

GENESIS

Introduction

Its name derives from the book's first words: "In the beginning...". We can distinguish three important divisions in the book:

Theological writings. *They refer to the Creation of the world, Paradise, and the First Sin. These are stories, they are not history but theology. They do not relate events that happened, but are fundamental messages about human beings, their relationship with God, and sin.*

Very old traditions. *The famous stories about Cain and Abel, the Flood, the Tower of Babel. These are very old traditions, previous even to the history of Israel. The great history compilers of Israel found them, and they included them as a "history of the origins", more legendary than historic, giving them a strong religious meaning.*

The history of the Patriarchs. *Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are the "fathers of the people". The origin of these stories is also rooted in legend. They have for us a symbolic value and the authors were more interested in their religious messages than in the historical events in themselves. This "history" ends with the marvelous "history of Joseph", one of the most beautiful stories of the whole Bible.*

Creation

1 ¹In the beginning, God began to create the heavens and the earth.

²The earth had no form and was void; darkness was over the deep and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.

³God said:

—Let there be light.

And there was light.

⁴God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light 'Day' and the darkness 'Night'.

There was evening and there was morning: the first day.

⁶God said:

—Let there be a firm ceiling between the waters and let it separate waters from waters. ⁷So God made the ceiling and separated the waters below it from the waters above it. And so it was.

⁸God called the firm ceiling 'Sky'.

There was evening and there was morning: the second day.

⁹God said:

—Let the waters below the sky be gathered together in one place and let dry land appear."

And so it was.

¹⁰God called the dry land 'Earth', and the waters gathered together he called 'Seas'.

God saw that it was good.

¹¹God said:

—Let the earth produce vegetation, seed-bearing plants, fruittrees bearing fruit with seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.

And so it was.

¹²The earth produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kind and trees producing fruit which has seed, according to their kind.

God saw that it was good.

¹³There was evening and there was morning: the third day.

¹⁴God said:

—Let there be lights in the ceiling of the sky to separate day from night and to serve as signs for the seasons, days and years; ¹⁵and let these lights in the sky shine above the earth.

And so it was.

¹⁶God therefore made two great lights, the greater light to govern the day and the smaller light to govern the night; and God made the stars as well. ¹⁷God placed them in the ceiling of the sky to give light on the earth ¹⁸and to separate the light from the darkness.

God saw that it was good.

¹⁹There was evening and there was morning: the fourth day.

²⁰God said:

—Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth under the ceiling of the sky.

²¹God created the great monsters of the sea and all living animals, those that teem in the waters, according to their kind, and every winged bird, according to its kind.

God saw that it was good.

²²God blessed them saying:

—Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the waters of the sea, and let the birds increase on the earth.

²³There was evening and there was morning: the fifth day.

²⁴God said:

—Let the earth produce living animals according to their kind: cattle, creatures that move along the ground, wild animals according to their kind.

So it was.

²⁵God created the wild animals according to their kind, and everything that creeps along the ground according to its kind.

God saw that it was good.

²⁶God said:

—Let us make man in our image, to our likeness. Let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over the wild animals, and over all creeping things that crawl along the ground.

²⁷So God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them and said to them:

—Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, over every living creature that moves on the ground.

²⁹God said:

—I have given you every seed-bearing plant which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree that bears fruit with seed. It will be for your food. ³⁰To every wild animal, to every bird of the sky, to everything that creeps along the ground, to everything that has the breath of life, I give every green plant for food.

So it was.

³¹God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

2¹That was the way the sky and earth were created and all their vast array.

²By the seventh day the work God had done was completed, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had done.

³And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on that day he rested from all the work he had done in his creation.

^{4a}These are the successive steps in the creation of the heavens and the earth.

In these two chapters we see two different stories about the creation of the world and of human beings that, evidently, contradict each other. The explanation is that the intention is not to try to explain how things happened (this was unknown to the authors, and even to us), but explain who God is (the Ruler, the Lord) and how humans relate to Him. These are also a beautiful hymn to the wisdom and power of God.

You can also read:

Proverbs 8:11,23-32. Good sense is the first of the creative tasks of God.

Ecclesiasticus 43:1-33. It is a great hymn to nature that is presented as a commentary to Psalm 148.

Job 38 and 39. God answers Job, who blames Him for the evil in his life.

And making use of lyrical genre addresses God in prayer of praise and thanksgiving in the Psalms. Psalms are the prayer of Israel. They are the expression of human experience turned towards God. They are the expression of the life of a people dragged along by God.

Psalms were composed for repeated use: they are not to become exhaust by the first person who composes or orders it, nor by the first historical experience of the people.

You can also see:

Psalms 8, 24, 104, 136, 148. All of them talk about the creation of God.

Paradise and Sin

^{4b}On the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵there was not yet on the earth any shrub of the fields, nor had any plant yet sprung up, for Yahweh God had not made it rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the earth, ⁶but a mist went up from the earth and watered the surface of the earth.

⁷Then Yahweh God formed Man, dust drawn from the clay, and breathed into his nostrils a breath of life and Man became alive with breath.

⁸God planted a garden in Eden in the east and there he placed Man whom he had created.

⁹Yahweh God caused to grow from the ground every kind of tree that is pleasing to see and good to eat, also the tree of Life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

¹⁵Yahweh God took Man and placed him in the garden of Eden to till it and take care of it. ¹⁶Then Yahweh God gave an order to Man saying:

—You may eat of every tree in the garden, ¹⁷but of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, you will not eat, for on the day you eat of it, you will die.

¹⁸Yahweh God said:

It is not good for Man to be alone; I will give him a helper who will be like him.

¹⁹Then Yahweh God formed from the earth all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air and brought them to Man to see what he would call them; and whatever Man called every living creature, that was its name.

²⁰So Man gave names to all the cattle, the birds of the air and to every beast of the field. But he did not find among them a helper like himself.

²¹Then Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to come over Man and he fell asleep. He took one of his ribs and filled its place with flesh.

²²The rib which Yahweh God had taken from Man he formed into a woman and brought her to the man.

²³The man then said:

—Now this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken from man.

²⁴That is why man leaves his father and mother and is attached to his wife, and with her becomes one flesh.

²⁵Both the man and his wife were naked and were not ashamed.

God has created everything good, innocent, perfect. But humanity is not like that: there is pain, work, death. In what follows the author of the book explains why there is so much evil in the world. Once again, the intention is not to tell what happened. The characters and actions are symbolic. It is a presentation, marvelously described, about the essence of temptation. Human beings prefer a small and immediate good to friendship with God. That is in the origin of humanity's problems. This tendency, ignorant and slaving, origin of all evils, is what we call "original sin". Not because it happened at the historical origin of humanity, but because it is at the deep root of all our mistakes, of all our sins.

3 ¹Now the serpent was the craftiest of all the wild creatures that Yahweh God had made.

He said to the woman:

—Did God really say: You must not eat from any tree in the garden?

²The woman said to the serpent:

³—We may eat the fruit of the trees in the garden, but of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden God said:

—You must not eat, and you must not touch it or you will die.

⁴The serpent said to the woman:

⁵—You will not die, but God knows that the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil.

⁶The woman saw that the fruit was good to eat, and pleasant to the eyes, and ideal for gaining knowledge. She took its fruit and ate it and gave some to her husband who was with her. He ate it.

⁷Then their eyes were opened and both of them knew they were naked. So they sewed leaves of a fig tree together and made themselves loincloths. ⁸They heard the voice of Yahweh God walking in the garden, in the cool of the day, and they, the man and his wife, hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden.

⁹Yahweh God called the man saying to him:

—Where are you?

¹⁰He said:

—I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.

¹¹God said:

—Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree I ordered you not to eat?

¹²The man answered:

—The woman you put with me gave me fruit from the tree and I ate it.

¹³God said to the woman:

—What have you done?

The woman said:

—The serpent deceived me and I ate.

¹⁴Yahweh God said to the serpent:

—Since you have done that, be cursed among all the cattle and wild beasts! You will crawl on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life.

¹⁵I will make you enemies, you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

¹⁷To the man, He said:

—Because you have listened to your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I forbade you to eat, cursed be the soil because of you! In suffering you will provide food for yourself from it, all the days of your life.

²⁰The man called his wife by the name of Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.

²¹Yahweh God made garments of skin for the man and his wife, and with these he clothed them.

Cain and Abel

It is a very, very old legend about grudges between farmers and cattlemen, represented by two typical personages. But the author has used it to portray what is perhaps the most important message of the whole book: YOU SHALL NOT KILL. Not even the killer. Pay special attention to the final passage, versicle 15.

⁴ ¹Adam had intercourse with Eve his wife; she became pregnant and gave birth to a child. She named him Cain, for she said:

—I have got a man with help from Yahweh.

²She later gave birth to Abel, his brother. Abel was a shepherd and kept flocks, and Cain tilled the soil. Cain was downcast. ⁶Then Yahweh said to Cain:

—Why are you angry and downcast? ⁷If you do right, why do you not look up? But if you are not doing what is right, sin is lurking at the door. It is striving to get you, but you must control it.

⁸Cain said to his brother Abel:

—Let's go to the fields.

Once there, Cain turned on his brother Abel and killed him.

⁹Yahweh said to Cain:

—Where is your brother, Abel?

He answered:

—I don't know; am I my brother's keeper?

¹⁰Yahweh asked:

—What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. ¹¹Now be cursed and driven from the ground that has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood that your hand has shed. ¹²When you till the soil, it will no longer yield you its produce. You will be a fugitive wandering on the earth."

¹³Cain said to Yahweh:

—My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴See! Today you drive me from this land. I must hide from you and be a wanderer and a fugitive on the earth, and it will so happen that whoever meets me will kill me.

¹⁵Yahweh said to him:

—Well then, whoever kills Cain, will suffer vengeance seven times.

And Yahweh put a mark on Cain to prevent anyone who met him from killing him.

¹⁶Cain then went from Yahweh's presence and settled in the land of Nod, to the east of Eden.

Sin: Flood

Historical data of terrible past floods, made bigger by legends, is used by the author to make an important penitential sermon, showing the graveness of sin and its consequences.

6⁴At that time there were giants on the earth, and afterwards as well, when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. These were the heroes of old, men of renown.

⁵Yahweh saw how great was the wickedness of man on the earth and that evil was always the only thought of his heart. ⁶Yahweh regretted having created man on the earth and his heart grieved. ⁷He said:

—I will destroy man whom I created and blot him out from the face of the earth, as well as the beasts, creeping creatures and birds, for I am sorry I made them.

⁸But Noah was pleasing to God.

Noah and the arc

⁹Noah was a just man, blameless among the people of his time, a man who walked with God. ¹⁰Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

¹¹The earth became corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. ¹²God saw the earth and saw it was corrupt, for corrupt, indeed, was the way of all mortals.

¹³Yahweh said to Noah:

—I have in mind to destroy all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. This is why I will destroy them and with them the earth. ¹⁴As for you, build an ark of cypress wood. You will make rooms in the ark and coat it with pitch inside and outside. ¹⁷I am about to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy the earth, to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life. Everything on earth will perish, ¹⁸but I will establish my covenant with you. You shall come into the ark, you, your wife, your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹You shall bring into the ark two of every kind of living thing, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰Of the birds, the animals and all creeping things on the ground, according to their kind, two of every sort shall come in to be kept alive with you. ²¹Take with you every sort of food that is eaten. Make a store of it and it will be food for you and them.

²²And Noah did all as God had commanded him.

Noah enters the arc

7⁷So Noah went into the ark with his children, his wife and his sons' wives to escape the waters of the flood. ⁸Clean animals and also unclean, birds, and all that crawls on the earth went into the ark with Noah; ⁹they went two and two, male and female, as God had commanded Noah.

¹⁰And after seven days the waters of the flood were over the earth. ¹¹In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month and on the seventeenth day of the month, all the fountains of the great deep burst forth.

¹²And there was a downpour on the earth lasting forty days and forty nights.

²⁴The waters flooded the earth for one hundred and fifty days.

End of the flood

8¹Then God remembered Noah and all the animals and cattle that were with him in the ark. God made a wind blow over the earth and the waters subsided. ⁴In the seventh month, in the seventeenth day of the month, the ark rested on Mount Ararat.

⁶At the end of the forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had built ⁷and let the raven out. This went off and kept flying to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. ⁸Then Noah let out the dove to see if the waters were receding from the earth. ⁹But the dove could not find a place to set its foot and flew back to him in the ark for the waters still covered the surface of the whole earth. So Noah stretched out his hand, took hold of it and brought it back to himself in the ark. ¹⁰He waited some more days and again sent the dove out from the ark. ¹¹This time the dove came back to him in the evening with a fresh olive branch in its beak. ¹²He waited seven more days and let the dove loose, but it did not return to him any more.

Noah goes out of the arc

¹⁵Then God said to Noah:

¹⁶—Come out of the ark, you and your wife, your sons and their wives with you. ¹⁷Bring out with you all flesh, that is, all the animals who are with you, all things of flesh; birds, cattle and all that crawls on the earth. Let them abound on the earth, be fruitful and increase in number.

¹⁸So Noah went out, with his sons, his wife and his sons' wives with him. ¹⁹All the animals, all the birds, all that creeps on the earth, came out of the ark, one kind after another.

²⁰Noah built an altar to Yahweh and, taking some of all the clean animals and all the clean birds, he offered burnt offerings on it.

²¹Yahweh smelled the pleasing aroma and said to himself:

—Never again will I curse the earth because of man, even though his heart is set on evil from childhood; never again will I strike down every living creature as I have done.

Covenant between God and Noah

9 ¹God blessed Noah and his sons and he said to them:

—Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth.

³Everything that moves and lives shall be food for you;

as I gave you the green plants.

⁵And from man I will demand a reckoning for the life of his fellow man.

⁶For in the image of God has God made man.

⁷As for you, be fruitful and increase.

Abound on the earth and be master of it.

⁸God spoke to Noah and his son:

—This is the sign of the covenant I make between me and you, and every animal living with you for all future generations. ¹³I set my bow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth, ¹⁶when the rainbow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of every kind that exists on the earth.

¹⁷God said to Noah:

—This is the sign of the covenant I have made between me and all that has life on the earth.

We have seen in this text a very deep and valid religious conception: God, the Lord, gives the earth to humans, as their house, and humans will have to render account of it. God is an Ally of humans: if they behave bad, He will punish them so they can change, but never looking for death but for their conversion. The rainbow is God's arch of war, hanging in the firmament for ever, as a sign of peace. This will be a permanently present throughout the Old Testament.

The Babel Tower

The tower of Babel gets its inspiration in the pyramidal constructions of Babylon and its imperialists pretensions.

11 ¹The whole world had one language and a common speech. ²As people moved from east, they found a plain in the country of Shinar where they settled.

³They said to one another:

—Come, let us make bricks and bake them in fire.

They used brick for stone and bitumen for mortar.

⁴They said also:

—Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top reaching heaven; so that we may become a great people and not be scattered over the face of the earth!

⁵Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower that the sons of man were building, ⁶and Yahweh said:

—They are one people and they have one language. If they carry this through, nothing they decide to do from now on will be impossible. ⁷Come! Let us go down and confuse their language so that they will no longer understand each other.

⁸So Yahweh scattered them over all the earth and they stopped building the city. ⁹That is why it was called Babel, because there Yahweh confused the language of the whole earth and from there Yahweh scattered them over the whole face of the earth.

PATRIARCHAL CYCLE: ABRAHAM

We now shift from the “history” of all humanity to the history of the people of Israel. Their great ancestors are presented, figures aggrandized by legends, who became religious types.

God intervenes in history and He always does it to call humans to a better destiny, although apparently more demanding and unknown. Abraham will be, first of all, “the one who trusted in God”, thus he left his land, trusting in God’s promise: “I will give you this land, I will make you father of a great people.”

His descendants were more mediocre. There are many dark stops in their lives. The author does not hide them; he also chronicles their sins, showing that God uses human frailty to carry on with his plan of salvation.

Vocation of Abram

12¹Yahweh said to Abram:

—Leave your country,
your family and your father’s house,

for the land I will show you.

²I will make you a great nation.

I will bless you and make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

³I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you,

I will curse, and in you
all peoples of the earth will be blessed.

⁴So Abram went as Yahweh had told him, and Lot went with him.

Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

⁵Abram took Sarai, his wife, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran. They set out for the land of Canaan.

⁶Abram traveled through the country as far as Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

⁷Yahweh appeared to Abram and said:

—To your descendants I will give this land.

There he built an altar to Yahweh who had appeared to him.

⁸From there he went on to the mountains east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There also he built an altar to Yahweh and called on the name of Yahweh.

Abram and Lot

13¹Abram went up from Egypt to the Negeb, he and his wife, with all he had and Lot with him.

²Abram settled in the country of Canaan while Lot lived among the towns of the plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

⁴Yahweh said to Abram after Lot had left him:

—Raise your eyes and look from where you are, towards the north, the south, the east and the west; ¹⁵all the land you see I will give to you and your descendants forever. ¹⁶I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; if the grains of the dust can be counted, then your descendants may be counted.

Covenant of the Lord with Abram

15¹After this the word of Yahweh was spoken to Abram in a vision:

—Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great!

⁵Then Yahweh brought him outside and said to him:

—Look up at the sky and count the stars if you can. Your descendants will be like that.

⁶Abram believed Yahweh who, because of this, held him to be an upright man.

⁷And he said:

—I am Yahweh who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession.

17¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to him and said:

—I am God Almighty. Walk in my presence and be without blame! ²I will make a covenant between myself and you, and I will multiply your race.

³Abram fell face down and God said to him:

⁴—This is my covenant with you: you will be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵No longer will you be called Abram, but Abraham, because I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁷And I will establish a covenant, an everlasting covenant between myself and you and your descendants after you; from now on I will be your God and the God of your descendants after you, for generations to come. ⁸I will give to you and your

descendants after you the land you are living in, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession and I will be the God of your race.

¹⁵God said to Abraham:

—As for Sarai, your wife, no longer are you to call her Sarai, but Sarah. ¹⁶I will bless her, and I will give you a son by her.

Intercession of Abraham

18 ¹⁷Yahweh said:

—Can I conceal from Abraham what I am about to do? ¹⁸Abraham, in fact, is going to become a great and powerful nation and through him all the nations of the earth will be blessed, ¹⁹for I have chosen him to command his sons and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that Yahweh may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.

²⁰Then Yahweh said:

—How great is the cry for justice against Sodom and Gomorrah! And how grievous is their sin! ²¹I am going down to see if they have done all that they are charged with in the outcry that has reached me. If it is not so, I will know.

²³Abraham went forward and said:

—Will you really let the just perish with the wicked? ²⁴Perhaps there are fifty good people in the town. Are you really going to let them perish? Would you not spare the place for the sake of these fifty righteous people? ²⁵It would not be at all like you to do such a thing and you can't let the good perish with the wicked, nor treat the good and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the judge of all the earth be just?

²⁶Yahweh said:

—If I find fifty good people in Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.

²⁷Abraham spoke up again:

—I know that I am very bold to speak like this to my Lord, I who am only dust and ashes! ²⁸But perhaps the number of the good is five less than fifty. Will you destroy the town because of five?

Yahweh replied:

—I will not destroy the town if I find forty-five good people there.

²⁹Again Abraham said to him:

—Perhaps there will be only forty.

He answered:

—For the sake of forty I will not do it.

³⁰Abraham went on, saying:

—May my Lord not be angry, but let me speak. Maybe only thirty good people will be found in the town.

Yahweh answered:

—I will not destroy it if I find thirty there.

³¹Abraham said:

—Now that I have been so bold as to speak to my Lord, what if only twenty can be found?

He said:

—For the sake of twenty I will not destroy the place.

³²But Abraham insisted:

—May my Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found?

And Yahweh answered:

—For the sake of ten good people, I will not destroy Sodom.

³³When Yahweh had finished speaking with Abraham, he left and Abraham went home.

Israel's tradition has always seen Abraham as "the friend of God". In its ingenuity and deepness, it is moving the image of Abraham bargaining with God to save the just of Sodoma.

19 ²⁹So when God destroyed the towns of the plain he remembered Abraham and made Lot escape from the catastrophe while he destroyed the cities where Lot had lived.

Birth of Isaac

21 ²Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time Yahweh had promised. ³Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son that Sarah bore him ⁴and circumcised him when he was eight days old, as Yahweh had commanded.

³⁴And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

The Sacrifice of Isaac

This story is confusing. It seems a cruel actuation of God. In reality, the writer has taken a very old story, previous to Israel, of human sacrifices, and cancelled it by substituting children with animals. As a result a kind of fable is created that magnifies the great obedience of Abraham. The happy ending shows that even in the worst scenarios one can still trust in God.

22 ¹Some time later God tested Abraham and said to him:

—Abraham!

And he answered:

—Here I am.

²Then God said:

—Take your 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 I shall point out to you.

³Abraham rose early next morning and saddled his donkey and took with him two of his young men and his son Isaac. He chopped wood for the burnt offering and set out for the place to which God had directed him. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance, ⁵and he said to the young men:

—Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship and then we will come back to you.

⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. He carried in his hand the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together,

⁷Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father:

—Father!

⁸And Abraham replied:

—Yes, my son?

Isaac said:

—The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?

Abraham replied:

—God himself will provide the lamb for the sacrifice.

They went on, the two of them together,⁹ until they came to the place to which God had directed them. When Abraham had built the altar and set the wood on it, he bound his son Isaac and laid him on the wood placed on the altar.¹⁰ He then stretched out his hand to seize the knife and slay his son.¹¹ But the Angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven:

—Abraham! Abraham!

And he said:

—Here I am.

¹²Yahweh told him:

—Do not lay your hand on the boy; do not harm him, for now I know that you fear God, and you have not held back from me your only son.

¹³Abraham looked around and saw behind him a ram caught by its horns in a bush. He offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son.¹⁴ Abraham named the place ‘The Lord will provide.’ And the saying has lasted to this day.

¹⁵And the Angel of Yahweh called from heaven a second time:

¹⁶—By myself I have sworn, it is Yahweh who speaks, because you have done this and not held back your son, your only son,¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the lands of their enemies.¹⁸ All the nations of the earth will be blessed through your descendants because you have obeyed me.

¹⁹So Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba and it was there that Abraham stayed.

PATRIARCHAL CYCLE: ISAAC

In the following passages little we will find about important religious messages. These are old stories, present in the tradition on the origin of these people as well as other neighbor peoples; the authors try to give a certain religious meaning.

25¹⁹This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham.

²⁰Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel, the Aramean from Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean.²¹ Isaac prayed to Yahweh for his wife, because she could not have children. Yahweh heard Isaac’s prayer and Rebecca, his wife, conceived.²² As the children struggled together within her, she said:

—If it is like this, why do I continue to live?

She went to consult Yahweh,²³ and Yahweh said to her:

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

²⁴When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb.

²⁵The first to be born was red and his whole body was like a hairy garment, so they called him Esau.²⁶ Then his brother was born and his hand had gripped Esau’s heel so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty at the time of their birth.

²⁷When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country; Jacob was a quiet man living in tents. ²⁸Isaac who had a liking for game loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob.

²⁹Once when Jacob was making a stew, Esau came back from the country and he was famished; ³⁰and he said to Jacob:

—Let me have some of that red stew, for I am famished. That is why he was also called Edom.

³¹Jacob said:

—First sell me your right as the firstborn.

³²Esau said:

—Since I am to die soon, what good is my right as the firstborn to me?

³³Then Jacob said:

—Give me your oath first.

So he swore to him and sold his firstborn right to Jacob. ³⁴Then Jacob gave him bread and the lentil stew. Esau ate and drank and then got up and went his way. So it was that Esau thought nothing of his right as the firstborn.

Isaac blesses Jacob

27 ¹When Isaac was old and his eyes so weak that he could no longer see, he called Esau, his older son, and said to him:

—My son!

He answered:

—Here I am.

²Isaac continued:

—You see I am old and I don't know when I shall die; ³so take your weapons, your bow and arrow, go out into the country and hunt some game for me. ⁴Then prepare some of the savory food I like and bring it to me so that I may eat and give you my blessing before I die.

⁵Now Rebecca was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau went into the country to hunt game and bring it back, ⁶Rebecca said to her son Jacob:

—I heard your father saying to your brother Esau: ⁷'Bring me some game and prepare food for me that I may eat and bless you before Yahweh before I die.' ⁸Now my son, listen and do what I command you. ⁹Go to the flock and bring me two fine kids so that I can prepare for your father the food that he likes. ¹⁰You will bring it to your father and he will eat it and give you his blessing before he dies.

¹¹Jacob said to Rebecca:

—My brother Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth-skinned. ¹²Perhaps my father will feel me and I will seem to be tricking him and so bring a curse on myself instead of a blessing.

¹³But his mother said:

—Let the curse fall on me, my son! Only do what I tell you; go and get the kids for me.

¹⁴So he went and got them and took them to his mother to prepare food that his father liked. ¹⁵Then Rebecca took the best clothes of her elder son Esau that she had in the house and put them on Jacob, her younger son. ¹⁶With the goatskin she covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck, ¹⁷and she handed to him the bread and food she had prepared.

¹⁸He went to his father and said:

—Father!

He answered:

—Yes, my son, who is it?

¹⁹and Jacob said to his father:

—It is Esau, your firstborn; I have done what you told me to do. Come, sit up and eat my game so that you may give me your blessing.

²⁰Isaac said:

—How quick you have been my son!

Jacob said:

—Yahweh, your God, guided me.

²¹Isaac said to Jacob:

—Come near and let me feel you, my son, and know that it is you, Esau my son, or not.

²²When Jacob drew near to Isaac, his father felt him and said:

—The voice is the voice of Jacob but the hands are the hands of Esau.

²³He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like the hands of Esau his brother and so he blessed him.

²⁴He asked:

—Are you really my son Esau?

And Jacob answered:

—I am.

²⁵Isaac said:

—Bring me some of your game, my son, so that I may eat and give you my blessing.

So Jacob brought it to him and he ate. And he brought him wine and he drank. ²⁶Then his father Isaac said to him:

—**Come near and kiss me, my son.**

²⁷**So Jacob came near and kissed him.**

Isaac then caught the smell of his clothes and blessed him, saying:

—The smell of my son
is like the smell of a field
which the Lord has blessed.

²⁸May God give you of the dew of heaven;
and of the richness of the earth;
and abundance of grain and wine.

²⁹Let peoples serve you
and nations bow down before you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and let your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be everyone that curses you
and blessed be everyone
that blesses you!

³⁰When Isaac had finished blessing him and Jacob had just left Isaac's room, Esau came in from hunting. ³¹He also prepared food and brought it to his father and said to him:

—Father, sit up and eat the game your son has prepared, so that you may give me your blessing.

³²Isaac said:

—Who are you?

—I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.

³³Isaac trembled violently and said:

—Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it all before you came and I blessed him and he will be blessed.

³⁴On hearing his father's words, Esau gave a loud and bitter cry and said:

—Bless me, too, father.

³⁵But Isaac said:

—Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.

³⁶Esau said:

—Is it because he is called Jacob that he has supplanted me twice? First he took my birthright and now he has taken my blessing.

Then he asked:

—Haven't you kept a blessing for me?

³⁷Isaac answered Esau:

—I have made him your lord. I have given him all his brothers as servants; I have provided him with grain and wine. What can I do for you, my son?

³⁸Esau said to his father:

—Have you only one blessing? Father, bless me, too. Then Esau wept aloud.

³⁹Isaac then gave him this answer:

—Your dwelling place shall be far away
from the richness of the earth,
away from the dew of heaven above.

⁴⁰You shall live by your sword,
and you shall serve your brother;
but when you win your freedom
you will throw off his yoke from your neck.

⁴¹Now Esau continued to hate his brother because of the blessing his father had given him and he thought to himself:

—The time of mourning for my father is near; I shall then kill my brother Jacob.

⁴²When Rebecca was told what her elder son had said, she sent and called her younger son, Jacob, and said to him:

—Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. ⁴³Now my son, listen to me and flee to Laban, my brother, in Haran. ⁴⁴You will stay with him for a time ⁴⁵until your brother's fury has cooled; and when he has forgotten his anger and what you did to him, I will send someone to bring you back. Why should I lose both of you on the same day?

PATRIARCHAL CYCLE: JACOB

Jacob a Pilgrim

28 ¹Isaac summoned Jacob and blessed him and commanded him:

—Do not marry a Canaanite woman. ²Go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father, and choose a wife for yourself from the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. ³May God Almighty bless you and make you increase to become a group of nations.

Jacob at Bethel

¹⁰Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. ¹¹When he reached a certain place the sun had set and he spent the night there. He took one of the stones that were there and using it as a pillow, he lay down to sleep.

¹²While Jacob was sleeping, he had a dream in which a ladder stood on the earth with its top reaching to heaven and on it were angels of God going up and coming down. ¹³And Yahweh was standing there near him and said:

—I am Yahweh, the God of your father, Abraham, and the God of Isaac. The land on which you sleep, I give to you and your descendants. ¹⁴Your descendants will be numerous like the specks of dust of the earth and you will spread out to the west and the east, to the north and the south. Through you and your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed. ¹⁵See, I am with you and I will keep you safe wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land and not leave you until I have done what I promised.

¹⁶Jacob woke from his dream and said:

—Truly, Yahweh was in this place and I was not aware of it.

¹⁷He was afraid and said:

—How full of awe is this place! It is nothing less than a *House of God*; it is the Gate to Heaven!

¹⁸Then Jacob rose early and took the stone he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.

Death of Isaac

35 ²²Jacob had twelve sons. ²³By Leah: Reuben, Jacob's eldest son, then Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. ²⁴The sons by Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁵The sons by Bilhah, Rachel's slave girl: Dan and Naphtali. ²⁶The sons by Zilpah, Leah's slave girl: Gad and Asher. These were the sons born to Jacob in Paddanaram.

²⁷Jacob came home to his father Isaac at Mamre or Kiriatharba (that is, Hebron) where Abraham and Isaac had lived. ²⁸After living a hundred and eighty years ²⁹Isaac breathed his last and was gathered to his people at a good old age. His sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

CYCLE OF JOSEPH

The history of Joseph is one of the most beautiful and known of the whole Old Testament. It is doubtful that it is historical, or even a legend. It seems rather a historical novel with a moralizing intention.

The message is heartbreaking: the fidelity of God that never fails the just person who remains faithful. In spite of all the calamities, God is there and the patience and fidelity of man will come back as blessing for him and his brothers.

This issue about the misfortunes of the just will occur many times, but not always with a "happy ending." The deepest expression of misfortunes will be found in the Book of Job.

Joseph's dreams

37 ¹Jacob lived in the land where his father had settled, in the land of Canaan. ²This is the history of Jacob's family.

²Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was shepherding the flock with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. Joseph informed his father of the bad reputation they had. ³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other children, for he was the son of his old age and he had a coat with long sleeves made for him. ⁴His brothers who saw that their father loved him more than he loved them, hated him and could no longer speak to him in a friendly way.

⁵Joseph had a dream which, when he told it to his brothers, made them hate him the more:

⁶—Listen to the dream I had. ⁷We were binding sheaves in the field when my sheaf rose and stood up and your sheaves gathered round and bowed down to my sheaf.

⁸His brothers said to him:

—So you want to rule us or lord it over us!

They hated him even more because of his dreams and what he said.

⁹Joseph had another dream which he told to his brothers:

—I saw the sun, the moon and seven stars bowing down before me.

¹⁰When he told this to his father and brothers, his father rebuked him:

—What is this dream of yours? Are all of us, myself, your mother and your brothers to bow to the ground before you?

¹¹His brothers were jealous of him but his father kept in mind what he had said.

¹²His brothers had gone to pasture their father's flock at Shechem, ¹³and Israel said to Joseph:

—Your brothers are pasturing the flock at Shechem; come along, I'll send you to them.

Joseph replied:

—Here I am.

¹⁴Then his father said:

—Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flock; then come back and tell me.

Jacob sent him from the valley of Hebron and Joseph arrived at Shechem.

¹⁸They saw him in the distance and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. ¹⁹They said to one another:

—Here comes the specialist in dreams! ²⁰Now's the time! Let's kill him and throw him into a well. We'll say a wild animal devoured him. Then we'll see what his dreams were all about!

²¹But Reuben heard this and tried to save him from their hands ²²saying:

—Let us not kill him; shed no blood! Throw him in this well in the wilderness, but do him no violence.

This he said to save him from them and take him back to his father.

Joseph sold by his brothers

²³So as soon as Joseph arrived, they stripped him of his long-sleeved coat that he wore ²⁴and then took him and threw him in the well. Now the well was empty, without water. ²⁵They were sitting for a meal when they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels laden with spices, balm and myrrh, which they were taking down to Egypt. ²⁶Judah then said to his brothers:

—What do we gain by killing our brother and hiding his blood? ²⁷Come! We'll sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother and our own flesh!"

His brothers agreed to this. ²⁸So when the Midianite merchants came along they pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the well. For twenty pieces of silver they sold Joseph to the Midianites, who took him with them to Egypt. ²⁹When Reuben went back to the well, Joseph was no longer there. He tore his clothes ³⁰and returned to his brothers and said:

—The boy has disappeared, and what am I to do?

³¹They then took Joseph's coat, killed a goat and dipped the coat in its blood. ³²They sent the long-sleeved coat and had it taken to their father, saying:

—This we have found; see if it is your son's coat or not.

³³He recognized it and said:

—It is my son's coat. Joseph has been attacked by a wild animal and torn to pieces.

³⁴Jacob then tore his garments, put on sackcloth and mourned his son for a long time. ³⁵All his sons and daughters came to comfort him but he refused to be consoled saying:

—No, I shall go down to the land of Shadows, mourning for my son.

Thus his father wept for him.

³⁶Meanwhile the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the commander of the guard.

Joseph, steward of Potiphar

39¹Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, commander of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there.

²Yahweh blessed Joseph while he lived in the house of his master, the Egyptian, and everything went right for him. ³The Egyptian could see that God was with him and everything worked well for him. ⁴So Joseph pleased his master who made him overseer of his house and of all that he owned, ⁵and from that time God blessed the Egyptian's house because of Joseph; he blessed all that the Egyptian owned, his household and his land. ⁶The Egyptian left all he had to the care of Joseph and, with Joseph fully in charge, he concerned himself with nothing except the food that he ate. Joseph was a handsome man and well-built.

Temptation, calumny and jail

⁷After some time his master's wife kept noticing him and said:

—Sleep with me.

⁸But he refused and said to her:

⁹—How can I do such an evil thing and sin against God?

¹⁰Although day after day she spoke to Joseph, he would not agree to sleep with her or give himself to her.

¹¹It happened that one day, when he entered the house to attend to his duties, none of the servants were in the house. ¹²Then Potiphar's wife caught hold of Joseph by his cloak. But Joseph left his cloak in her hands and ran out of the house.

¹³As soon as he had run out of the house, ¹⁴she called her servants and said:

—Look, a Hebrew has been brought here to make fun of us; he came here to lie with me, so I screamed ¹⁵and he left his cloak with me and run out of the house.

¹⁶Then she kept the cloak by her until the master came home. ¹⁷She then told her story

¹⁹When his master heard what his wife told him, "This is how your servant treated me," he blazed with anger. ²⁰He took Joseph and put him in the Royal Prison where the king's prisoners were kept.

But while Joseph was in prison ²¹Yahweh was with him and showed him kindness so that he was well-liked by the warden of the prison.

40 ¹Some time after this, it happened that the cupbearer of the king of Egypt, who prepared the drinks for Pharaoh, and his chief baker offended their lord. ²Pharaoh was angry with his two officers ³and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was kept. ⁴So the captain of the guard appointed Joseph to attend to their needs, for they were under arrest for some time.

²⁰It so happened that on the third day, Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his officers and remembered the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. ²¹The cupbearer was restored to his office and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand; ²²but the chief baker was hanged, as Joseph had interpreted to them. ²³Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

The dreams of Pharaoh

41 ¹After two whole years Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile ²when seven cows, sleek and fat, were coming up from the Nile and beginning to feed among the rushes. ³Behind them came seven other cows, lean and scraggy that stood beside the cows already there. ⁴These devoured the sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke.

⁵He fell asleep again and had a second dream. He saw growing on one stalk seven ears of corn that were full and ripe. ⁶And after these, there sprouted seven more ears of corn that were small and scorched by the east wind. ⁷Now the small ears of corn swallowed the plump and ripe ones. Then Pharaoh awoke.

⁸In the morning he was uneasy and called all the magicians and wise men in Egypt. He told his dreams to them but not one among them was able to interpret his dreams. ⁹Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh:

—This reminds me of my wrongs. ¹⁰Pharaoh was angry with his servants and had me put in custody in the house of the captain of the guard and with me the chief baker. ¹¹Once on the same night we both had a dream, each with its own meaning. ¹²With us was a young Hebrew, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him our dreams he interpreted them giving to each one its own meaning. ¹³What he interpreted for us happened. I was restored to my office and the chief baker was hanged.

Joseph interprets the dreams

¹⁴Pharaoh then had Joseph summoned. They took him quickly from the prison, shaved him, changed his clothes and he presented himself to Pharaoh.

¹⁵Then Pharaoh addressed him:

—I have had a dream which no one can explain; now I have heard that when you hear a dream you are able to interpret it.

¹⁶Joseph replied:

—It's not I but God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.

¹⁷Pharaoh then began telling his dream.

—I was beside the Nile ¹⁸when seven fine cows, sleek and fat, came up from the river and began to feed in the rushes. ¹⁹Then seven other cows came up behind them. These were poor, scraggy and lean. I had never seen any so ugly in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰The thin, gaunt cows ate up the seven fat cows, ²¹but after eating them, it was as if they had not eaten them at all because they remained as lean and scraggy as they were before. And then I woke. ²²I also saw in my dream seven ears of corn growing on one stalk, full and ripe. ²³Then, after them, there sprouted seven ears of corn that were hard and small and withered by the east wind. ²⁴The withered ears of corn swallowed the good ears. I told this to the magicians but none of them could explain its meaning.

²⁵Then Joseph said:

—Pharaoh’s dream is one and the same. Yahweh has just revealed to Pharaoh what he will do. ²⁶The seven fat cows are seven years and the seven good ears as well. It’s one dream! ²⁷The seven lean cows coming after them are seven years as are the seven withered ears of corn scorched by the east wind, and they are seven years of famine. ²⁸As I said to Pharaoh, God is revealing to him what he is about to do. ²⁹There will be seven years of plenty throughout the land of Egypt, ³⁰but they will be followed by seven years of famine. Then the time of abundance will be forgotten and famine will exhaust the land. ³¹So severe will the famine be that no one will remember the time of plenty.

³²If the dream has been repeated twice for Pharaoh it is because God has so determined and will soon make it happen. ³³Now it is for Pharaoh to choose an intelligent and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴Pharaoh could have supervisors in the land and could levy a tax of one fifth of the produce of the land during the seven years of plenty. ³⁵They must gather all the food of these productive years that are coming and, by the authority of Pharaoh, store grain for food in the towns and keep it. ³⁶This food will be a reserve for the seven years of famine coming to the land of Egypt so that the people will not die of hunger.

Joseph, the head minister

³⁷The proposal of Joseph pleased Pharaoh and his ministers, and Pharaoh asked them:

³⁸—Where shall we find such a man possessed with the spirit of God?

³⁹And to Joseph he said:

⁴⁰—You shall be over my house, and all my people will obey your orders.

⁴⁶Joseph was thirty years old when he was summoned to the presence of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. After taking his leave of Pharaoh he journeyed through the entire land of Egypt. ⁴⁷During the seven years of plenty the land produced abundantly. ⁴⁸So Joseph gathered up all the food that was produced during these years, storing in each town the food from the fields around it. ⁴⁹Joseph stored huge quantities of wheat, like the sand from the sea, so much that they lost count of the amount.

⁵³When the seven years of plenty throughout the land of Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴the seven years of famine began as Joseph had foretold. There was famine in all the countries but in every part of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵When the land of Egypt began to suffer from the famine, the people came to Pharaoh for bread. But Pharaoh told all the Egyptians:

—Go to Joseph and do as he tells you.

⁵⁷As the famine had worsened throughout the whole world, people came from other countries to buy grain from Joseph.

Joseph’s brothers: First encounter

42 ¹When Jacob heard there was wheat in Egypt he said to his sons:

—Why do you stand looking at one another? ²I’ve heard there is grain in Egypt, so go down and buy some for us so that we may stay alive and not die!

³Joseph’s brothers—ten of them—went down to Egypt to buy wheat. ⁷Joseph recognized his brothers but did not make himself known and, instead, said harshly to them:

—Where do you come from?

And they answered:

—We come from the land of Canaan to buy grain for food.

⁸Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him. ⁹And he remembered the dreams he once had concerning them. He told them:

—You are spies, and it is to discover the weak points of the land that you have come.

¹⁰They said:

—No, my lord, your servants have come to buy grain for food. ¹¹We are all sons of the same man. We are honest men; your servants are not spies.

¹²Joseph replied:

—No, it is to find out the weak points of the country that you have come.

¹³They said:

—Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; the youngest is today with our father and the other is no more.

¹⁴But Joseph insisted:

—It's just as I said, you are spies! ¹⁵And this will be proved. By the life of Pharaoh you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶One of you is to go and fetch your brother. The others will be imprisoned while I verify whether you are telling the truth. If not, then as true as Pharaoh lives, you are spies.

¹⁷And so he put them all in prison for three days.

¹⁸On the third day Joseph said to them:

—I will help you to save yourselves, for I am a man who fears God. ¹⁹If you are sincere, let one of your brothers remain prisoner in the house of the guard where you now are, and the rest of you take the grain to save your families from famine. ²⁰Then you will bring back your youngest brother, so the truth of what you say will be proved and your lives spared.

They did as they were ordered ²¹and said among themselves:

—Alas! We are guilty because of the way we treated our brother when he pleaded with us for mercy, but we didn't listen. That is why this trouble has come upon us.

²²Reuben answered them:

—Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy. But you did not listen and now we are brought to account for his blood.

²³Now they did not know that Joseph understood them as there was an interpreter between them.

²⁴As for Joseph, he withdrew and wept. When he came back, he spoke to them and took Simeon and had him bound and put in prison while they looked on.

Return to Canaan

²⁵Joseph ordered their sacks to be filled with wheat and their money replaced in the sack of each one and provisions be given them for the journey. All this was done; ²⁶they loaded the grain on their donkeys and set off.

²⁷But in the evening one of them emptied his sack to feed his donkey at the lodging place, and he saw his money at the mouth of the sack, so he said:

²⁸—My money has been put back: here it is in my sack! Their hearts failed them and they trembled and turned to each other and said:

—What is this that God has done to us!

²⁹When they came back to Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him about all their adventures:

³⁰—The man who is governor of the country spoke harshly to us and treated us as spies.

³¹But we said:

—We are honest men, not spies. ³²We were twelve brothers, sons of the same father; one is no more and the youngest is with our father in the land of Canaan.

³³Then the man who is lord of the land said: By this I will know if you are honest. Leave one of your brothers here; take grain to save your families from the famine and go. ³⁴Bring back your youngest brother and let me see you are not spies but honest men. Then I shall release your brother and you can trade in the land.

³⁵Now, when they emptied their sacks, each one found his money bag in his sack. When they saw this, they were afraid and their father as well. ³⁶Jacob their father said to them:

—You are taking my children from me. Joseph has gone; Simeon has gone and now you are taking Benjamin. I have all this to bear!

³⁷Then Reuben said to his father:

—You may have the lives of my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to me and I shall see that he comes back.

³⁸But Jacob said:

—My son will not go with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If he were to meet with some misfortune on the way, you would send my gray head to the land of Shadows in sorrow.

Second encounter

43 ¹The lack of food was severe in the land, ²and when they had eaten the grain they brought from Egypt, their father said to them:

—Go down again and buy us a little food.

³But Judah said to him:

—The man solemnly warned us that our brother had to come with us. ⁴If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy food for you; ⁵but if you don't send him, we will not go, for the man said: You will not be admitted to my presence if your brother is not with you.

⁶Israel then said:

—Why did you bring this misery on me by letting the man know you have another brother?

⁷They replied:

—The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kinsfolk saying: 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' And so we answered these questions. Could we have known that he would tell us to bring our brother?

⁸Judah then said to Israel his father:

—Send the boy with me. Let us go so that we, you and our children may live and not die. ⁹I will guarantee his safety. If I do not bring him back and set him here before you, I will bear the blame forever. ¹⁰If we hadn't delayed for so long we could have been there and back twice over.

¹¹Israel their father said to them:

—If it must be so, then do this: take some choice products of the land in your bags and a gift for the man—some balm, a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. ¹²Take double the money with you and you will repay what was put in your sacks; it may have been a mistake. ¹³Take your brother and go back to the man. ¹⁴May God Almighty grant you mercy in his presence, so that he will allow you to bring back your other brother and Benjamin. As for myself if I am bereaved of my children, then bereaved I shall have to be.

¹⁵Taking Benjamin, they set off and went down to Egypt and were admitted to the presence of Joseph.

¹⁶When Joseph saw that Benjamin was with them, he said to his steward:

—Bring these men to my house. Have an animal slaughtered and a meal prepared, for these men will eat with me at noon.

¹⁷The steward did as Joseph directed and brought the men to Joseph's house. ¹⁸They were afraid and said to each other:

—It's because of the money that was placed in our sacks the last time, that we are brought in. He wants to attack and overpower us and have us as slaves and take our donkeys.

¹⁹So they approached Joseph's steward and spoke to him at the door of the house:

²⁰—Oh my Lord, we came down here the first time to buy food, ²¹and when we reached a lodging place and opened our sacks, we found in the mouth of the sacks each one's money to the full weight. We have brought it back with us ²²as well as additional money to buy food. We don't know who put the money in our sacks.

²³The steward said:

—Be at peace! Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, put a treasure in your grain sacks. Your money reached me safely.

He then brought Simeon out to them. ²⁴The steward took them into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet and fodder for their donkeys. ²⁵They prepared their present and waited for Joseph's arrival at midday, for they heard they were to dine there.

²⁶When Joseph came into the house, they offered him the gift they had with them and bowed to the ground before him. ²⁷He asked them how they were and said:

—Is your father well, the old man you spoke about? Is he still alive?

²⁸They answered:

—Your servant our father is well and is still alive. ²⁹He looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, the son of his own mother, and said:

—Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?

And he added:

—God be good to you, my son!

³⁰So deeply moved was Joseph, on seeing his brother that he wanted to cry and went out quickly and wept in his own private room. ³¹After he had washed his face and come out, controlling himself, he said:

—Serve the meal.

³²He was served separately and so were they, and the Egyptians as well, for the Egyptians cannot share a meal with Hebrews; for the Egyptians this would be a shame. ³³They were seated opposite him in the order of their ages from the eldest to the youngest and they looked at each other in astonishment. ³⁴Joseph had portions from his own dish taken to them and Benjamin's portion was five times more than that of the others. So they drank freely with him.

Benjamin guilty

44 ¹Now Joseph gave this order to his steward:

—Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry and put back each man's silver in the mouth of his sack, ²and put my cup, the silver cup with the money for the grain in the sack of the youngest.

The steward did as Joseph had directed.

³As soon as it was light next morning the men were sent away with their donkeys. ⁴When they had gone but were still not far from the city, Joseph said to his steward:

—Go quickly after those men and when you have caught up with them, say this: 'Why have you repaid good with evil? ⁵Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and uses for divination? You have done a wicked thing.'

⁶When he caught up with them he repeated these words. ⁷They said to him:

—Why does my lord speak like that? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing. ⁸The money we found in the mouths of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan! How then could we have stolen silver or gold from your lord's house? ⁹If one of your servants is found with the object, he will die and we too will become my lord's slaves.

¹⁰—Very well then, he said, it will be as you say. The one who is found to have the cup will become my master's slave; the rest of you will go free.

¹¹Then each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. ¹²And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³Then they tore their clothes and, reloading their donkeys, they returned to the city.

Third encounter

¹⁴Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers returned and they threw themselves on the ground before him. ¹⁵Joseph said to them:

—What have you done? Didn't you know that a man such as I am is able to practice divination?

¹⁶Then Judah said:

—What shall we say to my lord? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servant's guilt; we are my lord's slaves, we and the one who has been found with the cup.

¹⁷But Joseph said:

—Far be it from me to do that. Only the man found to have the cup will be my slave. As for the rest, go back in peace to your father.

¹⁸Judah then went forward and said:

—My lord, allow your servant to speak. Do not be angry with your servant, although you are equal to Pharaoh himself. ¹⁹The last time you questioned your servants saying: 'Have you a father or a brother?' ²⁰We said to my lord: 'We have an aged father who had a child in his old age. His brother is dead and he is the only one left of his mother's children. And his father loves him.' ²¹Then you said to us: 'Bring him down so that I can see him for myself.' ²²We told my lord that the boy could not leave his father, for if he did, his father would die.

²³You then told us that if our youngest brother did not come with us, we would not be admitted to your presence. ²⁴All this we said to our father on returning there. ²⁵So when he told us to come back and buy a little food, ²⁶we said: 'We cannot go down again unless our youngest brother is with us. We shall not be admitted to the lord's presence unless our brother is with us.' ²⁷Then my father said: 'You know that my wife had two children. ²⁸One went away from me and has surely been torn to pieces since I have not seen him anymore. ²⁹If you take this one from me and something happens to him you will bring my gray hair in sorrow to the grave.' ³⁰Now I can't return to my father without the boy, for my father loves him very much. If he sees that the boy is not there, ³¹he will die and we will have sent the gray hairs of our father in sorrow to the grave.

³²Now I, your servant, guaranteed the boy's safety and said to my father: 'If I do not bring him back, I will bear the blame before you all my life.' ³³So now let me take the place of the boy and stay here as slave and let the boy go with his brothers, ³⁴for I can't return to my father without the boy. Do not let me see the misery that would be too much for my father.

Joseph reveals himself

45 ¹Now Joseph could no longer control his feelings in the presence of all those standing by and he called out:

—Leave my presence, everyone!

And only his brothers were with him when Joseph made himself known to them. ²He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard and the news spread through Pharaoh's house.

³Joseph said to his brothers:

—I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?

And his brothers could not answer because they were terrified at seeing him.

⁴Joseph said:

—Come closer.

And they drew nearer.

—I am Joseph your brother, yes, it's me, the one you sold to the Egyptians. ⁵Now don't grieve and reproach yourselves for selling me, because God has sent me before you to save your lives. ⁶It's two years since famine has been in the land and there will be another five years without tilling and without harvest. ⁷God has sent me ahead of you to make our race survive there and to save many of you. ⁸So it was not you but God who sent me here, and made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of his household, and ruler also of all the land of Egypt. ⁹Go back quickly to my father and say to him: 'Joseph your son sends you this message: God has made me lord of all Egypt; so come down to me without delay; ¹⁰you shall live in the land of Goshen and you shall be near me, you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and your herds, all that you have. ¹¹And there I will provide for you (for there will be five more years of famine) lest you and your household and all who belong to you, be in need. ¹²Now you can see for yourselves, and your brother Benjamin can see that it is I myself who speak to you. ¹³You will tell my father of the glory I have in Egypt and of all that you have seen. Go quickly and bring my father down here.

¹⁴Joseph then threw his arms around Benjamin and wept. ¹⁵Then weeping he kissed and embraced his brothers and they began to talk with him.

²⁴Then he sent his brothers away and as they left he said:

—Don't quarrel on the way.

²⁵They returned from Egypt and came back to Jacob their father in Canaan. ²⁶They told him:

—Joseph is alive and he is the ruler of all Egypt!

Jacob was stunned for he could not believe them. ²⁷But they told him all that Joseph had said and showed him the wagons that Joseph sent to carry him. Then Jacob's spirit revived and he said:

²⁸—It's enough, my son Joseph is alive; I will go and see him before I die.

Jacob goes down to Egypt

46 ¹Israel left with all he owned and reached Beersheba where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ²God spoke to Israel in visions that he had during the night:

—Jacob! Jacob!

He said:

—Here I am.

³—I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. ⁴I will go with you to Egypt and I will bring you back again and Joseph's hand will close your eyes.

⁵Jacob left Beersheba and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father with their little children and their wives in the wagons that Joseph had sent to fetch him.

⁶They also took their flocks and all that they had acquired in Canaan. And so it was that Jacob came to Egypt and with him all his family, ⁷his sons and his grandsons, his daughters and his granddaughters, in short all his children he took with him to Egypt.

Jacob meets Joseph

²⁸Jacob sent Judah ahead to let Joseph know he was coming and that he would soon arrive in the land of Goshen.

²⁹Joseph got his chariot ready in order to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He presented himself, threw his arms around his father and wept on his shoulder for a long time.

Jacob in Egypt

47 ¹¹ So Joseph had his father and brothers settled, giving them property in the best part of Egypt, in the land of Rameses as Pharaoh had commanded. ¹² Joseph provided his father, his brothers and his father's entire household with food according to the number of their dependents.

Death of Jacob: Manasseh and Ephraim

48 ¹ Some time later, when Joseph was told that his father was ill, he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. ² So they told Jacob that Joseph his son had come. Then Israel, mustering his strength, sat up in bed. ³ And he said to Joseph:

—God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me ⁴ saying, ‘I will make you fruitful and increase your number, and I will make of you a group of nations, and I will give this land to you and to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.’ ⁵ From now on your two sons who were born in Egypt, before I came to you here, are mine! Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. ⁶ Only the children born after them will be yours and the land they inherit shall be known by the names of Ephraim and Manasseh.

49 ³³ When Jacob had given these instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed; he breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

50 ¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers realized that their father was dead they said:

—What if Joseph turns against us in hate because of the evil we did him?

¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph saying:

—Before he died your father told us to say this to you: ¹⁷Please forgive the crime and the sin of your brothers in doing evil to you. Forgive the crime of the servants of your father's God.

When he was given the message, Joseph wept. ¹⁸ His brothers went and threw themselves down before him, and said:

—We are your slaves.

¹⁹ But Joseph reassured them:

—Don't be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to do me harm, but God intended to turn it to good in order to bring about what is happening today—the survival of many people. ²¹ So have no fear! I will provide for you and your little ones.

In this way he touched their hearts and consoled them.

Death of Joseph

²² Joseph remained in Egypt together with all his father's family. He lived for a hundred and ten years, ²³ long enough to see Ephraim's great-grandchildren, and also to have the children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, placed on his knees after their birth.

²⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers:

—I am going to die, but God will surely remember you and take you from this country to the land he promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

²⁵ Joseph then made the sons of Israel swear, saying:

—When God comes to bring you out from here, carry my bones with you.

²⁶ Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten; they embalmed him and laid him in a coffin in Egypt.

Here ends the Book of Genesis. A "history of the origins" in which religious messages, traditions and legends, events of history are interwoven. But absolutely all these stories are written as religious messages. The Bible was never interested in telling these things as pure historical curiosities; rather it uses history, or invents it, to transmit a religious message. This religious message is the true argument of all these stories.

You can also see:

Psalm 23. It is a Psalm of trust with the image of God as a shepherd and as host. See also Psalm 105.