted Job,
no one among you that answered his words.
13 Yet do not say, 'We have found wisdom;
God may vanquish him, not a human.'
14 He has not directed his words against me,
and I will not answer him with your speeches.

15 "They are dismayed, they answer no more;
they have not a word to say.
16 And am I to wait, because they do not speak,
because they stand there, and answer no more?
17 I also will give my answer;
I also will declare my opinion.
18 For I am full of words;
the spirit within me constrains me.
19 My heart is indeed like wine that has no vent;
like new wineskins, it is ready to burst.
20 I must speak, so that I may find relief;
I must open my lips and answer.
21 I will not show partiality to any person
or use flattery toward anyone.
22 For I do not know how to flatter—
or my Maker would soon put an end to me!

33 "But now, hear my speech, O Job,
and listen to all my words.
2 See, I open my mouth;
the tongue in my mouth speaks.
3 My words declare the uprightness of my heart,
and what my lips know they speak sincerely.
4 The spirit of God has made me,
and the breath of the Almighty[a] gives me life.
5 Answer me, if you can;
set your words in order before me; take your stand.
6 See, before God I am as you are;
I too was formed from a piece of clay.
7 No fear of me need terrify you;
my pressure will not be heavy on you.

8 "Surely, you have spoken in my hearing,
and I have heard the sound of your words.
9 You say, 'I am clean, without transgression;
I am pure, and there is no iniquity in me.
10 Look, he finds occasions against me,
he counts me as his enemy;
11 he puts my feet in the stocks,
and watches all my paths.'

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[b] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *many*

11–14). **7:** *I said*, i.e., to myself. **9:** *It is not the old that are wise*, he must mean that it is not always the old who have wisdom. **15:** From here to the end of ch 33 Elihu addresses Job, referring to the friends as "they." **17–22:** Elihu's third reason for speaking is that he feels he will explode with frustration if he does not. **19:** It is not his *heart* but his "belly" that is like a wineskin that the new fermenting wine will burst if it is not vented. **33.1–7:** Elihu challenges Job to prepare for debate. **8–33:** Job believes, says Elihu, that he is faultless (v. 9), that God's treatment of him is pure malice (vv. 10–11), and that God refuses to answer his complaints of injustice (v. 13). Elihu's response is that God has various ways of speaking to humans, e.g., dreams (vv. 15–17) and suffering (vv. 19–28). In both

12 "But in this you are not right. I will answer you:
God is greater than any mortal.
13 Why do you contend against him,
saying, 'He will answer none of my[a] words'?
14 For God speaks in one way,
and in two, though people do not perceive it.
15 In a dream, in a vision of the night,
when deep sleep falls on mortals,
while they slumber on their beds,
16 then he opens their ears,
and terrifies them with warnings,
17 that he may turn them aside from their deeds,
and keep them from pride,
18 to spare their souls from the Pit,
their lives from traversing the River.
19 They are also chastened with pain upon their beds,
and with continual strife in their bones,
20 so that their lives loathe bread,
and their appetites dainty food.
21 Their flesh is so wasted away that it cannot be seen;
and their bones, once invisible, now stick out.
22 Their souls draw near the Pit,
and their lives to those who bring death.
23 Then, if there should be for one of them an angel,
a mediator, one of a thousand,
one who declares a person upright,
24 and he is gracious to that person, and says,
'Deliver him from going down into the Pit;
I have found a ransom;
25 let his flesh become fresh with youth;
let him return to the days of his youthful vigor';
26 then he prays to God, and is accepted by him,
he comes into his presence with joy,
and God[b] repays him for his righteousness.
27 That person sings to others and says,
'I sinned, and perverted what was right,
and it was not paid back to me.
28 He has redeemed my soul from going down to the Pit,
and my life shall see the light.'

29 "God indeed does all these things,
twice, three times, with mortals,
30 to bring back their souls from the Pit,
so that they may see the light of life.[c]
31 Pay heed, Job, listen to me;
be silent, and I will speak.
32 If you have anything to say, answer me;
speak, for I desire to justify you.
33 If not, listen to me;
be silent, and I will teach you wisdom."

34 Then Elihu continued and said:
2 "Hear my words, you wise men,
and give ear to me, you who know;
3 for the ear tests words
as the palate tastes food.
4 Let us choose what is right;
let us determine among ourselves what is good.
5 For Job has said, 'I am innocent,
and God has taken away my right;

[a] Compare Gk: Heb *his*
[b] Heb *he*
[c] Syr: Heb *to be lighted with the light of life*

cases, God's purpose is not to punish but to rescue humans from their sin (vv. 29–30). **18:** *The Pit*, another term for Sheol, the abode of the dead. *The River*, the underworld stream the dead must cross before they reach Sheol, like the Greek river Styx. **23:** *An angel, a mediator, one of a thousand*, probably "the thousand" were a group of supportive angels (unlike the accusatory angel the Satan), who would take up the cause of humans in the divine court (cf. 5.1, where Eliphaz denies that Job can expect any help from such angels). **24:** *Ransom* is usually money paid to release a guilty person from punishment, but here some unspecified ground for forgiveness. **32:** Elihu's ultimate purpose, to *justify* Job, is like that of the supportive angels.

34.1–37: Elihu's second speech. In vv. 2–15 Elihu addresses the friends, in vv. 16–37 Job. God, he argues, cannot do wrong by failing to execute retribution; but Job is doing wrong by claiming that God has acted unjustly toward him. All of Elihu's criticism of Job concerns Job's speeches; he does not hold against him anything he may have said or done before the book opened. His focus is not on what Job deserves but on the infamy of his

6 in spite of being right I am counted a liar;
my wound is incurable, though I am without transgression.'
7 Who is there like Job,
who drinks up scoffing like water,
8 who goes in company with evildoers
and walks with the wicked?
9 For he has said, 'It profits one nothing to take delight in God.'

10 "Therefore, hear me, you who have sense,
far be it from God that he should do wickedness,
and from the Almighty[a] that he should do wrong.
11 For according to their deeds he will repay them,
and according to their ways he will make it befall them.
12 Of a truth, God will not do wickedly,
and the Almighty[a] will not pervert justice.
13 Who gave him charge over the earth
and who laid on him[b] the whole world?
14 If he should take back his spirit[c] to himself,
and gather to himself his breath,
15 all flesh would perish together,
and all mortals return to dust.

16 "If you have understanding, hear this;
listen to what I say.
17 Shall one who hates justice govern?
Will you condemn one who is righteous and mighty,
18 who says to a king, 'You scoundrel!'
and to princes, 'You wicked men!';
19 who shows no partiality to nobles,
nor regards the rich more than the poor,
for they are all the work of his hands?
20 In a moment they die;
at midnight the people are shaken and pass away,
and the mighty are taken away by no human hand.

21 "For his eyes are upon the ways of mortals,
and he sees all their steps.
22 There is no gloom or deep darkness
where evildoers may hide themselves.
23 For he has not appointed a time[d] for anyone
to go before God in judgment.
24 He shatters the mighty without investigation,
and sets others in their place.
25 Thus, knowing their works,
he overturns them in the night, and they are crushed.
26 He strikes them for their wickedness
while others look on,
27 because they turned aside from following him,
and had no regard for any of his ways,
28 so that they caused the cry of the poor to come to him,
and he heard the cry of the afflicted—
29 When he is quiet, who can condemn?
When he hides his face, who can behold him,
whether it be a nation or an individual?—

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[b] Heb lacks *on him*
[c] Heb *his heart his spirit*
[d] Cn: Heb *yet*

complaints against God. **7:** *Scoffing* is blasphemy against God, which is how Elihu regards Job's criticism of God. **8:** *Goes in company with evildoers*, metaphorically, by questioning the divine justice, Job puts himself in bad company. **9:** According to Job in 21.15, it is the wicked who say that there is no profit in religion, but Elihu asserts that Job's words, such as those in 9.22 and 21.7, amount to the same thing. Yet if Job were to say that religion is indeed profitable, he would deny that his piety is disinterested and he would accept the calumny of the Satan! **10–15:** God acts justly, for the righteous remain alive; if he did not, they might well be dead, for he has only to *gather to himself his breath* and mortals die. **16–37:** Turning to Job, Elihu makes the same argument: God, as the universal ruler, cannot act wrongly, and Job's suggestion that he can is itself a wickedness. **21:** Although Elihu speaks of *mortals* generally, his concern is purely with rulers. **24–28:** Elihu does not refer to all rulers, only to those who have behaved unjustly.

30 so that the godless should not reign,
or those who ensnare the people.

31 "For has anyone said to God,
'I have endured punishment; I will not offend any more;
32 teach me what I do not see;
if I have done iniquity, I will do it no more'?
33 Will he then pay back to suit you,
because you reject it?
For you must choose, and not I;
therefore declare what you know.[a]
34 Those who have sense will say to me,
and the wise who hear me will say,
35 'Job speaks without knowledge,
his words are without insight.'
36 Would that Job were tried to the limit,
because his answers are those of the wicked.
37 For he adds rebellion to his sin;
he claps his hands among us,
and multiplies his words against God."

35 Elihu continued and said:
2 "Do you think this to be just?
You say, 'I am in the right before God.'
3 If you ask, 'What advantage have I?
How am I better off than if I had sinned?'
4 I will answer you
and your friends with you.
5 Look at the heavens and see;
observe the clouds, which are higher than you.
6 If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against him?
And if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to him?
7 If you are righteous, what do you give to him;
or what does he receive from your hand?
8 Your wickedness affects others like you,
and your righteousness, other human beings.

9 "Because of the multitude of oppressions people cry out;
they call for help because of the arm of the mighty.
10 But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker,
who gives strength in the night,
11 who teaches us more than the animals of the earth,
and makes us wiser than the birds of the air?'
12 There they cry out, but he does not answer,
because of the pride of evildoers.
13 Surely God does not hear an empty cry,
nor does the Almighty[b] regard it.
14 How much less when you say that you do not see him,
that the case is before him, and you are waiting for him!
15 And now, because his anger does not punish,
and he does not greatly heed transgression,[c]
16 Job opens his mouth in empty talk,
he multiplies words without knowledge."

36 Elihu continued and said:
2 "Bear with me a little, and I will show you,

[a] Meaning of Heb of verses 29-33 uncertain
[b] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[c] Theodotion Symmachus Compare Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

35.1–16: Elihu's third speech. 2–8: Elihu takes up Job's complaints, that he is no better off than if he had sinned (v. 3b), and that there is no benefit in righteousness (v. 3a). Elihu responds that piety should be assessed in terms of benefit, and that justice is not a matter of one's own rights and deserts, but of others benefiting from one's virtue. **6:** Reminiscent of Job in 7.20; but whereas Job meant that any sin he may have done is hardly worth retribution since he himself will soon be dead, Elihu means that the important thing is the effect of sin or righteousness upon humans rather than upon God. **9–16:** The absence of a response from God does not mean that God cares nothing about humans, as Job claimed (24.12). God responds to the cries of the oppressed only if they deserve justice, for being oppressed is no proof of innocence, and crying out in pain is not the same as crying to God for deliverance.

for I have yet something to say on God's behalf.
3 I will bring my knowledge from far away,
and ascribe righteousness to my Maker.
4 For truly my words are not false;
one who is perfect in knowledge is with you.

5 "Surely God is mighty and does not despise any;
he is mighty in strength of understanding.
6 He does not keep the wicked alive,
but gives the afflicted their right.
7 He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous,
but with kings on the throne
he sets them forever, and they are exalted.
8 And if they are bound in fetters
and caught in the cords of affliction,
9 then he declares to them their work
and their transgressions, that they are behaving arrogantly.
10 He opens their ears to instruction,
and commands that they return from iniquity.
11 If they listen, and serve him,
they complete their days in prosperity,
and their years in pleasantness.
12 But if they do not listen, they shall perish by the sword,
and die without knowledge.

13 "The godless in heart cherish anger;
they do not cry for help when he binds them.
14 They die in their youth,
and their life ends in shame.[a]
15 He delivers the afflicted by their affliction,
and opens their ear by adversity.
16 He also allured you out of distress
into a broad place where there was no constraint,
and what was set on your table was full of fatness.

17 "But you are obsessed with the case of the wicked;
judgment and justice seize you.
18 Beware that wrath does not entice you into scoffing,
and do not let the greatness of the ransom turn you aside.
19 Will your cry avail to keep you from distress,
or will all the force of your strength?
20 Do not long for the night,
when peoples are cut off in their place.
21 Beware! Do not turn to iniquity;
because of that you have been tried by affliction.
22 See, God is exalted in his power;
who is a teacher like him?
23 Who has prescribed for him his way,
or who can say, 'You have done wrong'?

24 "Remember to extol his work,
of which mortals have sung.
25 All people have looked on it;
everyone watches it from far away.
26 Surely God is great, and we do not know him;
the number of his years is unsearchable.
27 For he draws up the drops of water;
he distills[b] his mist in rain,
28 which the skies pour down
and drop upon mortals abundantly.
29 Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds,

[a] Heb *ends among the temple prostitutes*
[b] Cn: Heb *they distill*

36.1–37.24: Elihu's fourth speech. It has two parts: 36.2–25, continuing the theme of the justice of God, and 36.26–37.24, an instruction on the theme of the God of nature, its subtext being that God's energies in creation and world governance are vehicles of his righteous judgments. **36.5–15:** The topic is how God treats those righteous people who fall into sin (vv. 7–12,15) in comparison with how he treats the truly wicked (vv. 6,14). By allowing that the righteous are sometimes sinful, Elihu transcends the traditional dogma that drew a firm line between righteous and wicked. **16–25:** Now Elihu offers his personal advice to Job. Finding himself subject to God's punishment, what he should do is not to complain about the injustice of it, but to discover in it God's instruction. **36.26–37.24:** Suffering is education, says Elihu, and God is the great Teacher. He has built into the order of creation lessons for the improvement of humans. Rain, for example, is a means of exhibiting divine

the thunderings of his pavilion?
30 See, he scatters his lightning around him
and covers the roots of the sea.
31 For by these he governs peoples;
he gives food in abundance.
32 He covers his hands with the lightning,
and commands it to strike the mark.
33 Its crashing[a] tells about him;
he is jealous[a] with anger against
iniquity.

37 "At this also my heart trembles,
and leaps out of its place.
2 Listen, listen to the thunder of his voice
and the rumbling that comes from his
mouth.
3 Under the whole heaven he lets it loose,
and his lightning to the corners of the
earth.
4 After it his voice roars;
he thunders with his majestic voice
and he does not restrain the lightnings[b]
when his voice is heard.
5 God thunders wondrously with his voice;
he does great things that we cannot
comprehend.
6 For to the snow he says, 'Fall on the
earth';
and the shower of rain, his heavy
shower of rain,
7 serves as a sign on everyone's hand,
so that all whom he has made may
know it.[c]
8 Then the animals go into their lairs
and remain in their dens.
9 From its chamber comes the whirlwind,
and cold from the scattering winds.
10 By the breath of God ice is given,
and the broad waters are frozen fast.
11 He loads the thick cloud with moisture;
the clouds scatter his lightning.
12 They turn round and round by his
guidance,
to accomplish all that he commands
them
on the face of the habitable world.
13 Whether for correction, or for his land,
or for love, he causes it to happen.

14 "Hear this, O Job;
stop and consider the wondrous works
of God.
15 Do you know how God lays his command
upon them,
and causes the lightning of his cloud to
shine?
16 Do you know the balancings of the
clouds,
the wondrous works of the one whose
knowledge is perfect,
17 you whose garments are hot
when the earth is still because of the
south wind?
18 Can you, like him, spread out the skies,
hard as a molten mirror?
19 Teach us what we shall say to him;
we cannot draw up our case because of
darkness.
20 Should he be told that I want to speak?
Did anyone ever wish to be swallowed
up?
21 Now, no one can look on the light
when it is bright in the skies,
when the wind has passed and cleared
them.
22 Out of the north comes golden splendor;
around God is awesome majesty.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *them*
[c] Meaning of Heb of verse 7 uncertain

munificence toward humans. **29:** *Pavilion,* God's heavenly dwelling (cf. 2 Sam 22.12). **30:** *Covers the roots of the sea*, the verb should rather mean "uncovers." **32:** It is here bolt lightning, as distinct from sheet lightning in v. 30. **36.33–37.5:** Thunder and lightning are further examples of how God teaches humans. **37.6–8:** The snows and rains of winter are both mysterious (v. 5b) and a further communication of the divine, "so that all may recognize that he is at work" (as v. 7b should probably be translated). **9–13:** Other meteorological phenomena. **9:** The winds are stored in heavenly chambers. *Whirlwind*, or rather "tempest" (a whirlwind is properly a tornado). **13:** Rain can have various significances: it may be a punishment (a *correction*), a sign of God's *love* (or rather, "loyalty"), or a token of his care for his world (as when it falls on uninhabited land; cf. 38.26). In any case, it tells humans something about God's workings. **14–24:** Some of the most obscure verses in the whole book. **22:** The *north* sometimes means the heavens (as in 26.7), and the *golden splendor* may be simply the sun. For the

23 The Almighty[a]—we cannot find him;
he is great in power and justice,
and abundant righteousness he will not violate.
24 Therefore mortals fear him;
he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit."

38 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:
2 "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
3 Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
6 On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone
7 when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings[b] shouted for joy?

8 "Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb?—
9 when I made the clouds its garment,
and thick darkness its swaddling band,
10 and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,
11 and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stopped'?

12 "Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,
13 so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?
14 It is changed like clay under the seal,
and it is dyed[c] like a garment.
15 Light is withheld from the wicked,
and their uplifted arm is broken.

16 "Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
18 Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
Declare, if you know all this.

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[b] Heb *sons of God*
[c] Cn: Heb *and they stand forth*

possibility that the speeches of Elihu originally ended with the poem about wisdom, see 32.1–37.24n; 28.1–28n.

38.1–42.6: The LORD's speeches and Job's responses.

38.1–40.2: The LORD's first speech. Between the proem in 38.2–3 and the peroration in 40.1–2, the speech is divided into two almost equal halves: 38.4–38 concerning the physical universe, and 38.39–39.30 concerning the world of animals. The divine speeches are notable for their silence over Job's complaint of injustice, as if God means to say that administering justice is not part of his cosmic plan. **38.1:** *Whirlwind,* better "storm," see 37.9. **2:** *Counsel*, or rather "the plan," the set of divine principles according to which the creation is run. Job *darkens*, or "obscures," them by focusing on his quest for justice, which is not included in the divine plan. **3:** *Gird up your loins like a man*, as a warrior does in preparation for combat. Job had better understand that summoning God to trial will not lead to a calm, rational, orderly legal process. **4–38:** In ten strophes, the LORD sketches his design, or plan, for the universe. **4–7:** Creation is conceived as the erection of a building. For the creator as architect, see Prov 8.27–30. The earth was built on foundations (vv. 4–6; see Pss 78.69; 102.25; 104.5; Isa 48.13), and strict limits were set for the primeval waters of chaos (vv. 8–11; 26.10; Pss 104.9; 148.6). **5:** *The line*, the measuring line for its foundations. **6:** *Cornerstone* should properly be "capstone," the last and topmost stone laid. Sinking the bases and laying the capstone mark the beginning and end of the work. **7:** The *stars* are regarded as *heavenly beings*. **8–11:** The separation of sea and land at creation. There is allusion to the ancient myth of a primordial divine struggle with the sea (cf. 7.12; 9.13), although the imagery uncharacteristically treats the sea as a newborn baby. **12–15:** The daily renewal of creation as each day is created afresh. As in 24.13–17, it is assumed that the wicked prefer the cover of darkness for their activities. **16–18:** The extent of the world, together with

19 "Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness,
20 that you may take it to its territory
and that you may discern the paths to its home?
21 Surely you know, for you were born then,
and the number of your days is great!

22 "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,
23 which I have reserved for the time of trouble,
for the day of battle and war?
24 What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,
or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

25 "Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt,
26 to bring rain on a land where no one lives,
on the desert, which is empty of human life,
27 to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground put forth grass?

28 "Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?
29 From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?
30 The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.

31 "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loose the cords of Orion?
32 Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season,
or can you guide the Bear with its children?
33 Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?
Can you establish their rule on the earth?

34 "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
so that a flood of waters may cover you?
35 Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go
and say to you, 'Here we are'?
36 Who has put wisdom in the inward parts,[a]
or given understanding to the mind?[a]
37 Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?
Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,
38 when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods cling together?

39 "Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

the underworld, *death* being regarded as a city with *gates*. **19–21:** *Light* and *darkness* are thought of as dwelling in the same home, using it each day in turns. **22–24:** *Snow, hail,* and heat are kept in heavenly storehouses. **24:** It is probably "heat," rather than *light* that is distributed over the earth, often by the hot, violent *east wind* or sirocco. **25–27:** Rainstorms travel via an unseen channel through the air from the clouds to the earth. **28–30:** *Rain, dew, ice, hoarfrost* are more placid forms of moisture than torrents (v. 25). **28:** *Has the rain a father?* No, it has no mythological ancestry, it is not supernatural. **29:** *Ice* is properly "rime" formed when water droplets in fog freeze, as on trees, as distinct from *hoarfrost* formed when water vapor settles, as on the ground. **31–33:** The four constellations, the *Pleiades*, *Orion*, *Mazzaroth* (perhaps the Hyades), and the *Bear* (or better, Aldebaran), were all regarded as bringers of rain; see 9.9n. *Binding* and *loosing* would be interfering with their rain-making. **34–38:** The clouds and lightning do not fall of their own accord, but in obedience to their master's voice. **36:** The verse should be translated: "Who gave the ibis its wisdom or endowed the rooster with its intelligence?" Both birds were regarded as foretellers of rain, which is depicted as stored in great jars (v. 37; not *waterskins*) in the clouds. **38.39–39.30:** In seven strophes, nine animals are depicted. They are all undomesticated animals, which live independently of humans. **38.39–41:** The lion and the raven—one huge, the other small—both need

40 when they crouch in their dens,
or lie in wait in their covert?
41 Who provides for the raven its prey,
when its young ones cry to God,
and wander about for lack of food?

39 "Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?
Do you observe the calving of the deer?
2 Can you number the months that they fulfill,
and do you know the time when they give birth,
3 when they crouch to give birth to their offspring,
and are delivered of their young?
4 Their young ones become strong, they grow up in the open;
they go forth, and do not return to them.

5 "Who has let the wild ass go free?
Who has loosed the bonds of the swift ass,
6 to which I have given the steppe for its home,
the salt land for its dwelling place?
7 It scorns the tumult of the city;
it does not hear the shouts of the driver.
8 It ranges the mountains as its pasture,
and it searches after every green thing.

9 "Is the wild ox willing to serve you?
Will it spend the night at your crib?
10 Can you tie it in the furrow with ropes,
or will it harrow the valleys after you?
11 Will you depend on it because its strength is great,
and will you hand over your labor to it?
12 Do you have faith in it that it will return,
and bring your grain to your threshing floor?[a]

13 "The ostrich's wings flap wildly,
though its pinions lack plumage.[b]
14 For it leaves its eggs to the earth,
and lets them be warmed on the ground,
15 forgetting that a foot may crush them,
and that a wild animal may trample them.
16 It deals cruelly with its young, as if they were not its own;
though its labor should be in vain, yet it has no fear;
17 because God has made it forget wisdom,
and given it no share in understanding.
18 When it spreads its plumes aloft,[b]
it laughs at the horse and its rider.

19 "Do you give the horse its might?
Do you clothe its neck with mane?
20 Do you make it leap like the locust?
Its majestic snorting is terrible.
21 It paws[c] violently, exults mightily;
it goes out to meet the weapons.
22 It laughs at fear, and is not dismayed;
it does not turn back from the sword.
23 Upon it rattle the quiver,
the flashing spear, and the javelin.
24 With fierceness and rage it swallows the ground;
it cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet.
25 When the trumpet sounds, it says 'Aha!'
From a distance it smells the battle,
the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

26 "Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars,
and spreads its wings toward the south?
27 Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up

[a] Heb *your grain and your threshing floor*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *they dig*

to hunt to feed their young. **39.1–4:** *Mountain goats* or ibexes, unlike lions and ravens, are shy and elusive. **5–8:** The *wild ass* or onager was famous for its independence and freedom, in contrast to its domesticated cousin the ass. **9–12:** The *wild ox* or aurochs was a massive animal with long thick horns; it too is contrasted with its obedient and hard-working domesticated counterpart. **13–18:** The *ostrich* is a paradoxical creature: it is a bird that cannot fly, and while reputedly foolish, it is clever enough to escape its predators. **19–25:** The war *horse* is not exactly wild, but it has a will of its own and is not a servant of humans. **26–30:** The *hawk* and the *eagle* are

and makes its nest on high?
28 It lives on the rock and makes its home
in the fastness of the rocky crag.
29 From there it spies the prey;
its eyes see it from far away.
30 Its young ones suck up blood;
and where the slain are, there it is."

40 And the LORD said to Job:
2 "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?[a]
Anyone who argues with God must respond."

3 Then Job answered the LORD:
4 "See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
5 I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but will proceed no further."

6 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:
7 "Gird up your loins like a man;
I will question you, and you declare to me.
8 Will you even put me in the wrong?
Will you condemn me that you may be justified?
9 Have you an arm like God,
and can you thunder with a voice like his?

10 "Deck yourself with majesty and dignity;
clothe yourself with glory and splendor.
11 Pour out the overflowings of your anger,
and look on all who are proud, and abase them.
12 Look on all who are proud, and bring them low;
tread down the wicked where they stand.
13 Hide them all in the dust together;
bind their faces in the world below.[b]
14 Then I will also acknowledge to you
that your own right hand can give you victory.

15 "Look at Behemoth,
which I made just as I made you;
it eats grass like an ox.
16 Its strength is in its loins,
and its power in the muscles of its belly.
17 It makes its tail stiff like a cedar;
the sinews of its thighs are knit together.
18 Its bones are tubes of bronze,
its limbs like bars of iron.

19 "It is the first of the great acts of God—
only its Maker can approach it with the sword.
20 For the mountains yield food for it
where all the wild animals play.

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[b] Heb *the hidden place*

birds of prey. **26:** The *wisdom* of the hawk is its instinct for its seasonal migration. **27:** *Eagle*, probably vulture. **30:** Vultures feed on the dead *slain* in battle. **40.1–2:** Despite the didactic language of the divine speech, this challenge shows that the ruling metaphor is still that of the lawsuit, in which Job must now either concede the case or offer new arguments.

40.3–5: Job's first response. Strikingly, Job does not capitulate; he says only that he will not repeat what he has already said. He defers his response until he speaks again in 42.2–6.

40.6–41.34: The LORD's second speech. 40.7–14: God's question *Will you even put me in the wrong?* (v. 8) means that he has correctly heard Job's speeches as not merely a demand for personal vindication but as a far-reaching critique of God's government of the world and as a demand for an alternative world order. God is obviously not going to change his world order, so his ironic response is: let Job re-order the world to his own taste by crushing the wicked (vv. 11–13); then he will have nothing to complain about. **15–24:** *Behemoth* is an ambiguous figure. It is dangerous, and yet to try capturing it is so absurd that it is beyond being a danger. It is powerful but actually does little except sleep, eat, and procreate. Unlike the animals of the first divine speech, it is a beast without qualities. Yet it is God's showpiece (v. 19a). Is it because it so well represents God's freedom to refuse rules and rationality and principles of utility? *Behemoth* is literally the plural of the common Heb term for "animal." Scholarly opinion is divided as to whether it is a primeval monster (v. 19) or is to be identified with

21 Under the lotus plants it lies,
in the covert of the reeds and in the marsh.
22 The lotus trees cover it for shade;
the willows of the wadi surround it.
23 Even if the river is turbulent, it is not frightened;
it is confident though Jordan rushes against its mouth.
24 Can one take it with hooks[a]
or pierce its nose with a snare?

41 [b] "Can you draw out Leviathan[c] with a fishhook,
or press down its tongue with a cord?
2 Can you put a rope in its nose,
or pierce its jaw with a hook?
3 Will it make many supplications to you?
Will it speak soft words to you?
4 Will it make a covenant with you
to be taken as your servant forever?
5 Will you play with it as with a bird,
or will you put it on leash for your girls?
6 Will traders bargain over it?
Will they divide it up among the merchants?
7 Can you fill its skin with harpoons,
or its head with fishing spears?
8 Lay hands on it;
think of the battle; you will not do it again!
9 [d] Any hope of capturing it[e] will be disappointed;
were not even the gods[f] overwhelmed at the sight of it?
10 No one is so fierce as to dare to stir it up.
Who can stand before it?[g]
11 Who can confront it[g] and be safe?[h]
—under the whole heaven, who?[i]

12 "I will not keep silence concerning its limbs,
or its mighty strength, or its splendid frame.
13 Who can strip off its outer garment?
Who can penetrate its double coat of mail?[j]
14 Who can open the doors of its face?
There is terror all around its teeth.
15 Its back[k] is made of shields in rows,
shut up closely as with a seal.
16 One is so near to another
that no air can come between them.
17 They are joined one to another;
they clasp each other and cannot be separated.
18 Its sneezes flash forth light,
and its eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn.
19 From its mouth go flaming torches;
sparks of fire leap out.
20 Out of its nostrils comes smoke,
as from a boiling pot and burning rushes.
21 Its breath kindles coals,
and a flame comes out of its mouth.
22 In its neck abides strength,
and terror dances before it.
23 The folds of its flesh cling together;
it is firmly cast and immovable.
24 Its heart is as hard as stone,
as hard as the lower millstone.
25 When it raises itself up the gods are afraid;
at the crashing they are beside themselves.
26 Though the sword reaches it, it does not avail,
nor does the spear, the dart, or the javelin.

[a] Cn: Heb *in his eyes*
[b] Ch 40.25 in Heb
[c] Or *the crocodile*
[d] Ch 41.1 in Heb
[e] Heb *of it*
[f] Cn Compare Symmachus Syr: Heb *one is*
[g] Heb *me*
[h] Gk: Heb *that I shall repay*
[i] Heb *to me*
[j] Gk: Heb *bridle*
[k] Cn Compare Gk Vg: Heb *pride*

the hippopotamus. It is otherwise not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible; see 2 Esd 6.49,51. **41.1–34:** The depiction of *Leviathan* treats, first, the impossibility of capturing it (vv. 1–11), second, its physical characteristics (vv. 12–24), and third, the creature in motion (vv. 25–32). Unlike Behemoth, who was indolent and unthreatening, Leviathan is nothing but violence and turmoil. Leviathan is described in terms that evoke the crocodile; some

27 It counts iron as straw,
and bronze as rotten wood.
28 The arrow cannot make it flee;
slingstones, for it, are turned to chaff.
29 Clubs are counted as chaff;
it laughs at the rattle of javelins.
30 Its underparts are like sharp potsherds;
it spreads itself like a threshing sledge
on the mire.
31 It makes the deep boil like a pot;
it makes the sea like a pot of ointment.
32 It leaves a shining wake behind it;
one would think the deep to be white-
haired.
33 On earth it has no equal,
a creature without fear.
34 It surveys everything that is lofty;
it is king over all that are proud."

42 Then Job answered the LORD:
2 "I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be
thwarted.
3 'Who is this that hides counsel without
knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not
understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I
did not know.
4 'Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you declare to
me.'
5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the
ear,
but now my eye sees you;
6 therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."

7 After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. 8 Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done." 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

10 And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. 11 Then there came to him all his

scholars understand it as the mythical chaos monster. (See 3.8n.) **34:** As *king* of beasts, Leviathan is a source of pleasure and pride for its maker.

42.1–6: Job's second response. Job abandons his lawsuit against God, but his charges have not been answered. He says: (1) *I know that you can do all things* (v. 2). He has always known that, but he means that he now recognizes that for God questions of justice are collapsed into the issue of his power. Job can only ever confront God's power, a sphere where he will inevitably be a loser. (2) *I have uttered . . . things too wonderful for me* (v. 3), Job means that he now realizes that cosmic justice is a marvel beyond human comprehension, like the structure of the universe. Justice is not a principle or value to which God is subject. (3) Now that he has *heard* God for himself and his *eye sees* him (a metaphor for his experience of God), he "submits" and "accepts consolation." *I despise myself*, no object of the verb is expressed, and the verb is probably not Heb "ma'as," "despise," but "masas," "melt, be discouraged," as in Josh 2.11 (REB rightly translates "I yield"). *Repent*, Job has never acknowledged any sin, so he cannot be repenting; the verb means rather "be comforted." Job means he will now end his period of mourning (in *dust and ashes*) and resume his normal life.

42.7–17: Epilogue. The naïve narrative of the folktale world of the prologue resumes, as Job is vindicated in the eyes of his friends (vv. 7–9) and his extended family (vv. 10–17). **7:** Surprisingly, the LORD is angry with the friends and their *folly* (v. 8), but says Job has *spoken of me what is right.* He must be referring to Job's conclusion that God does not execute justice in the realm of humans, which the friends always denied but which God himself has effectively admitted in his speeches. **10–17:** Job's lost possessions are restored to him twice over—perhaps an acknowledgment that what he had lost at the beginning of the story had actually been stolen from him by God (cf. Ex 22.4, where a thief must pay double restitution). He acquires a new family to replace his dead children, and he is feted by his family and friends. The pious man Job once again becomes the wealthiest man in all the east; so is the doctrine of retribution—which the book of Job has seemed so concerned to refute—here

brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money[a] and a gold ring.
12 The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. 13 He also had seven sons and three daughters. 14 He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch.
15 In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. 16 After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. 17 And Job died, old and full of days.

[a] Heb *a qesitah*

affirmed? **11:** *Bread* means "food." The *piece of money* is not a coin but a piece of silver of guaranteed weight. **14:** *Jemimah* probably means "turtledove," *Keziah* "cassia" or cinnamon, *Keren-happuch* "antinomy," a black eye-cosmetic, the three names invoking the three senses of hearing, taste, and sight. **15:** Along with his sons, Job's daughters are given an inheritance, an unusual practice.

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PSALMS

NAME, LOCATION IN CANON, AND NUMBERING

The word "Psalms" derives from the Greek name of the book, *Psalmoi*, which means songs played on a stringed instrument. This title reflects the musical character of the Psalms as hymns that were sung, accompanied by strings. The book's name in Hebrew is *Tehillim*, "praises," which reflects the religious character of the psalms.

In Jewish Bibles today the book of Psalms is the first book of the Writings, the third part of the canon. In Christian Bibles it is one of the poetical books, coming after the book of Job. In older manuscripts these books often occur in a slightly different order.

There have been two systems of numbering the psalms, one dependent on the Hebrew text and the other on the Greek Septuagint (LXX). The LXX counted Pss 9–10 and 114–115 as single poems and divided Pss 116 and 148 into two poems, resulting in a discrepancy of one from the Hebrew numbering of Pss 8–147; in the case of Pss 9–10 the LXX is clearly correct: they form a single acrostic (alphabetic) psalm. The Latin Vulgate and older Roman Catholic translations follow the Septuagint numbering; all modern translations follow the Hebrew numbering. There are also two systems of numbering psalm verses. The most common system, used by the NRSV and several other translations, assigns no verse number to the superscription or title, so that "v. 1" is always the first line of the psalm poem. The other system follows printed Hebrew Bibles in assigning a verse number to the superscription and thus often is one verse behind the NRSV verse number.

DATE AND AUTHORSHIP

The book of Psalms is an anthology, or more properly an anthology of anthologies, comprising several collections of hymns that were composed at various times and places in ancient Israel, mostly in the first half of the first millennium BCE. Although many are attributed to King David, and some to other individuals, scholars agree that few if any were actually written by them. Rather, their authors, like those of many of the books of the Hebrew Bible, are anonymous.

STRUCTURE AND SUPERSCRIPTIONS

The book of Psalms is divided into five books, a deliberate parallel to the five books of the Torah or Pentateuch. Each of these five parts—Psalms 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; 107–150—ends with a doxology or "word of praise." Psalm 1 introduces this collection by explicitly mentioning "the law (Heb *torah*) of the LORD." Psalm 150 serves as a megadoxology, concluding both the fifth part and the book of Psalms as a whole. In it "everything that breathes" praises the LORD in heaven and on earth, using a wide variety of musical instruments.

Both within the five parts, and sometimes ignoring that division, which occurred relatively late in the book's formation, we find evidence of other collections. A note at the end of Ps 72 states "The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended," but there follows another eighteen psalms attributed to David. Psalms 42–49; 84; 85; 87; and 88 are attributed to "the Korahites," members of a priestly family whose ancestor was Korah. Psalms 50 and 73–83 are attributed to Asaph, one of Korah's sons, and Ps 88 to Heman, another of his sons. Psalms 93–99, clustered together, share the theme of divine kingship. Each of Pss 120–134 is called "A Song of Ascents," apparently another collection, perhaps sung by pilgrims as they made their way up to Jerusalem or into the Temple precincts. There are repetitions in the psalms as well (e.g., Ps 14 = Ps 53), further showing that the book in its final form is an anthology of collections, some of which contained the same texts.

Scholars have also identified another collection. Psalms 43–83 are called the "Elohistic Psalter," because in these psalms there is a preference for the divine name "Elohim" ("God") over "Yahweh" ("the LORD"), which is much more frequent in the other psalms.

Many of the psalms have superscriptions—titles or prefatory verses that were added over the centuries. They are attempts to align the event to a biblical character, especially to David, or more often to inform the reader about the origin of the psalm or its melodies. Unfortunately, few of the technical terms can be identified with any certainty. The phrase "To the leader" occurs fifty-five times, usually with the ascription of the psalm

"Of David." Some terms may be the names of melodies, for example, "Do not Destroy" (Pss 57–59; 75), and "The Deer of the Dawn" (Ps 22). Other terms that occur are "Prayer" (Heb *tepillah*), "Maskil" ("instructive poem"?), "Psalm" (Heb *mizmor*), "Miktam," and "Song" (*shir*). Many of these and other terms in the superscriptions are obscure or uncertain, as is the term "Selah," a Hebrew word occurring seventy-one times in the body of thirty-nine psalms, perhaps to mark stanza divisions.

GENRES

More than eighty psalms fall into one of three main types or genres: hymn, petition (used in these notes for the customary "lament," that being only one component of the petition), and thanksgiving.

- *Hymn* (approximately twenty-eight psalms). The structure is simple: a call to worship, often with the subject named (e.g., "Praise the LORD, all you nations," Ps 117.1), sometimes with musical instruments mentioned (e.g., "Praise him with trumpet sound," Ps 150.3). The invitatory is often repeated in the final verse. The body of the poem is normally introduced by the preposition "for, because," giving the basis for the praise. This is typically something God has done, often the act by which Israel came into being as a people: the Exodus from Egypt and entry into Canaan. References to this one event can be in historical terms with human characters prominent (e.g., Ps 105) or in mythical terms with God portrayed as acting directly rather than through human agency (e.g., Ps 114).
- *Individual petition.* Petitionary psalms begin with an unadorned cry to the LORD (e.g., "Help, O LORD!" Ps 12.1). This is followed by a complaint, namely a description of a difficulty facing the psalmist such as sickness, unfair legal accusation, treachery of former friends, or ostracism from the community as a consequence of sin. Usually there is a statement of trust, uttered despite the trouble, which is often described hyperbolically (e.g., "I am not afraid of ten thousands of people," Ps 3:6). The worshiper prays for rescue and sometimes also for the downfall of the enemy. Some contain confessions of guilt, while others suggest that the psalmist is persecuted for unclear or unfair reasons. Each petition is a mini-drama with three actors: the psalmist, the enemies ("the wicked"), and God. Psalmists portray themselves as loyal followers of the LORD who are victims of a serious affliction (often personified) from which their LORD, their patron, should rescue them.
- *Community petitions* complain that the LORD has abandoned the nation to its enemies. They often "remember" or recite before God the event that brought Israel into existence in the hope that God will reactivate that event. Can the LORD allow that founding event to be annulled by an enemy? The foundational event can be described in various ways, for example, transplanting a vine from Egypt (Ps 80.8,14) or defeating Sea and installing the people in their land (Ps 77).
- *Individual thanksgiving.* Such psalms presume that the LORD has answered the petition and now give thanks to the LORD. In a sense they are a continuation of the individual petition, for they report to the community how God has heard the petition, a biblical way of giving thanks.

About thirty psalms are grouped together by scholars according to their subject: royal songs, Zion songs, festival songs, and liturgies. According to style or tone, others are reckoned "songs of trust" (e.g., Pss 23; 91; 121) and "instructions" (e.g., Pss 37; 49; 73). Three psalms have "torah" (law or instruction) as their subject (Pss 1; 19; 119).

INTERPRETATION

For nearly three thousand years the 150 Psalms have been a lovingly memorized and well-thumbed prayer book, transposing to the daily life of Jews and Christians the meeting of Israel and its LORD. Many were familiar to the prophet Isaiah and to other biblical writers and editors. They were prayed from antiquity onward, by the founders of rabbinic Judaism, the early Christians, the fathers of the church, and the medieval synagogue and church. They are today a treasure shared by Jews and Christians. The psalms' power lies not only in being sacred scripture but in reflecting human feelings before God and expressing them directly, concretely, and skillfully.

As prayers and schools of prayer, the psalms guide modern believers in their relationship to God. Their range and honesty encourage people to come before God in their weakness and need as well as in their strength. Against a modern tendency to make a relationship to God completely private, most of the poems are communal; even individual petitions and songs of trust display a vivid sense of belonging to a people chosen and blessed by God. Against self-centered worshipers, the psalms are unhesitatingly theocentric—the world is

made for and by God—though they balance it with the conviction that the LORD loves the people of Israel and is passionate about their flourishing. Psalms is the most cited Old Testament book in the New Testament. Christians praying the psalms have traditionally linked their prayer with that of Jesus, whose prayer becomes the prayer of the church.

Despite the psalms' splendor and humanity, people often find it difficult to pray them, for many of the psalms seem violent and vindictive. We must remember, however, that the chief issue for biblical worshipers is God's power to save. Can God save from life's dangers and grant protection and prosperity? Since the arena in which power was displayed most vividly is the battlefield, it is not surprising that the LORD was often portrayed as a warrior, ruling with power. The war imagery is, however, secondary to the main point: God is a just ruler and judge, who upholds the faithful and righteous and puts down the wicked and rebellious.

So-called vindictive psalms are especially difficult for those who simplistically view Christianity as uniformly gentle and concerned primarily with the individual soul. Yet these psalms are not interested in punishment for its own sake but in redressing a wrong in the present. The psalmists think concretely rather than abstractly: they view evil as embodied in unjust people and pray for their elimination, including their potential for living on in their children. The psalms generally entrust the carrying out of these wishes into God's hands in the conviction that only God can make the world truly just and good. Sufferers can, however, cry out to God to take action, and even use words that appear extreme. Those who trust in God (see Ps 37.5–6) can pray these psalms by leaving everything—execution and timetable—in God's hands.

Richard J. Clifford

BOOK I PSALMS 1–41

Psalm 1

1 Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
2 but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
3 They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.
4 The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
6 for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 2

1 Why do the nations conspire,
and the peoples plot in vain?
2 The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and his anointed, saying,

Ps 1: The two ways. A torah or instructional psalm serving as an introduction to the Psalms. Pss 1 and 2 are introductory to the book of Psalms in that both celebrate the saving presence of God—Ps 1 for the individual and Ps 2 for the Davidic king—who offers protection from the wicked. Unlike the following psalms, these introductory works lack a Davidic superscription, suggesting their secondary, editorial function. Using the metaphor of the two ways, one leading to life and the other to death, Psalm 1 declares that reciting God's saving torah or teaching (in this case, including the psalms) keeps one on the path of life. There are themes of wisdom literature in this psalm. **1–3:** Any individual who adheres to the torah (*law*) and rejects the views of the wicked is fortunate. **1:** *Scoffers,* like *the wicked* and *sinners*, they contemptuously dismiss God's capacity to rule of the world. **2:** *Meditate,* lit. "recite"; ancients usually read aloud. **3:** *Trees,* possibly the trees in the Temple garden (Pss 52.8; 92.12–15) on Mount Zion, abundantly watered, symbolizing life (Pss 46.4; 65.9; Ezek 47.12). **4–6:** In contrast to the well-watered and deeply rooted tree (a vertical image; cf. Jer 17.7–8) is the dry and wind-driven *chaff* (a horizontal image).

[3] "Let us burst their bonds asunder,
and cast their cords from us."

[4] He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the LORD has them in derision.
[5] Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
[6] "I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill."

[7] I will tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to me, "You are my son;
today I have begotten you.
[8] Ask of me, and I will make the nations
your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your
possession.
[9] You shall break them with a rod of iron,
and dash them in pieces like a potter's
vessel."

[10] Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
[11] Serve the LORD with fear,
with trembling [12] kiss his feet,[a]
or he will be angry, and you will perish in
the way;
for his wrath is quickly kindled.

Happy are all who take refuge in him.

Psalm 3

A Psalm of David, when he fled from his son Absalom.

[1] O LORD, how many are my foes!
Many are rising against me;
[2] many are saying to me,
"There is no help for you[b] in
God." *Selah*

[3] But you, O LORD, are a shield around me,
my glory, and the one who lifts up my
head.
[4] I cry aloud to the LORD,
and he answers me from his
holy hill. *Selah*

[5] I lie down and sleep;
I wake again, for the LORD sustains me.
[6] I am not afraid of ten thousands of
people
who have set themselves against me all
around.

[7] Rise up, O LORD!
Deliver me, O my God!

[a] Cn: Meaning of Heb of verses 11b and 12a is uncertain
[b] Syr: Heb *him*

Ps 2: The Israelite king, instrument of God's rule. In this royal psalm, a court poet asks incredulously why the nations dare to threaten the Davidic king (vv. 1–3) when the Most High has stated that the king is his son and representative, hence in principle the most high among earthly kings. Like Ps 1, Ps 2 is introductory, and there are links between the two psalms, which are considered a single unit in some traditions: Ps 2.11 ends with "happy," echoing the first word in Ps 1; "the way [of the wicked] will perish" in 1.6 is echoed in 2.11, "you will perish in the way"; thematically, the divine instruction of the psalms protects from evil just as the divine promise protects the Israelite king and people from evil kings. **1–3:** In describing hostile nations, the speaker quotes their deluded speech as in Pss 48.4–8; 76; and Ezek 38–39. **2:** *Anointed* (Heb "mashiaḥ"), is always used in the Hebrew Bible of an actual ruler rather than of a future king. **4–9:** Dismissing the vain posturing of the kings, the Davidic king cites God's adoption formula (see 2 Sam 7.14; Ps 89.26–27) and promise of universal sovereignty. **6:** *Zion, my holy hill,* Jerusalem, where the royal palace and the Temple were part of the same architectural complex. **10–11:** In the light of the divine promise, the poet warns the kings to end their rebellion and submit. **12:** The exact meaning of the words translated *kiss his feet* is debated.

Ps 3: Threatened by many but trusting still. An individual petition. Threatened by "many enemies" (v. 1) who deny that the LORD can provide "help" and "deliverance" (vv. 2,8), the psalmist calmly affirms God's presence. Each of the three sections (vv. 1–3; 4–6; 7–8) begins with a prayer and ends with a statement of confidence. **Superscription:** The superscription, secondarily inserted here, situates the psalm with David fleeing from his rebellious son Absalom (2 Sam 15–18). **1:** The psalmist responds to the enemies by addressing God as "you" (v. 3) and using divine titles expressing power to save. **2:** *Selah* (also vv. 4,8) is a musical notation, used a total of seventy-eight times in the Bible, only in Psalms and Hab 3. Its exact meaning is uncertain, but it is typically used after a section of a psalm, perhaps indicating an interlude. **3:** *My glory,* one who restores one's glory or dignity. **4:** *His holy hill*, Mount Zion, where some psalmists believed God was most present (but contrast, e.g., Ps 2.4,

For you strike all my enemies on the
cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked.

8 Deliverance belongs to the LORD;
may your blessing be on your people!
Selah

Psalm 4

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

1 Answer me when I call, O God of my
right!
You gave me room when I was in
distress.
Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

2 How long, you people, shall my honor
suffer shame?
How long will you love vain words, and
seek after lies? *Selah*
3 But know that the LORD has set apart the
faithful for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.

4 When you are disturbed,[a] do not sin;
ponder it on your beds, and be silent.
Selah
5 Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.

6 There are many who say, "O that we
might see some good!
Let the light of your face shine on us,
O LORD!"
7 You have put gladness in my heart
more than when their grain and wine
abound.

8 I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
for you alone, O LORD, make me lie
down in safety.

Psalm 5

To the leader: for the flutes. A Psalm of David.

1 Give ear to my words, O LORD;
give heed to my sighing.
2 Listen to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.
3 O LORD, in the morning you hear my
voice;
in the morning I plead my case to you,
and watch.

4 For you are not a God who delights in
wickedness;
evil will not sojourn with you.
5 The boastful will not stand before your
eyes;
you hate all evildoers.
6 You destroy those who speak lies;
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and
deceitful.

7 But I, through the abundance of your
steadfast love,
will enter your house,
I will bow down toward your holy temple
in awe of you.
8 Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.

9 For there is no truth in their mouths;
their hearts are destruction;

[a] Or *are angry*

"He who sits in the heavens"). **5:** *I lie down,* calmly sleeping as enemies lurk is an act of trust. **7:** God striking the enemies on the mouth for their words is poetic justice, punishment fitting the crime. The psalmist, however, leaves the actual punishment to God.

Ps 4: Rescue me so I can be an example to sinners. An individual petition, with a strong emphasis on trust. **1–3:** Confident in the care God lavishes on the faithful (vv. 1a, 3b), the psalmist boldly demands that the slanderers cease their lies. **2:** *Selah* (also v. 4), see Ps 3.2n. **4:** *Ponder it on your beds*, reflect in private in contrast to public worship, as in v. 5, "offer right sacrifices." **6:** Unlike *many* who demand divine gifts as a right, the psalmist quietly relies upon the LORD to grant joy and security. *Light . . . shine,* cf. Num 6.24–26.

Ps 5: Prayer for access to the Temple. An individual petition for protection from the wicked who seem to be keeping the psalmist away from the presence of God in the Temple. Two themes alternate: seeking and enjoying God's presence (vv. 1–3,7–8,11–12), and the threat of the wicked (vv. 4–6,9–10). **7:** *But I . . . will enter your house,* emphatically states the psalmist's intent to visit the Temple, and thus asks for God's help through

their throats are open graves;
they flatter with their tongues.
10 Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of their many transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.

11 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them,
so that those who love your name may exult in you.
12 For you bless the righteous, O LORD;
you cover them with favor as with a shield.

Psalm 6

To the leader: with stringed instruments; according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David.

1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,
or discipline me in your wrath.
2 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.
3 My soul also is struck with terror,
while you, O LORD—how long?

4 Turn, O LORD, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.
5 For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who can give you praise?

6 I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
7 My eyes waste away because of grief;
they grow weak because of all my foes.

8 Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.
9 The LORD has heard my supplication;
the LORD accepts my prayer.
10 All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror;
they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame.

Psalm 7

A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjaminite.

1 O LORD my God, in you I take refuge;
save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me,

divine *steadfast love* (Heb "ḥesed," a major theme in the Psalms) to travel there safely (v. 8). **9:** *Mouths, hearts, throats, tongues,* the enemies are characterized by their perverted organs of speech and the inconsistency of their words and their intentions. **11–12:** The mixing of private longing and public celebration and joy shows that the psalmist hopes to join fellow Israelites in worshiping God.

Ps 6: Plea for God's help in sickness. An individual petition consisting of petition (vv. 1–2,4–5), complaint (vv. 2–3,6–7), mention of enemies (v. 8), and statement of trust (vv. 9–10). Tightly structured in two major parts, vv. 1–5 address God, and vv. 6–10 address God and the enemies. The psalm is one of the seven penitential psalms in Christian tradition (Pss 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). **Superscription:** *Sheminith,* "the eighth" (cf. "octave"), a musical term of uncertain significance. **3:** The sufferer interprets physical illness and emotional exhaustion as divine abandonment and asks *how long* the estrangement will last. **4:** The opening imperative verb *turn* (to me), addressed to God, is matched by the imperative verb in v. 8, "depart from me," addressed to the enemies, whose exact nature is unclear here, as in many psalms. Separation from the God whom the psalmist delights in praising is intolerable. **5:** *Sheol* is the underworld, where all reside after death. The psalmist's death will diminish the praise due to God; cf. Pss 30.9; 88.10–12; 115.17. **8:** A sudden change of mood, caused by renewed confidence in God's help, which may have been intimated by a sign or oracle that the psalmist perceived.

Ps 7: Prayer for deliverance from enemies and for justice. This individual petition begins with the psalmist seeking refuge, perhaps in the Temple, and taking an oath of innocence (vv. 1–8); it continues by a plea for justice for the entire world (vv. 9–16), and ends with a statement of trust (v. 17). **Superscription:** This incident in David's life is otherwise unknown, suggesting that these superscriptions are based on events beyond those narrated in the books of Samuel. *Shiggaion,* a musical term of unknown meaning, occurring only here. **1–5:** An innocent person could claim sanctuary at the altar (Ex 21.14; 1 Kings 2.28–35), though an oath of innocence involved risk if one did not tell the truth. Job 31 contains a much longer negative oath of self-imprecation, which

2 or like a lion they will tear me apart;
they will drag me away, with no one to rescue.

3 O LORD my God, if I have done this,
if there is wrong in my hands,
4 if I have repaid my ally with harm
or plundered my foe without cause,
5 then let the enemy pursue and overtake me,
trample my life to the ground,
and lay my soul in the dust. *Selah*

6 Rise up, O LORD, in your anger;
lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies;
awake, O my God;[a] you have appointed a judgment.
7 Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered around you,
and over it take your seat[b] on high.
8 The LORD judges the peoples;
judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness
and according to the integrity that is in me.

9 O let the evil of the wicked come to an end,
but establish the righteous,
you who test the minds and hearts,
O righteous God.
10 God is my shield,
who saves the upright in heart.
11 God is a righteous judge,
and a God who has indignation every day.

12 If one does not repent, God[c] will whet his sword;
he has bent and strung his bow;
13 he has prepared his deadly weapons,
making his arrows fiery shafts.
14 See how they conceive evil,
and are pregnant with mischief,
and bring forth lies.
15 They make a pit, digging it out,
and fall into the hole that they have made.
16 Their mischief returns upon their own heads,
and on their own heads their violence descends.

17 I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness,
and sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.

Psalm 8

To the leader: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David.

1 O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.
2 Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

[a] Or *awake for me*
[b] Cn: Heb *return*
[c] Heb *he*

was used by ancients to protest their innocence. **5:** *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **6–8:** The psalmist urgently appeals for protection to the divine judge surrounded, it seems, by members of the heavenly court having responsibility over the nations. **15–16:** That the wicked are caught in the traps they set is a common idea in wisdom literature (e.g., Prov 26.27; see also Pss 9.15–16; 35.7–8; 141.10). **17:** Thanks given for the anticipated rescue.

Ps 8: Wonder at the LORD's creation of humans. This memorable hymn praises God who has given such honor and responsibility to humans. **Superscription:** *Gittith,* an unknown musical term, also in Pss 81; 84. **1:** *Name,* parallel to *glory* (of God). As often in hymns, the opening invitation is reprised in the final line (v. 9), forming an inclusio or envelope structure. **2:** The text is unclear; it may refer to the LORD's victory over chaotic forces (see Pss 89; 93). **3–8:** Looking at the vast universe, the poet is awed by the LORD's attentiveness to one small element in that universe: humans, who have been given the honor of ruling the three domains of sky, earth, and sea. The picture is much like Gen 1.26–28, where humans rule over the three domains and enjoy the dignity of being

the moon and the stars that you have established;
4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals[a] that you care for them?

5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God,[b]
and crowned them with glory and honor.
6 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
7 all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

9 O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Psalm 9

To the leader: according to Muth-labben. A Psalm of David.

1 I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart;
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.
2 I will be glad and exult in you;
I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

3 When my enemies turned back,
they stumbled and perished before you.
4 For you have maintained my just cause;
you have sat on the throne giving righteous judgment.

5 You have rebuked the nations, you have destroyed the wicked;
you have blotted out their name forever and ever.
6 The enemies have vanished in everlasting ruins;
their cities you have rooted out;
the very memory of them has perished.

7 But the LORD sits enthroned forever,
he has established his throne for judgment.
8 He judges the world with righteousness;
he judges the peoples with equity.

9 The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
10 And those who know your name put their trust in you,
for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.

11 Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion.
Declare his deeds among the peoples.
12 For he who avenges blood is mindful of them;
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

[a] Heb *ben adam*, lit. *son of man*
[b] Or *than the divine beings* or *angels*: Heb *elohim*

created in the image of God. **4:** Contrast Ps 144.3; Job 7.17. **5:** *God,* better, "heavenly beings" (Heb "elohim," [lit. "gods"]; see textual note *b*). As the heavenly world is ruled by heavenly beings, so the earthly world, parallel to it, is ruled by earthly beings.

Ps 9–10: Thanks, petition, and pain at God's delay in coming. Hebrew tradition handed down Pss 9–10 as two poems, but together they form one unit with an acrostic structure: Each section begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, though this psalm is poorly transmitted and some of this structure is broken. The Greek text also shows it is a single poem. As in other acrostic poems (Pss 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145; Lam 1–4; Prov 31.10–31), the alphabetic structure provides a formal unity, and the content is less systematically structured. The psalm records three successive experiences of God: joyous recognition of benefits to the singer (9.3–4) and the nation (9.5–8), a cry for help during an attack (9.13–14), and a deeply felt desire for justice (10.1–18). **Superscription:** *Muth-labben,* a musical term of unknown meaning; see also Ps 48.15n. **9.1:** A promise to tell others what God has done for the psalmist (vv. 3–4) and for the nation (vv. 5–8). **7–10:** The LORD as righteous judge and defender of the oppressed, a common theme in the Psalms (e.g., 98.9). **13–20:** Awareness of God's salvation inspires fresh petitions (vv. 13–14,19–20) and a serene statement that divine justice will

13 Be gracious to me, O LORD.
See what I suffer from those who hate me;
you are the one who lifts me up from the gates of death,
14 so that I may recount all your praises,
and, in the gates of daughter Zion,
rejoice in your deliverance.

15 The nations have sunk in the pit that they made;
in the net that they hid has their own foot been caught.
16 The LORD has made himself known, he has executed judgment;
the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. *Higgaion. Selah*

17 The wicked shall depart to Sheol,
all the nations that forget God.

18 For the needy shall not always be forgotten,
nor the hope of the poor perish forever.

19 Rise up, O LORD! Do not let mortals prevail;
let the nations be judged before you.
20 Put them in fear, O LORD;
let the nations know that they are only human. *Selah*

Psalm 10

1 Why, O LORD, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?
2 In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor—
let them be caught in the schemes they have devised.

3 For the wicked boast of the desires of their heart,
those greedy for gain curse and renounce the LORD.
4 In the pride of their countenance the wicked say, "God will not seek it out";
all their thoughts are, "There is no God."

5 Their ways prosper at all times;
your judgments are on high, out of their sight;
as for their foes, they scoff at them.
6 They think in their heart, "We shall not be moved;
throughout all generations we shall not meet adversity."

7 Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression;
under their tongues are mischief and iniquity.
8 They sit in ambush in the villages;
in hiding places they murder the innocent.

Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;
9 they lurk in secret like a lion in its covert;
they lurk that they may seize the poor;
they seize the poor and drag them off in their net.

10 They stoop, they crouch,
and the helpless fall by their might.
11 They think in their heart, "God has forgotten,
he has hidden his face, he will never see it."

12 Rise up, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand;
do not forget the oppressed.
13 Why do the wicked renounce God,
and say in their hearts, "You will not call us to account"?

prevail (vv. 15–18). **14:** A significant theme of the Psalms is that God enjoys being praised; cf. 6.4–5. **15–16:** See Ps 7.15–16n. *Higgaion,* a musical term of unknown meaning, occurring only here. *Selah* (also v. 20), see Ps 3.2n. **17:** *Sheol,* the underworld, the abode of the dead. **10.1–18:** With the question *Why?* (v. 1), the psalmist complains of the effects of God's absence—the persecution of the poor by the wealthy (v. 2a)—and gives an unusually long description of the wicked who devote all their energy to evil (vv. 3–11). Rather than requesting only his help, the psalmist here offers a broader argument about the power of evildoers and the suffering of the righteous.

14 But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief,
that you may take it into your hands;
the helpless commit themselves to you;
you have been the helper of the orphan.

15 Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers;
seek out their wickedness until you find none.
16 The LORD is king forever and ever;
the nations shall perish from his land.

17 O LORD, you will hear the desire of the meek;
you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear
18 to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed,
so that those from earth may strike terror no more.[a]

Psalm 11

To the leader. Of David.

1 In the LORD I take refuge; how can you say to me,
"Flee like a bird to the mountains;[b]
2 for look, the wicked bend the bow,
they have fitted their arrow to the string,
to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart.
3 If the foundations are destroyed,
what can the righteous do?"
4 The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD's throne is in heaven.
His eyes behold, his gaze examines humankind.
5 The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked,
and his soul hates the lover of violence.
6 On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and sulfur;
a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.
7 For the LORD is righteous;
he loves righteous deeds;
the upright shall behold his face.

Psalm 12

To the leader: according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David.

1 Help, O LORD, for there is no longer anyone who is godly;
the faithful have disappeared from humankind.
2 They utter lies to each other;
with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

3 May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,
the tongue that makes great boasts,
4 those who say, "With our tongues we will prevail;
our lips are our own—who is our master?"

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Gk Syr Jerome Tg: Heb *flee to your mountain, O bird*

Ps 11: Trust in the LORD and do not panic. A song of trust, which develops one aspect of the individual petition, the statement of trust in the LORD in the Temple (as in Pss 27.8–9,13; 42.2). **1:** *Flee like a bird to the mountains!* Disaster in the form of invading armies and moral collapse has struck and people are urging flight. A fleeing bird is a symbol of panic-stricken flight as in Isa 16.2; Prov 27.8. **4–7:** Rejecting the advice of others, the psalmist chooses instead to trust in the LORD's protective presence in the Temple, confident that the LORD is a just judge who scrutinizes human conduct, curbs the wicked, upholds the loyal. **4:** It is uncertain if the psalmist means God's heavenly *temple*, in which case the initial ideas are synonymous, or if God is being depicted as present both in *heaven* and in the earthly *temple* in Jerusalem. **6:** *Coals of fire and sulfur* and *a scorching wind,* divine weapons (see Gen 19.24; Am 7.4). **7:** The *upright* see the LORD's *face,* i.e., experience the divine presence in the Temple; see Pss 27.8–9; 42.2.

Ps 12: Prayer in a time of moral disorder and lawlessness. An individual petition provoked by the destructive speech of the powerful (vv. 1–4); it is answered by a promise of divine intervention (v. 5) that invites the psalmist's trust (vv. 6–8). Like Ps 60.6–8, this psalm seems to preserve an oracle of salvation (v. 5), perhaps uttered by a Temple official in response to a petition (cf. 1 Sam 1.11–18). **Superscription:** *Sheminith,* see Ps 6n. **3:** *Cut off all flattering lips,* victimized by an ungodly group using lies to control the community (vv. 1–2), the psalmist begs

5 "Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan,
I will now rise up," says the LORD;
"I will place them in the safety for which they long."
6 The promises of the LORD are promises that are pure,
silver refined in a furnace on the ground,
purified seven times.

7 You, O LORD, will protect us;
you will guard us from this generation forever.
8 On every side the wicked prowl,
as vileness is exalted among humankind.

Psalm 13

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
2 How long must I bear pain[a] in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
4 and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

5 But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
6 I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Psalm 14

To the leader. Of David.

1 Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;
there is no one who does good.

2 The LORD looks down from heaven on humankind
to see if there are any who are wise,
who seek after God.

3 They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse;
there is no one who does good,
no, not one.

4 Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers
who eat up my people as they eat bread,
and do not call upon the LORD?

5 There they shall be in great terror,
for God is with the company of the righteous.
6 You would confound the plans of the poor,
but the LORD is their refuge.

[a] Syr: Heb *hold counsels*

God to destroy their capacity to speak. **6–7:** The psalmist takes the *promises* as already operating.

Ps 13: How long will the enemy threaten my life? An individual petition. **1:** *How long?* A request to know exactly how much longer the suffering is destined to last, or perhaps a rhetorical complaint. *Hide your face,* God has refused to look beneficently at the psalmist, causing his grief. **2:** The psalmists blend internal anguish and external danger; often not distinguishing psychological, physical, and social suffering. **3:** *Consider and answer me,* a contemporary paraphrase might be, "Look at me! Talk to me!" *Give light to my eyes,* i.e., give me joy and vitality (see Prov 29.13). **5:** *But I trusted,* anxiety shifts to trust in the LORD, as is typical of individual petitions.

Ps 14: Refusal to be silenced by those who deny God's justice. A condemnation of those who deny that God is active in the world and a declaration of trust in the God who cares for the poor (among whom the psalmist wants to be counted). Psalm 53 is a near duplicate of this psalm. **1:** *There is no God,* denies God's ability to govern, not necessarily God's existence; see Ps 10.4. **2:** God's scrutiny lays bare the deniers' folly and malice. In the style of wisdom literature, the rebellious are contrasted with the *wise, who seek after God*. **4:** Evildoers will finally learn that God defends those whom they exploit. **5:** *There,* evidently a reference to Mount Zion as in Pss

7 O that deliverance for Israel would come
from Zion!
When the LORD restores the fortunes of
his people,
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

Psalm 15

A Psalm of David.

1 O LORD, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?

2 Those who walk blamelessly, and do
what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;
3 who do not slander with their
tongue,
and do no evil to their friends,
nor take up a reproach against their
neighbors;
4 in whose eyes the wicked are despised,
but who honor those who fear the
LORD;
who stand by their oath even to their
hurt;
5 who do not lend money at interest,
and do not take a bribe against the
innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be
moved.

Psalm 16

A Miktam of David.

1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take
refuge.
2 I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."[a]

3 As for the holy ones in the land, they are
the noble,
in whom is all my delight.

4 Those who choose another god multiply
their sorrows;[b]
their drink offerings of blood I will not
pour out
or take their names upon my lips.

5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in
pleasant places;
I have a goodly heritage.

7 I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
8 I keep the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall
not be moved.

[a] Jerome Tg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

48.6; 76.3. **7:** A generalized conclusion, moving from the individual to the community, as Israel lives in the hope that salvation comes from *Zion*. *When the LORD restores* may refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.

Ps 15: Who will be admitted into God's presence? The psalm seems to reflect a ritual admitting worshipers to the Temple (cf. Ps 24 and Isa 33.14b–16). Ten actions describe the righteousness expected of a genuine worshiper: the first two are positive (v. 2), the second three, negative (v. 3), the third three, negative and positive (v. 4), and the last two negative (v. 5b). **1:** *Tent*, a poetic designation for the Temple (Pss 27.5; 61.4). **2–5b:** The ten clauses describing the ideal worshiper overlap and make their effect cumulative. **2:** *Walk*, conduct oneself. *Speak the truth from their heart*, one does not say one thing while intending another. **4:** *In whose eyes the wicked are despised*, the righteous reject anyone rejected by God. **5:** *Do not lend money at interest*, forbidden by Ex 22.25 and Lev 25.37. Money (i.e., silver that was weighed out) was not regarded as a commodity. **5c:** After the confession, an officiant, perhaps a priest or Levite, presumably admitted worshipers to the security of the Temple.

Ps 16: The LORD dwells in the Temple. A declaration of trust in the one God of Israel, though others worship many gods: a daunting yet joyous commitment. **Superscription:** *Miktam,* a technical term of unknown meaning. **1–2:** Though seemingly a cry for rescue from an immediate danger, the verses are most probably a declaration of trust in a particular God—the LORD—in traditional client-patron language. **3:** NRSV interprets the unclear verse as referring to Israelites whose fellowship one gains when one professes faith in the LORD. **4:** *Drink offerings of blood,* blood offerings are not often attested in biblical religion; see Ps 50.13, and cf. Ex 24.6. **5–6:** *Portion, lot, boundary lines, heritage,* references to the distribution and possession of the land of Israel (Josh 13–19). Possibly the psalmist was a priest; see Num 18.20; Josh 18.7. **7–11:** The response of the individual

[9] Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.
[10] For you do not give me up to Sheol,
or let your faithful one see the Pit.

[11] You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 17

A Prayer of David.

[1] Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry;
give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit.
[2] From you let my vindication come;
let your eyes see the right.

[3] If you try my heart, if you visit me by night,
if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me;
my mouth does not transgress.
[4] As for what others do, by the word of your lips
I have avoided the ways of the violent.
[5] My steps have held fast to your paths;
my feet have not slipped.

[6] I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;
incline your ear to me, hear my words.
[7] Wondrously show your steadfast love,
O savior of those who seek refuge
from their adversaries at your right hand.
[8] Guard me as the apple of the eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings,
[9] from the wicked who despoil me,
my deadly enemies who surround me.
[10] They close their hearts to pity;
with their mouths they speak arrogantly.
[11] They track me down;[a] now they surround me;
they set their eyes to cast me to the ground.
[12] They are like a lion eager to tear,
like a young lion lurking in ambush.

[13] Rise up, O LORD, confront them, overthrow them!
By your sword deliver my life from the wicked,
[14] from mortals—by your hand, O LORD—
from mortals whose portion in life is in this world.
May their bellies be filled with what you have stored up for them;
may their children have more than enough;
may they leave something over to their little ones.

[15] As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;
when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.

[a] One Ms Compare Syr: MT *Our steps*

whose God is now the LORD, giving praise (v. 8) and rejoicing in God's nearness (vv. 9–11). **10:** *Sheol . . . the Pit,* the abode of the dead.

Ps 17: Rescue me, your loyal client, and let me see your face. An individual petition stressing the psalmist's past loyalty (vv. 1–5), present need (vv. 6–14), and ardent hope to see God in the Temple (v. 15). **1–5:** Wishing to gain a fair hearing, the psalmist claims to have passed every testing and been proven loyal. **6:** *You will answer me,* the result of the long-established trust between divine patron and human client. The psalmist personalizes life's many dangers as human enemies. **7:** *Steadfast love* (Heb "ḥesed"), a covenantal term here, referring to the loving obligations assumed by each partner. **8:** *Apple of the eye,* the pupil. *Shadow of your wings* (Pss 36.7; 57.1; etc.), either disembodied wings representing divine protection as in Egyptian religion, or the wings of the composite animals guarding the deity's throne in the Temple, the cherubim. **13:** *Confront them* (lit. "come before their face"), anticipating the conclusion of the psalm where the supplicant wants to see God's face. **14:** Expresses the wish that the wicked and their families undergo what they have tried to inflict on others. **15:** Though presumably still in danger, the psalmist speaks with the certainty that the opening petition has been granted. Although the Priestly source of the Pentateuch depicts the Temple as aniconic, without statue or image, language such as *I shall behold your face* may suggest that at one point the Temple had an image of God.

Psalm 18

To the leader. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD, *who addressed the words of this song to the* LORD *on the day when the* LORD *delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said:*

1 I love you, O LORD, my strength.
2 The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
3 I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
so I shall be saved from my enemies.

4 The cords of death encompassed me;
the torrents of perdition assailed me;
5 the cords of Sheol entangled me;
the snares of death confronted me.

6 In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.

7 Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations also of the mountains trembled
and quaked, because he was angry.
8 Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him.
9 He bowed the heavens, and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet.
10 He rode on a cherub, and flew;
he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind.
11 He made darkness his covering around him,
his canopy thick clouds dark with water.
12 Out of the brightness before him
there broke through his clouds
hailstones and coals of fire.
13 The LORD also thundered in the heavens,
and the Most High uttered his voice.[a]
14 And he sent out his arrows, and scattered them;
he flashed forth lightnings, and routed them.
15 Then the channels of the sea were seen,
and the foundations of the world were laid bare
at your rebuke, O LORD,
at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.

16 He reached down from on high, he took me;
he drew me out of mighty waters.
17 He delivered me from my strong enemy,
and from those who hated me;
for they were too mighty for me.
18 They confronted me in the day of my calamity;
but the LORD was my support.
19 He brought me out into a broad place;
he delivered me, because he delighted in me.

20 The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he recompensed me.

[a] Gk See 2 Sam 22.14: Heb adds *hailstones and coals of fire*

Ps 18: A royal thanksgiving. A report of the king's rescue (vv. 1–19) is followed by reflections on his intimate relationship with the LORD and his primacy among earth's kings (vv. 20–45); the psalm ends with a fresh acknowledgment of the LORD's aid (vv. 46–50). Some scholars think that Ps 18 may have been sung at the coronation of the Davidic king to ground his authority in the LORD's creation victory (cf. Ps 89.5–28). An alternate version of the psalm appears in 2 Sam 22. **Superscription:** Rescues of David from foreign kings and domestic enemies including Saul (e.g., 1 Sam 18.10–30). **2:** An unusually long list of divine epithets. **4–5:** The enemies from which the LORD delivered the king are cosmic, both the chaotic *torrents* of the primordial sea, and the power of *death,* in *Sheol,* the underworld, the abode of the dead. **7–15:** Answering the appeal of the king was a divine appearance or theophany, with the LORD described as a storm god. **10:** *Cherub,* one of the bearers of the divine throne (see Ex 25.18–120; Ezek 1; Ps 17.8n.). **16–19:** Deliverance from a tight spot (v. 6) into a *broad,* unconfined *place* (see also v. 36). **20–24:** *According to my righteousness* (vv. 20,24), having fulfilled his covenant

21 For I have kept the ways of the LORD,
and have not wickedly departed from my God.
22 For all his ordinances were before me,
and his statutes I did not put away from me.
23 I was blameless before him,
and I kept myself from guilt.
24 Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness,
according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.

25 With the loyal you show yourself loyal;
with the blameless you show yourself blameless;
26 with the pure you show yourself pure;
and with the crooked you show yourself perverse.
27 For you deliver a humble people,
but the haughty eyes you bring down.
28 It is you who light my lamp;
the LORD, my God, lights up my darkness.
29 By you I can crush a troop,
and by my God I can leap over a wall.
30 This God—his way is perfect;
the promise of the LORD proves true;
he is a shield for all who take refuge in him.

31 For who is God except the LORD?
And who is a rock besides our God?—
32 the God who girded me with strength,
and made my way safe.
33 He made my feet like the feet of a deer,
and set me secure on the heights.
34 He trains my hands for war,
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
35 You have given me the shield of your salvation,
and your right hand has supported me;
your help[a] has made me great.
36 You gave me a wide place for my steps under me,
and my feet did not slip.
37 I pursued my enemies and overtook them;
and did not turn back until they were consumed.
38 I struck them down, so that they were not able to rise;
they fell under my feet.
39 For you girded me with strength for the battle;
you made my assailants sink under me.
40 You made my enemies turn their backs to me,
and those who hated me I destroyed.
41 They cried for help, but there was no one to save them;
they cried to the LORD, but he did not answer them.
42 I beat them fine, like dust before the wind;
I cast them out like the mire of the streets.

43 You delivered me from strife with the peoples;[b]
you made me head of the nations;
people whom I had not known served me.
44 As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me;
foreigners came cringing to me.
45 Foreigners lost heart,
and came trembling out of their strongholds.

46 The LORD lives! Blessed be my rock,
and exalted be the God of my salvation,
47 the God who gave me vengeance
and subdued peoples under me;
48 who delivered me from my enemies;
indeed, you exalted me above my adversaries;
you delivered me from the violent.

49 For this I will extol you, O LORD, among the nations,
and sing praises to your name.

[a] Or *gentleness*
[b] Gk Tg: Heb *people*

responsibilities, the king counts on his patron's loyal response. **25–45:** A new section with fresh topics: the LORD as loyal supporter (vv. 25–31), arming the king and granting him victory (vv. 32–42), and installing him as head of the kings of the world (vv. 43–45). **46–48:** Repetition of the epithets of the LORD from vv. 1–3, *rock* and

50 Great triumphs he gives to his king,
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his descendants forever.

Psalm 19

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

1 The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament[a] proclaims his handiwork.
2 Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
3 There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
4 yet their voice[b] goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens[c] he has set a tent for the sun,
5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.

7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the LORD are sure,
making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true
and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
12 But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.
13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent;[d]
do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 20

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

1 The LORD answer you in the day of trouble!
The name of the God of Jacob protect you!

[a] Or *dome*
[b] Gk Jerome Compare Syr: Heb *line*
[c] Heb *In them*
[d] Or *from proud thoughts*

deliverer, bring the psalm to a close. **50:** The LORD's eternal commitment to the dynasty of David (see 2 Sam 7.13; Ps 89.27–37).

Ps 19: Divine instruction gives light and life to humans. Like Pss 1 and 119, this psalm insists that divine instruction (Heb "torah") transforms humans. Though many scholars divide the psalm into two distinct parts, a hymn to the sun in vv. 1–6 and a meditation on wisdom in vv. 7–14, the poem is coherent. Divine wisdom, discernible in the daily movements of the heavens (vv. 1–4b), particularly in the sun's steady course (vv. 4c–6), is also visible in the teaching (vv. 7–9) to which humans have access; the psalm concludes with a prayer to fulfill these teachings (vv. 10–14). **1–4:** Without a word being said, the sun leads the day-night rhythm of the heavens that manifests divine control. **4:** *A tent for the sun,* God has given authority to the sun to lead the course of the heavens. In comparable religious literature, the head of the pantheon authorized lesser deities to build their tent dwellings. The sun symbolizes divine justice and wisdom because nothing is hid from its rays. **7–10:** There are six synonyms for instruction or law (Heb "torah") in vv. 7–9. The first four describe the law's beneficial effects on humans; the final two are instead concerned with the teaching itself (v. 9). **11–13:** May the wisdom contained in the law instruct the psalmist's heart. **12:** *Errors* and *hidden faults* may refer to inadvertent sins.

Ps 20: Prayer for the king's victory. A communal petition for the king's victory, connected with Ps 21. The first part (vv. 1–5) prays that the king will be victorious in battle, and the second (vv. 6–9) gives an assurance that he will be successful. **1:** *The LORD answer you,* occurs as petition in v. 1, assurance in v. 6, and petition in v. 9.

2 May he send you help from the
sanctuary,
and give you support from Zion.
3 May he remember all your offerings,
and regard with favor your burnt
sacrifices. *Selah*

4 May he grant you your heart's desire,
and fulfill all your plans.
5 May we shout for joy over your victory,
and in the name of our God set up our
banners.
May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.

6 Now I know that the LORD will help his
anointed;
he will answer him from his holy
heaven
with mighty victories by his right hand.
7 Some take pride in chariots, and some in
horses,
but our pride is in the name of the LORD
our God.
8 They will collapse and fall,
but we shall rise and stand upright.

9 Give victory to the king, O LORD;
answer us when we call.[a]

Psalm 21

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

1 In your strength the king rejoices, O LORD,
and in your help how greatly he exults!
2 You have given him his heart's desire,
and have not withheld the request of
his lips. *Selah*
3 For you meet him with rich blessings;
you set a crown of fine gold on his head.
4 He asked you for life; you gave it to him—
length of days forever and ever.
5 His glory is great through your help;
splendor and majesty you bestow on
him.
6 You bestow on him blessings forever;
you make him glad with the joy of your
presence.
7 For the king trusts in the LORD,
and through the steadfast love of the
Most High he shall not be moved.

8 Your hand will find out all your
enemies;
your right hand will find out those who
hate you.
9 You will make them like a fiery furnace
when you appear.
The LORD will swallow them up in his
wrath,
and fire will consume them.
10 You will destroy their offspring from the
earth,
and their children from among
humankind.
11 If they plan evil against you,
if they devise mischief, they will not
succeed.
12 For you will put them to flight;
you will aim at their faces with your
bows.

13 Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength!
We will sing and praise your power.

[a] Gk: Heb *give victory, O LORD; let the King answer us when we call*

Day of trouble, a military crisis requiring the king to act as military commander. **3:** *Offerings* and *sacrifices* could be offered to gain divine favor. *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **6:** *Now I know,* the phrase elsewhere expresses great confidence (Job 19.25; Pss 41.11; 56.9); it may reflect a positive oracle that the king received. **7–8:** Victory lies with God rather than superior military technology; cf. Ps 44.3.

Ps 21: Thanksgiving for the king's victory. A royal thanksgiving, a companion piece to Ps 20, reporting a victory gained with the LORD's help (vv. 1–7); it is followed by an assurance of future help (vv. 8–12) and concluded by a prayer (v. 13). The king's military role was understood to implement divine justice in an often hostile world. **1:** *Rejoices* and *exults,* refers not only to the inner feelings of the king but to the public celebration that would follow a major victory. **2:** *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **4–7:** The king's divine-like qualities are not intrinsic to him, but are bestowed by God. **4:** *Life*, not only the king's life but the people's as well, for the victory has brought security and prosperity. **5:** *Glory . . . splendor and majesty,* the nimbus of light surrounding gods and kings. **10:** *Destroy their offspring*, no one should be left to carry on the enemies' nefarious work. **13:** Such a victory is an occasion for the entire community to rejoice in God.

Psalm 22

To the leader: according to The Deer of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.

[1] My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
[2] O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.

[3] Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
[4] In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
[5] To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

[6] But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
[7] All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
[8] "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver—
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"

[9] Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
[10] On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
[11] Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

[12] Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
[13] they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.

[14] I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
[15] my mouth[a] is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

[16] For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;[b]
[17] I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
[18] they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

[19] But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
[20] Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life[c] from the power of the dog!
[21] Save me from the mouth of the lion!

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued[d] me.

[a] Cn: Heb *strength*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Heb *my only one*
[d] Heb *answered*

Ps 22: Plea to be delivered from relentless enemies. An individual petition remarkable for its intense expressions of anguish (vv. 1–2,6–8,12–18), vivid recollections of God's healing presence (vv. 3–5,9–11), lively gratitude for rescue (vv. 22–26), and trust in God's universal sovereignty (vv. 27–31). **Superscription:** *According to the Deer of the Dawn,* a musical term, perhaps indicating the melody to which the words were sung. **1–21:** The complaint is that the LORD, the patron of Israel's ancestors (vv. 3–5) has not rescued one who suffers even though he has been faithful (vv. 9–11). **6:** The dehumanized psalmist is mocked by his enemies. **12–21:** The extensive and diverse metaphors for the supplicant's trouble express the great extent of his trouble. **12–13:** Enemies stalk the psalmist like wild beasts (Ps 7.2; Isa 56.9). The subhuman bestial world is contrasted with the human worshipers in the Temple (v. 22). **12:** *Bashan*, a fertile region in northern Transjordan famous for its cattle. **14:** *Poured out like water*, tears were conceived as welling up from the abdomen, that is, coming from the physical center of the person. **16:** *My hands and feet have shriveled,* textually obscure: (lit. "like a lion my hands and feet"); see textual note *b*. **17–18:** *I can count all my bones* (lit. "ribs"), robbers have stripped the psalmist of his clothes and he is

22 I will tell of your name to my brothers
and sisters;[a]
in the midst of the congregation I will
praise you:
23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of
Israel!
24 For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,[b]
but heard when I[c] cried to him.

25 From you comes my praise in the great
congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who
fear him.
26 The poor[d] shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the
LORD.
May your hearts live forever!

27 All the ends of the earth shall
remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.[e]
28 For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.

29 To him,[f] indeed, shall all who sleep in[g]
the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down
to the dust,
and I shall live for him.[h]
30 Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about
the Lord,
31 and[i] proclaim his deliverance to a people
yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

Psalm 23

A Psalm of David.

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;[j]
3 he restores my soul.[k]
He leads me in right paths[l]
for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the darkest
valley,[m]
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;

[a] Or *kindred*
[b] Heb *him*
[c] Heb *he*
[d] Or *afflicted*
[e] Gk Syr Jerome: Heb *you*
[f] Cn: Heb *They have eaten and*
[g] Cn: Heb *all the fat ones*
[h] Compare Gk Syr Vg: Heb *and he who cannot keep himself alive*
[i] Compare Gk: Heb *it will be told about the Lord to the generation,* 31*they will come and*
[j] Heb *waters of rest*
[k] Or *life*
[l] Or *paths of righteousness*
[m] Or *the valley of the shadow of death*

emaciated. **22–31:** The psalmist attempts to motivate God to rescue him by promising that he will then give thanks among humans, in the *great congregation* (v. 25), likely the Temple in Jerusalem; the rescue of a single individual will then have larger, even universal (see v. 27) and future (vv. 30–31) ramifications. **22:** *Tell of your name,* declare to others what God has done, thereby encouraging them to praise God. **27:** On praise of God by the nations, see, e.g., Pss 67.2–4; 86.9; 117.1. **29:** On worship by the dead, contrast Pss 6.5; 30.9; 88.10–12; 115.17.

Ps 23: The LORD as shepherd and host. The most beloved of the psalms, a song of trust. Though seemingly idyllic, evil lurks at the margin (vv. 4a, 5b), and "nature" is sometimes dangerous (v. 4). The poem transposes to individual experience the Exodus traditions of the divine shepherd guiding Israel (e.g., Ps 78.43–55). There are two distinct images of God in the psalm: shepherd (vv. 1–4), and host of a banquet (v. 5); and two grammatical persons used of God: *he* in vv. 1–3, *you* in vv. 4–6. **1:** *Shepherd,* a favorite title of ancient Near Eastern kings, symbolizing especially the king's compassionate care for his people (Pss 80.1; 95.7; 100.3; Isa 40.11; Jer 10.21; Ezek 34.11–16). Verse 1 can be paraphrased: It is the LORD who is my shepherd; that is why I lack nothing. **2:** *Still waters*, not swiftly running, so the sheep can keep their footing as they drink from the pool. **5:** *Prepare a table,*

you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
6 Surely[a] goodness and mercy[b] shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.[c]

Psalm 24

Of David. A Psalm.

1 The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
2 for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.

3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
4 Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.
5 They will receive blessing from the LORD,
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
6 Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.[d] *Selah*

7 Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.
8 Who is the King of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle.
9 Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.
10 Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory. *Selah*

Psalm 25

Of David.

1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
2 O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

4 Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.

[a] Or *Only*
[b] Or *kindness*
[c] Heb *for length of days*
[d] Gk Syr: Heb *your face, O Jacob*

the image of shepherd changes to that of host of a meal; cf. Ps 78.19. *In the presence of my enemies*, the LORD's invitation to dine vindicates the psalmist as just, whereas the enemies are not invited. **6:** *My whole life long,* the Hebrew suggests simply long life, not "forever." Residing in the *house of the LORD* implies divine protection.

Ps 24: The holiness of the house of the LORD. A hymn celebrating the LORD's enthronement that begins, like Ps 15, with a demand of right conduct. The psalm proceeds in three stages: the proclamation of the cosmic victory of the LORD (vv. 1–2), a scrutiny to make certain that only the loyal enter and welcome the Divine Warrior to his dwelling (vv. 3–6), and a call to the Temple gates to welcome God the king. **1–2:** Presupposed is the combat myth in which the storm god defeats chaotic Sea, creates the universe, and erects a palace (temple) to commemorate the victory. Israel likely borrowed and transformed this myth from its Canaanite predecessors. **3–6:** Only those loyal to the victorious LORD are fit to share the fruits of victory; the questions determine whether worshipers have been loyal. **4:** *Lift up their souls to what is false,* similar to the commandment of the Decalogue, "You shall have no other gods before you" (Ex 20.3; Deut 5.7). **5:** *Blessing from the LORD*, the deity shares the fruits of victory. **6:** *Selah* (also v. 10), see Ps 3.2n. **7:** *Lift up your heads, O gates!* Personified, the Temple *gates* are invited to lift up their heads in joy and join the chorus welcoming the triumphant warrior; some scholars emend "gates" to "gatekeepers."

Ps 25: Prayer for forgiveness and guidance. An individual petition in acrostic form (see Ps 9–10n.), divided into three parts (vv. 1–7; 8–14; 15–22). The first and third parts are lengthy petitions in which "I" (the singer) addresses "you" (God); the middle part (with the exception of v. 11) is a hymn-lesson, speaking of God in the third person. **1:** *My soul,* Heb "nepesh," the throat, face, and breast area, often rendered "soul" or "life" because one's vital signs are palpable in that part of the body; the Hebrew Bible does not recognize a body-soul dichotomy.

5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

6 Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

8 Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
9 He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.
10 All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

11 For your name's sake, O LORD,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.
12 Who are they that fear the LORD?
He will teach them the way that they should choose.

13 They will abide in prosperity,
and their children shall possess the land.
14 The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,
and he makes his covenant known to them.
15 My eyes are ever toward the LORD,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.

17 Relieve the troubles of my heart,
and bring me[a] out of my distress.
18 Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.

19 Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
20 O guard my life, and deliver me;
do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
21 May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.

22 Redeem Israel, O God,
out of all its troubles.

Psalm 26
Of David.

1 Vindicate me, O LORD,
for I have walked in my integrity,
and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.
2 Prove me, O LORD, and try me;
test my heart and mind.
3 For your steadfast love is before my eyes,
and I walk in faithfulness to you.[b]

4 I do not sit with the worthless,
nor do I consort with hypocrites;
5 I hate the company of evildoers,
and will not sit with the wicked.

6 I wash my hands in innocence,
and go around your altar, O LORD,

[a] Or *The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me*
[b] Or *in your faithfulness*

8–14: Apart from v. 11, the middle section is a hymn-lesson about divine guidance with allusions to the Exodus (*way*, *he leads*, *paths, covenant*). Even the petition for forgiveness in v. 11, *pardon my guilt*, cites Moses' plea in Ex 34.9. **15–22:** As motives to move God to help, the psalmist simply says *I am lonely* (v. 16), my foes are many (v. 19), and *I wait for you* (v. 21). **22:** At its conclusion, the psalm is generalized to the community.

Ps 26: Plea for salvation and for a declaration of righteousness. An individual petition, probably of a priest (presumably only a priest could *go around your altar*, v. 6) who is awed by the demands of his office. Since a priest represented all Israel (e.g., Ex 28.29–30) and Israel was a priestly people among the nations, a priest's psalm could be used by any individual. Walking occurs at the psalm's beginning and end, suggesting participation in sacred processions. **1:** The priest asks God to *vindicate* his claims of right conduct, for no one's self-assessment is valid without God's acceptance. **4–5:** As in Pss 1 and 101, the worshiper *hates* (rejects) the

7 singing aloud a song of thanksgiving,
and telling all your wondrous deeds.

8 O LORD, I love the house in which you dwell,
and the place where your glory abides.
9 Do not sweep me away with sinners,
nor my life with the bloodthirsty,
10 those in whose hands are evil devices,
and whose right hands are full of bribes.

11 But as for me, I walk in my integrity;
redeem me, and be gracious to me.
12 My foot stands on level ground;
in the great congregation I will bless the LORD.

Psalm 27
Of David.

1 The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold[a] of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.

3 Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

4 One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.

5 For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

6 Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"
Your face, LORD, do I seek.
9 Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
10 If my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will take me up.

11 Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.

[a] Or *refuge*

company and the projects of the wicked. **4:** *Sit with,* implies partnering (1 Sam 2.8; Ps 101.6). **6:** *I wash my hands,* washing is commanded by priestly rituals (Ex 30.21). **8–10:** In contrast to "hating" the wicked in vv. 4–5, the psalmist "loves," in the sense of choosing, God's house and ways. **11:** Confident of God's acceptance, the psalmist resolves to continue walking the right path.

Ps 27: Longing to find the LORD in the Temple despite obstacles. Two psalm genres, song of trust (vv. 1–6) and individual petition (vv. 7–14), have been combined to express intense desire and courageous journeying. Mention of enemies and the desire to see God's face in the Temple unify these two parts. **1–3:** *Light* is associated with the sanctuary as in Pss 36.9; 43.3; 56.13; in antiquity kings and divinities were often depicted as emanating light. **2:** *Devour my flesh,* the enemies are compared to wild animals (Pss 7.2; 17.12). **4:** Three metaphors for desiring God: living in God's house (Ps 84.4), beholding God's beauty (Ex 24.11), and seeking (*inquire*) an oracle. **5:** There are three metaphors for hope; all refer to the Temple: *shelter*, *tent* (Am 9.11; Ps 18.11), and *rock* (Ps 61.2). **6:** *Now,* the psalmist can now look down from a secure place upon the enemies that once posed a threat. **7–10:** A sudden shift to petition/lament as the psalmist becomes aware that enemies still pose a threat. **8:** *My heart says,* a unique variant of the idiom "to say in one's heart," connoting utter sincerity. On God's *face,* see Ps 17.15n. **10:** The image of God as parent is rare in Psalms (see, e.g., 103.13). **11:** *Lead me on a level path,* the psalmist asks

12 Do not give me up to the will of my
adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against
me,
and they are breathing out violence.

13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of
the LORD
in the land of the living.
14 Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take
courage;
wait for the LORD!

Psalm 28

Of David.

1 To you, O LORD, I call;
my rock, do not refuse to hear me,
for if you are silent to me,
I shall be like those who go down to the
Pit.
2 Hear the voice of my supplication,
as I cry to you for help,
as I lift up my hands
toward your most holy sanctuary.[a]

3 Do not drag me away with the wicked,
with those who are workers of evil,
who speak peace with their neighbors,
while mischief is in their hearts.
4 Repay them according to their work,
and according to the evil of their deeds;
repay them according to the work of their
hands;
render them their due reward.
5 Because they do not regard the works of
the LORD,
or the work of his hands,
he will break them down and build them
up no more.

6 Blessed be the LORD,
for he has heard the sound of my
pleadings.
7 The LORD is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts;
so I am helped, and my heart exults,
and with my song I give thanks to him.

8 The LORD is the strength of his people;
he is the saving refuge of his anointed.
9 O save your people, and bless your
heritage;
be their shepherd, and carry them
forever.

Psalm 29

A Psalm of David.

1 Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,[b]
ascribe to the LORD glory and
strength.
2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy splendor.

3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over mighty waters.

[a] Heb *your innermost sanctuary*
[b] Heb *sons of gods*

to be protected on the journey. **13:** *In the land of the living,* better rendered "in the land of life," an idiom for the Temple as in Pss 52.5; 56.13. **14:** Perhaps recited in response, as encouragement to the psalmist.

Ps 28: Plea for the vindication of one falsely accused. An individual petition that asks God to indicate the innocence of a person in the absence of reliable witnesses. The psalmist prays that God not be silent (v. 1) and allow false accusers to win the day. **1:** *The Pit,* a synonym for Sheol, the abode of the dead. 2: *Lift up my hands* was a posture of prayer. **3:** *Those . . . who speak peace,* false accusers. **6–8:** *Blessed be the LORD,* the LORD has spoken, perhaps through an oracle, and the psalmist responds with intense joy. **7:** *Strength* and *shield* complement "rock" (v. 1). **8–9:** As in other psalms (e.g., 14; 20; 25), the conclusion moves from the individual to the community, and to its leader, the *anointed* king. **9:** *Shepherd . . . carry,* the final prayer may evoke Isa 40.11, where God carries "[the lambs] in his bosom, and gently leads the mother sheep."

Ps 29: Acknowledging the LORD's might in the storm. A hymn in which heavenly beings praise the LORD of the storm who brings life-giving rain; many scholars think that this was a Canaanite psalm adapted by early Israel. **1:** The *heavenly beings* (lit. "sons of gods") are summoned to acknowledge the LORD returning victorious to the assembly (cf. Pss 82.1; 89.5–7). **2:** *In holy splendor,* perhaps "when the Holy One appears." **3–9:** The symbol of a cosmic event, a massive storm roars in from the Mediterranean and hits the coast with deafening thunderclaps (*the voice of the LORD*, used seven times in this section), drenching rain, and lightning flashes. The lumi-

4 The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

7 The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.
8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

9 The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,[a]
and strips the forest bare;
and in his temple all say, "Glory!"

10 The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.
11 May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!

Psalm 30

A Psalm. A Song at the dedication of the temple. Of David.

1 I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up,
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.
2 O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.
3 O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.[b]

4 Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.
5 For his anger is but for a moment;
his favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.

6 As for me, I said in my prosperity,
"I shall never be moved."
7 By your favor, O LORD,
you had established me as a strong mountain;
you hid your face;
I was dismayed.

8 To you, O LORD, I cried,
and to the LORD I made supplication:
9 "What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the Pit?
Will the dust praise you?
Will it tell of your faithfulness?
10 Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me!
O LORD, be my helper!"

11 You have turned my mourning into dancing;

[a] Or *causes the deer to calve*
[b] Or *that I should not go down to the Pit*

nous thundercloud is imagined as the LORD's chariot, and the thunder, rain, and lightning are his soldiers. They sweep across the trees and appear to shatter and shake the forested mountain; earthquake also accompanies a divine appearance or theophany (e.g., Pss 18.7; 114.7). **6:** *Sirion,* Mount Hermon (see Deut 3.9), at the southern border of *Lebanon*. **8:** *Wilderness of Kadesh,* the desert east of the city of Kadesh in central western Syria. **10:** *Enthroned over the flood*, ancient myths sometimes depicted the storm god defeating hostile Sea and building his palace upon its body. The heavenly beings pray that the divine king would extend the fruits of victory to Israel, the LORD's special people.

Ps 30: Praise for deliverance. A thanksgiving with a persistent metaphor system: going down, death, silence; and rising up, life, praise. God moves the psalmist from one state to the other. The divine names ("the LORD" and "God") add up to twelve, the number of the tribes of Israel, suggesting that the healing is a type of what God does for all the tribes. **Superscription:** The words *at the dedication of the temple* were added when this psalm was sung at the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) commemorating the cleansing of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus in 164 BCE. **3:** Language of death and recovery is used by people who were saved by God from life-threatening problems. *Sheol . . . the Pit,* the abode of the dead. **6:** *I shall never be moved,* the psalmist's smugness preceded the crisis. Withdrawal of divine support led to collapse (cf. Ps 104.27–30). **9:** The theme that God should save a psalmist because the dead do not praise God is common in the Psalms (see Ps 6.5n.). **11–12:** The

you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,
12 so that my soul[a] may praise you and not
be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to
you forever.

Psalm 31

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

1 In you, O LORD, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.
2 Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.

3 You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide
me,
4 take me out of the net that is hidden for
me,
for you are my refuge.
5 Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful
God.

6 You hate[b] those who pay regard to
worthless idols,
but I trust in the LORD.
7 I will exult and rejoice in your steadfast
love,
because you have seen my affliction;
you have taken heed of my adversities,
8 and have not delivered me into the hand
of the enemy;
you have set my feet in a broad place.

9 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in
distress;
my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.

10 For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,[c]
and my bones waste away.

11 I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror[d] to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from
me.
12 I have passed out of mind like one who
is dead;
I have become like a broken vessel.
13 For I hear the whispering of many—
terror all around!—
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.

14 But I trust in you, O LORD;
I say, "You are my God."
15 My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my
enemies and persecutors.
16 Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.
17 Do not let me be put to shame, O LORD,
for I call on you;
let the wicked be put to shame;
let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.
18 Let the lying lips be stilled
that speak insolently against the
righteous
with pride and contempt.

19 O how abundant is your goodness
that you have laid up for those who fear
you,

[a] Heb *that glory*
[b] One Heb Ms Gk Syr Jerome: MT *I hate*
[c] Gk Syr: Heb *my iniquity*
[d] Cn: Heb *exceedingly*

psalmist casts off the mourning garments (*sackcloth*) to dance with joy.

Ps 31: Prayer for deliverance, and thanksgiving. An individual petition that combines features of a petition (vv. 1–4,9–18) and a thanksgiving (vv. 5–8,19–24). **2–4:** The metaphors for refuge are spatial: *rock, fortress* (lit. "safe house"), crag (v. 3, NRSV "rock"). The psalmist asks to be led to those places. **9–18:** The psalm returns to direct petition. Sickness, or perhaps old age, has cut off the sufferer from family and friends (vv. 9–13). **16:** *Let your face shine*, a likely reference to the Priestly blessing (Num 6.25), meaning to adopt an open countenance that looks directly at the other person (see also Pss 4.6; 80.3). **17:** *Sheol*, the underworld, the abode of the dead. **19:** A major change in mood: leaving behind complaints, the psalmist expresses thanks. God hides the loyal in a shelter (a reference to the Temple as in Am 9.11; Pss 18.11; 27.5). The quest for a "safe house" in v. 2 has been

and accomplished for those who take
refuge in you,
in the sight of everyone!
20 In the shelter of your presence you hide
them
from human plots;
you hold them safe under your shelter
from contentious tongues.

21 Blessed be the LORD,
for he has wondrously shown his
steadfast love to me
when I was beset as a city under siege.
22 I had said in my alarm,
"I am driven far[a] from your sight."
But you heard my supplications
when I cried out to you for help.

23 Love the LORD, all you his saints.
The LORD preserves the faithful,
but abundantly repays the one who acts
haughtily.
24 Be strong, and let your heart take
courage,
all you who wait for the LORD.

Psalm 32

Of David. A Maskil.

1 Happy are those whose transgression is
forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
2 Happy are those to whom the LORD
imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no
deceit.

3 While I kept silence, my body wasted
away
through my groaning all day long.
4 For day and night your hand was heavy
upon me;
my strength was dried up[b] as by the
heat of summer. *Selah*

5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to
the LORD,"
and you forgave the guilt of
my sin. *Selah*

6 Therefore let all who are faithful
offer prayer to you;
at a time of distress,[c] the rush of mighty
waters
shall not reach them.
7 You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of
deliverance. *Selah*

8 I will instruct you and teach you the way
you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon
you.
9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without
understanding,

[a] Another reading is *cut off*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Cn: Heb *at a time of finding only*

answered by God's granting admission to the Temple. **23–24:** As is often the case in Psalms, at the end the petitioner moves from himself to the broader community. **23:** *Saints* is a misleading translation; it is elsewhere translated "faithful" or "loyal" ones.

Ps 32: Happy the one whose sin is forgiven. An individual thanksgiving, though in Christian tradition it is classed among the seven penitential psalms (Pss 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). The psalm has three mutually reinforcing metaphors for sin and three for forgiveness: sin is a burden one has to bear or carry, forgiveness occurring when God bears it away; sin is an act that God keeps on seeing (it is "in God's face"), forgiveness occurring when God covers it so it can no longer be seen; sin is "imputing iniquity," judging someone is a sinner and withholding blessing, and forgiveness consists in changing that judgment. **Superscription:** *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. **1:** *Whose transgression is forgiven*, an indirect way of expressing God's action. The psalmist's feverish attempts to *cover* (lit. "hide") the sin prevented God from *cover*ing it (looking away from it). **4:** *Your hand was heavy upon me* is an idiom for punishment (see 1 Sam 5.6). *Selah* (also vv. 5,7), see Ps 3.2n. **6–11:** Deeply moved by the experience of God's mercy, the singer tells the faithful what they may not realize: sin need not destroy you or separate you from God. **9:** *Like a horse or a mule,* people can turn away like work animals who do not understand human speech, but joy follows forgiveness.

whose temper must be curbed with bit
and bridle,
else it will not stay near you.

10 Many are the torments of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds those who
trust in the LORD.
11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice,
O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in
heart.

Psalm 33

1 Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous.
Praise befits the upright.
2 Praise the LORD with the lyre;
make melody to him with the harp of
ten strings.
3 Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully on the strings, with loud
shouts.

4 For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
5 He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of
the LORD.

6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were
made,
and all their host by the breath of his
mouth.
7 He gathered the waters of the sea as in a
bottle;
he put the deeps in storehouses.

8 Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world
stand in awe of him.
9 For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.

10 The LORD brings the counsel of the
nations to nothing;
he frustrates the plans of the
peoples.
11 The counsel of the LORD stands
forever,
the thoughts of his heart to all
generations.
12 Happy is the nation whose God is the
LORD,
the people whom he has chosen as his
heritage.

13 The LORD looks down from heaven;
he sees all humankind.
14 From where he sits enthroned he
watches
all the inhabitants of the earth—
15 he who fashions the hearts of them all,
and observes all their deeds.
16 A king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great
strength.
17 The war horse is a vain hope for
victory,
and by its great might it cannot save.

18 Truly the eye of the LORD is on those
who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast
love,
19 to deliver their soul from death,
and to keep them alive in famine.

20 Our soul waits for the LORD;
he is our help and shield.
21 Our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.
22 Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be
upon us,
even as we hope in you.

Ps 33: Praise of the LORD who created the universe. A hymn praising the divine word that made the three-tiered universe and guides it even when humans try to pervert it to their ends. **1–11:** The conjunction *for* in vv. 4 and 9 introduces the motive for giving praise, in this case, God's *upright* and powerful *word* that has brought the universe into being (vv. 6–7; cf. Gen 1.6). That creative word determines the course of history, and no human word can contravene it (vv. 10–11). **7:** *Storehouses,* cf. Ps 135.7; Job 38.22. **12–22:** Though not mentioned by name, Israel is declared *happy* or fortunate (v. 12) simply by being chosen out of all the nations. When the LORD scrutinizes humanity, all purely human sources of strength are relativized (vv. 16–17; cf. v. 10; Ps 20.7). Israel's (and the nations') task is not to rely on human strength but to wait on the LORD's goodness and power. **20–22:** These verses are connected causally and suggest that God should save Israel because of Israel's trust in God.

Psalm 34

Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.

1 I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
3 O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.
5 Look to him, and be radiant;
so your[a] faces shall never be ashamed.
6 This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.
7 The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
8 O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.
9 O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.
10 The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

11 Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
12 Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?
13 Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.
14 Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.
16 The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.
17 When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.
18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD rescues them from them all.
20 He keeps all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.
21 Evil brings death to the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Psalm 35

Of David.

1 Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me;
fight against those who fight against me!
2 Take hold of shield and buckler,
and rise up to help me!

[a] Gk Syr Jerome: Heb *their*

Ps 34: Praise and acknowledgment of deliverance from danger. An individual thanksgiving in acrostic form (see Ps 9–10n.). Individual thanksgivings publicize the deliverance to encourage others to remain loyal to God. The didactic element is underlined in this psalm. **Superscription:** According to 1 Sam 21.10–15, David feigned madness before Achish, not Abimelech. The ascription of this psalm to that particular historical situation is likely secondary. **8:** *Taste*, a metaphor for experience. **11–22:** Borrowing from the portrait of personified Wisdom (especially Prov 9), the healed psalmist teaches others how to gain life. "Life" here is long life resulting from righteous conduct, in contrast to the brief life of the wicked, who die prematurely. **11:** *Fear of the LORD,* best rendered "revering the LORD." **16–17:** The psalm reads better if this order of the two verses is reversed, following the order of the alphabet found in Lam 2; 3; 4.

Ps 35: Prayer for deliverance from enemies. An individual petition in three sections (vv. 1–10; 11–18; 19–28). It uses many metaphors for enemies—soldiers (vv. 1–3), hunters (v. 7), and lions (v. 17)—and the imagery of war, lawsuit, and conspiracy to show that the whole world is arrayed against a lone individual. Positive petitions (vv. 1–3,17,22–24,27) alternate with imprecations (vv. 4–6,8,19,25–26), promises of thanksgiving (vv. 9–10,18,28), and complaints (vv. 7,11–16). Each of the psalm's three sections concludes with a promise of praise

3 Draw the spear and javelin
against my pursuers;
say to my soul,
"I am your salvation."

4 Let them be put to shame and dishonor
who seek after my life.
Let them be turned back and confounded
who devise evil against me.
5 Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the LORD driving them on.
6 Let their way be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.

7 For without cause they hid their net[a] for me;
without cause they dug a pit[b] for my life.
8 Let ruin come on them unawares.
And let the net that they hid ensnare them;
let them fall in it—to their ruin.

9 Then my soul shall rejoice in the LORD,
exulting in his deliverance.
10 All my bones shall say,
"O LORD, who is like you?
You deliver the weak
from those too strong for them,
the weak and needy from those who despoil them."

11 Malicious witnesses rise up;
they ask me about things I do not know.
12 They repay me evil for good;
my soul is forlorn.
13 But as for me, when they were sick,
I wore sackcloth;
I afflicted myself with fasting.
I prayed with head bowed[c] on my bosom,
14 as though I grieved for a friend or a brother;
I went about as one who laments for a mother,
bowed down and in mourning.

15 But at my stumbling they gathered in glee,
they gathered together against me;
ruffians whom I did not know
tore at me without ceasing;
16 they impiously mocked more and more,[d]
gnashing at me with their teeth.

17 How long, O LORD, will you look on?
Rescue me from their ravages,
my life from the lions!
18 Then I will thank you in the great congregation;
in the mighty throng I will praise you.

19 Do not let my treacherous enemies rejoice over me,
or those who hate me without cause wink the eye.
20 For they do not speak peace,
but they conceive deceitful words
against those who are quiet in the land.
21 They open wide their mouths against me;
they say, "Aha, Aha,
our eyes have seen it."

22 You have seen, O LORD; do not be silent!
O Lord, do not be far from me!
23 Wake up! Bestir yourself for my defense,
for my cause, my God and my Lord!
24 Vindicate me, O LORD, my God,
according to your righteousness,
and do not let them rejoice over me.
25 Do not let them say to themselves,
"Aha, we have our heart's desire."
Do not let them say, "We have swallowed you[e] up."

[a] Heb *a pit, their net*
[b] The word *pit* is transposed from the preceding line
[c] Or *My prayer turned back*
[d] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *like the profanest of mockers of a cake*
[e] Heb *him*

(vv. 9–10,18,28). **4:** *Be put to shame and dishonor*, God is asked to bring about the rescue in full view of others. **5–6:** *The angel of the LORD* is God's emissary, effecting punishment. **7–8:** See Ps 7.15–16n. **23:** *Wake up,* the demand reflects the ancient Near Eastern view that God rested after a great deed (as in Gen 2.3) and required a fresh summons (Pss 44.23; 59.5; Isa 51.9).

[26] Let all those who rejoice at my calamity
be put to shame and confusion;
let those who exalt themselves against me
be clothed with shame and dishonor.

[27] Let those who desire my vindication
shout for joy and be glad,
and say evermore,
"Great is the LORD,
who delights in the welfare of his
servant."
[28] Then my tongue shall tell of your
righteousness
and of your praise all day long.

Psalm 36

To the leader. Of David, the servant of the LORD.

[1] Transgression speaks to the wicked
deep in their hearts;
there is no fear of God
before their eyes.
[2] For they flatter themselves in their own
eyes
that their iniquity cannot be found out
and hated.
[3] The words of their mouths are mischief
and deceit;
they have ceased to act wisely and do
good.
[4] They plot mischief while on their beds;
they are set on a way that is not good;
they do not reject evil.

[5] Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to
the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.
[6] Your righteousness is like the mighty
mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike,
O LORD.

[7] How precious is your steadfast love,
O God!
All people may take refuge in the
shadow of your wings.
[8] They feast on the abundance of your
house,
and you give them drink from the river
of your delights.
[9] For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.

[10] O continue your steadfast love to those
who know you,
and your salvation to the upright of heart!
[11] Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread
on me,
or the hand of the wicked drive me away.
[12] There the evildoers lie prostrate;
they are thrust down, unable to rise.

Psalm 37

Of David.

[1] Do not fret because of the wicked;
do not be envious of wrongdoers,
[2] for they will soon fade like the grass,
and wither like the green herb.

[3] Trust in the LORD, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy
security.
[4] Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your
heart.

Ps 36: God sustains the faithful. An individual petition that develops the statement of trust to an unusual degree. Instead of complaining about the attacks of the wicked, the psalmist gives a vivid portrait of the wicked person (vv. 1–4). The statement of trust (vv. 5–9) enlarges on the LORD's saving power, and the petition is extended (vv. 10–12). **1–4:** The self-ruled individual is contrasted with the God-ruled world. **4:** *While on their beds,* i.e., privately, at night; cf. Mic 2.1. **5–9:** The wicked are unaware that God works in all parts of the universe—sky, mountains (earth), and sea (vv. 5–6)—and especially in the Temple (*your house*) from which flows the *river of your delights* (v. 8); cf. Ps 46.4; Ezek 47.1–2. **7:** *Shadow of your wings,* see Ps 17.8n. **9:** *In your light we see light*, enjoy life (Job 3.16; Ps 49.19), which is made possible by the luminous God present in the Temple. **12:** *There*, possibly a reference to Zion and its Temple as in Pss 48.6; 76.3; 87.4.

Ps 37: Exhortation to courage and endurance. An instructional poem in acrostic form (see Ps 9–10n.), using aphorisms and exhortations to encourage people to a faithful life (see Pss 49; 78; 127; 128). **1–11:** One should maintain one's equanimity when the wicked prosper and are admired. Retribution is inevitable, however, for the wicked will be shamed (their hopes will prove empty) and the righteous rewarded, typically with the pre-

5 Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him, and he will act.
6 He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

7 Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,
over those who carry out evil devices.

8 Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.
9 For the wicked shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

10 Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.
11 But the meek shall inherit the land,
and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

12 The wicked plot against the righteous,
and gnash their teeth at them;
13 but the LORD laughs at the wicked,
for he sees that their day is coming.

14 The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows
to bring down the poor and needy,
to kill those who walk uprightly;
15 their sword shall enter their own heart,
and their bows shall be broken.

16 Better is a little that the righteous person has
than the abundance of many wicked.
17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
but the LORD upholds the righteous.

18 The LORD knows the days of the blameless,
and their heritage will abide forever;
19 they are not put to shame in evil times,
in the days of famine they have abundance.

20 But the wicked perish,
and the enemies of the LORD are like the glory of the pastures;
they vanish—like smoke they vanish away.

21 The wicked borrow, and do not pay back,
but the righteous are generous and keep giving;
22 for those blessed by the LORD shall inherit the land,
but those cursed by him shall be cut off.

23 Our steps[a] are made firm by the LORD,
when he delights in our[b] way;
24 though we stumble,[c] we[d] shall not fall headlong,
for the LORD holds us[e] by the hand.

25 I have been young, and now am old,
yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
or their children begging bread.
26 They are ever giving liberally and lending,
and their children become a blessing.

27 Depart from evil, and do good;
so you shall abide forever.

[a] Heb *A man's steps*
[b] Heb *his*
[c] Heb *he stumbles*
[d] Heb *he*
[e] Heb *him*

cious gift of the land (vv. 3,9,11,22,29,34). **12–20:** The wicked try to attack the righteous, but the LORD defends them. **21–26:** The same Heb word in vv. 21 and 26 marks off the section (NRSV *borrow*, *lending*). To give to others is to show confidence in the LORD and eventually leads to a share in the LORD's land (vv. 21–22). **25:** *I have not seen the righteous forsaken,* a statement of how the universe runs under divine rule, not necessarily an empirical observation. **27–40:** Three imperative verbs dominate the section: *Depart* (v. 27), *Wait* (v. 34), and *Mark* (v. 37).

28 For the LORD loves justice;
he will not forsake his faithful ones.

The righteous shall be kept safe forever,
but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.
29 The righteous shall inherit the land,
and live in it forever.

30 The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom,
and their tongues speak justice.
31 The law of their God is in their hearts;
their steps do not slip.

32 The wicked watch for the righteous,
and seek to kill them.
33 The LORD will not abandon them to their power,
or let them be condemned when they are brought to trial.

34 Wait for the LORD, and keep to his way,
and he will exalt you to inherit the land;
you will look on the destruction of the wicked.

35 I have seen the wicked oppressing,
and towering like a cedar of Lebanon.[a]
36 Again I[b] passed by, and they were no more;
though I sought them, they could not be found.

37 Mark the blameless, and behold the upright,
for there is posterity for the peaceable.
38 But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed;
the posterity of the wicked shall be cut off.

39 The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;
he is their refuge in the time of trouble.
40 The LORD helps them and rescues them;
he rescues them from the wicked, and saves them,
because they take refuge in him.

Psalm 38

A Psalm of David, for the memorial offering.

1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,
or discipline me in your wrath.
2 For your arrows have sunk into me,
and your hand has come down on me.

3 There is no soundness in my flesh
because of your indignation;
there is no health in my bones
because of my sin.
4 For my iniquities have gone over my head;
they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.

5 My wounds grow foul and fester
because of my foolishness;
6 I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;
all day long I go around mourning.
7 For my loins are filled with burning,
and there is no soundness in my flesh.
8 I am utterly spent and crushed;
I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

9 O Lord, all my longing is known to you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
10 My heart throbs, my strength fails me;
as for the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me.

[a] Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Gk Syr Jerome: Heb *he*

35–36: Like wisdom literature, this psalm emphasizes experience and observation.

Ps 38: Confession of sin and plea for forgiveness. An individual petition notable for its vivid portrayal of anguish resulting from sin and of patient waiting for healing. People have interpreted the psalmist's illness as divine rejection and therefore keep their distance. An individual lament in the Hebrew Bible, this psalm in Christian tradition is one of the seven penitential psalms (Pss 6; 32; 51; 102; 130; 143). **Superscription:** *For the memorial offering* (also Ps 70), meaning uncertain. **1:** Compare 6.1, suggesting that this was a stereotypical way of beginning a petition psalm. Psalms 6 and 38 are quite different, however: the petitioner in Ps 6 assumes that he is being unjustly punished, while this psalmist confesses his guilt. **9–10:** The verses echo the anguish

[11] My friends and companions stand aloof
from my affliction,
and my neighbors stand far off.

[12] Those who seek my life lay their
snares;
those who seek to hurt me speak of
ruin,
and meditate treachery all day long.

[13] But I am like the deaf, I do not hear;
like the mute, who cannot speak.
[14] Truly, I am like one who does not hear,
and in whose mouth is no retort.

[15] But it is for you, O LORD, that I wait;
it is you, O Lord my God, who will
answer.
[16] For I pray, "Only do not let them rejoice
over me,
those who boast against me when my
foot slips."

[17] For I am ready to fall,
and my pain is ever with me.
[18] I confess my iniquity;
I am sorry for my sin.
[19] Those who are my foes without cause[a]
are mighty,
and many are those who hate me
wrongfully.
[20] Those who render me evil for good
are my adversaries because I follow
after good.

[21] Do not forsake me, O LORD;
O my God, do not be far from me;
[22] make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation.

Psalm 39

To the leader: to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

[1] I said, "I will guard my ways
that I may not sin with my tongue;
I will keep a muzzle on my mouth
as long as the wicked are in my presence."
[2] I was silent and still;
I held my peace to no avail;
my distress grew worse,
[3] my heart became hot within me.
While I mused, the fire burned;
then I spoke with my tongue:

[4] "LORD, let me know my end,
and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting my life is.
[5] You have made my days a few handbreadths,
and my lifetime is as nothing in your
sight.
Surely everyone stands as a mere
breath. *Selah*
[6] Surely everyone goes about like a
shadow.
Surely for nothing they are in turmoil;
they heap up, and do not know who will
gather.

[7] "And now, O Lord, what do I wait for?
My hope is in you.
[8] Deliver me from all my transgressions.
Do not make me the scorn of the fool.
[9] I am silent; I do not open my mouth,
for it is you who have done it.
[10] Remove your stroke from me;
I am worn down by the blows[b] of your
hand.

[a] Q Mss: MT *my living foes*
[b] Heb *hostility*

described in vv. 3–8. **11:** Cf. Ps 31.9–18n. **15–16:** The verses echo the anguish in vv. 11–14. **15:** The psalmist trusts God rather than humans. **21–22:** The closing petitions are similar in syntax to the opening petitions (vv. 1–2). **21:** *Do not forsake me* is also a stereotypical expression in petitions, e.g., Ps 27.9.

Ps 39: Plea that suffering might end. An individual petition. Forced to remain silent because enemies misinterpret any utterance (vv. 1–3), the psalmist asks God how much longer the suffering will continue (vv. 4–6). Since the suffering comes from God, only God can end it (vv. 7–13). **Superscription:** *Jeduthun* (also in the superscriptions of Pss 62 and 77), a Temple singer (1 Chr 25.1; etc.). **1:** *Sin with my tongue*, better, "offend by my speech"; since one's words might convince others that the suffering is just retribution for rebellion, the psalmist resolves to complain only to God. **4:** *Let me know my end*, better , "Let me know the term (of my affliction), what the length of my days (of suffering) is," expressing the belief that afflictions lasted for a predetermined period. To the psalmist, it is unfair of God to burden an already short life span with a lengthy affliction. **5:** *Selah*

11 "You chastise mortals
in punishment for sin,
consuming like a moth what is dear to them;
surely everyone is a mere breath. *Selah*

12 "Hear my prayer, O LORD,
and give ear to my cry;
do not hold your peace at my tears.
For I am your passing guest,
an alien, like all my forebears.
13 Turn your gaze away from me, that I may smile again,
before I depart and am no more."

Psalm 40

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

1 I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
2 He drew me up from the desolate pit,[a]
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
3 He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.

4 Happy are those who make
the LORD their trust,
who do not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods.
5 You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you.
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be counted.

6 Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,
but you have given me an open ear.[b]
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.
7 Then I said, "Here I am;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.[c]
8 I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."

9 I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
see, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O LORD.
10 I have not hidden your saving help within my heart,
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.

11 Do not, O LORD, withhold
your mercy from me;
let your steadfast love and your faithfulness
keep me safe forever.
12 For evils have encompassed me
without number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
until I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails me.

13 Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me;
O LORD, make haste to help me.

[a] Cn: Heb *pit of tumult*
[b] Heb *ears you have dug for me*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

(also v. 11), see Ps 3.2n. **7:** *And now,* signals the shift from complaint to petition. **12:** See Lev 25.23; 1 Chr 29.15. **13:** A similar image is found in Job 7.19; in both cases, the sufferer asks God to look less closely, for if God scrutinizes people, they will surely be found guilty.

Ps 40: A thanksgiving with a plea for further help. A hybrid psalm of thanksgiving (vv. 1–10) and individual petition (vv. 11–17). After experiencing salvation, the psalmist faces further adversity. Vv. 13–17 are duplicated in Ps 70. **1–3b:** Report of the rescue. **3:** *New song*, "new" refers to the startling new action celebrated in the song. **6–8:** Instead of the customary sacrifice offering, God asks for a self-offering through obedience; cf. 1 Sam 15.22; Ps 50.8–9; Mic 6.6–7. **7:** *Here I am,* the psalmist is completely available for the task (cf. Isa 6.8), in this case, to tell of the deliverance and its significance (vv. 9–10). *The scroll of the book*, what is decreed from on high and immutable; cf. Pss 69.28; 139.16. **8:** Observing God's word is internalized. **11–17:** Acceptance of the task of proc-

14 Let all those be put to shame and confusion
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire my hurt.
15 Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

16 But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"
17 As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God.

Psalm 41

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

1 Happy are those who consider the poor;[a]
the LORD delivers them in the day of trouble.
2 The LORD protects them and keeps them alive;
they are called happy in the land.
You do not give them up to the will of their enemies.
3 The LORD sustains them on their sickbed;
in their illness you heal all their infirmities.[b]

4 As for me, I said, "O LORD, be gracious to me;
heal me, for I have sinned against you."
5 My enemies wonder in malice
when I will die, and my name perish.
6 And when they come to see me, they utter empty words,
while their hearts gather mischief;
when they go out, they tell it abroad.
7 All who hate me whisper together about me;
they imagine the worst for me.

8 They think that a deadly thing has fastened on me,
that I will not rise again from where I lie.
9 Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted,
who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me.
10 But you, O LORD, be gracious to me,
and raise me up, that I may repay them.

11 By this I know that you are pleased with me;
because my enemy has not triumphed over me.
12 But you have upheld me because of my integrity,
and set me in your presence forever.

13 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.

BOOK II PSALMS 42–72

Psalm 42

To the leader. A Maskil of the Korahites.

1 As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.

[a] Or *weak*

[b] Heb *you change all his bed*

lamation puts the psalmist in fresh danger and in need of God's help. **14:** *Shame*, violating accepted morality brought dishonor upon the violator. The prayer is that the enemies' schemes be publicly frustrated. **15:** *Aha, Aha*, malicious cries of triumph that the psalmist hopes will be proved foolish by God's judgment. **16:** God's help will encourage other righteous people. **17:** Psalms often depicts the supplicant as *poor* and *needy*.

Ps 41: Thanksgiving for rescue. A thanksgiving in which the psalmist in vv. 4–10 cites an earlier prayer as a kind of verbal votive offering. **1:** *Happy are those who consider the poor* (i.e., those who are attentive to the poor) is the psalmist's conclusion after a profound deliverance (like Ps 32.1). Those who help the needy are themselves helped in their need. **4–10:** The psalmist's earlier prayer shows fear of enemies who wanted the psalmist to die and leave behind no name, i.e., no children to carry on the family. **4:** The psalmist believes that sin is the cause of illness. **10:** To be raised from the sickbed constitutes a declaration of the psalmist's innocence to the enemies who wish the psalmist dead. **12:** *Forever* is hyperbolic. **13:** Not a part of the psalm, but a doxology or blessing concluding Book I, the first of five editorial sections of the Psalms. The vast majority of the previous psalms were ascribed to David; the following nine are not.

[2] My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold
the face of God?
[3] My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me continually,
"Where is your God?"

[4] These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,[a]
and led them in procession to the house
of God,
with glad shouts and songs of
thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.
[5] Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within
me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help [6] and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.
[7] Deep calls to deep
at the thunder of your cataracts;
all your waves and your billows
have gone over me.
[8] By day the LORD commands his steadfast
love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.
[9] I say to God, my rock,
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I walk about mournfully
because the enemy oppresses me?"
[10] As with a deadly wound in my body,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually,
"Where is your God?"

[11] Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

Psalm 43

[1] Vindicate me, O God, and defend my
cause
against an ungodly people;
from those who are deceitful and
unjust
deliver me!
[2] For you are the God in whom I take
refuge;
why have you cast me off?
Why must I walk about mournfully
because of the oppression of the
enemy?

[3] O send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling.
[4] Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy;

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

Ps 42–43: Longing to join the community in the Temple. Though handed down as two poems, the psalm is actually one poem (see the identical refrain in 42.6,11 and 43.5), an individual petition to be in the Temple (like Pss 27, 62, and 84). Here the sufferer, away from the protection of the Temple, complains of taunts by unbelievers (42.9–10) and pleads for a guide for the journey home. Distinctive is the psalmist's inner dialogue between discouragement and resolve, despair and hope. **Superscription:** *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. *Korahites,* lit. "sons of Korah," also in Pss 42–49; 84–85; and 87–88). Korah was a Levite priest (see Num 16) and his descendants were Temple singers (2 Chr 20.19) who favored phrases such as *the living God* (Pss 42.2; 84.2) *the face of God* (Pss 42.2; 44.24; 88.14) and *refuge* (Pss 43.2; 46.1,7; 48.3) **42.1–5:** The taunts of those who reject God depress the psalmist and awaken painful memories of past worship with believers. Verses 1–5 are unified by water imagery. **6–11:** Even in anger against God, the psalmist is able to hope (vv. 8,11b) and pray (vv. 8,9). **6:** *Land of Jordan and of Hermon,* northern sites, near the headwaters of the Jordan and far from Jerusalem. *Mizar,* precise location unknown. **7:** *Deep calls to deep*, the subterranean cosmic waters that symbolize chaos and death (cf. Jon 2.3–4; Ps 18.4–6). Being distant from the dwelling of the saving God is like being in the power of the chaotic sea. **43.1–5:** The tone changes and the prayer becomes more robust, asking God to send *your light and your truth*, qualities personified as heavenly beings able to lead the psalmist to God's shrine.

and I will praise you with the harp,
O God, my God.

5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

Psalm 44

To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Maskil.

1 We have heard with our ears, O God,
our ancestors have told us,
what deeds you performed in their days,
in the days of old:
2 you with your own hand drove out the nations,
but them you planted;
you afflicted the peoples,
but them you set free;
3 for not by their own sword did they win the land,
nor did their own arm give them victory;
but your right hand, and your arm,
and the light of your countenance,
for you delighted in them.

4 You are my King and my God;
you command[a] victories for Jacob.
5 Through you we push down our foes;
through your name we tread down our assailants.
6 For not in my bow do I trust,
nor can my sword save me.
7 But you have saved us from our foes,
and have put to confusion those who hate us.
8 In God we have boasted continually,
and we will give thanks to your name forever. *Selah*

9 Yet you have rejected us and abased us,
and have not gone out with our armies.
10 You made us turn back from the foe,
and our enemies have gotten spoil.
11 You have made us like sheep for slaughter,
and have scattered us among the nations.
12 You have sold your people for a trifle,
demanding no high price for them.

13 You have made us the taunt of our neighbors,
the derision and scorn of those around us.
14 You have made us a byword among the nations,
a laughingstock[b] among the peoples.
15 All day long my disgrace is before me,
and shame has covered my face
16 at the words of the taunters and revilers,
at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.

17 All this has come upon us,
yet we have not forgotten you,
or been false to your covenant.
18 Our heart has not turned back,
nor have our steps departed from your way,
19 yet you have broken us in the haunt of jackals,
and covered us with deep darkness.

20 If we had forgotten the name of our God,
or spread out our hands to a strange god,
21 would not God discover this?
For he knows the secrets of the heart.
22 Because of you we are being killed all day long,
and accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *You are my King, O God; command*
[b] Heb *a shaking of the head*

Ps 44: Prayer for recovery from national defeat. A communal petition on the occasion of a military defeat. Like similar communal petitions (Pss 77 and 89), it recalls the settling of the people in Canaan (vv. 1–3) to remind God to be faithful to that original moment. Not conscious of having sinned, the community asks why God let them fall into the hands of their enemies. **Superscription:** *Korahites,* see Ps 42–43n. *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. **1–8:** Israel's founding moment was the Exodus-Conquest, though the singer singles out the Conquest. Then, as now, the people trusted entirely in God's protection. **8:** *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **9–16:** The complaint: You have given us into the hand of our enemies. **17–22:** We have done nothing to warrant your

[23] Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep,
O Lord?
Awake, do not cast us off forever!
[24] Why do you hide your face?
Why do you forget our affliction and
oppression?
[25] For we sink down to the dust;
our bodies cling to the ground.
[26] Rise up, come to our help.
Redeem us for the sake of your
steadfast love.

Psalm 45

To the leader: according to Lilies. Of the Korahites. A Maskil. A love song.

[1] My heart overflows with a goodly theme;
I address my verses to the king;
my tongue is like the pen of a ready
scribe.

[2] You are the most handsome of men;
grace is poured upon your lips;
therefore God has blessed you forever.
[3] Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty
one,
in your glory and majesty.

[4] In your majesty ride on victoriously
for the cause of truth and to defend[a] the
right;
let your right hand teach you dread
deeds.

[5] Your arrows are sharp
in the heart of the king's enemies;
the peoples fall under you.

[6] Your throne, O God,[b] endures forever and
ever.
Your royal scepter is a scepter of
equity;
[7] you love righteousness and hate
wickedness.
Therefore God, your God, has anointed
you
with the oil of gladness beyond your
companions;
[8] your robes are all fragrant with myrrh
and aloes and cassia.
From ivory palaces stringed instruments
make you glad;
[9] daughters of kings are among your
ladies of honor;
at your right hand stands the queen in
gold of Ophir.

[10] Hear, O daughter, consider and incline
your ear;
forget your people and your father's
house,
[11] and the king will desire your beauty.

[a] Cn: Heb *and the meekness of*
[b] Or *Your throne is a throne of God, it*

abandoning us. **22:** The community struggles with being God's people when God is silent before their pain. **23:** As in Pss 35.23; 59.4; Isa 51.9, the psalmist expresses frustration at God's inaction using the ancient Near Eastern motif of the God who needs to be awakened. **26–27:** In conclusion, the psalmist offers two motivations for God: Israel's terrible state, and God's steadfast love (Heb "ḥesed") toward Israel.

Ps 45: Celebration of the king's wedding. A song for the king's wedding to a foreign princess, applied in later interpretation to the messianic king. Jewish tradition sees the singer as a model Torah scholar and the king as messiah. Christianity too sees a messianic reference; see Heb 1.8. **Superscription:** *According to Lilies,* probably refers to a melody (also Pss 69; 80; cf. 60). *Korahites,* see Ps 42–43n. *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. **1–6:** After an invocation (v. 1), the court poet praises the king's beauty (most *handsome of men,* v. 2), which implies divine favor (as in Gen 39.6; 1 Sam 16.12; 17.42). Similarly, *grace is poured upon your lips* in v. 2 means to utter decisions made by a wise heart (as in Prov 22.11). Verses 3–6 speak of the king's military prowess: by his wisdom and military skill, the king is an instrument of divine justice. **6:** *O God,* if a reference to the king, the only time in the Bible that the Davidic king is divinized in this fashion; see also textual note *b* and v. 17n. **7–16:** As vv. 2–6 focused on the king as defender of the land, vv. 7–16 emphasize the virility of the king to beget an heir, an ancient and modern concern. **7:** The anointing of the king was the central act of the coronation ritual. *Gladness,* elsewhere associated with marriage as in Jer 7.34; 16.9; 25.10; 33.11. **8:** *Myrrh and aloes and cassia,* evoke a sensuous and erotic mood (Prov 7.17–18; Song 1.13; 5.13). **9:** *The queen,* most likely the queen mother, since according to vv. 13–14 the bride is "in her chamber" from which she will be led to the king. According to 1 Kings 2.19, the queen mother sat on the king's right as in Ps 45.9, so it is she who addresses the

Since he is your lord, bow to him;
12 the people[a] of Tyre will seek your
favor with gifts,
the richest of the people 13 with all kinds
of wealth.

The princess is decked in her chamber
with gold-woven robes;[b]
14 in many-colored robes she is led to
the king;
behind her the virgins, her companions,
follow.
15 With joy and gladness they are led along
as they enter the palace of the king.

16 In the place of ancestors you, O king,[c]
shall have sons;
you will make them princes in all the
earth.
17 I will cause your name to be celebrated
in all generations;
therefore the peoples will praise you
forever and ever.

Psalm 46

To the leader. Of the Korahites. According to Alamoth. A Song.

1 God is our refuge and strength,
a very present[d] help in trouble.
2 Therefore we will not fear, though the
earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the
heart of the sea;
3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its
tumult. *Selah*

4 There is a river whose streams make glad
the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most
High.
5 God is in the midst of the city;[e] it shall
not be moved;
God will help it when the morning
dawns.
6 The nations are in an uproar, the
kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
7 The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.[f] *Selah*

8 Come, behold the works of the LORD;
see what desolations he has brought on
the earth.
9 He makes wars cease to the end of the
earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the
spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
10 "Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth."
11 The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.[f] *Selah*

[a] Heb *daughter*
[b] Or *people.* [13]*All glorious is the princess within, gold embroidery is her clothing*
[c] Heb lacks *O king*
[d] Or *well proved*
[e] Heb *of it*
[f] Or *fortress*

bride in vv. 10–12. *Ophir,* in southern Arabia (see Gen 10.29), a famous source of gold. **12:** *Tyre,* in Phoenicia, was known for its luxury items and fine craftsmanship. **17:** The court poet fulfills his task of making the king's name known, remarkably attributing to the king the type of praise elsewhere associated with God (e.g., Ps 145.21).

Ps 46: The glory of Mount Zion, residence of the LORD. A song of Zion, like Pss 48, 76, 84, and 122. The first of a cluster of three psalms about the LORD reigning in Jerusalem. Three refrains (vv. 1,7,11) structure the poem. **Superscription:** *Korahites,* see Ps 42–43n. *Alamoth,* probably a melody; see 1 Chr 15.20. **1–3:** The psalmist trusts in Zion, which many Israelites believed was the center of the world and residence of the LORD, which remains unshaken though the earth "totter" (NRSV *change*) and plunge into pre-creation chaos. **3:** *Selah* (also vv. 7,11), see Ps 3.2n. **4–7:** In contrast to the tumultuous and dangerous waters in vv. 2–3, the calm river of v. 4 is controlled by God to provide water and fertility for the holy city. The attacks of the rebellious nations in v. 6 function as a historical complement to the cosmic disaster in vv. 2–3. Yet God's *voice,* thunder, defeats them. **9:** Rather than just defeating the enemies, as in most psalms, God ends war. **10:** Stop what you are doing and embrace the peace the LORD has achieved. Zion is the place where God's victory is most visible and most appropriately praised.

Psalm 47

To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

[1] Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.
[2] For the LORD, the Most High, is awesome,
a great king over all the earth.
[3] He subdued peoples under us,
and nations under our feet.
[4] He chose our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob whom he loves. *Selah*

[5] God has gone up with a shout,
the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.
[6] Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.
[7] For God is the king of all the earth;
sing praises with a psalm.[a]

[8] God is king over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne.
[9] The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
he is highly exalted.

Psalm 48

A Song. A Psalm of the Korahites.

[1] Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised
in the city of our God.
His holy mountain, [2] beautiful in elevation,
is the joy of all the earth,
Mount Zion, in the far north,
the city of the great King.
[3] Within its citadels God
has shown himself a sure defense.

[4] Then the kings assembled,
they came on together.
[5] As soon as they saw it, they were
astounded;
they were in panic, they took to flight;
[6] trembling took hold of them there,
pains as of a woman in labor,
[7] as when an east wind shatters
the ships of Tarshish.
[8] As we have heard, so have we seen
in the city of the LORD of hosts,
in the city of our God,
which God establishes forever. *Selah*

[9] We ponder your steadfast love, O God,
in the midst of your temple.
[10] Your name, O God, like your praise,
reaches to the ends of the earth.
Your right hand is filled with victory.
[11] Let Mount Zion be glad,
let the towns[b] of Judah rejoice
because of your judgments.

[a] Heb *Maskil*
[b] Heb *daughters*

Ps 47: Acclaim the LORD the king of heaven and earth! An enthronement hymn, like Pss 93; 95–99, celebrating the LORD reigning over heaven and earth. The occasion for the recitation of this psalm is uncertain. **Superscription:** *Korahites,* see Ps 42–43n. **1–4:** Presupposed is the LORD's universal victory also celebrated in Pss 2, 46, 48, 76, 93. Israel's task is to offer a suitable welcome and receive the territory (*our heritage,* v. 4) that the victorious LORD assigns. **2:** *A great king,* better "the Great King," a title of suzerains in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Hittite kingdom. **4:** *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **5:** *Gone up,* ascended the throne as in 2 Sam 6.15; Isa 14.13. The *shout* and *trumpet* were part of the ritual proclaiming the new king (see 1 Kings 1.39–49). **6–8:** The threefold repetition of *king* makes clear the psalm's theme. **9:** *Gather as the people of the God of Abraham*, a possible translation is "The princes of the people assemble with the people of the God of Abraham." *Shields,* i.e., rulers (by metonymy).

Ps 48: A hymn to Zion, the place of God's peace. A song of Zion, like Pss 46; 76; 84; 122. Comparable Near Eastern texts describe how a particular god became the most high god by defeating chaos and then, after receiving the acclaim of the other heavenly beings, constructed a palace to memorialize the victory. Ps 48 seems to see "the kings" (v. 4) as representing the same disorderly power. **Superscription:** *Korahites,* see Ps 42–43n. **1–3:** Seven epithets are applied to Zion. The description is highly idealized. *In the far north*, better "the heights of Zaphon," the mountain home of the storm god Baal (modern Jebel el-Aqra' on the coast of northern Syria). The LORD has taken over Baal's domain. **4–8:** Rather than referring to a specific historical battle, the verses probably refer to a symbolic gathering of rebellious kingdoms against the LORD's governance of the universe. But this is no normal military victory: the nations needed only to see the magnificent Jerusalem, and they capitulated. **7:** *East wind,* the weapon of the storm god. *Tarshish,* location uncertain; it may be Tarsus in southern Turkey or Tartessus in southern Spain. **8:** *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **9–14:** The Temple buildings memorialize the LORD's

12 Walk about Zion, go all around it,
count its towers,
13 consider well its ramparts;
go through its citadels,
that you may tell the next generation
14 that this is God,
our God forever and ever.
He will be our guide forever.

Psalm 49

To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

1 Hear this, all you peoples;
give ear, all inhabitants of the world,
2 both low and high,
rich and poor together.
3 My mouth shall speak wisdom;
the meditation of my heart shall be
understanding.
4 I will incline my ear to a proverb;
I will solve my riddle to the music of the
harp.

5 Why should I fear in times of trouble,
when the iniquity of my persecutors
surrounds me,
6 those who trust in their wealth
and boast of the abundance of their
riches?
7 Truly, no ransom avails for one's life,[a]
there is no price one can give to God
for it.
8 For the ransom of life is costly,
and can never suffice,
9 that one should live on forever
and never see the grave.[b]
10 When we look at the wise, they die;
fool and dolt perish together
and leave their wealth to others.
11 Their graves[c] are their homes forever,
their dwelling places to all
generations,
though they named lands their own.
12 Mortals cannot abide in their pomp;
they are like the animals that perish.

13 Such is the fate of the foolhardy,
the end of those[d] who are pleased with
their lot. *Selah*
14 Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol;
Death shall be their shepherd;
straight to the grave they descend,[e]
and their form shall waste away;
Sheol shall be their home.[f]
15 But God will ransom my soul from the
power of Sheol,
for he will receive me. *Selah*

16 Do not be afraid when some become
rich,
when the wealth of their houses
increases.
17 For when they die they will carry
nothing away;

a Another reading is *no one can ransom a brother*
b Heb *the pit*
c Gk Syr Compare Tg: Heb *their inward* (thought)
d Tg: Heb *after them*
e Cn: Heb *the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning*
f Meaning of Heb uncertain

steadfast love (Heb "ḥesed") manifested in the victory that brought order and justice to the world. Military might is a means to justice, the right governance of the world. The psalm begins and ends (vv. 1–3,12–14) with the mountains and the buildings that remind visitors of the mercy and grandeur of God. **12–13:** *Walk about Zion . . . consider well its ramparts,* a command to contemplate the result of the divine victory just won, perhaps referring to a ritual procession through the city. **14:** The final word, *forever* (Heb "'al-mut"), may be out of place here and belong with the superscription of the following psalm as "Alamot" (Heb "'alamot"; see Ps 46n.).

Ps 49: An instruction on the limits of wealth. Though often classed as a wisdom psalm, instruction is a more apt term, in this case instruction about the folly of relying on wealth rather than God. Two sets of refrains tie the poem together and highlight its theme (vv. 7 and 15, 12 and 20). The text is often obscure, as the textual notes attest. **Superscription:** *Korahites,* see Ps 42–43n. **1–4:** A formal call for attention like Deut 32.1–3 and Ps 78.1–4. **5–12:** As in individual petitions, this psalmist has enemies (the arrogant wealthy), but instead of calling on God for rescue, reflects on the folly of relying on wealth. **12:** The psalmist's well-considered conclusion: wealth cannot stave off death. **13–20:** As the poem progresses, the tone grows bolder. **13:** *Selah* (also v. 15), see Ps 3.2n. **14:** *Sheol,* the abode of the dead. **15:** Though the wealthy seem to triumph, God will *ransom* and "take" (NRSV *receive*) the psalmist from the clutches of the underworld. The Hebrew word for "take" elsewhere describes

their wealth will not go down after
them.
18 Though in their lifetime they count
themselves happy
—for you are praised when you do well
for yourself—
19 they[a] will go to the company of their
ancestors,
who will never again see the light.
20 Mortals cannot abide in their pomp;
they are like the animals that perish.

Psalm 50

A Psalm of Asaph.

1 The mighty one, God the LORD,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to its setting.
2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God shines forth.

3 Our God comes and does not keep
silence,
before him is a devouring fire,
and a mighty tempest all around him.
4 He calls to the heavens above
and to the earth, that he may judge his
people:
5 "Gather to me my faithful ones,
who made a covenant with me by
sacrifice!"
6 The heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge. *Selah*

7 "Hear, O my people, and I will speak,
O Israel, I will testify against you.
I am God, your God.
8 Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;
your burnt offerings are continually
before me.
9 I will not accept a bull from your house,
or goats from your folds.
10 For every wild animal of the forest is
mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.
11 I know all the birds of the air,[b]
and all that moves in the field is mine.

12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and all that is in it is
mine.
13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls,
or drink the blood of goats?
14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,[c]
and pay your vows to the Most High.
15 Call on me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify
me."

16 But to the wicked God says:
"What right have you to recite my
statutes,
or take my covenant on your lips?
17 For you hate discipline,
and you cast my words behind you.
18 You make friends with a thief when you
see one,
and you keep company with adulterers.

[a] Cn: Heb *you*
[b] Gk Syr Tg: Heb *mountains*
[c] Or *make thanksgiving your sacrifice to God*

God's lifting loyal servants to the safety of heaven (see Ps 73.24; Gen 5.24; 2 Kings 2.10). **20:** Repeating v. 12.

Ps 50: A covenant renewal liturgy. A covenant liturgy like Pss 81 and 95. The poem is the first attributed to Asaph, one of David's musicians (1 Chr 6.39; 15.17; 16.5–7); the other Asaph psalms appear together as a collection in 73–83. **1–6:** Appearing in the storm at Mount Sinai (Ex 19), God made a covenant with Israel and now invites Israel to renew it on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. **4:** *Heavens . . . earth*, ancient treaties and covenants invoked such primal pairs as witnesses, and they are appropriately invoked here as the people are questioned about their fidelity to the covenant. **5:** *My faithful ones*, better, "consecrated ones," those who have become God's people by entering into the covenant. **6:** *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **7–15:** On God's rejection of animal sacrifice, see Isa 1.10–17; Jer 6.20; Am 5.21–24. Aggressive rebukes and questions often preceded renewal of vows, e.g., Ps 81; Josh 24; 1 Sam 12. The goal was positive: to encourage repentance. **7:** *I am God, your God,* a paraphrase of the beginning of the Decalogue (Ex 20.2); perhaps the entire Decalogue was meant to be repeated at this point in the ritual. **14:** *A sacrifice of thanksgiving* was mostly eaten by the worshiper, and thus would not be construed as feeding God in the same way as a burnt offering; contrast Ps 66.13–15. **16–23**: Though not everyone is guilty of the sins named in this section, the whole congregation must listen to the rebukes, for each is a member of the community. Verses 8–13 rebuked sacrifices that were a substitute for sincere calling unto God; vv. 16–21

19 "You give your mouth free rein for evil,
and your tongue frames deceit.
20 You sit and speak against your kin;
you slander your own mother's child.
21 These things you have done and I have been silent;
you thought that I was one just like yourself.
But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you.

22 "Mark this, then, you who forget God,
or I will tear you apart, and there will be no one to deliver.
23 Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me;
to those who go the right way[a]
I will show the salvation of God."

Psalm 51

To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.

5 Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

6 You desire truth in the inward being;[b]
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right[c] spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing[d] spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

[a] Heb *who set a way*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Or *steadfast*
[d] Or *generous*

condemns the sins themselves. **22–23:** A final warning and blessing.

Ps 51: Prayer of repentance and renewal. An individual petition, one of the most profound of the seven penitential psalms in Christian tradition (Pss 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). It is attributed to David after the prophet Nathan confronted him over his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah (2 Sam 12), a reminder that all humans, even the most revered, must ask God for forgiveness. The first section (vv. 1–9) is marked by the repetition of *blot out* in vv. 1 and 9, and *wash* in vv. 2 and 7. Repetition of *heart*, *God*, and *spirit* in vv. 10 and 17 frame the second section (vv. 10–19). As in Ps 50, contrition is considered more valuable than sacrifices. **1–8:** The psalmist asks forgiveness "as befits your faithfulness" (NRSV *according to your abundant mercy,* v. 1), i.e., because of who God is. Since the metaphor here for sin is stain, the psalmist asks for cleansing and purifying what is soiled or defiled. **5:** *I was born guilty,* the psalmist was never without sin (cf. Ps 88.15). The sense here, as in some other psalms, is that people are inherently sinful and therefore deserve divine compassion. **7:** The branches of *hyssop*, a wild shrub, were used for sprinkling liquids in purification rituals (Lev 14.4; Nu 19.6). **9–17:** The effects of forgiveness—interior renewal, nearness to God, an enlivened spirit, joy—will inspire the

15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
17 The sacrifice acceptable to God[a] is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
19 then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Psalm 52

To the leader. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech."

1 Why do you boast, O mighty one,
of mischief done against the godly?[b]
All day long 2 you are plotting destruction.
Your tongue is like a sharp razor,
you worker of treachery.
3 You love evil more than good,
and lying more than speaking the truth. *Selah*
4 You love all words that devour,
O deceitful tongue.
5 But God will break you down forever;
he will snatch and tear you from your tent;
he will uproot you from the land of the living. *Selah*
6 The righteous will see, and fear,
and will laugh at the evildoer,[c] saying,
7 "See the one who would not take refuge in God,
but trusted in abundant riches,
and sought refuge in wealth!"[d]

8 But I am like a green olive tree
in the house of God.
I trust in the steadfast love of God
forever and ever.
9 I will thank you forever,
because of what you have done.
In the presence of the faithful
I will proclaim[e] your name, for it is good.

Psalm 53

To the leader: according to Mahalath. A Maskil of David.

1 Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."

[a] Or *My sacrifice, O God,*
[b] Cn Compare Syr: Heb *the kindness of God*
[c] Heb *him*
[d] Syr Tg: Heb *in his destruction*
[e] Cn: Heb *wait for*

psalmist to teach sinners (vv. 13–15), which is of more value than sacrifice (v. 17). **18–19:** Apparently an addition inspired by the statement that *a broken spirit* is an acceptable sacrifice (v. 17): the Temple will be rebuilt and then there will be sacrifices again. As in other psalms, a personal petition is turned into a national psalm, here reflecting the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.

Ps 52: True confidence. A contrast between the self-confident, wicked warrior and the person who trusts God. The psalmist denounces the wicked (vv. 1–4) and confidently awaits God's punishment of them (vv. 5–7), and concludes with a declaration of trust in God (vv. 8–9). It is similar to Ps 36. **Superscription:** *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. On Doeg's betrayal of David, see 1 Sam 21.1–8; 22.6–19. **1–4:** The psalm uses types, typical ways of behaving (e.g., the wicked plot against the good person), common in wisdom literature. **1:** *O mighty one*, often applied to God (e.g., Ps 50.1), it is ironically applied to the self-important deceiver whose days are numbered. **3:** *Selah* (also v. 5), see Ps 3.2n. **5–7:** Justice must be seen to be done. **5:** *Land of the living*, better, "the land of life," i.e., the Temple, as in Pss 27.13; 116.9. The sinner will be excluded from the Temple, but the psalmist will be *like a green olive tree in the house of God* (v. 8). **6:** A common theme in Psalms: by applying justice in the world, God encourages people to act justly. **8:** *But I,* abruptly shifts attention to the psalmist who enjoys the protection of the Temple. Ancient temples had gardens that symbolized the life-giving capacity of the god worshiped there.

Ps 53: Refusal to be silenced by those who deny God's justice. A condemnation of those who deny that God is active in the world, and a declaration of trust in the God who cares for the poor (among whom the psalmist

They are corrupt, they commit
abominable acts;
there is no one who does good.

2 God looks down from heaven on
humankind
to see if there are any who are wise,
who seek after God.

3 They have all fallen away, they are all
alike perverse;
there is no one who does good,
no, not one.

4 Have they no knowledge, those
evildoers,
who eat up my people as they eat
bread,
and do not call upon God?

5 There they shall be in great terror,
in terror such as has not been.
For God will scatter the bones of the
ungodly;[a]
they will be put to shame,[b] for God has
rejected them.

6 O that deliverance for Israel would come
from Zion!
When God restores the fortunes of his
people,
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

Psalm 54

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites went and told Saul, "David is in hiding among us."

1 Save me, O God, by your name,
and vindicate me by your might.
2 Hear my prayer, O God;
give ear to the words of my mouth.

3 For the insolent have risen against me,
the ruthless seek my life;
they do not set God before them. *Selah*

4 But surely, God is my helper;
the Lord is the upholder of[c] my life.
5 He will repay my enemies for their evil.
In your faithfulness, put an end to
them.

6 With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to
you;
I will give thanks to your name, O LORD,
for it is good.
7 For he has delivered me from every
trouble,
and my eye has looked in triumph on
my enemies.

[a] Cn Compare Gk Syr: Heb *him who encamps against you*
[b] Gk: Heb *you have put (them) to shame*
[c] Gk Syr Jerome: Heb *is of those who uphold* or *is with those who uphold*

wants to be counted). This psalm is a near duplicate of Ps 14. A major difference is that this psalm is part of the "Elohistic Psalter" (Pss 42–83), which prefers the divine name "Elohim," translated "God" rather than "the LORD," and thus replaces many of the "LORD"s of Ps 14 with "God." **Superscription:** *Mahalath, Maskil,* technical terms of uncertain significance. **1:** *There is no God,* denies God's ability to govern, not necessarily God's existence; see Ps 10.4. **2:** God's scrutiny lays bare the deniers' folly and malice. In the style of wisdom literature, the rebellious are contrasted with the *wise, who seek after God*. **4:** Evildoers will finally learn that God defends those whom they exploit. **5:** Divine judgment will scatter the bones of the wicked to the four winds and they will be deprived of proper burial. *There,* evidently a reference to Mount Zion as in Pss 48.6; 76.3. **6:** A generalized conclusion, moving from the individual to the community, as Israel lives in the hope that salvation comes from *Zion*. *When God restores* may refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.

Ps 54: God's saving power. An individual petition that focuses on the power of God's name (vv. 1,6). **Superscription:** *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. On David's betrayal by the residents of Ziph, see 1 Sam 23.15–29. **1:** *Name,* when a person is presented to others, the name is a pledge, in this case that help is on the way. The psalmist wants to be vindicated, that is, shown to be in the right in a conflict with foes. In addition "name" is important in Psalms since the body of most psalms starts with a divine name or title, as here, where the Heb reads "O God, save me." **3:** *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **4:** A strong statement of trust in God as *helper* and *upholder* who will punish the enemies. **6:** The psalmist offers God two motivations to help: a *freewill offering,* and a promise to thank God publicly, thereby encouraging others.

Psalm 55

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David.

1 Give ear to my prayer, O God;
do not hide yourself from my supplication.
2 Attend to me, and answer me;
I am troubled in my complaint.
I am distraught 3 by the noise of the enemy,
because of the clamor of the wicked.
For they bring[a] trouble upon me,
and in anger they cherish enmity against me.

4 My heart is in anguish within me,
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
5 Fear and trembling come upon me,
and horror overwhelms me.
6 And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest;
7 truly, I would flee far away;
I would lodge in the wilderness; *Selah*
8 I would hurry to find a shelter for myself
from the raging wind and tempest."

9 Confuse, O Lord, confound their speech;
for I see violence and strife in the city.
10 Day and night they go around it
on its walls,
and iniquity and trouble are within it;
11 ruin is in its midst;
oppression and fraud
do not depart from its marketplace.

12 It is not enemies who taunt me—
I could bear that;
it is not adversaries who deal insolently with me—
I could hide from them.

13 But it is you, my equal,
my companion, my familiar friend,
14 with whom I kept pleasant company;
we walked in the house of God with the throng.
15 Let death come upon them;
let them go down alive to Sheol;
for evil is in their homes and in their hearts.

16 But I call upon God,
and the LORD will save me.
17 Evening and morning and at noon
I utter my complaint and moan,
and he will hear my voice.
18 He will redeem me unharmed
from the battle that I wage,
for many are arrayed against me.
19 God, who is enthroned from of old, *Selah*
will hear, and will humble them—
because they do not change,
and do not fear God.

20 My companion laid hands on a friend
and violated a covenant with me[b]
21 with speech smoother than butter,
but with a heart set on war;
with words that were softer than oil,
but in fact were drawn swords.

22 Cast your burden[c] on the LORD,
and he will sustain you;
he will never permit
the righteous to be moved.

[a] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *they cause to totter*
[b] Heb lacks *with me*
[c] Or *Cast what he has given you*

Ps 55: Plea to be delivered from violence and false friends. The petition of an individual emotionally distraught (vv. 4–8) by the violence of the community (*the city*, v. 9) and the deceit of a friend (vv. 12–15,22–23). In the second part (vv. 16–23), the psalmist finds solace in the hope that God will bring justice. **Superscription:** *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. **1–2:** The Hebrew words rendered *O God . . . I am troubled* are repeated in vv. 22–23 by *moved* and *O God,* which conclude the psalm. **6–7:** In contrast to most psalms, the supplicant does not feel he can find security in the Temple and wants to move far away. **7:** *Selah* (also v. 19), see Ps 3.2n. **12–15:** Harder to bear than societal corruption is the betrayal of a friend, a thought repeated in vv. 22–23. **12:** Not merely crying for revenge; the psalmist wants judgment on the wicked to be visible. **15:** *Alive,* in the prime of life (cf. Num 16.30; Ps 124.3). *Sheol,* the underworld, the abode of the dead. **17:** Either a reference to praying three times a day, as in later Judaism, or a figure of speech, meaning perpetual prayer. **22:** The psalmist is assured, perhaps by a priest or prophet, of divine protection.

[23] But you, O God, will cast them down
into the lowest pit;
the bloodthirsty and treacherous
shall not live out half their days.
But I will trust in you.

Psalm 56

To the leader: according to The Dove on Far-off Terebinths. Of David. A Miktam, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

[1] Be gracious to me, O God, for people
trample on me;
all day long foes oppress me;
[2] my enemies trample on me all day long,
for many fight against me.
O Most High, [3] when I am afraid,
I put my trust in you.
[4] In God, whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I am not afraid;
what can flesh do to me?

[5] All day long they seek to injure my
cause;
all their thoughts are against me for
evil.
[6] They stir up strife, they lurk,
they watch my steps.
As they hoped to have my life,
[7] so repay[a] them for their crime;
in wrath cast down the peoples, O God!

[8] You have kept count of my tossings;
put my tears in your bottle.
Are they not in your record?
[9] Then my enemies will retreat
in the day when I call.
This I know, that[b] God is for me.
[10] In God, whose word I praise,
in the LORD, whose word I praise,
[11] in God I trust; I am not afraid.
What can a mere mortal do to me?

[12] My vows to you I must perform, O God;
I will render thank offerings to you.
[13] For you have delivered my soul from death,
and my feet from falling,
so that I may walk before God
in the light of life.

Psalm 57

To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.

[1] Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to
me,
for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take
refuge,
until the destroying storms pass by.
[2] I cry to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.
[3] He will send from heaven and save me,
he will put to shame those who trample
on me. *Selah*
God will send forth his steadfast love and
his faithfulness.

[4] I lie down among lions
that greedily devour[c] human prey;
their teeth are spears and arrows,
their tongues sharp swords.

[a] Cn: Heb *rescue*
[b] Or *because*
[c] Cn: Heb *are aflame for*

Ps 56: Trust in the midst of oppression. Petition of a victim of oppression, notable for its assertions of trust (vv. 2c–4,8–13). The poem is structured by its two refrains, vv. 3–4 and 10–11, and is characterized by repetition. **Superscription:** *The Dove on Far-off Terebinths,* probably the name of a melody. *Miktam,* a technical term of unknown meaning. The psalm is associated with David when the Philistines seized him in Gath (1 Sam 21.11–15). **8:** *My tears in your bottle,* as a shepherd keeps track of his animals by putting pebbles in a bag. *Record,* the same Heb word is translated "book" elsewhere; see Ps 40.7n. With that statement, the tone changes to serene trust in God. **13:** *In the light of life,* in contrast to Sheol, the dark underworld.

Ps 57: A petition for God's faithfulness and a promise of praise. An individual petition divided by refrains (vv. 5,11) into two parts and unified by mention of God's steadfast love and faithfulness (vv. 3,10). **Superscription**: *Do Not Destroy,* perhaps a melody. *Miktam,* a technical term of unknown meaning. The psalm is related to David's being pursued by Saul (1 Sam 22–24). **1:** *The shadow of your wings*, either the wings of the cherubim, protectors of the throne of God in the Temple (1 Kings 6.27; 8.6; Ps 17.8n.) or possibly a comparison of the deity to a bird hovering protectively over its nestlings as in Deut 32.11 and some Egyptian divine images. **3:** *Steadfast love . . . faithfulness* (also v. 10), commonly paired, the two words express one concept, God's loving fidelity. *Selah* (also v. 6),

5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.
Let your glory be over all the earth.

6 They set a net for my steps;
my soul was bowed down.
They dug a pit in my path,
but they have fallen into it
themselves. *Selah*
7 My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast.
I will sing and make melody.
8 Awake, my soul!
Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn.
9 I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.
10 For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens;
your faithfulness extends to the clouds.

11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.
Let your glory be over all the earth.

Psalm 58

To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam.

1 Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods?[a]
Do you judge people fairly?
2 No, in your hearts you devise wrongs;
your hands deal out violence on earth.

3 The wicked go astray from the womb;
they err from their birth,
speaking lies.
4 They have venom like the venom of a serpent,
like the deaf adder that stops its ear,
5 so that it does not hear the voice of charmers
or of the cunning enchanter.

6 O God, break the teeth in their mouths;
tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!
7 Let them vanish like water that runs away;
like grass let them be trodden down[b] and wither.
8 Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime;
like the untimely birth that never sees the sun.
9 Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns,
whether green or ablaze, may he sweep them away!

10 The righteous will rejoice when they see vengeance done;
they will bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked.
11 People will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous;
surely there is a God who judges on earth."

[a] Or *mighty lords*
[b] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

see Ps 3.2n. **4:** The images of *lions* and weapons combine to express great danger, as do those of hunters in v. 6. **6:** See 7.15–16n. **7–10:** With the light of dawn, danger disappears, and the psalmist sings a song of thanksgiving in anticipation of salvation. **9:** The psalmist's declaration of a desire to acknowledge God widely is meant to motivate God to save him. **10–11:** The psalmist is asking God to act according to his character.

Ps 58: The importance of divine justice. Beginning with a contemptuous dismissal of evil "gods" who sponsor evil humans (vv. 1–5), the psalmist petitions God to break their power (vv. 6–9) and enable the just to enjoy peace (vv. 10–11), encouraging people to recognize that a just deity controls the world. **Superscription:** *Do Not Destroy,* see Ps 57n. *Miktam,* a technical term of unknown meaning. **1:** *You gods*, refers either to wicked humans behaving arrogantly (as in 2 Kings 24.15; Ezek 17:13) or, more likely, to heavenly beings who rebelled against the Lord's absolute authority to incite humans to act wickedly (vv. 3–5). Ps 82 is similar. **6–9:** *Break the teeth*, with a wealth of images the psalmist asks for a divine intervention that will restore God's original intentions. **10–11:** A successful intervention will let everyone know that there is a just god. *Bathe . . . in the blood,* the gory image expresses the totality of God's victory; cf. Ps 68.23; Isa 63.1–6.

Psalm 59

To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam, when Saul ordered his house to be watched in order to kill him.

1 Deliver me from my enemies, O my God;
protect me from those who rise up against me.
2 Deliver me from those who work evil;
from the bloodthirsty save me.

3 Even now they lie in wait for my life;
the mighty stir up strife against me.
For no transgression or sin of mine, O LORD,
4 for no fault of mine, they run and make ready.

Rouse yourself, come to my help and see!
5 You, LORD God of hosts, are God of Israel.
Awake to punish all the nations;
spare none of those who treacherously plot evil. *Selah*

6 Each evening they come back,
howling like dogs
and prowling about the city.
7 There they are, bellowing with their mouths,
with sharp words[a] on their lips—
for "Who," they think,[b] "will hear us?"

8 But you laugh at them, O LORD;
you hold all the nations in derision.
9 O my strength, I will watch for you;
for you, O God, are my fortress.
10 My God in his steadfast love will meet me;
my God will let me look in triumph on my enemies.

11 Do not kill them, or my people may forget;
make them totter by your power, and bring them down,
O Lord, our shield.
12 For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips,
let them be trapped in their pride.
For the cursing and lies that they utter,
13 consume them in wrath;
consume them until they are no more.
Then it will be known to the ends of the earth
that God rules over Jacob. *Selah*

14 Each evening they come back,
howling like dogs
and prowling about the city.
15 They roam about for food,
and growl if they do not get their fill.

16 But I will sing of your might;
I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning.
For you have been a fortress for me
and a refuge in the day of my distress.
17 O my strength, I will sing praises to you,
for you, O God, are my fortress,
the God who shows me steadfast love.

[a] Heb *with swords*
[b] Heb lacks *they think*

Ps 59: Prayer against the enemies of the community. The designation of the enemies as "all the nations" (vv. 5,8), "the city" (vv. 6,14), and "known to the ends of the earth" (v. 13) suggests that the poem is a petition of the community, perhaps uttered by the king. The doubled structure of the poem (vv. 1–10,11–17; note the refrains in vv. 6,14 and 9,17) enables the sufferer to change from a simple desire for personal rescue to a passion for justice, hope, and eagerness to sing praise. **Superscription:** *Do Not Destroy,* see Ps 57n. *Miktam,* a technical term of unknown meaning. The episode is related in 1 Sam 19.11–17. **4:** *Rouse yourself*, God is imagined as a sleeping warrior needing to be awakened by his frightened people as in Pss 44.23; 78.65; 121.4; Isa 51.9. **5:** *Selah* (also v. 13), see Ps 3.2n. **6–7,14–15:** The enemies are like dogs, not attacking but constantly yelping, and their cry is *Who . . . will hear us?* i.e., God is unable to save the city. **8:** *But you* introduces the statement of praise in vv. 8–10 just as *but I* (v. 16) introduces the statement of praise in vv. 16–17. This verse is similar to Ps 2.4, in a similar context of God mocking the nations for believing that he is powerless to save Israel. **11–13:** The psalmist wants God to make an object lesson out of the enemies. **16–17:** As is appropriate to this psalm, God is depicted metaphorically as *fortress, refuge,* and *strength*; see Ps 18.1–2. **16:** *In the morning,* see Ps 57.9–10.

Psalm 60

To the leader: according to the Lily of the Covenant. A Miktam of David; for instruction; when he struggled with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab on his return killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

1 O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses;
you have been angry; now restore us!
2 You have caused the land to quake; you have torn it open;
repair the cracks in it, for it is tottering.
3 You have made your people suffer hard things;
you have given us wine to drink that made us reel.

4 You have set up a banner for those who fear you,
to rally to it out of bowshot.[a] *Selah*
5 Give victory with your right hand, and answer us,[b]
so that those whom you love may be rescued.

6 God has promised in his sanctuary:[c]
"With exultation I will divide up Shechem,
and portion out the Vale of Succoth.
7 Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine;
Ephraim is my helmet;
Judah is my scepter.
8 Moab is my washbasin;
on Edom I hurl my shoe;
over Philistia I shout in triumph."

9 Who will bring me to the fortified city?
Who will lead me to Edom?
10 Have you not rejected us, O God?
You do not go out, O God, with our armies.
11 O grant us help against the foe,
for human help is worthless.
12 With God we shall do valiantly;
it is he who will tread down our foes.

Psalm 61

To the leader: with stringed instruments. Of David.

1 Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer.
2 From the end of the earth I call to you,
when my heart is faint.

Lead me to the rock
that is higher than I;
3 for you are my refuge,
a strong tower against the enemy.

[a] Gk Syr Jerome: Heb *because of the truth*
[b] Another reading is *me*
[c] Or *by his holiness*

Ps 60: May God grant victory! A community petition that God would be faithful to his ancient promise of protection (vv. 6–8) and support the beleaguered army (vv. 9–11). Verses 5–12 also appear in Ps 108.6–13. **Superscription:** *According to the Lily of the Covenant,* see Ps 45n.; cf. Ps 80. *Miktam,* a technical term of unknown meaning. Israel's struggles with Aram-naharaim (in northeastern Syria) and Aram-zobah (an Aramean city-state) are told in 2 Sam 8.3–8 and 10.6–13; Joab was David's general. **1–5:** Complaint and petition. **4:** *You have set up a banner,* best rendered as a petition: "Set up a banner so that we may rally to it." *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **6–8:** The psalmist cites an ancient oracle, probably uttered after a victory, in order to remind God to be faithful to it in the present crisis. *Shechem,* a major city in central Israel (*Ephraim,* the northern kingdom). *The Vale of Succoth,* in the east Jordan Valley. *Gilead* and *Manasseh,* Israelite territory in Transjordan. *Judah,* the southern kingdom. *Moab* and *Edom,* in southern Transjordan, and *Philistia,* on the southeastern Mediterranean coast, were areas subjected to Israel as vassals (see 2 Sam 8.11–12). *I hurl my shoe,* probably a reference to the legal gesture of claiming ownership attested in Ruth 4.7. **9–12:** Complaint and petition. **9:** *Who will bring me to the fortified city?* A prayer that God lead the commander of Israel's armies (perhaps the king) against their foes. *Fortified city*, a seemingly impregnable fort, probably referring to Bozrah, the capital of Edom. **10:** Reprises v. 1. *Go out . . . with our armies,* according to 1 Sam 4, the Israelites could carry the ark with them to bring God along in battle; in later times, divine support was imagined without the ark's presence. **11–12:** A common biblical theme, that victory depends on God alone, not on human might.

Ps 61: Plea to be in God's Temple. An individual, far away from the Temple, prays to be led there and enjoy its protection and nourishment. **2–4:** *From the end of the earth*, a remote place, far from the center in Jerusalem.

4 Let me abide in your tent forever,
find refuge under the shelter of
your wings. *Selah*
5 For you, O God, have heard my vows;
you have given me the heritage of those
who fear your name.

6 Prolong the life of the king;
may his years endure to all generations!
7 May he be enthroned forever before God;
appoint steadfast love and faithfulness
to watch over him!

8 So I will always sing praises to your name,
as I pay my vows day after day.

Psalm 62

To the leader: according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

1 For God alone my soul waits in
silence;
from him comes my salvation.
2 He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall never be shaken.

3 How long will you assail a person,
will you batter your victim, all of you,
as you would a leaning wall, a tottering
fence?
4 Their only plan is to bring down a person
of prominence.
They take pleasure in falsehood;
they bless with their mouths,
but inwardly they curse. *Selah*

5 For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.
6 He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
7 On God rests my deliverance and my
honor;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

8 Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us. *Selah*

9 Those of low estate are but a breath,
those of high estate are a delusion;
in the balances they go up;
they are together lighter than a
breath.
10 Put no confidence in extortion,
and set no vain hopes on robbery;
if riches increase, do not set your heart
on them.

11 Once God has spoken;
twice have I heard this:
that power belongs to God,
12 and steadfast love belongs to you,
O Lord.
For you repay to all
according to their work.

Psalm 63

A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah.

1 O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;

Rock, refuge, tower, tent, shelter of your wings, all can refer to the Temple and its precincts; see also Ps 57.1n. **4:** *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **5–8:** *You . . . have heard my vows,* best understood as a prayer of one still far from the Temple, confident that God has heard his vows. **6:** The sudden mention of the king is surprising, but the king, as God's anointed, was closely associated with the Temple; he also represented the people and so the psalmist's request is to join the people in their worship as in Pss 42–43.

Ps 62: Trust in God the stronghold. A song of trust, recording the feelings of an individual beset by enemies. Various synonyms for salvation and for God as a fortress predominate. **Superscription:** *Jeduthun,* see Ps 39n. **3–4:** Instead of speaking about the enemies, the psalmist speaks to the enemies (as in Pss 2.10–11; 4.2; 75.4–7); this is likely a literary conceit. **4:** *Selah* (also v. 8), see Ps 3.2n. **5:** *For God alone my soul waits in silence*, reprises v. 1; the psalmist's attitude differs totally from that of the evildoers (v. 4). **8–10:** Lest others be intimidated and cease trusting, the psalmist shares the hard-won conviction that nothing but God suffices. **9:** The good deeds of the evildoers are so unsubstantial, they are weightless. **11:** *Once . . . twice*, numerical parallelism, where a number X is paralleled by X+1. This verse thus means that *I heard* the one thing that God spoke, *that power belongs to God*.

Ps 63: Longing for God. A song of desire to be protected from enemies (vv. 9–10) and be in God's house (vv. 2–5), like Pss 27; 42–43; 61; and 84. The superscription associates the poem with David hiding from Saul in the wilderness of Judah (1 Sam 23.14–15; 24.1). **1:** *My soul thirsts*, communion with God is expressed in metaphors of

my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
3 Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
4 So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

5 My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,[a]
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
6 when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
7 for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
8 My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

9 But those who seek to destroy my life
shall go down into the depths of the earth;
10 they shall be given over to the power of the sword,
they shall be prey for jackals.
11 But the king shall rejoice in God;
all who swear by him shall exult,
for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

Psalm 64

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

1 Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint;
preserve my life from the dread enemy.
2 Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked,
from the scheming of evildoers,
3 who whet their tongues like swords,
who aim bitter words like arrows,
4 shooting from ambush at the blameless;
they shoot suddenly and without fear.
5 They hold fast to their evil purpose;
they talk of laying snares secretly,
thinking, "Who can see us?[b]
6 Who can search out our crimes?[c]
We have thought out a cunningly conceived plot."
For the human heart and mind are deep.

7 But God will shoot his arrow at them;
they will be wounded suddenly.
8 Because of their tongue he will bring them to ruin;[d]
all who see them will shake with horror.
9 Then everyone will fear;
they will tell what God has brought about,
and ponder what he has done.

[a] Heb *with fat and fatness*
[b] Syr: Heb *them*
[c] Cn: Heb *They search out crimes*
[d] Cn: Heb *They will bring him to ruin, their tongue being against them*

eating, seeing (v. 2), and praising (vv. 3–5). In Hebrew, the word for *soul* also means "throat," so the verse is punning. **2:** *I have looked*, the NRSV translation assumes the psalmist is already in the Temple, but in similar psalms being in the Temple is in the future. Thus one can translate, "I shall look upon." **3:** *Better than life*, experiencing God in the Temple is better than mere existence elsewhere. **6:** *On my bed*, spontaneous private prayer by the sleepless individual, in contrast to commanded ritual performance as in Pss 4:4b–5a; 149:5b,6–11. **6–11:** In contrast to the first part of the psalm (vv. 1–5), which expresses the hope of being in the Temple, the second part (vv. 6–11) acknowledges that God has never ceased being the psalmist's God. *Shadow of your wings*, see Ps 57.1n. **11:** For a similar concluding prayer mentioning the king, see Ps 61.6n.

Ps 64: Protection from enemies' plots. A carefully constructed individual petition to be protected from people who deny that God rules society. The second part (vv. 6–10), the statement of hope and trust, reverses the key words of the first part (vv. 1–5): *arrows/arrow* in vv. 3b and 7a; *tongues/tongue* in vv. 3a and 8a; *suddenly* in vv. 4b and 7b; *shoot* in vv. 4a, 4b, and 7a; *fear* in vv. 4b and 9a; and *see* in vv. 5c and 8b. God will *shoot his arrow* at those who have shot arrows at the righteous; those who use their *tongues* to attack the righteous and assert God's impotence will be ruined because of their tongue, that is, their words. The second part expresses the firm hope that God will undo each malicious act. **9:** *Then everyone will fear*, like many individual petitions, the conclusion moves from the single person to the community, here stating that people will be in awe as they

10 Let the righteous rejoice in the LORD
and take refuge in him.
Let all the upright in heart glory.

Psalm 65

To the leader. A Psalm of David. A Song.

1 Praise is due to you,
O God, in Zion;
and to you shall vows be performed,
2 O you who answer prayer!
To you all flesh shall come.
3 When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,
you forgive our transgressions.
4 Happy are those whom you choose and bring near
to live in your courts.
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,
your holy temple.

5 By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,
O God of our salvation;
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas.
6 By your[a] strength you established the mountains;
you are girded with might.
7 You silence the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples.
8 Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;
you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

9 You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.
10 You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.
11 You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
12 The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
13 the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

Psalm 66

To the leader. A Song. A Psalm.

1 Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;
2 sing the glory of his name;
give to him glorious praise.
3 Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!
Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.
4 All the earth worships you;
they sing praises to you,
sing praises to your name." *Selah*

5 Come and see what God has done:
he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.
6 He turned the sea into dry land;
they passed through the river on foot.
There we rejoiced in him,
7 who rules by his might forever,

[a] Gk Jerome: Heb *his*

recognize God's just action.

Ps 65: Thanksgiving for God's enlivening the world. 1–4: In Hebrew, the opening lines begin with "to you," underlining the centrality of God, to whom every liturgical act performed on Mount Zion is directed. **2:** *All flesh shall come,* see Pss 22.27n.; 100n. **3–4:** *Forgive . . . bring near,* liturgical vocabulary. **5:** *Awesome deeds,* deeds that elicit wonder. In Ps 106.22 the phrase refers to the Exodus miracles, and in Isa 5.8 to creation victory. **6–7:** The divine victory associated with creation: the *mountains* are placed in their bases (see Pss 89.12; 90.2) and the chaotic primeval waters are defeated (see Ps 89.9–13). **9–13:** One benefit of God's creation victory is that the once-dangerous waters now fertilize the earth. The psalmist focuses on the waters that make the earth bloom and give nurture to humans. **9:** *River of God,* see Ps 36.5–9n. **12–13:** Implicitly compares the earth to human beings, beautifully attired and singing joyous songs. The abundance of the harvest has a mythological quality.

Ps 66: Thanksgiving to God for help in danger. In this community thanksgiving, an individual calls upon the whole world (vv. 1–4,16–19) to acknowledge God's rescue of the people from danger (vv. 8–12) and promises to fulfill a vow made in that time of danger (vv. 13–15). **4:** *Selah* (also vv. 7,15), see Ps 3.2n. **5–6:** *Come and see,* when

whose eyes keep watch on the nations—
let the rebellious not exalt themselves.
Selah

8 Bless our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard,
9 who has kept us among the living,
and has not let our feet slip.
10 For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.
11 You brought us into the net;
you laid burdens on our backs;
12 you let people ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.[a]

13 I will come into your house with burnt offerings;
I will pay you my vows,
14 those that my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.
15 I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings,
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;
I will make an offering of bulls and goats.
Selah

16 Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for me.
17 I cried aloud to him,
and he was extolled with my tongue.
18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.
19 But truly God has listened;
he has given heed to the words of my prayer.

20 Blessed be God,
because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me.

Psalm 67

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song.

1 May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
Selah
2 that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.
3 Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth. *Selah*
5 Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

6 The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, has blessed us.
7 May God continue to bless us;
let all the ends of the earth revere him.

Psalm 68

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm. A Song.

1 Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered;
let those who hate him flee before him.

[a] Cn Compare Gk Syr Jerome Tg: Heb *to a saturation*

grave danger threatened, the psalmist called people to remember the great formative event of the Exodus (see Ex 14.21–22; Josh 4.23), assuming that God will be faithful to that past act. **10:** *Silver* ore was *tried* or refined by heat, which separated the pure silver from other minerals. **16–20:** Ritual thanksgiving is not enough; the psalmist must proclaim God's mighty works to the world.

Ps 67: May the nations acknowledge God in our prosperity! In this communal petition, the psalmist prays that the nations may see how God has caused Israel to prosper, has protected the people, and will judge them equitably, and that the nations will therefore praise him. "Bless" and "praise" are key words, repeated several times, emphasizing the theme of the psalm. **1:** *Make his face to shine upon us*, a reworking of the priestly blessing in Num 6.24–26. Like the sun and moon, the face is a light shining in favor upon the people (Pss 31.16; 80.3,7,19). *Selah* (also v. 4), see Ps 3.2n. **3–5:** The center of the poem is v. 4, the only three-line verse: it is framed by vv. 3 and 5. **6:** *The earth has yielded*, best translated as a prayer, "May the earth yield its increase": the people pray for their prosperity so that their God might receive more honor.

Ps 68: The victorious Lord comes to the aid of Israel. Psalm 68 is the most difficult psalm in the book, and scholars do not agree on what kind of poem Psalm 68 is, as well as what many of its words or phrases mean. It is perhaps best taken as a communal thanksgiving for defending the people against infertility and attack. The

2 As smoke is driven away, so drive them
away;
as wax melts before the fire,
let the wicked perish before God.
3 But let the righteous be joyful;
let them exult before God;
let them be jubilant with joy.

4 Sing to God, sing praises to his name;
lift up a song to him who rides upon the
clouds[a]—
his name is the LORD—
be exultant before him.

5 Father of orphans and protector of
widows
is God in his holy habitation.
6 God gives the desolate a home to live in;
he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,
but the rebellious live in a parched land.

7 O God, when you went out before your
people,
when you marched through the
wilderness, *Selah*
8 the earth quaked, the heavens poured
down rain
at the presence of God, the God of Sinai,
at the presence of God, the God of
Israel.
9 Rain in abundance, O God, you showered
abroad;
you restored your heritage when it
languished;
10 your flock found a dwelling in it;
in your goodness, O God, you provided
for the needy.

11 The Lord gives the command;
great is the company of those[b] who bore
the tidings:
12 "The kings of the armies, they flee,
they flee!"
The women at home divide the spoil,
13 though they stay among the
sheepfolds—
the wings of a dove covered with silver,
its pinions with green gold.
14 When the Almighty[c] scattered kings
there,
snow fell on Zalmon.

15 O mighty mountain, mountain of
Bashan;
O many-peaked mountain, mountain of
Bashan!
16 Why do you look with envy, O many-
peaked mountain,
at the mount that God desired for his
abode,
where the LORD will reside forever?

17 With mighty chariotry, twice ten
thousand,
thousands upon thousands,
the Lord came from Sinai into the holy
place.[d]
18 You ascended the high mount,
leading captives in your train
and receiving gifts from people,
even from those who rebel against the
LORD God's abiding there.
19 Blessed be the Lord,
who daily bears us up;
God is our salvation. *Selah*
20 Our God is a God of salvation,
and to GOD, the Lord, belongs escape
from death.

21 But God will shatter the heads of his
enemies,
the hairy crown of those who walk in
their guilty ways.
22 The Lord said,
"I will bring them back from Bashan,

[a] Or *cast up a highway for him who rides through the deserts*
[b] Or *company of the women*
[c] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[d] Cn: Heb *The Lord among them Sinai in the holy* (place)

battle-victory is described in cosmic terms, waged against "the depths of the sea" (v. 22), "wild animals," and "the herd of bulls" (v. 30), as well as "the kings of the armies" (v. 12). **1–3:** A summons for God to act. **4–6:** Invitation to sing to the God of justice. **4:** *Who rides upon the clouds,* God's storm-cloud chariot; see also v. 33. **7–14:** God's victorious campaign to make the earth fertile and safe. **7:** *Selah* (also vv. 19,32), see Ps 3.2n. **7–8:** Cf. Judg 5.4–5. **15–23:** The LORD returns to his holy mountain residence, Mount Zion, having earlier appeared at Sinai

I will bring them back from the depths of the sea,
23 so that you may bathe[a] your feet in blood,
so that the tongues of your dogs may have their share from the foe."

24 Your solemn processions are seen,[b] O God,
the processions of my God, my King, into the sanctuary—
25 the singers in front, the musicians last,
between them girls playing tambourines:
26 "Bless God in the great congregation,
the LORD, O you who are of Israel's fountain!"
27 There is Benjamin, the least of them, in the lead,
the princes of Judah in a body,
the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

28 Summon your might, O God;
show your strength, O God, as you have done for us before.
29 Because of your temple at Jerusalem
kings bear gifts to you.
30 Rebuke the wild animals that live among the reeds,
the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples.
Trample[c] under foot those who lust after tribute;
scatter the peoples who delight in war.[d]
31 Let bronze be brought from Egypt;
let Ethiopia[e] hasten to stretch out its hands to God.

32 Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth;
sing praises to the Lord, *Selah*
33 O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens;
listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.
34 Ascribe power to God,
whose majesty is over Israel;
and whose power is in the skies.
35 Awesome is God in his[f] sanctuary,
the God of Israel;
he gives power and strength to his people.

Blessed be God!

Psalm 69

To the leader: according to Lilies. Of David.

1 Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.
2 I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.
3 I am weary with my crying;
my throat is parched.
My eyes grow dim
with waiting for my God.

4 More in number than the hairs of my head
are those who hate me without cause;
many are those who would destroy me,
my enemies who accuse me falsely.
What I did not steal
must I now restore?
5 O God, you know my folly;
the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

6 Do not let those who hope in you be put to shame because of me,
O Lord GOD of hosts;

a Gk Syr Tg: Heb *shatter*
b Or *have been seen*
c Cn: Heb *Trampling*
d Meaning of Heb of verse 30 is uncertain
e Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*
f Gk: Heb *from your*

(v. 8). **14–15:** *Zalmon,* precise location unknown; perhaps a mountain in *Bashan,* in northern Transjordan. **23:** *Bathe . . . in blood,* see 58.10n. **24–31:** The tribes of Israel follow in procession. **32–35.** The nations are to bring tribute to the victorious LORD in the Temple and acknowledge God. **33–35:** Cf. Ps 29.1–3,11. *Rider in the heavens,* see v. 4n.

Ps 69: A loyal servant's prayer for deliverance. An individual petition, marked by deep commitment to God's cause. Verses 13d–29 repeat words occurring in vv. 1–13a, unifying the poem and lending it intensity. Another stylistic feature of the poem is the alternation between *I* (the psalmist) and *you* (God). **Superscription:** *According to Lilies,* probably refers to a melody (also Pss 45; 80). **1–4:** References to waters unify vv. 1–3, and references

do not let those who seek you be
dishonored because of me,
O God of Israel.
7 It is for your sake that I have borne
reproach,
that shame has covered my face.
8 I have become a stranger to my kindred,
an alien to my mother's children.

9 It is zeal for your house that has
consumed me;
the insults of those who insult you have
fallen on me.
10 When I humbled my soul with fasting,[a]
they insulted me for doing so.
11 When I made sackcloth my clothing,
I became a byword to them.
12 I am the subject of gossip for those who
sit in the gate,
and the drunkards make songs
about me.

13 But as for me, my prayer is to you,
O LORD.
At an acceptable time, O God,
in the abundance of your steadfast love,
answer me.
With your faithful help 14 rescue me
from sinking in the mire;
let me be delivered from my enemies
and from the deep waters.
15 Do not let the flood sweep over me,
or the deep swallow me up,
or the Pit close its mouth over me.

16 Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast
love is good;
according to your abundant mercy, turn
to me.
17 Do not hide your face from your
servant,
for I am in distress—make haste to
answer me.
18 Draw near to me, redeem me,
set me free because of my enemies.

19 You know the insults I receive,
and my shame and dishonor;
my foes are all known to you.
20 Insults have broken my heart,
so that I am in despair.
I looked for pity, but there was none;
and for comforters, but I found none.
21 They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me vinegar
to drink.

22 Let their table be a trap for them,
a snare for their allies.
23 Let their eyes be darkened so that they
cannot see,
and make their loins tremble
continually.
24 Pour out your indignation upon them,
and let your burning anger overtake
them.
25 May their camp be a desolation;
let no one live in their tents.
26 For they persecute those whom you have
struck down,
and those whom you have wounded,
they attack still more.[b]
27 Add guilt to their guilt;
may they have no acquittal from you.
28 Let them be blotted out of the book of
the living;
let them not be enrolled among the
righteous.
29 But I am lowly and in pain;
let your salvation, O God, protect me.

30 I will praise the name of God with a
song;
I will magnify him with thanksgiving.
31 This will please the LORD more than an ox
or a bull with horns and hoofs.
32 Let the oppressed see it and be glad;
you who seek God, let your hearts revive.

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *I wept, with fasting my soul*, or *I made my soul mourn with fasting*
[b] Gk Syr: Heb *recount the pain of*

to bodily organs (*throat, eyes, hairs of my head)* unify vv. 3–4. **5–12:** The psalmist asks for help promoting the honor of God's house (v. 7), though freely conceding personal weakness and folly (v. 5). **8:** See Ps 38.11; Job 19.13–15. **22–29:** The psalmist is less interested in personal vengeance than in being publicly vindicated as God's innocent and loyal servant. **28:** *The book of the living* was a scroll containing the fates of individuals. In postbiblical Judaism, the book was inscribed at the New Year, and sealed and finalized on Yom Kippur. **30–31:** A verbal

33 For the LORD hears the needy,
and does not despise his own that are in bonds.

34 Let heaven and earth praise him,
the seas and everything that moves in them.
35 For God will save Zion
and rebuild the cities of Judah;
and his servants shall live[a] there and possess it;
36 the children of his servants shall inherit it,
and those who love his name shall live in it.

Psalm 70

To the leader. Of David, for the memorial offering.

1 Be pleased, O God, to deliver me.
O LORD, make haste to help me!
2 Let those be put to shame and confusion
who seek my life.
Let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire to hurt me.
3 Let those who say, "Aha, Aha!"
turn back because of their shame.

4 Let all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you.
Let those who love your salvation
say evermore, "God is great!"
5 But I am poor and needy;
hasten to me, O God!
You are my help and my deliverer;
O LORD, do not delay!

Psalm 71

1 In you, O LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
2 In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.
3 Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress,[b] to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.

4 Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.
5 For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O LORD, from my youth.
6 Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.

7 I have been like a portent to many,
but you are my strong refuge.
8 My mouth is filled with your praise,
and with your glory all day long.
9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
do not forsake me when my strength is spent.
10 For my enemies speak concerning me,
and those who watch for my life consult together.
11 They say, "Pursue and seize that person
whom God has forsaken,
for there is no one to deliver."

[a] Syr: Heb *and they shall live*

[b] Gk Compare 31.3: Heb *to come continually you have commanded*

offering is superior to an animal one; cf. Ps 51.16–17. **32–36:** The salvation of the supplicant is not for his own sake, but so others will praise God. **35:** Perhaps a reference to the attack of the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 BCE, or to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.

Ps 70: A prayer that the psalmist's persecutors would be defeated. An individual petition, which is also found with a few variants in Ps 40.13–17. **Superscription:** *For the memorial offering* (also Ps 38), meaning uncertain. **1–3:** *God, help,* and *make haste,* the words are echoed in the final lines, bringing closure to the poem. **2:** *Shame*, violating accepted morality brought dishonor upon the violator. The prayer is that the enemies' schemes be publicly frustrated. **3:** *Aha, Aha*, malicious cries of triumph that the psalmist hopes will be proved foolish by God's judgment. **4:** God's help of this individual will encourage other righteous people. **5:** Psalms often depicts the supplicant as *poor* and *needy*.

Ps 71: An elderly person's plea for help. An individual petition that recycles material from Pss 22 and 31. Vv. 1–13 and 14–24 seem to constitute its two parts. **3:** *Rock of refuge,* a massive rock formation, a frequent metaphor

12 O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!
13 Let my accusers be put to shame and consumed;
let those who seek to hurt me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.
14 But I will hope continually,
and will praise you yet more and more.
15 My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,
of your deeds of salvation all day long,
though their number is past my knowledge.
16 I will come praising the mighty deeds of the Lord God,
I will praise your righteousness, yours alone.

17 O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.
18 So even to old age and gray hairs,
O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might
to all the generations to come.[a]
Your power 19 and your righteousness, O God,
reach the high heavens.

You who have done great things,
O God, who is like you?
20 You who have made me see many troubles and calamities
will revive me again;
from the depths of the earth
you will bring me up again.
21 You will increase my honor,
and comfort me once again.

22 I will also praise you with the harp
for your faithfulness, O my God;
I will sing praises to you with the lyre,
O Holy One of Israel.
23 My lips will shout for joy
when I sing praises to you;
my soul also, which you have rescued.
24 All day long my tongue will talk of your righteous help,
for those who tried to do me harm
have been put to shame, and disgraced.

Psalm 72

Of Solomon.

1 Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
2 May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.
3 May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
4 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.

5 May he live[b] while the sun endures,
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
6 May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.
7 In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

[a] Gk Compare Syr: Heb *to a generation, to all that come*
[b] Gk: Heb *may they fear you*

for God saving and helping someone. **7:** *A portent to many,* an example of God's merciful care for loyal servants. **14–16:** The psalmist is unusually buoyant despite the troubles. **17–21:** The psalmist looks back at a long life, finds that God has always been faithful, and is inspired by such fidelity. **24:** As in many petitions, the person praying imagines that the prayer has already been heard and the problem rectified.

Ps 72: Prayer that the king may prosper and extend God's rule to all lands. A royal psalm that may have been used at the king's coronation or anniversary. It views the Israelite king as the instrument of divine justice and protector of the poor (vv. 1–4,12–14), ensuring that the riches of creation are available to all (vv. 5–7); and he is the icon of God's universal rule (vv. 8–11). Nonetheless, he is still a human being in constant need of divine help (vv. 1,15–17). It is one of two psalms attributed to King Solomon (see also Ps 127), probably because an editor imagined that the land boundaries in v. 8 reflected the boundaries of Solomon's kingdom (see 1 Kings 4.24). **1–2:** *Justice, righteousness,* conformity to the divine will, which leads to *prosperity* (v. 3). **2:** *Your poor,* the existence of the poor (vv. 2, 4) is contrary to the divine will, so the king is to be an instrument of the more equitable distribu-

8 May he have dominion from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
9 May his foes[a] bow down before him,
and his enemies lick the dust.
10 May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles
render him tribute,
may the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring gifts.
11 May all kings fall down before him,
all nations give him service.

12 For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.
13 He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.
14 From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight.

15 Long may he live!
May gold of Sheba be given to him.
May prayer be made for him continually,
and blessings invoked for him all day long.
16 May there be abundance of grain in the land;
may it wave on the tops of the mountains;
may its fruit be like Lebanon;
and may people blossom in the cities
like the grass of the field.
17 May his name endure forever,
his fame continue as long as the sun.
May all nations be blessed in him;[b]
may they pronounce him happy.

18 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.
19 Blessed be his glorious name forever;
may his glory fill the whole earth.
Amen and Amen.

20 The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended.

BOOK III PSALMS 73—89

Psalm 73

A Psalm of Asaph.

1 Truly God is good to the upright,[c]
to those who are pure in heart.
2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;
my steps had nearly slipped.
3 For I was envious of the arrogant;
I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 For they have no pain;
their bodies are sound and sleek.
5 They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not plagued like other people.
6 Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them like a garment.
7 Their eyes swell out with fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
8 They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.
9 They set their mouths against heaven,
and their tongues range over the earth.

[a] Cn: Heb *those who live in the wilderness*
[b] Or *bless themselves by him*
[c] Or *good to Israel*

tion of the world's goods. **8–11:** As representative of the Lord of the world, the Israelite king receives the tribute of all the kings of the world in God's name. **8:** *The River,* the Euphrates. **10:** *Tarshish,* location uncertain; it may be Tarsus in southern Turkey or Tartessus in southern Spain. *The isles*, the islands of the eastern Aegean Sea. *Sheba* and *Seba,* both in southwestern Arabia. **12–14:** A repetition of the royal responsibilities, emphasizing the poor, similar to 2–4. **15–17:** Another cycle of blessings, similar to 5–11. **18–19:** A doxology, not part of the psalm, which marks the conclusion of Book Two of the Psalter. **20:** This verse suggests that at one time the book of Psalms, or at least the psalms attributed to David, ended here. (Other psalms also attributed to David will follow; e.g., 86; 101; 103.) This is important evidence for the growth of the book of Psalms over time.

Ps 73: Declaration of trust. Though sometimes classed as a wisdom psalm because it explores the problem of evil, the psalm actually records the psalmist's passage from despair at the apparent triumph of the wicked (vv. 3–12), through various stratagems to solve the problem (vv. 13–17), to a final appreciation of God's justice, nearness, and care (vv. 18–28). The psalm suggests that the wicked may triumph, but only temporarily. It opens a collection of psalms attributed to Asaph (73–83; see Ps 50n.). **1:** A statement of faith, paraphrased in the final

10 Therefore the people turn and praise
them,[a]
and find no fault in them.[b]
11 And they say, "How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"
12 Such are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.
13 All in vain I have kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.
14 For all day long I have been plagued,
and am punished every morning.

15 If I had said, "I will talk on in this way,"
I would have been untrue to the circle
of your children.
16 But when I thought how to understand
this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,
17 until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I perceived their end.
18 Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.
19 How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!
20 They are[c] like a dream when one awakes;
on awaking you despise their phantoms.

21 When my soul was embittered,
when I was pricked in heart,
22 I was stupid and ignorant;
I was like a brute beast toward you.
23 Nevertheless I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me with
honor.[d]
25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I
desire other than you.
26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength[e] of my heart and
my portion forever.

27 Indeed, those who are far from you will
perish;
you put an end to those who are false
to you.
28 But for me it is good to be near God;
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
to tell of all your works.

Psalm 74

A Maskil of Asaph.

1 O God, why do you cast us off forever?
Why does your anger smoke against the
sheep of your pasture?
2 Remember your congregation, which you
acquired long ago,
which you redeemed to be the tribe of
your heritage.
Remember Mount Zion, where you
came to dwell.
3 Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins;
the enemy has destroyed everything in
the sanctuary.

4 Your foes have roared within your holy
place;
they set up their emblems there.
5 At the upper entrance they hacked
the wooden trellis with axes.[f]

[a] Cn: Heb *his people return here*
[b] Cn: Heb *abundant waters are drained by them*
[c] Cn: Heb *Lord*
[d] Or *to glory*
[e] Heb *rock*
[f] Cn Compare Gk Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain

verse (v. 28). The verses in between tell how the psalmist came to such trust. **3–11:** Verses 3–7 tell what the psalmist *sees* (evildoers' well-fed bodies) and vv. 8–11 tell what the psalmist *hears* (their arrogant words). **17:** *I went into the sanctuary,* rejecting such strategies as criticizing God's injustice like Job (v. 15) or trying to reason about it (v. 16), the psalmist resolves to confront God in the sanctuary (v. 17) and there comes to understand *their* (the wicked) *end*: they are eventually swept away suddenly (vv. 18–20). **21–22:** An admission of guilt and an encouragement for others not to entertain such *stupid* and *brut*ish thoughts. **24:** *Receive me,* elevate to the security of God's domain, like Enoch (Gen 5.24), Elijah (2 Kings 2.11–12), and the psalmist in Ps 49.15.

Ps 74: The community begs God to restore the devastated Temple. A community petition that expresses pain over the immense punishment and abandonment symbolized by the ruined Temple (1–11), remembers in liturgical prayer God's primordial victory that created the world of which the Temple is a central part (vv. 12–17), and turns the experience into a triple prayer that God act now for his own sake (vv. 18–19,20–21,22–23). **Superscription:** *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. *Asaph,* see Ps 73n. **4:** *Emblems,* better, "signs," as

6 And then, with hatchets and hammers,
they smashed all its carved work.
7 They set your sanctuary on fire;
they desecrated the dwelling place of your name,
bringing it to the ground.
8 They said to themselves, "We will utterly subdue them";
they burned all the meeting places of God in the land.

9 We do not see our emblems;
there is no longer any prophet,
and there is no one among us who knows how long.
10 How long, O God, is the foe to scoff?
Is the enemy to revile your name forever?
11 Why do you hold back your hand;
why do you keep your hand in[a] your bosom?

12 Yet God my King is from of old,
working salvation in the earth.
13 You divided the sea by your might;
you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters.
14 You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
you gave him as food[b] for the creatures of the wilderness.
15 You cut openings for springs and torrents;
you dried up ever-flowing streams.
16 Yours is the day, yours also the night;
you established the luminaries[c] and the sun.
17 You have fixed all the bounds of the earth;
you made summer and winter.

18 Remember this, O LORD, how the enemy scoffs,
and an impious people reviles your name.
19 Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild animals;
do not forget the life of your poor forever.

20 Have regard for your[d] covenant,
for the dark places of the land are full of the haunts of violence.
21 Do not let the downtrodden be put to shame;
let the poor and needy praise your name.
22 Rise up, O God, plead your cause;
remember how the impious scoff at you all day long.
23 Do not forget the clamor of your foes,
the uproar of your adversaries that goes up continually.

Psalm 75

To the leader: Do Not Destroy. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

1 We give thanks to you, O God;
we give thanks; your name is near.
People tell of your wondrous deeds.

2 At the set time that I appoint
I will judge with equity.
3 When the earth totters, with all its inhabitants,
it is I who keep its pillars steady. *Selah*

[a] Cn: Heb *do you consume your right hand from*
[b] Heb *food for the people*
[c] Or *moon*; Heb *light*
[d] Gk Syr: Heb *the*

also in v. 9, a prophetic word telling when divine rescue will come. The psalmist complains in v. 9 that there is no one to give such an assuring word. **12–17:** Since God created the Temple as part of the universe, its devastated state calls into question God's ability to rule the universe. The psalmist therefore reminds God of the triumphant act of creation, using a variant of a Canaanite creation story known from Ugarit about Baal defeating the watery chaos. **14:** The mythological creature *Leviathan*, known from Ugarit, is a manifestation of primeval watery chaos; see also Isa 27.1; Job 3.8; 26.12–13; 41.1). **19:** *Your dove,* unclear; it may be an affectionate term for the king, or the dove may be a symbol of vulnerability (Pss 11.1; 102.7; 124.7). **20:** The *covenant* assured Israel's perpetual existence. **22–23:** In order to motivate God, the psalmist calls Israel's enemies *your* [God's] *foes*.

Ps 75: The community thanks God for putting down the wicked. A thanksgiving praising God (v. 1) for doing just deeds, in this case, punishing the wicked (vv. 2–5,6–8). The actual punishment is announced in an oracle of judgment with God speaking (vv. 2–5). **Superscription:** *Do Not Destroy,* see Ps 57n. *Asaph,* see Ps 73n. **3:** *The*

4 I say to the boastful, "Do not boast,"
and to the wicked, "Do not lift up your horn;
5 do not lift up your horn on high,
or speak with insolent neck."

6 For not from the east or from the west
and not from the wilderness comes lifting up;
7 but it is God who executes judgment,
putting down one and lifting up another.
8 For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup
with foaming wine, well mixed;
he will pour a draught from it,
and all the wicked of the earth
shall drain it down to the dregs.
9 But I will rejoice[a] forever;
I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.

10 All the horns of the wicked I will cut off,
but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.

Psalm 76

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

1 In Judah God is known,
his name is great in Israel.
2 His abode has been established in Salem,
his dwelling place in Zion.
3 There he broke the flashing arrows,
the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war. *Selah*

4 Glorious are you, more majestic
than the everlasting mountains.[b]
5 The stouthearted were stripped of their spoil;
they sank into sleep;
none of the troops
was able to lift a hand.
6 At your rebuke, O God of Jacob,
both rider and horse lay stunned.

7 But you indeed are awesome!
Who can stand before you
when once your anger is roused?
8 From the heavens you uttered judgment;
the earth feared and was still
9 when God rose up to establish judgment,
to save all the oppressed of the earth. *Selah*

10 Human wrath serves only to praise you,
when you bind the last bit of your[c] wrath around you.
11 Make vows to the LORD your God, and perform them;
let all who are around him bring gifts
to the one who is awesome,
12 who cuts off the spirit of princes,
who inspires fear in the kings of the earth.

[a] Gk: Heb *declare*
[b] Gk: Heb *the mountains of prey*
[c] Heb lacks *your*

earth totters, when God speaks, the earth trembles. *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **4:** *Lift*ing *up* a *horn* represents pride, arrogance, and victory. **6–8:** Expansion of the divine command, spoken perhaps by the king, the envoy of God. **8:** The *cup* (of the LORD's wrath in Isa 51.17; Jer 25.15) is a metaphor for punishment. **9–10:** The speaker accepts with joy the divine task of implementing justice.

Ps 76: God is acknowledged as victorious in the holy city. A song of Zion, celebrating Zion as the site where God won the victory that established the world as just and prosperous. **Superscription:** *Asaph,* see Ps 73n. **1–3:** By the creation-victory described in vv. 4–10, God is now recognized by all Israel as supreme over all other powers, and dwelling in *Salem* (an alternate name for Jerusalem, as in Gen 14.18). **3:** *Selah* (also v. 9), see Ps 3.2n. **7–10:** The psalm presumes that the cosmic battle was fought at the base of Mount Zion; comparable religious texts also tell how the storm god defeated his enemies at the base of his holy mountain. After the battle, God established the rules or justice to which the universe must conform (8–9); even the typically noisy *rider and horse* (v. 6), and *the earth* (v. 8) were *still* and quiet. **10:** *Human wrath serves only to praise you,* better "Even wrathful Edom praises you, the remnant of Hamath keeps your feast," referring to frequent enemies of Israel to the southeast and to the north, respectively. **11–12:** Because Zion is the site of the LORD's victory and of his dwelling, all nations must come there to pay homage. The pilgrimage of the nations is a significant theme in the Bible (Isa 2.1–4 || Mic 4.1–3; Isa 60–62; 66.20–21).

Psalm 77

To the leader: according to Jeduthun. Of Asaph. A Psalm.

1 I cry aloud to God,
aloud to God, that he may hear me.
2 In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;
in the night my hand is stretched out
without wearying;
my soul refuses to be comforted.
3 I think of God, and I moan;
I meditate, and my spirit faints. *Selah*

4 You keep my eyelids from closing;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
5 I consider the days of old,
and remember the years of long ago.
6 I commune[a] with my heart in the night;
I meditate and search my spirit:[b]
7 "Will the Lord spurn forever,
and never again be favorable?
8 Has his steadfast love ceased forever?
Are his promises at an end for all time?
9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has he in anger shut up his
compassion?" *Selah*
10 And I say, "It is my grief
that the right hand of the Most High
has changed."

11 I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord;
I will remember your wonders of old.
12 I will meditate on all your work,
and muse on your mighty deeds.
13 Your way, O God, is holy.
What god is so great as our God?
14 You are the God who works wonders;
you have displayed your might among
the peoples.
15 With your strong arm you redeemed
your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

16 When the waters saw you, O God,
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;
the very deep trembled.
17 The clouds poured out water;
the skies thundered;
your arrows flashed on every side.
18 The crash of your thunder was in the
whirlwind;
your lightnings lit up the world;
the earth trembled and shook.
19 Your way was through the sea,
your path, through the mighty waters;
yet your footprints were unseen.
20 You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Psalm 78

A Maskil of Asaph.

1 Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my
mouth.

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *My music*
[b] Syr Jerome: Heb *my spirit searches*

Ps 77: The mighty acts of God in national trouble. Though often classed as an individual lament or petition, the psalm is a community petition in which a speaker expresses the personal distress of all (vv. 1–10) and recalls God's past fidelity to the nation (vv. 11–20). **Superscription:** *Jeduthun,* see Ps 39n. *Asaph,* see Ps 73n. **3:** *Selah* (also vv. 9,15), see Ps 3.2n. **10:** *The right hand of the Most High has changed, right hand* connotes supreme power. That the Lord seems unable to save the people depresses the singer. **11–12:** *Call to mind, remember, meditate, muse,* the verbs here mean to recite aloud as in a ritual, as if the very recital in God's hearing would spur God to renew the acts that established the community. **11–20:** Combining historical and cosmic language, the psalmist describes the Exodus from Egypt, Israel's great founding event, noting that even then no visible trace of God's power was seen (v. 19c). **15:** *The descendants of Jacob and Joseph,* i.e., the Israelites. **16–19:** Cf. Pss 18.7–15; 114.3–6.

Ps 78: A lesson from history. Ps 78 juxtaposes two series of events in Israel's history (vv. 12–39,40–72) to demonstrate that the people's sin has triggered divine punishment, but, even more important, the offer of a new beginning. The first series of events is limited to those that took place "in the wilderness . . . in the desert" (v. 40; cf. Ex 14–Num 11); the second set is broader, embracing the entire Exodus including the conquest of Canaan, the founding of the national shrine at Shiloh, its rejection, and the choice of Zion and of David. The psalmist's attempt to persuade the northern kingdom of Israel ("the Ephraimites," v. 9) to accept the Davidic king suggests a time of composition in the eighth or seventh century BCE when the Northern and Southern Kingdoms were separated. The psalm makes clear that history is not recalled for its own sake, but for didactic reasons (see vv. 6–8). **Superscription:** *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. *Asaph,* see Ps 73n. **1–11:**

2 I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,
3 things that we have heard and known,
that our ancestors have told us.
4 We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.

5 He established a decree in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors
to teach to their children;
6 that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and rise up and tell them to their children,
7 so that they should set their hope in God,
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;
8 and that they should not be like their ancestors,
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast,
whose spirit was not faithful to God.

9 The Ephraimites, armed with[a] the bow,
turned back on the day of battle.
10 They did not keep God's covenant,
but refused to walk according to his law.
11 They forgot what he had done,
and the miracles that he had shown them.
12 In the sight of their ancestors he worked marvels
in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.
13 He divided the sea and let them pass through it,
and made the waters stand like a heap.
14 In the daytime he led them with a cloud,
and all night long with a fiery light.
15 He split rocks open in the wilderness,
and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.
16 He made streams come out of the rock,
and caused waters to flow down like rivers.

17 Yet they sinned still more against him,
rebelling against the Most High in the desert.
18 They tested God in their heart
by demanding the food they craved.
19 They spoke against God, saying,
"Can God spread a table in the wilderness?
20 Even though he struck the rock so that water gushed out
and torrents overflowed,
can he also give bread,
or provide meat for his people?"

21 Therefore, when the LORD heard, he was full of rage;
a fire was kindled against Jacob,
his anger mounted against Israel,
22 because they had no faith in God,
and did not trust his saving power.
23 Yet he commanded the skies above,
and opened the doors of heaven;
24 he rained down on them manna to eat,
and gave them the grain of heaven.
25 Mortals ate of the bread of angels;
he sent them food in abundance.
26 He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens,
and by his power he led out the south wind;

[a] Heb *armed with shooting*

Like Moses in Deut 5 and 18.18–19, the psalmist promises to interpret the national tradition so that the hearers might respond properly to God's new gracious act: choosing David as king and Zion as the national shrine. **2:** *Parable,* better, "lessons." **12–40:** Casting the wilderness traditions in a different order from the Pentateuch, the psalm mentions gracious act (vv. 12–16), rebellion (vv. 17–20), divine anger and punishment (vv. 21–31), and then, surprisingly, God's forgiveness and fresh invitation (vv. 32–39). **12:** *Zoan,* a city in northern Egypt. **13:** Ex 14.21, 29; 15.8. **14:** Ex 13.21–22; 14.19–20. **15–16:** Ex 17.6; Num 20.11; Isa 48.21. *The deep,* the chaotic waters

27 he rained flesh upon them like dust,
winged birds like the sand of the seas;
28 he let them fall within their camp,
all around their dwellings.
29 And they ate and were well filled,
for he gave them what they craved.
30 But before they had satisfied their craving,
while the food was still in their mouths,
31 the anger of God rose against them
and he killed the strongest of them,
and laid low the flower of Israel.

32 In spite of all this they still sinned;
they did not believe in his wonders.
33 So he made their days vanish like a breath,
and their years in terror.
34 When he killed them, they sought for him;
they repented and sought God earnestly.
35 They remembered that God was their rock,
the Most High God their redeemer.
36 But they flattered him with their mouths;
they lied to him with their tongues.
37 Their heart was not steadfast toward him;
they were not true to his covenant.
38 Yet he, being compassionate,
forgave their iniquity,
and did not destroy them;
often he restrained his anger,
and did not stir up all his wrath.
39 He remembered that they were but flesh,
a wind that passes and does not come again.
40 How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness
and grieved him in the desert!
41 They tested God again and again,
and provoked the Holy One of Israel.
42 They did not keep in mind his power,
or the day when he redeemed them from the foe;
43 when he displayed his signs in Egypt,
and his miracles in the fields of Zoan.
44 He turned their rivers to blood,
so that they could not drink of their streams.
45 He sent among them swarms of flies, which devoured them,
and frogs, which destroyed them.
46 He gave their crops to the caterpillar,
and the fruit of their labor to the locust.
47 He destroyed their vines with hail,
and their sycamores with frost.
48 He gave over their cattle to the hail,
and their flocks to thunderbolts.
49 He let loose on them his fierce anger,
wrath, indignation, and distress,
a company of destroying angels.
50 He made a path for his anger;
he did not spare them from death,
but gave their lives over to the plague.
51 He struck all the firstborn in Egypt,
the first issue of their strength in the tents of Ham.
52 Then he led out his people like sheep,
and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.
53 He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid;
but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.
54 And he brought them to his holy hill,
to the mountain that his right hand had won.
55 He drove out nations before them;
he apportioned them for a possession
and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.

56 Yet they tested the Most High God,
and rebelled against him.
They did not observe his decrees,
57 but turned away and were faithless like their ancestors;
they twisted like a treacherous bow.
58 For they provoked him to anger with their high places;
they moved him to jealousy with their idols.

vanquished by God, which served Israel's need for water; cf. Ps 104.5–14. **18–31:** The provisioning of the people with food after the Exodus is drawn from Ex 16 and Num 11. **40–54:** Different traditions but the same order: gracious act (vv. 40–55), rebellion (vv. 56–58), divine anger and punishment (vv. 59–64), forgiveness and offer

59 When God heard, he was full of wrath,
and he utterly rejected Israel.
60 He abandoned his dwelling at Shiloh,
the tent where he dwelt among
mortals,
61 and delivered his power to captivity,
his glory to the hand of the foe.
62 He gave his people to the sword,
and vented his wrath on his heritage.
63 Fire devoured their young men,
and their girls had no marriage song.
64 Their priests fell by the sword,
and their widows made no
lamentation.
65 Then the Lord awoke as from sleep,
like a warrior shouting because of wine.
66 He put his adversaries to rout;
he put them to everlasting disgrace.

67 He rejected the tent of Joseph,
he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim;
68 but he chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which he loves.
69 He built his sanctuary like the high
heavens,
like the earth, which he has founded
forever.
70 He chose his servant David,
and took him from the sheepfolds;
71 from tending the nursing ewes he
brought him
to be the shepherd of his people Jacob,
of Israel, his inheritance.
72 With upright heart he tended them,
and guided them with skillful hand.

Psalm 79

A Psalm of Asaph.

1 O God, the nations have come into your
inheritance;
they have defiled your holy temple;
they have laid Jerusalem in ruins.
2 They have given the bodies of your
servants
to the birds of the air for food,
the flesh of your faithful to the wild
animals of the earth.
3 They have poured out their blood like
water
all around Jerusalem,
and there was no one to bury them.
4 We have become a taunt to our
neighbors,
mocked and derided by those
around us.

5 How long, O Lord? Will you be angry
forever?
Will your jealous wrath burn like fire?
6 Pour out your anger on the nations
that do not know you,
and on the kingdoms
that do not call on your name.
7 For they have devoured Jacob
and laid waste his habitation.

8 Do not remember against us the
iniquities of our ancestors;
let your compassion come speedily to
meet us,
for we are brought very low.

(vv. 65–72). Here too the traditions are not identical to what is preserved in the books of Exodus and Numbers. **45–51:** The plagues (Ex 7–11; Ps 105.26–36). **51:** *Ham,* Egypt; see Gen 10.6. **52–55:** Cf. Ex 15.13; Ps 77.20. **60:** The ark of the covenant was in Shiloh according to 1 Sam 3–4 before it was brought to Jerusalem. It is uncertain when Shiloh was destroyed, even though Jeremiah also mentions this event (26.6,9). **61:** *His power . . . his glory,* referring to the ark, captured by the Philistines (1 Sam 4–6). **67–68:** God rejected the Northern Kingdom of Israel (*Joseph, Ephraim*) in favor of the Southern Kingdom of *Judah*. **71–72:** The image of the king as *shepherd* of the people is common in the ancient Near East.

Ps 79: A community petition for punishment for those dishonoring God. Though the prayer might seem concerned only with revenge, it actually seeks to maintain the community's relationship to God and uphold the divine honor. The initial verses suggest that it reflects the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Babylonian army in 586 BCE. **Superscription:** *Asaph,* see Ps 73n. **1:** *Your inheritance,* the land given by God. **2:** *The bodies . . . to the wild animals,* leaving bodies unburied shows the disrespect of victors and created grief for those defeated. **5:** *How long?* not necessarily a rhetorical question; people in antiquity sought to know how long an affliction would last. **8:** *Do not remember . . . the iniquities of our ancestors,* more accurately, "our past iniquities." The people do not deny they have sinned and deserve punishment, but object that their enemies have sinned

[9] Help us, O God of our
salvation,
for the glory of your name;
deliver us, and forgive our sins,
for your name's sake.
[10] Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"
Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of
your servants
be known among the nations before our
eyes.

[11] Let the groans of the prisoners come
before you;
according to your great power preserve
those doomed to die.
[12] Return sevenfold into the bosom of our
neighbors
the taunts with which they taunted you,
O Lord!
[13] Then we your people, the flock of your
pasture,
will give thanks to you forever;
from generation to generation we will
recount your praise.

Psalm 80

To the leader: on Lilies, a Covenant. Of Asaph. A Psalm.

[1] Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like
a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the
cherubim, shine forth
[2] before Ephraim and Benjamin and
Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
and come to save us!

[3] Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be
saved.

[4] O LORD God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your
people's prayers?
[5] You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full
measure.
[6] You make us the scorn[a] of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.

[7] Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

[8] You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.
[9] You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.
[10] The mountains were covered with its
shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches;
[11] it sent out its branches to the sea,
and its shoots to the River.
[12] Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck
its fruit?
[13] The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.

[a] Syr: Heb *strife*

much more by attacking the LORD's Temple and deserve immediate and severe punishment. **9–13:** A set of reasons why God should respond. **11–13:** Keep us as your people and defend your Temple and you are guaranteed praise forever! Like Pss 77 and 78, Ps 79 ends with—and Ps 80 begins with—the image of the divine shepherd, connecting these psalms "of Asaph."

Ps 80: Prayer that the shepherd of Israel would restore the people. A community petition: vv. 1–7 ask God to aid the northern tribes suffering from the effects of God's anger, vv. 8–13 recall Israel's founding event (the Exodus and settlement of Canaan) called into question by the enemies' triumph, and vv. 12–19 pray that God act now. The psalm imagines the founding event as the transplanting of a vine to Canaan; cf. Isa 5.1–7; Ezek 17.1–10. **Superscription:** *On Lilies,* probably refers to a melody (cf. Pss 45; 69). *Covenant,* cf. Ps 60. *Asaph,* see Ps 73n. **1:** *Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,* northern tribes separated from Judah since the schism of ca. 922 BCE. In 722, Assyria defeated the Northern Kingdom and seized its territory. God is imagined as *enthroned upon the cherubim*, namely present above the ark of the covenant in the Temple. **4:** The epithet *God of hosts*, which refers to God with his heavenly army, is especially suitable here, since God is asked to fight on behalf of Israel. **8–13:** Ex 15.17; Ps 44.2; and Ezek 19.10–14 also speak of the founding of Israel as a planting. **11:** *The River,* the Euphrates. **14–19:** May God protect the vine and *the one at your right hand* (v. 17, the Davidic king). Then we will

14 Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
15 the stock that your right hand planted,[a]
16 They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;[b]
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.
17 But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
18 Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.

19 Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Psalm 81

To the leader: according to The Gittith. Of Asaph.

1 Sing aloud to God our strength;
shout for joy to the God of Jacob.
2 Raise a song, sound the tambourine,
the sweet lyre with the harp.
3 Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
at the full moon, on our festal day.
4 For it is a statute for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
5 He made it a decree in Joseph,
when he went out over[c] the land of Egypt.

I hear a voice I had not known:
6 "I relieved your[d] shoulder of the burden;
your[d] hands were freed from the basket.
7 In distress you called, and I rescued you;
I answered you in the secret place of thunder;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah. *Selah*
8 Hear, O my people, while I admonish you;
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!
9 There shall be no strange god among you;
you shall not bow down to a foreign god.
10 I am the LORD your God,
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

11 "But my people did not listen to my voice;
Israel would not submit to me.
12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,
to follow their own counsels.
13 O that my people would listen to me,
that Israel would walk in my ways!
14 Then I would quickly subdue their enemies,
and turn my hand against their foes.
15 Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him,
and their doom would last forever.
16 I would feed you[e] with the finest of the wheat,

[a] Heb adds from verse 17 *and upon the one whom you made strong for yourself*
[b] Cn: Heb *it is cut down*
[c] Or *against*
[d] Heb *his*
[e] Cn Compare verse 16b: Heb *he would feed him*

be restored and faithful to God.

Ps 81: Invitation to renew the covenant. A covenant renewal liturgy like Ps 50 in which the community is invited to renew the covenant (vv. 1–5b) and is confronted with the consequences of disobedience (vv. 5c–16). **Superscription:** *Gittith,* see Ps 8n. *Asaph,* see Ps 73n. **3:** *Festal day,* the exact reference is uncertain; little is known about the covenant renewal ceremony in ancient Israel. **5:** *Joseph,* referring to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the principal constituents of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. *I hear a voice I had not known*, introduces an oracle in which God, speaking in the first person (vv. 6–10), describes the people's liberation from Egyptian bondage, their encounter with the LORD at Sinai, and guidance in the wilderness (vv. 6–7), and reminds the people of the commandment of loving the LORD alone (vv. 8–10). **7:** *The secret place of thunder,* Mount Sinai where God appeared in thunder (Ex 19.16,18; 20.18). For *the waters of Meribah*, see Ex 17.17; Num 20.13. *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **9–10:** A restatement of the beginning of the Decalogue. **9:** *Foreign god,* see Deut 32.12. **10:** *Open your mouth wide and I will fill it,* to accept the LORD's food in the wilderness is equivalently to accept the LORD as their God. **11–16:** A similar harsh scrutiny is found in Josh 24.19–21. Such language is meant to explain why all is not well with Is-

and with honey from the rock I would
satisfy you."

Psalm 82

A Psalm of Asaph.

1 God has taken his place in the divine
council;
in the midst of the gods he holds
judgment:
2 "How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah*
3 Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the
destitute.
4 Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the
wicked."

5 They have neither knowledge nor
understanding,
they walk around in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are
shaken.

6 I say, "You are gods,
children of the Most High, all of you;
7 nevertheless, you shall die like mortals,
and fall like any prince."[a]

8 Rise up, O God, judge the earth;
for all the nations belong to you!

Psalm 83

A Song. A Psalm of Asaph.

1 O God, do not keep silence;
do not hold your peace or be still, O God!
2 Even now your enemies are in tumult;
those who hate you have raised their
heads.
3 They lay crafty plans against your people;
they consult together against those you
protect.
4 They say, "Come, let us wipe them out as
a nation;
let the name of Israel be remembered
no more."
5 They conspire with one accord;
against you they make a covenant—
6 the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagrites,
7 Gebal and Ammon and Amalek,
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;
8 Assyria also has joined them;
they are the strong arm of the children
of Lot. *Selah*

[a] Or *fall as one man, O princes*

rael in the psalmist's period. **16:** *Finest of the wheat,* see Deut 32.14; Ps 147.14. *Honey from the rock,* see Deut 32.13.

Ps 82: Petition for divine justice. As in Ps 29, and to a lesser extent Pss 58 and 75, the setting is the assembly of the heavenly beings, who were thought to rule the nations of the earth under God's supervision (cf. Deut 32.8–9). This psalm tells how these beings lost their authority by ruling unjustly, and how God took over their rule. The psalm shares mythic and historical material with Gen 6.1–2; Isa 14.12–21; and Ezek 28.1–19. A variant of this judgment scene is Ps 58. **Superscription:** *Asaph,* see Ps 73n. **1:** *Divine council,* in 1 Kings 22.19–22; Isa 6; 40.1–9, the assembly is thoroughly obedient to God. In Ps 82, the gods are summoned to trial, found guilty of misrule, and punished with mortality, i.e., loss of divine status and expulsion from heaven. **2–4:** Acting both as prosecuting attorney and judge, God accuses them of not giving *justice to the weak*, i.e., not aiding them. **2:** *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **5:** Either a comment of the psalmist or of the heavenly prosecutor. **6–7:** The verdict. **8:** The implication of what precedes: A call for *God,* now acting alone, to *judge* fairly.

Ps 83: A plea that God would protect the community. A community petition that God might protect the people from ten nations bent on annihilating Israel. Ten is symbolic for many as in Gen 5 (ten individuals before the Flood); Gen 31.7; Num 14.22; Job 19.3. The list reflects no single historical reality but is cumulative, like the listing of enemies in Ezek 38–39, designating all enemies of God's people. In structure, v. 1 is the opening plea, vv. 2–8 the complaint (a conspiracy against Israel), and vv. 9–18 the plea that God wipe out all enemies (vv. 9–12) using the weapons of storm (vv. 13–17), so God's holy name may be exalted on earth (v. 18). **Superscription:** *Asaph,* see Ps 73n. **4–8:** The psalmist cites the speech of conspirators (v. 4) as in Ex 1.10 and Ps 2.3. **6:** *The tents of Edom,* the territory south and east of the Dead Sea. *Ishmaelites,* nomads (Gen 37.25) related to the Edomites (Gen 36.3, 9–10). *Moab,* east of the Dead Sea. *Hagrites,* their territory was east of Gilead (1 Chr 5.10,19–20). **7:** *Gebal,* later known as Byblos, on the coast of Lebanon. *Ammon,* in central Transjordan. *Amalek,* a people dispossessed by Israel in Ex 17.8–16; they disappear from the Bible after the time of David (1 Sam 15 and 30:13–25). **8:** *Assyria*

9 Do to them as you did to Midian,
as to Sisera and Jabin at the Wadi Kishon,
10 who were destroyed at En-dor,
who became dung for the ground.
11 Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb,
all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,
12 who said, "Let us take the pastures of God
for our own possession."

13 O my God, make them like whirling dust,[a]
like chaff before the wind.
14 As fire consumes the forest,
as the flame sets the mountains ablaze,
15 so pursue them with your tempest
and terrify them with your hurricane.
16 Fill their faces with shame,
so that they may seek your name, O LORD.
17 Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever;
let them perish in disgrace.
18 Let them know that you alone,
whose name is the LORD,
are the Most High over all the earth.

Psalm 84

To the leader: according to The Gittith. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

1 How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
2 My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
3 Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.
4 Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise. *Selah*

5 Happy are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.[b]
6 As they go through the valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
7 They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*
9 Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed.

10 For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.
11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
he bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does the LORD withhold
from those who walk uprightly.
12 O LORD of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.

[a] Or *a tumbleweed*
[b] Heb lacks *to Zion*

conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE and thereafter harassed Judah. *The children of Lot* were Moab and Ammon (Gen 19.36–38). *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **9–18:** May you show your enemies that you are supreme. The events in vv. 10–12 are narrated in Judg 4–8. **9:** *Midian,* a confederation of desert tribes. **10:** *En-dor,* near Mount Tabor in central Israel. **11:** *Oreb* and *Zeeb,* Midianite captains slain by Ephraimites (Judg 7.25; 8.3). *Zebah* and *Zalmunna,* Midianite kings slain by Gideon (Judg 8.4–21). **13–14:** These verses may have been accompanied by symbolic actions.

Ps 84: Longing for the Temple and a prayer for the Davidic king. A song of Zion, with emphasis on the desire to participate in its worship (cf. Pss 42–43; 63). **Superscription:** *Gittith,* see Ps 8n. *Korahites,* see Ps 42–43n. **1:** *Lovely,* better, "beloved" as in Isa 5.1 and Deut 33.12. **3:** *At your altars,* NRSV wrongly assumes birds' nests are at the altar, where birds' nests would never be allowed. The comparison is to a homeless bird finding a home for its young. It is unclear, however, if people could live on the Temple grounds, as suggested here and in Ps 23.6. **4:** *Selah* (also v. 8), see Ps 3.2n. **5–7:** The joyous final stage of the journey to Zion. **6:** *Baca,* precise location unknown. **9:** *Our shield, your anointed,* the Davidic king played an important role in the ceremonies in Zion.

Psalm 85

To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

[1] LORD, you were favorable to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
[2] You forgave the iniquity of your people;
you pardoned all their sin. *Selah*
[3] You withdrew all your wrath;
you turned from your hot anger.

[4] Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
and put away your indignation toward us.
[5] Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
[6] Will you not revive us again,
so that your people may rejoice in you?
[7] Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,
and grant us your salvation.

[8] Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.[a]
[9] Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

[10] Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
[11] Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.
[12] The LORD will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.
[13] Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.

Psalm 86

A Prayer of David.

[1] Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.
[2] Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.
You are my God; [3] be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all day long.
[4] Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
[5] For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.
[6] Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
listen to my cry of supplication.
[7] In the day of my trouble I call on you,
for you will answer me.

[8] There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any works like yours.
[9] All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.
[10] For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.
[11] Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.
[12] I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.
[13] For great is your steadfast love toward me;
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

[a] Gk: Heb *but let them not turn back to folly*

Ps 85: A prayer for forgiveness. A community petition that God would be merciful as in the past (vv. 1–3) and forgive this discouraged generation (vv. 4–13). **Superscription:** *Korahites,* see Ps 42–43n. **2:** *Pardoned,* lit. "covered." *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **8:** Though the exact mechanisms are unclear, worshipers expected to be able to discern the divine will, especially at the Temple. **10–13:** The effects of divine forgiveness on land and people are expressed in memorable metaphors and personifications: courtiers greeting each other with exquisite courtesy (v. 10), the land itself growing righteousness like a plant (vv. 11–12), and messengers preparing for the LORD's arrival (v. 13); cf. Ps 89.14.

Ps 86: Desire for God as helper. An individual petition that expresses the psalmist's desire to be God's loyal servant (vv. 1–7); it celebrates God's incomparability (vv. 8–13) prior to asking for help in a particular need (vv. 14–17). **1:** *Incline your ear . . . answer me,* repeated in v. 7 (NRSV *call . . . answer*), which concludes the section. The poet is proud to be the servant of so responsive a Lord. *Poor and needy,* to express one's poverty makes a claim

14 O God, the insolent rise up against me;
a band of ruffians seeks my life,
and they do not set you before them.
15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
16 Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to your servant;
save the child of your serving girl.
17 Show me a sign of your favor,
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

Psalm 87

Of the Korahites. A Psalm. A Song.

1 On the holy mount stands the city he founded;
2 the LORD loves the gates of Zion
more than all the dwellings of Jacob.
3 Glorious things are spoken of you,
O city of God. *Selah*

4 Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;
Philistia too, and Tyre, with Ethiopia[a]—
"This one was born there," they say.

5 And of Zion it shall be said,
"This one and that one were born in it";
for the Most High himself will establish it.
6 The LORD records, as he registers the peoples,
"This one was born there." *Selah*

7 Singers and dancers alike say,
"All my springs are in you."

Psalm 88

A Song. A Psalm of the Korahites. To the leader: according to Mahalath Leannoth. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.

1 O LORD, God of my salvation,
when, at night, I cry out in your presence,
2 let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.

3 For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
4 I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;
I am like those who have no help,
5 like those forsaken among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
6 You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep.

[a] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*

against God, for God wants the faithful to enjoy the goods of creation. **8:** Cf. Pss 71.19; 89.6–7; Ex 15.11. **9:** See Ps 22.27n. **14–17:** Having praised the LORD's graciousness in vv. 1–7 and 8–13, the psalmist now asks for the same compassion and justice in the present need. **13:** *Sheol,* the abode of the dead. **15:** Citing the attributes of God's compassionate nature from Ex 34.6.

Ps 87: Zion, God's chosen city. A song of Zion, probably from the sixth or fifth century BCE, assuring exiled Israelites their true home is Zion and welcoming the nations who bring them home. **Superscription:** *Korahites,* see Ps 42–43n. **3:** *Glorious things,* hymns sung in the city of God, as in Pss 48.1; 76.1. *Selah* (also v. 6), see Ps 3.2n. **4:** *Rahab*, probably Egypt (see Isa 30.7). *Philistia,* on the southeastern Mediterranean coast. *Tyre,* an important coastal city north of Israel, standing for Phoenicia (modern Lebanon). *This one was born there,* either Zion or the country where the exiles dwell. In the similar phrases in vv. 5 and 6, the referent is clearly Zion. Birth in a foreign country does not prevent one from calling Zion mother; cf. Isa 40–55 where Zion regains her husband and children. **7:** *All my springs,* citation of a song celebrating Zion as a source of fertility as in Ps 46.4.

Ps 88: The prayer of a near-hopeless individual. Perhaps the bleakest individual petition in the Psalms, with no expressions of trust and, strikingly, no mention of enemies; in a sense God is regarded as the enemy. The poem has three sections (vv. 1–9a, 9b–12, 13–18), each introduced by a verb of crying and a mention of the LORD (vv. 1a, 9b, 13a). The middle section develops the theme of God's withdrawal through six questions. **Superscription:** *Korahites,* see Ps 42–43n. *Mahalath Leannoth,* probably a melody. *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. *Heman the Ezrahite*, a legendary wise man (1 Kings 4.31) or Temple musician (see, e.g., 1 Chr 6.33); only

7 Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves. *Selah*

8 You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a thing of horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
9 my eye grows dim through sorrow.
Every day I call on you, O LORD;
I spread out my hands to you.
10 Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the shades rise up to praise you? *Selah*
11 Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
12 Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?

13 But I, O LORD, cry out to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
14 O LORD, why do you cast me off?
Why do you hide your face from me?
15 Wretched and close to death from my youth up,
I suffer your terrors; I am desperate.[a]
16 Your wrath has swept over me;
your dread assaults destroy me.
17 They surround me like a flood all day long;
from all sides they close in on me.
18 You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me;
my companions are in darkness.

Psalm 89

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

1 I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD,[b] forever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.
2 I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

3 You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to my servant David:
4 'I will establish your descendants forever,
and build your throne for all generations.'" *Selah*

5 Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.
6 For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?
Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Gk: Heb *the steadfast love of the* LORD

this psalm is ascribed to him. **3–4:** *Sheol . . . the Pit,* the underworld where all go upon death; the psalmist is seeing that he is almost dead. **7:** *Your wrath,* more impersonal than in English, something like "away from your favor and blessing." *Your waves,* Sheol was sometimes imagined as a watery place (e.g., Ps 42.7; Jon 2.3). *Selah* (also v. 10), see Ps 3.2n. **8:** The psalmist feels that God is the direct cause of all of his problems. **11–12:** If I die, the psalmist is saying, I will be in the underworld where you are not praised; see Ps 6.5n. *Abaddon* (lit. "destruction"), another name for the abode of the dead. **13–18:** Extending the thought of the first section, these verses detail the cruel behavior of God, asking *Why?* (v. 14). Yet the psalmist holds out the hope that God will return to him.

Ps 89: A plea that God will remain faithful to the covenant with David. Written when the king was important to national life (the tenth to the sixth centuries BCE), the community petition asks God to honor the ancient promise to give victory to the Davidic king (vv. 1–37) since that promise has been called into question by an unspecified defeat (vv. 38–51). **Superscription:** *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. *Ethan the Ezrahite,* according to 1 Kings 4.31 a sage, and according to 1 Chr 15.17,19, a Temple musician. Only this psalm is ascribed to him. **1:** *Steadfast love,* occurring seven times, the Heb word "ḥesed" underscores God's close relationship to the Davidic king. **1–4:** God's promise to David is no less rooted in creation than the never-failing cycle of the heavens. **4:** *Selah* (also vv. 37,45,48), see Ps 3.2n. **5–14:** According to several biblical passages (e.g., Ps 74.12–17), at the time of the creation of the universe, the heavenly assembly acknowledges the supremacy

7 a God feared in the council of the holy ones,
great and awesome[a] above all that are around him?
8 O LORD God of hosts,
who is as mighty as you, O LORD?
Your faithfulness surrounds you.
9 You rule the raging of the sea;
when its waves rise, you still them.
10 You crushed Rahab like a carcass;
you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.
11 The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours;
the world and all that is in it—you have founded them.
12 The north and the south[b]—you created them;
Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.
13 You have a mighty arm;
strong is your hand, high your right hand.
14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.
15 Happy are the people who know the festal shout,
who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance;
16 they exult in your name all day long,
and extol[c] your righteousness.
17 For you are the glory of their strength;
by your favor our horn is exalted.
18 For our shield belongs to the LORD,
our king to the Holy One of Israel.

19 Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said:
"I have set the crown[d] on one who is mighty,
I have exalted one chosen from the people.
20 I have found my servant David;
with my holy oil I have anointed him;
21 my hand shall always remain with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him.
22 The enemy shall not outwit him,
the wicked shall not humble him.
23 I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.
24 My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him;
and in my name his horn shall be exalted.
25 I will set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.
26 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'
27 I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.
28 Forever I will keep my steadfast love for him,
and my covenant with him will stand firm.
29 I will establish his line forever,
and his throne as long as the heavens endure.
30 If his children forsake my law
and do not walk according to my ordinances,
31 if they violate my statutes
and do not keep my commandments,
32 then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with scourges;
33 but I will not remove from him my steadfast love,
or be false to my faithfulness.
34 I will not violate my covenant,
or alter the word that went forth from my lips.

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *greatly awesome*
[b] Or *Zaphon and Yamin*
[c] Cn: Heb *are exalted in*
[d] Cn: Heb *help*

of the God who defeated Sea (vv. 9–10), arranged heaven and earth (vv. 11–12), and ascended to the throne (vv. 13–14). **6:** Cf. Pss 71.19; 86.8; Ex 15.11. **10:** *Rahab,* a name for the primeval chaos monster; Job 26.12; Isa 51.9. **12:** *Tabor and Hermon,* two prominent mountains, in southern and northern Galilee respectively. **14:** Cf. Ps 85.10–14. **15–18:** Paralleling the celebration in the heavens is the celebration of God's victory on earth. **19–37:** Time is collapsed, and David is chosen as king and anointed immediately after the conquest of chaos, as a human king who represents the divine. **25:** The king shares the divine task of controlling the primeval forces of watery chaos. **28–37:** The promise to David is unconditional: as in 2 Sam 7, on which this is based, if one of David's

35 Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness;
I will not lie to David.
36 His line shall continue forever,
and his throne endure before me like the sun.
37 It shall be established forever like the moon,
an enduring witness in the skies." *Selah*

38 But now you have spurned and rejected him;
you are full of wrath against your anointed.
39 You have renounced the covenant with your servant;
you have defiled his crown in the dust.
40 You have broken through all his walls;
you have laid his strongholds in ruins.
41 All who pass by plunder him;
he has become the scorn of his neighbors.
42 You have exalted the right hand of his foes;
you have made all his enemies rejoice.
43 Moreover, you have turned back the edge of his sword,
and you have not supported him in battle.
44 You have removed the scepter from his hand,[a]
and hurled his throne to the ground.
45 You have cut short the days of his youth;
you have covered him with shame. *Selah*

46 How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?
How long will your wrath burn like fire?
47 Remember how short my time is—[b]
for what vanity you have created all mortals!
48 Who can live and never see death?
Who can escape the power of Sheol? *Selah*

49 Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,
which by your faithfulness you swore to David?
50 Remember, O Lord, how your servant is taunted;
how I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples,[c]
51 with which your enemies taunt, O LORD,
with which they taunted the footsteps of your anointed.

52 Blessed be the LORD forever.
Amen and Amen.

BOOK IV PSALMS 90—106

Psalm 90

A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.

1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place[d]
in all generations.
2 Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

3 You turn us[e] back to dust,
and say, "Turn back, you mortals."

[a] Cn: Heb *removed his cleanness*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Cn: Heb *bosom all of many peoples*
[d] Another reading is *our refuge*
[e] Heb *humankind*

descendants is unfaithful to the covenant, that king will be punished but the dynasty will not be rejected. **26–27:** Language of (divine) adoption; see 2 Sam 7.14; Ps 2.9. **38–51:** A Davidic king has suffered defeat, and the community speaker insists that God remember the promise of fidelity. **48:** *Sheol,* the abode of the dead. **52:** This doxology or praise of God is not part of the psalm, but was inserted by an editor to mark the end of the third book of psalms. It is possible that the book of Psalms at one point began with Psalm 2 and ended with this psalm, focusing on Davidic kingship.

Ps 90: A prayer that God would rein in his wrath. Though scholars interpret the psalm as a meditation on human frailty and God's eternity, it is best viewed as a community petition complaining that God's wrath has lasted beyond the human life span and asking how much longer this unhappy state will continue (vv. 11–12). This interpretation rests on two pieces of evidence: ancients sought to know exactly how long tribulations were fated to last (Jer 25.11,12; 2 Sam 24.13; Pss 39.4; 74.9); and the proper translation of vv. 11–12: "Who knows the [pre–determined] extent of your anger, . . . Teach us how to calculate our days [of affliction], let us bring that

4 For a thousand years in your sight
are like yesterday when it is past,
or like a watch in the night.

5 You sweep them away; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning;
6 in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.

7 For we are consumed by your anger;
by your wrath we are overwhelmed.
8 You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

9 For all our days pass away under your wrath;
our years come to an end[a] like a sigh.
10 The days of our life are seventy years,
or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;
even then their span[b] is only toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.

11 Who considers the power of your anger?
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.
12 So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart.

13 Turn, O LORD! How long?
Have compassion on your servants!
14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
15 Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,
and as many years as we have seen evil.
16 Let your work be manifest to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.
17 Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands—
O prosper the work of our hands!

Psalm 91

1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,[c]
2 will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."
3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
4 he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
5 You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
6 or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

[a] Syr: Heb *we bring our years to an end*
[b] Cn Compare Gk Syr Jerome Tg: Heb *pride*
[c] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*

awareness into our minds." **Superscription:** Only this psalm is attributed to Moses, who often asked God to turn and have compassion (e.g., Ex 32.12) as in Ps 90.13. **1–6:** Divine eternity is contrasted with human mortality. **3:** *Turn back,* God decreed mortality and a short life span for humans. **5–6:** *Like grass,* cf. Ps 102.11; Isa 40.6–8. **7–12:** The psalmist complains that it is unfair to live one's entire life span in a period of divine wrath, i.e., withdrawal of divine blessing. *Seventy years . . . eighty,* even an exceptionally old person would never have enjoyed a period of blessing; an example of numerical parallelism (see Ps 62.11n.). **13–17:** May God turn from wrath so the community might experience God as being near and favorable.

Ps 91: Trust in God as protector. A song of trust that makes three promises of assistance, each of progressively decreasing length: vv. 1–8; 9–13; 14–16. Through v. 13, a person speaks in God's name; in vv. 14–16, God speaks in the first person. Striking imagery is used to show how the person who trusts God is protected, even when surrounded by death. **4:** *Pinions . . . wings,* possibly a reference to the winged cherubim guarding the Holy

7 A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
8 You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.

9 Because you have made the LORD your refuge,[a]
the Most High your dwelling place,
10 no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.

11 For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
12 On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
13 You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

14 Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
15 When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
16 With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.

Psalm 92

A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath Day.

1 It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
2 to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,
3 to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.
4 For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

5 How great are your works, O LORD!
Your thoughts are very deep!
6 The dullard cannot know,
the stupid cannot understand this:
7 though the wicked sprout like grass
and all evildoers flourish,
they are doomed to destruction forever,
8 but you, O LORD, are on high forever.
9 For your enemies, O LORD,
for your enemies shall perish;
all evildoers shall be scattered.

10 But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox;
you have poured over me[b] fresh oil.
11 My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies;
my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants.

12 The righteous flourish like the palm tree,
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

[a] Cn: Heb *Because you, LORD, are my refuge; you have made*
[b] Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain

of Holies in the Temple (Ex 25.20; 1 Kings 6.23–28,32; Ezek 1.4–9), but more likely a reference to a protecting bird as in Egyptian iconography and Ex 19.4; Deut 32.10–12. **7:** *Thousand . . . ten thousand,* an example of numerical parallelism; see Ps 62.11n. **9–13:** *His angels,* angels (divine messengers) lead one through perils, as in Ex 23.20,23 and 32.34. Here they serve to explain how the lone individual is saved from the surrounding destruction: God has appointed protective angels for him. **14–16:** The last assurance is the most intense, for God speaks in the first person; there are seven verbs depicting God's protection. It is striking that there is no demand for absolute righteousness in order to be saved, only love and trust of God.

Ps 92: Thanksgiving for God's governance of the world. A thanksgiving for God's governance has been developed into a hymn. which according to the superscription was recited on *the Sabbath Day*, perhaps because it deals with creation and uses the name of God seven times. **1:** *It is good to give thanks,* perhaps in the sense of "Come let us give thanks." **6–11:** God's just rule works in hidden ways that the foolish do not grasp. **8:** The exact center of the poem, asserting God's triumph in a short, indirect and reverential manner. **10:** *Horn,* a metaphor for strength. **12–15:** The righteous person is compared to a tree as in Pss 1.3; 52.8; Jer 17.8. The tree grows in the garden within the Jerusalem Temple. Ancient temples had orchards that symbolized the fertility that comes

13 They are planted in the house of the
LORD;
they flourish in the courts of our God.
14 In old age they still produce fruit;
they are always green and full of sap,
15 showing that the LORD is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no
unrighteousness in him.

Psalm 93

1 The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty;
the LORD is robed, he is girded with
strength.
He has established the world; it shall never
be moved;
2 your throne is established from of
old;
you are from everlasting.

3 The floods have lifted up, O LORD,
the floods have lifted up their voice;
the floods lift up their roaring.
4 More majestic than the thunders of
mighty waters,
more majestic than the waves[a] of the
sea,
majestic on high is the LORD!

5 Your decrees are very sure;
holiness befits your house,
O LORD, forevermore.

Psalm 94

1 O LORD, you God of vengeance,
you God of vengeance, shine forth!
2 Rise up, O judge of the earth;
give to the proud what they deserve!
3 O LORD, how long shall the wicked,
how long shall the wicked exult?

4 They pour out their arrogant words;
all the evildoers boast.
5 They crush your people, O LORD,
and afflict your heritage.
6 They kill the widow and the stranger,
they murder the orphan,
7 and they say, "The LORD does not see;
the God of Jacob does not perceive."

8 Understand, O dullest of the people;
fools, when will you be wise?
9 He who planted the ear, does he not
hear?
He who formed the eye, does he not see?
10 He who disciplines the nations,
he who teaches knowledge to humankind,
does he not chastise?
11 The LORD knows our thoughts,[b]
that they are but an empty breath.

12 Happy are those whom you discipline,
O LORD,
and whom you teach out of your law,
13 giving them respite from days of trouble,
until a pit is dug for the wicked.
14 For the LORD will not forsake his people;
he will not abandon his heritage;

[a] Cn: Heb *majestic are the waves*
[b] Heb *the thoughts of humankind*

from God. The flourishing of the righteous, like creation, testifies to God's power and righteousness.

Ps 93: The LORD is enthroned as supreme. Like Pss 95–99, Ps 93 praises the LORD as sole king of the universe. Early Israel shared the ancient view that a deity became supreme by defeating chaos and creating a stable and fertile world. In hymns such as this, the LORD defeats chaos (vv. 3–4), and the victory brings an orderly world into being (v. 1c). It is unclear if these psalms celebrating God's kingship were recited at a particular festival commemorating these events. **1:** On his return a victorious warrior would be *robed* in magnificent garments symbolizing the victory. **3–4:** In the cosmic battle, the LORD, using the weapons of a storm (lightning, thunder, wind, rain), defeats Sea (referring to the Canaanite myth in which Baal, the storm god, defeats Sea) attempting to encroach upon the land; cf. Pss 29; 48; 76.12–14; 89.9–10; 104.1–6. **5:** The victorious king proclaims the *decrees* that will govern the new universe.

Ps 94: Rise up, O LORD, to bring justice. A community petition that God would directly rectify wrongs against Israel. The Hebrew word for such rectifying or vindication is "naqam" (v. 1), upholding the rights of the poor; NRSV *vengeance* is misleading. The poem has a petition (vv. 1–2), complaint (vv. 3–7), questioning of God (vv. 3,20), challenge to the wicked (vv. 9–10,16), and statements of trust (vv. 17–18,22). The psalmist models confidence in God (vv. 17–18), boldly addressing God (vv. 1–3,12–13) and the wicked (vv. 8–11). **6:** God is called upon here as "father of orphans and protector of widows" (Ps 68.5). **12:** As in Prov 3.12, a justification for the

15 for justice will return to the righteous,
and all the upright in heart will
follow it.

16 Who rises up for me against the wicked?
Who stands up for me against
evildoers?
17 If the LORD had not been my help,
my soul would soon have lived in the
land of silence.
18 When I thought, "My foot is slipping,"
your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up.
19 When the cares of my heart are many,
your consolations cheer my soul.
20 Can wicked rulers be allied with you,
those who contrive mischief by statute?
21 They band together against the life of the
righteous,
and condemn the innocent to death.
22 But the LORD has become my stronghold,
and my God the rock of my refuge.
23 He will repay them for their iniquity
and wipe them out for their wickedness;
the LORD our God will wipe them out.

Psalm 95

1 O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of
our salvation!
2 Let us come into his presence with
thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with
songs of praise!
3 For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his
also.
5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have
formed.

6 O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
7 For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.

O that today you would listen to his voice!
8 Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
9 when your ancestors tested me,
and put me to the proof, though they
had seen my work.
10 For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, "They are a people whose
hearts go astray,
and they do not regard my ways."
11 Therefore in my anger I swore,
"They shall not enter my rest."

Psalm 96

1 O sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
2 Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
3 Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the
peoples.
4 For great is the LORD, and greatly to be
praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.
5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
6 Honor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his
sanctuary.

suffering of the seemingly innocent.

Ps 95: Worship and obedience to the glorious LORD. A hymn celebrating the LORD enthroned as supreme (see Ps 93n.). It invites Israel to sing (vv. 1–5), bow down before the LORD (vv. 6–7c), and obey (vv. 7d–11). Themes and phrases of Pss 95–99 overlap and interchange. **1:** *The rock,* a common metaphor for God—a massive cliff or mesa that serves as a refuge (*salvation*). **3:** *A great King,* a title of suzerains in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Hittite kingdom. **7:** *The sheep of his hand,* connotes special love in that God does not delegate the care of Israel to hirelings. **7d–11:** The tone and speaker change, and the community is told that as the LORD's own flock, they are held to a high standard (cf. Pss 50; 81.8–9). **8:** *Meribah,* a place in the wilderness, related by popular etymology to "place of strife"; *Massah,* another place in the wilderness, in popular etymology, "place of testing"; for both see Ex 17.1–7; Num 21.1–9. **10–11:** God's refusal to allow the first generation to enter the land (*my rest*) is told in Num 14 and Deut 1.34–2.15; here it serves as a reminder for the community to obey God.

Ps 96: Praise of the LORD who comes to judge the world. A hymn celebrating the LORD's kingship (see Ps

7 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.
9 Worship the LORD in holy splendor;
tremble before him, all the earth.

10 Say among the nations, "The LORD is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity."
11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
12 let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
13 before the LORD; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.

Psalm 97

1 The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!
2 Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
3 Fire goes before him,
and consumes his adversaries on every side.
4 His lightnings light up the world;
the earth sees and trembles.
5 The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,
before the Lord of all the earth.

6 The heavens proclaim his righteousness;
and all the peoples behold his glory.
7 All worshipers of images are put to shame,
those who make their boast in worthless idols;
all gods bow down before him.
8 Zion hears and is glad,
and the towns[a] of Judah rejoice,
because of your judgments, O God.
9 For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth;
you are exalted far above all gods.

10 The LORD loves those who hate[b] evil;
he guards the lives of his faithful;
he rescues them from the hand of the wicked.
11 Light dawns[c] for the righteous,
and joy for the upright in heart.
12 Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous,
and give thanks to his holy name!

Psalm 98

A Psalm.

1 O sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things.

[a] Heb *daughters*
[b] Cn: Heb *You who love the LORD hate*
[c] Gk Syr Jerome: Heb *is sown*

93n.) in which vv. 1–6 invite the whole world to sing, vv. 7–10 the family of nations, and vv. 11–13 heaven and earth. **1:** *New song,* celebrating God's arrival as a just king. **7:** *O families of the peoples,* the nations are to turn from their own deities to worship the LORD who has become king (v. 10). How the nations are meant to know this is unclear, but many of these psalms address peoples who are not physically present. Verses 7–9 quote Ps 29.1–2, with changes in the groups addressed. **10:** The LORD has gained royal supremacy by his powerful deeds. **13:** Only God, rather than any human king can *judge the world with righteousness;* this is the cause of great rejoicing.

Ps 97: Rejoice in the LORD who reigns over heaven and earth! A hymn celebrating the LORD who comes to rule the earth (v. 1; see Ps 93n.). The LORD's triumph is manifested in storm and theophany imagery (vv. 2–5). Worshipers of other deities are shamed as they see the LORD triumphant (vv. 6–7). Zion and its surrounding towns rejoice at the coming of so exalted a God (vv. 8–9). The psalm ends with an exhortation to show reverence to the powerful LORD, who, as in the previous psalm, will be manifest in justice (vv. 10–12).

Ps 98: Praise of the LORD, just and victorious ruler of the world. A hymn celebrating the victory of the LORD over the forces of evil, a victory that brought peace and justice to the world; see Ps 93n. Verses 1–3 invite Israel

His right hand and his holy arm
have gotten him victory.
2 The LORD has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.
3 He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

4 Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.
5 Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.
6 With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

7 Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.
8 Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy
9 at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming
to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

Psalm 99

1 The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
2 The LORD is great in Zion;
he is exalted over all the peoples.
3 Let them praise your great and awesome name.
Holy is he!
4 Mighty King,[a] lover of justice,
you have established equity;
you have executed justice
and righteousness in Jacob.
5 Extol the LORD our God;
worship at his footstool.
Holy is he!

6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel also was among those who called on his name.
They cried to the LORD, and he answered them.
7 He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud;
they kept his decrees,
and the statutes that he gave them.

8 O LORD our God, you answered them;
you were a forgiving God to them,
but an avenger of their wrongdoings.
9 Extol the LORD our God,
and worship at his holy mountain;
for the LORD our God is holy.

[a] Cn: Heb *And a king's strength*

to sing praise, vv. 4–6 invite the inhabitants of the earth to join in the song, and vv. 7–9 invite the inanimate elements of the world. The poem begins by announcing that the LORD has won a great victory and ends by introducing the LORD to his new subjects. **1:** On *a new song,* see Ps 96.1. **4–8:** The noisy acclamation of God as king mimics the human coronation ceremony. **9:** *Judge,* not judgment at the end of time but judgment in the biblical sense of ruling justly now.

Ps 99: Announcement that the LORD the king rules with justice. The last of the enthronement hymns (Pss 93; 95–99) celebrates the LORD's victory, enthronement, and authoritative decrees. Verses 1–5 call on the nations to recognize the LORD who establishes justice in the world, and vv. 6–9 describe how divine justice is mediated by Israel's traditions. Each section is concluded by the exhortation "Extol the LORD our God." **1:** *The cherubim* form a throne, on which God is enthroned; cf. 1 Sam 4.4; Ps 17.8n. **3:** *Holy is he!* the phrase appears again in v. 5 and is repeated climactically in v. 9, *the LORD our God is holy*. **4:** As in the other psalms about God's kingship, the emphasis is on divine justice. Human kings served as a type of supreme court; here God the king takes over this role, but unlike human kings he adjudicates fairly and impartially. **5:** The *footstool* of the cherubim throne (see v. 1) was the ark of the covenant. **6:** *Moses and Aaron . . . Samuel,* these ancient leaders mediated God's decrees to Israel. **9:** A variant of v. 5, forming a refrain.

Psalm 100

A Psalm of thanksgiving.

[1] Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
[2] Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

[3] Know that the LORD is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;[a]
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

[4] Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.

[5] For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 101

Of David. A Psalm.

[1] I will sing of loyalty and of justice;
to you, O LORD, I will sing.
[2] I will study the way that is blameless.
When shall I attain it?

I will walk with integrity of heart
within my house;
[3] I will not set before my eyes
anything that is base.

I hate the work of those who fall away;
it shall not cling to me.

[4] Perverseness of heart shall be far from me;
I will know nothing of evil.

[5] One who secretly slanders a neighbor I will destroy.
A haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not tolerate.

[6] I will look with favor on the faithful in the land,
so that they may live with me;
whoever walks in the way that is blameless
shall minister to me.

[7] No one who practices deceit
shall remain in my house;
no one who utters lies
shall continue in my presence.

[8] Morning by morning I will destroy
all the wicked in the land,
cutting off all evildoers
from the city of the LORD.

Psalm 102

A prayer of one afflicted, when faint and pleading before the LORD.

[1] Hear my prayer, O LORD;
let my cry come to you.

[a] Another reading is *and not we ourselves*

Ps 100: A call to the nations to worship the LORD. A hymn echoing the call to the nations in the enthronement psalms (Pss 93; 95–99). There are seven invitations to worship: *make a joyful noise*, *worship*, *come*, *know*, *enter*, *give thanks*, and *bless*. The motives for giving praise are introduced by *that* in v. 3a and *for* in v. 5a. Vv. 1–3 and 4–5 are parallel sections, expressing a similar sentiment in different words. The pilgrimage of the nations to Mount Zion is also found in Pss 22.27; 76.11–12; Isa 2.1–4; 60–62; 66.18–23. **3:** *Sheep of his pasture,* sheep that the LORD personally pastures, not delegating it to anyone else, as in Pss 74.1; 79.13; 95.7; Jer 23.1; Ezek 34.31.

Ps 101: Commitment to executing justice. Although explicitly stated, the psalm was most likely recited by the king, who proclaimed a commitment to rule in a manner befitting his divine patron. Acknowledging the divine *loyalty and . . . justice* (v. 1) that brought him to his throne, the king prays for the strength to fulfill his duties (v. 2ab). He makes twelve promises (*I will . . .*), being loyal (vv. 2c–4), forbidding abuses by members of the court (v. 5), appointing only God-fearing administrators (v. 6), expelling the wicked (v. 7), and administering a fair judicial system (v. 8). Underlying the king's vows is the desire to be a good servant and ruler, blessed by his divine patron. **8:** *Morning by morning,* that is, each morning. At night sin is rampant; justice comes with the morning sun as in Job 38.12–13. Ps 19 also associates the law with the all-seeing sun. *The city of the LORD* is Jerusalem, also the royal city.

Ps 102: A plea for the restoration of the psalmist and of Zion. This individual petition blends personal and national complaints into a single prayer. It is one of the seven penitential psalms in Christian tradition (Pss 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). Drawing a contrast between fragile mortal humans (vv. 3–11,23–24b) and the eternal

2 Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress.
Incline your ear to me;
answer me speedily in the day when I call.

3 For my days pass away like smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.
4 My heart is stricken and withered like grass;
I am too wasted to eat my bread.
5 Because of my loud groaning
my bones cling to my skin.
6 I am like an owl of the wilderness,
like a little owl of the waste places.
7 I lie awake;
I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.
8 All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who deride me use my name for a curse.
9 For I eat ashes like bread,
and mingle tears with my drink,
10 because of your indignation and anger;
for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside.
11 My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.

12 But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever;
your name endures to all generations.
13 You will rise up and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to favor it;
the appointed time has come.
14 For your servants hold its stones dear,
and have pity on its dust.
15 The nations will fear the name of the LORD,
and all the kings of the earth your glory.
16 For the LORD will build up Zion;
he will appear in his glory.
17 He will regard the prayer of the destitute,
and will not despise their prayer.

18 Let this be recorded for a generation to come,
so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD:
19 that he looked down from his holy height,
from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,
20 to hear the groans of the prisoners,
to set free those who were doomed to die;
21 so that the name of the LORD may be declared in Zion,
and his praise in Jerusalem,
22 when peoples gather together,
and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.

23 He has broken my strength in midcourse;
he has shortened my days.
24 "O my God," I say, "do not take me away
at the midpoint of my life,
you whose years endure
throughout all generations."

25 Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
26 They will perish, but you endure;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You change them like clothing, and they pass away;
27 but you are the same, and your years have no end.
28 The children of your servants shall live secure;
their offspring shall be established in your presence.

LORD (vv. 12–22, 24c–27), the psalm begs for the healing that will win for the LORD the praise of the nations (vv. 15,18–22) and nurture a new generation of Israelite worshipers (v. 28). There are three parallel sections: vv. 1–11: Hear me, for my days swiftly *pass away*; vv. 12–22: When you show *compassion*, all will honor you in your Temple; vv. 23–28: Do not make my short life (*shorten my days*) even briefer, O Eternal One. The mixture of private petition and request for the restoration of Zion may suggest that private prayer is more efficacious if it includes broader, communal requests. The superscription, *A prayer of one afflicted, when faint and pleading before the LORD*, suggests that anyone beset with woes or afflicted may recite this prayer. **3–11:** The diverse figures of speech combine to express the psalmist's desperation. **13:** Implies that this is the *time* to rebuild the Temple, which would date the psalm in the early postexilic period (late fifth century BCE). **11:** *Like grass,* cf. Ps 90.5–6; Isa

Psalm 103

Of David.

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.
2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
3 who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
4 who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
5 who satisfies you with good as long as you live[a]
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

6 The LORD works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
7 He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
8 The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
9 He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
12 as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
13 As a father has compassion for his children,
so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.
14 For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.

15 As for mortals, their days are like grass;
they flourish like a flower of the field;
16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
17 But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting
on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
18 to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.

19 The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.
20 Bless the LORD, O you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
obedient to his spoken word.
21 Bless the LORD, all his hosts,
his ministers that do his will.
22 Bless the LORD, all his works,
in all places of his dominion.
Bless the LORD, O my soul.

Psalm 104

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul.
O LORD my God, you are very great.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

40.6–8. **22:** For the idea of all nations worshiping at the Temple, see Ps 100n.

Ps 103: Praise to the LORD for forgiveness. As Ps 102 combined national and personal complaints into one petition, so Ps 103 blends personal and national benefits into one hymn. The poem draws two distinct parallels: God heals individuals (vv. 1–5) and the nation (vv. 6–14); God summons earthly beings (vv. 15–18) and heavenly beings (vv. 19–22) to give praise. **1–5:** The opening verses match the closing verses (19–22) in length and in the repeated *Bless!* **3–5:** The six blessings are essentially one: the healing of life-threatening forces. The first blessing mentioned, *who forgives all your iniquity*, is the key: God is fundamentally forgiving. *The Pit,* the abode of the dead. Having been personally healed, the psalmist hopes that the nation will be similarly healed (vv. 6–14). **5:** *Renewed like the eagle's,* like the vigor that seems to come with the annual molting of the eagle. **8:** Echoes Ex 34.6, when God forgave Israel after their apostasy with the golden calf. The psalm views the Exodus more as the forgiveness of Israel rather than the defeat of Egypt. **14:** As *dust* (see Gen 2.7), people cannot be judged too harshly, and deserve divine compassion. **15–18:** Even though they are *grass* (see Ps 102.11n.), they receive God's *steadfast love* (Heb "ḥesed") and righteousness. **22:** the psalm ends as it began, the words *Bless the LORD, O my soul* forming an inclusio.

Ps 104: Praise to the LORD who made the universe beautiful and life-giving. The hymn praises divine wisdom through a series of vignettes (vv. 1–9,10–12,13–18,19–23,24–26), a reflection (vv. 27–30) and a prayer (vv.

You are clothed with honor and majesty,
2 wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
3 you set the beams of your[a] chambers
on the waters,
you make the clouds your[a] chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
4 you make the winds your[a] messengers,
fire and flame your[a] ministers.

5 You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
6 You cover it with the deep as with a
garment;
the waters stood above the
mountains.
7 At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take
to flight.
8 They rose up to the mountains, ran down
to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for
them.
9 You set a boundary that they may not
pass,
so that they might not again cover the
earth.

10 You make springs gush forth in the
valleys;
they flow between the hills,
11 giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.
12 By the streams[b] the birds of the air have
their habitation;
they sing among the branches.
13 From your lofty abode you water the
mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of
your work.

14 You cause the grass to grow for the
cattle,
and plants for people to use,[c]
to bring forth food from the earth,
15 and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.
16 The trees of the LORD are watered
abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
17 In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
18 The high mountains are for the wild
goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coneys.
19 You have made the moon to mark the
seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
20 You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come
creeping out.
21 The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
22 When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
23 People go out to their work
and to their labor until the evening.

24 O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
25 Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
26 There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport
in it.

27 These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;

[a] Heb *his*
[b] Heb *By them*
[c] Or *to cultivate*

31–35). God, luminous and triumphant (vv. 1–4), organizes the primordial waters (vv. 5–18,24–26) and darkness (vv. 19–23) into a harmonious whole that supports life (vv. 27–35). The depiction owes much to the mythology of neighboring cultures: the storm god who vanquishes Sea (vv. 1–18), and the Egyptian sun-disk Aten whose rays illuminate the world (vv. 19–30); it also shares language and themes with Job 38–39. Psalms 103 and 104 begin and end similarly, but are very different in theme and tone. **1:** *Honor and majesty* are royal qualities. God is depicted in the psalm as a king who has constructed the superlative building project: the world. **2:** *Stretch out the heavens,* cf. Job 9.8; Isa 40.22; 42.5; Zech 12.1. **4:** Cf. Ps 148.8. **9:** Cf. Job 38.8–11; Prov 8.29; Jer 5.22. **13:** See Pss

28 when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
29 When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
30 When you send forth your spirit,[a] they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

31 May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works—
32 who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
33 I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
34 May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the LORD.
35 Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the LORD, O my soul.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 105

1 O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.
2 Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works.
3 Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
4 Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually.
5 Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered,
6 O offspring of his servant Abraham,[b]
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

7 He is the LORD our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.
8 He is mindful of his covenant forever,
of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,
9 the covenant that he made with Abraham,
his sworn promise to Isaac,
10 which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,
11 saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance."

12 When they were few in number,
of little account, and strangers in it,
13 wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another people,
14 he allowed no one to oppress them;
he rebuked kings on their account,
15 saying, "Do not touch my anointed ones;
do my prophets no harm."

16 When he summoned famine against the land,
and broke every staff of bread,
17 he had sent a man ahead of them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
18 His feet were hurt with fetters,
his neck was put in a collar of iron;

[a] Or *your breath*
[b] Another reading is *Israel* (compare 1 Chr 16.13)

36.8n.; 65.9. **21:** See Job 38.39. **24:** The psalm's key verse, summarizing the wonder of the world. **26:** *Leviathan,* see Ps 74.14n. **27–30:** The world continues to depend on God. **29–30:** Cf. Gen 1.30; 2.7; 3.19. **31–32:** A prayer that God will continue to act beneficently. *Mountains . . . smoke,* see Ps 144.5. **35:** *Sinners* and *the wicked* destroy the harmony of the world.

Ps 105: Praise of the LORD who has acted wonderfully toward Israel. A hymn to God's wondrous guidance of Israel, like Pss 135 and 136. Ps 105 makes the land of Canaan a symbol of God's generosity and fidelity. The promise is realized differently in each of the four historical periods selected. From v. 7 forward, a form of the key words "word/promise," "land," and "servant" occurs in each section. After an invitation to praise (vv. 1–6) and mention of the covenant promise of land (vv. 7–11; see Gen 15; 17; 28.13–14), the psalm follows the traditional historical periods: Abraham in Canaan (vv. 12–15; Gen 12–26), Joseph in the land of Egypt (vv. 16–22; Gen 37–47); Israel in Egypt (vv. 23–38; Ex 1–15); and Israel in the wilderness (vv. 39–45; Ex 16–17). **15:** Abraham is called a

19 until what he had said came to pass,
the word of the LORD kept testing him.
20 The king sent and released him;
the ruler of the peoples set him free.
21 He made him lord of his house,
and ruler of all his possessions,
22 to instruct[a] his officials at his pleasure,
and to teach his elders wisdom.

23 Then Israel came to Egypt;
Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham.
24 And the LORD made his people very fruitful,
and made them stronger than their foes,
25 whose hearts he then turned to hate his people,
to deal craftily with his servants.

26 He sent his servant Moses,
and Aaron whom he had chosen.
27 They performed his signs among them,
and miracles in the land of Ham.
28 He sent darkness, and made the land dark;
they rebelled[b] against his words.
29 He turned their waters into blood,
and caused their fish to die.
30 Their land swarmed with frogs,
even in the chambers of their kings.
31 He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,
and gnats throughout their country.
32 He gave them hail for rain,
and lightning that flashed through their land.
33 He struck their vines and fig trees,
and shattered the trees of their country.
34 He spoke, and the locusts came,
and young locusts without number;
35 they devoured all the vegetation in their land,
and ate up the fruit of their ground.
36 He struck down all the firstborn in their land,
the first issue of all their strength.

37 Then he brought Israel[c] out with silver and gold,
and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.
38 Egypt was glad when they departed,
for dread of them had fallen upon it.
39 He spread a cloud for a covering,
and fire to give light by night.
40 They asked, and he brought quails,
and gave them food from heaven in abundance.
41 He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
it flowed through the desert like a river.
42 For he remembered his holy promise,
and Abraham, his servant.

43 So he brought his people out with joy,
his chosen ones with singing.
44 He gave them the lands of the nations,
and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples,
45 that they might keep his statutes
and observe his laws.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 106

1 Praise the LORD!
O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.

a Gk Syr Jerome: Heb *to bind*
b Cn Compare Gk Syr: Heb *they did not rebel*
c Heb *them*

prophet in Gen 20.7; none of the patriarchs are ever called *anointed* (Heb "mashiaḥ") elsewhere (except for 1 Chr 16.23, which quotes this psalm). **18:** This is one of many cases in this psalm where the retelling of the past differs in detail from the narratives in the Torah. **27–36:** In terms of number and order, this differs strikingly from the plague narrative in Exodus. **38:** This contrasts with the account in Ex 14–15 of the Egyptians chasing after the Israelites and drowning in the Reed Sea. **42:** The relation between Israel and its land is permanent and unalterable, predicated on *his holy promise*. **45:** But the gift of the land depends on obedience to God. If written in the exilic period, this psalm would remind the people to return to God so that they might return to the land, and to remind God of his absolute, unalterable promise.

Ps 106: A confession of sin and record of divine forgiveness. A storytelling poem, describing seven occa-

2 Who can utter the mighty doings of the LORD,
or declare all his praise?
3 Happy are those who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times.

4 Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people;
help me when you deliver them;
5 that I may see the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation,
that I may glory in your heritage.

6 Both we and our ancestors have sinned;
we have committed iniquity, have done wickedly.
7 Our ancestors, when they were in Egypt,
did not consider your wonderful works;
they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love,
but rebelled against the Most High[a] at the Red Sea.[b]
8 Yet he saved them for his name's sake,
so that he might make known his mighty power.
9 He rebuked the Red Sea,[b] and it became dry;
he led them through the deep as through a desert.
10 So he saved them from the hand of the foe,
and delivered them from the hand of the enemy.
11 The waters covered their adversaries;
not one of them was left.
12 Then they believed his words;
they sang his praise.

13 But they soon forgot his works;
they did not wait for his counsel.
14 But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness,
and put God to the test in the desert;
15 he gave them what they asked,
but sent a wasting disease among them.

16 They were jealous of Moses in the camp,
and of Aaron, the holy one of the LORD.
17 The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan,
and covered the faction of Abiram.
18 Fire also broke out in their company;
the flame burned up the wicked.

19 They made a calf at Horeb
and worshiped a cast image.
20 They exchanged the glory of God[c]
for the image of an ox that eats grass.
21 They forgot God, their Savior,
who had done great things in Egypt,
22 wondrous works in the land of Ham,
and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.[b]
23 Therefore he said he would destroy them—
had not Moses, his chosen one,
stood in the breach before him,
to turn away his wrath from destroying them.

[a] Cn Compare 78.17, 56: Heb *rebelled at the sea*
[b] Or *Sea of Reeds*
[c] Compare Gk Mss: Heb *exchanged their glory*

sions of sin and forgiveness (vv. 6–46). Seven seems to symbolize completeness. Each occasion is identified by a place name (noted in italics): Rebellion and rescue *at the Red Sea* (vv. 6–12; Ex 14–15); testing God *in the desert* (vv. 13–15; Ex 16–17); jealousy of Moses *in the camp* (vv. 16–18; Num 16); the calf *at Horeb* and Moses' intercession (vv. 19–23; Ex 32); refusal to attack from the south and divine threat (vv. 23–27; Num 14), the sin with Baal of *Peor* and Phinehas' intercession (vv. 28–31; Num 25); sin *at the waters of Meribah* (vv. 32–33; Num 20); sacrifice of children in *Canaan* (vv. 34–46). The seventh and climactic occasion is complex, for the sin is typical rather than a single act: the sacrifice of infants (vv. 34–39) representing the people's adoption of corrupt native ways. The punishment is also typical, a series of punishments (v. 41) and mercies. In terms of theme (history) and opening (*Praise the* LORD), it is connected to the previous psalm, although its theme and understanding of the Israelite past is quite different from it. The past, presented in cycles of Israelite sin and divine forgiveness, is recounted

24 Then they despised the pleasant land,
having no faith in his promise.
25 They grumbled in their tents,
and did not obey the voice of the LORD.
26 Therefore he raised his hand and swore to them
that he would make them fall in the wilderness,
27 and would disperse[a] their descendants among the nations,
scattering them over the lands.

28 Then they attached themselves to the Baal of Peor,
and ate sacrifices offered to the dead;
29 they provoked the LORD to anger with their deeds,
and a plague broke out among them.
30 Then Phinehas stood up and interceded,
and the plague was stopped.
31 And that has been reckoned to him as righteousness
from generation to generation forever.

32 They angered the LORD[b] at the waters of Meribah,
and it went ill with Moses on their account;
33 for they made his spirit bitter,
and he spoke words that were rash.

34 They did not destroy the peoples,
as the LORD commanded them,
35 but they mingled with the nations
and learned to do as they did.
36 They served their idols,
which became a snare to them.
37 They sacrificed their sons
and their daughters to the demons;
38 they poured out innocent blood,
the blood of their sons and daughters,
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan;
and the land was polluted with blood.
39 Thus they became unclean by their acts,
and prostituted themselves in their doings.

40 Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people,
and he abhorred his heritage;
41 he gave them into the hand of the nations,
so that those who hated them ruled over them.
42 Their enemies oppressed them,
and they were brought into subjection under their power.
43 Many times he delivered them,
but they were rebellious in their purposes,
and were brought low through their iniquity.
44 Nevertheless he regarded their distress
when he heard their cry.
45 For their sake he remembered his covenant,
and showed compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.
46 He caused them to be pitied
by all who held them captive.

47 Save us, O LORD our God,
and gather us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and glory in your praise.

48 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
And let all the people say, "Amen."
Praise the LORD!

BOOK V PSALMS 107—150

Psalm 107

1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.

[a] Syr Compare Ezek 20.23: Heb *cause to fall*
[b] Heb *him*

in order to call upon God to forgive again (v. 47). **19:** *Horeb,* an alternate name for Sinai. **22:** *Ham,* see Ps 78.51n. **24:** In other words, they heeded the spies who recommended against fighting against the Canaanites. **37–38:** Exile is blamed on child-sacrifice, which made the land ritually impure; see 2 Kings 16.3; 21.6; Jer 19.5; Ezek 20.31; 23.37. **47:** A reference to the exile to Babylon in the early sixth century BCE. **48:** The plea of v. 47 was the original end of the psalm; the doxology in v. 48 was inserted by an editor when the Psalms were divided into five books or sections.

Ps 107: Thanksgiving for bringing back the people from exile. This community thanksgiving logically fol-

2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from trouble
3 and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.[a]

4 Some wandered in desert wastes,
finding no way to an inhabited town;
5 hungry and thirsty,
their soul fainted within them.
6 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress;
7 he led them by a straight way,
until they reached an inhabited town.
8 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
9 For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things.

10 Some sat in darkness and in gloom,
prisoners in misery and in irons,
11 for they had rebelled against the words of God,
and spurned the counsel of the Most High.
12 Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor;
they fell down, with no one to help.
13 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress;
14 he brought them out of darkness and gloom,
and broke their bonds asunder.
15 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
16 For he shatters the doors of bronze,
and cuts in two the bars of iron.

17 Some were sick[b] through their sinful ways,
and because of their iniquities endured affliction;
18 they loathed any kind of food,
and they drew near to the gates of death.
19 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress;
20 he sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from destruction.
21 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
22 And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

23 Some went down to the sea in ships,
doing business on the mighty waters;
24 they saw the deeds of the LORD,
his wondrous works in the deep.
25 For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,
which lifted up the waves of the sea.
26 They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths;
their courage melted away in their calamity;
27 they reeled and staggered like drunkards,
and were at their wits' end.

[a] Cn: Heb *sea*
[b] Cn: Heb *fools*

lows the two pleas for the exile to end in the previous Pss 105 and 106. Ps 107 provides four examples of divine deliverance (vv. 4–9; 10–16; 17–22; 23–32), followed by a final section (vv. 33–43) transposing the deliverance of vv. 4–32 into the daily governance of the land. The number four may suggest totality; cf. Isa 11.12. In each panel a danger occurs (vv. 4–5; 10–12; 17–18; 23–27), the afflicted cry out to the LORD (vv. 6; 13; 19; 28) who rescues them (vv. 6b–7; 13b–14; 19b–10; 28b–30), prompting them to respond with thanksgiving (vv. 8–9; 15–16; 21–22; 31–32). Verse 33 marks a new section with its initial verb (*he turns*). Vv. 1–3 invited the returned exiles to give praise; vv. 4–32 depict the four rescued groups: those hungering and thirsting in the wilderness (vv. 4–9); prisoners (vv. 10–16); the sick (vv. 17–22); those caught in an ocean storm (vv. 23–32); these are all metaphorical for the tribulations of the Babylonian exile of the sixth century BCE, and the difficulties of returning by foot from Babylon. Vv. 33–43 describe the LORD's rescue and governance of Israel. **2:** *The redeemed of the LORD*, in its

28 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he brought them out from their distress;
29 he made the storm be still,
and the waves of the sea were hushed.
30 Then they were glad because they had quiet,
and he brought them to their desired haven.
31 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
32 Let them extol him in the congregation of the people,
and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

33 He turns rivers into a desert,
springs of water into thirsty ground,
34 a fruitful land into a salty waste,
because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.
35 He turns a desert into pools of water,
a parched land into springs of water.
36 And there he lets the hungry live,
and they establish a town to live in;
37 they sow fields, and plant vineyards,
and get a fruitful yield.
38 By his blessing they multiply greatly,
and he does not let their cattle decrease.

39 When they are diminished and brought low
through oppression, trouble, and sorrow,
40 he pours contempt on princes
and makes them wander in trackless wastes;
41 but he raises up the needy out of distress,
and makes their families like flocks.
42 The upright see it and are glad;
and all wickedness stops its mouth.
43 Let those who are wise give heed to these things,
and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.

Psalm 108

A Song. A Psalm of David.

1 My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;[a]
I will sing and make melody.
Awake, my soul![b]
2 Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn.
3 I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the peoples,
and I will sing praises to you among the nations.
4 For your steadfast love is higher than the heavens,
and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens,
and let your glory be over all the earth.
6 Give victory with your right hand, and answer me,
so that those whom you love may be rescued.

7 God has promised in his sanctuary:[c]
"With exultation I will divide up Shechem,
and portion out the Vale of Succoth.
8 Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine;
Ephraim is my helmet;
Judah is my scepter.
9 Moab is my washbasin;
on Edom I hurl my shoe;
over Philistia I shout in triumph."

[a] Heb Mss Gk Syr: MT lacks *my heart is steadfast*
[b] Compare 57.8: Heb *also my soul*
[c] Or *by his holiness*

one other biblical use, the inhabitants of restored Zion (Isa 62.12). **11:** The exile was a punishment for Israel's behavior. **35:** Cf. Isa 41.18; 43.19. **41–42:** Two main themes of psalms: the vindication of the needy, which leads to public recognition of God's greatness. **43:** The *wise* understand that the LORD's *steadfast love* (Heb "ḥesed") allows for periods of tribulation and defeat, but Israel will always be restored.

Ps 108: A prayer for victory. A community petition using material from other psalms; vv. 1–5 appear also in Ps 57.7–11 and vv. 6–13 appear in Ps 60.5–12. For detailed comments, see the annotations to those texts. In vv. 1–6, the psalmist resolves to praise God's love and faithfulness; vv. 7–9 cite an ancient oracle; and vv. 10–13

10 Who will bring me to the fortified city?
Who will lead me to Edom?
11 Have you not rejected us, O God?
You do not go out, O God, with our armies.
12 O grant us help against the foe,
for human help is worthless.
13 With God we shall do valiantly;
it is he who will tread down our foes.

Psalm 109

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

1 Do not be silent, O God of my praise.
2 For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me,
speaking against me with lying tongues.
3 They beset me with words of hate,
and attack me without cause.
4 In return for my love they accuse me,
even while I make prayer for them.[a]
5 So they reward me evil for good,
and hatred for my love.

6 They say,[b] "Appoint a wicked man against him;
let an accuser stand on his right.
7 When he is tried, let him be found guilty;
let his prayer be counted as sin.
8 May his days be few;
may another seize his position.
9 May his children be orphans,
and his wife a widow.
10 May his children wander about and beg;
may they be driven out of[c] the ruins they inhabit.
11 May the creditor seize all that he has;
may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil.
12 May there be no one to do him a kindness,
nor anyone to pity his orphaned children.
13 May his posterity be cut off;
may his name be blotted out in the second generation.
14 May the iniquity of his father[d] be remembered before the LORD,
and do not let the sin of his mother be blotted out.
15 Let them be before the LORD continually,
and may his[e] memory be cut off from the earth.
16 For he did not remember to show kindness,
but pursued the poor and needy
and the brokenhearted to their death.
17 He loved to curse; let curses come on him.
He did not like blessing; may it be far from him.
18 He clothed himself with cursing as his coat,
may it soak into his body like water,
like oil into his bones.
19 May it be like a garment that he wraps around himself,
like a belt that he wears every day."

20 May that be the reward of my accusers from the LORD,
of those who speak evil against my life.
21 But you, O LORD my Lord,
act on my behalf for your name's sake;
because your steadfast love is good, deliver me.

[a] Syr: Heb *I prayer*
[b] Heb lacks *They say*
[c] Gk: Heb *and seek*
[d] Cn: Heb *fathers*
[e] Gk: Heb *their*

complain and pray.

Ps 109: Prayer for vindication. An urgent petition of an individual accused of exploiting the poor (v. 16) and who has therefore been cursed by enemies (vv. 6–19). Petitioners typically complain to God of their perilous plight; in this case the complaint is in the form of a quotation of the enemies' curses (twelve curses in vv. 6–19). NRSV adds *They* (the enemies) *say* in v. 6a to make clear the psalmist is citing the enemy's curses rather than personally cursing; other translations understand the curses to be those of the psalmist against his enemies. **6:** The word for accuser, Heb "satan," later means Satan, the devil. **14:** Following Ex 34.7 ("visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children") and other texts, may he be subject to intergenerational punishment. **20:** *May that be the reward,* a prayer that the curses fall on the enemies so as to demonstrate to all that the LORD has

22 For I am poor and needy,
and my heart is pierced within me.
23 I am gone like a shadow at evening;
I am shaken off like a locust.
24 My knees are weak through fasting;
my body has become gaunt.
25 I am an object of scorn to my accusers;
when they see me, they shake their heads.

26 Help me, O LORD my God!
Save me according to your steadfast love.
27 Let them know that this is your hand;
you, O LORD, have done it.
28 Let them curse, but you will bless.
Let my assailants be put to shame;[a] may your servant be glad.
29 May my accusers be clothed with dishonor;
may they be wrapped in their own shame as in a mantle.
30 With my mouth I will give great thanks to the LORD;
I will praise him in the midst of the throng.
31 For he stands at the right hand of the needy,
to save them from those who would condemn them to death.

Psalm 110

Of David. A Psalm.

1 The LORD says to my lord,
"Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies your footstool."
2 The LORD sends out from Zion
your mighty scepter.
Rule in the midst of your foes.
3 Your people will offer themselves willingly
on the day you lead your forces
on the holy mountains.[b]
From the womb of the morning,
like dew, your youth[c] will come to you.
4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind,
"You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."[d]

5 The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.
6 He will execute judgment among the nations,
filling them with corpses;
he will shatter heads
over the wide earth.
7 He will drink from the stream by the path;
therefore he will lift up his head.

Psalm 111

1 Praise the LORD!
I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

[a] Gk: Heb *They have risen up and have been put to shame*
[b] Another reading is *in holy splendor*
[c] Cn: Heb *the dew of your youth*
[d] Or *forever, a rightful king by my edict*

vindicated the psalmist. Cf. also v. 29. **22:** *I am poor and needy,* far from persecuting the poor as the enemies have asserted (v. 16), the psalmist is himself poor and needy and thus has a claim on God's protection. **28:** For the psalmist, curses are not automatically effective but depend on God. **31:** The word for *right hand* links this psalm with the next (see 110.1)

Ps 110: Victory to the Davidic king. A royal psalm in which a court official cites promises of victory made to the Davidic king (vv. 1,4) and then elaborates them (vv. 2–3,5–7). Christian interpretation has understood the king's victory as prefiguring Jesus' resurrection and rule over the nations (Acts 2.34; 1 Cor 15.25; Heb 1.3,13). **1–3:** *Sit,* take your throne; *right hand* is the place of honor; *footstool,* victorious kings were depicted with their feet on their defeated foes' necks. **3:** Though very obscure, the general sense is clear: the king will lead the army and defeat the LORD's enemies. **4–7:** *Melchizedek,* priest-king of pre-Israelite Jerusalem who greeted Abraham in Gen 14.17–20; the tradition is applied only here to the Davidic king. As elsewhere in the ancient Near East, Israelite kings are sometimes described as exercising priestly duties (e.g., 2 Sam 6.13–14; 8.18; 1 Kings 3.4). **7:** Obscure, possibly referring to a ritual of the warrior returning from victory.

[2] Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.
[3] Full of honor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.
[4] He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.
[5] He provides food for those who fear him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.
[6] He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the heritage of the nations.
[7] The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.
[8] They are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
[9] He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name.
[10] The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it[a] have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever.

Psalm 112

[1] Praise the LORD!
Happy are those who fear the LORD,
who greatly delight in his commandments.
[2] Their descendants will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.
[3] Wealth and riches are in their houses,
and their righteousness endures forever.
[4] They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright;
they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.
[5] It is well with those who deal generously and lend,
who conduct their affairs with justice.
[6] For the righteous will never be moved;
they will be remembered forever.
[7] They are not afraid of evil tidings;
their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD.
[8] Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid;
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.
[9] They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever;
their horn is exalted in honor.
[10] The wicked see it and are angry;
they gnash their teeth and melt away;
the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.

Psalm 113

[1] Praise the LORD!
Praise, O servants of the LORD;
praise the name of the LORD.

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *them*

Ps 111: Hymn to God's great deeds. A hymn in acrostic form (see Ps 9–10n.) celebrating the great deeds of the Exodus-Conquest. **5:** Food may refer to the manna and quail that God provided in the wilderness (see Ex 16; Num 11; Ps 105.40). **7:** The verse is the transition from admiring the divine deeds (v. 2b) to imitating the God who did them (*all his precepts*; *those who practice it*, v. 10). **10:** *Fear of the LORD* (best rendered "revering the LORD"), pointing forward to v. 1 of Ps 112, its companion piece. See Ps 19.9; Prov 1.7; 9.10; etc.

Ps 112: Blessings on those who treasure God's acts and give to the poor. An instruction in acrostic form (see Ps 9–10n.) and companion piece to Psalm 111, depicting the righteous person as one who ponders God's works (cf. Ps 111.2) and puts into practice God's precepts (cf. Ps 111.7). The virtue singled out is mercy shown in giving to the poor (vv. 4,5,9). Paradoxically, generous givers do not deprive their children of an inheritance (vv. 2–3) nor suffer the shame that comes with poverty (vv. 6,8,10), for the LORD will recompense them. This psalm and Prov 19.17 influenced Jewish and Christian views of almsgiving (e.g., Dan 4.24; Matt 6.12). **1:** *Fear the LORD*, see Ps 110.10n. **3:** *And their righteousness endures forever* helps to join this psalm to Ps 111; see 111.3. **9:** *Horn,* a metaphor for strength.

Ps 113: A hymn to the just God. Like other hymns, this one opens and closes with a call to praise, and specifically names those called to praise ("servants of the LORD," v. 1). Ps 113 concludes the three Hallelujah psalms (Pss 111–113) and begins the "Egyptian Hallel" (= Heb "praise") psalms (113–118) sung at major Jewish festivals even though the Bible does not suggest that they are a collection. Many scholars think that Pss 113–114 were sung before the Passover meal and Pss 115–118 after it. Images of "high" and "low" unify the psalm. **1:** It is uncertain

2 Blessed be the name of the LORD
from this time on and forevermore.
3 From the rising of the sun to its setting
the name of the LORD is to be
praised.
4 The LORD is high above all nations,
and his glory above the heavens.

5 Who is like the LORD our God,
who is seated on high,
6 who looks far down
on the heavens and the earth?
7 He raises the poor from the dust,
and lifts the needy from the ash
heap,
8 to make them sit with princes,
with the princes of his people.
9 He gives the barren woman a home,
making her the joyous mother of
children.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 114

1 When Israel went out from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of
strange language,
2 Judah became God's[a] sanctuary,
Israel his dominion.

3 The sea looked and fled;
Jordan turned back.

4 The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs.

5 Why is it, O sea, that you flee?
O Jordan, that you turn back?
6 O mountains, that you skip like rams?
O hills, like lambs?

7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the
LORD,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
8 who turns the rock into a pool of
water,
the flint into a spring of water.

Psalm 115

1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your
name give glory,
for the sake of your steadfast love and
your faithfulness.
2 Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"

3 Our God is in the heavens;
he does whatever he pleases.
4 Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.
5 They have mouths, but do not speak;
eyes, but do not see.

[a] Heb *his*

if the *servants of the LORD* refer to all worshipers or is a technical term for a specific group in the Temple. *The name* represents the person, here the LORD who rules earth and heaven (vv. 2–4). In late biblical and in postbiblical texts, the *name* of God was used as a surrogate for God. **5–6:** A rhetorical question expecting the answer "None." **6:** *Who looks far down,* better "who rules over." **7–9:** Two typical examples of divine ruling: enabling a poor man to sit with honor among the village elders, and giving the barren woman a child; cf. 1 Sam 2.4–8.

Ps 114: The wonder of the Exodus. A unique psalm with hymnlike features, celebrating the Exodus from Egypt and the Conquest, with the crossing of the sea and the Jordan River. An apt Hallel psalm (Pss 113–118) with standard synonymous parallelism and internal repetition (vv. 3–4 || 5–6). **1–4:** Somewhat abruptly, the psalm describes Israel leaving Egypt through the sea (see Ex 14–15) to a safe land. Telescoping events, this poem has the people cross from Egypt directly into Canaan (*Judah*, *Israel,* v. 2, where the Southern and Northern kingdoms are meant). **2:** Strikingly, it is at the Exodus, and not at Sinai, that Israel becomes God's holy people (a preferable translation to *sanctuary*). **3:** *The sea* is parallel to *Jordan* and is personified as a defeated warrior (cf. Pss 77.16; 104.7). The LORD taunts sea and mountains as they tremble and flee (Ps 96.9; Deut 2.25). **8:** A reference to God providing water in the wilderness from a *rock*; see Ps 78.15,20; Ex 17.6; Num 20.11.

Ps 115: Show forth your glory to the nations. A community petition that the LORD in the heavens (v. 3), too powerful to be contained in earthly statues (vv. 4–8), might display his glory on earth and enable Israel to live in trust (vv. 9–18). **1:** *Not to us,* better, "Not for our sake, O LORD, not for our sake, but for the sake of your name display your glory." The Hebrew phrase, lit., "to give glory," actually means "display glory" as in Ezek 39.21. **2:** *Where is their God?* a taunt that Israel's God is powerless. **3–8:** There are two contrasts: between our God (singular) in the heavens and their gods (images, plural) on earth; between God who acts and the gods who cannot. **3:**

[6] They have ears, but do not hear;
noses, but do not smell.
[7] They have hands, but do not feel;
feet, but do not walk;
they make no sound in their throats.
[8] Those who make them are like them;
so are all who trust in them.

[9] O Israel, trust in the LORD!
He is their help and their shield.
[10] O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD!
He is their help and their shield.
[11] You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD!
He is their help and their shield.

[12] The LORD has been mindful of us; he will bless us;
he will bless the house of Israel;
he will bless the house of Aaron;
[13] he will bless those who fear the LORD,
both small and great.

[14] May the LORD give you increase,
both you and your children.
[15] May you be blessed by the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

[16] The heavens are the LORD's heavens,
but the earth he has given to human beings.
[17] The dead do not praise the LORD,
nor do any that go down into silence.
[18] But we will bless the LORD
from this time on and forevermore.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 116

[1] I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my supplications.
[2] Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
[3] The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.
[4] Then I called on the name of the LORD:
"O LORD, I pray, save my life!"

[5] Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
our God is merciful.
[6] The LORD protects the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.
[7] Return, O my soul, to your rest,
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

[8] For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling.
[9] I walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.
[10] I kept my faith, even when I said,
"I am greatly afflicted";
[11] I said in my consternation,
"Everyone is a liar."

[12] What shall I return to the LORD
for all his bounty to me?
[13] I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,
[14] I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.

Our God is in the heavens, a bold response to the taunt *Where is their God?* Ridicule of divine images is common in exilic texts and later (e.g., Jer 10.1–16; Isa 40.18–20; 41.6–7; Bel). **9:** *Trust in the LORD,* those who trust in images will be frustrated (v. 8) and those who trust in the LORD will find a *help* and *shield* (vv. 9–11). **10:** *House of Aaron,* the priests, who claimed Aaron as their ancestor. **12–13:** The psalmist turns to God, asking him to bless the same three groups who were just asked (vv. 10–11) to have trust in the LORD. **15:** *Who made heaven and earth,* see Ps 124.8n. **17:** According to the biblical worldview, all who died went down to Sheol, the underworld, where all was quiet; the dead could thus be called those *that go down into silence*. See also 6.5n.

Ps 116: Thanksgiving to a saving God. An individual thanksgiving for having found a saving God rather than for a particular rescue. God is attentive (vv. 1–2) and merciful (vv. 5–6), and the psalmist resolves to respond by acts of trust (vv. 7,9–11) and worship (vv. 12–19). There seem to be four sections: the rescue and the resulting relationship (vv. 1–4); the nature of God revealed by the rescue and the psalmist's response (vv. 5–8); resolve to live as a trusting client of the divine patron (vv. 9–11); resolve to offer appropriate ritual thanks (vv. 12–19). **1:** *I love the LORD,* in the sense of choose (Prov 12.1; 20.13; Isa 41.8); the Hebrew reads "I love that the LORD has heard." **3:** *Sheol,* the underworld, the abode of the dead. **7:** *Soul* refers to breathing or life-force.

15 Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.
16 O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the child of your
serving girl.
You have loosed my bonds.
17 I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice
and call on the name of the LORD.
18 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
19 in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 117

1 Praise the LORD, all you nations!
Extol him, all you peoples!
2 For great is his steadfast love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the LORD
endures forever.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 118

1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!

2 Let Israel say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."
3 Let the house of Aaron say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."
4 Let those who fear the LORD say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."

5 Out of my distress I called on the LORD;
the LORD answered me and set me in a
broad place.
6 With the LORD on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?
7 The LORD is on my side to help me;
I shall look in triumph on those who
hate me.
8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in mortals.
9 It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in princes.

10 All nations surrounded me;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!
11 They surrounded me, surrounded me on
every side;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!
12 They surrounded me like bees;
they blazed[a] like a fire of thorns;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!
13 I was pushed hard,[b] so that I was
falling,
but the LORD helped me.
14 The LORD is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.

15 There are glad songs of victory in the
tents of the righteous:
"The right hand of the LORD does
valiantly;
16 the right hand of the LORD is exalted;
the right hand of the LORD does
valiantly."
17 I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the LORD.

[a] Gk: Heb *were extinguished*
[b] Gk Syr Jerome: Heb *You pushed me hard*

13: *Cup of salvation,* a drink offering poured out in thanksgiving (e.g., Ex 25.29; Lev 23.37). **14:** A person in a precarious situation could make a vow that would be fulfilled upon being saved. **15:** *Precious,* in the sense of "*too* precious" as in Ps 72.14, i.e., grievous in the LORD's sight. **17–18:** When in distress, the psalmist *vow*ed to offer *a thanksgiving sacrifice*.

Ps 117: Invitation to the nations to worship. In the Bible's shortest chapter, this psalm is a hymn with an invitatory, which is repeated in the last verse, and the motive for praise is introduced by *for* (v. 2a). Oddly, the motive for the nations to give praise is the LORD's steadfast love and faithfulness toward Israel. Perhaps for the psalmist Israel showcases the LORD's generosity and exemplifies what the LORD intends for all peoples.

Ps 118: Giving thanks in a solemn procession. A thanksgiving, spoken in the first person, possibly by the king speaking for the people. The salvation is described twice, in vv. 5–9 as a transfer from a tight spot to a broad place, and in vv. 10–18 as rescue from hostile nations. As the procession enters the Temple precincts, the leader asks for admittance (v. 19) and an officiant states the qualifications necessary for entering (v. 20). In v. 21, the speaker, now within the Temple, gives fresh thanks, and in vv. 22–27, the congregation takes up the praise. The final verse repeats the beginning, forming an inclusio. **1–4:** *His steadfast love,* a covenant term (Heb "ḥesed"); the speaker gives thanks for the LORD's fidelity to past promises of protection. **5:** *Distress,* lit. "restricted

18 The LORD has punished me severely,
but he did not give me over to death.

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.

20 This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.

21 I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
22 The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
23 This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
24 This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.[a]
25 Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!
O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.[b]
We bless you from the house of the LORD.
27 The LORD is God,
and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.[c]

28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God, I will extol you.

29 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Psalm 119

1 Happy are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the LORD.
2 Happy are those who keep his decrees,
who seek him with their whole heart,
3 who also do no wrong,
but walk in his ways.
4 You have commanded your precepts
to be kept diligently.
5 O that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping your statutes!

[a] Or *in him*
[b] Or *Blessed in the name of the LORD is the one who comes*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

place." **12:** *Bees,* a metaphor for enemies as in Deut 1.44. **14:** Copied from Ex 15.2. **22:** *The stone,* the unsuitable stone becomes the very cornerstone toward which all the building blocks are oriented; such a transformation from low to high is a sign of divine intervention (v. 23). **27:** *Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar* was probably a ritual instruction that accidentally became part of the psalm. The horns were four projections at the corners of the altar.

Ps 119: The grandeur and the necessity of divine teaching. An individual petition that the LORD's teaching (Heb "torah," NRSV "law") guide one's every moment: in danger and discouragement, in joy and exultation. The psalm is an elaborate acrostic (see Ps 9–10n.): Each of the twenty-two stanzas begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each stanza has eight verses and (usually) eight synonyms of "law," more accurately "authoritative teaching": "law," "word," "promise(s)," "ordinances," "statutes," "commandments," "decrees," and "precepts." Though for the most part synonymous in this psalm, each term may retain its own shade of meaning: illumination ("law," "word"), moral demand ("ordinances," "statutes," "commandments"), guidance ("decrees, precepts"), and promise ("promise"). Life is regarded as warfare with the evil principle; definitive victory lies only in the future. The major weapon in the battle is the divine word, for its observance trains the passions, gives strength in temptation, and elevates the mind to God. The psalm is constructed as a petition, as seen in its multiple imperatives, as in v. 149. Often petitions and references to "torah" (the two main themes), are combined in a single verse, as in v. 173. Yet, even after reading the entire psalm, it is uncertain exactly what "torah" means: if it refers to the law of Moses, it is odd that there is no mention of him or of Sinai.

This is the longest psalm in the Bible and is innovative in the manner that it refers to the Torah with words typically used of God, such as "love" (e.g., vv. 47,97), "truth" (v. 142), and "true" (v. 151). This reflects the growing importance of the Torah in the postexilic period, and anticipates the idea that the Torah is a type of stand-in for God, who is no longer regarded as imminent. **1:** *Law,* teaching that is authoritative because of divine origin. "Law" is a less satisfactory rendering. **135:** *Shine,* see Num 6.24–26.

6 Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
7 I will praise you with an upright heart,
when I learn your righteous ordinances.
8 I will observe your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me.

9 How can young people keep their way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.
10 With my whole heart I seek you;
do not let me stray from your commandments.
11 I treasure your word in my heart,
so that I may not sin against you.
12 Blessed are you, O LORD;
teach me your statutes.
13 With my lips I declare
all the ordinances of your mouth.
14 I delight in the way of your decrees
as much as in all riches.
15 I will meditate on your precepts,
and fix my eyes on your ways.
16 I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

17 Deal bountifully with your servant,
so that I may live and observe your word.
18 Open my eyes, so that I may behold
wondrous things out of your law.
19 I live as an alien in the land;
do not hide your commandments from me.
20 My soul is consumed with longing
for your ordinances at all times.
21 You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones,
who wander from your commandments;
22 take away from me their scorn and contempt,
for I have kept your decrees.
23 Even though princes sit plotting against me,
your servant will meditate on your statutes.
24 Your decrees are my delight,
they are my counselors.

25 My soul clings to the dust;
revive me according to your word.
26 When I told of my ways, you answered me;
teach me your statutes.
27 Make me understand the way of your precepts,
and I will meditate on your wondrous works.
28 My soul melts away for sorrow;
strengthen me according to your word.
29 Put false ways far from me;
and graciously teach me your law.
30 I have chosen the way of faithfulness;
I set your ordinances before me.
31 I cling to your decrees, O LORD;
let me not be put to shame.
32 I run the way of your commandments,
for you enlarge my understanding.

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes,
and I will observe it to the end.
34 Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.
35 Lead me in the path of your commandments,
for I delight in it.
36 Turn my heart to your decrees,
and not to selfish gain.
37 Turn my eyes from looking at vanities;
give me life in your ways.
38 Confirm to your servant your promise,
which is for those who fear you.
39 Turn away the disgrace that I dread,
for your ordinances are good.
40 See, I have longed for your precepts;
in your righteousness give me life.

41 Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD,
your salvation according to your promise.
42 Then I shall have an answer for those who taunt me,
for I trust in your word.
43 Do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
for my hope is in your ordinances.
44 I will keep your law continually,
forever and ever.
45 I shall walk at liberty,
for I have sought your precepts.

46 I will also speak of your decrees before kings,
and shall not be put to shame;
47 I find my delight in your commandments,
because I love them.
48 I revere your commandments, which I love,
and I will meditate on your statutes.

49 Remember your word to your servant,
in which you have made me hope.
50 This is my comfort in my distress,
that your promise gives me life.
51 The arrogant utterly deride me,
but I do not turn away from your law.
52 When I think of your ordinances from of old,
I take comfort, O Lord.
53 Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked,
those who forsake your law.
54 Your statutes have been my songs wherever I make my home.
55 I remember your name in the night, O Lord,
and keep your law.
56 This blessing has fallen to me,
for I have kept your precepts.

57 The Lord is my portion;
I promise to keep your words.
58 I implore your favor with all my heart;
be gracious to me according to your promise.
59 When I think of your ways,
I turn my feet to your decrees;
60 I hurry and do not delay
to keep your commandments.
61 Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me,
I do not forget your law.
62 At midnight I rise to praise you,
because of your righteous ordinances.
63 I am a companion of all who fear you,
of those who keep your precepts.
64 The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love;
teach me your statutes.

65 You have dealt well with your servant,
O Lord, according to your word.
66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge,
for I believe in your commandments.
67 Before I was humbled I went astray,
but now I keep your word.
68 You are good and do good;
teach me your statutes.
69 The arrogant smear me with lies,
but with my whole heart I keep your precepts.
70 Their hearts are fat and gross,
but I delight in your law.
71 It is good for me that I was humbled,
so that I might learn your statutes.
72 The law of your mouth is better to me
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

73 Your hands have made and fashioned me;
give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.
74 Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice,
because I have hoped in your word.
75 I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right,
and that in faithfulness you have humbled me.
76 Let your steadfast love become my comfort
according to your promise to your servant.
77 Let your mercy come to me, that I may live;
for your law is my delight.
78 Let the arrogant be put to shame,
because they have subverted me with guile;
as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.
79 Let those who fear you turn to me,
so that they may know your decrees.
80 May my heart be blameless in your statutes,
so that I may not be put to shame.

81 My soul languishes for your salvation;
I hope in your word.
82 My eyes fail with watching for your promise;
I ask, "When will you comfort me?"

[83] For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke,
yet I have not forgotten your statutes.
[84] How long must your servant endure?
When will you judge those who persecute me?
[85] The arrogant have dug pitfalls for me;
they flout your law.
[86] All your commandments are enduring;
I am persecuted without cause; help me!
[87] They have almost made an end of me on earth;
but I have not forsaken your precepts.
[88] In your steadfast love spare my life,
so that I may keep the decrees of your mouth.

[89] The LORD exists forever;
your word is firmly fixed in heaven.
[90] Your faithfulness endures to all generations;
you have established the earth, and it stands fast.
[91] By your appointment they stand today,
for all things are your servants.
[92] If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my misery.
[93] I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have given me life.
[94] I am yours; save me,
for I have sought your precepts.
[95] The wicked lie in wait to destroy me,
but I consider your decrees.
[96] I have seen a limit to all perfection,
but your commandment is exceedingly broad.

[97] Oh, how I love your law!
It is my meditation all day long.
[98] Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is always with me.
[99] I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for your decrees are my meditation.
[100] I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.
[101] I hold back my feet from every evil way,
in order to keep your word.
[102] I do not turn away from your ordinances,
for you have taught me.

[103] How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
[104] Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.

[105] Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.
[106] I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
to observe your righteous ordinances.
[107] I am severely afflicted;
give me life, O LORD, according to your word.
[108] Accept my offerings of praise, O LORD,
and teach me your ordinances.
[109] I hold my life in my hand continually,
but I do not forget your law.
[110] The wicked have laid a snare for me,
but I do not stray from your precepts.
[111] Your decrees are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.
[112] I incline my heart to perform your statutes
forever, to the end.

[113] I hate the double-minded,
but I love your law.
[114] You are my hiding place and my shield;
I hope in your word.
[115] Go away from me, you evildoers,
that I may keep the commandments of my God.
[116] Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live,
and let me not be put to shame in my hope.
[117] Hold me up, that I may be safe
and have regard for your statutes continually.
[118] You spurn all who go astray from your statutes;
for their cunning is in vain.
[119] All the wicked of the earth you count as dross;
therefore I love your decrees.
[120] My flesh trembles for fear of you,
and I am afraid of your judgments.

[121] I have done what is just and right;
do not leave me to my oppressors.
[122] Guarantee your servant's well-being;
do not let the godless oppress me.

123 My eyes fail from watching for your
salvation,
and for the fulfillment of your righteous
promise.
124 Deal with your servant according to
your steadfast love,
and teach me your statutes.
125 I am your servant; give me
understanding,
so that I may know your decrees.
126 It is time for the LORD to act,
for your law has been broken.
127 Truly I love your commandments
more than gold, more than fine gold.
128 Truly I direct my steps by all your
precepts;[a]
I hate every false way.

129 Your decrees are wonderful;
therefore my soul keeps them.
130 The unfolding of your words gives light;
it imparts understanding to the simple.
131 With open mouth I pant,
because I long for your commandments.
132 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
as is your custom toward those who
love your name.
133 Keep my steps steady according to your
promise,
and never let iniquity have dominion
over me.
134 Redeem me from human oppression,
that I may keep your precepts.
135 Make your face shine upon your servant,
and teach me your statutes.
136 My eyes shed streams of tears
because your law is not kept.

137 You are righteous, O LORD,
and your judgments are right.
138 You have appointed your decrees in
righteousness
and in all faithfulness.
139 My zeal consumes me
because my foes forget your words.
140 Your promise is well tried,
and your servant loves it.
141 I am small and despised,
yet I do not forget your precepts.
142 Your righteousness is an everlasting
righteousness,
and your law is the truth.

143 Trouble and anguish have come upon me,
but your commandments are my
delight.
144 Your decrees are righteous forever;
give me understanding that I may live.

145 With my whole heart I cry; answer me,
O LORD.
I will keep your statutes.
146 I cry to you; save me,
that I may observe your decrees.
147 I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I put my hope in your words.
148 My eyes are awake before each watch of
the night,
that I may meditate on your promise.
149 In your steadfast love hear my voice;
O LORD, in your justice preserve my life.
150 Those who persecute me with evil
purpose draw near;
they are far from your law.
151 Yet you are near, O LORD,
and all your commandments are true.
152 Long ago I learned from your decrees
that you have established them forever.

153 Look on my misery and rescue me,
for I do not forget your law.
154 Plead my cause and redeem me;
give me life according to your promise.
155 Salvation is far from the wicked,
for they do not seek your statutes.
156 Great is your mercy, O LORD;
give me life according to your justice.
157 Many are my persecutors and my
adversaries,
yet I do not swerve from your decrees.
158 I look at the faithless with disgust,
because they do not keep your
commands.
159 Consider how I love your precepts;
preserve my life according to your
steadfast love.
160 The sum of your word is truth;
and every one of your righteous
ordinances endures forever.

161 Princes persecute me without cause,
but my heart stands in awe of your
words.

[a] Gk Jerome: Meaning of Heb uncertain

162 I rejoice at your word
like one who finds great spoil.
163 I hate and abhor falsehood,
but I love your law.
164 Seven times a day I praise you
for your righteous ordinances.
165 Great peace have those who love your law;
nothing can make them stumble.
166 I hope for your salvation, O LORD,
and I fulfill your commandments.
167 My soul keeps your decrees;
I love them exceedingly.
168 I keep your precepts and decrees,
for all my ways are before you.

169 Let my cry come before you, O LORD;
give me understanding according to your word.
170 Let my supplication come before you;
deliver me according to your promise.
171 My lips will pour forth praise,
because you teach me your statutes.
172 My tongue will sing of your promise,
for all your commandments are right.
173 Let your hand be ready to help me,
for I have chosen your precepts.
174 I long for your salvation, O LORD,
and your law is my delight.
175 Let me live that I may praise you,
and let your ordinances help me.
176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant,
for I do not forget your commandments.

Psalm 120

A Song of Ascents.

1 In my distress I cry to the LORD,
that he may answer me:
2 "Deliver me, O LORD,
from lying lips,
from a deceitful tongue."

3 What shall be given to you?
And what more shall be done to you,
you deceitful tongue?
4 A warrior's sharp arrows,
with glowing coals of the broom tree!

5 Woe is me, that I am an alien in Meshech,
that I must live among the tents of Kedar.
6 Too long have I had my dwelling
among those who hate peace.
7 I am for peace;
but when I speak,
they are for war.

Psalm 121

A Song of Ascents.

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
2 My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

Ps 120: Prayer for rescue from slanderers. This is the first of the collection of Songs of Ascents, Pss 120–134. The meaning of this superscription is debated; it may refer to the steplike parallelism in many of the poems (e.g., Ps 127.1: "unless the LORD builds the house . . . unless the LORD guards the city"), or to songs sung while going up to Jerusalem for pilgrimage. This psalm is an individual petition with the expected petitions for the punishment of enemies (vv. 3–4) and complaints (vv. 2–3,5–7), though without a statement of hope. The two complaints—slanderous attacks (vv. 2–4) and unwilling exile in a hostile country far from Jerusalem (vv. 5–7)—tell the same story with two metaphor systems (tongues as weapons, being in a distant, hostile land). Reputation, a community, and a home—all these have been taken from the psalmist. Others' words have become weapons (vv. 2–3,7) and the only rescue the psalmist can imagine is retaliation in military terms (vv. 3–4). **4:** *Broom,* a desert shrub. **5:** *Meshech . . . Kedar,* places far from Jerusalem in the remote north (southern Asia Minor [see Ezek 38.2]), and remote south (northern Arabia [Isa 21.13–17]), symbolizing distance. **7:** *Peace* (Heb "shalom"), perhaps a play on the name of Jerusalem.

Ps 121: Confidence in God's care. A declaration of trust shaped by tight, steplike parallelism: "not slumber" links vv. 3–4; "keep" links vv. 3–5 and 7–8. "Coming" in v. 8 echoes "come" in v. 1, concluding the poem. Perhaps this was recited by a traveler, even a pilgrim to Zion who asks the question, which he first answers (v. 2); the answer is then expanded upon by a priest conscious that the LORD dwells in Zion (vv. 3–8). God's careful protection is the dominant image; the LORD guides one's steps and does not slumber even when people sleep.

3 He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
4 He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

7 The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
8 The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

Psalm 122

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

1 I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the LORD!"
2 Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

3 Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together.
4 To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
5 For there the thrones for judgment were set up,
the thrones of the house of David.

6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
"May they prosper who love you.
7 Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers."
8 For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, "Peace be within you."
9 For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.

Psalm 123

A Song of Ascents.

1 To you I lift up my eyes,
O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
2 As the eyes of servants
look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a maid
to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to the LORD our God,
until he has mercy upon us.

3 Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us,
for we have had more than enough of contempt.

Superscription: *Song of Ascents,* see Ps 120n. **1:** *Hills,* probably those around Jerusalem. **2:** *Who made heaven and earth,* see Ps 124.8n. **5:** *The LORD is your keeper,* the exact center of the poem.

Ps 122: Longing to go to Zion and a prayer for its peace. A song of Zion celebrating the sacred city for its beautiful buildings (v. 3), worship in common (v. 4), and just legal decisions (v. 5). One can imagine a pilgrim, awed by the holiness of the place, uttering the prayer for the welfare of the city (vv. 6–9). **Superscription:** *Song of Ascents,* see Ps 120n. **1:** *Let us go,* Passover, Weeks (Pentecost), and Tabernacles were pilgrimage festivals, requiring heads of households to travel to Jerusalem and ascend its hills (Ex 23.17; 34.23; Deut 16.16). *The house of the LORD,* the Temple (also v. 9). **5:** *Thrones for judgment,* Jerusalem was the city of the Davidic king; *judgment* can refer to legal decisions as well as to ordinary governance. **6–7:** The other pilgrims are probably being addressed here. **6:** *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem,* alliterative in Hebrew ("sha'alu shalom yerushalaim") **9:** The concluding reference to the Temple forms an inclusio with v. 1, emphasizing that it is the presence of God in the Temple that makes Jerusalem such a significant and holy city.

Ps 123: A plea for divine mercy. A community petition, perhaps composed in the Second Temple period when the nation felt the indignity (v. 3) of being a small state in the vast Persian empire. Feeling like a powerless slave (NRSV "servant," v. 2), the community speaker ("I" in v. 1) feels constricted, repeating a plea for divine mercy three times. The psalmist's hope is not constricted, however, for the prayer is directed to the divine king "enthroned in the heavens" (v. 1). **Superscription:** *Song of Ascents,* see Ps 120n. **2:** *The eyes of servants,* the metaphor of looking expectantly to the LORD is developed through servants looking at their masters; contrasts are maximized—male and female, plural and singular—to express completeness: all look to you. Female images of God are very rare in the Bible (e.g., Isa 49.14–16), especially in Psalms, making the comparison of God to *mistress* noteworthy.

4 Our soul has had more than its fill
of the scorn of those who are at ease,
of the contempt of the proud.

Psalm 124

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

1 If it had not been the LORD who was on our side
—let Israel now say—
2 if it had not been the LORD who was on our side,
when our enemies attacked us,
3 then they would have swallowed us up alive,
when their anger was kindled against us;
4 then the flood would have swept us away,
the torrent would have gone over us;
5 then over us would have gone
the raging waters.

6 Blessed be the LORD,
who has not given us
as prey to their teeth.
7 We have escaped like a bird
from the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken,
and we have escaped.

8 Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 125

A Song of Ascents.

1 Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but abides forever.
2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the LORD surrounds his people,
from this time on and forevermore.
3 For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous,
so that the righteous might not stretch out their hands to do wrong.
4 Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,
and to those who are upright in their hearts.
5 But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways
the LORD will lead away with evildoers.
Peace be upon Israel!

Psalm 126

A Song of Ascents.

1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,[a]

[a] Or *brought back those who returned to Zion*

Ps 124: Giving thanks after a narrow escape. A community thanksgiving notable for its simple theme: give thanks for we would have died if the LORD had not rescued us. The simple theme is mirrored by a simple structure: the first two verses begin "If it had not been the LORD who was on our side" and the next three begin with "then" followed by a complex step-parallelism. Such step-parallelism, common in the Songs of Ascents (see Ps 120n.), adds drama and movement. **1:** *Let Israel now say,* the singer provides the community with the proper words to express their intense relief and gratitude. **3–5:** The metaphors of devouring beasts and waters flooding the earth are used for the enemies. **7:** *Like a bird,* a totally different metaphor for the rescued nation: a little bird flying upward to freedom from a broken trap, a perfect symbol of miraculous deliverance. **8:** *Who made heaven and earth,* a frequent postexilic epithet for God (see also Pss 115.15; 121.2; 146.6); here it emphasizes that God the powerful creator can still help Israel.

Ps 125: Prayer for Zion's purification from evildoers. A Zion song that, unlike most other such songs, prays that sinners be removed from its midst so it might truly be worthy of the LORD (vv. 4–5). Examples of such purifying judgments are Isa 1.21–28; 65; Zeph 3.11–13. Like other Songs of Ascents (Pss 122; 123; 124; 126; see Ps 120n.), Ps 125 has an opening statement (vv. 1–3) followed by a prayer (vv. 4–5). **2:** *The mountains,* majestic pillars of the universe, the hills surrounding Jerusalem are an apt symbol of the powerful and ever-present LORD present in Zion. **3:** *Scepter of wickedness:* A scepter wielded by an unjust ruler cannot rest (figuratively) on the land given to the righteous lest they be led to do wrong. **4:** *Do good . . . to those who are upright,* justice means upholding the righteous as well as punishing the wicked. **5:** *Peace be upon Israel!* is repeated later in this collection, in 128.6.

Ps 126: A prayer for the return of all the exiles. A community prayer for the return of all exiles and the restoration of Israel. Like other Songs of Ascents (Pss 122–125; see 120n.), it has an opening statement (vv. 1–3) developed into a prayer (vv. 4–5). It also is characterized by step-parallelism: "restore the fortunes," "then,"

we were like those who dream.
2 Then our mouth was filled with
laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for
them."
3 The LORD has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.
5 May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.
6 Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

Psalm 127

A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.

1 Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the LORD guards the city,
the guard keeps watch in vain.
2 It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives sleep to his beloved.[a]

3 Sons are indeed a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward.
4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the sons of one's youth.
5 Happy is the man who has
his quiver full of them.
He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the
gate.

Psalm 128

A Song of Ascents.

1 Happy is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways.
2 You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your
hands;

[a] Or *for he provides for his beloved during sleep*

"the LORD has done great things," "shouts of joy," and the verb "bearing/carrying." The psalmist regards the return of the exiles from Babylon, where they had been deported in the early sixth century BCE, as a past event, yet prays for the return of all in the spirit of grand promises such as Isa 60.10. The book of Ezra suggests that in fact few returned from Babylon, the return was a disappointment, and the hyperbolic prophecies of Isa 40–55 were not fulfilled. **4:** *Restore our fortunes,* picks up "restored the fortunes" (v. 1) and prays for its completion. *The watercourses in the Negeb*, riverbeds in the arid south, dry except when a rare rainstorm in an instant creates torrents sweeping away all in their path, a bold metaphor for sudden transformation of infertile land. The metaphor is ironic, since such watercourses are destructive, yet it sets the stage for the positive water and agricultural imagery in the following verses.

Ps 127: An instruction and prayer for the house. This psalm does not fit the usual categories. It is a declaration that one of God's greatest blessings is children (in that culture, sons), and is a companion piece to Ps 128. Step-parallelism highlights the words *unless*, *in vain,* and *sons.* Hebrew wordplay unites vv. 1–2 and 3–5: *builds* ("yibneh") and *those who build* ("bonayo") in v. 1, and *sons* ("banim") in vv. 3–4. Those same *sons* will protect the family head when he confronts enemies in the city gate, thereby linking v. 4 and v. 1cd (*guards the city)*. **Superscription:** *Song of Ascents,* see Ps 120n. Since it deals with building, the psalm is ascribed to King Solomon (see Ps 72n.), who built the First Temple (see also v. 2n.). **1:** *House,* can refer both to the Temple and to the dynasty, as well as to a household. **2:** *Beloved* (Heb "yedid") recalls Solomon's birth name Jedidiah ("yedidyah," 2 Sam 12.25). **3–5:** Asserting the uselessness of human effort alone to build a house and protect the city (vv. 1–2), vv. 3–5 declare that it is through sons that the LORD builds a house(hold) and protects the community. *The gate* was the setting for legal and commercial transactions; see, e.g., Ruth 4.1–12; Prov 30.23,31.

Ps 128: The blessings of the man who fears God. A companion piece to Ps 127, declaring that he "who fears the LORD" (v. 1) will flourish in his family (v. 3), national, and religious life (vv. 5–6). The three spheres were closely related, for the father was paterfamilias of the house, the king was paterfamilias of the house of Israel, and the LORD functioned as the patrimonial lord to whom Israel was bound through covenant. Correspondingly, the blessings include family (fruitful wife, many children), nation (prosperity of Jerusalem, seat of the dynasty), and God (font of blessings). Like several Songs of Ascents (see Ps 120n.), the poem has two parts: a statement of trust (vv. 1–4) and a prayer that builds on the statement (vv. 5–6). **1:** *Happy,* fortunate because of a quality

you shall be happy, and it shall go well
with you.

3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.
4 Thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.

5 The LORD bless you from Zion.
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.
6 May you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!

Psalm 129

A Song of Ascents.

1 "Often have they attacked me from my
youth"
—let Israel now say—
2 "often have they attacked me from my
youth,
yet they have not prevailed against me.
3 The plowers plowed on my back;
they made their furrows long."
4 The LORD is righteous;
he has cut the cords of the wicked.
5 May all who hate Zion
be put to shame and turned backward.
6 Let them be like the grass on the
housetops
that withers before it grows up,
7 with which reapers do not fill their
hands
or binders of sheaves their arms,
8 while those who pass by do not say,
"The blessing of the LORD be upon you!
We bless you in the name of the LORD!"

Psalm 130

A Song of Ascents.

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.
2 Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

3 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
4 But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
6 my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the
morning,
more than those who watch for the
morning.

possessed or a choice made. **3:** The verse both expresses and reinforces the status of the father as head of the household. **6:** *Peace be upon Israel!* see Ps 125.5n.

Ps 129: Prayer against Zion's enemies. A community petition that the LORD punish those who have persecuted Israel. As often in Songs of Ascents (see Ps 120n.), step-parallelism highlights key phrases, "often have they attacked me from my youth" and "blessing/bless." The complaint is not so much of present suffering but of relentless, unending sufferings "from my youth" (vv. 1,2), perhaps referring to Egyptian bondage (cf. Hos 2.15; Jer 2.2; Ezek 23.3). **3:** *Plowed on my back,* perhaps echoing Isa 51.23, which quotes Israel's tormentors in the exile. Thus the psalmist complains about the sufferings of being the LORD's people in the world, selecting two typical instances of suffering, one from the Exodus (vv. 1,2) and the other from the sixth-century BCE exile (v. 3). **6:** *Grass on the housetops,* weeds growing on mud-plastered roofs; cf. 2 Kings 19.26; Isa 37.27. **9:** Likely a standard blessing formula used in the postexilic period.

Ps 130: Waiting for the LORD's redemption. One of the seven penitential psalms in Christian tradition (Pss 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143), this individual petition seeks rescue "out of the depths" (v. 1), but seems even more intent on simply being heard by God. The usual statement of trust takes the form of resolutions to wait for the LORD (vv. 5–6) and the other common feature of petitions, teaching others to revere the LORD, appears in vv. 7–8. Verses 1–6 detail the psalmist's desire to be heard, and vv. 7–8 detail the psalmist's and Israel's waiting for the redeeming LORD (vv. 5–8). Its central theme is that humans are inherently sinful, and thus God must be inherently forgiving. **Superscription:** *Song of Ascents,* see Ps 120n. **1:** *Out of the depths,* Latin Vulgate, "de profundis"; God seems too distant to hear the psalmist's voice. **4:** At the middle of the psalm, the psalmist reminds God of his forgiving nature. **5–6:** *Wait,* repeated three times in step-parallelism; waiting expectantly is a form of prayer.

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.
8 It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Psalm 131

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

1 O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.
2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is
with me.[a]

3 O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time on and forevermore.

Psalm 132

A Song of Ascents.

1 O LORD, remember in David's favor
all the hardships he endured;
2 how he swore to the LORD
and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
3 "I will not enter my house
or get into my bed;
4 I will not give sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,
5 until I find a place for the LORD,
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of
Jacob."

6 We heard of it in Ephrathah;
we found it in the fields of Jaar.
7 "Let us go to his dwelling place;
let us worship at his footstool."

8 Rise up, O LORD, and go to your resting
place,
you and the ark of your might.
9 Let your priests be clothed with
righteousness,
and let your faithful shout for joy.
10 For your servant David's sake
do not turn away the face of your
anointed one.

11 The LORD swore to David a sure
oath
from which he will not turn back:
"One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.

[a] Or *my soul within me is like a weaned child*

Ps 131: Waiting for the LORD like a child. A declaration of trust with an extraordinary central metaphor: a weaned child, in that culture a three- to five-year-old. The poem is framed by its opening and closing occurrences of "the LORD" and its opening and closing statements, the first put negatively ("my heart is not lifted up") and the second put positively ("I have calmed and quieted my soul"). The three-fold denial in v. 1 and the doubled affirmation in v. 2 show deep feeling. V. 3, as in many other psalms, moves from the individual to the community, here inviting all Israel to imitate the singer's calm and trust. **Superscription:** *Song of Ascents,* see Ps 120n. **2:** *Like a weaned child with its mother,* the singer, like the child, has been nurtured daily and would not doubt the mother's further care. The image of God as female is the second in the Songs of Ascents; cf. Ps 125.2.

Ps 132: Bringing the LORD to reign in Zion. A royal psalm narrating in four stanzas David's desire to be affirmed as king and to transfer the ark-throne of the LORD to Zion. In vv. 1–5, David swears to provide a dwelling place for the LORD; in vv. 6–10, the ark is found and taken solemnly to Jerusalem; in vv. 11–13, the LORD swears to give David an eternal dynasty and ratifies the choice of Zion; vv. 14–18 affirm and expand these choices. Each of the four stanzas has five couplets and each contains the name "David"; the last line of each stanza is linked to the first line of the following stanza by word repetition ("find/found" in vv. 5 and 6; "David" in vv. 10 and 11; "desired" in vv. 13 and 14). In both structure and content, it is quite atypical of the Songs of Ascents (see Ps 120n.). **2–5:** An extensive elaboration of 2 Sam 7.2. **2:** *The Mighty One of Jacob* (also v. 5), see Gen 49.24; Isa 1.24; 49.26. **6–10:** The singer asks that the LORD allow the ark to be transferred to Zion (vv. 6–9) and that he support David (v. 10; cf. v. 1). **6–7:** A poetic version of the discovery of the ark of the covenant, the visible symbol of God's presence, and its transfer to Jerusalem; cf. 2 Sam 6. **6:** *Ephrathah,* near Bethlehem, in Judah. *Jaar,* a variant of Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam 7.1–2). **7:** The ark was the *footstool* component of the divine cherubim throne; cf. Ps 99.5. **8:** Cf. Num 10.35–36. **11–14:** The first request is answered in vv. 11–12 and the second in vv. 13–14. This is a paraphrase of 1 Sam 7.5–17, though that passage (like Ps 89.28–37) makes an unconditional promise of dynasty to David, while in this psalm (v. 12: *If your sons)* it is conditional. The choice of Zion, however, is presented as uncondi-

12 If your sons keep my covenant
and my decrees that I shall teach them,
their sons also, forevermore,
shall sit on your throne."

13 For the LORD has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his habitation:
14 "This is my resting place forever;
here I will reside, for I have desired it.
15 I will abundantly bless its provisions;
I will satisfy its poor with bread.
16 Its priests I will clothe with salvation,
and its faithful will shout for joy.
17 There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one.
18 His enemies I will clothe with disgrace,
but on him, his crown will gleam."

Psalm 133

A Song of Ascents.

1 How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
2 It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.
3 It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the LORD ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.

Psalm 134

A Song of Ascents.

1 Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD,
who stand by night in the house of the LORD!
2 Lift up your hands to the holy place,
and bless the LORD.

3 May the LORD, maker of heaven and earth,
bless you from Zion.

Psalm 135

1 Praise the LORD!
Praise the name of the LORD;
give praise, O servants of the LORD,
2 you that stand in the house of the LORD,
in the courts of the house of our God.
3 Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good;
sing to his name, for he is gracious.
4 For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself,
Israel as his own possession.

tional and eternal (v. 14: *This is my resting place forever*). **17:** *Horn,* a symbol of strength. *Lamp,* cf. 2 Sam 21.17.

Ps 133: The divine gift of unity. A song of Zion like several Songs of Ascents (Pss 122; 125; 128; 129; 132; see Ps 120n.). Like them, it has step-parallelism: "running down" three times in vv. 2–3 (NRSV "falls down" in v. 3). Like Ps 122, it celebrates Jerusalem as the place where the tribes of Israel happily gather on holy days. The famous first line of Ps 133 recalls Ps 122.4. The references to Aaron and Zion, although somewhat obscure, connect it to the previous psalm. **2:** *Oil* was used for washing in antiquity, and in the ordination rite of priests (Lev 8.12) and thus stirs thoughts of joyous Temple celebrations that bring the community together. The abundance of oil in the ceremonies evokes the plentiful dew of Mount Herman in the north that was so important in the agricultural life of Israel, especially in the dry summer months.

Ps 134: Come, bless the LORD. The final Song of Ascents (see Ps 120n.) is a blessing, similar to the blessings concluding each of the five books of the Psalms. It mentions themes prominent in the collection such as the Temple in Zion and its ceremonies. It is also similar to the opening and closing of the following psalm. The repeated invitation "Bless the LORD" and the response to it in v. 3 provides structure. **1:** It is uncertain exactly which group is meant by *all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD!* **2:** *Lift*ing *up . . . hands* was the position of prayer in antiquity.

Ps 135: Praise of the LORD who brought Israel to its land. A hymn praising the LORD the creator for defeating Pharaoh and the nations who held the land intended for Israel. It forms a pair with Ps 136. The psalm has drawn heavily on earlier tradition (e.g., v. 4 from Deut 7.6; v. 7 from Jer 10.13). These borrowings, late linguistic features, and the attack on images (vv. 15–18) were characteristic of postexilic times when the concept of authoritative scripture was developing. Ps 135 has a concentric or sandwich structure: "Praise the LORD / Blessed is the LORD" is the frame (vv. 1a, 21b), within which vv. 1b–4 match 19–20, and vv. 5–7 match 15–18; the center is vv. 8–14, which describe the LORD's great acts on behalf of Israel. **4:** *Possession,* Heb "segullah," something treasured and

5 For I know that the LORD is great;
our Lord is above all gods.
6 Whatever the LORD pleases he does,
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and all deeps.
7 He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth;
he makes lightnings for the rain
and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

8 He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
both human beings and animals;
9 he sent signs and wonders
into your midst, O Egypt,
against Pharaoh and all his servants.
10 He struck down many nations
and killed mighty kings—
11 Sihon, king of the Amorites,
and Og, king of Bashan,
and all the kingdoms of Canaan—
12 and gave their land as a heritage,
a heritage to his people Israel.

13 Your name, O LORD, endures forever,
your renown, O LORD, throughout all ages.
14 For the LORD will vindicate his people,
and have compassion on his servants.

15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.
16 They have mouths, but they do not speak;
they have eyes, but they do not see;
17 they have ears, but they do not hear,
and there is no breath in their mouths.
18 Those who make them
and all who trust them
shall become like them.

19 O house of Israel, bless the LORD!
O house of Aaron, bless the LORD!
20 O house of Levi, bless the LORD!
You that fear the LORD, bless the LORD!
21 Blessed be the LORD from Zion,
he who resides in Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 136

1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
2 O give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
3 O give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

4 who alone does great wonders,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
5 who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
6 who spread out the earth on the waters,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
7 who made the great lights,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

set apart ("stashed") by a god or a king. **5:** *I know,* a confession of faith like that in Ex 18.10–11. *Above all gods,* see Pss 29.1; 89.6–8. **6–7:** God's actions in nature are a preface to his actions in history; both illustrate God's immense power. *Storehouses,* cf. Ps 33.11; Job 38.22. **8–14:** The great founding act of Israel was the Exodus, here presented in two panels, as in Ps 114 linking Exodus and Conquest. The first concerns Egypt (i.e., the Exodus proper), and the second concerns the Transjordanian kings Sihon and Og, and the kingdoms of Canaan (i.e., the Conquest). **8:** See Ex 12.29. **9:** A reference to the plagues; see Ex 7.3; Deut 6.22. **11:** *Sihon* (king of the Amorites, in central Transjordan) and *Og* (king of Bashan, in northern Transjordan), see Num 21.21–35; Deut 2.24–3.7. **12:** *Heritage,* Canaan as a land that is to be inherited by successive generations of Israelites. **13:** A restatement of Ex 3.15. **15–18:** Cf. Ps 115.4–11. **19–20:** Similar to and likely based on Ps 118.3–4.

Ps 136: Praise of the LORD who created the world and Israel. A hymn telling of the creation of the world and of the Exodus and Conquest, the holy people designed to motivate Israel to give praise, and perhaps for God to remember Israel in its "low estate" (v. 23), when it is persecuted and suffers from famine (vv. 24–25). Pss 135 and 136 share vocabulary and a similar view of sacred history, though Ps 136 uniquely preserves the antiphonal reply "for his steadfast love endures forever" (26 times), which was frequently used in ritual in the postexilic period (see Ezra 3.11; 1 Chr 16.34; Ps 118.1–4). **1–3:** *Give thanks to the LORD/God* (vv. 1–3,26) opens and closes Ps 136 and also Ps 118 (vv. 1,29), suggesting that Pss 113–118 and 135–136 were meant to frame the Songs of Ascents (Pss 120–134). As the psalm progresses, each new stage of divine activity is introduced by the participle form of the verb (vv. 4a, 5a, 6a, 7a, 10a, 13a, 16a, and 17a). The psalm narrates a single series of divine actions, beginning

8 the sun to rule over the day,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
9 the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

10 who struck Egypt through their firstborn,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
11 and brought Israel out from among them,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
12 with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
13 who divided the Red Sea[a] in two,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
14 and made Israel pass through the midst of it,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
15 but overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,[a]
for his steadfast love endures forever;
16 who led his people through the wilderness,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
17 who struck down great kings,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
18 and killed famous kings,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
19 Sihon, king of the Amorites,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
20 and Og, king of Bashan,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
21 and gave their land as a heritage,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
22 a heritage to his servant Israel,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

23 It is he who remembered us in our low estate,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
24 and rescued us from our foes,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
25 who gives food to all flesh,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

26 O give thanks to the God of heaven,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Psalm 137

1 By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
2 On the willows[b] there
we hung up our harps.
3 For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

4 How could we sing the LORD's song
in a foreign land?
5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!
6 Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy.

[a] Or *Sea of Reeds*
[b] Or *poplars*

with creation and ending with deliverance and guidance into the land. **7–9:** Cf. Gen 1.16. **10–14:** Like Ps 135, Ps 136 sees the Exodus primarily as two events: liberation through defeating Pharaoh in Egypt (vv. 10–14) and the giving of land through overcoming kings in Transjordan and Canaan (vv. 17–22). **19–20:** *Sihon . . . and Og,* see Ps 135.11n. **23–25:** Changes in syntax and grammatical person (from third to second person) indicate the shift from recital of the past to speaking of Israel dwelling in the land of Canaan. In Canaan, God still wondrously protects and feeds the people.

Ps 137: A lament over destroyed Jerusalem. A community petition that complains vigorously of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. The first stanza (vv. 1–3) is framed by "Zion," the second (vv. 4–6) by "Jerusalem," and the third, a cry for justice against Edom and Babylon, the enemies responsible for the destruction. Although the last stanza is repugnant to modern readers and is often omitted in modern uses of the psalm, one must understand it as the cry of one singer who feels acutely the dishonor inflicted by an arrogant empire and its helpers. **1:** *Rivers,* irrigation canals. **3:** *Mirth,* to be understood as "songs of joy," abstract for concrete. Such songs (e.g., Pss 46; 48; 76; 84; 122) told of the grandeur of Zion where the LORD defeated enemy kings and dwelled in the midst of Israel. It is humiliating to sing them now, especially to people who laugh at them. **5:** Wordplay: the Heb word "shakaḥ" is a homonym for two different verbs, "to forget" and "to wither."

7 Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem's fall,
how they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!"
8 O daughter Babylon, you devastator![a]
Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!
9 Happy shall they be who take your little ones
and dash them against the rock!

Psalm 138

Of David.

1 I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
2 I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness;
for you have exalted your name and your word
above everything.[b]
3 On the day I called, you answered me,
you increased my strength of soul.[c]

4 All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD,
for they have heard the words of your mouth.
5 They shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the glory of the LORD.
6 For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.
7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;
you stretch out your hand,
and your right hand delivers me.
8 The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Psalm 139

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
3 You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
4 Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
5 You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

7 Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?

[a] Or *you who are devastated*
[b] Cn: Heb *you have exalted your word above all your name*
[c] Syr Compare Gk Tg: Heb *you made me arrogant in my soul with strength*

5–6: *Hand* and *tongue* are the means of making music. **7:** *Edom,* south of the Dead Sea, Edom was an ally in the Babylonian destruction of the city (Lam 4.21; Ezek 25.12–14; 36.5; Obad 8–14). **8:** *Babylon,* by poetic justice, it will suffer what it forced others to suffer.

Ps 138: From personal to universal thanks. An individual thanksgiving that gives thanks for a rescue (vv. 1–3), invites the kings of the world to offer their praise (vv. 4–6), and asserts confidence in the LORD's future protection (vv. 7–8). The first in a collection of David psalms (Pss 138–145). **1:** *Before the gods,* either the heavenly beings who serve in the court of the Most High God (see Ps 29.1n.), or the "gods" of the kings mentioned in vv. 4–6. **3:** Going beyond a conventional thanksgiving; the psalmist seems to give thanks for protection throughout life. **4–5:** So wonderful has been God's protection that kings, representing the nations, should offer praise (cf. Pss 67.3–5; 126.2). Exactly what is meant by *the words of your mouth* is unclear. **8:** As v. 3 sums up the psalmist's past relationship, this verse sums up the psalmist's hope that the relationship will continue.

Ps 139: A request for guidance from a powerful God. Often classed as an individual petition, this poem is unique, recording an individual's experience of God, first as an intimidating outsider (vv. 1–12), and then as a nurturing insider (vv. 13–18). Only after experiencing the range of God's power and beauty does the psalmist comprehend his or her own place and the malice of sin (vv. 19–24). **2:** *Sit down . . . rise up,* i.e., always; a merism,

8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
9 If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

13 For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
17 How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
18 I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end[a]—I am still with you.

19 O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—
20 those who speak of you maliciously,
and lift themselves up against you for evil![b]
21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
22 I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.
23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
24 See if there is any wicked[c] way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.[d]

Psalm 140

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

1 Deliver me, O LORD, from evildoers;
protect me from those who are violent,
2 who plan evil things in their minds
and stir up wars continually.
3 They make their tongue sharp as a snake's,
and under their lips is the venom of vipers. *Selah*

a Or *I awake*
b Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain
c Heb *hurtful*
d Or *the ancient way.* Compare Jer 6.16

in which the ends of a spectrum represent the entire spectrum. **9:** *The wings of the morning,* if I leave at dawn. **8:** *Sheol,* the underworld, the abode of the dead. **13:** *For it was you,* better "It was surely you." The perspective suddenly shifts from outside to inside as the psalmist realizes that the divine power that seemed to loom over life and constrict it (vv. 1–12) also gives life and shapes it in the maternal womb. Delicacy, growth, and "maternal" involvement are also God's work. **14:** *I am . . . wonderfully made,* the psalmist's own creation is as wondrous as the other great deeds of the LORD (e.g., Pss 65.5; 106.22; 145.6). **18:** *I am still with you,* no longer feeling alone and judged, the psalmist knows God is near and has been so from the beginning. God's great power and omnipresence (vv. 1–12) are complemented by nearness and personal care (vv. 13–18). **19–24:** The psalmist's solidarity with God, whom he asks for protection from his wicked enemies.

Ps 140: Petition, complaint, and hope. An individual petition that helps the sufferer move from pain to peaceful hope. NRSV correctly marks the stanzas: vv. 1–3,4–5,6–8,9–11,12–13 on the basis of their syntax, content, and word count. Vv. 1–3 and 4–5 are paired by their syntax, each beginning with similar petitions and descriptions of enemies ("Protect me from those who are violent, who plan . . ."), and each section ends with "Selah," which typically marks a disjunction (see Ps 3.2n.). Vv. 6–8 are distinct by their initial verb "I say" and assertions of loyalty to the LORD. Vv. 9–11 reverse the order of previous sections by beginning with a complaint (v. 9a) and ending with a petition (vv. 9b–11). The final section, vv. 12–13, the statement of trust, is marked by

[4] Guard me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked;
protect me from the violent
who have planned my downfall.
[5] The arrogant have hidden a trap for me,
and with cords they have spread a net,[a]
along the road they have set snares for me. *Selah*

[6] I say to the LORD, "You are my God;
give ear, O LORD, to the voice of my supplications."
[7] O LORD, my Lord, my strong deliverer,
you have covered my head in the day of battle.
[8] Do not grant, O LORD, the desires of the wicked;
do not further their evil plot.[b] *Selah*

[9] Those who surround me lift up their heads;[c]
let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them!
[10] Let burning coals fall on them!
Let them be flung into pits, no more to rise!
[11] Do not let the slanderer be established in the land;
let evil speedily hunt down the violent!

[12] I know that the LORD maintains the cause of the needy,
and executes justice for the poor.
[13] Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your name;
the upright shall live in your presence.

Psalm 141

A Psalm of David.

[1] I call upon you, O LORD; come quickly to me;
give ear to my voice when I call to you.
[2] Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,
and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.

[3] Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD;
keep watch over the door of my lips.
[4] Do not turn my heart to any evil,
to busy myself with wicked deeds
in company with those who work iniquity;
do not let me eat of their delicacies.

[5] Let the righteous strike me;
let the faithful correct me.
Never let the oil of the wicked anoint my head,[d]
for my prayer is continually[e] against their wicked deeds.
[6] When they are given over to those who shall condemn them,
then they shall learn that my words were pleasant.
[7] Like a rock that one breaks apart and shatters on the land,

[a] Or *they have spread cords as a net*
[b] Heb adds *they are exalted*
[c] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *those who surround me are uplifted in head*; Heb divides verses 8 and 9 differently
[d] Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[e] Cn: Heb *for continually and my prayer*

its initial verb *I know*. **6:** *I say,* shifts from petition to confession that the LORD has been loyal in the past. **7:** *You have covered my head,* you protected my head. **12:** *I know,* shifts back from petition to confession (as in v. 6), affirming God's fidelity as in Jon 4.2; Pss 20.6; 56.9; 135.5. The psalmist wants to be counted among the *needy* and *poor* whom the LORD always helps. **13:** *Surely* emphasizes the psalmist's triumphant hope that the righteous will be rescued.

Ps 141: Save me from my own evil impulses and from evil companions. An individual petition. Vv. 1–2 ask God to give special attention to the psalmist's plea, and vv. 3–4 beg to be kept from sin and evil companions (vv. 3–4). Vv. 5–7 are textually uncertain. Vv. 8–10 express total trust in God and hope of future protection. **2:** *As incense before you,* according to Ex 30.6, priests offered incense every morning, and according to Ex 29.38–42, the evening sacrifice was burned at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **3:** *My mouth,* in the Bible, the most expressive human organ is the mouth, for words reveal the inner self, the heart. Acknowledging the perversity of the human heart (cf. Jer 17.5; 23.17), the psalmist asks God to purify that vital organ (cf. Ps 51.10). **4:** *Eat of their*

so shall their bones be strewn at the
mouth of Sheol.[a]

8 But my eyes are turned toward you,
O God, my Lord;
in you I seek refuge; do not leave me
defenseless.
9 Keep me from the trap that they have laid
for me,
and from the snares of evildoers.
10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets,
while I alone escape.

Psalm 142

A Maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A Prayer.

1 With my voice I cry to the Lord;
with my voice I make supplication to
the Lord.
2 I pour out my complaint before him;
I tell my trouble before him.
3 When my spirit is faint,
you know my way.

In the path where I walk
they have hidden a trap for me.
4 Look on my right hand and see—
there is no one who takes notice
of me;
no refuge remains to me;
no one cares for me.

5 I cry to you, O Lord;
I say, "You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."
6 Give heed to my cry,
for I am brought very low.

Save me from my persecutors,
for they are too strong for me.
7 Bring me out of prison,
so that I may give thanks to your name.
The righteous will surround me,
for you will deal bountifully with me.

Psalm 143

A Psalm of David.

1 Hear my prayer, O Lord;
give ear to my supplications in your
faithfulness;
answer me in your righteousness.
2 Do not enter into judgment with your
servant,
for no one living is righteous before
you.

[a] Meaning of Heb of verses 5-7 is uncertain

delicacies, share their fellowship; cf. Ps 41.9. **7:** Some scholars suggest that the words *Like a rock that one breaks apart and shatters on the land* were accompanied with the ritual shattering of a rock. *Sheol,* the underworld, the abode of the dead. **10:** See Ps 7.15–16n.

Ps 142: Prayer of a friendless person for God's help. An individual petition that proceeds in two stages: the first stage (vv. 1–4) simply lists the peril and danger and declares there is no one else to turn to, and the second (vv. 5–7), with more confidence, calls God "my refuge, my portion in the land of the living" (v. 5) and promises praise. **Superscription:** *Maskil,* a technical term of uncertain significance. *In the cave,* most likely referring to the story of David fleeing from Saul (1 Sam 24). **4:** Loyal friends customarily stood at one's *right hand* (Ps 109.31), but no one is there for the psalmist. **5:** For the first time, the psalmist addresses God, using two impressive metaphors that illustrate God's ability to help at this time of crisis. *Refuge* is elsewhere parallel to mighty rock (Pss 62.7; 91.2; 94.22). *Portion* means a share in land (cf. Josh 18.5,6,9), which in that agrarian society was the source of food and clothing. *You are . . . my portion,* cf. Num 18.20. **7:** As a motivation for divine help, *so that I may give thanks to your name* is similar to Ps 86.12; these psalmists assume that God wants to be thanked, and this motivates divine behavior.

Ps 143: A plea that God would act out of fidelity to a loyal servant. An individual petition that requests divine attention and deliverance from enemies, insisting that no person is righteous before God. It is one of the seven penitential psalms in Christian tradition (Pss 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). Though old material has been recycled, Ps 143 is unique, establishing the idea that dealings with God must be based on divine faithfulness and righteousness (vv. 1–2, 10c–12), rather than on human actions. The poetic structure is not easy to determine. "I remember" in v. 5 changes the topic from petition to remembering past times. Verse 7 clearly begins a new section, for each verse in vv. 7–10a begins with a verb in the imperative mood. The final section, vv. 10b–12, is indicated by a shift in syntax: all the verbs except the last are placed at or near the end of the colon (unit). **5:**

3 For the enemy has pursued me,
crushing my life to the ground,
making me sit in darkness like those long dead.
4 Therefore my spirit faints within me;
my heart within me is appalled.

5 I remember the days of old,
I think about all your deeds,
I meditate on the works of your hands.
6 I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. *Selah*

7 Answer me quickly, O LORD;
my spirit fails.
Do not hide your face from me,
or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.
8 Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning,
for in you I put my trust.
Teach me the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.

9 Save me, O LORD, from my enemies;
I have fled to you for refuge.[a]
10 Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God.
Let your good spirit lead me
on a level path.

11 For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life.
In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.
12 In your steadfast love cut off my enemies,
and destroy all my adversaries,
for I am your servant.

Psalm 144

Of David.

1 Blessed be the LORD, my rock,
who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle;
2 my rock[b] and my fortress,
my stronghold and my deliverer,
my shield, in whom I take refuge,
who subdues the peoples[c] under me.

3 O LORD, what are human beings that you regard them,
or mortals that you think of them?
4 They are like a breath;
their days are like a passing shadow.

5 Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down;
touch the mountains so that they smoke.
6 Make the lightning flash and scatter them;
send out your arrows and rout them.
7 Stretch out your hand from on high;
set me free and rescue me from the mighty waters,
from the hand of aliens,
8 whose mouths speak lies,
and whose right hands are false.

9 I will sing a new song to you, O God;
upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you,

[a] One Heb Ms Gk: MT *to you I have hidden*
[b] With 18.2 and 2 Sam 22.2: Heb *my steadfast love*
[c] Heb Mss Syr Aquila Jerome: MT *my people*

The days of old refers to God's great actions in creation and history; see Ps 77.11–12. **6:** *Thirsts,* see Pss 42.1; 63.1. *Selah,* see Ps 3.2n. **7:** *Do not hide your face from me* refers to the idea that God on occasion, for no reason, ignores innocent supplicants. *The Pit,* a synonym for Sheol, the abode of the dead. **8:** *Morning* was an especially propitious time for a good judgment (see Ps 90.14). **11:** Since the psalmist is assuming a relationship with God that depends on divine mercy rather than fair judgment of human actions, he evokes God's name (reputation), as in some prophetic literature (e.g., Ezek 20.9) and some psalms (e.g., 23.3).

Ps 144: A royal request for divine assistance. A psalm in which an individual, possibly the king, asks for divine assistance and general peace and security. The manner in which this late psalm quotes other psalms makes it especially difficult to interpret. **1:** *Blessed be the LORD,* a formula for praising God for a beneficial act, in this case for equipping the supplicant, possibly to wage war. **3:** Cf. Ps 8.4; Job 7.17. **4:** Cf. Pss 102.11; 109.23. **5:** The beginning of the verse is taken from 2 Sam 22.10=Ps 18.10. **7:** *Mighty waters . . . the hand of aliens,* a mixture of cosmic language and historic language, the first referring to the waters of chaos and the second to the human

[10] the one who gives victory to kings,
who rescues his servant David.
[11] Rescue me from the cruel sword,
and deliver me from the hand of aliens,
whose mouths speak lies,
and whose right hands are false.

[12] May our sons in their youth
be like plants full grown,
our daughters like corner pillars,
cut for the building of a palace.
[13] May our barns be filled,
with produce of every kind;
may our sheep increase by thousands,
by tens of thousands in our fields,
[14] and may our cattle be heavy with young.
May there be no breach in the walls,[a] no exile,
and no cry of distress in our streets.

[15] Happy are the people to whom such blessings fall;
happy are the people whose God is the LORD.

Psalm 145

Praise. Of David.

[1] I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.
[2] Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name forever and ever.
[3] Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
his greatness is unsearchable.
[4] One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.
[5] On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.
[6] The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,
and I will declare your greatness.
[7] They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

[8] The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
[9] The LORD is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.

[10] All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD,
and all your faithful shall bless you.
[11] They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,
and tell of your power,
[12] to make known to all people your[b] mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of your[c] kingdom.

[a] Heb lacks *in the walls*
[b] Gk Jerome Syr: Heb *his*
[c] Heb *his*

agents of chaotic forces. **9–10:** King David was a famous poet and musician; see 1 Sam 16.18; 2 Sam 1.17. **12–15:** In an agrarian society, political peace and agricultural fertility go together; this psalm seems to assume a period of *distress*. This blessing that the psalmist requests would be suitable for a royal psalm since the king protects the land from invaders and blesses its fertility (cf. Ps 72.3–7).

Ps 145: Praise of the goodness of the LORD the king. A hymn ending the Davidic collection (Pss 138–145) and preparing for the hymns (Pss 146–150) that conclude the Psalms in a symphony of praise. This psalm too is an acrostic (see Ps 9–10n.), although the fourteenth letter ("nun") is missing in the Hebrew text. The singer's own voice is prominent: "I will extol you, my God" (vv. 1–2) and "My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD" (v. 21). In vv. 3–7, one generation tells the next of the acts of the LORD. V. 8, "the LORD is gracious and merciful," emphasizes the loving governance behind those acts (vv. 11–13) and the generosity toward human beings (vv. 10–20). The final verse (v. 21) reprises the first. **1:** *My . . . King,* most of the attributes mentioned in the psalm are connected to royalty; this initial reference also points forward to the four occurrences of *kingdom* in vv. 11–13. **2:** *Your name,* your presence. **4:** *One generation shall laud your works to another,* like the process of education in Ps 78.4 (cf. Ex 13.8,14; Deut 6.20). The children experience the effects of the mighty deeds of old that are constantly renewed. **5:** Glory, *splendor* and *majesty* are royal qualities that God as king possesses. **8:** Citation of the divine attributes in Ex 34.6. **11:** *Your kingdom,* occurs four times at the psalm's center in vv. 11–13. The contexts

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

The LORD is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.[a]
14 The LORD upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.
15 The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
16 You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.
17 The LORD is just in all his ways,
and kind in all his doings.
18 The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
19 He fulfills the desire of all who fear him;
he also hears their cry, and saves them.
20 The LORD watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.

21 My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

Psalm 146

1 Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD, O my soul!
2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

3 Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.

5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God,
6 who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
7 who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;
8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
9 The LORD watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

10 The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 147

1 Praise the LORD!
How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.

[a] These two lines supplied by Q Ms Gk Syr

make clear that the word means active rule, reigning, rather than static kingdom. **13:** Cf. Dan 4.3. **14–16:** Cf. Pss 104.27; 146.7–8. **17–18:** The word *all* appears twice in each of these verses, and another three times before the psalm concludes, for a total of seventeen times, emphasizing God's incomparability.

Ps 146: Praise of the LORD, savior of the downtrodden. A hymn, like Pss 147–150; together, these five psalms form the concluding doxology to the entire book of Psalms. Each of these hymns begins and ends with "Hallelujah" (traditionally translated "Praise the LORD"). The singer in Ps 146 engages in an inner dialogue ("O my soul!" v. 1b) before addressing the community in v. 3. Such reflection enables the singer to appreciate the vanity of human resources (vv. 3–4) and the compassion of the LORD's governance of the world (vv. 5–9). **5:** In contrast to placing one's hopes in human helpers, weak and mortal (vv. 3–4), the psalmist's hopes are in the LORD, already covenanted to Israel, the powerful and just creator and judge (vv. 6–7). **6:** *Who made heaven and earth,* see Ps 124.8n. **7–9:** All the LORD's actions here are rescues of beleaguered individuals, inspiring the psalmist to hope and praise for rescues in the future. **9:** God's justice is complete; *the way of the wicked he brings to ruin*, before their plans reach fruition. **10:** These aspects of God—creator, righteous judge—are related to his kingship, mentioned explicitly only in the final verse. This connects Pss 145 and 146.

Ps 147: Praise the LORD who restores Jerusalem. The second of the five hymns concluding the Psalms. Each of its three sections (vv. 1–6, 7–11, and 12–20) begins with an invitation in the imperative to praise the LORD and

2 The LORD builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.
3 He heals the brokenhearted,
and binds up their wounds.
4 He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.
5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.
6 The LORD lifts up the downtrodden;
he casts the wicked to the ground.

7 Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre.
8 He covers the heavens with clouds,
prepares rain for the earth,
makes grass grow on the hills.
9 He gives to the animals their food,
and to the young ravens when they cry.
10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;[a]
11 but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

12 Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!
13 For he strengthens the bars of your gates;
he blesses your children within you.
14 He grants peace[b] within your borders;
he fills you with the finest of wheat.
15 He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
16 He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.
17 He hurls down hail like crumbs—
who can stand before his cold?
18 He sends out his word, and melts them;
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.
19 He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.
20 He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his ordinances.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 148

1 Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!
2 Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!

3 Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!
4 Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

[a] Heb *legs of a person*
[b] Or *prosperity*

lists the divine acts for which praise is to be given. Vv. 1–6 cite the LORD's restoration of Jerusalem and gathering of exiles; vv. 7–11 cite the LORD's control of fertility for the nurture of humans, and vv. 12–20 cite the LORD's gift to Israel of his powerful word. Written for a scattered, malnourished, and demoralized people, most likely in the exilic or postexilic period, the psalm teaches them how to see divine purpose and give thanks. **4:** *He determines the number of the stars,* creating the heavens and rebuilding Zion are parallel works as in Isa 51.16, for God ensures that the original creation continues. The psalm interprets creation in the manner of Isaiah 40–55. **7–11:** Again directing creation to benefit Israel, God promises to restore the devastated lands to provide food. **7:** It is unclear if *thanksgiving* is a sacrifice or verbal thanks. **15:** *His word,* vv. 15–20 have seven terms for the word of God, some repeated: *command*, *word*, *statutes*, *ordinances*. **19–20:** The LORD spoke *his word* at Sinai and afterward. It made Israel distinctive then (Deut 4.5–8) and does so now, for God *has not dealt thus with any other nation* (v. 20a). The Torah here is recognized as Israel's special gift (*his ordinances*) from God.

Ps 148: Let heaven and earth praise the LORD. The third of the hymns that make up the doxology concluding the Psalms. More formal than the two preceding psalms, it employs the verb "to praise" twelve times, "LORD" four times, and "the name (of the LORD)" three times; it is neatly composed of two almost equal panels, vv. 1–6, introduced by "Praise the LORD from the heavens," and vv. 7–14, introduced by "Praise the LORD from the earth." Unlike other hymns, it focuses on the groups invited to praise, the inhabitants of heaven (vv. 1–4), and the inhabitants of earth (vv. 7–12). The divine acts meriting praise are mentioned only briefly: for the first group (vv. 5–6), the motive for giving praise is that the LORD created them and assigned them all their tasks); for the second (v. 13), the motive is that the LORD's name and glory are exalted above heaven and earth. **3:** This may

5 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.
6 He established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.[a]

7 Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
8 fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

9 Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
10 Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!

11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
12 Young men and women alike,
old and young together!

13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.
14 He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 149

1 Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.
2 Let Israel be glad in its Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.
3 Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.
4 For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with victory.
5 Let the faithful exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their couches.
6 Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,
7 to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,
8 to bind their kings with fetters
and their nobles with chains of iron,
9 to execute on them the judgment decreed.
This is glory for all his faithful ones.
Praise the LORD!

[a] Or *he set a law that cannot pass away*

recall other ancient cultures, in which astral bodies were deities. **5:** *For he commanded and they were created*, the psalm recognizes here and elsewhere the orderly Priestly story of creation by word in Gen 1, emphasizing that God continues to have this role in the universe. **7–8:** Somewhat autonomous deities in surrounding cultures, but under God's strict control here. **14:** *A horn for his people,* a symbol of strength.

Ps 149: Praise for Israel's task in the world. This fourth hymn in the series of five concluding the Psalms may disturb readers with its apparent call to vengeance against foreigners. Ps 149 develops the ideas of two psalms, the immediately preceding Ps 148, which singles out Israel as having a mission to proclaim the supremacy of the LORD to the nations (Ps 148.14), and Ps 2 (second from the beginning as Ps 149 is second from the last) in which the Davidic king is given authority to subdue the nations. Ps 149 transposes the royal role of Ps 2 to the entire nation (as in Isa 55.3). Ps 149 has two stanzas, vv. 1–4 and 5–9, the first inviting praise for the LORD's victory and second equating that praise metaphorically with weapons of war against the rebellious kings. **1:** *New song,* as in Isa 42.10 and other psalms (e.g., 33.3; 96.1; 98.1); here in response to creation, for Israel is *glad in its Maker* (v. 2); the act establishes the kingship of the LORD. In the previous psalm, God as king is creating the universe, while here he creates Israel. **5:** *On their couches,* symbolizes private (in contrast to public) expression as in Pss 4.4; 6.6; 36.4; Hos 7.14. **6:** Wielding a *sword* (and the other military actions in vv. 7–9) is a metaphor for proclaiming the LORD's sovereignty over kings and nations. The conjunction *and* makes the statements of v. 6a and 6b into a comparison: praising God is like wielding a sword. Israel has the task of embodying divine sovereignty and rendering it visible in the world. This unmasks false gods and invites the nations to join in God's praise and recognition of Israel. **7:** *Vengeance*, best rendered "retribution" for the kings' refusal to recognize their true suzerain. **9:** *Judgment decreed*, the ultimate triumph of the LORD.

Psalm 150

[1] Praise the LORD!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty firmament![a]
[2] Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

[3] Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
[4] Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!
[5] Praise him with clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
[6] Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD!

[a] Or *dome*

Ps 150: Climactic praise for the LORD's total sovereignty. The last of the final five hymns ending the Psalms. All the verses except the final one (v. 6) begin with the same verb in the imperative mood: *Praise him . . .* ! The verb occurs thirteen times in this final outburst of praise. Each of the first four books of the Psalms ends with a one- or two-verse doxology (Pss 41.13; 72.18–19; 89.52; 106.48), and it is fitting that a whole poem be the final doxology that notes where (v. 1), why (v. 2), and how (vv. 3–5) God should be praised. The invitatory extends throughout the whole poem; the poem is one long invitation to give praise. The group summoned to give praise, whom most psalms name almost immediately, is not revealed until the end, and it is vast: "everything that breathes" (v. 6). It goes beyond Israel to the entire human race, even to animals. The vast reach of the poem is a reminder that the call of one people is made in view of God's commitment to all.

PROVERBS

NAME AND PLACE IN CANON

In Jewish tradition the Proverbs of Solomon (Heb *mishle shelomoh*), shortened to Proverbs (*mishle*), is found in the third division of the canon, the Writings, grouped with Psalms and Job. The order of the books varies in early manuscripts, with Proverbs either after Psalms and Job or sandwiched between them. In Christian Bibles, Proverbs is one of the poetical and wisdom books and is placed between Psalms and Ecclesiastes.

AUTHORSHIP

The book of Proverbs is traditionally attributed to King Solomon (1.1; 10.1; 25.1), who ruled in the mid-tenth century BCE. Although he had a reputation for wisdom (1 Kings 4.29–34), it is unlikely that this is more than a general attribution to lend authority to the collection. The proverbs in the main section (10.1–22.16) have the character of folk wisdom, generated in an oral culture and passed down over many generations. At some point in the preexilic period they were collected and written down, a process that may have taken place at the hands of sages or scribes at the court of a king such as Solomon or Hezekiah (715–687 BCE), who is mentioned in 25.1. Later sections, such as chs 1–9, were probably added by scribes in the attempt to bring the collection together.

LITERARY HISTORY AND DATING

The book of Proverbs is a composite, consisting of several different collections dating from different periods and most likely with different authors. Proverbs 10.1–22.16 ("The proverbs of Solomon") is the main sayings collection and probably the oldest. Proverbs 25–29 forms a distinct unit of further proverbial material, with some repeats from the main collection (e.g., 21.9 = 25.24) and is dated to the time of Hezekiah. Proverbs 22.17–24.34 ("The words of the wise") is also a separate collection, which has close connections with an Egyptian wisdom text "The Instruction of Amenemope." This Egyptian text, which dates to ca. 1100 BCE, was copied by schoolchildren learning to read and write. Proverbs 22.17–23.11 especially may contain evidence of copying from "Amenemope," suggesting a school context for at least part of the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 25–29 ("Proverbs of Solomon that the officials of King Hezekiah of Judah copied") is another distinct unit, with some repetitions from the main collection (e.g., 21.9 = 25.24). There are two attributions at the end of the book, to Agur (30.1) and Lemuel (31.1), confirming that Proverbs is essentially a collection of collections. Finally, Proverbs 1–9, which opens the book, is often regarded as its latest part, with a more advanced theology and reflection on the nature of the wisdom, although it no doubt contains older material.

The complex stages of oral and literary development make it difficult to situate the book historically. The major sayings collections are likely preexilic, written down in the ninth or eighth century BCE. Other sections, such as chs 1–9, are later, probably from the exilic or early postexilic period, the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. The book as a whole probably was shaped in the early postexilic period.

CONTENTS AND INTERPRETATION

In chs 1–9, Proverbs presents itself as a handbook of the experience of others designed to offer insight and guidance to any, but especially the young, who seek its advice. The purpose of the book is set out in the introduction (1.2–7), which mentions learning about "wisdom" and "instruction." Instruction refers both to the educational role of this teaching and to a genre of literature paralleled in Egypt and found in Proverbs 1–9, that of instruction from father and mother to child (1.8; 4.1–4; 6.20–21). There is a moral dimension to this teaching, which includes learning about "righteousness, justice, and equity" (1.3, terms familiar from elsewhere in the Bible), accompanied by a highly practical purpose which includes "shrewdness, knowledge, and prudence" (1.4).

At the climax of the introduction to Proverbs is the idea that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (1.7; cf. 9.10; 15.33), a sentiment that introduces the divine dimension to the apparently human quest for wisdom. In this phrase is the recognition that at the beginning and end of the quest stands God, who is the author of all wisdom and understanding. Although only a part of this is accessible to human beings (16.1–2,9; 21.30), the person who seeks wisdom will truly gain insight by first fearing the Lord. Wisdom, personified as a woman in chs 1–9, is the mediator of that divine wisdom in her offer of its fruits to human beings (1.20–33;

8.4–5; 9.5–6), leading them on the path to "life" (3.16–18). The threat to the gaining of wisdom comes from her antithesis, the strange woman (chs 2; 5; 7; 9) whose path leads to death (2.18–19). Woman Wisdom is not just the embodiment of the kind of woman any young man might seek as a wife, but she is also described in cosmic terms as having been present with God during creation (8.22–31). This depiction underscores the underlying theological emphasis of the book of Proverbs on God as creator. God creates the world and sustains it; Woman Wisdom delights in all that he has made (8.30–31). God set up an order in the world and in society that can be known by human beings through wisdom, an order that helps them to lead a virtuous, moral, successful life. The rewards of wise living are longevity, offspring, wealth, the respect of others, and a fulfilled existence. This rather simplistic view of behaving well, and hence automatically reaping wisdom's rewards, was challenged by the later wisdom books of Job and Ecclesiastes, whose authors argue that experience teaches otherwise.

Although the NRSV translation "my child" opens up the audience to all seekers of wisdom, the Hebrew actually reads "my son," and the material is essentially addressed to men. They would have been the main recipients of education in the home and in schools. However, this orientation is balanced by reference to the mother's involvement in the teaching process (1.8; 6.20; cf. 31.1), by the figure of the ideal wife in 31.10–31, and by the two female figures of chs 1–9.

In the body of the book the main literary form for transmitting wisdom is the proverb (1.6), a pithy one- or two-line saying that conveys truth by the use of comparison between unlike phenomena or parallel thoughts that extend understanding. Proverbs occur in two main types: antithetical, and synonymous. Antithetical proverbs provide a contrast in the second line, while synonymous proverbs use the second line to extend the thought of the first. The former type predominates in chs 10–15, while the latter is more frequent from ch 16 onward. Interpreting proverbs is an intellectual discipline, not for the fool (26.7,9), and proverbs that are in tension or even contradictory are sometimes juxtaposed (e.g., 17.27–28; 26.4–5). For the most part the arrangement of proverbs seems random, however, although there are some small thematic clusters (e.g., 25.1–7), and there is some evidence of catchwords, plays on words, alliteration, and assonance in the Hebrew, which may have been aides to memorization. The binary form of proverbs and their perspective on the world are related. There is often a stress on opposite types: the righteous and the wicked, the rich and the poor, the diligent and the lazy, the patient person and the angry one, the restrained speaker and the gossip. This schematic organization of types is matched by the view of divine retribution, whereby the good are rewarded and the wicked punished.

The authors of texts such as Ecclesiasticus (Sirach; early second century BCE) and the Wisdom of Solomon (first century BCE or first century CE) were clearly familiar with Proverbs. For example, Sirach 24 rereads Proverbs 8 by identifying Wisdom with Torah; and the Wisdom of Solomon sees personified Wisdom as a hypostasis of the LORD (e.g., Wis 7.22; 8.2). Fragments of Proverbs were found at Qumran, and a few previously unknown wisdom texts seem to use its imagery (e.g., in 4Q185 the figure of Woman Folly from Prov 5; 7; 9 reappears). Proverbs seems to have influenced the rabbinic wisdom collection Pirqe Abot ("The sayings of the Fathers") in the Mishnah. Early Christians saw Jesus in part as a wisdom teacher (see especially the Q material in the Synoptic Gospels) and employed traditions about personified Wisdom to understand his identity and mission (e.g., Jn 1.1–18; Col 1.15–20). The letter of James in the New Testament contains wisdom instruction, and its author exalts "wisdom from above" (3.13–18), echoing portrayals of Woman Wisdom in Proverbs.

GUIDE TO READING

Despite its heterogeneous nature, the book of Proverbs can be read from beginning to end. The beginning and end of the book are formed by representations of two symbolically related women: personified wisdom (chs 1–9), and the "woman of substance" (31.10–31) who is a human embodiment of Woman Wisdom. Thus, the introductory chapters invite the reader to acquire wisdom. The body of the book provides sustained training in the perceptiveness and values needed to become wise. And the conclusion portrays the fulfillment of living in wisdom's household.

It is equally appropriate, however, to read each of the different collections independently, appreciating their distinct literary forms and tropes. Indeed, since there seldom seems to be an intentional order to the proverbial sayings, readers may also ponder them individually, thinking about life contexts to which they are applicable. The book of Proverbs invites multiple forms of reading.

Katharine Dell

1 The proverbs of Solomon son of David,
king of Israel:

[2] For learning about wisdom and instruction,
for understanding words of insight,
[3] for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;
[4] to teach shrewdness to the simple,
knowledge and prudence to the
young—
[5] let the wise also hear and gain in
learning,
and the discerning acquire skill,
[6] to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

[7] The fear of the LORD is the beginning of
knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

[8] Hear, my child, your father's instruction,
and do not reject your mother's teaching;
[9] for they are a fair garland for your head,
and pendants for your neck.

[10] My child, if sinners entice you,
do not consent.
[11] If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in
wait for blood;
let us wantonly ambush the innocent;
[12] like Sheol let us swallow them alive
and whole, like those who go down to
the Pit.
[13] We shall find all kinds of costly things;
we shall fill our houses with booty.
[14] Throw in your lot among us;
we will all have one purse"—
[15] my child, do not walk in their way,
keep your foot from their paths;
[16] for their feet run to evil,
and they hurry to shed blood.
[17] For in vain is the net baited
while the bird is looking on;
[18] yet they lie in wait—to kill themselves!
and set an ambush—for their own lives!
[19] Such is the end[a] of all who are greedy for
gain;

[a] Gk: Heb *are the ways*

1.1–7: Introduction. 1: *Solomon son of David, king of Israel,* King Solomon, successor to his father, David (see 1 Kings 1–11) ruled a united kingdom of Israel in the mid-tenth century BCE. He is famed for his wisdom (1 Kings 4) and his role as Temple builder (1 Kings 6). The latter role is not mentioned here, nor is there much mention of ritual activity in Proverbs. The attribution is probably pseudonymous, though Solomon may have coined some proverbs. His court is a possible setting for the collection of proverbial material and may have witnessed a time of cultural expansion and international connections. **2–6:** The instructional purpose of the book; see the Introduction. The address is to the *simple* and the *young,* but also to the *wise* who never cease the learning process. **6:** *A proverb* (see Introduction) . . . *figure,* an artistic saying or terse poem; *riddles,* enigmatic puzzles in brief, concentrated form that challenge the reader to find a solution. **7:** The divine dimension. *Fear of the LORD,* i.e., reverence and awe, is a prerequisite for wisdom (9.10; 15.33; 31.30b; Job 28.28; Ps 111.10; Sir 1.14). A contrast is made here between God-fearers and *fools*, unlike the usual contrast between wise person and fool. Fools have no desire to learn: they are not just unintelligent, but their conduct is unethical.

1.8–19: Parental warning against the enticements of sinners. 8: *My child* (lit. "my son") could reflect the home educational situation or represent a student in a teacher/pupil relationship in a school setting. *Father* and *mother* have parallel teaching roles within the family, at least in the child's early years. The term *teaching* (Heb "torah") refers here not to law specifically (as frequently elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible) but to wisdom instruction. It is significant that the same term can refer to covenant law, which also contains ethical instruction (as in Deuteronomy). Sirach 24 identifies the two. **9:** *Fair garland* and *pendants*, wisdom instruction is often associated with adornment (cf. the portrayal of Woman Wisdom as beautifully adorned and yet more valuable than costly jewels in ch 8). Here the metaphor means that the teaching should be an intimate part of one, as if worn on head and neck (cf. 3.22; 4.9; 6.21; 7.3; Job 31.35–36). **12:** *Sheol . . . the Pit*, the abode of the dead (see also 5.5; 7.27; 9.18; 23.27; 27.30; 30.16). Cf. the depiction in Ugaritic mythology of Mot, the god of death, with a vast throat stretching from earth to heaven into which he swallows his victims whole and alive. **15:** *Way . . . paths*, a frequently used image in Proverbs for a life course (e.g., 2.7–20; 3.6,17,23; 8.13,20; 11.5; 28.18). **16:** Cf. Isa 59.7. **17–18:** The citation of a popular proverb, using animal imagery: if a *bird* is watching, there is no use in setting a trap for it. Ironically, these wicked but stupid ambushers are both those who set the traps and those who fall into them.

it takes away the life of its
possessors.

20 Wisdom cries out in the street;
in the squares she raises her voice.
21 At the busiest corner she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she
speaks:
22 "How long, O simple ones, will you love
being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their
scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?
23 Give heed to my reproof;
I will pour out my thoughts to you;
I will make my words known to you.
24 Because I have called and you refused,
have stretched out my hand and no one
heeded,
25 and because you have ignored all my
counsel
and would have none of my reproof,
26 I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when panic strikes you,
27 when panic strikes you like a storm,
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon
you.
28 Then they will call upon me, but I will
not answer;
they will seek me diligently, but will not
find me.
29 Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the LORD,
30 would have none of my counsel,
and despised all my reproof,
31 therefore they shall eat the fruit of their
way
and be sated with their own devices.
32 For waywardness kills the simple,
and the complacency of fools destroys
them;
33 but those who listen to me will be secure
and will live at ease, without dread of
disaster."

2 My child, if you accept my words
and treasure up my commandments
within you,
2 making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to
understanding;
3 if you indeed cry out for insight,
and raise your voice for
understanding;
4 if you seek it like silver,
and search for it as for hidden
treasures—
5 then you will understand the fear of the
LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
6 For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and
understanding;
7 he stores up sound wisdom for the
upright;
he is a shield to those who walk
blamelessly,

1.20–33: Wisdom personified as a prophet. Wisdom speaks out in *the street, the squares, the busiest corner* and *the city gates*, i.e., the hub of city social life where legal decisions were often made (cf. Ruth 4.1). This portrayal has many similarities to the prophetic role (v. 22, cf. Jer 4.14,21; v. 24, cf. Isa 65.2,12; 66.4; Jer 7.13,24–27), and contains a strong, reproving tone (vv. 26–32). Listening and hearing are an important part of the pedagogical relationship in Proverbs. **22:** The *simple* (see 1.4) can learn if inclined to do so, but *scoffers* and *fools* are generally beyond hope of instruction (1.7; 15.12; 26.3). **23:** *Reproof* (Heb "tokaḥat"), also translated as "rebuke" and "admonition," is a central part of wisdom instruction (e.g., 1.23,30; 3.11; 5.12; 12.1; 15.5,31–32; 29.1). **32–33:** The contrast between not listening to Wisdom and heeding her is drawn sharply in these verses: life or death, security or disaster.

2.1–22: The advantages of following wisdom. This poem of 22 lines (the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet) expresses the benefits of following wisdom in contrast to succumbing to the enticements of a "strange woman" (see v. 16n.) who is *loose*. The conditional aspect of reaping wisdom's rewards is stressed by the keyword "if" and a strong note of warning is sounded. **2:** *Heart* denotes not only the seat of the emotions but also the rational center of a person (i.e., the mind; see 4.23). **4:** Wisdom is often compared to *silver* or treasure or other precious metals (3.14–16; 8.10–11,19; Job 28.15–19); the inference is that both are hard to find (hence *hidden treasures*; contrast 8.1–5 where wisdom's treasures are openly offered). **5:** *Fear of the LORD*, see 1.7n. **6:** Wisdom comes directly from the mouth of God (cf. Sir 24.3). Wis 7.25 makes the close identification of wisdom with God

[8] guarding the paths of justice
and preserving the way of his faithful ones.
[9] Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
[10] for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
[11] prudence will watch over you;
and understanding will guard you.
[12] It will save you from the way of evil,
from those who speak perversely,
[13] who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
[14] who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of evil;
[15] those whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways.

[16] You will be saved from the loose[a] woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth words,
[17] who forsakes the partner of her youth
and forgets her sacred covenant;
[18] for her way[b] leads down to death,
and her paths to the shades;
[19] those who go to her never come back,
nor do they regain the paths of life.

[20] Therefore walk in the way of the good,
and keep to the paths of the just.
[21] For the upright will abide in the land,
and the innocent will remain in it;
[22] but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

3 My child, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my commandments;
[2] for length of days and years of life
and abundant welfare they will give you.

[3] Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
[4] So you will find favor and good repute
in the sight of God and of people.

[5] Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
[6] In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
[7] Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.
[8] It will be a healing for your flesh
and a refreshment for your body.

[9] Honor the LORD with your substance
and with the first fruits of all your produce;
[10] then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with wine.

[a] Heb *strange*
[b] Cn: Heb *house*

into a metaphysical claim. **8:** *Paths* and *way* (see 1.15n.), a major theme of chs 1–9 is the choice between the path of wisdom, and hence of life, or the path of the loose woman that leads to death (see final summary in vv. 20–22). *Paths of justice* denotes the righteous behavior God requires. **9:** Here the qualities listed in 1.3 are reiterated and associated with *every good path* (i.e., a range of moral options one might take). **16:** *Loose,* Heb "zarah" (lit. "strange, foreign"); see 5.1–23n.; 7.5; 22.14. *Adulteress*, Heb "nokriyyah" (lit. "alien" or possibly "foreign" woman); see 5.20; 6.24; 7.5; 23.27. These are parallel terms for the same woman who is essentially "other" and clearly threatens marital life. **17:** *Sacred covenant* (lit. "covenant of her God") refers to marriage (cf. Mal 2.10–16). **18:** *The shades*, the dead. **19:** *Never come back,* the route to death is a one-way ticket (Job 7.9).

3.1–12: Instruction in the fear of the LORD. 2: *Length of days and years of life*, longevity is a gift of wisdom (3.18; 8.25; 9.11). **3:** Wisdom's values are to be worn around the *neck* as an amulet or ornament (cf. Deut 6.6–9 in reference to the commandments of God), i.e., intimately and personally appropriated and written *on the tablet of your heart*, i.e., memorized and internalized; cf. 3.22; 6.20–21; 7.3. **5:** *Do not rely on your own insight*, not an anti-intellectual admonition but a warning against arrogance. **7b:** See 1.7n. **8:** In addition to being associated with life (3.2n.) wisdom is also linked with health and healing (4.22; 12.18). **9–10:** *First fruits*, see Ex 23.19; Deut 26.1–11. This is one of the few references in Proverbs to ritual practices (see also 7.14n.). Honoring God in this

11 My child, do not despise the LORD's
discipline
or be weary of his reproof,
12 for the LORD reproves the one he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights.

13 Happy are those who find wisdom,
and those who get understanding,
14 for her income is better than silver,
and her revenue better than gold.
15 She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare
with her.
16 Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.
17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold
of her;
those who hold her fast are called
happy.

19 The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the
heavens;
20 by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.
21 My child, do not let these escape from
your sight:
keep sound wisdom and prudence,
22 and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.
23 Then you will walk on your way securely
and your foot will not stumble.
24 If you sit down,[a] you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be
sweet.
25 Do not be afraid of sudden panic,
or of the storm that strikes the wicked;
26 for the LORD will be your confidence
and will keep your foot from being
caught.

27 Do not withhold good from those to
whom it is due,[b]
when it is in your power to do it.
28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and
come again,
tomorrow I will give it"—when you
have it with you.
29 Do not plan harm against your
neighbor
who lives trustingly beside you.
30 Do not quarrel with anyone without
cause,
when no harm has been done to you.
31 Do not envy the violent
and do not choose any of their ways;
32 for the perverse are an abomination to
the LORD,
but the upright are in his confidence.

[a] Gk: Heb *lie down*
[b] Heb *from its owners*

way leads to future plentiful harvests. **11–12:** Suffering is understood here as a sign of God's discipline (Deut 8.5; Ps 94.12–13), a sentiment echoed by the friends of Job (e.g., Job 5.17–18).

3.13–20: A description of Wisdom. 13: *Happy are those* is a characteristic wisdom formula (8.34; 20.7; 28.14; 29.18; 31.28; Ps 1.1) often called a beatitude (cf. Mt 5.3–11; Lk 6.20–23). Beatitudes extol a virtue or experience by exclaiming how fortunate its possessor is. **14–15:** Cf. Job 28.15–19 and see 2.4n. Wisdom transcends all attempts at comparison. **16:** The imagery echoes that of the Egyptian goddess Ma'at, who represents right order. She was portrayed with the symbols of life in one hand and of wealth and prestige in the other. **18:** *Tree of life*, a symbol of longevity and well-being, but also a source of eternal life in Gen 2.9; 3.22, from which humans are barred. It is also an Egyptian motif, associated with the sycamore tree. **19–20:** This is the first association of wisdom with creation, expanded in 8.22–31. It shows the integral part that wisdom played in the divine creative act. *The deeps* represent the subterranean waters of chaos over which God has ultimate control (cf. Ps 29.10); the *dew*, the moisture from above that continues to sustain the earth.

3.21–35: An admonition, six prohibitions and three aphorisms on the fate of righteous and wicked. 22: Cf. v. 3n. **23–26:** Along with life (v. 2n.) and health (v. 8n.), security is one of the benefits of wisdom (e.g., 2.11–12; 4.12; 10.25). **25:** *Do not* is the language of prohibition, used six times in succession here in short, proverbial-type sentences. *Sudden panic* is usually associated with unexpected disaster (cf. 1.26–27). **27–28:** The language suggests that the issue concerns loans and their repayment (cf. 6.1–5; 11.24). **31:** Envy of *the violent* may spring from their seeming prosperity. **32:** *Abomination to the LORD* has a special meaning in Proverbs in reference of moral offenses that God finds loathsome, often concerning falsity in speech, thought, or words.

33 The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked,
but he blesses the abode of the righteous.
34 Toward the scorners he is scornful,
but to the humble he shows favor.
35 The wise will inherit honor,
but stubborn fools, disgrace.

4 Listen, children, to a father's instruction,
and be attentive, that you may gain[a] insight;
2 for I give you good precepts:
do not forsake my teaching.
3 When I was a son with my father,
tender, and my mother's favorite,
4 he taught me, and said to me,
"Let your heart hold fast my words;
keep my commandments, and live.
5 Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget,
nor turn away
from the words of my mouth.
6 Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;
love her, and she will guard you.
7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,
and whatever else you get, get insight.
8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;
she will honor you if you embrace her.
9 She will place on your head a fair garland;
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown."

10 Hear, my child, and accept my words,
that the years of your life may be many.
11 I have taught you the way of wisdom;
I have led you in the paths of uprightness.
12 When you walk, your step will not be hampered;
and if you run, you will not stumble.
13 Keep hold of instruction; do not let go;
guard her, for she is your life.
14 Do not enter the path of the wicked,
and do not walk in the way of evildoers.
15 Avoid it; do not go on it;
turn away from it and pass on.
16 For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong;
they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.
17 For they eat the bread of wickedness
and drink the wine of violence.
18 But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,
which shines brighter and brighter until full day.
19 The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;
they do not know what they stumble over.
20 My child, be attentive to my words;
incline your ear to my sayings.
21 Do not let them escape from your sight;
keep them within your heart.
22 For they are life to those who find them,
and healing to all their flesh.
23 Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.
24 Put away from you crooked speech,
and put devious talk far from you.
25 Let your eyes look directly forward,
and your gaze be straight before you.
26 Keep straight the path of your feet,
and all your ways will be sure.
27 Do not swerve to the right or to the left;
turn your foot away from evil.

[a] Heb *know*

4.1–9: Get wisdom, get insight. The father's instruction is now emphasized, and he recalls his instruction from his own father (v. 3). The message passed down from generation to generation remains the same: "Get wisdom, get insight" (vv. 5,7). **6–8:** *Love . . . embrace* suggests the metaphor of wisdom as the beloved wife (cf. 5.15–20; 7.4; 31.20–31). **9:** See 1.9n.

4.10–27: The two paths. The father's instruction continues with the image of two alternate paths: that of wisdom/righteousness or that of the wicked. It is a common image in the book (1.15–6; 2.7–20; 3.6,17,23; 5.5,21; 6.23; 7.25; 8.13,20,32; 9.6; 10.9; 11.5; 16.17; 28.6). **18–19:** In keeping with the binary way of understanding reality common in Proverbs, the ways of righteous and wicked are compared to light and dark. **24:** *Crooked speech* is the dark side of Proverbs' emphasis on proper speech and speech ethics. **25–27:** What is *straight* is an image of righteousness and correct conduct. The contrast between crooked and straight is a fundamental metaphor in the wisdom tradition (cf. 8.8–9).

5 My child, be attentive to my wisdom;
incline your ear to my understanding,
2 so that you may hold on to prudence,
and your lips may guard knowledge.
3 For the lips of a loose[a] woman drip honey,
and her speech is smoother than oil;
4 but in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
sharp as a two-edged sword.
5 Her feet go down to death;
her steps follow the path to Sheol.
6 She does not keep straight to the path of life;
her ways wander, and she does not know it.

7 And now, my child,[b] listen to me,
and do not depart from the words of my mouth.
8 Keep your way far from her,
and do not go near the door of her house;
9 or you will give your honor to others,
and your years to the merciless,
10 and strangers will take their fill of your wealth,
and your labors will go to the house of an alien;
11 and at the end of your life you will groan,
when your flesh and body are consumed,
12 and you say, "Oh, how I hated discipline,
and my heart despised reproof!
13 I did not listen to the voice of my teachers
or incline my ear to my instructors.
14 Now I am at the point of utter ruin
in the public assembly."

15 Drink water from your own cistern,
flowing water from your own well.
16 Should your springs be scattered abroad,
streams of water in the streets?
17 Let them be for yourself alone,
and not for sharing with strangers.
18 Let your fountain be blessed,
and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
May her breasts satisfy you at all times;
may you be intoxicated always by her love.
20 Why should you be intoxicated, my son,
by another woman
and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?
21 For human ways are under the eyes of the LORD,
and he examines all their paths.
22 The iniquities of the wicked ensnare them,
and they are caught in the toils of their sin.
23 They die for lack of discipline,
and because of their great folly they are lost.

6 My child, if you have given your pledge to your neighbor,
if you have bound yourself to another,[c]

[a] Heb *strange*
[b] Gk Vg: Heb *children*
[c] Or *a stranger*

5.1–23: Avoid the temptations of the loose woman. The antithesis to woman Wisdom is the loose or strange woman (Heb "zarah," vv. 3,20a) who is also described as an adulteress (Heb "nokriyyah," v. 20b; lit., "alien"). Since the Heb words literally mean "strange" and "foreign," the terminology may reflect the postexilic prohibition of marriage to foreign women (Ezra 9–10; Neh 13.23–30). See 2.16n. Probably a prostitute, she may also be another man's wife (7.19). She is aligned with the path of the wicked which is ultimately the path to death (v. 5). **3:** *Smooth speech,* like crooked talk (4.24n.) is another dark side of speech. **4:** *Wormwood,* an extremely bitter and poisonous herbal extract. **5:** *Sheol,* the abode of the dead; see 1.12n. **9:** Probably a reference to the young man's youthful, sexual vigor, wasted on a union that will bear no fruit. **10:** Probably a reference to loss of earnings: prostitutes are expensive! **14:** *Ruin in the public assembly,* public shame was a strong deterrent and was used for social control (cf. Ezra 10.8). **15–16:** *Water* is a euphemism for sexual activity (cf. Song 4.12b,15). *Your own cistern* and *well* refer to "your wife" as the source of that water. *Springs* refer to male sexual activity, which is wasted in this context, with water in the streets possibly indicating offspring outside marriage. **18–19:** Exhortation to rejoice in sexual intimacy with one's own wife. *Fountain* refers to her sexual organs, seen as the property of her husband, and possibly to the offspring that will ensue. Comparing a lover to *deer* or *doe,* cf. Song 2.9,17; 4.5. **22–23:** The metaphor represents humans as game animals and *folly* and *sin* as hidden, fatal traps that require *discipline* (Heb "musar"; 1.23n.) to avoid. Cf. 1.17–18.

2 you are snared by the utterance of your
lips,[a]
caught by the words of your mouth.
3 So do this, my child, and save yourself,
for you have come into your neighbor's
power:
go, hurry,[b] and plead with your
neighbor.
4 Give your eyes no sleep
and your eyelids no slumber;
5 save yourself like a gazelle from the
hunter,[c]
like a bird from the hand of the fowler.

6 Go to the ant, you lazybones;
consider its ways, and be wise.
7 Without having any chief
or officer or ruler,
8 it prepares its food in summer,
and gathers its sustenance in
harvest.
9 How long will you lie there, O lazybones?
When will you rise from your sleep?
10 A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest,
11 and poverty will come upon you like a
robber,
and want, like an armed warrior.

12 A scoundrel and a villain
goes around with crooked speech,
13 winking the eyes, shuffling the feet,
pointing the fingers,
14 with perverted mind devising evil,
continually sowing discord;
15 on such a one calamity will descend
suddenly;
in a moment, damage beyond repair.

16 There are six things that the LORD
hates,
seven that are an abomination to
him:
17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
18 a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that hurry to run to evil,
19 a lying witness who testifies falsely,
and one who sows discord in a
family.

20 My child, keep your father's
commandment,
and do not forsake your mother's
teaching.
21 Bind them upon your heart always;
tie them around your neck.
22 When you walk, they[d] will lead you;
when you lie down, they[d] will watch
over you;
and when you awake, they[d] will talk
with you.
23 For the commandment is a lamp and the
teaching a light,
and the reproofs of discipline are the
way of life,
24 to preserve you from the wife of
another,[e]
from the smooth tongue of the
adulteress.
25 Do not desire her beauty in your
heart,

[a] Cn Compare Gk Syr: Heb *the words of your mouth*
[b] Or *humble yourself*
[c] Cn: Heb *from the hand*
[d] Heb *it*
[e] Gk: MT *the evil woman*

6.1–19: Practical admonitions. 1–5: The dangers of acting as a surety or guarantor for another who is borrowing money because he is in debt (cf. 11.15; 17.18; 20.16; 22.26–27). **5:** See 5.22–23n. Admonition to extricate oneself, however debasing or difficult it may seem, suggests the seriousness of the danger. **6–11:** Didactic comparison with plants or animals is a common technique in wisdom literature (cf. 30.15–19; 24–31; see also Judg 9.5–8; 1 Kings 4.33–34). Laziness is a frequent topic in Proverbs (cf. 10.26; 18.9; 20.4,13; 22.13; 24.30–34; 26.13–16). **12–15:** Warnings against worthless and unsavory types. **12:** *Crooked speech* indicates deceitful talk. **13:** *Winking the eyes, shuffling the feet,* and *pointing the fingers* are forms of body language that indicate character. **16–19:** A numerical saying (cf. 30.18–21; Am 1.3–2.8) concerning seven vices disliked by the LORD. *Abomination*, see 3.32n.

6.20–35: The dangers of adultery. 20: *Father* and *mother,* see 1.8n. **21:** For the idea of binding and tying the teachings to the body, cf. 3.3n.; Deut 6.6–8. **23:** The importance of *discipline* is a favorite theme of the wise. **24–29:** The *wife of another*, i.e., an adulteress, is the subject here. A contrast is made (v. 26) between a mere

and do not let her capture you with her
eyelashes;
26 for a prostitute's fee is only a loaf of
bread,[a]
but the wife of another stalks a man's
very life.
27 Can fire be carried in the bosom
without burning one's clothes?
28 Or can one walk on hot coals
without scorching the feet?
29 So is he who sleeps with his neighbor's
wife;
no one who touches her will go
unpunished.
30 Thieves are not despised who steal only
to satisfy their appetite when they are
hungry.
31 Yet if they are caught, they will pay
sevenfold;
they will forfeit all the goods of their
house.
32 But he who commits adultery has no
sense;
he who does it destroys himself.
33 He will get wounds and dishonor,
and his disgrace will not be wiped away.
34 For jealousy arouses a husband's fury,
and he shows no restraint when he
takes revenge.
35 He will accept no compensation,
and refuses a bribe no matter how
great.

7 My child, keep my words
and store up my commandments with
you;
2 keep my commandments and live,
keep my teachings as the apple of your
eye;
3 bind them on your fingers,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
4 Say to wisdom, "You are my sister,"
and call insight your intimate friend,
5 that they may keep you from the loose[b]
woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth
words.

6 For at the window of my house
I looked out through my lattice,
7 and I saw among the simple ones,
I observed among the youths,
a young man without sense,
8 passing along the street near her corner,
taking the road to her house
9 in the twilight, in the evening,
at the time of night and darkness.

10 Then a woman comes toward him,
decked out like a prostitute, wily of
heart.[c]
11 She is loud and wayward;
her feet do not stay at home;
12 now in the street, now in the squares,
and at every corner she lies in wait.
13 She seizes him and kisses him,
and with impudent face she says to him:
14 "I had to offer sacrifices,
and today I have paid my vows;

[a] Cn Compare Gk Syr Vg Tg: Heb *for because of a harlot to a piece of bread*
[b] Heb *strange*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

prostitute and the social harm caused by succumbing to another man's wife. This suggests that the issue was not simply sexual conduct itself but the danger posed to the social system—including the system of inheritance—by adultery, which could result in uncertainty about paternity. **30–31:** The comparison is made with *thieves* for whom punishment for a seemingly minor crime is quite extensive, including forfeiture of property. **32–35:** For the adulterer retribution is worse and inescapable. In Lev 20.10 adultery is explicitly a capital crime; Proverbs seems to be aware of this (see v. 26), but focuses on the emotions and personal revenge of the cuckolded husband.

7.1–27: Another warning against the loose woman. 2–3: *Apple of your eye*, i.e., pupil. The triad of eye, fingers, and heart denotes the whole person. Binding on *fingers* and writing on the *tablet of your heart* recalls Deuteronomic exhortations about the law (Deut 6.8; 11.18); cf. 3.3n. **4:** *Sister* here does not imply kinship, but is a conventional term of endearment for the beloved (Song 4.9–12; 5.1). *Intimate friend* could be male or female, and the envisaged relationship is an egalitarian one. **6–23:** A seduction by the loose woman is described in narrative form. **10:** It is not clear whether the woman is a *prostitute* or simply dressed as one. Since she is married (vv. 19–20), the act is clearly one of adultery (cf. 6.24–35). **11:** *Loud*, also characteristic of folly in 9.13. **12:** *Street,*

15 so now I have come out to meet you,
to seek you eagerly, and I have found you!
16 I have decked my couch with coverings,
colored spreads of Egyptian linen;
17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh,
aloes, and cinnamon.
18 Come, let us take our fill of love until morning;
let us delight ourselves with love.
19 For my husband is not at home;
he has gone on a long journey.
20 He took a bag of money with him;
he will not come home until full moon."

21 With much seductive speech she persuades him;
with her smooth talk she compels him.
22 Right away he follows her,
and goes like an ox to the slaughter,
or bounds like a stag toward the trap[a]
23 until an arrow pierces its entrails.
He is like a bird rushing into a snare,
not knowing that it will cost him his life.

24 And now, my children, listen to me,
and be attentive to the words of my mouth.
25 Do not let your hearts turn aside to her ways;
do not stray into her paths.
26 For many are those she has laid low,
and numerous are her victims.
27 Her house is the way to Sheol,
going down to the chambers of death.

8 Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
2 On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
3 beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
4 "To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.
5 O simple ones, learn prudence;
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.
6 Hear, for I will speak noble things,
and from my lips will come what is right;
7 for my mouth will utter truth;
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
8 All the words of my mouth are righteous;
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.
9 They are all straight to one who understands
and right to those who find knowledge.
10 Take my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than choice gold;
11 for wisdom is better than jewels,
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.
12 I, wisdom, live with prudence,[b]
and I attain knowledge and discretion.
13 The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.

[a] Cn Compare Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

squares, corner, also spaces where wisdom is found in 1.20. The seductive woman is her polar opposite. **14:** The act of offering *sacrifices* and *vows* could suggest that this woman was participating in a non-Israelite fertility ritual, although an Israelite worship situation is possible (cf. Lev 7.16). **17:** *Myrrh* is an aromatic resin; *aloes and cinnamon* are expensive aromatic spices imported from Arabia and South Asia. Their mention creates an atmosphere of expensive lushness (cf. Song 1.13; 3.6; 4.6,11,14–16; 5.5,13). **21:** *Seductive speech* and *smooth talk* (cf. 2.16) are part of the repertoire of negative and dangerous forms of speech Proverbs warns against (see 4.24n.). **22–27:** The emphasis on the "strange woman's" inexorable pull toward death heightens her stark opposition to Wisdom, personified as a woman who offers life (3.16; 8.35–36). **27:** *Sheol*, the abode of the dead. Sheol was thought to have many chambers (probably seven), of which the "depths" was the worst (cf. 9.18).

8.1–36: Woman Wisdom calls (cf. Sir 24.1–34; Wis 7.22–8.1). This chapter contains the most profoundly developed depiction of Woman Wisdom in Proverbs, especially vv. 22–31 where she is aligned with God at creation. **1–5:** Public address of Wisdom to all people; cf. 1.20–33, and especially to those who need to learn *prudence* and *intelligence*. **6–9:** Woman Wisdom is the antithesis to the loose woman and her deceptively smooth speech (2.16; 5.3; 7.21): she utters *truth*, and *righteous* and *straight* words. **10–11:** See 2.4n. Wisdom is more valuable than any precious metals or jewels (cf. v. 19; 2.4; Job 28.15–19). **13:** *Fear of the LORD*, see 1.7n. The divine

Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate.
14 I have good advice and sound wisdom;
I have insight, I have strength.
15 By me kings reign,
and rulers decree what is just;
16 by me rulers rule,
and nobles, all who govern rightly.
17 I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.
18 Riches and honor are with me,
enduring wealth and prosperity.
19 My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.
20 I walk in the way of righteousness,
along the paths of justice,
21 endowing with wealth those who love me,
and filling their treasuries.
22 The LORD created me at the beginning[a] of his work,[b]
the first of his acts of long ago.
23 Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
25 Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—
26 when he had not yet made earth and fields,[c]
or the world's first bits of soil.
27 When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
28 when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
29 when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
30 then I was beside him, like a master worker;[d]
and I was daily his[e] delight,
rejoicing before him always,
31 rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

32 "And now, my children, listen to me:
happy are those who keep my ways.

[a] Or *me as the beginning*
[b] Heb *way*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Another reading is *little child*
[e] Gk: Heb lacks *his*

dimension is introduced and it is clear that this figure and God are at one in their opposition to *evil*. **15–16:** Her authority is that by which *kings reign*. For the close association between wisdom and just rule see also 16.10,13; 20.26,28; 25.1–7; 28.2–3,15–16; 29.2,12,14,16,26; 30.27–31; 31.1–9. Solomon's prayer for wisdom (1 Kings 3.7–9), his wise judgment (1 Kings 3.16–29), and administrative skill (1Kings 4) are narrative examples of this idea. **17:** In contrast to Job 28, which represents wisdom as hidden and elusive, Proverbs emphasizes the responsiveness and accessibility of wisdom to those who *love* and *seek* her; cf. Sir 4.14; Wis 6.12–13. The relationship is two-way: Wisdom will respond to *those who love me*. **18–21:** The word translated *prosperity* in v. 18 and *righteousness* in v. 20 is the same in Hebrew ("tsedaqah"). In general the wisdom tradition believed that moral well-being led to material well-being, though the "better than" sayings (e.g., 16.8) stress the superiority of moral values. **21:** Following Wisdom leads to material wealth; the wise are ever pragmatic. **22–31:** Wisdom recounts her origins as created by God before the physical world came into being and her role as God's helper in creation (cf. Sir 1.4; 24.9). God's ordered creation of the world is then described. **22:** *Created,* the proper translation of the Heb word ("qanah") is debated, but "acquired" (see 4.5,7) or "engendered, conceived" (Gen 4.1) are also possible. **23:** *Set up*, the same term used in Ps 2.6 for the Israelite king. **24–29:** An account of creation; cf. Gen 1; Job 28.25–27; 38.4–11; Ps 104.5–9. **30:** The word translated *master worker* or "little child" (see textual note *d*) suggests either an actual role for Wisdom in setting up the world or an image related to the sense of delight expressed in v. 30b. Comparisons have been made with the Egyptian goddess Ma'at, daughter of the creator god Amun Re, who is sometimes depicted as a little child playing on his lap. **32–36:** The *life . . . death* contrast is a fundamental trope in Proverbs. See 2.18–19; 3.2,16–18; 4.4,13; 5.5–6; 7.27; 9.11; 11.19; etc.

33 Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.
34 Happy is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.
35 For whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the LORD;
36 but those who miss me injure themselves;
all who hate me love death."

9 Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.
2 She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,
she has also set her table.
3 She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls
from the highest places in the town,
4 "You that are simple, turn in here!"
To those without sense she says,
5 "Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
6 Lay aside immaturity,[a] and live,
and walk in the way of insight."

7 Whoever corrects a scoffer wins abuse;
whoever rebukes the wicked gets hurt.
8 A scoffer who is rebuked will only hate you;
the wise, when rebuked, will love you.
9 Give instruction[b] to the wise, and they will become wiser still;
teach the righteous and they will gain in learning.
10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
11 For by me your days will be multiplied,
and years will be added to your life.
12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself;
if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

13 The foolish woman is loud;
she is ignorant and knows nothing.
14 She sits at the door of her house,
on a seat at the high places of the town,
15 calling to those who pass by,
who are going straight on their way,
16 "You who are simple, turn in here!"
And to those without sense she says,
17 "Stolen water is sweet,
and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."
18 But they do not know that the dead[c] are there,
that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

10 The proverbs of Solomon.
A wise child makes a glad father,
but a foolish child is a mother's grief.

a Or *simpleness*
b Heb lacks *instruction*
c Heb *shades*

9.1–18: Wisdom's banquet. The tension between invitations to a banquet given by Wisdom and one given by the *foolish woman* (v. 13; Heb "'eshet kesilut," a variant on the loose woman), is developed here, with a section of aphorisms contrasting *scoffers* with *the wise* dividing the two calls (vv. 7–12). **1:** *Seven pillars* may allude simply to the pillars of Wisdom's house or may suggest the pillars on which the earth was founded (Job 9.6; 26.11; Ps 75.3; cf. 8.29–30). The number seven denotes completeness. **2:** *Slaughtered her animals* and *mixed her wine* suggests a feast. Wine was sometimes mixed with spices (cf. Song 8.2). **4:** Her call is to the *simple,* meaning the untutored rather than simpletons, and to *those without sense,* who are clearly susceptible to seduction (cf. v. 16 in reference to the foolish woman's charms). **7–9:** Proverbs uses several different terms to contrast with the wise. The *scoffer* is characterized by arrogance and self-absorption (21.24) and hence lacks the receptiveness to correction displayed by the wise (cf. 13.1; 15.12). **10:** *Fear of the LORD*, see 1.7n. **17:** *Stolen water* is probably a euphemism for illicit sex (see 5.15–16n.). **18:** This woman's banquet (like that of the loose woman, 2.18–19; 5.5; 7.27) entertains the dead in the deepest chamber of *Sheol* (see 7.27n.).

10.1–22.16: Proverbial sayings. A long series of separate two-line sayings, sometimes connected by catchwords and thematic associations or forming small clusters. Most probably originally circulated orally. Opposites such as wise and foolish, righteous and wicked are frequently juxtaposed. Antithetic parallelism, in which the second line restates the first line in an opposite way, is used more frequently in chs 10–15, while 16–22 favor synonymous or synthetic parallelism, in which the second line repeats or extends the thought of the first. **10.1:**

2 Treasures gained by wickedness do not
profit,
but righteousness delivers from death.
3 The Lord does not let the righteous go
hungry,
but he thwarts the craving of the
wicked.
4 A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.
5 A child who gathers in summer is
prudent,
but a child who sleeps in harvest brings
shame.
6 Blessings are on the head of the
righteous,
but the mouth of the wicked conceals
violence.
7 The memory of the righteous is a
blessing,
but the name of the wicked will rot.
8 The wise of heart will heed
commandments,
but a babbling fool will come to ruin.
9 Whoever walks in integrity walks
securely,
but whoever follows perverse ways will
be found out.
10 Whoever winks the eye causes trouble,
but the one who rebukes boldly makes
peace.[a]
11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain
of life,
but the mouth of the wicked conceals
violence.
12 Hatred stirs up strife,
but love covers all offenses.
13 On the lips of one who has
understanding wisdom is found,
but a rod is for the back of one who
lacks sense.
14 The wise lay up knowledge,
but the babbling of a fool brings ruin
near.
15 The wealth of the rich is their fortress;
the poverty of the poor is their ruin.
16 The wage of the righteous leads to life,
the gain of the wicked to sin.
17 Whoever heeds instruction is on the
path to life,
but one who rejects a rebuke goes
astray.
18 Lying lips conceal hatred,
and whoever utters slander is a fool.
19 When words are many, transgression is
not lacking,
but the prudent are restrained in
speech.
20 The tongue of the righteous is choice
silver;
the mind of the wicked is of little worth.
21 The lips of the righteous feed many,
but fools die for lack of sense.
22 The blessing of the Lord makes rich,
and he adds no sorrow with it.[b]
23 Doing wrong is like sport to a fool,
but wise conduct is pleasure to a person
of understanding.
24 What the wicked dread will come upon
them,

[a] Gk: Heb *but a babbling fool will come to ruin*
[b] Or *and toil adds nothing to it*

Proverbs of Solomon, see Introduction. This proverb (cf. 15.20) links with the parental instruction found in chs 1–9 (e.g., 1.8) and acts as a bridge between the two sections. The effects of wise and foolish children is a frequent topic; cf. v. 5; 13.1; 15.20; 17.21,25; 19.13,26. **2–3:** Affirmation of the doctrine of divine retribution whereby the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished; cf. 3.2,16; 9.11; 10.27; 13.12. Other proverbs complicate this doctrine of divine reward and punishment (e.g., 15.16; 16.8), and the books of Job and Ecclesiastes challenge it profoundly. **4–5:** Laziness is a major theme of Proverbs: it leads directly to poverty, while diligence leads to material prosperity (cf. 6.6–11; 12.24,27; 13.4; 15.19). **7:** The remembering of one's *name* and deeds by children and community is a sign of blessing in biblical and Jewish tradition. **8:** Numerous proverbs in this chapter address the topic of the power of speech for good or ill. See vv. 11,13–14,18–21,31–32. The topic is prominent throughout Proverbs, e.g., 2.12; 12.13–14,17–19,22–23; 13.3; 22.14; 24.26; 25.15; 26.28; 31.26. **9:** *Walks . . . ways*, see 1.15n. **10:** He who *winks the eye* is not to be trusted as it suggests covert activity (cf. 6.13). **11:** Four things are said to be a fountain of life in this section: the teaching of the wise (13.14), revering the Lord (14.27), Wisdom (16.22), and here, the *mouth of the righteous*, i.e., their speech. **15–16:** Verse 15 is a neutral observation about the reality of *wealth* and *poverty*; v. 16 adds ethical comments on the *gain of the wicked*. Cf. 11.28 and 18.11, where the protection of wealth is declared to be illusory. **18–21:** See v. 8n. Different parts of the mouth are featured to reiter-

but the desire of the righteous will be granted.
25 When the tempest passes, the wicked are no more,
but the righteous are established forever.
26 Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes,
so are the lazy to their employers.
27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life,
but the years of the wicked will be short.
28 The hope of the righteous ends in gladness,
but the expectation of the wicked comes to nothing.
29 The way of the LORD is a stronghold for the upright,
but destruction for evildoers.
30 The righteous will never be removed,
but the wicked will not remain in the land.
31 The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom,
but the perverse tongue will be cut off.
32 The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable,
but the mouth of the wicked what is perverse.

11 A false balance is an abomination to the LORD,
but an accurate weight is his delight.
2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace;
but wisdom is with the humble.
3 The integrity of the upright guides them,
but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.
4 Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,
but righteousness delivers from death.
5 The righteousness of the blameless keeps their ways straight,
but the wicked fall by their own wickedness.
6 The righteousness of the upright saves them,
but the treacherous are taken captive by their schemes.
7 When the wicked die, their hope perishes,
and the expectation of the godless comes to nothing.
8 The righteous are delivered from trouble,
and the wicked get into it instead.
9 With their mouths the godless would destroy their neighbors,
but by knowledge the righteous are delivered.
10 When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices;
and when the wicked perish, there is jubilation.
11 By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,
but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.
12 Whoever belittles another lacks sense,
but an intelligent person remains silent.
13 A gossip goes about telling secrets,
but one who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a confidence.
14 Where there is no guidance, a nation[a] falls,
but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.
15 To guarantee loans for a stranger brings trouble,
but there is safety in refusing to do so.
16 A gracious woman gets honor,
but she who hates virtue is covered with shame.[b]

[a] Or *an army*
[b] Compare Gk Syr: Heb lacks *but she . . . shame*

ate the need for restraint. **24:** See vv. 2–3n. **25:** *The tempest* may represent divine judgment (e.g., 1.27; Isa 21.2; 29.6; 66.15; Ps 83.16). **26:** See 6.6–11n. **27:** *The fear of the LORD*, see 1.7n and 3.2n. **28–30:** See vv. 2–3n. **31–32:** See v. 8n. **11.1:** Weights and balances and their misuse is another recurring theme in Proverbs (see 16.11; 20.10,23; cf. Lev 19.35–37; Deut 25.13–16). **2:** The *humble* are closely associated with the wise (15.33; 18.12; 22.4; Sir 3.17–24). **3:** The wisdom tradition often observes how those who intend to harm others end up harming themselves; cf. v. 6; 26.27; Job 18.7–8. **5–11:** Here, in vv. 18–21, and throughout chs 10–15 the primary contrast terms are the *righteous* and the *wicked* rather than the wise and the foolish. Passages like 9.7–9 suggest that these terms are roughly equivalent. **12–13:** The issue of speech ethics is prominent in Proverbs; see 4.24n. and 5.21n. For gossip cf. 20.19; 25.9; Sir 27.16–17. **14:** *Counselors*, a possible role for the wise themselves. **15:** See 6.1–5n. **16–17:** In v. 16 the NRSV follows the Septuagint, which adds lines b and c. The original MT contrast may have been between the *gracious woman* who gets honor versus *aggressive* men who gain temporary riches. Taken in parallel with v.

The timid become destitute,[a]
but the aggressive gain riches.
17 Those who are kind reward themselves,
but the cruel do themselves harm.
18 The wicked earn no real gain,
but those who sow righteousness get a true reward.
19 Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live,
but whoever pursues evil will die.
20 Crooked minds are an abomination to the LORD,
but those of blameless ways are his delight.
21 Be assured, the wicked will not go unpunished,
but those who are righteous will escape.
22 Like a gold ring in a pig's snout
is a beautiful woman without good sense.
23 The desire of the righteous ends only in good;
the expectation of the wicked in wrath.
24 Some give freely, yet grow all the richer;
others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.
25 A generous person will be enriched,
and one who gives water will get water.
26 The people curse those who hold back grain,
but a blessing is on the head of those who sell it.
27 Whoever diligently seeks good seeks favor,
but evil comes to the one who searches for it.
28 Those who trust in their riches will wither,[b]
but the righteous will flourish like green leaves.
29 Those who trouble their households will inherit wind,
and the fool will be servant to the wise.
30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
but violence[c] takes lives away.
31 If the righteous are repaid on earth,
how much more the wicked and the sinner!

12 Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,
but those who hate to be rebuked are stupid.
2 The good obtain favor from the LORD,
but those who devise evil he condemns.
3 No one finds security by wickedness,
but the root of the righteous will never be moved.
4 A good wife is the crown of her husband,
but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.
5 The thoughts of the righteous are just;
the advice of the wicked is treacherous.
6 The words of the wicked are a deadly ambush,
but the speech of the upright delivers them.
7 The wicked are overthrown and are no more,
but the house of the righteous will stand.
8 One is commended for good sense,
but a perverse mind is despised.
9 Better to be despised and have a servant,

[a] Gk: Heb lacks *The timid . . . destitute*
[b] Cn: Heb *fall*
[c] Cn Compare Gk Syr: Heb *a wise man*

17 there is a pairing with the *kind* versus the *cruel.* **18–21:** See 10.2–3n. **22:** A single-line proverb containing a criticism of superficial esteem for beauty using an animal comparison. Ear and nose rings were common adornments of women. Such beauty is wasted on both a senseless woman and an unclean pig. **24–26:** These proverbs are linked thematically by the idea of generosity versus greed. The paradox of v. 24 is explained by v. 25: a *generous person* inspires others to reciprocate (cf. v. 17). In contrast, *those who hold back grain* in a time of scarcity, waiting for the price to rise, are cursed by the community. **27:** Seeking and finding that which you seek. Divine *favor* accompanies human favor (cf. 8.35; 12.2; 18.22). **28,30:** Plant imagery often describes the flourishing of *the righteous* (cf. v. 30; Pss 1.3; 92.12–14). **12.1:** The place of *discipline* (Heb "musar") is an important theme in Proverbs (cf. 3.11; 5.12; 13.1; 15.5) and is often paired with the concept of reproof. See 1.23n. **2–3:** See 10.2–3n. **4:** A preoccupation of the wise is the choice of a *good wife* for the young initiate in wisdom (cf. 18.22; 19.31–34; 31.10–31; Sir 26.1–3,13–18). **9:** The "better" saying conveys insight through paradox (cf. 15.16–17; 16.8,19,32; 17.1,12; 19.1,22; 21.9,19; 22.1; 25.24; 27.5,10c; 28.6; Eccl 4.6,13; 7.1–3; 9.4). *Despised* is a strong translation. The word can mean "of

than to be self-important and lack food.
10 The righteous know the needs of their animals,
but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.
11 Those who till their land will have plenty of food,
but those who follow worthless pursuits have no sense.
12 The wicked covet the proceeds of wickedness,[a]
but the root of the righteous bears fruit.
13 The evil are ensnared by the transgression of their lips,
but the righteous escape from trouble.
14 From the fruit of the mouth one is filled with good things,
and manual labor has its reward.
15 Fools think their own way is right,
but the wise listen to advice.
16 Fools show their anger at once,
but the prudent ignore an insult.
17 Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence,
but a false witness speaks deceitfully.
18 Rash words are like sword thrusts,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
19 Truthful lips endure forever,
but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.
20 Deceit is in the mind of those who plan evil,
but those who counsel peace have joy.
21 No harm happens to the righteous,
but the wicked are filled with trouble.
22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,
but those who act faithfully are his delight.
23 One who is clever conceals knowledge,
but the mind of a fool[b] broadcasts folly.
24 The hand of the diligent will rule,
while the lazy will be put to forced labor.
25 Anxiety weighs down the human heart,
but a good word cheers it up.
26 The righteous gives good advice to friends,[c]
but the way of the wicked leads astray.
27 The lazy do not roast[d] their game,
but the diligent obtain precious wealth.[d]
28 In the path of righteousness there is life,
in walking its path there is no death.

13 A wise child loves discipline,[e]
but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
2 From the fruit of their words good persons eat good things,
but the desire of the treacherous is for wrongdoing.
3 Those who guard their mouths preserve their lives;
those who open wide their lips come to ruin.
4 The appetite of the lazy craves, and gets nothing,
while the appetite of the diligent is richly supplied.
5 The righteous hate falsehood,
but the wicked act shamefully and disgracefully.
6 Righteousness guards one whose way is upright,
but sin overthrows the wicked.
7 Some pretend to be rich, yet have nothing;
others pretend to be poor, yet have great wealth.
8 Wealth is a ransom for a person's life,
but the poor get no threats.

[a] Or *covet the catch of the wicked*
[b] Heb *the heart of fools*
[c] Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[e] Cn: Heb *A wise child the discipline of his father*

little account." Cf. Sir 10.27. **10:** What passes for *mercy* with the *wicked* is in fact *cruel.* On the treatment of animals in the first half of the verse, cf. Deut 25.4. **11:** Cf. 28.19. **13–23:** A cluster of sayings on the theme of speech. See 10.8n.,18–21. **17:** The setting is the law court (cf. 14.25; 25.18). **24:** See 6.6–11n. **25–26:** Internal worry versus encouragement from outside (cf. 15.13; 17.22). **27:** Some are too *lazy* to cook their own food and so starve in the midst of abundance (cf. 13.4; 19.24). The *diligent* do not waste such opportunities: an exhortation to good use of resources. **13.1–3:** Care in listening and speaking is a frequent topic, e.g., vv. 13–14,18; see also 10.8n.,18–21n. **4:** Cf. v. 25. **7–8,11:** Paradoxes of wealth and poverty. The wise were against excessive wealth, but in favor of a moderate amount, enough to feel secure. Wealth can even put one in danger of criminal threats (v. 8). Get-rich-

9 The light of the righteous rejoices,
but the lamp of the wicked goes out.
10 By insolence the heedless make strife,
but wisdom is with those who take advice.
11 Wealth hastily gotten[a] will dwindle,
but those who gather little by little will increase it.
12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.
13 Those who despise the word bring destruction on themselves,
but those who respect the commandment will be rewarded.
14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life,
so that one may avoid the snares of death.
15 Good sense wins favor,
but the way of the faithless is their ruin.[b]
16 The clever do all things intelligently,
but the fool displays folly.
17 A bad messenger brings trouble,
but a faithful envoy, healing.
18 Poverty and disgrace are for the one who ignores instruction,
but one who heeds reproof is honored.
19 A desire realized is sweet to the soul,
but to turn away from evil is an abomination to fools.
20 Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise,
but the companion of fools suffers harm.
21 Misfortune pursues sinners,
but prosperity rewards the righteous.
22 The good leave an inheritance to their children's children,
but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous.
23 The field of the poor may yield much food,
but it is swept away through injustice.
24 Those who spare the rod hate their children,
but those who love them are diligent to discipline them.
25 The righteous have enough to satisfy their appetite,
but the belly of the wicked is empty.

14 The wise woman[c] builds her house,
but the foolish tears it down with her own hands.
2 Those who walk uprightly fear the LORD,
but one who is devious in conduct despises him.
3 The talk of fools is a rod for their backs,[d]
but the lips of the wise preserve them.
4 Where there are no oxen, there is no grain;
abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.
5 A faithful witness does not lie,
but a false witness breathes out lies.
6 A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain,

[a] Gk Vg: Heb *from vanity*
[b] Cn Compare Gk Syr Vg Tg: Heb *is enduring*
[c] Heb *Wisdom of women*
[d] Cn: Heb *a rod of pride*

quick schemes are not favored but rather careful saving (v. 11). **9:** *Light* and *lamp* are symbols of life (20.20; 24.20; Job 3.20; Ps 97.11). **12:** *Tree of life* is a symbol of the fullness of life, such as humans feel when a *desire* is *fulfilled* (cf. v. 19; 3.18n.; 11.30). **13:** *Word* and *commandment* refer to the advice of the sages, but came to be understood as references to the Torah (Deut 30.11–14; Sir 24.23; Bar 4.1). **14:** See 10.11n. **17:** The *messenger* played an important role (cf. 22.21; 25.13,25; 26.6). They were professionally trained to high standards and enjoyed a high status in society. **21–23:** *Prosperity* is the reward of the righteous according to the doctrine of retribution. This in turn enables those rewards to be passed down through the generations. That the wicked were sometimes prosperous troubled the sages, who resolved the contradiction by assuming that the sinner's wealth (only temporarily enjoyed) goes eventually to the righteous (cf. Job 27.13–17). **23:** Despite their belief in the doctrine of retribution, the sages recognized that not all poverty is caused by laziness or bad judgment but also by the *injustice* of the powerful. **24:** *Spare the rod* indicates the emphasis placed on necessary discipline (cf. 22.15; 23.13–14; 26.3; 29.15); the sages, however, were opposed to cruelty in any form. **14.1:** *The wise woman* could be Woman Wisdom who also *builds her house* (cf. 9.1) and the *foolish,* her antithesis (cf. 9.13–18), but the saying also alludes to the critical role of women in Israelite society; cf. 31.10–31. **2:** See 1.7n. Beginning with ch 14, proverbs that mention the *LORD* appear with increasing frequency. **4:** The ox was a highly valued work animal (cf. 12.10; Deut

but knowledge is easy for one who understands.
7 Leave the presence of a fool,
for there you do not find words of knowledge.
8 It is the wisdom of the clever to understand where they go,
but the folly of fools misleads.
9 Fools mock at the guilt offering,[a]
but the upright enjoy God's favor.
10 The heart knows its own bitterness,
and no stranger shares its joy.
11 The house of the wicked is destroyed,
but the tent of the upright flourishes.
12 There is a way that seems right to a person,
but its end is the way to death.[b]
13 Even in laughter the heart is sad,
and the end of joy is grief.
14 The perverse get what their ways deserve,
and the good, what their deeds deserve.[c]
15 The simple believe everything,
but the clever consider their steps.
16 The wise are cautious and turn away from evil,
but the fool throws off restraint and is careless.
17 One who is quick-tempered acts foolishly,
and the schemer is hated.
18 The simple are adorned with[d] folly,
but the clever are crowned with knowledge.
19 The evil bow down before the good,
the wicked at the gates of the righteous.
20 The poor are disliked even by their neighbors,
but the rich have many friends.
21 Those who despise their neighbors are sinners,
but happy are those who are kind to the poor.
22 Do they not err that plan evil?
Those who plan good find loyalty and faithfulness.
23 In all toil there is profit,
but mere talk leads only to poverty.
24 The crown of the wise is their wisdom,[e]
but folly is the garland[f] of fools.
25 A truthful witness saves lives,
but one who utters lies is a betrayer.
26 In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence,
and one's children will have a refuge.
27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,
so that one may avoid the snares of death.
28 The glory of a king is a multitude of people;
without people a prince is ruined.
29 Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding,
but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
30 A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh,
but passion makes the bones rot.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *ways of death*
[c] Cn: Heb *from upon him*
[d] Or *inherit*
[e] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *riches*
[f] Cn: Heb *is the folly*

22.10; 1 Kings 19.19). **6:** For the scoffer see 9.7–8a; 13.1; 15.12; 21.24; 22.10. **9:** *Guilt offering* (see Lev 5.14–19; 6.1–7) is an offering of reparation or compensation; cf. 3.9–10n. The *upright* have no need to do so as they already *enjoy God's favor*. **10:** *The heart* is the seat of the inner person and no one else can know its deepest emotions. **11:** See 10.2–3n. **12:** Choices can be misleading, and no one can predict the future (cf. 16.25). **13:** Cf. Eccl 7.2–4. **15–18:** A series of sayings about good and bad judgment. **17:** Anger, as an uncontrolled and anti–social expression of emotion, is often warned against; see v. 29; 16.32; 19.11; 27.4; 29.11,22. **19:** Righteousness is ultimately stronger than wickedness according to the doctrine of retribution. **20–21:** A social reality that connects wealth with popularity in v. 20 (cf. 19.4) is relativized by v. 21, which chastises the very *neighbor*s who ignore the poor (cf. v. 31; 17.5). **24:** The image of the *crown* is also used to describe a good wife (12.4), knowledge (14.18), old age (16.31), and grandchildren (17.6). **26–27:** *Fear of the* LORD, see 1.7n. *Fountain of life*, see 10.11n. **28:** A king needs his people; his glory does not simply rest on himself. **29–30:** Self-control is a key virtue in Proverbs (cf. 12.16; 15.18; 19.19; 20.3; 25.28). Here "passion" refers not to sexual passion but to strong, unregulated emotion of any sort. *Flesh*

31 Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,
but those who are kind to the needy honor him.
32 The wicked are overthrown by their evildoing,
but the righteous find a refuge in their integrity.[a]
33 Wisdom is at home in the mind of one who has understanding,
but it is not[b] known in the heart of fools.
34 Righteousness exalts a nation,
but sin is a reproach to any people.
35 A servant who deals wisely has the king's favor,
but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully.

15 A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.
2 The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge,[c]
but the mouths of fools pour out folly.
3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place,
keeping watch on the evil and the good.
4 A gentle tongue is a tree of life,
but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.
5 A fool despises a parent's instruction,
but the one who heeds admonition is prudent.
6 In the house of the righteous there is much treasure,
but trouble befalls the income of the wicked.
7 The lips of the wise spread knowledge;
not so the minds of fools.
8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
but the prayer of the upright is his delight.
9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
but he loves the one who pursues righteousness.
10 There is severe discipline for one who forsakes the way,
but one who hates a rebuke will die.
11 Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD,
how much more human hearts!
12 Scoffers do not like to be rebuked;
they will not go to the wise.
13 A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance,
but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.
14 The mind of one who has understanding seeks knowledge,
but the mouths of fools feed on folly.
15 All the days of the poor are hard,
but a cheerful heart has a continual feast.
16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD
than great treasure and trouble with it.
17 Better is a dinner of vegetables where love is
than a fatted ox and hatred with it.
18 Those who are hot-tempered stir up strife,
but those who are slow to anger calm contention.
19 The way of the lazy is overgrown with thorns,
but the path of the upright is a level highway.
20 A wise child makes a glad father,
but the foolish despise their mothers.
21 Folly is a joy to one who has no sense,
but a person of understanding walks straight ahead.
22 Without counsel, plans go wrong,
but with many advisers they succeed.

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *in their death*
[b] Gk Syr: Heb lacks *not*
[c] Cn: Heb *makes knowledge good*

and *bones* is a frequent fixed pair in the Bible (cf. Gen 2.23; Judg. 9.2; Job 2.5). **31:** Concern for *the poor* is a theme in the wisdom literature (cf. 17.5; 19.17; 21.13; 22.16; 28.3), in the prophets (e.g., Ezek 22.29; Am 4.1; Zech 7.10), and in the law (e.g., Ex 22.25–27; Lev 25.36–37; Deut 14.28–29; 24.19–22). **35:** Cf. 16.14; 19.12. **15.1–2,4,7:** A series of sayings on proper and improper speech. See 10.8n.,18–21; 12.13–23. **4:** *Tree of life,* see 13.12n. **5:** Cf. vv. 31–33. **8:** Sincerity in worship is essential (v. 29; 21.3,27). **11:** *Sheol,* the underworld; *Abaddon* (lit. "Destruction") is an alternative abode for the place and state of the dead (cf. 1.13; for 11b, cf. 20.27; Sir 42.18). **16–17:** Two *better . . . than* sayings that put in question the value of prosperity (cf. 16.8; 17.1). *A dinner of vegetables* is simple fare in contrast to the luxury of eating a *fatted ox*. **20:** See 10.1n. **22:** The importance of *counsel* and planning is a favorite theme

23 To make an apt answer is a joy to
anyone,
and a word in season, how good it is!
24 For the wise the path of life leads
upward,
in order to avoid Sheol below.
25 The Lord tears down the house of the
proud,
but maintains the widow's boundaries.
26 Evil plans are an abomination to the Lord,
but gracious words are pure.
27 Those who are greedy for unjust gain
make trouble for their households,
but those who hate bribes will live.
28 The mind of the righteous ponders how
to answer,
but the mouth of the wicked pours out
evil.
29 The Lord is far from the wicked,
but he hears the prayer of the righteous.
30 The light of the eyes rejoices the heart,
and good news refreshes the body.
31 The ear that heeds wholesome
admonition
will lodge among the wise.
32 Those who ignore instruction despise
themselves,
but those who heed admonition gain
understanding.
33 The fear of the Lord is instruction in
wisdom,
and humility goes before honor.

16 The plans of the mind belong to
mortals,
but the answer of the tongue is from
the Lord.
2 All one's ways may be pure in one's own
eyes,
but the Lord weighs the spirit.
3 Commit your work to the Lord,
and your plans will be established.
4 The Lord has made everything for its
purpose,
even the wicked for the day of
trouble.
5 All those who are arrogant are an
abomination to the Lord;
be assured, they will not go
unpunished.
6 By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is
atoned for,
and by the fear of the Lord one avoids
evil.
7 When the ways of people please the
Lord,
he causes even their enemies to be at
peace with them.
8 Better is a little with righteousness
than large income with injustice.
9 The human mind plans the way,
but the Lord directs the steps.
10 Inspired decisions are on the lips of a
king;
his mouth does not sin in judgment.
11 Honest balances and scales are the
Lord's;
all the weights in the bag are his work.
12 It is an abomination to kings to do evil,
for the throne is established by
righteousness.
13 Righteous lips are the delight of a king,
and he loves those who speak what is
right.

of the wise (cf. 11.14; 13.10; 19.20; 20.18); see v. 26 for its antithesis. **24:** Slight variant on the image of the path (see 1.15n.), this time leading *upward* (representing success) or downward (representing failure), because of Sheol's location *below* the earth's surface. **25:** Boundaries are the markers that indicate the extent of a field (see 22.28; Deut 19.4). Widows were lowly members of society and vulnerable to the encroachments of the powerful (cf. Job 24.2–3), hence the special divine protection (cf. 23.10–11). **27:** The wise oppose bribery in all its forms, cf. 17.23; Sir 20.29. **30:** *The light of the eyes* refers to the friendly looks of another person. A frequent theme in Proverbs is the effect others, and particularly their words, have upon a person (cf. 12.25). **31–33:** On the importance of *admonition* see 1.23n. The word translated *instruction* in vv. 5,32,33 (Heb "musar") is elsewhere often translated as discipline; see 12.1n. **33:** *Fear of the Lord*, see 1.7n. **16.1–7:** A string of proverbs that stress the role of the Lord in directing the lives both of individuals and of wider communities. **1:** Cf. vv. 9,33; 19.21; 20.24; 21.30–31. **2:** Cf. 17.3; 21.2; 24.12. **4:** *The day of trouble* is a day on which disaster strikes unexpectedly (cf. 11.4; Eccl 7.17). **6:** *Loyalty and faithfulness* indicate proper devotion (cf. 3.3; 14.22). *Fear of the Lord*, see 1.7n. **7:** God's pleasure leads not only to internal but also to external *peace* in relation to *enemies.* **8:** Cf. 15.16–17. **10–15:** A small group of sayings concerning the *king*. **10:** *Inspired decisions* indicate the king's wisdom and authority. Solomon embodies the

14 A king's wrath is a messenger of death,
and whoever is wise will appease it.
15 In the light of a king's face there is life,
and his favor is like the clouds that
bring the spring rain.
16 How much better to get wisdom than
gold!
To get understanding is to be chosen
rather than silver.
17 The highway of the upright avoids evil;
those who guard their way preserve
their lives.
18 Pride goes before destruction,
and a haughty spirit before a fall.
19 It is better to be of a lowly spirit among
the poor
than to divide the spoil with the proud.
20 Those who are attentive to a matter will
prosper,
and happy are those who trust in the
LORD.
21 The wise of heart is called perceptive,
and pleasant speech increases
persuasiveness.
22 Wisdom is a fountain of life to one who
has it,
but folly is the punishment of fools.
23 The mind of the wise makes their speech
judicious,
and adds persuasiveness to their lips.
24 Pleasant words are like a honeycomb,
sweetness to the soul and health to the
body.
25 Sometimes there is a way that seems to
be right,
but in the end it is the way to death.
26 The appetite of workers works for them;
their hunger urges them on.
27 Scoundrels concoct evil,
and their speech is like a scorching fire.
28 A perverse person spreads strife,
and a whisperer separates close friends.
29 The violent entice their neighbors,
and lead them in a way that is not good.
30 One who winks the eyes plans[a] perverse
things;
one who compresses the lips brings evil
to pass.
31 Gray hair is a crown of glory;
it is gained in a righteous life.
32 One who is slow to anger is better than
the mighty,
and one whose temper is controlled
than one who captures a city.
33 The lot is cast into the lap,
but the decision is the LORD's alone.

17 Better is a dry morsel with quiet
than a house full of feasting with strife.
2 A slave who deals wisely will rule over a
child who acts shamefully,
and will share the inheritance as one of
the family.
3 The crucible is for silver, and the furnace
is for gold,
but the LORD tests the heart.
4 An evildoer listens to wicked lips;
and a liar gives heed to a mischievous
tongue.
5 Those who mock the poor insult their
Maker;
those who are glad at calamity will not
go unpunished.
6 Grandchildren are the crown of the aged,
and the glory of children is their
parents.
7 Fine speech is not becoming to a fool;
still less is false speech to a ruler.[b]
8 A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of
those who give it;

[a] Gk Syr Vg Tg: Heb *to plan*
[b] Or *a noble person*

ideal of the wise king (1 Kings 3.7–9,16–28). **11:** Cf. 11.1n. **14:** *A king's wrath* is more dangerous than that of most people because of the power he wields, hence it is worth appeasing (cf. 19.12; 20.2). **15:** Royal favor is compared to the clouds that precede the spring rains and water the first crop, valued as a great blessing (cf. Hos 6.3). **16:** Cf. 8.10–11. **18–19:** Cf. 11.2. **21:** Perception and eloquence are keynotes of the wise person who needs at times to employ powers of persuasion (cf. v. 23). Contrast the persuasive seductiveness of the loose woman in 2.16; 5.3; 7.5. **22:** Cf. 10.11. **25:** =14.12. **26:** *Hunger* is appreciated as a motive for diligence; cf. Eccl 6.7. **27–30:** Four sayings on different types of wicked people and their dangerous speech; see 10.8n. **31:** The *gray hair* of the elderly is related to *righteous* living, which was thought to produce longevity (cf. 20.29; Sir 25.3–6). **32:** See 14.17n. **33:** Casting lots was a common way of making decisions. All destinies are in God's hands, even the direction in which *the lot* falls (cf. 18.18). **17.1:** Cf. 15.16–17. **2:** Wisdom can trump even the norms of law and custom (cf.

wherever they turn they prosper.
9 One who forgives an affront fosters
friendship,
but one who dwells on disputes will
alienate a friend.
10 A rebuke strikes deeper into a discerning
person
than a hundred blows into a fool.
11 Evil people seek only rebellion,
but a cruel messenger will be sent
against them.
12 Better to meet a she-bear robbed of its
cubs
than to confront a fool immersed in
folly.
13 Evil will not depart from the house
of one who returns evil for good.
14 The beginning of strife is like letting out
water;
so stop before the quarrel breaks out.
15 One who justifies the wicked and one
who condemns the righteous
are both alike an abomination to the
LORD.
16 Why should fools have a price in hand
to buy wisdom, when they have no
mind to learn?
17 A friend loves at all times,
and kinsfolk are born to share adversity.
18 It is senseless to give a pledge,
to become surety for a neighbor.
19 One who loves transgression loves strife;
one who builds a high threshold invites
broken bones.
20 The crooked of mind do not prosper,
and the perverse of tongue fall into
calamity.
21 The one who begets a fool gets trouble;
the parent of a fool has no joy.
22 A cheerful heart is a good medicine,
but a downcast spirit dries up the
bones.
23 The wicked accept a concealed bribe
to pervert the ways of justice.
24 The discerning person looks to wisdom,
but the eyes of a fool to the ends of the
earth.
25 Foolish children are a grief to their
father
and bitterness to her who bore them.
26 To impose a fine on the innocent is not
right,
or to flog the noble for their integrity.
27 One who spares words is
knowledgeable;
one who is cool in spirit has
understanding.
28 Even fools who keep silent are
considered wise;
when they close their lips, they are
deemed intelligent.

18 The one who lives alone is self-
indulgent,
showing contempt for all who have
sound judgment.[a]
2 A fool takes no pleasure in
understanding,
but only in expressing personal opinion.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

19.10b). **3:** A *crucible* tests for impurities in precious metal; cf. 27.21. **4:** See 14.7n. **5:** See 14.31n. **8:** An unusual observation that a bribe works. *In the eyes of,* however, indicates self-delusion. Gifts to curry favor were acceptable up to a point (cf. 18.16; 21.14), but elsewhere bribery is condemned (e.g., v. 23). **9:** Forgiveness in the context of friendship; cf. 10.12. **10:** *A hundred blows*, Deut 25.3 limits corporal punishment to forty blows. **12:** Meeting an angry *she-bear,* a popular image for great danger (cf. 2 Sam 17.8; 2 Kings 2.23–24; Hos 13.8). **14:** *Letting out water* from a dam, a process that is unstoppable once it is started. **15:** The abuse of judicial power was a serious concern; cf. v. 26; 19.5; Deut 25.1; Ex 23.2–3,6–8; Isa 5.23. **16:** *A price in hand* is probably a fee to the wise. Such fools think they can buy wisdom with no commitment to it. **17:** A true friend is supportive in good times and bad, while relatives are regarded as more of a safety net in adversity (cf. 18.24). **18:** Cf. 6.1–5; 11.15; 20.16. **19:** *Builds a high threshold*, a "cause and effect" proverb. Just as a badly built (and perhaps ostentatious) *threshold invites* problems, so deliberate provocation to transgression causes conflict. **20:** See 10.2–3n. **21:** See 10.1n. **22:** *Dries up the bones* indicates the withering effect of depression on the whole body. **23:** Cf. v. 8; 15.27. **24:** *The eyes of a fool* gaze on the distant horizon (and unattainable goals) when wisdom is actually close at hand and readily attainable to the *discerning person* (cf. Deut 30.11–15). **25:** See 10.1n. **26:** See v. 15n.; cf. 18.5; Deut 22.19; Am 2.8. **27–28:** A pair of proverbs on the ambiguity of silence, normally a virtue of the wise (cf. 10.19; 12.23; 13.3; 15.28), but paradoxically when fools keep silent they are *considered wise*. **18.1–2:** The loner and the *fool* have this in com-

3 When wickedness comes, contempt
comes also;
and with dishonor comes disgrace.
4 The words of the mouth are deep waters;
the fountain of wisdom is a gushing
stream.
5 It is not right to be partial to the guilty,
or to subvert the innocent in judgment.
6 A fool's lips bring strife,
and a fool's mouth invites a flogging.
7 The mouths of fools are their ruin,
and their lips a snare to themselves.
8 The words of a whisperer are like
delicious morsels;
they go down into the inner parts of the
body.
9 One who is slack in work
is close kin to a vandal.
10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower;
the righteous run into it and are safe.
11 The wealth of the rich is their strong city;
in their imagination it is like a high
wall.
12 Before destruction one's heart is
haughty,
but humility goes before honor.
13 If one gives answer before hearing,
it is folly and shame.
14 The human spirit will endure sickness;
but a broken spirit—who can bear?
15 An intelligent mind acquires knowledge,
and the ear of the wise seeks
knowledge.
16 A gift opens doors;
it gives access to the great.
17 The one who first states a case seems
right,
until the other comes and cross-
examines.
18 Casting the lot puts an end to disputes
and decides between powerful
contenders.
19 An ally offended is stronger than a city;[a]
such quarreling is like the bars of a
castle.
20 From the fruit of the mouth one's
stomach is satisfied;
the yield of the lips brings satisfaction.
21 Death and life are in the power of the
tongue,
and those who love it will eat its fruits.
22 He who finds a wife finds a good thing,
and obtains favor from the LORD.
23 The poor use entreaties,
but the rich answer roughly.
24 Some[b] friends play at friendship[c]
but a true friend sticks closer than one's
nearest kin.

19 Better the poor walking in integrity
than one perverse of speech who is a
fool.
2 Desire without knowledge is not good,
and one who moves too hurriedly
misses the way.
3 One's own folly leads to ruin,
yet the heart rages against the LORD.
4 Wealth brings many friends,
but the poor are left friendless.
5 A false witness will not go unpunished,
and a liar will not escape.

[a] Gk Syr Vg Tg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Syr Tg: Heb *A man of*
[c] Cn Compare Syr Vg Tg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

mon: neither listens to the other (cf. v. 13). The proverbs are linked by a wordplay in Hebrew. **4:** The *deep waters* of speech are ambiguous: words can be life-giving as wisdom is, but they can also be dangerous (cf. v. 21; 10.11). By the first alternative, the two lines would be synonymous, otherwise antithetical. **5:** See 17.15n.,26. **6–7:** The danger of foolish speech is a common topic; cf. 10.13–14; 12.13; 13.3; 14.3. **8:** *A whisperer* indicates a gossip for whom scandal is as essential as food (= 26.22). **9:** See 6.6–11n. **10–11:** A proverb pair containing a subtle contrast: *the name of the LORD* (a phrase found only here in Proverbs) offers security (cf. Pss 61.4; 124.8), but the protection of wealth may prove to be imaginary (cf. 10.15–16; 11.4). **12:** Cf. 11.2; 15.33; 16.18; 18.3. **14:** The contrast here is between physical illness and psychological depression. **16:** See 17.8n. **17–18:** Legal language suggesting that both sides of a case must be argued for a fair airing of opposing views, and that intractable disputes can only be settled by *casting the lot,* i.e., seeking God's decision; cf. 16.33. **19:** *An ally offended* is likely to build up impenetrable barriers due to a strong sense of personal injury. **20–21:** See 10.8n. **22:** See 12.4n. **23:** The powerlessness of the poor leads to *entreaties* while the rich can answer as they please; cf. Sir 13.3. **19.1:** A "better than" saying; cf. 15.16–17; 16.8; 17; 28.6. **2:** *Desire* indicates intention, and hurried movement represents action; hastiness in both creates problems. **3:** The fool is self-deceived and misplaces blame; cf. Sir 15.11–20. **4:** *The poor are*

6 Many seek the favor of the generous,
and everyone is a friend to a giver of gifts.
7 If the poor are hated even by their kin,
how much more are they shunned by their friends!
When they call after them, they are not there.[a]
8 To get wisdom is to love oneself;
to keep understanding is to prosper.
9 A false witness will not go unpunished,
and the liar will perish.
10 It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury,
much less for a slave to rule over princes.
11 Those with good sense are slow to anger,
and it is their glory to overlook an offense.
12 A king's anger is like the growling of a lion,
but his favor is like dew on the grass.
13 A stupid child is ruin to a father,
and a wife's quarreling is a continual dripping of rain.
14 House and wealth are inherited from parents,
but a prudent wife is from the Lord.
15 Laziness brings on deep sleep;
an idle person will suffer hunger.
16 Those who keep the commandment will live;
those who are heedless of their ways will die.
17 Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,
and will be repaid in full.
18 Discipline your children while there is hope;
do not set your heart on their destruction.
19 A violent tempered person will pay the penalty;
if you effect a rescue, you will only have to do it again.[a]
20 Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom for the future.
21 The human mind may devise many plans,
but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established.
22 What is desirable in a person is loyalty,
and it is better to be poor than a liar.
23 The fear of the Lord is life indeed;
filled with it one rests secure
and suffers no harm.
24 The lazy person buries a hand in the dish,
and will not even bring it back to the mouth.
25 Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence;
reprove the intelligent, and they will gain knowledge.
26 Those who do violence to their father
and chase away their mother
are children who cause shame and bring reproach.
27 Cease straying, my child, from the words of knowledge,
in order that you may hear instruction.
28 A worthless witness mocks at justice,
and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity.
29 Condemnation is ready for scoffers,
and flogging for the backs of fools.

20 Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler,
and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

left friendless, see vv. 6–7; see also 14.20n. **5:** A court of law is envisaged; the *false witness* is a frequent topic (see v. 9; 6.19; 12.17; 14.5,25; 21.28; 25.7c–10,18; Ex 20.16; 23.1–3,7). **10:** This proverb decries a situation that has gone topsy-turvy; cf. 30.21–22; Eccl 10.6–7. **11–12:** Warnings against anger; see 14–17n. For the *king's anger* and *favor* see 16.14–15n. **13–14:** A male perspective on domestic unhappiness contrasted with the advantages of a *prudent wife*; cf. 31.10–31. **16:** *The commandment* is that of any legitimate authority such as parent, sage, or the Lord (cf. 13.13). **17:** God's commitment to *the poor*, cf. 14.31n.; 17.5; 28.27. **18:** *While there is hope*, during childhood, when there is potential for change and lasting formation can occur. **19:** The *violent tempered person* will be punished. He is locked into a repeated pattern and cannot be helped. **20:** The value of seeking *advice* and *instruction* is a frequent topic; cf. 1.8; 4.1,10; 23.12. **21:** Cf. 16.1,9,33; 21.30–31. **22:** *Loyalty* has overtones of covenant loyalty. **23:** *Fear of the Lord*, see 1.7n. **24:** See 6.6–11n. **25:** See 9.7–9n.; 12.1n. **26:** See 10.1n. **20.1:** Warnings about the effects

2 The dread anger of a king is like the growling of a lion;
anyone who provokes him to anger forfeits life itself.
3 It is honorable to refrain from strife,
but every fool is quick to quarrel.
4 The lazy person does not plow in season;
harvest comes, and there is nothing to be found.
5 The purposes in the human mind are like deep water,
but the intelligent will draw them out.
6 Many proclaim themselves loyal,
but who can find one worthy of trust?
7 The righteous walk in integrity—
happy are the children who follow them!
8 A king who sits on the throne of judgment
winnows all evil with his eyes.
9 Who can say, "I have made my heart clean;
I am pure from my sin"?
10 Diverse weights and diverse measures
are both alike an abomination to the LORD.
11 Even children make themselves known by their acts,
by whether what they do is pure and right.
12 The hearing ear and the seeing eye—
the LORD has made them both.
13 Do not love sleep, or else you will come to poverty;
open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.
14 "Bad, bad," says the buyer,
then goes away and boasts.
15 There is gold, and abundance of costly stones;
but the lips informed by knowledge are a precious jewel.
16 Take the garment of one who has given surety for a stranger;
seize the pledge given as surety for foreigners.
17 Bread gained by deceit is sweet,
but afterward the mouth will be full of gravel.
18 Plans are established by taking advice;
wage war by following wise guidance.
19 A gossip reveals secrets;
therefore do not associate with a babbler.
20 If you curse father or mother,
your lamp will go out in utter darkness.
21 An estate quickly acquired in the beginning
will not be blessed in the end.
22 Do not say, "I will repay evil";
wait for the LORD, and he will help you.
23 Differing weights are an abomination to the LORD,
and false scales are not good.
24 All our steps are ordered by the LORD;
how then can we understand our own ways?
25 It is a snare for one to say rashly, "It is holy,"
and begin to reflect only after making a vow.
26 A wise king winnows the wicked,
and drives the wheel over them.
27 The human spirit is the lamp of the LORD,
searching every inmost part.
28 Loyalty and faithfulness preserve the king,
and his throne is upheld by righteousness.[a]
29 The glory of youths is their strength,

[a] Gk: Heb *loyalty*

of *wine* and *strong drink* (cf. 23.19–21,29–35; 31.4–5). **2:** See 16.14; 19.12. **3:** Cf. 17.14; 26.17. **4:** See 6.6–11n. **5:** The wise have good powers of expression of their deepest thoughts (see 18.4). **6:** *Many . . . but,* for similar contrasts see 18.24; 31.29. **8:** *Winnows* refers to spotting evil quickly, cf. v. 26. **9:** A rhetorical question anticipating the answer "no one." **10:** See. v. 23; 11.1n. **13:** See 6.6–11n. **14:** In the world of bartering, the *buyer* misleadingly downgrades the deal to get a good price and then is pleased with his deception. **15:** See 2.4n. **16:** See 6.1–5n.; 27.13. Giving *surety* for a stranger or foreigner, who has no ties to the community, is a high-risk strategy. **17:** The difference between initial appearance and later reality; cf. 9.17–18; Job 20.12–14. **18:** See 15.22n.; 24.5–6. **20:** *Lamp will go out*, see 13.9n. **21:** *Quickly acquired*, not properly inherited. On the insubstantiality of hastily or unjustly acquired wealth see 1.10–19; 10.2; 13.11; 15.6; 16.8; 28.8,20,22. **23:** See v. 10; 11.1n. **24:** On divine control see 16.1–7. **25:** See the reckless vow by Jephthah in Judg 11.29–40; cf. Eccl 5.4–6. **26:** *The wheel* is a threshing implement (v.

but the beauty of the aged is their gray hair.
30 Blows that wound cleanse away evil;
beatings make clean the innermost parts.

21 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD;
he turns it wherever he will.
2 All deeds are right in the sight of the doer,
but the LORD weighs the heart.
3 To do righteousness and justice
is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.
4 Haughty eyes and a proud heart—
the lamp of the wicked—are sin.
5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance,
but everyone who is hasty comes only to want.
6 The getting of treasures by a lying tongue
is a fleeting vapor and a snare[a] of death.
7 The violence of the wicked will sweep them away,
because they refuse to do what is just.
8 The way of the guilty is crooked,
but the conduct of the pure is right.
9 It is better to live in a corner of the housetop
than in a house shared with a contentious wife.
10 The souls of the wicked desire evil;
their neighbors find no mercy in their eyes.
11 When a scoffer is punished, the simple become wiser;
when the wise are instructed, they increase in knowledge.
12 The Righteous One observes the house of the wicked;
he casts the wicked down to ruin.
13 If you close your ear to the cry of the poor,
you will cry out and not be heard.
14 A gift in secret averts anger;
and a concealed bribe in the bosom, strong wrath.
15 When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous,
but dismay to evildoers.
16 Whoever wanders from the way of understanding
will rest in the assembly of the dead.
17 Whoever loves pleasure will suffer want;
whoever loves wine and oil will not be rich.
18 The wicked is a ransom for the righteous,
and the faithless for the upright.
19 It is better to live in a desert land
than with a contentious and fretful wife.
20 Precious treasure remains[b] in the house of the wise,
but the fool devours it.
21 Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness
will find life[c] and honor.
22 One wise person went up against a city of warriors
and brought down the stronghold in which they trusted.
23 To watch over mouth and tongue
is to keep out of trouble.
24 The proud, haughty person, named "Scoffer,"
acts with arrogant pride.
25 The craving of the lazy person is fatal,
for lazy hands refuse to labor.
26 All day long the wicked covet,[d]

[a] Gk: Heb *seekers*
[b] Gk: Heb *and oil*
[c] Gk: Heb *life and righteousness*
[d] Gk: Heb *all day long one covets covetously*

8; Isa 28.27). **27:** *Lamp,* cf. Zeph 1.12. See also 15.11; 16.2; 17.3. **29:** See 16.31. **30:** Corporal punishment as a component of pedagogical discipline (cf. 13.24; 22.15; 23.13–14). **21.1:** Even the mind of a king is controlled by God (cf. vv. 30–31). **2:** Cf. 16.2. **3:** Cf. 15.8,29; 28.9,13. The fixed pair *righteousness and justice* is common, cf. 18.19; Ps 33.5; and in the opposite order, Isa 56.1; Job 37.28; 2 Sam 8.15. **6:** See 20.21n. **9:** *Contentious wife*, cf. v. 19; 25.24; 27.15; cf. also 19.13–14n. *In a corner of the housetop*, either an exposed roof or a small room constructed on top of the house (2 Kings 4.10). **12:** *Righteous One,* i.e., God (cf. 13.6; 19.3) **13:** See 14.31n. **14:** See 17.8n. **16:** *Assembly of the dead,* i.e., Sheol. **17:** Warnings against overindulgence and overspending; cf. v. 20. **18:** *Ransom* indicates compensation money. The righteous are rescued from danger and the wicked put in their place (cf. 11.8; 13.8). **19:** Cf. 19.13–14; 21.9. **22:** *One wise person* indicates a narrative about the superiority of wisdom to military strength; cf.

but the righteous give and do not hold back.
27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination;
how much more when brought with evil intent.
28 A false witness will perish,
but a good listener will testify successfully.
29 The wicked put on a bold face,
but the upright give thought to[a] their ways.
30 No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel,
can avail against the LORD.
31 The horse is made ready for the day of battle,
but the victory belongs to the LORD.

22 A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
and favor is better than silver or gold.
2 The rich and the poor have this in common:
the LORD is the maker of them all.
3 The clever see danger and hide;
but the simple go on, and suffer for it.
4 The reward for humility and fear of the LORD
is riches and honor and life.
5 Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse;
the cautious will keep far from them.
6 Train children in the right way,
and when old, they will not stray.
7 The rich rule over the poor,
and the borrower is the slave of the lender.
8 Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity,
and the rod of anger will fail.
9 Those who are generous are blessed,
for they share their bread with the poor.
10 Drive out a scoffer, and strife goes out;
quarreling and abuse will cease.
11 Those who love a pure heart and are gracious in speech
will have the king as a friend.
12 The eyes of the LORD keep watch over knowledge,
but he overthrows the words of the faithless.
13 The lazy person says, "There is a lion outside!
I shall be killed in the streets!"
14 The mouth of a loose[b] woman is a deep pit;
he with whom the LORD is angry falls into it.
15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a boy,
but the rod of discipline drives it far away.
16 Oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself,
and giving to the rich, will lead only to loss.

17 The words of the wise:

Incline your ear and hear my words,[c]
and apply your mind to my teaching;
18 for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,

[a] Another reading is *establish*
[b] Heb *strange*
[c] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise*

Eccl 9.13–16. **23:** See 10.8n. **24:** See 9.7–9n. **25:** See 6.6–11n. **27:** See v. 3n. **28:** See 19.5n. **30–31:** The limitations of human wisdom in the light of the LORD's superior wisdom; cf. 16.1–7. **22.1:** A *good name*, cf. Sir 41.12–13. **2:** God as creator of all, cf. 29.13; Job 31.13–15. **4–5:** See 10.2–3n. **7:** *The borrower is the slave*, debt slavery was a reality in ancient Israel (Ex 21.2–7; 2 Kings 4.1; Neh 5.5). **9:** See 14.31n. **13:** The excuses of the lazy person become more and more ridiculous; cf. 26.13. **14:** Cf. 2.16–17; 7.10–27. **15:** See 13.24n. **16:** *Giving to the rich* probably indicates attempting to bribe them.

22.17–24.22: The words of the wise. This section forms a separate collection. Its sayings are formulated as longer units of second-person address, like the Egyptian "Instruction" genre and like Proverbs 1–9. The unit 22.17–23.11 has close similarities to the Egyptian "Instruction of Amenemope" (ca. 1100 BCE; see *CoS* 1.115–22), a text widely copied in schools. 22.17–23.11 follows its topical order and hence could be a Hebrew adaptation of the Egyptian text. **22.17–21**: A prologue, patterned after the introduction to "Amenemope." **20:** *Thirty sayings* may correspond to the thirty sections of "Amenemope," though it is not clear how there are thirty units in this

if all of them are ready on your lips.
19 So that your trust may be in the LORD,
I have made them known to you
today—yes, to you.
20 Have I not written for you thirty sayings
of admonition and knowledge,
21 to show you what is right and true,
so that you may give a true answer to
those who sent you?

22 Do not rob the poor because they are
poor,
or crush the afflicted at the gate;
23 for the LORD pleads their cause
and despoils of life those who despoil
them.
24 Make no friends with those given to
anger,
and do not associate with hotheads,
25 or you may learn their ways
and entangle yourself in a snare.
26 Do not be one of those who give pledges,
who become surety for debts.
27 If you have nothing with which to pay,
why should your bed be taken from
under you?
28 Do not remove the ancient landmark
that your ancestors set up.
29 Do you see those who are skillful in their
work?
They will serve kings;
they will not serve common people.

23 When you sit down to eat with a ruler,
observe carefully what[a] is before you,
2 and put a knife to your throat
if you have a big appetite.
3 Do not desire the ruler's[b] delicacies,
for they are deceptive food.
4 Do not wear yourself out to get rich;
be wise enough to desist.
5 When your eyes light upon it, it is gone;
for suddenly it takes wings to itself,
flying like an eagle toward heaven.
6 Do not eat the bread of the stingy;
do not desire their delicacies;
7 for like a hair in the throat, so are they.[c]
"Eat and drink!" they say to you;
but they do not mean it.
8 You will vomit up the little you have
eaten,
and you will waste your pleasant
words.
9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool,
who will only despise the wisdom of
your words.
10 Do not remove an ancient landmark
or encroach on the fields of orphans,
11 for their redeemer is strong;
he will plead their cause against you.
12 Apply your mind to instruction
and your ear to words of knowledge.
13 Do not withhold discipline from your
children;
if you beat them with a rod, they will
not die.
14 If you beat them with the rod,
you will save their lives from Sheol.
15 My child, if your heart is wise,
my heart too will be glad.
16 My soul will rejoice
when your lips speak what is right.
17 Do not let your heart envy sinners,
but always continue in the fear of the
LORD.
18 Surely there is a future,
and your hope will not be cut off.

19 Hear, my child, and be wise,
and direct your mind in the way.
20 Do not be among winebibbers,
or among gluttonous eaters of meat;

[a] Or *who*
[b] Heb *his*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

section. **22–23:** As in "Amenemope," concern for *the poor* follows the prologue. The LORD replaces the Egyptian Ma'at here as the one who pleads their cause. **24–25:** See 14.7n. **26–27:** See 6.1–5n. **28:** *Ancient landmark* is a marker indicating a property boundary (cf. Deut 19.14; 27.17) which has ancestral authority. "Amenemope" contains a similar admonition. **29:** *Serve kings*, cf. the similar comment in "Amenemope." **23.1–3:** Etiquette at the table of the powerful is an important topic in "Amenemope" and in other Egyptian instructions. See also Sir 31.12–18. **2:** *Knife to your throat*, i.e., restrain your hunger. **4–5:** "Amenemope" has a corresponding image using geese instead of an eagle. **6–8:** "Amenemope" has a similar metaphor. **10–11:** See 15.25; 22.28; *redeemer* refers to God. **13–14:** See 13.24n. *Sheol*, the abode of the dead. **17–18:** Cautions against envy; cf. 3.31; 24.1,19–20; 27.4. **20–**

21 for the drunkard and the glutton will
come to poverty,
and drowsiness will clothe them with
rags.

22 Listen to your father who begot you,
and do not despise your mother when
she is old.
23 Buy truth, and do not sell it;
buy wisdom, instruction, and
understanding.
24 The father of the righteous will greatly
rejoice;
he who begets a wise son will be glad
in him.
25 Let your father and mother be glad;
let her who bore you rejoice.

26 My child, give me your heart,
and let your eyes observe[a] my ways.
27 For a prostitute is a deep pit;
an adulteress[b] is a narrow well.
28 She lies in wait like a robber
and increases the number of the
faithless.

29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow?
Who has strife? Who has
complaining?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?
30 Those who linger late over wine,
those who keep trying mixed wines.
31 Do not look at wine when it is red,
when it sparkles in the cup
and goes down smoothly.
32 At the last it bites like a serpent,
and stings like an adder.
33 Your eyes will see strange things,
and your mind utter perverse things.
34 You will be like one who lies down in the
midst of the sea,
like one who lies on the top of a mast.[c]
35 "They struck me," you will say,[d] "but I
was not hurt;
they beat me, but I did not feel it.
When shall I awake?
I will seek another drink."

24 Do not envy the wicked,
nor desire to be with them;
2 for their minds devise violence,
and their lips talk of mischief.

3 By wisdom a house is built,
and by understanding it is established;
4 by knowledge the rooms are filled
with all precious and pleasant riches.
5 Wise warriors are mightier than strong
ones,[e]
and those who have knowledge than
those who have strength;
6 for by wise guidance you can wage your
war,
and in abundance of counselors there
is victory.
7 Wisdom is too high for fools;
in the gate they do not open their
mouths.

8 Whoever plans to do evil
will be called a mischief-maker.
9 The devising of folly is sin,
and the scoffer is an abomination to all.

10 If you faint in the day of adversity,
your strength being small;
11 if you hold back from rescuing those
taken away to death,
those who go staggering to the
slaughter;
12 if you say, "Look, we did not know
this"—
does not he who weighs the heart
perceive it?
Does not he who keeps watch over your
soul know it?

[a] Another reading is *delight in*
[b] Heb *an alien woman*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Gk Syr Vg Tg: Heb lacks *you will say*
[e] Gk Compare Syr Tg: Heb *A wise man is strength*

21: Warning against excessive eating and drinking; cf. Deut 21.18–21. **22–25:** Parental relationships; see 10.1n. **26–28:** A briefer version of Prov 7. Cf. 2.16; 6.26; 7.10. **29–35:** A humorous mocking of the ill effects of drunkenness (cf. vv. 20–21; 20.1; 31.4–5; cf. Isa 5.11) with a comparison to seasickness in v. 34 (cf. Ps 107.26–27). **24.3–4:** *House* indicates both building and household; cf. v. 27; 9.1; 14.1; 31.10–31. **5–6:** Wise strategy outdoes might (cf. 21.22; but contrast 21.30–31.). **10–12:** God sees through excuses for not helping victims of violence and *weighs*

And will he not repay all according to
their deeds?

13 My child, eat honey, for it is good,
and the drippings of the honeycomb are
sweet to your taste.
14 Know that wisdom is such to your soul;
if you find it, you will find a future,
and your hope will not be cut off.

15 Do not lie in wait like an outlaw against
the home of the righteous;
do no violence to the place where the
righteous live;
16 for though they fall seven times, they
will rise again;
but the wicked are overthrown by
calamity.

17 Do not rejoice when your enemies fall,
and do not let your heart be glad when
they stumble,
18 or else the LORD will see it and be
displeased,
and turn away his anger from them.

19 Do not fret because of evildoers.
Do not envy the wicked;
20 for the evil have no future;
the lamp of the wicked will go out.

21 My child, fear the LORD and the king,
and do not disobey either of them;[a]
22 for disaster comes from them suddenly,
and who knows the ruin that both can
bring?

23 These also are sayings of the wise:

Partiality in judging is not good.
24 Whoever says to the wicked, "You are
innocent,"
will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by
nations;
25 but those who rebuke the wicked will
have delight,
and a good blessing will come upon
them.
26 One who gives an honest answer
gives a kiss on the lips.

27 Prepare your work outside,
get everything ready for you in the field;
and after that build your house.

28 Do not be a witness against your
neighbor without cause,
and do not deceive with your lips.
29 Do not say, "I will do to others as they
have done to me;
I will pay them back for what they have
done."

30 I passed by the field of one who was
lazy,
by the vineyard of a stupid person;
31 and see, it was all overgrown with
thorns;
the ground was covered with nettles,
and its stone wall was broken down.
32 Then I saw and considered it;
I looked and received instruction.
33 A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest,
34 and poverty will come upon you like a
robber,
and want, like an armed warrior.

25 These are other proverbs of Solomon that the officials of King Hezekiah of Judah copied.

[a] Gk: Heb *do not associate with those who change*

the heart (cf. 16.2; 21.2). **13–14:** *Honey* refers to wisdom here (cf. 16.24; Ps 19.10; Ezek 3.3; Ps 119.103). **16:** The doctrine of retribution is affirmed (see 10:2–3n.), though it is assumed that the righteous do encounter hardship. **17–18:** Cf. Ps 35.11–16,19; Job 31.29. Contrast Pss 37.10–13; 52.5–7; 58.10–11. **19–20:** See 10.2–3n.; cf. Job 18.5–6. **21–22:** *The LORD and the king* are often associated in authority and respect; cf. 16.10; 21.1; Ex 22.28; 1 Kings 21.13.

24.23–34: Further words of the wise. A short separate section, an appendix to the words of the wise in 22.17–24.22. **23b–25,28:** Legal language; cf. 17.15n.; 28.21; Lev 19.15; Deut 16.19. **26:** *Kiss on the lips*, a gesture of respect and affection that should accompany truth. **27:** The importance of correct priorities and advance preparation. **29:** Human beings should not take punishment into their own hands; cf. vv. 17–18. **30–34:** A short teaching-narrative about laziness; see 6.6–11n.

2 It is the glory of God to conceal things,
but the glory of kings is to search things out.
3 Like the heavens for height, like the earth for depth,
so the mind of kings is unsearchable.
4 Take away the dross from the silver,
and the smith has material for a vessel;
5 take away the wicked from the presence of the king,
and his throne will be established in righteousness.
6 Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence
or stand in the place of the great;
7 for it is better to be told, "Come up here,"
than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.

What your eyes have seen
8 do not hastily bring into court;
for[a] what will you do in the end,
when your neighbor puts you to shame?
9 Argue your case with your neighbor directly,
and do not disclose another's secret;
10 or else someone who hears you will bring shame upon you,
and your ill repute will have no end.

11 A word fitly spoken
is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.
12 Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold
is a wise rebuke to a listening ear.
13 Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest
are faithful messengers to those who send them;
they refresh the spirit of their masters.
14 Like clouds and wind without rain
is one who boasts of a gift never given.
15 With patience a ruler may be persuaded,
and a soft tongue can break bones.
16 If you have found honey, eat only enough for you,
or else, having too much, you will vomit it.
17 Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house,
otherwise the neighbor will become weary of you and hate you.
18 Like a war club, a sword, or a sharp arrow
is one who bears false witness against a neighbor.
19 Like a bad tooth or a lame foot
is trust in a faithless person in time of trouble.
20 Like vinegar on a wound[b]
is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.
Like a moth in clothing or a worm in wood,
sorrow gnaws at the human heart.[c]
21 If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat;
and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink;
22 for you will heap coals of fire on their heads,
and the LORD will reward you.
23 The north wind produces rain,
and a backbiting tongue, angry looks.

[a] Cn: Heb *or else*
[b] Gk: Heb *Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, like vinegar on lye*
[c] Gk Syr Tg: Heb lacks *Like a moth . . . human heart*

25.1–29.27: Proverbial sayings copied by Hezekiah's officials. The heading refers not only to Solomon (cf. 1.1; 10.1), to whom the proverbial sayings are attributed, but also to the officials of King Hezekiah (king of Judah ca. 715–687 BCE) who were involved in their transmission. This note gives a rare indication of a historical context for this collection. **25.1:** *Copied* refers to the editing and arranging of older sayings. **2–3:** God's world is mysterious, but the king is endowed with the profound wisdom to seek to comprehend it. Cf. 1 Kings 4.29–34. *Glory* here means "action worthy of glory." **4–5:** For similar uses of the metaphor of refining metals, see 27.21–22; Job 33.10; Isa 1.25; 48.10; Jer 6.29–30; Ezek 22.17–22. **6–7a:** Proverb against self-promotion. **7c–10:** Caution about haste in going to court with a grievance, advising direct mediation where possible. **11–12:** The comparison of wisdom and its good practices to ornaments is a frequent motif; see 2.4n. On good speech cf. 15.23; 16.24; 20.15. **13–14:** Use of weather imagery to illuminate human behavior (cf. v. 23). **15:** A positive view of the power of persuasion. **16–17:** The merits of restraint; cf. Sir 37.27–31. **18:** See 19.5n. **22:** *Heap coals of fire on their heads,* undeserved kindness awakens remorse; cf. Rom 12.17–21. A similar Egyptian penitential ritual was possibly known to the sages

24 It is better to live in a corner of the housetop
than in a house shared with a contentious wife.
25 Like cold water to a thirsty soul,
so is good news from a far country.
26 Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain
are the righteous who give way before the wicked.
27 It is not good to eat much honey,
or to seek honor on top of honor.
28 Like a city breached, without walls,
is one who lacks self-control.

26 Like snow in summer or rain in harvest,
so honor is not fitting for a fool.
2 Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying,
an undeserved curse goes nowhere.
3 A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey,
and a rod for the back of fools.
4 Do not answer fools according to their folly,
or you will be a fool yourself.
5 Answer fools according to their folly,
or they will be wise in their own eyes.
6 It is like cutting off one's foot and drinking down violence,
to send a message by a fool.
7 The legs of a disabled person hang limp;
so does a proverb in the mouth of a fool.
8 It is like binding a stone in a sling
to give honor to a fool.
9 Like a thornbush brandished by the hand of a drunkard
is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.
10 Like an archer who wounds everybody
is one who hires a passing fool or drunkard.[a]
11 Like a dog that returns to its vomit
is a fool who reverts to his folly.
12 Do you see persons wise in their own eyes?
There is more hope for fools than for them.
13 The lazy person says, "There is a lion in the road!
There is a lion in the streets!"
14 As a door turns on its hinges,
so does a lazy person in bed.
15 The lazy person buries a hand in the dish,
and is too tired to bring it back to the mouth.
16 The lazy person is wiser in self-esteem
than seven who can answer discreetly.
17 Like somebody who takes a passing dog by the ears
is one who meddles in the quarrel of another.
18 Like a maniac who shoots deadly firebrands and arrows,
19 so is one who deceives a neighbor
and says, "I am only joking!"
20 For lack of wood the fire goes out,
and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.
21 As charcoal is to hot embers and wood to fire,
so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife.
22 The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels;
they go down into the inner parts of the body.
23 Like the glaze[b] covering an earthen vessel
are smooth[c] lips with an evil heart.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Cn: Heb *silver of dross*
[c] Gk: Heb *burning*

of Israel. **24:** Cf. 21.9n. **26:** *A muddied spring* refers to a befouled supply of fresh water, thus rendered useless (cf. Ezek. 34.18). **27–28:** Cf. vv. 16–17.

26.1–12: A section on fools. The term used for fool here (Heb "kesil") refers to someone who is self-complacent to the point of obtuseness. **4–5:** Juxtaposing two proverbs provokes reflection on their competing claims. Answering fools *according to their folly* means speaking to them on their level. On the one hand, doing so likens you to them; on the other, not doing so means they will think they have outwitted you. **8:** *Binding a stone in a sling* is used as a metaphor for doing something that defeats the purpose; stones are meant to be thrown from a sling, not bound in it. **9:** The expression may indicate uselessness (cf. vv. 7–8) or the use of a proverb in a hurtful way. **13–16:** A section on lazy people; see 6.6–11n. **13:** A ridiculous excuse; a *lion* is not likely to appear in the *streets*. **15:** Such people are too lazy to eat (cf. 19.24). **17–28:** A section on the consequences of antisocial speech

24 An enemy dissembles in speaking
while harboring deceit within;
25 when an enemy speaks graciously, do
not believe it,
for there are seven abominations
concealed within;
26 though hatred is covered with guile,
the enemy's wickedness will be exposed
in the assembly.
27 Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,
and a stone will come back on the one
who starts it rolling.
28 A lying tongue hates its victims,
and a flattering mouth works ruin.

27 Do not boast about tomorrow,
for you do not know what a day may
bring.
2 Let another praise you, and not your own
mouth—
a stranger, and not your own lips.
3 A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty,
but a fool's provocation is heavier than
both.
4 Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming,
but who is able to stand before
jealousy?
5 Better is open rebuke
than hidden love.
6 Well meant are the wounds a friend
inflicts,
but profuse are the kisses of an
enemy.
7 The sated appetite spurns honey,
but to a ravenous appetite even the
bitter is sweet.
8 Like a bird that strays from its nest
is one who strays from home.
9 Perfume and incense make the heart
glad,
but the soul is torn by trouble.[a]
10 Do not forsake your friend or the friend
of your parent;
do not go to the house of your kindred
in the day of your calamity.
Better is a neighbor who is nearby
than kindred who are far away.
11 Be wise, my child, and make my heart glad,
so that I may answer whoever
reproaches me.
12 The clever see danger and hide;
but the simple go on, and suffer for it.
13 Take the garment of one who has given
surety for a stranger;
seize the pledge given as surety for
foreigners.[b]
14 Whoever blesses a neighbor with a loud
voice,
rising early in the morning,
will be counted as cursing.
15 A continual dripping on a rainy day
and a contentious wife are alike;
16 to restrain her is to restrain the wind
or to grasp oil in the right hand.[c]
17 Iron sharpens iron,
and one person sharpens the wits[d] of
another.
18 Anyone who tends a fig tree will eat its
fruit,
and anyone who takes care of a master
will be honored.
19 Just as water reflects the face,
so one human heart reflects another.
20 Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied,
and human eyes are never satisfied.
21 The crucible is for silver, and the furnace
is for gold,
so a person is tested[e] by being praised.
22 Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle
along with crushed grain,
but the folly will not be driven out.

[a] Gk: Heb *the sweetness of a friend is better than one's own counsel*
[b] Vg and 20.16: Heb *for a foreign woman*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Heb *face*
[e] Heb lacks *is tested*

and behavior. On concern for speech see 10.8n. **22:** See 18.18. **27:** A kind of "poetic justice" (cf. Ps 7.15; Eccl 10.8).

27.1–22: A miscellaneous collection featuring proverb pairs. 1–2: The words *boast* and *praise* are the same in Hebrew. **3–4:** The imagery of overwhelming weight or force links these proverbs. **5–6:** Two proverbs on the paradoxes of true friendship. **7:** The same insight as expressed in Benjamin Franklin's proverb, "Hunger is a good pickle." **10:** A tripartite proverb in which the main maxim is in the final part of the verse. **12:** Cf. 22.3. **13:** See 20.16. Repetition of earlier proverbs occurs frequently in this section. **14:** A humorous proverb on untimely behavior; cf. Eccl 3.1–8. **15–16:** See 19.13–14n. **17–19:** Proverbs on beneficial interpersonal relationships. **20:** *Sheol*

23 Know well the condition of your flocks,
and give attention to your herds;
24 for riches do not last forever,
nor a crown for all generations.
25 When the grass is gone, and new growth appears,
and the herbage of the mountains is gathered,
26 the lambs will provide your clothing,
and the goats the price of a field;
27 there will be enough goats' milk for your food,
for the food of your household
and nourishment for your servant-girls.

28 The wicked flee when no one pursues,
but the righteous are as bold as a lion.
2 When a land rebels
it has many rulers;
but with an intelligent ruler
there is lasting order.[a]
3 A ruler[b] who oppresses the poor
is a beating rain that leaves no food.
4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked,
but those who keep the law struggle against them.
5 The evil do not understand justice,
but those who seek the LORD understand it completely.
6 Better to be poor and walk in integrity
than to be crooked in one's ways even though rich.
7 Those who keep the law are wise children,
but companions of gluttons shame their parents.
8 One who augments wealth by exorbitant interest
gathers it for another who is kind to the poor.
9 When one will not listen to the law,
even one's prayers are an abomination.
10 Those who mislead the upright into evil ways
will fall into pits of their own making,
but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance.
11 The rich is wise in self-esteem,
but an intelligent poor person sees through the pose.
12 When the righteous triumph, there is great glory,
but when the wicked prevail, people go into hiding.
13 No one who conceals transgressions will prosper,
but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.
14 Happy is the one who is never without fear,
but one who is hard-hearted will fall into calamity.
15 Like a roaring lion or a charging bear
is a wicked ruler over a poor people.
16 A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor;
but one who hates unjust gain will enjoy a long life.
17 If someone is burdened with the blood of another,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Cn: Heb *A poor person*

and Abaddon, see 15.11n. **21:** Cf. 17.3 where it is the LORD who tests. **22:** The Heb term for fool here is "'ewil," a person of obstinate disposition without proper moral orientation. **23–27:** A section of practical advice on tending flocks and herds (cf. 12.10; Sir 7.22). The reference to a *crown* in v. 24 and the traditional link of king and shepherd imagery (e.g., 1 Kings 22.17; Isa 44.28) means that it could be read as royal advice.

28.1–29.7: A distinct unit characterized by many antithetical proverbs and a concern for just government. 28.1 and 29.27 both contrast the righteous and the wicked. **28.2:** *Many rulers* may refer to factions in the reign of a weak king or to a period of political instability. **3:** *A beating rain that leaves no food* refers to the ruining of a ripe crop by heavy rain (cf. 26.1). **4:** *The law* (Heb "torah"; cf. vv. 7,9; 29.18) can mean either revealed law or teaching, as often in Proverbs (e.g., 3.1). **5:** Cf. 29.7. **8:** *Exorbitant interest* is forbidden in biblical law; see Ex 22.25; Lev 25.36; Deut 23.19. By the principle of retribution, the oppressor should not profit (cf. 13.22; 14.31; 19.17). **9:** Cf. 15.8,29. **11:** *In self-esteem*, (lit., "in his own eyes"), the characteristic of a fool (cf. 3.7; 14.12; 26.5,12; 28.26). **14:** *Fear*, a different word than in the phrase "the fear of the LORD." The wise understand danger; fools do not (cf.

let that killer be a fugitive until death;
let no one offer assistance.
18 One who walks in integrity will be safe,
but whoever follows crooked ways will
fall into the Pit.[a]
19 Anyone who tills the land will have
plenty of bread,
but one who follows worthless pursuits
will have plenty of poverty.
20 The faithful will abound with blessings,
but one who is in a hurry to be rich will
not go unpunished.
21 To show partiality is not good—
yet for a piece of bread a person may do
wrong.
22 The miser is in a hurry to get rich
and does not know that loss is sure to
come.
23 Whoever rebukes a person will
afterward find more favor
than one who flatters with the tongue.
24 Anyone who robs father or mother
and says, "That is no crime,"
is partner to a thug.
25 The greedy person stirs up strife,
but whoever trusts in the LORD will be
enriched.
26 Those who trust in their own wits are
fools;
but those who walk in wisdom come
through safely.
27 Whoever gives to the poor will lack
nothing,
but one who turns a blind eye will get
many a curse.
28 When the wicked prevail, people go into
hiding;
but when they perish, the righteous
increase.

29 One who is often reproved, yet
remains stubborn,
will suddenly be broken beyond
healing.
2 When the righteous are in authority, the
people rejoice;
but when the wicked rule, the people
groan.
3 A child who loves wisdom makes a parent
glad,
but to keep company with prostitutes is
to squander one's substance.
4 By justice a king gives stability to the
land,
but one who makes heavy exactions
ruins it.
5 Whoever flatters a neighbor
is spreading a net for the neighbor's
feet.
6 In the transgression of the evil there is a
snare,
but the righteous sing and rejoice.
7 The righteous know the rights of the
poor;
the wicked have no such
understanding.
8 Scoffers set a city aflame,
but the wise turn away wrath.
9 If the wise go to law with fools,
there is ranting and ridicule without
relief.
10 The bloodthirsty hate the blameless,
and they seek the life of the upright.
11 A fool gives full vent to anger,
but the wise quietly holds it back.
12 If a ruler listens to falsehood,
all his officials will be wicked.
13 The poor and the oppressor have this in
common:
the LORD gives light to the eyes of both.
14 If a king judges the poor with equity,
his throne will be established forever.
15 The rod and reproof give wisdom,
but a mother is disgraced by a neglected
child.
16 When the wicked are in authority,
transgression increases,
but the righteous will look upon their
downfall.

[a] Syr: Heb *fall all at once*

14.16; 27.12). **17:** Cf. Cain in Gen 4.12. **18:** *The Pit*, i.e., Sheol, the abode of the dead; see 1.12n. **19:** See 6.6–11n.; 20.21n. **21:** *For a piece of bread*, bribery (cf. 18.5; 24.23b), accompanied by greed. **23:** See 1.23n. **25–26:** Proper and misplaced trust connect these sayings. **27:** See 14.31n. **29.1:** See 1.23n. **3:** See 10.1n. **4:** Cf. 16.10–13; 20.28. **5–6:** Two proverbs linked by the imagery of a hidden trap. **7:** Cf. 28.5. Wisdom literature often associates evil with a failure to perceive the true nature of things. **8:** *Set a city aflame,* i.e., ignite anger. **9:** *With fools* it is impossible to conduct a reasonable dispute (cf. 26.4). **11–13:** On self-restraint see 12.16; 14.17. **12:** On the critical role of the

17 Discipline your children, and they will
give you rest;
they will give delight to your heart.
18 Where there is no prophecy, the people
cast off restraint,
but happy are those who keep the law.
19 By mere words servants are not disciplined,
for though they understand, they will
not give heed.
20 Do you see someone who is hasty in
speech?
There is more hope for a fool than for
anyone like that.
21 A slave pampered from childhood
will come to a bad end.[a]
22 One given to anger stirs up strife,
and the hothead causes much
transgression.
23 A person's pride will bring humiliation,
but one who is lowly in spirit will
obtain honor.
24 To be a partner of a thief is to hate one's
own life;
one hears the victim's curse, but
discloses nothing.[b]
25 The fear of others[c] lays a snare,
but one who trusts in the LORD is secure.
26 Many seek the favor of a ruler,
but it is from the LORD that one gets
justice.
27 The unjust are an abomination to the
righteous,
but the upright are an abomination to
the wicked.

30 The words of Agur son of Jakeh. An oracle.
Thus says the man: I am weary, O God,
I am weary, O God. How can I prevail?[d]
2 Surely I am too stupid to be human;
I do not have human understanding.
3 I have not learned wisdom,
nor have I knowledge of the holy
ones.[e]
4 Who has ascended to heaven and come
down?
Who has gathered the wind in the
hollow of the hand?
Who has wrapped up the waters in a
garment?
Who has established all the ends of the
earth?
What is the person's name?
And what is the name of the person's
child?
Surely you know!

5 Every word of God proves true;
he is a shield to those who take refuge
in him.
6 Do not add to his words,
or else he will rebuke you, and you will
be found a liar.

7 Two things I ask of you;
do not deny them to me before I die:
8 Remove far from me falsehood and
lying;
give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that I need,
9 or I shall be full, and deny you,
and say, "Who is the LORD?"

[a] Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Or *human fear*
[d] Or *I am spent*. Meaning of Heb uncertain
[e] Or *Holy One*

king see 14.25; 16.10,12–13; 25.5; 29.4. **13:** Cf. 22.2. The LORD gives life irrespective of a person's moral nature. **18:** *Prophecy*, lit. "vision." *Law*, cf. 28.4n. A society lacking guidance experiences chaos. **19,21:** The concern with servants suggests that the audience of Proverbs is the upper class. **23:** Cf. 15.33; 16.18–19; 18.12. **24:** *Partner of a thief*, not an actual accomplice, but someone with knowledge of the crime who *discloses nothing* (cf. Lev. 5.1). **25:** Anxious *fear of others* detracts from trusting the LORD.

30.1–14: The words of Agur. A separate section with its own attribution to "Agur son of Jakeh," an unknown figure. **1:** *An oracle* (Heb "massa'"); cf. Num 24.14–25 (the oracle of Balaam). Others understand the Heb to mean "from Massa," a region of northern Arabia with a tribal group of that name, attested in Assyrian sources as early as 734 BCE, indicating that Agur was a non-Israelite sage. **2–3:** The writer acknowledges his limitations in self-deprecating terms (cf. Ps 73.21–2; Job 25.4–6). **4:** Rhetorical questions implying the answer "God" and referring to his work in creation (cf. Job 38.4–41). **5–6:** A pious response to vv. 1–4; cf. Ps 18.30 (v. 5); Deut 4.2 (v. 6). **7–10:** A prayer to God to be kept from *falsehood* and to be given just enough. This is the only prayer in the book of

or I shall be poor, and steal,
and profane the name of my God.

10 Do not slander a servant to a master,
or the servant will curse you, and you
will be held guilty.

11 There are those who curse their fathers
and do not bless their mothers.
12 There are those who are pure in their
own eyes
yet are not cleansed of their
filthiness.
13 There are those—how lofty are their
eyes,
how high their eyelids lift!—
14 there are those whose teeth are swords,
whose teeth are knives,
to devour the poor from off the earth,
the needy from among mortals.

15 The leech[a] has two daughters;
"Give, give," they cry.
Three things are never satisfied;
four never say, "Enough":
16 Sheol, the barren womb,
the earth ever thirsty for water,
and the fire that never says,
"Enough."[a]

17 The eye that mocks a father
and scorns to obey a mother
will be pecked out by the ravens of the
valley
and eaten by the vultures.

18 Three things are too wonderful for me;
four I do not understand:
19 the way of an eagle in the sky,
the way of a snake on a rock,
the way of a ship on the high seas,
and the way of a man with a girl.

20 This is the way of an adulteress:
she eats, and wipes her mouth,
and says, "I have done no wrong."

21 Under three things the earth trembles;
under four it cannot bear up:
22 a slave when he becomes king,
and a fool when glutted with food;
23 an unloved woman when she gets a
husband,
and a maid when she succeeds her
mistress.

24 Four things on earth are small,
yet they are exceedingly wise:
25 the ants are a people without strength,
yet they provide their food in the summer;
26 the badgers are a people without power,
yet they make their homes in the
rocks;
27 the locusts have no king,
yet all of them march in rank;
28 the lizard[b] can be grasped in the hand,
yet it is found in kings' palaces.

29 Three things are stately in their stride;
four are stately in their gait:
30 the lion, which is mightiest among wild
animals
and does not turn back before any;
31 the strutting rooster,[c] the he-goat,
and a king striding before[a] his people.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *spider*
[c] Gk Syr Tg Compare Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

Proverbs and could be a later addition (cf. Sir 31.1–4). **11–14:** Four types of sinners are described: the unfilial, the self-deluded, the arrogant, and those who exploit the poor. The sayings are linked by repetition of keywords.

30.15–31: Numerical sayings. 15: *The leech* is a bloodsucking worm, an image of the insatiable. *Two daughters*, the suckers by which the leech attaches. *Three . . . four*, a numerical saying. **16:** Four unlike phenomena are listed as insatiable: *Sheol,* the abode of the dead, never ceases claiming victims; the *barren womb* (cf. Gen 30.1) in that the woman's desire for a child does not go away; the thirst of the dry *earth* for water; and the consuming *fire* (cf. Amos 7.4). **18–19:** The catchword *way*, although used in different senses (course, manner, path, and sexual relations) unites the phenomena; cf. Wis 5.10–11. **20:** A moralizing comment on v. 19d in the context of adultery; *eats*, engages in illicit sex (cf. 5.15; 9.17). **21–23:** Four intolerable situations. *Maid . . . mistress*; cf. Sarah and Hagar in Gen 16.3–4. **24–28:** Four small yet instructive creatures. Wisdom is valued over size and power. **29–31:** Four examples of grandeur; cf. the association of lion and king in 19.12; 20.2.

32 If you have been foolish, exalting
yourself,
or if you have been devising evil,
put your hand on your mouth.
33 For as pressing milk produces curds,
and pressing the nose produces blood,
so pressing anger produces strife.

31 The words of King Lemuel. An oracle
that his mother taught him:

2 No, my son! No, son of my womb!
No, son of my vows!
3 Do not give your strength to women,
your ways to those who destroy kings.
4 It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
it is not for kings to drink wine,
or for rulers to desire[a] strong drink;
5 or else they will drink and forget what
has been decreed,
and will pervert the rights of all the
afflicted.
6 Give strong drink to one who is perishing,
and wine to those in bitter distress;
7 let them drink and forget their poverty,
and remember their misery no more.
8 Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.[b]
9 Speak out, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and
needy.

10 A capable wife who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.
11 The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.
12 She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.
13 She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.
14 She is like the ships of the merchant,
she brings her food from far away.
15 She rises while it is still night
and provides food for her household
and tasks for her servant-girls.
16 She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a
vineyard.
17 She girds herself with strength,
and makes her arms strong.
18 She perceives that her merchandise is
profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
19 She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.
20 She opens her hand to the poor,
and reaches out her hands to the
needy.
21 She is not afraid for her household when
it snows,
for all her household are clothed in
crimson.
22 She makes herself coverings;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
23 Her husband is known in the city gates,
taking his seat among the elders of the
land.
24 She makes linen garments and sells
them;
she supplies the merchant with sashes.
25 Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.
26 She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her
tongue.
27 She looks well to the ways of her
household,

[a] Cn: Heb *where*
[b] Heb *all children of passing away*

31.1–9: The words of Lemuel, an unknown king who, like Agur (30.1), may have been a non-Israelite. **1:** *An oracle*, see 30.1n. *His mother*, cf. 1.8b; 6.20b. **2–9:** Warnings against women and wine (only to be used for those in distress), and stress on his duties as king, notably to protect the powerless.

31.10–31 The capable wife. An acrostic poem of 22 lines (in which each verse begins with a subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet) from the point of view of the *husband* (vv. 11,23,28) and *children* (v. 28) about the ideal *wife* (v. 10) whose virtues are listed in hymnic style. **10:** *Capable* (Heb "hayil"), variously rendered as "good," "perfect," "virtuous," "noble," "worthy," or "valiant" (cf. 12.4; Ruth 3.11). *Who can find?* suggests it is difficult to do so (cf. 18.22; 19.14). *More precious than jewels* echoes personified Wisdom in 3.15; 8.11. **11–19:** Her varied economic activities contribute to the well-being of the household. **19:** *Spindle, distaff*, tools used in spinning. **20:** *Opens her hand*, see Deut 15.7. **21–22:** *Crimson . . . purple*, luxury items. **23:** The *city gates*, where commercial and legal transactions took place (22.22; 24.7; Deut 21.19; 25.7; Ruth 4.1–12). **25:** She is independent and confident;

and does not eat the bread of
idleness.
28 Her children rise up and call her happy;
her husband too, and he praises her:
29 "Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all."
30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the LORD is to
be praised.
31 Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the city
gates.

cf. Job 5.22; 39.22. **26:** Cf. personified Wisdom in 8.6–10. **31:** Praise from both family and the community. As one who *fears the LORD* (see 1.7n.) she is the embodiment of wisdom.

ECCLESIASTES

NAME AND AUTHOR

Ecclesiastes is the Latin transliteration of the Greek rendering of the pen-name of the author, known in Hebrew as *Qohelet* (also *Qoheleth*), which literally means "Gatherer" or "Acquirer" (of wisdom, wealth, pleasures). The Hebrew term indicates something of the acquisitive environment in which the author lived and taught. The Greek term, though, meant a member of an assembly and "Ecclesiastes" was soon interpreted, incorrectly, to mean "one who gathers the assembly," hence, "Preacher." Modern scholars noting that the author of the book is more like a philosopher than a preacher, sometimes prefer to translate the name as "Teacher" (cf. 12.9). The superscription of the book (1.2) presents Qohelet as "the son of David" who ruled in Jerusalem, evoking the memory of Solomon, king of Israel (968–928 BCE), the consummate sage and gatherer of wealth and wisdom (see 1 Kings 3–4; 10). Apart from the superscription and 1.12–2.11, however, the author never speaks as king, and the epilogue portrays the author as a teacher rather than as a king (12.9–14). Moreover, the perspective in most of the book is that of an outsider to the royal court (3.16; 4.13–16; 8.1–6; 10.16–20).

CANONICAL STATUS AND LOCATION IN THE CANON

Ecclesiastes is one of the poetical and wisdom books in the Christian canon. It shares many generic features of form and content with Proverbs and Job, the other books commonly referred to as wisdom literature. In the Jewish canon, it is placed in the third division of the canon, the Writings, as one of the Megillot or "five scrolls" (Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther). Perhaps because of its radical ideas, it was a controversial book in antiquity. In Jewish tradition the canonical status of Ecclesiastes was debated as late as the second century CE. Although Ecclesiastes is included on second-century Christian canonical lists, Bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia (fifth century) questioned its sacred status.

DATE OF COMPOSITION, HISTORICAL CONTEXT, AND INTERPRETATION

The date of the book is disputed, although most scholars argue on linguistic grounds that it should be dated to the postexilic period (after 539 BCE). The presence of two indisputable Persian loan words ("parks" in 2.5; "sentence" in 8.11) points to a date some time after 450 BCE, for there are no Persian loan words or Persian names in the Hebrew Bible that can be dated earlier. The abundance of Aramaisms (i.e., Aramaic loan words, forms, and constructions) also points to the postexilic period, when Aramaic became widely used in Palestine. A number of specific idioms regarding inheritance, grants, prisons, social abuses, judicial problems, and socioeconomic classes are attested in documents from the Persian period; in no other periods in history do we find such a coincidence of terminology. These features, together with the absence of Greek loan words or ideas with an indisputably Greek origin, suggest that the book should be probably dated sometime before the Hellenistic period, between 450 and 330 BCE, although many scholars date it a century later, based in part on putative links between Ecclesiastes and Greek philosophical ideas. The book is better understood, however, against the background of the ancient Near East.

The Persian period was characterized by tremendous economic activity, spurred on by the introduction of standardized coinage by the Persian central government beginning around 515 BCE. Money subsequently became a commodity, desired for its own sake (cf. 5.10; 7.12; 10.19). Standardized currency helped to democratize economic opportunities, so that it became possible for even the poorest people in society to become wealthy. As in any era of significant economic innovation, the Persian period brought both opportunities and risks to the average person in the empire.

The volatile economy led to widespread insecurity as people toiled to get ahead or simply to gain some control over their lives, and thus understand what was happening in their world. Qohelet uses the attitudes in that uncertain period as a trope to speak theologically about human attempts to control their lives and understand a world that is contradictory, if not altogether absurd. The sense of the individual as a small part of a large scene is evident in the political allusions (e.g., 4.1), which should be read against the background of the empire. Many descriptions of life and death emphasize the impotence of individuals to change their

environment (8.8). The inevitability of one's fate (3.15; 6.10), the unavoidability of death (3.19), and the repetitions of life (3.1–8) all work together to create a vision of the remoteness, the inscrutability, and ultimately the indifference of the world to the individual. In a vision of bleak grandeur the author faces this indifference, acknowledges it, and admits an inability to transcend it, but nevertheless derives from it a hard-won wisdom: This is how the world is.

The author appears to have drawn lessons from the wider wisdom tradition, yet he often approached the preoccupation of his audience through socioeconomic idioms current in his generation. Despite the newness of their environment, the fundamental problems they faced about the possibility of coping with life in a world that is inconsistent, if not contradictory, were not new after all (see 1.10). Every generation must deal with the fact that mortals inevitably live in a world in which they do not have control ("all is vanity") and life can only be lived before a sovereign God who alone determines all that happens on earth.

LITERARY STRUCTURE AND GUIDE TO READING

Opinions as to the literary structure of Ecclesiastes have ranged from the claim that there is no structure at all to attempts to work out intricate patterns. Most readers, however, discern only a rough structure. Clearly marked is the superscription (1.1) and the epilogue (12.9–14), and the motto of the book ("vanity of vanities"), which appears first in 1.2 and for the last time in 12.8. The opening poem (1.3–11) is matched at the end by a concluding poem (12.1–7). Between them the book has two halves of approximately equal length (1.12–6.9; 6.10–11.10). Within each half the first part presents a problematic situation (1.12–4.16; 6.10–8.17), and the second part contains advice on how to cope with that situation (5.1–6.9; 9.1–11.10).

Because the book is relatively short, it should be read in a single sitting. Readers should be alert for the repeated phrases that underline the recurrent perceptions of the author (e.g., "vanity of vanities," "chasing after wind," "under the sun"). Also, the reader is likely to note certain tensions, if not contradictions, in the book. Whether these represent the author's quotation and refutation of current opinion or whether they represent the author's own internal sense of contradictory experience remains debated. But the different perspectives, as well as the ironic tone, give the book a lively quality and the reader the sense of having been plunged into the midst of a conversation about important ideas.

Choon-Leong Seow

1 The words of the Teacher,[a] the son of
David, king in Jerusalem.
[2] Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,[a]
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.
[3] What do people gain from all the toil
at which they toil under the sun?
[4] A generation goes, and a generation
comes,
but the earth remains forever.
[5] The sun rises and the sun goes
down,
and hurries to the place where it
rises.
[6] The wind blows to the south,
and goes around to the north;
round and round goes the wind,
and on its circuits the wind returns.
[7] All streams run to the sea,
but the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow,
there they continue to flow.
[8] All things[b] are wearisome;
more than one can express;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
or the ear filled with hearing.
[9] What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be
done;
there is nothing new under the sun.
[10] Is there a thing of which it is said,
"See, this is new"?
It has already been,
in the ages before us.
[11] The people of long ago are not
remembered,
nor will there be any remembrance
of people yet to come
by those who come after them.
[12] I, the Teacher,[a] when king over Israel in
Jerusalem, [13] applied my mind to seek and to
search out by wisdom all that is done under
heaven; it is an unhappy business that God
has given to human beings to be busy with.

[a] Heb *Qoheleth*, traditionally rendered *Preacher*
[b] Or *words*

1.1: Superscription. The author is identified by his pen-name, *Teacher* (Heb "Qohelet"; cf. 12.9), properly, "Gatherer"—one who is supposed to have accumulated plenty of everything, including wisdom, wealth, and pleasure. The description of the author as *the son of David, king in Jerusalem* evokes images of Solomon, the consummate gatherer of wealth, wisdom, and pleasure (see also 1.2–2.11; 1 Kings 3–4; 10).

1.2–11: Preface. Despite constant activity, the world seems always to remain the same. **2:** *Vanity,* Heb "hebel," which literally means "breath" or "vapor" (Isa 57.13; Ps 62.9). In Ecclesiastes, it is used as a metaphor for things that cannot be grasped either physically or intellectually, things that are ephemeral, insubstantial, enigmatic, or absurd. Elsewhere in the Bible, the human life span and human beings themselves are said to be "hebel" (see Pss 39.4–11; 62.9; 78.33; Job 7.16). *Vanity of vanities* is a way of expressing the superlative in Hebrew; hence the phrase means "utter vanity." Virtually identical words are found in 12.8, the last verse of the book before the epilogue (12.9–14); the epigram thus frames the book. **3:** The term *gain* does not mean just "benefit," but "excess," "advantage," or "surplus." *Toil* is not the same as "work." The normal Hebrew word for the latter is also the word for "worship," but the word for *toil* typically bears negative connotations. *From all the toil* may also be translated as "in exchange for all their toil." Here, as elsewhere in the book, *toil* refers not only to the process of toiling, but to the fruit of one's toiling (see 2.10). The phrase *under the sun* occurs in the Bible only in Ecclesiastes, but it is attested elsewhere in the ancient Near East. It is a near synonym of "under the heavens" (1.13; 2.3; 3.1). "Under the heavens," however, is a spatial designation (referring to what is happening "everywhere in the world"), whereas *under the sun* refers to the realm of the living as opposed to the realm of the dead (cf. 4.15; 9.6,9). **4:** *The earth remains forever,* better "the world always stays the same." Despite human toiling and the coming and going of human generations, the world remains as it was. **5–7:** The elements of nature—light, air, and water—are also engaged in daily activities, with no new results. *The sun . . . hurries* (lit. "stomps" or "pants") to its destination, only to have to recommence its routine. The winds blow every which way and streams flow endlessly, with no new results. **8–11:** As with nature, so with knowledge; human speculations and endless instructions produce nothing new. **11:** Cf. 2.16; 9.5.

1.12–2.11: The author's experiences and accomplishments. The style of this passage is similar to that of many royal inscriptions in the ancient Near East. The author, in his assumed role as king, has experienced it all and done it all, but even he has to admit that nothing is ultimately reliable. **1.12:** The author takes on the persona of Solomon (1.1n.; 2.9). **13:** *Unhappy business* or "terrible preoccupation" may refer to human anxiety

14 I saw all the deeds that are done under the
sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after
wind.[a]
15 What is crooked cannot be made straight,
and what is lacking cannot be counted.
16 I said to myself, "I have acquired great
wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jeru-
salem before me; and my mind has had great
experience of wisdom and knowledge." 17 And
I applied my mind to know wisdom and to
know madness and folly. I perceived that this
also is but a chasing after wind.[a]
18 For in much wisdom is much vexation,
and those who increase knowledge
increase sorrow.

2 I said to myself, "Come now, I will make
a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself." But
again, this also was vanity. 2 I said of laughter,
"It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?"
3 I searched with my mind how to cheer my
body with wine—my mind still guiding me
with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly,
until I might see what was good for mortals to
do under heaven during the few days of their
life. 4 I made great works; I built houses and
planted vineyards for myself; 5 I made myself
gardens and parks, and planted in them all
kinds of fruit trees. 6 I made myself pools
from which to water the forest of growing
trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves, and
had slaves who were born in my house; I also
had great possessions of herds and flocks,
more than any who had been before me in
Jerusalem. 8 I also gathered for myself silver
and gold and the treasure of kings and of
the provinces; I got singers, both men and
women, and delights of the flesh, and many
concubines.[b]
9 So I became great and surpassed all
who were before me in Jerusalem; also my
wisdom remained with me. 10 Whatever
my eyes desired I did not keep from them;
I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my
heart found pleasure in all my toil, and
this was my reward for all my toil. 11 Then I
considered all that my hands had done and
the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all
was vanity and a chasing after wind,[a] and
there was nothing to be gained under the
sun.
12 So I turned to consider wisdom and
madness and folly; for what can the one do
who comes after the king? Only what has
already been done. 13 Then I saw that wisdom
excels folly as light excels darkness.
14 The wise have eyes in their head,
but fools walk in darkness.
Yet I perceived that the same fate befalls
all of them. 15 Then I said to myself, "What
happens to the fool will happen to me also;
why then have I been so very wise?" And I
said to myself that this also is vanity. 16 For
there is no enduring remembrance of the
wise or of fools, seeing that in the days to
come all will have been long forgotten. How
can the wise die just like fools? 17 So I hated
life, because what is done under the sun was
grievous to me; for all is vanity and a chasing
after wind.[a]
18 I hated all my toil in which I had toiled
under the sun, seeing that I must leave it
to those who come after me 19 —and who
knows whether they will be wise or fool-
ish? Yet they will be master of all for which
I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun.
This also is vanity. 20 So I turned and gave
my heart up to despair concerning all the
toil of my labors under the sun, 21 because
sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom

[a] Or *a feeding on wind.* See Hos 12.1
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

over all that is happening in the world. **14:** *Under the sun,* see 1.3n. *Chasing after wind,* i.e., pursuit of futility (Hos 12.2; Prov 15.14; Sir 34.1–2). **15:** A proverb about humanly impossible tasks (cf. 7.13). **2.4–11:** A summary of accomplishments like those found in royal inscriptions. Despite his worldly successes, the author concludes that everything is but "vanity"—that is, beyond the grasp of mortals. **11:** *Nothing to be gained,* cf. 1.3n.

2.12–26: The leveling effect of death. Whatever advantage anyone might have in life is negated by death. **12–17:** Wisdom is better than folly (*as light excels darkness,* v. 13), yet the wise and fools face *the same fate* of death (v. 14; cf. 3.19–20; 9.2–3), and they are all *forgotten* after their death (cf. 1.11). **17:** *Chasing after wind,* see 1.14n. **18–23:** Toil does not give an advantage in the face of death. People cannot take the fruit of their toil with them when they die, and thus are discontented with it when they live. Even the possibility of passing an inheritance to heirs does not give enjoyment, for the heirs may not deserve the inheritance. **18:** *Under the sun,* see

and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22 What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? 23 For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

24 There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; 25 for apart from him[a] who can eat or who can have enjoyment? 26 For to the one who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.[b]

3 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
2 a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
3 a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
5 a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
6 a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
7 a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
8 a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.
9 What gain have the workers from their toil? 10 I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. 11 He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; 13 moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. 14 I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. 15 That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.[c]

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *apart from me*
[b] Or *a feeding on wind.* See Hos 12.1
[c] Heb *what is pursued*

1.3n. **24–26:** People do not have control over their future; the only good is to partake of life fully in the present, for enjoyment is *from the hand of God* (v. 24). Cf. 3.13; 5.18; 9.7–10. The sovereign God arbitrarily gives the possibility of enjoyment to those who are somehow favored, but not to *the sinner*, a term that may simply mean "the one who misses out," the loser (cf. 7.26; 9.2,18; Prov 8.36; 13.22; 14.21; 19.2; 20.2).

3.1–15: The determination of events. God determines time and timing. **1–8:** A rhythmic series of contrary pairs (seven sets, each with two pairs of opposites) that together represent the totality and variety of the times and seasons humans encounter. These events include those that simply happen to people (like being born and dying) and occasions to which they must respond (like planting and plucking up what is planted). **9:** The rhetorical question is essentially the same as in 1.3; 2.22; 6.11, except that human beings are called *the workers* (lit. "the one who acts"), even though God is the one who acts effectively in the following verses. **10:** *Business,* see 1.13n. **11:** The same God who *made everything suitable for its time* ironically puts *a sense of past and future* (lit. "eternity") into human consciousness. Human beings must live with this paradox of knowing the reality that transcends the moment ("eternity") while being able to cope only with the moment. **12–13:** In view of human limitations, one should partake of good, for it is *God's gift* to do so; cf. 5.18. **14:** *Whatever God does endures forever*, the Hebrew should be taken to mean that God's deeds are "eternal," i.e., not bound by time (see 3.11n.). The timeless, eternal character of God's doing stands in stark contrast to the "eternity" that exists only in human hearts (v. 11). Human activity is always only "in its time" (v. 11), whereas God's activity is not bound by time. The language of adding and subtracting is used elsewhere for matters that are decisive, authoritative, and invariable (Deut 4.2; 12.32; cf. Jer 26.2; Prov 30.6). God establishes the difference so that human beings might know their place, that is, *stand in awe* of God. **15:** *What has gone by,* lit. "what is pursued."

16 Moreover I saw under the sun that in
the place of justice, wickedness was there,
and in the place of righteousness, wicked-
ness was there as well. 17 I said in my heart,
God will judge the righteous and the wicked,
for he has appointed a time for every matter,
and for every work. 18 I said in my heart with
regard to human beings that God is testing
them to show that they are but animals. 19 For
the fate of humans and the fate of animals
is the same; as one dies, so dies the other.
They all have the same breath, and humans
have no advantage over the animals; for all is
vanity. 20 All go to one place; all are from the
dust, and all turn to dust again. 21 Who knows
whether the human spirit goes upward and
the spirit of animals goes downward to the
earth? 22 So I saw that there is nothing better
than that all should enjoy their work, for that
is their lot; who can bring them to see what
will be after them?

4 Again I saw all the oppressions that are
practiced under the sun. Look, the tears
of the oppressed—with no one to comfort
them! On the side of their oppressors there
was power—with no one to comfort them.
2 And I thought the dead, who have already
died, more fortunate than the living, who are
still alive; 3 but better than both is the one
who has not yet been, and has not seen the
evil deeds that are done under the sun.

4 Then I saw that all toil and all skill in
work come from one person's envy of an-
other. This also is vanity and a chasing after
wind.[a]

5 Fools fold their hands
and consume their own flesh.
6 Better is a handful with quiet
than two handfuls with toil,
and a chasing after wind.[a]

7 Again, I saw vanity under the sun: 8 the
case of solitary individuals, without sons or
brothers; yet there is no end to all their toil,
and their eyes are never satisfied with riches.
"For whom am I toiling," they ask, "and
depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is
vanity and an unhappy business.

9 Two are better than one, because they
have a good reward for their toil. 10 For if they
fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to
one who is alone and falls and does not have
another to help. 11 Again, if two lie together,
they keep warm; but how can one keep warm
alone? 12 And though one might prevail
against another, two will withstand one. A
threefold cord is not quickly broken.

13 Better is a poor but wise youth than
an old but foolish king, who will no longer
take advice. 14 One can indeed come out of
prison to reign, even though born poor in the
kingdom. 15 I saw all the living who, moving
about under the sun, follow that[b] youth who
replaced the king;[c] 16 there was no end to all
those people whom he led. Yet those who
come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this
also is vanity and a chasing after wind.[a]

[a] Or *a feeding on wind.* See Hos 12.1
[b] Heb *the second*
[c] Heb *him*

3.16–22: The determination of humanity's fate. There are injustices in the world, even in places where one might expect justice; cf. 8.14. God will, however, adjudicate the situation in God's own time; cf. 12.14. **19:** As far as mortality is concerned, human beings have no advantage over animals: All must die. **20:** *One place,* Sheol, the abode of the dead (9.10). *Dust,* 12.7; Gen 3:19. **21:** *Who knows,* a rhetorical question. The author is apparently skeptical about the belief in survival after death, an idea which was beginning to be developed.

4.1–16: Relative good. In the light of the author's insistence that there is nothing better for humanity than to enjoy work (3.22), these verses make plain that everything thought by mortals to be good is only relatively so. **1–3:** The living still have to witness the injustices of life, whereas the dead no longer have to do so and those who have never been born never have to do so. **4–6:** On the one hand, human toil and strivings are driven by envy. On the other hand, the idleness of fools is self-destructive. The better alternative, even if only relatively good, is to have a little (material goods, enjoyment, or both), but to have it with peace. **6:** Sayings of the form "*better . . . than*" are common in Proverbs (12.9; 15.16–17; 16.8). **7–8:** People toil for no reason other than habit or obsessive compulsion. **7:** *Under the sun,* 1.3n. **9–12:** There is relative advantage in numbers, but no guarantee. A three-ply cord may still snap, although not as easily as a cord with only two strands or one. **13–16:** It is better to start out poorly and end up well. Every generation will have its new underdog-turned-hero, who will seem to have limitless support from populace, until the next hero comes along. **16:** *Vanity,* 1.2n. *Chasing after wind,* 1.14n.

5 [a] Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools; for they do not know how to keep from doing evil.[b] [2] [c]Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few.

[3] For dreams come with many cares, and a fool's voice with many words.

[4] When you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill what you vow. [5] It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfill it. [6] Do not let your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your words, and destroy the work of your hands?

[7] With many dreams come vanities and a multitude of words;[d] but fear God.

[8] If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and right, do not be amazed at the matter; for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. [9] But all things considered, this is an advantage for a land: a king for a plowed field.[d]

[10] The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity.

[11] When goods increase, those who eat them increase; and what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes?

[12] Sweet is the sleep of laborers, whether they eat little or much; but the surfeit of the rich will not let them sleep.

[13] There is a grievous ill that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owners to their hurt, [14] and those riches were lost in a bad venture; though they are parents of children, they have nothing in their hands. [15] As they came from their mother's womb, so they shall go again, naked as they came; they shall take nothing for their toil, which they may carry away with their hands. [16] This also is a grievous ill: just as they came, so shall they go; and what

[a] Ch 4.17 in Heb
[b] Cn: Heb *they do not know how to do evil*
[c] Ch 5.1 in Heb
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain

5.1–7: Attitude before God. God and human beings do not belong to the same realm. It is necessary, therefore, to have the right attitude before God. **1:** It is more acceptable to obey God than to show off one's religiosity, as fools often do (cf. Prov 21.3; 1 Sam 15.22; Am 5.22–24; Hos 6.6). *They do not know how to keep from doing evil,* fools are often described as lacking perceptiveness (Prov 10.21,23; 14.8; 18.2). **3:** In the ancient Near East, *dreams* were often seen as foreshadowing the future, though in coded symbols (cf. the anxiety-producing dreams of Pharaoh in Gen 41 and Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 2; 4). **4–7:** Vows must be taken seriously; cf. Deut 23.21–22; Sir 18.2. The text warns against the lack of restraint in speech, for the mouth may bring condemnation to the entire person (cf. Lev 5.4; Prov 10:19). It is unclear who *the messenger* in v. 6 refers to; perhaps the Temple priest to whom people went to confess that they had erred (see Num 15.22–31; Lev 4.2,22,27–30). The confession would be useless, however, because God would still be angry at the foolish utterances. **7:** *Fear God,* respect and awe before God are central values in wisdom literature (Job 1.1,8; 2.3; 28.28; Prov 1.7).

5.8–6.9: Enjoy, but do not be greedy. The passage is arranged in such a way that the outer sections lead inward toward its center in 5.20, with its call for enjoyment. **5.8:** *High official* (lit. "high one"), a term elsewhere used of someone who is arrogant (Job 41.34; Ps 138.6; Isa 10.33; Ezek 21.26) and never of officials of any sort. This text does not refer to a government bureaucracy, but to ambitious people who strive to get ahead of one another and commit injustice in the process. No matter how high they get, however, there will always be people higher than they who look down upon them. **9:** The meaning of this verse is obscure. **10:** Wealth itself is not the problem here but greed—the insatiability of the rich (see Sir 31.5–7). *Vanity,* 1.2n. **11:** The rhetorical question presupposes a negative answer. *To see them with his eyes* implies that wealth is good only for present enjoyment. **12:** The contrast is not between one who works and one who is a sluggard, but between poor *laborers* (or "employees") and *the rich* who cannot stop worrying despite the plenty they already possess (Sir 31:1). *Surfeit,* overindulgence in food or perhaps possessions. The rich consume so much that they are unable to sleep either because of indigestion or worry, or both. **13–14:** The case of the rich person who accumulates much wealth, only to lose it all. **15:** When people are buried, they figuratively return to the womb of mother earth; cf. Job 1.21;

gain do they have from toiling for the wind?
17 Besides, all their days they eat in darkness,
in much vexation and sickness and resentment.

18 This is what I have seen to be good: it is
fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in
all the toil with which one toils under the sun
the few days of the life God gives us; for this
is our lot. 19 Likewise all to whom God gives
wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and
find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of
God. 20 For they will scarcely brood over the
days of their lives, because God keeps them
occupied with the joy of their hearts.

6 There is an evil that I have seen under the
sun, and it lies heavy upon humankind:
2 those to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that they lack nothing of
all that they desire, yet God does not enable
them to enjoy these things, but a stranger
enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous ill.
3 A man may beget a hundred children, and
live many years; but however many are the
days of his years, if he does not enjoy life's
good things, or has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. 4 For it comes
into vanity and goes into darkness, and in
darkness its name is covered; 5 moreover it
has not seen the sun or known anything; yet
it finds rest rather than he. 6 Even though he
should live a thousand years twice over, yet
enjoy no good—do not all go to one place?

7 All human toil is for the mouth, yet the
appetite is not satisfied. 8 For what advantage
have the wise over fools? And what do the
poor have who know how to conduct themselves before the living? 9 Better is the sight
of the eyes than the wandering of desire; this
also is vanity and a chasing after wind.[a]

10 Whatever has come to be has already
been named, and it is known what human
beings are, and that they are not able to
dispute with those who are stronger. 11 The
more words, the more vanity, so how is one
the better? 12 For who knows what is good for
mortals while they live the few days of their
vain life, which they pass like a shadow? For
who can tell them what will be after them
under the sun?

[a] Or *a feeding on wind.* See Hos 12.1

Sir 40.1. **17:** The preceding verses focus on the loss of possessions; this one highlights the complementary ill of not enjoying what one does possess. **18–19:** The right to enjoy life is, as a rule, given by God to all humanity. **18:** *Under the sun,* 1.3n. **19:** *Gift of God,* cf. 3.12–13n. **20:** *They will scarcely brood over the days of their lives*, perhaps better "they should not much call to mind the days of their lives." Rather than constantly thinking about their lives and their mortality they should enjoy the present because God has given them joy. The Hebrew word translated *keeps them occupied* is the same form for the word "answer" (Prov 15.1,23; 16.1; 29.19; Job 32.3,5). **6.1–2:** Whereas God has given some people the opportunity to enjoy (5.18–19), sometimes God does the contrary. **3:** *But however many are the days of his years,* perhaps better "and yet he complains that the days of his years will come to pass." Even though this person has everything that anyone might desire, including abundant wealth, progeny, and long life, he complains about the days ahead of him, dissatisfied with all that he has, and even worried about proper burial when he dies. In that case, he is no better off than *a stillborn child* (cf. Job 3.16–18). **4–6:** There is no point in having a long life if one cannot enjoy it. **7:** *The appetite is not satisfied,* the language here alludes to the insatiability of Death in Canaanite mythology (cf. Isa 5.14; Hab 2.5; Prov 27.20; 30.16). Compare the similar perspective on unending activity in 1.3–8. **8–9:** *Sight of the eyes . . . wandering of desire*, the contrast appears to be between what is present and the insatiable appetite for what is not. The answer lies in the enjoyment of what one has, i.e., in contentment. **9:** For the form of the saying, see 4.6n. *Vanity . . . chasing after wind,* 1.2n.; 1.14n.

6.10–7.14: The limits of knowledge. The passage begins (6.10–12) and ends (7.13–14) with statements that emphasize human ignorance and weakness, over against divine determination and the deity's incomprehensible activity. The "better . . . than" sayings in 7.1–12 are, therefore, quoted in mockery: they illustrate the sort of sayings proffered by those who believe that mortals know what is really good. **6.10–12:** Despite the passive verbs (v. 10), it is clear that the author means that God is the one who has *named* and *known.* **10:** *Dispute with those who are stronger*, a possible allusion to Job 9.1–4. **11–12:** The reference to abundant and empty words anticipates the sayings to follow (7.1–12). By using rhetorical questions, the author suggests that humans have no advantage, because no one *knows what is good for mortals*. Neither the foolish nor the wise can give others

7 A good name is better than precious ointment,
and the day of death, than the day of birth.
2 It is better to go to the house of mourning
than to go to the house of feasting;
for this is the end of everyone,
and the living will lay it to heart.
3 Sorrow is better than laughter,
for by sadness of countenance the heart is made glad.
4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning;
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.
5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise
than to hear the song of fools.
6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot,
so is the laughter of fools;
this also is vanity.
7 Surely oppression makes the wise foolish,
and a bribe corrupts the heart.
8 Better is the end of a thing than its beginning;
the patient in spirit are better than the proud in spirit.
9 Do not be quick to anger,
for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.
10 Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?"
For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.
11 Wisdom is as good as an inheritance,
an advantage to those who see the sun.
12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,
and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to the one who possesses it.
13 Consider the work of God;
who can make straight what he has made crooked?
14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them.
15 In my vain life I have seen everything; there are righteous people who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their life in their evildoing. 16 Do not be too righteous, and do not act too wise; why should you destroy yourself? 17 Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time? 18 It is good that you should take hold of the one, without letting go of the other; for the one who fears God shall succeed with both.
19 Wisdom gives strength to the wise more than ten rulers that are in a city.
20 Surely there is no one on earth so righteous as to do good without ever sinning.
21 Do not give heed to everything that people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you; 22 your heart knows that many times you have yourself cursed others.

advice on what is universally good. **7.1–12:** A series of "better . . . than" sayings imitating the style of traditional proverbs (see 4.6n.), with their tendency to present issues in dialectical pairs: fame and luxury (v. 1a), birth and death (v. 1b), funeral and wedding (v. 2), merriment and sadness (v. 3), mourning and pleasure (v. 4), rebuke and praise (v. 5), the wise and the fool (vv. 6–7), beginning and end (v. 8), patience and arrogance (v. 8). The sayings are all subverted and relativized, however. The effect of the overall presentation is to show that no one knows what is universally good. Each saying may contain an element of truth, but the sum total of these many words is, again, "vanity" (v. 6; see 1.2n.)—just so much empty talk (cf. 6.11). **13–14:** People should accept good when it is accessible and face adversity when that is a reality; see 1.15; 3.14.

7.15–29: Righteousness and wisdom are elusive. This passage consists of two parts: The first concerns the dangers of extreme behavior, including excessive righteousness and wisdom (vv. 15–22); the second concerns the elusiveness of wisdom (vv. 23–29). **15:** The traditional doctrine of retribution (e.g., Prov 11.3–11) is often contradicted by experience. **16:** Those who aspire to extreme righteousness (also meaning "rightness") may destroy themselves. **17:** Those who are too wicked and foolish will suffer the consequences. The wisdom tradition often advocates moderation (see Sir 7.4–5). **18:** *The one . . . the other* refers to the two ideas in vv. 16–17. Whoever is religious (*fears God*) will follow both precepts. **19:** Perhaps a proverbial illustration of the value people place on wisdom and power, although neither will avert death. **20:** Perfect righteousness ("rightness") is impossible, for every mortal misses the mark (cf. 1 Kings 8.46; 2 Chr 6.26; Pss 14.1–3; 53.1–3; 143.2; Prov 20.9; Job 4.17).

23 All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. 24 That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out? 25 I turned my mind to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the sum of things, and to know that wickedness is folly and that foolishness is madness. 26 I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. 27 See, this is what I found, says the Teacher,[a] adding one thing to another to find the sum, 28 which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. 29 See, this alone I found, that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes.

8 Who is like the wise man?
And who knows the interpretation of a thing?
Wisdom makes one's face shine,
and the hardness of one's countenance is changed.

2 Keep[b] the king's command because of your sacred oath. 3 Do not be terrified; go from his presence, do not delay when the matter is unpleasant, for he does whatever he pleases. 4 For the word of the king is powerful, and who can say to him, "What are you doing?" 5 Whoever obeys a command will meet no harm, and the wise mind will know the time and way. 6 For every matter has its time and way, although the troubles of mortals lie heavy upon them. 7 Indeed, they do not know what is to be, for who can tell them how it will be? 8 No one has power over the wind[c] to restrain the wind,[c] or power over the day of death; there is no discharge from the battle, nor does wickedness deliver those who practice it. 9 All this I observed, applying my mind to all that is done under the sun, while one person exercises authority over another to the other's hurt.

10 Then I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place, and were praised in the city where they had done such things.[d] This also is vanity. 11 Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human heart is fully set to do evil. 12 Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know

[a] *Qoheleth*, traditionally rendered *Preacher*
[b] Heb *I keep*
[c] Or *breath*
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain

26: *The woman who is a trap,* this is not a polemic against women in general but echoes in allegorical fashion the warnings in other wisdom writings against Folly, personified as a seductive woman (Prov 2.16–19; 5.20; 6.24–35; 7.5–27; 23.27–28). Wisdom is elusive, but Folly is on a hunt to catch people unawares. **27:** *Teacher,* see 1.1n. *Adding one thing to another,* an image of an accountant or merchant working on a ledger (cf. v. 25). **28:** *One man among a thousand . . . a woman among all these*, this notoriously difficult sentence may be a gloss prompted by misinterpretation of v. 26 as referring to women in general. The first part of the verse refers to the elusiveness of wisdom (cf. Prov 1.28; 3.13–15; 31.10).

8.1–17: Reflections on the limits of power. 1–5: Traditional advice on how to react to arbitrary power only shows the limits of wisdom. **1:** *Makes one's face shine,* elsewhere it is always God who "makes one's face shine" (Num 6.25; Pss 31.16; 67.1; 80.3,7,19; 119.135; etc.). The idiom means "to be gracious" or "to be pleasant." Wisdom causes one to act pleasantly. **2:** *Because of,* perhaps "in the manner of." *Sacred oath,* an oath sworn in the name of God (Ex 22.11; 2 Sam 21.7; 1 Kings 2.43), hence, the most solemn oath. A *king's command* should be taken that seriously. **3:** *Do not delay when the matter is unpleasant,* or "do not persist in a harmful thing," possibly an allusion to sedition. In the face of overwhelming odds, one should not do anything dangerous. **5b–7:** *Time and way*, lit. "time and judgment" (cf. 3.1,16–17). There are a proper time and a proper judgment, although no one knows when and how until after the fact. **8:** *Power over the wind to restrain the wind,* or "power over the (life-) breath to hold back the (life-)breath." No one has the power to avert death. *No discharge from battle,* better "no substitution in battle." No one can send a substitute to take his or her place in the final battle that is death. **10:** The wicked are properly interred and honored upon their death (Job 21.32–33). *Vanity,* 1.2n. **11:** The slow judicial process encourages the wicked to do even more evil (Job 21.19–21). **12–13:** The wicked may live long, but the human life span is finally limited: they will not *prolong their days* (that are) *like a shadow,* a transient and unreliable

that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him, 13 but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God.

14 There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. 15 So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun.

16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how one's eyes see sleep neither day nor night, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out what is happening under the sun. However much they may toil in seeking, they will not find it out; even though those who are wise claim to know, they cannot find it out.

9 All this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate one does not know. Everything that confronts them 2 is vanity,[a] since the same fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil,[b] to the clean and the unclean, to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. As are the good, so are the sinners; those who swear are like those who shun an oath. 3 This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone. Moreover, the hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. 4 But whoever is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5 The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost. 6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun.

7 Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. 8 Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. 9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

11 Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,

[a] Syr Compare Gk: Heb *Everything that confronts them 2is everything*

[b] Gk Syr Vg: Heb lacks *and the evil*

thing (cf. 6.12; Pss 102.11; 109.23; 144.4; Job 8.9; 14.2; 17.7). **14:** *Vanity . . . vanity,* here means an incomprehensible situation (see 1.2n.). **15:** *To eat, and drink, and enjoy,* traditionally "to eat, and to drink, and to be merry" (KJV); cf. 2.24; 3.13; 5.18; 9.7. **16–17:** *One's eyes see sleep neither day nor night,* an idiom for constant effort. Even those who are so dedicated to understanding God's mysterious activity cannot find what they yearn to know.

9.1–10: Enjoy life. All people face the common fate of death, regardless of their character. Yet life is better than death and one should enjoy life whenever able to do so. **1–2:** *Love* and *hate* may refer to human emotions that accompany their *deeds,* or to divine favor and disfavor. Since death *comes to all* (cf. 2.14–15; 3.19), one cannot deduce God's attitude. *Vanity,*1.2n. **4–6:** For all its limitations, life is still better than death, for the dead will not have whatever life has to offer. For the living, there are still some possibilities, however uncertain and ephemeral those may be. **7–10:** Enjoy life while you can, for God has already *approved what you do;* when you die this will be impossible. A similar passage in the ancient Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh suggests that the advice to enjoy life in the full knowledge of certain death was a piece of folk wisdom. **8:** *Let your garments always be white,* clean garments indicate a happy, prosperous life. *Oil . . . on your head,* another indication of happiness and prosperity (cf. Ps 23.5). **9:** *Vain life,* lit. "days of vanity," here refers to the ephemeral nature of life (see 1.2n.). **10:** *Whatever your hand finds to do,* means one's ability to act (cf. Lev 12.8; 25.28; 1 Sam 10.7). *Sheol,* the abode of the dead.

9.11–10.15: The world is full of risks. 9.11–12: The author disputes the cause-and-effect or act-and-consequence logic that characterizes Proverbs' view of life. Outcomes are not predictable. *Time and chance,* i.e., death

nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all. [12] For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.

[13] I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. [14] There was a little city with few people in it. A great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. [15] Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. [16] So I said, "Wisdom is better than might; yet the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded."

[17] The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded
than the shouting of a ruler among fools.
[18] Wisdom is better than weapons of war,
but one bungler destroys much good.

10 Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a foul odor;
so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.
[2] The heart of the wise inclines to the right,
but the heart of a fool to the left.
[3] Even when fools walk on the road, they lack sense,
and show to everyone that they are fools.
[4] If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post,
for calmness will undo great offenses.
[5] There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as great an error as if it proceeded from the ruler: [6] folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. [7] I have seen slaves on horseback, and princes walking on foot like slaves.

[8] Whoever digs a pit will fall into it;
and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a snake.
[9] Whoever quarries stones will be hurt by them;
and whoever splits logs will be endangered by them.
[10] If the iron is blunt, and one does not whet the edge,
then more strength must be exerted;
but wisdom helps one to succeed.
[11] If the snake bites before it is charmed,
there is no advantage in a charmer.

[12] Words spoken by the wise bring them favor,
but the lips of fools consume them.
[13] The words of their mouths begin in foolishness,
and their talk ends in wicked madness;
[14] yet fools talk on and on.
No one knows what is to happen,
and who can tell anyone what the future holds?
[15] The toil of fools wears them out,
for they do not even know the way to town.

[16] Alas for you, O land, when your king is a servant,[a]
and your princes feast in the morning!

[a] Or *a child*

as an unpredictable event. **13–16:** An illustration that wisdom provides no guarantee. *Wisdom* may be *better than might,* but wisdom may not be heeded because of issues of social class. **15:** *Delivered,* better "might have delivered." The text concerns lost opportunity. This wise man might have saved the city, but no one thought of him because of his lowly status. **17:** A proverb that can only be understood ironically in light of v. 16. **18:** The relative virtue of wisdom is negated by a single fool. **10.1:** With a slight emendation, the text reads "a fly that dies" instead of *dead flies*. Just as a single fool might negate the value of wisdom, so a single dead fly could ruin a pot of precious ointment. **2:** *Right . . . left,* indicate opposite sides, but may also carry ethical connotations of what is good and right on the one hand, and what is bad and sinister on the other. **5–7:** A world turned topsy-turvy (see Prov 26.1; 30.21–23; Isa 3.4–5). **8:** The hunter who *digs a pit* to trap animals is most vulnerable to his own trap. A farmer who breaks down old walls to build new ones is susceptible to dangers that come with that task. **9:** *Whoever quarries stones* or *splits logs* is vulnerable to occupational hazards. **10–11:** Just as precautionary measures might help avert accidents, so wisdom is desirable. Yet, sometimes the precautionary measure may come too late or where there may be no advantage in taking the measure at all (as with snakes that cannot be charmed).

10.16–11.6: Living with risks. First political risks are discussed (10.16–20), then economic risks (11.1–6).

17 Happy are you, O land, when your king is a nobleman,
and your princes feast at the proper time—
for strength, and not for drunkenness!
18 Through sloth the roof sinks in,
and through indolence the house leaks.
19 Feasts are made for laughter;
wine gladdens life,
and money meets every need.
20 Do not curse the king, even in your thoughts,
or curse the rich, even in your bedroom;
for a bird of the air may carry your voice,
or some winged creature tell the matter.

11 Send out your bread upon the waters,
for after many days you will get it back.
2 Divide your means seven ways, or even eight,
for you do not know what disaster may happen on earth.
3 When clouds are full,
they empty rain on the earth;
whether a tree falls to the south or to the north,
in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.
4 Whoever observes the wind will not sow;
and whoever regards the clouds will not reap.
5 Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything.
6 In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let your hands be idle; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.
7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.
8 Even those who live many years should rejoice in them all; yet let them remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.
9 Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your

10.16–17: *Your king is a servant,* or "your king is a boy" (the Heb word has both meanings). The point is that incompetent people have gained power (cf. 9.17–18; 10.5–6), and other leaders, too, have proven themselves unqualified because of their indiscretion. **18–19:** *The house leaks*, or, "the house collapses": subversive political commentary in the guise of an innocuous proverb. The saying appears to be about the ruin of a house because of the owner's laziness, but *the house* may have political overtones, suggesting the incompetence and indiscretion of the leaders. Similarly, v. 19 may be read as a proverb affirming life's pleasures and rewards, or as a critique of the irresponsible lifestyle of the elite. **20:** The Heb verb for *curse* used here simply means "to denigrate" or "to vilify." The author warns against the kinds of subversive activity suggested by the "inside jokes" of vv. 18–19. Even cryptic and private criticisms will become known to those in power. **11.1:** *Send out your bread upon the waters,* a parallel from an Egyptian wisdom text suggests that this is about spontaneous good deeds. Generosity is expressed by the image of bread that is voluntarily given up, released upon the waters, where it will either float downstream or sink. One may do something without thinking much about it, yet one may not lose all in such an action. **2:** *Divide your means seven ways, or even eight,* lit. "Give a portion to seven or even to eight." This is a numerical saying (Prov 6.16; 30.15–33; Am 1–2); *seven* and *eight* together signify a large, though indefinite, amount (cf. Mic 5.5). The point is to be generous "although" (instead of *for*) one does not know what the future may bring. **3–4:** *Clouds* and *wind* are mysterious things that mortals do not control. When clouds are saturated it will rain, and when a tree is blown by a north wind or a south wind it will fall accordingly. People are powerless either to cause these natural phenomena or to prevent them from happening. The farmer who waits for the perfect weather conditions to *sow* or to *reap* will never do so. **5:** The Heb word for *breath* is the same word used for "wind" in v. 4. The word used for *mother* (lit. "full one") echoes the reference to the clouds being "full" (v. 3). Just as the movement of the wind is a mystery, so too the way the life-breath enters a body is a mystery. Likewise, the activity of God is a mystery beyond human understanding (cf. Ps 139.13–16). **6:** Instead of waiting for the perfect timing, one should be willing to work at any time—*in the morning* or *at evening*.

11.7–12.8: Conclusion: enjoy life while there is still time to do so. **8:** *All that comes is vanity* (see 1.2n.), i.e., nothing is permanent. **9:** *But know that . . . God will bring you into judgment*: the translation implies that enjoyment is contrary to the will of God. For the author, however, enjoyment is a divine gift (2.24–26; 3.10–15; 5.18–20; 9.7,9). A better translation is: "and know that . . . God will bring you into judgment" for failure to accept

heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

10 Banish anxiety from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

12 Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return with[a] the rain; 3 in the day when the guards of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the women who grind cease working because they are few, and those who look through the windows see dimly; 4 when the doors on the street are shut, and the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low; 5 when one is afraid of heights, and terrors are in the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along[b] and desire fails; because all must go to their eternal home, and the mourners will go about the streets; 6 before the silver cord is snapped,[c] and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern, 7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath[d] returns to God who gave it.

8 Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher;[e] all is vanity.

9 Besides being wise, the Teacher[e] also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs. 10 The Teacher[e] sought to find pleasing words, and he wrote words of truth plainly.

11 The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings that are given by one shepherd.[f] 12 Of anything beyond these, my child, beware.

[a] Or *after*; Heb *'ahar*
[b] Or *is a burden*
[c] Syr Vg Compare Gk: Heb *is removed*
[d] Or *the spirit*
[e] *Qoheleth*, traditionally rendered *Preacher*
[f] Meaning of Heb uncertain

the gift of enjoyment. **12.1:** The mention of the *creator* anticipates v. 7. The Heb for *your creator* ("bore'eka") sounds like the word "cistern" ("bor") in v. 6. The call to *remember* points back to the injunction to enjoy while one is able (11.7–10), but it also points forward to the scene of death at the end of the passage and to the creator who gave and will receive the human life-breath (v. 7.) **2–7:** In a poem that uses eschatological language, the author takes poetic license in arguing that mortals should enjoy what they can while they still have a chance, for a time may come when no one can enjoy. With poetic exaggeration, the author depicts the end of human life in terms of the end of the world. **2:** The language of the darkening sky is reminiscent of prophetic eschatology (cf. Isa 5.30; 13.10; Ezek 32.7–8; Am 5.8; 8.9; Mic 3.6). The Heb text says that rain clouds return "after" (not *with*) the rain, a sign of disaster, perhaps implying the return of the Flood (Gen 7.11–12; 8.2). **3:** *In the day when* (cf. Mal 3.1–3). Even the strong and valiant are terrified of what is happening (cf. Rev 6.12–17). The women who work the mills suddenly stop work (cf. Mt 24.40–41; Lk 17.34–35). Women look out the windows in despair (cf. Judg 5.28). The domestic routines are interrupted. **4:** *The doors* of the street-bazaar *are shut*; the mills that produce meals are silenced. *One rises up at the sound of a bird*, better "the sound of the birds rises," a reference to the cacophony of birds of prey descending. Thus, while the salutary sound of the mill drops, the unsavory sound of the birds rises. Moreover, the birds actually descend when they see the terror on the ground (v. 5). **5:** The translation of this difficult text depends on the interpretation of the scenario. The consonantal text of the Hebrew suggests the decline and dying of several types of trees. Thus, it is not the blossoming of *the almond tree,* but the tree becoming "hideous." The "locust" tree, too, "droops" (NRSV: *the grasshopper drags itself along*), while the caper-berry tree defoliates (NRSV: *desire fails*). In short, nature languishes (Am 1.2; Joel 2.12; Hab 3.17; Rev 6.12–14), as humanity marches toward the grave, *their eternal home* and an imaginary funeral takes place. **6:** Symbols of the permanent end of life. **7:** See Gen 2.7; 3.19. **8:** *Vanity of vanities,* the words echo 1.2, which together with this verse frame the body of the book.

12.9–14: Epilogue. An assessment and apology for the author and the book. **9:** The author is a typical sage: He teaches, gathers wisdom sayings, and works with them. **10:** Like a sage, the author's words have been deliberately chosen and rightly presented. **11:** The words of the wise are hard to hear but, like goads and nails, they have been deliberately applied as by a shepherd to his flock. **12:** A formulaic conclusion to establish the

Of making many books there is no end, and
much study is a weariness of the flesh.
13 The end of the matter; all has been
heard. Fear God, and keep his command-
ments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.
14 For God will bring every deed into judg-
ment, including[a] every secret thing, whether
good or evil.

[a] Or *into the judgment on*

authority of the text. Everything intended by the author has been laid out. **13:** *The end of the matter*, these words originally ended the epilogue and, hence, the book. The words beyond this point are later additions. The call to *fear God* is found elsewhere in the book (3.14; 5.7; 8.12–13), but the call to obey God's *commandments* is not.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

NAME OF BOOK AND LOCATION IN CANON

The Song of Solomon (Heb "Song of Songs"), also known as Canticles, appears in the Megillot, or "five scrolls" (Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther), in the third part of the Jewish canon, the Writings. In the Christian canon it is among the Poetical and Wisdom books.

AUTHORSHIP, DATE OF COMPOSITION, LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Song of Solomon, the Bible's only love poem, offers no clues about when, where, or under what circumstances it was composed. Its author is unknown. The traditional attribution of the book to Solomon probably derives from references to Solomon in the poem (1.5; 3.7,9,11; 8.11,12) and his reputation as the composer of songs (1 Kings 4.32) and owner of a large harem (1 Kings 11.3).

Speculation about the date of composition ranges from the time of Solomon (tenth century BCE) to the Hellenistic period (fourth to second centuries BCE). Some scholars see the Song as a collection, in which case the various love poems would come from different authors and different times.

Similarities to Mesopotamian (3000–1000 BCE) and, in particular, Egyptian love poetry (thirteenth to eleventh centuries BCE), indicate that the poet drew upon a rich cultural tradition of love poetry. Shared features include wishing, desiring, praising the beloved, metaphoric descriptions of the body, double entendre, nature imagery, and the appeal to the senses. Sometimes a dialogue format is used; frequently the lovers address each other as "sister" and "brother." Many of the Mesopotamian love poems deal with the marriage of the goddess and her consort and were used in ritual contexts. In contrast, the Song, like the Egyptian love poems, is not about gods nor does it appear to have had anything to do with worship.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

The Song is about how glorious it is to be in love. It looks at love from both a woman's and a man's point of view, and it consists entirely of dialogue, so that we learn about love through what lovers say about it. The dialogue format creates the impression that we are overhearing the lovers as they speak, and observing their love unfold. The poet seeks to immortalize a vision of love as strong as death by portraying the lovers as forever seeking and finding gratification of their mutual desire. They delight in each other and in the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangibility of the world around them, making the Song a feast for the senses.

A third speaking voice belongs to the women of Jerusalem, a kind of chorus functioning as an audience within the poem and whose presence, because the lovers are aware of and encourage it, facilitates the reader's entry into the lovers' seemingly private world of erotic intimacy.

The poem begins and ends with short speeches in which the speakers change frequently, and the voices of the woman, the man, and, occasionally, the women of Jerusalem intermingle (1.2–2.7; 8.1–14). In between—although the structure is not rigid—are two cycles of long speeches, in which the woman speaks, then the man, with the woman interrupting his speeches at the end (2.8–3.11 and 4.1–5.1; 5.2–6.3 and 6.4–7.13).

INTERPRETATION

Allegory was the dominant mode of interpretation from the early centuries of the Common Era until the rise of critical biblical scholarship in the nineteenth century. Jewish interpreters typically read the Song as an account of the relationship between God and Israel, while Christians saw it as about the love between Christ and the church, or Christ (or the divine logos) and the individual believer. Modern scholars recognize its subject as human love, though some have argued that it originated as a liturgical text whose speakers are a god and goddess. Whether the Song was included in the canon because it had been allegorized or was allegorized because it had been included in the canon has long been debated. Allegorization alone cannot have been the reason the Song was included, since the text must have already achieved a certain status—perhaps as national religious literature—for anyone to have taken the trouble to develop an allegorical interpretation of it.

GUIDE TO READING

The Song is a lyric poem, not a record of events in the lives of two lovers. This means that unusual events or sudden transitions do not require explanation to make them seem more realistic or more intelligible. When we read lyric poetry, which is essentially a discontinuous form, we should not expect to find the kind of linear unfolding of events that produces a plot. The Song meanders, repeating themes, images, phrases, and sometimes whole sections. As we read the poem, we may feel that we get to know the lovers, for they each have their own distinctive way of talking about their love and its effect on them. She is lovesick (2.5; 5.8), and she tells stories in which he comes to court her and she searches for him (2.8–17; 3.1–5; 5.2–8). He is overwhelmed by her (4.9; 6.5), and praises her charms in detail (4.1–15; 6.4–10; 7.1–9). Yet even as we build a picture of them, we need to recognize that the woman and the man are personae created by the poet to represent all lovers. They appear in various guises—shepherds, vineyard keepers, royal figures—as well as appearing as themselves. Because they are not real lovers, their movements are not restricted. They effortlessly traverse the poetic landscape—vineyards, gardens, palaces, houses, rocky cliffs, the wilderness, Lebanon—finding pleasure wherever their fancy takes them.

Readers are meant to revel in the poem's sonorousness, rich vocabulary, and exotic images. Its dense metaphoric language and extravagant images are not reducible to simple prose paraphrase, and typically the metaphors the lovers use to describe each other's bodies hide as much as they reveal.

This is no private poem, intended for a lover's ears only. It invites its readers to participate in the wonder of love, along with the women of Jerusalem, whose presence serves as a reminder that what seems to be a closed dialogue between lovers is indeed addressed to the reader.

J. Cheryl Exum

1 The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

[2] Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your love is better than wine,
[3] your anointing oils are fragrant,
your name is perfume poured out;
therefore the maidens love you.
[4] Draw me after you, let us make haste.
The king has brought me into his chambers.
We will exult and rejoice in you;
we will extol your love more than wine;
rightly do they love you.

[5] I am black and beautiful,
O daughters of Jerusalem,
like the tents of Kedar,
like the curtains of Solomon.
[6] Do not gaze at me because I am dark,
because the sun has gazed on me.
My mother's sons were angry with me;
they made me keeper of the vineyards,
but my own vineyard I have not kept!

1.1: Title. *Song of Songs*, a superlative, "the best song," like "king of kings" (Ezek 26.7), the king above all kings; "holy of holies" (Ex 26.33), the most holy place; "vanity of vanities" (Eccl 1.2), the height of absurdity. Hebrew "shir" is a generic term for "song" or "poem." *Which is Solomon's* could indicate authorship, or that Solomon is the dedicatee, or that the Song is connected with him in some way (compare the use of "of David" as an editorial superscription to many psalms).

1.2–2.7: A montage of short speeches. 1.2: The poem begins with a romantic relationship already in progress. The woman speaks about her lover as "him," as though he were not there, then suddenly he materializes and she speaks to him of *your love*. *Love*, a plural form referring to physical lovemaking (4.10; 7.12; cf. Prov 7.18). Like *wine*, love is intoxicating (cf. Judg 9.13). **4:** *The king*, i.e., the lover in his royal or Solomonic guise. Here too she speaks of him in the third person, as the king, and then in the second person "you," as in v. 2. *We*, the lovers, or, more likely, the woman and the *maidens* mentioned in v. 3, who are probably also the "they" at the end of v. 4. She is besotted with him and imagines that other women are similarly affected. **5–6:** *Black and beautiful*, her dark skin, she explains, is due to exposure to the sun while working in the vineyards. **5:** *Daughters of Jerusalem*, the female inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. "sons of Israel" for Israelites). *Kedar*, a northern Arabian tribe whose name means "dark." **6:** No reason is given for the brothers' anger nor is any further reference made to it. *My*

7 Tell me, you whom my soul loves,
where you pasture your flock,
where you make it lie down at noon;
for why should I be like one who is veiled
beside the flocks of your companions?

8 If you do not know,
O fairest among women,
follow the tracks of the flock,
and pasture your kids
beside the shepherds' tents.

9 I compare you, my love,
to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots.
10 Your cheeks are comely with ornaments,
your neck with strings of jewels.
11 We will make you ornaments of gold,
studded with silver.

12 While the king was on his couch,
my nard gave forth its fragrance.
13 My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh
that lies between my breasts.
14 My beloved is to me a cluster of henna
blossoms
in the vineyards of En-gedi.

15 Ah, you are beautiful, my love;
ah, you are beautiful;
your eyes are doves.
16 Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved,
truly lovely.
Our couch is green;
17 the beams of our house are cedar,
our rafters[a] are pine.

2 I am a rose[b] of Sharon,
a lily of the valleys.

2 As a lily among brambles,
so is my love among maidens.

3 As an apple tree among the trees of the
wood,
so is my beloved among young men.
With great delight I sat in his shadow,
and his fruit was sweet to my taste.
4 He brought me to the banqueting house,
and his intention toward me was love.
5 Sustain me with raisins,
refresh me with apples;
for I am faint with love.
6 O that his left hand were under my head,
and that his right hand embraced me!
7 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does:
do not stir up or awaken love
until it is ready!

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *crocus*

own vineyard refers to the woman herself, probably with a sexual meaning, as also in 8.12. **7–8:** The lovers appear in the guise of shepherds. **7:** *Pasture your flock*, there is no term for flock in the Hebrew, which reads, "Where do you graze?" This is one of many instances of double entendre in the Song: the man grazes or feeds among the lilies and in the gardens, figures for the woman herself (2.1–2; 4.12–5.1; see also 2.16 and 6.2–3, where NRSV also inserts "flock"). *Veiled* could refer to a disguise, or, better, read "one who wanders," with some ancient versions. **8:** Spoken either by the man or by the women of Jerusalem, who elsewhere address the woman as "fairest among women" (5.9; 6.1). **9–11:** The man compares his beloved to a fine horse, a common form of praise in antiquity. **11:** He will have the work done, without specifying who will do it (though possibly "we" could be the lovers or the man and the women of Jerusalem). **12–14:** The woman speaks of her beloved as *the king*, as in 1.4. The fragrance of *nard* and *myrrh*, costly aromatics, blend with the natural scent of *henna blossoms,* which are strongly scented and grow in dense clusters. *En-gedi*, an oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea. **1.15–2.3:** Mutual adoration. The man (v. 15) and the woman (vv. 16–17) praise each other in similar terms. She compares herself to flowers we cannot identify with any certainty (2.1). He turns her self-description into a compliment (v. 2), which she returns in a way that echoes his words (v. 3). *Sharon*, either the coastal plain between Jaffa and Mount Carmel or simply "the plain." **2.4:** *Banqueting house*, lit. "house of wine," where the lovers dwell in their mutual intoxication. **5–7:** The woman addresses the women of Jerusalem. *Faint with love*, lovesickness, for which the cause, love, is also the cure. **6:** Either a wish or a statement of fact; see 8.3. **7:** See 3.5; 8.4. This resembles a conventional way of swearing an oath but lacks the solemnity: the word for "gazelles" looks and sounds like the word for "hosts" in the name "Lord of Hosts," and Hebrew "'aylot hassadeh" ("wild does") recalls the divine name El Shaddai. *Love* is personified as something that has a will of its own.

[8] The voice of my beloved!
Look, he comes,
leaping upon the mountains,
bounding over the hills.
[9] My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.
Look, there he stands
behind our wall,
gazing in at the windows,
looking through the lattice.
[10] My beloved speaks and says to me:
"Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;
[11] for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
[12] The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.
[13] The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.
[14] O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
in the covert of the cliff,
let me see your face,
let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely.
[15] Catch us the foxes,
the little foxes,
that ruin the vineyards—
for our vineyards are in blossom."
[16] My beloved is mine and I am his;
he pastures his flock among the lilies.
[17] Until the day breathes
and the shadows flee,
turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle
or a young stag on the cleft mountains.[a]

3 Upon my bed at night
I sought him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not;
I called him, but he gave no answer.[b]
[2] "I will rise now and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves."
I sought him, but found him not.
[3] The sentinels found me,
as they went about in the city.
"Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"
[4] Scarcely had I passed them,
when I found him whom my soul loves.
I held him, and would not let him go
until I brought him into my mother's
house,
and into the chamber of her that
conceived me.
[5] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does:
do not stir up or awaken love
until it is ready!

[6] What is that coming up from the wilderness,
like a column of smoke,

[a] Or *on the mountains of Bether*; meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Gk: Heb lacks this line

2.8–3.11: The woman's first long speech. The woman's primary mode of speaking about love is to tell stories in which she and her lover are characters. As stories, these parts of the Song, unlike the poem as a whole, have plots. Here she tells three. **2.8–17:** The first describes the man's visit to her house and his invitation to her to join him outdoors to enjoy the springtime. *The voice of my beloved*, better, "Listen! My lover!" "Listen" and *look* create the impression of immediacy. His movements are captured in process as he draws closer: *leaping* and *bounding*, then *standing* and *gazing*. **11:** *Winter*, the rainy season. **12:** *Time of singing* may also be read as "time of pruning." **14:** She seems inaccessible, perhaps also shy and hesitant. **15–17:** She answers his request to hear her voice. *Foxes* and *vineyards*, young men and young women. In v. 15 she speaks for women in general; in v. 16, about her relationship with her lover, which is exclusive and mutual. **17:** *Until the day breathes and the shadows flee* could refer to either evening or morning. Whereas she seems to be saying that the time has come for her lover to return, over the mountains, from which he came (v. 8), *cleft mountains* (or emend to "mountains of spices" as in 8.14) alludes to the woman herself and the various pleasures her body offers, perhaps her breasts (see 4.5–6). **3.1–5:** In her second story, she describes her nocturnal search for her beloved and its resolution when she finds him. **5:** See 2.7; 8.4. **3.6–11:** Her third story. A luxurious conveyance approaches, bearing her lover, whom she casts in the role of King Solomon on his wedding day. **6:** *Coming up*, the procession is in motion. First

perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
with all the fragrant powders of the merchant?
7 Look, it is the litter of Solomon!
Around it are sixty mighty men
of the mighty men of Israel,
8 all equipped with swords
and expert in war,
each with his sword at his thigh
because of alarms by night.
9 King Solomon made himself a palanquin
from the wood of Lebanon.
10 He made its posts of silver,
its back of gold, its seat of purple;
its interior was inlaid with love.[a]
Daughters of Jerusalem,
11 come out.
Look, O daughters of Zion,
at King Solomon,
at the crown with which his mother crowned him
on the day of his wedding,
on the day of the gladness of his heart.

4 How beautiful you are, my love,
how very beautiful!
Your eyes are doves
behind your veil.
Your hair is like a flock of goats,
moving down the slopes of Gilead.
2 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes
that have come up from the washing,
all of which bear twins,
and not one among them is bereaved.
3 Your lips are like a crimson thread,
and your mouth is lovely.
Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate
behind your veil.
4 Your neck is like the tower of David,
built in courses;
on it hang a thousand bucklers,
all of them shields of warriors.
5 Your two breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle,
that feed among the lilies.
6 Until the day breathes
and the shadows flee,
I will hasten to the mountain of myrrh
and the hill of frankincense.
7 You are altogether beautiful, my love;
there is no flaw in you.
8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride;
come with me from Lebanon.
Depart[b] from the peak of Amana,
from the peak of Senir and Hermon,
from the dens of lions,
from the mountains of leopards.

9 You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride,
you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *Look*

it looks *like a column of smoke*. Next comes an appeal to the sense of smell created by the fragrant aromas of *myrrh* and *frankincense*, suggesting that what is approaching from the distance might be a caravan laden with *fragrant powders of the merchant*. **7–8:** *Look*, now the source of the smoke and the fragrance can be seen, a *litter* or *palanquin* (v. 9), an enclosed chair or couch carried by bearers, surrounded by an armed escort. **9–10:** The trappings of the magnificent *palanquin* progressively come into view. *Love* is not a material for decorating, like *wood*, *silver*, *gold*, and *purple*, and should be emended to "precious stones" or "ebony."

4.1–5.1: The man's first long speech. The man's mode of speaking about love is to look at his lover, tell her what he sees and how it affects him. **4.1–5:** He describes parts of her body, using similes and metaphors. **1:** *Goats, moving down the slopes*, flowing tresses of wavy black hair (goats were commonly black or dark colored). *Gilead*, a hilly region in northern Jordan. **2:** *Teeth*, white and evenly paired, with none missing. **3:** *Cheeks*, *halves of a pomegranate*, perhaps rosy cheeks glimpsed through a white mesh *veil*. **4:** The image suggests a *neck* adorned with a necklace made up of several rows of beads. *Tower of David* evokes her regal quality; no such tower is known. **5:** Elsewhere the man is described as *feeding among the lilies*, an erotically suggestive image in which the lilies signify the woman (2.16; 6.2–3). **6:** He responds to her exhortation of 2.17. *Mountain of myrrh*, *hill of frankincense*, the woman's breasts, the woman herself, and the place where the lovers enjoy love's pleasures. **8:** *Bride*, here and v. 11, and "my sister, my bride" (4.9,10,12; 5.1) are terms of endearment. *Amana*, *Senir*, and *Hermon*, peaks in the Anti-Lebanon mountain range, north of Israel, where lions and leopards make their dens, create a contrast to the accessible mountains of v. 6 and symbolize the woman's inaccessibility and the awe she inspires

with one jewel of your necklace.
10 How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride!
how much better is your love than wine,
and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!
11 Your lips distill nectar, my bride;
honey and milk are under your tongue;
the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon.
12 A garden locked is my sister, my bride,
a garden locked, a fountain sealed.
13 Your channel[a] is an orchard of pomegranates
with all choicest fruits,
henna with nard,
14 nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,
with all trees of frankincense,
myrrh and aloes,
with all chief spices—
15 a garden fountain, a well of living water,
and flowing streams from Lebanon.

16 Awake, O north wind,
and come, O south wind!
Blow upon my garden
that its fragrance may be wafted abroad.
Let my beloved come to his garden,
and eat its choicest fruits.

5 I come to my garden, my sister, my bride;
I gather my myrrh with my spice,
I eat my honeycomb with my honey,
I drink my wine with my milk.

Eat, friends, drink,
and be drunk with love.

2 I slept, but my heart was awake.
Listen! my beloved is knocking.
"Open to me, my sister, my love,
my dove, my perfect one;
for my head is wet with dew,
my locks with the drops of the night."
3 I had put off my garment;
how could I put it on again?
I had bathed my feet;
how could I soil them?
4 My beloved thrust his hand into the opening,
and my inmost being yearned for him.
5 I arose to open to my beloved,
and my hands dripped with myrrh,
my fingers with liquid myrrh,
upon the handles of the bolt.
6 I opened to my beloved,
but my beloved had turned and was gone.
My soul failed me when he spoke.
I sought him, but did not find him;
I called him, but he gave no answer.
7 Making their rounds in the city
the sentinels found me;
they beat me, they wounded me,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

in him. **9:** *Ravished*, either "stirred my heart" or "captured my heart." He speaks of love in terms of conquest, describing his feeling of being overwhelmed by her as something she has done to him. **11:** *The scent of Lebanon*, i.e., the fragrant cedars. **4.12–5.1:** A cluster of metaphors create a picture of his lover as a fragrant garden, full of edible delights. **4.12:** *Garden locked*, his private garden for his exclusive pleasure. **13–15:** She is a paradisiacal garden, where exotic spice-bearing plants and trees from such faraway places as Arabia, Africa, and India grow side by side. **16:** The woman interrupts him, first inviting the winds into her garden to whet the man's appetite by stirring up its sweet smells, then inviting her lover to an erotic banquet. **5.1:** Eating and drinking are symbols of sexual intimacy. *Eat, friends*, the women of Jerusalem encourage the lovers in their mutual intoxication.

5.2–6.3: The woman's second long speech. Again the woman tells of a visit by the man followed by her search for him in the city streets at night. A dialogue with the women of Jerusalem enables her story to reach the desired outcome, union with her lover. **5.2–8:** See 3.1–5. Her story is replete with sexual allusions. **5.2:** *I slept, but my heart was awake*, a light sleep, in which the woman, desiring or anticipating her lover's visit, is half-listening for his voice. **3:** Either an explanation for her delay, addressed to the women of Jerusalem, or a playful reply to her lover ("I have put off my garment"). **5.** *Myrrh*, with which the woman had anointed herself, or perfumed her bed (Prov 7.17), or both. **6:** *My soul failed me* (lit. "went forth") may refer to swooning or fainting (cf. the similar expression used of dying, Gen 35.18; Ps 146.4). *When he spoke*, better translated, "because of him" or "when he left." **7:** A forceful reminder of the perils of love, or of the willingness of love to suffer. No justification

they took away my mantle,
those sentinels of the walls.
[8] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
if you find my beloved,
tell him this:
I am faint with love.

[9] What is your beloved more than another beloved,
O fairest among women?
What is your beloved more than another beloved,
that you thus adjure us?

[10] My beloved is all radiant and ruddy,
distinguished among ten thousand.
[11] His head is the finest gold;
his locks are wavy,
black as a raven.
[12] His eyes are like doves
beside springs of water,
bathed in milk,
fitly set.[a]
[13] His cheeks are like beds of spices,
yielding fragrance.
His lips are lilies,
distilling liquid myrrh.
[14] His arms are rounded gold,
set with jewels.
His body is ivory work,[a]
encrusted with sapphires.[b]
[15] His legs are alabaster columns,
set upon bases of gold.
His appearance is like Lebanon,
choice as the cedars.
[16] His speech is most sweet,
and he is altogether desirable.
This is my beloved and this is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

6 Where has your beloved gone,
O fairest among women?
Which way has your beloved turned,
that we may seek him with you?

[2] My beloved has gone down to his garden,
to the beds of spices,
to pasture his flock in the gardens,
and to gather lilies.
[3] I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine;
he pastures his flock among the lilies.

[4] You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love,
comely as Jerusalem,
terrible as an army with banners.
[5] Turn away your eyes from me,
for they overwhelm me!
Your hair is like a flock of goats,
moving down the slopes of Gilead.
[6] Your teeth are like a flock of ewes,
that have come up from the washing;
all of them bear twins,
and not one among them is bereaved.
[7] Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate
behind your veil.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *lapis lazuli*

is given for the woman's harsh treatment at the hands of the *sentinels*, and the verse is ambiguous regarding the severity of their attack. **5.9–6.3:** The women of Jerusalem's questions and the woman's answers reveal that they are not taking the search too seriously. **9:** They ask what is so special about him. **10–16:** She answers by praising him, thereby evoking his presence. The images are intimate and erotically suggestive. **10:** *Radiant and ruddy*, a sign of health, youthfulness, and beauty (Ps 104.15; 1 Sam 16.12; 17.42; Lam 4.7). **12:** *Doves* in pellucid pools, as though *bathed in milk*, evoke the pupil and iris surrounded by the wet milky whiteness of the eye. **14–16:** Her description of his statuesque body made of strong and precious materials expresses his value to her. **16:** *His speech* (lit. "his palate"), better, "his mouth," since she is describing his physical attributes. *My friend*, her only use of a term of endearment he uses frequently of her (1.9,15; 2.2,10,13; 4.1,7; 5.2; 6.4, where NRSV translates, "my love"). **6.1:** The playfulness of the dialogue is obvious, since they ask her where he has gone in order to help her find him. **2–3:** She knows where he is. The *garden* represents both the woman and the setting for lovemaking. Grazing *in the gardens* and *among the lilies* are double entendres for erotic play (see 1.7n.).

6.4–7.9: The man's second long speech. Again the man describes the woman's charms in similes and metaphors. **6.4:** *Tirzah*, capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel ca. 920–880 BCE. *Terrible as an army with banners*, more likely the Hebrew means "as awesome in splendor as they," i.e., Jerusalem and Tirzah in this verse; the moon and the sun in v. 10. **5a:** *They overwhelm me*, he describes the way he feels as something she has done to

[8] There are sixty queens and eighty
concubines,
and maidens without number.
[9] My dove, my perfect one, is the only one,
the darling of her mother,
flawless to her that bore her.
The maidens saw her and called her
happy;
the queens and concubines also, and
they praised her.
[10] "Who is this that looks forth like the
dawn,
fair as the moon, bright as the sun,
terrible as an army with banners?"

[11] I went down to the nut orchard,
to look at the blossoms of the
valley,
to see whether the vines had budded,
whether the pomegranates were in
bloom.
[12] Before I was aware, my fancy set me
in a chariot beside my prince.[a]

[13] [b]Return, return, O Shulammite!
Return, return, that we may look upon
you.

Why should you look upon the
Shulammite,
as upon a dance before two armies?[c]

7 How graceful are your feet in sandals,
O queenly maiden!
Your rounded thighs are like jewels,
the work of a master hand.
[2] Your navel is a rounded bowl
that never lacks mixed wine.
Your belly is a heap of wheat,
encircled with lilies.
[3] Your two breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle.
[4] Your neck is like an ivory tower.
Your eyes are pools in Heshbon,
by the gate of Bath-rabbim.
Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon,
overlooking Damascus.
[5] Your head crowns you like Carmel,
and your flowing locks are like purple;
a king is held captive in the tresses.[d]

[6] How fair and pleasant you are,
O loved one, delectable maiden![e]
[7] You are stately[f] as a palm tree,
and your breasts are like its clusters.
[8] I say I will climb the palm tree
and lay hold of its branches.

[a] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Ch 7.1 in Heb
[c] Or *dance of Mahanaim*
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[e] Syr: Heb *in delights*
[f] Heb *This your stature is*

him (cf. 4.9). **5b–7:** See 4.1–3n. **9-10:** A royal fantasy (cf. 1.2–4,12; 3.6–11). **10:** The man's words or words he puts in the mouth of the queens and other royal wives (here translated "concubines"). **11–12:** *I went down to the nut orchard*, either the man's words or a short interruption of his speech by the woman, since in v. 13 she is asked to return. **12:** The verse is corrupt and untranslatable. **13:** *Shulammite*, not a proper name; possibly meaning "the perfect one," it evokes the name "Solomon." *We*, the man and the women of Jerusalem. *A dance before two armies*, the meaning of the phrase is obscure. **7.1:** *Your rounded thighs are like jewels* probably refers to the curves of hips or thighs as resembling ornaments of some type. **2:** Parts of the body not normally exposed to view are described in metaphors that are not transparent. Perhaps *navel* is a euphemism for "vulva." *Heap of wheat* suggests the softness and gentle curve of the woman's stomach. **4:** The image evokes the gracefulness of a long neck. *Your eyes are pools*, the same Hebrew word, "'ayin," means both "eye" and "spring." *Heshbon*, east of Jerusalem in Transjordan, where excavations have revealed the remains of a large reservoir, dating from the ninth to eighth centuries BCE. The location of *Bath-rabbim*, meaning "daughter of many," is unknown. Perhaps the significance of *Lebanon* has to do with its scent; cf. 4.11n. **5:** The comparison to Mount Carmel, which overlooks the Mediterranean Sea at Haifa, suggests the stately way she holds her head. *Locks are like purple*, shiny black hair has a purple sheen. Purple, the color of royalty, evokes rich and luxurious hair, suitable for capturing a *king*. **7–9:** *I say I will climb*, i.e., "I intend to climb." The man puts himself in the picture (cf. 5.1), and, through a series of images, moves closer to the object of his desire. First he must climb the tall *palm tree* to reach *its clusters* that represent his lover's breasts (v. 7). Then, envisioned as grape clusters (v. 8), her breasts become more accessible.

O may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
and the scent of your breath like apples,
9 and your kisses[a] like the best wine
that goes down[b] smoothly,
gliding over lips and teeth.[c]

10 I am my beloved's,
and his desire is for me.
11 Come, my beloved,
let us go forth into the fields,
and lodge in the villages;
12 let us go out early to the vineyards,
and see whether the vines have budded,
whether the grape blossoms have opened
and the pomegranates are in bloom.
There I will give you my love.
13 The mandrakes give forth fragrance,
and over our doors are all choice fruits,
new as well as old,
which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.

8 O that you were like a brother to me,
who nursed at my mother's breast!
If I met you outside, I would kiss you,
and no one would despise me.
2 I would lead you and bring you
into the house of my mother,
and into the chamber of the one who bore me.[d]
I would give you spiced wine to drink,
the juice of my pomegranates.
3 O that his left hand were under my head,
and that his right hand embraced me!
4 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
do not stir up or awaken love
until it is ready!

5 Who is that coming up from the wilderness,
leaning upon her beloved?

Under the apple tree I awakened you.
There your mother was in labor with you;
there she who bore you was in labor.

6 Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.
7 Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.
If one offered for love
all the wealth of one's house,
it would be utterly scorned.

8 We have a little sister,
and she has no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister,
on the day when she is spoken for?
9 If she is a wall,
we will build upon her a battlement of silver;
but if she is a door,

[a] Heb *palate*
[b] Heb *down for my lover*
[c] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *lips of sleepers*
[d] Gk Syr: Heb *my mother; she* (or *you*) *will teach me*

7.10–13: The woman's reply. The man's second long speech, like his first, gives rise to the woman's invitation to love (cf. 4.16). **11:** *Villages*, the same Hebrew word also means "henna bushes," preferable here because of the outdoor setting. **13:** *Mandrakes* were thought by some to be an aphrodisiac.

8.1–14: A montage of short speeches. 1–4: The woman speaks of her desire. **3–4:** Cf. 2.6–7. **5a:** The women of Jerusalem speak about the lovers. **5b:** *In labor*, better, "conceived you." The woman aroused her lover in a setting where his mother also enjoyed sexual intimacy. **6–7:** The only statement in the Song about the nature of love in general. The poet places these words in the mouth of the woman, who speaks to the man not, as she has until now, about their love, but about love itself. **6:** She wants to be intimately and permanently close to him, like a seal he might wear. Seals made of precious or semiprecious metal or stone could be worn on a necklace or a bracelet for the wrist or upper arm, or a signet ring. *Love is strong as death*, not stronger. Their struggle to possess the same object (the loved one) is illustrated in the rivalry between their counterparts, *passion* (more precisely, "jealousy") and *the grave* (Heb "Sheol," the abode of the dead). **8-12:** The lovers speak in similitudes about themselves and their beloved. **8–10:** Unlike the girl in her example, for whom preparations will be made when she reaches marriageable age, the woman asserts that she needs no such arrangements, since she has

we will enclose her with boards of
cedar.
10 I was a wall,
and my breasts were like towers;
then I was in his eyes
as one who brings[a] peace.
11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon;
he entrusted the vineyard to keepers;
each one was to bring for its fruit a
thousand pieces of silver.
12 My vineyard, my very own, is for
myself;
you, O Solomon, may have the
thousand,
and the keepers of the fruit two
hundred!

13 O you who dwell in the gardens,
my companions are listening for your
voice;
let me hear it.

14 Make haste, my beloved,
and be like a gazelle
or a young stag
upon the mountains of spices!

[a] Or *finds*

already surrendered to her lover. **10:** In the context of a city under siege (v. 9), to *bring peace* signifies surrender, and to find peace is to have the offer of surrender accepted (Deut 20.10–11; Josh 9.15; 11.19). **11–12:** The man compares his vineyard (the woman; see 1.6n.) to Solomon's: it is more valuable and he alone will tend it. *Baal-hamon*, no such place is known; meanings of the name, "owner of wealth" or "husband of a multitude," suggest that it was chosen to emphasize Solomon's privileged status. **13–14:** The poet does not bring the Song to a proper close, so that the love it celebrates can remain unending. **13:** *Let me hear it*, the man's words send us back to the beginning of the Song, where we hear the woman's voice, speaking of her desire. **14:** *Make haste*, the Hebrew word indicates movement away from the speaker. *Mountains of spices*, an erotic image for the woman herself; see 2.17; 4.6. As in 2.17, the woman appears to be sending her lover away and calling him to her at the same time. The effect is to leave love forever in progress, for only when the woman seems to send her lover away can the poem begin again with longing and the quest to gratify desire.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

CANONICAL PLACEMENT AND CONTENTS

In both the Jewish and the Christian canons the prophetic books form a distinct section of the Bible. The two traditions differ, however, with respect to the number, sequence, and placement of the prophetic books. Jewish tradition divides the canon into three parts: the Torah (i.e., Genesis–Deuteronomy), the Prophets, and the Writings. The term "Former Prophets" is used to designate the historical books Joshua–2 Kings (excluding Ruth), perhaps reflecting a tradition that these books were written by prophets, and the term "Latter Prophets" is used for those books that bear the name of a particular prophet (i.e., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets). In Christian Bibles the prophetic books form the last section of the Old Testament canon, following the Pentateuch, the Historical Books, and the Poetical Books. Christian tradition includes Daniel among the prophetic books, in contrast to Judaism, which groups Daniel with the Writings. Also, Christian Bibles place Lamentations, which is not a book of prophecy, immediately after the book of Jeremiah, reflecting the tradition of the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation [LXX] of the Hebrew Bible) that Jeremiah was the author of Lamentations. Likewise, in some Christian canons, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical book of Baruch comes after Lamentations, because of the connection between the prophet Jeremiah and his scribe, Baruch.

THE NATURE AND COMPOSITION OF THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

The prophetic books are unusual and complex compositions. With the exception of Jonah, which is a story about a prophet, these books all contain extended sayings and speeches that purport to come from the prophet whose name the book bears. While the books undoubtedly do preserve authentic words of the prophets in question, one should not think of the prophetic books simply as transcriptions of the words of prophets. Although much remains unknown about the composition of the prophetic books, it is possible to reconstruct a general picture. Scholars generally agree that the poetic materials in the prophetic books originated as oral pronouncements by the prophet to a public audience. These oracles were subsequently written down, perhaps by the prophet or an associate. The circumstances that led to these original written collections were undoubtedly different. A reference in the book of Isaiah suggests that oracles might be written down as a form of authentication (Isa 30.8). The book of Jeremiah describes how Jeremiah, having been banned from speaking publicly in the Temple, had his assistant Baruch write down a selection of his prophetic words so that they could be taken into the Temple and read to the people (Jer 36.5–6). When King Jehoiakim destroyed the scroll, Jeremiah had Baruch write out another copy, to which they added additional material (Jer 36.27–32). This collection may have formed the nucleus of the book of Jeremiah. On the other hand, unlike most of the other prophetic books, Ezekiel may have been composed as a written document from the beginning. Elsewhere in the Bible there is further evidence of prophetic collections; see 1 Chr 29.29; 2 Chr 9.29.

Once small collections of prophetic oracles and pronouncements were made, they were subject to further editing, rearranging, annotating, and expansion. In some cases narratives about the prophet were added; these are both autobiographical (e.g., Isa 6; 8; Jer 1.4–19; 13.1–11; Hos 1–2; Am 7.1–7) and biographical (e.g., Isa 7; 36–39; Jer 26; 36–44; Hos 3; Am 7.10–17). The occasions for such editorial activity would have differed, but national crises may have prompted some of this process. Most likely, written collections of the oracles of the prophets Amos and Hosea, which were originally addressed to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, were brought to the Southern Kingdom of Judah after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE, and edited and circulated there. Isaiah of Jerusalem seems to have knowledge of Amos's oracles, and Jeremiah is unquestionably influenced by Hosea. Many of the prophetic books originating before the fall of Judah to the Babylonians and the exile of most Judeans to Babylon in 586 BCE show evidence of editorial additions and reorganizations that reflect the circumstances of exilic and postexilic times, that is, from later in the sixth century BCE and beyond. The book of Amos, for example, now includes material that presupposes the fall of Judah (9.11–15). The most dramatic example of the expansion and reworking of prophetic materials is the book of Isaiah. Although it contains extensive

material from the eighth-century prophet, chs 40–55 clearly reflect the situation of the Babylonian exile, and chs 56–66 the period of the restoration of the Judean community in the late sixth century BCE. Yet even though the book contains materials dating from several centuries, it is unified by a number of motifs, themes, and topics that recur throughout the work.

The complex activity of preserving and developing the prophetic oracle collections reflects a conviction that the prophet's words were not only significant for the circumstance in which they were originally pronounced but potentially relevant for later ones as well. At the same time, the freedom with which later generations could rework the prophetic oracles indicates that the prophets' words did not at first possess the kind of fixed authority that is later associated with the concept of "scripture." Although the processes by which the prophetic books came to assume a relatively final form and canonical status are difficult to trace, this probably occurred during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods (the fifth through the third centuries BCE). Most likely, during this time scribal editors added the superscriptions that introduce most of the books, indicating the identity of the prophet (name, father's name, and occasionally other information) and often the kings of Israel or Judah during whose reigns the prophets were active (e.g., Isa 1.1; Jer 1.1–3; Hos 1.1). In addition to editorial additions to the individual prophetic books, the smaller prophetic books (Hosea–Malachi) were arranged and edited to form a group known as "the Book of the Twelve," which was copied on a single scroll. By the beginning of the second century BCE Ben Sira refers to these prophets as "the twelve" (Sir 49.10). The number twelve is symbolic of the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel, and considerable editorial work was required to organize these prophetic materials into a grouping of twelve. In fact, the book of Zechariah consists of three separate collections (chs 1–8, 9–11, 12–14) grouped together editorially. Only the first of these comes from the prophet Zechariah, whereas the other two are anonymous. The final book in the collection, Malachi, is also an anonymous piece, since "Malachi" is not a personal name but a phrase meaning "my messenger," picked up from 3.1 to serve as the name of the prophet in the superscription.

THE PHENOMENON OF PROPHECY

The phenomenon of prophecy was widespread in the ancient Near East, and many important themes and genres familiar from biblical prophecy have parallels there. Moreover, many more prophets were active in ancient Israel and Judah than those whose work is represented in the prophetic books of the Bible, and their activities were more varied than these writings suggest. The books of Samuel and Kings provide important additional information. Since our sources are limited, it is difficult to reconstruct the history of prophecy. Some of the features are clear, however. The prophet was essentially an intermediary between God and the people, and one of the major functions was that of messenger. Often prophets introduced their communications with a version of the formula typically used by messengers, "Thus says the LORD." But prophets might also bring inquiries from the people to God or make intercession on behalf of the people. In contrast to priesthood, which was exclusively male, both women and men could be prophets. Women prophets included Deborah (Judg 4.4), Huldah (2 Kings 22.14), and Noadiah (Neh 6.10); see also Joel 2.28. Additional aspects of the prophetic role are suggested by the various terms used to identify them. In addition to "prophet" (Heb *nabi'*, perhaps meaning "one who is called"), a prophet could be called a seer (Heb *ro'eh,* e.g. 1 Sam 9.9; and *ḥozeh,* e.g., Am 7.12), and a holy man (Heb *'ish ha'elohim*, literally "man of God"; e.g., 2 Kings 1.9).

The history of prophecy in ancient Israel can be traced for more than a thousand years, from the premonarchical period to the turn of the era. As one would expect, over such a long time the nature and function of prophecy altered in response to changing historical, social, and religious circumstances. Four periods define the major epochs of prophecy: the early monarchical period (eleventh through ninth centuries), the Assyrian crisis (eighth century), the Babylonian crisis (late seventh through early sixth centuries), and the postexilic restoration (mid-sixth through mid-fifth centuries).

The extant evidence suggests that in the earliest period prophets may have been local or itinerant holy men and women who were revered for their special religious powers and who might be consulted for a variety of private inquiries, from locating lost property (1 Sam 9.1–10) to learning whether a sick child would live or die (1 Kings 14.1–18). Some lived in prophetic communities that cultivated ecstatic forms of religious experience (1 Sam 19.18–24; 2 Kings 6.1–7). Prophets also had the public function of declaring God's will concerning whether the people should go to war (Judg 4.4–10). The emergence of monarchy in ancient Israel may have changed aspects of the prophets' role. Prophets appear as king-makers and king-breakers, as they announce that God

has designated an individual to become king or has rejected a reigning king (1 Sam 10.1; 15.23; 1 Kings 11.29–39; 14.1–18). Though prophets continued their role in advising about matters of war (1 Kings 22), they also served as critics of the king in religious and social affairs. The consolidation of royal power and the foreign religious practices introduced through royal marriages often threatened older tribal institutions and values. The conflict between Elijah, the prophet, and Ahab and Jezebel, the king and queen, illustrates these tensions between prophet and king (1 Kings 18–21).

Prophecy appears to have undergone a dramatic change during the eighth century, although this impression may be affected by the change in the nature of the sources of information. From the eighth century on, collections of prophetic oracles are preserved; yet, with the exceptions of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, few extended narratives about prophets exist. It does appear that in this period prophets began to function less as private counselors and critics of kings and more as public figures who influenced opinion through their pronouncements in the Temple courts and in other public places. Prophets of the eighth century (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah) interpreted international affairs, critiqued complacent religious practices, and condemned the abuses of social justice that accompanied the increasing urbanization and centralization of state power characteristic of the eighth century. The prophetic careers of Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah took place in the shadow of the expansionist Assyrian empire, which eventually put an end to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 and subjected the Southern Kingdom of Judah to the status of a vassal. The prophets interpreted these events, however, in terms of the judgment of the Lord, not simply as the success of the powerful Assyrians. This perspective allowed Isaiah, for example, to anticipate the ultimate downfall of Assyria because of its overweening arrogance.

The third major period of prophecy occurred during the Babylonian crisis. The prophet Nahum celebrated the defeat of Assyria (612–609 BCE), but when Babylon succeeded Assyria as the dominant empire the excitement he expressed soon turned to confusion, as expressed in Hab 1–2. Jeremiah's prophetic career spanned the time from the decline of Assyria through the Babylonian overlordship of Judah, to the revolt and destruction of Judah in 586 and the exile of a significant portion of its population. Although it is difficult to correlate many of his poetic oracles with specific events in this period, the narratives about Jeremiah give a vivid picture of a nation and its leadership deeply conflicted about what political course to follow and the religious significance of the choices that were forced upon it. Even the prophetic community was bitterly divided and gave contradictory advice to the king concerning the will of the Lord (Jer 26–29; 36–44). Overlapping the career of Jeremiah, the prophet Ezekiel (active 593–ca. 571 BCE) was among the Judeans exiled to Babylon after the revolt of 597 BCE, a decade before the final revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem. Ezekiel's prophetic work was first to persuade the exiled Judeans of the inevitability of Jerusalem's destruction, and, following the fall of the city, to begin to articulate the theological grounds for conceiving a possible future, including a return of the exiles and a rebuilding of the destroyed Temple. In contrast to the prophets who preceded him, Ezekiel drew strongly on priestly traditions for his categories of thought, forms of speech, and evocative symbols.

The defeat of the Babylonian empire by the Persian king Cyrus altered political conditions dramatically. Although Judah did not regain its independence but became a part of the Persian empire, Cyrus and his successors authorized the rebuilding of the Temple and of Jerusalem, allowing members of the exiled community in Babylon who so desired to return to Judah. Thus the prophetic task during this period largely concerned issues of the restoration of the community and its institutions in a context significantly different from that which prevailed during the Israelite and Judean monarchies. The anonymous prophet whose work is found in Isa 40–55 (often called "Second Isaiah") addressed the Babylonian exiles just at the time that Cyrus was engaged in the conquest of Babylon. Second Isaiah's message to the exilic community was that unfolding events represented God's action in history. He thus interpreted the significance of Cyrus as God's "anointed" who would rebuild Jerusalem, and he encouraged the exiles to return to Jerusalem. The process of rebuilding the Temple (520–515 BCE) provides the context for the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Zechariah in particular suggests this was a time of expectation that perhaps the monarchy might be restored, an event that did not occur. Issues concerning reorganization of the Judean community and tensions regarding economic justice, institutional corruption, and the boundaries of the community are variously reflected in Zechariah, Isa 56–66, and Malachi, prophets who were active in roughly the period 525–475 BCE.

Although prophets in all periods might speak of the dramatic intervention of God in historical events and the consequent transformation of the conditions of life, this type of language seems to have become more

common and more vivid in the postexilic prophets (e.g., Isa 56–66, Zechariah, Malachi, Joel, and postexilic additions to earlier prophetic books, such as Isa 24–27). Some of the passages anticipate a war or other cataclysmic event of cosmic proportions that will precede a time of deliverance, peace, and virtual re-creation of the world. Such imagery and the expectations it expresses suggest to some scholars that apocalyptic literature, with its focus on the details of the end time as revealed by a heavenly messenger, was an outgrowth of the phenomenon of prophecy.

The book of Daniel, the only book in the Hebrew Bible that could be called an apocalypse, illustrates the complexity of the matter. Although Christian tradition groups Daniel with the prophetic books, Jewish tradition places it in the Writings (as noted earlier). The first part of the book consists of a cycle of narratives in which Daniel and his friends are portrayed as sages trained in the technical skills of Babylonian scribal wisdom. Like Joseph, Daniel is able to interpret dreams sent by God. He is not presented as a prophet. In the latter part of the book, however, Daniel is the recipient of visions that disclose the future. These vision reports do bear significant similarities to those found in Ezekiel and especially in Zechariah, though their almost allegorical style is quite different. Similarly, although general claims about God's foreknowledge of historical events can be found in Second Isaiah, Daniel's representation of history as predetermined both with respect to its epochal structure and its specific events is strikingly different from the representation of history by the prophets. A clue to the relationship of apocalyptic writing to prophecy may be found in Daniel 9, where Daniel is presented as studying the book of Jeremiah and receiving an angelic interpretation of its significance. As suggested by the presentation of Daniel as a technically trained sage, the authors of apocalyptic books were perhaps themselves learned scribes who studied and appropriated aspects of the prophetic tradition and combined them with other influences in their attempts to understand the nature of the cosmos and the course of history.

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ISAIAH

NAME AND CANONICAL STATUS

The book of Isaiah (Heb "yesha'yah(u)," "the LORD saves") is named for the prophet Isaiah ben Amoz who lived during the latter half of the eighth century BCE at the time of the Assyrian invasions of Israel and Judah. Isaiah is included among the Latter Prophets in the Jewish Bible and among the Prophets of the Old Testament in the Christian Bible. Jewish manuscripts and traditions frequently place Isaiah first because he lived before Jeremiah and Ezekiel, although the book sometimes appears after Jeremiah and Ezekiel because of its concern with comfort or restoration (*b. B. Bat.* 14b). In Christian Bibles, Isaiah is usually first among the Prophets because he lived before Jeremiah and Ezekiel, although the Minor Prophets sometimes appear first in some manuscripts of the Greek Septuagint (LXX) versions, probably because the prophet Hosea was thought to have lived before Isaiah.

AUTHORSHIP, COMPOSITION, AND LITERARY HISTORY

Traditional interpreters in both Judaism and Christianity attribute the book of Isaiah to the prophet Isaiah, but interpreters as early as the Middle Ages observed that the second portion of the book, beginning in ch 40, presupposes the conclusion of the Babylonian exile and the rise of King Cyrus of Persia in 545–539 BCE (see 44.28; 45.1). Modern scholars generally attribute the book to three major stages of composition: (1) the works of Isaiah ben Amoz, which appear generally in chs 1–39; (2) the work of an anonymous prophet known as Second Isaiah from the conclusion of the Babylonian exile in chs 40–55; and (3) the work of Third Isaiah, a collection of materials from a number of prophetic hands who wrote during the early Persian-period restoration of Jerusalem (late sixth through fifth or early fourth centuries BCE) in chs 56–66. Some interpreters maintain that chs 56–66 should be included with Second Isaiah, and others maintain that chs 1–39 have been heavily edited in the seventh, sixth, and fifth centuries BCE as well. Altogether, the book appears to have gone through at least four stages of composition: first, during the lifetime of Isaiah ben Amoz, who witnessed the period of the Assyrian invasions of Israel and Judah in 742–701 BCE; second, during the late seventh-century BCE restoration of King Josiah of Judah (640–609 BCE), when Isaiah was edited to support the king's reforms; third, during the late sixth-century BCE collapse of Babylon and the rise of King Cyrus of Persia (559–530 BCE), who authorized the return of exiled Jews to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple; and fourth, during the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE when Nehemiah and Ezra attempted to consolidate the Jerusalem Temple's status as holy center of Judaism in keeping with their understandings of the Torah and the Isaian tradition. The writers of each stage of Isaiah's composition edited and expanded the book in order to demonstrate that the prophet addressed events of their own times. Whereas Isaiah ben Amoz spoke about divine judgment and restoration in his own day, each of the subsequent editions of the book presupposes that Isaiah's visions of restoration would be realized in their own time.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

Four pivotal moments in the history of the Israelite people form the background of the various parts of Isaiah.

1. The Syro-Ephraimite war and its aftermath. After a period of relative peace between Israel (the Northern Kingdom, often called "Ephraim" in Isaiah after its most important tribe) and Judah (the Southern Kingdom), international tensions rose when Tiglath-pileser III became king of the Assyrian empire in 745 BCE and began an effort to conquer the lands to the west of Assyria, including Syria, Israel, and Judah. Uzziah, the king of Judah whose reign began during the peaceful era, died in 733 (6.1), but because he was quarantined due to an illness, his son Jotham became king in 759, followed by Jotham's son Ahaz in 743 or 735 (the chronology is disputed). Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria (Damascus or Aram) tried, beginning in 735, to enlist Ahaz in an alliance against Assyria, and when that effort failed, they attacked Judah to replace Ahaz with a king more amenable to their policies (ch 7). This conflict is known as the Syro-Ephraimite war, since it was a war of Syria and Ephraim against Judah. Ahaz successfully turned to Assyria for help in fending off Israel and Syria. The price he paid was steep: Judah became a vassal of Assyria.

2. The Assyrian invasion. During the decades following the Syro-Ephraimite war, the Assyrians expanded their influence in the area, taking over Syria and then attacking the Northern Kingdom, which fell in 722. When the Assyrian ruler at the time, Sargon II, died in 705, Hezekiah, the king of Judah and son of Ahaz, rebelled against Assyria. Hezekiah had thought to take advantage of the confusion at the change of rulers, and in addition sought support from Egypt that was not forthcoming (36.6). The new Assyrian king, Sennacherib, retaliated and conquered the cities surrounding Jerusalem in 701. Hezekiah was able to avert the conquest of Jerusalem itself only by paying tribute.

3. The conquest of Jerusalem and the exile. During the century following these events, the Assyrian empire gradually weakened. In 612, the rising Babylonian empire conquered the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, and the international power struggle became one between Babylon and Egypt, with Judah caught between. In 605 the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the Egyptian pharaoh, Neco, at the battle of Carchemish, and Babylon became the leading empire of the day. Judah came under Babylon's control, and when the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, rebelled against Babylon, the result was an invasion by Nebuchadnezzar. In 586 he destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple and deported a good deal of the population to Babylon, an event referred to as the exile.

4. The return. During the sixth century BCE, the Babylonians were increasingly challenged by the rise of another great empire, the Persians. In 539 Cyrus, the Persian king, defeated the Babylonians at the battle of Opis. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Judah, and many (though not all) eventually did so. The returning exiles rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple.

CONTENTS AND STRUCTURE

Although the book of Isaiah was composed in stages, the final form of Isaiah is designed to be read as a single work ascribed to the prophet Isaiah ben Amoz. Its different sections are unified partly by common themes, such as the Davidic/Zion tradition that presumes the ultimate rule of Jerusalem and the restored Israel by the house of David, under the sovereignty of the LORD. The various sections are also linked through common vocabulary, such as the divine title "the Holy One of Israel" (for example, 1.4; 29.19; 40.25; 60.9). The literary structure of Isaiah consists of two major parts, both of which are concerned with reading Isaiah as a witness to Jerusalem as the seat of the LORD's sovereignty throughout all of creation. Chapters 1–33 address the period of punishment and anticipate the period of restoration through which the LORD's sovereignty will be recognized throughout the world, and chs 34–66 presuppose that the time of restoration and the recognition of the LORD's sovereignty are at hand. A more detailed outline of the formal literary structure of the book is as follows:

THE VISION OF ISAIAH BEN AMOZ:
PROPHETIC EXHORTATION TO JERUSALEM AND JUDAH TO ADHERE TO THE LORD

I. The LORD's plans to reveal worldwide sovereignty at Zion	1.1–33.24
A. Prologue to the book: Introductory oracles concerning the LORD's plans to purify Jerusalem	1.1–31
B. Prophetic instruction concerning the LORD's plans to reveal worldwide sovereignty at Zion: Announcement of the Day of the LORD	2.1–33.24
1. prophetic announcement concerning the purging of Zion for its role as the center for the LORD's world rule	2.1–4.6
2. prophetic instruction concerning Assyrian judgment against Israel and the restoration of the Davidic kingdom	5.1–12.6
3. prophetic announcement concerning the preparation of the nations for the LORD's world rule	13.1–27.13
a. announcements concerning the nations	13.1–23.18
b. restoration for Zion at the center of the nations	24.1–27.13
4. prophetic instruction concerning the LORD's plans for the new king in Jerusalem	28.1–33.24

II. Concerning the realization of the LORD's plans for revealing worldwide sovereignty from Zion	34.1–66.24
A. Prophetic instruction concerning the realization of the LORD's sovereignty at Zion	34.1–54.17
1. prophetic instruction concerning the LORD's power to return the redeemed exiles to Zion	34.1–35.10
2. historical narratives concerning Hezekiah	36.1–39.8
3. prophetic instruction that the LORD maintains covenant and restores Zion	40.1–54.17
a. renewed prophetic commission to announce the LORD's restoration of Zion	40.1–11
b. contention: the LORD is master of creation	40.12–31
c. contention: the LORD is master of human events	41.1–42.13
d. contention: the LORD is redeemer of Israel	42.14–44.23
e. contention: the LORD will use Cyrus for the restoration of Zion	44.24–48.22
f. contention: the LORD is restoring Zion	49.1–54.17
B. Prophetic exhortation to adhere to the LORD's covenant	55.1–66.24
1. exhortation proper to adhere to the LORD	55.1–13
2. substantiation: prophetic instruction concerning the restored covenant community in Jerusalem	56.1–66.24
a. prophetic instruction concerning proper observance of the covenant	56.1–59.21
b. prophetic announcement of restoration for the nation	60.1–62.12
c. prophetic instruction concerning the process of Zion's restoration	63.1–66.24

INTERPRETATION

The book of Isaiah serves as a theological reflection upon Jerusalem's experience of threat, exile, and restoration. It takes up fundamental questions of divine involvement in human history. To what extent is the LORD sovereign over Israel and Judah on the one hand, and the nations and all creation on the other? To what extent does the LORD bring both judgment and restoration to Jerusalem, Israel, and the world at large? To what extent is the LORD hidden in times of suffering and to what extent will the LORD deliberately bring suffering on one generation to achieve divine purpose in another? To what extent does the LORD's promise of security to Jerusalem/Zion and the royal house of David hold true? To what extent should human beings respond to the LORD's intervention in the human world with faithfulness? Such questions have occupied the readers of the book of Isaiah from ancient through modern times. Jewish interpreters have looked to Isaiah to understand the time when the LORD would restore Jerusalem, and Christian interpreters have looked to Isaiah to understand when the LORD would reveal the Messiah. Indeed, two major copies of the book of Isaiah and a number of shorter Isaian texts were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran. The command "in the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD" apparently motivated the Qumran sect to move to the wilderness of the Dead Sea to await the time that God would destroy the Romans and all others considered evil in the world. Citations from Isaiah play a major role in presenting the life and significance of Jesus in the New Testament, and readings from Isaiah play an especially important role in Jewish liturgy where Isaian texts are frequently read to complete and interpret the reading of the Torah.

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1 The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

[2] Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth;
for the LORD has spoken:
I reared children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me.
[3] The ox knows its owner,
and the donkey its master's crib;
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.

[4] Ah, sinful nation,
people laden with iniquity,
offspring who do evil,
children who deal corruptly,
who have forsaken the LORD,
who have despised the Holy One of Israel,
who are utterly estranged!

[5] Why do you seek further beatings?
Why do you continue to rebel?
The whole head is sick,
and the whole heart faint.
[6] From the sole of the foot even to the head,
there is no soundness in it,
but bruises and sores
and bleeding wounds;
they have not been drained,
or bound up,
or softened with oil.

[7] Your country lies desolate,
your cities are burned with fire;
in your very presence
aliens devour your land;
it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners.
[8] And daughter Zion is left
like a booth in a vineyard,

1.1–33.24: The LORD's plans to reveal worldwide sovereignty at Zion. The first half of the book focuses especially on the punishment of Zion and its anticipation of future restoration in an effort to demonstrate the LORD's plans to reveal sovereignty over Israel, the nations, and creation at large. The second half of the book (chs 34–66) presupposes that the time of the restoration and the LORD's revelation are at hand.

1.1–31: Prologue to the book of Isaiah: Introductory oracles concerning divine plans to purge Jerusalem. The prologue in ch 1 is an introduction both to the entire book of Isaiah and to the first portion of the book in chs 1–33. It is designed to convince its audience that Jerusalem's suffering during the late eighth century BCE and beyond was due to the LORD's plans to purge Jerusalem in preparation for its role as the seat for the LORD's rule over all of creation. In keeping with his understanding of the David/Zion tradition, Isaiah presumes the LORD's sovereignty, righteousness, and power to defend the royal house of David and the city of Jerusalem. The prophet therefore contends that Jerusalem's suffering is due to human wrongdoing and that the city must be purged to enable it to serve as the LORD's capital for all of creation. Such a position is theologically problematic, presuming the guilt of those who suffer.

1.1: Superscription. The prophetic books typically begin with a superscription that provides the reader with essential information concerning the prophet (cf. Jer 1.1–3; Ezek 1.1–3; Hos 1.1; Joel 1.1; Am 1.1; Obad 1; Mic 1.1; Nah 1.1; Hab 1.1; Zeph 1.1). This superscription introduces both the entire book and 1.2–31. Subsequent superscriptions in 2.1; 13.1; 14.28; 15.1; 17.1; 19.1; 21.1,11,13; 22.1; 23.1; and 30.6 introduce smaller subunits. Isaiah's *vision* (both visual and auditory communication from the LORD) reveals divine plans concerning Judah and Jerusalem during the reigns of the Judean monarchs, Uzziah (783–742 BCE); Jotham (742–735 BCE); Ahaz (735–715 BCE); and Hezekiah (715–687 BCE). Although the superscription identifies the setting of the book in relation to the eighth-century BCE Assyrian invasions of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, the book as a whole takes up Jerusalem's experiences through the time of the Babylonian exile and the early Persian period restoration in the sixth century BCE.

1.2–20: The speech of the accuser. The prophet employs the language of the courtroom, beginning with the LORD's accusation speech that charges Israel with wrongdoing, to explain Jerusalem's suffering. **2–3:** Appeal to all creation, namely, heaven and earth, to witness the divine complaints against Israel (cf. Deut 32.1; Mic 6.1–8). The passage metaphorically portrays Israel as the LORD's rebellious children who do not even have the understanding of animals. **4–9:** Rhetorical questions designed to motivate the listeners to return to God. The suffering of the people is presented as the result of their own wrongdoing rather than any lapse on the LORD's part. The imagery shifts from personal illness and injury to the suffering of the entire land during the Assyrian invasions, when Jerusalem was left standing alone surrounded by the forces of the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 BCE (2 Kings 18–20; Isa 36–39). **4:** *The Holy One of Israel,* a divine title that occurs throughout the book.

like a shelter in a cucumber field,
like a besieged city.
9 If the LORD of hosts
had not left us a few survivors,
we would have been like Sodom,
and become like Gomorrah.

10 Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of Sodom!
Listen to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!
11 What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the LORD;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.

12 When you come to appear before me,[a]
who asked this from your hand?
Trample my courts no more;
13 bringing offerings is futile;
incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.
14 Your new moons and your appointed festivals
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.
15 When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.
16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
17 learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.

18 Come now, let us argue it out,
says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
19 If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;
20 but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

21 How the faithful city
has become a whore!
She that was full of justice,
righteousness lodged in her—

[a] Or *see my face*

8: Jerusalem is frequently personified as *daughter Zion* in Isaiah (10.32; 16.1; 37.22; 52.2; 62.11) and elsewhere (e.g., Zeph 3.14–20; Lam 1.6; 2; 4.22). **9:** *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, the evil cities destroyed by the LORD (Gen 18–19). **10–17:** The prophet continues to characterize the people as Sodom and Gomorrah in an effort to accuse them of insincere worship. Although many interpreters maintain that Isaiah opposes ritual and sacrificial worship in principle, the LORD's instructions call for moral action to accompany Temple worship (see 1 Sam 15.22; Ps 50.7–15). The LORD threatens to ignore the people's prayers, a disturbing claim in the face of foreign invasion and a frequent concern of both Isaiah (e.g., 8.17; 54.8; 59.2; 64.6) and the Psalms (e.g., 10.11; 13.2; 22.25; 27.9; 51.11; 104.29). **13:** Sacrifices were offered at *sabbath* (weekly) and *new moon* (monthly) festivals. **18–20:** The accusation speech employs legal language and sacrificial imagery to conclude with an appeal to return to the LORD.

1.21–31: The speech of the judge. The courtroom metaphor continues as the LORD now speaks as the judge who announces Zion's ultimate redemption and restoration. Jerusalem suffered greatly under the Assyrians and the Babylonians from the late eighth through the sixth centuries BCE, but the book of Isaiah understands these events in relation to Jerusalem's restoration in the early Persian period. **21–26:** The prophet's announcement of Jerusalem's rehabilitation combines metaphorical charges that the city is a *whore* and that it must be purified much as metal is refined by the removal of impurities known as *dross*. The principal accusation is the corruption

but now murderers!
22 Your silver has become dross,
your wine is mixed with water.
23 Your princes are rebels
and companions of thieves.
Everyone loves a bribe
and runs after gifts.
They do not defend the orphan,
and the widow's cause does not come
before them.

24 Therefore says the Sovereign, the LORD
of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel:
Ah, I will pour out my wrath on my
enemies,
and avenge myself on my foes!
25 I will turn my hand against you;
I will smelt away your dross as with lye
and remove all your alloy.
26 And I will restore your judges as at the first,
and your counselors as at the
beginning.
Afterward you shall be called the city of
righteousness,
the faithful city.

27 Zion shall be redeemed by justice,
and those in her who repent, by
righteousness.
28 But rebels and sinners shall be destroyed
together,
and those who forsake the LORD shall
be consumed.
29 For you shall be ashamed of the oaks
in which you delighted;
and you shall blush for the gardens
that you have chosen.
30 For you shall be like an oak
whose leaf withers,
and like a garden without water.
31 The strong shall become like tinder,
and their work[a] like a spark;
they and their work shall burn
together,
with no one to quench them.

2 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2 In days to come
the mountain of the LORD's house
shall be established as the highest of the
mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.
3 Many peoples shall come and say,

[a] Or *its makers*

of the judicial process (cf. 5.23; 33.15; Am 5.10,12; Mic 3.9,11). **27–28:** The prophet distinguishes the fate of the righteous from the wicked (see chs 65–66). **29–31:** The metaphor of the tree portrays the restoration of Zion. Trees and gardens were frequently associated with Canaanite fertility rites and goddesses. The prophet maintains that the dead branches must be trimmed and the tree burned. Later oracles will stress the new growth of the tree (6.12–13; 11.1–9).

2.1–4.6: Prophetic announcement concerning the purging of Zion for its role as the center for the LORD's world rule. This unit begins with its own superscription (see 1.1n.). Ideal portrayals of Jerusalem as a center for the pilgrimage of the nations appear at the beginning (2.2–4) and as a holy center for the remnant of Israel at the end (4.2–6) of the unit. The material in 2.5–4.1 focuses in detail on the LORD's plans for purging Zion in preparation for its divine role.

2.1: Superscription. A shorter version of the superscription in 1.1, specifying the concern with Judah and Jerusalem.

2.2–4: Announcement concerning the establishment of Zion as the center for the LORD's worldwide sovereignty. This oracle portrays a future time when the nations will make pilgrimage to Zion, the site of the Jerusalem Temple. The ideal of the nations at peace in Zion is a primary tenet of Davidic/Zion theology, which maintains that the LORD protects Zion as the seat of divine sovereignty in creation (Pss 2; 46; 48; cf. Ps 47). A parallel version of this passage appears in Mic 4.1–5, and it is also cited in Joel 3.10 and Zech 8.20–23. **2:** *In days to come,* past interpreters, including the Septuagint (LXX), have understood the Heb eschatologically as "in the latter days," but it simply means "in the future." *The mountain of the LORD's house,* throughout the ancient Near East, temples were described as the houses in which gods dwelt. In common with this ancient motif, Jerusalem is often represented as the cosmic mountain (10.12,32; 11.9; 16.1; 29.8; 30.29; 40.9; 57.13; 65.26; Ps 48.1–2; Ezek 20.40; 40.2). **3:** *Instruction,* Heb "torah." Although "torah" is frequently translated as "law," the term means

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the
LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from
Jerusalem.
4 He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into
plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against
nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

5 O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD!
6 For you have forsaken the ways of[a] your
people,
O house of Jacob.
Indeed they are full of diviners[b] from the
east
and of soothsayers like the Philistines,
and they clasp hands with
foreigners.
7 Their land is filled with silver and gold,
and there is no end to their treasures;
their land is filled with horses,
and there is no end to their chariots.
8 Their land is filled with idols;
they bow down to the work of their
hands,
to what their own fingers have made.
9 And so people are humbled,
and everyone is brought low—
do not forgive them!
10 Enter into the rock,
and hide in the dust
from the terror of the LORD,
and from the glory of his majesty.
11 The haughty eyes of people shall be
brought low,
and the pride of everyone shall be
humbled;
and the LORD alone will be exalted on that
day.
12 For the LORD of hosts has a day
against all that is proud and lofty,
against all that is lifted up and high;[c]
13 against all the cedars of Lebanon,
lofty and lifted up;
and against all the oaks of Bashan;
14 against all the high mountains,
and against all the lofty hills;
15 against every high tower,
and against every fortified wall;
16 against all the ships of Tarshish,
and against all the beautiful craft.[d]
17 The haughtiness of people shall be
humbled,
and the pride of everyone shall be
brought low;

[a] Heb lacks *the ways of*
[b] Cn: Heb lacks *of diviners*
[c] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *low*
[d] Compare Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain

"teaching, instruction."

2.5–4.6: The prophet's address concerning the purging of Zion. The prophet outlines in three addresses how the ideal portrayal of the nations' recognition of the LORD at Zion expressed in 2.2–4 is to be achieved. **2.5–9:** The first oracular address begins with an invitation to the *house of Jacob*, a term frequently employed to characterize Israel (see Gen 32.28; Ex 19.3; Ps 114.1; Isa 46.3), to join the nations in their pilgrimage to Zion. The passage quickly turns to assertions that the LORD has forsaken the people because of their alleged wrongdoing in dealing with foreigners. The passage points to a source of tension: while it posits an ideal scenario of world peace and cooperation among the nations, it also points to the nations as a source of corruption and evil because of their associations with divinatory practices (cf. Deut 18.9–14); wealth in the form of *silver, gold, horses*, and *chariots* (cf. 1 Kings 10.26); and *idols* (cf. Isa 44.9–20). In the view of the prophet, such practices render the nations unholy and their association with Jacob renders Israel unholy as well. **10–21:** In the second oracular address, the prophet announces the future Day of the LORD as a time when the LORD will appear to punish and bring down all who are arrogant, high, proud, and uplifted in the world so that the LORD alone will be recognized as the true sovereign. The Day of the LORD tradition is well known among the prophets (see Isa 13.6,9; Ezek 13.5; Joel 1.15; 2.11,31; 3.14; Am 5.18–20; Obad 15; Zeph 1.7,14; Mal 4.5). **13:** *Lebanon*, the mountainous area north of Israel famous for its cedars; *Bashan*, the high plateau in northern Transjordan known for its timber (Ezek 27.6).

and the LORD alone will be exalted on
that day.
18 The idols shall utterly pass away.
19 Enter the caves of the rocks
and the holes of the ground,
from the terror of the LORD,
and from the glory of his majesty,
when he rises to terrify the earth.
20 On that day people will throw away
to the moles and to the bats
their idols of silver and their idols of gold,
which they made for themselves to
worship,
21 to enter the caverns of the rocks
and the clefts in the crags,
from the terror of the LORD,
and from the glory of his majesty,
when he rises to terrify the earth.
22 Turn away from mortals,
who have only breath in their nostrils,
for of what account are they?

3 For now the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts,
is taking away from Jerusalem and from
Judah
support and staff—
all support of bread,
and all support of water—
2 warrior and soldier,
judge and prophet,
diviner and elder,
3 captain of fifty
and dignitary,
counselor and skillful magician
and expert enchanter.
4 And I will make boys their princes,
and babes shall rule over them.
5 The people will be oppressed,
everyone by another
and everyone by a neighbor;
the youth will be insolent to the
elder,
and the base to the honorable.

6 Someone will even seize a relative,
a member of the clan, saying,
"You have a cloak;
you shall be our leader,
and this heap of ruins
shall be under your rule."
7 But the other will cry out on that day,
saying,
"I will not be a healer;
in my house there is neither bread nor
cloak;
you shall not make me
leader of the people."
8 For Jerusalem has stumbled
and Judah has fallen,
because their speech and their deeds are
against the LORD,
defying his glorious presence.

9 The look on their faces bears witness
against them;
they proclaim their sin like Sodom,
they do not hide it.
Woe to them!
For they have brought evil on
themselves.
10 Tell the innocent how fortunate they are,
for they shall eat the fruit of their
labors.
11 Woe to the guilty! How unfortunate they
are,
for what their hands have done shall be
done to them.
12 My people—children are their
oppressors,

16: *Tarshish*, either in southern Turkey (later Tarsus) or in southern Spain. **2.22–4.6:** The third oracular address focuses specifically on the purging of Jerusalem and Judah. **2.22:** The introductory wisdom saying pleads with the audience to desist from human self-reliance. **3.1–11:** The prophet elaborates the purging of Jerusalem and Judah by focusing on the punishment of the male leaders of the city and the nation. The Assyrians were well known for deporting the leading figures and skilled craftspeople of a conquered society in order to exploit their talents elsewhere in the empire and to destabilize the conquered society to prevent further revolt. The prophet once again characterizes the people as Sodom (see 1.10; Gen 18–19) in order to press home his point that the suffering of the people must be the result of their own wrongdoing. **3.12–4.1:** The prophet portrays a courtroom scene in which the LORD charges the leaders of the nation with exploitation of the poor (by enclosure and confiscation of lands, indentured service, etc.), a frequent topic of eighth-century BCE prophetic polemic (Am 2.6–8; 3.9–11; 6.4–7; 8.4–6; Mic 2.1–3; 3.1–4,9–12). He accuses the women of Jerusalem of arrogance and being more concerned with fashion than with the fate of their city and nation. When Jerusalem is conquered, the

and women rule over them.
O my people, your leaders mislead you,
and confuse the course of your paths.

13 The LORD rises to argue his case;
he stands to judge the peoples.
14 The LORD enters into judgment
with the elders and princes of his people:
It is you who have devoured the vineyard;
the spoil of the poor is in your houses.
15 What do you mean by crushing my people,
by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord GOD of hosts.

16 The LORD said:
Because the daughters of Zion are haughty
and walk with outstretched necks,
glancing wantonly with their eyes,
mincing along as they go,
tinkling with their feet;
17 the Lord will afflict with scabs
the heads of the daughters of Zion,
and the LORD will lay bare their secret parts.

18 In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; 19 the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarfs; 20 the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; 21 the signet rings and nose rings; 22 the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; 23 the garments of gauze, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils.
24 Instead of perfume there will be a stench;
and instead of a sash, a rope;
and instead of well-set hair, baldness;
and instead of a rich robe, a binding of sackcloth;
instead of beauty, shame.[a]
25 Your men shall fall by the sword
and your warriors in battle.
26 And her gates shall lament and mourn;
ravaged, she shall sit upon the ground.

4 Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying,
"We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes;
just let us be called by your name;
take away our disgrace."

2 On that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. 3 Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, 4 once the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. 5 Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over its places of assembly a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night. Indeed over all the glory there will be a canopy. 6 It will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat, and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

[a] Q Ms: MT lacks *shame*

women will be stripped, humiliated, and desperate to find a husband in the devastation, even willing to forego the financial support mandated by law (Ex 21.10). **4.2–6:** An idyllic portrayal of the restored Jerusalem following its period of purging begins with the formula, *on that day*. The passage combines the metaphor of the *branch* that will grow again after it is cut (cf. 6.12–13; 11.1–9) with the imagery of the daughters of Zion, washing and purifying themselves after their menstrual periods (see Lev 15.19–24). *Cloud by day* and *flaming fire by night* over the sacred site of Mount Zion recalls the LORD leading Israel at the time of the Exodus and Wilderness wandering (e.g., Ex 13.21–22; 14.19–20; 24.15–18; 40.34–38; Num 10.11–36; cf. 1 Kings 8.10–12). Such imagery also refers to the column of smoke and fire that rises from the Temple altar during sacrifice to signify the LORD's presence. Here the smoke and fire forms a protective canopy for the restored city.

5.1–12.6: Prophetic instruction concerning Assyrian judgment against Israel and the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. Although chs 5–12 lack a superscription, the interest in both Israel and Judah is clear throughout the unit. The passage begins (5.3) with an announcement of divine judgment against Israel and Judah in 5.1–30, and a lengthy elaboration concerning the significance of that judgment and the restoration to follow

5 Let me sing for my beloved
my love-song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
2 He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
he expected it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.

3 And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem
and people of Judah,
judge between me
and my vineyard.
4 What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I have not done in it?
When I expected it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?

5 And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
6 I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and it shall be overgrown with briers
and thorns;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.

7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice,
but saw bloodshed;
righteousness,
but heard a cry!
8 Ah, you who join house to house,
who add field to field,
until there is room for no one but you,
and you are left to live alone
in the midst of the land!
9 The LORD of hosts has sworn in my hearing:
Surely many houses shall be desolate,
large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant.
10 For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath,
and a homer of seed shall yield a mere ephah.[a]

11 Ah, you who rise early in the morning
in pursuit of strong drink,
who linger in the evening
to be inflamed by wine,
12 whose feasts consist of lyre and harp,
tambourine and flute and wine,
but who do not regard the deeds of the LORD,

[a] The Heb *bath*, *homer*, and *ephah* are measures of quantity

in 6.1–12.6.

5.1–30: Announcement of judgment against Israel and Judah. This block of oracles combines the prophet's accusations of social wrongdoing in Israel with a vivid portrayal of the approach of the Assyrian army in an effort to argue that the LORD has brought the Assyrians to punish Israel. **1–7:** Isaiah's song of the vineyard (see also 27.2–6) allegorically portrays the LORD as Isaiah's friend (*beloved* does not adequately convey the Hebrew here) who worked so hard to ensure a productive vineyard only to be disappointed when it yielded sour grapes. The allegory, which is explained only at the end, draws in the audience, as many in ancient Judah would have had extensive experience in vineyards. Its conclusion uses puns to make its point, viz., the LORD expects *justice* (Heb "mishpat"), but sees only *bloodshed* (Heb "mispaḥ"), and hopes for *righteousness* (Heb "tsedaqah") only to hear a *cry* (Heb "tse aqah"). **8–24:** A series of "woe" (NRSV "*Ah*") oracles (see also 28.1; 29.1,15; 30.1; 31.1; 33.1; Hab 2.6–19), each introduced by the Heb exclamation "hoy" ("woe!") warns the people of coming punishment due to the failure of the leadership of Israel to ensure justice as called for in Israel's law codes, particularly Ex 20–23. **8–10:** The first oracle criticizes seizure of property, a frequent concern of eighth-century BCE prophets (see 3.12–4.1n.). A *bath* is a liquid measure of ca. 6 gal (23 liters), a poor yield for ten acres. A *homer* is ca. 6.5 bu (230 liters), and an *ephah* is only one-tenth of a *homer*. **11–17:** The prophet charges Israel's leadership with drunken incompetence. **11:** Drunkenness is frequently denounced in the prophets (Isa 28.7–8; Hos 4.11; 7.5; Am 4.1; Mic 2.11). **12:** The *deeds* and *work*, or plan and agenda, of God is a central motif in Isaiah (5.19; 10.12; 14.24–27; 19.12,17; 23.9;

or see the work of his hands!
13 Therefore my people go into exile
without knowledge;
their nobles are dying of hunger,
and their multitude is parched with
thirst.

14 Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite
and opened its mouth beyond measure;
the nobility of Jerusalem[a] and her
multitude go down,
her throng and all who exult in her.
15 People are bowed down, everyone is
brought low,
and the eyes of the haughty are
humbled.
16 But the LORD of hosts is exalted by
justice,
and the Holy God shows himself holy
by righteousness.
17 Then the lambs shall graze as in their
pasture,
fatlings and kids[b] shall feed among the
ruins.

18 Ah, you who drag iniquity along with
cords of falsehood,
who drag sin along as with cart ropes,
19 who say, "Let him make haste,
let him speed his work
that we may see it;
let the plan of the Holy One of Israel
hasten to fulfillment,
that we may know it!"
20 Ah, you who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!
21 Ah, you who are wise in your own eyes,
and shrewd in your own sight!
22 Ah, you who are heroes in drinking wine
and valiant at mixing drink,
23 who acquit the guilty for a bribe,
and deprive the innocent of their rights!
24 Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours
the stubble,
and as dry grass sinks down in the
flame,
so their root will become rotten,
and their blossom go up like dust;
for they have rejected the instruction of
the LORD of hosts,
and have despised the word of the Holy
One of Israel.

25 Therefore the anger of the LORD was
kindled against his people,
and he stretched out his hand against
them and struck them;
the mountains quaked,
and their corpses were like refuse
in the streets.
For all this his anger has not turned away,
and his hand is stretched out still.

26 He will raise a signal for a nation far
away,

[a] Heb *her nobility*
[b] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *aliens*

28.21; 30.1). **14:** The threat of exile and death is personified as *Sheol*, the underworld abode of the dead, which opens its mouth to swallow up the leadership of the people, much as they swallowed wine and food at their feasts. Such abasement of the people highlights the LORD's power, holiness, and righteousness in the eyes of the prophet. **20–24:** The prophet charges that the people can no longer distinguish between right and wrong, perverting the judicial system (1.23; Mic 3.11; cf. Ex 23.8; Deut 16.19) in their own narcissism and drunkenness. Returning to the vineyard allegory of 5.1–7, the prophet charges that the people will be utterly consumed by *fire* for neglecting divine instruction. **25–30:** The final subunit shifts from the metaphor of a burning vineyard to a chilling portrayal of the approaching Assyrian army summoned by the LORD. The outstretched hand of the LORD appears throughout 9.7–10.5 as well, and builds upon the imagery of Moses' outstretched hand throughout the plagues of the Exodus narratives (see Ex 7–10), the crossing of the sea (Ex 14.26–29), the provision of water from the rock (Ex 17.1–7), and the defeat of Amalek in the wilderness (Ex 17.8–16). The *signal* (Heb "nes") raised to summon the nations likewise recalls the LORD's "banner" ("nes") in Ex 17.15–16. The roaring of the Assyrian army like lions recalls the lion as the symbol of the tribe of Judah and the house of David (Gen 49.9), now turned against the people. The darkening cloud over the land recalls the pillar of cloud and smoke, identified with the LORD's presence during the Exodus and in the Holy of Holies in the Temple (see 4.2–6n.), but now absent.

and whistle for a people at the ends of the earth;
Here they come, swiftly, speedily!
27 None of them is weary, none stumbles,
none slumbers or sleeps,
not a loincloth is loose,
not a sandal-thong broken;
28 their arrows are sharp,
all their bows bent,
their horses' hoofs seem like flint,
and their wheels like the whirlwind.
29 Their roaring is like a lion,
like young lions they roar;
they growl and seize their prey,
they carry it off, and no one can rescue.
30 They will roar over it on that day,
like the roaring of the sea.
And if one look to the land—
only darkness and distress;
and the light grows dark with clouds.

6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

4 The pivots[a] on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7 The seraph[b]

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *He*

6.1–13: Isaiah's commission. Isaiah's lengthy explanation of divine judgment and restoration in 6.1–12.6 begins with a first-person visionary account of his commission as a prophet. Prophetic visions are common in the Bible (Ex 33; 1 Sam 3; 1 Kings 19; Jer 1.11–19; 24; Ezek 1–3; 8–11; 40–48; Am 7–9; Hab 2.2; Zech 1.7–6.15) and in the larger ancient Near Eastern world (cf. Balaam's visions in Num 22–24). Although they are commonly associated with temples, priests (e.g., Moses; Samuel; Jeremiah; Ezekiel; Zechariah) and non-priests (Elijah; Amos; Habakkuk) alike may experience visions. Although Isaiah is not a priest, his vision portrays the LORD enthroned in the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple. As a royal adviser, Isaiah would stand with the king by the column at the entrance of the Temple where he could see the interior of the Temple (2 Kings 11.14; 23.3). Such a vision of the LORD's royal court corresponds to the visions of Micaiah ben Imlah (1 Kings 22.19–23) and Ezekiel (Ezek 1). Given the emphasis on purging the people from sin, it is possible that the vision takes place on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when the priest beholds the LORD in the Holy of Holies to atone on behalf of the people (Lev 16; 23.26–32). **1–2:** *King Uzziah* of Judah, also known as Azariah, died in 742 or 733 BCE (2 Kings 15.1–7,32); the chronology is uncertain for this period. The reigns of his son, Jotham, and grandson, Ahaz, saw the first attempts by the Syro-Ephraimite alliance, i.e., the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Aram, to invade Judah, thereby initiating Assyria's attempts to take control of the region (2 Kings 15.32–16.20; Isa 7.1–9.6). Because Isaiah is heavily influenced by the royal Davidic/Zion theology, he sees the LORD enthroned as a king in the Holy of Holies of the Temple. The ark of the covenant, which was housed in the Holy of Holies (1 Kings 8.6–9), was believed to serve as the footstool for the LORD's throne (see 1 Sam 4.4; 6.2; Isa 37.16; 66.1; Pss 80.2; 99.1). The *seraphs* are heavenly beings who serve as attendants to the divine king. The Hebrew word "serap" (lit. "fiery one") also refers to fiery snakes in the wilderness (Num 21.6–9; Deut 8.15; cf. Isa 14.29; 30.6). Here, they are comparable to the cherubim, winged creatures of composite animal and human form, that are guardians of the ark (Ex 25.10–22). Isaiah's vision of the seraphs is apparently influenced by the imagery of the flickering lights of the lamp stands in the thick incense smoke that fills the Temple during worship. *Feet*, probably a euphemism for genitals. **3–4:** The hymn of the seraphs, well known in both Jewish and Christian worship, recounts the LORD's holiness as sovereign of all creation, and points to the liturgical setting of Isaiah's vision. The shaking of the thresholds likely represents the movement of the Temple doors as they are opened. *Smoke* accompanies the divine presence (4.5; 30.27; Ex 19.18; Ps 18.8), in this case also from the fire on the altar (v. 6). **5:** Isaiah recognizes that he is not sufficiently pure to stand before the LORD in the Temple (cf. Ex 33.18–20). **6–7:** The cleansing of Isaiah's mouth with a hot coal from the altar presupposes the mouth purification rituals of oracular priests

touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." [8] Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" [9] And he said, "Go and say to this people:

'Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
keep looking, but do not understand.'
[10] Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears,
and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed."
[11] Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said:
"Until cities lie waste
without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is utterly desolate;
[12] until the LORD sends everyone far away,
and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.
[13] Even if a tenth part remain in it,
it will be burned again,
like a terebinth or an oak
whose stump remains standing
when it is felled."[a]
The holy seed is its stump.

7 In the days of Ahaz son of Jotham son of Uzziah, king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel went up to attack Jerusalem, but could not mount an attack against it. [2] When the house of David heard that Aram had allied itself with Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz[b] and the

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *his heart*

in ancient Mesopotamia so that they could speak on behalf of their gods. **8:** The LORD's question and Isaiah's response recalls the experience of Micaiah (1 Kings 22.20–21). *Us*, the plural refers to the entire divine assembly. **9–10:** The LORD's commission to Isaiah is one of the most disturbing elements of the book, insofar as Isaiah's task is to ensure that the people will not see, hear, or understand so that they cannot repent and thereby avoid the punishment of the LORD (cf. the LORD's hardening the heart of Pharaoh; Ex 7.3–5; 10.1). **11–13:** Isaiah's response *How long?* is often understood to be a sign of his resignation to the divine will and his empathy for his people, although other figures, such as Abraham (Gen 18), Moses (Ex 33; Num 14), Amos (Am 7.1–6), and Job were not afraid to challenge the LORD when they thought a divine act was questionable. The concluding images of judgment against the land culminate in a portrayal of a tree stump that must be burned after the tree is cut down. Despite the horrific imagery of a mere 10 percent survival rate, the account concludes with a hopeful image of new growth from the ravaged stump that will constitute the holy seed of restoration (see Ezra 9.2).

7.1–8.15: Narrative concerning the LORD's judgment against Judah. The explanation of divine judgment shifts to a third-person narrative concerning Isaiah's confrontation with King Ahaz of Judah (743/735–727/715 BCE) at the time of the Syro-Ephraimite invasion of Judah (see 1 Kings 16) in 7.1–25, followed by a return to Isaiah's first-person narrative in 8.1–15 concerning the significance of the Maher-shalal-hash-baz sign (see textual note *a* on 8.1). The passage has a complex history of revision in response to changing circumstances. Thus many images are alternately used with positive and negative significance.

7.1–25: Dialogue between King Ahaz and Isaiah. The narrative begins with reference to the Syro-Ephraimite War of 735–732 BCE. In an attempt to oppose advances into western Asia by the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser III (745–727), King Rezin of Damascus (Aram; ca. 750–732) and King Pekah of Israel (735–732) formed the Syro-Ephraimite alliance. Pekah came to the throne of Israel in a coup engineered by Aram that saw the assassination of his predecessor, Pekahiah (737–735), the son of the pro-Assyrian Menahem (747–737; 2 Kings 15.17–26). Rezin and Menahem attempted to assemble all of the smaller states in the region into a united force that would face the Assyrians. King Jotham of Judah (759–743), who likely knew all too well the animosity between Israel and Aram over the past century (King Ahab of Israel was killed at Ramoth-gilead while fighting the Arameans; see 1 Kings 22), refused to join such an unstable alliance. Jotham died of unknown causes before the combined forces of the northern kingdom of Israel and Aram arrived at Jerusalem, leaving his twenty-year-old son Ahaz to face the threat (1 Kings 16). The goal of the assault was to force Judah into the Syro-Ephraimite alliance by removing the Davidic king and replacing him with a presumably more pliable figure named "son of Tabeel" (v. 6). **2:** *Ephraim*, the northern kingdom of Israel. **3–9:** *The end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the*

heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

3 Then the LORD said to Isaiah, Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub,[a] at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field, 4 and say to him, Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. 5 Because Aram—with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah—has plotted evil against you, saying, 6 Let us go up against Judah and cut off Jerusalem[b] and conquer it for ourselves and make the son of Tabeel king in it; 7 therefore thus says the Lord GOD:

It shall not stand,
and it shall not come to pass.
8 For the head of Aram is Damascus,
and the head of Damascus is Rezin.
(Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered, no longer a people.)
9 The head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.
If you do not stand firm in faith,
you shall not stand at all.

10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, 11 Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. 12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. 13 Then Isaiah[c] said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman[d] is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.[e] 15 He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. 17 The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on your ancestral house such days as have not come

[a] That is *A remnant shall return*
[b] Heb *cut it off*
[c] Heb *he*
[d] Gk *the virgin*
[e] That is *God is with us*

Fuller's Field. A *fuller* is a person who processes wool. The location refers to the Gihon spring, Jerusalem's water source, which was located beyond the fortified wall of the city in the Kidron Valley immediately east of the city of David. All ancient cities faced the problem of access to water in times of siege. Like several ancient Israelite cities, Jerusalem had a tunnel that would allow protected access to the Gihon from inside the walls of the city. Ahaz was inspecting Jerusalem's defenses when Isaiah arrived with his son, symbolically named *Shear-jashub* ("a remnant will return"). The symbolic name is both a reassurance that the LORD would defend Jerusalem in keeping with the Davidic/Zion tradition, and also an acknowledgment of Judah's losses. **4:** Isaiah's advice to trust in the LORD makes some practical military sense, since the Israelite and Aramean armies would hardly have time to lay a protracted siege of Jerusalem, leaving their own borders open to Assyrian attack. **9:** *If you do not stand firm in faith* (Heb "'im lo' ta'aminu"), *you shall not stand at all* ("lo' te'amenu," lit. "you will not be secure"), a wordplay between two forms of the Heb verb, "'amen," "to stand firm." **10–25:** The narrative suggests that Ahaz is skeptical, prompting the prophet to demand that the king ask a "sign" of the LORD. **11:** *Sheol*, the underworld. Although Ahaz rejects Isaiah's advice, his response to the prophet is a model of piety insofar as he will not put the LORD to the test. **14:** Isaiah's reply emphasizes the LORD's own *sign*, i.e., the birth of the child *Immanuel* ("God is with us") to express the LORD's commitment to defend Jerusalem. The *young woman* is not identified; she may be either the wife of Isaiah (cf. 8.3) or of King Ahaz. Although 7.14 is cited in Mt 1.23 as a proof text for the virgin birth of Jesus, based on the LXX translation "parthenos" (virgin), the Heb word "'almah" simply means *young woman*, not virgin. **15–17:** *Curds and honey,* choice fare, difficult to obtain during a siege; by the time the child is weaned (two to three years) the northern allies will have been totally defeated and the land (of milk and honey) will return to the prosperity it enjoyed under David and Solomon. **18–19:** A negative oracle describing the dire consequences, particularly the subjugation of Judah by the Assyrian empire, that will befall Jerusalem and Judah as a result of Ahaz's refusal to accept Isaiah's promises. The Isaiah narrative presumes Ahaz's decision to send for help to the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings 16.7–18). Ahaz's appeal to Assyria put him and his nation in debt to the Assyrians. Had he followed Isaiah's advice to wait out the siege, Tiglath-pileser, needing no invitation to invade Aram and Israel, would have come anyway, and Ahaz would not have been so indebted.

since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria."

18 On that day the LORD will whistle for
the fly that is at the sources of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. 19 And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures.

20 On that day the Lord will shave with a razor hired beyond the River—with the king of Assyria—the head and the hair of the feet, and it will take off the beard as well.

21 On that day one will keep alive a young cow and two sheep, 22 and will eat curds because of the abundance of milk that they give; for everyone that is left in the land shall eat curds and honey.

23 On that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver, will become briers and thorns. 24 With bow and arrows one will go there, for all the land will be briers and thorns; 25 and as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe, you will not go there for fear of briers and thorns; but they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where sheep tread.

8 Then the LORD said to me, Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, "Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz,"[a] 2 and have it attested[b] for me by reliable witnesses, the priest Uriah and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah. 3 And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; 4 for before the child knows how to call "My father" or "My mother," the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria.

5 The LORD spoke to me again: 6 Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and melt in fear before[c] Rezin and the son of Remaliah; 7 therefore, the Lord is bringing up against it the mighty flood waters of the River, the king of Assyria and all his glory; it will rise above all its channels and overflow all its banks; 8 it will sweep on into Judah as a flood, and, pouring over, it will reach up to the neck; and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.

9 Band together, you peoples, and be
dismayed;
listen, all you far countries;
gird yourselves and be dismayed;
gird yourselves and be dismayed!
10 Take counsel together, but it shall be
brought to naught;
speak a word, but it will not stand,
for God is with us.[d]

[a] That is *The spoil speeds, the prey hastens*
[b] Q Ms Gk Syr: MT *and I caused to be attested*
[c] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Heb *immanu el*

20: For the shaming of prisoners by the removal of facial and body hair, see 2 Sam 10.1–5. *Feet*, genitals. **21–22:** A reuse of the curds-and-honey motif signifying that the land will go back to pasture as a result of invasion. **23–25:** Reuse of the motif of the reversion of the vineyards to briers and thorns, as in 5.6. **23:** *A thousand shekels,* ca. 25 lb (55 kg).

8.1–15: Autobiographical account concerning the Maher-shalal-hash-baz sign. The narrative abruptly shifts to Isaiah's first-person account concerning the birth of his son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz , who serves as a sign concerning the impending judgment to be suffered by Judah when the Assyrian king takes control of Judah. **1–4:** The prophet recounts how he secured witnesses concerning the future birth of his son, *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*, whose name means "the spoil speeds, the prey hastens," symbolically conveying the speed with which the Assyrians will act against the Syro-Ephraimite coalition and establish their authority over Judah. **2:** *Uriah and Zechariah*, the former may be the chief priest of the Jerusalem Temple (2 Kings 16.10–16) and the latter the father-in-law of Ahaz (2 Kings 18.2). **3:** *The prophetess*, Isaiah's wife, perhaps in the service of the Temple or court. **5–8:** The prophet makes clear the LORD's dissatisfaction with Ahaz's refusal to accept the divine offer of protection. *The waters of Shiloah,* the stream fed by the Gihon spring that symbolizes the LORD's sustenance of Jerusalem and the house of David (Neh 2.14; 3.15). The oracle plays on the imagery of the protective stream that now becomes a threatening force as it overflows its banks to flood the land. **7:** *The River*, the Euphrates, in western Assyria. **8:** Whereas *Immanuel*, "God is with us," earlier signified God's protection of Judah, the name now symbolizes the LORD's punishment of the land. **9–10:** A brief hymn expands on the Immanuel theme with

11 For the LORD spoke thus to me while his
hand was strong upon me, and warned me
not to walk in the way of this people, saying:
12 Do not call conspiracy all that this people
calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears,
or be in dread. 13 But the LORD of hosts, him
you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear,
and let him be your dread. 14 He will become
a sanctuary, a stone one strikes against; for
both houses of Israel he will become a rock
one stumbles over—a trap and a snare for the
inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 And many among
them shall stumble; they shall fall and be
broken; they shall be snared and taken.

16 Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples. 17 I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. 18 See, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. 19 Now if people say to you, "Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living, 20 for teaching and for instruction?" surely, those who speak like this will have no dawn! 21 They will pass through the land,[a] greatly distressed and hungry; when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will curse[b] their king and their gods. They will turn their faces upward, 22 or they will look to the earth, but will see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness.[c]

9[d] But there will be no gloom for those who
were in anguish. In the former time he
brought into contempt the land of Zebulun
and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time
he will make glorious the way of the sea, the
land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

2[e] The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
3 You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;

[a] Heb *it*
[b] Or *curse by*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Ch 8.23 in Heb
[e] Ch 9.1 in Heb

reference to the victorious Jerusalem of the future (anticipating 8.16–12.6). **11–15:** The *hand* of the Lord signifies possession by the spirit of God, resulting in transformed prophetic consciousness (e.g., 1 Kings 18.46; 2 Kings 3.15; Ezek 1.3; 3.22; 8.1; 33.22). Isaiah's opposition to Ahaz and his circle has apparently led to accusations of conspiracy directed against him and his followers.

8.16–12.6: Announcement concerning the fall of Assyria and the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. Having laid out the scenario for Jerusalem's and Judah's judgment at the hands of Assyria in 7.1–8.15, the prophet's oracles then turn to a scenario of divine judgment against Assyria for its own arrogance (cf. 2.10–21) and the restoration of righteous Davidic rule over a reunited Israel and Judah.

8.16–9.7: Prophetic instruction concerning the LORD's signs to Israel and the house of David. Isaiah now expresses frustration as he decides to wait for the LORD to act. Isaiah maintains that the LORD is hiding from the nation, a disturbing proposition that is meant to overcome suggestions of divine impotence or maliciousness in the face of crisis, but nevertheless points to the LORD as an important cause of Judah's suffering. **8.16:** The commands to *bind up the testimony* and *seal the teaching* (Heb "torah") among *my disciples* is an ambiguous statement. Heb "limmuday," translated here as "my disciples," may also refer to "my teachings," since "limmud" means "taught," whether the content is the teaching or the person taught. The phrase may have played a role in motivating the expansion of the book of Isaiah in the exilic and postexilic periods as later interpreters reflected upon the meaning of the prophet's oracles in relation to their own times. **8.18–9.7:** The prophet anticipates a period of gloom and darkness until a new Davidic monarch arises to replace Ahaz. **18:** *I and the children,* Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, are portents for the future; the name Isaiah ("The LORD saves") connotes the hope of salvation. **19:** Recourse to *ghosts and the familiar spirits* (i.e., necromancy) was a practice in ancient Israel and Judah, though often condemned (19.3; Lev 19.31; Deut 18.10–11). Here Isaiah threatens that it can only lead to greater distress and darkness. **9.1:** *Zebulun* and *Naphtali* refer to the Assyrian annexation of Israelite tribal territories in Galilee following Tiglath-pileser's defeat of northern Israel in 732 BCE. The Assyrian provinces of Dur (Dor, *the way of the sea*), Gal'azu (Gilead, *the land beyond the Jordan*), and Magidu (Megiddo, *Galilee of the nations*), areas just south and west of Zebulun and Naphtali, were also carved out of Israel at this

they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
4 For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
6 For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

8 The Lord sent a word against Jacob,
and it fell on Israel;
9 and all the people knew it—
Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria—
but in pride and arrogance of heart they said:
10 "The bricks have fallen,
but we will build with dressed stones;
the sycamores have been cut down,
but we will put cedars in their place."
11 So the LORD raised adversaries[a] against them,
and stirred up their enemies,
12 the Arameans on the east and the Philistines on the west,
and they devoured Israel with open mouth.
For all this his anger has not turned away;
his hand is stretched out still.

13 The people did not turn to him who struck them,
or seek the LORD of hosts.
14 So the LORD cut off from Israel head and tail,
palm branch and reed in one day—
15 elders and dignitaries are the head,
and prophets who teach lies are the tail;
16 for those who led this people led them astray,
and those who were led by them were left in confusion.
17 That is why the Lord did not have pity on[b] their young people,

[a] Cn: Heb *the adversaries of Rezin*
[b] Q Ms: MT *rejoice over*

time. **2–7:** The royal song of thanksgiving answers the hopes of those who wait for the LORD to act to restore righteous Davidic rule in Israel. **4–5:** Military oppression is symbolized by the yoke (10.27; 14.25), the bar (10.24), the rod (10.24; 14.5; Gen 49.10), and the trampling boot. **4:** *The day of Midian* refers to Gideon's defeat of Midian and deliverance of Israel in Judg 7.15–25. **6–7:** The birth of a new king, perhaps Hezekiah, the son and successor of Ahaz, signals a new period of *peace, justice*, and *righteousness* in which Davidic rule will be reestablished in Israel. See also Ps 2.7. *For us,* see 6.8n.

9.8–10.4: Prophetic warning of judgment to Israel's leaders. The prophet returns to a focus on northern Israel. The oracles in this passage all conclude with the formulaic statement, "for all this, his (the LORD's) anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still" (9.12b, 17b, 21b; 10.4b). The occurrence of this formula in 5.25 indicates that 5.1–30 and 9.8–10.4 form a literary envelope around 6.1–9.7. The oracles presuppose Israel's experience in the Syro-Ephraimite alliance, and point to Israel's leadership as the cause of its problems. **9.8–12:** This oracle presupposes Aram's (and Philistia's) aggression against Israel in the ninth century BCE when King Ahab was killed in battle (1 Kings 22). Later Israelite kings and their Judean vassals were contained by the Aramean push into Philistia (2 Kings 10.32; 12.17–18; 13.7). **8:** *Jacob* is the eponymous ancestor of Israel (Gen 32.22–32; 35.9–15) and is especially associated with northern Israelite locations. **9:** *Ephraim* is the dominant tribe of northern Israel, and Samaria is the capital of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 16.24). **13–17:** Isaiah decries Israel's failure to recognize that the LORD was the party responsible for striking against Israel's leaders. Although the Jehu dynasty eventually achieved security for Israel during the reigns of Jehoash (800–784) and Jeroboam II (788–747; 2 Kings 13.24–25; 14.23–29), ancient Near Eastern sources indicate that Jehu (842–814) and Jehoash did so by forming an alliance with Assyria to contain Aram. King Zechariah (747), the last king of

or compassion on their orphans and widows;
for everyone was godless and an evildoer,
and every mouth spoke folly.
For all this his anger has not turned away;
his hand is stretched out still.

18 For wickedness burned like a fire,
consuming briers and thorns;
it kindled the thickets of the forest,
and they swirled upward in a column of smoke.
19 Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts
the land was burned,
and the people became like fuel for the fire;
no one spared another.
20 They gorged on the right, but still were hungry,
and they devoured on the left, but were not satisfied;
they devoured the flesh of their own kindred;[a]
21 Manasseh devoured Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh,
and together they were against Judah.
For all this his anger has not turned away;
his hand is stretched out still.

10 Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees,
who write oppressive statutes,
2 to turn aside the needy from justice
and to rob the poor of my people of their right,
that widows may be your spoil,
and that you may make the orphans your prey!
3 What will you do on the day of punishment,
in the calamity that will come from far away?
To whom will you flee for help,
and where will you leave your wealth,
4 so as not to crouch among the prisoners
or fall among the slain?
For all this his anger has not turned away;
his hand is stretched out still.

5 Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger—
the club in their hands is my fury!
6 Against a godless nation I send him,
and against the people of my wrath I command him,
to take spoil and seize plunder,
and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.
7 But this is not what he intends,
nor does he have this in mind;
but it is in his heart to destroy,
and to cut off nations not a few.
8 For he says:
"Are not my commanders all kings?
9 Is not Calno like Carchemish?
Is not Hamath like Arpad?
Is not Samaria like Damascus?
10 As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols
whose images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria,

[a] Or *arm*

the house of Jehu, was ultimately assassinated by pro-Aramean elements in Israel (2 Kings 8–12). **18–21:** The last years of the kingdom of Israel were marked by a series of royal assassinations as pro-Assyrian and pro-Aramean elements struggled for control of the nation. King Pekah (see 7.1–25n.), who joined Israel with Aram to form the Syro-Ephraimite alliance, gained his throne by assassinating Pekahiah, the son of the pro-Assyrian King Menahem (2 Kings 15.17–26; cf. 2 Kings 15.25). **21:** *Ephraim* and *Manasseh* were the two largest tribes in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. **10.1–4:** The last oracle of the sequence begins with "woe" (*Ah*) to signal the prophet's judgment against Israel's leadership for its oppression of the poor and manipulation of the judicial system (see 5.20–24n.). Ultimately the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser (745–727) stripped away much of Israel's outlying territory, which prompted Hoshea (732–722) to assassinate Pekah and submit to Assyria (2 Kings 15.29–30).

10.5–12.6: Prophetic announcement of Assyrian downfall and Davidic restoration. The final oracular sequence in chs 5–12 takes up divine judgment against the Assyrian monarch for his arrogance and the coming restoration of righteous Davidic rule over a reunified Israel and Judah. **10.5–11:** The sequence begins with a "woe" (*Ah*) oracle directed against the Assyrian king. Although the LORD sent the Assyrians to punish Israel, the Assyrian king arrogantly sees himself and not the LORD as the true power in the world. The Assyrian monarch portrayed here is Sargon II (721–705 BCE). **9:** The cities named are all Aramean cities conquered by Tiglath-pileser (745–727) or Sargon. *Calno* (Calneh) in 740 and 738; *Carchemish* in 717; *Hamath* in 738 and again in 720; *Arpad*

[11] shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols
what I have done to Samaria and her
images?"

[12] When the Lord has finished all his work
on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he[a] will
punish the arrogant boasting of the king of
Assyria and his haughty pride. [13] For he says:
"By the strength of my hand I have
done it,
and by my wisdom, for I have
understanding;
I have removed the boundaries of peoples,
and have plundered their treasures;
like a bull I have brought down those
who sat on thrones.
[14] My hand has found, like a nest,
the wealth of the peoples;
and as one gathers eggs that have been
forsaken,
so I have gathered all the earth;
and there was none that moved a wing,
or opened its mouth, or chirped."

[15] Shall the ax vaunt itself over the one
who wields it,
or the saw magnify itself against the
one who handles it?
As if a rod should raise the one who lifts
it up,
or as if a staff should lift the one who is
not wood!
[16] Therefore the Sovereign, the LORD of
hosts,
will send wasting sickness among his
stout warriors,
and under his glory a burning will be
kindled,
like the burning of fire.
[17] The light of Israel will become a fire,
and his Holy One a flame;
and it will burn and devour
his thorns and briers in one day.
[18] The glory of his forest and his fruitful
land
the LORD will destroy, both soul and
body,
and it will be as when an invalid wastes
away.
[19] The remnant of the trees of his forest
will be so few
that a child can write them down.

[20] On that day the remnant of Israel and
the survivors of the house of Jacob will no
more lean on the one who struck them,
but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of
Israel, in truth. [21] A remnant will return, the
remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. [22] For
though your people Israel were like the
sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will
return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing
with righteousness. [23] For the Lord GOD of
hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in all
the earth.[b]

[24] Therefore thus says the Lord GOD of
hosts: O my people, who live in Zion, do not
be afraid of the Assyrians when they beat
you with a rod and lift up their staff against

[a] Heb *I*
[b] Or *land*

in 740; and *Damascus* in 732. **10–11:** To the Assyrian king, *Samaria* and *Jerusalem* are ruled by idols and will fall to him just like the others. **12–19:** Once the LORD completes the punishment of Jerusalem, divine attention will turn to the punishment of the Assyrian king for his arrogant and self-aggrandizing boasting. **15:** The imagery of *ax* and *saw* presupposes the Assyrian practice of cutting down trees in the land of their enemies to provide wood for siege engines and to destroy the agricultural base of the economy (cf. Deut 20.19–20). The LORD will become a raging fire that will burn Assyria, symbolically portrayed as felled trees. **20–27a:** The prophet returns to the theme of the remnant that will survive the Syro-Aramean and Assyrian onslaughts (cf. 1.9; 4.2–6; 6.12–13; 7.1–15) to see the final overthrow of the Assyrians. **24:** Assyria has become an oppressor of Israel much like the pharaoh of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. The oracle plays on the image of Assyria's *rod* (cf. 10.5), first to be used to punish Israel, then as an instrument of oppression, and finally used against Assyria, much as the rods of Moses and Aaron were used against Egypt during the plagues and at the parting of the sea (Ex 6–11; 13–15). **26:** A reference to Gideon's defeat of *Midian* at the rock of *Oreb* (Judg 7.25). **10.27b–11.9:** The advance of the Assyrian king against Jerusalem generally follows the route from northern Israel through Benjamin south into Jerusalem. The Assyrian king who threatens Jerusalem is likely Sargon II, who passed through Jerusalem in 720 BCE and put on a show of force to intimidate the city on his way to confront the Egyptians and Philistines at Raphia.

you as the Egyptians did. 25 For in a very
little while my indignation will come to an
end, and my anger will be directed to their
destruction. 26 The LORD of hosts will wield a
whip against them, as when he struck Midian
at the rock of Oreb; his staff will be over the
sea, and he will lift it as he did in Egypt. 27 On
that day his burden will be removed from
your shoulder, and his yoke will be destroyed
from your neck.

He has gone up from Rimmon,[a]
28 he has come to Aiath;
he has passed through Migron,
at Michmash he stores his baggage;
29 they have crossed over the pass,
at Geba they lodge for the night;
Ramah trembles,
Gibeah of Saul has fled.
30 Cry aloud, O daughter Gallim!
Listen, O Laishah!
Answer her, O Anathoth!
31 Madmenah is in flight,
the inhabitants of Gebim flee for safety.
32 This very day he will halt at Nob,
he will shake his fist
at the mount of daughter Zion,
the hill of Jerusalem.

33 Look, the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts,
will lop the boughs with terrifying
power;
the tallest trees will be cut down,
and the lofty will be brought low.
34 He will hack down the thickets of the
forest with an ax,
and Lebanon with its majestic trees[b]
will fall.

11 A shoot shall come out from the stump
of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
2 The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and
understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of
the LORD.
3 His delight shall be in the fear of the
LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
4 but with righteousness he shall judge the
poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of
the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his
mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall
kill the wicked.
5 Righteousness shall be the belt around
his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his
loins.

6 The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling
together,
and a little child shall lead them.
7 The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
8 The nursing child shall play over the hole
of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand
on the adder's den.
9 They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge
of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

10 On that day the root of Jesse shall stand

[a] Cn: Heb *and his yoke from your neck, and a yoke will be destroyed because of fatness*
[b] Cn Compare Gk Vg: Heb *with a majestic one*

10.27b–32: Some of the cities named cannot be identified with certainty, but all are presumably not far north of Jerusalem. **33:** Isaiah's use of tree imagery appears once again (see 10.15–19). **34:** *Lebanon,* see 2.13n. **11.1–9:** In place of the felled Assyrian tree, the stump will produce a new branch that will grow into the new and righteous Davidic monarch who will preside over Jerusalem in peace (cf. 6.12–13; 9.1–7). **1:** *Jesse*, the father of David (1 Sam 16.1–20). **2:** *The spirit of the LORD*, the charismatic endowment of the future ruler is expressed in three pairs of attributes; LXX adds "the spirit of piety," providing the basis for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in Christian theology. **6–8:** The idyllic scenario in which the animals live in peace and even a baby is safe recalls the garden

as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall
inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be
glorious.
11 On that day the Lord will extend his hand
yet a second time to recover the remnant that
is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt,
from Pathros, from Ethiopia,[a] from Elam,
from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the
coastlands of the sea.
12 He will raise a signal for the nations,
and will assemble the outcasts of Israel,
and gather the dispersed of Judah
from the four corners of the earth.
13 The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart,
the hostility of Judah shall be cut off;
Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah,
and Judah shall not be hostile towards
Ephraim.
14 But they shall swoop down on the backs
of the Philistines in the west,
together they shall plunder the people
of the east.
They shall put forth their hand against
Edom and Moab,
and the Ammonites shall obey them.
15 And the Lord will utterly destroy
the tongue of the sea of Egypt;
and will wave his hand over the River
with his scorching wind;
and will split it into seven channels,
and make a way to cross on foot;
16 so there shall be a highway from Assyria
for the remnant that is left of his
people,
as there was for Israel
when they came up from the land of
Egypt.

12 You will say in that day:
I will give thanks to you, O Lord,
for though you were angry with me,
your anger turned away,
and you comforted me.

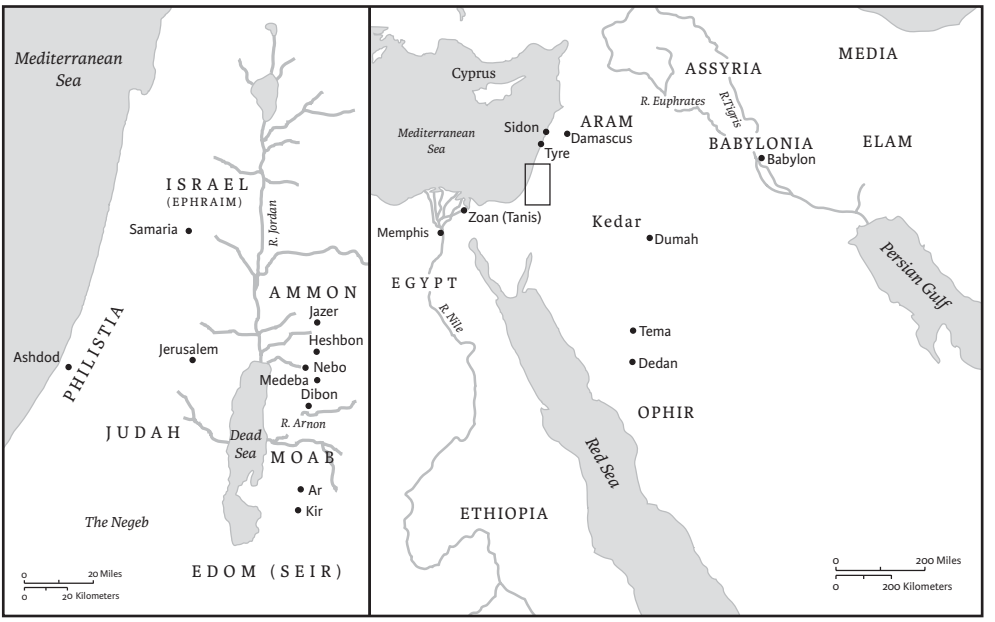
2 Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the Lord God[b] is my strength and my
might;
he has become my salvation.

3 With joy you will draw water from the wells
of salvation. 4 And you will say in that day:
Give thanks to the Lord,
call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.

5 Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done
gloriously;
let this be known[c] in all the earth.

[a] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*
[b] Heb *for Yah, the* Lord
[c] Or *this is made known*

of Eden (Gen 2). **9:** *My holy mountain*, see 2.2n. **10:** The *signal* (Heb "nes," "banner") that summons the nations recalls the banner of the Lord that summoned the Assyrians in 5.26 and that symbolized the defeat of Amalek in Ex 17.15–16. **11–16:** The restoration of righteous Davidic rule in Jerusalem prompts the return of Israel's exiles and the restoration of the united Davidic empire. Israelites were exiled to Assyria and others had fled to Egypt during the course of the Assyrian invasions in the late eighth century. **11:** *Pathros*, in southern Egypt; *Ethiopia* (Heb "Cush"), south of Egypt; *Elam,* in southern Iran, east of Babylonia; *Shinar,* the plain of Babylon; *Hamath,* in north central Aram (Syria); *the coastlands of the sea,* the Phoenician littoral on the eastern Mediterranean coast, or the islands of the eastern Aegean. **12–14:** With the exiles recovered, Israel and Judah will reunite under the rule of the Davidic king as in the days of David and Solomon, to conquer Philistia and Transjordan (*Edom, Moab,* and *the Ammonites*), regions that had once been part of the kingdom of David and Solomon (2 Sam 8). **15:** The Lord's defeat of the sea of Egypt recalls the parting of the sea at the time of the Exodus (Ex 14–15). The *scorching wind* is a dry sirocco or east wind that plays a role in the parting of the sea and other acts of the Lord (Ex 10.13; 14.21). *The River,* the Euphrates. *Seven channels* evokes mythological traditions about the dragon Leviathan (cf. 27.1), who has seven heads in Canaanite mythology. The *highway from Assyria* is compared to the King's Highway, a trade route through Transjordan, that Israel followed on its way through Moab to the promised land (Num 20.17; 21.22; Deut 2.17). **12.1–6:** The concluding song of thanksgiving quotes from the Song of the Sea in Ex 15 (see esp. Ex 15.1–3) and various Psalms (e.g., 105.1; 118.14,21). The drawing of water suggests a setting in the celebration of Sukkot (Tabernacles; Lev 23.33–44), when water libations were poured at the Temple to celebrate the end of the fruit harvest and the onset of the rainy season as well as Israel's journey through the wilderness.



Places mentioned in the oracles against the nations

6 Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal[a] Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

13 The oracle concerning Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw.

2 On a bare hill raise a signal,
cry aloud to them;
wave the hand for them to enter the gates of the nobles.
3 I myself have commanded my consecrated ones,

[a] Or *O inhabitant of*

13.1–27.13: Prophetic announcement concerning the preparation of the nations for the LORD's world rule. The oracles concerning the nations in chs 13–23 together with prophecies of restoration for Zion and Israel in chs 24–27 constitute a major unit that anticipates the LORD's actions and sovereignty from throughout the entire world. The superscription in 13.1 that introduces this section is styled much like that in 2.1. Major blocks of oracles concerning the nations are a common feature of prophetic books (see Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32; Am 1–2; Ob; Nah; Zeph 2.4–15). Isaiah's oracles are each marked with a superscription that identifies it as an oracle or pronouncement (Heb "massa'") concerning the nation in question. The prophet's pronouncements include nations that were ultimately conquered by the Persian empire, beginning with the Persian King Cyrus's conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE, which prompted his decree to end the Babylonian exile and allow Jews to return to their own land (2 Chr 36.22–23; Ezra 1.1–4). Insofar as the latter portions of Isaiah designate Cyrus as the LORD's "messiah" and "temple builder" (44.28; 45.1), the final form of the book of Isaiah views Cyrus and the Persian empire as the means by which the LORD exercises worldwide sovereignty.

13.1–14.32: Isaiah's pronouncement concerning Babylon. The prophet's oracle concerning Babylon includes a summation in 14.24–27 that applies the oracles concerning Assyria to Babylon, and an appendix in 14.28–32 that takes up Philistia. **13.1:** The superscription both introduces the oracle concerning Babylon and the oracles concerning the nations throughout Isaiah 13–23. **13.2–14.27:** The lengthy oracle concerning Babylon is unexpected immediately following the earlier concerns with Assyria and its threat to Israel and Judah in the eighth century. Nevertheless, the book as a whole also addresses the Babylonian exile and the Persian-period restoration in the sixth century BCE. It therefore portrays Babylon as the natural successor to Assyria as the LORD's agent of punishment who must in turn be brought down to realize Jerusalem's restoration. **13.2–5:** The sum-

have summoned my warriors, my
proudly exulting ones,
to execute my anger.

4 Listen, a tumult on the mountains
as of a great multitude!
Listen, an uproar of kingdoms,
of nations gathering together!
The LORD of hosts is mustering
an army for battle.
5 They come from a distant land,
from the end of the heavens,
the LORD and the weapons of his
indignation,
to destroy the whole earth.

6 Wail, for the day of the LORD is near;
it will come like destruction from the
Almighty![a]
7 Therefore all hands will be feeble,
and every human heart will melt,
8 and they will be dismayed.
Pangs and agony will seize them;
they will be in anguish like a woman in
labor.
They will look aghast at one another;
their faces will be aflame.
9 See, the day of the LORD comes,
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,
to make the earth a desolation,
and to destroy its sinners from it.
10 For the stars of the heavens and their
constellations
will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising,
and the moon will not shed its light.
11 I will punish the world for its evil,
and the wicked for their iniquity;
I will put an end to the pride of the
arrogant,
and lay low the insolence of tyrants.
12 I will make mortals more rare than fine
gold,
and humans than the gold of Ophir.
13 Therefore I will make the heavens
tremble,
and the earth will be shaken out of its
place,
at the wrath of the LORD of hosts
in the day of his fierce anger.
14 Like a hunted gazelle,
or like sheep with no one to gather
them,
all will turn to their own people,
and all will flee to their own lands.
15 Whoever is found will be thrust through,
and whoever is caught will fall by the
sword.
16 Their infants will be dashed to pieces
before their eyes;
their houses will be plundered,
and their wives ravished.
17 See, I am stirring up the Medes against
them,
who have no regard for silver
and do not delight in gold.
18 Their bows will slaughter the young
men;
they will have no mercy on the fruit of
the womb;
their eyes will not pity children.
19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms,
the splendor and pride of the
Chaldeans,
will be like Sodom and Gomorrah
when God overthrew them.
20 It will never be inhabited
or lived in for all generations;

[a] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*

mons to war presupposes Israel's holy war traditions (cf. Deut 20; Josh 1–11) in which the LORD fights on behalf of Israel and employs a heavenly army (see Ex 23.20–33; Josh 5.13–15; 2 Kings 6.15–19; 7.3–8). **6–8:** *The day of the LORD*, see 2.10–21n. The imagery of wailing together with *pangs* and *agony* evokes the imagery of childbirth. Such imagery builds on the role that the birth of Isaiah's own symbolically named sons play in communicating his oracles (7.1–9; 8.1–15,18). **9–16:** Because the LORD is the sovereign of all creation, elements of creation such as the stars, moon, and sun, all play roles in the assault against the arrogant and evil on the Day of the LORD. **12:** *Ophir*, in Arabia, was known for its gold (1 Kings 9.26–28). **17–22:** The *Medes* are a nation northwest of Persia, which allied with the Babylonians in 627–609 BCE to bring down the Assyrian empire. Later, under the rule of Cyrus, they united with Persia to form the Persian empire, which in turn conquered Babylonia in 539 BCE. **19:** *Chaldeans,* the Babylonians. *Sodom and Gomorrah,* see 1.9n. **20–22:** The reversion of cities to a primitive condition is a common theme in Isaiah; see 14.22; 17.23; 18.6; 25.2; 27.10–11; 32.13–14; 34.8–15. Although Cyrus

Arabs will not pitch their tents there,
shepherds will not make their flocks lie down there.
21 But wild animals will lie down there,
and its houses will be full of howling creatures;
there ostriches will live,
and there goat-demons will dance.
22 Hyenas will cry in its towers,
and jackals in the pleasant palaces;
its time is close at hand,
and its days will not be prolonged.

14 But the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land; and aliens will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob. 2 And the nations will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess the nations[a] as male and female slaves in the LORD's land; they will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.

3 When the LORD has given you rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve, 4 you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon:

How the oppressor has ceased!
How his insolence[b] has ceased!
5 The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked,
the scepter of rulers,
6 that struck down the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows,
that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution.
7 The whole earth is at rest and quiet;
they break forth into singing.
8 The cypresses exult over you,
the cedars of Lebanon, saying,
"Since you were laid low,
no one comes to cut us down."
9 Sheol beneath is stirred up
to meet you when you come;
it rouses the shades to greet you,
all who were leaders of the earth;
it raises from their thrones
all who were kings of the nations.
10 All of them will speak
and say to you:
"You too have become as weak as we!
You have become like us!"
11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol,
and the sound of your harps;
maggots are the bed beneath you,
and worms are your covering.

12 How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!
13 You said in your heart,
"I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne
above the stars of God;
I will sit on the mount of assembly
on the heights of Zaphon;[c]
14 I will ascend to the tops of the clouds,
I will make myself like the Most High."
15 But you are brought down to Sheol,
to the depths of the Pit.

[a] Heb *them*
[b] Q Ms Compare Gk Syr Vg: Meaning of MT uncertain
[c] Or *assembly in the far north*

defeated the Babylonian army in the field, Babylon surrendered to him peacefully and was not destroyed. **21:** *Goat-demons*, satyrs and demons, including Lilith (34.14), are at home in the wilderness. **14.1–2:** With the defeat and destruction of Babylon, the LORD turns to the restoration of Israel to its own land. **3–23:** The LORD instructs Isaiah to sing a taunt song at the downfall of the king of Babylon. **7–8:** Both Assyrian and Babylonian kings were known for cutting down the cypresses and *cedars* of Lebanon (2.13n), as the wood was prized for building luxurious palaces (see 37.24). The trees therefore rejoice at the king's death. **9–11:** *Sheol*, the underworld, prepares to welcome the dead king. Despite his arrogance (cf. 10.5–32), the king must recognize that no one, not even kings, escapes death and its consequences. **12–14:** The names *Day Star* and *son of Dawn* draw on divine names known from Canaanite mythology. The name was translated as Lucifer in Latin, and the passage was later understood to refer to Satan's fall from heaven. The taunt song apparently reflects mythological references to failed attempts by gods to challenge the rule of the chief god (see also Ezek 28; Ps 82). **15:** The king's descent to *Sheol* (also called *the Pit*) draws on mythic patterns such as the Mesopotamian "Descent of Ishtar/Inanna to the Underworld," in which a goddess descends to the netherworld in an attempt to recover her dead consort. *Zaphon* ("north") is the mythological northern mountain of Baal in Canaanite mythology; it is identified with

16 Those who see you will stare at you,
and ponder over you:
"Is this the man who made the earth
tremble,
who shook kingdoms,
17 who made the world like a desert
and overthrew its cities,
who would not let his prisoners go
home?"
18 All the kings of the nations lie in glory,
each in his own tomb;
19 but you are cast out, away from your
grave,
like loathsome carrion,[a]
clothed with the dead, those pierced by
the sword,
who go down to the stones of the Pit,
like a corpse trampled underfoot.
20 You will not be joined with them in
burial,
because you have destroyed your land,
you have killed your people.

May the descendants of evildoers
nevermore be named!
21 Prepare slaughter for his sons
because of the guilt of their father.[b]
Let them never rise to possess the earth
or cover the face of the world with cities.

22 I will rise up against them, says the LORD of hosts, and will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, offspring and posterity, says the LORD. 23 And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog, and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction, says the LORD of hosts.

24 The LORD of hosts has sworn:
As I have designed,
so shall it be;
and as I have planned,
so shall it come to pass:
25 I will break the Assyrian in my land,
and on my mountains trample him
under foot;
his yoke shall be removed from them,
and his burden from their
shoulders.
26 This is the plan that is planned
concerning the whole earth;
and this is the hand that is stretched out
over all the nations.
27 For the LORD of hosts has planned,
and who will annul it?
His hand is stretched out,
and who will turn it back?

28 In the year that King Ahaz died this
oracle came:

29 Do not rejoice, all you Philistines,
that the rod that struck you is broken,
for from the root of the snake will come
forth an adder,
and its fruit will be a flying fiery
serpent.
30 The firstborn of the poor will graze,
and the needy lie down in safety;
but I will make your root die of famine,
and your remnant I[c] will kill.
31 Wail, O gate; cry, O city;

[a] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *like a loathed branch*
[b] Syr Compare Gk: Heb *fathers*
[c] Q Ms Vg: MT *he*

Mount Zion in Ps 48.2. **18–21:** Allusion to the body of the king lying unburied in vv. 19–20 indicate that the passage originally presupposed the Assyrian King Sargon II, whose body was reportedly left on the battlefield in 705 BCE. **22–23:** A prose conclusion repeating the motif of reversion to primitive conditions (see 13.20–22n.). **24–27:** The reference to the LORD's plan to defeat Assyria in the land of Israel draws an analogy between Assyria and Babylon as nations that must be punished for their arrogance following their roles as agents for divine punishment of Israel. The similarities with 10.5–34 suggest that the two passages may once have formed a unit in an earlier edition of Isaiah's oracles. Babylon succeeds Assyria as the major enemy in chs 40–55. The reference to the LORD's plan also anticipates statements that concerning the LORD's word in 40.8 and the realization of divine plans in 55.11.

14.28–32: Appendix concerning Isaiah's pronouncement against Philistia. Following the death of King Ahaz (715 BCE), Philistia attempted to revolt against Assyria, and likely approached Ahaz's son, King Hezekiah (727/715–698/687) for support. Isaiah was opposed to military alliances against Assyria due to his belief in the Davidic/Zion theology that posited the LORD's protection of Jerusalem (cf. 7.1–25). Sargon put down the Philis-

melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you!
For smoke comes out of the north,
and there is no straggler in its ranks.

32 What will one answer the messengers of the nation?
"The LORD has founded Zion,
and the needy among his people will find refuge in her."

15 An oracle concerning Moab.

Because Ar is laid waste in a night,
Moab is undone;
because Kir is laid waste in a night,
Moab is undone.
2 Dibon[a] has gone up to the temple,
to the high places to weep;
over Nebo and over Medeba
Moab wails.
On every head is baldness,
every beard is shorn;
3 in the streets they bind on sackcloth;
on the housetops and in the squares
everyone wails and melts in tears.
4 Heshbon and Elealeh cry out,
their voices are heard as far as Jahaz;
therefore the loins of Moab quiver;[b]
his soul trembles.
5 My heart cries out for Moab;
his fugitives flee to Zoar,
to Eglath-shelishiyah.
For at the ascent of Luhith
they go up weeping;
on the road to Horonaim
they raise a cry of destruction;
6 the waters of Nimrim
are a desolation;
the grass is withered, the new growth fails,
the verdure is no more.
7 Therefore the abundance they have gained
and what they have laid up
they carry away
over the Wadi of the Willows.
8 For a cry has gone
around the land of Moab;
the wailing reaches to Eglaim,
the wailing reaches to Beer-elim.
9 For the waters of Dibon[c] are full of blood;
yet I will bring upon Dibon[c] even more—
a lion for those of Moab who escape,
for the remnant of the land.

16 Send lambs
to the ruler of the land,
from Sela, by way of the desert,
to the mount of daughter Zion.
2 Like fluttering birds,
like scattered nestlings,
so are the daughters of Moab
at the fords of the Arnon.

[a] Cn: Heb *the house and Dibon*
[b] Cn Compare Gk Syr: Heb *the armed men of Moab cry aloud*
[c] Q Ms Vg Compare Syr: MT *Dimon*

tine revolt in 713 BCE.

15.1–16.14: Isaiah's pronouncement concerning Moab. The superscription introduces a lamentation concerning the downfall of Moab, a nation east of the Dead Sea that was often on unfriendly terms with Israel and Judah (cf. Gen 19.30–37). The poem employs the poetic meter typical of dirges in ancient Hebrew poetry (cf. Lam 1–2). Elements of the oracle also appear in Jer 48.29–38, which employs the Isaian oracle to comment on Moab's fate at the hands of Babylon in Jeremiah's time. Although the setting of this oracle is disputed, a likely setting is Tiglath-pileser's invasion of Israel during the Syro-Ephraimite War of 735–732 BCE. Moabite territory north of the Arnon had once been the tribal territory of Reuben and perhaps Gad (see Num 32). In the Moabite Stone (Mesha Stele, ninth century BCE), the Moabite King Mesha boasts of having defeated Israel—and the men of Gad in particular—and taking their land. The Assyrians would have considered this territory to be Israelite and therefore fair game for their own plans for taking control of the region. Moab's appeal for assistance to Jerusalem makes sense in the Syro-Ephraimite War, because Ahaz summons the Assyrians for assistance and maintains his loyalty as an Assyrian vassal (see 7.1–25) **15.1–9:** The Moabite towns mentioned in the oracle indicate an invasion that targeted Moabite territory north of the Wadi Arnon, the Wadi el-Mujib that flows into the Dead Sea. **1–4:** The cities of *Ar*, *Kir*(-hareseth), *Nebo, Medeba, Heshbon*, and *Elealeh*, are all located in the north and subject to attack. *Dibon* and *Jahaz,* on the old border of Moab just north of the Arnon, only serve as witnesses. *Baldness . . . sackcloth,* signs of mourning. **5–8:** The southern cities and locations, none of which can be conclusively identified,

3 "Give counsel,
grant justice;
make your shade like night
at the height of noon;
hide the outcasts,
do not betray the fugitive;
4 let the outcasts of Moab
settle among you;
be a refuge to them
from the destroyer."

When the oppressor is no more,
and destruction has ceased,
and marauders have vanished from the land,
5 then a throne shall be established in steadfast love
in the tent of David,
and on it shall sit in faithfulness
a ruler who seeks justice
and is swift to do what is right.

6 We have heard of the pride of Moab
—how proud he is!—
of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence;
his boasts are false.
7 Therefore let Moab wail,
let everyone wail for Moab.
Mourn, utterly stricken,
for the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth.

8 For the fields of Heshbon languish,
and the vines of Sibmah,
whose clusters once made drunk
the lords of the nations,
reached to Jazer
and strayed to the desert;
their shoots once spread abroad
and crossed over the sea.
9 Therefore I weep with the weeping of Jazer
for the vines of Sibmah;
I drench you with my tears,
O Heshbon and Elealeh;
for the shout over your fruit harvest
and your grain harvest has ceased.
10 Joy and gladness are taken away
from the fruitful field;
and in the vineyards no songs are sung,
no shouts are raised;
no treader treads out wine in the presses;
the vintage-shout is hushed.[a]
11 Therefore my heart throbs like a harp for Moab,
and my very soul for Kir-heres.
12 When Moab presents himself, when he wearies himself upon the high place, when he comes to his sanctuary to pray, he will not prevail.

13 This was the word that the LORD spoke concerning Moab in the past. 14 But now the LORD says, In three years, like the years of a hired worker, the glory of Moab will be brought into contempt, in spite of all its great multitude; and those who survive will be very few and feeble.

17 An oracle concerning Damascus.

See, Damascus will cease to be a city,
and will become a heap of ruins.
2 Her towns will be deserted forever;[b]
they will be places for flocks,
which will lie down, and no one will make them afraid.
3 The fortress will disappear from Ephraim,
and the kingdom from Damascus;
and the remnant of Aram will be
like the glory of the children of Israel,
says the LORD of hosts.

[a] Gk: Heb *I have hushed*
[b] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *the cities of Aroer are deserted*

are places to which refugees flee from the assault in the north. **16.1:** *Sela*, unidentified, perhaps modern Petra. **8–11:** Lament for the destruction of the vineyards of *Sibmah*, apparently the wine-producing region of Moab.

17.1–18.7: Isaiah's pronouncement concerning Damascus. The superscription identifies this unit as the prophet's pronouncement concerning Damascus, but the contents of the oracle include material concerning Israel and the LORD's recognition by Cush (i.e., Ethiopia). This suggests that the oracle is concerned with the Syro-Ephraimite coalition of Aram-Damascus and Israel, and Israel's efforts to convince Cush to join in opposition to Assyria. **17.1b–6:** The initial segment of the oracle targets both *Damascus*, the capital of Aram, and *Ephraim*, the tribal name identified with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Isaiah's favored images of harvest and gleaning then portray the decimation of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians. The *Valley of Rephaim* (lit. the Valley

4 On that day
the glory of Jacob will be brought low,
and the fat of his flesh will grow lean.
5 And it shall be as when reapers gather
standing grain
and their arms harvest the ears,
and as when one gleans the ears of grain
in the Valley of Rephaim.
6 Gleanings will be left in it,
as when an olive tree is beaten—
two or three berries
in the top of the highest bough,
four or five
on the branches of a fruit tree,
says the LORD God of Israel.

7 On that day people will regard their Maker, and their eyes will look to the Holy One of Israel; 8 they will not have regard for the altars, the work of their hands, and they will not look to what their own fingers have made, either the sacred poles[a] or the altars of incense.

9 On that day their strong cities will be like the deserted places of the Hivites and the Amorites,[b] which they deserted because of the children of Israel, and there will be desolation.

10 For you have forgotten the God of your salvation,
and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge;
therefore, though you plant pleasant plants
and set out slips of an alien god,
11 though you make them grow on the day that you plant them,
and make them blossom in the morning that you sow;
yet the harvest will flee away
in a day of grief and incurable pain.

12 Ah, the thunder of many peoples,
they thunder like the thundering of the sea!
Ah, the roar of nations,
they roar like the roaring of mighty waters!
13 The nations roar like the roaring of many waters,
but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away,
chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind
and whirling dust before the storm.
14 At evening time, lo, terror!
Before morning, they are no more.
This is the fate of those who despoil us,
and the lot of those who plunder us.

18 Ah, land of whirring wings
beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,[c]
2 sending ambassadors by the Nile
in vessels of papyrus on the waters!
Go, you swift messengers,
to a nation tall and smooth,
to a people feared near and far,

[a] Heb *Asherim*
[b] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *places of the wood and the highest bough*
[c] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*

of the Shades), is located south of Jerusalem (2 Sam 5.18). The beating of *olive trees* appears also in 10.5–33. **7–8:** The LORD's actions against Israel will prompt the people to reconsider their adherence to other gods. *Sacred poles* were tree trunks or monoliths dedicated to the goddess Asherah (2 Kings 17.7–18; 10.16). **9–11:** *Hivites* and *Amorites,* pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land displaced because of their idolatry and evil practices (Deut 7.1–6). *Slips of an alien god*, i.e., veneration of a vegetation deity, perhaps the Mesopotamian Tammuz (see Ezek 8.14–18), also known as Adonis. **12–14:** The prophet employs the mythological motif of the combat with the sea to portray the LORD's defeat of the nations (Pss 46; 74; 93; Ex 15). In Isaiah's understanding of the Davidic/Zion tradition, the LORD alone defends Jerusalem (cf. Ps 2). **18.1–7:** The appended "woe" (*Ah*) oracle focuses on Cush (*Ethiopia*) to whom Israel sent messengers in 724 BCE during the reign of King Hoshea in an effort to gain support for its revolt against Assyria (2 Kings 17.4). Isaiah is consistently opposed to such alliances, and looks to the natural world to illustrate his view. When grapes are cut and harvested, the vines are left to the mercy of birds and animals. When nations see how the LORD trims these shoots and leaves the remnant to be picked over, they will bring offerings to Zion to recognize the LORD's sovereignty.

a nation mighty and conquering,
whose land the rivers divide.

3 All you inhabitants of the world,
you who live on the earth,
when a signal is raised on the mountains,
look!
When a trumpet is blown, listen!
4 For thus the LORD said to me:
I will quietly look from my dwelling
like clear heat in sunshine,
like a cloud of dew in the heat of
harvest.
5 For before the harvest, when the blossom
is over
and the flower becomes a ripening
grape,
he will cut off the shoots with pruning
hooks,
and the spreading branches he will hew
away.
6 They shall all be left
to the birds of prey of the mountains
and to the animals of the earth.
And the birds of prey will summer on them,
and all the animals of the earth will
winter on them.

7 At that time gifts will be brought to the LORD of hosts from[a] a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the LORD of hosts.

19 An oracle concerning Egypt.

See, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud
and comes to Egypt;
the idols of Egypt will tremble at his
presence,
and the heart of the Egyptians will melt
within them.
2 I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians,
and they will fight, one against the
other,
neighbor against neighbor,
city against city, kingdom against
kingdom;
3 the spirit of the Egyptians within them
will be emptied out,
and I will confound their plans;
they will consult the idols and the spirits
of the dead
and the ghosts and the familiar spirits;
4 I will deliver the Egyptians
into the hand of a hard master;
a fierce king will rule over them,
says the Sovereign, the LORD of
hosts.

5 The waters of the Nile will be dried up,
and the river will be parched and dry;
6 its canals will become foul,
and the branches of Egypt's Nile will
diminish and dry up,
reeds and rushes will rot away.
7 There will be bare places by the Nile,
on the brink of the Nile;
and all that is sown by the Nile will dry up,
be driven away, and be no more.
8 Those who fish will mourn;
all who cast hooks in the Nile will
lament,
and those who spread nets on the water
will languish.
9 The workers in flax will be in despair,
and the carders and those at the loom
will grow pale.
10 Its weavers will be dismayed,

[a] Q Ms Gk Vg: MT *of*

19.1–20.6: Isaiah's pronouncement concerning Egypt. Isaiah's pronouncement concerning Egypt includes both the oracle against Egypt in 19.1b–25 and a narrative concerning Isaiah's symbolic actions at the time of the fall of Ashdod that legitimizes the oracle concerning Egypt. **19.1–25:** Egypt played an important role in attempting to foment revolt against the Assyrians by Israel, Judah, and the other small states in the Syro-Israelite region. Such moves would help to defend them from Assyrian invasion through the Sinai and enable them to extend their own influence into western Asia. **1a:** The superscription follows the standard form for Isaiah's pronouncements (13.1a; 15.1a; 17.1a; 23.1a). **1b–10:** The LORD is portrayed as riding on a cloud (cf. Pss 18.10; 68.33), which is also how the Canaanite god Baal and the Assyrian god Assur were sometimes portrayed. The conflict among the Egyptians presupposes the internal struggle that took place in Egypt during the late eighth century, resulting finally in the emergence of the Twenty-fifth Ethiopian Dynasty, ca. 715 BCE. The Nile River provides

and all who work for wages will be
grieved.

11 The princes of Zoan are utterly foolish;
the wise counselors of Pharaoh give
stupid counsel.
How can you say to Pharaoh,
"I am one of the sages,
a descendant of ancient kings"?
12 Where now are your sages?
Let them tell you and make known
what the LORD of hosts has planned
against Egypt.
13 The princes of Zoan have become fools,
and the princes of Memphis are
deluded;
those who are the cornerstones of its
tribes
have led Egypt astray.
14 The LORD has poured into them[a]
a spirit of confusion;
and they have made Egypt stagger in all its
doings
as a drunkard staggers around in vomit.
15 Neither head nor tail, palm branch or
reed,
will be able to do anything for Egypt.

16 On that day the Egyptians will be like women, and tremble with fear before the hand that the LORD of hosts raises against them. 17 And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians; everyone to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the plan that the LORD of hosts is planning against them.

18 On that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD of hosts. One of these will be called the City of the Sun.

19 On that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the center of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border. 20 It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; when they cry to the LORD because of oppressors, he will send them a savior, and will defend and deliver them. 21 The LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians; and the Egyptians will know the LORD on that day, and will worship with sacrifice and burnt offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. 22 The LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing; they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their supplications and heal them.

23 On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

24 On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, 25 whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage."

20 In the year that the commander-in-chief, who was sent by King Sargon of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it

[a] Gk Compare Tg: Heb *it*

the agricultural foundations for Egypt; the loss of its waters would devastate Egypt. **11–15:** Isaiah returns to his critique of Jerusalem's efforts to establish an alliance with Egypt against Assyria. *Zoan* is another name for the Egyptian city of Rameses or Tanis in the Delta region. The site is associated with the Exodus tradition (Ps 78.12,43; cf. Ex 1.11). *Memphis* is the capital of Lower (Northern) Egypt. *Head*, *tail*, *palm branch*, and *reed* refer to the leadership and people of Israel (see 9.14–15). **16–25:** The oracle concerning the course of future punishment and restoration for Egypt may include some later expansions of the text that presuppose Assyria's conquest of Egypt in 671 BCE and the rise of the Twenty-sixth Saite Egyptian Dynasty that began as an Assyrian vassal but ultimately served as an autonomous Assyrian ally as Assyrian power declined. The five "on that day" statements posit that Egypt will ultimately recognize the LORD together with Israel and the Assyrians. Such a sentiment builds on images of the nations' recognition of the LORD in 2.2–4; 60.10–12; 61.5–10; 66.18–24. **18:** *The City of the Sun,* the Egyptian city Heliopolis (Jer 43.13). *The language of Canaan*, Hebrew. The passage may refer to the Judean diaspora in Egypt. *Five cities* in which Judeans were settled are mentioned in Jer 2.16; 43.7; 44.1. **20.1–6:** King Sargon II of Assyria (722–705) put down a revolt by the Philistine city of Ashdod in 711 BCE. The revolt was instigated by Egypt. In order to illustrate his view that alliance with the Egyptians and Ethiopians is useless, Isaiah walks about Jerusalem naked for three years to symbolize the fate of the Egyptians and Ethiopians taken

and took it— 2 at that time the LORD had spoken
to Isaiah son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and loose
the sackcloth from your loins and take your
sandals off your feet," and he had done so,
walking naked and barefoot. 3 Then the LORD
said, "Just as my servant Isaiah has walked
naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and
a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia,[a] 4 so shall
the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as
captives and the Ethiopians[b] as exiles, both the
young and the old, naked and barefoot, with
buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.
5 And they shall be dismayed and confounded
because of Ethiopia[a] their hope and of Egypt
their boast. 6 In that day the inhabitants of
this coastland will say, 'See, this is what has
happened to those in whom we hoped and to
whom we fled for help and deliverance from the
king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?'"

21 The oracle concerning the wilderness
of the sea.

As whirlwinds in the Negeb sweep on,
it comes from the desert,
from a terrible land.
2 A stern vision is told to me;
the betrayer betrays,
and the destroyer destroys.
Go up, O Elam,
lay siege, O Media;
all the sighing she has caused
I bring to an end.
3 Therefore my loins are filled with
anguish;
pangs have seized me,
like the pangs of a woman in labor;
I am bowed down so that I cannot hear,
I am dismayed so that I cannot see.
4 My mind reels, horror has appalled me;
the twilight I longed for
has been turned for me into trembling.
5 They prepare the table,
they spread the rugs,
they eat, they drink.
Rise up, commanders,
oil the shield!
6 For thus the Lord said to me:
"Go, post a lookout,
let him announce what he sees.
7 When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs,
riders on donkeys, riders on camels,
let him listen diligently,
very diligently."
8 Then the watcher[c] called out:
"Upon a watchtower I stand, O Lord,
continually by day,
and at my post I am stationed
throughout the night.
9 Look, there they come, riders,
horsemen in pairs!"
Then he responded,
"Fallen, fallen is Babylon;
and all the images of her gods
lie shattered on the ground."
10 O my threshed and winnowed one,
what I have heard from the LORD of
hosts,
the God of Israel, I announce to you.

[a] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*
[b] Or *Nubians*; Heb *Cushites*
[c] Q Ms: MT *a lion*

prisoner by the Assyrians. Prophets frequently engaged in symbolic actions that were meant to symbolize and realize their prophetic messages (see Jer 27–28; Ezek 5; Hos 1–3).

21.1–10: Isaiah's pronouncement concerning the wilderness of the sea. The reference to Babylon's fall in v. 9 indicates that *the wilderness of the sea* refers to Babylon. The oracle expresses Isaiah's view that Babylon would be defeated by Assyria. The term likely refers to the marshlands of southern Babylonia where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers join and flow into the Persian Gulf. The Babylonian prince Merodach-baladan, who allied with Hezekiah to revolt against Assyria in 705–701 BCE (cf. ch 39), hid from Sennacherib in this region through 689 BCE. The watchman waits for word concerning Babylon only to learn of its defeat. The references to *Elam* and *Media* in v. 2 suggest the possibility of a later setting. Media, northeast of Babylon, allied with it to defeat Assyria in 627–609 BCE. Elam, directly east of Babylon, had been conquered by the Assyrians in the mid-seventh century, but was allied with Merodach-baladan in the late eighth century. Perhaps they later joined with Media against Assyria. Elam and Media formed part of the Persian empire that defeated Babylon in 539 BCE. Isaiah's original oracle was either updated or later read to account for that event. **1:** *Negeb*, the desert region south of Judah.

[11] The oracle concerning Dumah.

One is calling to me from Seir,
"Sentinel, what of the night?
Sentinel, what of the night?"
[12] The sentinel says:
"Morning comes, and also the night.
If you will inquire, inquire;
come back again."

[13] The oracle concerning the desert plain.

In the scrub of the desert plain you will lodge,
O caravans of Dedanites.
[14] Bring water to the thirsty,
meet the fugitive with bread,
O inhabitants of the land of Tema.
[15] For they have fled from the swords,
from the drawn sword,
from the bent bow,
and from the stress of battle.
[16] For thus the Lord said to me: Within a year, according to the years of a hired worker, all the glory of Kedar will come to an end; [17] and the remaining bows of Kedar's warriors will be few; for the LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken.

22 The oracle concerning the valley of vision.

What do you mean that you have gone up,
all of you, to the housetops,
[2] you that are full of shoutings,
tumultuous city, exultant town?
Your slain are not slain by the sword,
nor are they dead in battle.
[3] Your rulers have all fled together;
they were captured without the use of a bow.[a]
All of you who were found were captured,
though they had fled far away.[b]
[4] Therefore I said:
Look away from me,
let me weep bitter tears;
do not try to comfort me
for the destruction of my beloved people.

[5] For the Lord GOD of hosts has a day
of tumult and trampling and confusion
in the valley of vision,
a battering down of walls
and a cry for help to the mountains.
[6] Elam bore the quiver
with chariots and cavalry,[c]
and Kir uncovered the shield.
[7] Your choicest valleys were full of chariots,

[a] Or *without their bows*
[b] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *fled from far away*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

21.11–12: Isaiah's pronouncement concerning Dumah. *Dumah,* a major oasis in the Arabian Desert conquered by the Assyrian King Sennacherib in 689 BCE. *Seir* is a name for Edom, located southeast of the Dead Sea.

21.13–17: Isaiah's pronouncement concerning Arabia. Although the NRSV refers to the *desert plain*, the Hebrew text refers to Arabia, including the Arabian Desert situated to the east of Transjordan, to the west of Babylon, and south into the Arabian peninsula. The Assyrians conducted a number of campaigns in this region from the late eighth through the seventh centuries BCE. The most likely scenario is Sennacherib's defeat of *Kedar* in the northern Arabian desert in 689 BCE. The cities of *Dedan* and *Tema* were located in the northwestern Arabian peninsula south of Edom or Seir.

22.1–22: Isaiah's pronouncement concerning the valley of vision. The contents of this oracle indicate that *the valley of vision* refers to Jerusalem. No such name is known. The term is meant as a pun on the name of the Kidron Valley that defines the eastern boundary of biblical Jerusalem. Kidron means "darkness" or "gloom," and Isaiah's use of the term *valley of vision* to refer to the site is a play that reverses the meaning of the valley's name to designate it as a site of vision or revelation concerning the LORD's intentions for the city of Jerusalem. **1b–14:** The oracle begins with Isaiah's observations concerning the rejoicing of the city at the deliverance of the city of Jerusalem from an enemy, most likely the lifting of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE. Although Isaiah 36–37 indicates that Sennacherib withdrew following the LORD's defeat of his army, Assyrian records indicate that no such defeat took place and that Sennacherib withdrew after accepting Hezekiah's surrender. Isaiah points out the cost of the siege: although Jerusalem was spared, the land of Judah was devastated by the Assyrians. The prophet Micah from Moresheth-gath along Judah's border with Philistia was forced to flee for his life

and the cavalry took their stand at the
gates.
8 He has taken away the covering of Judah.

On that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest, 9 and you saw that there were many breaches in the city of David, and you collected the waters of the lower pool. 10 You counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. 11 You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or have regard for him who planned it long ago.

12 In that day the Lord God of hosts
called to weeping and mourning,
to baldness and putting on sackcloth;
13 but instead there was joy and festivity,
killing oxen and slaughtering sheep,
eating meat and drinking wine.
"Let us eat and drink,
for tomorrow we die."
14 The Lord of hosts has revealed himself
in my ears:
Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven
you until you die,
says the Lord God of hosts.
15 Thus says the Lord God of hosts: Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is master of the household, and say to him: 16 What right do you have here? Who are your relatives here, that you have cut out a tomb here for yourself, cutting a tomb on the height, and carving a habitation for yourself in the rock? 17 The Lord is about to hurl you away violently, my fellow. He will seize firm hold on you, 18 whirl you round and round, and throw you like a ball into a wide land; there you shall die, and there your splendid chariots shall lie, O you disgrace to your master's house! 19 I will thrust you from your office, and you will be pulled down from your post.

20 On that day I will call my servant Eliakim son of Hilkiah, 21 and will clothe him with your robe and bind your sash on him. I will commit your authority to his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open. 23 I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his ancestral house. 24 And they will hang on him the whole weight of his ancestral house, the offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons. 25 On that day, says the Lord of hosts, the peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way; it will be cut down and fall, and the load that was on it will perish, for the Lord has spoken.

23 The oracle concerning Tyre.

Wail, O ships of Tarshish,
for your fortress is destroyed.[a]

[a] Cn Compare verse 14: Heb *for it is destroyed, without houses*

to Jerusalem to escape the Assyrian attack (Mic 1–2; see also 36.1; 37.8). **6:** *Elam* and *Kir* refer to elements of the Assyrian army. Elam was located in southern Iran and allied with Merodach-baladan against Assyria, although Assyria was known for incorporating military units of its vassals into its own army. Kir was an Aramean city subjugated by Assyria. **8b–11:** Prose expansion describing preparations for the siege. *The waters of the lower pool*, the prophet refers to King Hezekiah's attempts to fortify the city, including his digging of the Siloam Tunnel under *the city of David* to channel the waters of the Gihon Spring into Jerusalem where they would form the Siloam pool protected by Jerusalem's walls at the southern tip of the city. Such a move eliminated the problem that Ahaz faced: protecting the water source (7.1–9). The famed Siloam Inscription commemorates the digging of the tunnel. **12–14:** Bitter, fatalistic rejoicing in a time of disaster. **15–25:** Isaiah condemns the *steward Shebna,* a major administrative official in charge of the royal palace (*household*); his tomb has been found in the Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem. The prophet condemns Shebna for building his tomb when the Lord plans to remove him from office and replace him with *Eliakim son of Hilkiah*. In 36.2 Eliakim ben Hilkiah is called the officer "in charge of the palace" and Shebna the "secretary" or "recorder." The secretary may have worked under the supervision of the officer "over the house." In Isaiah's view, Eliakim will ultimately lose his job as well.

23.1–18: Isaiah's pronouncement concerning Tyre. *Tyre* was the dominant Phoenician city located along the sea coast north of Akko and south of *Sidon*. It was the major sea power of the day with a large navy that de-

When they came in from Cyprus
they learned of it.
2 Be still, O inhabitants of the coast,
O merchants of Sidon,
your messengers crossed over the sea[a]
3 and were on the mighty waters;
your revenue was the grain of Shihor,
the harvest of the Nile;
you were the merchant of the nations.
4 Be ashamed, O Sidon, for the sea has spoken,
the fortress of the sea, saying:
"I have neither labored nor given birth,
I have neither reared young men
nor brought up young women."
5 When the report comes to Egypt,
they will be in anguish over the report about Tyre.
6 Cross over to Tarshish—
wail, O inhabitants of the coast!
7 Is this your exultant city
whose origin is from days of old,
whose feet carried her
to settle far away?
8 Who has planned this
against Tyre, the bestower of crowns,
whose merchants were princes,
whose traders were the honored of the earth?
9 The LORD of hosts has planned it—
to defile the pride of all glory,
to shame all the honored of the earth.
10 Cross over to your own land,
O ships of[b] Tarshish;
this is a harbor[c] no more.
11 He has stretched out his hand over the sea,
he has shaken the kingdoms;
the LORD has given command concerning Canaan
to destroy its fortresses.
12 He said:
You will exult no longer,
O oppressed virgin daughter Sidon;
rise, cross over to Cyprus—
even there you will have no rest.

13 Look at the land of the Chaldeans!
This is the people; it was not Assyria. They destined Tyre for wild animals. They erected their siege towers, they tore down her palaces, they made her a ruin.[d]
14 Wail, O ships of Tarshish,
for your fortress is destroyed.
15 From that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, the lifetime of one king. At the end of seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song about the prostitute:
16 Take a harp,
go about the city,
you forgotten prostitute!
Make sweet melody,
sing many songs,
that you may be remembered.
17 At the end of seventy years, the LORD will visit Tyre, and she will return to her trade, and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth.
18 Her merchandise and her wages will be dedicated to the LORD; her profits[e] will not be stored or hoarded, but her merchandise will supply abundant food and fine clothing for those who live in the presence of the LORD.

[a] Q Ms: MT *crossing over the sea, they replenished you*
[b] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *like the Nile, daughter*
[c] Cn: Heb *restraint*
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[e] Heb *it*

fended the island city from attack and engaged in trade throughout the Mediterranean (see Ezek 27). Tyre was allied with Hezekiah in the revolt against Assyria in 705–701 BCE, but Sennacherib's assault against Phoenicia in 701 quickly forced Tyre and its Phoenician dependents to submit. With Tyre out of the picture, Hezekiah's allies in western Asia quickly capitulated, leaving him to face Assyria alone. **1:** *Tarshish,* see 2.16n. **3:** *Shihor*, Lower (northern) Egypt. **13–18:** The oracle has been updated by a reference to the *Chaldeans*, the Neo-Babylonian empire founded by Nabo-polassar in 625 BCE. His son Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 BCE) conquered Tyre—but did not destroy it—following a thirteen year siege that ended in 572 BCE (cf. Ezek 26–28). The *seventy-year* period of Tyre's decline corresponds to Jeremiah's claims of a seventy-year period for Jerusalem's exile (Jer 25.11–12; 29.10). Because Tyre trades with many nations, she is disparaged as a *prostitute*, but ultimately her merchandise will be dedicated to the LORD (cf. 19.16–25).

24 Now the LORD is about to lay waste
the earth and make it desolate,
and he will twist its surface and scatter
its inhabitants.
[2] And it shall be, as with the people, so
with the priest;
as with the slave, so with his master;
as with the maid, so with her mistress;
as with the buyer, so with the seller;
as with the lender, so with the
borrower;
as with the creditor, so with the debtor.
[3] The earth shall be utterly laid waste and
utterly despoiled;
for the LORD has spoken this word.

[4] The earth dries up and withers,
the world languishes and withers;
the heavens languish together with the
earth.
[5] The earth lies polluted
under its inhabitants;
for they have transgressed laws,
violated the statutes,
broken the everlasting covenant.
[6] Therefore a curse devours the earth,
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;
therefore the inhabitants of the earth
dwindled,
and few people are left.
[7] The wine dries up,
the vine languishes,
all the merry-hearted sigh.
[8] The mirth of the timbrels is stilled,
the noise of the jubilant has ceased,
the mirth of the lyre is stilled.
[9] No longer do they drink wine with singing;
strong drink is bitter to those who
drink it.
[10] The city of chaos is broken down,
every house is shut up so that no one
can enter.
[11] There is an outcry in the streets for lack
of wine;
all joy has reached its eventide;
the gladness of the earth is banished.
[12] Desolation is left in the city,
the gates are battered into ruins.
[13] For thus it shall be on the earth
and among the nations,
as when an olive tree is beaten,
as at the gleaning when the grape
harvest is ended.

24.1–27.13: Prophetic announcement of the LORD's new world order based in Zion. Chapters 24–27 form a distinct block of material at the conclusion of Isaiah's oracles concerning the nations. This material posits the future withering of creation (24.1–13), the downfall of an unnamed exalted city (24.10,12; 25.2,3; 26.5), the recognition of the LORD by the nations at Zion (25.6–8), and the ultimate restoration of Zion itself as the seat of the LORD's sovereignty throughout the world of both creation and the nations. Although these chapters are sometimes called "the Isaiah apocalypse," the themes of cosmic chaos and restoration, the resurrection of the dead (26.14,19), and the view that the future constitutes the end of time need not indicate that these chapters are an apocalyptic work; the formula "in that day" may serve as a simple reference to the future. Similarly, mythological perspectives can be used to identify divine action in the world. Rather than pointing to the end of time, chs 24–27 point to the restoration of Jerusalem in chs 25–27 following the portrayal of its period of punishment in ch 24. The frequent citation of earlier prophetic literature indicates that this material was composed at a later time, probably in the sixth century BCE when the Babylonian exile was coming to an end and Jerusalem's restoration was at hand.

24.1–23: Prophetic announcement of the LORD's punishment of the earth. The depiction of a devastated land appears frequently in ancient Near Eastern treaty curses, the covenant curses of the biblical law codes (e.g., Lev 26; Deut 28–29), and the judgment scenarios of the prophets (e.g., Isa 34.11–17; Jer 5.6; 19.7–9; Hos 4; 13.7–8; Zeph 2.9). The background of such scenarios is the withdrawal or death of fertility gods such as the Canaanite Baal or the Mesopotamian Tammuz. Likewise, biblical literature, particularly Deuteronomy and many of the prophets, maintains that the LORD also ensures the fertility of the land in conjunction with human behavior. **5:** *The everlasting covenant* is the foundation for all creation, including Israel (Gen 9.16; 17.7; Ex 31.16; Lev 24.8; Isa 55.3; 61.8; Jer 32.40; Ezek 37.26). **10:** *The city of chaos* is not named, although the context suggests that it represents the enemy of the LORD, such as the Assyrian capital Nineveh, Babylon, or the capital of any empire that might threaten Israel or the LORD. Chaos (Heb "tohu") describes the state of the earth before creation commenced (Gen 1.2). The defeat of human enemies is frequently portrayed in cosmic terms (e.g., Ex 15). **13:** The beating of the *olive tree*

14 They lift up their voices, they sing for joy;
they shout from the west over the majesty of the LORD.
15 Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD;
in the coastlands of the sea glorify the name of the LORD, the God of Israel.
16 From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise,
of glory to the Righteous One.
But I say, I pine away,
I pine away. Woe is me!
For the treacherous deal treacherously,
the treacherous deal very treacherously.

17 Terror, and the pit, and the snare
are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth!
18 Whoever flees at the sound of the terror
shall fall into the pit;
and whoever climbs out of the pit
shall be caught in the snare.
For the windows of heaven are opened,
and the foundations of the earth tremble.
19 The earth is utterly broken,
the earth is torn asunder,
the earth is violently shaken.
20 The earth staggers like a drunkard,
it sways like a hut;
its transgression lies heavy upon it,
and it falls, and will not rise again.

21 On that day the LORD will punish
the host of heaven in heaven,
and on earth the kings of the earth.
22 They will be gathered together
like prisoners in a pit;
they will be shut up in a prison,
and after many days they will be punished.
23 Then the moon will be abashed,
and the sun ashamed;
for the LORD of hosts will reign
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and before his elders he will manifest his glory.

25 O LORD, you are my God;
I will exalt you, I will praise your name;
for you have done wonderful things,
plans formed of old, faithful and sure.
2 For you have made the city a heap,
the fortified city a ruin;
the palace of aliens is a city no more,
it will never be rebuilt.
3 Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;
cities of ruthless nations will fear you.
4 For you have been a refuge to the poor,
a refuge to the needy in their distress,
a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.
When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm,
5 the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place,
you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds;
the song of the ruthless was stilled.

6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
7 And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,

alludes to 17.6 (cf. 10.33–34). **14–16:** The downfall of the city of chaos prompts the recognition of the LORD from throughout the world. *The coastlands of the sea,* the Aegean island, i.e., the far west. The treachery of *the treacherous* is a citation of 21.2 (cf. 33.1), which portrays the downfall of Babylon. **17–20:** There was no escape when *the windows of heaven* opened at the time of the flood (Gen 7.11), and there is no escape from the LORD's judgment now. **21–23:** *The host of heaven . . . kings of the earth,* the gods and rulers of the nations.

25.1–12: The LORD's blessing of the earth at Zion. With the downfall of the enemy city, the time of restoration may begin. **1–5:** A communal psalm of thanksgiving greets the LORD following the downfall of the oppressive city, much like the hymn of praise sung by Moses, Miriam, and the people at the Sea in Ex 15. **4–5:** Citation of language from 4.5b–6 and 32.1–2. **6–12:** A banquet for all the nations is held on Mount Zion in the aftermath of the LORD's victory over the city of chaos. Such a banquet symbolizes worship at the Jerusalem Temple, particularly since the sacrifice of offering at the Temple altar was conceived as a meal or banquet shared by the

the sheet that is spread over all nations;
[8] he will swallow up death forever.
Then the Lord God will wipe away the
tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will
take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.
[9] It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for
him, so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have
waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his
salvation.
[10] For the hand of the LORD will rest on this
mountain.

The Moabites shall be trodden down in
their place
as straw is trodden down in a dung-pit.
[11] Though they spread out their hands in
the midst of it,
as swimmers spread out their hands to
swim,
their pride will be laid low despite the
struggle[a] of their hands.
[12] The high fortifications of his walls will
be brought down,
laid low, cast to the ground, even to the
dust.

26 On that day this song will be sung in
the land of Judah:
We have a strong city;
he sets up victory
like walls and bulwarks.
[2] Open the gates,
so that the righteous nation that keeps
faith
may enter in.
[3] Those of steadfast mind you keep in
peace—
in peace because they trust in you.
[4] Trust in the LORD forever,
for in the LORD GOD[b]
you have an everlasting rock.
[5] For he has brought low
the inhabitants of the height;
the lofty city he lays low.
He lays it low to the ground,
casts it to the dust.
[6] The foot tramples it,
the feet of the poor,
the steps of the needy.

[7] The way of the righteous is level;
O Just One, you make smooth the path
of the righteous.
[8] In the path of your judgments,
O LORD, we wait for you;
your name and your renown
are the soul's desire.
[9] My soul yearns for you in the night,
my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.
For when your judgments are in the earth,
the inhabitants of the world learn
righteousness.
[10] If favor is shown to the wicked,
they do not learn righteousness;
in the land of uprightness they deal
perversely
and do not see the majesty of the LORD.
[11] O LORD, your hand is lifted up,
but they do not see it.
Let them see your zeal for your people,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *in Yah, the LORD*

people with their God. **7:** *Shroud, sheet*, garments worn in time of mourning. **8:** *Swallow up death,* in ancient Near Eastern mythological traditions the fertility god, e.g., the Canaanite Baal or the Mesopotamian Tammuz, is rescued from the underworld to bring fertility and life back to the world of creation. As sovereign of creation, the LORD now brings life to creation. **8b–12:** *Wipe away the tears*, cf. Rev 7.1; 21.4. The demise of Moab refers to the defeat of Moab by Babylon in the sixth century BCE, and cites 2.9–17 to portray the downfall of the arrogant.

26.1–21: Judah's petition to the LORD for deliverance. The liturgical setting of the thanksgiving hymn and the banquet in ch 25 prompts the liturgical hymns in ch 26 that praise the LORD and call for deliverance from the wicked. **1b–6:** The initial song of praise celebrates the victory of the LORD over the oppressive city of chaos mentioned in 24.10. **4:** *Trust in the LORD*, a common feature of complaint psalms that petition the LORD for deliverance in a time of threat or need (e.g., Pss 6; 7). **5a:** *The inhabitants of the height,* cf. 2.6–21 concerning the LORD's capacity to bring down the arrogant. **7–10:** Confidence in the LORD. The LORD's righteousness becomes a factor in teaching righteousness to the wicked of the world. **11–19:** Petitions for action on the part of the LORD.

and be ashamed.
Let the fire for your adversaries
consume them.
12 O LORD, you will ordain peace for us,
for indeed, all that we have done, you
have done for us.
13 O LORD our God,
other lords besides you have ruled
over us,
but we acknowledge your name alone.
14 The dead do not live;
shades do not rise—
because you have punished and destroyed
them,
and wiped out all memory of them.
15 But you have increased the nation,
O LORD,
you have increased the nation; you are
glorified;
you have enlarged all the borders of the
land.

16 O LORD, in distress they sought you,
they poured out a prayer[a]
when your chastening was on them.
17 Like a woman with child,
who writhes and cries out in her pangs
when she is near her time,
so were we because of you, O LORD;
18 we were with child, we writhed,
but we gave birth only to wind.
We have won no victories on earth,
and no one is born to inhabit the world.
19 Your dead shall live, their corpses[b] shall
rise.
O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing
for joy!
For your dew is a radiant dew,
and the earth will give birth to those
long dead.[c]

20 Come, my people, enter your
chambers,
and shut your doors behind you;
hide yourselves for a little while
until the wrath is past.
21 For the LORD comes out from his place
to punish the inhabitants of the earth
for their iniquity;
the earth will disclose the blood shed on it,
and will no longer cover its slain.

27 On that day the LORD with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.

2 On that day:
A pleasant vineyard, sing about it!
3 I, the LORD, am its keeper;
every moment I water it.
I guard it night and day
so that no one can harm it;
4 I have no wrath.
If it gives me thorns and briers,
I will march to battle against it.
I will burn it up.
5 Or else let it cling to me for protection,
let it make peace with me,
let it make peace with me.

6 In days to come[d] Jacob shall take root,
Israel shall blossom and put forth
shoots,
and fill the whole world with fruit.

a Meaning of Heb uncertain
b Cn Compare Syr Tg: Heb *my corpse*
c Heb *to the shades*
d Heb *Those to come*

13: *Other lords,* perhaps an allusion to the oppressor city of chaos (24.10), whose downfall will come in response to the people's petition. **14:** *The dead do not live*, a common theme in the psalms; only the living can praise God (Pss 6.5; 30.9; 49.10–20); see 39.18–19. **17–18:** Childbirth is a common image for an immanent event (see 13.8; 66.7–9). **19:** *Your dead shall live*, the response to v. 14, expressing an intuition of a meaningful survival of death; cf. Ezek 37.1–14; Dan 12.2. **20–21:** Exhortation to wait for the LORD (cf. 2.10,19,21).

27.1: The LORD's defeat of Leviathan. *Leviathan,* the seven-headed serpent known from Ugaritic and biblical tradition as a chaos monster whose defeat by the LORD aids in bringing about order in creation (Ps 74.13–14; cf. Isa 11.15–16).

27.2–13: The new vineyard allegory plays upon the earlier allegory in 5.1–7 that accused the people of Israel and Judah of wrongdoing before the LORD. Now the LORD stands ready to resume care for the vineyard. **6:** *Jacob*

7 Has he struck them down as he struck
down those who struck them?
Or have they been killed as their killers
were killed?
8 By expulsion,[a] by exile you struggled
against them;
with his fierce blast he removed them in
the day of the east wind.
9 Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be
expiated,
and this will be the full fruit of the
removal of his sin:
when he makes all the stones of the altars
like chalkstones crushed to pieces,
no sacred poles[b] or incense altars will
remain standing.
10 For the fortified city is solitary,
a habitation deserted and forsaken, like
the wilderness;
the calves graze there,
there they lie down, and strip its
branches.
11 When its boughs are dry, they are
broken;
women come and make a fire of them.
For this is a people without understanding;
therefore he that made them will not
have compassion on them,
he that formed them will show them no
favor.

12 On that day the LORD will thresh from the channel of the Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you will be gathered one by one, O people of Israel. 13 And on that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

28 Ah, the proud garland of the
drunkards of Ephraim,
and the fading flower of its glorious
beauty,
which is on the head of those bloated
with rich food, of those overcome
with wine!
2 See, the Lord has one who is mighty and
strong;
like a storm of hail, a destroying
tempest,
like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters;
with his hand he will hurl them down
to the earth.
3 Trampled under foot will be
the proud garland of the drunkards of
Ephraim.
4 And the fading flower of its glorious
beauty,
which is on the head of those bloated
with rich food,
will be like a first-ripe fig before the
summer;
whoever sees it, eats it up
as soon as it comes to hand.

5 In that day the LORD of hosts will be a
garland of glory,
and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant
of his people;
6 and a spirit of justice to the one who sits
in judgment,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Heb *Asherim*

shall take root, cf. 11.1–9. **7–13:** A justification of the LORD. The suffering of the people constitutes the LORD's efforts to purge the nation of sins and idolatry. **10:** *The fortified city,* referring to the unnamed city of 24.10; 25.2; 26.5. **11:** *Without understanding*, cf. 1.2–3. **12–13:** With the downfall of the oppressor, the time to gather the exiles from Assyria and Egypt has now arrived (cf. 11.15–16).

28.1–33.24: Prophetic instruction concerning the LORD's plans for the new king in Jerusalem. This block of material is defined by its introductory "Woe" (NRSV "*Ah,*" "Ha," "Oh," "Alas,") oracle forms (28.1; 29.1,15; 30.1; 31.1; 33.1); its overall concern for the deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria; and its culminating concern for the establishment of a righteous king in Jerusalem.

28.1–29: Prophetic instruction concerning the LORD's purpose in bringing Assyrian rule. This oracle condemns both Israelite and Judean leadership as an explanation for Assyrian rule of Israel and Judah. **1–4:** The introductory "woe" ("*Ah*") oracle condemns the leadership of northern Israel (*Ephraim* was the dominant tribe of northern Israel) for self-indulgence in food and wine (cf. 5.8–24). *Proud garland* and *glorious beauty* designate the royal crown. **5–6:** The LORD's promise to support a future monarch who rules in justice and defends the na-

and strength to those who turn back
the battle at the gate.

7 These also reel with wine
and stagger with strong drink;
the priest and the prophet reel with strong
drink,
they are confused with wine,
they stagger with strong drink;
they err in vision,
they stumble in giving judgment.
8 All tables are covered with filthy vomit;
no place is clean.

9 "Whom will he teach knowledge,
and to whom will he explain the
message?
Those who are weaned from milk,
those taken from the breast?
10 For it is precept upon precept, precept
upon precept,
line upon line, line upon line,
here a little, there a little."[a]

11 Truly, with stammering lip
and with alien tongue
he will speak to this people,
12 to whom he has said,
"This is rest;
give rest to the weary;
and this is repose";
yet they would not hear.
13 Therefore the word of the LORD will be
to them,
"Precept upon precept, precept upon
precept,
line upon line, line upon line,
here a little, there a little;"[a]
in order that they may go, and fall
backward,
and be broken, and snared, and taken.

14 Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you
scoffers
who rule this people in Jerusalem.
15 Because you have said, "We have made a
covenant with death,
and with Sheol we have an agreement;
when the overwhelming scourge passes
through
it will not come to us;
for we have made lies our refuge,
and in falsehood we have taken
shelter";
16 therefore thus says the Lord GOD,
See, I am laying in Zion a foundation
stone,
a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation:
"One who trusts will not panic."
17 And I will make justice the line,
and righteousness the plummet;
hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
and waters will overwhelm the
shelter.
18 Then your covenant with death will be
annulled,
and your agreement with Sheol will not
stand;
when the overwhelming scourge passes
through
you will be beaten down by it.
19 As often as it passes through, it will take
you;
for morning by morning it will pass
through,
by day and by night;
and it will be sheer terror to understand
the message.
20 For the bed is too short to stretch
oneself on it,
and the covering too narrow to wrap
oneself in it.
21 For the LORD will rise up as on Mount
Perazim,
he will rage as in the valley of Gibeon

[a] Meaning of Heb of this verse uncertain

tion (cf. 9.1–7; 11.1–9). **7–13:** The oracle presupposes the Canaanite "marzeaḥ" ritual, associated with funerary rites that called for all-night drinking and feasting. This ritual has also been associated with the conclusion of treaties. **14–22:** An indictment of Jerusalem's leadership. The covenant with Sheol, the abode of the dead, plays upon the previously noted "marzeaḥ" ritual. It may also refer to an alliance with Egypt. **16:** The *foundation stone* in Jerusalem symbolizes both the foundation for a major building, such as the Jerusalem Temple, and the Davidic/Zion tradition of the LORD's promise of security for Jerusalem and the house of David. **21:** *Perazim* refers to the LORD's victory over the Philistines at Baal-perazim (2 Sam 5.17–21) and *Gibeon* to the victory over the Canaanites

to do his deed—strange is his deed!—
and to work his work—alien is his work!
22 Now therefore do not scoff,
or your bonds will be made stronger;
for I have heard a decree of destruction
from the Lord God of hosts upon the whole land.

23 Listen, and hear my voice;
Pay attention, and hear my speech.
24 Do those who plow for sowing plow continually?
Do they continually open and harrow their ground?
25 When they have leveled its surface,
do they not scatter dill, sow cummin,
and plant wheat in rows
and barley in its proper place,
and spelt as the border?
26 For they are well instructed;
their God teaches them.

27 Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge,
nor is a cart wheel rolled over cummin;
but dill is beaten out with a stick,
and cummin with a rod.
28 Grain is crushed for bread,
but one does not thresh it forever;
one drives the cart wheel and horses over it,
but does not pulverize it.
29 This also comes from the Lord of hosts;
he is wonderful in counsel,
and excellent in wisdom.

29 Ah, Ariel, Ariel,
the city where David encamped!
Add year to year;
let the festivals run their round.
2 Yet I will distress Ariel,
and there shall be moaning and lamentation,
and Jerusalem[a] shall be to me like an Ariel.[b]
3 And like David[c] I will encamp against you;
I will besiege you with towers
and raise siegeworks against you.
4 Then deep from the earth you shall speak,
from low in the dust your words shall come;
your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost,
and your speech shall whisper out of the dust.

5 But the multitude of your foes[d] shall be like small dust,
and the multitude of tyrants like flying chaff.
And in an instant, suddenly,
6 you will be visited by the Lord of hosts
with thunder and earthquake and great noise,
with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire.
7 And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel,
all that fight against her and her stronghold, and who distress her,
shall be like a dream, a vision of the night.
8 Just as when a hungry person dreams of eating
and wakes up still hungry,
or a thirsty person dreams of drinking

[a] Heb *she*
[b] Probable meaning, *altar hearth*; compare Ezek 43.15
[c] Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Cn: Heb *strangers*

(Josh 10.10). But now, the Lord will punish Jerusalem's leaders. **23–29:** The concluding allegory illustrates the duration of the punishment. Just as a farmer must plow the ground and then thresh, beat, and crush the crops to prepare them for human use, so the Lord will plow and thresh the people in preparation for their restoration.

29.1–24: Prophetic instruction concerning the Lord's purpose in assaulting Ariel/Zion. 1–4: The first portion of this "woe" ("*Ah*") oracle begins with a portrayal of an assault against the city of Jerusalem, apparently presupposing or anticipating an Assyrian attack. Just as *David* once conquered Jerusalem (2 Sam 5.6–9), the Lord will do the same with a foreign army. **1:** The Heb term *Ariel* means "lion of God," recalling the lion as the symbol for Judah (Gen 49.8–11). It is related to a Heb word that designates the hearth of the altar (Ezek 43.15–16). **6–7:** God will appear with all the elements of a theophany as a divine warrior to fight against those attacking

and wakes up faint, still thirsty,
so shall the multitude of all the nations be
that fight against Mount Zion.

9 Stupefy yourselves and be in a stupor,
blind yourselves and be blind!
Be drunk, but not from wine;
stagger, but not from strong drink!
10 For the LORD has poured out upon you
a spirit of deep sleep;
he has closed your eyes, you prophets,
and covered your heads, you seers.
11 The vision of all this has become for you
like the words of a sealed document. If it is
given to those who can read, with the com-
mand, "Read this," they say, "We cannot, for
it is sealed." 12 And if it is given to those who
cannot read, saying, "Read this," they say,
"We cannot read."

13 The Lord said:
Because these people draw near with their
mouths
and honor me with their lips,
while their hearts are far from me,
and their worship of me is a human
commandment learned by rote;
14 so I will again do
amazing things with this people,
shocking and amazing.
The wisdom of their wise shall perish,
and the discernment of the discerning
shall be hidden.

15 Ha! You who hide a plan too deep for the
LORD,
whose deeds are in the dark,
and who say, "Who sees us? Who
knows us?"
16 You turn things upside down!
Shall the potter be regarded as the clay?
Shall the thing made say of its maker,
"He did not make me";
or the thing formed say of the one who
formed it,
"He has no understanding"?

17 Shall not Lebanon in a very little while
become a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field be regarded as a
forest?
18 On that day the deaf shall hear
the words of a scroll,
and out of their gloom and darkness
the eyes of the blind shall see.
19 The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the
LORD,
and the neediest people shall exult in
the Holy One of Israel.
20 For the tyrant shall be no more,
and the scoffer shall cease to be;
all those alert to do evil shall be cut
off—
21 those who cause a person to lose a
lawsuit,
who set a trap for the arbiter in the gate,
and without grounds deny justice to the
one in the right.

22 Therefore thus says the LORD, who
redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of
Jacob:
No longer shall Jacob be ashamed,
no longer shall his face grow pale.
23 For when he sees his children,
the work of my hands, in his midst,
they will sanctify my name;
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob,
and will stand in awe of the God of
Israel.

Jerusalem. **9–10:** *Stupefy . . . blind yourselves* recalls the prophet's commission in 6.9–10 to render the people blind, deaf, and ignorant so that they will not repent and be saved. The *deep sleep* poured on the people is like that of the first human when the woman was created (Gen 2.21) and of Abraham when he had a vision of Israel's deliverance from Egypt at the Exodus (Gen 15.12–16). **11–12:** The *sealed document,* cf. 8.16–17. Ultimately, the significance of Isaiah's prophecies will be understood only when later generations read them, perhaps in the time of the Babylonian exile (chs 40–55) or the Persian-period restoration (chs 56–66). **13–14:** Cf. 1.10–17. **15–24:** The second portion of this "woe" (*Ha!*) oracle focuses on the future realization of the LORD's purposes for Zion. The LORD is the *potter* and not the *clay*; cf. 45.9; Jer 18.1–6. **17:** *Lebanon*, 2.13n; see also 10.34. The deaf and the blind (cf. 6.9–10) will understand when they read the scroll of Isaiah's prophecies (cf. 8.16–23). **22:** *Abraham*, cf. 41.8; 51.2. Abraham, redeemed by God's call to journey into the promised land, becomes the model for those who returned to Judah in the post–disaster period.

[24] And those who err in spirit will come to
understanding,
and those who grumble will accept
instruction.

30 Oh, rebellious children, says the
LORD,
who carry out a plan, but not mine;
who make an alliance, but against my will,
adding sin to sin;
[2] who set out to go down to Egypt
without asking for my counsel,
to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh,
and to seek shelter in the shadow of
Egypt;
[3] Therefore the protection of Pharaoh shall
become your shame,
and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt
your humiliation.
[4] For though his officials are at Zoan
and his envoys reach Hanes,
[5] everyone comes to shame
through a people that cannot profit
them,
that brings neither help nor profit,
but shame and disgrace.

[6] An oracle concerning the animals of the
Negeb.
Through a land of trouble and distress,
of lioness and roaring[a] lion,
of viper and flying serpent,
they carry their riches on the backs of
donkeys,
and their treasures on the humps of
camels,
to a people that cannot profit them.
[7] For Egypt's help is worthless and empty,
therefore I have called her,
"Rahab who sits still."[b]

[8] Go now, write it before them on a tablet,
and inscribe it in a book,
so that it may be for the time to come
as a witness forever.
[9] For they are a rebellious people,
faithless children,
children who will not hear
the instruction of the LORD;
[10] who say to the seers, "Do not see";
and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy
to us what is right;
speak to us smooth things,
prophesy illusions,
[11] leave the way, turn aside from the path,
let us hear no more about the Holy One
of Israel."
[12] Therefore thus says the Holy One of
Israel:
Because you reject this word,
and put your trust in oppression and
deceit,
and rely on them;
[13] therefore this iniquity shall become for
you
like a break in a high wall, bulging out,
and about to collapse,
whose crash comes suddenly, in an
instant;
[14] its breaking is like that of a potter's
vessel
that is smashed so ruthlessly
that among its fragments not a sherd is
found
for taking fire from the hearth,
or dipping water out of the cistern.

[15] For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One
of Israel:

[a] Cn: Heb *from them*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

30.1–33: Prophetic instruction concerning the LORD's delay in delivering the people from Assyria. This lengthy "woe" oracle-complex expresses Isaiah's dissatisfaction with Hezekiah's embassies to Egypt in order to enlist support for his revolt against Assyria in 701 BCE. **1–11:** Isaiah opposes attempts to ally with other nations for Jerusalem's protection because his understanding of Davidic/Zion theology holds that the LORD alone will protect Jerusalem and the house of David. **4:** *Zoan,* see 19.11–15n. *Hanes* is south of Memphis. **6–7:** The *oracle* condemns Judah for sending a caravan of goods to Egypt to enlist Egyptian aid. *Negeb*, see 20.1n. *Rahab* is a mythological sea dragon that sometimes symbolizes Egypt (51.9–11; Ps 89.9; Job 9.13). **8–11:** The prophet records his oracle because the people are not ready to hear him but only want to hear *smooth* or comforting things. The significance of the LORD's actions will only be understood at a later time (cf. 8.16–23; 29.11–12). **12–17:** The prophet argues that the LORD will delay deliverance from Assyria because the people do not trust the prophet's

In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.
But you refused [16] and said,
"No! We will flee upon horses"—
therefore you shall flee!
and, "We will ride upon swift steeds"—
therefore your pursuers shall be swift!
[17] A thousand shall flee at the threat of one,
at the threat of five you shall flee,
until you are left
like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain,
like a signal on a hill.

[18] Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you;
therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you.
For the LORD is a God of justice;
blessed are all those who wait for him.
[19] Truly, O people in Zion, inhabitants of Jerusalem, you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you. [20] Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. [21] And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." [22] Then you will defile your silver-covered idols and your gold-plated images. You will scatter them like filthy rags; you will say to them, "Away with you!"

[23] He will give rain for the seed with which you sow the ground, and grain, the produce of the ground, which will be rich and plenteous. On that day your cattle will graze in broad pastures; [24] and the oxen and donkeys that till the ground will eat silage, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork. [25] On every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be brooks running with water—on a day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. [26] Moreover the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, like the light of seven days, on the day when the LORD binds up the injuries of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.

[27] See, the name of the LORD comes from far away,
burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke;[a]
his lips are full of indignation,
and his tongue is like a devouring fire;
[28] his breath is like an overflowing stream
that reaches up to the neck—
to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction,
and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads them astray.

[29] You shall have a song as in the night when a holy festival is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute to go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel. [30] And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and tempest and hailstones. [31] The Assyrian will be terror-stricken at the voice of the LORD, when he strikes with his rod. [32] And every stroke of the staff of punishment that the LORD lays upon him will be to the sound of timbrels and lyres; battling with brandished arm he will fight with him. [33] For his burning place[b] has long been prepared; truly it is made ready for the king,[c] its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of sulfur, kindles it.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *Topheth*
[c] Or *Molech*

message. **17:** *A thousand shall flee*, see Lev 26.36–37; Deut 32.30. **18–26:** The LORD will ultimately show mercy to Jerusalem. A *Teacher*, perhaps someone who would interpret the prophecies that were bound up. Such a statement might motivate the writings of later prophets in chs 40–66. **27–33:** Ultimately, the LORD will strike down the Assyrian oppressor (cf. 10.5–33; 14.24–27). The oracle invokes the imagery of a Temple festival when the LORD is revealed in the smoke and flame of the incense burners and lamp stands of the Jerusalem Temple, perhaps at Rosh ha-Shanah (New Year) or Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), when the LORD judges the wicked.

31 Alas for those who go down to Egypt
for help
and who rely on horses,
who trust in chariots because they are
many
and in horsemen because they are very
strong,
but do not look to the Holy One of Israel
or consult the LORD!
[2] Yet he too is wise and brings disaster;
he does not call back his words,
but will rise against the house of the
evildoers,
and against the helpers of those who
work iniquity.
[3] The Egyptians are human, and not God;
their horses are flesh, and not spirit.
When the LORD stretches out his hand,
the helper will stumble, and the one
helped will fall,
and they will all perish together.

[4] For thus the LORD said to me,
As a lion or a young lion growls over its
prey,
and—when a band of shepherds is
called out against it—
is not terrified by their shouting
or daunted at their noise,
so the LORD of hosts will come down
to fight upon Mount Zion and upon its
hill.
[5] Like birds hovering overhead, so the
LORD of hosts
will protect Jerusalem;
he will protect and deliver it,
he will spare and rescue it.

[6] Turn back to him whom you[a] have deeply betrayed, O people of Israel. [7] For on that day all of you shall throw away your idols of silver and idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you.
[8] "Then the Assyrian shall fall by a sword,
not of mortals;
and a sword, not of humans, shall
devour him;
he shall flee from the sword,
and his young men shall be put to
forced labor.
[9] His rock shall pass away in terror,
and his officers desert the standard in
panic,"
says the LORD, whose fire is in Zion,
and whose furnace is in
Jerusalem.

32 See, a king will reign in
righteousness,
and princes will rule with justice.
[2] Each will be like a hiding place from the
wind,
a covert from the tempest,
like streams of water in a dry place,
like the shade of a great rock in a weary
land.
[3] Then the eyes of those who have sight
will not be closed,
and the ears of those who have hearing
will listen.
[4] The minds of the rash will have good
judgment,
and the tongues of stammerers will
speak readily and distinctly.
[5] A fool will no longer be called noble,
nor a villain said to be honorable.
[6] For fools speak folly,
and their minds plot iniquity:
to practice ungodliness,
to utter error concerning the LORD,
to leave the craving of the hungry
unsatisfied,
and to deprive the thirsty of drink.
[7] The villainies of villains are evil;
they devise wicked devices
to ruin the poor with lying words,
even when the plea of the needy is
right.

[a] Heb *they*

31.1–9: The prophet's warning concerning reliance on Egyptian aid against Assyria. Isaiah again condemns attempts to ally with Egypt in preparation for Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria in 701 BCE. The prophet employs the allegories of a lion over its prey and a bird protecting its young to illustrate his point. **1:** Cf. Ps 20.7. **8–9:** The final defeat of Assyria (14.24–27). *Fire, furnace*, a reference to the temple altar.

32.1–33.24: Prophetic instruction concerning the righteous king. 32.1–8: When the king rules over Jerusalem in righteousness (cf. 9.1–7; 11.1–16), the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the people will understand (revers-

[8] But those who are noble plan noble things,
and by noble things they stand.

[9] Rise up, you women who are at ease, hear
my voice;
you complacent daughters, listen to my
speech.
[10] In little more than a year
you will shudder, you complacent ones;
for the vintage will fail,
the fruit harvest will not come.
[11] Tremble, you women who are at ease,
shudder, you complacent ones;
strip, and make yourselves bare,
and put sackcloth on your loins.
[12] Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields,
for the fruitful vine,
[13] for the soil of my people
growing up in thorns and briers;
yes, for all the joyous houses
in the jubilant city.
[14] For the palace will be forsaken,
the populous city deserted;
the hill and the watchtower
will become dens forever,
the joy of wild asses,
a pasture for flocks;
[15] until a spirit from on high is poured out
on us,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful
field,
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.
[16] Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful
field.
[17] The effect of righteousness will be
peace,
and the result of righteousness,
quietness and trust forever.
[18] My people will abide in a peaceful
habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting
places.
[19] The forest will disappear completely,[a]
and the city will be utterly laid low.
[20] Happy will you be who sow beside every
stream,
who let the ox and the donkey range
freely.

33 Ah, you destroyer,
who yourself have not been destroyed;
you treacherous one,
with whom no one has dealt
treacherously!
When you have ceased to destroy,
you will be destroyed;
and when you have stopped dealing
treacherously,
you will be dealt with treacherously.

[2] O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for
you.
Be our arm every morning,
our salvation in the time of trouble.
[3] At the sound of tumult, peoples fled;
before your majesty, nations
scattered.
[4] Spoil was gathered as the caterpillar
gathers;
as locusts leap, they leaped[b] upon it.
[5] The LORD is exalted, he dwells on high;
he filled Zion with justice and
righteousness;
[6] he will be the stability of your times,
abundance of salvation, wisdom, and
knowledge;
the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure.[c]

[7] Listen! the valiant[b] cry in the streets;
the envoys of peace weep bitterly.

[a] Cn: Heb *And it will hail when the forest comes down*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Heb *his treasure*; meaning of Heb uncertain

ing 6.9–10). **9–20:** The prophet summarizes the themes of his prophecies by describing the reversal from crop failure to a transformation of the natural and moral environment through a spirit from on high (cf. 5.6; 11.1–9). **33.1–24:** The prophet's announcement of the righteous king is formulated as a liturgical cycle that combines elements of the complaint songs with the announcement of the king. **1:** The liturgy begins with a "woe" (*Ah*) oracle that proclaims the downfall of the oppressor. **2–4:** An address to the LORD petitions for relief from the oppressor. **5–6:** An address to the audience reiterates Isaiah's view that the LORD is exalted (cf. 2.9–21). **7–9:** The prophet summarizes the suffering and withering of the land that precede the rise of the righteous king. *Lebanon*, 2.13n. *Sharon*, the fertile coastal plain extending south from Akko/Acre and Dor nearly to Jaffa/Joppa.

[8] The highways are deserted,
travelers have quit the road.
The treaty is broken,
its oaths[a] are despised,
its obligation[b] is disregarded.
[9] The land mourns and languishes;
Lebanon is confounded and withers away;
Sharon is like a desert;
and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves.

[10] "Now I will arise," says the LORD,
"now I will lift myself up;
now I will be exalted.
[11] You conceive chaff, you bring forth stubble;
your breath is a fire that will consume you.
[12] And the peoples will be as if burned to lime,
like thorns cut down, that are burned in the fire."

[13] Hear, you who are far away, what I have done;
and you who are near, acknowledge my might.
[14] The sinners in Zion are afraid;
trembling has seized the godless:
"Who among us can live with the devouring fire?
Who among us can live with everlasting flames?"
[15] Those who walk righteously and speak uprightly,
who despise the gain of oppression,
who wave away a bribe instead of accepting it,
who stop their ears from hearing of bloodshed
and shut their eyes from looking on evil,
[16] they will live on the heights;
their refuge will be the fortresses of rocks;
their food will be supplied, their water assured.

[17] Your eyes will see the king in his beauty;
they will behold a land that stretches far away.
[18] Your mind will muse on the terror:
"Where is the one who counted?
Where is the one who weighed the tribute?
Where is the one who counted the towers?"
[19] No longer will you see the insolent people,
the people of an obscure speech that you cannot comprehend,
stammering in a language that you cannot understand.
[20] Look on Zion, the city of our appointed festivals!
Your eyes will see Jerusalem,
a quiet habitation, an immovable tent,
whose stakes will never be pulled up,
and none of whose ropes will be broken.
[21] But there the LORD in majesty will be for us
a place of broad rivers and streams,
where no galley with oars can go,
nor stately ship can pass.
[22] For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our ruler,
the LORD is our king; he will save us.

[23] Your rigging hangs loose;
it cannot hold the mast firm in its place,
or keep the sail spread out.

Then prey and spoil in abundance will be divided;

[a] Q Ms: MT *cities*
[b] Or *everyone*

Bashan, the fertile plain south of Aram (Syria) and east of the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee). *Carmel,* the fertile mountain range that extends from Akko/Acre south along the eastern edge of the Sharon coastal plain. **10–12:** A response in which the God of Israel threatens to arise and burn the enemy like thorns; cf. 10.16–17; 30.27–33. **13–16:** Those in Zion who do not trust in the LORD will also suffer. **17–24:** Those who had been blind, deaf, and ignorant (32.1–3; cf. 6.9–10) will finally see the righteous king in Jerusalem. **19:** *Obscure speech,* the Assyrian oppressors, who speak a foreign language, will be gone, and Zion will again see its Temple festivals.

even the lame will fall to plundering.
[24] And no inhabitant will say, "I am sick";
the people who live there will be
forgiven their iniquity.

34 Draw near, O nations, to hear;
O peoples, give heed!
Let the earth hear, and all that fills it;
the world, and all that comes from it.
[2] For the LORD is enraged against all the nations,
and furious against all their hordes;
he has doomed them, has given them over for slaughter.
[3] Their slain shall be cast out,
and the stench of their corpses shall rise;
the mountains shall flow with their blood.
[4] All the host of heaven shall rot away,
and the skies roll up like a scroll.
All their host shall wither
like a leaf withering on a vine,
or fruit withering on a fig tree.

[5] When my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens,
lo, it will descend upon Edom,
upon the people I have doomed to judgment.
[6] The LORD has a sword; it is sated with blood,
it is gorged with fat,
with the blood of lambs and goats,
with the fat of the kidneys of rams.
For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah,
a great slaughter in the land of Edom.
[7] Wild oxen shall fall with them,
and young steers with the mighty bulls.
Their land shall be soaked with blood,
and their soil made rich with fat.

[8] For the LORD has a day of vengeance,
a year of vindication by Zion's cause.[a]
[9] And the streams of Edom[b] shall be turned into pitch,
and her soil into sulfur;
her land shall become burning pitch.
[10] Night and day it shall not be quenched;
its smoke shall go up forever.
From generation to generation it shall lie waste;
no one shall pass through it forever and ever.
[11] But the hawk[c] and the hedgehog[c] shall possess it;
the owl[c] and the raven shall live in it.
He shall stretch the line of confusion over it,

[a] Or *of recompense by Zion's defender*
[b] Heb *her streams*
[c] Identification uncertain

34.1–66.24: Concerning the realization of the LORD's plans for revealing worldwide sovereignty from Zion. Whereas chs 1–33 anticipate the revelation of the LORD's worldwide sovereignty at Zion, the second half of the book in chs 34–66 presupposes that the time is at hand.

34.1–35.10: Prophetic instruction concerning the LORD's power to return the redeemed exiles to Zion. Chs 34–35 introduce the second half of the book of Zion with an emphasis on the judgment of the nations, represented by Edom, and the return of the exiles to Zion.

34.1–17: Prophetic instruction concerning the LORD's power over the nations. Chapter 34 emphasizes the LORD's power over the nations by focusing especially on the fate of Edom, Israel's neighbor to the southeast (cf. 63.1–6). Edom, which is condemned in biblical literature for its role in the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer 49.7–22; Ezek 25.12–17; Ob; Ps 137.7; Lam 4.21–22), began to decline in the sixth century BCE as Arab tribes began to encroach upon Edomite territory. This decline provides a counterpart for the judgment leveled against Israel and Jerusalem in ch 1. Links between chs 34 and 1 include parallel calls to attention (34.1; 1.2); the LORD's vengeance (34.8; 1.24); unquenchable burning (34.10; 1.24); the mouth of the LORD that has spoken (34.16; 1.20); the sword of punishment (34.5,6; 1.20); the sacrificial blood and fat of cattle (34.6–7; 1.11–15); Sodom and Gomorrah (34.9–10; 1.7–9,10); and wilting leaves (34.4; 1.30). **1–15:** The address to the nations calls their attention to Edom's punishment. The portrayal of destruction employs the images of sacrifice. **6:** *Bozrah*: a major city in Edom. **8:** The passage takes up the "Day of the LORD" theme (cf. 2.10–21; 13.6–16). **9–10:** The fate of Edom will resemble that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19.24–28), located at the southern end of the Dead Sea by Edom. **11:** Confusion (Heb "tohu") and chaos (Heb "bohu") are terms employed to describe primeval chaos prior to

and the plummet of chaos over[a] its nobles.
12 They shall name it No Kingdom There,
and all its princes shall be nothing.
13 Thorns shall grow over its strongholds,
nettles and thistles in its fortresses.
It shall be the haunt of jackals,
an abode for ostriches.
14 Wildcats shall meet with hyenas,
goat-demons shall call to each other;
there too Lilith shall repose,
and find a place to rest.
15 There shall the owl nest
and lay and hatch and brood in its shadow;
there too the buzzards shall gather,
each one with its mate.
16 Seek and read from the book of the LORD:
Not one of these shall be missing;
none shall be without its mate.
For the mouth of the LORD has commanded,
and his spirit has gathered them.
17 He has cast the lot for them,
his hand has portioned it out to them with the line;
they shall possess it forever,
from generation to generation they shall live in it.

35 The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus 2 it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.

3 Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
4 Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you."

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
6 then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
7 the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,[b]
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

8 A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;

[a] Heb lacks *over*
[b] Cn: Heb *in the haunt of jackals is her resting place*

creation (Gen 1.2). **14:** *Lilith* is a hostile goddess associated with the night in Sumerian mythology. In later Jewish folklore, she is known as Adam's first wife who gives birth to demons. **16–17:** *Book of the LORD,* perhaps the book of Isaiah as it then existed. The second address asks the reader to search the book for confirmation of the LORD's purpose concerning the nations.

35.1–10: Prophetic oracle of salvation concerning the return of the redeemed to Zion. The return of the exiles to Zion is portrayed here as a second Exodus in which the people return to Zion through the wilderness. **1–2:** The announcement of the return emphasizes the rejoicing and blooming of the wilderness as the LORD is sovereign of all creation. *Lebanon* is the mountain range north of Israel, *Carmel* is the fertile mountain range running south of Akko/Acre, and *Sharon* is the coastal plain to the west of Carmel; contrast 33.9. **4:** *Do not fear* is the reassurance formula addressed by the prophet to King Ahaz in 7.4 and to Hezekiah in 37.6. **5–6:** A reversal of 6.9–10. The open eyes of the blind and the unstopped ears of the deaf indicate that the LORD's commands that Isaiah render the people blind and deaf so that they cannot repent and be saved are now at an end (cf. 29.18; 32.3; 42.16,18–19; 43.8; 44.18). **8–10:** The highway through the wilderness is a motif of both the Exodus/Wilderness tradition (Num 20.17; 21.22; Deut 2.8) and the second exodus of the book of Isaiah (40.3; 42.16; 43.19). The

the unclean shall not travel on it,[a]
but it shall be for God's people;[b]
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.
9 No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

36 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. 2 The king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem, with a great army. He stood by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field. 3 And there came out to him Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder.

4 The Rabshakeh said to them, "Say to Hezekiah: Thus says the great king, the

[a] Or *pass it by*
[b] Cn: Heb *for them*

return of exiles from Egypt and Assyria appears in 11.16; 27.12–13.

36.1–39.8: Historical narratives concerning Hezekiah. These narratives also appear in 2 Kings 18–20. Because the prophet Isaiah makes his last appearance here in the book of Isaiah, many interpreters consider chs 36–39 to be drawn from 2 Kings 18–20 in order to form a historical appendix to First Isaiah (chs 1–39). Although chs 36–39 may originally have been intended as an appendix in an early edition of the book, the reference to the exile of Hezekiah's sons to Babylon in 39.1–8 indicates that they now are transitional chapters that prepare the reader for the downfall of Babylon and the return of the exiles to Zion beginning in ch 40. The figure of Hezekiah is contrasted with that of Ahaz in 7.1–9.6 to demonstrate that Hezekiah's return to the LORD results in the deliverance of his people whereas Ahaz's refusal to turn to the LORD resulted in the subjugation of his people to Assyria. Such a portrayal also facilitates Second Isaiah's call to turn to the LORD in chs 40–55 at the time of the restoration. Although chs 36–39 are largely parallel to 2 Kings 18–20, subtle differences in the text indicate an effort to whitewash Hezekiah's character in Isa 36–39 in order to present him as a pure figure who places his trust entirely in the LORD.

36.1–37.38: Confrontation story concerning the LORD's defeat of Sennacherib at Jerusalem. This narrative presents an account of the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian King Sennacherib in 701 BCE. King Hezekiah allied with Babylon and assembled a coalition to revolt against Assyria following the death of Sargon II in 705 BCE. Sargon's successor, Sennacherib, attacked western Asia including Judah in 701 BCE. As Hezekiah's allies quickly submitted to Assyria, Hezekiah found himself alone against the Assyrians. Sennacherib's records indicate that he concentrated his attack in southwestern Judah along the border with Philistia, that he devastated the land of Judah, that he besieged Jerusalem, and that he ultimately forced Hezekiah to submit, taking away captives, a great deal of booty, and even Hezekiah's own daughters. Hezekiah nevertheless retained his throne. Sennacherib was assassinated by his own sons in 681 BCE. Most interpreters maintain that chs 36–37 are an idealized account of the siege designed to celebrate the LORD's victory over Sennacherib as the Assyrian empire began to decline in the seventh century BCE. **36.1:** *The fourteenth year,* 701 BCE, the year Sennacherib invaded western Asia. The narrative of Hezekiah's initial capitulation to Sennacherib in 2 Kings 18.14–16 does not appear here. **2–22:** The Assyrian Rabshakeh, "Cup-bearer" or "Chief Steward" of the Assyrian king, presents the terms of surrender to Hezekiah and the besieged defenders of Jerusalem. **2:** *Lachish*, the major royal city in southwestern Judah. Excavations indicate that it was conquered by the Assyrians, who forced Jewish prisoners of war to build a ramp up the side of the city's fortifications. A pit with 1,500 human skeletons on the site indicates the extent of the Judean casualties. Wall reliefs at Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh portray the defeat of Lachish in order to impress visitors with his power. *Conduit of the upper pool,* the same location where Isaiah confronted Ahaz (see 7.3–9n.). **3:** The Judean officers negotiate with the Rabshakeh on behalf of Hezekiah. *Shebna,* here described as the secretary, appears as the King's chief administrator "over the house" in 22.15–25. Shebna has now been replaced by *Eliakim*. **4–10:** The Rabshakeh's speech is meant to intimidate the Judean defenders and weaken their morale. At this point, the Egyptians, with whom Hezekiah had allied, had already been turned back by the

king of Assyria: On what do you base this confidence of yours? 5 Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? On whom do you now rely, that you have rebelled against me? 6 See, you are relying on Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of anyone who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him. 7 But if you say to me, 'We rely on the LORD our God,' is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar'? 8 Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. 9 How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants, when you rely on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? 10 Moreover, is it without the LORD that I have come up against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it."

11 Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall." 12 But the Rabshakeh said, "Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and drink their own urine?"

13 Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! 14 Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. 15 Do not let Hezekiah make you rely on the LORD by saying, The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' 16 Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make your peace with me and come out to me; then every one of you will eat from your own vine and your own fig tree and drink water from your own cistern, 17 until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. 18 Do not let Hezekiah mislead you by saying, The LORD will save us. Has any of the gods of the nations saved their land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 19 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? 20 Who among all the gods of these countries have saved their countries out of my hand, that the LORD should save Jerusalem out of my hand?'"

21 But they were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was, "Do not answer him." 22 Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of the Rabshakeh.

37 When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. 2 And he sent Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. 3 They said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and

Assyrians. The Rabshakeh's boastful speech may have represented Assyrian views but has drawn on 10.8–11,13–14. **6:** Cf. the sayings on the Egyptian alliance (18.1–19.15; 30.1–7; 31.1–3). **7:** On Hezekiah's removal of the high places, see 2 Kings 18.3–6. **10:** Appeal to the anger of the national deity reflects Isaiah's sayings about Assyria as the LORD's agent for the punishment of Israel. **11:** *Aramaic* was the language of diplomacy from the late Neo-Assyrian period onward. *The language of Judah* is Hebrew. **12–20:** The Rabshakeh speaks in Hebrew in order to address the Judean troops directly and appeal for their surrender. His description of their circumstances reveals the desperate conditions in a besieged city (cf. 2 Kings 6.24–32). Deportation of soldiers and skilled persons from subjugated lands was a standard Assyrian practice. **19:** *Hamath* and *Arpad* were cities conquered by the Assyrians (see 10.9n.). *Samaria*, the capital of northern Israel conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BCE (2 Kings 17). *Sepharvaim*, located in Aram between Hamath and Damascus, was a city under Assyrian control to which northern Israelites were deported (2 Kings 17.24,31). **37.1–7:** The delegation to Isaiah recalls the consultation of prophets by earlier and later kings (1 Kings 22.5–28; 2 Kings 1.9–17; 3.11–17; 22.11–14; Jer 21.1–4). The prophet's

of disgrace; children have come to the birth,
and there is no strength to bring them forth.
4 It may be that the LORD your God heard the
words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master
the king of Assyria has sent to mock the liv-
ing God, and will rebuke the words that the
LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up
your prayer for the remnant that is left."

5 When the servants of King Hezekiah
came to Isaiah, 6 Isaiah said to them, "Say to
your master, 'Thus says the LORD: Do not be
afraid because of the words that you have
heard, with which the servants of the king of
Assyria have reviled me. 7 I myself will put a
spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor,
and return to his own land; I will cause him
to fall by the sword in his own land.'"

8 The Rabshakeh returned, and found the
king of Assyria fighting against Libnah; for
he had heard that the king had left Lachish.
9 Now the king[a] heard concerning King
Tirhakah of Ethiopia,[b] "He has set out to fight
against you." When he heard it, he sent mes-
sengers to Hezekiah, saying, 10 "Thus shall
you speak to King Hezekiah of Judah: Do not
let your God on whom you rely deceive you
by promising that Jerusalem will not be given
into the hand of the king of Assyria. 11 See,
you have heard what the kings of Assyria
have done to all lands, destroying them utter-
ly. Shall you be delivered? 12 Have the gods of
the nations delivered them, the nations that
my predecessors destroyed, Gozan, Haran,
Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in
Telassar? 13 Where is the king of Hamath, the
king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sephar-
vaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?"

14 Hezekiah received the letter from the
hand of the messengers and read it; then
Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD
and spread it before the LORD. 15 And Heze-
kiah prayed to the LORD, saying: 16 "O LORD
of hosts, God of Israel, who are enthroned
above the cherubim, you are God, you alone,
of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have
made heaven and earth. 17 Incline your ear,
O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD,
and see; hear all the words of Sennacherib,
which he has sent to mock the living God.
18 Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid
waste all the nations and their lands, 19 and
have hurled their gods into the fire, though
they were no gods, but the work of human
hands—wood and stone—and so they were
destroyed. 20 So now, O LORD our God, save us
from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the
earth may know that you alone are the LORD."

21 Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent to Heze-
kiah, saying: "Thus says the LORD, the God
of Israel: Because you have prayed to me
concerning King Sennacherib of Assyria,
22 this is the word that the LORD has spoken
concerning him:

She despises you, she scorns you—
virgin daughter Zion;
she tosses her head—behind your back,
daughter Jerusalem.

23 "Whom have you mocked and reviled?
Against whom have you raised your
voice
and haughtily lifted your eyes?
Against the Holy One of Israel!
24 By your servants you have mocked the
Lord,
and you have said, 'With my many
chariots

[a] Heb *he*
[b] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*

immediate response reassures Hezekiah with the classic formula "do not fear" (cf. 7.4). **8–13:** The Rabshakeh delivers a second message to Hezekiah from Sennacherib. Having taken Lachish, Sennacherib is besieging *Libnah*, located near Lachish although the precise site is disputed. **9:** *King Tirhakah of Ethiopia* may have been a general in the army since he came to the throne of Egypt only in 690. **12:** Northern Mesopotamian sites taken by the Assyrians: *Gozan*, on the Habur River in Mesopotamia (2 Kings 17.6); *Haran*, on the Balikh River (Gen 11.27–32); *Rezeph*, near the west end of the Jebel Singar; *Eden*, between the Euphrates and the Balikh Rivers (Am 1.5; Ezek 27.23); and *Telassar*, located near Eden in Aram. **13:** See 36.19n. *Hena* and *Ivvah* are unknown. **14–20:** Unlike Ahaz in 7.1–25, Hezekiah turns to the LORD in this time of distress. **16:** *Enthroned above the cherubim*, the ark of the covenant and its cherubim (66.1; 1 Sam 4.4; 2 Sam 6.2), which served as the LORD's throne in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kings 8.6–7). **21–35:** Isaiah conveys the LORD's oracle of reassurance to Hezekiah. The LORD repeats claims of greatness made by Sennacherib to illustrate his arrogance (cf. 2.10–21). Mesopotamian

I have gone up the heights of the
mountains,
to the far recesses of Lebanon;
I felled its tallest cedars,
its choicest cypresses;
I came to its remotest height,
its densest forest.
25 I dug wells
and drank waters,
I dried up with the sole of my foot
all the streams of Egypt.'

26 "Have you not heard
that I determined it long ago?
I planned from days of old
what now I bring to pass,
that you should make fortified cities
crash into heaps of ruins,
27 while their inhabitants, shorn of
strength,
are dismayed and confounded;
they have become like plants of the field
and like tender grass,
like grass on the housetops,
blighted[a] before it is grown.

28 "I know your rising up[b] and your sitting
down,
your going out and coming in,
and your raging against me.
29 Because you have raged against me
and your arrogance has come to my
ears,
I will put my hook in your nose
and my bit in your mouth;
I will turn you back on the way
by which you came.

30 "And this shall be the sign for you:
This year eat what grows of itself, and in
the second year what springs from that;
then in the third year sow, reap, plant
vineyards, and eat their fruit. 31 The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall
again take root downward, and bear fruit
upward; 32 for from Jerusalem a remnant
shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band
of survivors. The zeal of the LORD of hosts
will do this.

33 "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come
into this city, shoot an arrow there, come
before it with a shield, or cast up a siege ramp
against it. 34 By the way that he came, by the
same he shall return; he shall not come into
this city, says the LORD. 35 For I will defend
this city to save it, for my own sake and for
the sake of my servant David."

36 Then the angel of the LORD set out
and struck down one hundred eighty-five
thousand in the camp of the Assyrians;
when morning dawned, they were all dead
bodies. 37 Then King Sennacherib of Assyria
left, went home, and lived at Nineveh. 38 As
he was worshiping in the house of his god
Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer
killed him with the sword, and they escaped
into the land of Ararat. His son Esar-haddon
succeeded him.

38 In those days Hezekiah became sick
and was at the point of death. The
prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came to him,
and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: Set
your house in order, for you shall die; you
shall not recover." 2 Then Hezekiah turned
his face to the wall, and prayed to the LORD:

[a] With 2 Kings 19.26: Heb *field*
[b] Q Ms Gk: MT lacks *your rising up*

kings frequently felled trees in *Lebanon* (see 2.13n). **22:** *Virgin daughter Zion,* see 1.8n. **26:** Whereas the Assyrian king claims great accomplishments, the LORD had planned long ago to bring the Assyrians as a tool of punishment (cf. 5.8–30; 10.5–34). **30–35:** The surviving remnant of Judah, like the ruined Judean wheat crop, will continue to grow each season in the aftermath of the Assyrian invasion, i.e., the LORD will defend Jerusalem in keeping with the Davidic/Zion tradition. **36–38:** The angel of death that killed the Assyrian troops recalls the tenth plague of the Exodus that saw the deaths of the firstborn of Egypt (Ex 11; 12.29–32). Sennacherib was assassinated by his own sons in 681 BCE as part of a coup. The coup was put down, and another son, Esarhaddon, succeeded his father. **38:** The name *Nisroch* is elsewhere unattested. *Ararat* is Armenia.

38.1–22: Royal narrative concerning Hezekiah's recovery from illness. This narrative complements the earlier narrative in chs 36–37 concerning the deliverance of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kings 20.1–11). **1–8:** *In those days* coordinates this account with chs 36–37, although the contents of the narrative indicate an event well before the

3 "Remember now, O LORD, I implore you,
how I have walked before you in faithfulness with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

4 Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: 5 "Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. 6 I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and defend this city.

7 "This is the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he has promised: 8 See, I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of Ahaz turn back ten steps." So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined.[a]

9 A writing of King Hezekiah of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness:

10 I said: In the noontide of my days
I must depart;
I am consigned to the gates of Sheol
for the rest of my years.
11 I said, I shall not see the LORD
in the land of the living;
I shall look upon mortals no more
among the inhabitants of the world.
12 My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me
like a shepherd's tent;
like a weaver I have rolled up my life;
he cuts me off from the loom;
from day to night you bring me to an end;[a]
13 I cry for help[b] until morning;
like a lion he breaks all my bones;
from day to night you bring me to an end.[a]
14 Like a swallow or a crane[a] I clamor,
I moan like a dove.
My eyes are weary with looking upward.
O Lord, I am oppressed; be my security!
15 But what can I say? For he has spoken to me,
and he himself has done it.
All my sleep has fled[c]
because of the bitterness of my soul.

16 O Lord, by these things people live,
and in all these is the life of my spirit.[a]
Oh, restore me to health and make me live!
17 Surely it was for my welfare
that I had great bitterness;
but you have held back[d] my life
from the pit of destruction,
for you have cast all my sins
behind your back.
18 For Sheol cannot thank you,
death cannot praise you;
those who go down to the Pit cannot hope
for your faithfulness.
19 The living, the living, they thank you,
as I do this day;
fathers make known to children
your faithfulness.

20 The LORD will save me,
and we will sing to stringed instruments[e]
all the days of our lives,
at the house of the LORD.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Cn Compare Syr: Heb *I will walk slowly all my years*
[d] Cn Compare Gk Vg: Heb *loved*
[e] Heb *my stringed instruments*

siege of Jerusalem. **3:** Hezekiah's petition to the LORD resembles Ps 26. The LORD's promise to deliver Hezekiah and his city out of the hand of the king of Assyria indicates that this account is meant to be read with chs 36–37. **4–8:** The miraculous reversal of *ten steps* on the sundial of Ahaz both confirms the LORD's oracle and reminds the reader of Hezekiah's contrasting portrayal with that of Ahaz in 7.1–9.6. **5:** *Fifteen years*, calculated on the basis of 2 Kings 18.2,13. **9–22:** A song of thanksgiving attributed to Hezekiah (cf. Pss 30; 32; 92; Jon 2). The song does not appear in 2 Kings 20.1–11. It functions here to highlight Hezekiah's piety. **10–13:** Elements of complaint introduce the song, conveying Hezekiah's distress. **10:** *Sheol*, the underworld. **14–16:** Petition for security and

21 Now Isaiah had said, "Let them take a lump
of figs, and apply it to the boil, so that he may
recover." 22 Hezekiah also had said, "What is the
sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?"

39 At that time King Merodach-baladan
son of Baladan of Babylon sent envoys
with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he
heard that he had been sick and had recov-
ered. 2 Hezekiah welcomed them; he showed
them his treasure house, the silver, the gold,
the spices, the precious oil, his whole armory,
all that was found in his storehouses. There
was nothing in his house or in all his realm
that Hezekiah did not show them. 3 Then the
prophet Isaiah came to King Hezekiah and said
to him, "What did these men say? From where
did they come to you?" Hezekiah answered,
"They have come to me from a far country, from
Babylon." 4 He said, "What have they seen in
your house?" Hezekiah answered, "They have
seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in
my storehouses that I did not show them."

5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear
the word of the LORD of hosts: 6 Days are
coming when all that is in your house, and
that which your ancestors have stored up
until this day, shall be carried to Babylon;
nothing shall be left, says the LORD. 7 Some
of your own sons who are born to you shall
be taken away; they shall be eunuchs in
the palace of the king of Babylon." 8 Then
Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the
LORD that you have spoken is good." For he
thought, "There will be peace and security
in my days."

40 Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

3 A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the
LORD,

health. **17–20:** Thanksgiving for restoration to health. *The Pit,* a poetic synonym for *Sheol.* **21–22:** Isaiah acts as a healer in prescribing a compress for Hezekiah's boil; cf. 2 Kings 20.8.

39.1–8: Narrative concerning Isaiah's condemnation of Hezekiah for allying with Merodach-baladan of Babylon. Hezekiah entered into an alliance with Prince *Merodach-baladan* (Marduk-apal-iddina) of Babylon to mount a revolt against Assyria in 705–701 BCE. Babylon was also an Assyrian vassal at this time. The strategy was to hit Assyria simultaneously from both east and west, and thereby force Sennacherib to divide his forces, but it failed when Hezekiah was forced to capitulate in 701 BCE. Merodach-baladan was never caught, although Sennacherib was still hunting him as late as 689 BCE. A parallel narrative appears in 2 Kings 20.12–19. **1–2:** The phrase *at that time* coordinates the narrative with both chs 36–37 and 38. The display of wealth and provisions demonstrates to Merodach-baladan's envoys that Hezekiah is prepared for revolt. **3–8:** Isaiah, based on his adherence to Davidic/Zion theology, objects to the alliance on the grounds that the LORD will protect Jerusalem and the king. Isaiah's statements that Hezekiah's wealth and sons will be carried off to Babylon corresponds to Sennacherib's account of the siege. In the context of the book of Isaiah, it foreshadows the Babylonian exile presupposed from ch 40 on. Hezekiah's concluding question reemphasizes his piety. In 2 Kings 20.19, the formulation of the question highlights his self-interest.

40.1–54.17: Prophetic instruction that the LORD maintains covenant and restores Zion. Chapter 40 begins the portion of the book (chs 40–55) attributed to an anonymous prophet of the latter years of the Babylonian exile when King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylonia and decreed that Jews could return to their homeland (ca. 545–539 BCE). Although these chapters are clearly written long after the time of the eighth-century prophet Isaiah, they nevertheless share his basic theological perspective rooted in the Zion/Davidic tradition, i.e., that the LORD protects Zion, although the Davidic covenant is now applied to the people rather than to the Davidic king (55.3). These chapters therefore function within the book to describe the realization of the LORD's plans to restore Zion as articulated throughout chs 1–33.

40.1–11: Renewed prophetic commission to announce the LORD's restoration of Zion. This segment renews the prophet's commission to speak (cf. ch 6) and announces that the time of the restoration is at hand. **1–2:** A message of comfort to Jerusalem. *Double* restitution of stolen property is the penalty in the case of theft (Ex 22.7). **3–5:** The voices are those of the attendants in the heavenly court of the LORD (cf. 1 Kings 22.19–23; Isa 6;

make straight in the desert a highway
for our God.
[4] Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made
low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
[5] Then the glory of the LORD shall be
revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

[6] A voice says, "Cry out!"
And I said, "What shall I cry?"
All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the
field.
[7] The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows
upon it;
surely the people are grass.
[8] The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand
forever.
[9] Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;[a]
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,[b]
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"
[10] See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
[11] He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

[12] Who has measured the waters in the
hollow of his hand
and marked off the heavens with a
span,
enclosed the dust of the earth in a
measure,
and weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?
[13] Who has directed the spirit of the LORD,
or as his counselor has instructed him?
[14] Whom did he consult for his
enlightenment,
and who taught him the path of justice?
Who taught him knowledge,
and showed him the way of
understanding?
[15] Even the nations are like a drop from a
bucket,
and are accounted as dust on the
scales;
see, he takes up the isles like fine dust.
[16] Lebanon would not provide fuel enough,
nor are its animals enough for a burnt
offering.
[17] All the nations are as nothing before
him;
they are accounted by him as less than
nothing and emptiness.

[18] To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him?

[a] Or *O herald of good tidings to Zion*
[b] Or *O herald of good tidings to Jerusalem*

Ps 82). The passage evokes the tradition of the journey through the wilderness in which the people traveled along the King's Highway in Transjordan on their way to the land of Israel (Num 20.17; 21.22; Deut 2.8). *The glory of the LORD* refers to the divine presence, often symbolized by a cloud of smoke and flickering flame, such as was seen at Sinai, upon the wilderness Tabernacle, and in the Holy of Holies of the Temple (see Ex 19.16; 40.34–38; 1 Kings 8.10–13). **6–8:** The prophet's message emphasizes the permanence of God's word. Just as Isaiah said that the LORD would restore Jerusalem (e.g., 2.1–4; 31.4–5; 33.20), now it comes to pass (cf. 55.10–11). **9–11:** *Zion* or *Jerusalem* functions as the *herald* of the LORD to announce the news of God's return and Zion's restoration. Using the typical image of Mesopotamian and Judean kings, the LORD appears as a *shepherd* who cares for the *flock* (cf. 1 Sam 16.11,19; 17.1,20,34–37).

40.12–31: The LORD is the master of creation. This is the first of a series of sections (40.12–31; 41.1–42.13; 42.14–44.23) that are designed to demonstrate that the LORD is indeed acting to restore Zion. The first focuses on the LORD's role as the creator. **12–14:** The argumentative style of the passage employs rhetorical questions to make its basic points. **15–17:** *Lebanon*'s fuel (see 2.13n) refers to its tall trees that, like the animals of its forests, are insufficient to provide a suitable sacrifice before the LORD. **18–20:** The beginning of this prophet's polemic

19 An idol? —A workman casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold,
and casts for it silver chains.
20 As a gift one chooses mulberry wood[a]
—wood that will not rot—
then seeks out a skilled artisan
to set up an image that will not topple.

21 Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
22 It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to live in;
23 who brings princes to naught,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows upon them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

25 To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.
26 Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?
He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.

27 Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
"My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God"?
28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
29 He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
30 Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
31 but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

41 Listen to me in silence, O coastlands;
let the peoples renew their strength;
let them approach, then let them speak;
let us together draw near for judgment.

2 Who has roused a victor from the east,
summoned him to his service?
He delivers up nations to him,
and tramples kings under foot;

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

against idolatry, which also targets aspects of the religious and intellectual tradition of the Babylonians (also 41.6–7,29; 42.17; 43.10; 44.9–20; 45.16,20; 46.1–7; Jer 10.1–10). **21–24:** A rhetorical recapitulation of vv. 12–20. The language in which the cosmos is here described should be compared with Gen 1.1–31. **25–26:** The passage returns to the key question of v. 18. The Heb verb "bara'" ("create") is for the most part restricted to Gen 1 and these chapters (40.28; 41.26; 42.5; 43.1,7,15; 45.7,8,12,18; 48.7; 54.16). **27–31:** An attempt to answer the crisis of faith that political disaster provoked by presenting the LORD as a cosmic rather than a purely national deity. Waiting for God, implying trust, is frequently advocated in the book (8.17; 30.18; 49.23; 64.4).

41.1–42.13: The LORD is the master of human events. The second contention in the series is the power of the LORD to play a decisive role in human events. **41.1–4:** The passage is formulated as a courtroom scene in which the LORD cross-examines witnesses. The LORD demands the attention of the *coastlands* (the islands of the Aegean) and the nations. **2:** The first point is that the LORD has summoned *a victor from the east,* King Cyrus II of Persia (559–530), who would conquer the Babylonian empire in 539 BCE. He is called to emerge as the LORD's

he makes them like dust with his sword,
like driven stubble with his bow.
3 He pursues them and passes on safely,
scarcely touching the path with his feet.
4 Who has performed and done this,
calling the generations from the beginning?
I, the LORD, am first,
and will be with the last.
5 The coastlands have seen and are afraid,
the ends of the earth tremble;
they have drawn near and come.
6 Each one helps the other,
saying to one another, "Take courage!"
7 The artisan encourages the goldsmith,
and the one who smooths with the hammer encourages the one who strikes the anvil,
saying of the soldering, "It is good";
and they fasten it with nails so that it cannot be moved.
8 But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
9 you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, "You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you off";
10 do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

11 Yes, all who are incensed against you
shall be ashamed and disgraced;
those who strive against you
shall be as nothing and shall perish.
12 You shall seek those who contend with you,
but you shall not find them;
those who war against you
shall be as nothing at all.
13 For I, the LORD your God,
hold your right hand;
it is I who say to you, "Do not fear,
I will help you."

14 Do not fear, you worm Jacob,
you insect[a] Israel!
I will help you, says the LORD;
your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.
15 Now, I will make of you a threshing sledge,
sharp, new, and having teeth;
you shall thresh the mountains and crush them,
and you shall make the hills like chaff.
16 You shall winnow them and the wind shall carry them away,
and the tempest shall scatter them.
Then you shall rejoice in the LORD;
in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory.

17 When the poor and needy seek water,
and there is none,
and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the LORD will answer them,
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.
18 I will open rivers on the bare heights,[b]

[a] Syr: Heb *men of*
[b] Or *trails*

anointed king and Temple builder in 44.28; 45.1. **4:** By claiming to be *first* and *last* (see 44.6; 48.12), the LORD asserts control over all events in human history from beginning to end. **5–20:** The LORD maintains that just as the coastlands and nations have granted recognition, Jacob/Israel must do likewise. **5–7:** The nations fear the approach of the LORD, and build idols in a futile attempt to protect themselves (cf. 44.9–20). **8–20:** Israel must recognize the LORD's power to act in the human world just as the nations have done. **8:** *Israel* is the LORD's servant much like Moses (Ex 14.31) and David (2 Sam 7.5). The mention of *Abraham* recalls the origins of Israel's covenant with the LORD (Gen 15). In exilic texts the people of Israel are often referred to as *Jacob*, whose story of exile and return (Gen 28–32) is similar to that of the exiles in Babylon. Based on the perspective of the Zion/Davidic covenant tradition, the LORD has chosen Israel and will uphold the covenant to protect the nation. **10:** The reassurance formula *do not fear* supports the assertions of the LORD. **11–17:** The LORD reiterates the reassurance theme in an effort to convince the audience of the LORD's absolute fidelity to the divine promise. **14:** The LORD as *Redeemer* (43.14; 44.6; 47.4; see Ex 6.6; 15.13) is the first of many echoes of the Exodus tradition in these chapters. **15–16:** A *threshing sledge* was employed to crush grain stalks so that the chaff could be removed from the grain. **17–20:** As creator, the LORD is able to provide for the needs of the poor as in the time of the wilderness

and fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
and the dry land springs of water.
19 I will put in the wilderness the cedar,
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive;
I will set in the desert the cypress,
the plane and the pine together,
20 so that all may see and know,
all may consider and understand,
that the hand of the LORD has done this,
the Holy One of Israel has created it.

21 Set forth your case, says the LORD;
bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob.
22 Let them bring them, and tell us
what is to happen.
Tell us the former things, what they are,
so that we may consider them,
and that we may know their outcome;
or declare to us the things to come.
23 Tell us what is to come hereafter,
that we may know that you are gods;
do good, or do harm,
that we may be afraid and terrified.
24 You, indeed, are nothing
and your work is nothing at all;
whoever chooses you is an abomination.

25 I stirred up one from the north, and he has come,
from the rising of the sun he was summoned by name.[a]
He shall trample[b] on rulers as on mortar,
as the potter treads clay.
26 Who declared it from the beginning, so that we might know,
and beforehand, so that we might say, "He is right"?
There was no one who declared it, none who proclaimed,
none who heard your words.
27 I first have declared it to Zion,[c]
and I give to Jerusalem a herald of good tidings.
28 But when I look there is no one;
among these there is no counselor
who, when I ask, gives an answer.
29 No, they are all a delusion;
their works are nothing;
their images are empty wind.

42 Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
2 He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
3 a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
4 He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

5 Thus says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,

[a] Cn Compare Q Ms Gk: MT *and he shall call on my name*
[b] Cn: Heb *come*
[c] Cn: Heb *First to Zion—Behold, behold them*

wandering (Ex 17.1–7; Num 20.2–13; Pss 78.15–16; 105.41). **21–29:** The passage returns to the courtroom imagery (cf. vv. 1–5) in which the LORD demands counterarguments from the gods of the nations. The LORD presumes that they cannot explain the past or the future and therefore do not have the capacity to act like the LORD, much less to challenge the LORD's power to act in the human world. **25:** *One from the north* and from the east, the LORD once again claims to have brought a deliverer, i.e., Cyrus (41.2; 44.28; 45.1), which demonstrates once again the LORD's capacity to act in human affairs. Having claimed to have announced these events long ago, the LORD observes that there is no one to answer. **42.1–4:** The first of the four so-called "servant songs" of Isaiah (see 49.1–6; 50.4–11; 52.13–53.12). The servant represents Israel. **5–9:** As a covenant to the peoples and a light to the nations, Israel's experience of punishment and restoration becomes the means by which all the nations will recognize the LORD's sovereignty in the world. By opening the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, the servant brings to an end the period of blindness and deafness called for in Isaiah's commission (6.9–10).

who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:
6 I am the LORD, I have called you in
righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept
you;
I have given you as a covenant to the
people,[a]
a light to the nations,
7 to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the
dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in
darkness.
8 I am the LORD, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.
9 See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

10 Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise from the end of the earth!
Let the sea roar[b] and all that fills it,
the coastlands and their inhabitants.
11 Let the desert and its towns lift up their
voice,
the villages that Kedar inhabits;
let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy,
let them shout from the tops of the
mountains.
12 Let them give glory to the LORD,
and declare his praise in the coastlands.
13 The LORD goes forth like a soldier,
like a warrior he stirs up his fury;
he cries out, he shouts aloud,
he shows himself mighty against his
foes.

14 For a long time I have held my peace,
I have kept still and restrained myself;
now I will cry out like a woman in labor,
I will gasp and pant.
15 I will lay waste mountains and hills,
and dry up all their herbage;
I will turn the rivers into islands,
and dry up the pools.
16 I will lead the blind
by a road they do not know,
by paths they have not known
I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into
light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I will do,
and I will not forsake them.
17 They shall be turned back and utterly
put to shame—
those who trust in carved images,
who say to cast images,
"You are our gods."

18 Listen, you that are deaf;
and you that are blind, look up and see!
19 Who is blind but my servant,
or deaf like my messenger whom I
send?

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Cn Compare Ps 96.11; 98.7: Heb *Those who go down to the sea*

That the former things have come to pass, i.e., those things foretold earlier in the book of Isaiah, serves as an argument that the things now declared will also happen. **10–13:** A hymn of praise for the LORD closes the section devoted to demonstrating the LORD's mastery of human events. Now creation itself rejoices like worshipers in the Temple (cf. Pss 96; 98). *Kedar* is located in the Arabian desert (see 21.16), and *Sela* is located in Edom.

42.14–44.23: The LORD is the redeemer of Israel. The third contention in the series is that the LORD redeems Israel. Insofar as Israel had suffered punishment and exile at the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians, acting as agents of the LORD, such a contention is designed to answer claims that the LORD is an enemy to Israel or that the LORD is powerless to redeem Israel. **42.14–17:** The LORD's silence and inaction during the period of Israel's punishment has come to an end. The image of a woman in childbirth (cf. 13.8; 26.1–18) indicates that the time for action has come. The passage evokes the wilderness tradition (see 40.3–5n.) to portray the LORD's guidance of Israel. The *blind* are now given light (cf. 6.9–10; 8.23). **18–25:** The passage addresses Israel as the *blind* and the *deaf*, a recurrent image (6.9–10; 29.9,18; 32.3; 35.5; 42.16; 43.8) denoting spiritual imperception and obtuseness. In fact, however, the LORD has controlled the fate of the nation all along. Now the time has come for Israel to recognize the LORD as their redeemer. Although the LORD had revealed divine "torah" ("teaching," v. 21) to the people, they were punished for having failed to observe the LORD's instruction, improperly translated

Who is blind like my dedicated one,
or blind like the servant of the LORD?
20 He sees many things, but does[a] not observe them;
his ears are open, but he does not hear.
21 The LORD was pleased, for the sake of his righteousness,
to magnify his teaching and make it glorious.
22 But this is a people robbed and plundered,
all of them are trapped in holes and hidden in prisons;
they have become a prey with no one to rescue,
a spoil with no one to say, "Restore!"
23 Who among you will give heed to this,
who will attend and listen for the time to come?
24 Who gave up Jacob to the spoiler,
and Israel to the robbers?
Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned,
in whose ways they would not walk,
and whose law they would not obey?
25 So he poured upon him the heat of his anger
and the fury of war;
it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand;
it burned him, but he did not take it to heart.

43 But now thus says the LORD,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
3 For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
Ethiopia[b] and Seba in exchange for you.
4 Because you are precious in my sight,
and honored, and I love you,
I give people in return for you,
nations in exchange for your life.
5 Do not fear, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you;
6 I will say to the north, "Give them up,"
and to the south, "Do not withhold;
bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from the end of the earth—
7 everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."

8 Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes,
who are deaf, yet have ears!
9 Let all the nations gather together,
and let the peoples assemble.
Who among them declared this,
and foretold to us the former things?
Let them bring their witnesses to justify them,
and let them hear and say, "It is true."
10 You are my witnesses, says the LORD,

[a] Heb *You see many things but do*
[b] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*

in v. 24 as "law" (cf. 2.2–4; 5.24). **43.1–7:** The reassurance formula *do not fear* (cf. 7.4; 37.6; 41.10,14) emphasizes that Israel's punishment is now over and redemption is at hand. **2:** The passage evokes the Exodus and wilderness tradition as Israel passes through waters (see, e.g., Ex 14–15) as it returns from exile to its homeland. *Through fire*, cf. Ps 66.12. **3:** *Egypt, Ethiopia*, and *Seba* (or Sheba, a kingdom in southwestern Arabia), all of which Cyrus was expected to conquer, serve as a ransom for the redemption of Israel from its exile. The return of the exiles from throughout the world is a frequent theme in Isaiah (11.15–16; 27.12–13; 35.1–10; 49.22; 60.9).

43.8–44.23: The setting returns to the courtroom as the LORD substantiates the claims to redeem Israel (see 41.1–5,21–29). **43.8–13:** The LORD calls both blind and deaf Israel (6.9–10; 42.19–20; cf. 42.7) and the nations to witness to the LORD's claims. **9:** *The former things*, the statements of the LORD's plans found in the Isaian tradition. Only the LORD can carry out Israel's redemption; no idols can possibly manifest such planning and

and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor shall there be any after me.
11 I, I am the LORD,
and besides me there is no savior.
12 I declared and saved and proclaimed,
when there was no strange god among you;
and you are my witnesses, says the LORD.
13 I am God, and also henceforth I am He;
there is no one who can deliver from my hand;
I work and who can hinder it?

14 Thus says the LORD,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
For your sake I will send to Babylon
and break down all the bars,
and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentation.[a]
15 I am the LORD, your Holy One,
the Creator of Israel, your King.
16 Thus says the LORD,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
17 who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
18 Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
19 I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
20 The wild animals will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
21 the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

22 Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob;
but you have been weary of me, O Israel!
23 You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings,
or honored me with your sacrifices.
I have not burdened you with offerings,
or wearied you with frankincense.
24 You have not bought me sweet cane with money,
or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices.
But you have burdened me with your sins;
you have wearied me with your iniquities.

25 I, I am He
who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,
and I will not remember your sins.
26 Accuse me, let us go to trial;
set forth your case, so that you may be proved right.
27 Your first ancestor sinned,
and your interpreters transgressed against me.
28 Therefore I profaned the princes of the sanctuary,
I delivered Jacob to utter destruction,
and Israel to reviling.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

power. **14–15:** *Redeemer* and *Holy One* are frequent designations for the LORD in this section of Isaiah (41.14; 47.4; 48.17;49.7; 54.5). *Chaldea,* a term for the Neo-Babylonian empire of Nebuchadnezzar. **16–21:** The LORD is identified as the one who led Israel through the sea at the time of the Exodus (Ex 14–15), the *former things* of v. 18 which provide the foundation for understanding the *new thing,* i.e., the exodus from Babylon. Once again, the LORD provides a highway in the wilderness for the people to return home (11.15–16; 27.12–13; 35.1–10; 40.3–5). Water in the wilderness recalls the wilderness tradition (Ex 15.22–27; 17.17; Num 20.2–13). **22–28:** The LORD justifies past punishment of Israel, charging that the people did not honor the LORD appropriately with sacrifices, but sinned instead. Nevertheless, the LORD will not remember those sins now that the punishment is over. **27:** *First ancestor*, Jacob (cf. Hos 12.2–4). *Interpreters transgressed*, translation and meaning are uncertain; perhaps it is a denunciation of optimistic prophets during the time of the monarchy who led the people astray.

44 But now hear, O Jacob my servant,
Israel whom I have chosen!
[2] Thus says the LORD who made you,
who formed you in the womb and will help you:
Do not fear, O Jacob my servant,
Jeshurun whom I have chosen.
[3] For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my spirit upon your descendants,
and my blessing on your offspring.
[4] They shall spring up like a green tamarisk,
like willows by flowing streams.
[5] This one will say, "I am the LORD's,"
another will be called by the name of Jacob,
yet another will write on the hand, "The LORD's,"
and adopt the name of Israel.

[6] Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.
[7] Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth before me.
Who has announced from of old the things to come?[a]
Let them tell us[b] what is yet to be.
[8] Do not fear, or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared it?
You are my witnesses!
Is there any god besides me?
There is no other rock; I know not one.

[9] All who make idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit; their witnesses neither see nor know. And so they will be put to shame. [10] Who would fashion a god or cast an image that can do no good? [11] Look, all its devotees shall be put to shame; the artisans too are merely human. Let them all assemble, let them stand up; they shall be terrified, they shall all be put to shame.

[12] The ironsmith fashions it[c] and works it over the coals, shaping it with hammers, and forging it with his strong arm; he becomes hungry and his strength fails, he drinks no water and is faint. [13] The carpenter stretches a line, marks it out with a stylus, fashions it with planes, and marks it with a compass; he makes it in human form, with human beauty, to be set up in a shrine. [14] He cuts down cedars or chooses a holm tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. [15] Then it can be used as fuel. Part of it he takes and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Then he makes a god and worships it, makes it a carved image and bows down before it. [16] Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he roasts meat, eats it and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, "Ah, I am warm, I can feel the fire!" [17] The rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, bows down to it and worships it; he prays to it and says, "Save me, for you are my god!"

[18] They do not know, nor do they comprehend; for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see, and their minds as well, so that they cannot understand. [19] No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals, I roasted meat and have eaten. Now shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" [20] He feeds on ashes; a deluded mind has led him astray, and he cannot save himself or say, "Is not this thing in my right hand a fraud?"

[a] Cn: Heb *from my placing an eternal people and things to come*
[b] Tg: Heb *them*
[c] Cn: Heb *an ax*

44.1–5: An oracle of salvation for Israel. **2:** *Jeshurun,* "one who is upright," is a poetic name for Israel (Deut 32.15; 33.5,26). **3:** The passage employs the imagery of libation offerings poured out at the Temple at the festival of Sukkot, "Tabernacles," to celebrate the onset of the rainy season and fertility in the land. **6–8:** A recapitulation of earlier arguments for the incomparability of the LORD who has declared the divine plans for Israel from the beginning (see 41.21–29; 43.10–13). **9–20:** A lengthy and satirical prose polemic against idolatry, describing how artisans meticulously fashion idols out of metal and wood and then declare the idol to be a god (cf. Wis 13–15; Let Jer). The blindness and deafness motif is here applied to the idols who can neither see nor hear (cf. 6.9–10;

21 Remember these things, O Jacob,
and Israel, for you are my servant;
I formed you, you are my servant;
O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.
22 I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud,
and your sins like mist;
return to me, for I have redeemed you.

23 Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it;
shout, O depths of the earth;
break forth into singing, O mountains,
O forest, and every tree in it!
For the LORD has redeemed Jacob,
and will be glorified in Israel.

24 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer,
who formed you in the womb:
I am the LORD, who made all things,
who alone stretched out the heavens,
who by myself spread out the earth;
25 who frustrates the omens of liars,
and makes fools of diviners;
who turns back the wise,
and makes their knowledge foolish;
26 who confirms the word of his servant,
and fulfills the prediction of his messengers;
who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be inhabited,"
and of the cities of Judah, "They shall be rebuilt,
and I will raise up their ruins";
27 who says to the deep, "Be dry—
I will dry up your rivers";
28 who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd,
and he shall carry out all my purpose";
and who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be rebuilt,"
and of the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."

45 Thus says the LORD to his anointed,
to Cyrus,
whose right hand I have grasped
to subdue nations before him
and strip kings of their robes,
to open doors before him—
and the gates shall not be closed:
2 I will go before you
and level the mountains,[a]
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut through the bars of iron,
3 I will give you the treasures of darkness
and riches hidden in secret places,
so that you may know that it is I, the LORD,

[a] Q Ms Gk: MT *the swellings*

42.18–20). **21–22:** Conclusion of the oracle in vv. 6–8. **23:** Hymnic conclusion in which all creation celebrates the redemption of Israel.

44.24–48.22: The LORD will use Cyrus for the restoration of Zion. This lengthy unit constitutes the fourth contention in the series. The claim that the LORD uses Cyrus to restore Zion is particularly controversial because the Persian king is a foreign monarch who displaces the role traditionally assigned to the Davidic king as anointed one and Temple builder. Nevertheless, Cyrus's conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE opened the way for his declaration that exiled Jews could return to their homeland to rebuild the Temple (2 Chr 36.22–23; Ezra 1.1–4). Since Cyrus does not restore Davidic kingship, the prophet determines that the LORD has declared Cyrus to be the righteous king of Isaian tradition (9.1–7; 11.1–16; 32.1–8).

44.24–45.8: The LORD's announcement concerning Cyrus. The LORD announces the plan to use Cyrus as the redeemer of Zion. **44.24–28:** Reiterations of the divine qualities and roles previously articulated. **25:** *Omens . . . diviners*, Babylonian religion was renowned for its use of techniques for determining the future. **28:** *Shepherd*, a common metaphor for ruler (56.11; Jer 23.4). Cyrus II (558–530 BCE), founder of the Persian Empire, is identified with the LORD's long established plans, including the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, a role formerly accomplished by David and Solomon. **45.1–7:** Cyrus is commissioned to act as the LORD's agent for restoration, and is identified as the LORD's messiah or *anointed* one to signify that the Persian king now occupies the role once held by the Davidic kings. The imagery presupposes elements of the Babylonian Akitu or New Year Festival in which the Babylonian king's right to rule is renewed for the coming year. The king grasps the hand of Marduk, the god of Babylon, and is granted the tablets of destiny as part of his authorization to rule. Cyrus was authorized to serve as king of Babylon when he participated in the Akitu festival in 539 BCE. The LORD here takes

the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
4 For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I surname you, though you do not know me.
5 I am the LORD, and there is no other;
besides me there is no god.
I arm you, though you do not know me,
6 so that they may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is no one besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other.
7 I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe;
I the LORD do all these things.

8 Shower, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness;
let the earth open, that salvation may spring up,[a]
and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also;
I the LORD have created it.

9 Woe to you who strive with your Maker,
earthen vessels with the potter![b]
Does the clay say to the one who fashions it, "What are you making"?
or "Your work has no handles"?
10 Woe to anyone who says to a father,
"What are you begetting?"
or to a woman, "With what are you in labor?"
11 Thus says the LORD,
the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker:
Will you question me[c] about my children,
or command me concerning the work of my hands?
12 I made the earth,
and created humankind upon it;
it was my hands that stretched out the heavens,
and I commanded all their host.
13 I have aroused Cyrus[d] in righteousness,
and I will make all his paths straight;
he shall build my city
and set my exiles free,
not for price or reward,
says the LORD of hosts.
14 Thus says the LORD:
The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia,[e]
and the Sabeans, tall of stature,
shall come over to you and be yours,
they shall follow you;
they shall come over in chains and bow down to you.
They will make supplication to you, saying,
"God is with you alone, and there is no other;
there is no god besides him."
15 Truly, you are a God who hides himself,
O God of Israel, the Savior.
16 All of them are put to shame and confounded,
the makers of idols go in confusion together.
17 But Israel is saved by the LORD
with everlasting salvation;
you shall not be put to shame or confounded
to all eternity.

18 For thus says the LORD,

[a] Q Ms: MT *that they may bring forth salvation*
[b] Cn: Heb *with the potsherds*, or *with the potters*
[c] Cn: Heb *Ask me of things to come*
[d] Heb *him*
[e] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*

on the role of Marduk, is declared to be the only God, and authorizes Cyrus to rule. **8:** The heavens celebrate Cyrus's role with showers and a hymn of praise.

45.9–48.19: Trial scene concerning the LORD's use of Cyrus as redeemer. The contention that the LORD had chosen Cyrus as king was no doubt controversial. Once again, the LORD appears in court to support such claims. **45.9–19:** An introductory court speech disputes any challenge to the LORD's decision. For the metaphor of the potter and the clay see 29.16; Jer 18.1–6. **14:** *Egypt, Ethiopia*, and *Seba*. In contrast to 43.3 where these nations are given to Cyrus as a ransom, here their wealth will come to Israel when they are conquered by Cyrus. **20–25:**

who created the heavens
(he is God!),
who formed the earth and made it
(he established it;
he did not create it a chaos,
he formed it to be inhabited!):
I am the LORD, and there is no other.
19 I did not speak in secret,
in a land of darkness;
I did not say to the offspring of Jacob,
"Seek me in chaos."
I the LORD speak the truth,
I declare what is right.

20 Assemble yourselves and come together,
draw near, you survivors of the nations!
They have no knowledge—
those who carry about their wooden
idols,
and keep on praying to a god
that cannot save.
21 Declare and present your case;
let them take counsel together!
Who told this long ago?
Who declared it of old?
Was it not I, the LORD?
There is no other god besides me,
a righteous God and a Savior;
there is no one besides me.

22 Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.
23 By myself I have sworn,
from my mouth has gone forth in
righteousness
a word that shall not return:
"To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear."

24 Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me,
are righteousness and strength;
all who were incensed against him
shall come to him and be ashamed.
25 In the LORD all the offspring of Israel
shall triumph and glory.

46 Bel bows down, Nebo stoops,
their idols are on beasts and cattle;
these things you carry are loaded
as burdens on weary animals.
2 They stoop, they bow down together;
they cannot save the burden,
but themselves go into captivity.

3 Listen to me, O house of Jacob,
all the remnant of the house of Israel,
who have been borne by me from your birth,
carried from the womb;
4 even to your old age I am he,
even when you turn gray I will carry you.
I have made, and I will bear;
I will carry and will save.

5 To whom will you liken me and make me
equal,
and compare me, as though we were
alike?
6 Those who lavish gold from the purse,
and weigh out silver in the scales—
they hire a goldsmith, who makes it into
a god;
then they fall down and worship!
7 They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it,
they set it in its place, and it stands
there;
it cannot move from its place.
If one cries out to it, it does not
answer
or save anyone from trouble.

8 Remember this and consider,[a]

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

An offer of salvation and a demand for LORD to be recognized as sovereign of all creation by the nations and by Israel.

46.1–47.15: Presentation of evidence concerning the LORD's power. Two major sections (46.1–13 and 47.1–15) demonstrate the powerlessness of Babylon's gods before the LORD. **46.1–4:** This section draws on the imagery of the Babylonian Akitu or New Year festival, when the gods are paraded through the streets of Babylon in procession to the temple of Marduk, city god of Babylon, at the center of the city. Bel and Nebo appear as burdens to those who carry them through the streets rather than as powerful gods who can act on behalf of their people. *Bel,* meaning "lord," is a title of Marduk, and *Nebo* is the city god of Borsippa and son of Marduk. In contrast to their weakness, the LORD asserts the capacity to carry Israel as well as to redeem. **5–7:** A satirical

recall it to mind, you transgressors,
9 remember the former things of old;
for I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is no one like me,
10 declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, "My purpose shall stand,
and I will fulfill my intention,"
11 calling a bird of prey from the east,
the man for my purpose from a far country.
I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass;
I have planned, and I will do it.

12 Listen to me, you stubborn of heart,
you who are far from deliverance:
13 I bring near my deliverance, it is not far off,
and my salvation will not tarry;
I will put salvation in Zion,
for Israel my glory.

47 Come down and sit in the dust,
virgin daughter Babylon!
Sit on the ground without a throne,
daughter Chaldea!
For you shall no more be called
tender and delicate.
2 Take the millstones and grind meal,
remove your veil,
strip off your robe, uncover your legs,
pass through the rivers.
3 Your nakedness shall be uncovered,
and your shame shall be seen.
I will take vengeance,
and I will spare no one.
4 Our Redeemer—the LORD of hosts is his name—
is the Holy One of Israel.

5 Sit in silence, and go into darkness,
daughter Chaldea!
For you shall no more be called
the mistress of kingdoms.
6 I was angry with my people,
I profaned my heritage;
I gave them into your hand,
you showed them no mercy;
on the aged you made your yoke
exceedingly heavy.
7 You said, "I shall be mistress forever,"
so that you did not lay these things to heart
or remember their end.

8 Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures,
who sit securely,
who say in your heart,
"I am, and there is no one besides me;
I shall not sit as a widow
or know the loss of children"—
9 both these things shall come upon you
in a moment, in one day:
the loss of children and widowhood
shall come upon you in full measure,
in spite of your many sorceries
and the great power of your enchantments.

10 You felt secure in your wickedness;
you said, "No one sees me."
Your wisdom and your knowledge
led you astray,
and you said in your heart,
"I am, and there is no one besides me."
11 But evil shall come upon you,
which you cannot charm away;
disaster shall fall upon you,
which you will not be able to ward off;
and ruin shall come on you suddenly,
of which you know nothing.

12 Stand fast in your enchantments

polemic against idols; see 40.18–20; 44.9–20. **8–11:** A reiteration of the incomparability of the LORD who predicts events and brings them to pass; see 40.2–5; 41.25–29; 43.10–13; 44.6–8. **11:** The *bird of prey* from the east is Cyrus. **47.1–15:** Babylon is portrayed as a once magnificent princess who has been thrown to the dirt and humiliated before her conquerors. It was common for cities in the ancient Near Eastern world to be portrayed as women or goddesses; cf. Jerusalem's designation as "daughter Zion" (see 1.8n.; 37.22; 52.2). **5–7:** Babylon, much like the Assyrian king earlier (see 10.5–34; 14.24–27), overstepped its bounds in oppressing Israel and failing to recognize that it acted as the LORD's agent. **8–11:** Babylon's boast of uniqueness is countered by the claim of the God of Israel's incomparability. **12–15:** Babylonian diviners and astrologers developed mathematics and other

and your many sorceries,
with which you have labored from your youth;
perhaps you may be able to succeed,
perhaps you may inspire terror.
13 You are wearied with your many consultations;
let those who study[a] the heavens
stand up and save you,
those who gaze at the stars,
and at each new moon predict
what[b] shall befall you.

14 See, they are like stubble,
the fire consumes them;
they cannot deliver themselves
from the power of the flame.
No coal for warming oneself is this,
no fire to sit before!
15 Such to you are those with whom you have labored,
who have trafficked with you from your youth;
they all wander about in their own paths;
there is no one to save you.

48 Hear this, O house of Jacob,
who are called by the name of Israel,
and who came forth from the loins[c] of Judah;
who swear by the name of the LORD,
and invoke the God of Israel,
but not in truth or right.
2 For they call themselves after the holy city,
and lean on the God of Israel;
the LORD of hosts is his name.

3 The former things I declared long ago,
they went out from my mouth and I made them known;
then suddenly I did them and they came to pass.
4 Because I know that you are obstinate,
and your neck is an iron sinew
and your forehead brass,
5 I declared them to you from long ago,
before they came to pass I announced them to you,
so that you would not say, "My idol did them,
my carved image and my cast image commanded them."

6 You have heard; now see all this;
and will you not declare it?
From this time forward I make you hear new things,
hidden things that you have not known.
7 They are created now, not long ago;
before today you have never heard of them,
so that you could not say, "I already knew them."
8 You have never heard, you have never known,
from of old your ear has not been opened.
For I knew that you would deal very treacherously,
and that from birth you were called a rebel.

9 For my name's sake I defer my anger,
for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you,
so that I may not cut you off.
10 See, I have refined you, but not like[d] silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of adversity.
11 For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Gk Syr Compare Vg: Heb *from what*
[c] Cn: Heb *waters*
[d] Cn: Heb *with*

sciences in their attempts to track the movements of the planets and the stars to determine the will of the gods. Despite such expertise, Babylon's efforts are useless before the LORD.

48.1–22: A series of courtroom summary speeches and concluding hymn reiterates the LORD's right to use Cyrus as the redeemer of Israel. **1–5:** The fulfillment of prophecies should have persuaded the people to recognize the truth of the LORD's claims. **6–8:** The *new things* are the conquests of Cyrus, which are destined to lead to a change of fortune for Judah; cf. 43.18–19. Proof is necessary because of Israel's history of religious infidelity. **9–11:** The concern for the divine name or reputation and divine sanctity is also a prominent theme in Ezekiel

for why should my name[a] be profaned?
My glory I will not give to another.

12 Listen to me, O Jacob,
and Israel, whom I called:
I am He; I am the first,
and I am the last.
13 My hand laid the foundation of the earth,
and my right hand spread out the heavens;
when I summon them,
they stand at attention.

14 Assemble, all of you, and hear!
Who among them has declared these things?
The LORD loves him;
he shall perform his purpose on Babylon,
and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans.
15 I, even I, have spoken and called him,
I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way.
16 Draw near to me, hear this!
From the beginning I have not spoken in secret,
from the time it came to be I have been there.
And now the Lord GOD has sent me and his spirit.

17 Thus says the LORD,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
I am the LORD your God,
who teaches you for your own good,
who leads you in the way you should go.
18 O that you had paid attention to my commandments!
Then your prosperity would have been like a river,
and your success like the waves of the sea;
19 your offspring would have been like the sand,
and your descendants like its grains;
their name would never be cut off
or destroyed from before me.

20 Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea,
declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it,
send it forth to the end of the earth;
say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!"
21 They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts;
he made water flow for them from the rock;
he split open the rock and the water gushed out.

22 "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."

49 Listen to me, O coastlands,
pay attention, you peoples from far away!
The LORD called me before I was born,
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.
2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;

[a] Gk Old Latin: Heb *for why should it*

(e.g., 36.11,21–23). The imagery of refined silver is drawn from 1.24–25. **12–16:** *First* and *last*; see also 41.4; 43.10; 44.6. **14:** *Chaldeans*, the Neo-Babylonian kingdom. **17–19:** The LORD reiterates the terms of the ancestral covenant with Abraham (Gen 15.5; 17.1–8; 22.16–18) and with Jacob (Gen 28.13–14; 35.9–15) to emphasize the cost to Israel of its failure to observe the LORD's commandments. **20–22:** The concluding hymn calls upon the exiles to flee from Babylon and Chaldea and to journey through the wilderness as they make their way home. The theme of water in the wilderness (Ex 17.1–7; Num 20.2–13) demonstrates the LORD's sustenance on this new exodus from Babylon. **22:** See also 57.21.

49.1–54.17: The LORD is restoring Zion. The fifth and concluding contention in the series is the prophet's announcement that the LORD is restoring Zion. This lengthy unit focuses especially on the role of the servant figure, earlier identified as Israel, in the divine plan.

49.1–13: Announcement concerning the role of the servant. The servant is defined both in relation to the restoration of Israel and as a light to the nations. **1–6:** The second of the "servant songs" (see 42.1n.) presents the servant as an individual figure who is also identified as Israel. He is called from the womb much like Jeremiah

he made me a polished arrow,
in his quiver he hid me away.
3 And he said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified."
4 But I said, "I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing
and vanity;
yet surely my cause is with the LORD,
and my reward with my God."

5 And now the LORD says,
who formed me in the womb to be his
servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
and that Israel might be gathered to
him,
for I am honored in the sight of the LORD,
and my God has become my strength—
6 he says,
"It is too light a thing that you should be
my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end
of the earth."

7 Thus says the LORD,
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy
One,
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the
nations,
the slave of rulers,
"Kings shall see and stand up,
princes, and they shall prostrate
themselves,
because of the LORD, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen
you."

8 Thus says the LORD:
In a time of favor I have answered you,
on a day of salvation I have helped you;
I have kept you and given you
as a covenant to the people,[a]
to establish the land,
to apportion the desolate heritages;
9 saying to the prisoners, "Come out,"
to those who are in darkness, "Show
yourselves."
They shall feed along the ways,
on all the bare heights[b] shall be their
pasture;
10 they shall not hunger or thirst,
neither scorching wind nor sun shall
strike them down,
for he who has pity on them will lead
them,
and by springs of water will guide them.
11 And I will turn all my mountains into a
road,
and my highways shall be raised up.
12 Lo, these shall come from far away,
and lo, these from the north and from
the west,
and these from the land of Syene.[c]

13 Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult,
O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For the LORD has comforted his people,
and will have compassion on his
suffering ones.

14 But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken
me,
my Lord has forgotten me."
15 Can a woman forget her nursing child,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *the trails*
[c] Q Ms: MT *Sinim*

(Jer 1.5). **3:** The servant is here specifically identified as Israel, although his task in v. 5 is to bring Israel/Jacob to the LORD. **6:** *A light to the nations,* see 42.5–9n. **7–12:** An oracle of restoration. **7:** The servant's restoration demonstrates the sovereignty of the LORD in the world; cf. 52.13–15. **8–12:** *Covenant to the people*, here the role of the servant in relation to the people Israel who will be released from prison to return through the wilderness to their homeland in a second exodus (see also 40.3–5; 41.17–20; 43.19; 48.20–22). **12:** *Syene,* Aswan in Upper (southern) Egypt at the first cataract of the Nile, where a Jewish settlement existed prior to the Persian conquest of Egypt in 525 BCE. **13:** The concluding hymn portrays the celebration of all creation at the restoration of Israel (cf. 44.23; 45.8).

49.14–52.12: The LORD's announcement of the restoration of Zion. The LORD attempts to convince Israel that despite her experience of exile the LORD will now return the nation to Zion. **49.14–18:** Many Jews in Babylonian

or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.
16 See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are continually before me.
17 Your builders outdo your destroyers,[a]
and those who laid you waste go away from you.
18 Lift up your eyes all around and see;
they all gather, they come to you.
As I live, says the LORD,
you shall put all of them on like an ornament,
and like a bride you shall bind them on.

19 Surely your waste and your desolate places
and your devastated land—
surely now you will be too crowded for your inhabitants,
and those who swallowed you up will be far away.
20 The children born in the time of your bereavement
will yet say in your hearing:
"The place is too crowded for me;
make room for me to settle."
21 Then you will say in your heart,
"Who has borne me these?
I was bereaved and barren,
exiled and put away—
so who has reared these?
I was left all alone—
where then have these come from?"

22 Thus says the Lord GOD:
I will soon lift up my hand to the nations,
and raise my signal to the peoples;
and they shall bring your sons in their bosom,
and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.
23 Kings shall be your foster fathers,
and their queens your nursing mothers.
With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you,
and lick the dust of your feet.
Then you will know that I am the LORD;
those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.

24 Can the prey be taken from the mighty,
or the captives of a tyrant[b] be rescued?
25 But thus says the LORD:
Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken,
and the prey of the tyrant be rescued;
for I will contend with those who contend with you,
and I will save your children.
26 I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh,
and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine.
Then all flesh shall know
that I am the LORD your Savior,
and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

50 Thus says the LORD:
Where is your mother's bill of divorce with which I put her away?
Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?
No, because of your sins you were sold,

[a] Or *Your children come swiftly; your destroyers*
[b] Q Ms Syr Vg: MT *of a righteous person*

exile would have questioned the power of the LORD to protect the nation. In this section Zion is personified as a woman (49.14; 50.1; 51.17–52.2; 54.1–14; see 1.8n.). The LORD similarly is compared to a mother with her child and claims not to have forgotten or abandoned the people (cf. 66.13). **18:** This verse is echoed and developed in Bar 5.5–9. **22–23:** The raised hand of the LORD reverses the hand of judgment extended against Israel (9.7–10.4) and recalls the banner that signals restoration (11.1–16). **24–26:** The rhetorical questions function here as assertions of divine power insofar as the LORD can make these things happen. **50.1–11:** The language of the courtroom appears once again as the LORD explains the divine role in Israel's experience. **1–3:** Rhetorical questions are used to make the LORD's case. Zion is portrayed as a mother, who was neither divorced nor sold to creditors to pay the LORD's bill. Instead, the LORD contends that she was sold for the sins of the nation. Nevertheless, the LORD

and for your transgressions your
mother was put away.
2 Why was no one there when I came?
Why did no one answer when I called?
Is my hand shortened, that it cannot
redeem?
Or have I no power to deliver?
By my rebuke I dry up the sea,
I make the rivers a desert;
their fish stink for lack of water,
and die of thirst.[a]
3 I clothe the heavens with blackness,
and make sackcloth their covering.

4 The Lord God has given me
the tongue of a teacher,[b]
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.
Morning by morning he wakens—
wakens my ear
to listen as those who are taught.
5 The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.
6 I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out
the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.

7 The Lord God helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to
shame;
8 he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
9 It is the Lord God who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?
All of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.

10 Who among you fears the Lord
and obeys the voice of his servant,
who walks in darkness
and has no light,
yet trusts in the name of the Lord
and relies upon his God?
11 But all of you are kindlers of fire,
lighters of firebrands.[c]
Walk in the flame of your fire,
and among the brands that you have
kindled!
This is what you shall have from my hand:
you shall lie down in torment.

51 Listen to me, you that pursue
righteousness,
you that seek the Lord.
Look to the rock from which you were
hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were
dug.
2 Look to Abraham your father
and to Sarah who bore you;
for he was but one when I called him,
but I blessed him and made him
many.
3 For the Lord will comfort Zion;
he will comfort all her waste places,
and will make her wilderness like Eden,
her desert like the garden of the Lord;
joy and gladness will be found in her,
thanksgiving and the voice of song.

[a] Or *die on the thirsty ground*
[b] Cn: Heb *of those who are taught*
[c] Syr: Heb *you gird yourselves with firebrands*

asserts divine power as creator of the universe to redeem. **4–9:** The third servant song (see 42.1n.) appears in vv. 4–11, although vv. 10–11 presuppose a different speaker. **4:** The servant links himself with Isaiah's disciples (see 8.16n.). **6:** Obedience to God entailed suffering (cf. 6.9–10, which calls for the suffering of the people as part of the divine plan). The persecution of the servant recalls that of Jeremiah (Jer 11.9; 20.1–2; 26.7–24). **10–11:** The Lord maintains that those who refuse to fear the Lord and honor the servant kindle the fire of their own suffering (cf. 1.29–31). **51.1–52.12:** Proof for the restoration for Zion. **51.1–8:** The Lord addresses the righteous who seek the Lord. The argument proceeds from the basis of the Lord's promises to make Abraham and Sarah into a great nation by which all nations will be blessed (Gen 12.2–3; cf. Gen 15.1–6,17–21; 17.15–22; 22.15–18). To fulfill the ancestral promise, the Lord will comfort and restore Zion. Israel will then emerge as a basis for sending the Lord's teaching (Heb "torah") and *justice* to the entire world (cf. 2.2–4). Even if the world changes, the

4 Listen to me, my people,
and give heed to me, my nation;
for a teaching will go out from me,
and my justice for a light to the peoples.
5 I will bring near my deliverance swiftly,
my salvation has gone out
and my arms will rule the peoples;
the coastlands wait for me,
and for my arm they hope.
6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment,
and those who live on it will die like gnats;[a]
but my salvation will be forever,
and my deliverance will never be ended.

7 Listen to me, you who know righteousness,
you people who have my teaching in your hearts;
do not fear the reproach of others,
and do not be dismayed when they revile you.
8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment,
and the worm will eat them like wool;
but my deliverance will be forever,
and my salvation to all generations.

9 Awake, awake, put on strength,
O arm of the LORD!
Awake, as in days of old,
the generations of long ago!
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,
who pierced the dragon?
10 Was it not you who dried up the sea,
the waters of the great deep;
who made the depths of the sea a way
for the redeemed to cross over?
11 So the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

12 I, I am he who comforts you;
why then are you afraid of a mere mortal who must die,
a human being who fades like grass?
13 You have forgotten the LORD, your Maker,
who stretched out the heavens
and laid the foundations of the earth.
You fear continually all day long
because of the fury of the oppressor,
who is bent on destruction.
But where is the fury of the oppressor?
14 The oppressed shall speedily be released;
they shall not die and go down to the Pit,
nor shall they lack bread.
15 For I am the LORD your God,
who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—
the LORD of hosts is his name.
16 I have put my words in your mouth,
and hidden you in the shadow of my hand,
stretching out[b] the heavens
and laying the foundations of the earth,
and saying to Zion, "You are my people."

17 Rouse yourself, rouse yourself!
Stand up, O Jerusalem,
you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD
the cup of his wrath,
who have drunk to the dregs

[a] Or *in like manner*
[b] Syr: Heb *planting*

promises of the LORD never change. **9–11:** The prophet calls upon the arm of the LORD to act (cf. Ps 44.23) and recounts past actions. *Rahab* is a mythological sea monster who is defeated by God before creation (Ps 89.10; Job 26.12; cf. Ps 74.12–17; Isa 27.1). Again, the Exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the sea illustrate the power of the LORD to redeem Israel (Ex 14–15; cf. Isa 11.15–16; 27.12–13). **12–16:** Israel should not fear human opponents when the LORD, creator of heaven and earth, acts on their behalf. **14:** *The Pit,* Sheol, the underworld (cf. 14.9–11). **17–23:** The prophet addresses Jerusalem, here portrayed as a woman who has suffered at the hands of the LORD. The metaphorical cup of divine wrath appears elsewhere (e.g., Jer 25.15–29; Hab 2.15–16). As a result of the devastation, Jerusalem's children lie dead leaving no one to help her. The LORD announces the end of Jerusalem's

the bowl of staggering.
18 There is no one to guide her
among all the children she has borne;
there is no one to take her by the hand
among all the children she has brought up.
19 These two things have befallen you
—who will grieve with you?—
devastation and destruction, famine and sword—
who will comfort you?[a]
20 Your children have fainted,
they lie at the head of every street
like an antelope in a net;
they are full of the wrath of the LORD,
the rebuke of your God.

21 Therefore hear this, you who are wounded,[b]
who are drunk, but not with wine:
22 Thus says your Sovereign, the LORD,
your God who pleads the cause of his people:
See, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering;
you shall drink no more
from the bowl of my wrath.
23 And I will put it into the hand of your tormentors,
who have said to you,
"Bow down, that we may walk on you";
and you have made your back like the ground
and like the street for them to walk on.

52 Awake, awake,
put on your strength, O Zion!
Put on your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city;
for the uncircumcised and the unclean
shall enter you no more.
2 Shake yourself from the dust, rise up,
O captive[c] Jerusalem;
loose the bonds from your neck,
O captive daughter Zion!

3 For thus says the LORD: You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money. 4 For thus says the Lord GOD: Long ago, my people went down into Egypt to reside there as aliens; the Assyrian, too, has oppressed them without cause. 5 Now therefore what am I doing here, says the LORD, seeing that my people are taken away without cause? Their rulers howl, says the LORD, and continually, all day long, my name is despised. 6 Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I.

7 How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."
8 Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
the return of the LORD to Zion.
9 Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the LORD has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
10 The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

[a] Q Ms Gk Syr Vg: MT *how may I comfort you?*
[b] Or *humbled*
[c] Cn: Heb *rise up, sit*

suffering and declares that the cup of divine wrath will now be drunk by her oppressors. **52.1–6:** The imagery of restoration reverses many of the miseries described in Lamentations (cf. Lam 1.9–10,14,17; 2.10). The prophet addresses Jerusalem as a woman once again (see 1.8n.; 37.22), and calls upon her to awake and to put on her beautiful clothing because her suffering is over. Foreign enemies will no longer enter or rape her and subject her to captivity. **3–6:** The LORD explains how Israel was oppressed both by Egypt (Ex 1–15) during the Exodus and Assyria in more recent times. The LORD will therefore act to redeem the people and to put an end to the derision of the divine name among Israel's oppressors. When the LORD acts, the people will know their God. **7–10:** As in 40.9, the prophet once again describes the messenger who brings good news that the LORD is returning to Zion (cf. Isa 40.9; Nah 1.15 [Heb 2.1]). **11–12:** In response to the LORD's return to Zion, the exiles are called upon to leave Babylon and to form a holy procession bearing the Temple vessels (see Ezra 1.7–11) as they return to their

11 Depart, depart, go out from there!
Touch no unclean thing;
go out from the midst of it, purify
yourselves,
you who carry the vessels of the LORD.
12 For you shall not go out in haste,
and you shall not go in flight;
for the LORD will go before you,
and the God of Israel will be your rear
guard.

13 See, my servant shall prosper;
he shall be exalted and lifted up,
and shall be very high.
14 Just as there were many who were
astonished at him[a]
—so marred was his appearance,
beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of mortals—
15 so he shall startle[b] many nations;
kings shall shut their mouths because
of him;
for that which had not been told them
they shall see,
and that which they had not heard they
shall contemplate.

53 Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD
been revealed?
2 For he grew up before him like a young
plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should
look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we
should desire him.
3 He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering[c] and acquainted with
infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their
faces[d]
he was despised, and we held him of no
account.

4 Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
5 But he was wounded for our
transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made
us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers
is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
8 By a perversion of justice he was taken
away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the
living,
stricken for the transgression of my
people.

[a] Syr Tg: Heb *you*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Or *a man of sorrows*
[d] Or *as one who hides his face from us*

homeland. *Not . . . in haste*, the exodus from Babylon will be different from the first Exodus; cf. Ex 12.11; 13.21–22.

52.13–53.12: Announcement of the exaltation of the servant of the LORD. The fourth and final servant song (see 42.1n.) portrays the suffering of the servant and his ultimate exaltation. Talmudic tradition identifies the servant with Moses, who suffered throughout the wilderness journey (*b. Sotah* 14a), and early Christian tradition identifies the servant with Jesus (Acts 8.32–35). Second Isaiah identifies the servant with Israel (49.3), although the servant's mission is to restore Israel and Jacob to the LORD (49.5). Other figures identified with the servant include the prophet Jeremiah, who was persecuted throughout his life; King Josiah, who was killed by Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo (2 Kings 23.29–30); and King Jehoiachin, who was exiled to Babylon (2 Kings 24.10–16). **52.13–15:** The disfigurement and suffering of the servant, but also his exaltation elicit astonishment from foreign nations and rulers (cf. 49.7). **53.1–12:** The intense suffering of the servant is defined vicariously; just as the LORD calls for Israel to be blind and deaf so that they will suffer punishment (6.9–10), so the servant now exemplifies that role. His suffering serves as a means to atone for the sins of the nation, much like a lamb

9 They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb[a] with the rich,[b]
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush
him with pain.[c]
When you make his life an offering for
sin,[d]
he shall see his offspring, and shall
prolong his days;
through him the will of the LORD shall
prosper.
11 Out of his anguish he shall see light;[e]
he shall find satisfaction through his
knowledge.
The righteous one,[f] my servant, shall
make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.
12 Therefore I will allot him a portion with
the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the
strong;
because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the
transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the
transgressors.

54 Sing, O barren one who did not bear;
burst into song and shout,
you who have not been in labor!
For the children of the desolate woman
will be more
than the children of her that is married,
says the LORD.
2 Enlarge the site of your tent,
and let the curtains of your habitations
be stretched out;
do not hold back; lengthen your cords
and strengthen your stakes.
3 For you will spread out to the right and to
the left,
and your descendants will possess the
nations
and will settle the desolate towns.

4 Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed;
do not be discouraged, for you will not
suffer disgrace;
for you will forget the shame of your
youth,
and the disgrace of your widowhood
you will remember no more.
5 For your Maker is your husband,
the LORD of hosts is his name;
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.
6 For the LORD has called you
like a wife forsaken and grieved in
spirit,
like the wife of a man's youth when she is
cast off,
says your God.
7 For a brief moment I abandoned you,
but with great compassion I will gather
you.
8 In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have
compassion on you,
says the LORD, your Redeemer.

9 This is like the days of Noah to me:
Just as I swore that the waters of Noah

[a] Q Ms: MT *and in his death*
[b] Cn: Heb *with a rich person*
[c] Or *by disease*; meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[e] Q Mss: MT lacks *light*
[f] Or *and he shall find satisfaction. Through his knowledge, the righteous one*

sacrificed at the Temple altar. **10:** The servant's *offspring* refer to those who follow his example and teaching after his death rather than indicating that he survived and was rehabilitated.

54.1–17: Restoration of the covenant between the LORD and Zion. Like other major sections of Second Isaiah, 49.1–54.17 closes with a hymn (cf. 42.13; 44.23; 48.20–22). **1–3:** Zion is addressed once again as a woman (cf. 49.14; 50.1; 51.17–52.2). Much like Sarah (Gen 16.1), she is described as a barren woman. In keeping with the promises to Abraham and Sarah, Zion will soon have so many children that her home will not be able to contain them (Gen 12.2–3; cf. Gen 15.1–6,17–21; 17.15–22; 22.15–18). **4–10:** The reassurance formula (cf. 7.4; 37.6) informs Zion that her time as an abandoned woman is at an end. The passage metaphorically identifies the LORD as Zion's husband in keeping with Israelite tradition that posited a marriage relationship between the LORD and

would never again go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you
and will not rebuke you.
10 For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

11 O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted,
I am about to set your stones in antimony,
and lay your foundations with sapphires.[a]
12 I will make your pinnacles of rubies,
your gates of jewels,
and all your wall of precious stones.
13 All your children shall be taught by the LORD,
and great shall be the prosperity of your children.
14 In righteousness you shall be established;
you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear;
and from terror, for it shall not come near you.
15 If anyone stirs up strife,
it is not from me;
whoever stirs up strife with you
shall fall because of you.
16 See it is I who have created the smith
who blows the fire of coals,
and produces a weapon fit for its purpose;
I have also created the ravager to destroy.
17 No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper,
and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.
This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD
and their vindication from me, says the LORD.

55 Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
3 Incline your ear, and come to me;

[a] Or *lapis lazuli*

Israel (cf. Jer 2; Ezek 16; Hos 1–3; Zeph 3.14–20). **8:** *Hid my face*, cf. 8.16–17. **9:** *Days of Noah,* an allusion to the eternal covenant made with Noah never again to destroy the earth by flood (Gen 9.8–17), invoked to illustrate the permanence and validity of this new divine promise. **10:** The *covenant of peace* signifies God's lasting commitment to be present with *steadfast love* (Heb "ḥesed"); cf. 55.3; Num 25.10–13; Ezek 34.25. **11–17:** The LORD addresses Jerusalem as a bride about to be decked out in jewels before her wedding. **11–13a:** The new Jerusalem is adorned with precious stones and gems by builders supernaturally instructed; cf. Ezek 28.13–19. Christian apocalyptic literature draws on this imagery to describe the new Jerusalem (Rev 21.18–21). **17b:** The future Jerusalem will be given to the servants of the LORD. The mention of this faithful segment of the people serves as a point of transition to the last section of the book (cf. 56.6; 63.17; 65.8–9,13–16; 66.14). Scholars are divided as to whether the second part of the book (Second Isaiah) ends with ch 54 or ch 55.

55.1–66.24: Prophetic exhortation to adhere to the LORD's covenant. The final block of the book of Isaiah calls upon the audience of the book to adhere to the LORD as the period of restoration is at hand. Although most of this material is attributed to Third Isaiah, generally recognized as a collective designation for anonymous prophets of the early Persian period, the block is introduced by the final chapter of Second Isaiah in ch 55.

55.1–13: Exhortation to adhere to the LORD. 1–5: The prophet employs the metaphors of thirst and hunger to invite the audience of the book to partake of what the LORD has to offer. The invitation is formulated in the language of wisdom literature, which often employs the metaphor of food to portray the pursuit of wisdom (cf. Prov 9.1–6). **3–5:** The prophet reiterates the Davidic covenant tradition with its promise of eternal kingship for

listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting
covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
4 See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the
peoples.
5 See, you shall call nations that you do not
know,
and nations that do not know you shall
run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy
One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

6 Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
7 let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may
have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly
pardon.
8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the
LORD.
9 For as the heavens are higher than the
earth,
so are my ways higher than your
ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
10 For as the rain and the snow come down
from heaven,
and do not return there until they have
watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to
the eater,
11 so shall my word be that goes out from
my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I
purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I
sent it.

12 For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap
their hands.
13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the
cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the
myrtle;
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be
cut off.

56 Thus says the LORD:
Maintain justice, and do what
is right,

the house of David (2 Sam 7). Because no Davidic king would ascend the throne under Persian rule, however, the prophet applies the Davidic covenant to the people of Israel at large. Just as David established an empire over surrounding nations (2 Sam 8), Israel will now serve as a means to call nations to recognize the LORD (cf. 2.2–4). **6–13:** The exhortation to follow the LORD addresses the audience directly (cf. 1.17; Am 5.6,14). The distinction between the righteous and the wicked in this passage is a rhetorical device to persuade the audience to choose to be included among the righteous rather than to suffer punishment with the wicked. **8–9:** The distinction between the ways and thoughts of the LORD and those of the audience builds the case that the LORD planned for punishment to culminate in restoration. **10–11:** The passage reiterates the permanence of the LORD's word (cf. 40.8), and that it will accomplish the divine purpose (cf. 14.27). **12–13:** In contrast to the thorns and thistles produced by Israel in the vineyard song (5.1–7), Israel will grow into *cypress* and *myrtle* as an everlasting sign of its relationship with the LORD (cf. 11.1–16). The imagery also recapitulates the theme of glorious return in 40.3–5 and 48.20–22, the beginning and end of chs 40–48. It therefore indicates a point of closure at a stage in the formation of the book. **13:** *Memorial,* lit. "name."

56.1–66.24: Portrayal of the restored covenant community. The collection of writings in chs 56–66 is generally ascribed to Third Isaiah, a name for various anonymous prophets from the time of the early Persian period restoration in the late sixth through the fifth centuries BCE.

56.1–59.21: Instruction concerning proper observance of the covenant. The various subunits of this section of Isaiah offer instruction concerning the observance of the covenant with the LORD as the restoration comes to fruition. **56.1–8:** The passage begins with a general statement of principles concerning the LORD's

for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

2 Happy is the mortal who does this,
the one who holds it fast,
who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it,
and refrains from doing any evil.

3 Do not let the foreigner joined to the
LORD say,
"The LORD will surely separate me from
his people";
and do not let the eunuch say,
"I am just a dry tree."
4 For thus says the LORD:
To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,
5 I will give, in my house and within my walls,
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.

6 And the foreigners who join themselves
to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of
the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not
profane it,
and hold fast my covenant—
7 these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of
prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of
prayer
for all peoples.
8 Thus says the Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.[a]

9 All you wild animals,
all you wild animals in the forest, come
to devour!
10 Israel's[b] sentinels are blind,
they are all without knowledge;
they are all silent dogs
that cannot bark;
dreaming, lying down,
loving to slumber.
11 The dogs have a mighty appetite;
they never have enough.
The shepherds also have no
understanding;
they have all turned to their own way,
to their own gain, one and all.
12 "Come," they say, "let us[c] get wine;
let us fill ourselves with strong drink.
And tomorrow will be like today,
great beyond measure."

[a] Heb *besides his gathered ones*
[b] Heb *His*
[c] Q Ms Syr Vg Tg: MT *me*

expectations. Justice and righteousness are the basis of biblical law and subsequent Jewish tradition. **2:** *The sabbath* is the foundational observance of Jewish tradition, having been founded as the LORD's day of rest from the time of creation (Gen 2.1–3; cf. Ex 20.8–11; 31.12–17; 20.8–11; Lev 19.30; 23.3; Deut 5.12–15). **3–8:** Foreigners joined to the LORD refers to those who have converted to Judaism, much as Jethro (Ex 18) and Ruth (Ruth 1) were viewed. Although Ezra and Nehemiah expelled foreign women from Jerusalem, those expelled maintained their native languages and religious traditions without having converted (Neh 13.23–30; Ezra 9–10; cf. Deut 7.1–6). Deut 21.10–14 defines the procedure for marriage to a foreign woman captured in war, and biblical laws constantly stress that foreigners may join Israel if they observe the LORD's instructions (cf. Ex 12.48–49; Lev 24.22; Num 9.14; 15.27–31). *Eunuch,* castrated, e.g., for service in a foreign court or harem. Deut 23.1–8 bans eunuchs, Ammonites and Moabites, and those born of an illicit marriage from membership in the community, but the present passage makes provision for eunuchs and foreigners if they observe the sabbath as the foundation of the covenant with the LORD.

56.9–57.21: The LORD's willingness to forgive those who repent and return to the LORD. 56.9–12: The prophet metaphorically compares Israel's sentinels or leaders to wild animals and silent dogs, who lack understanding and serve only their own immediate interests (cf. 1.2–3; cf. Jer 12.8–9; Ezek 39.17). Alternatively, they are drunks (see 5.11–12; 28.1,7–13). Such characterization is designed to motivate the audience to accept the proph-

57 The righteous perish,
and no one takes it to heart;
the devout are taken away,
while no one understands.
For the righteous are taken away from calamity,
[2] and they enter into peace;
those who walk uprightly
will rest on their couches.
[3] But as for you, come here,
you children of a sorceress,
you offspring of an adulterer and a whore.[a]
[4] Whom are you mocking?
Against whom do you open your mouth wide
and stick out your tongue?
Are you not children of transgression,
the offspring of deceit—
[5] you that burn with lust among the oaks,
under every green tree;
you that slaughter your children in the valleys,
under the clefts of the rocks?
[6] Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion;
they, they, are your lot;
to them you have poured out a drink offering,
you have brought a grain offering.
Shall I be appeased for these things?
[7] Upon a high and lofty mountain
you have set your bed,
and there you went up to offer sacrifice.
[8] Behind the door and the doorpost
you have set up your symbol;
for, in deserting me,[b] you have uncovered your bed,
you have gone up to it,
you have made it wide;
and you have made a bargain for yourself with them,
you have loved their bed,
you have gazed on their nakedness.[c]
[9] You journeyed to Molech[d] with oil,
and multiplied your perfumes;
you sent your envoys far away,
and sent down even to Sheol.
[10] You grew weary from your many wanderings,
but you did not say, "It is useless."
You found your desire rekindled,
and so you did not weaken.

[11] Whom did you dread and fear
so that you lied,
and did not remember me
or give me a thought?
Have I not kept silent and closed my eyes,[e]
and so you do not fear me?
[12] I will concede your righteousness and your works,
but they will not help you.
[13] When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you!
The wind will carry them off,
a breath will take them away.
But whoever takes refuge in me shall possess the land
and inherit my holy mountain.

[14] It shall be said,
"Build up, build up, prepare the way,

[a] Heb *an adulterer and she plays the whore*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Or *their phallus*; Heb *the hand*
[d] Or *the king*
[e] Gk Vg: Heb *silent even for a long time*

et's teachings concerning observance of the LORD's covenant. **57.1–13:** The prophet chastises Israel for idolatrous and immoral behavior. **1–2:** A complaint that the probably violent death of the righteous goes unnoticed and unlamented; cf. Ps 12.1; Mic 7.2. Placed here as a contrast with the polemic that follows. The righteous die in peace, but their fate is ignored. **3–10:** The prophet portrays non-Israelite fertility worship, often associated with sexual rites in the Bible (e.g., Num 25; Lev 18.24–39). The language in these verses has much sexual innuendo. **6:** Streams would be an appropriate place to pour out libations to the gods. **7:** High mountains or hills are often sanctuary sites because they symbolize the majesty of the gods and more practically because grain is more readily threshed in the winds that blow across hilltops. **9:** *Molech* is a Canaanite god to whom children were apparently sacrificed (Lev 18.21; 20.2–5; 2 Kings 3.27; 23.10; Jer 7.31; 32.35); the spelling of his name is uncertain because the vowels employed in it are taken from Heb "boshet" ("shame"). *Sheol* is the underworld. **11–12:** The LORD's rhetorical questions assert that the people feared their idols. The LORD claims to have remained silent

remove every obstruction from my
people's way."
15 For thus says the high and lofty one
who inhabits eternity, whose name is
Holy:
I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with those who are contrite
and humble in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the humble,
and to revive the heart of the contrite.
16 For I will not continually accuse,
nor will I always be angry;
for then the spirits would grow faint
before me,
even the souls that I have made.
17 Because of their wicked covetousness I
was angry;
I struck them, I hid and was angry;
but they kept turning back to their own
ways.
18 I have seen their ways, but I will heal them;
I will lead them and repay them with
comfort,
creating for their mourners the fruit of
the lips.[a]
19 Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says
the LORD;
and I will heal them.
20 But the wicked are like the tossing sea
that cannot keep still;
its waters toss up mire and mud.
21 There is no peace, says my God, for the
wicked.

58 Shout out, do not hold back!
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
2 Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced
righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of
their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments,
they delight to draw near to God.
3 "Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not
notice?"
Look, you serve your own interest on your
fast day,
and oppress all your workers.
4 Look, you fast only to quarrel and to
fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on
high.
5 Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?

6 Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
7 Is it not to share your bread with the
hungry,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

through the period of Israel's oppression and exile, but now the LORD has returned. **14–21:** The prophet now turns to themes of restoration and a concluding diatribe. **14–15:** The motif of the highway that leads the exiles home, as in the Exodus tradition (cf. 11.15–16; 27.12–13; 35.1–10; 40.3–5) is now applied metaphorically. The LORD emphasizes that the time of judgment is now past and that the time of healing and peace has begun. **18:** *The fruit of the lips,* praise and joyful prayer in the place of mourning, as an accompaniment or substitute for sacrifice (cf. Hos 14.2). **21:** A concluding diatribe condemns the wicked who will have no peace (cf. 48.22).

58.1–14: A call to repentance and promise of restoration. The LORD calls upon the people to repent and defines the criteria by which they may observe the covenant. **1–2:** The celebratory tone evokes festival observance in the Temple, but the LORD's first demand is for righteous moral action to accompany holy ritual action. **3–5:** The questions of the people presuppose a time of distress that would have continued throughout the Babylonian exile as the people waited for a divine response that was long in coming. Fasting was a means to humble oneself before the LORD in such a time of distress (cf. Zech 7.1–14; 8.18–19; Joel 1.14; 2.15). **6–14:** A definition of genuine fasting. The LORD then spells out the means by which one should practice righteousness before the LORD. Concern for the poor is a hallmark of biblical tradition, including both biblical law and the prophets (Ex

and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator[a] shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say,
Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
10 if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
11 The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.
12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

13 If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;
if you call the sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;[b]
14 then you shall take delight in the LORD,
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

59 See, the LORD's hand is not too short to save,
nor his ear too dull to hear.
2 Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.
3 For your hands are defiled with blood,
and your fingers with iniquity;
your lips have spoken lies,
your tongue mutters wickedness.
4 No one brings suit justly,
no one goes to law honestly;
they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies,
conceiving mischief and begetting iniquity.
5 They hatch adders' eggs,
and weave the spider's web;
whoever eats their eggs dies,
and the crushed egg hatches out a viper.
6 Their webs cannot serve as clothing;
they cannot cover themselves with what they make.
Their works are works of iniquity,
and deeds of violence are in their hands.
7 Their feet run to evil,
and they rush to shed innocent blood;
their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity,
desolation and destruction are in their highways.

[a] Or *vindication*
[b] Heb *or speaking words*

22.21–27; 23.10–11; Lev 19.9–10; Deut 14.28–29; Isa 1.10–17; Am 2.6–8). **9:** When the people are righteous, the LORD answers the prayers of the nation (cf. 1.10–17, esp. v. 15) and rebuilds its ruins. **12:** *Ruins . . . foundations,* a reinterpretation of earlier promises of restoration (44.26–28). **13–14:** The LORD's instruction culminates in observance of the *sabbath* (cf. 56.1–8). For the final formula see 40.5.

59.1–21: The lament of the nation will be answered when the LORD comes to restore those who repent. **1–8:** The prophet argues that the LORD has the power and the will to restore the nation, but the people have not yet begun to practice righteousness. **2:** *Hidden his face*, cf. 8.16–17. **3:** *Hands . . . defiled with blood*, cf. 1.18–20. **5:**

8 The way of peace they do not know,
and there is no justice in their paths.
Their roads they have made crooked;
no one who walks in them knows peace.

9 Therefore justice is far from us,
and righteousness does not reach us;
we wait for light, and lo! there is darkness;
and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.
10 We grope like the blind along a wall,
groping like those who have no eyes;
we stumble at noon as in the twilight,
among the vigorous[a] as though we were dead.
11 We all growl like bears;
like doves we moan mournfully.
We wait for justice, but there is none;
for salvation, but it is far from us.
12 For our transgressions before you are many,
and our sins testify against us.
Our transgressions indeed are with us,
and we know our iniquities:
13 transgressing, and denying the LORD,
and turning away from following our God,
talking oppression and revolt,
conceiving lying words and uttering them from the heart.
14 Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands at a distance;
for truth stumbles in the public square,
and uprightness cannot enter.
15 Truth is lacking,
and whoever turns from evil is despoiled.

The LORD saw it, and it displeased him
that there was no justice.
16 He saw that there was no one,
and was appalled that there was no one to intervene;
so his own arm brought him victory,
and his righteousness upheld him.
17 He put on righteousness like a breastplate,
and a helmet of salvation on his head;
he put on garments of vengeance for clothing,
and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle.
18 According to their deeds, so will he repay;
wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies;
to the coastlands he will render requital.
19 So those in the west shall fear the name of the LORD,
and those in the east, his glory;
for he will come like a pent-up stream
that the wind of the LORD drives on.

20 And he will come to Zion as Redeemer,
to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the LORD.
21 And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD: my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, says the LORD, from now on and forever.

60 Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

Adders and *spiders* are poisonous and represent sins that destroy the wicked (cf. Pss 58.3–4; 140.1–3). **9–15a:** A communal confession of sin, though only v. 12 is addressed to God (cf. Pss 51.5; 90.8). The passage appears to be a meditation on 8.16–23, which portrays divine absence and the people groping in darkness. **15b–21:** The LORD prepares to come in judgment on seeing that there is no justice. **17:** The LORD's justice is described metaphorically as armor that a warrior puts on for battle. **18–20:** When the wicked are punished, Zion will be redeemed (cf. 1.27–28). **21:** A promise of prophetic guidance (cf. 53.10; 61.1–4).

60.1–62.12: Proclamation of restoration for the nation. These chapters have strong similarities of content and style with chs 40–55. **60.1–9:** Zion's restoration, the return of the glory of the LORD, and the approach of the nations bearing gifts. As before, Zion is imaged as a woman (cf. 49.4; 52.1–2,7–12; 54.1–17). **1:** *Arise, shine,* see 51.17; 52.1–2; and cf. 2.2–4; 8.23. **1b–2:** *The glory of the LORD* is described as it was in the wilderness tabernacle (Ex

[2] For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
[3] Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

[4] Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.
[5] Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,[a]
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
[6] A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.
[7] All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you,
the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;
they shall be acceptable on my altar,
and I will glorify my glorious house.

[8] Who are these that fly like a cloud,
and like doves to their windows?
[9] For the coastlands shall wait for me,
the ships of Tarshish first,
to bring your children from far away,
their silver and gold with them,
for the name of the LORD your God,
and for the Holy One of Israel,
because he has glorified you.
[10] Foreigners shall build up your walls,
and their kings shall minister to you;
for in my wrath I struck you down,
but in my favor I have had mercy on you.
[11] Your gates shall always be open;
day and night they shall not be shut,
so that nations shall bring you their wealth,
with their kings led in procession.
[12] For the nation and kingdom
that will not serve you shall perish;
those nations shall be utterly laid waste.
[13] The glory of Lebanon shall come to you,
the cypress, the plane, and the pine,
to beautify the place of my sanctuary;
and I will glorify where my feet rest.
[14] The descendants of those who oppressed you
shall come bending low to you,
and all who despised you
shall bow down at your feet;
they shall call you the City of the LORD,
the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.
[15] Whereas you have been forsaken and hated,
with no one passing through,
I will make you majestic forever,
a joy from age to age.
[16] You shall suck the milk of nations,
you shall suck the breasts of kings;
and you shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior
and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

[17] Instead of bronze I will bring gold,
instead of iron I will bring silver;

[a] Heb *be enlarged*

40.34–38), the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kings 8.1–13), and the restored Zion (4.2–5). **3:** The approach of the nations echoes the procession to Zion in 2.2–4. **4:** Dispersed Judeans will return, assisted by Gentiles (also 49.12; 51.9–11; 60.8–9; 66.20). **5–9:** Foreigners will bring gifts to honor the LORD (cf. 45.14,22–23; 60.11,16; Zeph 3.9–10; Hag 2.1–9). **6–7:** The Arabian kingdoms *Midian* (Ex 2.15), *Ephah* (Gen 25.4), *Sheba* (Gen 10.17; 1 Kings 10.1–13), *Kedar* (Isa 21.13–17; Jer 49.28–29), and *Nebaioth* (Gen 25.13). **9:** *Coastlands,* the islands of the Aegean. *Tarshish*, either in southern Turkey (later Tarsus) or in southern Spain. **10–22:** Whereas the nations in the past were brought by the LORD for Zion's punishment, now they will come to submit to her and to sustain her. **13:** *Lebanon* was known for its tall trees that were prized throughout the ancient Near East for splendid building projects, including the Jerusalem Temple (2.13; 1 Kings 5.8–10). The place where the LORD's feet rest is the Holy of Holies of the Temple where the ark of the covenant served as the footstool for the LORD's throne (cf. 66.1). **16:** *The breasts of kings,* a

instead of wood, bronze,
instead of stones, iron.
I will appoint Peace as your overseer
and Righteousness as your taskmaster.
18 Violence shall no more be heard in your land,
devastation or destruction within your borders;
you shall call your walls Salvation,
and your gates Praise.
19 The sun shall no longer be your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night;[a]
but the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.
20 Your sun shall no more go down,
or your moon withdraw itself;
for the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your days of mourning shall be ended.
21 Your people shall all be righteous;
they shall possess the land forever.
They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands,
so that I might be glorified.
22 The least of them shall become a clan,
and the smallest one a mighty nation;
I am the LORD;
in its time I will accomplish it quickly.

61 The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
4 They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

5 Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines;
6 but you shall be called priests of the LORD,
you shall be named ministers of our God;
you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations,
and in their riches you shall glory.
7 Because their[b] shame was double,
and dishonor was proclaimed as their lot,
therefore they shall possess a double portion;
everlasting joy shall be theirs.

8 For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;[c]
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

[a] Q Ms Gk Old Latin Tg: MT lacks *by night*
[b] Heb *your*
[c] Or *robbery with a burnt offering*

metaphor for the nations' sustenance of Zion. **21:** *The shoot that I planted*, cf. 6.12–13; 11.1–16. **22:** The concluding statements recall the promise of both land and a numerous posterity to the ancestors (Gen 12.1–3; 15.5–6,17–21; 17.1–8; 28.10–15; 35.9–15). **61.1–7:** This passage presupposes the persona of the servant from Second Isaiah (cf. 42.1–4; 49.1–6; 50.4–11; 52.13–53.12). **1–2:** The imagery evokes the priestly proclamation of a year of jubilee or release from debt (Lev 25.8–17). The year of jubilee was observed every fiftieth year as a means to forgive debt and to return land and property to its ancestral owners. It is applied here to the return of Zion to its exiled people. **3b:** *Oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD*, see 6.12–13; 11.1–9; cf. 5.1–7; 27.2–6. **6:** The people of Israel will serve as priests to the nations (cf. Ex 19.6). Their double portion recalls Zion's double punishment (40.2). **8–9:**

[9] Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.
[10] I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
[11] For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.
[2] The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.
[3] You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
[4] You shall no more be termed Forsaken,[a]
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;[b]
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,[c]
and your land Married;[d]
for the LORD delights in you,
and your land shall be married.
[5] For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your builder[e] marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.
[6] Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,
I have posted sentinels;
all day and all night
they shall never be silent.
You who remind the LORD,
take no rest,
[7] and give him no rest
until he establishes Jerusalem
and makes it renowned throughout the earth.
[8] The LORD has sworn by his right hand
and by his mighty arm:
I will not again give your grain
to be food for your enemies,
and foreigners shall not drink the wine
for which you have labored;
[9] but those who garner it shall eat it
and praise the LORD,
and those who gather it shall drink it
in my holy courts.

[10] Go through, go through the gates,
prepare the way for the people;
build up, build up the highway,
clear it of stones,

[a] Heb *Azubah*
[b] Heb *Shemamah*
[c] Heb *Hephzibah*
[d] Heb *Beulah*
[e] Cn: Heb *your sons*

An everlasting covenant with the restored people of Zion (cf. 54.9–10). **61.10–62.12:** Joy at the LORD's restoration of Zion (61.10–11). Just as Zion is dressed as a bride (52.12; 54.11–14) and the LORD is dressed in the armor of righteousness to redeem Zion (59.16–21), so the prophet now dresses for the wedding that will celebrate the reunion of the LORD and Zion. The imagery of growing shoots symbolizes the restoration (cf. 6.12–13; 11.1–9). **62.1–12:** The bridal imagery confirms Zion's restored status. Whereas the nations were appalled at the sight of the servant (52.13–53.12), now they will witness the emergence of a beautiful Zion. **3:** The *crown of beauty* also symbolizes the restored walls of the city (4.2; 28.5–6). **4:** *No more be termed Forsaken . . . Desolate*, cf. 54.1,6. **5:** The builder is now the LORD in contrast to 44.28 where it was Cyrus acting on behalf of the LORD. **6–9:** The task of the sentinels or watchers is to ensure that the LORD keeps the divine promise to restore Zion. The image is based in part on the armed guards of a city, but it also presupposes the role of the priestly gatekeepers who ensured the sanctity of the Temple and its holy courts (1 Chr 9.17–27; 26.1–19; cf. 2 Kings 11.4–8). **10–12:** Once again

lift up an ensign over the peoples.
[11] The Lord has proclaimed
to the end of the earth:
Say to daughter Zion,
"See, your salvation comes;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him."
[12] They shall be called, "The Holy People,
The Redeemed of the Lord";
and you shall be called, "Sought Out,
A City Not Forsaken."

63 "Who is this that comes from Edom,
from Bozrah in garments stained
crimson?
Who is this so splendidly robed,
marching in his great might?"

"It is I, announcing vindication,
mighty to save."

[2] "Why are your robes red,
and your garments like theirs who tread
the wine press?"

[3] "I have trodden the wine press alone,
and from the peoples no one was with
me;
I trod them in my anger
and trampled them in my wrath;
their juice spattered on my garments,
and stained all my robes.
[4] For the day of vengeance was in my heart,
and the year for my redeeming work
had come.
[5] I looked, but there was no helper;
I stared, but there was no one to sustain
me;
so my own arm brought me victory,
and my wrath sustained me.
[6] I trampled down peoples in my anger,
I crushed them in my wrath,
and I poured out their lifeblood on the
earth."

[7] I will recount the gracious deeds of the
Lord,
the praiseworthy acts of the Lord,
because of all that the Lord has done
for us,
and the great favor to the house of
Israel
that he has shown them according to his
mercy,
according to the abundance of his
steadfast love.
[8] For he said, "Surely they are my people,
children who will not deal falsely";
and he became their savior
[9] in all their distress.
It was no messenger[a] or angel
but his presence that saved them;[b]
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them all
the days of old.

[a] Gk: Heb *anguish*
[b] Or *savior.* [9] *In all their distress he was distressed; the angel of his presence saved them;*

the prophet calls for the people to go out (48.20–22), to prepare the *highway* (11.15; 27.12–13; 35.1–10; 40.3–5), and to raise the *ensign* (Heb "nes"; cf. 11.10; 49.22) to proclaim Zion's restoration.

63.1–66.24: The prophet's instruction concerning the process of Zion's restoration. The final unit of Third Isaiah and the book as a whole focuses on the means by which the Lord will judge the wicked before the ideal restoration can be achieved. Such a view attempts to explain why the ideals of the book have not yet been achieved (e.g., 2.2–4; 9.1–7; 11.1–16) by charging that some among the people are wicked rather than by raising questions about the Lord's ability to bring about the restoration.

63.1–6: Vengeance on Edom. During the sixth through the fourth centuries BCE, Edom disintegrated as it was displaced by Arabian tribal groups that formed the Nabatean kingdom. The Isaian oracle explains the Edomite decline as a deliberate act of the Lord (cf. ch 34). **1:** *Edom* is located southeast of the Dead Sea and the Negeb regions of Judah. *Bozrah,* a key city in Edom. **2–3:** The prophet employs the imagery of treading wine to depict the Lord's blood-splattered clothing. Now that the vineyard has been restored (27.2–6), the harvest metaphorically begins. **4–6:** The Lord's day of vengeance builds upon the Day of the Lord tradition in Isaiah when evil is defeated (2.10–21; 13.6–22; 34.8–17; 61.2).

63.7–64.12: A psalm of communal lamentation. 7–9: Recollection of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. See Ex 23.20, which asserts that an angel would lead Israel through the wilderness. In Ex 13.17–21, however, the Lord,

10 But they rebelled
and grieved his holy spirit;
therefore he became their enemy;
he himself fought against them.
11 Then they[a] remembered the days of old,
of Moses his servant.[b]
Where is the one who brought them up
out of the sea
with the shepherds of his flock?
Where is the one who put within them
his holy spirit,
12 who caused his glorious arm
to march at the right hand of Moses,
who divided the waters before them
to make for himself an everlasting name,
13 who led them through the depths?
Like a horse in the desert,
they did not stumble.
14 Like cattle that go down into the valley,
the spirit of the LORD gave them rest.
Thus you led your people,
to make for yourself a glorious name.
15 Look down from heaven and see,
from your holy and glorious habitation.
Where are your zeal and your might?
The yearning of your heart and your
compassion?
They are withheld from me.
16 For you are our father,
though Abraham does not know us
and Israel does not acknowledge us;
you, O LORD, are our father;
our Redeemer from of old is your name.
17 Why, O LORD, do you make us stray from
your ways
and harden our heart, so that we do not
fear you?
Turn back for the sake of your servants,
for the sake of the tribes that are your
heritage.
18 Your holy people took possession for a
little while;
but now our adversaries have trampled
down your sanctuary.
19 We have long been like those whom you
do not rule,
like those not called by your name.

64 O that you would tear open the
heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at
your presence—
2 [c]as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your
adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at
your presence!
3 When you did awesome deeds that we
did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked
at your presence.
4 From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for
him.
5 You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your
ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we
transgressed.[d]
6 We have all become like one who is
unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a
filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take
us away.
7 There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;

a Heb *he*
b Cn: Heb *his people*
c Ch 64.1 in Heb
d Meaning of Heb uncertain

symbolized as the pillar of smoke and fire, leads the nation. **10:** *But they rebelled*, i.e., in the wilderness; see Ex 32–34; Num 11–25. **15–19:** Direct appeal for the LORD to *look down* and *see.* **17:** The prophet takes up the motif of the hardened heart, applied to Pharaoh in the Exodus tradition (Ex 7.3–5; cf. Isa 6.9–10) to demand that the LORD cease afflicting Israel. **18:** The trampling of the sanctuary would refer to the Babylonian destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. **64.1–3:** A direct appeal to God, characteristic of the lament psalms, to intervene, to appear in power as in the days of old (cf. Ex 19.16–18; Judg 5.4–5; Ps 68.7–8; Hab 3.3–15). **5b–7:** The prophet reiterates the LORD's anger and hidden face from the people (cf. 8.16–17). Having been ravaged, the nation has now become

for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered[a] us into the hand of our iniquity.
8 Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
9 Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.
10 Your holy cities have become a wilderness,
Zion has become a wilderness,
Jerusalem a desolation.
11 Our holy and beautiful house,
where our ancestors praised you,
has been burned by fire,
and all our pleasant places have become ruins.
12 After all this, will you restrain yourself, O LORD?
Will you keep silent, and punish us so severely?

65 I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask,
to be found by those who did not seek me.
I said, "Here I am, here I am,"
to a nation that did not call on my name.
2 I held out my hands all day long
to a rebellious people,
who walk in a way that is not good,
following their own devices;
3 a people who provoke me
to my face continually,
sacrificing in gardens
and offering incense on bricks;
4 who sit inside tombs,
and spend the night in secret places;
who eat swine's flesh,
with broth of abominable things in their vessels;
5 who say, "Keep to yourself,
do not come near me, for I am too holy for you."
These are a smoke in my nostrils,
a fire that burns all day long.
6 See, it is written before me:
I will not keep silent, but I will repay;
I will indeed repay into their laps
7 their[b] iniquities and their[b] ancestors' iniquities together,
says the LORD;
because they offered incense on the mountains
and reviled me on the hills,
I will measure into their laps
full payment for their actions.
8 Thus says the LORD:
As the wine is found in the cluster,
and they say, "Do not destroy it,
for there is a blessing in it,"
so I will do for my servants' sake,
and not destroy them all.
9 I will bring forth descendants[c] from Jacob,
and from Judah inheritors[d] of my mountains;
my chosen shall inherit it,
and my servants shall settle there.
10 Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks,
and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down,
for my people who have sought me.
11 But you who forsake the LORD,
who forget my holy mountain,

[a] Gk Syr Old Latin Tg: Heb *melted*
[b] Gk Syr: Heb *your*
[c] Or *a descendant*
[d] Or *an inheritor*

impure. No one calls upon the LORD because the LORD is the source of Israel's punishment. **8–12:** A final appeal for the LORD to cease the divine silence and the punishment of the nation. Now that the Temple is destroyed, the LORD's relationship with the nation is in jeopardy. **8:** *Clay . . . potter,* cf. 29.16; 45.9.

65.1–66.24: The LORD's answer. The passage attempts to explain the failure of the nation to attain the ideals stated in the book by charging that evil still exists among the people. **1–7:** The people rejected the LORD despite the LORD's readiness to be sought. **3–4:** *Sacrificing in gardens,* non-Israelite fertility rituals practiced in gardens (cf. 1.28–31; 66.17). A list of abominations follows, such as tomb rituals to worship or consult the dead (Deut 18.11–12) and the eating of swine's flesh (66.17; Deut 14.8). **8–25:** The seed of Jacob will be restored in the new creation on Zion, but the wicked will be destroyed. **9:** The descendants of both *Jacob* (northern Israel) and *Judah* will be restored in keeping with the LORD's covenant. **10:** *Sharon,*

who set a table for Fortune
and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny;
12 I will destine you to the sword,
and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter;
because, when I called, you did not answer,
when I spoke, you did not listen,
but you did what was evil in my sight,
and chose what I did not delight in.
13 Therefore thus says the Lord God:
My servants shall eat,
but you shall be hungry;
my servants shall drink,
but you shall be thirsty;
my servants shall rejoice,
but you shall be put to shame;
14 my servants shall sing for gladness of heart,
but you shall cry out for pain of heart,
and shall wail for anguish of spirit.
15 You shall leave your name to my chosen to use as a curse,
and the Lord God will put you to death;
but to his servants he will give a different name.
16 Then whoever invokes a blessing in the land
shall bless by the God of faithfulness,
and whoever takes an oath in the land
shall swear by the God of faithfulness;
because the former troubles are forgotten
and are hidden from my sight.

17 For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
18 But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.
19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
20 No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
21 They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
22 They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
23 They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;[a]
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.
24 Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,

[a] Or *sudden terror*

the coastal plain south of Akko and the Carmel, formerly desolate (33.9), and *Achor*, the barren valley south of Jericho and west of the Dead Sea (Josh 7.24; Hos 2.15), will both become fertile pastureland. The border regions of Israel will be secure. **11–12:** *Fortune* and *Destiny*, Heb "Gad" and "Meni," deities of fate and good luck venerated among Syrians, Arabs, and Nabateans. **13–16:** The contrasting fates of the wicked and the Lord's servants, i.e., those who are righteous. **15–16:** The names of the reprobate will serve as a curse, like the names of the prophets Ahab and Zedekiah executed by the Babylonians (Jer 29.22). The giving of a new name signifies a new status (43.1,7; 44.1–5; 62.2). **17–25:** The new heavens and earth essentially constitutes a new creation. Insofar as the Temple was the holy center of creation, its destruction and rebuilding entailed a new creation. Life in the restored land will be idyllic. **17b:** *Former things*, 43.18. **20:** The prediction of vastly increased life expectancy connotes a return to the original creation (cf. Gen 5). **21–23:** The future Israel will witness the reversal of familiar curses attached to treaties and covenants; see 62.8–9; Deut 28.30. **22:** *Days of a tree*, cf. 6.12–13; Job 14.7–9. **23:** The imagery of successful childbirth reverses that employed to describe

the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the LORD.

66 Thus says the LORD:
Heaven is my throne
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build
for me,
and what is my resting place?
2 All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things are mine,[a]
says the LORD.
But this is the one to whom I will look,
to the humble and contrite in spirit,
who trembles at my word.

3 Whoever slaughters an ox is like one who
kills a human being;
whoever sacrifices a lamb, like one who
breaks a dog's neck;
whoever presents a grain offering, like one
who offers swine's blood;[b]
whoever makes a memorial offering
of frankincense, like one who
blesses an idol.
These have chosen their own ways,
and in their abominations they take
delight;
4 I also will choose to mock[c] them,
and bring upon them what they fear;
because, when I called, no one answered,
when I spoke, they did not listen;
but they did what was evil in my sight,
and chose what did not please me.
5 Hear the word of the LORD,
you who tremble at his word:
Your own people who hate you
and reject you for my name's sake
have said, "Let the LORD be glorified,
so that we may see your joy";
but it is they who shall be put to
shame.

6 Listen, an uproar from the city!
A voice from the temple!
The voice of the LORD,
dealing retribution to his enemies!

7 Before she was in labor
she gave birth;
before her pain came upon her
she delivered a son.
8 Who has heard of such a thing?
Who has seen such things?
Shall a land be born in one day?
Shall a nation be delivered in one
moment?
Yet as soon as Zion was in labor
she delivered her children.
9 Shall I open the womb and not deliver?
says the LORD;
shall I, the one who delivers, shut the
womb?
says your God.

10 Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for
her,
all you who love her;
rejoice with her in joy,
all you who mourn over her—
11 that you may nurse and be satisfied
from her consoling breast;
that you may drink deeply with delight
from her glorious bosom.

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *these things came to be*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Or *to punish*

the Day of the LORD (13.8; cf. 26.17–18). **24–25:** The idyllic portrayal of predators at peace with prey is drawn from 11.6–9.

66.1–24: Restoration for the righteous. **1–4:** The Temple (*house*) only symbolizes the divine reality of the LORD's sovereignty (see 1 Kings 8.27). A saying directed against false understandings and expectations associated with the Jerusalem Temple and its sacrificial worship, rather than against the Temple as such or the project of rebuilding. Without an attitude of humility, sacrifice and offerings are of no use (cf. 1.10–17); see also 65.3–4n. **6:** The judgment to come has its source in the Temple; cf. Joel 3.16; Am 1.2. **7–9:** Here miraculously easy childbirth symbolizes the downfall of the old world and the rise of the new (contrast 13.8; 26.17–18; 37.3). **10–14:** The imagery of the rejoicing Jerusalem extends the metaphor of childbirth to the portrayal of a nursing mother (cf. 54.1–17). *River . . . overflowing stream*, now an image of prosperity; contrast 8.6–8, which portrays the Assyrian

12 For thus says the LORD:
I will extend prosperity to her like a river,
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream;
and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm,
and dandled on her knees.
13 As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.
14 You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice;
your bodies[a] shall flourish like the grass;
and it shall be known that the hand of the LORD is with his servants,
and his indignation is against his enemies.
15 For the LORD will come in fire,
and his chariots like the whirlwind,
to pay back his anger in fury,
and his rebuke in flames of fire.
16 For by fire will the LORD execute judgment,
and by his sword, on all flesh;
and those slain by the LORD shall be many.

17 Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following the one in the center, eating the flesh of pigs, vermin, and rodents, shall come to an end together, says the LORD.

18 For I know[b] their works and their thoughts, and I am[c] coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory, 19 and I will set a sign among them. From them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Put,[d] and Lud—which draw the bow—to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations. 20 They shall bring all your kindred from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and on mules, and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring a grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. 21 And I will also take some of them as priests and as Levites, says the LORD.

22 For as the new heavens and the new earth,
which I will make,
shall remain before me, says the LORD;
so shall your descendants and your name remain.
23 From new moon to new moon,
and from sabbath to sabbath,
all flesh shall come to worship before me,
says the LORD.

24 And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

[a] Heb *bones*
[b] Gk Syr: Heb lacks *know*
[c] Gk Syr Vg Tg: Heb *it is*
[d] Gk: Heb *Pul*

onslaught as a flood that will inundate the land. **15–24:** Judgment and new creation at Zion. **15–16:** Theophanies and scenarios of judgment often feature fire (26.11; 29.5–6; 30.27,33; 31.9; 33.12,14; 34.10) and the LORD's sword (27.1; 31.8; 34.5–7). **17:** See 65.3–4n. **18–21:** The gathering of the nations at Zion recalls 2.2–4. *Tarshish*, either later Tarsus in southern Turkey, or Tartessus in Spain; *Put*, in Libya; *Lud*, Lydia in Asia Minor; *Tubal*, also in Asia Minor; *Javan*, Greece or Ionia. Those taken to be *priests* and *Levites* are drawn from the returned exiles, not from the nations. **22–23:** The new creation (cf. 65.15–16) is declared permanent, like the old creation (Gen 9.8–17). **24:** The book closes with a portrayal of the fate of the wicked, designed to motivate the audience to identify with the righteous.

JEREMIAH

NAME AND CANONICAL STATUS

The book of Jeremiah, the second scroll among the major prophets alongside Isaiah and Ezekiel, is a compilation of prophetic oracles edited by members of the Deuteronomistic school and attributed to the prophet by that name. For the different placement of the prophets in Hebrew and Christian Bibles see the essay on "The Canons of the Bible."

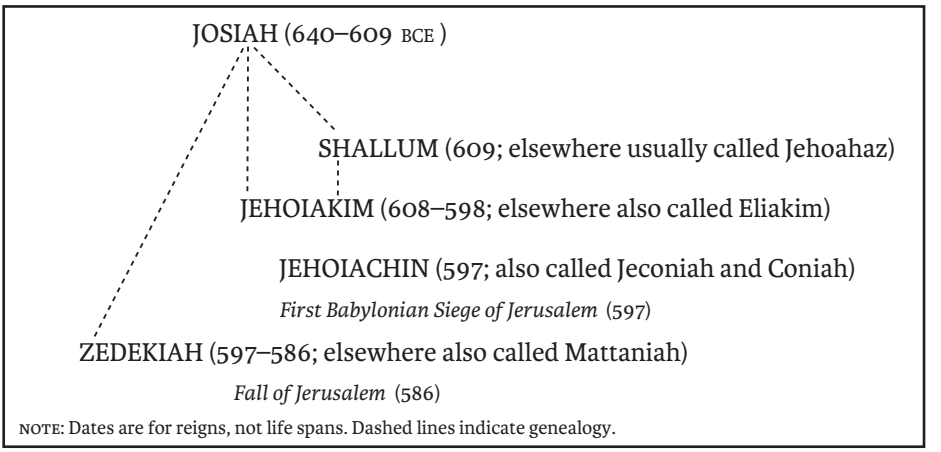
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Jeremiah lived during the critical years spanning the "golden age" of the Judean king Josiah (640–609 BCE) and the subsequent fall and destruction of Jerusalem and the deportations of the Judean population into captivity (597–586 BCE), all at the hand of Nebuchadrezzar II of Babylon. Some scholars think that Jeremiah was born in 627 BCE and began his prophetic ministry only in 609 BCE following the death of King Josiah. The traditional assumption, however, suggested by the text itself and followed here, is that he began his ministry in 627 BCE (Jer 25.3) and prophesied until well after the deportation of 586 BCE and the subsequent murder of Gedaliah and flight of a major group of Judeans to Egypt. Jeremiah, along with his friend and scribal colleague Baruch, was forcibly taken by this group as a hostage to Egypt, where he is last heard speaking judgment oracles against the community in the years following 586 BCE.

Jeremiah was born during the final years of the reign of King Manasseh (ca. 645 BCE) and began his ministry during the initial period of Josiah's reform movement. At this time the youthful king Josiah was rejecting the "accommodationist" pro-Assyrian policies of his early advisers and beginning to flex his ambitious nationalistic policies directed against his Assyrian overlords and toward the reunification of Israel and Judah (2 Chr 34.1–7). As a part of these ambitious political goals, Josiah's thoroughgoing religious reform movement attempted to remove the syncretistic elements of the accommodationist rituals, purge worship of non-Yahwistic practices and elements, and reunify the country around the central power-base of Jerusalem, similar to the goals of the reform movement of his great-grandfather, Hezekiah (2 Kings 18.1–8). Jeremiah, deeply steeped in the Deuteronomistic tradition of many of the prophets, was likely an early advocate of Josiah's reform, and Jeremiah held Josiah in esteem as an exemplar of the righteous king (Jer 22.15–16), a view shared with the Deuteronomistic Historians (2 Kings 22.2; 23.25).

Josiah was killed in an adventurous and risky military move against Egypt in 609 BCE (see 22.10n.), and the reform almost certainly collapsed. By 605 Babylon was clearly in control of Palestine and the last kings of Judah—Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah—were unable to avoid the awful results of Babylonian expansionism. Jehoiakim joined in a revolt against the Babylonians in 601 BCE, which led to a Babylonian invasion and the first deportation of 597 BCE. His uncle, Zedekiah, tried to walk a narrow line between the various political factions demanding attention at the Jerusalem court, but he too eventually joined a revolt, leading to the final destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of the Babylonians in 586 and the second deportation of its population.

Jeremiah was from the town of Anathoth in Benjamin. He may therefore have belonged to the disaffected priestly clan of Abiathar, which had lost its Temple privileges centuries earlier when King Solomon consolidated his power and had his potential adversaries—who had supported his brother Adonijah's claims to the throne—either eliminated or exiled (1 Kings 1.5–2.46). As part of this consolidation, Solomon promoted the priestly family of Zadok, who supported him in the succession. With the Temple firmly in Zadokite priestly hands, the descendents of Abiathar languished in rural sites, which themselves were eventually shut down during the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah. As one of those descendants, Jeremiah may have been heir to sentiments that ran deeply in favor of the old tribal traditions and values and in opposition to the "Jerusalemite" policies predominant since the reign of Solomon.



The last kings of Judah in the book of Jeremiah.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

The book of Jeremiah was edited into three major cycles of oracles and traditions. Each cycle is more-or-less chronologically ordered, and each is concluded by a reference to the creation of the scroll of 605 BCE, written at the dictation of Jeremiah by his scribal colleague, Baruch. References to this scroll are found in chs 25, 36, and 45, and these references divide the book into its constitutive cycles. It is often assumed that the scroll produced at this time (the second scroll, Jer 36.32) formed the core of oracles now found in the first cycle, chs 1–24. The book concludes with a compilation of "oracles against the nations" in chs 46–51. The book of Jeremiah is unique in many regards, but especially because the Greek tradition differs from the Hebrew tradition in this book more than in any other. A major difference is that the Greek tradition (the Septuagint) locates the "oracles against the nations" not at the end of the book but rather immediately following an appropriate reference to "this book" at 25.13. This and other differences between the Hebrew and Greek traditions has convinced many scholars that the Greek tradition preserves earlier and better traditions concerning the oracles, the language of the text, and the character of Jeremiah. Both of these textual traditions are attested among the Hebrew biblical texts found at Qumran (the Dead Sea Scrolls), indicating that the book of Jeremiah had a fluid editorial history.

INTERPRETATION

Jeremiah's message was closely related to the core values of the Deuteronomic tradition. A virulent antipathy toward "foreign gods," especially the Canaanite Baal, is combined with a fierce devotion to the ethics and mores of Deuteronomy's humanitarian program. Jeremiah shares the basic commitments and outlook of the Deuteronomistic History, even though the prophet is never mentioned in that history. Central to this outlook is the conviction that the disastrous political events leading to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its population were a direct result of divine anger at Israel's continued apostasy. The figure of Jeremiah became the subject of fascination in later history, as represented already in the Chronicler's history (2 Chr 35.25; 36.12,21–22) as well as in the books of Daniel (9.2) and in deuterocanonical traditions (2 Macc 2.1–7; 15.14–15).

GUIDE TO READING

The reader should take care to read each of the three cycles as an independent unit with its own chronological ordering. When beginning a new cycle, be prepared for a chronological displacement that carries the reader back in time. Read the relevant sections of the Deuteronomistic History, especially 2 Kings 21–25, as is appropriate for understanding the political backdrop to the oracles and narratives.

Rodney R. Hutton

1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."
6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." 7 But the LORD said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.
8 Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the LORD."

9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth.
10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."

11 The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see a branch of an almond tree."[a] 12 Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching[b] over my word to perform it." 13 The word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a boiling pot, tilted away from the north."

14 Then the LORD said to me: Out of the north disaster shall break out on all the inhabitants of the land. 15 For now I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, says the LORD; and they shall come and all of them shall set their thrones at the

[a] Heb *shaqed*
[b] Heb *shoqed*

1.1–3: Editor's superscription. The superscription conforms to those of several of the prophetic books (Hos 1.1; Am 1.1; Mic 1.1; Zeph 1.1) and probably represents a stage in the gathering and editing of the books of the prophets as a whole. **1**: *Priests . . . in Anathoth*, see the introduction. The *land of Benjamin* lay immediately north of Judah, and Anathoth was located about 3 mi (5 km) north of Jerusalem. **2**: *Thirteenth year*. 627 BCE (see 25.3), taken by most to be the year when Jeremiah began his public ministry, one year after the reform movement of King Josiah of Judah began (2 Chr 34.3). **3**: *Eleventh year of King Zedekiah*, 587 BCE. *In the fifth month* recalls the burning of the Temple and the razing of Jerusalem by the invading Babylonians (2 Kings 25.8–12; Zech 7.3–5).

1.4–19: Jeremiah's call as a "prophet to the nations" and his initial visions. 1:4–10: The call. The narrative of Jeremiah's call follows a typical pattern (see Ex 3–6; Judg 6.11–18; Isa 6) involving God's identification of a task and commission of the called one to be God's agent (v. 5), the excuses of the commissioned one (v. 6), God's promise to be with the commissioned one (vv. 7–8), and God's giving a sign (vv. 9–10). **4**: *Word of the LORD*, the prophets' primary area of responsibility was conveying the "word," often gained by visionary experience (see 18.18; Ezek 7.26). **5**: *I formed you*, as a potter creates from clay (cf. Gen 2.7). *To the nations*, the call narrative introduces and presumes the entire book of Jeremiah, including the oracles against the nations. It portrays Jeremiah's ministry as a critical moment in world history (cf. Jer 25). **6**: *A boy*, indicating apprentice or assistant status (see 2 Kings 4.12). Jeremiah protests his lack of experience. **9**: *Touched my mouth*, the verb implying that this divine action involved an object, such as Isaiah's coal (Isa 6.7). Perhaps God's word was the object (15:16). **10**: *To pluck up . . . to plant*, Jeremiah's twofold task of judgment and restoration, a common theme throughout the book. Compare 18.7–9; 24.6; 31.28.

1.11–19: Two visions of pending judgment. 11: *Almond tree*, a very early blooming tree, thus one that "wakes early and watches" for spring. See textual notes *a* and *b* for a play on these words in Heb. On God as "watching," see 31.28 and 44.27. **13–14**: *Out of the north*, the mythological location of the mountain of the gods (Isa 14.13; Job 37.22) and of the ideal Zion (Ps 48.2); but also the direction from which Israel's mythical and historical enemies attacked (Isa 41.25; Zeph 2.13). The pot was *boiling* over as first Assyria and then Babylon exercised expansionist imperial policies against Judah and its neighbors. **15**: *Set their thrones at the entrance of the gates*, at the place

entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its surrounding walls and against all the cities of Judah. [16] And I will utter my judgments against them, for all their wickedness in forsaking me; they have made offerings to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands. [17] But you, gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them. [18] And I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. [19] They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you.

2 The word of the LORD came to me, saying:
[2] Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD:

I remember the devotion of your youth,
your love as a bride,
how you followed me in the wilderness,
in a land not sown.
[3] Israel was holy to the LORD,
the first fruits of his harvest.
All who ate of it were held guilty;
disaster came upon them,
says the LORD.

[4] Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. [5] Thus says the LORD:

What wrong did your ancestors find in me
that they went far from me,
and went after worthless things, and
became worthless themselves?
[6] They did not say, "Where is the LORD
who brought us up from the land of
Egypt,
who led us in the wilderness,
in a land of deserts and pits,
in a land of drought and deep darkness,
in a land that no one passes through,
where no one lives?"
[7] I brought you into a plentiful land
to eat its fruits and its good things.
But when you entered you defiled my land,
and made my heritage an abomination.
[8] The priests did not say, "Where is the
LORD?"
Those who handle the law did not know
me;
the rulers[a] transgressed against me;
the prophets prophesied by Baal,
and went after things that do not profit.

[9] Therefore once more I accuse you,
says the LORD,

[a] Heb *shepherds*

of judgment and justice; a sign of military conquest (39.3; 43.10). **16:** *Worshiped*, indicating bowing down in prostration. The *works of their own hands* are the images and idols of other gods fashioned by artisans (10.9). **17:** *Gird up your loins,* as if binding up a garment for hard travel on an assignment (2 Kings 4.29; 9.1) or strapping on battle gear (Job 38.3; Nah 2.1). **18:** *The whole land*, if the target is Judah. But Heb "'erets" also means "earth," and expresses the universal commission of Jeremiah against nations and kingdoms.

2.1–3.5: Israel's apostasy. Early oracles critical of Israel's fickle devotion to God and Baal. **1–3:** Recalls the wilderness period immediately after the Exodus in idealized terms as a period of fidelity to God (compare Hos 2.14–15). In a *land not sown* (v. 2) there was no temptation to worship the fertility gods of Canaan. **3:** *Israel was holy to the LORD*, recalling that some sacrifices were "most holy" and therefore reserved strictly for priestly consumption. Those who encroached upon them were *guilty* (Lev 5.15–16; 6.25–29), just as are the nations who have devoured Israel, God's own holy portion.

2.4–8: Israel defiles the land. 5: *Worthless things*, or "vaporous puffs of wind" (Heb "hebel"), that which is mere "vanity" (Eccl 1.2). **6–7:** Israel is not only incapable of recalling its history, but is incapable of engaging in lament, of complaining "Where is the LORD?"! The loss of lament indicates the loss of relationship. **8:** *The priests did not say* reminds the priests that they were to lead the community in such complaint, and had failed to do so. If the community cannot complain to God, it cannot trust in God. *Those who handle the law*, that is, the priests, whose task it was to instruct the community with God's instruction or *law* (Heb "torah"). *Prophesied by Baal*, the Canaanite god, one of the common accusations against the prophets; cf. Hos 2.8–17. *Things that do not profit* (Heb "ya'al"), a play on the name Baal ("ba'al"), i.e., they worshiped Baal to no avail.

and I accuse your children's children.
10 Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look,
send to Kedar and examine with care;
see if there has ever been such a thing.
11 Has a nation changed its gods,
even though they are no gods?
But my people have changed their glory
for something that does not profit.
12 Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
be shocked, be utterly desolate,
says the LORD,
13 for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living water,
and dug out cisterns for themselves,
cracked cisterns
that can hold no water.

14 Is Israel a slave? Is he a homeborn
servant?
Why then has he become plunder?
15 The lions have roared against him,
they have roared loudly.
They have made his land a waste;
his cities are in ruins, without
inhabitant.
16 Moreover, the people of Memphis and
Tahpanhes
have broken the crown of your head.
17 Have you not brought this upon yourself
by forsaking the LORD your God,
while he led you in the way?
18 What then do you gain by going to
Egypt,
to drink the waters of the Nile?
Or what do you gain by going to
Assyria,
to drink the waters of the Euphrates?
19 Your wickedness will punish you,
and your apostasies will convict you.
Know and see that it is evil and bitter
for you to forsake the LORD your God;
the fear of me is not in you,
says the Lord GOD of hosts.

20 For long ago you broke your yoke
and burst your bonds,
and you said, "I will not serve!"
On every high hill
and under every green tree
you sprawled and played the whore.
21 Yet I planted you as a choice vine,
from the purest stock.
How then did you turn degenerate
and become a wild vine?
22 Though you wash yourself with lye
and use much soap,
the stain of your guilt is still before me,
says the Lord GOD.
23 How can you say, "I am not defiled,
I have not gone after the Baals"?
Look at your way in the valley;

2.9–13: God's resulting legal accusation. 9: *I accuse you*, formal language for making a legal complaint. **10:** From *the coasts of Cyprus* to *Kedar*, that is from the extremities of west to east. "Cyprus," better "Kittim" (Heb "kittiyyim"; see Gen 10.4; Isa 23.1), a reference to the distant western lands in the Mediterranean (perhaps Rome, as in Dan 11.30 or Greece, as in 1 Macc 1.1). On *Kedar* in northern Arabia, see 49.28n. **11:** As in v. 8, the phrase *does not profit* indicates that the Canaanite god Baal is meant. That Israel acts against simple reason, natural instinct, and plain common sense is a frequent theme in Jeremiah (see 8.7). **13:** *Cracked cisterns*, lit. "broken," i.e., severely damaged.

2.14–15: The consequences of Israel's apostasy. 14: The rhetorical questions beg a negative response. Of course Israel is no slave. But that free status is dissonant with the present reality of subjugation. **15:** *The lions*, that is, Israel's enemies.

2.16–25: Israel's wild promiscuity. Israel is here addressed as a young woman. **16:** *Memphis* and *Tahpanhes*, cities in Egypt (43.7; 44.1; 46.14,19). *Broken the crown of your head*, lit., "they have grazed the top of your head bare," perhaps a reference to shaving a woman's head as a mark of humiliation. **18:** *Egypt . . . Assyria*, the temptation was to make alliances with a stronger neighbor, Egypt or Assyria, in order to protect against other enemies (2 Kings 16.7; Isa 31.1). Such alliances could involve worshiping the gods of the major treaty power, resulting in religious apostasy. **21:** God's *choice vine* from *purest stock* turned into something *wild*, lit. "foreign"; see Isa 5:2. **23:** *The Baals*, local manifestations of the chief Canaanite god of fertility. The Heb word "ba'al" meant "master, husband, owner," and Israel's God might also be thought of as Israel's "husband" or "baal" (3.14; 31.32; Hos 2.16), thereby creating religious confusion. **23b–24:** The metaphor of animals *in heat* suggests the uncontrollable

know what you have done—
a restive young camel interlacing her tracks,
24 a wild ass at home in the wilderness,
in her heat sniffing the wind!
Who can restrain her lust?
None who seek her need weary themselves;
in her month they will find her.
25 Keep your feet from going unshod
and your throat from thirst.
But you said, "It is hopeless,
for I have loved strangers,
and after them I will go."

26 As a thief is shamed when caught,
so the house of Israel shall be shamed—
they, their kings, their officials,
their priests, and their prophets,
27 who say to a tree, "You are my father,"
and to a stone, "You gave me birth."
For they have turned their backs to me,
and not their faces.
But in the time of their trouble they say,
"Come and save us!"
28 But where are your gods
that you made for yourself?
Let them come, if they can save you,
in your time of trouble;
for you have as many gods
as you have towns, O Judah.

29 Why do you complain against me?
You have all rebelled against me,
says the LORD.
30 In vain I have struck down your children;
they accepted no correction.
Your own sword devoured your prophets
like a ravening lion.
31 And you, O generation, behold the word of the LORD![a]
Have I been a wilderness to Israel,
or a land of thick darkness?
Why then do my people say, "We are free,
we will come to you no more"?
32 Can a girl forget her ornaments,
or a bride her attire?
Yet my people have forgotten me,
days without number.

33 How well you direct your course
to seek lovers!
So that even to wicked women
you have taught your ways.
34 Also on your skirts is found
the lifeblood of the innocent poor,
though you did not catch them breaking in.
Yet in spite of all these things[a]
35 you say, "I am innocent;
surely his anger has turned from me."
Now I am bringing you to judgment
for saying, "I have not sinned."
36 How lightly you gad about,
changing your ways!
You shall be put to shame by Egypt
as you were put to shame by Assyria.
37 From there also you will come away
with your hands on your head;

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

nature of Israel's apostasy. **25:** As in v. 22, what is strange or foreign is the apostasy that defiles (v. 23). **2.26–28: Judah's confused apostasy. 26:** *A thief is shamed*, the use of "shame" (Heb "boshet") hints at Baal, since the word "shame" was often used in place of the name of Baal (see 2 Sam 3.8 textual note *c*). **27:** The *tree* or wood pole (Heb "'asherah") symbolized the goddess Asherah, and the standing *stone* symbolized the god Baal. But Israel even confuses its apostate iconography and cannot tell father from mother.

2.29–37: God's legal suit against Israel. 29: *Complain against*, formal language of legal complaint. **30:** *Devoured your prophets*, that Israel neglected the prophets is a refrain of the Deuteronomistic editor of Jeremiah (7.25; 25.4; 26.5; 29.19; 35.15; 44.4); on killing prophets, see 1 Kings 19.10; Neh 9.26. **31:** The rhetorical questions beg the answer "Of course not." *We are free*, or "We have wandered aimlessly," as though in a trackless wilderness or in the darkness of night. Israel cannot find its way to God. **32:** Continues the theme of vv. 10–11: Israel's behavior defies all logic, common sense and natural instinct (see also 8.4–5,7; 18.14–15). **33–37** are again addressed to the young woman. **34:** *You did not catch them breaking in*, if caught in the act of burglary, such violence directed against the thief might be excusable (Ex 22.2–3). **36:** Recalls the invasion of Judah and siege

for the LORD has rejected those in whom
you trust,
and you will not prosper through them.

3 If[a] a man divorces his wife
and she goes from him
and becomes another man's wife,
will he return to her?
Would not such a land be greatly
polluted?
You have played the whore with many
lovers;
and would you return to me?
says the LORD.
2 Look up to the bare heights,[b] and see!
Where have you not been lain with?
By the waysides you have sat waiting for
lovers,
like a nomad in the wilderness.
You have polluted the land
with your whoring and
wickedness.
3 Therefore the showers have been
withheld,
and the spring rain has not come;
yet you have the forehead of a whore,
you refuse to be ashamed.
4 Have you not just now called to me,
"My Father, you are the friend of my
youth—
5 will he be angry forever,
will he be indignant to the end?"
This is how you have spoken,
but you have done all the evil that you
could.

6 The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and played the whore there? 7 And I thought, "After she has done all this she will return to me"; but she did not return, and her false sister Judah saw it. 8 She[c] saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce; yet her false sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. 9 Because she took her whoredom so lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. 10 Yet for all this her false sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but only in pretense, says the LORD.

11 Then the LORD said to me: Faithless Israel has shown herself less guilty than false Judah. 12 Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say:

Return, faithless Israel,
says the LORD.

[a] Q Ms Gk Syr: MT *Saying, If*
[b] Or *the trails*
[c] Q Ms Gk Mss Syr: MT *I*

of Jerusalem by the Assyrians in 701 BCE (2 Kings 18.13–19.28). **37:** *Your hands on your head*, a sign of deep mourning (2 Sam 13.19).

3.1–5: No return is possible. 1: *Will he return*? The rhetorical question demands a negative answer; Deut 4.1–4 prohibits second marriages to the same person. *Would you return to me?* Although the analogy would exclude the possibility of repentance and reconciliation between people and God, later passages in the chapter envision such restoration of the covenant relationship. In both Hebrew and Greek this is a statement rather than a question, suggesting inappropriate and bizarre behavior. **2:** *Lain with*, the MT contains alternate readings of the verb. One is "ravished" (Heb "shagal"), which implies that Israel was a victim rather than complicit. Ancient editors of the MT preferred to read "shakab" ("lain with") instead, pointing to Israel's complicity; cf. Zech 14.2 for the same distinction. *Like a nomad* (Heb "'arabi"): Greek suggests reading "like a raven" (= Heb "'oreb"); see Isa 34.11; Zeph 2.14. **3:** Israel's behavior pollutes the environment and disrupts nature; see Hag 1.5–11. *Forehead*, that is, stubbornness (cf. Isa 48.4). **4:** *The friend of my youth*, Heb "'allup" implies God's cozy intimacy.

3.6–4.4: Call for faithless Israel and Judah to return. This section continues the theme of *return* (3.1). **3.6–13:** Judah is worse than her sister Israel; cf. Ezek 16.45–52; 23.1–21. **6:** *Days of King Josiah*, 640–609 BCE. *High hill . . . green tree*, high places were sites for illicit worship, and the wood pole/tree represented the goddess Asherah (see 2.27n.). **8:** *Decree of divorce*, see Deut 24.1–4. **9:** *Stone and tree*, symbols of religious apostasy; see 2.27n. **10:** *In pretense*, lit. "in the lie" (Heb "sheqer"), code language for the Canaanite god Baal. **12:** *Toward the north*, the kingdom of Israel lay to the north of Judah, and had earlier been carried away by the Assyrians into captivity by her own northern enemies. What follows is directed to the Northern Kingdom.

I will not look on you in anger,
for I am merciful,
says the LORD;
I will not be angry forever.
13 Only acknowledge your guilt,
that you have rebelled against the LORD your God,
and scattered your favors among strangers under every green tree,
and have not obeyed my voice,
says the LORD.
14 Return, O faithless children,
says the LORD,
for I am your master;
I will take you, one from a city and two from a family,
and I will bring you to Zion.

15 I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. 16 And when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says the LORD, they shall no longer say, "The ark of the covenant of the LORD." It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made. 17 At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no longer stubbornly follow their own evil will. 18 In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your ancestors for a heritage.

19 I thought
how I would set you among my children,
and give you a pleasant land,
the most beautiful heritage of all the nations.
And I thought you would call me, My Father,
and would not turn from following me.
20 Instead, as a faithless wife leaves her husband,
so you have been faithless to me,
O house of Israel,
says the LORD.

21 A voice on the bare heights[a] is heard,
the plaintive weeping of Israel's children,
because they have perverted their way,
they have forgotten the LORD their God:
22 Return, O faithless children,
I will heal your faithlessness.

[a] Or *the trails*

Merciful, also implying faithful and loyal. **13.** *Strangers*, implying a dangerous and defiling foreignness. See 2.25n. **3.14–18: Israel's restoration.** These words are now directed toward a masc. plural subject, a syntactical shift indicating that this oracle is independent of the previous one. **14:** *I am your master* (Heb "ba'alti bakem"), the Hebrew word "ba'al" also means husband; see 2.23n. **15:** *Shepherds*, that is, kings and leaders. The term *feed you* comes from the same Hebrew root (lit., "shepherd you"). **16:** *Ark of the covenant*, Judah's central religious symbol had likely been removed in military attack and was no longer present in the Temple by Jeremiah's time. Later tradition ascribed to Jeremiah the securing of the final secret resting place for the Ark of the Covenant, where he hid it following the destruction of the Temple (2 Macc 2.4–5) on Mount Nebo, the same mountain near which Moses' secret burial site was located (Deut 34.1,6). On the removal of such important icons from religious memory, cf. the reference to the memory of the Exodus event (16.14; 23.7). **17:** *Jerusalem . . . the throne*, as part of the divine throne, the ark was God's footstool (1 Chr 28.2; Ps 132.7–8). Now Jerusalem itself will become God's throne. **18:** *Land of the north*, both Assyria and Babylon were symbolically located in the north; see 1.14n.

3.19–22a: Mixed oracles pleading for Israel to return. 19: Addressed to the young woman, whom God would honor by setting her among God's sons (NRSV "children") for an inheritance. Normally women did not inherit property, as illustrated by the case of the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 26.33; 27.1–7; 36.2–9; cf. also Job 42.15). **21:** *Bare heights*, hot, dry, desolate, barren land, scene of Israel's misery (see 14.6).

3.22b–25: Israel's confession. 23. *A delusion* (Heb "sheqer"), as in 3.10 a play on code language for the Canaanite god Baal. *Orgies* is a strong translation; Heb "hamon" implies only the tumultuous noise of a crowd out of control. **24:** *Shameful thing*, a reference to Baal; see 2.26n. *Devoured*, on Baal's voracious appetite see

"Here we come to you;
for you are the LORD our God.
23 Truly the hills are[a] a delusion,
the orgies on the mountains.
Truly in the LORD our God
is the salvation of Israel.
24 "But from our youth the shameful thing
has devoured all for which our ancestors had
labored, their flocks and their herds, their
sons and their daughters. 25 Let us lie down
in our shame, and let our dishonor cover us;
for we have sinned against the LORD our God,
we and our ancestors, from our youth even to
this day; and we have not obeyed the voice of
the LORD our God."

4 If you return, O Israel,
says the LORD,
if you return to me,
if you remove your abominations from my
presence,
and do not waver,
2 and if you swear, "As the LORD lives!"
in truth, in justice, and in
uprightness,
then nations shall be blessed[b] by him,
and by him they shall boast.
3 For thus says the LORD to the people of
Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem:
Break up your fallow ground,
and do not sow among thorns.
4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,
remove the foreskin of your hearts,
O people of Judah and inhabitants of
Jerusalem,
or else my wrath will go forth like fire,
and burn with no one to quench it,
because of the evil of your doings.

5 Declare in Judah, and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say:
Blow the trumpet through the land;
shout aloud[c] and say,
"Gather together, and let us go
into the fortified cities!"
6 Raise a standard toward Zion,
flee for safety, do not delay,
for I am bringing evil from the north,
and a great destruction.
7 A lion has gone up from its thicket,
a destroyer of nations has set out;
he has gone out from his place
to make your land a waste;
your cities will be ruins
without inhabitant.
8 Because of this put on sackcloth,
lament and wail:
"The fierce anger of the LORD
has not turned away from us."

9 On that day, says the LORD, courage shall fail the king and the officials; the priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded. 10 Then

[a] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *Truly from the hills is*
[b] Or *shall bless themselves*
[c] Or *shout, take your weapons*: Heb *shout, fill* (your hand)

51.33–44; cf. Bel 1.1–28. **25:** *Lie down in our shame*. As Israel "lay" with Baal (3.2), so now they will "lie" in their "shame" as the consequence mirrors the offense.

4.1–4: God's appeal for Israel's return, continuing the theme. 2: *As the LORD lives*, a call for sincere oath-taking in God's name in judicial cases. *Nations shall be blessed*, Israel's restoration would yield a blessing for the nations; cf. Gen 12.2–3; 18.18. **3:** The people are to live their lives as seed planted in freshly tilled soil; see Hos 10.12. **4:** *Circumcise . . . your hearts*, outward display must be matched by inward conversion; see Deut 10.16; 30.6.

4.5–6.26: The siege of Jerusalem by the enemy from the north. A lengthy section warning about the coming invasion and siege of Jerusalem.

4.5–10: The sentinels and leaders are commanded to signal the attack of the foe from the north (see 1.14n.). **5:** *The trumpet* was used for signaling, especially in battle (4.19; Judg 3.27; 6.34). But here the signal is for taking refuge inside the walled city. **6:** *A standard*, any visible marker, such as a pole or signal fire, that could be seen from a distance. The letters from Lachish, contemporary to this period, refer to the signal fire from Azekah as no longer visible, a signal that the end had come; see 34.7n. **7:** *A lion has gone up,* a reference to Nebuchadrezzar II of Babylon (605–562 BCE). But it is a mixed metaphor, since God, too, can be described as a lion on the prowl (25.36–38; 49.19; 50.44), or as one watching the people as a predator watches its prey (1.12; 5.6; 44.27).

I said, "Ah, Lord GOD, how utterly you have
deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying,
'It shall be well with you,' even while the
sword is at the throat!"

11 At that time it will be said to this people
and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me
out of the bare heights[a] in the desert toward
my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse—
12 a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who
speak in judgment against them.
13 Look! He comes up like clouds,
his chariots like the
whirlwind;
his horses are swifter than eagles—
woe to us, for we are ruined!
14 O Jerusalem, wash your heart clean of
wickedness
so that you may be saved.
How long shall your evil schemes
lodge within you?
15 For a voice declares from Dan
and proclaims disaster from Mount
Ephraim.
16 Tell the nations, "Here they are!"
Proclaim against Jerusalem,
"Besiegers come from a distant land;
they shout against the cities of
Judah.
17 They have closed in around her like
watchers of a field,
because she has rebelled against me,
says the LORD.
18 Your ways and your doings
have brought this upon you.
This is your doom; how bitter it is!
It has reached your very heart."

19 My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in
pain!
Oh, the walls of my heart!
My heart is beating wildly;
I cannot keep silent;
for I[b] hear the sound of the trumpet,
the alarm of war.
20 Disaster overtakes disaster,
the whole land is laid waste.
Suddenly my tents are destroyed,
my curtains in a moment.
21 How long must I see the standard,
and hear the sound of the trumpet?
22 "For my people are foolish,
they do not know me;
they are stupid children,
they have no understanding.
They are skilled in doing evil,
but do not know how to do good."

23 I looked on the earth, and lo, it was
waste and void;
and to the heavens, and they had no
light.
24 I looked on the mountains, and lo, they
were quaking,
and all the hills moved to and fro.
25 I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,
and all the birds of the air had fled.

[a] Or *the trails*
[b] Another reading is *for you, O my soul,*

10. Jeremiah charges God with deceiving the people by convincing them that everything will be "peace" (Heb "shalom"). Normally attributed to the "lying" prophets (6.14; 8.11), this may reflect promises that God would be with the people (e.g., Deut 20.1; Isa 7.14). On the theme of God deceiving the prophets, see 1 Kings 22.18–23.

4.11–18: The siege is near. 11: *From me* is lacking in the Hebrew, though clearly God stands behind this invasion (v. 6). *My poor people*, lit. "the daughter of my people." There is no sympathy suggested. This wind is too strong to winnow, as it would blow both chaff and grain away. Cf. 51.1–2. **15:** The enemy sweeps over Dan in the far north and through Ephraim in the center of Israel hurrying toward Jerusalem. **17:** *Like watchers*, the term "besiegers" (v. 16) connotes those who "watch" or "guard" against anyone escaping from the city under siege; here a synonym is used of "watching" or "guarding" a field, perhaps indicating the ease of so doing.

4.19–28: The anguished voice of the prophet. Some scholars think that Jerusalem may be speaking in vv. 19–21, as in v. 31; cf. 6.24; 10.19–21. **19:** *For I hear*, lit. "for you have heard, O my soul." The sound of the trumpet penetrates to the prophet's very core; see textual note *b*. **20:** *Tents . . . curtains*, though often used of the sanctuary (see 10.20n.), here the terms likely refer to Israel as God's dwelling (see 49.29; Isa 54.2; Hab 3.7). **22:** *Skilled* (lit. "wise") *in doing evil*, in fact they are fools, the opposite of wise. **23:** *Waste and void,* echoing Gen 1.2, these verses envision the reduction of creation to primordial chaos. *No light*, even the first act of God's creation was undone. **25:** *No one*, lit. "no ''adam'," no first human being.

[26] I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a
desert,
and all its cities were laid in ruins
before the LORD, before his fierce anger.
[27] For thus says the LORD: The whole land
shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full
end.
[28] Because of this the earth shall mourn,
and the heavens above grow black;
for I have spoken, I have purposed;
I have not relented nor will I turn back.

[29] At the noise of horseman and archer
every town takes to flight;
they enter thickets; they climb among
rocks;
all the towns are forsaken,
and no one lives in them.
[30] And you, O desolate one,
what do you mean that you dress in crimson,
that you deck yourself with ornaments
of gold,
that you enlarge your eyes with paint?
In vain you beautify yourself.
Your lovers despise you;
they seek your life.
[31] For I heard a cry as of a woman in labor,
anguish as of one bringing forth her
first child,
the cry of daughter Zion gasping for
breath,
stretching out her hands,
"Woe is me! I am fainting before killers!"

5 Run to and fro through the streets of
Jerusalem,
look around and take note!
Search its squares and see
if you can find one person
who acts justly
and seeks truth—
so that I may pardon Jerusalem.[a]
[2] Although they say, "As the LORD lives,"
yet they swear falsely.
[3] O LORD, do your eyes not look for
truth?
You have struck them,
but they felt no anguish;
you have consumed them,
but they refused to take correction.
They have made their faces harder than
rock;
they have refused to turn back.

[4] Then I said, "These are only the poor,
they have no sense;
for they do not know the way of the LORD,
the law of their God.
[5] Let me go to the rich[b]
and speak to them;
surely they know the way of the LORD,
the law of their God."
But they all alike had broken the yoke,
they had burst the bonds.

[6] Therefore a lion from the forest shall kill
them,
a wolf from the desert shall destroy
them.
A leopard is watching against their cities;
everyone who goes out of them shall be
torn in pieces—
because their transgressions are many,
their apostasies are great.

[7] How can I pardon you?
Your children have forsaken me,
and have sworn by those who are no
gods.
When I fed them to the full,
they committed adultery
and trooped to the houses of
prostitutes.
[8] They were well-fed lusty stallions,
each neighing for his neighbor's wife.

[a] Heb *it*
[b] Or *the great*

4.29–31: Israel the rejected whore. 30: *Crimson . . . gold*, signs of wealth (2 Sam 1.24). Bejeweled and fully made up, Israel hopes for a tryst but has already been rejected by her lovers; cf. Ezek 16.

5.1–9: No one is righteous. 1: In an extreme offer of vicarious merit, one righteous person would be enough to pardon the city; cf. Gen 18.23–33; Ezek 14.14,20. **2:** *As the LORD lives*, see 4.2n. **4:** *The poor*, implying helpless, not expected to know better. *Law*, lit. "justice" (so v. 1). **5:** *The rich*, lit. "the great," the important people who ought to know by virtue of their social status. **6:** Vicious predatory animals symbolize the coming enemy, but God too can be cast as such an animal; see 4.7n. **7:** *Adultery . . . prostitutes*, used sym-

9 Shall I not punish them for these things?
says the LORD;
and shall I not bring retribution
on a nation such as this?

10 Go up through her vine-rows and
destroy,
but do not make a full end;
strip away her branches,
for they are not the LORD's.
11 For the house of Israel and the house of
Judah
have been utterly faithless to me,
says the LORD.
12 They have spoken falsely of the LORD,
and have said, "He will do nothing.
No evil will come upon us,
and we shall not see sword or famine."
13 The prophets are nothing but wind,
for the word is not in them.
Thus shall it be done to them!

14 Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of
hosts:
Because they[a] have spoken this word,
I am now making my words in your mouth
a fire,
and this people wood, and the fire shall
devour them.
15 I am going to bring upon you
a nation from far away, O house of
Israel,
says the LORD.
It is an enduring nation,
it is an ancient nation,
a nation whose language you do not
know,
nor can you understand what they
say.
16 Their quiver is like an open tomb;
all of them are mighty warriors.
17 They shall eat up your harvest and your
food;
they shall eat up your sons and your
daughters;
they shall eat up your flocks and your
herds;
they shall eat up your vines and your
fig trees;
they shall destroy with the sword
your fortified cities in which you
trust.

18 But even in those days, says the LORD, I will not make a full end of you. 19 And when your people say, "Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?" you shall say to them, "As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours."

20 Declare this in the house of Jacob,
proclaim it in Judah:
21 Hear this, O foolish and senseless
people,
who have eyes, but do not see,
who have ears, but do not hear.

[a] Heb *you*

bolically of religious apostasy, perhaps resulting from international contacts. **8:** *Neighing*, normally used only of humans shouting excitedly, it is used twice of horses (8.16; 50.11). God desires to pardon (v. 7), but cannot hold back punishment and must "avenge" divine honor (v. 9). **9:** A refrain in this section (see 5.29), repeated in 9.9.

5.10–19: Destruction comes in spite of Israel's deluded self-confidence. 10: *Vine-rows*, or perhaps rows of olive trees, where oil is pressed (see Job 24.11). *Do not make a full end*, there need to be witnesses left who can remember what happened (5.18–19; see also 4.27; 30.11; 46.28). **12:** *He will do nothing*, representing the false words of the prophets (v. 14). The Hebrew is ambiguous, perhaps "He is nothing" or "It will not happen." *Evil*, or "disaster," on God's inability to act either for good or ill, cf. Zeph 1.12. **13:** *Wind*, that is, "spirit," an ironic statement about the lack of inspiration of prophetic visions. For the prophet's responsibility for the "word," see 1.4n. **14:** The pronouns are confusing here. The syntax indicates that the people are the wood, and they will be set afire by Jeremiah's prophetic word, thereby consuming the ineffectual prophets of v. 13. **15:** This invading enemy is likely either Assyria (if this is an early oracle) or Babylon (if a later oracle). **17:** That enemies would devour the harvest is characteristic of curses; see Lev 26.16; Deut 28.25–37. **18:** God will not make a *full end* so that there might be some left who can ask what happened, and can witness to the disaster.

5.20–31: Israel's foolishness is evident in its lack of reverence for God and in its injustice toward the vulner-

22 Do you not fear me? says the LORD;
Do you not tremble before me?
I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea,
a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass;
though the waves toss, they cannot prevail,
though they roar, they cannot pass over it.
23 But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart;
they have turned aside and gone away.
24 They do not say in their hearts,
"Let us fear the LORD our God,
who gives the rain in its season,
the autumn rain and the spring rain,
and keeps for us
the weeks appointed for the harvest."
25 Your iniquities have turned these away,
and your sins have deprived you of good.
26 For scoundrels are found among my people;
they take over the goods of others.
Like fowlers they set a trap;[a]
they catch human beings.
27 Like a cage full of birds,
their houses are full of treachery;
therefore they have become great and rich,
28 they have grown fat and sleek.
They know no limits in deeds of wickedness;
they do not judge with justice
the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper,
and they do not defend the rights of the needy.
29 Shall I not punish them for these things?
says the LORD,
and shall I not bring retribution
on a nation such as this?

30 An appalling and horrible thing
has happened in the land:
31 the prophets prophesy falsely,
and the priests rule as the prophets direct;[b]
my people love to have it so,
but what will you do when the end comes?

6 Flee for safety, O children of Benjamin,
from the midst of Jerusalem!
Blow the trumpet in Tekoa,
and raise a signal on Beth-haccherem;
for evil looms out of the north,
and great destruction.
2 I have likened daughter Zion
to the loveliest pasture.[c]
3 Shepherds with their flocks shall come against her.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *rule by their own authority*
[c] Or *I will destroy daughter Zion, the loveliest pasture*

able. 21: Cf. Isa 6.9–10. **22:** *Sand as a boundary for the sea*, like the waxing and waning of the tides of the ocean, God has set a limit for the primeval chaos surrounding creation, beyond which it cannot pass; see Gen 1.2–8; Job 38.8–11; Ps 104.9. **23:** *Stubborn and rebellious* recalls the sort of perverse behavior by a child that has deadly consequences (Deut 21.18–21). Unlike such natural elements as the sea that honor their limits, Israel refuses that which is natural. **24:** *The weeks appointed* refers to the seven-week period between the first cutting and the festival of weeks or Pentecost (Deut 16.9–10). **26:** *They take over the goods of others*, or perhaps "They lurk like hunters crouching." Given what follows (v. 27), the image here is that of hunting birds and stuffing them into baskets. **28:** As if trapping birds, the wicked trap *the orphan* and *the needy*, the most vulnerable members of society; cf. Isa 1.17; Am 2.6–7; Mic 3.1–3; Zech 7.10; Ex 22.21–24; Deut 24.17–18. **29:** See 5.9n. **31:** The prophets prophesy the lie (Heb "sheqer"), referring alternatively either to false confidence in God or else to devotion to the Canaanite god Baal, two aspects of the same offense. *The priests rule as the prophets direct*, lit. "the priests rule over their hands." Either the priests make decisions on the basis of false prophecy, or the priests dominate the prophets and censor their message (see 20.1–2; 29.26–27).

6.1–9: The attack surrounds Jerusalem. 1: The tribal territory of *Benjamin* was directly north of Jerusalem and *Tekoa*, hometown of the prophet Amos (Am 1.1), was ca. 11 mi (18km) to its south. Again the *trumpet* and *signal* (lit. "an upraising") warn of attack. The verb "blow (trumpet)" (Heb "tiq'u") plays on the name "Tekoa" ("teqoa'"); see 4.5–6n. *Beth-haccherem* ("vineyard house") is mentioned otherwise only in Neh 3.14, where it is a district in Judah. Some scholars identify it here as Ramat-rahel, ca. 3 mi (5 km) south of Jerusalem. **3:** *Shepherds*,

They shall pitch their tents around her;
they shall pasture, all in their places.
4 "Prepare war against her;
up, and let us attack at noon!"
"Woe to us, for the day declines,
the shadows of evening lengthen!"
5 "Up, and let us attack by night,
and destroy her palaces!"
6 For thus says the LORD of hosts:
Cut down her trees;
cast up a siege ramp against Jerusalem.
This is the city that must be punished;[a]
there is nothing but oppression within her.
7 As a well keeps its water fresh,
so she keeps fresh her wickedness;
violence and destruction are heard within her;
sickness and wounds are ever before me.
8 Take warning, O Jerusalem,
or I shall turn from you in disgust,
and make you a desolation,
an uninhabited land.

9 Thus says the LORD of hosts:
Glean[b] thoroughly as a vine
the remnant of Israel;
like a grape-gatherer, pass your hand again
over its branches.

10 To whom shall I speak and give warning,
that they may hear?
See, their ears are closed,[c]
they cannot listen.
The word of the LORD is to them an object of scorn;
they take no pleasure in it.
11 But I am full of the wrath of the LORD;
I am weary of holding it in.
Pour it out on the children in the street,
and on the gatherings of young men as well;
both husband and wife shall be taken,
the old folk and the very aged.
12 Their houses shall be turned over to others,
their fields and wives together;
for I will stretch out my hand
against the inhabitants of the land,
says the LORD.

13 For from the least to the greatest of them,
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;
and from prophet to priest,
everyone deals falsely.
14 They have treated the wound of my people carelessly,
saying, "Peace, peace,"
when there is no peace.
15 They acted shamefully, they committed abomination;
yet they were not ashamed,
they did not know how to blush.
Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;
at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,
says the LORD.
16 Thus says the LORD:
Stand at the crossroads, and look,
and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way lies; and walk in it,

[a] Or *the city of license*
[b] Cn: Heb *They shall glean*
[c] Heb *are uncircumcised*

enemy kings and their armies will surround Jerusalem. The verb used of "pitching" a tent is the same used of "blowing" a trumpet in v. 1. **4–5:** Alternating quotations of the enemy and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. *Prepare*, lit. "sanctify," since war involved blood and required a state of ritual purity (see 2 Sam 11.11; Jer 51.27; Joel 3.9). **6:** *Cut down her trees*, permitted for building siege ramps to storm defensive walls (see Deut 20.19–20). **8:** *Turn from you in disgust*, the verb used here (Heb "teqa'") again plays on the name Tekoa (see vv. 1n., 3n.) and indicates a dislocation of something, as in the dislocation of Jacob's hip (Gen 32.26). **9:** *Glean*, Israel will be stripped clean by its enemies. Gleaning was the practice of allowing the poor to come into a field to pick what remained after the regular harvest (Deut 24.21).

6.10–21: Israel refuses to heed the sentinel's warning. Vv. 12–15 are a near doublet of 8.10–12. **11:** The prophet's personal agony; see 20.9. *Taken*, that is, captured by the enemy. **14:** Prophetic promises of peace and well-

and find rest for your souls.
But they said, "We will not walk in it."
17 Also I raised up sentinels for you:
"Give heed to the sound of the trumpet!"
But they said, "We will not give heed."
18 Therefore hear, O nations,
and know, O congregation, what will happen to them.
19 Hear, O earth; I am going to bring disaster on this people,
the fruit of their schemes,
because they have not given heed to my words;
and as for my teaching, they have rejected it.
20 Of what use to me is frankincense that comes from Sheba,
or sweet cane from a distant land?
Your burnt offerings are not acceptable,
nor are your sacrifices pleasing to me.
21 Therefore thus says the LORD:
See, I am laying before this people
stumbling blocks against which they shall stumble;
parents and children together,
neighbor and friend shall perish.

22 Thus says the LORD:
See, a people is coming from the land of the north,
a great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth.
23 They grasp the bow and the javelin,
they are cruel and have no mercy,
their sound is like the roaring sea;
they ride on horses,
equipped like a warrior for battle,
against you, O daughter Zion!

24 "We have heard news of them,
our hands fall helpless;
anguish has taken hold of us,
pain as of a woman in labor.
25 Do not go out into the field,
or walk on the road;
for the enemy has a sword,
terror is on every side."

26 O my poor people, put on sackcloth,
and roll in ashes;
make mourning as for an only child,
most bitter lamentation:
for suddenly the destroyer
will come upon us.

27 I have made you a tester and a refiner[a] among my people
so that you may know and test their ways.
28 They are all stubbornly rebellious,
going about with slanders;
they are bronze and iron,
all of them act corruptly.
29 The bellows blow fiercely,
the lead is consumed by the fire;

[a] Or *a fortress*

being are delusional; cf. Ezek 13.10. **17:** Israel repeatedly refuses to heed the sentinel's warnings. On the prophet as a sentinel, cf. Ezek 3.17–21. **20:** *Sheba*, located in Arabia and valued for its spice trade (Isa 60.6; Ezek 27.22). All these items, including sweet cane, were offered to God in smoke (*burnt offerings*) as a pleasing odor in Israel's Temple worship (see Gen 8.20–21; Lev 1.9; Isa 43.24), but God rejects them if they are not accompanied by acts of justice and mercy (Am 5.21–24; 1 Sam 15.22).

6.22–26: Refusing the warning, the enemy comes and Israel is called to ritual mourning. 22: On the enemy from the north, see 1.14n. **23:** *Ride on horses*, that is, ride on horse-drawn chariots, which were the major battlefield war machines, rather than riding horseback. **24:** Now Israel hears the warning, but it is too late. *A woman in labor* is a common metaphor for being in agony and distress. See 4.31; 13.21; 22.23. **25:** *Terror is on every side*, a refrain in Jeremiah (20.3–4,10; 46.5; 49.29). **26:** *My poor people*, lit. "daughter of my people" (see 4.11). *Sackcloth . . . ashes,* ritual actions associated with mourning and entreaty for divine favor in crisis situations (see Jon 3.6; Isa 58.5; Dan 9.3).

6.27–30: Conclusion to the oracles from the time of King Josiah: Israel's final rejection. God appoints Jeremiah to refine Israel's metal (cf. Isa 48.10; Zech 13.9; Mal 3.2–4), but it is in vain. Jeremiah may be fortified with bronze and iron (1.18), but Israel has proved to be a match, as they too are bronze and iron (v. 28). Israel's dross cannot be removed by any process of refinement, no matter how hot the fire. The section concludes with final words of divine rejection, bringing this first section of the book to an ominous close.

in vain the refining goes on,
for the wicked are not removed.
30 They are called "rejected silver,"
for the LORD has rejected them.

7 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the LORD. 3 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you[a] in this place. 4 Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is[b] the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD."

5 For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, 6 if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, 7 then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.

8 Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. 9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, 10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, "We are safe!"—only to go on doing all these abominations? 11 Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? You know, I too am watching, says the LORD. 12 Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. 13 And now, because you have done all these things, says the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, 14 therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh. 15 And I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsfolk, all the offspring of Ephraim.

16 As for you, do not pray for this people, do not raise a cry or prayer on their behalf, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you. 17 Do you not see what they are doing in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? 18 The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women

[a] Or *and I will let you dwell*
[b] Heb *They are*

7.1–15: The Temple sermon opens the unit 7.1–10.25, which depicts the sickness, death, and funeral of Judah along with Judah's acceptance of its fate. The Temple sermon is generally associated with the events of ch 26 and Jeremiah's first arrest in 609 BCE, given the thematic connections of chs 7 and 26. **3:** *Let me dwell*, this is not a request by God, but rather a promise expressing God's strong intentionality that God will indeed dwell with the people (or will indeed establish their dwelling, following both the MT and the Gk) under changed conditions. **4:** The Temple was regarded as a place of sanctuary where one might seek refuge from reprisal (1 Kings 1.50; 2.28; see 17.1n.). The people believe that their mere presence in the Temple renders them safe (v. 10). Although liturgical tradition expressed God's protection of Jerusalem and the Temple (e.g., Pss 46; 48; 76; see also Isa 31.4; 37.35), it is deceptive (lit. a "lie," Heb "sheqer") to think that this necessarily assures God's protection. The threefold repetition implies that the phrase had become a cliché. **5–7**: The requirements for true sincerity are consistent with the values expressed in Deuteronomy (5.7; 10.18–19; 24.17–22; 27.19) and in other prophets (Isa 10.2; 59.7; Hos 3.1). **9:** Five of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20.1–17; Deut 5.6–21). **11:** *Den of robbers,* they imagine the Temple to be a bandit cave or hideout. **12:** *At first*, or "formerly." On Eli and the fate of Shiloh, destroyed during the early Philistine wars, see 1 Sam 4–6; Ps 78.60. The memory of Shiloh was important for Jeremiah's own family, descended from the priests of Shiloh through Abiathar, David's priest who was exiled to Anathoth by Solomon. **14:** *Called by my name,* characteristic of Deuteronomic theology, which speaks of God choosing a place "to put his name there" (Deut 12.5; 14.23). **15:** *Ephraim*, the tribe whose ancestor was the son of Joseph, and the most important within the northern tribal group, here as elsewhere symbolizing the entirety of the Northern Kingdom, which had been defeated and deported by the Assyrians more than a century earlier.

7.16–20: Jeremiah prohibited from intercession, a critical function of prophetic identity (Am 7.2,5); cf. 11.14; 14.11. **18:** *Cakes for the queen of heaven*, a ritual custom honoring the goddess Astarte (Babylonian Ishtar), goddess of fecundity and fertility; see also 44.17–19 and cf. Judg 2.13; 10.6; 1 Sam 7.3–4; 2 Kings 23.13. Though the

knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger. 19 Is it I whom they provoke? says the LORD. Is it not themselves, to their own hurt? 20 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: My anger and my wrath shall be poured out on this place, on human beings and animals, on the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched.

21 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. 22 For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. 23 But this command I gave them, "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you." 24 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward. 25 From the day that your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; 26 yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did.

27 So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. 28 You shall say to them: This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.

29 Cut off your hair and throw it away;
raise a lamentation on the bare heights,[a]
for the LORD has rejected and forsaken
the generation that provoked his wrath.

30 For the people of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the LORD; they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it. 31 And they go on building the high place[b] of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire—which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. 32 Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter: for they will bury in Topheth until there is no more room. 33 The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the animals of the earth; and no one will frighten

[a] Or *the trails*
[b] Gk Tg: Heb *high places*

worship of the queen of heaven was practiced chiefly by women (so 44.15,19), the texts here indicate that the entire family was actively involved; see also 44.17n. **19:** *To their own hurt*, or "to the shame (Heb "boshet") of their own face." The term "boshet" is code language for the Canaanite god Baal and for religious apostasy in general. See 2.26n.; 3.24.

7.21–26: Sacrifice and obedience. While part of the "sacrifice" was eaten by the one offering it, the "burnt offering" was offered up whole to God in smoke. The eating of both typifies the ritual abuses of Israel. **22:** *I did not speak . . . concerning . . . sacrifices*, the Exodus preceded the giving of the sacrificial laws at Sinai; see also Amos 5.25. The custom of sacrifice is but one illustration of the commitment one is to show toward God, and ritual actions are no substitute or replacement for moral integrity (Isa 1.11–17). **25:** That God has *persistently sent all my servants the prophets* is a principle of Deuteronomistic theology explicit in Jeremiah; see 25.4; 26.5; 29.19; 35.15; 44.4; 2 Kings 17.13,23; 21.10; 24.2.

7.27–8.3: Israel's death announced. Israel's lack of obedience leads to its death, consistent with the language of Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 30.19). **27:** Like Isaiah (6.9–11), Jeremiah will preach to an audience unwilling or unable to hear. **29:** *Cut off your hair . . . raise a lamentation*, both were funeral rituals (see 16.6n.). **31:** *High place,* see 3.6n. *Topheth . . . in the valley of the son of Hinnom*, the valley skirting Jerusalem to the south and west was likely the site of many fire-pits for garbage, but also the site for sacrificing children in fire for divine favor. The custom was practiced even by Israel's kings (Deut 18.10; 2 Kings 16.3; 21.6) but was proscribed in the reform of King Josiah (2 Kings 23.10); see 19.2–5; 32.35. "Topheth" is also a "burning place" in Isa 30.33 (see textual note *b* there). The name Valley of Hinnom (Heb "ge' hinnom") lies behind the later name Gehenna, used for the netherworld as a fire-pit. **33:** *No one will frighten them away*, exposure of a dead corpse was an act of desecration and

them away. 34 And I will bring to an end the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of the bride and bridegroom in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for the land shall become a waste.

8 At that time, says the LORD, the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs; 2 and they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served, which they have followed, and which they have inquired of and worshiped; and they shall not be gathered or buried; they shall be like dung on the surface of the ground. 3 Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, says the LORD of hosts.

4 You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD:
When people fall, do they not get up again?
If they go astray, do they not turn back?
5 Why then has this people[a] turned away
in perpetual backsliding?
They have held fast to deceit,
they have refused to return.
6 I have given heed and listened,
but they do not speak honestly;
no one repents of wickedness,
saying, "What have I done!"
All of them turn to their own course,
like a horse plunging headlong into battle.
7 Even the stork in the heavens
knows its times;
and the turtledove, swallow, and crane[b]
observe the time of their coming;
but my people do not know
the ordinance of the LORD.

8 How can you say, "We are wise,
and the law of the LORD is with us,"
when, in fact, the false pen of the scribes
has made it into a lie?
9 The wise shall be put to shame,
they shall be dismayed and taken;
since they have rejected the word of the LORD,
what wisdom is in them?
10 Therefore I will give their wives to others
and their fields to conquerors,
because from the least to the greatest
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;
from prophet to priest
everyone deals falsely.
11 They have treated the wound of my people carelessly,
saying, "Peace, peace,"
when there is no peace.
12 They acted shamefully, they committed abomination;
yet they were not at all ashamed,
they did not know how to blush.
Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;
at the time when I punish them, they shall be overthrown,
says the LORD.
13 When I wanted to gather them, says the LORD,
there are[c] no grapes on the vine,

[a] One Ms Gk: MT *this people, Jerusalem,*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Or *I will make an end of them, says the LORD. There are*

shaming. On the importance of keeping birds and animals away from a corpse, see 2 Sam 21.1–10. **34:** On this formulaic language see 16.9; 25.10; 33.11. **8.1–3:** On exhuming the remains as a way of shaming the deceased, see 16.4; 1 Kings 13.2; 2 Kings 23.14,16. Bones were also unclean, so spreading them upon sacred sites defiled the worship of the deities mentioned here. **2:** *All the host of heaven*, the stars, astral deities whose worship was forbidden (Deut 4.19; 17.3; 2 Kings 23.4–5; cf. 7.17–18).

8.4–9.26: Israel's wisdom is reduced to the funeral dirge. 8.4–12: Israel's false claim to wisdom. Though human behavior is conditioned by nature (v. 4) and though nature is infused with wisdom (8.7, birds migrate with seasons), Israel's claim to wisdom is a sham (8.8–9), both because of its moral failure (v. 10) and for promoting false optimism in a time of national crisis (v. 11). **8:** *False pen of the scribes*, normally it is the priest who is responsible for guarding and dispensing law or instruction (Heb "torah"). Perhaps what is meant here is the learned priest who also functions in such a literary capacity like Ezra the priest, who was also a scribe, a "scholar

nor figs on the fig tree;
even the leaves are withered,
and what I gave them has passed away from them.[a]

14 Why do we sit still?
Gather together, let us go into the fortified cities
and perish there;
for the LORD our God has doomed us to perish,
and has given us poisoned water to drink,
because we have sinned against the LORD.
15 We look for peace, but find no good,
for a time of healing, but there is terror instead.

16 The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan;
at the sound of the neighing of their stallions
the whole land quakes.
They come and devour the land and all that fills it,
the city and those who live in it.
17 See, I am letting snakes loose among you,
adders that cannot be charmed,
and they shall bite you,
says the LORD.

18 My joy is gone, grief is upon me,
my heart is sick.
19 Hark, the cry of my poor people
from far and wide in the land:
"Is the LORD not in Zion?
Is her King not in her?"
("Why have they provoked me to anger with their images,
with their foreign idols?")
20 "The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved."
21 For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt,
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.

22 Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of my poor people
not been restored?
9 [b] O that my head were a spring of water,
and my eyes a fountain of tears,
so that I might weep day and night
for the slain of my poor people!
2 [c] O that I had in the desert
a traveler's lodging place,
that I might leave my people
and go away from them!
For they are all adulterers,
a band of traitors.
3 They bend their tongues like bows;
they have grown strong in the land for falsehood, and not for truth;

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Ch 8.23 in Heb
[c] Ch 9.1 in Heb

of the text" of the Torah (Ezra 7.11). **10–12:** Cf. the near doublet at 6.12–15. **13–14**: *Gather,* a term associated with "ingathering" of fruit at the fall harvest. There is no produce to be gathered, so the people seek to "gather themselves" for death. **16:** *Horses*, the horse was the chief animal of warfare (see 6.23n.), signaling that the enemy armies are pressing in from Dan, in the far north of the country; cf. 4.15. **17:** The *adder* represents those snakes known to be nonresponsive to being "charmed" by whispering; see Ps 58.4–5; Eccl 10.11.

8.18–9.3: Israel is sick unto death, and God grieves. 8.19: *My poor people*, lit. "daughter (of) my people." See 4.11; 6.26. Of course the *king* (God) is in *Zion,* and it is thus an offense that they have not removed the *images* and *idols* from God's presence. **20–21:** *The harvest is past*, see 8.13–14n. Death and mourning rituals are near at hand. **22:** *Balm in Gilead*, the region of Gilead, in the north of Israel's territory in Transjordan, was known for its medicinal herbs (46.11; Gen 37.25). The question begs a positive response, thereby setting up an intolerable incongruity between what ought to be and what is in fact the case. With plenty of medicine at hand, Jerusalem is dying. **9.1:** *Spring of water*, the people have drunk "poison water" (Heb "me-ro'sh," 8.14), but an entire "head of waters" (Heb "ro'shi mayim") cannot provide tears enough to mourn Israel's death. **3:** *Bend their tongues like*

for they proceed from evil to evil,
and they do not know me, says the LORD.

4 Beware of your neighbors,
and put no trust in any of your kin;[a]
for all your kin[b] are supplanters,
and every neighbor goes around like a slanderer.
5 They all deceive their neighbors,
and no one speaks the truth;
they have taught their tongues to speak lies;
they commit iniquity and are too weary to repent.[c]
6 Oppression upon oppression, deceit[d] upon deceit!
They refuse to know me, says the LORD.

7 Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts:
I will now refine and test them,
for what else can I do with my sinful people?[e]
8 Their tongue is a deadly arrow;
it speaks deceit through the mouth.
They all speak friendly words to their neighbors,
but inwardly are planning to lay an ambush.
9 Shall I not punish them for these things? says the LORD;
and shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?

10 Take up[f] weeping and wailing for the mountains,
and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness,
because they are laid waste so that no one passes through,
and the lowing of cattle is not heard;
both the birds of the air and the animals have fled and are gone.
11 I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins,
a lair of jackals;
and I will make the towns of Judah a desolation,
without inhabitant.

12 Who is wise enough to understand this? To whom has the mouth of the LORD spoken, so that they may declare it? Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through? 13 And the LORD says: Because they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, or walked in accordance with it, 14 but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their ancestors taught them. 15 Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am feeding this people with wormwood, and giving them poisonous water to drink. 16 I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their ancestors have known; and I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them.

17 Thus says the LORD of hosts:
Consider, and call for the mourning women to come;

[a] Heb *in a brother*
[b] Heb *for every brother*
[c] Cn Compare Gk: Heb *they weary themselves with iniquity.* 6*Your dwelling*
[d] Cn: Heb *Your dwelling in the midst of deceit*
[e] Or *my poor people*
[f] Gk Syr: Heb *I will take up*

bows. That is, they string (lit. "thread") their tongues so that their words can be shot like deadly arrows; cf. v. 8 where the tongue is now the arrow.

9.4–9: The LORD's warnings: *Supplanters* (Heb "'aqob ya'qob"), Israel is characterized by its name, Jacob ("ya'aqob"), and is full of oppression and deceit. On Jacob's twofold "supplanting" of his brother, see Gen 27.36; cf. Gen 25.26 (textual note *d*); Hos 12.3. **4:** *Slanderer* (Heb "rakil"), perhaps a play on the name of Jacob's wife Rachel ("raḥel"). **7:** *Refine and test them*, such efforts in purging Israel of its dross have already proven ineffective (see 6.27–30n.). *Sinful people*, lit. "daughter (of) my people," as in 8.19. **9:** See 5.9n.

9.10–26: Only the professional singers of the funeral dirge are truly wise. 10: *Lamentation* (Heb "qinah") is the technical term for the funeral dirge. The displacement of domestic animals by wild animals is a conventional way of representing the destruction of a city or a land (Isa 13.20–22; 34.10–15). **12:** The central question is posed: "Who is wise enough?" **14:** *Baals*, see 2.23n. **15:** *Wormwood*, an extremely bitter and poisonous herbal extract; cf. 23.15; Deut 29.17; Am 6.12. *Poisonous water*, cf. 8.14. Israel is experiencing death by poisoning. **17:**

send for the skilled women to come;
[18] let them quickly raise a dirge over us,
so that our eyes may run down with tears,
and our eyelids flow with water.
[19] For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion:
"How we are ruined!
We are utterly shamed,
because we have left the land,
because they have cast down our dwellings."

[20] Hear, O women, the word of the LORD,
and let your ears receive the word of his mouth;
teach to your daughters a dirge,
and each to her neighbor a lament.
[21] "Death has come up into our windows,
it has entered our palaces,
to cut off the children from the streets
and the young men from the squares."
[22] Speak! Thus says the LORD:
"Human corpses shall fall
like dung upon the open field,
like sheaves behind the reaper,
and no one shall gather them."

[23] Thus says the LORD: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; [24] but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the LORD.

[25] The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will attend to all those who are circumcised only in the foreskin: [26] Egypt, Judah, Edom, the Ammonites, Moab, and all those with shaven temples who live in the desert. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.

10 Hear the word that the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. [2] Thus says the LORD:
Do not learn the way of the nations,
or be dismayed at the signs of the heavens;
for the nations are dismayed at them.
[3] For the customs of the peoples are false:
a tree from the forest is cut down,
and worked with an ax by the hands of an artisan;
[4] people deck it with silver and gold;
they fasten it with hammer and nails
so that it cannot move.
[5] Their idols[a] are like scarecrows in a cucumber field,
and they cannot speak;
they have to be carried,
for they cannot walk.
Do not be afraid of them,
for they cannot do evil,
nor is it in them to do good.

[a] Heb *They*

Skilled women, lit. "the wise women." Only these professional dirge singers (cf. 2 Chr 35.25) are truly "wise," because they recognize death as a reality. **21:** Death sneaking in through the window echoes a theme from Canaanite mythology regarding Baal's own palace. **22:** *No one shall gather them*, echoing the failure of the harvest (8.13–14). **25:** *Circumcised only in the foreskin*, other nations shared the custom of circumcision with Israel, and shared Israel's guilt, in that physical circumcision is no substitute for circumcision of the heart; see 4.4n. **26:** *Shaven temples*, lit. "cutting the corners," a practice of desert inhabitants (25.23; 49.32) but proscribed for Israelites (Lev 19.27; 21.5).

10.1–18: Israel's judgment doxology. Custom dictated that persons condemned "give glory to God" as a means of accepting any "bloodguilt" for a pending judgment upon them (13.16; Josh 7.19). **1–10:** A characteristic satire of human-made idols, similar to Isa 44.9–20. **2:** *Dismayed at the signs of the heavens*, i.e., obsessed by astrological phenomena, characteristic of Israel's neighbors. The gods were associated with stars and planets. **4:** *Deck it*, that is "adorn it, beautify it" (cf. Isa 40.18–20; 41.6–7). *So that it cannot move*, or "so that it will not teeter"; see Isa 28.7. **5:** *Like scarecrows in a cucumber field*, obscure reference, meaning they are either as stiff as a post or totally lifeless, although made to look human (or divine); cf. Isa 1.8; Let Jer 1.70. *They have to be carried*, whereas God "carried" Israel, such idols have to be carried themselves (Isa 46.3–7). That such gods can do

6 There is none like you, O LORD;
you are great, and your name is great in might.
7 Who would not fear you, O King of the nations?
For that is your due;
among all the wise ones of the nations
and in all their kingdoms
there is no one like you.
8 They are both stupid and foolish;
the instruction given by idols
is no better than wood![a]
9 Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish,
and gold from Uphaz.
They are the work of the artisan and of the hands of the goldsmith;
their clothing is blue and purple;
they are all the product of skilled workers.
10 But the LORD is the true God;
he is the living God and the everlasting King.
At his wrath the earth quakes,
and the nations cannot endure his indignation.

11 Thus shall you say to them: The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.[b]

12 It is he who made the earth by his power,
who established the world by his wisdom,
and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.
13 When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens,
and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth.
He makes lightnings for the rain,
and he brings out the wind from his storehouses.
14 Everyone is stupid and without knowledge;
goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols;
for their images are false,
and there is no breath in them.
15 They are worthless, a work of delusion;
at the time of their punishment they shall perish.
16 Not like these is the LORD,[c] the portion of Jacob,
for he is the one who formed all things,
and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance;
the LORD of hosts is his name.

17 Gather up your bundle from the ground,
O you who live under siege!
18 For thus says the LORD:
I am going to sling out the inhabitants of the land
at this time,
and I will bring distress on them,
so that they shall feel it.

19 Woe is me because of my hurt!
My wound is severe.
But I said, "Truly this is my punishment,
and I must bear it."

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] This verse is in Aramaic
[c] Heb lacks *the* LORD

neither good nor harm is a complaint also used against God (Zeph 1.12). **6–10:** A hymn of praise, contrasting God with foreign idols. The incomparability of God is a common theme in such doxologies; see Ex 15.11; Deut 33.26; Ps 113.5. **8:** *Instruction . . . than wood*, perhaps a play on the concept that discipline was delivered by a rod of wood (Prov 13.24; 22.15). **9:** *Silver . . . from Tarshish*, most likely Tarsus in Turkey, or perhaps Tartessus in southern Spain; on Tarshish as a source of silver, see 1 Kings 10.22; Isa 60.9. *Uphaz*, unknown (Dan 10.5), perhaps an error for Ophir, a region in southern Arabia famous for gold (see 1 Kings 9.28). *Blue and purple,* the colors of royal clothing, indicating their pretentious claims in the face of God's kingship (v. 10). **11:** This verse is in Aramaic (see textual note *b*), indicating that it is a later gloss. **12–16:** Continues the doxology using traditional creation language (Isa 42.5; 44.24; Job 9.8; Zech 12.1). **12:** On creation as effected by divine *wisdom,* see Prov 8.22–31. **13:** An ancient mythological image was that of the creator god giving his *voice* in thunder, defeating the chaotic power of the primeval seas; see Ps 29.1–11. *Storehouses,* see Deut 28.12; Job 38.22; Pss 33.7; 135.7. **17–18:** Jerusalem is to *gather* together (cf. 8.13,14; 9.22) what little remains following the siege to be carried off into exile.

10.19–25: Israel accepts God's judgment. Following her doxology, Israel confesses her guilt and accepts

20 My tent is destroyed,
and all my cords are broken;
my children have gone from me,
and they are no more;
there is no one to spread my tent again,
and to set up my curtains.
21 For the shepherds are stupid,
and do not inquire of the LORD;
therefore they have not prospered,
and all their flock is scattered.

22 Hear, a noise! Listen, it is coming—
a great commotion from the land of the north
to make the cities of Judah a desolation,
a lair of jackals.

23 I know, O LORD, that the way of human beings is not in their control,
that mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps.
24 Correct me, O LORD, but in just measure;
not in your anger, or you will bring me to nothing.

25 Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not know you,
and on the peoples that do not call on your name;
for they have devoured Jacob;
they have devoured him and consumed him,
and have laid waste his habitation.

11 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 3 You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant, 4 which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron-smelter, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, 5 that I may perform the oath that I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day. Then I answered, "So be it, LORD."

6 And the LORD said to me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. 7 For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. 8 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will. So I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.

divine punishment. **20–21:** *Tent . . . cords . . . curtains* are used metaphorically of Jerusalem and the Temple; see Ex 26.12; 35.18; 39.40. The invading Babylonians destroyed Judah's infrastructure in 586 BCE and carried the leaders (*shepherds*) and wealthy into captivity (52.1–30). **22:** As elsewhere, this invasion comes *from . . . the north* (1.13–15; 4.6; 6.22; 25.9). **23–25:** A prayer. The one who prays cites Prov 20.24 (v. 23) and Ps 79.6–7 (v. 25) to direct God's attention away from Judah and to neighboring nations instead. **24:** It was acceptable for Israel to plead for tempered justice (cf. 46.28; Ps 141.5). **25:** Biblical piety often allows the one experiencing divine judgment also to call for divine action against the enemies of God who "devour" God's portion; see 2.3; Ps 7.6,9.

11.1–17: The broken covenant. The disobedience of Israel's ancestors and their punishment has not prompted Israel to any greater faithfulness. They, like their ancestors, have also broken the covenant and are so cut off from divine favor that even intercession is of no assistance. Much of the language echoes the book of Deuteronomy (v. 3, Deut 27.26; v. 4, Deut 4.20; v. 5, *oath . . . ancestors*, Deut 7.8,12–13; *a land flowing with milk and honey*, Deut 6.3; 11.9; *as at this day*, Deut 6.24; 10.15). **1–5:** Recalls the curses and blessings that typically conclude a treaty or covenant agreement. **4:** *Your ancestors*, that is, those led by Moses from Egypt in the Exodus. In this tradition, the covenant was made with Moses at Sinai. **5:** *The oath that I swore to your ancestors*, here the reference is to the ancestors of those mentioned in v. 4—that is, to the generations of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In this tradition, these ancestors did not receive a "covenant" but rather an "oath" or "promissory note." This promissory note was for the land of Canaan, flowing with milk and honey (see Ex 13.5; Deut 6.3; 11.9; 26.15). *So be it, LORD*, Jeremiah's response (Heb "'amen"), is the technical response accepting the consequences of a self-imprecation when swearing an oath; see Deut 27.15–26. **6–8:** Given the failure of their ancestors, the people are subject to the treaty curses. **7:** *Your ancestors*, that

9 And the LORD said to me: Conspiracy
exists among the people of Judah and the
inhabitants of Jerusalem. 10 They have turned
back to the iniquities of their ancestors of
old, who refused to heed my words; they
have gone after other gods to serve them;
the house of Israel and the house of Judah
have broken the covenant that I made with
their ancestors. 11 Therefore, thus says the
LORD, assuredly I am going to bring disaster
upon them that they cannot escape; though
they cry out to me, I will not listen to them.
12 Then the cities of Judah and the inhabi-
tants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the
gods to whom they make offerings, but they
will never save them in the time of their
trouble. 13 For your gods have become as
many as your towns, O Judah; and as many
as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars to
shame you have set up, altars to make offer-
ings to Baal.

14 As for you, do not pray for this people,
or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for
I will not listen when they call to me in the
time of their trouble. 15 What right has my
beloved in my house, when she has done vile
deeds? Can vows[a] and sacrificial flesh avert
your doom? Can you then exult? 16 The LORD
once called you, "A green olive tree, fair with
goodly fruit"; but with the roar of a great
tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches
will be consumed. 17 The LORD of hosts, who
planted you, has pronounced evil against you,
because of the evil that the house of Israel
and the house of Judah have done, provoking
me to anger by making offerings to Baal.

18 It was the LORD who made it known to
me, and I knew;
then you showed me their evil deeds.
19 But I was like a gentle lamb
led to the slaughter.
And I did not know it was against me
that they devised schemes, saying,
"Let us destroy the tree with its fruit,
let us cut him off from the land of the
living,
so that his name will no longer be
remembered!"
20 But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge
righteously,
who try the heart and the mind,
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.
21 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning
the people of Anathoth, who seek your life,
and say, "You shall not prophesy in the name
of the LORD, or you will die by our hand"—
22 therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: I am
going to punish them; the young men shall
die by the sword; their sons and their daugh-
ters shall die by famine; 23 and not even a
remnant shall be left of them. For I will bring
disaster upon the people of Anathoth, the
year of their punishment.

[a] Gk: Heb *Can many*

is, the generation of Moses. **8:** *All the words of this covenant*. The curse of v. 3, but more generally of Deut 28.15–44. **9–13:** Israel's present disobedience (going *after other gods*, v. 10) is a return to the ways of the ancestors, that is, to the generation of Moses. **9:** *Conspiracy*, used specifically of plots of rebellion against the king. See 2 Sam 15.12; 2 Kings 11.14. **13:** *Shame* (Heb "boshet") is a metaphor for the Canaanite god Baal (see 2.26n.; 3.24; 7.19). **14–17:** God's refusal to listen to Israel's cry (v. 11) has as its corollary God's refusal to allow Jeremiah to intercede on their behalf (see 7.16). **16:** *Green olive tree*, on the high status of this tree, see Judg 9.8–9; Hos 14.6; Ps 52.8.

11.18–12.17: Jeremiah's complaints and divine response. The first of Jeremiah's complaints, these words were shaped by the editor utilizing typical psalm language and attributed to Jeremiah in order to enhance the persona of the suffering prophet. See also 15.20–21; 17.14–18; 18.18–23; 20.7–13; 20.14–18. **11.18–23:** If Jeremiah cannot pray on behalf of the people (see v. 14), he will pray (lament) on his own behalf. **19:** *Lamb led to the slaughter,* cf. Isa 53.7. **20:** *Who try the heart and the mind*, the psalmist often appeals to God's testing as a basis for God to act for the sake of divine justice and mercy, convinced that God will find the heart free from sin and deceit. See Pss 17.3; 26.2. 139.23. **21:** *The people of Anathoth*, that is, from Jeremiah's own hometown, suggesting that Jeremiah was threatened with death if he continued to prophesy such things. On Anathoth, see 1.1n. and 7.12n. **22:** *Famine*, that is, a shortage of food prompted by the Babylonian siege; cf. 19.9 and 2 Kings 6.24–29.

12.1–17: **The complaints of Jeremiah and God** merge in their grief over Israel. Such accusation against God

12 You will be in the right, O LORD,
when I lay charges against you;
but let me put my case to you.
Why does the way of the guilty prosper?
Why do all who are treacherous thrive?
2 You plant them, and they take root;
they grow and bring forth fruit;
you are near in their mouths
yet far from their hearts.
3 But you, O LORD, know me;
You see me and test me—my heart is with you.
Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter,
and set them apart for the day of slaughter.
4 How long will the land mourn,
and the grass of every field wither?
For the wickedness of those who live in it
the animals and the birds are swept away,
and because people said, "He is blind to our ways."[a]

5 If you have raced with foot-runners and they have wearied you,
how will you compete with horses?
And if in a safe land you fall down,
how will you fare in the thickets of the Jordan?
6 For even your kinsfolk and your own family,
even they have dealt treacherously with you;
they are in full cry after you;
do not believe them,
though they speak friendly words to you.

7 I have forsaken my house,
I have abandoned my heritage;
I have given the beloved of my heart
into the hands of her enemies.
8 My heritage has become to me
like a lion in the forest;
she has lifted up her voice against me—
therefore I hate her.
9 Is the hyena greedy[b] for my heritage at my command?
Are the birds of prey all around her?
Go, assemble all the wild animals;
bring them to devour her.
10 Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard,
they have trampled down my portion,
they have made my pleasant portion
a desolate wilderness.
11 They have made it a desolation;
desolate, it mourns to me.
The whole land is made desolate,
but no one lays it to heart.
12 Upon all the bare heights[c] in the desert
spoilers have come;
for the sword of the LORD devours
from one end of the land to the other;
no one shall be safe.

[a] Gk: Heb *to our future*
[b] Cn: Heb *Is the hyena, the bird of prey*
[c] Or *the trails*

and, at the same time, against one's enemies is characteristic of Israelite piety. Just as Jeremiah is alienated from his *own family* (v. 6), so God is alienated from God's own house (v. 7). **1:** *Lay charges*, technical term for lodging a formal legal appeal. Like Job (Job 9.3; 23.1–17), Jeremiah wishes to sue God in court but knows that he cannot win. Conventional wisdom and the sentiments of Deuteronomic theology suggest that sin is punished and righteousness rewarded. Jeremiah frames his complaint in terms of general human suffering; cf. Hab 1.1–17. **3:** *Know me . . . test me*, typical sentiments of the Psalms, where God's testing is invited to prove one's merit and righteousness (Pss 11.5; 17.3; 139.23–24). *Like sheep for the slaughter*, cf. 11.19.

12.5–6: God's response to Jeremiah. 5: *Foot-runners*, or more likely foot soldiers (Judg 20.2; 1 Sam 4.10; 15.4), as opposed to horse-drawn chariots. *Thickets of the Jordan*, the "pride" or lush river banks of the Jordan River was the abode of wild lions (49.19; Zech 11.3). **6:** *Even your kinsfolk*, the people of Anathoth; see 11.21.

12.7–13: God's lament over Israel for abandoning her to her enemies. 8: *I hate her*, the term also has the technical sense in treaty contexts of becoming an enemy to another nation. God has become Israel's covenanted enemy. **9:** The questions beg a negative answer, so the scavengers must be assembled to feed on the carcass of the victim. **10:** *Many shepherds*, referring to Israel's kings; see 23.1–4. **11.** *The whole land*, the Heb term "'erets" can mean "land" (of Israel) or "earth." The term here used of Israel introduces a cosmic element that is developed in what follows as all the nations are swept up in divine judgment.

[13] They have sown wheat and have reaped
thorns,
they have tired themselves out but
profit nothing.
They shall be ashamed of their[a] harvests
because of the fierce anger of the LORD.

[14] Thus says the LORD concerning all my evil neighbors who touch the heritage that I have given my people Israel to inherit: I am about to pluck them up from their land, and I will pluck up the house of Judah from among them. [15] And after I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them, and I will bring them again to their heritage and to their land, every one of them. [16] And then, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, "As the LORD lives," as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people. [17] But if any nation will not listen, then I will completely uproot it and destroy it, says the LORD.

13 Thus said the LORD to me, "Go and buy yourself a linen loincloth, and put it on your loins, but do not dip it in water." [2] So I bought a loincloth according to the word of the LORD, and put it on my loins. [3] And the word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, [4] "Take the loincloth that you bought and are wearing, and go now to the Euphrates,[b] and hide it there in a cleft of the rock." [5] So I went, and hid it by the Euphrates,[c] as the LORD commanded me. [6] And after many days the LORD said to me, "Go now to the Euphrates,[b] and take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there." [7] Then I went to the Euphrates,[b] and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. But now the loincloth was ruined; it was good for nothing.

[8] Then the word of the LORD came to me: [9] Thus says the LORD: Just so I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. [10] This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own will and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. [11] For as the loincloth clings to one's loins, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the LORD, in order that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory. But they would not listen.

[12] You shall speak to them this word: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Every wine-jar should be filled with wine. And they will say to you, "Do you think we do not know that every wine-jar should be filled with wine?" [13] Then you shall say to them: Thus says the LORD: I am about to fill all the inhabitants of this land—the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—with drunkenness. [14] And I will dash them one against

[a] Heb *your*
[b] Or *to Parah*; Heb *perath*
[c] Or *by Parah*; Heb *perath*

12.14–17: An addition to the divine lament, reshaping it to promise Judah's restoration in the midst of universal restoration. **14:** *Pluck them up*, a thematic term in Jeremiah, used of judgment (1.10). Here Judah's fate is placed in universal context as all the nations are uprooted, Judah among them. **15:** *Everyone of them* refers not simply to Judah but to all nations, who will live figuratively in Judah's midst (vv. 16–17). **16:** *Baal*, the Canaanite deity. **17:** *Uproot . . . destroy*,1.10.

13.1–27: The sign of the loincloth. A series of oracles held together by word associations. The series is introduced with the symbolic story of Jeremiah's loincloth, representing God's intimacy with Israel and Israel's "clinging" to God (v. 11); it also represents the "ruined" nature of the relationship that was now "good for nothing" (v. 10). **1–11:** Sign-acts are a common feature of prophetic behavior (cf. chs 16; 18; 19; 32; Ezek 4.1–5.17). **4:** *Euphrates*, some doubt there were two trips to the Euphrates (Heb "perat"); instead they suggest that the town of Parah (textual note *b*), mentioned only in Josh 18.23, is meant. This sign is more likely a literary device. See also the prophetic sign associated with the Euphrates in 51.60–64. **9:** *Pride of Jerusalem*, majesty belongs to God, and national pride, whether that of Israel and Jerusalem (Hos 5.5; Am 6.8) or other nations (48.29; Isa 13.11,19; Ezek 16.49), is offensive to God. **12–14:** Taking up the term "ruin" from the earlier sign (v. 14, "destroy"), the image shifts to the nations being filled with wine, often a symbol of either drunkenness or even of poisoning

another, parents and children together, says the LORD. I will not pity or spare or have compassion when I destroy them.

15 Hear and give ear; do not be haughty,
for the LORD has spoken.
16 Give glory to the LORD your God
before he brings darkness,
and before your feet stumble
on the mountains at twilight;
while you look for light,
he turns it into gloom
and makes it deep darkness.
17 But if you will not listen,
my soul will weep in secret for your pride;
my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears,
because the LORD's flock has been taken captive.

18 Say to the king and the queen mother:
"Take a lowly seat,
for your beautiful crown
has come down from your head."[a]
19 The towns of the Negeb are shut up
with no one to open them;
all Judah is taken into exile,
wholly taken into exile.

20 Lift up your eyes and see
those who come from the north.
Where is the flock that was given you,
your beautiful flock?
21 What will you say when they set as head over you
those whom you have trained
to be your allies?
Will not pangs take hold of you,
like those of a woman in labor?
22 And if you say in your heart,
"Why have these things come upon me?"
it is for the greatness of your iniquity
that your skirts are lifted up,
and you are violated.
23 Can Ethiopians[b] change their skin
or leopards their spots?
Then also you can do good
who are accustomed to do evil.
24 I will scatter you[c] like chaff
driven by the wind from the desert.
25 This is your lot,
the portion I have measured out to you, says the LORD,
because you have forgotten me
and trusted in lies.
26 I myself will lift up your skirts over your face,
and your shame will be seen.
27 I have seen your abominations,
your adulteries and neighings, your shameless prostitutions
on the hills of the countryside.
Woe to you, O Jerusalem!
How long will it be
before you are made clean?

14 The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought:
2 Judah mourns
and her gates languish;
they lie in gloom on the ground,
and the cry of Jerusalem goes up.
3 Her nobles send their servants for water;
they come to the cisterns,

[a] Gk Syr Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *Nubians*; Heb *Cushites*
[c] Heb *them*

(25.15–16; 51.7; Ezek 23.33). **15–27:** Various oracles keyed to the terms "pride" (v. 17), "flock" (vv. 17,20), "head" (vv. 18,21), and "beauty" (vv. 18,20). **16:** *Give glory*, an invitation to provide a judgment doxology, as in 10.1–18. **18:** *The king*, either Jehoiakim, who reigned through most of the first Babylonian siege until 597 BCE, or his son Jehoiachin, who reigned briefly before Jerusalem finally fell. **19:** *Negeb,* the southernmost region of Judah. **20:** *From the north*, the invading Babylonian army; see 1.14n. **21:** The pains of childbirth symbolize agony and despair (Isa 13.8; Mic 4.9). **22,26:** Exposure and sexual violation was a form of punishment.; cf. Nah 3.5; Ezek 16.35–43. **23:** *Ethiopians,* the inhabitants of Cush, the land south of Egypt. In her present state, Jerusalem cannot change herself; cf. Hos 5.4. **27:** *Your . . . neighings*, the lust of horses was a strong symbol of sexual depravity symbolizing Israel's foreign dalliances and resulting religious apostasy (5.8; Ezek 23.20).

14.1–15.21: Oracles concerning the drought. **14.1–10**: In the face of critical drought (vv. 2–6), a lament and intercessory plea is voiced (vv. 7–9), only to be rejected by God (v. 10). **1:** *The drought*, the Heb term is general

they find no water,
they return with their vessels empty.
They are ashamed and dismayed
and cover their heads,
4 because the ground is cracked.
Because there has been no rain on the land
the farmers are dismayed;
they cover their heads.
5 Even the doe in the field forsakes her newborn fawn
because there is no grass.
6 The wild asses stand on the bare heights,[a]
they pant for air like jackals;
their eyes fail
because there is no herbage.

7 Although our iniquities testify against us,
act, O LORD, for your name's sake;
our apostasies indeed are many,
and we have sinned against you.
8 O hope of Israel,
its savior in time of trouble,
why should you be like a stranger in the land,
like a traveler turning aside for the night?
9 Why should you be like someone confused,
like a mighty warrior who cannot give help?
Yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us,
and we are called by your name;
do not forsake us!

10 Thus says the LORD concerning this people:
Truly they have loved to wander,
they have not restrained their feet;
therefore the LORD does not accept them,
now he will remember their iniquity
and punish their sins.

11 The LORD said to me: Do not pray for the welfare of this people. 12 Although they fast, I do not hear their cry, and although they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I do not accept them; but by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence I consume them.

13 Then I said: "Ah, Lord GOD! Here are the prophets saying to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you true peace in this place.'" 14 And the LORD said to me: The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. 15 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name though I did not send them, and who say, "Sword and famine shall not come on this land": By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. 16 And the people to whom they prophesy shall be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword. There shall be no one to bury them—themselves, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out their wickedness upon them.

17 You shall say to them this word:
Let my eyes run down with tears night and day,
and let them not cease,

[a] Or *the trails*

("the trouble," see Pss 9.9; 10.1), but the LXX uses a word that specifically refers to "drought." **3,4:** *Cover their heads* as a ritual sign of mourning (2 Sam 15.30; Esth 6.12). **7:** *For your name's sake*, Israelite theology understood that, in spite of one's sin, God might act simply for the sake of God's own reputation; cf. Num 14.13–16; Ezek 20.1–26; Pss 25.11; 79.9. **8:** *Stranger*, or "sojourner," a foreign resident and not a citizen with full rights and obligations, but nevertheless enjoying some social protections. **9:** *Called by your name*, indicates possession. The appeal here is to God's responsibility as "owner" of Israel. **10:** In spite of their appropriate and well-fashioned lament, God rejects their prayer using the technical language of worship. **11–16:** Immediately following this lament and rejection, Jeremiah is again instructed not to perform the prophetic task of intercession (cf. 7.16; 11.14; 14.11), and God restates the rejection, again using the technical language of worship. **14:** *They are prophesying*, using a form of the verb suggesting the ecstatic nature of prophetic utterance. *Lies*, a term used in Jeremiah to refer either to Baal worship or, as here, to the false confidence in God that "peace" (v. 13) is the order of the day (cf. 7.4). **17–18:** The theme of "sword and famine" from the previous verses shapes this lament. **17.** *Virgin*

for the virgin daughter—my people—is
struck down with a crushing blow,
with a very grievous wound.
18 If I go out into the field,
look—those killed by the sword!
And if I enter the city,
look—those sick with[a] famine!
For both prophet and priest ply their trade
throughout the land,
and have no knowledge.

19 Have you completely rejected Judah?
Does your heart loathe Zion?
Why have you struck us down
so that there is no healing for us?
We look for peace, but find no good;
for a time of healing, but there is terror
instead.
20 We acknowledge our wickedness,
O LORD,
the iniquity of our ancestors,
for we have sinned against you.
21 Do not spurn us, for your name's sake;
do not dishonor your glorious throne;
remember and do not break your
covenant with us.
22 Can any idols of the nations bring rain?
Or can the heavens give showers?
Is it not you, O LORD our God?
We set our hope on you,
for it is you who do all this.

15 Then the LORD said to me: Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go! 2 And when they say to you, "Where shall we go?" you shall say to them: Thus says the LORD:

Those destined for pestilence, to
pestilence,
and those destined for the sword, to the
sword;
those destined for famine, to famine,
and those destined for captivity, to
captivity.

3 And I will appoint over them four kinds of destroyers, says the LORD: the sword to kill, the dogs to drag away, and the birds of the air and the wild animals of the earth to devour and destroy. 4 I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what King Manasseh son of Hezekiah of Judah did in Jerusalem.

5 Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem,
or who will bemoan you?
Who will turn aside
to ask about your welfare?
6 You have rejected me, says the LORD,
you are going backward;
so I have stretched out my hand against
you and destroyed you—
I am weary of relenting.
7 I have winnowed them with a winnowing
fork
in the gates of the land;
I have bereaved them, I have destroyed my
people;
they did not turn from their ways.

[a] Heb *look—the sicknesses of*

daughter, the loss of a virgin daughter was particularly tragic. **18:** *Ply their trade*, the verb has the negative connotation that prophets and priests treat their responsibility for "word" and "instruction" as though they were merchandise for sale. **19–22:** Another lament by the people in which they seem to have a thoroughgoing change of heart. This outstanding example of confession of sin and of hope for divine mercy, as well stated as it is, is to no avail. **19:** Cf. Lam 5.22; Ps 74.1; 79.5. *Healing*, 3.22; 8.22. **20:** Cf. 3.25; Ps 79.8. **21:** *For your name's sake*, that is, for the sake of God's own reputation among the nations. See v. 7n.; Ps 79.10; 115.2. **22:** *Hope*, see v. 8. **15.1–4:** Moses and Samuel were honored as Israel's chief intercessors, repeatedly pleading for God's good favor in the face of the people's disobedience (Ex 32.11–14; Num 11.12; 21.7; 1 Sam 8.6). Israel's destruction cannot be mitigated. **2:** The usual triad is sword, famine, and pestilence; see Jer 14.12; 24.10; 27.8. But here the four terms are "death" (NRSV "pestilence"), "sword," "famine," and "captivity," each matched with one of the "four kinds of destroyers" (v. 3). **4:** *King Manasseh* (698/687–642 BCE) was blamed for singlehandedly assuring Judah's destruction, in spite of his son Josiah's reforming efforts (2 Kings 23.26–27).

15.5–9: God's lament over Jerusalem. 6: *Backward*, looking or going backward as a statement of going in the wrong direction in rebellion; cf. 7.24; Isa 50.5. *Relenting*, the term used of God "repenting of" or "regretting" a decision (Gen 6.6). The ability of God to "relent of punishment" was a standard aspect of Israel's faith (Jon 4.2;

[8] Their widows became more numerous
than the sand of the seas;
I have brought against the mothers of
youths
a destroyer at noonday;
I have made anguish and terror
fall upon her suddenly.
[9] She who bore seven has languished;
she has swooned away;
her sun went down while it was yet day;
she has been shamed and
disgraced.
And the rest of them I will give to the
sword
before their enemies,
says the LORD.

[10] Woe is me, my mother, that you ever bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me. [11] The LORD said: Surely I have intervened in your life[a] for good, surely I have imposed enemies on you in a time of trouble and in a time of distress.[b] [12] Can iron and bronze break iron from the north?

[13] Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder, without price, for all your sins, throughout all your territory. [14] I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.

[15] O LORD, you know;
remember me and visit me,
and bring down retribution for me on
my persecutors.
In your forbearance do not take me away;
know that on your account I suffer
insult.
[16] Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart;
for I am called by your name,
O LORD, God of hosts.
[17] I did not sit in the company of
merrymakers,
nor did I rejoice;
under the weight of your hand I sat alone,
for you had filled me with indignation.
[18] Why is my pain unceasing,
my wound incurable,
refusing to be healed?
Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook,
like waters that fail.

[19] Therefore thus says the LORD:
If you turn back, I will take you back,
and you shall stand before me.
If you utter what is precious, and not what
is worthless,
you shall serve as my mouth.
It is they who will turn to you,
not you who will turn to them.
[20] And I will make you to this people
a fortified wall of bronze;

[a] Heb *intervened with you*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

Joel 2.13). **7:** *Bereaved them*, that is, made them childless. **9:** Bearing seven children or sons was considered a sign of blessing and good fortune (Gen 46.25; Ruth 4.15; 1 Sam 2.5; Job 42.13), just as the loss of seven was considered absolute bereavement (2 Sam 21.5–14; 2 Macc 7.20).

15.10–21: Jeremiah's second complaint and God's response. See 11.18–12.17n. **10:** Borrowing and lending represents Jeremiah's claim to overall and basic innocence. Israel had strict limits to borrowing and lending; see Ex 22.25; Deut 24.10–11; Neh 5.10–11; and cf. 1 Sam 12.3. **11:** *The LORD said*, or perhaps, with LXX, Jeremiah continues, "So be it LORD," with more claims of his innocence. See textual note *a*. **12:** The question, though obscure, requires a negative response and must refer to the onslaught of the enemy *from the north* (see 1.14n.). Even Israel, armored with bronze and iron (6.28), cannot withstand the enemy from the north. **13:** This must represent God's response. Israel is about to be plundered as punishment for its sins; cf. 17.3–4. **14:** The notion of God's wrath burning *forever* is not in the Hebrew. **15:** *In your forbearance*, God's "slowness to anger" is normally prized (Ex 34.6; Num 14.18), but here it becomes a scandalous problem for the one hoping for speedy divine intervention against the enemy. *On your account*, the psalmist can protest that he is suffering precisely because of devotion to God; see Ps 69.7. **16:** *Your words were found*, may refer either to 1.9 or to the finding of the book of the law in the Temple (2 Kings 22.8); cf. Ezek 3.3. **17:** *Merrymakers*, those who experience and celebrate the normal joys of life. Jeremiah complains of being bereft of joy. **18:** *Deceitful brook*, cf. Job 6.15–20. **19:** *I will take you back*, or "I shall bring you back." God's role might be more active than simply receiving Israel back. **20:** *A fortified wall of*

they will fight against you,
but they shall not prevail over you,
for I am with you
to save you and deliver you,
says the LORD.
21 I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked,
and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

16 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place. 3 For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bear them and the fathers who beget them in this land: 4 They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried; they shall become like dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall become food for the birds of the air and for the wild animals of the earth.

5 For thus says the LORD: Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament, or bemoan them; for I have taken away my peace from this people, says the LORD, my steadfast love and mercy. 6 Both great and small shall die in this land; they shall not be buried, and no one shall lament for them; there shall be no gashing, no shaving of the head for them. 7 No one shall break bread[a] for the mourner, to offer comfort for the dead; nor shall anyone give them the cup of consolation to drink for their fathers or their mothers. 8 You shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and drink. 9 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to banish from this place, in your days and before your eyes, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.

10 And when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, "Why has the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?" 11 then you shall say to them: It is because your ancestors have forsaken me, says the LORD, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law; 12 and because you have behaved worse than your ancestors, for here you are, every one of you, following your stubborn evil will, refusing to listen to me. 13 Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your ancestors have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.

14 Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt," 15 but "As the LORD lives who brought the people of

[a] Two Mss Gk: MT *break for them*

bronze, God challenges Jeremiah to remain steadfast to his call and to the divine promise of being armored for battle against his adversaries (1.18; 15.12) in the face of popular assault.

16.1–21: Further prohibitions for Jeremiah as sign-acts of coming judgment. Like the prohibition of intercession, now Jeremiah is prohibited from the normal patterns of family life and mourning rituals as signs of the coming judgment. **1–4:** Jeremiah is prohibited from marrying and having children, taken by some scholars to suggest a late date for his ministry, which could not then have begun until 609 BCE, when he was fairly young (see Introduction). Most argue that this is a literary or symbolic device and downplay its biographical accuracy. **4:** Common themes in Jeremiah relating to the desecration of corpses; cf. 7.33; 8.2; 9.21; 19.7; 22.18; 25.33. **5–13:** Jeremiah is prohibited from performing mourning customs. The image of dead bodies conjures up the next image of the "house of mourning." **5:** *House of mourning* (Heb "bet marzeaḥ"), an uncommon word also found in nonbiblical sources, likely referring to a banquet held in honor of the dead, thus involving feasting; see Am 6.7. **6:** *Gashing* and *shaving of the head*, ritual actions of mourning; cf. 7.29; Lev 19.28; Deut 14.1; Hos 7.14. **8:** The house of mourning, with its food rituals, is connected with the *house of feasting*, lit. "house of drinking" with emphasis upon the consumption of wine. **9:** See 7.34n. **10–12:** Cf. Deut 4.25–28; 29.24–29. **12:** The people's sin is more grievous even than that of their ancestors; cf. 11.6–10. **13:** The punishment will perfectly fit the crime: Israel will be forced to worship other gods in the land of their exile. **14–15:** A brief interpolation from 23.7–8 promising restoration. The Exodus will be forgotten in the face of God's new salvific event; cf. 3.16; 31.29; Isa 43.18. **16–18:**

Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them." For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their ancestors.

16 I am now sending for many fishermen,
says the LORD, and they shall catch them; and
afterward I will send for many hunters, and
they shall hunt them from every mountain
and every hill, and out of the clefts of the
rocks. 17 For my eyes are on all their ways; they
are not hidden from my presence, nor is their
iniquity concealed from my sight. 18 And[a] I
will doubly repay their iniquity and their sin,
because they have polluted my land with the
carcasses of their detestable idols, and have
filled my inheritance with their abominations.

19 O LORD, my strength and my stronghold,
my refuge in the day of trouble,
to you shall the nations come
from the ends of the earth and say:
Our ancestors have inherited nothing but
lies,
worthless things in which there is no
profit.
20 Can mortals make for themselves gods?
Such are no gods!

21 "Therefore I am surely going to teach
them, this time I am going to teach them my
power and my might, and they shall know
that my name is the LORD."

17 The sin of Judah is written with an
iron pen; with a diamond point it is
engraved on the tablet of their hearts, and
on the horns of their altars, 2 while their
children remember their altars and their
sacred poles,[b] beside every green tree, and
on the high hills, 3 on the mountains in
the open country. Your wealth and all your
treasures I will give for spoil as the price of
your sin[c] throughout all your territory. 4 By
your own act you shall lose the heritage that
I gave you, and I will make you serve your
enemies in a land that you do not know, for
in my anger a fire is kindled[d] that shall burn
forever.

5 Thus says the LORD:
Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength,
whose hearts turn away from the LORD.
6 They shall be like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see when relief comes.

[a] Gk: Heb *And first*
[b] Heb *Asherim*
[c] Cn: Heb *spoil your high places for sin*
[d] Two Mss Theodotion: *you kindled*

Fishing and hunting as metaphors for divine judgment. **18:** *Doubly repay* as fullness of compensation; see Gen 43.15; Isa 40.2. Double punishment is warranted for the offense. Since dead carcasses pollute, as do things that are "detestable" (Lev 11.10–12), the dead carcasses of detestable things (*idols*) would be particularly defiling. **19–21:** A brief concluding hymn of praise and divine oath regarding the conversion of the nations. **19**. *Worthless things*, a term used of idols of false gods (Deut 22.31; Ps 31.6). *No profit*, an allusion to the Canaanite god Baal; see 2.8n. On the theme of the conversion of the nations, see Isa 2.2; 60.3; 66.18; Mic. 4.2; Zech 8.22; 14.16; Ps 86.9. **20:** See 10.5,8,14–15.

17.1–18: Various oracles gathered under the theme of the drought. Fragments brought together under the theme established in 14.1, these oracles present a collage of coming judgment. **1–4:** Israel's intransigence is likened to an engraver writing on rock; cf. Job 19.24. **1:** *Diamond point*, the term usually refers to sharp thorns, but can be used also of sharp hard stone, probably flint; cf. Ezek 3.9; Zech 7.12. *Tablet of their hearts*, combining the images of the Torah being written on the human heart (Deut 30.14) and on tablets of stone (Ex 24.12; 31.18). But now it is their sinfulness that is so engraved. The human heart represented the center of resolve and will. Its hardening was a common metaphor for human stubbornness. *Horns of their altars,* protrusions at each of the four corners of a cut-stone altar, symbolizing divine strength and functioning to hold in place the wood and animal parts. Sanctuary could be gained by seizing the horns; see 7.4n. **2:** *Sacred poles,* Heb "'asherim" (the "'asherah" represented the goddess Asherah), which were used even in the Temple itself (2 Kings 21.7; 23.4). *Green tree*, a symbol of high places, at which religious rituals were conducted in violation of the prohibitions in Deuteronomy; see 3.6,13; 1 Kings 14.23; 2 Kings 16.4. **3–4:** See 15.13. **4:** *A fire is kindled*, cf. 15.4, linking to the theme of drought. **5–8:** A curse and accompanying blessing, linked to the theme of drought in vv. 6 and 8. Cf. Ps 1 and the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, using similar imagery. **5:** *Flesh* symbolizes human

They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

7 Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.
8 They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

9 The heart is devious above all else;
it is perverse—
who can understand it?
10 I the LORD test the mind
and search the heart,
to give to all according to their ways,
according to the fruit of their doings.

11 Like the partridge hatching what it did not lay,
so are all who amass wealth unjustly;
in mid-life it will leave them,
and at their end they will prove to be fools.

12 O glorious throne, exalted from the beginning,
shrine of our sanctuary!
13 O hope of Israel! O LORD!
All who forsake you shall be put to shame;
those who turn away from you[a] shall be recorded in the underworld,[b]
for they have forsaken the fountain of living water, the LORD.

14 Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed;
save me, and I shall be saved;
for you are my praise.
15 See how they say to me,
"Where is the word of the LORD?
Let it come!"
16 But I have not run away from being a shepherd[c] in your service,
nor have I desired the fatal day.
You know what came from my lips;
it was before your face.
17 Do not become a terror to me;
you are my refuge in the day of disaster;
18 Let my persecutors be shamed,
but do not let me be shamed;
let them be dismayed,
but do not let me be dismayed;
bring on them the day of disaster;
destroy them with double destruction!

19 Thus said the LORD to me: Go and stand in the People's Gate, by which the kings of Judah enter and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem, 20 and say to them: Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. 21 Thus says the LORD: For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. 22 And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the sabbath or do any work, but keep the sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors. 23 Yet they did not listen or

[a] Heb *me*
[b] Or *in the earth*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

weakness as opposed to divine strength. **9–10:** God tests the human heart. See Pss 11.5; 44.21. **9:** *Devious* (Heb "'aqob"), a play on the name "Jacob" (Heb "ya'aqob"); see 9.4n. **10:** The question posed in v. 9 is immediately answered: God tests the heart (*mind*) and examines the kidneys (*heart*). See 11.20. On the use of "kidneys" as the seat of strong emotion and feeling, see Pss 7.9; 26.2; 73.21; Prov 23.16. **11:** A wisdom saying like those in the book of Proverbs. **12–13:** A hymnic warning. **13:** *Hope of Israel* as a title for Israel's God, cf. 14.8. *Recorded in the underworld*, lit. "written in the earth." The disobedient are doomed to die. The Heb word "'erets" means "earth," "land," or "country," (1.18; 12.11) but is also used for the netherworld (e.g., Pss 22.29; 44.26; 63.10). See Ps 69.28 for the concept of names being registered in a "book of life." *Fountain of living water*, cf. 2.13.

17.14–18: Jeremiah's third complaint (see 11.18–12.6n.). **15:** *Word of the LORD*, the prophetic oracle of judgment. They taunt Jeremiah regarding his oracles of coming disaster. **18:** *Double destruction,* see 16.18n. These sentiments wishing for divine judgment upon one's adversaries are typical of pleas of intercession.

17.19–27: A command to honor the sabbath, concluding the section concerning the drought. The gates were the control point for matters of sabbath keeping (Neh 13.15–19), so this word is to be delivered at all of the gates.

incline their ear; they stiffened their necks
and would not hear or receive instruction.
24 But if you listen to me, says the LORD,
and bring in no burden by the gates of this
city on the sabbath day, but keep the sabbath
day holy and do no work on it, 25 then there
shall enter by the gates of this city kings[a] who
sit on the throne of David, riding in chari-
ots and on horses, they and their officials,
the people of Judah and the inhabitants
of Jerusalem; and this city shall be inhab-
ited forever. 26 And people shall come from
the towns of Judah and the places around
Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from
the Shephelah, from the hill country, and
from the Negeb, bringing burnt offerings and
sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense,
and bringing thank offerings to the house
of the LORD. 27 But if you do not listen to me,
to keep the sabbath day holy, and to carry in
no burden through the gates of Jerusalem on
the sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its
gates; it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem
and shall not be quenched.

18 The word that came to Jeremiah from
the LORD: 2 "Come, go down to the
potter's house, and there I will let you hear
my words." 3 So I went down to the pot-
ter's house, and there he was working at his
wheel. 4 The vessel he was making of clay was
spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked
it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.
5 Then the word of the LORD came to me:
6 Can I not do with you, O house of Israel,
just as this potter has done? says the LORD.
Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are
you in my hand, O house of Israel. 7 At one
moment I may declare concerning a nation
or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break
down and destroy it, 8 but if that nation,
concerning which I have spoken, turns from
its evil, I will change my mind about the dis-
aster that I intended to bring on it. 9 And at
another moment I may declare concerning
a nation or a kingdom that I will build and
plant it, 10 but if it does evil in my sight, not
listening to my voice, then I will change my
mind about the good that I had intended to
do to it. 11 Now, therefore, say to the people
of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem:
Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter
shaping evil against you and devising a plan
against you. Turn now, all of you from your
evil way, and amend your ways and your
doings.
12 But they say, "It is no use! We will follow
our own plans, and each of us will act accord-
ing to the stubbornness of our evil will."

13 Therefore thus says the LORD:
Ask among the nations:
Who has heard the like of this?
The virgin Israel has done
a most horrible thing.
14 Does the snow of Lebanon leave
the crags of Sirion?[b]

[a] Cn: Heb *kings and officials*
[b] Cn: Heb *of the field*

21: *Burden*, the term is also used for a divine "oracle"; cf. 23.33–40. **22:** *Keep the sabbath day holy,* Ex 20.8–11. **26:** *Benjamin . . . the Shephelah . . . the hill country . . . the Negeb*, the regions surrounding Jerusalem to the north, west, and south. **27:** *Kindle a fire,* cf. 15.14; 17.4, again tying this oracle into the theme of the drought.

18.1–23: The potter's house and pottery as signs of judgment. The beginning of a lengthy section (chs 18–20) focused on pottery and pottery-making as symbols of divine judgment. **1–17: A sign-act.** See 13.1–11n. At the potter's house, Jeremiah observes the potter at work as a sign of God's power to reshape Israel's future. **3:** *At his wheel*, lit. "upon the stones," referring to the stones used for turning pots. **8:** *I will change my mind about the disaster*, see 15.6n. Like the potter, God can rework the pot that is flawed. But the potter has control also to ruin his creation (v. 10); cf. Isa 45.9. The relationship between potter and clay is a metaphor of God's relationship to creation also in Isa 64.8; Sir 33.13. **10:** God can "repent" both of "disaster" and, as here, of "the good" that is planned. God can exercise total freedom to change the divine mind. **11:** The metaphor shifts from that of God's freedom to change course to that of God "plotting evil." That God "devises a plan" (or "plots a plot") against the people is taken up in the next verse. **12:** Although God may have a "plan," the people can only follow their own. The people express their fatalistic sense of doom, their inability to be "reworked." **14:** Israel acts contrary to the laws of nature by forgetting God, a common theme in the book; see 2.32n. *Lebanon*, the mountain range north of Israel that parallels the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The name "Lebanon" is related to the word

Do the mountain[a] waters run dry,[b]
the cold flowing streams?
15 But my people have forgotten me,
they burn offerings to a delusion;
they have stumbled[c] in their ways,
in the ancient roads,
and have gone into bypaths,
not the highway,
16 making their land a horror,
a thing to be hissed at forever.
All who pass by it are horrified
and shake their heads.
17 Like the wind from the east,
I will scatter them before the
enemy.
I will show them my back, not my face,
in the day of their calamity.

18 Then they said, "Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah—for instruction shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us bring charges against him,[d] and let us not heed any of his words."

19 Give heed to me, O LORD,
and listen to what my adversaries say!
20 Is evil a recompense for good?
Yet they have dug a pit for my life.
Remember how I stood before you
to speak good for them,
to turn away your wrath from them.
21 Therefore give their children over to
famine;
hurl them out to the power of the
sword,
let their wives become childless and
widowed.
May their men meet death by
pestilence,
their youths be slain by the sword in
battle.
22 May a cry be heard from their houses,
when you bring the marauder suddenly
upon them!
For they have dug a pit to catch me,
and laid snares for my feet.
23 Yet you, O LORD, know
all their plotting to kill me.
Do not forgive their iniquity,
do not blot out their sin from your
sight.
Let them be tripped up before you;
deal with them while you are angry.

19 Thus said the LORD: Go and buy a potter's earthenware jug. Take with you[e] some of the elders of the people and some of

[a] Cn: Heb *foreign*
[b] Cn: Heb *Are . . . plucked up?*
[c] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *they made them stumble*
[d] Heb *strike him with the tongue*
[e] Syr Tg Compare Gk: Heb lacks *take with you*

for "white," alluding to the snowy peaks. *Sirion* is a conjecture (see textual note *b*); if correct, it refers to Mount Hermon in Israel's far north (cf. Deut 3.9; Ps 29.6). *Mountain waters* is also a conjecture (see textual note *a*). **16:** Hissing and shaking the head are gestures of abhorrence and shaming. See 19.8; 1 Kings 9.8; Mic 6.16; 2 Chr 29.8;. **17:** *Show them my back*, lit "neck" or "back of the neck." This is a sign of stubbornness or neglect. Just as Israel can be "stiff-necked" (Ex 32.9), so can God; cf. 2.27; 7.26.

18.18–23: Jeremiah's fourth complaint, concerning his enemies (see 11.18–12.6n.). The sentiments are bitter, but not unusual for the piety of the Psalms. **18:** *Make plots*, this is a catchword in the section; cf. 18.8,11,12. *Priests, the wise,* and *prophets* were each associated with a primary form of divine revelation: *instruction* (Heb "torah"), *counsel,* and *word*; cf. Ezek 7.26. Jeremiah's adversaries claim these traditional forms of authority over Jeremiah's claim to an alternative word. **20:** A surprising claim, given prohibitions against Jeremiah interceding (7.16; 11.14). **23:** *While you are angry*, an appeal that God's mercy not be extended to the prophet's adversaries; see 15.15n.

19.1–20.18: The potter's flask and Jeremiah at Topheth. This section continues the theme of pottery as a symbol of divine judgment, concluding with Jeremiah's fifth complaint. No time reference is given, but by 605 BCE Jeremiah had been barred from the Temple (36.5), perhaps as a result of his confinement by the priest Pashhur, the chief officer of the Temple personnel (20.1–2). This section is the last of the oracles in the first cycle dated prior to the reign of Zedekiah.

19.1–20.6: Jeremiah at Topheth and its aftermath. On the rituals conducted at Topheth, see 7.31n. **2:** *Potsherd Gate*, nowhere else named. But since the Hinnom Valley was on the south of Jerusalem, this is likely the later

the senior priests, [2] and go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. [3] You shall say: Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. [4] Because the people have forsaken me, and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah have known, and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent, [5] and gone on building the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it enter my mind; [6] therefore the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter. [7] And in this place I will make void the plans of Judah and Jerusalem, and will make them fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life. I will give their dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth. [8] And I will make this city a horror, a thing to be hissed at; everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss because of all its disasters. [9] And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and all shall eat the flesh of their neighbors in the siege, and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life afflict them.

[10] Then you shall break the jug in the sight of those who go with you, [11] and shall say to them: Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. In Topheth they shall bury until there is no more room to bury. [12] Thus will I do to this place, says the LORD, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth. [13] And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah shall be defiled like the place of Topheth—all the houses upon whose roofs offerings have been made to the whole host of heaven, and libations have been poured out to other gods.

[14] When Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, he stood in the court of the LORD's house and said to all the people: [15] Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am now bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their necks, refusing to hear my words.

20 Now the priest Pashhur son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. [2] Then Pashhur struck the prophet Jeremiah, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the LORD. [3] The next morning when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, The LORD has named you not Pashhur but "Terror-all-around." [4] For thus says the LORD: I am making you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies while you look on. And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon; he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall kill them with the sword. [5] I will give all the wealth of this city, all its gains, all its prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of their enemies, who shall plunder them, and seize them, and carry them to Babylon. [6] And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house, shall go into captivity, and to

Dung Gate (Neh 3.13–14), used to discard refuse (thus "Potsherd Gate"). **4:** *Blood of the innocent*, a reference to the practice of burning children to the Canaanite god Baal (or Molech) at this site in the Hinnom Valley; see 7.29n. **5:** *Baal*, but elsewhere Molech; see 32.35; 2 Kings 23.10. **7:** *Make void*, a verb (Heb "baqaq") related to the word for "jug" (Heb "baqbuq," vv. 1,10), thereby explaining the connection with the prophetic sign. **9:** The horrors of siege warfare; see 11.22n.; Deut 28.53–57. **10:** Jeremiah performs the sign-act, unleashing the curse he has spoken. **13:** *Host of heaven*, 7.18; 8.2n.; 2 Kings 21.3–5. **20.1:** *Chief officer,* the chief Temple administrator in charge of monitoring prophetic activity. Compare the role of Zephaniah in 29.26–28 and Amaziah in Am 7.10–13. Such an office was customary throughout the ancient Near East. **2:** *Stocks*, cf. 29.26 and 2 Chr 16.10, where they are similarly used to confine prophets. The Hebrew word suggests being subjected to a contorting position or

Babylon you shall go; there you shall die, and
there you shall be buried, you and all your
friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely.

7 O Lord, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed.
I have become a laughingstock all day long;
everyone mocks me.
8 For whenever I speak, I must cry out,
I must shout, "Violence and
destruction!"
For the word of the Lord has become
for me
a reproach and derision all day long.
9 If I say, "I will not mention him,
or speak any more in his name,"
then within me there is something like a
burning fire
shut up in my bones;
I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot.
10 For I hear many whispering:
"Terror is all around!
Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"
All my close friends
are watching for me to stumble.
"Perhaps he can be enticed,
and we can prevail against him,
and take our revenge on him."
11 But the Lord is with me like a dread
warrior;
therefore my persecutors will stumble,
and they will not prevail.
They will be greatly shamed,
for they will not succeed.
Their eternal dishonor
will never be forgotten.
12 O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous,
you see the heart and the mind;
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.

13 Sing to the Lord;
praise the Lord!
For he has delivered the life of the needy
from the hands of evildoers.

14 Cursed be the day
on which I was born!
The day when my mother bore me,
let it not be blessed!
15 Cursed be the man
who brought the news to my father,
saying,
"A child is born to you, a son,"
making him very glad.
16 Let that man be like the cities
that the Lord overthrew without pity;
let him hear a cry in the morning
and an alarm at noon,
17 because he did not kill me in the womb;
so my mother would have been my
grave,
and her womb forever great.
18 Why did I come forth from the womb
to see toil and sorrow,
and spend my days in shame?

turned upside down. **3:** *Terror-all-around,* see 17.17n. **6:** *You have prophesied*, spoken of Pashhur the priest. Priests could function as prophets (so Jeremiah himself as well as Ezekiel), or perhaps it was because of his office (see v. 1) that he is attributed prophetic status.

20.7–18: Jeremiah's final complaint (see 11.18–12.6n.). Using strong language that has sexual overtones, Jeremiah complains of having been tricked or seduced by God. Jeremiah's own words are played upon by his enemies, who seek his ruin. A brief word of trust and praise (v. 11–13) gives way to a final self-imprecation as Jeremiah curses his own life. **7:** *Enticed*, though the term can be used positively (Hos 2.14), it can also be used of seduction (Ex 22.16; Judg 14.15) and deception (2 Sam 3.25; Ps 78.36); see 1 Kings 22.20–21 for its use in a prophetic context. **10:** *Terror is all around*, cf. v. 3; 6.25n. *Enticed . . . prevail*, key words in this section, cf. v. 7. **11:** The expression of confidence is a common element in laments (e.g., Pss 6.8–10; 12.6–7). **12:** Typical sentiments of complaint psalms in which the psalmist invites divine scrutiny and pleads for vengeance against adversaries. **13:** A call to praise is typical of psalms of complaint, where deliverance is anticipated and a vow is made to lead the community in praise when deliverance is experienced (e.g., Pss 22.22–31; 31.19–24). **14–18:** Raw words of bitterness concerning the human condition. Such sentiments regarding wished-for abortion or stillbirth are shocking, but not without parallels; see Job 3; Jon 4.3,8. **16:** *The cities that the Lord overthrew,* Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19.21,25,29; Deut 29.23; Isa 13.19; Am 4.11). **17**. *Forever great*, that is, "pregnant."

21 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur son of Malchiah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah, saying,
[2] "Please inquire of the LORD on our behalf, for King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon is making war against us; perhaps the LORD will perform a wonderful deed for us, as he has often done, and will make him withdraw from us."

[3] Then Jeremiah said to them: [4] Thus you shall say to Zedekiah: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I am going to turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls; and I will bring them together into the center of this city. [5] I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and mighty arm, in anger, in fury, and in great wrath. [6] And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both human beings and animals; they shall die of a great pestilence. [7] Afterward, says the LORD, I will give King Zedekiah of Judah, and his servants, and the people in this city—those who survive the pestilence, sword, and famine—into the hands of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, into the hands of their enemies, into the hands of those who seek their lives. He shall strike them down with the edge of the sword; he shall not pity them, or spare them, or have compassion.

[8] And to this people you shall say: Thus says the LORD: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. [9] Those who stay in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but those who go out and surrender to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have their lives as a prize of war. [10] For I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good, says the LORD: it shall be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

[11] To the house of the king of Judah say: Hear the word of the LORD, [12] O house of David! Thus says the LORD:

Execute justice in the morning,
and deliver from the hand of the oppressor
anyone who has been robbed,
or else my wrath will go forth like fire,
and burn, with no one to quench it,
because of your evil doings.

[13] See, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley,
O rock of the plain,
says the LORD;
you who say, "Who can come down against us,

21.1–24.10: Oracles from the reign of Zedekiah. The final phase of the first cycle of oracles. Zedekiah was the last of Judah's kings who reigned from the first deportation in 597 until the final fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. These oracles focus upon the royal house and establishment.

21.1–14: Oracles directed to Zedekiah, the people, and the royal house. In the face of the people's confidence, the LORD warns that he will fight against Judah (vv. 5–7), and Jerusalem and Zedekiah will fall to Nebuchadrezzar. Zedekiah repeatedly sent envoys to Jeremiah for divine guidance and information, always with similar results: Zedekiah should capitulate to the Babylonian armies; cf. 37.3–10; 38.1–3. The historical setting is apparently 588 BCE, after Zedekiah had committed himself to a rebellion against Babylon (see 52.3). **1:** *Pashhur son of Malchiah*, cf. 38.1. *Zephaniah son of Maaseiah,* the chief Temple officer who was apparently sympathetic toward Jeremiah (29.24–29). **2:** *Nebuchadrezzar*, the king of Babylon (605–562 BCE); his name is also written as "Nebuchadnezzar" (e.g., 27.6). **4:** *Chaldeans*, the inhabitants of the lower plain formed by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, a term that came to be used for Babylonians. **8:** *The way of life and the way of death,* Deuteronomic language (Deut 30.15,19). Ironically, Jeremiah offers the people the opportunity to choose, but their choices do not include the option of avoiding the Babylonian onslaught. The only possibility for life is surrender to the enemy besieging the city; Jerusalem, however, will be destroyed (38.17). **9:** *By the sword, by famine, and by pestilence*, a frequent triad in Jeremiah (14.12; 15.2; 18.21; 29.17–18). *A prize of war*, that is the "spoil" or "booty" that was divided among the soldiers after battle (Gen 49.27; Ex 15.9; Josh 22.8). **13:** Jerusalem was built on a narrow ridge and neighboring hill, protected on the west, south, and east, but it was vulnerable from the north. To refer to it as built in a "valley" and "plain" is derogatory language, as is the term "come *down* against," indicating its critical vulnerability in the current situation; one usually "went up" to Jerusalem. Compare the boast of the Jebusites in 2 Sam 5.6.

or who can enter our places of refuge?"
14 I will punish you according to the fruit of
your doings,
says the LORD;
I will kindle a fire in its forest,
and it shall devour all that is around it.

22 Thus says the LORD: Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, 2 and say: Hear the word of the LORD, O King of Judah sitting on the throne of David—you, and your servants, and your people who enter these gates. 3 Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place. 4 For if you will indeed obey this word, then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people. 5 But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. 6 For thus says the LORD concerning the house of the king of Judah:

You are like Gilead to me,
like the summit of Lebanon;
but I swear that I will make you a
desert,
an uninhabited city.[a]
7 I will prepare destroyers against you,
all with their weapons;
they shall cut down your choicest cedars
and cast them into the fire.

8 And many nations will pass by this city, and all of them will say one to another, "Why has the LORD dealt in this way with that great city?" 9 And they will answer, "Because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshiped other gods and served them."

10 Do not weep for him who is dead,
nor bemoan him;
weep rather for him who goes away,
for he shall return no more
to see his native land.

11 For thus says the LORD concerning Shallum son of King Josiah of Judah, who succeeded his father Josiah, and who went away from this place: He shall return here no more, 12 but in the place where they have carried him captive he shall die, and he shall never see this land again.

13 Woe to him who builds his house by
unrighteousness,
and his upper rooms by injustice;
who makes his neighbors work for
nothing,

[a] Cn: Heb *uninhabited cities*

22.1–9: Oracles directed to the king. Here the "house" refers to the palace; cf. 21.11–12, where it refers to the royal family and the dynasty. The king, as benefactor and symbol of justice, is instructed to perform the standard duties of kingship to insure the continued existence of the Davidic dynasty. The criteria of justice recall Deuteronomy (Deut 16.11,14; 24.19–21); cf. Jer 7.5–7. **3:** The language repeats that of 21.12, tying these sections together thematically. **4:** Cf. 17.25. **6:** *Like Gilead*, well known for its rich cattle industry (Num 32.1; Song 4.1; 6.5) and trade in medicinal herbs (see 8.22n.; cf. 46.11). *Lebanon*, see 18.14n. **7:** *Prepare*, that is, "sanctify," indicating warfare; see 6.4n.; 51.27–28; Joel 4.9. **8–9:** A later comment (5.19; Deut 29.23–28; 1 Kings 9.8–9) referring to Jerusalem, not the palace.

22.10–30: A chronological survey of Israel's kings from Josiah to Zedekiah (see chart on p. 1058). **10–11:** *Him who is dead*, Josiah was killed at Megiddo in 609 BCE in a battle with Pharaoh Neco. Neco was leading the Egyptian army northward to come to the aid of the Assyrian army, which was under critical pressure from the Babylonians. Josiah's political program was governed by his revolt against Assyria, so he did not want Neco's campaign to relieve Assyria to succeed. *Him who goes away*, Josiah's son Jehoahaz (*Shallum*) reigned briefly but was taken captive by Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt (ruled 610–595 BCE), who placed his brother Jehoiakim (608–598 BCE) on the throne (2 Kings 23.31–34; 2 Chr 36:1–4; Ezek 19.4). **13–23:** An oracle against Jehoiakim, who is judged to be the antithesis of his father, Josiah (vv. 15–17). **13:** *Work for nothing*, the royal building projects were carried out by use of conscripted laborers, one of the realities of dynastic kingship as suggested by Samuel's warning (1 Sam 8.10–18). References to elaborate building projects completed by means of uncompensated

and does not give them their wages;
14 who says, "I will build myself a spacious
house
with large upper rooms,"
and who cuts out windows for it,
paneling it with cedar,
and painting it with vermilion.
15 Are you a king
because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and
righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
16 He judged the cause of the poor and
needy;
then it was well.
Is not this to know me?
says the LORD.
17 But your eyes and heart
are only on your dishonest gain,
for shedding innocent blood,
and for practicing oppression and
violence.
18 Therefore thus says the LORD
concerning King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of
Judah:
They shall not lament for him, saying,
"Alas, my brother!" or "Alas, sister!"
They shall not lament for him, saying,
"Alas, lord!" or "Alas, his majesty!"
19 With the burial of a donkey he shall be
buried—
dragged off and thrown out beyond the
gates of Jerusalem.

20 Go up to Lebanon, and cry out,
and lift up your voice in Bashan;
cry out from Abarim,
for all your lovers are crushed.
21 I spoke to you in your prosperity,
but you said, "I will not listen."
This has been your way from your youth,
for you have not obeyed my voice.
22 The wind shall shepherd all your
shepherds,
and your lovers shall go into captivity;
then you will be ashamed and dismayed
because of all your wickedness.
23 O inhabitant of Lebanon,
nested among the cedars,
how you will groan[a] when pangs come
upon you,
pain as of a woman in labor!

24 As I live, says the LORD, even if King
Coniah son of Jehoiakim of Judah were the
signet ring on my right hand, even from there
I would tear you off 25 and give you into the
hands of those who seek your life, into the
hands of those of whom you are afraid, even
into the hands of King Nebuchadrezzar of
Babylon and into the hands of the Chaldeans.
26 I will hurl you and the mother who bore
you into another country, where you were
not born, and there you shall die. 27 But they
shall not return to the land to which they
long to return.
28 Is this man Coniah a despised broken
pot,
a vessel no one wants?
Why are he and his offspring hurled out
and cast away in a land that they do not
know?
29 O land, land, land,
hear the word of the LORD!
30 Thus says the LORD:

[a] Gk Vg Syr: Heb *will be pitied*

labor suggest that Jehoiakim was perceived as imitating Solomon's grandeur and autocratic power (1 Kings 5.13–18). **14:** *Windows . . . cedar . . . vermilion*, signs of royal ostentation and arrogance. **15:** *Your father*, that is, Josiah. **18:** The lack of professional mourners at one's funeral was a mark of shame and degradation; cf. 2 Kings 24.6, which suggests that nothing was unusual about Jehoiakim's death and burial. **20–23**: The addressee is an individual feminine figure, presumably Jerusalem; cf. 2.20–25,33–37. **20:** From distant regions (*Lebanon, Bashan* in northern Transjordan, *Abarim* east of the Dead Sea), lamentation will be made for Jerusalem, whose *lovers* (military and political allies) have been defeated. **23:** *Inhabitant of Lebanon*, a figurative reference either to Jerusalem or to King Jehoiakim. **24–30:** An oracle against Coniah (Jehoiachin), who reigned only briefly before surrendering to the Babylonians in 597 BCE. **27:** Jehoiachin was maintained at the Babylonian court, and continued to be the focus of hope for some Judeans and those in exile with him (compare the "good figs" of 24.4–7); see 2 Kings 25.27–30. **30:** *None of his offspring*, some evidence suggests that Sheshbazzar, "prince of Judah" (Ezra 1.8), was the "Shenazzar" listed among the sons of Jehoiachin in 1 Chr 3.18, and was appointed by

Record this man as childless,
a man who shall not succeed in his days;
for none of his offspring shall succeed
in sitting on the throne of David,
and ruling again in Judah.

23 Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. [2] Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. [3] Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. [4] I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

[5] The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. [6] In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

[7] Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt," [8] but "As the LORD lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he[a] had driven them." Then they shall live in their own land.

[9] Concerning the prophets:
My heart is crushed within me,
all my bones shake;
I have become like a drunkard,
like one overcome by wine,
because of the LORD
and because of his holy words.
[10] For the land is full of adulterers;
because of the curse the land mourns,
and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up.
Their course has been evil,
and their might is not right.
[11] Both prophet and priest are ungodly;
even in my house I have found their wickedness,
says the LORD.
[12] Therefore their way shall be to them
like slippery paths in the darkness,
into which they shall be driven and fall;
for I will bring disaster upon them
in the year of their punishment,
says the LORD.

[a] Gk: Heb *I*

the Persians as governor of Judah (1 Esd 2.12).

23.1–8: Conclusion. The chronological survey of Judah's kings concludes with a general oracle against the "shepherds" (a common metaphor for kings; cf. 22.22; Ezek 34) and a veiled reference to Zedekiah (vv. 5–6). **2:** The shepherds have driven the flock away, but under divine purpose (vv. 3,8). *Not attended . . . attend to you*, an ambiguous term connoting both attentive care (Ex 3.16; 4.31) and especially scrutinizing punishment (Am 3.14; Zech 10.3). Both meanings are implied here. See also v. 4. **4:** *Be missing*, a third meaning of the term "attend." The basic meaning of the word is to "muster" or "count off." In counting and arranging in order some may be discovered to be missing. **5:** *Righteous Branch*, cf. 33.15; Isa 11.1; Zech 3.8; 6.12. The possession of wisdom and the execution of justice and righteousness were the hallmarks of the just king throughout the ancient Near East. **6:** This king's name is "yahweh-tsidqenu," "the LORD is our righteousness," a play on the name of Zedekiah ("tsidqi-yahu"), the last king of Judah (597–586 BCE) appointed to the throne by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24.17). The reversal of the two elements of the name suggests that he will be the antithesis of Zedekiah. Here the stress is upon the person of the future ruler; cf. 33.16, where the hope is placed not in the person of the king but in the city Jerusalem. **7–8:** See 16.14–15n. Future deliverance will surpass the past in significance, even the Exodus (cf. Isa 51.9–11; 52.11–12).

23.9–40: Oracles directed to the prophets as royal agents, who function alongside the priests in the Temple (v. 11) and who preach soothing words of well-being at a time of crisis. This oracle emphasizes words such as

[13] In the prophets of Samaria
I saw a disgusting thing:
they prophesied by Baal
and led my people Israel astray.
[14] But in the prophets of Jerusalem
I have seen a more shocking thing:
they commit adultery and walk in lies;
they strengthen the hands of evildoers,
so that no one turns from wickedness;
all of them have become like Sodom to me,
and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.
[15] Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts
concerning the prophets:
"I am going to make them eat wormwood,
and give them poisoned water to drink;
for from the prophets of Jerusalem
ungodliness has spread throughout the
land."

[16] Thus says the LORD of hosts: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they are deluding you. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. [17] They keep saying to those who despise the word of the LORD, "It shall be well with you"; and to all who stubbornly follow their own stubborn hearts, they say, "No calamity shall come upon you."

[18] For who has stood in the council of the
LORD
so as to see and to hear his word?
Who has given heed to his word so as to
proclaim it?
[19] Look, the storm of the LORD!
Wrath has gone forth,
a whirling tempest;
it will burst upon the head of the
wicked.
[20] The anger of the LORD will not turn back
until he has executed and accomplished
the intents of his mind.
In the latter days you will understand it
clearly.

[21] I did not send the prophets,
yet they ran;
I did not speak to them,
yet they prophesied.
[22] But if they had stood in my council,
then they would have proclaimed my
words to my people,
and they would have turned them from
their evil way,
and from the evil of their doings.

[23] Am I a God near by, says the LORD, and not a God far off? [24] Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD. [25] I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed!" [26] How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? [27] They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal. [28] Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the LORD. [29] Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces? [30] See, therefore, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who steal my words from one another. [31] See, I am against the prophets, says

"driven" and "punishment" (v. 12; cf. vv. 2,3,4). **13:** *Samaria*, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. For *prophets* of the Canaanite God *Baal* there, see 1 Kings 18.20–24. **14:** Jerusalem outdoes Samaria with its offenses; cf. Ezek 16.46–55; 23.2–11. *Sodom . . . Gomorrah*, see 20.16n. **15:** *Wormwood*, see 9.15n. **18:** *Council of the LORD*, the abode of God was conceived of as a royal court with many divine beings present (1 Kings 22.19–23; Isa 6.1–7; Pss 82.1; 89.7). **19–20:** See 30.23–24. *Storm* imagery is frequently used to represent the coming of the LORD as a warrior. **21:** *They ran*, using the metaphor of a runner bringing a message (2 Sam 18.19–26; cf. Isa 52.7). **23:** *Am I a God near by?* a question supposing a negative response. God is not near by, but rather is far off, filling the heavens and seeing all things even in secret places; see 1 Kings 8.27. Jeremiah protests the assumptions of divine immanence and coziness. **28:** *Dream . . . word*, a contrast between common wishful thinking and powerful visionary experience producing God's fiery word. Num 12.6 and Joel 2.28, however, suggest that both dreams and visionary experiences were legitimate means of receiving oracles from God, so this is not likely a disparaging of the one for the sake of the other ("but" is not in the MT). The divine word surpasses any medium of its

the LORD, who use their own tongues and say, "Says the LORD." 32 See, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the LORD, and who tell them, and who lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or appoint them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the LORD.

33 When this people, or a prophet, or a priest asks you, "What is the burden of the LORD?" you shall say to them, "You are the burden,[a] and I will cast you off, says the LORD." 34 And as for the prophet, priest, or the people who say, "The burden of the LORD," I will punish them and their households. 35 Thus shall you say to one another, among yourselves, "What has the LORD answered?" or "What has the LORD spoken?" 36 But "the burden of the LORD" you shall mention no more, for the burden is everyone's own word, and so you pervert the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God. 37 Thus you shall ask the prophet, "What has the LORD answered you?" or "What has the LORD spoken?" 38 But if you say, "the burden of the LORD," thus says the LORD: Because you have said these words, "the burden of the LORD," when I sent to you, saying, You shall not say, "the burden of the LORD," 39 therefore, I will surely lift you up[b] and cast you away from my presence, you and the city that I gave to you and your ancestors. 40 And I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace and perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.

24 The LORD showed me two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the LORD. This was after King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon had taken into exile from Jerusalem King Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim of Judah, together with the officials of Judah, the artisans, and the smiths, and had brought them to Babylon. 2 One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs, but the other basket had very bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten. 3 And the LORD said to me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" I said, "Figs, the good figs very good, and the bad figs very bad, so bad that they cannot be eaten."

4 Then the word of the LORD came to me: 5 Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. 6 I will set my eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. 7 I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

8 But thus says the LORD: Like the bad figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten, so will I treat King Zedekiah of Judah, his officials, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who live in the land of Egypt. 9 I will make them a horror, an evil thing, to all the kingdoms of the earth—a disgrace, a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I shall drive them. 10 And I will send sword, famine, and pestilence upon them,

[a] Gk Vg: Heb *What burden*
[b] Heb Mss Gk Vg: MT *forget you*

conveyance, and is powerful (v. 29). **31:** *Says the LORD*, these prophets are not prophesying in the name of Baal (v. 27), but rather in the very name of God. They are, however, simply mimicking one another and plagiarizing each other's messages (v. 30). **33:** *Burden of the LORD*, a term also used for an "oracle" (see Nah 1.1; Zech 9.1; 12.1; Mal 1.1). A sarcastic play on words: the people seek an oracle from Jeremiah but they are declared to be a burden to God; cf. 17.21. **39:** *I will surely lift you up*, a further play on the term "burden," from the Heb verb "nasa'," which means "to carry or lift."

24.1–10: Conclusion to this group of oracles from the time of Zedekiah. The exiled Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) was held in high esteem by those exiled with him in Babylon and by the supporters of Jeremiah's program. Those left in Judah who supported Zedekiah were regarded as rotten and inedible figs; see further 22.27; 29.17; 2 Kings 24.10–17. In this perspective, the future hope lay with those in exile. This language was a polemical support for the community which eventually returned from exile and reestablished control in the postexilic reconstruction under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. **5:** *Land of the Chaldeans*, Babylon (see 21.4n.). **6:** See 1.10. **8:** *In the land of Egypt*, many Judeans fled to Egypt, an ally of Judah's in its struggle against the Babylonians; cf. 42.13–14.

until they are utterly destroyed from the land that I gave to them and their ancestors.

25 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah (that was the first year of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon), [2] which the prophet Jeremiah spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem: [3] For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. [4] And though the LORD persistently sent you all his servants the prophets, you have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear [5] when they said, "Turn now, every one of you, from your evil way and wicked doings, and you will remain upon the land that the LORD has given to you and your ancestors from of old and forever; [6] do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, and do not provoke me to anger with the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm." [7] Yet you did not listen to me, says the LORD, and so you have provoked me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.

[8] Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, [9] I am going to send for all the tribes of the north, says the LORD, even for King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these nations around; I will utterly destroy them, and make them an object of horror and of hissing, and an everlasting disgrace.[a] [10] And I will banish from them the sound of mirth and the sound of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. [11] This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. [12] Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, says the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. [13] I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. [14] For many nations and great kings shall make slaves of them also; and I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.

[15] For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. [16] They shall drink and stagger and go out of their minds because of the sword that I am sending among them.

[17] So I took the cup from the LORD's hand, and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it: [18] Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste, an object of hissing and of cursing, as they are today; [19] Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his officials, and all his people; [20] all the mixed people;[b] all the kings of the land of Uz; all the kings of

[a] Gk Compare Syr: Heb *and everlasting desolations*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

25.1–38: Judah among all the nations. The conclusion of the first cycle of oracles with its reference to the scroll of 605 BCE (see 36.1–32). With Nebuchadrezzar's victory over the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605, Judah's fate became a part of unfolding world events. Its destruction here is placed in cosmic perspective as God's wrath is directed against all the nations, and finally against Babylon itself. The LXX places the oracles against the nations (chs 46–51) here, following v. 13. **1:** *Fourth year,* 605 BCE. **3:** *Twenty-three years*, suggesting that Jeremiah's ministry began in 627 BCE. See 1.2 and the introduction. **4:** This role of the prophets is characteristic of Jeremiah; see 7.25n. **9:** *All the tribes of the north*, the direction of coming disaster; see 1.14. *All these nations around*, Judah's neighbors. **10:** See 7.34n. **11:** *Seventy years*, an expected lifetime; see Ps 90.10; Isa 23.15. No one alive will experience repatriation to their land. **13:** *This book*, that is, material in chs 1–25 or the scroll of 605 BCE. By placing the oracles against the nations at this point, however, the Septuagint takes "this book" to refer to chs 46–51. **15:** *Cup of the wine of wrath*, see 13.12–14n. **18:** *As they are today*, presumes an exilic perspective (after 586 BCE) rather than that of 605 BCE as indicated in 25.1. **19–25:** The nations are listed in their proximity to Judah from nearest to farthest. **20:** *Mixed people*, a term associated with desert dwellers in v. 24. *Uz* is in Edom, the

the land of the Philistines—Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod; [21] Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites; [22] all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastland across the sea; [23] Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who have shaven temples; [24] all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed peoples[a] that live in the desert; [25] all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of Media; [26] all the kings of the north, far and near, one after another, and all the kingdoms of the world that are on the face of the earth. And after them the king of Sheshach[b] shall drink.

[27] Then you shall say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Drink, get drunk and vomit, fall and rise no more, because of the sword that I am sending among you.

[28] And if they refuse to accept the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them: Thus says the LORD of hosts: You must drink! [29] See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that is called by my name, and how can you possibly avoid punishment? You shall not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, says the LORD of hosts.

[30] You, therefore, shall prophesy against them all these words, and say to them:

The LORD will roar from on high,
and from his holy habitation utter his voice;
he will roar mightily against his fold,
and shout, like those who tread grapes,
against all the inhabitants of the earth.
[31] The clamor will resound to the ends of the earth,
for the LORD has an indictment against the nations;
he is entering into judgment with all flesh,
and the guilty he will put to the sword,
says the LORD.

[32] Thus says the LORD of hosts:
See, disaster is spreading
from nation to nation,
and a great tempest is stirring
from the farthest parts of the earth!
[33] Those slain by the LORD on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become dung on the surface of the ground.

[34] Wail, you shepherds, and cry out;
roll in ashes, you lords of the flock,
for the days of your slaughter have come—
and your dispersions,[a]
and you shall fall like a choice vessel.
[35] Flight shall fail the shepherds,
and there shall be no escape for the lords of the flock.
[36] Hark! the cry of the shepherds,
and the wail of the lords of the flock!
For the LORD is despoiling their pasture,
[37] and the peaceful folds are devastated,
because of the fierce anger of the LORD.
[38] Like a lion he has left his covert;
for their land has become a waste
because of the cruel sword,
and because of his fierce anger.

26 At the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came from the LORD: [2] Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the LORD's house,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] *Sheshach* is a cryptogram for *Babel*, Babylon

home of Job (Job 1.1), though its precise location is unknown. **21:** *Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites*, nations in Transjordan, east of Israel and Judah. **23:** *Dedan, Tema, Buz*, cities in Arabia. *Shaven temples*, see 9.26n. **26:** *Sheshach*, code language for "Babel" (Babylon) derived by substituting the letters of the alphabet in reverse order, an encryption method called "atbash"; see also 51.1,41. **30:** Divine wrath is portrayed in conventional terms as a roaring lion (Am 1.2; Hos 11.10; Joel 3.16) or one treading out grapes like blood (Gen 49.11; Isa 63.1–3; Zech 9.15). **33:** Using common themes; cf. 16.4. **34:** *Roll in ashes*, characteristic mourning ritual; cf. 6.26. **38:** *He has left*, that is, God, the lion of Judah, has abandoned his abode.

26.1–29.32: Jeremiah in conflict. These narratives begin the second cycle of prophetic oracles, and detail several episodes where Jeremiah was in conflict with Temple and royal officials and other prophets. This cycle includes chs 26–35, and concludes with ch 36. It again spans the time from Jehoiakim's reign (609 BCE) down to the reign of Zedekiah and the final siege of Jerusalem (586 BCE). Some attribute this narrative material in chs

and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the LORD; speak to them all the words that I command you; do not hold back a word. 3 It may be that they will listen, all of them, and will turn from their evil way, that I may change my mind about the disaster that I intend to bring on them because of their evil doings. 4 You shall say to them: Thus says the LORD: If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you, 5 and to heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently—though you have not heeded— 6 then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.

7 The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. 8 And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, "You shall die! 9 Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant'?" And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

10 When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the LORD and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the LORD. 11 Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears."

12 Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, "It is the LORD who sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. 13 Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will change his mind about the disaster that he has pronounced against you. 14 But as for me, here I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. 15 Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will be bringing innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the LORD sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears."

16 Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God." 17 And some of the elders of the land arose and said to all the assembled people, 18 "Micah of Moresheth, who prophesied during the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, said to all the people of Judah: 'Thus says the LORD of hosts,

Zion shall be plowed as a field;
Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,
and the mountain of the house a
wooded height.'

19 Did King Hezekiah of Judah and all Judah actually put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD,

26–29 to "Baruch's memoirs," but this is conjectural.

26.1–24: Jeremiah's Temple Sermon. Generally associated with ch 7 because of its location in the Temple and its reference to Shiloh (see 7.1,12–15). Attention is given here to the aftermath of the event and Jeremiah's near arrest and execution. **1:** *The beginning of the reign,* 609 BCE. **3:** *That I may change my mind*, see 18.8,10n., and the freedom God has to alter divine plans. **5:** See 7.25n. **6:** *Shiloh*, see 7.12n. **9:** To prophesy threats against the royal sanctuary was tantamount to treason. Compare Amos's reception at Bethel (Am 7.10–13). **10:** *Seat in the entry of the New Gate*, indicates that this is a formal judicial hearing, with justice being administered "in the gate" (Isa 29.21; Am 5.15). **12:** *It is the LORD who sent me*, as elsewhere in the ancient Near East, prophets were granted some degree of protection by virtue of the fact that they were constrained to bring their message by the gods (cf. v. 15). But such immunity had limits. **15:** *Innocent blood*, the killing of an innocent person was a horrific crime that had disastrous consequences, especially in the perspective of Deuteronomy (see Deut 19.10–13; 21.8–9; 27.25). **16–19:** The charge is mitigated for two reasons. First, they recognize the prophet's claim to immunity on the basis of being constrained by God to deliver a message (v. 16). Second, the precedent of Micah is invoked, with a rare quotation of an earlier book (Mic 3.12). Micah's prediction of disaster did not come to pass because, it is argued, he successfully prompted Hezekiah to plead for divine favor. There is no mention of this event in the historical books, where only Isaiah is mentioned in connection with Hezekiah and the Assyrian

and did not the LORD change his mind about the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster on ourselves!"

20 There was another man prophesying in the name of the LORD, Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim. He prophesied against this city and against this land in words exactly like those of Jeremiah. 21 And when King Jehoiakim, with all his warriors and all the officials, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Uriah heard of it, he was afraid and fled and escaped to Egypt. 22 Then King Jehoiakim sent[a] Elnathan son of Achbor and men with him to Egypt, 23 and they took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, who struck him down with the sword and threw his dead body into the burial place of the common people.

24 But the hand of Ahikam son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over into the hands of the people to be put to death.

27 In the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah[b] son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD. 2 Thus the LORD said to me: Make yourself a yoke of straps and bars, and put them on your neck. 3 Send word[c] to the king of Edom, the king of Moab, the king of the Ammonites, the king of Tyre, and the king of Sidon by the hand of the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to King Zedekiah of Judah. 4 Give them this charge for their masters: Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: This is what you shall say to your masters: 5 It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the people and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever I please. 6 Now I have given all these lands into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him even the wild animals of the field to serve him. 7 All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave.

8 But if any nation or kingdom will not serve this king, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, then I will punish that nation with

[a] Heb adds *men to Egypt*
[b] Another reading is *Jehoiakim*
[c] Cn: Heb *send them*

crisis (2 Kings 18.13–20.19). **20–23:** The precedent of Uriah, however, indicated the danger facing Jeremiah. For exactly the same charge (v. 20) Uriah was hunted down by Jehoiakim and executed. **22:** *Elnathan*, see 36.12,25. **24:** *Ahikam son of Shaphan*, as Josiah's secretary, Shaphan had been instrumental in the reform movement of Josiah (2 Kings 22.3–13), of which Jeremiah was likely an enthusiastic supporter. This particular family, comprised of Shaphan's sons Ahikam and Gemariah and Ahikam's son Gedaliah, along with others, was one of Jeremiah's chief advocates within the royal ranks of the princes; see 36.11–19. That Ahikam had to rescue Jeremiah indicates that, in spite of the sentiments of the officials and people, Jeremiah was still in grave danger, as indicated by the precedent of Uriah.

27.1–28.17: Jeremiah's ox yoke and his confrontation with Hananiah. These conflict narratives are linked together syntactically and thematically. The date of Jeremiah's confrontation with Hananiah, according to 28.1, is August, 594 BCE (contrast 27.1, which has a scribal error, dating the event to the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, under the influence of 26.1). In early 594 BCE a revolt in the Babylonian army prompted a conspiracy among the western states, including Judah, to revolt against Nebuchadrezzar. The meeting of these foreign emissaries in Jerusalem to consider the details for such a revolt is the occasion for the recorded prophetic sign in ch 27. Zedekiah did not join the conspiracy at this time, however, and Judah was spared the retaliatory strike by Babylon later that year.

27.1–11: Jeremiah's word to the foreign emissaries. 2: *A yoke of*, the phrase is lacking in the text. Jeremiah is simply told to make "straps" and "bars." But a yoke was comprised of straps and bars; see Lev 26.13; Ezek 34.27. **3:** *Send word*, the text ("Send them") suggests that it was the yoke itself that was sent via the emissaries. See textual note *c*. **6:** *Nebuchadnezzar*, this form of the name, used in chs 27–29, shows the influence of the Deuteronomistic editor. Elsewhere in Jeremiah the form is more correctly rendered as Nebuchadrezzar. *My servant*, a striking designation for a foreign ruler (cf. Isa 44.28–45.1). He is God's servant because he is the instrument of punishment against Judah and her neighbors. **7:** Cf. 25.11–14. **8–14:** Jeremiah offers a choice and limited hope:

the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, says the LORD, until I have completed its[a] destruction by his hand. 9 You, therefore, must not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers,[b] your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who are saying to you, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon." 10 For they are prophesying a lie to you, with the result that you will be removed far from your land; I will drive you out, and you will perish. 11 But any nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave on its own land, says the LORD, to till it and live there.

12 I spoke to King Zedekiah of Judah in the same way: Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. 13 Why should you and your people die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, as the LORD has spoken concerning any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? 14 Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are telling you not to serve the king of Babylon, for they are prophesying a lie to you. 15 I have not sent them, says the LORD, but they are prophesying falsely in my name, with the result that I will drive you out and you will perish, you and the prophets who are prophesying to you.

16 Then I spoke to the priests and to all this people, saying, Thus says the LORD: Do not listen to the words of your prophets who are prophesying to you, saying, "The vessels of the LORD's house will soon be brought back from Babylon," for they are prophesying a lie to you. 17 Do not listen to them; serve the king of Babylon and live. Why should this city become a desolation? 18 If indeed they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, then let them intercede with the LORD of hosts, that the vessels left in the house of the LORD, in the house of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem may not go to Babylon. 19 For thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the pillars, the sea, the stands, and the rest of the vessels that are left in this city, 20 which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon did not take away when he took into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon King Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim of Judah, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem— 21 thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels left in the house of the LORD, in the house of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem: 22 They shall be carried to Babylon, and there they shall stay, until the day when I give attention to them, says the LORD. Then I will bring them up and restore them to this place.

28 In that same year, at the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah of Judah, in the fifth month of the fourth year, the prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying, 2 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. 3 Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD's house, which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. 4 I will also bring back to this place King Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah who went

[a] Heb *their*
[b] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *dreams*

willing submission to vassalage or destruction. **9:** *Diviners . . . dreamers . . . soothsayers . . . sorcerers*, though these intermediaries were banned by Deuteronomic tradition (Deut 18.10,14), the prophets inveigh against these customs, suggesting they were practiced also in Israel.

27.12–22: Jeremiah speaks similar words to Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem. 16. *The vessels*, ritual paraphernalia used in the Temple; see 28.3; 2 Kings 24.13; Ezra 5.14–15. **19:** The *pillars* Jachin and Boaz (1 Kings 7.15–22), the large basin known as the *sea* (1 Kings 7.23–26), and the *stands* and *vessels* (1 Kings 7.27–39) were furnishings of the Temple taken to Babylon in 586 BCE (2 Kings 25.13–17). The vessels, which were not broken up, were later returned by Cyrus in 538 BCE (Ezra 1.7–11).

28.1–17: Jeremiah's confrontation with the prophet Hananiah. Hananiah represented the message of "peace" being proclaimed by the "lying prophets," encouraging resistance to Babylon and false hopes of a quick end to the political crisis, a restoration not only of the Temple vessels but of King Jehoiachin to the throne. Jeremiah cites prophetic tradition in support of his message of disaster. The contest is resolved by the death of Hananiah two months later. **1:** On the contradictory dates see 27.1–28.17n. **4:** *Jeconiah*, Jehoiachin

to Babylon, says the LORD, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon."

5 Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD; 6 and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD fulfill the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles. 7 But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. 8 The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. 9 As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet."

10 Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, and broke it. 11 And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD: This is how I will break the yoke of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years." At this, the prophet Jeremiah went his way.

12 Sometime after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 13 Go, tell Hananiah, Thus says the LORD: You have broken wooden bars only to forge iron bars in place of them! 14 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have put an iron yoke on the neck of all these nations so that they may serve King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and they shall indeed serve him; I have even given him the wild animals. 15 And the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah, "Listen, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, and you made this people trust in a lie. 16 Therefore thus says the LORD: I am going to send you off the face of the earth. Within this year you will be dead, because you have spoken rebellion against the LORD."

17 In that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died.

29 These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. 2 This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. 3 The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: 4 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that

(2 Kings 24.8–12). **5:** The first-person perspective of a Jeremiah memoir (27.2,12,16; 28.1) suddenly shifts to a third-person account. This illustrates the composite nature of this material. **6:** There is considerable debate as to whether Jeremiah is sincere in his wish or is speaking with bitter irony. Because the story, under Deuteronomistic editing, is committed to the theme of prophetic fulfillment (see v. 9), the reader cannot doubt Jeremiah's word. **8:** Commonly prophets issued oracles against foreign nations; see Am 1–2; Isa 13–24; Ezek 25–32. This is especially true of early forms of "war prophecy"; see Jer 46.1. **9:** On the criterion of prophetic fulfillment, see Deut 18.21–22. This Deuteronomistic perspective controls the narrative here, as indicated by 28.16–17. **16.** *Send you off*, a play on the fact that Hananiah has not been sent by God (v. 15).

29.1–32: Jeremiah in conflict with prophets among the exile community. Correspondence with leaders among the exiles in Babylon indicates their opposition to Jeremiah's message. Jeremiah's letter encouraging the exiles to prepare for a lengthy stay in captivity (vv. 4–14) is met with a letter of rebuke by Shemaiah (v. 25) instructing Zephaniah, the Temple overseer in Jerusalem, to clamp down on Jeremiah and control his oracles (vv. 25–28). This prompts another letter from Jeremiah to Shemaiah (v. 24) and a warning to all the exiles concerning Shemaiah's fate (vv. 31–32). **2:** *Jeconiah*, Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24.8–12). *The court officials*, or "eunuchs"; see 34.19n. **3:** *Elasah* (perhaps the brother of Ahikam; 26.24) and *Gemariah* (36.10), apparently supporters of Jeremiah's program and sensitive to Babylonian interests. *Hilkiah*, see 2 Kings 22–23. **5:** *Build . . . plant*, characteristic language

they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. 8 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream,[a] 9 for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the LORD.

10 For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. 12 Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. 13 When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, 14 I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

15 Because you have said, "The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon,"— 16 Thus says the LORD concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who live in this city, your kinsfolk who did not go out with you into exile: 17 Thus says the LORD of hosts, I am going to let loose on them sword, famine, and pestilence, and I will make them like rotten figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten. 18 I will pursue them with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, and will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be an object of cursing, and horror, and hissing, and a derision among all the nations where I have driven them, 19 because they did not heed my words, says the LORD, when I persistently sent to you my servants the prophets, but they[b] would not listen, says the LORD. 20 But now, all you exiles whom I sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon, hear the word of the LORD: 21 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying a lie to you in my name: I am going to deliver them into the hand of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, and he shall kill them before your eyes. 22 And on account of them this curse shall be used by all the exiles from Judah in Babylon: "The LORD make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire," 23 because they have perpetrated outrage in Israel and have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives, and have spoken in my name lying words that I did not command them; I am the one who knows and bears witness, says the LORD.

24 To Shemaiah of Nehelam you shall say: 25 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: In your own name you sent a letter to all the people who are in Jerusalem, and to the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah, and to all the priests, saying, 26 The LORD himself has made you priest instead of the priest Jehoiada, so that there may be officers in the house of the LORD to control any madman who plays the prophet, to put him in the stocks and the collar. 27 So now why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who plays the prophet for you? 28 For he has actually sent to us in Babylon, saying, "It will be a long time; build houses and live in them, and plant gardens and eat what they produce."

29 The priest Zephaniah read this letter in the hearing of the prophet Jeremiah. 30 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 31 Send to all the exiles, saying, Thus says

[a] Cn: Heb *your dreams that you cause to dream*
[b] Syr: Heb *you*

of Jeremiah's vision of restoration (Jer 1.10), which will first occur in Babylon itself. **7:** *Welfare*, that is "the peace" (Heb "shalom"). They are to pray for the peace not of Jerusalem (cf. Ps 122.6) but of Babylon. **10:** *Babylon's seventy years*, see 25.11n. **12–14:** See 23.3; 31.7–10. **16:** *This city*, that is, Jerusalem. **17:** *Rotten figs*, cf. 24.1–10. **19:** See 7.25n. **21:** *Ahab . . . Zedekiah*, two of the prophets among the exiled community referred to in v. 15. **22:** *Roasted in the fire*, cf. Dan 3.19–23. **26:** *Officers*, see 20.1n. *Madman*, indicating the ecstatic qualities of typical prophetic behavior. A fine line separated prophetic ecstasy and the behavior of the insane; see 1 Sam 10.10–13; 19.20–24. *Who plays the prophet*, that is, who engages in such ecstatic behavior. *Stocks and the collar*, cf. 20.2n.

the LORD concerning Shemaiah of Nehelam:
Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you,
though I did not send him, and has led you to
trust in a lie, 32 therefore thus says the LORD:
I am going to punish Shemaiah of Nehelam
and his descendants; he shall not have anyone
living among this people to see[a] the good that
I am going to do to my people, says the LORD,
for he has spoken rebellion against the LORD.

30 The word that came to Jeremiah from
the LORD: 2 Thus says the LORD, the
God of Israel: Write in a book all the words
that I have spoken to you. 3 For the days are
surely coming, says the LORD, when I will
restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and
Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them
back to the land that I gave to their ancestors
and they shall take possession of it.

4 These are the words that the LORD spoke
concerning Israel and Judah:

5 Thus says the LORD:
We have heard a cry of panic,
of terror, and no peace.
6 Ask now, and see,
can a man bear a child?
Why then do I see every man
with his hands on his loins like a
woman in labor?
Why has every face turned pale?
7 Alas! that day is so great
there is none like it;
it is a time of distress for Jacob;
yet he shall be rescued from it.
8 On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will
break the yoke from off his[b] neck, and I will
burst his[b] bonds, and strangers shall no more
make a servant of him. 9 But they shall serve
the LORD their God and David their king,
whom I will raise up for them.

10 But as for you, have no fear, my servant
Jacob, says the LORD,
and do not be dismayed, O Israel;
for I am going to save you from far away,
and your offspring from the land of
their captivity.
Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease,
and no one shall make him afraid.
11 For I am with you, says the LORD, to save
you;
I will make an end of all the nations
among which I scattered you,
but of you I will not make an end.
I will chastise you in just measure,
and I will by no means leave you
unpunished.

12 For thus says the LORD:
Your hurt is incurable,
your wound is grievous.
13 There is no one to uphold your cause,
no medicine for your wound,
no healing for you.
14 All your lovers have forgotten you;
they care nothing for you;
for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy,
the punishment of a merciless foe,

[a] Gk: Heb *and he shall not see*
[b] Cn: Heb *your*

30.1–31.40: The book of consolation, a cluster of oracles looking forward to God's restoration of Judah and Jerusalem, prompted by the reference to "the good" in 29.32. These oracles are said to be in a book or document (30.2,4) centering on the theme of "restoring the fortunes" of Israel/Judah. Since Israel (Ephraim) and Judah often appear as two separate political entities in this material, and because there is a frequent northern orientation (compare 30.4; 31.5,6,15), some of the oracles may be early, envisioning the desire of Josiah to reunify Judah with the former territory of Israel. Jer 31.26 ("Thereupon I awoke") indicates that an original dream vision underlay some of this material, which has been reworked and expanded in its present form to address the hopes for the restoration of Judah following the Babylonian exile. **30.1–4:** Introduction. The expressions "for the days are surely coming" and "restore the fortunes" sound the theme of this material. **3:** *Fortunes*, or perhaps the spoils and persons lost in warfare, captivity or in crisis. **5–11:** Using the imagery of breaking the yoke of captivity (v. 8), taken up from chs 27–28, God's salvation is promised. The language is akin to that of Second Isaiah, especially in vv. 10–11 (cf. Isa 35.4; 43.1). **6:** The rhetorical question requires a negative response. The pain of pregnancy and labor in childbirth is a common metaphor for distress in the midst of crisis. See Jer 4.31; 6.24; 13.21. **11:** *Not make an end*, see 4.27; 5.10,18. Israel will have to suffer the just consequence of its transgressions. **12–17:** Shift to female subject. Lady Zion seems incurably wounded (cf. 14.17; 15.8,18) having suffered

because your guilt is great,
because your sins are so numerous.
15 Why do you cry out over your hurt?
Your pain is incurable.
Because your guilt is great,
because your sins are so numerous,
I have done these things to you.
16 Therefore all who devour you shall be devoured,
and all your foes, every one of them, shall go into captivity;
those who plunder you shall be plundered,
and all who prey on you I will make a prey.
17 For I will restore health to you,
and your wounds I will heal,
says the LORD,
because they have called you an outcast:
"It is Zion; no one cares for her!"

18 Thus says the LORD:
I am going to restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob,
and have compassion on his dwellings;
the city shall be rebuilt upon its mound,
and the citadel set on its rightful site.
19 Out of them shall come thanksgiving,
and the sound of merrymakers.
I will make them many, and they shall not be few;
I will make them honored, and they shall not be disdained.
20 Their children shall be as of old,
their congregation shall be established before me;
and I will punish all who oppress them.
21 Their prince shall be one of their own,
their ruler shall come from their midst;
I will bring him near, and he shall approach me,
for who would otherwise dare to approach me?
says the LORD.
22 And you shall be my people,
and I will be your God.

23 Look, the storm of the LORD!
Wrath has gone forth,
a whirling[a] tempest;
it will burst upon the head of the wicked.
24 The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back
until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind.
In the latter days you will understand this.

31 At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.
2 Thus says the LORD:
The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness;
when Israel sought for rest,
3 the LORD appeared to him[b] from far away.[c]
I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.
4 Again I will build you, and you shall be built,
O virgin Israel!
Again you shall take[d] your tambourines,
and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.

[a] One Ms: Meaning of MT uncertain
[b] Gk: Heb *me*
[c] Or *to him long ago*
[d] Or *adorn yourself with*

God's punishment, but the time of healing and restoration is at hand. **14**. *Lovers*, that is, political allies. To be in alliance with a suzerain power, however, meant paying appropriate homage to its deities. This custom lay behind the connection of religious apostasy and the charge of committing adultery and fornication. **30.18–31.1:** Shift to male subject. The city and its ruler will be restored. **30.18:** *Its mound*, that is, its "tell." Cities were built on occupation mounds and, when destroyed, the mound was cleared, filled in, built higher and refortified. **21:** *Prince . . . ruler*, avoiding the term for "king," perhaps reflecting a more subdued expectation than that expressed in v. 9. **23–24** duplicates 23.19–20, and was likely a fragment appended to this section. **31.2–6:** Shift to female subject. "Virgin Israel" will dance and celebrate her vineyards. **2:** *Grace in the wilderness*, an Exodus theme (Ex 33.12–17) appropriated as a metaphor for return from exile (see Isa 40.3; 41.18–19; 43.19). **3:** *From far away*, see 23.23,

5 Again you shall plant vineyards
on the mountains of Samaria;
the planters shall plant,
and shall enjoy the fruit.
6 For there shall be a day when sentinels will call
in the hill country of Ephraim:
"Come, let us go up to Zion,
to the LORD our God."

7 For thus says the LORD:
Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
"Save, O LORD, your people,
the remnant of Israel."
8 See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labor, together;
a great company, they shall return here.
9 With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations[a] I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;
for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

10 Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock."
11 For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.
12 They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.
13 Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.
14 I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,
says the LORD.

15 Thus says the LORD:
A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more.
16 Thus says the LORD:
Keep your voice from weeping,

[a] Gk Compare Vg Tg: Heb *supplications*

where God's nature is to be far away rather than close at hand. **31.7–9:** Shift to male subject. The repatriation of the remnant of Israel. **7:** *Save, O LORD*, a festival cry lying behind the term "Hosanna"; see Ps 118.25. **8.** *Blind . . . lame*, those most pitiful and often discriminated against; cf. Lev 21.18; 2 Sam 5.8. **9:** *Ephraim* was one of the Joseph tribes, the central power base of Israel (the north). Because of its significant political power base and its ancient associations with the Joseph traditions at Shechem, it was considered the *firstborn*; see Gen 48.8–20. **10–14:** God's announcement to the nations. Using standard imagery, Israel's deliverance is declared. **10:** Cf. 23.2–3. **12:** *Grain . . . wine . . . oil*, images of agricultural bounty; see Deut 11.14; Hos 2.8; Joel 2.19,24. **13:** Typical images of joy and celebration; cf. Ps 30.11; Isa 35.10. **14.** *Fatness*, the fat of sacrifices was not to be eaten (Lev 3.17; 7.23–25), as it was reserved for God and was burned to ashes. This fatty ash residue was removed by the priests following sacrificial rites (Lev 6.3–4), and was a symbol of divine bounty (Ps 36.9). **15–20:** *Rachel* comforted and her children restored. Rachel's sons were the ancestors of the Joseph tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh) and the tribe of Benjamin. Her death in childbirth was an occasion of mourning (see Gen 35.16–21). *Ramah* was in Benjaminite territory (Josh 18.21–25), and it was during Benjamin's birth that Rachel died. The Joseph tribes were

and your eyes from tears;
for there is a reward for your work,
says the LORD:
they shall come back from the land of the enemy;
17 there is hope for your future,
says the LORD:
your children shall come back to their own country.

18 Indeed I heard Ephraim pleading:
"You disciplined me, and I took the discipline;
I was like a calf untrained.
Bring me back, let me come back,
for you are the LORD my God.
19 For after I had turned away I repented;
and after I was discovered, I struck my thigh;
I was ashamed, and I was dismayed
because I bore the disgrace of my youth."
20 Is Ephraim my dear son?
Is he the child I delight in?
As often as I speak against him,
I still remember him.
Therefore I am deeply moved for him;
I will surely have mercy on him,
says the LORD.

21 Set up road markers for yourself,
make yourself signposts;
consider well the highway,
the road by which you went.
Return, O virgin Israel,
return to these your cities.

22 How long will you waver,
O faithless daughter?
For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth:
a woman encompasses[a] a man.

23 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah and in its towns when I restore their fortunes:
"The LORD bless you, O abode of righteousness,
O holy hill!"
24 And Judah and all its towns shall live there together, and the farmers and those who wander[b] with their flocks.
25 I will satisfy the weary,
and all who are faint I will replenish.
26 Thereupon I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me.
27 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. 28 And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD. 29 In those days they shall no longer say:

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Cn Compare Syr Vg Tg: Heb *and they shall wander*

taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 BCE, the occasion for Rachel's mourning. **18:** *Ephraim*, the more powerful of the Joseph tribes, and therefore representative of all Israel (the north); see 7.15. **19:** *Struck my thigh*, a sign of mourning and regret; see Ezek 21.12. **20:** Questions normally expecting a negative response. Though *Ephraim* does not act like a dear son or delightful child, nevertheless God cannot ultimately turn against him; cf. Hos 11.1–9. *Deeply moved*, strong language indicating the churning of one's intestines. **21–22:** The faithless daughter's return. **21:** *Road markers*, or more likely grave markers (see 2 Kings 23.17; Ezek 39.15). *Signposts*, term used in v. 15, so likely associated with the mourning at a grave. Israel is to recall its deadly path into exile. **22:** *A new thing*, cf. Isa 43.19. *A woman encompasses a man*, a cryptic phrase, perhaps playing on the term "faithless." The word translated "encompasses" is used of God's protective care in Deut 32.10. Normally women were under the protection of male members of their family. **23–26:** Conclusion to an earlier dream-vision sequence, a sign of the editing of this material.

31.27–40: Three oracles looking forward to God's radically new future.

31.27–30: God will build and plant the new Israel. 28: *Watched over . . . to build and to plant*, the central theme of the book; see 1.10,11–12. **29:** Cf. Ezek 18.1–4. Unlike Ezekiel, Jeremiah does not refute the saying but simply retires it from its traditional usage as a respected and honored truth about the nature of God; cf. Ex 20.5; 34.7.

"The parents have eaten sour grapes,
and the children's teeth are set on
edge."
30 But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth
of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set
on edge.
31 The days are surely coming, says the
LORD, when I will make a new covenant with
the house of Israel and the house of Judah.
32 It will not be like the covenant that I made
with their ancestors when I took them by
the hand to bring them out of the land of
Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though
I was their husband,[a] says the LORD. 33 But
this is the covenant that I will make with
the house of Israel after those days, says the
LORD: I will put my law within them, and
I will write it on their hearts; and I will be
their God, and they shall be my people. 34 No
longer shall they teach one another, or say
to each other, "Know the LORD," for they
shall all know me, from the least of them to
the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive
their iniquity, and remember their sin no
more.

35 Thus says the LORD,
who gives the sun for light by day
and the fixed order of the moon and the
stars for light by night,
who stirs up the sea so that its waves
roar—
the LORD of hosts is his name:
36 If this fixed order were ever to cease
from my presence, says the LORD,
then also the offspring of Israel would
cease
to be a nation before me forever.

37 Thus says the LORD:
If the heavens above can be measured,
and the foundations of the earth below
can be explored,
then I will reject all the offspring of Israel
because of all they have done,
says the LORD.

38 The days are surely coming, says the
LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for
the LORD from the tower of Hananel to the
Corner Gate. 39 And the measuring line shall
go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and
shall then turn to Goah. 40 The whole valley
of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the
fields as far as the Wadi Kidron, to the corner
of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be
sacred to the LORD. It shall never again be
uprooted or overthrown.

32 The word that came to Jeremiah from
the LORD in the tenth year of King
Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth

[a] Or *master*

This principle, however, was already coming under critique; see Deut 24.16; 2 Kings 14.6.

31.31–37: **The renewed covenant. 32:** *I was their husband*, using the term associated with the Canaanite god Baal; cf. Hos 2.16; Jer 3.14. God could function as "husband" or "master" (Heb "ba'al"), and this led to confusion between God and Baal. In functioning as "ba'al," it is God, not Baal, who gives Israel its "grain, wine and oil"; see Hos 2.8. **33–34:** Though the *law* (Heb "torah," which also means "teaching") was traditionally thought of as being "in the heart" (Deut 30.14), it would become so instinctual that "teaching" would become unnecessary, a radically new idea given the strong Deuteronomic concern for teaching (Deut 4.10; 5.1,31; 11.19; 31.12–13). **35–37:** Later additions using standard hymnic language. God's commitment is as sure as the cosmos is fixed and unfathomable; cf. 33.19–26.

31.38–40: **Jerusalem rebuilt.** A later oracle depicting the restoration of Jerusalem's walls around its perimeter. On these places, several of which are otherwise unknown, see Neh 3.1,28; 12.39; Zech 14.10; 2 Kings 14.13.

32.1–33.26: God's restoration of Israel. These chapters are thematically linked to the "Book of Consolation" (chs 30–31) and so are included here, even though they should follow ch 34 chronologically; they are dated to the very end of the reign of Zedekiah and of the Babylonian siege (588–586 BCE), during which Jeremiah was in confinement. Jer 32.1–44 centers on the theme that "fields shall be bought . . . and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed" (v. 44), using Jeremiah's offer of redeeming family property in Anathoth as a sign. Jer 33.1–26 centers on the rebuilding of the city and the promise that the city will be given a new name, "the LORD is our righteousness" (v. 16).

32.1–25: Jeremiah purchases the family property. 1: *The tenth year . . . the eighteenth year*, 588 BCE. **3–5:** Jer-

year of Nebuchadrezzar. 2 At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, 3 where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, "Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says the LORD: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; 4 King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape out of the hands of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; 5 and he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I attend to him, says the LORD; though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?"

6 Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me: 7 Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours." 8 Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.

9 And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. 10 I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. 11 Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; 12 and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. 13 In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, 14 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. 15 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

16 After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD, saying: 17 Ah Lord GOD! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. 18 You show steadfast love to the thousandth generation,[a] but repay the guilt of parents into the laps of their children after them, O great and mighty God whose name is the LORD of hosts, 19 great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of mortals, rewarding all according to their ways and according to the fruit of their doings. 20 You showed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all humankind, and have made yourself a name that continues to this very day. 21 You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror; 22 and you gave them this land, which you swore to their ancestors to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; 23 and they entered and took possession of it. But they did not obey your voice or follow your law; of all you commanded them to do, they did nothing. Therefore you have made all these disasters come upon them. 24 See, the siege ramps have been cast up against the city to take it, and the city,

[a] Or *to thousands*

emiah's arrest is narrated in 37.1–38.28. The prophetic oracle alluded to is 34.2–3. During a brief lifting of the siege (see 34.8–22) Jeremiah tried to leave the city, was accused of desertion, and was arrested (37.11–16). **4:** *Chaldeans*, i.e., Babylonians. **7:** *Right of redemption*, to keep property within the extended family, members who could do so were expected to "redeem" land that was in jeopardy of being forfeited or sold outside the family; see Lev 25.23–28. **9:** *Seventeen shekels*, ca. 7 oz (194 grams). At this time there was no coinage, and "money" was weighed. **11:** *Sealed deed . . . open copy*, contracts were sealed with a signet ring on a clay "bulla," but a copy or summary of the contents was left available on the outside of the scroll for reference and public scrutiny. Storage of such documents in clay jars was common practice. **12:** *Baruch, son of Neriah*, Jeremiah's scribe. See 36.4; 51.59. **17–18:** Standard hymnic language in creedal form; see Ex 20.5–6; 34.6–7. **20:** *Signs and wonders,* a refer-

faced with sword, famine, and pestilence, has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it. What you spoke has happened, as you yourself can see. 25 Yet you, O Lord God, have said to me, "Buy the field for money and get witnesses"—though the city has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans.

26 The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 27 See, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me? 28 Therefore, thus says the Lord: I am going to give this city into the hands of the Chaldeans and into the hand of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, and he shall take it. 29 The Chaldeans who are fighting against this city shall come, set it on fire, and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs offerings have been made to Baal and libations have been poured out to other gods, to provoke me to anger. 30 For the people of Israel and the people of Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; the people of Israel have done nothing but provoke me to anger by the work of their hands, says the Lord. 31 This city has aroused my anger and wrath, from the day it was built until this day, so that I will remove it from my sight 32 because of all the evil of the people of Israel and the people of Judah that they did to provoke me to anger—they, their kings and their officials, their priests and their prophets, the citizens of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 33 They have turned their backs to me, not their faces; though I have taught them persistently, they would not listen and accept correction. 34 They set up their abominations in the house that bears my name, and defiled it. 35 They built the high places of Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter my mind that they should do this abomination, causing Judah to sin.

36 Now therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, "It is being given into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence": 37 See, I am going to gather them from all the lands to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place, and I will settle them in safety. 38 They shall be my people, and I will be their God. 39 I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for all time, for their own good and the good of their children after them. 40 I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me. 41 I will rejoice in doing good to them, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

42 For thus says the Lord: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good fortune that I now promise them. 43 Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, It is a desolation, without human beings or animals; it has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans. 44 Fields shall be bought for money, and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, of the hill country, of the Shephelah, and of the Negeb; for I will restore their fortunes, says the Lord.

33 The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still confined in the court of the guard: 2 Thus

ence to the plagues tradition (cf. Ex 3.20; 4.21; Deut 34.11). **25:** After reviewing Israel's history of disobedience, Jeremiah is struck by the irony that, with the land about to be captured by the *Chaldeans* (the Babylonians) and all land-tenure about to be nullified, he is being asked to perform such a foolish transaction. **26–44:** In the face of Jeremiah's resistance, God restates the promise of restoration. A typically Deuteronomic sermon (vv. 26–35) is followed by words of promise. **29:** *Roofs* were commonly used for many purposes, including religious rituals both legitimate (Neh 8.16) and illegitimate (19.13; Zeph 1.5). **35:** On the rituals in the Hinnom Valley, see 7.31; 19.5–6. *Molech* is either the name of a foreign god (1 Kings 11.7) or an epithet for Baal, formed by combining the vowels of the word for "foolishness" (Heb "boshet") with the consonants of the word for "king" ("melek"). **36:** *Of which you say*, the pronoun here, as in v. 43, is plural, indicating that this is the popular sentiment at this critical time of the siege. **39–41:** As in 31.31–34, the saving action is here solely God's, who acts unilaterally in the face of Israel's own utter failure. **44:** *Benjamin . . . Negeb*, see 17.26n.

says the LORD who made the earth,[a] the LORD who formed it to establish it—the LORD is his name: [3] Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. [4] For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense against the siege ramps and before the sword:[b] [5] The Chaldeans are coming in to fight[c] and to fill them with the dead bodies of those whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this city because of all their wickedness. [6] I am going to bring it recovery and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them abundance[b] of prosperity and security. [7] I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. [8] I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. [9] And this city[d] shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them; they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.

[10] Thus says the LORD: In this place of which you say, "It is a waste without human beings or animals," in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without inhabitants, human or animal, there shall once more be heard [11] the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD:

"Give thanks to the LORD of hosts,
for the LORD is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!"

For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the LORD.

[12] Thus says the LORD of hosts: In this place that is waste, without human beings or animals, and in all its towns there shall again be pasture for shepherds resting their flocks. [13] In the towns of the hill country, of the Shephelah, and of the Negeb, in the land of Benjamin, the places around Jerusalem, and in the towns of Judah, flocks shall again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says the LORD.

[14] The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. [15] In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. [16] In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

[17] For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, [18] and the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to make grain offerings, and to make sacrifices for all time.

[a] Gk: Heb *it*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Cn: Heb *They are coming in to fight against the Chaldeans*
[d] Heb *And it*

33.1–26: Oracles of restoration, connected to the previous oracles by their presumed location (Jeremiah in confinement). **4:** *Houses of this city*, introduces the theme of the restoration of Jerusalem's buildings. Now the city itself becomes the subject of visions of restoration; cf. v. 9. The desperation of the city is clear, as the buildings within it are dismantled to use as raw material to defend against the Babylonian siege ramps. **5:** *Chaldeans*, i.e., Babylonians. **7:** *At first*, or "formerly." **8–9:** God's favor will be lavished on Israel out of sheer divine mercy, with no preconditions, and the nations of the world will be astounded to see such beneficence. **10:** *Of which you say*, again the pronoun is plural, expressing popular pessimistic sentiment. **11:** Cf. 7.34; 16.9; 25.10. This thanksgiving uses standard psalmic language (Pss 106.1; 107.1; 136.1–26; Sir 51.12). **13:** *Shephelah . . . Negeb*, see 17.26n. **14–16:** Echoes 23.5–6, except that in v. 6 ("by which it will be called"), it is now the city of Jerusalem that is given the name rather than the anticipated Davidic ruler. **17–18:** The first of three appended oracles regarding Jerusalem's leadership, using late language reflecting 2 Chr 7.18. The term *levitical priests* is common to Deuteronomy but used only here in Jeremiah. **19–22:** Second appended oracle recalling the argument of 31.36–37. Again hopes are placed on both royal and levitical persons, characteristic of the postexilic hopes for both a Davidic and a

19 The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:
20 Thus says the LORD: If any of you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night would not come at their appointed time, 21 only then could my covenant with my servant David be broken, so that he would not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with my ministers the Levites. 22 Just as the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will increase the offspring of my servant David, and the Levites who minister to me.

23 The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:
24 Have you not observed how these people say, "The two families that the LORD chose have been rejected by him," and how they hold my people in such contempt that they no longer regard them as a nation? 25 Thus says the LORD: Only if I had not established my covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth, 26 would I reject the offspring of Jacob and of my servant David and not choose any of his descendants as rulers over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes, and will have mercy upon them.

34 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms of the earth and all the peoples under his dominion were fighting against Jerusalem and all its cities: 2 Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Go and speak to King Zedekiah of Judah and say to him: Thus says the LORD: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. 3 And you yourself shall not escape from his hand, but shall surely be captured and handed over to him; you shall see the king of Babylon eye to eye and speak with him face to face; and you shall go to Babylon. 4 Yet hear the word of the LORD, O King Zedekiah of Judah! Thus says the LORD concerning you: You shall not die by the sword; 5 you shall die in peace. And as spices were burned[a] for your ancestors, the earlier kings who preceded you, so they shall burn spices[b] for you and lament for you, saying, "Alas, lord!" For I have spoken the word, says the LORD.

6 Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah, in Jerusalem, 7 when the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, Lachish and Azekah; for these were the only fortified cities of Judah that remained.

[a] Heb *as there was burning*
[b] Heb *shall burn*

priestly leader (compare Zech 4.11–14). **22:** Cf. Gen 22.17–18. **23–26:** Third appended oracle. Again celebrates the promise to the "two families," but now this is a reference to the entire land of Israel represented by Jacob (Israel) and David (Judah); cf. the cosmic argument of 31.36–37. **25:** *Covenant with day and night*, this radical language echoes the Priestly language explicit in Gen 9.8–16 that God's covenant is with "all flesh" and, indeed, with "the earth," that is, the cosmos. In this tradition, Gen 9 is understood as a recapitulation of creation itself (Gen 1).

34.1–7: Judgment against Zedekiah. This oracle, spoken during the Babylonian siege, recapitulates the speech that, according to 32.3–5, was the basis for Jeremiah's imprisonment. Though v. 5 sounds as though it is a threat against Zedekiah, it is rather a mitigation of divine judgment, promising Zedekiah a normal death and burial with full honor; contrast the fate of Jehoiakim in 22.18–19, for whom these normal rituals of burial would not be conducted. In fact, Zedekiah's fate was not this "peaceful," according to 52.9–11; 2 Kings 25.6–7. **7:** *Lachish* (21 mi [45 km] southwest of Jerusalem) *and Azekah* (11mi [18 km] north-northwest of Lachish) were two garrison cities defending Jerusalem on the southwest. Letters found at Lachish from this time indicate the drama of these final days, when at last even the signal fire from Azekah could no longer be seen and Lachish alone survived.

34.8–22: The aborted manumission of slaves. The context for this event is the period when the siege was briefly lifted because Egyptian forces under Pharaoh Hophra (Apries) arrived in Judah to attempt to break the siege of the Babylonian army. Babylonian forces temporarily withdrew from Jerusalem in order to face Hophra's army; see 37.5,11. The manumission was in accord with the principles of Ex 21.2 and Deut 15.12, as referenced in Jer 34.14. The manumission likely also served practical purposes, given scarcity of food resources and the need for male support troops. As soon as the siege was lifted, however, the people presumed that normality would

8 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty to them— 9 that all should set free their Hebrew slaves, male and female, so that no one should hold another Judean in slavery. 10 And they obeyed, all the officials and all the people who had entered into the covenant that all would set free their slaves, male or female, so that they would not be enslaved again; they obeyed and set them free. 11 But afterward they turned around and took back the male and female slaves they had set free, and brought them again into subjection as slaves. 12 The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 13 Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I myself made a covenant with your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, saying, 14 "Every seventh year each of you must set free any Hebrews who have been sold to you and have served you six years; you must set them free from your service." But your ancestors did not listen to me or incline their ears to me. 15 You yourselves recently repented and did what was right in my sight by proclaiming liberty to one another, and you made a covenant before me in the house that is called by my name; 16 but then you turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back your male and female slaves, whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them again into subjection to be your slaves. 17 Therefore, thus says the LORD: You have not obeyed me by granting a release to your neighbors and friends; I am going to grant a release to you, says the LORD—a release to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. 18 And those who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make like[a] the calf when they cut it in two and passed between its parts: 19 the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf 20 shall be handed over to their enemies and to those who seek their lives. Their corpses shall become food for the birds of the air and the wild animals of the earth. 21 And as for King Zedekiah of Judah and his officials, I will hand them over to their enemies and to those who seek their lives, to the army of the king of Babylon, which has withdrawn from you. 22 I am going to command, says the LORD, and will bring them back to this city; and they will fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire. The towns of Judah I will make a desolation without inhabitant.

35 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah: 2 Go to the house of the Rechabites, and speak with them, and bring them to the house of the LORD, into one of

[a] Cn: Heb lacks *like*

return and therefore the manumission was retracted. **17:** *A release to you*, using the term for the "amnesty" or "manumission," Jeremiah offers a play on words. **18:** *Like the calf when they cut it in two*, likely a reference to the fact that covenants were "cut" (Heb "karat," see v. 13) rather than "made," and were accompanied by ritual actions such as those suggested by Gen 15.9–18. **19:** *The eunuchs*, the Heb term "saris" is often used of court officials (1 Sam 8.15; 2 Kings 8.6; Jer 29.2; 52.25), indicating perhaps how highly in Judean court life such persons of ambiguous gender could ascend. Some scholars, however, suggest that the term has two distinct meanings ("official" and "eunuch"). There is no indication, however, that the "eunuch" was a social pariah. The common scholarly assumption that the laws of Lev 21.20; 22.24 and Deut 23.1 refer to eunuchs is far from certain. **22:** *Bring them back*, the siege will be resumed.

35.1–19: The sign of the Rechabites. The clan of the Rechabites traced their origins to Jonadab ben Rechab (v. 6), and rallied around the anti-agrarian policies indicated in vv. 8–10, perhaps as a fundamentalist reaction against cultural assimilation to the perceived values of the Canaanites. Jonadab was remembered as an ally of the conservative Yahwist Jehu (842–814 BCE) in his revolt against the syncretistic policies of the Omri dynasty in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 10.15,23). Their faithfulness to their extreme values was used by Jeremiah as a stark contrast with the faithlessness of the people of Jerusalem, who could not obey even divinely sanctioned norms. **1:** *King Jehoiakim* (608–598 BCE), a surprising regression in time, perhaps to prepare the

the chambers; then offer them wine to drink.
3 So I took Jaazaniah son of Jeremiah son of Habazziniah, and his brothers, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites.
4 I brought them to the house of the LORD into the chamber of the sons of Hanan son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which was near the chamber of the officials, above the chamber of Maaseiah son of Shallum, keeper of the threshold. 5 Then I set before the Rechabites pitchers full of wine, and cups; and I said to them, "Have some wine." 6 But they answered, "We will drink no wine, for our ancestor Jonadab son of Rechab commanded us, 'You shall never drink wine, neither you nor your children; 7 nor shall you ever build a house, or sow seed; nor shall you plant a vineyard, or even own one; but you shall live in tents all your days, that you may live many days in the land where you reside.' 8 We have obeyed the charge of our ancestor Jonadab son of Rechab in all that he commanded us, to drink no wine all our days, ourselves, our wives, our sons, or our daughters, 9 and not to build houses to live in. We have no vineyard or field or seed; 10 but we have lived in tents, and have obeyed and done all that our ancestor Jonadab commanded us.
11 But when King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon came up against the land, we said, 'Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and the army of the Arameans.' That is why we are living in Jerusalem."

12 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 13 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Go and say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Can you not learn a lesson and obey my words? says the LORD. 14 The command has been carried out that Jonadab son of Rechab gave to his descendants to drink no wine; and they drink none to this day, for they have obeyed their ancestor's command. But I myself have spoken to you persistently, and you have not obeyed me. 15 I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying, "Turn now every one of you from your evil way, and amend your doings, and do not go after other gods to serve them, and then you shall live in the land that I gave to you and your ancestors." But you did not incline your ear or obey me. 16 The descendants of Jonadab son of Rechab have carried out the command that their ancestor gave them, but this people has not obeyed me. 17 Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem every disaster that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them and they have not listened, I have called to them and they have not answered.

18 But to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said: Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the command of your ancestor Jonadab, and kept all his precepts, and done all that he commanded you, 19 therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab son of Rechab shall not lack a descendant to stand before me for all time.

36 In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken

reader for ch 36, also set during the reign of Jehoiakim. **4:** *Chamber*, prominent families had open rooms in the Temple complex where they gathered, shared sacrificial meals, and conducted other business (36.10; 2 Kings 23.11). *Keeper of the threshold*, on this important priestly function, see 2 Kings 12.9; 22.4; 23.4; 25.18. **11:** *When King Nebuchadrezzar . . . came up against the land*, must refer to the Babylonian (Chaldean) incursion into the Levant in 605–604 BCE, setting the stage for ch 36. *Arameans*, centered in Damascus (that is, Syria), who were often the historical enemies of Israel and perhaps always a problem for the nomadic clans of herdsmen in the eastern steppes. **15:** See 7.25n.

36.1–32: Commissioning and reading the scroll of 605 BCE. In a pivotal year, the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians in battle and asserted themselves as the dominant power over Judah, forcing the radical reshaping of Judean aspirations and allegiances, events introduced in 35.11. As in ch 25, so here the editor's use of the "scroll tradition" concludes a major section of the oracles (chs 26–35), the second such cycle. The oracles include the chief collection of Jeremiah's utterances from 627 down to 605 BCE (compare 25.3 and 36.2). At this time, Jeremiah was already under a temporary ban from the Temple quarters (36.5), so the story likely follows the event of his being arraigned and beaten by the Temple overseer Pashhur (20.1–6), a possible occa-

to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today. 3 It may be that when the house of Judah hears of all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them may turn from their evil ways, so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.

4 Then Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at Jeremiah's dictation all the words of the LORD that he had spoken to him. 5 And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, saying, "I am prevented from entering the house of the LORD; 6 so you go yourself, and on a fast day in the hearing of the people in the LORD's house you shall read the words of the LORD from the scroll that you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the people of Judah who come up from their towns. 7 It may be that their plea will come before the LORD, and that all of them will turn from their evil ways, for great is the anger and wrath that the LORD has pronounced against this people." 8 And Baruch son of Neriah did all that the prophet Jeremiah ordered him about reading from the scroll the words of the LORD in the LORD's house.

9 In the fifth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, in the ninth month, all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who came from the towns of Judah to Jerusalem proclaimed a fast before the LORD. 10 Then, in the hearing of all the people, Baruch read the words of Jeremiah from the scroll, in the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah son of Shaphan the secretary, which was in the upper court, at the entry of the New Gate of the LORD's house.

11 When Micaiah son of Gemariah son of Shaphan heard all the words of the LORD from the scroll, 12 he went down to the king's house, into the secretary's chamber; and all the officials were sitting there: Elishama the secretary, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Achbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the officials. 13 And Micaiah told them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the scroll in the hearing of the people. 14 Then all the officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah son of Shelemiah son of Cushi to say to Baruch, "Bring the scroll that you read in the hearing of the people, and come." So Baruch son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand and came to them. 15 And they said to him, "Sit down and read it to us." So Baruch read it to them. 16 When they heard all the words, they turned to one another in alarm, and said to Baruch, "We certainly must report all these words to the king." 17 Then they questioned Baruch, "Tell us now, how did you write all these words? Was it at his dictation?" 18 Baruch answered them, "He dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink on the scroll." 19 Then the officials said to Baruch, "Go and hide, you and Jeremiah, and let no one know where you are."

20 Leaving the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the secretary, they went to the court of the king; and they reported all the words to the king. 21 Then the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it from the chamber of Elishama the secretary; and Jehudi read it to the king and all the officials who stood beside the king. 22 Now the king was sitting in his winter apartment (it was the ninth month), and there was a fire burning in the brazier before him. 23 As Jehudi read three or four columns, the

sion for the ban. As elsewhere, Jeremiah has the assistance of Baruch, who serves as his scribe (see 32.12–16; 51.59), and is supported by the family of Shaphan within the royal court and family (Gemariah and Micaiah), who send Baruch and Jeremiah into protective hiding (v. 19). Piece by piece Jehoiakim burned the scroll, likely as a means of mitigating the effects of the words of judgment, which would have been received as a type of "curse." Most scholars assume that the second scroll, produced to replace the first destroyed by Jehoiakim (vv. 27–32), contained the core of material now found in chs 1–24 (compare 36.29 with 7.20 and 21.6). **6:** *On a fast day*, that is, on a day specially set aside for public mourning and divine intercession in the face of Judah's political crisis (v. 9). **12:** *Elnathan son of Achbor*, perhaps the king's father-in-law (2 Kings 24.8) and head of the mission that brought the prophet Uriah back from Egypt for execution (Jer 26.22–23). **22:** *Winter apartment*, or "harvest quarters." On the morality of the royal accumulation of such dwellings, see 22.13–17; Am 3.15. *Ninth month,* November–December.

king[a] would cut them off with a penknife and throw them into the fire in the brazier, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier. 24 Yet neither the king, nor any of his servants who heard all these words, was alarmed, nor did they tear their garments. 25 Even when Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. 26 And the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son and Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest the secretary Baruch and the prophet Jeremiah. But the LORD hid them.

27 Now, after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 28 Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which King Jehoiakim of Judah has burned. 29 And concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah you shall say: Thus says the LORD, You have dared to burn this scroll, saying, Why have you written in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will cut off from it human beings and animals? 30 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah: He shall have no one to sit upon the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night. 31 And I will punish him and his offspring and his servants for their iniquity; I will bring on them, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the people of Judah, all the disasters with which I have threatened them—but they would not listen.

32 Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the secretary Baruch son of Neriah, who wrote on it at Jeremiah's dictation all the words of the scroll that King Jehoiakim of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them.

37 Zedekiah son of Josiah, whom King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon made king in the land of Judah, succeeded Coniah son of Jehoiakim. 2 But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of the LORD that he spoke through the prophet Jeremiah.

3 King Zedekiah sent Jehucal son of Shelemiah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah to the prophet Jeremiah saying, "Please pray for us to the LORD our God." 4 Now Jeremiah was still going in and out among the people, for he had not yet been put in prison. 5 Meanwhile, the army of Pharaoh had come out of Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they withdrew from Jerusalem.

6 Then the word of the LORD came to the prophet Jeremiah: 7 Thus says the LORD, God of Israel: This is what the two of you shall say to the king of Judah, who sent you to me to inquire of me: Pharaoh's army, which set out to help you, is going to return to its own land, to Egypt. 8 And the Chaldeans shall return and fight against this city; they shall take it and burn it with fire. 9 Thus says the LORD: Do not deceive yourselves, saying, "The Chaldeans will surely go away from us," for they will not go away. 10 Even if you defeated the whole army of Chaldeans who are fighting against you, and there remained of them only

[a] Heb *he*

37.1–38.28: The final arrest of Jeremiah. Two different accounts of what was likely one event have been juxtaposed, recounting the story of Jeremiah's final confinement just before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. The main story (37.1–21 and 38.14–28), concerning Jeremiah's desire to escape imprisonment in the house of the secretary Jonathan (37.15,20; 38.26), is embellished with the story of Jeremiah's rescue by the Ethiopian courtier, Ebed-melech (38.1–13). As this material begins the third cycle, it resets chronologically to a period prior to the events mentioned in chs 32–33. Jeremiah, not yet under arrest, is still prophesying publicly and openly (37.4; 38.1). During the brief lifting of the Babylonian siege (v. 5, see 34.8–22), Jeremiah attempted to leave Jerusalem to take care of some family business (vv. 11–12). He was arrested for desertion and his fate, which would have been severe at the hands of the officials, was softened by allowance of King Zedekiah. In both accounts, Jeremiah is threatened with harsh incarceration but is allowed to stay under royal protection in the court of the guard.

37.1–10: Jeremiah's response to Zedekiah's request for intercession. The context of the lifting of the siege provides the language for Jeremiah's oracle: the Babylonians (Chaldeans) will be right back, so take no comfort in the brief respite! **1:** *Coniah*, Jehoiachin. **5:** See 34.8–22n.

wounded men in their tents, they would rise up and burn this city with fire.

11 Now when the Chaldean army had withdrawn from Jerusalem at the approach of Pharaoh's army, 12 Jeremiah set out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to receive his share of property[a] among the people there. 13 When he reached the Benjamin Gate, a sentinel there named Irijah son of Shelemiah son of Hananiah arrested the prophet Jeremiah saying, "You are deserting to the Chaldeans." 14 And Jeremiah said, "That is a lie; I am not deserting to the Chaldeans." But Irijah would not listen to him, and arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials. 15 The officials were enraged at Jeremiah, and they beat him and imprisoned him in the house of the secretary Jonathan, for it had been made a prison. 16 Thus Jeremiah was put in the cistern house, in the cells, and remained there many days.

17 Then King Zedekiah sent for him, and received him. The king questioned him secretly in his house, and said, "Is there any word from the LORD?" Jeremiah said, "There is!" Then he said, "You shall be handed over to the king of Babylon." 18 Jeremiah also said to King Zedekiah, "What wrong have I done to you or your servants or this people, that you have put me in prison? 19 Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land'? 20 Now please hear me, my lord king: be good enough to listen to my plea, and do not send me back to the house of the secretary Jonathan to die there." 21 So King Zedekiah gave orders, and they committed Jeremiah to the court of the guard; and a loaf of bread was given him daily from the bakers' street, until all the bread of the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

38 Now Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah was saying to all the people, 2 Thus says the LORD, Those who stay in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but those who go out to the Chaldeans shall live; they shall have their lives as a prize of war, and live. 3 Thus says the LORD, This city shall surely be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon and be taken. 4 Then the officials said to the king, "This man ought to be put to death, because he is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm." 5 King Zedekiah said, "Here he is; he is in your hands; for the king is powerless against you." 6 So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. Now there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.

7 Ebed-melech the Ethiopian,[b] a eunuch in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. The king happened to be sitting at the Benjamin Gate, 8 So Ebed-melech left the king's house and spoke

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Or *Nubian*; Heb *Cushite*

37.11–21: Jeremiah's incarceration in the Court of the Guard. 12: Jeremiah was from the Benjaminite town of Anathoth (1.1) and would later be invited to redeem some family property there (32.7–9). **16:** *Cistern house*, apparently a vaulted room formerly used as a cistern for water storage. Jeremiah believed that incarceration here would be deadly (v. 20), perhaps because while there he was under threat of some particularly hostile princes and did not enjoy any royal protection. **21:** *The court of the guard* was located in the royal palace itself, under direct supervision of the king (32.2).

38.1–13: An alternate account regarding Jeremiah and Ebed-melech. This story develops the theme of the conflict between Zedekiah and his pro-Egyptian advisers, who were particularly opposed to Jeremiah's message of capitulation to the Babylonians. The charge that Jeremiah was "discouraging the soldiers" is similar to a charge made in the Lachish letters against certain other royal princes (likely those associated with the Shaphan party) that they too were discouraging the troops. That the opposition of this party is lethal to Jeremiah's safety (v. 4) is brought out in this story. Here the cistern into which Jeremiah is thrown has a different name and is located in the court of the guard itself (v. 6). **1:** *Gedaliah son of Pashhur*, see 20.1; *Jucal* (Jehucal), see 37.3; *Pashhur*, see 21.1. **6:** The cistern was nearly dry, indicating a time shortly before Nebuchadrezzar's final assault, August

to the king, 9 "My lord king, these men have acted wickedly in all they did to the prophet Jeremiah by throwing him into the cistern to die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city." 10 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian,[a] "Take three men with you from here, and pull the prophet Jeremiah up from the cistern before he dies." 11 So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the house of the king, to a wardrobe of[b] the storehouse, and took from there old rags and worn-out clothes, which he let down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes. 12 Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian[a] said to Jeremiah, "Just put the rags and clothes between your armpits and the ropes." Jeremiah did so. 13 Then they drew Jeremiah up by the ropes and pulled him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

14 King Zedekiah sent for the prophet Jeremiah and received him at the third entrance of the temple of the LORD. The king said to Jeremiah, "I have something to ask you; do not hide anything from me." 15 Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I tell you, you will put me to death, will you not? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me." 16 So King Zedekiah swore an oath in secret to Jeremiah, "As the LORD lives, who gave us our lives, I will not put you to death or hand you over to these men who seek your life."

17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, If you will only surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. 18 But if you do not surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be handed over to the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you yourself shall not escape from their hand." 19 King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans, for I might be handed over to them and they would abuse me." 20 Jeremiah said, "That will not happen. Just obey the voice of the LORD in what I say to you, and it shall go well with you, and your life shall be spared. 21 But if you are determined not to surrender, this is what the LORD has shown me— 22 a vision of all the women remaining in the house of the king of Judah being led out to the officials of the king of Babylon and saying,

'Your trusted friends have seduced you
and have overcome you;
Now that your feet are stuck in the mud,
they desert you.'

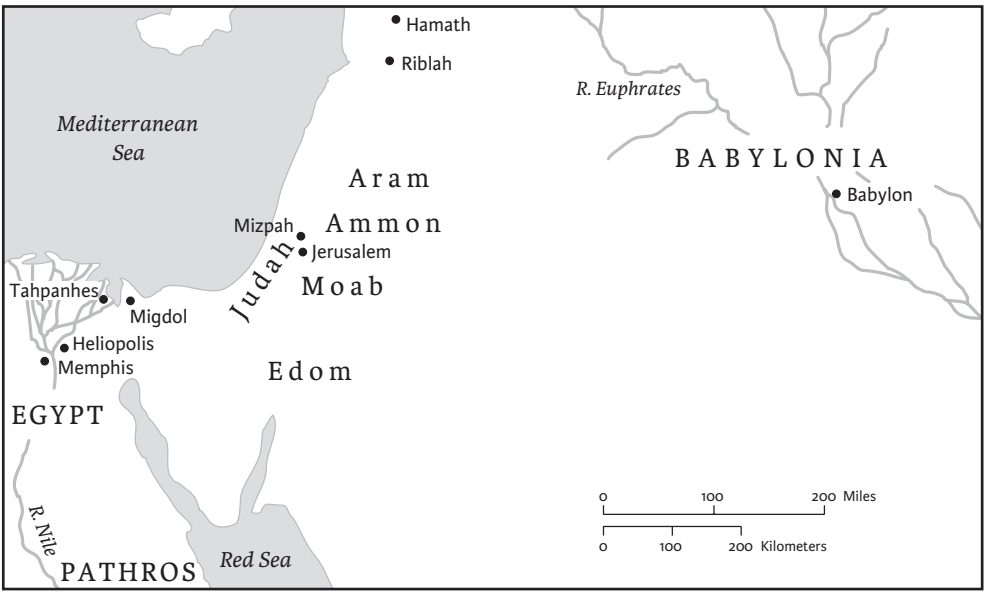
23 All your wives and your children shall be led out to the Chaldeans, and you yourself shall not escape from their hand, but shall be seized by the king of Babylon; and this city shall be burned with fire."

24 Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Do not let anyone else know of this conversation, or you will die. 25 If the officials should hear that I have spoken with you, and they should come and say to you, 'Just tell us what you said to the king; do not conceal it from us, or we will put you to death. What did the king say to you?' 26 then you shall say to them, 'I was presenting my plea to the king not to send me back to the house of Jonathan to die there.'" 27 All the officials did come to Jeremiah and questioned him; and he answered them in the very words the king had commanded. So they stopped questioning him, for the conversation had not been overheard. 28 And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken.

[a] Or *Nubian*; Heb *Cushite*
[b] Cn: Heb *to under*

586 BCE (52.5–7). **7:** *A eunuch in the king's house*, see 34.19n concerning the social position of such eunuchs. **9:** *No bread left in the city*, an editorial comment, which does not suit the context but attempts to relate this alternate account sequentially to the main story line (see 37.21).

38.14–28: An alternate account of Jer 37.17–21. 17: *Surrender*, that is, "go out," abandon the city. **19.** Zedekiah is afraid of reprisals against him by those who, already having surrendered, are aligned with King Jehoiachin in exile and who regard Zedekiah as an illegitimate heir to the throne; cf. the "good and bad figs" in ch 24. **22.** *Your feet are stuck in the mud*, an image recalling Jeremiah's experience in v. 6 and possibly accounting for the linking of these variant traditions. **26.** *House of Jonathan*, connecting this story to that of the main story line (Jer 37.20–21) rather than to the story line of 38.1–13.



Chs 39, 52: Babylon and Judah in the early sixth century BCE.

39 In the ninth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, in the tenth month, King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and besieged it; **2** in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, a breach was made in the city. **3** When Jerusalem was taken,[a] all the officials of the king of Babylon came and sat in the middle gate: Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim the Rabsaris, Nergal-sharezer the Rabmag, with all the rest of the officials of the king of Babylon. **4** When King Zedekiah of Judah and all the soldiers saw them, they fled, going out of the city at night by way of the king's garden through the gate between the two walls; and they went toward the Arabah. **5** But the army of the Chaldeans pursued them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and when they had taken him, they brought him up to King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, at Riblah, in the land of Hamath; and he passed sentence on him. **6** The king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes; also the king of Babylon slaughtered all the nobles of Judah. **7** He put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters to take him to Babylon. **8** The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the houses of the people, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. **9** Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard exiled to Babylon the rest of the people who were left in the city, those who had deserted to him, and the people who remained. **10** Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left in the land of Judah some of the poor people who

[a] This clause has been transposed from 38.28

39.1–18: The fall of Jerusalem. The Hebrew text indicates that ch 39 is a smooth continuation of ch 38 (see textual note *a* at 39.3), as does the reference to the court of the guard (Jer 39.14; see 38.28). The account here basically follows that of 52.4–16 and 2 Kings 25.1–22. **1–2:** *The ninth year . . . the eleventh year*, the siege of Jerusalem began in January 587 and lasted until July 586 BCE when the walls were breached. **3:** *Rabsaris* and *Rabmag* are titles of Babylonian officials. *Sat in the middle gate*, on the dispensing of justice in the gate as a sign of foreign conquest, see 1.15; 43.10. **4:** *Arabah*, the rift valley of the Jordan River and Dead Sea, which continues southward to the Gulf of Aqaba. **5:** *Riblah*, about 70 mi (110 km) north of Damascus, had earlier served as the Egyptian provincial capital (2 Kings 23.33), and was where the Babylonian governorship likewise was temporarily established. According to 52.6–13 and 2 Kings 25.3–9, there was a one-month lag between the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem and the sacking of the city. **9:** According to 52.29, the Babylonians deported a total

owned nothing, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.

11 King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon gave command concerning Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, saying, 12 "Take him, look after him well and do him no harm, but deal with him as he may ask you." 13 So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, Nebushazban the Rabsaris, Nergal-sharezer the Rabmag, and all the chief officers of the king of Babylon sent 14 and took Jeremiah from the court of the guard. They entrusted him to Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan to be brought home. So he stayed with his own people.

15 The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah while he was confined in the court of the guard: 16 Go and say to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian:[a] Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to fulfill my words against this city for evil and not for good, and they shall be accomplished in your presence on that day. 17 But I will save you on that day, says the LORD, and you shall not be handed over to those whom you dread. 18 For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword; but you shall have your life as a prize of war, because you have trusted in me, says the LORD.

40 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in fetters along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon. 2 The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, "The LORD your God threatened this place with this disaster; 3 and now the LORD has brought it about, and has done as he said, because all of you sinned against the LORD and did not obey his voice. Therefore this thing has come upon you. 4 Now look, I have just released you today from the fetters on your hands. If you wish to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will take good care of you; but if you do not wish to come with me to Babylon, you need not come. See, the whole land is before you; go wherever you think it good and right to go. 5 If you remain,[b] then return to Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of

[a] Or *Nubian*; Heb *Cushite*
[b] Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain

of eight hundred thirty-two persons in this second deportation. **14:** Because Gedaliah was a member of the pro-Babylonian party, from the family of Shaphan, Nebuchadrezzar appointed him to serve as "governor" of the new Babylonian province (40.5). **15–18**. Words of deliverance for Ebed-melech and his family. See 38.7–13.

40.1–43.13: Political crisis results in the flight of Judeans to Egypt. Following the destruction of Jerusalem, the territorial governorship under Gedaliah was established in Mizpah, the venerable site associated with the ancient judgeship of Samuel (1 Sam 7.16), located between Jerusalem and Bethel. An attempted insurrection led by a member of the royal family, Ishmael son of Nethaniah (see 41.1), led to the assassination of Gedaliah and a debate by the Judeans who were left as to whether their future lay in staying in Judah or in flight to Egypt to avoid certain Babylonian repercussions. Against the advice of Jeremiah, the decision is made to flee to Egypt. **40.1–6:** With some slight changes in detail, 40.1–6 repeats the information from 39.11–14. Though the opening of the speech of the captain of the guard (vv. 2–4) is likely Deuteronomistic rhetoric, victorious kings in fact did claim the support of the deity of the conquered territory. So Cyrus of Media, after conquering Babylon, claimed to have been supported by Marduk, the god of Babylon. Compare 2 Kings 18.19–22, where the Assyrian official claims the support of Israel's God for the Assyrian invasion. **1:** *Ramah* (31.15n.) was a transit point for deportees. Jeremiah was allowed to choose exile or residence in Judah. Choosing the latter, he was placed in the custody of Gedaliah, the newly appointed governor of Judah with whose family Jeremiah had long been friendly (26.24; 36.10). Gedaliah's family figures prominently, not only in the life of Jeremiah but also at the Judean court and in relation to the Deuteronomic reform. Gedaliah's grandfather Shaphan delivered the newly discovered law scroll to King Josiah (2 Kings 22.3–13). Gedaliah's father, Ahikam, a member of the delegation sent to the prophetess Huldah (2 Kings 22.12–14), was Jeremiah's champion as well (26.24). Gedaliah's uncle Gemariah (36.24) and first cousin Micaiah (36.25) play similar, though unsuccessful, roles with regard to Jeremiah's scroll that was read to king Jehoiakim. Another of Gedaliah's uncles, Elasah, delivered Jeremiah's letter to the exiles (29.3). The close connection between this aristocratic family, the Deuteronomic movement, and the prose of the book of Jeremiah is intriguing.

Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the towns of Judah, and stay with him among the people; or go wherever you think it right to go." So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go. 6 Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah, and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land.

7 When all the leaders of the forces in the open country and their troops heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed to him men, women, and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been taken into exile to Babylon, 8 they went to Gedaliah at Mizpah—Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, Jezaniah son of the Maacathite, they and their troops. 9 Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan swore to them and their troops, saying, "Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall go well with you. 10 As for me, I am staying at Mizpah to represent you before the Chaldeans who come to us; but as for you, gather wine and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and live in the towns that you have taken over." 11 Likewise, when all the Judeans who were in Moab and among the Ammonites and in Edom and in other lands heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant in Judah and had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan as governor over them, 12 then all the Judeans returned from all the places to which they had been scattered and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah; and they gathered wine and summer fruits in great abundance.

13 Now Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah 14 and said to him, "Are you at all aware that Baalis king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah to take your life?" But Gedaliah son of Ahikam would not believe them. 15 Then Johanan son of Kareah spoke secretly to Gedaliah at Mizpah, "Please let me go and kill Ishmael son of Nethaniah, and no one else will know. Why should he take your life, so that all the Judeans who are gathered around you would be scattered, and the remnant of Judah would perish?" 16 But Gedaliah son of Ahikam said to Johanan son of Kareah, "Do not do such a thing, for you are telling a lie about Ishmael."

41 In the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, of the royal family, one of the chief officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. As they ate bread together there at Mizpah, 2 Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the ten men with him got up and struck down Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan with the sword and killed him, because the king of Babylon had appointed him governor in the land. 3 Ishmael also killed all the Judeans who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldean soldiers who happened to be there.

4 On the day after the murder of Gedaliah, before anyone knew of it, 5 eighty men arrived from Shechem and Shiloh and Samaria, with their beards shaved and their clothes torn, and their bodies gashed, bringing grain offerings and incense to present at the temple of the LORD. 6 And Ishmael son of Nethaniah came out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he came. As he met them, he said to them, "Come to Gedaliah son of Ahikam." 7 When they reached the middle of the city,

40.7–41.18: **Gedaliah's governorship and his assassination. 40.7–12:** Gedaliah assured his countrymen that he would represent them before the Babylonians (*Chaldeans*) and urged them to return to their fields and towns. When *they gathered wine and summer fruits in great abundance,* Gedaliah's assurance that life in the land could continue seemed confirmed. **14:** The Ammonites, when not fighting Israel, were often their allies against larger imperial powers. Baalis of Ammon supported a nationalistic revolution in Judah led by Ishmael, a member of the royal family, but Gedaliah refused to heed the warnings for his own safety. **41.1:** *As they ate bread*, ancient rules of hospitality and table fellowship bound host and guest to faithfulness toward one another. Ishmael's act was therefore particularly heinous. **3:** *Chaldean*, Babylonian. **5:** Eighty pilgrims from the north going to Jerusalem, likely to commemorate the day of atonement. Since animal sacrifice was suspended, they brought what might be appropriate for the occasion. To lure them to their deaths, Ishmael feigns their own ritual actions of

Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the men with him slaughtered them, and threw them[a] into a cistern. [8] But there were ten men among them who said to Ishmael, "Do not kill us, for we have stores of wheat, barley, oil, and honey hidden in the fields." So he refrained, and did not kill them along with their companions.

[9] Now the cistern into which Ishmael had thrown all the bodies of the men whom he had struck down was the large cistern[b] that King Asa had made for defense against King Baasha of Israel; Ishmael son of Nethaniah filled that cistern with those whom he had killed. [10] Then Ishmael took captive all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah, the king's daughters and all the people who were left at Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, had committed to Gedaliah son of Ahikam. Ishmael son of Nethaniah took them captive and set out to cross over to the Ammonites.

[11] But when Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him heard of all the crimes that Ishmael son of Nethaniah had done, [12] they took all their men and went to fight against Ishmael son of Nethaniah. They came upon him at the great pool that is in Gibeon. [13] And when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him, they were glad. [14] So all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned around and came back, and went to Johanan son of Kareah. [15] But Ishmael son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men, and went to the Ammonites. [16] Then Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him took all the rest of the people whom Ishmael son of Nethaniah had carried away captive[c] from Mizpah after he had slain Gedaliah son of Ahikam—soldiers, women, children, and eunuchs, whom Johanan brought back from Gibeon.[d] [17] And they set out, and stopped at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem, intending to go to Egypt [18] because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael son of Nethaniah had killed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.

42 Then all the commanders of the forces, and Johanan son of Kareah and Azariah[e] son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest, approached [2] the prophet Jeremiah and said, "Be good enough to listen to our plea, and pray to the LORD your God for us—for all this remnant. For there are only a few of us left out of many, as your eyes can see. [3] Let the LORD your God show us where we should go and what we should do." [4] The prophet Jeremiah said to them, "Very well: I am going to pray to the LORD your God as you request, and whatever the LORD answers you I will tell you; I will keep nothing back from you." [5] They in their turn said to Jeremiah, "May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do

[a] Syr: Heb lacks *and threw them*; compare verse 9
[b] Gk: Heb *whom he had killed by the hand of Gedaliah*
[c] Cn: Heb *whom he recovered from Ishmael son of Nethaniah*
[d] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[e] Gk: Heb *Jezaniah*

mourning. **9:** On the building projects of King Asa of Judah (908–867 BCE) in conjunction with his war against King Baasha of Israel (906–883 BCE), including those at Mizpah, see 1 Kings 15.16–22. **12.** *The great pool . . . in Gibeon*, the site of the battle between the forces of Joab and Abner (2 Sam 2.13). **17:** *Geruth Chimham*, perhaps meaning "fief of Chimham," referring to property given to Barzillai's son Chimham (see 2 Sam 19.37–40); precise location unknown.

42.1–22: The remnant under the leadership of Johanan son of Kareah asks Jeremiah for divine guidance regarding their plan to go to Egypt. That this takes place near Bethlehem (41.17) suggests that Jeremiah was not at his home in Mizpah but was with the group rescued by Johanan. At first the people seem to be open to whatever direction God provides (vv. 5–6). But as the conversation progresses, it is apparent that their earlier plan to go to Egypt was already set, and they were not open to divine direction. Even before hearing the people's response, Jeremiah presumes that they have disobeyed (v. 21). Much depends on the significance of the participle "saying" in v. 13 ("But if you continue to say . . .") and the use of the infinitive in v. 18 ("when you go . . ."). As in earlier times, Egypt was a place of refuge for those fleeing Judah for one reason or another; see 26.21; Gen 12.10; 46.6; 1 Kings 11.40. **1:** *Azariah*, MT reads "Jezaniah," but see textual note *e* and cf. 43.2.

not act according to everything that the LORD your God sends us through you. 6 Whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God to whom we are sending you, in order that it may go well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God."

7 At the end of ten days the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. 8 Then he summoned Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who were with him, and all the people from the least to the greatest, 9 and said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your plea before him: 10 If you will only remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I am sorry for the disaster that I have brought upon you. 11 Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, as you have been; do not be afraid of him, says the LORD, for I am with you, to save you and to rescue you from his hand. 12 I will grant you mercy, and he will have mercy on you and restore you to your native soil. 13 But if you continue to say, 'We will not stay in this land,' thus disobeying the voice of the LORD your God 14 and saying, 'No, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war, or hear the sound of the trumpet, or be hungry for bread, and there we will stay,' 15 then hear the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: If you are determined to enter Egypt and go to settle there, 16 then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there, in the land of Egypt; and the famine that you dread shall follow close after you into Egypt; and there you shall die. 17 All the people who have determined to go to Egypt to settle there shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; they shall have no remnant or survivor from the disaster that I am bringing upon them.

18 "For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Just as my anger and my wrath were poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so my wrath will be poured out on you when you go to Egypt. You shall become an object of execration and horror, of cursing and ridicule. You shall see this place no more. 19 The LORD has said to you, O remnant of Judah, Do not go to Egypt. Be well aware that I have warned you today 20 that you have made a fatal mistake. For you yourselves sent me to the LORD your God, saying, 'Pray for us to the LORD our God, and whatever the LORD our God says, tell us and we will do it.' 21 So I have told you today, but you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God in anything that he sent me to tell you. 22 Be well aware, then, that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go and settle."

43 When Jeremiah finished speaking to all the people all these words of the LORD their God, with which the LORD their God had sent him to them, 2 Azariah son of Hoshaiah and Johanan son of Kareah and all the other insolent men said to Jeremiah, "You are telling a lie. The LORD our God did not send you to say, 'Do not go to Egypt to settle there'; 3 but Baruch son of Neriah is inciting you against us, to hand us over to the Chaldeans, in order that they may kill us or take us into exile in Babylon." 4 So Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces and all the people did not obey the voice of the LORD, to stay in the land of Judah. 5 But Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned to settle in the land of Judah from all the nations to which they had been driven— 6 the men, the women, the children, the princesses, and everyone whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan; also the prophet Jeremiah and Baruch son of Neriah. 7 And they came into the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the LORD. And they arrived at Tahpanhes.

43.1–13: The flight to Tahpanhes and Jeremiah's oracle. The leaders dismiss Jeremiah's oracle as a "lie," suggesting that he is colluding with Baruch for their destruction. This insinuates a role for Baruch otherwise left unexplored in the book. The fears of Babylonian reprisal may not have been overdrawn, since 52.30 indicates that five years following the destruction of Jerusalem, there was a third deportation of Judeans, perhaps in response to political crises such as that of the assassination of Gedaliah. **6:** *Nebuzaradan*, see 39.11–14; 40.1–6. **7:** *Tahpanhes* was an Egyptian border fortress in the eastern Nile Delta; see 2.16. There were Judean refugee settlements in many areas of Egypt (see 44.1), especially at the military garrison of Elephantine in the upper Nile.

[8] Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes: [9] Take some large stones in your hands, and bury them in the clay pavement[a] that is at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes. Let the Judeans see you do it, [10] and say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to send and take my servant King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, and he[b] will set his throne above these stones that I have buried, and he will spread his royal canopy over them. [11] He shall come and ravage the land of Egypt, giving

those who are destined for pestilence, to pestilence,
and those who are destined for captivity, to captivity,
and those who are destined for the sword, to the sword.

[12] He[c] shall kindle a fire in the temples of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them and carry them away captive; and he shall pick clean the land of Egypt, as a shepherd picks his cloak clean of vermin; and he shall depart from there safely. [13] He shall break the obelisks of Heliopolis, which is in the land of Egypt; and the temples of the gods of Egypt he shall burn with fire.

44 The word that came to Jeremiah for all the Judeans living in the land of Egypt, at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Memphis, and in the land of Pathros, [2] Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You yourselves have seen all the disaster that I have brought on Jerusalem and on all the towns of Judah. Look at them; today they are a desolation, without an inhabitant in them, [3] because of the wickedness that they committed, provoking me to anger, in that they went to make offerings and serve other gods that they had not known, neither they, nor you, nor your ancestors. [4] Yet I persistently sent to you all my servants the prophets, saying, "I beg you not to do this abominable thing that I hate!" [5] But they did not listen or incline their ear, to turn from their wickedness and make no offerings to other gods. [6] So my wrath and my anger were poured out and kindled in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they became a waste and a desolation, as they still are today. [7] And now thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel: Why are you doing such great harm to

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Gk Syr: Heb *I*
[c] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *I*

9–10: A prophetic sign-act indicating Babylonian control over Egypt. On setting up the royal throne at the gate, see 39.3. **12:** *Pick clean*, the Hebrew suggests a shepherd wrapping himself in a garment (see 1 Sam 28.14; Ps 109.19), but the LXX understood it to refer to removing lice. The verb can mean "to grasp tightly" (Isa 22.17). **13:** *Obelisks of Heliopolis*, the Hebrew reads "the stone pillars of Beth-shemesh," but Beth-shemesh means "house of the Sun." Heliopolis, or "city of the Sun," was the ancient center with a temple for the worship of the sun, as indicated by its name. It was located in the Nile Delta 6 mi (10 km) northeast of Cairo, and was also known as On (Gen 41.45,50; 46.20).

44.1–30: Dispute over disaster and divine purpose. A final oracle against the Jewish refugee communities in Egypt (cf. ch 43), in the context of a confrontation concerning why Judah has experienced the present crisis. In standard Deuteronomistic language, Jeremiah associates the disaster with the people's faithlessness toward God (vv. 2–10). He meets popular resistance from those who insist that the disaster has come precisely because they had discontinued their ancient syncretistic ritual practices, especially that of the adoration of and homage paid to the goddess known as the "queen of heaven," probably Astarte, variously known as Ishtar in Babylon and Ashtart in Canaan (vv. 15–19). The insinuation is that the reform movement of Josiah, with its restriction of worship to the Jerusalem Temple and its purging of the land of all syncretistic and foreign worship elements, was the cause of offense. Jeremiah's Deuteronomistic argument brackets that of the people, because it represents the fundamental theological principle of the book as prepared by its Deuteronomistic editors. **1:** Expands the focus far beyond the Jewish community in Tahpanhes (Jer 43.1–13). *Migdol,* like *Tahpanhes,* lay in the eastern Nile Delta and was associated with the Exodus (Ex 14.2). It was apparently the closest Egyptian garrison to Judah (Ezek 29.10). *Memphis* (or Noph), was the ancient imperial capital located at the head of the Nile Delta; see 2.16. *Pathros* was a designation for upper (i.e., southern) Egypt, and is listed alongside and parallel to Egypt in several lists (e.g., Isa 11.11); on the Jewish colony at Elephantine in upper Egypt, see 43.7n. **4:** See 7.25n.

yourselves, to cut off man and woman, child and infant, from the midst of Judah, leaving yourselves without a remnant? 8 Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands, making offerings to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to settle? Will you be cut off and become an object of cursing and ridicule among all the nations of the earth? 9 Have you forgotten the crimes of your ancestors, of the kings of Judah, of their[a] wives, your own crimes and those of your wives, which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? 10 They have shown no contrition or fear to this day, nor have they walked in my law and my statutes that I set before you and before your ancestors.

11 Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am determined to bring disaster on you, to bring all Judah to an end. 12 I will take the remnant of Judah who are determined to come to the land of Egypt to settle, and they shall perish, everyone; in the land of Egypt they shall fall; by the sword and by famine they shall perish; from the least to the greatest, they shall die by the sword and by famine; and they shall become an object of execration and horror, of cursing and ridicule. 13 I will punish those who live in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, 14 so that none of the remnant of Judah who have come to settle in the land of Egypt shall escape or survive or return to the land of Judah. Although they long to go back to live there, they shall not go back, except some fugitives.

15 Then all the men who were aware that their wives had been making offerings to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, all the people who lived in Pathros in the land of Egypt, answered Jeremiah: 16 "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we are not going to listen to you. 17 Instead, we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials, used to do in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. We used to have plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no misfortune. 18 But from the time we stopped making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything and have perished by the sword and by famine." 19 And the women said,[b] "Indeed we will go on making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her; do you think that we made cakes for her, marked with her image, and poured out libations to her without our husbands' being involved?"

20 Then Jeremiah said to all the people, men and women, all the people who were giving him this answer: 21 "As for the offerings that you made in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your ancestors, your kings and your officials, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them? Did it not come into his mind? 22 The LORD could no longer bear the sight of your evil doings, the abominations that you committed; therefore your land became a desolation and a waste and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is to this day. 23 It is because you burned offerings, and because you sinned against the LORD and did not obey the voice of the LORD or walk in his law and in his statutes and in his decrees, that this disaster has befallen you, as is still evident today."

24 Jeremiah said to all the people and all the women, "Hear the word of the LORD, all you Judeans who are in the land of Egypt, 25 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You and your wives have accomplished in deeds

[a] Heb *his*

[b] Compare Syr: Heb lacks *And the women said*

9: *Their wives*, the Hebrew "his wives" may have in mind the specific case of Solomon (1 Kings 11.1–13), whose wives led him to apostasy and the schism of the empire. **15:** It is strange that Jeremiah, who apparently settled as a hostage in Tahpanhes, is here addressed by Jews residing in upper Egypt. **17:** The worship of the *queen of heaven* was popular throughout the ancient world, including popular religious expression in Israel (compare the worship of Aphrodite and Venus). Her worship included the making of raisin cakes to her, expressive of prayers for fertility (v. 19). This goddess represented the evening-star phase of the planet Venus, while in Canaan her brother, Ashtar, represented the morning-star phase (see Isa 14.12–15, which refers to an ancient myth

what you declared in words, saying, 'We are determined to perform the vows that we have made, to make offerings to the queen of heaven and to pour out libations to her.' By all means, keep your vows and make your libations! [26] Therefore hear the word of the LORD, all you Judeans who live in the land of Egypt: Lo, I swear by my great name, says the LORD, that my name shall no longer be pronounced on the lips of any of the people of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, 'As the Lord GOD lives.' [27] I am going to watch over them for harm and not for good; all the people of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall perish by the sword and by famine, until not one is left. [28] And those who escape the sword shall return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah, few in number; and all the remnant of Judah, who have come to the land of Egypt to settle, shall know whose words will stand, mine or theirs! [29] This shall be the sign to you, says the LORD, that I am going to punish you in this place, in order that you may know that my words against you will surely be carried out: [30] Thus says the LORD, I am going to give Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, into the hands of his enemies, those who seek his life, just as I gave King Zedekiah of Judah into the hand of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, his enemy who sought his life."

45 The word that the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Baruch son of Neriah, when he wrote these words in a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah: [2] Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: [3] You said, "Woe is me! The LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest." [4] Thus you shall say to him, "Thus says the LORD: I am going to break down what I have built, and pluck up what I have planted—that is, the whole land. [5] And you, do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for I am going to bring disaster upon all flesh, says the LORD; but I will give you your life as a prize of war in every place to which you may go."

46 The word of the LORD that came to the prophet Jeremiah concerning the nations.

[2] Concerning Egypt, about the army of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates at Carchemish and which King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah:

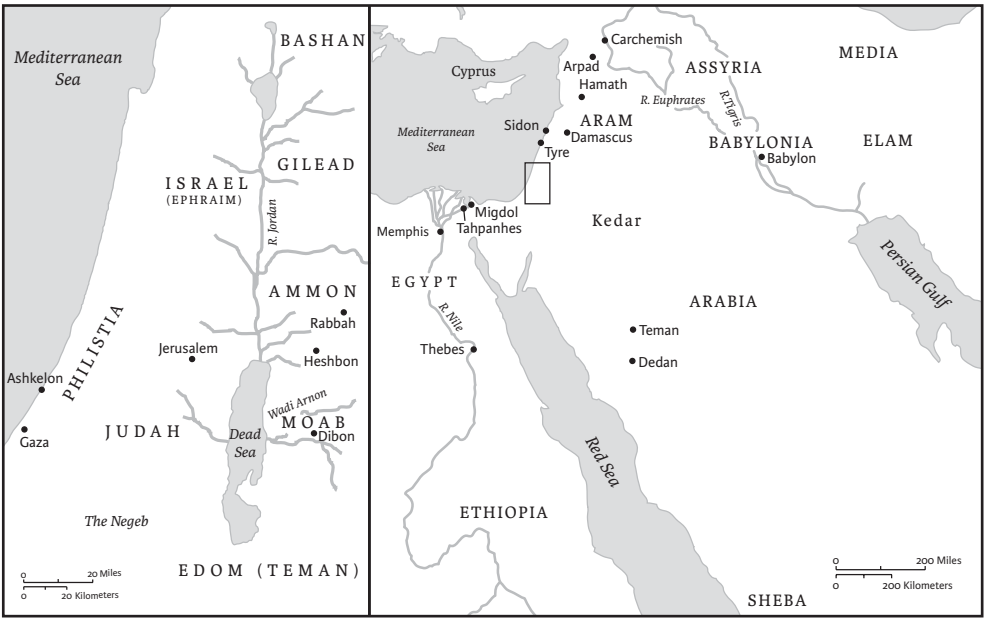
[3] Prepare buckler and shield,
and advance for battle!
[4] Harness the horses;
mount the steeds!

associated with Ashtar, the "day star" who ushers in the light of morning); see also 7.18n. **27:** *Watch over them for harm*, it is deeply ironic that this last oracle addressed to the people echoes the language with which the book began (1.11–12), suggesting that, in spite of the hope of 31.28, the book tragically ends where it began for these Egyptian refugees. The promise resides with the exiles in Babylon. **30:** *Pharaoh Hophra* (Apries, ruled ca. 589–570 BCE) was assassinated by an enemy within the Egyptian court.

45.1–5: Words of promise to Baruch. This third and final cycle of oracles is concluded, as were the earlier two, by recollecting the scroll of 605 BCE (see 36.4–6,27–32). Using the central code language of the book, a final negative judgment is given: building yields to breaking down and planting yields to plucking up (see 1.10; etc.). But Baruch is reassured of his own survival. **5:** *Prize of war*, see 21.9; 38.2; 39.18.

46.1–51.64: Oracles against the nations. Prophetic books commonly have collections of such oracles directed against Israel's enemies (see Isa 13–23, Ezek 25–32, Am 1–2). These oracles may preserve one of the early functions of prophecy as "war prophecy": undermining the strength of the enemy with curses and psychologically fortifying the home troops for victory. The placement of these oracles is a major difference between the Hebrew and Greek traditions of the book of Jeremiah, with the latter (the Septuagint [LXX]) locating the oracles within the context of ch 25. The Hebrew and Greek traditions also differ in their ordering of the specific oracles. The Hebrew tradition begins with the oracle against Egypt, connecting with the geographical orientation of the previous chapters. The general sweep is then from west to east (or, using the language of the text, from "south" to "north") and concludes with the lengthy oracle against Babylon (chs 50–51), the major enemy in the book of Jeremiah.

46.2–28: Against Egypt, two oracles. The first oracle (vv. 3–12) is set in the context of Babylon's defeat of



Chs 46–51: Places mentioned in the oracles against foreign nations.

Take your stations with your helmets,
whet your lances,
put on your coats of mail!
5 Why do I see them terrified?
They have fallen back;
their warriors are beaten down,
and have fled in haste.
They do not look back—
terror is all around!
says the LORD.
6 The swift cannot flee away,
nor can the warrior escape;
in the north by the river Euphrates
they have stumbled and fallen.

7 Who is this, rising like the Nile,
like rivers whose waters surge?
8 Egypt rises like the Nile,
like rivers whose waters surge.
It said, Let me rise, let me cover the earth,
let me destroy cities and their inhabitants.
9 Advance, O horses,
and dash madly, O chariots!
Let the warriors go forth:
Ethiopia[a] and Put who carry the shield,
the Ludim, who draw[b] the bow.
10 That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts,
a day of retribution,
to gain vindication from his foes.
The sword shall devour and be sated,
and drink its fill of their blood.
For the Lord GOD of hosts holds a sacrifice
in the land of the north by the river Euphrates.

[a] Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*
[b] Cn: Heb *who grasp, who draw*

Egypt in 605 BCE at Carchemish on the Euphrates (vv. 6,10), solidifying Babylonian control over the Levant; cf. 36.1–32. The second oracle (vv. 13–28) is set in the context of the later invasion of Egypt by the Babylonian army (compare 43.9–13). **2:** *Pharaoh Neco* II ruled ca. 610–595 BCE. **3:** *Buckler . . . shield*, two different sizes of shields: the first smaller and the second covering the entire body. The unusual poetic meter of these verses mimics the sound of marching armies (compare Nah 2.1–9). **5:** *Terror is all around*, language celebrating the Egyptian defeat; see 6.25n.; 20.3,10; 49.29. **7–8:** Like the annual flooding of the Nile, Egypt's pretensions rose above manageable levels. **9:** *Ethiopia* (Heb "Cush"), *Put*, and *the Ludim* were all African nations known for their military prowess (see

11 Go up to Gilead, and take balm,
O virgin daughter Egypt!
In vain you have used many medicines;
there is no healing for you.
12 The nations have heard of your shame,
and the earth is full of your cry;
for warrior has stumbled against warrior;
both have fallen together.

13 The word that the LORD spoke to the prophet Jeremiah about the coming of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon to attack the land of Egypt:

14 Declare in Egypt, and proclaim in Migdol;
proclaim in Memphis and Tahpanhes;
Say, "Take your stations and be ready,
for the sword shall devour those around you."
15 Why has Apis fled?[a]
Why did your bull not stand?
—because the LORD thrust him down.
16 Your multitude stumbled[b] and fell,
and one said to another,[c]
"Come, let us go back to our own people
and to the land of our birth,
because of the destroying sword."
17 Give Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the name
"Braggart who missed his chance."

18 As I live, says the King,
whose name is the LORD of hosts,
one is coming
like Tabor among the mountains,
and like Carmel by the sea.
19 Pack your bags for exile,
sheltered daughter Egypt!
For Memphis shall become a waste,
a ruin, without inhabitant.

20 A beautiful heifer is Egypt—
a gadfly from the north lights upon her.
21 Even her mercenaries in her midst
are like fatted calves;
they too have turned and fled together,
they did not stand;
for the day of their calamity has come upon them,
the time of their punishment.

22 She makes a sound like a snake gliding away;
for her enemies march in force,
and come against her with axes,
like those who fell trees.
23 They shall cut down her forest,
says the LORD,
though it is impenetrable,
because they are more numerous
than locusts;
they are without number.
24 Daughter Egypt shall be put to shame;
she shall be handed over to a people from the north.

25 The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, said: See, I am bringing punishment upon Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh, and Egypt and her gods and her kings, upon Pharaoh and those who trust in him. 26 I will hand them over to those who seek their life, to King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon and his officers. Afterward Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old, says the LORD.

27 But as for you, have no fear, my servant Jacob,
and do not be dismayed, O Israel;
for I am going to save you from far away,

[a] Gk: Heb *Why was it swept away*
[b] Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Gk: Heb *and fell one to another and they said*

Gen 10.6,13; Ezek 27.10). **11:** *Gilead . . . balm*, see 8.22n. **14.** *Migdol . . . Memphis . . . Tahpanhes*, see 44.1n. **15:** *Why has Apis fled*, following the Greek text, underlying which is a different word division; MT reads "Why is it fallen?" Apis was a bull deity worshiped in Memphis and the subject of elaborate sacrificial and burial rituals. The flight of Apis represents the retreat of the imperial Egyptian armies. **18:** *Like Tabor*, a prominent mountain in the Galilee. *Like Carmel*, a prominent mountain point protecting the seaward (west) end of the Jezreel valley: **20:** *Gadfly from the north*, that is, Babylon. **21:** Egypt's troops have fled like their Apis bull (v. 15). **22:** The *snake gliding away* may recall the royal emblem on the Egyptian crown. **25:** *Amon of Thebes*, the major deity and religious center of upper Egypt. **26:** *Afterward Egypt shall be inhabited,* that the oracle concludes with a brief word of promise for the restoration of Egypt is strange, but consistent with 48.47; 49.6,39. **27–28:** A doublet of 30.10–11 in the exilic

and your offspring from the land of
their captivity.
Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease,
and no one shall make him afraid.
28 As for you, have no fear, my servant
Jacob,
says the LORD,
for I am with you.
I will make an end of all the nations
among which I have banished you,
but I will not make an end of you!
I will chastise you in just measure,
and I will by no means leave you
unpunished.

47 The word of the LORD that came to the prophet Jeremiah concerning the Philistines, before Pharaoh attacked Gaza:

2 Thus says the LORD:
See, waters are rising out of the north
and shall become an overflowing
torrent;
they shall overflow the land and all that
fills it,
the city and those who live in it.
People shall cry out,
and all the inhabitants of the land shall
wail.
3 At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs
of his stallions,
at the clatter of his chariots, at the
rumbling of their wheels,
parents do not turn back for children,
so feeble are their hands,
4 because of the day that is coming
to destroy all the Philistines,
to cut off from Tyre and Sidon
every helper that remains.
For the LORD is destroying the Philistines,
the remnant of the coastland of
Caphtor.
5 Baldness has come upon Gaza,
Ashkelon is silenced.
O remnant of their power![a]
How long will you gash yourselves?
6 Ah, sword of the LORD!
How long until you are quiet?
Put yourself into your scabbard,
rest and be still!
7 How can it[b] be quiet,
when the LORD has given it an order?
Against Ashkelon and against the
seashore—
there he has appointed it.

48 Concerning Moab.

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel:
Alas for Nebo, it is laid waste!
Kiriathaim is put to shame, it is taken;
the fortress is put to shame and broken
down;
2 the renown of Moab is no more.
In Heshbon they planned evil against her:
"Come, let us cut her off from being a
nation!"
You also, O Madmen, shall be brought to
silence;[c]
the sword shall pursue you.

3 Hark! a cry from Horonaim,
"Desolation and great destruction!"

[a] Gk: Heb *their valley*
[b] Gk Vg: Heb *you*
[c] The place-name *Madmen* sounds like the Hebrew verb *to be silent*

language of Second Isaiah.

47.1–7: Against Philistia. This oracle alludes to the Babylonian destruction of the Philistine city of Ashkelon in 694 BCE (see vv. 5, 7). **4:** *Tyre and Sidon* were part of Phoenicia rather than Philistia, and elsewhere are listed separately from Philistia (25.20–22; Am 1.6–10; Ezek 25.15–28.26). The Philistines were associated with the ancestral land of Caphtor (Crete, Gen 10.14; Deut 2.23; Am 9.7), but Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia were connected in tradition (Joel 3.4), all associated with incursions of Hellenic groups, and therefore are grouped together and combined here. **5:** For similar signs of lamentation, cf. 16.6; 41.5. **6–7:** *Sword of the* LORD, 12.1; 25.31; Isa 34.6.

48.1–47: Against Moab. This lengthy oracle is comprised of a number of originally independent oracles, several of which are found in other prophetic collections. **1:** Although *Nebo, Kiriathaim,* and other Moabite cities were sometimes controlled by the Israelites (Mesha inscription; Num 32.37), they were traditionally part of Moabite territory (Deut 32.49). **2:** *In Heshbon they planned evil*, a play on words, since "plot" or "plan" is Heb "ḥashab." *Heshbon*, a northern Moabite city, is modern Hesban. **3–5:** On the place names *Horonaim* and the

[4] "Moab is destroyed!"
her little ones cry out.
[5] For at the ascent of Luhith
they go[a] up weeping bitterly;
for at the descent of Horonaim
they have heard the distressing cry of anguish.
[6] Flee! Save yourselves!
Be like a wild ass[b] in the desert!

[7] Surely, because you trusted in your strongholds[c] and your treasures,
you also shall be taken;
Chemosh shall go out into exile,
with his priests and his attendants.
[8] The destroyer shall come upon every town,
and no town shall escape;
the valley shall perish,
and the plain shall be destroyed,
as the LORD has spoken.

[9] Set aside salt for Moab,
for she will surely fall;
her towns shall become a desolation,
with no inhabitant in them.

[10] Accursed is the one who is slack in doing the work of the LORD; and accursed is the one who keeps back the sword from bloodshed.

[11] Moab has been at ease from his youth,
settled like wine[d] on its dregs;
he has not been emptied from vessel to vessel,
nor has he gone into exile;
therefore his flavor has remained
and his aroma is unspoiled.
[12] Therefore, the time is surely coming, says the LORD, when I shall send to him decanters to decant him, and empty his vessels, and break his[e] jars in pieces. [13] Then Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence.

[14] How can you say, "We are heroes
and mighty warriors"?
[15] The destroyer of Moab and his towns has come up,
and the choicest of his young men have gone down to slaughter,
says the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts.
[16] The calamity of Moab is near at hand
and his doom approaches swiftly.
[17] Mourn over him, all you his neighbors,
and all who know his name;
say, "How the mighty scepter is broken,
the glorious staff!"

[18] Come down from glory,
and sit on the parched ground,
enthroned daughter Dibon!
For the destroyer of Moab has come up against you;
he has destroyed your strongholds.
[19] Stand by the road and watch,
you inhabitant of Aroer!
Ask the man fleeing and the woman escaping;
say, "What has happened?"
[20] Moab is put to shame, for it is broken down;
wail and cry!
Tell it by the Arnon,
that Moab is laid waste.

[21] Judgment has come upon the tableland, upon Holon, and Jahzah, and Mephaath,

[a] Cn: Heb *he goes*
[b] Gk Aquila: Heb *like Aroer*
[c] Gk: Heb *works*
[d] Heb lacks *like wine*
[e] Gk Aquila: Heb *their*

ascent of Luhith, see Isa 15.15. Their locations are unknown. **6:** *Like a wild ass* (Heb "'aro'er") *in the desert*, a reference to the Moabite town Aroer (17.6; Deut 2.36; 2 Kings 10.33). **7:** *Chemosh*, the national god of the Moabites; see Judg 11.24; 1 Kings 11.7. **9:** *Salt for Moab* refers to the ancient practice of "salting" a conquered territory to destroy its soil's fertility for generations to come; see Judges 9.45. But this is also a wordplay on the terms "salt" (Heb "tsits") and "fall" or "go out" (Heb "tetse'"). **10:** Probably an editorial comment. **11–12:** Uses language referring to Moab's well-known viticulture; see vv. 32–33. **13:** *Bethel* represented religious apostasy in prophetic critique (Hos 10.15; Am 3.14; 4.4; 5.5–6), because of the worship associated with the calf that Jeroboam installed there (1 Kings 12.26–31; 2 Kings 10.29). **18.** *Dibon*, a Moabite city located near Aroer north of the Wadi Arnon (v.

22 and Dibon, and Nebo, and Beth-diblathaim,
23 and Kiriathaim, and Beth-gamul, and Beth-meon, 24 and Kerioth, and Bozrah, and all the towns of the land of Moab, far and near.
25 The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, says the LORD.

26 Make him drunk, because he magnified himself against the LORD; let Moab wallow in his vomit; he too shall become a laughingstock. 27 Israel was a laughingstock for you, though he was not caught among thieves; but whenever you spoke of him you shook your head!

28 Leave the towns, and live on the rock,
O inhabitants of Moab!
Be like the dove that nests
on the sides of the mouth of a gorge.
29 We have heard of the pride of Moab—
he is very proud—
of his loftiness, his pride, and his arrogance,
and the haughtiness of his heart.
30 I myself know his insolence, says the LORD;
his boasts are false,
his deeds are false.
31 Therefore I wail for Moab;
I cry out for all Moab;
for the people of Kir-heres I mourn.
32 More than for Jazer I weep for you,
O vine of Sibmah!
Your branches crossed over the sea,
reached as far as Jazer;[a]
upon your summer fruits and your vintage
the destroyer has fallen.
33 Gladness and joy have been taken away
from the fruitful land of Moab;
I have stopped the wine from the wine presses;
no one treads them with shouts of joy;
the shouting is not the shout of joy.

34 Heshbon and Elealeh cry out;[b] as far as Jahaz they utter their voice, from Zoar to Horonaim and Eglath-shelishiyah. For even the waters of Nimrim have become desolate.
35 And I will bring to an end in Moab, says the LORD, those who offer sacrifice at a high place and make offerings to their gods. 36 Therefore my heart moans for Moab like a flute, and my heart moans like a flute for the people of Kir-heres; for the riches they gained have perished.

37 For every head is shaved and every beard cut off; on all the hands there are gashes, and on the loins sackcloth. 38 On all the housetops of Moab and in the squares there is nothing but lamentation; for I have broken Moab like a vessel that no one wants, says the LORD.
39 How it is broken! How they wail! How Moab has turned his back in shame! So Moab has become a derision and a horror to all his neighbors.

40 For thus says the LORD:
Look, he shall swoop down like an eagle,
and spread his wings against Moab;
41 the towns[c] shall be taken
and the strongholds seized.
The hearts of the warriors of Moab, on that day,
shall be like the heart of a woman in labor.
42 Moab shall be destroyed as a people,
because he magnified himself against the LORD.
43 Terror, pit, and trap
are before you, O inhabitants of Moab!
says the LORD.
44 Everyone who flees from the terror
shall fall into the pit,
and everyone who climbs out of the pit
shall be caught in the trap.
For I will bring these things[d] upon Moab
in the year of their punishment,
says the LORD.

[a] Two Mss and Isa 16.8: MT *the sea of Jazer*
[b] Cn: Heb *From the cry of Heshbon to Elealeh*
[c] Or *Kerioth*
[d] Gk Syr: Heb *bring upon it*

20). **19:** *Aroer*, see v. 6n. **31:** *Kir-heres*, otherwise known as Kir-hareseth (see Isa 16.7,11), is modern el-Kerak, the imposing and easily defended Moabite city 18 km (11 mi) east of the Dead Sea. **32:** *Vine of Sibmah*, see vv. 11–12n.; Isa 16.8,9. **34:** References several towns in Moab; see map on p. 1130. Cf. Isa 15.4–6; Num 32.3 **36:** *Moans . . . like a flute*, normally flutes are associated with joyful sounds (Isa 5.12; 30.29); cf. Isa 16.11. **37:** Characteristic rituals of mourning. *On all the hands*, or perhaps "between the hands," that is, marks made by slashing one's chest

45 In the shadow of Heshbon
fugitives stop exhausted;
for a fire has gone out from Heshbon,
a flame from the house of Sihon;
it has destroyed the forehead of Moab,
the scalp of the people of tumult.[a]
46 Woe to you, O Moab!
The people of Chemosh have perished,
for your sons have been taken captive,
and your daughters into captivity.
47 Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab
in the latter days, says the LORD.
Thus far is the judgment on Moab.

49 Concerning the Ammonites.

Thus says the LORD:
Has Israel no sons?
Has he no heir?
Why then has Milcom dispossessed Gad,
and his people settled in its towns?
2 Therefore, the time is surely coming,
says the LORD,
when I will sound the battle alarm
against Rabbah of the Ammonites;
it shall become a desolate mound,
and its villages shall be burned with
fire;
then Israel shall dispossess those who
dispossessed him,
says the LORD.

3 Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai is laid waste!
Cry out, O daughters[b] of Rabbah!
Put on sackcloth,
lament, and slash yourselves with
whips![c]
For Milcom shall go into exile,
with his priests and his
attendants.
4 Why do you boast in your strength?
Your strength is ebbing,
O faithless daughter.
You trusted in your treasures, saying,
"Who will attack me?"
5 I am going to bring terror upon you,
says the Lord GOD of hosts,
from all your neighbors,
and you will be scattered, each
headlong,
with no one to gather the fugitives.
6 But afterward I will restore the fortunes
of the Ammonites, says the LORD.

7 Concerning Edom.

Thus says the LORD of hosts:
Is there no longer wisdom in Teman?
Has counsel perished from the
prudent?
Has their wisdom vanished?
8 Flee, turn back, get down low,
inhabitants of Dedan!

[a] Or *of Shaon*
[b] Or *villages*
[c] Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

or back; see Zech 13.6. **45:** *Heshbon*, see v. 2n. *Sihon*, the legendary Amorite king of Heshbon; see the ancient ballad in Num 21.27–28. **47:** Moab's fortunes will be restored, as will those of Ammon (49.6) and Elam (49.39).

49.1–6: Against Ammon. The oracle against Ammon follows that of Moab, as the two are connected in tradition; see Gen 19.30–38; Deut 23.3. Both Moab and Ammon had recently been used by the Babylonians as proxies in the effort to subdue Judah (2 Kings 24.2). **1:** *Milcom . . . Gad*, as the east-Jordanian tribe of Reuben tried to establish itself in territory claimed by Moab, so the east-Jordanian tribe of Gad was in competition with the Ammonites, whose national god was Milcom (1 Kings 11.5,33) and who eventually became independent of Israel, thereby claiming their own territory (2 Kings 15.29). **3:** Reference to several major Ammonite towns, including Heshbon, the old Amorite city of Sihon (see 48.2n.; Num 21.21–24) and the capital, Rabbah (2 Sam 11.1), modern day Amman. *Ai* here probably does not refer to the ancient city of Ai near Bethel. The word is also the Heb term for "ruin," and may be used here in reference to Rabbah. **6:** *Restore the fortunes*, see 48.47n.

49.7–22: Against Edom. South of Ammon and Moab, Edom was the third east–Jordanian country that competed with Israel for territory and independence. Parts of this oracle are also found with variations in the book of Obadiah. **7–8:** Teman, perhaps in northern Arabia, was associated with Esau, the ancestor of Edom (Gen 36.1,8–11,15). Ancient traditions connected the God of Israel with Teman (Hab 3.3), and it was associated with ancient wisdom (Bar 3.22–23). As Edom's "brother," Israel recognized a strained kinship with the Edomites, but the relationship soured as Edom too was used as a proxy by Babylon (Ps 137.7–9). *Dedan*, a region in north-

For I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him,
the time when I punish him.
9 If grape-gatherers came to you,
would they not leave gleanings?
If thieves came by night,
even they would pillage only what they wanted.
10 But as for me, I have stripped Esau bare,
I have uncovered his hiding places,
and he is not able to conceal himself.
His offspring are destroyed, his kinsfolk and his neighbors; and he is no more.
11 Leave your orphans, I will keep them alive;
and let your widows trust in me.
12 For thus says the LORD: If those who do not deserve to drink the cup still have to drink it, shall you be the one to go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished; you must drink it. 13 For by myself I have sworn, says the LORD, that Bozrah shall become an object of horror and ridicule, a waste, and an object of cursing; and all her towns shall be perpetual wastes.
14 I have heard tidings from the LORD,
and a messenger has been sent among the nations:
"Gather yourselves together and come against her,
and rise up for battle!"
15 For I will make you least among the nations,
despised by humankind.
16 The terror you inspire
and the pride of your heart have deceived you,
you who live in the clefts of the rock,[a]
who hold the height of the hill.
Although you make your nest as high as the eagle's,
from there I will bring you down,
says the LORD.
17 Edom shall become an object of horror; everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss because of all its disasters. 18 As when Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors were overthrown, says the LORD, no one shall live there, nor shall anyone settle in it.
19 Like a lion coming up from the thickets of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly chase Edom[b] away from it; and I will appoint over it whomever I choose.[c]
For who is like me? Who can summon me?
Who is the shepherd who can stand before me? 20 Therefore hear the plan that the LORD has made against Edom and the purposes that he has formed against the inhabitants of Teman: Surely the little ones of the flock shall be dragged away; surely their fold shall be appalled at their fate. 21 At the sound of their fall the earth shall tremble; the sound of their cry shall be heard at the Red Sea.[d]
22 Look, he shall mount up and swoop down like an eagle, and spread his wings against Bozrah, and the heart of the warriors of Edom in that day shall be like the heart of a woman in labor.

23 Concerning Damascus.

Hamath and Arpad are confounded,
for they have heard bad news;
they melt in fear, they are troubled like the sea[e]
that cannot be quiet.
24 Damascus has become feeble, she turned to flee,
and panic seized her;
anguish and sorrows have taken hold of her,

[a] Or *of Sela*
[b] Heb *him*
[c] Or *and I will single out the choicest of his rams*: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Or *Sea of Reeds*
[e] Cn: Heb *there is trouble in the sea*

west Arabia associated with trade (Ezek 25.15–29). **13:** *Bozrah*, modern Buseirah, a great fortress city in northern Edom. **16:** *Clefts of the rock*, Edom was known for its mountainous and hill-top dwellings such as at Sela ("rock"); see textual note *a*. **18:** *Sodom and Gomorrah*, see 20.16n. A doublet of 50.40, but appropriately located here, given Edomite associations with the southern Arabah. **19:** *Lion . . . thickets of the Jordan,* see 12.5n. **21:** *Red Sea* or "Sea of Reeds" (see textual note *d*), here probably referring to the eastern arm of the Reed Sea, the Gulf of Aqaba.

49.23–27: Against Damascus, the capital of Aram, one of Israel's traditional enemies. **23:** On the connection

as of a woman in labor.
[25] How the famous city is forsaken,[a]
the joyful town![b]
[26] Therefore her young men shall fall in her squares,
and all her soldiers shall be destroyed in that day,
says the LORD of hosts.
[27] And I will kindle a fire at the wall of Damascus,
and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad.

[28] Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor that King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon defeated.

Thus says the LORD:
Rise up, advance against Kedar!
Destroy the people of the east!
[29] Take their tents and their flocks,
their curtains and all their goods;
carry off their camels for yourselves,
and a cry shall go up: "Terror is all around!"
[30] Flee, wander far away, hide in deep places,
O inhabitants of Hazor!
says the LORD.
For King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon
has made a plan against you
and formed a purpose against you.

[31] Rise up, advance against a nation at ease,
that lives secure,
says the LORD,
that has no gates or bars,
that lives alone.
[32] Their camels shall become booty,
their herds of cattle a spoil.
I will scatter to every wind
those who have shaven temples,
and I will bring calamity
against them from every side,
says the LORD.
[33] Hazor shall become a lair of jackals,
an everlasting waste;
no one shall live there,
nor shall anyone settle in it.

[34] The word of the LORD that came to the prophet Jeremiah concerning Elam, at the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah of Judah.

[35] Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am going to break the bow of Elam, the mainstay of their might; [36] and I will bring upon Elam the four winds from the four quarters of heaven; and I will scatter them to all these winds, and there shall be no nation to which the exiles from Elam shall not come. [37] I will terrify Elam before their enemies, and before those who seek their life; I will bring disaster upon them, my fierce anger, says the LORD. I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them; [38] and I will set my throne in Elam, and destroy their king and officials, says the LORD.

[39] But in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam, says the LORD.

50 The word that the LORD spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by the prophet Jeremiah:

[a] Vg: Heb *is not forsaken*
[b] Syr Vg Tg: Heb *the town of my joy*

of the neighboring kingdoms of Arpad and Hamath, see 2 Kings 18.34; Isa 36.19; 10.9; 37.13. **27:** On this stylized language, see Am 1.4,14. *Ben-hadad*, name of several of the kings of Aram-Damascus.

49.28–33: Against Kedar and Hazor. *Kedar* was a collective name for Ishmaelite nomadic tribes (Gen 25.13) who lived in tents (Ps 120.5; Song 1.5) and grazed sheep and goats (Ezek 27.21). *Hazor* here must also refer to desert nomadic wanderers. As such, they lived in unwalled villages (v. 31) and their economy was based upon camel caravaneering (vv. 29,32). **28:** In midwinter 599–598 BCE Nebuchadrezzar led a successful campaign against the Arab tribes in the eastern desert. **29:** *Terror is all around,* see 46.5n. **32:** *Shaven temples,* a mark of eastern nomadic groups; see 9.26n.; 25.23.

49.34–39: Against Elam. The unusually long introduction to this oracle suggests that it was a later addition to the collection. One of the few dated oracles, it is placed in the context of the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah following the first deportation (597 BCE). Elam, with its capital at Susa, lay to the east of Babylon. The reference to the *bow of Elam* (v. 35) highlights its reputation (Isa 22.6). **36:** On the traditional division of the

[2] Declare among the nations and
proclaim,
set up a banner and proclaim,
do not conceal it, say:
Babylon is taken,
Bel is put to shame,
Merodach is dismayed.
Her images are put to shame,
her idols are dismayed.
[3] For out of the north a nation has come up
against her; it shall make her land a desola-
tion, and no one shall live in it; both human
beings and animals shall flee away.

[4] In those days and in that time, says
the LORD, the people of Israel shall come,
they and the people of Judah together; they
shall come weeping as they seek the LORD
their God. [5] They shall ask the way to Zion,
with faces turned toward it, and they shall
come and join[a] themselves to the LORD by
an everlasting covenant that will never be
forgotten.

[6] My people have been lost sheep; their
shepherds have led them astray, turning them
away on the mountains; from mountain to
hill they have gone, they have forgotten their
fold. [7] All who found them have devoured
them, and their enemies have said, "We are
not guilty, because they have sinned against
the LORD, the true pasture, the LORD, the hope
of their ancestors."

[8] Flee from Babylon, and go out of the
land of the Chaldeans, and be like male goats
leading the flock. [9] For I am going to stir up
and bring against Babylon a company of
great nations from the land of the north; and
they shall array themselves against her; from
there she shall be taken. Their arrows are
like the arrows of a skilled warrior who does
not return empty-handed. [10] Chaldea shall be
plundered; all who plunder her shall be sated,
says the LORD.

[11] Though you rejoice, though you exult,
O plunderers of my heritage,
though you frisk about like a heifer on the
grass,
and neigh like stallions,
[12] your mother shall be utterly shamed,
and she who bore you shall be
disgraced.
Lo, she shall be the last of the nations,
a wilderness, dry land, and a desert.
[13] Because of the wrath of the LORD she
shall not be inhabited,

[a] Gk: Heb *toward it. Come! They shall join*

heavens into four quadrants, each with its wind, see Ezek 37.9; Zech 2.6; 6.5. **39:** On the restoration of Elam's fortunes, see 48.47; 49.6.

50.1–51.58: Against Babylon. The oracle against Babylon (Chaldea) appears last in the list, reflecting its historical importance and the cosmic aspects of Jeremiah's proclamation of judgment against the nations (25.11–14). This lengthy oracle, made up of numerous fragments, expresses both a harsh judgment upon Babylon and visions of restoration for Judah. Lacking is the sense expressed elsewhere that Babylon was an agent in God's purposeful design (see 27.6–11). Instead the oracle stresses the arrogance and defiance of Babylon, which will now face retribution from Israel's God.

50.1–3: Babylon's destruction is announced. 2: *Bel*, a title of Marduk, the chief deity of Babylon, related to the Canaanite title *ba'al*, "lord, master" (Isa 46.1); cf. Bel 1.1–22. *Merodach* refers to the chief patron deity of Babylon, Marduk, creator of the world in Babylonian mythology and founder of the city of Babylon. The name appears in the Bible only otherwise in the royal names Merodach-baladan (2 Kings 20.12=Isa 39.1) and Evil-merodach (52.31). **3:** Even Babylon, the enemy from the north, is subject to her own "enemies from the north" (1.14; 50.9,41–42). Babylon was conquered by Cyrus, head of a coalition of Medes and Persians, in 539 BCE, but the image here may be more literary and mythological than historical.

50.4–10: The restoration of Israel and Judah, envisioning the reestablishment of the united tribal alliance. **7:** Metaphor of lost sheep being devoured by predators, but compare with 2.3 and its ritual associations. **8:** Cf. Isa 48.20.

50.11–16: The LORD's vengeance against Babylon. 12: *Your mother*, that is, Babylon. Cities can often be spoken of as "mothers" to their inhabitants or surrounding villages.

but shall be an utter desolation;
everyone who passes by Babylon shall be appalled
and hiss because of all her wounds.
14 Take up your positions around Babylon,
all you that bend the bow;
shoot at her, spare no arrows,
for she has sinned against the LORD.
15 Raise a shout against her from all sides,
"She has surrendered;
her bulwarks have fallen,
her walls are thrown down."
For this is the vengeance of the LORD:
take vengeance on her,
do to her as she has done.
16 Cut off from Babylon the sower,
and the wielder of the sickle in time of harvest;
because of the destroying sword
all of them shall return to their own people,
and all of them shall flee to their own land.

17 Israel is a hunted sheep driven away by lions. First the king of Assyria devoured it, and now at the end King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon has gnawed its bones. 18 Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria. 19 I will restore Israel to its pasture, and it shall feed on Carmel and in Bashan, and on the hills of Ephraim and in Gilead its hunger shall be satisfied. 20 In those days and at that time, says the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and none shall be found; for I will pardon the remnant that I have spared.

21 Go up to the land of Merathaim;[a]
go up against her,
and attack the inhabitants of Pekod[b]
and utterly destroy the last of them,[c]
says the LORD;
do all that I have commanded you.
22 The noise of battle is in the land,
and great destruction!
23 How the hammer of the whole earth
is cut down and broken!
How Babylon has become
a horror among the nations!
24 You set a snare for yourself and you were caught, O Babylon,
but you did not know it;
you were discovered and seized,
because you challenged the LORD.
25 The LORD has opened his armory,
and brought out the weapons of his wrath,
for the Lord GOD of hosts has a task to do
in the land of the Chaldeans.
26 Come against her from every quarter;
open her granaries;
pile her up like heaps of grain, and destroy her utterly;
let nothing be left of her.
27 Kill all her bulls,
let them go down to the slaughter.
Alas for them, their day has come,
the time of their punishment!

28 Listen! Fugitives and refugees from the land of Babylon are coming to declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God, vengeance for his temple.

29 Summon archers against Babylon, all who bend the bow. Encamp all around her; let no one escape. Repay her according to her deeds; just as she has done, do to her—for she has arrogantly defied the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. 30 Therefore her young men shall fall in her squares, and all her soldiers shall be destroyed on that day, says the LORD.

[a] Or *of Double Rebellion*
[b] Or *of Punishment*
[c] Tg: Heb *destroy after them*

50.17–20: Israel restored. 19: Carmel, a promontory in the western Jezreel Valley, and Bashan in Transjordan were known for their fertility (Isa 33.9; Nah 1.4; Ezek 39.18).

50.21–32: The military assault on Babylon. 21: *Merathaim*, used only here, is perhaps a derisive term for Babylon meaning "double rebellion," probably playing on the name of southern Babylon, "mat marrati," "land of the lagoons." *Pekod* was a part of Babylonian territory or an allied territory; see Ezek 23.23. Also a play on words, since Heb "paqad" commonly means to "attend to," as in punishing (vv. 18,27). **24:** *You set*, Heb "I set."

31 I am against you, O arrogant one,
says the Lord God of hosts;
for your day has come,
the time when I will punish you.
32 The arrogant one shall stumble and fall,
with no one to raise him up,
and I will kindle a fire in his cities,
and it will devour everything around
him.

33 Thus says the Lord of hosts: The people of Israel are oppressed, and so too are the people of Judah; all their captors have held them fast and refuse to let them go. 34 Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is his name. He will surely plead their cause, that he may give rest to the earth, but unrest to the inhabitants of Babylon.

35 A sword against the Chaldeans, says the
Lord,
and against the inhabitants of Babylon,
and against her officials and her sages!
36 A sword against the diviners,
so that they may become fools!
A sword against her warriors,
so that they may be destroyed!
37 A sword against her[a] horses and against
her[a] chariots,
and against all the foreign troops in her
midst,
so that they may become women!
A sword against all her treasures,
that they may be plundered!
38 A drought[b] against her waters,
that they may be dried up!
For it is a land of images,
and they go mad over idols.

39 Therefore wild animals shall live with hyenas in Babylon,[c] and ostriches shall inhabit her; she shall never again be peopled, or inhabited for all generations. 40 As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors, says the Lord, so no one shall live there, nor shall anyone settle in her.

41 Look, a people is coming from the north;
a mighty nation and many kings
are stirring from the farthest parts of
the earth.
42 They wield bow and spear,
they are cruel and have no mercy.
The sound of them is like the roaring sea;
they ride upon horses,
set in array as a warrior for battle,
against you, O daughter Babylon!

43 The king of Babylon heard news of them,
and his hands fell helpless;
anguish seized him,
pain like that of a woman in labor.

44 Like a lion coming up from the thickets of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly chase them away from her; and I will appoint over her whomever I choose.[d] For who is like me? Who can summon me? Who is the shepherd who can stand before me? 45 Therefore hear the plan that the Lord has made against Babylon, and the purposes that he has formed against the land of the Chaldeans: Surely the little ones of the flock shall be dragged away; surely their[e] fold shall be appalled at their fate. 46 At the sound of the capture of Babylon the earth shall tremble, and her cry shall be heard among the nations.

[a] Cn: Heb *his*
[b] Another reading is *A sword*
[c] Heb lacks *in Babylon*
[d] Or *and I will single out the choicest of her rams*: Meaning of Heb uncertain
[e] Syr Gk Tg Compare 49.20: Heb lacks *their*

50.33–34: Israel's redeemer will plead her cause. The terminology is of family redemption in a legal suit (cf. Isa 47.4).

50.35–40: Judgment against Babylon. Using a repeating phrase ("a sword [Heb "ḥereb"] against . . . "), changes images to "a drought [Heb "ḥoreb"] against" in v. 38. **36:** *Diviners*, but Heb suggests a derogatory term for "those who prattle on about nothing." **37:** *They may become women*, a common slander made against foreign soldiers. Compare 51.30; Isa 19.16; Nah 3.13. **40:** *Sodom and Gomorrah*, see 20.16n.

50.41–43: The assault of the enemy from the north. See v. 3n.

50.44–46: The Lord is a lion. *Thickets of the Jordan*, see 12.5n. *Shepherd*, a metaphor for king.

51 Thus says the LORD:
I am going to stir up a destructive wind[a]
against Babylon
and against the inhabitants of Leb-qamai;[b]
2 and I will send winnowers to Babylon,
and they shall winnow her.
They shall empty her land
when they come against her from every side
on the day of trouble.
3 Let not the archer bend his bow,
and let him not array himself in his coat of mail.
Do not spare her young men;
utterly destroy her entire army.
4 They shall fall down slain in the land of the Chaldeans,
and wounded in her streets.
5 Israel and Judah have not been forsaken
by their God, the LORD of hosts,
though their land is full of guilt
before the Holy One of Israel.

6 Flee from the midst of Babylon,
save your lives, each of you!
Do not perish because of her guilt,
for this is the time of the LORD's vengeance;
he is repaying her what is due.
7 Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand,
making all the earth drunken;
the nations drank of her wine,
and so the nations went mad.
8 Suddenly Babylon has fallen and is shattered;
wail for her!
Bring balm for her wound;
perhaps she may be healed.
9 We tried to heal Babylon,
but she could not be healed.
Forsake her, and let each of us go
to our own country;
for her judgment has reached up to heaven
and has been lifted up even to the skies.
10 The LORD has brought forth our vindication;
come, let us declare in Zion
the work of the LORD our God.

11 Sharpen the arrows!
Fill the quivers!
The LORD has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of the LORD, vengeance for his temple.
12 Raise a standard against the walls of Babylon;
make the watch strong;
post sentinels;
prepare the ambushes;
for the LORD has both planned and done
what he spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon.
13 You who live by mighty waters,
rich in treasures,
your end has come,
the thread of your life is cut.
14 The LORD of hosts has sworn by himself:
Surely I will fill you with troops like a swarm of locusts,
and they shall raise a shout of victory over you.

[a] Or *stir up the spirit of a destroyer*
[b] *Leb-qamai* is a cryptogram for *Kasdim*, Chaldea

51.1–10: A wind will blow against Babylon. The image of winnowing is used ironically to depict a destructive wind that goes far beyond simply separating grain from chaff. **1:** *Leb-qamai*, a cryptic 'atbash reading for "Kasdim," meaning "Chaldea" or "Babylon"; see textual note *b*; cf. 25.26n.; 51.41. Also, the term *qamai* sounds like the word for "standing grain" (Heb "qamah") which is being winnowed, so that *Leb-qamai* suggests "heart of the standing grain." **7:** On God's cup of wine, see 25.15–29. Here it is Babylon herself who is God's cup. The nations drink and "go mad" (the same word as in 50.38).

51.11–14: The Medes attack Babylon. Cyrus was king of the empire of Media and Persia, and attacked Babylon in 539 BCE. **13:** *Mighty waters*, Babylon was surrounded by the Euphrates and other water–ways as natural defenses. **14:** *Troops like a swarm of locusts*, cf. Joel 1.1–2.11 for the connection of a locust plague and the invasion of enemy troops.

15 It is he who made the earth by his power,
who established the world by his wisdom,
and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.
16 When he utters his voice there is a tumult of waters in the heavens,
and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth.
He makes lightnings for the rain,
and he brings out the wind from his storehouses.
17 Everyone is stupid and without knowledge;
goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols;
for their images are false,
and there is no breath in them.
18 They are worthless, a work of delusion;
at the time of their punishment they shall perish.
19 Not like these is the LORD,[a] the portion of Jacob,
for he is the one who formed all things,
and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance;
the LORD of hosts is his name.

20 You are my war club, my weapon of battle:
with you I smash nations;
with you I destroy kingdoms;
21 with you I smash the horse and its rider;
with you I smash the chariot and the charioteer;
22 with you I smash man and woman;
with you I smash the old man and the boy;
with you I smash the young man and the girl;
23 with you I smash shepherds and their flocks;
with you I smash farmers and their teams;
with you I smash governors and deputies.

24 I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea before your very eyes for all the wrong that they have done in Zion, says the LORD.

25 I am against you, O destroying mountain,
says the LORD,
that destroys the whole earth;
I will stretch out my hand against you,
and roll you down from the crags,
and make you a burned-out mountain.
26 No stone shall be taken from you for a corner
and no stone for a foundation,
but you shall be a perpetual waste,
says the LORD.

27 Raise a standard in the land,
blow the trumpet among the nations;
prepare the nations for war against her,
summon against her the kingdoms,
Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz;
appoint a marshal against her,
bring up horses like bristling locusts.
28 Prepare the nations for war against her,
the kings of the Medes, with their governors and deputies,
and every land under their dominion.
29 The land trembles and writhes,
for the LORD's purposes against Babylon stand,
to make the land of Babylon a desolation,
without inhabitant.

[a] Heb lacks *the LORD*

51.15–19: A hymn of praise to God. A doublet of 10.12–16 appended here to contrast the power of the God of Israel with the impotence of the idols of Babylon.

51.20–24: Refers back to the kings of the Medes (v. 11) as God's weapon of war to be used against Babylon. The repeated term *I smash* (Heb "nipatsti") is related to the term for "war club" (Heb "mapets"), a common weapon in the ancient Near East.

51.25–33: Babylon is destroyed and left desolate as Babylon's famous ziggurat (artificial temple mound) will be made an extinct burned-out volcano (v. 25). **26:** After cities were destroyed, their stone blocks were often reused in the rebuilding process. Even Babylon's ruins, however, will be unfit for future use. **27–33:** *Ararat*, ancient Urartu, modern Armenia, north of Lake Van. *Minni*, Manneans living south of Lake Urmia. *Ashkenaz*, the Scythians. See Gen 8.4; 10.3. All were defeated by the Medes in the early sixth century BCE. **27:** *Marshal*, a

30 The warriors of Babylon have given up
fighting,
they remain in their strongholds;
their strength has failed,
they have become women;
her buildings are set on fire,
her bars are broken.
31 One runner runs to meet another,
and one messenger to meet another,
to tell the king of Babylon
that his city is taken from end to end:
32 the fords have been seized,
the marshes have been burned with
fire,
and the soldiers are in panic.
33 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God
of Israel:
Daughter Babylon is like a threshing floor
at the time when it is trodden;
yet a little while
and the time of her harvest will come.

34 "King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon has
devoured me,
he has crushed me;
he has made me an empty vessel,
he has swallowed me like a monster;
he has filled his belly with my delicacies,
he has spewed me out.
35 May my torn flesh be avenged on
Babylon,"
the inhabitants of Zion shall say.
"May my blood be avenged on the
inhabitants of Chaldea,"
Jerusalem shall say.
36 Therefore thus says the LORD:
I am going to defend your cause
and take vengeance for you.
I will dry up her sea
and make her fountain dry;
37 and Babylon shall become a heap of
ruins,
a den of jackals,
an object of horror and of hissing,
without inhabitant.

38 Like lions they shall roar together;
they shall growl like lions' whelps.
39 When they are inflamed, I will set out
their drink
and make them drunk, until they
become merry
and then sleep a perpetual sleep
and never wake, says the LORD.
40 I will bring them down like lambs to the
slaughter,
like rams and goats.

41 How Sheshach[a] is taken,
the pride of the whole earth seized!
How Babylon has become
an object of horror among the nations!
42 The sea has risen over Babylon;
she has been covered by its tumultuous
waves.
43 Her cities have become an object of
horror,
a land of drought and a desert,
a land in which no one lives,
and through which no mortal passes.
44 I will punish Bel in Babylon,
and make him disgorge what he has
swallowed.
The nations shall no longer stream to him;
the wall of Babylon has fallen.

[a] *Sheshach* is a cryptogram for *Babel*, Babylon

military official (Nah 3.17). **28:** *Prepare*, lit. "sanctify"; see 6.4n. **30:** *Become women*, see 50.37n.

51.34–44: God will seek vengeance against Babylon for devouring Judah. The theme of Babylon "devouring" Judah (v. 34) ushers in a theme pursued through this section. That Israel is "devoured" is a common theme (see 10.25; 30.16). But here the image is combined with the common mythological image of the sea-monster "swallowing" with a voracious appetite (v. 34; Ps 69.15; Prov 1.12), in turn combined with the polemic that Bel, the god of Babylon, has such a voracious appetite (v. 44), but will be forced by God to disgorge all he has devoured in conquest. See Jer 50.2 and the polemic in Bel 1.1–22, where Bel is characterized principally by his voracious appetite. **36:** *Dry up her sea*, that is, the mythological enemy, the sea-dragon with its all-consuming appetite, representing the power of destructive chaos. Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon, was the hero god who slew the dragon Tiamat, and who himself was depicted as a dragon on murals throughout Babylon. **41:** *Sheshach*, as in v. 1, cryptogram for Babel (*Babylon*); see 25.26n. **42:** See v. 36. **44:** *Bel*, see 50.2n. *Make him disgorge*, that is, "bring out," leading into what follows.

45 Come out of her, my people!
Save your lives, each of you,
from the fierce anger of the LORD!
46 Do not be fainthearted or fearful
at the rumors heard in the land—
one year one rumor comes,
the next year another,
rumors of violence in the land
and of ruler against ruler.

47 Assuredly, the days are coming
when I will punish the images of
Babylon;
her whole land shall be put to shame,
and all her slain shall fall in her midst.
48 Then the heavens and the earth,
and all that is in them,
shall shout for joy over Babylon;
for the destroyers shall come against
them out of the north,
says the LORD.
49 Babylon must fall for the slain of Israel,
as the slain of all the earth have fallen
because of Babylon.

50 You survivors of the sword,
go, do not linger!
Remember the LORD in a distant land,
and let Jerusalem come into your mind:
51 We are put to shame, for we have heard
insults;
dishonor has covered our face,
for aliens have come
into the holy places of the LORD's house.

52 Therefore the time is surely coming, says
the LORD,
when I will punish her idols,
and through all her land
the wounded shall groan.
53 Though Babylon should mount up to
heaven,
and though she should fortify her
strong height,
from me destroyers would come upon her,
says the LORD.

54 Listen!—a cry from Babylon!
A great crashing from the land of the
Chaldeans!
55 For the LORD is laying Babylon waste,
and stilling her loud clamor.
Their waves roar like mighty waters,
the sound of their clamor resounds;
56 for a destroyer has come against her,
against Babylon;
her warriors are taken,
their bows are broken;
for the LORD is a God of recompense,
he will repay in full.
57 I will make her officials and her sages
drunk,
also her governors, her deputies, and
her warriors;
they shall sleep a perpetual sleep and
never wake,
says the King, whose name is the LORD
of hosts.

58 Thus says the LORD of hosts:
The broad wall of Babylon
shall be leveled to the ground,
and her high gates
shall be burned with fire.
The peoples exhaust themselves for
nothing,
and the nations weary themselves only
for fire.[a]

59 The word that the prophet Jeremiah
commanded Seraiah son of Neriah son of

[a] Gk Syr Compare Hab 2.13: Heb *and the nations for fire, and they are weary*

51.45–49: Israel is urged to "come out" as that which is "disgorged" from Babylon. The figure of Babylon continued for a long time to symbolize the power of God's great destructive enemy in biblical tradition; see Rev 18.2–21.

51.50–58: Babylon's ultimate destruction. 50: *Remember . . . distant land*, normally a difficult task; cf. Ps 137.4. **51:** *Aliens*, unlike "strangers" (sojourners), "aliens" are dangerous to the solidarity of the community and threaten its integrity. Therefore "aliens" (Heb "zarim") are discriminated against in a way that goes far beyond the favorable concern shown to sojourners. **53:** *Mount up to heaven*, that is, assert itself against God's authority; cf. Isa 14.13.

51.59–64: The scroll thrown into the Euphrates. The oracles against Babylon ("all these words," v. 60) were,

Mahseiah, when he went with King Zedekiah of Judah to Babylon, in the fourth year of his reign. Seraiah was the quartermaster. 60 Jeremiah wrote in a[a] scroll all the disasters that would come on Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon. 61 And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: "When you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, 62 and say, 'O LORD, you yourself threatened to destroy this place so that neither human beings nor animals shall live in it, and it shall be desolate forever.' 63 When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it, and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, 64 and say, 'Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disasters that I am bringing on her.'"[b]

Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

52 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 2 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, just as Jehoiakim had done. 3 Indeed, Jerusalem and Judah so angered the LORD that he expelled them from his presence.

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. 4 And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and they laid siege to it; they built siegeworks against it all around. 5 So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. 6 On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. 7 Then a breach was made in the city wall;[c] and all the soldiers fled and went out from the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. They went in the direction of the Arabah. 8 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered, deserting him. 9 Then they captured the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he passed sentence on him. 10 The king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and also killed all the officers of Judah at Riblah. 11 He put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters, and the king of Babylon took him to Babylon, and put him in prison until the day of his death.

12 In the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month—which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard who served the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem. 13 He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. 14 All the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls around Jerusalem. 15 Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile

[a] Or *one*
[b] Gk: Heb *on her. And they shall weary themselves*
[c] Heb lacks *wall*

according to this account, sealed in a scroll and then taken to the Euphrates by courier and thrown in as a prophetic sign and curse that Babylon would so sink in divine disaster. This action is dated to 594 BCE, the year of the likely aborted revolt against Babylon; see 27.1–28.17n. The emissaries sent by Zedekiah to Babylon here may have been in response to a reaffirmation of treaty support by Zedekiah of his Babylonian overlords. **59:** *Seraiah . . . Neriah . . . Mahseiah*, apparently Seraiah was Baruch's brother; see 32.16. *Quartermaster*, or perhaps "chief of storage houses," an appropriate official to send to convince the king of Babylon that no revolt was planned. **64:** *Thus far are the words of Jeremiah,* an additional comment calling attention to the supplementary character of the appendix in ch 52.

52.1–34: The fall and looting of Jerusalem. Vv. 1–27 are nearly identical to 2 Kings 24.18–25.21. Vv. 28–30 provide statistics regarding the numbers of Judeans taken into exile during the three deportations, figures not recorded elsewhere. Vv. 31–34 are excerpted nearly verbatim from 2 Kings 25.27–30. This historical recitation from the Deuteronomistic History makes a fitting ending to the Deuteronomistically edited book of Jeremiah. **1:** *Zedekiah,* the last king of Judah, ruled ca. 597–586 BCE. **3:** A tragic theological conclusion consistent with the Deuteronomistic perspective; see 2 Kings 23.26–27. **4–11:** January 587 to August 586 BCE. On the attempted escape and capture of Zedekiah and his fate, cf. 39.1–10. **12–14:** *The fifth month* continued to be memorialized in

some of the poorest of the people and the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the artisans. 16 But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left some of the poorest people of the land to be vinedressers and tillers of the soil.

17 The pillars of bronze that were in the house of the LORD, and the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried all the bronze to Babylon. 18 They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the basins, the ladles, and all the vessels of bronze used in the temple service. 19 The captain of the guard took away the small bowls also, the firepans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the ladles, and the bowls for libation, both those of gold and those of silver. 20 As for the two pillars, the one sea, the twelve bronze bulls that were under the sea, and the stands,[a] which King Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weighing. 21 As for the pillars, the height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, its circumference was twelve cubits; it was hollow and its thickness was four fingers. 22 Upon it was a capital of bronze; the height of the capital was five cubits; latticework and pomegranates, all of bronze, encircled the top of the capital. And the second pillar had the same, with pomegranates. 23 There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides; all the pomegranates encircling the latticework numbered one hundred.

24 The captain of the guard took the chief priest Seraiah, the second priest Zephaniah, and the three guardians of the threshold; 25 and from the city he took an officer who had been in command of the soldiers, and seven men of the king's council who were found in the city; the secretary of the commander of the army who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land who were found inside the city. 26 Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. 27 And the king of Babylon struck them down, and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah went into exile out of its land.

28 This is the number of the people whom Nebuchadrezzar took into exile: in the seventh year, three thousand twenty-three Judeans; 29 in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar he took into exile from Jerusalem eight hundred thirty-two persons; 30 in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadrezzar, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took into exile of the Judeans seven hundred forty-five persons; all the persons were four thousand six hundred.

31 In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the year he began to reign, showed favor to King Jehoiachin of Judah and brought him out of prison; 32 he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the seats of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. 33 So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes, and every day of his life he dined regularly at the king's table. 34 For his allowance, a regular daily allowance was given him by the king of Babylon, as long as he lived, up to the day of his death.

[a] Cn: Heb *that were under the stands*

commemoration of the destruction of the Temple; see Zech 7.3,5; 8.19. **17:** *Pillars of bronze*, see 1 Kings 7.15–16. On the *bronze sea* and Ahaz's reforms, see 1 Kings 7.23–26; 2 Kings 16.17. **22–23:** *Pomegranates* were a particularly important symbol used in Israel's ritual decorations, adorning both priestly wear and the Temple furnishings; see Ex 28.33; 39.24–25; 1 Kings 7.18–20,42. **24:** *Chief priest*, a relatively late title for the principal priest ("head" priest, or "first" priest), alongside his principal assistant, the "second" priest; compare with the term "high priest" (lit. "great" priest) in 2 Kings 12.10; 22.4,8; Hag 1.1. **30:** On the significance of the third deportation (581 BCE), see 43.1–13. **31.** *Evil-merodach* (562–560 BCE), Babylonian king whose name means "man of Marduk"; see 50.2n.

LAMENTATIONS

NAME, AUTHORSHIP, AND LOCATION IN CANON

The name Lamentations is a translation of the title of the book as it appears in the Septuagint, *Threnoi*. In the Hebrew Bible the book is titled *'Ekah*, literally "How," which is the first word of the initial verse, "How lonely sits the city."

In the Christian canon, Lamentations follows Jeremiah, who was traditionally thought to have been its author. While Jewish tradition also ascribes the book's authorship to Jeremiah, in the Hebrew Bible Lamentations is located in the Writings, among the Five Scrolls. It is read liturgically on the Ninth of Av, the day of public mourning in commemoration of the destruction of the First and Second Temples. (The First Temple was destroyed in 586 BCE by the Babylonians, and the Second Temple in 70 CE by the Romans.) In Christian tradition, readings from Lamentations are part of the Holy Week liturgies. The traditional ascription of authorship to Jeremiah derives from the impetus to ascribe all biblical books to inspired biblical authors as those books became authoritative or canonical. Jeremiah, a prophet who lived during the last days of the kingdom of Judah and prophesied its demise, was an obvious choice for Lamentations. According to 2 Chr 35.25, Jeremiah composed laments for the death of King Josiah. This suggests that already by the time of Chronicles, Jeremiah had a reputation as an author of laments.

DATE AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The five poems that comprise Lamentations, each with its distinctive tone and theme, were initially composed to lament the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Babylonians, which brought the independent country of Judah to an end (see 2 Kings 25.8–21). The sequence of the chapters is not chronological, and despite the vividness of their descriptions, the poems may not have been written by eyewitnesses to the events. The dating of the book is clearly after 586 BCE and before the end of the sixth century BCE, when the Temple was rebuilt, but the exact time, place, and reason for their composition is unknown. Perhaps the poems were used at the site of the ruined Temple to commemorate its loss.

GENRE

An ancient Near Eastern tradition of laments over the destruction of cities goes back to the Sumerian laments of the early second millennium BCE (e.g., "Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur," "Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur," "Nippur Lament"). Despite the generic similarity, however, there is no direct line of influence from the Sumerian laments to the book of Lamentations. Moreover, the Sumerian laments were recited on the occasion of the rebuilding of a temple, so their "story" has a happy ending. Not so in the book of Lamentations, where hopes for the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple remain unrealized, and God, who is so movingly implored to end his people's suffering and exile and to restore them to their former condition, never responds. The poems in Lamentations resemble Pss 74 and 79, also written in the aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction (see also Ps 137), but the origin and development of the Jerusalem-laments in Israel remains unknown. The destruction of city and Temple was an unprecedented event in Judah; and perhaps a new genre arose to fill a new need.

STRUCTURE, INTERPRETATION, AND GUIDE TO READING

The book's first four poems (chs 1; 2; 3; 4) are alphabetic acrostics, a formal device found elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., Pss 111; 112; 145; Prov 31.10–31), in which each verse or stanza begins with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, twenty-two in all. Chapter 3 is a triple acrostic; all three verses of each stanza begin with the same letter. Chapter 5, although not an acrostic, also contains twenty-two verses. In Lamentations this formal device gives expression to the enormity or totality of the destruction (extending "from A to Z") and also attempts to give structure and closure to the incomprehensible events and unstructured pain that engulfed Judah and its inhabitants.

The language of the book is highly poetic and extraordinarily moving, so much so that at times we want to avert our eyes from the violence and suffering described. The experiences of warfare, siege, famine, and death

are individualized—brave men reduced to begging, mothers unable to nourish their children. The national catastrophe is thus made real, as society disintegrates and people die or are deported. All of this is addressed to God, so that he may feel the suffering of his people and save them. The entire book may be thought of as an appeal for God's mercy. Yet God remains silent.

If the book fails to move God, it fulfills another function, that of public mourning which both relives and commemorates a catastrophe of incomprehensible proportion. Lamentations does not create a new theology. It assumes the theology of Deuteronomy, where sin leads to divine punishment and exile (see Deut 28). God is responsible for the disaster; the Babylonians are merely divine agents. So, God, whose power is not diminished despite the Temple's destruction, must be the one to end the Babylonian dominance and bring about the return from exile. Repentance, the antidote to sin, is mentioned but is not central (this is not penitential prayer); rather, the idea in Lamentations is that the punishment, even if deserved, outweighs the sin. The immediacy of the disproportionate punishment drowns out everything else.

As a short book, Lamentations can easily be read in one sitting. Each chapter is a window through which a poet attempts to render chaos into language in the formal structure of the acrostic.

Adele Berlin

1 How lonely sits the city
that once was full of people!
How like a widow she has become,
she that was great among the nations!
She that was a princess among the provinces
has become a vassal.

2 She weeps bitterly in the night,
with tears on her cheeks;
among all her lovers
she has no one to comfort her;
all her friends have dealt treacherously with her,
they have become her enemies.

3 Judah has gone into exile with suffering
and hard servitude;
she lives now among the nations,
and finds no resting place;
her pursuers have all overtaken her
in the midst of her distress.

4 The roads to Zion mourn,
for no one comes to the festivals;
all her gates are desolate,
her priests groan;
her young girls grieve,[a]
and her lot is bitter.

5 Her foes have become the masters,
her enemies prosper,
because the LORD has made her suffer
for the multitude of her transgressions;
her children have gone away,
captives before the foe.

6 From daughter Zion has departed
all her majesty.
Her princes have become like stags
that find no pasture;
they fled without strength
before the pursuer.

7 Jerusalem remembers,
in the days of her affliction and wandering,

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

1.1–22. Lament over the destroyed Jerusalem. The chapter has two sections, vv. 1–11, the lament of the narrator, and vv. 12–22, the lament of the city. Shame, mourning, and suffering are the main themes. The phrase "no one to comfort her/me" occurs four times (vv. 2,9,17,21; cf. vv. 7,16) and emphasizes unceasing mourning.

1.1–11: The poet laments Jerusalem. Jerusalem is personified as a woman, widowed, abandoned, and shamed. **1:** *How*, or "woe" is a common beginning of dirges (Isa 1.21; Jer 48.17; Lam 2.1; 4.1). **2:** *Lovers*, Judah's political allies who failed to support her. The term also hints that Jerusalem, by taking lovers, was unfaithful to God. **3:** *Suffering and hard servitude* is reminiscent of the Egyptian bondage (Ex 1.14; 2.23; 3.7,17; 4.31; 5.11; 6.6), to which the Babylonian exile is likened. **6:** *Daughter Zion,* or "Mistress Zion," a common epithet (e.g., 1.15; 2.1;

all the precious things
that were hers in days of old.
When her people fell into the hand of the foe,
and there was no one to help her,
the foe looked on mocking
over her downfall.

8 Jerusalem sinned grievously,
so she has become a mockery;
all who honored her despise her,
for they have seen her nakedness;
she herself groans,
and turns her face away.

9 Her uncleanness was in her skirts;
she took no thought of her future;
her downfall was appalling,
with none to comfort her.
"O LORD, look at my affliction,
for the enemy has triumphed!"

10 Enemies have stretched out their hands
over all her precious things;
she has even seen the nations
invade her sanctuary,
those whom you forbade
to enter your congregation.

11 All her people groan
as they search for bread;
they trade their treasures for food
to revive their strength.
Look, O LORD, and see
how worthless I have become.

12 Is it nothing to you,[a] all you who pass by?
Look and see
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,
which was brought upon me,
which the LORD inflicted
on the day of his fierce anger.

13 From on high he sent fire;
it went deep into my bones;
he spread a net for my feet;
he turned me back;
he has left me stunned,
faint all day long.

14 My transgressions were bound[a] into a yoke;
by his hand they were fastened together;
they weigh on my neck,
sapping my strength;
the Lord handed me over
to those whom I cannot withstand.

15 The LORD has rejected
all my warriors in the midst of me;
he proclaimed a time against me
to crush my young men;
the Lord has trodden as in a wine press
the virgin daughter Judah.

16 For these things I weep;
my eyes flow with tears;
for a comforter is far from me,
one to revive my courage;
my children are desolate,
for the enemy has prevailed.

17 Zion stretches out her hands,
but there is no one to comfort her;
the LORD has commanded against Jacob

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

4.22) conveying the sense of "dear little Zion." **8:** *Mockery,* or "banished." *Nakedness*, shame, especially sexual shame (cf. Isa 47.5; Jer 13.22; Ezek 16.37; Nah 3.5). **9:** *Uncleanness*, not from menstruation but from sexual impropriety. Jerusalem's sin was unfaithfulness to God, the taking of other "lovers." **10:** *Precious things,* the Temple treasures looted by the victors (cf. 2 Chr 36.10). The Babylonian invasion is conveyed in sexual terms, as a rape of Jerusalem by someone who had no rights of access to her. **11:** Jerusalem speaks in the final line, and continues speaking in vv. 12–16 and 18–22.

1.12–22. Jerusalem's lament. 12: *Was brought*, the Heb word is much stronger and actually conveys violence (cf. 1 Sam 31.4; Jer 38.19; Judg 19.25). *Day . . . anger*, like "the day of the Lord," when God comes in judgment against Judah itself (e.g., Am 5.18). **15:** *Trodden as in a wine press,* crushed so the blood runs out (see Deut 32.14; Isa 63.1–2). *Virgin*, part of the epithet "daughter Zion" (see 1.6n.), Heb "betulah" means a girl of marriageable age. **17:** *Jacob*, a common term for Judah in postexilic literature. *Filthy thing,* a menstruant, who is ritually impure, not fit to come into contact with holy things and off-limits for sexual contact. Jerusalem's "lovers" (vv.

that his neighbors should become his
foes;
Jerusalem has become
a filthy thing among them.

18 The LORD is in the right,
for I have rebelled against his word;
but hear, all you peoples,
and behold my suffering;
my young women and young men
have gone into captivity.

19 I called to my lovers
but they deceived me;
my priests and elders
perished in the city
while seeking food
to revive their strength.

20 See, O LORD, how distressed I am;
my stomach churns,
my heart is wrung within me,
because I have been very rebellious.
In the street the sword bereaves;
in the house it is like death.

21 They heard how I was groaning,
with no one to comfort me.
All my enemies heard of my trouble;
they are glad that you have done it.
Bring on the day you have announced,
and let them be as I am.

22 Let all their evil doing come before you;
and deal with them
as you have dealt with me
because of all my transgressions;
for my groans are many
and my heart is faint.

2 How the Lord in his anger
has humiliated[a] daughter Zion!
He has thrown down from heaven to earth
the splendor of Israel;
he has not remembered his footstool
in the day of his anger.

2 The Lord has destroyed without mercy
all the dwellings of Jacob;
in his wrath he has broken down
the strongholds of daughter Judah;
he has brought down to the ground in
dishonor
the kingdom and its rulers.

3 He has cut down in fierce anger
all the might of Israel;
he has withdrawn his right hand from them
in the face of the enemy;
he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob,
consuming all around.

4 He has bent his bow like an enemy,
with his right hand set like a foe;
he has killed all in whom we took pride
in the tent of daughter Zion;
he has poured out his fury like fire.

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

2,19) distance themselves from her. The narrator interrupts Jerusalem's speech, just as she did his (1.9c). **18:** An admission of sin, but the emphasis is on the suffering. **20:** *Stomach,* innards, the seat of emotions. *In the street,* better "outside," that is, outside the city walls where the fighting took place. Inside the besieged city the inhabitants were ravaged by famine and disease (see Ezek 7.15). **22:** Not simply vindictive revenge, this is a plea to restore the world order in which Israel is safe under God's protection and its enemies are banished. Chapters 3 and 4 end in a similar manner. The trope of the destruction of the enemy is common in psalms of lament.

2.1–22: The Lord has become like an enemy. The tone changes from the despair of ch 1 to anger, with a concomitant shift from a focus on the victim to a focus on God, the perpetrator. Many verbs of strong military action portray God as a destroying enemy: e.g., "thrown down," "destroyed," "cut down," "burned," "bent his bow," "killed."

2.1–10: God in his anger battles against Jerusalem, destroying the city and the country of Judah. **1:** *How*, see 1.1n. *Humiliated*, or "made loathsome." *The splendor of Israel,* the Temple, thought of as a link between heaven and earth. That link is now broken and formal ritual access to God is cut off. *Footstool*, i.e., the ark of the covenant or the Temple. God is envisioned as a king sitting in heaven with his feet touching the Temple (see Ps 132.7; Isa 60.13; Ezek 43.7; 1 Chr 28.2). **3:** *His right hand*, God's fighting arm and the symbol of his power and protection is intentionally withheld from Judah (Ex 15.6,12; Isa 41.10; Pss 48.10; 89.13; 98.1). **4:** *Tent*, an old-fashioned

5 The Lord has become like an enemy;
he has destroyed Israel.
He has destroyed all its palaces,
laid in ruins its strongholds,
and multiplied in daughter Judah
mourning and lamentation.

6 He has broken down his booth like a garden,
he has destroyed his tabernacle;
the LORD has abolished in Zion
festival and sabbath,
and in his fierce indignation has spurned
king and priest.

7 The Lord has scorned his altar,
disowned his sanctuary;
he has delivered into the hand of the enemy
the walls of her palaces;
a clamor was raised in the house of the LORD
as on a day of festival.

8 The LORD determined to lay in ruins
the wall of daughter Zion;
he stretched the line;
he did not withhold his hand from destroying;
he caused rampart and wall to lament;
they languish together.

9 Her gates have sunk into the ground;
he has ruined and broken her bars;
her king and princes are among the nations;
guidance is no more,
and her prophets obtain
no vision from the LORD.

10 The elders of daughter Zion
sit on the ground in silence;
they have thrown dust on their heads
and put on sackcloth;
the young girls of Jerusalem
have bowed their heads to the ground.

11 My eyes are spent with weeping;
my stomach churns;
my bile is poured out on the ground
because of the destruction of my people,
because infants and babes faint
in the streets of the city.

12 They cry to their mothers,
"Where is bread and wine?"
as they faint like the wounded
in the streets of the city,
as their life is poured out
on their mothers' bosom.

13 What can I say for you, to what compare you,
O daughter Jerusalem?
To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you,
O virgin daughter Zion?
For vast as the sea is your ruin;
who can heal you?

14 Your prophets have seen for you
false and deceptive visions;
they have not exposed your iniquity
to restore your fortunes,
but have seen oracles for you
that are false and misleading.

15 All who pass along the way
clap their hands at you;

way of referring to the homes in Judah and to the Temple in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam 7.6). **6:** *His booth*, a temporary shelter (Job 27.18; Jon 4.5) and also the Temple (Pss 27.5; 76.3). *Like a garden*, the Temple was destroyed easily, as if it were a booth or hut in a garden. **7:** *Clamor*, the exultant crowing of the invading and plundering enemy has replaced the joyful sounds of the crowds coming to the Temple on festivals. **8–10:** We see the towers, walls, and gates disintegrate. The movement is from top to bottom, ending with the inhabitants sitting on the ground in mourning. **8:** *Stretched the line,* like an architect, God made a plan for unbuilding the city (cf. 2 Kings 21.13; Isa 34.11; Jer 31.39; Zech 1.16; Job 38.5). **9:** *Guidance,* Heb "torah."

2.11–19: The narrator's reaction. 11: The narrator's words echo those of Jerusalem in 1.20. *Streets,* broad places near the gates, squares. The babies are fainting and dying in public. **12:** *Where is bread and wine,* that is, the stored up food supplies, the staples. There is no food left anywhere. *Bread,* lit. "grain." *On their mother's bosom,* or, "lap." The mothers are holding their children where they should find comfort (Ruth 4.16) as they

they hiss and wag their heads
at daughter Jerusalem;
"Is this the city that was called
the perfection of beauty,
the joy of all the earth?"

16 All your enemies
open their mouths against you;
they hiss, they gnash their teeth,
they cry: "We have devoured her!
Ah, this is the day we longed for;
at last we have seen it!"

17 The LORD has done what he purposed,
he has carried out his threat;
as he ordained long ago,
he has demolished without pity;
he has made the enemy rejoice
over you,
and exalted the might of your foes.

18 Cry aloud[a] to the Lord!
O wall of daughter Zion!
Let tears stream down like a torrent
day and night!
Give yourself no rest,
your eyes no respite!

19 Arise, cry out in the night,
at the beginning of the watches!
Pour out your heart like water
before the presence of the Lord!
Lift your hands to him
for the lives of your children,
who faint for hunger
at the head of every street.

20 Look, O LORD, and consider!
To whom have you done this?
Should women eat their offspring,
the children they have borne?
Should priest and prophet be killed
in the sanctuary of the Lord?

21 The young and the old are lying
on the ground in the streets;
my young women and my young men
have fallen by the sword;
in the day of your anger you have killed
them,
slaughtering without mercy.

22 You invited my enemies from all around
as if for a day of festival;
and on the day of the anger of the LORD
no one escaped or survived;
those whom I bore and reared
my enemy has destroyed.

3 I am one who has seen affliction
under the rod of God's[b] wrath;
2 he has driven and brought me
into darkness without any light;

[a] Cn: Heb *Their heart cried*
[b] Heb *his*

starve to death. **15:** *Clap . . . hiss . . . wag*, gestures of surprise and derision. The trope of the passer-by witnessing the shame of the victims and reacting with shock is common and provides an additional perspective to that of Zion and the narrator. *Perfection of beauty,* see Ezek 16.14; 27.3; Ps 50.2. *Joy of all the earth*, see Jer 51.41; Ps 48.2. **16:** The enemies mock and taunt the victims, taking credit for Judah's destruction, which v. 17 ascribes to God. The Babylonians never appear in the book (only Edom is named, in 4.21). **17:** *Ordained long ago*, the decree that if Judah sinned, the Temple would be destroyed and the people exiled from their land (1 Kings 9.6–9). **18:** *Wall,* the physical city should cry out to God on behalf of its people. **19:** *Watches,* the night was divided into three watches (see Ex 14.24; 1 Sam 11.11; Song 3.1–3; 5.7). Nighttime is when suffering seems hardest to bear and when many prayers are offered, with the expectation that God will respond in the morning (cf. Ps 30.5).

2.20–22: Jerusalem's address to God. 20: *Eat their offspring,* cannibalism was a result of the famine during a siege (4.10; 2 Kings 6.28) and a punishment for violating the covenant (Deut 28.53–57); this is a common trope in describing a siege. It is the reversal of the norm, in which women feed their children. **21–22:** *Slaughtering*, as if preparing meat for food or sacrifice. The idea continues in the next verse, where God invites the enemies *as if for a day of festival* when they would participate in a sacrificial meal in the Temple. *Day of the anger of the LORD,* the time of punishment, like "the day of the LORD," when God will punish those who deserve it (cf. 1.12; 2.1).

3.1–66: The complaint of the one who has seen affliction. The longest and most complex poem of the book, arranged as a triple acrostic: each stanza has three short verses assigned to each successive letter of the alphabet. The logical subdivisions according to content do not correspond to the alphabetic structure,

3 against me alone he turns his hand,
again and again, all day long.

4 He has made my flesh and my skin waste away,
and broken my bones;
5 he has besieged and enveloped me
with bitterness and tribulation;
6 he has made me sit in darkness
like the dead of long ago.

7 He has walled me about so that I cannot escape;
he has put heavy chains on me;
8 though I call and cry for help,
he shuts out my prayer;
9 he has blocked my ways with hewn stones,
he has made my paths crooked.

10 He is a bear lying in wait for me,
a lion in hiding;
11 he led me off my way and tore me to pieces;
he has made me desolate;
12 he bent his bow and set me
as a mark for his arrow.

13 He shot into my vitals
the arrows of his quiver;
14 I have become the laughingstock of all my people,
the object of their taunt-songs all day long.
15 He has filled me with bitterness,
he has sated me with wormwood.

16 He has made my teeth grind on gravel,
and made me cower in ashes;
17 my soul is bereft of peace;
I have forgotten what happiness is;
18 so I say, "Gone is my glory,
and all that I had hoped for from the LORD."

19 The thought of my affliction and my homelessness
is wormwood and gall!
20 My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.
21 But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:

22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,[a]
his mercies never come to an end;

[a] Syr Tg: Heb *LORD, we are not cut off*

with the result that the reader is pulled along from one thought to the next and interrupted by a new stanza in mid-thought. The chapter uses the language of lament and of wisdom or theological reflection on God's punishment and mercy. The mood alternates between despair and hope. The identity of the male speaker has long been debated. Some think he was a historical individual (Jeremiah, Jehoiachin, or Zedekiah have been suggested), but it seems preferable to take him as a literary persona, the counterpart of the female city speaking in 1.12–22. He is a Job-like figure, using some phraseology similar to Job's (especially in vv. 25–39), crying out to God from his suffering, trying to make sense of the terrible event, and to provoke God's response. But unlike Job, this speaker is not successful, for God never answers him.

3.1–20: The lament of the male persona, who appears to be a survivor in exile, or perhaps the collective voice of the people. Verses 1–13 are constructed on the image of God as a bad shepherd who leads his flock into dark and dangerous places (exile), in stark contrast to the image of God as a good shepherd (as in Ps 23). **1:** *I am one,* (lit. "I am the man"). Heb "geber" is clearly masculine although NRSV has stripped it of gender. *Rod of God's wrath*, the shepherd's rod, normally an instrument of protection, is here the rod with which God punishes, as in Isa 10.5, where Assyria is the rod of God's wrath. **2:** *Driven and brought*, like a flock (cf. Isa 40.11; Ps 78.52–53). **6:** *Darkness like the dead*, exile is often compared to darkness, prison, and death. In exile the Judeans were cut off from access to God's Temple, like a dead person. *The dead of long ago,* better, "like the eternally dead," those who have no hope of life. **8:** *He shuts out my prayer*, see 3.44n. **10:** *Bear . . . lion,* from being a bad shepherd God changes into the dangerous wild animals from whom the shepherd is supposed to protect his flock (cf. David in 1 Sam 17.34–37). **12–13:** Instead of shooting at the wild animals, God shoots at the speaker. God is elsewhere a divine archer who shoots disaster from his bow; cf. Deut 32.23–24; Ps 38.2–3; Job 16.12–13. **15:** *Bitterness . . . wormwood,* a common symbol of suffering, see 3.19; 4.21; Jer 9.14; Job 9.18. **17:** *My soul*, my being or self.

3.21–24: Despair turns to hope in these transitional verses framed by *Therefore I have hope/Therefore I will*

23 they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."

25 The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.
26 It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.
27 It is good for one to bear
the yoke in youth,
28 to sit alone in silence
when the Lord has imposed it,
29 to put one's mouth to the dust
(there may yet be hope),
30 to give one's cheek to the smiter,
and be filled with insults.

31 For the Lord will not
reject forever.
32 Although he causes grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
33 for he does not willingly afflict
or grieve anyone.

34 When all the prisoners of the land
are crushed under foot,
35 when human rights are perverted
in the presence of the Most High,
36 when one's case is subverted
—does the Lord not see it?

37 Who can command and have it done,
if the Lord has not ordained it?
38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
that good and bad come?
39 Why should any who draw breath complain
about the punishment of their sins?

40 Let us test and examine our ways,
and return to the LORD.
41 Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands
to God in heaven.
42 We have transgressed and rebelled,
and you have not forgiven.

43 You have wrapped yourself with anger and pursued us,
killing without pity;
44 you have wrapped yourself with a cloud
so that no prayer can pass through.
45 You have made us filth and rubbish
among the peoples.

46 All our enemies
have opened their mouths against us;
47 panic and pitfall have come upon us,
devastation and destruction.
48 My eyes flow with rivers of tears
because of the destruction of my people.

49 My eyes will flow without ceasing,
without respite,

hope in him. **22:** *Steadfast love . . . mercies . . . faithfulness,* attributes of God representing covenant loyalty (Ex 34.6–7; see also 2 Sam 7.15; Ps 89.2–4).

3.25–39: Drawing on wisdom thought, the poet finds reasons for hope in the face of suffering. **25–27:** *Good* begins each verse, applied to God and to human patience. Humans must wait for God's merciful help, and in the meantime accept the burden of their suffering (*bear the yoke*). **29:** *Put one's mouth to the dust*, accept God's discipline submissively (cf. Mic 7.17; Ps 72.9). **33:** *Willingly*, better "willfully" (lit. "from his heart"). God does not mete out punishment capriciously. **34–39:** Standard biblical theology: all is ordained by God, who is the source of both good and evil (cf. Job 2.10; Isa 45.7); punishment received is punishment deserved.

3.40–47: Communal lament. The discourse shifts back to lament, although now in the first-person plural with direct address to God. At the beginning the tone is conciliatory, but then becomes accusatory. **40–41:** As if persuaded by 3.25–29, the speakers call for self-examination, repentance, and contrition. **41:** *Lift up our hearts as well as our hands,* a call for sincerity in repentance, not merely going through the motions of prayer. **42–44:** A devastating turning point: confession of sin does not bring forgiveness. **44:** *Wrapped yourself with a cloud*, the cloud through which God revealed himself at Sinai (Ex 19.16), and which protects the people from fatal direct contact with the divine, is here perceived as a barrier that God erected to prevent prayer from reaching him.

3.48–66: Individual lament. The first-person singular "I" returns, emphasizing the personal dimension of

50 until the LORD from heaven
looks down and sees.
51 My eyes cause me grief
at the fate of all the young women in my city.

52 Those who were my enemies without cause
have hunted me like a bird;
53 they flung me alive into a pit
and hurled stones on me;
54 water closed over my head;
I said, "I am lost."

55 I called on your name, O LORD,
from the depths of the pit;
56 you heard my plea, "Do not close your ear
to my cry for help, but give me relief!"
57 You came near when I called on you;
you said, "Do not fear!"

58 You have taken up my cause, O Lord,
you have redeemed my life.
59 You have seen the wrong done to me, O LORD;
judge my cause.
60 You have seen all their malice,
all their plots against me.

61 You have heard their taunts, O LORD,
all their plots against me.

62 The whispers and murmurs of my assailants
are against me all day long.
63 Whether they sit or rise—see,
I am the object of their taunt-songs.

64 Pay them back for their deeds, O LORD,
according to the work of their hands!
65 Give them anguish of heart;
your curse be on them!
66 Pursue them in anger and destroy them
from under the LORD's heavens.

4 How the gold has grown dim,
how the pure gold is changed!
The sacred stones lie scattered
at the head of every street.

2 The precious children of Zion,
worth their weight in fine gold—
how they are reckoned as earthen pots,
the work of a potter's hands!

3 Even the jackals offer the breast
and nurse their young,
but my people has become cruel,
like the ostriches in the wilderness.

4 The tongue of the infant sticks
to the roof of its mouth for thirst;

the suffering. **53:** *Pit*, a cistern for holding water or for imprisoning people (cf. Jer 38.6), and also the grave or the netherworld (Sheol; cf. Isa 14.15; Pss 30.3; 88.4). **54:** *Water closed over my head*, the water in the cistern, but also a metaphor for desperation (see Jon 2.6–7; 2 Sam 22.5–6 = Ps 18.5–6). **56:** The verbs translated in the past tense here and in the following verses probably express a wish for the future. **58–60:** Legal language. The poet casts himself as a plaintiff in court where God will judge him innocent and the enemy guilty (cf. 3.34–36). **63:** *Whether they sit or rise*, whatever they do, at all times. **64–66:** A call for retribution; see 1.22. **66:** *From under the LORD's heavens*, there is no place in God's world for the wicked.

4.1–22: The community under siege in Jerusalem. The physical and social effects of starvation are graphically described. The progression is realistic: first the children and then the adults. Degradation and debasement is the main theme; those once well-off are now destitute, those once healthy are dying or dead. Much of the effect is achieved by the contrast in color, the "before" and the "after," as the rich palette of the colors of wealth and health (gold, scarlet, white, red, sapphire in vv. 1,2,5,7,8) is drained away to blackness. Heat is another dimension, the unrelenting heat of the summer siege, the dry and blackened skin (v. 8), the parched mouths (v. 4), God's burning anger setting fire to Zion (v. 11). There is no shade, no protection provided by God or the king (v. 20). Like chs 1 and 2, this chapter contains a single alphabetic acrostic and opens with the word *How* (see 1.1n).

4.1–10: The suffering of the siege. 1: *Sacred stones,* or gems, and gold, though appearing to be meant literally, are metaphors for the children (v. 2). **2:** *Earthen pots* were cheap and easily broken and discarded, while gold was an expensive and durable material. The children are likened to throw-away objects because no one can care for them. **3:** *Jackals,* considered despicable scavengers. *Ostriches,* thought to be cruel and neglectful parents (cf. Job 39.13–18). *My people has become cruel*, not willingly but from desperation; they are no longer able

the children beg for food,
but no one gives them anything.

5 Those who feasted on delicacies
perish in the streets;
those who were brought up in purple
cling to ash heaps.

6 For the chastisement[a] of my people has
been greater
than the punishment[b] of Sodom,
which was overthrown in a moment,
though no hand was laid on it.[c]

7 Her princes were purer than snow,
whiter than milk;
their bodies were more ruddy than coral,
their hair[c] like sapphire.[d]

8 Now their visage is blacker than soot;
they are not recognized in the streets.
Their skin has shriveled on their bones;
it has become as dry as wood.

9 Happier were those pierced by the sword
than those pierced by hunger,
whose life drains away, deprived
of the produce of the field.

10 The hands of compassionate women
have boiled their own children;
they became their food
in the destruction of my people.

11 The LORD gave full vent to his wrath;
he poured out his hot anger,
and kindled a fire in Zion
that consumed its foundations.

12 The kings of the earth did not believe,
nor did any of the inhabitants of the
world,
that foe or enemy could enter
the gates of Jerusalem.

13 It was for the sins of her prophets
and the iniquities of her priests,
who shed the blood of the righteous
in the midst of her.

14 Blindly they wandered through the
streets,
so defiled with blood
that no one was able
to touch their garments.

15 "Away! Unclean!" people shouted at
them;
"Away! Away! Do not touch!"
So they became fugitives and wanderers;
it was said among the nations,
"They shall stay here no longer."

16 The LORD himself has scattered them,
he will regard them no more;
no honor was shown to the priests,
no favor to the elders.

17 Our eyes failed, ever watching
vainly for help;
we were watching eagerly
for a nation that could not save.

[a] Or *iniquity*
[b] Or *sin*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Or *lapis lazuli*

to care for their children. **4:** *The tongue . . . sticks to the roof of its mouth*, an expression meaning that no sound is uttered (Ezek 3.26; Ps 137.6; Job 29.10). The children are too weak even to cry. **6:** *Sodom,* whose punishment was legendary (Gen 19.24–25), was overthrown in an instant, whereas Jerusalem was made to suffer long agony. **7–8:** The colors associated with vigor have disappeared; now people are dried up. **10:** See 2.20n.

4.11–16: God's wrathful punishment. 12: The Judean belief in the inviolability of Zion, that God would never permit his city to be destroyed (see Pss 46.5; 48.3–8), is here attributed even to foreigners, a creative use of the "passers-by" trope (see 2.15n). **13–14:** *Prophets . . . priests*, those most associated with purity and vision are described as the most blind and defiled. **15:** *Away! Unclean!* The public warning that lepers must give so that no one will come in contact with them (Lev 13.45–46).

4.17–22: The voice of the community. As in 3.40–47, the speaker is "we," describing the final days of the siege and the fall of Jerusalem. **17:** *For a nation that could not save*, most likely Egypt, the major power opposed to Babylonia (see Jer 37.5–10; Isa 30.7). Contrary to what prophets like Jeremiah advised, Judah relied on help

18 They dogged our steps
so that we could not walk in our streets;
our end drew near; our days were numbered;
for our end had come.

19 Our pursuers were swifter
than the eagles in the heavens;
they chased us on the mountains,
they lay in wait for us in the wilderness.

20 The LORD's anointed, the breath of our life,
was taken in their pits—
the one of whom we said, "Under his shadow
we shall live among the nations."

21 Rejoice and be glad, O daughter Edom,
you that live in the land of Uz;
but to you also the cup shall pass;
you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare.

22 The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter Zion, is accomplished,
he will keep you in exile no longer;
but your iniquity, O daughter Edom, he will punish,
he will uncover your sins.

5 Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;
look, and see our disgrace!
2 Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers,
our homes to aliens.
3 We have become orphans, fatherless;
our mothers are like widows.
4 We must pay for the water we drink;
the wood we get must be bought.
5 With a yoke[a] on our necks we are hard driven;
we are weary, we are given no rest.
6 We have made a pact with[b] Egypt and Assyria,
to get enough bread.
7 Our ancestors sinned; they are no more,
and we bear their iniquities.

[a] Symmachus: Heb lacks *With a yoke*
[b] Heb *have given the hand to*

from another nation, not from God. **19:** Perhaps an allusion to the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem, when Zedekiah and his soldiers fled the city and were pursued and captured by the Babylonian army (2 Kings 25.4–5). **20:** *The LORD's anointed, the breath of our life, . . . under his shadow,* royal epithets (1 Sam 24.7; 2 Sam 1.14,16; Pss 17.8; 91.1). The reference is most likely to Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, whose defeat signals the failure of the Davidic dynasty to protect the people. **21–22:** A curse on Edom, a neighbor of Judah who was a vassal to Babylonia. Edom is often singled out for negative comment in postexilic literature (Ezek 35; Ob 11; Ps 137.7). Edom is synonymous with Esau (Gen 36.1) and therefore the traditional enemy or rival of Jacob/Israel (=Judah). **21:** *Rejoice and be glad,* an ironic statement. *Daughter Edom,* an epithet parallel to "Daughter Zion." *Uz*, a region in southern Jordan or northwestern Arabia, often connected with Edom (Gen 36.28; Jer 25.20; Job 1.1; 1 Chr 1.42). *The cup,* of God's wrath (see 3.15; Jer 25.15–29; 49.12; 51.7; Hab 2.15–16), which will make Edom drunk. *Strip yourself bare*, expose your nakedness and be shamed as Jerusalem was (1.8–10). **22:** The most hopeful sentiment in the book (cf. Joel 4).

5.1–22: A prayer of the survivors in Judah in the aftermath of the destruction. A call to God to notice the abject state of his people in Judah and to restore them to their previous condition. The chapter resembles communal laments and also penitential prayers of the Second Temple period. **1:** The plea to God to *remember* is framed by "Why have you forgotten" in v. 20. *Remember* means "to pay mind to" and "forget" means "to ignore." **2–3:** The breakdown of the institution of the family. **2:** *Our inheritance*, ancestral land was to be kept within the family. Here the reference may be to individual real estate or to the country as a whole. *Strangers,* those outside the family. *Aliens*, foreigners. **3:** *Fatherless*, an orphan is a person without a father. Widows and orphans are defenseless and required special protection (e.g., Isa 1.23; Ps 68.5). **4–5:** Harsh economic conditions; rampant inflation. *Water* and *wood* are basic necessities. **6:** *Egypt and Assyria,* traditional superpowers and enemy-invaders of Israel, are often found in parallelism even when, as in this period, Assyria was long gone (Isa 52.4; Zech 10.10–11). **7:** *Iniquities* also means "punishment." Earlier sinful generations did not suffer punishment like the current generation. Did the current generation also see itself as sinful and deserving of punishment, or do

[8] Slaves rule over us;
there is no one to deliver us from their hand.
[9] We get our bread at the peril of our lives,
because of the sword in the wilderness.
[10] Our skin is black as an oven
from the scorching heat of famine.
[11] Women are raped in Zion,
virgins in the towns of Judah.
[12] Princes are hung up by their hands;
no respect is shown to the elders.
[13] Young men are compelled to grind,
and boys stagger under loads of wood.
[14] The old men have left the city gate,
the young men their music.
[15] The joy of our hearts has ceased;
our dancing has been turned to mourning.
[16] The crown has fallen from our head;
woe to us, for we have sinned!
[17] Because of this our hearts are sick,
because of these things our eyes have grown dim:
[18] because of Mount Zion, which lies desolate;
jackals prowl over it.

[19] But you, O LORD, reign forever;
your throne endures to all generations.
[20] Why have you forgotten us completely?
Why have you forsaken us these many days?
[21] Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored;
renew our days as of old—
[22] unless you have utterly rejected us,
and are angry with us beyond measure.

they think they are paying unfairly for the sins of their ancestors? The verse is ambiguous. **8:** *Slaves rule over us*, previously Judah was ruled by its own king but now it is governed by the lackeys of the Babylonian king (cf. 2 Kings 25.24). **9:** Food is scarce. *The sword in the wilderness*, a difficult phrase which may mean that scavenging in the countryside was dangerous because of marauders. Alternatively, it is a metaphor for the dehydration and starvation of the inhabitants of Judah, who suffer famine that resembles the famine of the siege (v. 10 and cf. 4.8). **11–14:** Social order has disintegrated; violence and indignity abound. Women are shamed sexually; leaders are shamed publicly; young and old are denied their proper calling and subjected to abusive labor. **12:** *Hung up*, impalement of corpses was a form of public shaming (Deut 21.22; Josh 10.26–27; 1 Sam 31.10). *By their hands*, probably meaning by the hands of the enemy (see v. 8), since victims were not generally hung by their hands. A better interpretation may be that this is not a form of execution or corpse display, but a form of torture and humiliation of the living, like putting a person in the stocks. **13:** *To grind*, a task normally done by women (Ex 11.5; Isa 47.2; Job 31.10) or slaves (Judg 16.21) and therefore demeaning if undertaken by a man. The Hebrew is "pull the millstone," which may refer to a large milling operation in which a donkey would normally pull the heavy millstone, making this line parallel in meaning to the next one. *Boys stagger under loads of wood*, humans are made to do the work of animals, beasts of burden. **14:** *City gate*, the location of business and legal transactions (Ruth 4.1; Job 29.7). **16:** *The crown*, the emblem of kingship, the Davidic dynasty. Or perhaps the crenellated walls of the city. *We have sinned*, an admission of guilt (cf. 3.42 and 5.7n). **18:** *Jackals*, or "foxes," proverbial inhabitants of ruined cities (see 4.3; Ezek 13.4; Isa 34.11–17; Zeph 2.13–15). **19:** A strong theological statement: Even though God's earthly throne, the Temple, lies in ruins, God continues to reign forever. **21:** A wish that the former relationship with God be reinstated. **22:** The book ends in tragic despair, with the suggestion that God's rejection of the people continues. *Unless* is difficult in the Hebrew; perhaps it is better translated "but instead," or even more literally, "for if," suggesting that the conclusion of the conditional clause has been withheld, thus perpetuating indefinitely the divine rejection with which the book ends.

EZEKIEL

NAME

The book is named for the prophet to whom it is attributed. His name, "Ezekiel," means "God strengthens." God's strengthening turns out to be imperative for Ezekiel, whose rebellious audience is characterized by ingrained defiance and stubbornness (see 2.5n. [rebellious house]; 3.8–9n. [hard]).

LOCATION IN CANON

Ezekiel is the last of the three major prophets, the others being Isaiah and Jeremiah. Their books are arranged in presumed chronological order: the first part of the book of Isaiah focuses on the prophet Isaiah's ministry in Jerusalem in the late eighth century BCE; the prophet Jeremiah was active in the late seventh and early sixth centuries; and Ezekiel's prophecies follow those of Jeremiah, his older contemporary. (In many English Bibles, following the order of the Septuagint [LXX], Lamentations comes between Jeremiah and Ezekiel.) According to the Talmud and in some manuscripts there was another order for the major prophets, in which Ezekiel's combined message of judgment and salvation appears between Jeremiah's predominant tone of sorrow and Isaiah's emphatic promises.

AUTHORSHIP

The only information we have about the prophet comes from the book itself. In this collection, God's divine prerogative overshadows and submerges the prophetic personality. Since Ezekiel is a literary character within his own prophecies, his shocking and mystifying actions must often be interpreted in a highly symbolic and theological manner, not necessarily as a window into the prophet's actual personality.

Some facts seem established. Ezekiel was a Judean exile in Babylonia, living in the deportee settlement of Tel-abib (see 3.15n.). His prophetic career stretched from 593 to at least 571 BCE. The prophet and his school—the followers who edited and preserved his prophecies—were members of a lineage of priests in Israel known as the Zadokites (see 1.1–3n.; 44.15–31n.).

At the time of Ezekiel's exile, the Zadokites controlled the Israelite high priesthood and held power at the Jerusalem Temple. They took a specific priestly theology with them into exile, preserved elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as a source of the Pentateuch known as the "Holiness School." The priestly theology of the Holiness School thoroughly infuses the book of Ezekiel.

DATE OF COMPOSITION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ezekiel wrote his prophecies, and his followers edited, expanded, and preserved them, in the sixth century BCE in Babylonia, during the exile of the Judeans from their homeland. The exile thus forms the historical context of the book, and at several points, particularly in the allegory in 17.1–24, Ezekiel refers to the Babylonian subjugation of Judah.

The Babylonians under Nebuchadrezzar II (ruled 605–562 BCE) defeated the Egyptians in 605 at the battle of Carchemish. The Egyptians had allied with the great Assyrian empire, which the Babylonians destroyed between 614 and 609. Although these victories made Babylonia the leading political power in Syria-Palestine, including the territory of Judah, the Judeans, often acting in concert with other neighboring states, eventually rebelled. The Babylonians, in an escalating response to the continued efforts of the Judeans to throw them off, exiled the Judeans in two phases, spaced about a decade apart. They first besieged Jerusalem in 597 during the reign of King Jehoiakim, who died during the siege. When his successor, his son Jehoiachin, surrendered to the Babylonians, he, along with many of the Judean ruling class, was exiled to Babylon. The Babylonians installed a puppet king, Zedekiah; when he, too, attempted to rebel, they destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 586, and exiled much of the population, except the poorest, to Babylon.

Ezekiel was among the first group of exiles, taken to Babylonia in 597. Even so, he remained well informed about events in Judah, and his prophecies concern both the exiles and those who remained in Judah. He could address both communities as a single entity, since they were in frequent contact with each other, and both were passionately concerned about the fate of Jerusalem. Neither group accepted Ezekiel's indictment of their

guilt or believed his prophecies about Jerusalem's coming destruction. After the destruction took place, the prophet's words turned to themes of renewed hope, regeneration, and blessing.

LITERARY HISTORY

The prophet and his followers composed the book in writing and preserved it for the specific purpose of instructing readers at a later time. The written composition and the careful preservation of Ezekiel contrast with much of the other prophetic literature in the Bible, which was spoken directly to a contemporaneous audience. Many of the words of prophets, such as Isaiah, were written down only a considerable time after they had been spoken; therefore they could be, and often were, modified to adapt them to situations that arose in later times. In Ezekiel, however, there are clear indications of an originally written composition and of an early intention to preserve the text. For instance, the thoroughgoing chronological notations show that Ezekiel and his followers took great care to demonstrate the timeliness and veracity of Ezekiel's oracles, and thereby their authority as prophecy. This care for the written text and its accurate transmission, as well as for the preservation of authoritative traditions such as the Holiness School material (see Interpretation section), mark a breakthrough in the development of written scripture in Israel, and therefore help us to understand the historical processes that created the biblical canon over the centuries.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

The book of Ezekiel is complex, but fortunately its organization and outline are agreeably simple. Chapters 1–24 are set before the fall of Jerusalem and are largely prophecies of doom against the city and against Judah. An extended body of material on Ezekiel's call to prophesy begins this section in chs 1–3. Chapters 25–32 are prophecies against foreign nations, forming a bridge between Ezekiel's initial message of doom and his ultimate message of hope. The hope comes in the prophecies of restoration, chs 33–48, dating from the time after Jerusalem's fall. Clearly the capture and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 was the critical moment in Ezekiel's prophetic career. The prophecies of restoration include an apocalyptic passage (chs 38–39) and an extended blueprint for the restored Temple and land (chs 40–48).

INTERPRETATION

Ezekiel and his editors were Jerusalem priests at the center of Judean society, and as such were proponents of "Zion theology," the traditions that emphasized God's choice of Zion (Jerusalem), the holy city, as his home, and the protection that resulted from this choice (see 2 Sam 7.4–17; Pss 46; 132) both for the city and for the Davidic dynasty whose capital it was. The exile of the Judean elite and the destruction of Jerusalem directly challenged this theology, since they called into question God's promises to Zion of eternal protection. Ezekiel answered these challenges with cosmic, eschatological, and apocalyptic visions of a rebuilt Zion that will fulfill God's promises despite the fall of the earthly Jerusalem (see 1.22–25n.,26–28n.; 37.28n.; 38.12n.; 43.7n.; 48.35n.). In these visions particularly, Ezekiel anticipated much that was yet to come in the biblical writings, including later developments of apocalypticism (see especially Dan 7–12 and, in the New Testament, the book of Revelation).

The specific language and laws of the priests and the traditions of the Temple heavily influenced Ezekiel as a Zadokite. A significant body of these traditions, the "Holiness School" (HS) can be found in the Pentateuch. (Multiple references to the Pentateuch in this introduction and in the annotations that precede the notation [HS] are included in this body of material, except where noted.) The Holiness School material extends beyond the confines of Lev 17–26 (known as the "Holiness Code" or "Holiness Collection"), and includes other parts of the Pentateuch often identified as belonging to the Priestly source (P). The relationship between God and Israel assumed by the Holiness School is that of a vassal-covenant (see Lev 26.9,15,25), a type of agreement in which guarantees on one side are specifically linked to responsibilities on the other, with significant sanctions if the responsibilities of vassalage are not met. For Ezekiel this covenant form proved invaluable in interpreting the exile, since it allowed for the possibility that defilement, injustice, and covenant infidelity on Israel's part could lead to punishments, including exile, without annulling God's eternal promises to Israel (Lev 26.42).

In his allegory of the unfaithful wife (ch 16), the prophet rehearses the failed history of the Israelites' vassal-covenant with God. As in a marriage, with all its mutual obligations, God "pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you" (16.8). Because Jerusalem proves an adulterous wife, however, God determines to

divorce her and expose her to be stoned (16.40; cf. Lev 20.10 [HS]). Jerusalem is doomed, because the people have "despised the oath, breaking the covenant" (16.59; cf. 17.19).

For the Holiness School, God's land is a delicately organized structure of holiness, subject to overthrow through the spread of uncleanness and bloodshed. It is like an uneasy stomach, ready to vomit out those who defile it (Lev 18.24–28). Ezekiel, in 36.16–19, insists that just such regurgitation has now happened. The land has fallen victim to defilement, and God's people have lost possession of it just as the Holiness School warned they would. Defiling any part of the land, God's holy territory, constitutes an assault of impurity on God's shrine (Lev 15.31; 19.30; 26.2; Num 5.3; 19.13; Ezek 8.6; 9.9). If the pollution of the sanctuary becomes willful and chronic, it will eventually force out God's glory (Num 35.34; Ezek 10.19; 11.22–23). Exposed to catastrophic judgment, the people become cut off (Ezek 37.11).

Despite Israel's lack of obedience to the covenant, Ezekiel prophesies a renewed covenantal relationship after the exile (16.60,62). God will guarantee this new vassal-covenant's success by transplanting new obedient hearts into the people (11.19–20; 16.60; 36.26–28; 37.23–27). Under God's new plan, the people will "follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (11.20; cf. 36.27; Lev 26.3 [HS]).

The Holiness School stresses the unique sacredness of the people and land of Israel, in the midst of which dwells the glory of the LORD. This sacredness includes not only ritual and worship but also morality and social justice. The tangible dwelling of God's glory in the Temple at the center of Israel brings sanctity to all people and groups arrayed around it. It means the realization of Lev 20.26, where God proclaims: "You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine."

Since Israel is so intimately associated with God in this theology, the people must constantly grow in personal and collective holiness through their interaction with the divine presence (Ezek 11.12; 20.12; 37.28; Lev 11.44–45; 19.2; 20.7,26 [HS]). God's people, in Ezekiel's ideal world, emulate the holiness of God that sojourns in their midst (37.27; 43.9; cf. Ex 25.8; 29.45–46; 40.34; Lev 26.11; Num 5.3; 35.34 [HS]). From the midst of Israel, God radiates the divine holiness out to the entire land and to every sector of society (37.28; cf. Ex 31.13; Lev 21.15,23; 22.32 [HS]).

GUIDE TO READING

The prophecies in the book of Ezekiel are among the most fascinating and puzzling writings in the Bible. The prophet expresses his thought through a variety of literary forms, including symbolic action reports, visions, allegories, denunciations, and legal arguments. He sometimes uses bizarre or extreme imagery and elaborates it to an almost excessive point. He has inspired fear, awe, and wonder in readers because he attempts not merely to name but also to embody God's sovereignty, holiness, and mystery in words that come close to the limits of expression.

At first this variety, intricacy, and elaboration can seem confusing. It is easy to get lost in Ezekiel's images and forget his larger concerns; it is easy as well to pick out striking passages and ignore the context of the book as a whole. But Ezekiel makes a coherent effort to deal with profound and difficult issues, and readers should honor this effort by attending to the full sweep of the book in all its profundity. Ezekiel's book has been carefully put together and preserved for the instruction of later readers.

Ezekiel's character as a literary text makes it a complex book to read and interpret. Much of the other prophetic material of the Bible, as oral literature, generally uses less elaborate forms; Ezekiel, however, is made up of intricate, deliberately composed literary creations. Although some scholars have viewed such literary ornamentation and intricacy as indicating confused layers of literary growth, more recently scholars have argued for literary integrity in the texts, even when the final form has resulted from a process of transmission and editing. One of the characteristic features of the book is the frequent repetition of key words or phrases, such as "mortal" (literally, "son of man"), "for the sake of my holy name," and "so that you/they will know that I am the LORD." Important aspects of the theology of Ezekiel are reinforced by the repetition of these and other formulas.

The style of Ezekiel does not always render reality by direct representation. Instead, it probes behind or beyond observable things and events, using metaphors and mythic poetry to portray the underlying structure of existence or the transcendent realities beneath both plain sensory observation and historical records. The visions in Ezekiel show both inner and outer realities, going beyond or abolishing normal sensory and temporal bounds.

Because of these literary qualities, reading Ezekiel requires a sophisticated approach, in order to avoid mistaking some of the descriptions for historical events, observable behaviors, or factual reports. For example, some interpretations of Ezekiel's behavior take it as evidence of a disoriented or abnormal personality. But the descriptions of these acts—such as muteness (3.22–27), holding prolonged, agonizing postures (4.4–8), and a failure to mourn (24.15–27)—are not evidence of psychological illness but are instead literary images that have rich theological import. The book portrays Ezekiel engaging in bizarre and disturbing behavior in order to provoke recollection of preceding scripture and intense theological reflection. A profound reorientation in the relationship of God and Israel is imminent, the authors believe, and they ask their audience to detect radical implications for life and faith in the metaphorical and parabolic character of their descriptions.

Stephen L. Cook

1 In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. [2] On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), [3] the word of the LORD came to the priest Ezekiel son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was on him there.

[4] As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. [5] In the middle of it was something like four living creatures. This was their appearance: they were of human form. [6] Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. [7] Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. [8] Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: [9] their

1.1–3.27: The call of Ezekiel. 1.1–3: Superscription. Ezekiel was a Zadokite *priest* (v. 3; 4.5–6n.; 44.15–31n.), steeped in the theological traditions of Zion and of the Holiness School (see Introduction). Despite being a deportee, he never loses his priestly identity (cf. 43.12n.), although many priestly tasks would be impossible for him in exile away from Jerusalem. *The thirtieth year,* probably Ezekiel's own age. At the age for assuming his duties at the Jerusalem Temple (Num 4.3 [HS]), Ezekiel sought solitude outside his settlement (see 3.14–15) to reflect on what course his life might instead take in exile. *Fifth day* of the *fourth month . . . fifth year of the exile* would be July 31, 593 BCE. This would make Ezekiel fifty years old in 573 when he envisioned the ideal Temple at the end of his book (40.1n.), so his career fits the normal twenty-year span of a priest's active service (Num 4.3,23,30 [HS]). *Chebar,* a canal near Nippur, providing artificial irrigation from the Euphrates. It is mentioned also in fifth-century Babylonian documents. **3:** The name *Ezekiel* means "God strengthens." *Hand of the LORD* (3.14,22; 8.1; 33.22; 37.1; 40.1), a metaphor highlighting how God is about to seize the prophet, exercising control over his person, so that he will undergo the same types of divine compulsions and ecstatic trances experienced by Israel's early prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 18.46; 2 Kings 3.15). The prophetic narratives of Ezekiel, like the prophetic legends of the books of Kings, depict stupendous, wondrous events in a manner intended to enliven readers' imaginations. *Chaldeans,* Babylonians.

1.4–28a: The throne-chariot vision. Cf. the imagery in 1 Kings 22.19–22; Isa 6.1–9. The first two-thirds of Ezekiel's vision of God describes the creatures and wheels below the platform supporting God's throne. In Ezekiel's theology of God's transcendence, God is clearly far removed from earthly perception. A graduated, spatial system of layered holiness with wheels, heavenly creatures, and a crystalline expanse separates the prophet from the divine presence. **4:** *Stormy wind . . . cloud . . .* and *fire* are phenomena often associated with the appearance of God (see Ps 18.8–12; Nah 1.3), as are "the sound of mighty waters" and "thunder" (v.24; see also 43.2; Ps 29.3). *Brightness . . . fire flashing forth continually*, as in the Holiness School, God's glory appears as a brilliant, fiery radiance (Ex 24.17; 40.38; Num 16.35, all HS). *Something like*, Ezekiel struggles to find words to express transcendent reality. **5–14:** The *living creatures* are later identified as cherubim (10.15,20), guardians of God's throne (see Ex 25.18–22; 1 Kings 6.23–28), namely winged, human-headed lions or bulls exhibiting the qualities of mobility, intelligence, and strength. Uncharacteristically, the creatures Ezekiel sees have four faces

wings touched one another; each of them moved straight ahead, without turning as they moved. [10] As for the appearance of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle; [11] such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. [12] Each moved straight ahead; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. [13] In the middle of[a] the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; the fire was bright, and lightning issued from the fire. [14] The living creatures darted to and fro, like a flash of lightning.

[15] As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them.[b] [16] As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl; and the four had the same form, their construction being something like a wheel within a wheel. [17] When they moved, they moved in any of the four directions without veering as they moved. [18] Their rims were tall and awesome, for the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. [19] When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. [20] Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

[21] When they moved, the others moved; when they stopped, the others stopped; and when they rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

[22] Over the heads of the living creatures there was something like a dome, shining like crystal,[c] spread out above their heads. [23] Under the dome their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another; and each of the creatures had two wings covering its body. [24] When they moved, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of mighty waters, like the thunder of the Almighty,[d] a sound of tumult like the sound of an army; when they stopped, they let down their wings. [25] And there came a voice from above the dome over their heads; when they stopped, they let down their wings.

[26] And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire;[e] and seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form. [27] Upward from what appeared like the loins I saw something like gleaming amber, something that looked like fire enclosed all around; and downward from what looked like the loins I saw something that looked like fire, and there was a splendor all around. [28] Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of

[a] Gk OL: Heb *And the appearance of*
[b] Heb *of their faces*
[c] Gk: Heb *like the awesome crystal*
[d] Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
[e] Or *lapis lazuli*

(v. 10). **13:** *Torches*, cf. Gen 15.17. **15–21:** *The four . . . wheels* (cf. the four faces of the creatures) to God's throne are a crucial element in Ezekiel's reconciling his central priestly belief that God had chosen and dwelled in Zion with the earthly Zion's coming destruction by the Babylonians (see Introduction). Its wheels mean that the real, cosmic Zion-throne has omnidirectional mobility and is not tied down to earthly Jerusalem. See also 1.26–28n. **18:** *Full of eyes,* symbolic of omniscience (10.12; Zech 4.2,5,10). **22–25:** *A dome,* referring to the cosmic firmament of Gen 1.6–8, which separates earth and heaven. Jerusalem and its Temple mount symbolize the cosmic mountain where heaven and earth intersect at the dome. **26–28:** Thus the LORD was still really enthroned atop the cosmos, even though Jerusalem, the symbol of God's cosmic dwelling (Pss 26.8; 63.2; 102.16), was to be destroyed by the Babylonians. **26:** *Seemed like a human form,* Ezekiel provides a rather humanlike image of God in keeping with the imagery of the Holiness School; the Mesopotamian god Ashur can also be depicted as a human figure with a glowing upper torso and a flaming lower body. Other biblical traditions, such as those in Isa 40–66 and in the Priestly Torah, would be aghast that Ezekiel would dare associate God with any sort of likeness or appearance (see Isa 40.18,25; 46.5). **28:** *Appearance of the likeness,* the qualified language again emphasizes God's transcendence and cosmic power (see 1.4n.). God's self is three levels removed from Ezekiel's

the splendor all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.

When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone speaking.

2 He said to me: O mortal,[a] stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. [2] And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. [3] He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation[b] of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. [4] The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD." [5] Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. [6] And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. [7] You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house.

[8] But you, mortal, hear what I say to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you. [9] I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. [10] He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

3 He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. [2] So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. [3] He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.

[4] He said to me: Mortal, go to the house of Israel and speak my very words to them. [5] For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel— [6] not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. [7] But the house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. [8] See, I have made your face hard against their faces, and

[a] Or *son of man*; Heb *ben adam* (and so throughout the book when Ezekiel is addressed)
[b] Syr: Heb *to nations*

description of God. *The glory of the LORD* is not God's self, but divine holiness made present, tangible, and accessible; see further 10.1–22n. It is Israel's divinely appointed role to receive this holiness, be transformed by it, and then reflect it back to God.

1.28b–3.27: Ezekiel's commissioning. The length of this section helps buttress Ezekiel's authority in the face of opposition and perhaps reflects his own resistance to God's commissioning. **1.28b–2.8a:** Ezekiel is commissioned in a series of addresses. **1:28b:** *Fell on my face*, a reaction of awe, and a gesture of submission to authority (also 3.23; 43.3). **2.1:** *Mortal* (Heb "ben adam," see textual note *a*), a member of the category of "humanity." Ezekiel emphasizes that God and the divine realm tower above this category; the idiom occurs ninety-three times in the book. Yet in Ezekiel's Holiness School theology God brings the holy realm of the creator and the profane realm of creatures into permanent contact. **2:** *Spirit* (see 3.12,14,24), a vigorous empowerment that Ezekiel experiences at receiving God's word. **3:** *Transgressed*, violated the terms of the covenant with God of the Holiness School (Lev 26.9,15,25). In this type of covenant, there are punishments for disobedience: Israel can forfeit its status as God's people on God's land. **5:** *Rebellious house,* a phrase unique to Ezekiel (2.5,6,8; 3.9,26,27; 12.2,3,9,25; 17.12; 24.3) that expresses one of his major themes: Judah's defiance and contempt for God's holiness (ch 20). The theme has roots in the Holiness School, which emphasizes the people's ingrained tendency toward stubbornness and irreverence (cf. Num 17.10). **6:** *Briers and thorns . . . scorpions,* though Ezekiel is a priestly official, his message will be met with hostility.

2.8b–3.3: In keeping with the contemporary emergence of the concept of God's word as sacred text, Ezekiel is told to eat a *scroll* (cf. Jer 1.9; Zech 5.1–4). The scroll depicts the coming, fixed judgment of Judah; see 3.22–27n. **3.3:** Jeremiah's metaphor (Jer 15.16) becomes concrete in Ezekiel. God's word is *sweet* (Ps 19.10), even when its contents involve pain. **3.4–9:** Preparation for resistance. **5–6:** *Obscure speech,* like the language of Judah's enemies, perceived as harsh and unintelligible (Isa 33.19; Jer 5.15). **8–9:** *Hard,* or "strong"; compare the meaning

your forehead hard against their foreheads. 9 Like the hardest stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not fear them or be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. 10 He said to me: Mortal, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart and hear with your ears; 11 then go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them. Say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD"; whether they hear or refuse to hear.

12 Then the spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of the LORD rose[a] from its place, I heard behind me the sound of loud rumbling; 13 it was the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, that sounded like a loud rumbling. 14 The spirit lifted me up and bore me away; I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the LORD being strong upon me. 15 I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who lived by the river Chebar.[b] And I sat there among them, stunned, for seven days.

16 At the end of seven days, the word of the LORD came to me: 17 Mortal, I have made you a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 18 If I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die," and you give them no warning, or speak to warn the wicked from their wicked way, in order to save their life, those wicked persons shall die for their iniquity; but their blood I will require at your hand. 19 But if you warn the wicked, and they do not turn from their wickedness, or from their wicked way, they shall die for their iniquity; but you will have saved your life. 20 Again, if the righteous turn from their righteousness and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before them, they shall die; because you have not warned them, they shall die for their sin, and their righteous deeds that they have done shall not be remembered; but their blood I will require at your hand. 21 If, however, you warn the righteous not to sin, and they do not sin, they shall surely live, because they took warning; and you will have saved your life.

22 Then the hand of the LORD was upon me there; and he said to me, Rise up, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you. 23 So I rose up and went out into the valley; and the glory of the LORD stood there, like the glory that I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. 24 The spirit entered into me, and set me on my feet; and he spoke with me and said to me: Go, shut yourself inside your house. 25 As for you, mortal, cords shall be placed on you, and you shall be bound with

[a] Cn: Heb *and blessed be the glory of the* LORD
[b] Two Mss Syr: Heb *Chebar, and to where they lived.* Another reading is *Chebar, and I sat where they sat*

of Ezekiel's name, "God strengthens" (1.3n.). **10–11:** A final charge.

3.12–15: Ezekiel returns to his people. 12: *Glory of the* LORD, see 10.1–22n. **14:** Ezekiel feels either God's anger at the people or his own distress over his difficult task. *The hand of the* LORD, see 1.3n. **15:** *Tel-abib,* ("mound of the deluge"), not modern Tel Aviv but a settlement of exiles near Nippur, not far from the Chebar canal. *Chebar*, 1.1–3n.

3.16–21: The sentinel. Prophets as sentries (Jer 6.17; Hab 2.1) provide early warnings of possible dangers (cf. 2 Kings 9.17). Ezekiel is assured that his personal responsibility is limited to delivering such warnings; the members of his audience are accountable for their responses (18.1–32; see also 33.1–9). **16:** *The word of the* LORD *came to me*, a form of expression occurring about fifty times in Ezekiel, which marks the beginnings of nearly all his main units of prophetic speech.

3.22–27: Ezekiel's speechlessness. *The hand of the* LORD *was upon me*, a phrase that in Ezekiel frequently introduces a vision; cf. 1.3n. *The valley,* a specific site near Tel-abib (see 37.1n.). It was probably a low-lying area, perhaps with a spring. Ezekiel's *speechless* state is best seen as one of the characteristic literary metaphors of the book, with a complex relationship to observable reality (Ezekiel is not literally speechless after this point; cf. 11.25). The metaphor's meaning is bound up with the growing significance of written, authoritative scripture in Ezekiel's time. In view of this development, Ezekiel must fall speechless, and let the scroll that he has swallowed (2.8b–3.3n.) have its fulfillment. The judgments of scripture (such as those of the book of Habakkuk) are now inevitable. The metaphor of speechlessness helps structure the book of Ezekiel. The judgments of the swallowed scroll play themselves out in the first half of Ezekiel, after which he regains his speech (24.25–27; 33.21–22).

them, so that you cannot go out among the people; [26] and I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be speechless and unable to reprove them; for they are a rebellious house. [27] But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord God"; let those who will hear, hear; and let those who refuse to hear, refuse; for they are a rebellious house.

4 And you, O mortal, take a brick and set it before you. On it portray a city, Jerusalem; [2] and put siegeworks against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a ramp against it; set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around. [3] Then take an iron plate and place it as an iron wall between you and the city; set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house of Israel.

[4] Then lie on your left side, and place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it; you shall bear their punishment for the number of the days that you lie there. [5] For I assign to you a number of days, three hundred ninety days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment; and so you shall bear the punishment of the house of Israel. [6] When you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah; forty days I assign you, one day for each year. [7] You shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and with your arm bared you shall prophesy against it. [8] See, I am putting cords on you so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have completed the days of your siege.

[9] And you, take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt; put them into one vessel, and make bread for yourself. During the number of days that you lie on your side, three hundred ninety days, you shall eat it. [10] The food that you eat shall be twenty shekels a day by weight; at fixed times you shall eat it. [11] And you shall drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin; at fixed times you shall drink. [12] You shall eat it as a barley-cake, baking it in their sight on human dung. [13] The Lord said, "Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread, unclean, among the nations to which I will drive them." [14] Then I said, "Ah Lord God! I have never defiled

4.1–24,27: Prophecies of doom against Judah and Jerusalem. 4.1–5.17: Actions symbolizing Jerusalem's coming siege. Like Ezekiel's speechlessness, these actions appear to be literary metaphors rather than observable performances (e.g., see 4.4–8n.). In Ezekiel, reality is more complex than the merely observable. **4.1–3:** A *brick* (common in Babylonia) inscribed, before baking, with a drawing of Jerusalem. Archaeologists have unearthed several ancient clay bricks like this one, inscribed with city plans. *An iron plate,* a baking griddle, symbolizing the barrier between the city and God. **4–8:** More than simple, nonverbal dramatization, Ezekiel's symbolic actions contain complex layers of meaning. At one level the postures commanded of Ezekiel illustrate the coming siege of Jerusalem. At a deeper level, they also depict both God's pre-siege punishments of Israel in the land over the previous 390 years (v. 5; see Lev 26.14–32 [HS]) and God's post-siege punishment of Judah in exile over the course of forty years (v. 6; cf. Num 14.34 [HS]). **4–5:** *Punishment*, or "iniquity." Bearing the weight of Israel's iniquity was a normal function of Israelite priests such as Ezekiel (Num 18.1 [HS]). **5–6:** The figure of 390 years may be Ezekiel's retrospective tabulation of the years that Israel polluted the Temple with its iniquity, from the time of its dedication by Solomon until its imminent destruction. The second figure of forty years (roughly one generation) represents Judah's coming period of exile outside of the promised land. The figure echoes the period of wilderness wanderings in the book of Numbers (see Num 14.34 [HS]). As with the wanderings of Numbers, the exile in Babylonia may set the stage for a new beginning of God with Israel. **9–17:** Coarse bread and rationing symbolize the rigors of the coming siege of Jerusalem (cf. Jer 19.9; Lam 4.10). **9:** The necessity of mixing grains in odd combinations indicates scarcity of foodstuffs. **10–11:** *Twenty shekels*, approximately 8 oz. (228 gr). *One-sixth of a hin*, approximately .67 qt. (64 liters). On this extremely meager diet, Jerusalem's inhabitants would totter on the brink of starvation (vv. 16–17). **12–13:** Siege symbolism again blurs into exile symbolism here. *Human dung,* considered unclean (Deut 23.12–14), represents the defiling effects of exile to an unclean land. (Lands outside Israel were deemed *unclean*, since God's holy presence did not reside there to purify and sanctify the territory; cf. Josh 22.19; Hos 9.3; Amos 7.17. Zech 3.3–5 shows how those in the tradition of Ezekiel came to terms with the defilement of the exile after the return.) Ezekiel was allowed to substitute dried "cow's

myself; from my youth up until now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by animals, nor has carrion flesh come into my mouth." [15] Then he said to me, "See, I will let you have cow's dung instead of human dung, on which you may prepare your bread."

[16] Then he said to me, Mortal, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with fearfulness; and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay. [17] Lacking bread and water, they will look at one another in dismay, and waste away under their punishment.

5 And you, O mortal, take a sharp sword; use it as a barber's razor and run it over your head and your beard; then take balances for weighing, and divide the hair. [2] One third of the hair you shall burn in the fire inside the city, when the days of the siege are completed; one third you shall take and strike with the sword all around the city;[a] and one third you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. [3] Then you shall take from these a small number, and bind them in the skirts of your robe. [4] From these, again, you shall take some, throw them into the fire and burn them up; from there a fire will come out against all the house of Israel.

[5] Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. [6] But she has rebelled against my ordinances and my statutes, becoming more wicked than the nations and the countries all around her, rejecting my ordinances and not following my statutes. [7] Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not followed my statutes or kept my ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations that are all around you; [8] therefore thus says the Lord God: I, I myself, am coming against you; I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations. [9] And because of all your abominations, I will do to you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again. [10] Surely, parents shall eat their children in your midst, and children shall eat their parents; I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to every wind. [11] Therefore, as I live, says the Lord God, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations—therefore I will cut you down;[b] my eye will not spare, and I will have no pity. [12] One third of you shall die of pestilence or be consumed by famine among you; one third shall fall by the sword around you; and one third I will scatter to every wind and will unsheathe the sword after them.

[13] My anger shall spend itself, and I will vent my fury on them and satisfy myself; and they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken in my jealousy, when I spend my fury on them. [14] Moreover I will make you a desolation and an object of mocking among the nations around you, in the sight of all that pass by. [15] You shall be[c] a mockery and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious punishments—I, the Lord, have spoken— [16] when I

[a] Heb *it*
[b] Another reading is *I will withdraw*
[c] Gk Syr Vg Tg: Heb *It shall be*

dung" (v. 15), a common fuel in the Near East. **14:** Cf. Lev 17.10–16 (HS). **16:** In Ezekiel's antecedent text, Lev 26.26 (HS), God's breaking the *staff of bread* ("food supply") is a penalty for violating the Holiness School covenant. **5.1–17:** The *razor* symbolizes military defeat (Isa 7.20). The defeated people are then destroyed in three different ways. Even the surviving remnant undergoes further judgment. **3:** Objects could be carried in the folds of one's garments (Hag 2.12). **5:** *Center of the nations,* Jerusalem was viewed as the mythic center of the earth (see 38.12, "center [lit., navel] of the earth"; 43.13–17n.). **8:** Formulaic language for challenging someone to a duel. God is resolved to come against Jerusalem as an enemy. *Sight of the nations,* Ezekiel is concerned throughout the book that the nations, as well as Israel, understand God's holiness. Israel should have been an object lesson in holiness to other nations. **10:** Cannibalism was a curse for breaking the Holiness School covenant (Lev 26.29). **11:** If textual note *b* is the correct reading, this verse anticipates the departure of the Lord's glory from the Temple described in 10.1–22 and 11.22–25. **12:** *Pestilence . . . famine,* cf. the Holiness School covenant sanctions in Lev

loose against you[a] my deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will let loose to destroy you, and when I bring more and more famine upon you, and break your staff of bread. [17] I will send famine and wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children; pestilence and bloodshed shall pass through you; and I will bring the sword upon you. I, the LORD, have spoken.

6 The word of the LORD came to me:
[2] O mortal, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, [3] and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys: I, I myself will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. [4] Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense stands shall be broken; and I will throw down your slain in front of your idols. [5] I will lay the corpses of the people of Israel in front of their idols; and I will scatter your bones around your altars. [6] Wherever you live, your towns shall be waste and your high places ruined, so that your altars will be waste and ruined,[b] your idols broken and destroyed, your incense stands cut down, and your works wiped out. [7] The slain shall fall in your midst; then you shall know that I am the LORD.
[8] But I will spare some. Some of you shall escape the sword among the nations and be scattered through the countries. [9] Those of you who escape shall remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, how I was crushed by their wanton heart that turned away from me, and their wanton eyes that turned after their idols. Then they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations. [10] And they shall know that I am the LORD; I did not threaten in vain to bring this disaster upon them.
[11] Thus says the Lord GOD: Clap your hands and stamp your foot, and say, Alas for all the vile abominations of the house of Israel! For they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. [12] Those far off shall die of pestilence; those nearby shall fall by the sword; and any who are left and are spared shall die of famine. Thus I will spend my fury upon them. [13] And you shall know that I am the LORD, when their slain lie among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the mountain tops, under every green tree, and under every leafy oak, wherever they offered pleasing odor to all their idols. [14] I will stretch out my hand against them, and make the land

[a] Heb *them*
[b] Syr Vg Tg: Heb *and be made guilty*

26.25–26. **13:** *They shall know . . . ,* 6.7n. **16:** *Staff of bread,* 4.16n. **17:** 14.21; Lev 26.22 (HS).

6.1–14: Two prophecies against Israel's idolatry. 1–10: *The mountains of Israel,* the central highland ridge of the promised land representing, in Ezekiel, the entire homeland territory (19.9; 33.38; 34.14; 35.12; 37.22; 38.8). Mountains symbolized the intersection of earth and heaven, so Israel's typography points to its unique status as God's holy land and the world's center (38.12; cf. Lev 26.11–12; Zech 2.12). Degrading this holy status, Israel's mountains are here associated with illegitimate worship (v. 9; cf. 18.6). **2:** *Set your face toward,* an idiom of Ezekiel (cf. 13.17; 20.46; 21.2; 25.2; 28.21; 29.2; 35.2; 38.2) calling for a hostile orientation based on God's angry disposition. **3:** *High places* were ritual installations or shrines. Their destruction was a curse for breaking the Holiness School covenant (Lev 26.30). **4:** *Idols* translates Ezekiel's characteristic term "gillulim," found in Lev 26.30 and thirty-nine times in Ezekiel, compared with eight times elsewhere in the Bible. The term is contemptuous, probably equating idols with sheep droppings. The people are devoted to vile futility. **6:** *Towns shall be waste,* Lev 26.31 (HS). **7:** *You shall know . . . ,* one of over sixty similar closing declarations in Ezekiel (see vv. 10,13–14). Ezekiel shares an emphasis on recognition of the LORD with the Holiness School (e.g., Ex 6.7; 7.5; 10.2; 16.12; 31.13). He prophesies that God's judging and saving acts will prove God's sovereign identity and result in human recognition of God. The central purpose of God's work on earth is to evoke this recognition, which in the understanding of Ezekiel and the Holiness School means being drawn into direct experience of God's life. God is focused on making Israel holy, and nothing is more important than for Israel to align itself with this intention (see Ex 10.2; 16.32; Lev 23.43 [HS]). In general, the book of Ezekiel de-emphasizes the prophet's human experience, focusing instead on God's desire to reveal the mystery and "otherness" of God's own self. **9:** The people will finally despair of their state of alienation from God. **11–14:** A second prophecy of judgment, beginning with an expressive action (cf. 21.14n.) communicating divine distress and anger over the people's abominations. **11:**

desolate and waste, throughout all their settlements, from the wilderness to Riblah.[a] Then they shall know that I am the LORD.

7 The word of the LORD came to me: [2] You, O mortal, thus says the Lord GOD to the land of Israel:

An end! The end has come
upon the four corners of the land.
[3] Now the end is upon you,
I will let loose my anger upon you;
I will judge you according to your ways,
I will punish you for all your
abominations.
[4] My eye will not spare you, I will have no
pity.
I will punish you for your ways,
while your abominations are among you.
Then you shall know that I am the LORD.
[5] Thus says the Lord GOD:
Disaster after disaster! See, it comes.
[6] An end has come, the end has come.
It has awakened against you; see, it comes!
[7] Your doom[b] has come to you,
O inhabitant of the land.
The time has come, the day is near—
of tumult, not of reveling on the
mountains.
[8] Soon now I will pour out my wrath upon
you;
I will spend my anger against you.
I will judge you according to your ways,
and punish you for all your
abominations.
[9] My eye will not spare; I will have no pity.
I will punish you according to your
ways,
while your abominations are among
you.
Then you shall know that it is I the LORD who
strike.
[10] See, the day! See, it comes!
Your doom[b] has gone out.
The rod has blossomed, pride has
budded.
[11] Violence has grown into a rod of
wickedness.
None of them shall remain,
not their abundance, not their
wealth;
no pre-eminence among them.[b]
[12] The time has come, the day draws near;
let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller
mourn,
for wrath is upon all their multitude.
[13] For the sellers shall not return to what has
been sold as long as they remain alive. For
the vision concerns all their multitude; it
shall not be revoked. Because of their iniquity, they cannot maintain their lives.[b]
[14] They have blown the horn and made
everything ready;
but no one goes to battle,
for my wrath is upon all their
multitude.
[15] The sword is outside, pestilence and
famine are inside;
those in the field die by the sword;
those in the city—famine and
pestilence devour them.
[16] If any survivors escape,
they shall be found on the mountains
like doves of the valleys,
all of them moaning over their iniquity.
[17] All hands shall grow feeble,
all knees turn to water.
[18] They shall put on sackcloth,
horror shall cover them.
Shame shall be on all faces,

[a] Another reading is *Diblah*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

Sword . . . famine . . . pestilence, Lev 26.25–26 (HS). **14:** *Stretch out my hand,* a repeated expression of Ezekiel denoting hard, crushing judgment (14.9,13; 16.27; 25.7; 35.3). *From the wilderness* of southern Judah *to Riblah* in central Syria was the maximum extent of Israelite territory.

7.1–27: Prophecies on the approaching end. 1–4: The theme, *the end,* is reminiscent of Am 8.2. **3:** Cf. Ps 78.49. **5–9:** *The day* (v. 7) of the end is "the day of the LORD," the time of God's appearance to defeat evil and establish justice (Am 5.18–20; Isa 2.11,12–17; Joel 1.15). The experience will be nothing short of cataclysmic, leaving nothing unchanged (Zeph 1.14–18). **9:** See v. 4. **10–27:** The end spells dissolution of normal life. **10:** *The rod,* the term both connotes "discipline" and evokes a similar Hebrew word meaning "injustice." **12:** The joys and sorrows of daily life and commerce (Prov 20.14) are rendered moot by the approach of Jerusalem's end. **14:** The trumpet calls to the defense, but the people are too enfeebled to respond. **18:** Wearing coarse *sackcloth* and shaving the

baldness on all their heads.
19 They shall fling their silver into the streets,
their gold shall be treated as unclean.
Their silver and gold cannot save them on the day of the wrath of the LORD. They shall not satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity. 20 From their[a] beautiful ornament, in which they took pride, they made their abominable images, their detestable things; therefore I will make of it an unclean thing to them.
21 I will hand it over to strangers as booty,
to the wicked of the earth as plunder;
they shall profane it.
22 I will avert my face from them,
so that they may profane my treasured[b] place;
the violent shall enter it,
they shall profane it.
23 Make a chain![c]
For the land is full of bloody crimes;
the city is full of violence.
24 I will bring the worst of the nations
to take possession of their houses.
I will put an end to the arrogance of the strong,
and their holy places shall be profaned.
25 When anguish comes, they will seek peace,
but there shall be none.
26 Disaster comes upon disaster,
rumor follows rumor;
they shall keep seeking a vision from the prophet;
instruction shall perish from the priest,
and counsel from the elders.
27 The king shall mourn,
the prince shall be wrapped in despair,
and the hands of the people of the land shall tremble.
According to their way I will deal with them;
according to their own judgments I will judge them.
And they shall know that I am the LORD.

8 In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord GOD fell upon me there. 2 I looked, and there was a figure that looked like a human being;[d] below what appeared to be its loins it was fire, and above the loins it was like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming amber. 3 It stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my head; and the spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north,

[a] Syr Symmachus: Heb *its*
[b] Or *secret*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Gk: Heb *like fire*

head (*baldness*) were both intentional displays of mourning (cf. 27.31; Am 8.10; Isa 22.12). The disaster will also provoke involuntary reactions of *horror* and *shame*. **19:** Zeph 1.18. **20:** *Beautiful ornament,* perhaps the gold and silver of the Temple treasury, used to fashion idolatrous images (16.17; 2 Kings 21.7). **22:** *My treasured place,* the land of Israel, and particularly Jerusalem, containing God's Temple. **23a:** Perhaps a call to be chained together in a long train for exile (cf. Nah 3.10; Jer 40.1), but see textual note *c.* **23b:** Social ethics, as well as idolatry, concern Ezekiel and the Holiness School (12.19; 28.16; cf. Gen 6.11). **24:** Human *arrogance* has no place in the Zion theology used by Ezekiel (see Introduction), which stresses God's sovereignty (Lev 26.19 [HS]). **25–27:** The confusion and brutality of the invasion and siege.

8.1–11.25: The Temple visions. 8.1–18: The vision of idolatry (September 17, 592 BCE). In his vision of wickedness in Jerusalem's Temple, Ezekiel saw beyond the observable offenses of his time into the ingrained, polluted essence of the shrine. **1:** The *elders* in exile with the prophet (also his audience in 14.1; 20.1) were the traditional leaders, from premonarchic times, of Israel's family lines and kin groups. During the exile, they stepped in to fill the leadership vacuum among the deportees. *The hand of the Lord GOD* (see 1.3n.) grips Ezekiel suddenly, yanking him into a vision of a scene far removed, both spatially and temporally, from his setting in Babylonia. **2:** The *figure* is described in terms similar to those in 1.26–27. **3:** *By a lock of my head,* cf. Bel 36. The *gateway* to the Temple's inner court is also termed the *altar gate* (v. 5), as it led from the outer court to the great altar of sacrifice. The *image of jealousy* is probably the carved image of the goddess Asherah that King Manasseh set up in the Temple (2 Kings 21.7). Though removed by Ezekiel's time (2 Kings 23.6), it stood out starkly in the proph-

to the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy. 4 And the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I had seen in the valley.

5 Then God[a] said to me, "O mortal, lift up your eyes now in the direction of the north." So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and there, north of the altar gate, in the entrance, was this image of jealousy. 6 He said to me, "Mortal, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? Yet you will see still greater abominations."

7 And he brought me to the entrance of the court; I looked, and there was a hole in the wall. 8 Then he said to me, "Mortal, dig through the wall"; and when I dug through the wall, there was an entrance. 9 He said to me, "Go in, and see the vile abominations that they are committing here." 10 So I went in and looked; there, portrayed on the wall all around, were all kinds of creeping things, and loathsome animals, and all the idols of the house of Israel. 11 Before them stood seventy of the elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah son of Shaphan standing among them. Each had his censer in his hand, and the fragrant cloud of incense was ascending. 12 Then he said to me, "Mortal, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of images? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.'" 13 He said also to me, "You will see still greater abominations that they are committing."

14 Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the LORD; women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. 15 Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O mortal? You will see still greater abominations than these."

16 And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD; there, at the entrance of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, prostrating themselves to the sun toward the east. 17 Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O mortal? Is it not bad enough that the house of Judah commits the abominations done here? Must they fill the land with violence, and provoke my anger still further? See, they are putting the branch to their nose! 18 Therefore I will act in wrath; my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; and though they cry in my hearing with a loud voice, I will not listen to them."

9 Then he cried in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, "Draw near, you executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand." 2 And six men came from

[a] Heb *he*

et's transhistorical perception. **4:** See 3.22–23. On *the glory of the God of Israel,* see 10.1–22n. **7–13:** The Temple stands infested by an ongoing rebellion against God's hierarchies of holiness that began in the wilderness period. The elders of Judah with censers inside the secret gatehouse chamber perform the very same improper act as that described in Num 16.2,17,35 (HS). Ezekiel views the scriptural story in Num 16 as prototypical, and it informs his assessment of the preexilic Temple's wickedness (see also 44.6–14n.). **10:** Cf. 23.14; Deut 4.17–18. **11:** The *elders* here are in the prophet's vision of Jerusalem, and are not the same as those in v. 1. The mention of *Jaazaniah* among the encroachers upon the holy precincts is particularly disturbing, given his family's record of faithfulness. His father *Shaphan* was active in King Josiah's reform movement (2 Kings 22), and his brother Ahikam and nephew Gedaliah assisted and protected Jeremiah (Jer 26.24; 39.14). **12:** The elders' idea that *the LORD has forsaken the land* becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (see 11.22–23). **14–15:** *Tammuz,* a Mesopotamian god; the weeping was for his descent into the underworld. Transtemporal perception is again suggested here, since Ezekiel sees the weeping rite in the sixth month (v. 1) and not in the fourth month (June-July), when it was normally practiced. **16–18:** The climactic abomination seen by Ezekiel was sun worship. Its practice in Israel is evidenced by texts such as 2 Kings 23.5,11 and by an Israelite ritual stand found at Taanach that depicts the sun as a deity. **17:** The *branch* gesture may be an obscene expression. The Hebrew text originally referred to God's nose, but the scribes toned down the offensive image. **18:** The judgment is irrevocable (see 14.12–23n.).

9.1–11: The punishment of the guilty. 1–2: From the upper gate (Jer 20.2) come the *executioners* (divine functionaries sent to punish) and *a man clothed in linen,* who functions as the LORD's scribe, as did the Mesopotamian god Nabu among the seven Babylonian planetary deities. *Linen,* a bleached fabric signifying purity, was

the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand; among them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar.

3 Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. The LORD called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his side; 4 and said to him, "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it." 5 To the others he said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and kill; your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. 6 Cut down old men, young men and young women, little children and women, but touch no one who has the mark. And begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were in front of the house. 7 Then he said to them, "Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go!" So they went out and killed in the city. 8 While they were killing, and I was left alone, I fell prostrate on my face and cried out, "Ah Lord GOD! will you destroy all who remain of Israel as you pour out your wrath upon Jerusalem?" 9 He said to me, "The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city full of perversity; for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see.' 10 As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity, but I will bring down their deeds upon their heads."

11 Then the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his side, brought back word, saying, "I have done as you commanded me."

10 Then I looked, and above the dome that was over the heads of the cherubim there appeared above them something like a sapphire,[a] in form resembling a throne. 2 He said to the man clothed in linen, "Go within the wheelwork underneath the cherubim; fill your hands with burning coals from among the cherubim, and scatter them over the city." He went in as I looked on. 3 Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the house when the man went in; and a cloud filled the inner court. 4 Then the glory of the LORD rose up from the cherub to the threshold of the house; the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the glory of the LORD. 5 The sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty[b] when he speaks.

6 When he commanded the man clothed in linen, "Take fire from within the wheelwork, from among the cherubim," he went in and stood beside a wheel. 7 And a cherub stretched out his hand from among the cherubim to the fire that was among the

[a] Or *lapis lazuli*
[b] Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

worn by divine messengers (Dan 10.5) and also by priests (44.17; Lev 6.10 [HS]). **3:** On the departure of the *glory,* see 10.1–22n. *The cherub,* in the singular (also 10.4), is used of the inanimate pair of statues in the Temple that formed part of the divine throne. The actual living entities are referred to with the Heb plural, "cherubim." **4:** The *mark* was the Heb letter "taw," made like an X. **6:** The *elders* are those of 8.16. **7:** Ezekiel's Holiness School traditions stressed that corpses defile (Lev 21.1; Num 5.2–3; 9.6; 19.11,13 [HS]). **8:** *All who remain,* those remaining in Palestine after the initial deportation of 597 BCE.

10.1–22 and **11.22–25: The departure of the LORD's glory from the Temple** is repeatedly described in each of three versions of Jerusalem's abandonment (9.3; 10.4; 11.22). *The glory of the LORD* is the revealed, objective presence of the majesty of God, manifesting God's holiness in fiery radiance (1.28n.; Lev 9.23; Num 20.6). The pattern of movement of the glory of the LORD helps structure the book of Ezekiel. The glory has been present in Jerusalem, even when the city's inhabitants felt forsaken by it (8.4,12b), but because of their wickedness it departs, first to the doorway of the Temple (also 9.3), and then to the east gate of the Temple's outer court (10.18–19). It then leaves the desecrated sanctuary. The departure continues in 11.22–25, where the glory heads east over the Mount of Olives toward Babylon. It was in Babylonia that Ezekiel first saw the glory of the LORD (1.28; 3.22–23; cf. 8.4; 11.16). Eventually, the prophet envisions it returning to the restored Temple (43.2–5; 44.4). **1:** *Cherubim,* see 1.5–14n. **2:** *Man clothed in linen,* see 9.1–2n. *Burning coals,* cf. Isa 31.9; Ps 18.10–13. **3–4:** The throne-chariot comes to collect the glory of the LORD from the cherub statues (see 9.3n.). The *cloud* filling the

cherubim, took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed in linen, who took it and went out. [8] The cherubim appeared to have the form of a human hand under their wings.

[9] I looked, and there were four wheels beside the cherubim, one beside each cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like gleaming beryl. [10] And as for their appearance, the four looked alike, something like a wheel within a wheel. [11] When they moved, they moved in any of the four directions without veering as they moved; but in whatever direction the front wheel faced, the others followed without veering as they moved. [12] Their entire body, their rims, their spokes, their wings, and the wheels—the wheels of the four of them—were full of eyes all around. [13] As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing "the wheelwork." [14] Each one had four faces: the first face was that of the cherub, the second face was that of a human being, the third that of a lion, and the fourth that of an eagle.

[15] The cherubim rose up. These were the living creatures that I saw by the river Chebar. [16] When the cherubim moved, the wheels moved beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise up from the earth, the wheels at their side did not veer. [17] When they stopped, the others stopped, and when they rose up, the others rose up with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in them.

[18] Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house and stopped above the cherubim. [19] The cherubim lifted up their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight as they went out with the wheels beside them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

[20] These were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they were cherubim. [21] Each had four faces, each four wings, and underneath their wings something like human hands. [22] As for what their faces were like, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the river Chebar. Each one moved straight ahead.

11 The spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the house of the LORD, which faces east. There, at the entrance of the gateway, were twenty-five men; among them I saw Jaazaniah son of Azzur, and Pelatiah son of Benaiah, officials of the people. [2] He said to me, "Mortal, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel in this city; [3] they say, 'The time is not near to build houses; this city is the pot, and we are the meat.' [4] Therefore prophesy against them; prophesy, O mortal."

[5] Then the spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and he said to me, "Say, Thus says the LORD: This is what you think, O house of Israel; I know the things that come into your mind. [6] You have killed many in this city, and have filled its streets with the slain. [7] Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: The slain whom you have placed within it are the meat, and this city is the pot; but you shall be taken out of it. [8] You have feared the sword; and I will bring the sword upon you, says the Lord GOD. [9] I will take you out of it and give you over to the hands of foreigners, and execute judgments

Temple recalls Ex 16.10; 40.34–35 (HS); it both conceals and reveals the divine presence. **12:** *Eyes all around,* see 1.18n. **14:** *That of the cherub,* the bull face of 1.10 (some ancient cherubim were bovine). **15:** *Chebar,* 1.1–3n.

11.1–25: Judgment and promise. 11.1–13: A disputation over the city. *Jaazaniah* and *Pelatiah* are otherwise unknown *officials of the people* (a postexilic title). *Wicked counsel* perhaps refers to the plot between Egypt and the pro-Egyptian counselors of King Zedekiah of Judah against the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar (Jer 27.1–3; 37.5,7,11). **3:** Having a false confidence in Zion's ironclad invulnerability (*the pot*), they assure the populace of the city's security. They put off domestic construction, perhaps because they have now appropriated the houses of the slain (v. 6) and of the deportees (v. 15). Alternatively, they are urging that all construction be concentrated on fortifying Jerusalem for their planned rebellion. *The pot,* an impenetrable metal cauldron or a sturdy crock where food was safely stored. Ezekiel returns to the symbol of the pot in 24.3–8. **5–13:** Ezekiel has formulated a far more sophisticated Zion theology than their rather denuded conception (see 1.15–21n.,26–28n.). Accusing the leaders of gross violence (7.23; ch 22), he tells them that a morally complacent trust in Zion will not protect them (cf. 24.1–14), but they will be judged at *the border of Israel* (v. 11; perhaps Riblah; see 6.14n.; 2 Kings

upon you. 10 You shall fall by the sword; I will judge you at the border of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD. 11 This city shall not be your pot, and you shall not be the meat inside it; I will judge you at the border of Israel. 12 Then you shall know that I am the LORD, whose statutes you have not followed, and whose ordinances you have not kept, but you have acted according to the ordinances of the nations that are around you."

13 Now, while I was prophesying, Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. Then I fell down on my face, cried with a loud voice, and said, "Ah Lord GOD! will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel?"

14 Then the word of the LORD came to me: 15 Mortal, your kinsfolk, your own kin, your fellow exiles,[a] the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, "They have gone far from the LORD; to us this land is given for a possession." 16 Therefore say: Thus says the Lord GOD: Though I removed them far away among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a little while[b] in the countries where they have gone. 17 Therefore say: Thus says the Lord GOD: I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. 18 When they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. 19 I will give them one[c] heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God. 21 But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations,[d] I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, says the Lord GOD.

22 Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. 23 And the glory of the LORD ascended from the middle of the city, and stopped on the mountain east of the city. 24 The spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen left me. 25 And I told the exiles all the things that the LORD had shown me.

12 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 Mortal, you are living in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, who have ears to hear but do not hear; 3 for they are a rebellious house.

a Gk Syr: Heb *people of your kindred*
b Or *to some extent*
c Another reading is *a new*
d Cn: Heb *And to the heart of their detestable things and their abominations their heart goes*

25.6,18–21). **13:** Pelatiah's death is a prediction within the prophetic vision, not an actual event. Ezekiel's desperate question at the end of this verse receives a reassuring negative answer in vv. 14–21, an authentically early (pre-586 BCE, see v. 15) oracle of promise in Ezekiel.

11.14–21: The future lies with the exiles. This passage disputes the claim of those who remained in the land that the exiles were bearing God's punishment, and that their property thus now belonged to those who remained. Ezekiel warns them that God is with his exiled people and will restore them. It is the exile group that constitutes the true Israel (cf. 20.41–42). **15:** *Your fellow exiles,* see textual note *a*; the rare Heb noun translated "kindred" denotes people who, according to the Holiness School, should be defended against the permanent alienation of their land (Lev 25.25–28). The Jerusalemites are violating Holiness School traditions (see 45.8–9n.). **16:** *A sanctuary,* the Hebrew indicates that the glory of the LORD is now tabernacling with the exiles in Babylonia rather than with those who remained behind (v. 23). **17–21:** Promise of restoration to the exiles. The prophecy is authentic to the prophet's message before the city's fall in 586 BCE, as shown by its concern with contemporaries inhabiting Jerusalem before its destruction (v. 21). **19:** New *heart,* see 36.26n. **20:** The new covenant, cf. 16.60; 36.27–28; 37.23,27. **24:** *Chaldea,* Babylonia.

11.22–25: Two reports conclude the Temple visions. **22–23:** See 10.1–22n. *The mountain east of the city* is the Mount of Olives.

12.1–20: Two symbolic actions. 12.1–16: First symbol, an exile's baggage. Ezekiel symbolizes the Jerusalemites' coming exile by collecting whatever goods exiles could carry (Jer 10.17; 46.19) and leaving the city. Features within this text later revealed themselves as stunningly applicable to events surrounding Zedekiah

Therefore, mortal, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight; you shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. 4 You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile; and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who go into exile. 5 Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry the baggage through it. 6 In their sight you shall lift the baggage on your shoulder, and carry it out in the dark; you shall cover your face, so that you may not see the land; for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel.

7 I did just as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day, as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands; I brought it out in the dark, carrying it on my shoulder in their sight.

8 In the morning the word of the LORD came to me: 9 Mortal, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, "What are you doing?" 10 Say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel in it." 11 Say, "I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall go into exile, into captivity." 12 And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage on his shoulder in the dark, and shall go out; he[a] shall dig through the wall and carry it through; he shall cover his face, so that he may not see the land with his eyes. 13 I will spread my net over him, and he shall be caught in my snare; and I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it; and he shall die there. 14 I will scatter to every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops; and I will unsheathe the sword behind them. 15 And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them through the countries. 16 But I will let a few of them escape from the sword, from famine and pestilence, so that they may tell of all their abominations among the nations where they go; then they shall know that I am the LORD.

17 The word of the LORD came to me: 18 Mortal, eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and with fearfulness; 19 and say to the people of the land, Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with fearfulness, and drink their water in dismay, because their land shall be stripped of all it contains, on account of the violence of all those who live in it. 20 The inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land shall become a desolation; and you shall know that I am the LORD.

21 The word of the LORD came to me: 22 Mortal, what is this proverb of yours about the land of Israel, which says, "The days are prolonged, and every vision comes to nothing"? 23 Tell them therefore, "Thus says the Lord GOD: I will put an end to this proverb, and they shall use it no more as a proverb in Israel." But say to them, The days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision. 24 For there shall no longer be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. 25 But I the LORD will speak the word that I speak, and it will be fulfilled. It will no longer be delayed; but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and fulfill it, says the Lord GOD.

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *they*

(the *prince,* v. 12), who left Jerusalem by night at the city's fall. The oracle was then revised to bring out this applicability. It now specifies how Zedekiah was captured (17.20) and blinded (*may not see,* vv. 6,12; 2 Kings 25.4,7; Jer 39.1–10). **2:** Cf. Isa 6.10. **3–4:** *An exile's baggage,* deportees typically carried large sacks with supplies and personal items for the long trek into exile. Such sacks appear in several Assyrian reliefs, including a depiction of Judean captives from Lachish. **5:** *Dig through the wall,* either the prophet switched roles and portrayed Jerusalem's besiegers breaching the city's walls (cf. Jer 39.2) or he depicts fugitives attempting to dig their way out of the city (through partially breached walls). **12:** The Heb text may mean "they [the besiegers] will dig through the wall to bring [the prince] out through it" (see textual note *a*). **14:** 5.2,12; 17.21; Lev 26.33 (HS). **15–16:** 14.21–23.

12.17–20: Second symbol, eating with trembling. The people's emotional breakdown at the approaching invasion (cf. Ps 80.5) is prophesied.

12.21–28: Disputations about prophecy. Ezekiel condemns the people's skepticism about prophecies of

[26] The word of the LORD came to me:
[27] Mortal, the house of Israel is saying, "The vision that he sees is for many years ahead; he prophesies for distant times." [28] Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be fulfilled, says the Lord GOD.

13 The word of the LORD came to me:
[2] Mortal, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are prophesying; say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination: "Hear the word of the LORD!" [3] Thus says the Lord GOD, Alas for the senseless prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! [4] Your prophets have been like jackals among ruins, O Israel. [5] You have not gone up into the breaches, or repaired a wall for the house of Israel, so that it might stand in battle on the day of the LORD. [6] They have envisioned falsehood and lying divination; they say, "Says the LORD," when the LORD has not sent them, and yet they wait for the fulfillment of their word! [7] Have you not seen a false vision or uttered a lying divination, when you have said, "Says the LORD," even though I did not speak?

[8] Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have uttered falsehood and envisioned lies, I am against you, says the Lord GOD. [9] My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations; they shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am the Lord GOD. [10] Because, in truth, because they have misled my people, saying, "Peace," when there is no peace; and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets[a] smear whitewash on it. [11] Say to those who smear whitewash on it that it shall fall. There will be a deluge of rain,[b] great hailstones will fall, and a stormy wind will break out. [12] When the wall falls, will it not be said to you, "Where is the whitewash you smeared on it?" [13] Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: In my wrath I will make a stormy wind break out, and in my anger there shall be a deluge of rain, and hailstones in wrath to destroy it. [14] I will break down the wall that you have smeared with whitewash, and bring it to the ground, so that its foundation will be laid bare; when it falls, you shall perish within it; and you shall know that I am the LORD. [15] Thus I will spend my wrath upon the wall, and upon those who have smeared it with whitewash; and I will say to you, The wall is no more, nor those who smeared it— [16] the prophets of Israel who prophesied concerning Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for it, when there was no peace, says the Lord GOD.

[17] As for you, mortal, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own imagination; prophesy against them [18] and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the women who sew bands on all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every height, in the hunt for hu-

[a] Heb *they*
[b] Heb *rain and you*

judgment (vv. 22,27; Jer 5.12; 17.15). **26–28:** Second disputation.

13.1–23: Oracles against false prophecy. 1–16: A major challenge for Ezekiel was opposing false prophets, particularly ones advocating nationalistic hope. Such prophets gave the people a false security that robbed them of their chance to find life amid the coming judgment. **4:** *Jackals among ruins* have no regard for their surroundings and actually contribute to their decay (Lam 5.18). **5:** True prophets would care enough about their people to go *up into the breaches* (like Moses, Ps 106.23), i.e., to risk their lives by arguing with God on the people's behalf (9.8; 11.13). *Day of the LORD,* see 7.5–9n. **10–16:** *Whitewash,* better "plaster." The false prophets' messages (Jer 23; 27–29), like mud-plaster that dissolves in a storm, were futile attempts to bolster the people, despite their ultimate defenselessness before God's inevitable coming judgment. *Peace . . . no peace,* cf. Jer 6.14; 8.11.

13.17–23: Against sorceresses. For a meager fee (v. 19), some exiles safeguarded the wicked and attacked their enemies through black magic. *Bands* and *veils* (perhaps "head clothes" or "necklaces" with amulets attached) were likely magical devices used in Babylonian witchcraft to attack and defend, respectively. Magic was prevalent in ancient Babylonia. **18:** The hunting may have involved snatching victims' souls from their bodies. The sorceresses entrap souls like hunters trapping prey, luring people to their deaths.

man lives! Will you hunt down lives among my people, and maintain your own lives? 19 You have profaned me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, putting to death persons who should not die and keeping alive persons who should not live, by your lies to my people, who listen to lies.

20 Therefore thus says the Lord God: I am against your bands with which you hunt lives;[a] I will tear them from your arms, and let the lives go free, the lives that you hunt down like birds. 21 I will tear off your veils, and save my people from your hands; they shall no longer be prey in your hands; and you shall know that I am the Lord. 22 Because you have disheartened the righteous falsely, although I have not disheartened them, and you have encouraged the wicked not to turn from their wicked way and save their lives; 23 therefore you shall no longer see false visions or practice divination; I will save my people from your hand. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

14 Certain elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me. 2 And the word of the Lord came to me: 3 Mortal, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and placed their iniquity as a stumbling block before them; shall I let myself be consulted by them? 4 Therefore speak to them, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Any of those of the house of Israel who take their idols into their hearts and place their iniquity as a stumbling block before them, and yet come to the prophet—I the Lord will answer those who come with the multitude of their idols, 5 in order that I may take hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, all of whom are estranged from me through their idols.

6 Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Repent and turn away from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. 7 For any of those of the house of Israel, or of the aliens who reside in Israel, who separate themselves from me, taking their idols into their hearts and placing their iniquity as a stumbling block before them, and yet come to a prophet to inquire of me by him, I the Lord will answer them myself. 8 I will set my face against them; I will make them a sign and a byword and cut them off from the midst of my people; and you shall know that I am the Lord.

9 If a prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. 10 And they shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the inquirer and the punishment of the prophet shall be the same— 11 so that the house of Israel may no longer go astray from me, nor defile themselves any more with all their transgressions. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God, says the Lord God.

12 The word of the Lord came to me: 13 Mortal, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it, and break its staff of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it human beings and animals, 14 even if Noah, Daniel,[b] and Job, these three, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness, says the Lord God. 15 If I send wild animals through the land to ravage it, so that it is made desolate, and no one may

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *lives for birds*
[b] Or, as otherwise read, *Danel*

14.1–11: A legal case involving consultation. Ezekiel uses the legal language of the Holiness School to indict sinful elders who try to consult God. Consultation is refused, since the words for the situation have already been inscribed as scripture (see 3.22–27n.). For now there will be no negotiation, only performance (12.28). **5:** *Idols,* not necessarily only false gods here, but any religious duplicity. **6:** *Repent,* cf. 18.21,30; 33.11. **7:** *Aliens,* see 47.21–23n. **9–11:** Deceived prophets will be punished similarly to those inquiring of them. For the Lord deceiving prophets, see 1 Kings 22.23.

14.12–23: The inevitability of God's judgment. Infamous Sodom might have been spared for a sufficient number of righteous people (Gen 18.22–33), but Jerusalem's impending punishment is inevitable (since it is already a matter of scriptural record, 2.8b–3.3n.). Under these circumstances, only righteous individuals themselves can be saved. **14:** Noah (Gen 6.9) and Job (Job 1.1) are renowned in the Bible for their righteousness. Ezekiel's references to Daniel (also 28.3) suggest the Canaanite Danel (see textual note *b*) of the Ugaritic texts (ca.

pass through because of the animals; [16] even if these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they would save neither sons nor daughters; they alone would be saved, but the land would be desolate. [17] Or if I bring a sword upon that land and say, "Let a sword pass through the land," and I cut off human beings and animals from it; [18] though these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they would save neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be saved. [19] Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off humans and animals from it; [20] even if Noah, Daniel,[a] and Job were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they would save neither son nor daughter; they would save only their own lives by their righteousness.

[21] For thus says the Lord God: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four deadly acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild animals, and pestilence, to cut off humans and animals from it! [22] Yet, survivors shall be left in it, sons and daughters who will be brought out; they will come out to you. When you see their ways and their deeds, you will be consoled for the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, for all that I have brought upon it. [23] They shall console you, when you see their ways and their deeds; and you shall know that it was not without cause that I did all that I have done in it, says the Lord God.

15 The word of the Lord came to me:
[2] O mortal, how does the wood of the vine surpass all other wood—
the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest?
[3] Is wood taken from it to make anything?
Does one take a peg from it on which to hang any object?
[4] It is put in the fire for fuel;
when the fire has consumed both ends of it
and the middle of it is charred,
is it useful for anything?
[5] When it was whole it was used for nothing;
how much less—when the fire has consumed it,
and it is charred—
can it ever be used for anything!
[6] Therefore thus says the Lord God: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. [7] I will set my face against them; although they escape from the fire, the fire shall still consume them; and you shall know that I am the Lord, when I set my face against them. [8] And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, says the Lord God.

16 The word of the Lord came to me:
[2] Mortal, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, [3] and say, Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite. [4] As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in cloths. [5] No eye pitied you, to do any of these things

[a] Or, as otherwise read, *Danel*

1400 BCE), who is described as an ideally righteous ruler. **21:** On the four agents of divine judgment, see 5.17 (cf. 5.10n.; 33.27). The four scenarios in vv. 13–14,15–16,17–18, and 19–20 each highlighted one of the agents. **22–23:** *Console,* since their wicked behavior would prove the justice of God's judgment.

15.1–8: Analogy of the useless vine. The wood of the vine is good only when it is cultivated in a vineyard and produces; a wild vine of the forest is practically useless—its fruit may be poisonous (2 Kings 4.39–40), and it is unusable for woodworking. This metaphor for Jerusalem shows it has no worthiness on its own. **7:** *They escape*d from total destruction back in 597 BCE, when the Babylonians first attacked Jerusalem.

16.1–63: The allegory of the unfaithful wife. 1–8: Jerusalem, the foundling. 3: Jerusalem's historical ancestry here suggests a predisposition to apostasy. Ezekiel conveys a ruthless theological image of sin as deep rooted and ineradicable (cf. Gen 8.21; Ps 51.5). The *Canaanites, Amorites,* and *Hittites* were Israel's predecessors in the Promised Land (e.g., Ex 3.8,17; Josh 3.10), whom God commanded Israel to drive out. According to Ezekiel's Holiness School traditions, they were depraved peoples who defiled the land through their abominations (vv. 44–52; Lev 18.24–25). As Israel took root in the land, it did not fully drive out the inhabitants but often assimilated them, their practices, and their cities. The prophet is literally correct that Jerusalem was a Canaanite city, which

for you out of compassion for you; but you were thrown out in the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born.

6 I passed by you, and saw you flailing about in your blood. As you lay in your blood, I said to you, "Live! 7 and grow up[a] like a plant of the field." You grew up and became tall and arrived at full womanhood;[b] your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare.

8 I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine. 9 Then I bathed you with water and washed off the blood from you, and anointed you with oil. 10 I clothed you with embroidered cloth and with sandals of fine leather; I bound you in fine linen and covered you with rich fabric.[c] 11 I adorned you with ornaments: I put bracelets on your arms, a chain on your neck, 12 a ring on your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. 13 You were adorned with gold and silver, while your clothing was of fine linen, rich fabric,[c] and embroidered cloth. You had choice flour and honey and oil for food. You grew exceedingly beautiful, fit to be a queen. 14 Your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of my splendor that I had bestowed on you, says the Lord God.

15 But you trusted in your beauty, and played the whore because of your fame, and lavished your whorings on any passer-by.[d] 16 You took some of your garments, and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore; nothing like this has ever been or ever shall be.[c] 17 You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and my silver that I had given you, and made for yourself male images, and with them played the whore; 18 and you took your embroidered garments to cover them, and set my oil and my incense before them. 19 Also my bread that I gave you—I fed you with choice flour and oil and honey—you set it before them as a pleasing odor; and so it was, says the Lord God. 20 You took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. As if your whorings were not enough! 21 You slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering to them. 22 And in all your abominations and your whorings you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, flailing about in your blood.

23 After all your wickedness (woe, woe to you! says the Lord God), 24 you built yourself a platform and made yourself a lofty place in every square; 25 at the head of every

[a] Gk Syr: Heb *Live! I made you a myriad*
[b] Cn: Heb *ornament of ornaments*
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[d] Heb adds *let it be his*

King David captured and assimilated (2 Sam 5.6–10). **4:** Rubbing the skin with salt may have been thought to make it firm; alternatively, the salt may have functioned as an antibacterial agent. Wrapping infants in swaddling *cloths* was a sign of care (Wis 7.4), which this infant was not given. **5–7:** By God's intervention, this abandoned and exposed infant grew into *full womanhood*. *Breasts* and pubic *hair* indicate sexual maturity. **8:** *Covering* a woman's *nakedness* with a garment is a euphemism for taking a wife and sharing in her sexuality (Ruth 3.9; Deut 22.30; 27.20). *I pledged myself,* see 20.5. The bilateral, mutually committed, and legally binding relationship of marriage constituted a *covenant* in the ancient world (Mal 2.14; Prov 2.17). Several biblical texts depict God's covenant with Israel as a marriage (Hos 1–3; Jer 2.2; 31.32; Isa 50.1; 54.5–6). In like manner, ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties spoke of the covenant relationship between sovereigns and their subjects in terms of love. **9–14: The beautiful bride. 9:** The *blood* may signify the breaking of the virginal bride's hymen (see Deut 22.13–21). Alternatively, due to the time compression of the allegory, the birth blood of v. 6 may still be in mind. **15–34: Sexual betrayal**. The image of Israel as a sexually unfaithful wife was first popularized by Hosea, for whom the image had both literal reference to sexualized worship (Hos 4.10–14) and metaphorical reference to religious apostasy in general (Hos 2.13). Ezekiel adopts the image as a metaphor from Hosea and Jeremiah (Jer 3.1–13), intensifies it to shocking extremes, and expands it into a quasi-biography of Israel's infidelity. This biography will climax in Jerusalem's destruction. **20–22:** Children were offered as human sacrifices (20.26,31; 23.37; 2 Kings 23.10; Jer 7.31; 32.35; Isa 57.5,9), against the prohibitions of the Holiness School (Lev 18.21; 20.2). **23–34:** The Zion

street you built your lofty place and prostituted your beauty, offering yourself to every passer-by, and multiplying your whoring.
26 You played the whore with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, multiplying your whoring, to provoke me to anger. 27 Therefore I stretched out my hand against you, reduced your rations, and gave you up to the will of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. 28 You played the whore with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; you played the whore with them, and still you were not satisfied. 29 You multiplied your whoring with Chaldea, the land of merchants; and even with this you were not satisfied.

30 How sick is your heart, says the Lord GOD, that you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen whore; 31 building your platform at the head of every street, and making your lofty place in every square! Yet you were not like a whore, because you scorned payment.
32 Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! 33 Gifts are given to all whores; but you gave your gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from all around for your whorings. 34 So you were different from other women in your whorings: no one solicited you to play the whore; and you gave payment, while no payment was given to you; you were different.

35 Therefore, O whore, hear the word of the LORD: 36 Thus says the Lord GOD, Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whoring with your lovers, and because of all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them, 37 therefore, I will gather all your lovers, with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated; I will gather them against you from all around, and will uncover your nakedness to them, so that they may see all your nakedness. 38 I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring blood upon you in wrath and jealousy. 39 I will deliver you into their hands, and they shall throw down your platform and break down your lofty places; they shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful objects and leave you naked and bare. 40 They shall bring up a mob against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. 41 They shall burn your houses and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; I will stop you from playing the whore, and you shall also make no more payments. 42 So I will satisfy my fury on you, and my jealousy shall turn away from you; I will be calm, and will be angry no longer. 43 Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things; therefore, I have returned your deeds upon your head, says the Lord GOD.

Have you not committed lewdness beyond all your abominations? 44 See, everyone who

theology (see Introduction), in which Ezekiel was steeped, advocated trust in God's exclusive sovereignty over geopolitics (cf. Isa 7.8–9). Given this divine prerogative, foreign alliances were a form of unfaithfulness. **26:** Israel's illicit relations with Egypt culminated for Ezekiel in the negotiations in the early sixth century BCE of King Zedekiah of Judah with Pharaoh Psammetichus II for assistance against Babylonia (17.7n.). *Lustful neighbors,* the Hebrew denotes their oversized genitals (cf. 23.20). **27:** A probable reference to the Assyrian king Sennacherib's transfer of Judean territory to the Philistine cities of Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza in 701 BCE. Sennacherib's annals describe the event. *Who were ashamed,* even the foreign Philistines were embarrassed by Jerusalem's behavior. **28:** Judah willingly became an Assyrian vassal in 734 BCE (see 2 Kings 16.7–8), after which Assyria dominated the region until the rise of the Babylonians, who destroyed their empire between 614 and 609 BCE. Assyrian records mention that King Manasseh of Judah (698/687–642 BCE) was a loyal vassal. **29:** *Chaldea,* Babylonia. After the battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE, Babylonia became the leading political power in Syria-Palestine. Already in the eighth century BCE, King Hezekiah of Judah entertained a Babylonian embassy to the dismay of the prophet Isaiah, according to 2 Kings 20.12–19. Later, King Jehoiakim of Judah (608–598 BCE) became a vassal of Babylonia (2 Kings 24.1) as did King Zedekiah (597–586 BCE; 17.13–14; 2 Kings 24.20; 2 Chr 36.13). **30–34:** Instead of receiving income for her services, Jerusalem invited her lovers and paid them. **33:** *Gifts,* see 2 Kings 16.7–9; 18.14–16; 23.34–35; Jer 2.18 for examples of Judah's payment of tribute to foreign powers. **35–43: The threat of punishment.** Foreign nations (her lovers) will turn against her. God will divorce her and expose her to be stoned

uses proverbs will use this proverb about you, "Like mother, like daughter." 45 You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. 46 Your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters. 47 You not only followed their ways, and acted according to their abominations; within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways. 48 As I live, says the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. 49 This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. 50 They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it. 51 Samaria has not committed half your sins; you have committed more abominations than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed. 52 Bear your disgrace, you also, for you have brought about for your sisters a more favorable judgment; because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you. So be ashamed, you also, and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous.

53 I will restore their fortunes, the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and the fortunes of Samaria and her daughters, and I will restore your own fortunes along with theirs, 54 in order that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, becoming a consolation to them. 55 As for your sisters, Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former state, Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former state, and you and your daughters shall return to your former state. 56 Was not your sister Sodom a byword in your mouth in the day of your pride, 57 before your wickedness was uncovered? Now you are a mockery to the daughters of Aram[a] and all her neighbors, and to the daughters of the Philistines, those all around who despise you. 58 You must bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations, says the Lord.

59 Yes, thus says the Lord God: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath, breaking the covenant; 60 yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. 61 Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I[b] take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of my[c] covenant with you. 62 I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, 63 in order that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord God.

[a] Another reading is *Edom*
[b] Syr: Heb *you*
[c] Heb lacks *my*

(Lev 20.10). **44–58: Additional accusation.** This section elaborates the preceding theme, showing Jerusalem to be so much worse than *Samaria* (2 Kings 17) and *Sodom* (Gen 19), both of which were destroyed, that they *appear righteous* by comparison (Jer 3.11). **46:** *Elder sister,* better "bigger sister" (which makes more sense historically). Likewise, Sodom is a "smaller" sister, not necessarily a *younger* one (by Canaanite geopolitical standards, Sodom was an unimpressive city-state). **49:** Ezekiel does not represent Sodom's characteristic sin in sexual terms but primarily as social and moral injustice, especially toward the *poor and needy*. His perspective expands on Gen 18.20 and 19.13. Ezekiel's Holiness School traditions especially stressed social justice and care for the poor (Lev 19.9–15,33–35; 23.22; 25.13–17 [HS]). **53–58:** God will restore all three sisters, humiliating Jerusalem by putting it on the same footing as Samaria and Sodom. **57:** *Aram* should probably be read as "Edom" (see textual note *a*; cf. 36.5). **59–63: Jerusalem's restoration.** God will remember the covenant with the ancestors, as the Holiness School anticipated (Lev 26.43–45), as well as his marriage contract with Jerusalem (v. 8). **62:** *Will establish my covenant* (see also v. 60), a phrase characteristic of the Holiness School (e.g., Gen 17.7; Ex 6.4; Lev 26.9 [HS]).

17 The word of the LORD came to me:
2 O mortal, propound a riddle, and
speak an allegory to the house of Israel. 3 Say:
Thus says the Lord GOD:
A great eagle, with great wings and long
pinions,
rich in plumage of many colors,
came to the Lebanon.
He took the top of the cedar,
4 broke off its topmost shoot;
he carried it to a land of trade,
set it in a city of merchants.
5 Then he took a seed from the land,
placed it in fertile soil;
a plant[a] by abundant waters,
he set it like a willow twig.
6 It sprouted and became a vine
spreading out, but low;
its branches turned toward him,
its roots remained where it stood.
So it became a vine;
it brought forth branches,
put forth foliage.

7 There was another great eagle,
with great wings and much
plumage.
And see! This vine stretched out
its roots toward him;
it shot out its branches toward him,
so that he might water it.
From the bed where it was planted
8 it was transplanted
to good soil by abundant waters,
so that it might produce branches
and bear fruit
and become a noble vine.
9 Say: Thus says the Lord GOD:
Will it prosper?
Will he not pull up its roots,
cause its fruit to rot[a] and wither,
its fresh sprouting leaves to fade?
No strong arm or mighty army will be
needed
to pull it from its roots.
10 When it is transplanted, will it thrive?
When the east wind strikes it,
will it not utterly wither,
wither on the bed where it grew?
11 Then the word of the LORD came to me:
12 Say now to the rebellious house: Do you
not know what these things mean? Tell them:
The king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, took
its king and its officials, and brought them
back with him to Babylon. 13 He took one of
the royal offspring and made a covenant with
him, putting him under oath (he had taken
away the chief men of the land), 14 so that the
kingdom might be humble and not lift itself
up, and that by keeping his covenant it might
stand. 15 But he rebelled against him by send-
ing ambassadors to Egypt, in order that they
might give him horses and a large army. Will
he succeed? Can one escape who does such
things? Can he break the covenant and yet
escape? 16 As I live, says the Lord GOD, surely
in the place where the king resides who made
him king, whose oath he despised, and whose
covenant with him he broke—in Babylon he
shall die. 17 Pharaoh with his mighty army
and great company will not help him in war,
when ramps are cast up and siege walls built
to cut off many lives. 18 Because he despised
the oath and broke the covenant, because he
gave his hand and yet did all these things, he
shall not escape. 19 Therefore thus says the

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain

17.1–24: The allegorical fable of the eagles. Verses 1–10 are the fable, and vv. 11–21 interpret it. **1–10: The fable. 3–4:** *Great eagle,* the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar; *Lebanon,* Jerusalem; *the top of the cedar,* house of David (Jer 22.23); *topmost shoot,* Jehoiachin, Judean king who was exiled to Babylon in 597 BCE (2 Kings 24.8–16); *land of trade,* Babylonia; *city of merchants,* Babylon; *seed from the land,* Zedekiah, the last king of Judah (597–586 BCE). **5:** *Placed it in fertile soil,* i.e., made him king in Judah (2 Kings 24.17). **6:** *Low,* submissive to King Nebuchadrezzar. *Branches turned toward him,* loyal in his vassalage. **7:** *Another great eagle,* Psammetichus II of Egypt (594–588 BCE), with whom Zedekiah negotiated for assistance against Babylonia (Jer 37.5). **9–10:** Zedekiah will be unable to resist Nebuchadrezzar (*he,* v. 9; *the east wind*, v. 10) for long, though the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem lasted nineteen months (2 Kings 25.1–4). **11–21: The interpretation. 13:** *Under oath,* 2 Chr 36.13. Nebuchadrezzar would have to punish Zedekiah for violating his oath of loyalty (see v. 7n.). **17:** The original text read, "and not with a mighty army shall he [Nebuchadrezzar] deal with him" (as in v. 9b). The verse was revised after the siege of Jerusalem to reflect historical detail, thus bringing out the prophecy's correlation with its fulfillment.

Lord God: As I live, I will surely return upon his head my oath that he despised, and my covenant that he broke. 20 I will spread my net over him, and he shall be caught in my snare; I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with him there for the treason he has committed against me. 21 All the pick[a] of his troops shall fall by the sword, and the survivors shall be scattered to every wind; and you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken.

22 Thus says the Lord God:
I myself will take a sprig
from the lofty top of a cedar;
I will set it out.
I will break off a tender one
from the topmost of its young twigs;
I myself will plant it
on a high and lofty mountain.
23 On the mountain height of Israel
I will plant it,
in order that it may produce boughs and
bear fruit,
and become a noble cedar.
Under it every kind of bird will live;
in the shade of its branches will nest
winged creatures of every kind.
24 All the trees of the field shall know
that I am the Lord.
I bring low the high tree,
I make high the low tree;
I dry up the green tree
and make the dry tree flourish.
I the Lord have spoken;
I will accomplish it.

18 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? 3 As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. 4 Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.

5 If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right— 6 if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman during her menstrual period, 7 does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, 8 does not take advance or accrued interest, withholds

[a] Another reading is *fugitives*

19–21: Just as Nebuchadrezzar will not overlook Zedekiah's breaking his oath of loyalty, so also will God punish him for breaking the Lord's covenant with Israel (16.59). **22–24: The fable expanded,** an allegory about the restoration of the Davidic monarchy. As in v. 3, the *top of a cedar* is the house of David, but now God becomes the great eagle who is protecting and cultivating it. For the image of the coming king as a *twig* or branch, cf. Isa 11.1; Jer 23.5–6; 33.15; Zech 3.8; 6.12. Other passages in Ezekiel that speak of a new, ideal Davidic king include 29.21; 34.23–24; 37.24–25. *Lofty mountain,* Mount Zion (cf. Isa 2.2). *Noble cedar,* the archetypical "cosmic tree" in Near Eastern mythology. Planted at the center of the world, it connects heaven and earth and offers shelter to all peoples.

18.1–32: Being accountable. 1–4: The text does not necessarily deny the notion of corporate (communal) punishment or contradict the statement of Ex 20.5 that parents can pass on the consequences of sin to their children. In places such as 16.44 and 20.4,30 Ezekiel affirms that sins and their punishments may involve long-term consequences for individuals and for the corporate community. What Ezekiel is stressing is that the exiles cannot hide behind a defense of fatalism but must take responsibility for their present circumstances and their future. The prophet's audience is far from an innocent generation, and it is not appropriate for them to view their present fate as inexorably determined by past actions of their ancestors (cf. Jer 31.29–30, which quotes the same *proverb*). **4:** Ezekiel's stress on individual responsibility is not innovative but recalls Num 16:22–24 (HS; cf. Deut 24.16). God, who owns *all lives,* i.e., "the spirits of all flesh" (Num 16.22 [HS]), desires life for each human creature (cf. Ezek 18.23,32; 33:11), and those Israelites who separate themselves from all offenders against God's holiness will surely find salvation in the midst of God's judgment (Num 16.24 [HS]; cf. Deut 24.16). **5–9:** First, righteous generation. The list includes both ritual and ethical provisions; Ezekiel's theology shares with the Holiness School a concern with the entire range of sin from ceremonial to moral. **6:** *Eat upon the mountains,* idolatrous sacrifices at high places (6.1–14). *Lift up his eyes,* seek aid from (cf. 23.27; 33.25). *Defile his neighbor's wife,* Lev 18.20 (HS). *Menstrual period,* Lev 18.19 (HS). **7:** *Oppress anyone,* Lev 25.17 (HS). *Restores to the debtor his*

his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between contending parties, [9] follows my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances, acting faithfully—such a one is righteous; he shall surely live, says the Lord God.

[10] If he has a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, [11] who does any of these things (though his father[a] does none of them), who eats upon the mountains, defiles his neighbor's wife, [12] oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore the pledge, lifts up his eyes to the idols, commits abomination, [13] takes advance or accrued interest; shall he then live? He shall not. He has done all these abominable things; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself.

[14] But if this man has a son who sees all the sins that his father has done, considers, and does not do likewise, [15] who does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife, [16] does not wrong anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, [17] withholds his hand from iniquity,[b] takes no advance or accrued interest, observes my ordinances, and follows my statutes; he shall not die for his father's iniquity; he shall surely live. [18] As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what is not good among his people, he dies for his iniquity.

[19] Yet you say, "Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?" When the son has done what is lawful and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. [20] The person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child; the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own.

[21] But if the wicked turn away from all their sins that they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live; they shall not die. [22] None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them; for the righteousness that they have done they shall live. [23] Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live? [24] But when the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity and do the same abominable things that the wicked do, shall they live? None of the righteous deeds that they have done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which they are guilty and the sin they have committed, they shall die.

[25] Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is unfair." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? [26] When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. [27] Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. [28] Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. [29] Yet the house of Israel says, "The way of the Lord is unfair." O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

[30] Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin.[c] [31] Cast away from you all

[a] Heb *he*
[b] Gk: Heb *the poor*
[c] Or *so that they shall not be a stumbling block of iniquity to you*

pledge, returns any security on a loan once a debt is repaid. *Robbery,* Lev 19.13 (HS). **8:** *Interest,* Lev 25.36 (HS). *Executes true justice,* Lev 19.15 (HS); Zech 7.9. **10–13:** Second, wicked generation. A life opposite to that of the father is represented. **10:** *Shedder of blood,* 16.38; 22.3; 23.45; 33.25; Num 35.33–34 (HS). **14–18:** Third, righteous generation; another reversal. **19–20:** Summation: neither the righteousness nor the wickedness of a previous generation is transferable to the next; cf. Deut 24.16. **21–24:** Within an individual's life the same argument pertains. **23:** See v. 4n. **25–29:** To object is to misunderstand God's justice; cf. 33.17,20. **30–32:** The invitation to repentance is open (cf. 14.6; 33.11). The prophet's call that the people create for themselves a *new heart and a new spirit* is later replaced by an emphasis that God will have to take the initiative and perform this action (36.26n.; cf. 11.19; Jer 32.39). *Why will you die?* see 33.11n.

the transgressions that you have committed
against me, and get yourselves a new heart
and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house
of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the
death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn,
then, and live.

19 As for you, raise up a lamentation for
the princes of Israel, 2 and say:
What a lioness was your mother
among lions!
She lay down among young lions,
rearing her cubs.
3 She raised up one of her cubs;
he became a young lion,
and he learned to catch prey;
he devoured humans.
4 The nations sounded an alarm against
him;
he was caught in their pit;
and they brought him with hooks
to the land of Egypt.
5 When she saw that she was thwarted,
that her hope was lost,
she took another of her cubs
and made him a young lion.
6 He prowled among the lions;
he became a young lion,
and he learned to catch prey;
he devoured people.
7 And he ravaged their strongholds,[a]
and laid waste their towns;
the land was appalled, and all in it,
at the sound of his roaring.
8 The nations set upon him
from the provinces all around;
they spread their net over him;
he was caught in their pit.
9 With hooks they put him in a cage,
and brought him to the king of
Babylon;
they brought him into custody,
so that his voice should be heard no more
on the mountains of Israel.
10 Your mother was like a vine in a
vineyard[b]
transplanted by the water,
fruitful and full of branches
from abundant water.
11 Its strongest stem became
a ruler's scepter;[c]
it towered aloft
among the thick boughs;
it stood out in its height
with its mass of branches.
12 But it was plucked up in fury,
cast down to the ground;
the east wind dried it up;
its fruit was stripped off,
its strong stem was withered;
the fire consumed it.
13 Now it is transplanted into the
wilderness,
into a dry and thirsty land.
14 And fire has gone out from its stem,
has consumed its branches and fruit,
so that there remains in it no strong stem,
no scepter for ruling.

This is a lamentation, and it is used as a
lamentation.

[a] Heb *his widows*
[b] Cn: Heb *in your blood*
[c] Heb *Its strongest stems became rulers' scepters*

19.1–14: Two funeral dirges. 1–9: First dirge. **1:** *Lamentation,* a parody of a dirge, condemning the exploitative and high-handed rule of Judah's last monarchs. *Princes,* monarchic rulers (cf. 12.10; 19.1; 34.24; 37.25; 44.1–3n.). **2:** The *lioness* is Judah (cf. Gen 49.9). **3–4:** The first cub is Jehoahaz, the king who was taken to Egypt in 609 BCE (2 Kings 23.30–34; Jer 22.10–12; 2 Chr 36.4). **5–9:** The identity of the second cub is less certain. It could be King Jehoiachin, who was exiled to Babylon in 597 BCE (Jer 22.24–30; 2 Kings 24.8–16), but is more likely King Zedekiah, likewise exiled to Babylon in 586 BCE (2 Kings 25.7; Jer 39.7). If the latter, the two cubs would have the same literal mother, Hamutal (2 Kings 23.31; 24.18; Jer 52.1). Alternatively, the second cub is Zedekiah's predecessor, King Jehoiakim, although the biblical references to his being brought *into custody* (v. 9) by Nebuchadrezzar and the Babylonians are of questionable historicity (2 Chr 36.6; Dan 1.1–2). Jehoiakim fits the description of the second cub in that *the land was appalled* (v. 7) during his reign (cf. 2 Kings 24.4; Jer 22.13–19).

19.10–14: Second dirge. **10:** The *vine* is Judah, and its wild, towering growth signals arrogant pride. **11–13:** The *strongest stem* is King Zedekiah, who was dried up by *the east wind* (Nebuchadrezzar, 17.10) and *transplanted* (taken to Babylon). If the reading of textual note *c* is correct, however, two Judean kings, both Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, are in view.

20 In the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, certain elders of Israel came to consult the LORD, and sat down before me. [2] And the word of the LORD came to me: [3] Mortal, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: Why are you coming? To consult me? As I live, says the Lord GOD, I will not be consulted by you. [4] Will you judge them, mortal, will you judge them? Then let them know the abominations of their ancestors, [5] and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob—making myself known to them in the land of Egypt—I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God. [6] On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. [7] And I said to them, Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God. [8] But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; not one of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.

Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. [9] But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt. [10] So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. [11] I gave them my statutes and showed them my ordinances, by whose observance everyone shall live. [12] Moreover I gave them my sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, so that they might know that I the LORD sanctify them. [13] But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness; they did not observe my statutes but rejected my ordinances, by whose observance everyone shall live; and my sabbaths they greatly profaned.

Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make an end of them. [14] But I acted for the sake of my name, so that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. [15] Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most

20.1–44: Israel's pattern of rebellion. The passage is not intended as a chronological account but as a theological narrative about the people's ingrained waywardness, evident in a pattern of rebellion despite God's self-revelation (vv. 5–9,10–17,18–26). Israel has repeatedly failed to know the LORD, appreciate the LORD's holiness (vv. 12,20,26), and demonstrate this holiness before the world (vv. 9,14,22,39,41). The effect of Ezekiel's rhetoric is to drive home how this same rebellious pattern is inevitable for the present generation (vv. 30–32). **1–4:** Date: August 14, 591 BCE. All consultation of the LORD is prohibited (see v. 31n.; 3.22–27n.; 14.1–11n.). **5–9:** Rebellion in Egypt. **5:** *I am the LORD your God,* Ex 6.7 (HS). **6:** On God's oath to bring the people to the promised land, see Ex 6.8 (HS). *A land flowing with milk and honey,* v. 15; Lev 20.24 (HS; cf. Ex 3.8; Deut 6.3). *Most glorious of all lands,* in Ezekiel God is intensely, even patriotically devoted to the sacred land of Israel (Lev 25.23 [HS]; Ezek 7.22; 34.26; 35.10; 36.5). **7–8:** *I am the LORD your God,* Lev 19.4 (HS). Idolatrous worship in Egypt is mentioned explicitly in Josh 24.14. The Exodus narratives themselves lack information on Hebrew worship practices in Egypt, but Ex 32.1–6 suggests that the people had grown comfortable with worship of images and orgiastic rites. **9:** *For the sake of my name* (vv. 14,22,39,44; cf. 36.20–23; 39.7,25; 43.7–8), the motif in Ezekiel of God's intense concern with the honor of the divine name comes straight out of the Holiness School (see Lev 18.21; 19.12; 20.3; 21.6; 22.2,32 [HS]). The motif emphasizes the mystery of God's mercy (see 36.22–32n.) over against Israel's fossilized heart (cf. 2.4; 3.7; 20.33; 36.26). The people are not, and have not been, pleasing to God, so God must act in a manner set by God's character (God's "name") and by God's intention to infuse the world with divine holiness, not based on how humans make God feel. Only God's proactive grace has preserved Israel in the past and gives the people hope for the future. **10–17:** Rebellion in the wilderness. **11:** Lev 18.5 (HS). **12–13:** Ezekiel is influenced by the emphasis on the sabbath in the Holiness School (Ex 31.13; Lev 19.30; 26.2 [HS]). In this tradition, keeping the sabbath is a sign of the holiness and priestly service of all God's people. For a particular example of violation of the sabbath within the narratives of the Holiness School, see Ex 16.27–30. **13b–17:** Ex 32.9–14; Num 14.11–20;

glorious of all lands, [16] because they rejected my ordinances and did not observe my statutes, and profaned my sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. [17] Nevertheless my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make an end of them in the wilderness.

[18] I said to their children in the wilderness, Do not follow the statutes of your parents, nor observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols. [19] I the LORD am your God; follow my statutes, and be careful to observe my ordinances, [20] and hallow my sabbaths that they may be a sign between me and you, so that you may know that I the LORD am your God. [21] But the children rebelled against me; they did not follow my statutes, and were not careful to observe my ordinances, by whose observance everyone shall live; they profaned my sabbaths.

Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. [22] But I withheld my hand, and acted for the sake of my name, so that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. [23] Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, [24] because they had not executed my ordinances, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their ancestors' idols. [25] Moreover I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live. [26] I defiled them through their very gifts, in their offering up all their firstborn, in order that I might horrify them, so that they might know that I am the LORD.

[27] Therefore, mortal, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: In this again your ancestors blasphemed me, by dealing treacherously with me. [28] For when I had brought them into the land that I swore to give them, then wherever they saw any high hill or any leafy tree, there they offered their sacrifices and presented the provocation of their offering; there they sent up their pleasing odors, and there they poured out their drink offerings. [29] (I said to them, What is the high place to which you go? So it is called Bamah[a] to this day.) [30] Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your ancestors and go astray after their detestable things? [31] When you offer your gifts and make your children pass through the fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be consulted by you, O house of Israel? As I live, says the Lord GOD, I will not be consulted by you.

[32] What is in your mind shall never happen—the thought, "Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone."

[33] As I live, says the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, I will be king over you. [34] I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out; [35] and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. [36] As I entered into judgment with your ancestors in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, says the Lord GOD. [37] I will make you pass under the staff,

[a] That is *High Place*

Deut 9.25–29. **18–26:** Rebellion of the next generation. **25–26:** The people may have been using the "law of the firstborn" (Ex 22.29; 34.19) to legitimate child sacrifice (16.20–22n.). The notion that God's law may be an occasion of punishment, unique in the Hebrew Bible, recurs in Rom 7.7–13. **27–32:** Application of the passage to Ezekiel's contemporaries. **29:** *High place,* 6.3n. The Heb word for "high place" ("bamah") is explained by the preceding words ("what" ["mah"] and "go" ["ba"]). **31:** On making *children pass through the fire,* see 16.20–22n.; 23.37; Deut 18.10; 2 Kings 16.3; 17.17; 21.6. The end of the verse echoes v. 3, forming an inclusio (envelope) around the passage. Judgment on the people's faithless state is fixed: Ezekiel can not intervene for them with God (see 3.22–27n.). **33–38: A new Exodus and judgment in the wilderness.** This is an oracle of promise, but with an angry tone dating prior to Jerusalem's destruction in 586 BCE. God will triumph with Israel, through force if necessary. (In accord with Zion theology, the election of God's people is ultimately irrevocable. See Introduction;

and will bring you within the bond of the covenant. 38 I will purge out the rebels among you, and those who transgress against me; I will bring them out of the land where they reside as aliens, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.

39 As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: Go serve your idols, every one of you now and hereafter, if you will not listen to me; but my holy name you shall no more profane with your gifts and your idols.

40 For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, says the Lord GOD, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land; there I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred things. 41 As a pleasing odor I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. 42 You shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your ancestors. 43 There you shall remember your ways and all the deeds by which you have polluted yourselves; and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed. 44 And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, or corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, says the Lord GOD.

45 [a]The word of the LORD came to me: 46 Mortal, set your face toward the south, preach against the south, and prophesy against the forest land in the Negeb; 47 say to the forest of the Negeb, Hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you and every dry tree; the blazing flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from south to north shall be scorched by it. 48 All flesh shall see that I the LORD have kindled it; it shall not be quenched. 49 Then I said, "Ah Lord GOD! they are saying of me, 'Is he not a maker of allegories?'"

21 [b] 2 Mortal, set your face toward Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuaries; prophesy against the land of Israel 3 and say to the land of Israel, Thus says the LORD: I am coming against you, and will draw my sword out of its sheath, and will cut off from you both righteous and wicked. 4 Because I will cut off from you both righteous and wicked, therefore my sword shall go out of its sheath against all flesh from south to north; 5 and all flesh shall know that I the LORD have drawn my sword out of its sheath; it shall not be sheathed again. 6 Moan therefore, mortal; moan with breaking heart and bitter grief before their eyes. 7 And when they say to you, "Why do you moan?" you shall say, "Because of the news that has come. Every heart will melt and all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint and all knees will turn to water. See, it comes and it will be fulfilled," says the Lord GOD.

8 And the word of the LORD came to me: 9 Mortal, prophesy and say: Thus says the Lord; Say:

A sword, a sword is sharpened,
  it is also polished;
10 it is sharpened for slaughter,
  honed to flash like lightning!
How can we make merry?
  You have despised the rod,
  and all discipline.[c]

[a] Ch 21.1 in Heb
[b] Ch 21.6 in Heb
[c] Meaning of Heb uncertain

Lev 26.42 [HS].) As in the wilderness (Num 14.26–35 [HS]), the unfaithful will be purged. **37:** *Pass under the staff,* see Lev 27.32 (HS). **39–44: Final acceptance.** After the new Exodus, God will restore the people to Zion, and their sacrifices will again be acceptable. Deity, nation, and land will be united in covenant once and for all. **40:** Ezekiel's Zion theology (cf. 5.5n.; 28.14; 40:2; 43.12; Ob 16; Zech 8.3; Joel 3.17). *Mountain height of Israel,* 17.23; 34.14.

20.45–21.32: Sword prophecies (Lev 26.25,33 [HS]). **20.45–21.7: The sword against all flesh. 20.45–49:** *South* and *Negeb* both stand for Judah and Jerusalem, which lie south of their attackers. **49:** The people cannot take a claim of Jerusalem's vulnerability seriously (see 2.6n.; 3.7; 33.32). **21.1–5:** The preceding forest fire is interpreted as the sword of God. **6–7:** The message is reiterated through an expressive action.

21.8–17: Song of the sword. The sword is first polished (vv. 8–13), and then it will be engaged (vv. 14–17). **12:**

[11] The sword[a] is given to be polished,
to be grasped in the hand;
it is sharpened, the sword is polished,
to be placed in the slayer's hand.
[12] Cry and wail, O mortal,
for it is against my people;
it is against all Israel's princes;
they are thrown to the sword,
together with my people.
Ah! Strike the thigh!
[13] For consider: What! If you despise the rod,
will it not happen?[b] says the Lord God.
[14] And you, mortal, prophesy;
strike hand to hand.
Let the sword fall twice, thrice;
it is a sword for killing.
A sword for great slaughter—
it surrounds them;
[15] therefore hearts melt
and many stumble.
At all their gates I have set
the point[b] of the sword.
Ah! It is made for flashing,
it is polished[c] for slaughter.
[16] Attack to the right!
Engage to the left!
—wherever your edge is directed.
[17] I too will strike hand to hand,
I will satisfy my fury;
I the Lord have spoken.

[18] The word of the Lord came to me: [19] Mortal, mark out two roads for the sword of the king of Babylon to come; both of them shall issue from the same land. And make a signpost, make it for a fork in the road leading to a city; [20] mark out the road for the sword to come to Rabbah of the Ammonites or to Judah and to[d] Jerusalem the fortified. [21] For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the fork in the two roads, to use divination; he shakes the arrows, he consults the teraphim,[e] he inspects the liver. [22] Into his right hand comes the lot for Jerusalem, to set battering rams, to call out for slaughter, for raising the battle cry, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up ramps, to build siege towers. [23] But to them it will seem like a false divination; they have sworn solemn oaths; but he brings their guilt to remembrance, bringing about their capture.

[24] Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have brought your guilt to remembrance, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sins appear—because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand.[f]
[25] As for you, vile, wicked prince of Israel,
you whose day has come,
the time of final punishment,
[26] thus says the Lord God:
Remove the turban, take off the crown;
things shall not remain as they are.
Exalt that which is low,
abase that which is high.
[27] A ruin, a ruin, a ruin—
I will make it!
(Such has never occurred.)
Until he comes whose right it is;
to him I will give it.

[28] As for you, mortal, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord God concerning the Ammonites, and concerning their reproach; say:

[a] Heb *It*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[c] Tg: Heb *wrapped up*
[d] Gk Syr: Heb *Judah in*
[e] Or *the household gods*
[f] Or *be taken captive*

Strike the thigh, a sign of mourning (Jer 31.19). **14:** *Strike hand to hand,* in vexation (also v. 17; cf. 6.11).

21.18–32: The sword of Nebuchadrezzar. 18–24: A symbolic act. **20:** *Rabbah* (modern Amman, Jordan), capital of Ammon (25.5). **21:** Perhaps from Riblah (see 2 Kings 25.6), Nebuchadrezzar uses *divination* to determine which rebel to attack first: belomancy (i.e., casting of *arrows* inscribed with names of projected victims); necromancy (*teraphim* were a traditional family's religious images, perhaps ancestor figurines [Gen 31.19; 1 Sam 19.13], sometimes expected to convey messages to the living [see Zech 10.2]); and hepatoscopy (making predictions based on the configurations and markings of animal *livers*). **22:** The sword is about to fall—on Jerusalem! **23:** The results of the divination seem false to the Jerusalemites, since they believe Jerusalem invulnerable (20.49n.). **25–27:** The sword will strike Zedekiah, Judah's last king (Jer 21.7). *To him,* i.e., to Nebuchadrezzar. Ezekiel turns language drawn from Gen 49.10 upside down in order to destroy the false hopes of the Jerusalemites. **21.28–32: A poem** addressing the Babylonian sword directly and telling it of its own eventual punishment. **28:** A prose introduction alerts the *Ammonites* (see v. 20) that their glee over the sword's work (25.3,6) will be short-lived.

A sword, a sword! Drawn for slaughter,
polished to consume,[a] to flash like
lightning.
29 Offering false visions for you,
divining lies for you,
they place you over the necks
of the vile, wicked ones—
those whose day has come,
the time of final punishment.
30 Return it to its sheath!
In the place where you were created,
in the land of your origin,
I will judge you.
31 I will pour out my indignation upon you,
with the fire of my wrath
I will blow upon you.
I will deliver you into brutish hands,
those skillful to destroy.
32 You shall be fuel for the fire,
your blood shall enter the earth;
you shall be remembered no more,
for I the LORD have spoken.

22 The word of the LORD came to me:
2 You, mortal, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Then declare to it all its abominable deeds. 3 You shall say, Thus says the Lord GOD: A city! Shedding blood within itself; its time has come; making its idols, defiling itself. 4 You have become guilty by the blood that you have shed, and defiled by the idols that you have made; you have brought your day near, the appointed time of your years has come. Therefore I have made you a disgrace before the nations, and a mockery to all the countries. 5 Those who are near and those who are far from you will mock you, you infamous one, full of tumult.

6 The princes of Israel in you, everyone according to his power, have been bent on shedding blood. 7 Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the alien residing within you suffers extortion; the orphan and the widow are wronged in you. 8 You have despised my holy things, and profaned my sabbaths. 9 In you are those who slander to shed blood, those in you who eat upon the mountains, who commit lewdness in your midst. 10 In you they uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you they violate women in their menstrual periods. 11 One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; another in you defiles his sister, his father's daughter. 12 In you, they take bribes to shed blood; you take both advance interest and accrued interest, and make gain of your neighbors by extortion; and you have forgotten me, says the Lord GOD.

13 See, I strike my hands together at the dishonest gain you have made, and at the blood that has been shed within you. 14 Can your courage endure, or can your hands remain strong in the days when I shall deal with you? I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it. 15 I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you through the countries, and I will purge your filthiness out of you. 16 And I[b] shall be profaned through you in the sight of the nations; and you shall know that I am the LORD.

17 The word of the LORD came to me: 18 Mortal, the house of Israel has become dross to me; all of them, silver,[c] bronze, tin, iron, and lead. In the smelter they have become dross. 19 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. 20 As one gathers silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin into a smelter, to blow the fire upon them in order to melt them; so I will gather you in my anger and in my wrath, and I will put you in and melt you. 21 I will gather you and blow upon

[a] Cn: Heb *to contain*
[b] Gk Syr Vg: Heb *you*
[c] Transposed from the end of the verse; compare verse 20

29: Divination (v. 21) has directed the sword's use. **30–32:** Although Nebuchadrezzar served as God's agent, he himself, and Babylonia, will eventually face God's judgment.

22.1–31: Prophecies of smelting judgment. 22.1–16: A prophecy against Jerusalem, the bloody city. The indictment of vv. 6–12 contains a catalogue of sins based on the regulations of the Holiness School (Lev 18–20). **13–16:** In scorn and anger (*strike my hands together,* 21.14,17) God will punish this bloody city (18.10n.; Num 35.33–34 [HS]).

22.17–22: Israel is dross. The judgment will be like a smelter in which base metals are removed.

you with the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted within it. 22 As silver is melted in a smelter, so you shall be melted in it; and you shall know that I the LORD have poured out my wrath upon you.

23 The word of the LORD came to me: 24 Mortal, say to it: You are a land that is not cleansed, not rained upon in the day of indignation. 25 Its princes[a] within it are like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured human lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows within it. 26 Its priests have done violence to my teaching and have profaned my holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. 27 Its officials within it are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. 28 Its prophets have smeared whitewash on their behalf, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, "Thus says the Lord GOD," when the LORD has not spoken. 29 The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the alien without redress. 30 And I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one. 31 Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath; I have returned their conduct upon their heads, says the Lord GOD.

23 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 Mortal, there were two women, the daughters of one mother; 3 they played the whore in Egypt; they played the whore in their youth; their breasts were caressed there, and their virgin bosoms were fondled. 4 Oholah was the name of the elder and Oholibah the name of her sister. They became mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.

5 Oholah played the whore while she was mine; she lusted after her lovers the Assyrians, warriors[b] 6 clothed in blue, governors and commanders, all of them handsome young men, mounted horsemen. 7 She bestowed her favors upon them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them; and she defiled herself with all the idols of everyone for whom she lusted. 8 She did not give up her whorings that she had practiced since Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her and fondled her virgin bosom and poured out their lust upon her. 9 Therefore I delivered her into the hands of her lovers, into the hands of the Assyrians, for whom she lusted. 10 These uncovered her nakedness; they seized her sons and her daughters; and they killed her with the sword. Judgment was executed upon her, and she became a byword among women.

[a] Gk: Heb *indignation.* 25*A conspiracy of its prophets*
[b] Meaning of Heb uncertain

22.23–31: All classes are corrupt. This oracle seems to come after Jerusalem's fall in 586 BCE (see v. 31) and describes Judah's sinfulness in retrospect. All classes of Judean society were corrupt, and all must be punished; cf. Jer 8.8–10; Zeph 3.3–4. **26:** 42.20; 44.23; Lev 10.10–11 (HS). **28:** 13.10–16n. **30:** 13.5n.

23.1–49: The allegory of the sisters, Oholah and Oholibah (cf. ch 16). **1–4:** Introduction. **3:** *In Egypt,* thus Israel's apostasy was deep-rooted (20.5–9). **4:** The wordplay *Oholah,* "her [own] tent," (i.e., Samaria, which had been the northern kingdom of Israel), and *Oholibah,* "my tent [is] in her" (i.e., Jerusalem), may suggest that though the northern kingdom had shrines to Yahweh, God's real dwelling (tent) was in Jerusalem, thus emphasizing the enormity of Judah's apostasy. The two names are reminiscent of the Israelites' origins as tent-dwelling peoples (see Gen 36.2 for a similar type of name). Oholah/Samaria is a "bigger" sister, not necessarily an *elder* one (see 16.46n.). Ezekiel borrowed the image of the marrying of sisters from Jeremiah (Jer 3.6–11). **5–10:** Oholah. The northern kingdom is condemned for its alliances with Assyria (e.g., 2 Kings 15.19; 17.3). Like Jeremiah (4.30; same rare word for "*lovers*" as in Ezek 23.5,9), Ezekiel viewed foreign alliances as disloyalty to God. For Ezekiel, true realism was not political pragmatism but trust in God's geopolitical prerogative. **10:** The fall of Samaria to Assyria in 722 BCE. **11–21:** Indictment of Oholibah. Jerusalem, like Samaria, is condemned for its foreign alliances. Judah had allied itself with Assyria (2 Kings 16.7–9) and then with Babylon (17.13; 2 Kings 24.1,17;

11 Her sister Oholibah saw this, yet she was more corrupt than she in her lusting and in her whorings, which were worse than those of her sister. 12 She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and commanders, warriors[a] clothed in full armor, mounted horsemen, all of them handsome young men. 13 And I saw that she was defiled; they both took the same way. 14 But she carried her whorings further; she saw male figures carved on the wall, images of the Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion, 15 with belts around their waists, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like officers—a picture of Babylonians whose native land was Chaldea. 16 When she saw them she lusted after them, and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. 17 And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their lust; and after she defiled herself with them, she turned from them in disgust. 18 When she carried on her whorings so openly and flaunted her nakedness, I turned in disgust from her, as I had turned from her sister. 19 Yet she increased her whorings, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the whore in the land of Egypt 20 and lusted after her paramours there, whose members were like those of donkeys, and whose emission was like that of stallions. 21 Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians[b] fondled your bosom and caressed[c] your young breasts.

22 Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord God: I will rouse against you your lovers from whom you turned in disgust, and I will bring them against you from every side: 23 the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them, handsome young men, governors and commanders all of them, officers and warriors,[d] all of them riding on horses. 24 They shall come against you from the north[e] with chariots and wagons and a host of peoples; they shall set themselves against you on every side with buckler, shield, and helmet, and I will commit the judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their ordinances. 25 I will direct my indignation against you, in order that they may deal with you in fury. They shall cut off your nose and your ears, and your survivors shall fall by the sword. They shall seize your sons and your daughters, and your survivors shall be devoured by fire. 26 They shall also strip you of your clothes and take away your fine jewels. 27 So I will put an end to your lewdness and your whoring brought from the land of Egypt; you shall not long for them, or remember Egypt any more. 28 For thus says the Lord God: I will deliver you into the hands of those whom you hate, into the hands of those from whom you turned in disgust; 29 and they shall deal with you in hatred, and take away all the fruit of your labor, and leave you naked and bare, and the nakedness of your whorings shall be exposed. Your lewdness and your whorings 30 have brought this upon you, because you played the whore with the nations, and polluted yourself with their idols. 31 You have gone the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand. 32 Thus says the Lord God:

You shall drink your sister's cup,
deep and wide;
you shall be scorned and derided,
it holds so much.
33 You shall be filled with drunkenness and
sorrow.
A cup of horror and desolation
is the cup of your sister Samaria;

[a] Meaning of Heb uncertain
[b] Two Mss: MT *from Egypt*
[c] Cn: Heb *for the sake of*
[d] Compare verses 6 and 12: Heb *officers and called ones*
[e] Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain

cf. Isa 39.1–8). **17:** Judah swung to an anti-Babylonian policy (2 Kings 24.20; Jer 27.3). **19:** The passage moves to the contemporary event of Judah's alliance with Egypt (17.7,15). **20:** The reference is to oversized genitals and ejaculations; cf. 16.26n. Horses are proverbially oversexed (Jer 5.8). **22–35:** Announcements about Oholibah's punishment. **23:** Kindred allies of the *Babylonians* included *Pekod* (an important Aramean tribe in southeast Babylonia), *Shoa* and *Koa* (unknown tribes). The three names sound like Hebrew words for "punishment!" "war cry!" and "shriek!" and Ezekiel may have chosen the names to produce a striking wordplay. *Assyrian* troops were co-opted by their Babylonian conquerors. **32–34:** The poem of the cup of wrath (Jer 25.15–29; Hab 2.16; Ob 16)

34 you shall drink it and drain it out,
and gnaw its sherds,
and tear out your breasts;
for I have spoken, says the Lord God. 35 Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have forgotten me and cast me behind your back, therefore bear the consequences of your lewdness and whorings.

36 The Lord said to me: Mortal, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominable deeds. 37 For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands; with their idols they have committed adultery; and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me. 38 Moreover this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my sabbaths. 39 For when they had slaughtered their children for their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it. This is what they did in my house.

40 They even sent for men to come from far away, to whom a messenger was sent, and they came. For them you bathed yourself, painted your eyes, and decked yourself with ornaments; 41 you sat on a stately couch, with a table spread before it on which you had placed my incense and my oil. 42 The sound of a raucous multitude was around her, with many of the rabble brought in drunken from the wilderness; and they put bracelets on the arms[a] of the women, and beautiful crowns upon their heads.

43 Then I said, Ah, she is worn out with adulteries, but they carry on their sexual acts with her. 44 For they have gone in to her, as one goes in to a whore. Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, wanton women. 45 But righteous judges shall declare them guilty of adultery and of bloodshed; because they are adulteresses and blood is on their hands.

46 For thus says the Lord God: Bring up an assembly against them, and make them an object of terror and of plunder. 47 The assembly shall stone them and with their swords they shall cut them down; they shall kill their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses. 48 Thus will I put an end to lewdness in the land, so that all women may take warning and not commit lewdness as you have done. 49 They shall repay you for your lewdness, and you shall bear the penalty for your sinful idolatry; and you shall know that I am the Lord God.

24 In the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: 2 Mortal, write down the name of this day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day. 3 And utter an allegory to the rebellious house and say to them, Thus says the Lord God:

Set on the pot, set it on,
pour in water also;
4 put in it the pieces,
all the good pieces, the thigh and the shoulder;
fill it with choice bones.
5 Take the choicest one of the flock,
pile the logs[b] under it;
boil its pieces,[c]
seethe[d] also its bones in it.

6 Therefore thus says the Lord God:
Woe to the bloody city,
the pot whose rust is in it,
whose rust has not gone out of it!

[a] Heb *hands*
[b] Compare verse 10: Heb *the bones*
[c] Two Mss: Heb *its boilings*
[d] Cn: Heb *its bones seethe*

links Jerusalem's fate with Samaria's. **36–49: The case against the sisters.** As adulterers are stoned (Lev 20.10), so the adultery (i.e., idolatry, child sacrifice, profanation of the sabbath, foreign alliances) of Samaria and Judah has been and will be punished—with death. **37:** 16.20–22n. **40:** Cf. vv. 16–17. **48:** Oholibah's fate becomes an object lesson (cf. v. 10; 26.16; 27.35; 30.9).

24:1–14: The allegory of the pot is a disputation with those still quoting nationalistic slogans about Jerusalem being as inviolable as a cauldron (11.3). Ezekiel turns the cauldron image on its head by depicting it as a dirty pot about to be cleaned by overheating (like a modern self-cleaning oven; vv. 5,9) until the bones inside are burned (v. 10). **1:** January 15, 588 BCE, the day that the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem began. **5:** Jerusalem will be *boil*ed as its assailants heap siege equipment around it. **6–8:** Going beyond mere interpretation, these verses expand the image of the pot to provide reasons for Jerusalem's punishment. *Rust,* or, alternatively, "encrusted