

The *Genesis* of Ethics...

*The Stories of Biblical Injustice that Led to the
Ten Commandments and Modern Law*

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5-Part Pentecost Study – Examining Torah, the Teaching
animated by Canon Jim Irvine

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1. GOD THREATENS – AND BACKS DOWN

GENESIS 2:

¹⁶ YHWH, God, commanded concerning the human, saying:
From every (other) tree of the garden you may eat, yes, eat,
die, yes, die: ¹⁷ but from the Tree of the Knowing of Good and Evil—
you are not to eat from it,
for on the day that you eat from it, you must die, yes, die...

GENESIS 3:

¹ Now the snake was more shrewd than all the living-things of the field that
YHWH, God, had made.

It said to the woman:

Even though God said: You are not to eat from any of the
trees in the garden...!

² The woman said to the snake:

From the fruit of the (other) trees in the garden we may eat,
³ but from the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden,
God has said:

You are not to eat from it and you are not to touch it,
lest you die.

⁴ The snake said to the woman:

Die, you will not die!

⁵ Rather, God knows

that on the day that you eat from it, your eyes will be opened
and you will become like gods, knowing good and evil.

⁶ The woman saw

that the tree was good for eating
and that it was a delight to the eyes,
and the tree was desirable to contemplate.
She took from its fruit and ate
and gave also to her husband beside her,
and he ate.

⁷ The eyes of the two of them were opened
and they knew then
that they were nude.

They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ Now they heard the sound of YHWH, God, (who was) walking about in
the garden at the breezy-time of the day.

And the human and his wife hid themselves from the face of YHWH, God,
amid the trees of the garden.

⁹ YHWH, God, called to the human 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 am nude,
and so I hid myself.

¹¹ He said:

Who told you that you are nude?

From the tree about which I command you not to eat,
have you eaten?

¹² The human said:

The woman whom you gave to be beside me, she gave me from the tree,
and so I ate.

¹³ YHWH, God, said to the woman:

What is this that you have done?

The woman said:

The snake enticed me,
and so I ate.

¹⁴ YHWH, God, said to the snake:

Because you have done this,
damned be you from all the animals and from all the living-things of the
field;
upon your belly shall you walk and dust shall you eat, all the days of your
life.

¹⁵ I put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her
seed:

they will bruise you on the head, you will bruise them in the heel.

¹⁶ To the woman he said:

I will multiply, multiply your pain (from) your pregnancy,
with pains shall you bear children.

Toward your husband will be your lust, yet he will rule over you.

¹⁷ To Adam he said:

Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying:

You are not to eat from it!

Damned be the soil on your account,
with painstaking-labor shall you eat from it, all the days of your life.

¹⁸ Thorn and sting-shrub let it spring up for you,
when you (seek to) eat the plants of the field!

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread,
until you return to the soil,
for from it you were taken.

For you are dust, and to dust shall you return.

²⁰ The human called his wife's name: Havva/Life-giver! [*Trad. English*
"Eve."]

For she became the mother of all the living.

²¹ Now YHWH, **God, made Adam and his wife coats of skins and clothed them.**

²² YHWH, God, said:

Here, the human has become like one of us, in knowing good and evil.

So now, lest he send forth his hand
and take also from the Tree of Life
and eat

and live throughout the ages...!

²³ So YHWH, God, sent him away from the garden of Eden, to work the soil
from which he had been taken.

²⁴ He drove the human out
and caused to dwell, eastward of the garden of Eden,
the winged-sphinxes and the flashing, ever-turning sword
to watch over the way to the Tree of Life.

God...clothed them: Once punishment has been pronounced, God cares for the man and the woman. Both aspects of God comprise the biblical understanding of his nature, and they are not exclusive of each other.

2. CAIN MURDERS ABEL AND WALKS

GENESIS 4:

³ It was, after the passing of days
that Kayin brought, from the fruit of the soil, a gift to YHWH,
⁴ and as for Hevel, he too brought—from the firstborn of his flock, from
their fat-parts.

YHWH had regard for Hevel and his gift,
⁵ for Kayin and his gift he had no regard.
Kayin became exceedingly upset and his face fell.

⁶ YHWH said to Kayin:
Why are you so upset? Why has your face fallen?

⁷ Is it not thus:
If you intend good, bear-it-aloft,
but if you do not intend good,
at the entrance is sin, a crouching-demon,
toward you his lust—but you can rule over him.

⁸ Kayin said to Hevel his brother...
But then it was, when they were out in the field
that Kayin rose up against Hevel his brother
and he killed him.

⁹ YHWH said to Kayin:
Where is Hevel your brother?
He said:
I do not know. *Am I the watcher of my brother?*

¹⁰ Now he said:
What have you done!
A sound—your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil!
¹¹ And now,
damned be you from the soil,
which opened up its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

¹² When you wish to work the soil
it will not henceforth give its strength to you;
wavering and wandering must you be on earth!

¹³ Kayin said to YHWH:
My iniquity is too great to be borne!
¹⁴ Here, you drive me away today from the face of the soil,
and from your face must I conceal myself,
I must be wavering and wandering on earth—
now it will be
that whoever comes upon me will kill me!

¹⁵ YHWH said to him:
No, therefore,
whoever kills Kayin, sevenfold will it be avenged!
So YHWH set a sign for Kayin,
so that whoever came upon him would not strike him down.

¹⁶ Kayin went out from the face of YHWH
and settled in the land of Nod/Wandering, east of Eden.

¹⁷ Kayin knew his wife;
she became pregnant and bore Hanokh.
Now he became the builder of a city
and called the city's name according to his son's name,
Hanokh.

3. GOD OVERREACTS AND FLOODS THE WORLD

GENESIS 6:

[*Antiquity and the Preparation for the Flood* (6:1–8): The final pre-Flood section of the text includes a theme common to other ancient tales: the biological mixing of gods and men in dim antiquity. Perhaps this fragment, which initially seems difficult to reconcile with biblical ideas about God, has been retained here to round out a picture familiar to ancient readers, and to recall the early closeness of the divine and the human which, according to many cultures, later dissolved. It is also possible that the episode serves as another example of a world that has become disordered, thus providing further justification for a divinely ordered destruction.

The stage is set for the Flood by means of a powerful sound reference. In 5:29 Noah was named, ostensibly to comfort his elders' "sorrow" over human "pains" in tilling the soil. Here (6:6), however, the meaning of the name has been ironically reversed. The one who was supposed to bring comfort only heralds God's own being "sorry" and "pained" (vv. 6–7). A similar ironic wordplay, where the audience knows what the name-bestower does not, occurs in Ex. 2:3; curiously, the hero of that passage, the baby Moses, is also connected with an "ark"—the term for the little basket in which he is set adrift.]

¹ Now it was when humans first became many on the face of the soil
and women were born to them,

² that the divine beings saw how beautiful the human women were,
so they took themselves wives, whomever they chose.

³ YHWH said:

My rushing-spirit shall not remain in humankind for ages, for they too are
flesh;

let their days be then a hundred and twenty years!

⁴ The giants were on earth in those days,
and afterward as well,
when the divine beings came in to the human women
and they bore them (children)—
they were the heroes who were of former ages, the men of name.

⁵ Now YHWH saw
that great was humankind's evildoing on earth
and every form of their heart's planning was only evil all the day.

⁶ Then YHWH was sorry
that he had made humankind on earth,
and it pained his heart.

⁷ YHWH said:

I will blot out humankind, whom I have created, from the face of the soil,
from man to beast, to crawling thing and to the fowl of the
heavens,
for I am sorry that I made them.

⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of YHWH.
[God then flooded the world in forty days]

4. ABRAHAM DEFENDS THE GUILTY AND LOSES

GENESIS 18:

¹⁷ Now YHWH had said to himself:

Shall I cover up from Avraham what I am about to do?

¹⁸ For Avraham is to become, yes, become a nation great and mighty (in number),

and all the nations of the earth will find blessing through him.

¹⁹ Indeed, I have known him,

in order that he may charge his sons and his household after him:

they shall keep the way of YHWH,

to do what is right and just,

in order that YHWH may bring upon Avraham what he spoke concerning him.

²⁰ So YHWH said:

The outcry in Sedom and Amora—how great it is!

And their sin—how exceedingly heavily it weighs!

²¹ Now let me go down and see:

if they have done according to its cry that has come to me—
destruction!

And if not—

I wish to know.

²² The men turned from there and went toward Sedom,

but Avraham still stood in the presence of YHWH.

²³ Avraham came close and said:

Will you really sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?

²⁴ Perhaps there are fifty innocent within the city,
will you really sweep it away?

Will you not bear with the place because of the fifty innocent that are in its
midst?

²⁵ Heaven forbid for you to do a thing like this,
to deal death to the innocent along with the guilty,
that it should come about: like the innocent, like the guilty,
Heaven forbid for you!

The judge of all the earth—will he not do what is just?

²⁶ YHWH said:

If I find in Sedom fifty innocent within the city,

I will bear with the whole place for their sake.

²⁷ Avraham spoke up, and said:

Now pray, I have ventured to speak to my Lord,
and I am but earth and ashes:

²⁸ Perhaps of the fifty innocent, five will be lacking—
will you bring ruin upon the whole city because of the five?

He said:

I will not bring ruin, if I find there forty-five.

²⁹ But he continued to speak to him and said:

Perhaps there will be found there only forty!

He said:

I will not do it, for the sake of the forty.

³⁰ But he said:

Pray let not my Lord be upset that I speak further:

Perhaps there will be found there only thirty!

He said:

I will not do it, if I find there thirty.

³¹ But he said:

Now pray, I have ventured to speak to my Lord:

Perhaps there will be found there only twenty!

He said:

I will not bring ruin, for the sake of the twenty.

³² But he said:

Pray let my Lord not be upset that I speak further just this one time:

Perhaps there will be found there only ten!

He said:

I will not bring ruin, for the sake of the ten.

³³ YHWH went, as soon as he had finished speaking to Avraham, and Avraham returned to his place.

5. LOT'S DAUGHTERS RAPE THEIR FATHER – AND SAVE THE WORLD

GENESIS 19:

⁴ They had not yet lain down, when the men of the city, the men of Sedom, encircled the house, from young lad to old man, all the people (even) from the outskirts.

⁵ They called out to Lot and said to him:
Where are the men who came to you tonight?
Bring them out to us, we want to know them!

⁶ Lot went out to them, to the entrance, shutting the door behind him
⁷ and said:

Pray, brothers, do not be so wicked!

⁸ Now pray, I have two daughters who have never known a man, pray let me bring them out to you, and you may deal with them however seems good in your eyes;
only to these men do nothing,
for they have, after all, come under the shadow of my roof-beam!

⁹ But they said:

Step aside!

and said:

This one came to sojourn and (wants to) judge, play-the-judge?!

Now we will do worse to you than (to) them!

And they pressed exceedingly hard against the man, against Lot, and stepped closer to break down the door.

¹⁰ But the men put out their hand and brought Lot in to them, into the house, and shut the door.

¹¹ And the men who were at the entrance to the house, they struck with dazzling-light—(all men) great and small, so that they were unable to find the entrance.

¹² The men said to Lot:

Whom else have you here—a son-in-law, sons, daughters?

Bring anyone whom you have in the city out of the place!

¹³ For we are about to bring ruin on this place,
for how great is their outcry before YHWH!

And YHWH has sent us to bring it to ruin.

¹⁴ Lot went out to speak to his sons-in-law, those who had taken his daughters (in marriage), and said:

Up, out of this place, for YHWH is about to bring ruin on the city!

But in the eyes of his sons-in-law, he was like one who jests.

¹⁵ Now when the dawn came up,

the messengers pushed Lot on, saying:

Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here,
lest you be swept away in the iniquity of the city!

¹⁶ When he lingered,

the men seized his hand, his wife's hand, and the hand of his two daughters

—because YHWH's pity was upon him—

and, bringing him out, they left him outside the city.

¹⁷ It was, when they had brought him outside, that (one of them) said:

Escape for your life, do not gaze behind you, do not stand still anywhere in the plain:

to the hill-country escape, lest you be swept away!

¹⁸ Lot said to them:

No, pray, my lord!

¹⁹ Now pray, your servant has found favor in your eyes,
you have shown great faithfulness in how you have dealt with me,
keeping me alive—

but I, I am not able to escape to the hill-country,
lest the wickedness cling to me, and I die!

²⁰ Now pray, that town is near enough to flee to, and it is so tiny;
pray let me escape there—is it not tiny?—and stay alive!

²¹ He said to him:

Here then, I lift up your face in this matter as well,
by not overturning this town of which you speak.

²² Make haste, escape there,
for I am not able to do anything until you come there.
Therefore the name of the town was called: Tzo'ar/Tiny.

²³ (Now) the sun was going out over the earth as Lot came to Tzo'ar.

²⁴ But YHWH rained down brimstone and fire upon Sodom and Amora,
coming from YHWH, from the heavens,

²⁵ he overturned those cities and all of the plain, all those settled in the
cities and the vegetation of the soil.

²⁶ Now his wife gazed behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

²⁷ Avraham started-early in the morning to the place where he had stood
in YHWH's presence,

²⁸ he looked down upon the face of Sodom and Amora and upon the
whole face of the plain-country
and saw:

here, the dense-smoke of the land went up like the dense-smoke of a
furnace!

²⁹ Thus it was, when God brought ruin on the cities of the plain,
that God kept Avraham in mind and sent out Lot from the overturning,
when he overturned the cities where Lot had settled.

³⁰ Lot went up from Tzo'ar and settled in the hill-country, his two
daughters with him,
for he was afraid to settle in Tzo'ar.

So he settled in a cave, he and his two daughters.

³¹ Now the firstborn said to the younger:

Our father is old,

and there is no man in the land to come in to us as befits the way of all
the earth!

³² Come, let us have our father drink wine and lie with him
so that we may keep seed alive by our father.

³³ So they had their father drink wine that night,
then the firstborn went in and lay with her father—
but he knew nothing of her lying down or her rising up.

³⁴ It was on the morrow that the firstborn said to the younger:
Here, yesternight I lay with father.

Let us have him drink wine tonight as well,
then you go in and lie with him,
so that we may keep seed alive by our father.

³⁵ They had their father drink wine that night as well,
then the younger arose and lay with him,

but he knew nothing of her lying down or her rising up.

³⁶ And Lot's two daughters became pregnant by their father.

6. ABRAHAM [*Avraham*] COMMITS ATTEMPTED MURDER – AND IS PRAISED

GENESIS 22:

[*The Great Test*: This story is certainly one of the masterpieces of biblical literature. In a famous article by Erich Auerbach it is remarked how biblical style as exemplified here, in contradistinction to that of Homer and other epic bards, eschews physical and psychological details in favor of one central preoccupation: a man's decision in relation to God. The result of this style is a terrible intensity, a story which is so stark as to be almost unbearable.

Chapter. 22 is a tale of God's seeming retraction of his promise (of "seed") to Avraham. The fact that other issues may be involved here (i.e., Israel's rejection of local and widely practiced ideas of child sacrifice) may be quite beside the point. Coming just one chapter after the birth of the long-awaited son, the story completely turns around the tension of the whole cycle and creates a new, frightening tension of its own. The real horror of the story lies in this threatened contradiction to what has gone before.

Most noticeable in the narrative is Avraham's *silence*, his mute acceptance of, and acting on, God's command. We are told of no sleepless night, nor does he ever say a word to God. Instead he is described with a series of verbs: starting-early, saddling, taking, splitting, arising, going (v.3; similarly in vv.6 and 9–10). Avraham the bargainer, so willing to enter into negotiations with relations (Chapter 13), allies (Chapter 14), local princes (Chapter 20), and even God himself (Chapter 18), here falls completely silent.

The chapter serves an important structural function in the Avraham cycle, framing it in conjunction with Chapter 12. The triplet in v.2 ("Pray take your son,/ your only-one,/ whom you love") recalls "from your land/ from your kindred/ from your father's house" in 12:1; "go-you-forth" and "the land that I will tell you of" (v.2; the latter, three times in the story) similarly point back to Avraham's call (12:1, "Go-you-forth...to the land that I will let you see"). There he had been asked to give up the past (his father); here, the future (his son). Between the two events lies Avraham's active life as man of God, ancestor, and intercessor. After this God will never speak with him again.

In many ways this story is the midpoint of Genesis. It brings the central theme of continuity and discontinuity to a head in the strongest possible way. After Moriyya, we can breathe easier, knowing that God will come to the rescue of his chosen ones in the direst of circumstances. At the same time we are left to ponder the difficulties of being a chosen one, subject to such an incredible test.

The story is also the paradigmatic narrative of the entire book. The Patriarch passes the test, and we know that the fulfillment of the divine promise is assured. Yet there is an ominous note: love, which occurs here by name for the first time, leads almost to heartbreak. So it will be for the rest of Genesis.]

¹ Now after these events it was
that God tested Avraham
and said to him:

Avraham!

He said:

Here I am.

² He said:

Pray take your son,
your only-one,

whom you love,

Yitzhak,

and go-you-forth to the land of Moriyya/Seeing,
and offer him up there as an offering-up
upon one of the mountains
that I will tell you of.

³ Avraham started-early in the morning,
he saddled his donkey,
he took his two serving-lads with him and Yitzhak his son,
he split wood for the offering-up
and arose and went to the place that God had told him of.

⁴ On the third day Avraham lifted up his eyes
and saw the place from afar.

⁵ Avraham said to his lads:
You stay here with the donkey,
and I and the lad wish to go yonder,
we wish to bow down and then return to you.

⁶ Avraham took the wood for the offering-up,
he placed them upon Yitzhak his son,
in his hand he took the fire and the knife.
Thus the two of them went together.

⁷ Yitzhak said to Avraham his father, he said:

Father!

He said:

Here I am, my son.

He said:

Here are the fire and the wood,
but where is the lamb for the offering-up?

⁸ Avraham said:

God will **see-for-himself** to the lamb for the offering-up,
my son.

Thus the two of them went together.

⁹ They came to the place that God had told him of;
there Avraham built the slaughter-site
and arranged the wood
and bound Yitzhak his son
and placed him on the slaughter-site atop the wood.

¹⁰ And Avraham stretched out his hand,
he took the knife to slay his son.

¹¹ But YHWH's messenger called to him from heaven
and said:

Avraham! Avraham!

He said:

Here I am.

¹² He said:

Do not stretch out your hand against the lad,
do not do anything to him!

For now I know

that you are in awe of God—

you have not withheld your son, your only-one, from me.

Yitzhak: The name is left until the end of the phrase, to heighten tension. Similarly, see 27:32. Moriyya: Trad. English "Moriah." The mountain here is later identified with the site of Solomon's Temple.

see-for-himself: Or "select." See the name of the mountain in verse 14, "YHWH Sees." offering-up,/ my son: One might read it with a dash instead of a comma, to preserve what may be an ironic answer.

7. JACOB [YAAKOV] DECEIVES – AND GETS DECEIVED

GENESIS 25:

²⁴ When her days were fulfilled for bearing, here: twins were in her body!

²⁵ The first one came out ruddy, like a hairy mantle all over, so they called his name: Esav/Rough-One.

²⁶ After that his brother came out, his hand grasping Esav's heel, so they called his name: Yaakov/Heel-Holder.

Yitzhak was sixty years old when she bore them.

²⁷ The lads grew up:

Esav became a man who knew the hunt, a man of the field, but Yaakov was a plain man, staying among the tents.

²⁸ Yitzhak grew to love Esav, for (he brought) hunted-game for his mouth,

but Rivka loved Yaakov.

²⁹ Once Yaakov was **boiling boiled-stew**, when Esav came in from the field, and he was weary.

³⁰ Esav said to Yaakov:

Pray give me a gulp of the red-stuff, that red-stuff, for I am so weary!

Therefore they called his name: Edom/Red-One.

³¹ Yaakov said:

Sell me your firstborn-right here-and-now.

³² Esav said:

Here, I am on my way to dying, so what good to me is a firstborn-right?

³³ Yaakov said:

Swear to me here-and-now.

He swore to him and sold his firstborn-right to Yaakov.

³⁴ Yaakov gave Esav bread and boiled lentils;

he ate and drank and arose and went off.

Thus did Esav despise the firstborn-right.

GENESIS 27:

¹ Now when Yitzhak was old and his eyes had become too dim for seeing,

he called Esav, his elder son, and said to him:

My son!

He said to him:

Here I am.

² He said:

Now here, I have grown old, and do not know the day of my death.

³ So now, pray pick up your weapons—your hanging-quiver and your bow,

go out into the field and hunt me down some hunted-game,

⁴ and make me a delicacy, such as I love;

bring it to me, and I will eat it,

that I may give you my own blessing before I die.

⁵ Now Rivka was listening as Yitzhak spoke to Esav his son,

and so when Esav went off into the fields to hunt down hunted-game to bring (to him),

⁶ Rivka said to Yaakov her son, saying:

Here, I was listening as your father spoke to Esav your brother, saying:

boiling boiled-stew:

This phrase may connote plotting, as in our English “cook up,” “brew,” “concoct,” or “stir up” trouble. Other forms of the Hebrew denote “insolence” or “intentional evil.”

⁷ Bring me some hunted-game and make me a delicacy, I will eat it and give you blessing before YHWH, before my death.

⁸ So now, my son, listen to my voice, to what I command you:

⁹ Pray go to the flock and take me two fine goat kids from there, I will make them into a delicacy for your father, such as he loves;

¹⁰ you bring it to your father, and he will eat, so that he may give you blessing before his death.

¹¹ Yaakov said to Rivka his mother:

Here, Esav my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man,

¹² perhaps my father will feel me—then I will be like a trickster in his eyes,

and I will bring a curse and not a blessing on myself!

¹³ His mother said to him:

Let your curse be on me, my son!

Only: listen to my voice and go, take them for me.

¹⁴ He went and took and brought them to his mother, and his mother made a delicacy, such as his father loved.

¹⁵ Rivka then took the garments of Esav, her elder son, the choicest ones that were with her in the house,

¹⁶ and clothed Yaakov, her younger son;

and with the skins of the goat kids, she clothed his hands and the smooth-parts of his neck.

¹⁷ Then she placed the delicacy and the bread that she had made in the hand of Yaakov her son.

¹⁸ He came to his father and said:

Father!

He said:

Here I am. **Which one are you**, my son?

¹⁹ Yaakov said to his father:

I am Esav, your firstborn.

I have done as you spoke to me:

Pray arise, sit and eat from my hunted-game,

that you may give me your own blessing.

²⁰ Yitzhak said to his son:

How did you find it so hastily, my son?

He said: Indeed, YHWH your God made it happen for me.

²¹ Yitzhak said to Yaakov:

Pray come closer, that I may feel you, my son,

whether you are really my son Esav or not.

²² Yaakov moved closer to Yitzhak his father.

He felt him and said:

The voice is Yaakov's voice, the hands are Esav's hands—

²³ but he did not recognize him, for his hands were like the hands of Esav his brother, hairy.

Now he was about to bless him,

²⁴ when he said:

Are you he, my son Esav?

He said:

I am.

Let your curse be on me: Ominously, Rivka disappears from the narrative after v.46.

Which one are you: Three times—here, in v.21, and in v.24—the father asks for assurances about the son's identity. my son: This phrase reverberates throughout the story, underlining the confusion over the identity of the sons.

GENESIS 29:

¹⁶ Now Lavan had two daughters: the name of the elder was Lea, the name of the younger was Rahel.

¹⁷ Lea's eyes were delicate, but Rahel was fair of form and fair to look at.

¹⁸ And Yaakov fell in love with Rahel.

He said:

I will serve you seven years for Rahel, your younger daughter.

¹⁹ Lavan said:

My giving her to you is better than my giving her to another man; stay with me.

²⁰ So Yaakov served seven years for Rahel, yet they were in his eyes as but a few days, because of his love for her.

²¹ Then Yaakov said to Lavan:

Come-now, (give me) my wife, for my days-of-labor have been fulfilled, so that I may come in to her.

²² Lavan gathered all the people of the place together and made a drinking-feast.

²³ Now in the evening he took Lea his daughter and brought her to him, and he came in to her.

²⁴ Lavan also gave her Zilpa his maid, for Lea his daughter as a maid.

²⁵ Now in the morning:

here, she was Lea!

He said to Lavan:

What is this that you have done to me!

Was it not for Rahel that I served you?

Why have you deceived me?

²⁶ Lavan said:

Such is not done in our place, giving away the younger before the firstborn;

²⁷ just fill out the bridal-week for this one, then we shall give you that one also,

for the service which you will serve me for yet another seven years.

²⁸ Yaakov did so—he fulfilled the bridal-week for this one, and then he gave him Rahel his daughter as a wife.

²⁹ Lavan also gave Rahel his daughter Bilha his maid, for her as a maid.

³⁰ So he came in to Rahel also, and he loved Rahel also, more than Lea.

Then he served him for yet another seven years.

GENESIS 37:

²³ So it was, when Yosef came to his brothers, that they stripped Yosef of his coat, the ornamented coat that he had on,

²⁴ and took him and cast him into the pit.

Now the pit was empty—no water in it.

²⁵ And they sat down to eat bread.

They lifted up their eyes and saw:

there was a caravan of Yishmaelites coming from Gil'ad,

their camels carrying balm, balsam, and ladanum,
traveling to take them down to Egypt.

²⁶ Now Yehuda said to his brothers:

What gain is there
if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?

²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Yishmaelites—

but let not our hand be upon him,

for he is our brother, our flesh!

And his brothers listened to him.

²⁸ Meanwhile, some Midyanite men, merchants, passed by;

they hauled up Yosef from the pit

and sold Yosef to the Yishmaelites, for twenty pieces-of-silver.

They brought Yosef to Egypt.

²⁹ When Re'even returned to the pit:

here, Yosef was no more in the pit!

He rent his garments

³⁰ and returned to his brothers and said:

The child is no more!

And I—where am I to go?

³¹ But they took Yosef's coat,

they slew a hairy goat

and dipped the coat in the blood.

³² They had the ornamented coat sent out

and had it brought to their father and said:

We found this;

pray recognize

whether it is your son's coat or not!

³³ He recognized it

and said:

My son's coat!

An ill-tempered beast has devoured him!

Yosef is torn, torn-to-pieces!

8. DINA IS RAPED – AND HER BROTHERS TAKE REVENGE

GENESIS 34:

¹ Now Dina, Lea's daughter, whom she had borne to Yaakov, went out to see the women of the land.

² And Shekhem son of Hamor the Hivvite, the prince of the land, saw her:

he took her and lay with her, forcing her.

³ But his emotions clung to Dina, Yaakov's daughter—he loved the girl, and he spoke to the heart of the girl.

⁴ So Shekhem said to Hamor his father, saying:

Take me this girl as a wife!

⁵ Now Yaakov had heard that he had defiled Dina his daughter, but since his sons were with his livestock in the fields, Yaakov kept silent until they came home.

⁶ Hamor, Shekhem's father, went out to Yaakov, to speak with him.

⁷ But Yaakov's sons came back from the fields when they heard, and the men were pained, they were exceedingly upset, for he had done a disgrace in Israel by lying with Yaakov's daughter, such (a thing) is not to be done!

⁸ Hamor spoke with them, saying:

My son Shekhem—

his emotions are so attached to your daughter,

(so) pray give her to him as a wife!

⁹ And make marriage-alliances with us:

give us your daughters, and our daughters take for yourselves,

¹⁰ and settle among us!

The land shall be before you:

settle down, travel about it, obtain holdings in it!

¹¹ And Shekhem said to her father and to her brothers:

May I only find favor in your eyes!

However much you say to me, I will give-in-payment,

¹² to whatever extreme you multiply the bride-price and the marriage-gift,

I will give however much you say to me—

only give me the girl as a wife!

¹³ Now Yaakov's sons answered Shekhem and Hamor his father **with deceit**,

speaking (thus) because he had defiled Dina their sister,

¹⁴ they said to them:

We cannot do this thing,

give our sister to a man who has a foreskin,

for that would be a reproach for us!

¹⁵ Only on this (condition) will we comply with you:

if you become like us, by having every male among you circumcised.

¹⁶ Then we will give you our daughters, and your daughters we will take for ourselves,

and we will settle among you, so that we become a single people.

¹⁷ But if you do not hearken to us, to be circumcised,

we will take our daughter and go.

¹⁸ Their words seemed good in the eyes of Hamor and in the eyes of Shekhem son of Hamor,

¹⁹ and the young man did not hesitate to do the thing,

for he desired Yaakov's daughter.

with deceit: Another example of a key word in the Yaakov stories; see 27:35 and 29:25.

Now he carried more weight than anyone in his father's house.

²⁰ When Hamor and Shekhem his son came back to the gate of their city, they spoke to the men of their city, saying:

²¹ These men are peaceably disposed toward us; let them settle in the land and travel about in it, for the land is certainly wide-reaching enough for them! Let us take their daughters as wives for ourselves, and let us give them our daughters.

²² But only on this (condition) will the men comply with us, to settle among us, to become a single people: that every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised.

²³ Their acquired livestock, their acquired property and all their beasts—will they not then become ours?!

Let us only comply with them, that they may settle among us!

²⁴ So they hearkened to Hamor and to Shekhem his son, all who go out (to war) from the gate of his city:

all the males were circumcised, all who go out (to war) from the gate of his city.

²⁵ But on the third day it was, when they were still hurting, that two of Yaakov's sons, **Shim'on and Levi**, Dina's full-brothers, took each man his sword,

they came upon the city (feeling) secure, and killed all the males,

²⁶ and Hamor and Shekhem his son they killed by the sword.

Then they took Dina from Shekhem's house and went off.

²⁷ Yaakov's (other) sons came up upon the corpses and plundered the city,

because they had defiled their sister.

²⁸ Their sheep, their oxen, their donkeys—whatever was inside the city and out in the field, they took,

²⁹ all their riches, all their little-ones and their wives they captured and plundered,

as well as all that was in the houses.

³⁰ But Yaakov said to Shim'on and to Levi:

You have stirred-up-trouble for me, making me reek among the settled-folk of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites!

For I have menfolk few in number; they will band together against me and strike me, and I will be destroyed, I and my household!

³¹ But they said:

Should our sister then be treated like a whore?

Shim'on and Levi:
They are condemned
for this incident by
Yaakov in 49:5–7.

9. TAMAR BECOMES A PROSTITUTE – AND THE PROGENITOR OF DAVID AND THE MESSIAH

GENESIS 38:

[*Yehuda and Tamar* (38): Chapter 38 has been the subject of many discussions, for it seems to be out of place. It interrupts the story of Yosef at a crucial dramatic spot, and is not chronologically fully consistent with it (Yehuda ages considerably; then we return to Yosef as a seventeen-year-old). Some feel that the suspension in the drama helps to raise tension; others argue that this is the only possible place to put an important tradition about the important brother. While these and other arguments may have their merit, one may discern some significant thematic connections as well, both within the context of the Yosef story and of Genesis as a whole.

The episode first of all demonstrates the growth of Yehuda as a character who is central to the Yosef novella. Already in Chapter 37 he had demonstrated active leadership, albeit in a questionable cause. There he actually saved Yosef's life, in contrast to Re'uven's unsuccessful and ultimately self-centered rescue attempt. As the one who basically assumes responsibility, he will be made to undergo an inner development in the narrative, and again becomes the one to take charge of the youngest son (Binyamin, in Chapters 43 and 44). The missing piece that begins to explain his nobility in this regard (Chapter 44) is the present chapter. Yehuda here learns what it is to lose sons, and to want desperately to protect his youngest. Although his failure to marry off Tamar to the youngest son leads to public humiliation (twice, actually), his response shows that he immediately accepts blame: "She is in-the-right more than I" (v.26). Such an interpretation is further confirmed by the restriction of the word "pledge" to here and 43:9. Yehuda has learned what it means to stake oneself for a principle.

Only after we have been informed of Yehuda's change can the narrative resume with Chap. 39. True to biblical thinking, redemption may start only after the crime has been punished (e.g., the Samson story, where the hero's hair begins to grow immediately after his imprisonment).

Actually the chronology works out quite well. We are told via 41:46, 53–54, that about twenty years elapse between the sale of Yosef and his meetings with the brothers in Egypt; this often signifies a period in biblical parlance and could encompass a generation or a bit less. Since Yehuda was quite possibly a father already in Chapter 37, the present story could well end just before the events reported in Chapter 43—in other words, Yehuda reaches full inner maturity just in time.

The other function of this story seems to be to carry out the major theme of Genesis as we have presented it: continuity and discontinuity between the generations. What is at stake here is not merely the line of one of the brothers, but the line which (as the biblical audience must have been fully aware) will lead to royalty—King David was a descendant of Peretz of v.29. This should not be surprising in a book of origins; we noted the possible mention of Jerusalem in 14:18. Apparently a popular early theme, connected as we have noted to the power of God in history, continuity/discontinuity is repeated in somewhat similar circumstances in the book of Ruth (which contains the only other mention of "begettings" outside of Genesis and Num.3:1).

The narrator has woven Chapters 38 and 37 together with great skill. Again a man is asked to "recognize" objects, again the use of a kid, and again a brother (this time a dead one) is betrayed.]

¹ Now it was at about that time that Yehuda went down, **away from his brothers** and turned aside to an Adullamite man—his name was Hira.

² There Yehuda saw the daughter of a Canaanite man—his name was Shua, he took her (as his wife) and came in to her.

³ She became pregnant and bore a son, and he called his name: Er.

⁴ She became pregnant again and bore a son, and she called his name: Onan.

⁵ Once again she bore a son, and she called his name: Shela. Now he was in Ceziv when she bore him.

⁶ Yehuda took a wife for Er, his firstborn—her name was Tamar.

⁷ But Er, Yehuda’s firstborn, did ill in the eyes of YHWH, and YHWH caused him to die.

⁸ Yehuda said to Onan: Come in to your brother’s wife, do **a brother-in-law’s duty** by her, to preserve seed for your brother!

⁹ But Onan knew that the seed would not be his, so it was, whenever he came in to his brother’s wife, he let it go to ruin on the ground, so as not to provide seed for his brother.

¹⁰ **What he did was ill** in the eyes of YHWH, and he caused him to die as well. Otherwise he will die: Folk belief often regarded a woman who had outlived two husbands as a bad risk in marriage. The emotion here—a father’s fear of losing a young son—will return as central in 42:36.

¹¹ Now Yehuda said to Tamar his daughter-in-law: Sit as a widow in your father’s house until Shela my son has grown up. For he said to himself: Otherwise he will die as well, like his brothers! So Tamar went and stayed in her father’s house.

¹² And many days passed. Now Shua’s daughter, Yehuda’s wife, died. When Yehuda had been comforted, he went up to his sheep-shearers, he and his friend Hira the Adullamite, to Timna.

¹³ Tamar was told, saying: Here, your father-in-law is going up to Timna to shear his sheep.

¹⁴ She removed her widow’s garments from her, covered herself with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat down by the entrance to Enayim/Two-Wells, which is on the way to Timna, for she saw that Shela had grown up, yet she had not been given to him as a wife.

¹⁵ When Yehuda saw her, he took her for a whore, for she had covered her face.

¹⁶ So he turned aside to her by the road and said: Come-now, pray 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 for coming in to me?

¹⁷ He said:

away from his brothers: More than geography seems to be meant. Yehuda begins to change as a person here, in preparation for Chapter 44. Note that the place Adullam assonates with Arabic (*Āadula*) “to turn aside.”

a brother-in-law’s duty: It was a well-known practice in biblical times that if a man died without leaving an heir, it was the obligation of his nearest of kin (usually his brother) to marry the widow and sire a son—who would then bear the name of the deceased man (Deut. 25:5–10).

What he did was ill: Onan dies because he does not fulfill his legal obligation to continue his brother’s line. The later interpretation, that his crime was masturbation (“onanism”), has no basis in this text.

I myself will send out a goat kid from the flock.
She said:
Only if you give me a pledge, until you send it.
¹⁸ He said:
What is the pledge that I am to give you?
She said:
Your seal, your cord, and your staff that is in your hand.
He gave them to her and then he came in to her—and she became pregnant by him.
¹⁹ She arose and went away,
then she put off her veil from her and clothed herself in her widow's garments.
²⁰ Now when Yehuda sent the goat kid by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to fetch the pledge from the woman's hand, he could not find her.
²¹ He asked the people of her place, saying:
Where is that **holy-prostitute**, the one in Two-Wells by the road?
They said:
There has been no holy-prostitute here!
²² So he returned to Yehuda and said:
I could not find her; moreover, the people of the place said: There has been no holy-prostitute here!
²³ Yehuda said:
Let her keep them for herself, lest we become a laughing-stock.
Here, I sent her this kid, but you, you could not find her.
²⁴ Now it was, after almost three New-Moons that Yehuda was told, saying:
Tamar your daughter-in-law has played-the-whore, in fact, she has become pregnant from whoring!
Yehuda said:
Bring her out and let her be burned!
²⁵ (But) as she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law, saying:
By the man to whom these belong I am pregnant. And she said:
Pray recognize—
whose seal and cords and staff are these?
²⁶ Yehuda recognized them
and said:
She is in-the-right more than I!
For after all, I did not give her to Shela my son!
And he did not know her again.

holy-prostitute: Or “cult prostitute,” one attached to a shrine in Canaan. Sex in the ancient world was often linked to religion (as part of fertility rites), although the Hebrews sought to sever the tie.

10. JOSEPH [*Yosef*] Is FRAMED – AND THEN FRAMES HIS BROTHERS

GENESIS 39:

⁷ Now after these events it was
that his lord's wife fixed her eyes upon Yosef
and said:

Lie with me!

⁸ But he refused,

he said to his lord's wife:

Look, my lord need not concern himself with anything in the house, with
me here,

and everything that belongs to him, he has placed in my hands.

⁹ He is no greater in this house than I

and has withheld nothing from me

except for yourself,

since you are his wife.

So how could I do this great ill?

I would be sinning against God!

¹⁰ Now it was, as she would speak to Yosef day after day, that he would
not hearken to her, to lie beside her, to be with her—

¹¹ so it was, on such a day,

when he came into the house to do his work,

and none of the house-people was there in the house—

¹² that she grabbed him by his garment, saying:

Lie with me!

But he left his garment in her hand and fled, escaping outside.

¹³ Now it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and
had fled outside,

¹⁴ that she called in her house-people and said to them, saying:

See! He has brought to us

a Hebrew man to play around with us!

He came to me, to lie with me,

but I called out with a loud voice,

¹⁵ and it was, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and called out

that he left his garment beside me and fled, escaping outside!

¹⁶ Now she kept his garment beside her, until his lord came back to the
house.

¹⁷ Then she spoke to him according to these words, saying:

There came to me the Hebrew servant whom you brought to us, to play
around with me;

¹⁸ but it was, when I lifted up my voice and called out,

that he left his garment beside me and fled outside.

¹⁹ Now it was, when his lord heard his wife's words which she spoke to
him,

saying: According to these words, your servant did to me!—

that his anger flared up;

²⁰ Yosef's lord took him and put him in the dungeon house,

in the place where the king's prisoners are imprisoned.

GENESIS 44:

¹ Now he commanded the steward of his house, saying:
Fill the men's packs with food, as much as they are able to carry,
and put each man's silver in the mouth of his pack.
² And my goblet, the silver goblet, put in the mouth of the youngest's
pack, along with the silver for his rations.
He did according to Yosef's word which he had spoken.
³ At the light of daybreak, the men were sent off, they and their donkeys;
⁴ they were just outside the city—they had not yet gone far—when
Yosef said to the steward of his house:
Up, pursue the men, and when you have caught up with them, say to
them:
Why have you paid back ill for good?
⁵ Is not this (goblet) the one that my lord drinks with?
And he also **divines**, yes, divines with it!
You have wrought ill in what you have done!
⁶ When he caught up with them, he spoke those words to them.
⁷ They said to him:
Why does my lord speak such words as these?
Heaven forbid for your servants to do such a thing!
⁸ Here, the silver that we found in the mouth of our packs, we returned to
you from the land of Canaan;
so how could we steal silver or gold from the house of your lord?
⁹ He with whom it is found among your servants, he shall die,
and we also will become my lord's servants!
¹⁰ He said:
Now as well, according to your words, so be it:
he with whom it is found shall become my servant, but you shall be
clear.
¹¹ With haste each-man let down his pack to the ground, each-man
opened his pack.
¹² and then he searched: with the eldest he started and with the youngest
he finished—
and the goblet was found in Binyamin's pack!
¹³ They rent their clothes,
each-man loaded up his donkey, and they returned to the city.
¹⁴ Yehuda and his brothers came into Yosef's house
—he was still there—
and flung themselves down before him to the ground.
¹⁵ Yosef said to them:
What kind of deed is this that you have done!
Do you not know that a man like me can divine, yes, divine?
¹⁶ Yehuda said:
What can we say to my lord?
What can we speak, by what can we show ourselves innocent?
God has found out your servants' crime!
Here we are, servants to my lord, so we, so the one in whose hand the
goblet was found.
¹⁷ But he said:
Heaven forbid that I should do this!
The man in whose hand the goblet was found—he shall become my
servant,
but you—go up in peace to your father!

divines: Cups were used in predicting the future in the ancient Near East. The diviner would examine the shapes made by insoluble liquids, such as oil in water. You have wrought ill: Resembling Laban's accusation against Yaakov, "You have done foolishly" (31:28).

¹⁸ **Now Yehuda came closer to him and said:**

Please, my lord,
pray let your servant speak a word in the ears of my lord,
and do not let your anger flare up against your servant,
for you are like Pharaoh!

¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, saying: Do you have a father or (another) brother?

²⁰ And we said to my lord: We have an old father
and a young child of his old age,
whose brother is dead,
so that he alone is left of his mother,
and his father loves him.

²¹ And you said to your servants: Bring him down to me, I wish to set my eyes upon him.

²² But we said to my lord:
The lad cannot leave his father,
were he to leave his father, he would die.

²³ But you said to your servants: If your youngest brother does not come down with you, you shall not see my face again.

²⁴ Now it was, when we went up to your servant, my father, we told him my lord's words,

²⁵ and our father said: Return, buy us some food-rations.

²⁶ But we said: We cannot go down;
if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down,
for we cannot see the man's face if our youngest brother is not with us.

²⁷ Now your servant, my father, said to us:

You yourselves know
that my wife bore two to me.

²⁸ One went away from me,
I said: For sure he is torn, torn-to-pieces!
And I have not seen him again thus far.

²⁹ Now should you take away this one as well from before my face,
should harm befall him, you will bring down my gray hair in ill-fortune to Sheol!

³⁰ So now,
when I come back to your servant, my father, and the lad is not with us,
—with whose life his own life is bound up!—

³¹ it will be, that when he sees that the lad is no more, he will die,
and your servant will have brought down the gray hair of your servant,
our father, in grief to Sheol!

³² For your servant pledged himself for the lad to my father,
saying: If I do not bring him back to you, I will be culpable-for-sin
against my father all the days (to come).

³³ So now,
pray let your servant stay instead of the lad, as servant to my lord,
but let the lad go up with his brothers!

³⁴ For how can I go up to my father, when the lad is not with me?
Then would I see the ill-fortune that would come upon my father!

GENESIS 45

:

[*Reconciliation* (45): In revealing his true identity at last, Yosef makes two points: first, that it was all part of God's plan; and second, that the family must

Now Yehuda...

said...: Yehuda's great speech, masterful in its rhetoric, is chiefly aimed at stirring up sympathy for the father; it contains the word "father" fourteen times. Binyamin, whose appearance actually causes Yosef great anguish, is hardly treated as a personality at all. you are like Pharaoh: Lit. "like you is like Pharaoh."

immediately prepare for migration to Egypt. Thus the personal story is intertwined with the national one, and the text therefore gives limited time and space to psychological details. The motif of God's plan is stressed by the repetition of "God sent me" (vv.5, 7, 8), while the anticipated bounties of settling in Egypt are brought out by the threefold "good-things of Egypt" (vv.18, 20, 23) and by the repeated exhortation to "come" (vv.18, 19).]

¹ Yosef could no longer restrain himself in the presence of all who were stationed around him,

he called out:

Have everyone leave me!

So no one stood (in attendance upon) him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers.

² He put forth his voice in weeping:

the Egyptians heard, Pharaoh's household heard.

³ Then Yosef said to his brothers:

I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?

But his brothers were not able to answer him,
for they were confounded in his presence.

⁴ Yosef said to his brothers:

Pray come close to me!

They came close.

He said:

I am Yosef your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.

⁵ But now, do not be pained,

and do not let upset be in your eyes that you sold me here!

For it was to save life that God sent me on before you.

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A passage of Scripture may be read...

Minister Most merciful God,
All **we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole
heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as
ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly
repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us,
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your name. Amen.**

A priest says,

Almighty God have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your
sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all
goodness,
and keep you in eternal life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

People **Amen.**

Minister The peace of the Lord be always with
you.

People **And also with you.**

Minister As our Saviour taught us, let us pray,

All **Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

Minister The gifts of God for the People of God.
People **Thanks be to God.**

Following the Communion, this doxology may be said...

Minister All your works praise you, O Lord.
People **And your faithful servants bless you.**

All **Gracious God
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son
Jesus Christ.
May we, who share his body,
live his risen life;
we, who drink his cup,
bring life to others;
we, whom the Spirit lights,
give light to the world.
Keep us firm in the hope you have set
before us,
so that we and all your children shall
be free,
and the whole earth live to praise your
name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Minister Let us bless the Lord.
People **Thanks be to God.**

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