

Theological Foundations

Alternate Edition

J.J. Mueller, SJ, et al.

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Introduction

From the Editor

J.J. Mueller, SJ, PhD

What Is Theology?

When we ask the question, “What is theology?” the word’s etymology offers us helpful insight. The word *theology* comes from the Greek and means “God-talk” (*theos* = “God”; *logos* = “word”). Hence, theology describes *what* we do: We talk about God. Better yet, we have conversations about God. Theology is communal; it belongs to the life of faith in the ongoing Christian community, stemming from the revelation of Jesus two-thousand years ago. Theology also describes the methods we use when we talk about God. Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) defined theology as “faith seeking understanding,” and we would add, “so that understanding deepens our faith, which means understanding and acting in pursuit of our goal, which is loving God and neighbor as Jesus did.” We do not find the word *theology* in other religious traditions (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam); it is, however, the word used in the Christian tradition. Besides the generic sense of “talk about God,” it has developed a specific sense as an academic discipline with a body of writing, methods, interpretations, subdisciplines, and so on. (This same specificity occurs in academic disciplines with generic names, such as English, history, philosophy, and medicine.)

Purpose of This Book

This book is about how to successfully study theology. Nothing is foreign to this pursuit of theology and, because theology pursues the deepest questions of being authentically human in God, why should there be any limit? Absolutely everything is grist for the theological mill. As an academic discipline, theology is not insular, exclusive, or a foreigner in the academy; it is in conversation with the best results, discoveries, and methods of every academic discipline’s pursuit of truth. Theology takes up the most important questions for every human being, such as what is the meaning and purpose of life, death, suffering, family, person, society, structures, governance, poverty, and wealth? It takes up cosmic

questions as well: Why am I here? Why is this planet spinning in this galaxy among billions of other galaxies? What if there is intelligent life elsewhere? Why is there a universe at all? What is it all about?

Theology above all recognizes that we live in God's Mystery and that we cannot answer all these questions adequately but that there is purpose to being here in this universe. The Christian believes what Jesus said and did and in what he asked of his followers: to love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves. God is love.

Audience

This book is intended primarily for college students; however, it is also for people of the Catholic faith and other Christian denominations; people of other religious traditions; and people who are of no particular tradition but who are seekers. All are welcome to sit at the theological table.

This book provides a solid foundation. The text is designed for both people with little or no background in theology and those with quite a bit who seek a solid explanation of the subdisciplines involved. It is designed as a "first book," to be read all at once or by individual chapters chosen to introduce theological material pertinent to a particular course. In reading each chapter, students will receive an overview of the subdisciplines of theology. They will come to understand terms, concepts, vocabulary, and the development of the tradition through the ages and across cultures. Students will build a basic understanding of the whole of theology through its parts. They will be capable of building upon this base immediately, as well as be able to relate new material to this foundation.

Organization of the Book

This book is broken into ten chapters or subdisciplines of theology. These chapters are then grouped into five parts based upon similarities among the methods used for study in the subdisciplines. Read chronologically, the book moves from the revelation found in scripture to a discussion of global Christianity. However, the book is flexible in that each chapter is able to stand alone as a self-contained lesson on a particular theological discipline or topic. The chapters can be read in any order, grouped together, or read from front to back, according to the desires of the instructor.



I

THE SACRED SCRIPTURES AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

1

The Old Testament

From the Editor

Have you ever seen movies, read books, or heard stories about people who lost their memory and, as a result, also lost their identity? Who we are is unveiled in time by our earliest environment of family, then by what we do, experiences we have, choices we make, and their consequences. Each of us is born in the middle of the human story, not the beginning. Before people wrote, they told stories about themselves and the meaning of life as they experienced it. At some point, they began to record their memories and what they believed about how to live and what was important in writing. Those memories were largely based on their religious experiences. First orally transmitted and then in writing, the record provided an identity for those people. In the major religious traditions of the world, we refer to the most significant oral traditions and written records as Sacred Texts. They are handed down to help shape the people of current and future generations, called humanity. Sacred Texts therefore hold a special place in a community because they talk about the God–Human relationship and who we are, why we are here, and what we are about.

Theology (lit., “talk about God”) is faith seeking understanding, or we can say now it is the “memory” of a faith community seeking God, finding God, and handing down that knowledge and wisdom, so others can know the truth of this encounter with God and its essential role in being human. We do not simply repeat a text; it is alive in the community as a resource to find God, point to God, live in God, and be formed by God.

We begin this book at the beginning with the sacred memory, the Sacred Texts of Christianity, in order to understand who, what, and why this community of believers has come to be. We will find out why Christianity has incorporated the Jewish Sacred Text as part of the Christian Sacred Texts—an important part of the tradition not only for Christians but, as we shall see later, also for Muslims in their Sacred Texts, called “the Qur’an.” And remember, while we are investigating what theology is and does, we do not want to

lose sight of the great theme of theology: you, me, humanity, creation, and God together. No one and nothing is left behind.

The Old Testament

Bernhard A. Asen, PhD

The Hebrew Bible, Called by Christians the “Old Testament”

My maternal grandfather was a great storyteller. Over the years, I have told and retold many of his stories to family and friends. He was fond of talking about his youth and his life on the farm. He sang songs and recited poetry, told riddles, and recited limericks. I have also found out from my mother and other family members that many of Grandpa’s stories were precisely that—stories. “Some of them had a kernel of truth,” my mother once told me, “but most of them were greatly embellished!”

Sometime in the second century BC, a man named Jesus, son of Eleazar son of Sirach of Jerusalem, wrote an introduction to a book he says was written by his grandfather, Jesus Ben Sira.

Many great teachings have been given to us through the *Law and the Prophets and the other [books]* that followed them, and for these we should praise Israel for instruction and wisdom. . . . So my grandfather Jesus, who had devoted himself especially to the reading of the *Law and the Prophets and the other books* of our ancestors, and had acquired considerable proficiency in them, was himself also led to write something pertaining to instruction and wisdom so that by becoming familiar also with his book those who love learning might make even greater progress in living according to the law.

You are invited therefore to read it with goodwill and attention, and to be indulgent in cases where, despite our diligent labor in translating, we may seem to have rendered some phrases imperfectly. For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language. Not only this book, but even the *Law itself, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books* differ not a little when read in the original. [emphasis added]

This introduction to the book of Sirach (also known as the Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach, and Ecclesiasticus) gives us some valuable information about the collection of books that circulated among the Jewish community some two-hundred

years before the beginning of the Christian era. Three times, Ben Sira's grandson tells us his grandfather was devoted to reading the "Law and the Prophets and the other books." Here, we may have the earliest reference to the division of the Hebrew Bible into three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. When referring to these three parts of their Bible, the Jewish people, who are often referred to as the "People of the Book," use the Hebrew words for Law (*Torah*), Prophets (*Nebiim*), and Writings (*Kethubim*). By adding the vowel "a" between the first and second letters of these words (*TNK*) they form an acronym—*TaNak*. Even today, Jews still refer to their Bible by this acronym. The Tanak is also known as the Jewish Testament, the First Testament, and, by most Christians, the Old Testament (OT). The word *Old* is to be understood in the sense of prior, first, or venerable, not outdated or superseded by the New or Christian Testament.

Ben Sira's grandson tells us further that he translated his grandfather's book from Hebrew into Greek and that when you translate from one language into another, the "books differ not a little when read in the original." The Tanak was originally written in Hebrew, although some small portions (e.g., Dan 2:4b–7:28) are written in Aramaic.

Also beginning around the second century BC, the Tanak was translated into Greek. This translation is known as the Septuagint and is frequently abbreviated by the Roman numerals LXX. (According to an ancient tradition, seventy-two scholars translated the Tanak in seventy-two days. The number was rounded off to seventy.)

It is important to note that while Sirach's grandson refers to the "Law, Prophets and other books," the Jewish people do not consider the Book of Sirach to be part of the Tanak. The book was included, however, in the LXX. By the time Sirach was translated, Greek had replaced Hebrew as the dominant language of the ancient world. The leaders of the Jewish community at that time did not consider books written in Greek to be inspired by God. Consequently, some books that were part of the LXX were not included in the Tanak. Jews and Protestants refer to the following books, or parts of books, as apocryphal (their meaning is "hidden" or obscure), but Roman Catholics refer to them as deuterocanonical (added later to the collection or canon of inspired writings):

1 and 2 Esdras

The Wisdom of Solomon (follows Song of Songs)

1 and 2 Maccabees

The Letter of Jeremiah (chapter 6 of Baruch)

Tobit (follows Nehemiah)

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) (follows The Wisdom of Solomon)

Susanna (chapter 13 of Daniel)

The Prayer of Manasseh

Baruch (follows Lamentations)

Judith (follows Tobit)

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews (follows Daniel 3:23; verses 24–90)

Bel and the Dragon (chapter 14 of Daniel)

Additions to Esther (follows Esther)

As stated, the Jews did not include these writings in the Tanak, not only because they were written in Greek but also because they were not widely read or used. But why do Protestants refer to these books as apocryphal, while Roman Catholics refer to them as deuterocanonical? In order to answer this question, we need to move forward in history to the fourth century AD, when Latin became the dominant language of the Roman Empire. From approximately 390–405 AD, Jerome (342–420), who was a great scholar, saint, and linguist, moved to the Holy Land to translate the Christian scriptures from their original languages into the growingly popular Latin, the language of the people of the fourth-century Roman Empire, which he did; it is called the Vulgate. He relied on both the Hebrew and Greek texts for his translation but placed a higher value on the Hebrew language and decided to follow the order of books in the Tanak rather than in the LXX. The books not included in the Tanak were considered apocryphal.

Centuries later, when Martin Luther (1483–1546) translated the Bible into German, he also followed the order of books in the Tanak and placed these writings in a separate section still known today as the Apocrypha. Luther, following the lead of Jerome, considered these books important for history and spiritual edification but not canonical, inspired, or useful for establishing Church doctrine. In response to Luther and the Reformation, the Council of Trent (1545) officially declared for the Roman Catholic Church that these books were not apocryphal but deuterocanonical.

You may have noticed that the division of Law, Prophets, and Writings referred to in the introduction to Sirach places the prophetic books in the middle of the collection. However, if you look at your English translation of the Bible, you will no doubt find that the prophets are not in the middle but at the end of the

Tanak. The last book of the Tanak is Second Chronicles, but the last book of most English translations of the Bible is the book of the prophet Malachi, which ends with the words, “Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse” (4:5–6).

In order to understand this positioning, we once again need to jump ahead hundreds of years into the Christian era. Whereas the Jewish people saw the prophets as the prime interpreters of the Torah, Christians saw the prophets as foreshadowing or hoping for the future coming of Jesus. In the New Testament (NT) gospels, John the Baptist is referred to as “Elijah who is to come” (Mt 11:14; 17:9–13; Mk 6:14–15; Lk 1:17), mentioned by the prophet Malachi. According to the gospel writers, John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, whom Christians confess as the Christ. Christ is not Jesus’ last name but a Greek translation of a Hebrew word *meschiach* (“messiah”), which means “anointed one.” In 1 Samuel 10:1, we read that “Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on [Saul’s] head, and kissed him; he said, “The Lord has anointed you ruler over his people Israel.” From that time on, when kings ascended to the throne, they were considered “anointed ones” (messiahs). As we will see later, it was with Saul’s successor, David, that the word *messiah* took on special, even technical, meaning.

The Jews believed that through David’s descendants, his kingship would last forever, and from David’s day to this day, the Jewish people expect the coming of the new and final David, the Messiah. Christians, however, believe that Jesus is the “Messiah, the Son of David, the son of Abraham” (Mt 1:1).

Though the Jewish people have great respect for the NT, they do not need it to live out their faith. Christians, however, need the Tanak to properly understand Jesus because the word *messiah* (*Christos* in Greek) is thoroughly grounded in the history and tradition of the Tanak. Christians must never lose sight of the fact that without “the Old Testament, the New Testament would be an incomprehensible book, a plant deprived of its roots and destined to dry up and wither” (The Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2002, p. 211).

An influential Jewish scholar named Martin Buber (1878–1965) once addressed a group of priests and said, “What is the difference between Jews and Christians? We all await the Messiah. You believe He has already come and gone, while we do not. I therefore propose that we await Him together. And when He appears, we can ask him: were You here before?” Then he paused and added: “And

I hope that at that moment I will be close enough to whisper in his ear, ‘For the love of heaven, don’t answer’” (Wiesel, 1995, 354–355).

As we proceed now to look at the various divisions of the Tanak, we need to keep in mind that, like my grandfather’s stories, the stories contained in the Law, Prophets, and Writings are diverse kinds of literature. Many of the stories record actual events that can be corroborated by extrabiblical history and literature, but many of them are based on legends, remnants of ancient myths, songs, and hymns that may never have actually happened but that contain important and enduring “kernels of truth.”

Tanak Division 1—Torah: Words of Instruction

The first division of the Tanak is the Torah. *Torah* is often translated into English as “law” but more properly means “teaching” or “instruction.” In the broadest sense, the entire Tanak is teaching and instruction. More narrowly defined, the Torah refers to the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books are known as the Pentateuch (“five scrolls”). The Jewish tradition also calls them the “Five Books of Moses” because, according to Jewish tradition, Moses was the author of these books.

However, through many centuries, it has become clear to Jewish and Christian scholars that the Pentateuch was not the work of Moses or of any one particular author but is rather a compilation of a variety of authors and literary sources.

Already in the seventeenth century, Jewish scholar Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) and Christian scholar Richard Simon (1638–1712) began to question the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. However, it was not until the nineteenth century that a formal hypothesis developed concerning the formation of the Pentateuch. A German scholar, Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), developed what has come to be known variously as the “Documentary,” “Source,” or “JEDP Hypothesis,” which argues that the Pentateuch is a compilation of four primary anonymous sources. Though the hypothesis has been and continues to be questioned and refined, it is still accepted by contemporary scholarship as a valuable analytical method for studying the Pentateuch. The anonymous sources are as follows:

- J This author prefers to refer to Israel’s God by the name *Yahweh* (“Lord”). The Yahwist’s literary style is down-to-earth, picturesque, and fond of what are known as anthropomorphisms (placing human qualities on God). For example, the Lord walks “in the garden at the time of the evening breeze” (Gen 3:8)

and “made garments of skins for the man [Adam] and for his wife, and clothed them” (3:21).

- E** Known as the Elohist source, this author prefers to use the name *Elohim* (“God”). In the Hebrew language, *Elohim* is plural in form but singular in meaning. The Elohist sees God as more transcendent than does the Yahwist and emphasizes God’s communication through dreams (Gen 28:10–22).
- D** The *Deuteronomist* (“second law”) is concerned with issues relating to Israel’s law code and the importance of Israel’s covenant relationship with Yahweh. Most scholars today consider the book of Deuteronomy to be the heart of the Pentateuch.
- P** The *Priestly* source emphasizes God’s holiness, the importance of worship, the sacrificial system, times, seasons, and genealogies. (cf. Gen 1:1–2:4; or Gen 5:1–32)

Precisely when these sources were written is still the subject of considerable debate. Many of the stories were first passed on orally from generation to generation. Various redactors (editors) along the way provided additional information and commentary until finally, sometime after the Babylonian exile (586 BC), the sources came together into the form we have today.

Genesis: Origins and Ancestry

The first book of the Torah (Pentateuch) is Genesis. It can be divided into two major sections: Chapters 1–11 are known as the Primeval History (the word *primeval* refers to “origins,” “beginnings”) because they deal with the creation of the cosmos and human beings, the alienation of human beings from God, and the destruction of the world through the great flood, followed by a new beginning and the start of civilization. Chapters 12–50 were once referred to as the Patriarchal History (a patriarch is a man who is head of a family or group). However, more recently—and more accurately—these chapters have been called the Ancestral History because men and women played equally crucial roles in Israel’s history and tradition.

The Tanak contains two accounts of the creation of “the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). The first (Gen 1:1–2:4) is assigned to the Priestly (P) writer of the Pentateuch. As you read it, you will discover that it is progressive and repetitious and that the transcendent God “speaks” the world and humanity out of chaos into existence. It is as though the author wanted to provide people with a creation creed or a confession that could be used in worship or in teaching.

When God says, “Let *us* make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness” (Gen 1:26, emphasis added), God is addressing all the heavenly beings, inviting them to become involved in the creative process. Christians believe that the fullness of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) was involved in creation. However, the Trinity was not on the mind of the Priestly writer.

Other nations around Israel also had creation stories filled with gods, goddesses, and heavenly beings. One of these stories, the Enuma Elish, or Babylonian creation story, dates as far back as 2300 BC and has some interesting parallels to the P creation story. For example, both stories speak about chaos, and both follow a similar pattern of the creative process. The major and decisive difference between the two stories is that the Enuma Elish involves many gods (polytheism), while Israel’s God is “most high over all the earth” and “exalted far above all gods” (Ps 97:9).

This transcendent God also created male and female human beings simultaneously. When you read Genesis 1:26 carefully, you will observe that one gender is not created before the other. God first creates human beings and then differentiates them according to gender. The Hebrew word used here for “human being” is *’adam* and includes both male and female.

In the second creation story (Gen 2:4b—3:24), the J writer of the Pentateuch sees the Lord God (Yahweh Elohim) as very down-to-earth. In fact, the man (*ha-’adam*) is formed from “the dust of the ground” (*’adamah*) (Gen 2:7). There is a Hebrew play on words here (*’adam*, *’adamah*), where God is imaged as a potter who shapes clay. Later (2:21–22), the woman is “built” or “constructed” from the man’s rib. Though the man was created first, the woman, we are told, was to be a “helper,” a “partner” (2:18), not a subordinate. They were created in relation, not in competition, to one another.

The man and the woman lived in a primeval garden where they had access to all the fruit of the trees except the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of “good and evil” (Gen 3:5) that was in middle of the garden (3:3). Created in relationship but also with the freedom to choose, the man and the woman *both* decided to eat from the forbidden tree. In so doing, they overstepped the bounds of being creatures. They wanted, rather, to become “know-it-all” —gods themselves. Theologians refer to this as the “Fall” and to the couple’s decision as the “originating” or “original sin,” which led to their expulsion from the garden and God’s decision to keep the first couple from eating “from the tree of life . . . and liv[ing] forever” (3:22).

Like the P creation story, another ancient text sheds some interesting light on J’s Fall narrative. In one version of a document known as the Mesopotamian

(Babylonian) *Gilgamesh Epic* (720–612 BC), the hero, Gilgamesh, searches for a plant that will give him everlasting life. However, on his return home after he finds the plant, a snake steals it and then the snake sheds its skin. The ancients saw this as a sign of immortality.

From here on, the primeval history of humanity becomes increasingly estranged from the creator God. Brotherly rivalry (Cain and Abel) leads to violence and finally to murder (Gen 4:1–15). The world’s violence and corruption increase to the point where God decides to send a great flood to destroy the earth (Gen 6–8:19). Just as there were other accounts of creation in the ancient world, so also there were other flood stories. The Babylonian *Gilgamesh* and *Atrahasis* epics share a number of similarities with the biblical flood account. The primary difference in the biblical account is that the “Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever” (Ps 29:10). God then makes a covenant with Noah promising that the world will never again be destroyed by the mighty waters (Gen 8:20–9:17) and places the rainbow in the sky as the sign of that promise. Civilization begins anew, but human corruption and alienation from God continue (Gen 9:18–28). The primeval history ends with the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9), where human beings once again attempt to become like God by building a tower that reaches to heaven. God confuses their speech into babbling, however, which means that they cannot understand one another and have to stop the construction of their tower. Thus, Genesis explains the beginning of many languages and nations. This biblical word for confusing speech (*Babel*) has entered the English language as the word *babble*, often referring to the nonsense speech of babies.

The Ancestral History

Genesis 12–50 recounts the stories of the founders of God’s people, especially Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and their wives and families. The three major themes in the ancestral history all revolve around the word *promise*:

Promise of land

Promise of many descendants

Promise of a continuing relationship with God (covenant)

However, the ancestors repeatedly face what seem to be insurmountable obstacles to the fulfillment of these promises.

In Genesis 12:1–3, Abram (“mighty father”) is told by the Lord, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show

you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

The obstacle, however, is that we are told in Genesis 11:30 that Abram’s wife, Sarai, “was barren; she had no child.” Fearing that the promise of many descendants (Gen 15:5) will not be fulfilled, Sarai decides to help the promise along, so she gives Abram her slave-girl, Hagar, so as to produce an heir. Hagar gives birth to Ishmael (which means “God has heard”), but Ishmael will not be the heir. God tells Abraham (Abram) that Sarah (Sarai) will bear a son and his name will be Isaac (Gen 17:19). With names changed from Abram and Sarai to Abraham (“father of a multitude”) and Sarah (“princess”) (Gen 17:5, 15), the birth of Isaac is announced in Genesis 18. Sarah laughs at the prospect of bearing a child at age 90, but God has the last laugh when Isaac (“laughter”) is born (Gen 21:1–7).

While Genesis 16 and 21 are the only accounts in the Tanak concerning Hagar and Ishmael, it is important to point out that God also promises Hagar (Gen 21:18) and Abraham that Ishmael will be blessed, fruitful, exceedingly numerous, and the father of twelve princes and a “great nation” (Gen 17:20). According to the Islamic tradition, which traces its religious heritage back to Abraham, Abraham and Hagar are buried near the Ka’aba in the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and Ishmael, not Isaac, is Abraham’s number-one son. Furthermore, when Abraham dies at age 175, we are told that *both* his sons, “Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah” (Gen 25:9).

After Abraham passes the supreme test of faith through his willingness to offer his “only son” (Gen 22:2), the Lord once again reaffirms the promise to Abraham to make his offspring “as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore” (Gen 22:17). Abraham obeyed the Lord’s command because he submitted himself to God (the word *Islam*, by the way, means “submission”) and trusted that the Lord would “provide” (Gen 22:8, 14).

The realization of this promise of many descendants, however, requires now that Isaac and his beautiful wife, Rebekah, also have children. However, the same obstacle that confronted Sarah now confronts Rebekah; she is unable to bear children. Isaac prays to the Lord, who responds by allowing Rebekah to conceive not one but two children, Esau and Jacob, who represent two nations: Israel (Jacob) and Edom (Esau) (Gen 25:23).

Esau is the firstborn and, according to ancient custom, should receive his father’s blessing, as well as the lion’s share of the family inheritance. During their birth, however, Jacob (which means “the one who supplants”) grabs his brother

Esau by the heel and tries to pull him back into the womb so that Jacob will be the firstborn (Gen 25:26). Jacob is unsuccessful, but it will not be his last attempt to gain the right of the firstborn. Rivals from the beginning, Jacob manages to swindle Esau out of his birthright in exchange for a bowl of stew (Gen 25:29–34) and later, with his mother Rebekah’s help, tricks Esau out of father Isaac’s blessing (Gen 27).

At odds with Esau, Jacob then embarks on a series of journeys that include several encounters with the Lord. The first encounter comes through a dream at Bethel (“house of God”), where the Lord introduces himself to Jacob as the “God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac” (Gen 28:13) and then reiterates the ancestral promise to Jacob that “the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth . . . and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring” (Gen 28:13–14).

Jacob meets and falls in love with Rachel, daughter of his uncle Laban, and works seven years for her hand in marriage (Gen 29:20) but is tricked into marrying Leah instead and then has to work another seven years before marrying Rachel (Gen 29:27–28).

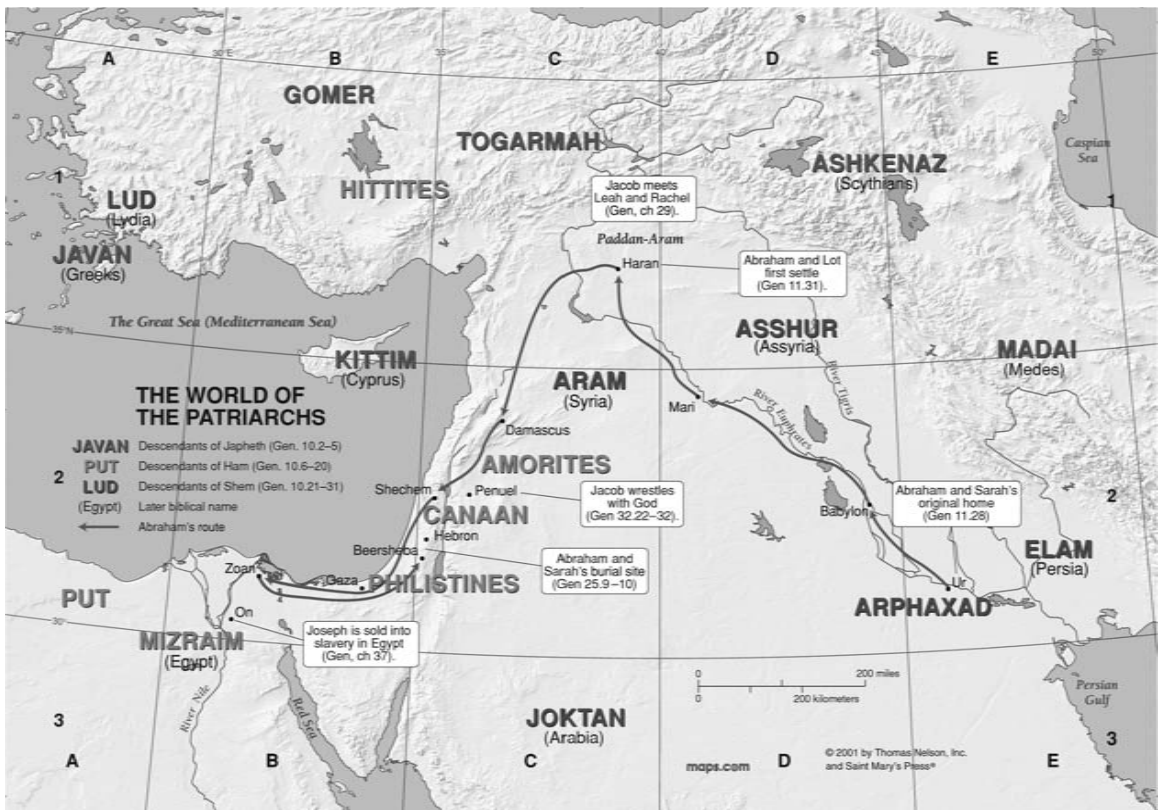
Rachel, like Rebekah and Sarah before her, was barren, but “God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son . . . and she named him Joseph” (Gen 30:22–24).

Jacob’s next decisive encounter with the Lord occurs at a place called Peniel (“face of God”), where a “man” (perhaps an angel, perhaps the Lord) wrestled with Jacob until daybreak (Gen 32:24). Refusing to let the “man” go, Jacob says, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me” (Gen 32:26). Jacob is asked his name, responds, and is then told, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed” (Gen 32:27–28). And so Jacob becomes Israel (“the one who strives with God”), the father of the twelve tribes that will make up the nation known as Israel.

Jacob next meets his estranged twin, Esau, and upon seeing him is so moved that he says, “[F]or truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God” (Gen 33:10). At the end of the Jacob story, the rival brothers are reconciled and, like Ishmael and Isaac before them, together bury their father, Jacob (Gen 35:29).

The final chapters of the ancestral history (Gen 37–50) recount the story of Joseph and his rivalry with his brothers. Not only do the brothers resent that Joseph is their father Jacob’s favorite, but also they are put off by Joseph’s dreams and,

on first reading, his superior attitude. The brothers initially plot to kill Joseph but instead decide to sell him into servitude in Egypt, where, ironically, through his ability to interpret dreams, Joseph will rise to power, be reconciled with his brothers, and eventually save his entire family from famine. In the end, Jacob journeys to Egypt and settles in the land of Goshen. The book of Genesis ends with Joseph's words to his brothers, restating the promise to Abraham that "God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Gen 50:24). Joseph dies and is "placed in a coffin in Egypt." The very last word of Genesis, "Egypt," prepares the way for the remaining books of the Torah.



World of the Patriarchs

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