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LIGUORI CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY



Pentateuch I

CREATION AND COVENANT

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Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study*

READING THE BIBLE can be daunting. It's a complex book, and many a person of goodwill has tried to read the Bible and ended up putting it down in utter confusion. It helps to have a companion, and *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is a solid one. Over the course of this series, you'll learn about biblical messages, themes, personalities, and events and understand how the books of the Bible rose out of the need to address new situations.

Across the centuries, people of faith have asked, "Where is God in this moment?" Millions of Catholics look to the Bible for encouragement in their journey of faith. Wisdom teaches us not to undertake Bible study alone, disconnected from the Church that was given Scripture to share and treasure. When used as a source of prayer and thoughtful reflection, the Bible comes alive.

Your choice of a Bible-study program should be dictated by what you want to get out of it. One goal of *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is to give readers greater familiarity with the Bible's structure, themes, personalities, and message. But that's not enough. This program will also teach you to use Scripture in your prayer. God's message is as compelling and urgent today as ever, but we get only part of the message when it's memorized and stuck in our heads. It's meant for the entire person—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

We're baptized into life with Christ, and we're called to live more fully with Christ today as we practice the values of justice, peace, forgiveness, and community. God's new covenant was written on the hearts of the people of Israel; we, their spiritual descendants, are loved that intimately by God today. *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* will draw you closer to God, in whose image and likeness we are fashioned.

Group and Individual Study

The *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* series is intended for group and individual study and prayer. This series gives you the tools to start a study group. Gathering two or three people in a home or announcing the meeting of a Bible-study group in a parish or community can bring surprising results. Each lesson in this series contains a section to help groups study, reflect, pray, and share biblical reflections. Each lesson also has a second section for individual study.

Many people who want to learn more about the Bible don't know where to begin. This series gives them a place to start and helps them continue until they're familiar with all the books of the Bible.

Bible study can be a lifelong project, always enriching those who wish to be faithful to God's Word. When people complete a study of the whole Bible, they can begin again, making new discoveries with each new adventure into the Word of God.



Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

BIBLE STUDY isn't just a matter of gaining intellectual knowledge of the Bible; it's also about gaining a greater understanding of God's love and concern for creation. The purpose of reading and knowing the Bible is to enrich our relationship with God. God loves us and gave us the Bible to illustrate that love. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, a study of the Bible is not only an intellectual pursuit but also a spiritual adventure that should influence our dealings with God and neighbor.

The Meaning of *Lectio Divina*

Lectio divina is a Latin expression that means "divine or sacred reading." The process for *lectio divina* consists of Scripture readings, reflection, and prayer. Many clergy, religious, and laity use *lectio divina* in their daily spiritual reading to develop a closer and more loving relationship with God. Learning about Scripture has as its purpose the living of its message, which demands a period of reflection on the Scripture passages.

Prayer and *Lectio Divina*

Prayer is a necessary element for the practice of *lectio divina*. The entire process of reading and reflecting is a prayer. It's not merely an intellectual pursuit; it's also a spiritual one. Page 16 includes an Opening Prayer for gathering one's thoughts before moving on to the passages in each section. This prayer may be used privately or in a group. For those who use the book for daily spiritual reading, the prayer for each section may be repeated each day. Some may wish to keep a journal of each day's meditation.

Pondering the Word of God

Lectio divina is the ancient Christian spiritual practice of reading the holy Scriptures with intentionality and devotion. This practice helps Christians center themselves and descend to the level of the heart to enter an inner quiet space, finding God.

This sacred reading is distinct from reading for knowledge or information, and it's more than the pious practice of spiritual reading. It is the practice of opening ourselves to the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As we intentionally focus on and become present to the inner meaning of the Scripture passage, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts. We come to the text willing to be influenced by a deeper meaning that lies within the words and thoughts we ponder.

In this space, we open ourselves to be challenged and changed by the inner meaning we experience. We approach the text in a spirit of faith and obedience as a disciple ready to be taught by the Holy Spirit. As we savor the sacred text, we let go of our usual control of how we expect God to act in our lives and surrender our hearts and consciences to the flow of the divine (*divina*) through the reading (*lectio*).

The fundamental principle of *lectio divina* leads us to understand the profound mystery of the Incarnation, "The Word became flesh," not only in history but also within us.

Praying *Lectio* Today

Before you begin, relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). Then practice these four simple actions:

1. Read a passage from Scripture or the daily Mass readings. This is known as *lectio*. (If the Word of God is read aloud, the hearers listen attentively.)
2. Pray the selected passage with attention as you listen for a specific meaning that comes to mind. Once again, the reading is listened to or silently read and reflected or meditated on. This is known as *meditatio*.

3. The exercise becomes active. Pick a word, sentence, or idea that surfaces from your consideration of the chosen text. Does the reading remind you of a person, place, or experience? If so, pray about it. Compose your thoughts and reflection into a simple word or phrase. This prayer-thought will help you remove distractions during the *lectio*. This exercise is called *oratio*.
4. In silence, with your eyes closed, quiet yourself and become conscious of your breathing. Let your thoughts, feelings, and concerns fade as you consider the selected passage in the previous step (*oratio*). If you're distracted, use your prayer word to help you return to silence. This is *contemplatio*.

This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

Many teachers of prayer call contemplation the prayer of resting in God, a prelude to losing oneself in the presence of God. Scripture is transformed in our hearing as we pray and allow our hearts to unite intimately with the Lord. The Word truly takes on flesh, and this time it is manifested in our flesh.



How to Use This Bible-Study Companion

THE BIBLE, along with the commentaries and reflections found in this study, will help participants become familiar with the Scripture texts and lead them to reflect more deeply on the texts' message. At the end of this study, participants will have a firm grasp of Genesis and Exodus and realize how each book offers spiritual nourishment. This study is not only an intellectual adventure, it's also a spiritual one. The reflections lead participants into their own journey with the Scripture readings.

Context

When the authors wrote the Pentateuch, they didn't simply link random stories together. They placed them in a context to stress a message. To help readers learn about each passage in relation to those around it, each lesson begins with an overview that puts the Scripture passages into context.

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Part 1: Group Study

To give participants a comprehensive study of Genesis and Exodus, this book is divided into eight lessons. Lesson 1 is group study only; Lessons 2 through 8 are divided into Part 1, group study, and Part 2, individual study. For example, Lesson 2 covers passages from Genesis 4 through 15. The study group reads and discusses only Genesis 4 through 8 (Part 1). Participants privately read and reflect on Genesis 9 through 15 (Part 2).

Group study may or may not include *lectio divina*. With *lectio divina*, the group meets for ninety minutes using the format at the top of page 14. Without *lectio divina*, the group meets for one hour using the format at the bottom of page 14, and participants are urged to privately read the *lectio divina* section at the end of Part 1. It contains additional reflections on the Scripture passages studied during the group session that will take participants even further into the passages.

Part 2: Individual Study

The gospel passages not covered in Part 1 are divided into three to six shorter components, one to be studied each day. Participants who don't belong to a study group can use the lessons for private sacred reading. They may choose to reflect on one Scripture passage per day, making it possible for a clearer understanding of the Scripture passages used in their *lectio divina* (sacred reading).

A PROCESS FOR SACRED READING

Liguori Publications has designed this study to be user friendly and manageable. However, group dynamics and leaders vary. We're not trying to keep the Holy Spirit from working in your midst, thus we suggest you decide beforehand which format works best for your group. If you have limited time, you could study the Bible as a group and save prayer and reflection for personal time.

However, if your group wishes to digest and feast on sacred Scripture through both prayer and study, we recommend you spend closer to ninety minutes each week by gathering to study and pray with Scripture. *Lectio*

divina (see page 9) is an ancient contemplative prayer form that moves readers from the head to the heart in meeting the Lord. We strongly suggest using this prayer form whether in individual or group study.

GROUP-STUDY FORMATS

1. Bible Study With *Lectio Divina*

About ninety minutes of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (30 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud a second time, followed by quiet time for meditation and contemplation (5 minutes)
- ✠ Spend some time in prayer with the selected passage. Group participants will slowly read the Scripture passage a third time in silence, listening for the voice of God as they read (10–20 minutes)
- ✠ Shared reflection (10–15 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

To become acquainted with lectio divina, see page 9.

2. Bible Study

About one hour of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (40 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

Notes to the Leader

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Plan which sections will be covered each week of your Bible study.
- ✘ Read the material in advance of each session.
- ✘ Establish written ground rules. (Example: We won't keep you longer than ninety minutes; don't dominate the sharing by arguing or debating.)
- ✘ Meet in an appropriate and welcoming gathering space (church building, meeting room, house).
- ✘ Provide name tags and perhaps use a brief icebreaker for the first meeting; ask participants to introduce themselves.
- ✘ Mark the Scripture passage(s) that will be read during the session.
- ✘ Decide how you would like the Scripture to be read aloud (whether by one or multiple readers).
- ✘ Use a clock or watch.
- ✘ Provide extra Bibles (or copies of the Scripture passages) for participants who don't bring their Bible.
- ✘ Ask participants to read "Introduction: Pentateuch I" (page 17) before the first session.
- ✘ Tell participants which passages to study and urge them to read the passages and commentaries before the meeting.
- ✘ If you opt to use the *lectio divina* format, familiarize yourself with this prayer form ahead of time.

Notes to Participants

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Read "Introduction: Pentateuch I" (page 17) before the first class.
- ✘ Read the Scripture passages and commentaries before each session.
- ✘ Be prepared to share and listen respectfully. (This is not a time to debate beliefs or argue.)

Opening Prayer

Leader: O God, come to my assistance,

Response: O Lord, make haste to help me.

Leader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

Response: ...as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Leader: Christ is the vine and we are the branches. As branches linked to Jesus, the vine, we are called to recognize that the Scriptures are always being fulfilled in our lives. It is the living Word of God living on in us. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in us the fire of your divine wisdom, knowledge, and love.

Response: Open our minds and hearts as we study your great love for us as shown in the Bible.

Reader: (Open your Bible to the assigned Scripture(s) and read in a paced, deliberate manner. Pause for one minute, listening for a word, phrase, or image that you may use in your *lectio divina* practice.)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Response: Our Father...

Leader: Lord, inspire us with your Spirit as we study your Word in the Bible. Be with us this day and every day as we strive to know you and serve you and to love as you love. We believe that through your goodness and love, the Spirit of the Lord is truly upon us. Allow the words of the Bible, your Word, to capture us and inspire us to live as you live and to love as you love.

Response: Amen.

Leader: May the divine assistance remain with us always.

Response: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



INTRODUCTION

Pentateuch I

Read this overview before the first class.

The term “Pentateuch” is a Greek term that refers to the first five books of the Jewish and Christian Bible. Jewish tradition calls the first five books of the Bible the “Torah,” meaning an Instruction or Law. This designation stems from the central theme found in these books: namely, the covenant God made with Moses on Mount Sinai and the legislation that God revealed to Moses.

Who Wrote the Pentateuch?

Until the seventeenth century, most Catholic and Jewish scholars believed that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch, and there are still a few scholars today who hold this theory. However, in the nineteenth century, a more in-depth study of the style and content of the original writings led scholars to conclude that the books of the Pentateuch were written and edited by more than one author and that the writings of the different books and parts of the books were written at different periods of history, under different circumstances.

German scholars were able to identify these differences and could infer an approximate era when the different authors and editors took part in bringing the Pentateuch to its final form. Although we will refer to the authors of the various traditions found in the following summary as a single author, we must remember that each tradition may consist of several authors. The following is a summary of some conclusions drawn from this in-depth study of the Pentateuch:

1. J (Yahwist tradition). Around the middle of the tenth century before Christ, an author wrote about God's creation and God's dealing with the early families shortly after the creation of the world. This first author of passages found in the Pentateuch wrote about ten centuries after Abraham. German Scripture scholars from the nineteenth century after Christ noted that an author who wrote portions of the Pentateuch used a personal name for God: Yahweh. In German, the term Yahweh became Jahweh. Since the first letter of the term Jahweh was a "J" in German, the German scholars referred to the author who used this term for God as "J."

The Yahwist author (J) covers the period from the creation of the world to the journey of the Israelites in the desert. Besides using the term Yahweh for God, the Yahwist author had characteristics not found in the other writers. In the Yahwist tradition, we discover an anthropomorphic image of God. God has human qualities as shown in the Book of Genesis when Adam and Eve "heard the sound of the Lord God walking about in the Garden at the breezy time of the day" (3:8). In the biblical text, the Yahwist author pictures God as visiting Abraham and conversing with him (see Genesis 18).

The Yahwist author wrote from Judea at a time when the tribes of Israel were united in the one kingdom of Israel. Hence, the style of the writing found in the Yahwist saga is more colorful than that found in the other writers of the Pentateuch. Yahwist tradition gathers together the stories, poems, oracles, and other forms of oral messages and shapes them into an intriguing story. And when the author speaks of the mountain where Moses concludes the covenant made with God, he names the mountain Mount Sinai.

2. E (Elohist tradition). In the ninth century BC, another author wrote a narrative that later became part of the Pentateuch. It is referred to as the Elohist tradition because the author uses the more formal term of Elohim for God. His writings are designated by the letter "E." The author's style in the Elohist tradition is less colorful than those found written by the Yahwist author. Still, the fascinating story of Abraham's test when asked to sacrifice Isaac comes from the Elohist author (see Genesis 22:1-19).

The Elohist author avoids the human images of God as found in the

Yahwist writings and makes use of dreams, heavenly messengers, or majestic theophanies (visitations from God) to communicate with humans.

Toward the end of the tenth century before Christ, after the reign of King Solomon, Israel broke into two separate kingdoms, one in the north, known as Israel, and the other in the south, known as Judah. The Elohist author writes from the northern kingdom. This difference in location between the Yahwist and Elohist authors may explain why some stories are repeated with small variations. Both writers received some of the same oral stories and incorporated them into their manuscripts, but the Elohist author refers to Mount Sinai as Mount Horeb.

3. P (Priestly tradition). A later author or editor wrote about Priestly concerns, laws, and rituals that eventually found their way into the Pentateuch. This author (or authors) wrote circa 550 to 450 BC, the period of time immediately following the Israelites' return from exile in Babylon. The Priestly account, designated by the letter "P," contains a number of genealogies and presents its message in the most precise and factual manner of all other passages in the Pentateuch. Here, however, the author does show signs of poetic genius in the first story of creation, containing therein an obvious poetic balance. The Priestly author or editor not only added new material to the story, but also mingled some of the stories of both the Yahwist and Elohist authors, making it difficult at times to distinguish one source from the other.

4. D (Deuteronomist). The Deuteronomist author, referred to as "D," wrote circa the years 650 to 620 BC. The author speaks of reforms in the last Book of the Pentateuch, and these writings appear mainly in the Book of Deuteronomy.

An Important Note About Genealogies and Laws

Many people who attempt to study the Bible read as far as the lists of genealogies or laws and soon find themselves bogged down in these lists of names that mean little to them. The same is also true of the laws initially intended to instruct the daily life of the Jewish community in Israel. For many readers, attempting to navigate these genealogies and laws can become

a tedious and boring struggle at times. At this point, many abandon the reading of the Bible. It is for this reason that this study suggests that the reader scan or skip the genealogies in the Bible and read the commentaries in this text. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, a brief commentary indicates to the reader that he or she can skip or scan the biblical text in these sections of Genesis and Exodus according to need. The reader will find these sections grey-scaled in this study, but if possible, participants might read the text all the same.

Genealogies: In the Pentateuch, the Priestly editor will often interrupt the story to introduce genealogies, which he uses to bind the story together. Although the genealogies help the reader in understanding the family line of the major figures found in the Pentateuch, they can also distract the reader from the flow of the story. Some names in the genealogies mean nothing to the reader and others have a significant and often subtle message. In most cases, the genealogies were not part of the original narrative.

Laws and Rituals: Many people who read or study the Bible find its story extremely interesting until chapter 20 in Exodus, after Moses receives the Ten Commandments. The laws that follow in chapters 21, 22, and 23 are later additions to the commandments, some of which address issues for people who are no longer nomads, but who have settled down in the Promised Land. The Priestly author who wrote around the sixth or fifth century before Christ inserts many laws and rituals in the text as though they were given to Moses, an event that seems highly unlikely. The present text will give a short commentary on the laws but will not add a reflection. The reader may decide to scan the laws or skip over them and move on to the narrative sections of the Bible.

Note that many of the reflections in the *lectio divina* link the Pentateuch stories with segments from the New Testament. Using this approach enables the reader to understand more fully the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament. Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them (see Matthew 5:17).



LESSON 2

From Cain to Abram

GENESIS 4—15

When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and every living creature—every mortal being—so that the waters will never again become a flood to destroy every mortal being (9:14–15).

Opening Prayer (SEE PAGE 16)

Context

Part 1: Genesis 4—8 God accepts Abel's offering over that of his brother Cain, who kills Abel. God tells Cain that his brother's blood cries out to heaven from the ground and punishes him by making Cain and his descendants wanderers on the earth. Adam and Eve conceive another son named Seth. The world becomes so sinful that God chooses Noah and his family to escape from a mighty flood over the land. Noah builds an ark and brings his family and animals into the ark. The family of Noah and all the animals survive the Flood.

Part 2: Genesis 9—15 God makes a covenant with Noah and puts a rainbow in the sky as a sign of the covenant, promising never again to destroy the world with a flood. Noah's second son, Ham, sins against Noah, and Noah curses him and his descendants. Later in time, when God sees the people building a tower with its top in the sky, God confuses their languages. Abram, his wife, Sarai, and

his nephew, Lot, appear in the narrative as nomads migrating over the land. In Egypt, when Pharaoh is informed that Sarai is Abram's sister, he takes her into his home, but a plague strikes him and his household. Pharaoh berates Abram for his deception. Later, Abram and Lot part so that each may shepherd their herds peacefully. In time, Abram must rescue Lot from men who capture him.

PART 1: GROUP STUDY (GENESIS 4—8)

Read aloud Genesis 4:1–16 and 6—8.

4:1–16 Cain and Abel

Adam has intercourse with his wife, and she conceives a son whom she names Cain. She later conceives another son named Abel. When both sons grow older, they bring an offering to God. Cain, a tiller of the land, brings an offering from the fruit of the land, and Abel, a tender of flocks, brings the fatty portion of the firstlings of his flock. For some unknown and unexplained reason, God looks with favor on Abel's offering and rejects Cain's. God warns Cain that sin lies at his door. The Yahwist author speaks of sin as though sin is an animal lying in wait for its prey.

Cain kills his brother Abel, committing the first murder in the Bible, and God challenges Cain, asking about Abel. Cain's curt response is, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The presumed answer that is found throughout the Scriptures is "Yes." God states that the blood of his brother Abel cries out from the ground. According to the Book of Numbers, blood was sacred as the seat of life, and the blood of unpunished murders pollutes the ground (Numbers 35:33).

God punishes Cain by telling him that the land would no longer produce for him, thus making Cain, who was once a tiller of the land, now a wanderer. Cain fears for his life as a constant wanderer, but God put some type of mark, possibly a tattoo, to protect him. The use of tattooing for tribal marks on wanderers was a common practice. Cain settles in the land of Nod, a symbolic name indicating one who wanders, not a specific location.

4:17—5 The Family Line of Adam and Eve

(Read “Note About Genealogies” in the “Introduction: Pentateuch I,” page 19. You may skip or scan the biblical text in this section.)

Cain’s wife conceived and bore a son named Enoch. Cain, who was not a nomad, founded a city and named it after Enoch. Four generations after Enoch are quickly mentioned. Enoch became the father of Irad, Irad the father of Mehujael, Mehujael becomes the father of Methusael, who then becomes the father of Lamech. Lamech has two wives who give him three sons who are ancestors of a developing civilization. From Lamech came Jabal, whose offspring dwell in tents and keep livestock; Jubal, whose offspring played the lyre and reed pipe; and Tubalcain, whose offspring forge instruments of bronze and iron. Because of this history beginning with Cain, Cain becomes recognized by some as the father of civilization. Civilization, with all its advantages, does not solve the split between people and God, as the story of Lamech illustrates. The sin of Cain becomes even more bitter with his offspring.

God provides a glimmer of hope as Adam and Eve give birth to Seth, whom Eve views as a replacement for Abel. Seth had a son named Enosh. At that time, people began to invoke the Lord by name. The Yahwist author places the beginning of the use of the name “Yahweh” here in the primeval era, whereas the Priestly tradition will place its first usage in a revelation of the divine name given to Moses in Exodus. God tells Moses, “I am the LORD. As God the Almighty I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but by my name, Lord, I did not make myself known to them” (6:2–3).

The Priestly editor takes the descendants found in the seven generations in the Yahwist story in chapter 4 and joins them to his genealogy of ten generations in chapter 5. The genealogies in chapter 5 move from Adam to Noah’s three sons. In both genealogies, the editor ends with three names which signify some type of action or development. In ancient Babylon’s lists of genealogies, the ages of those on the list were exceedingly long. Since the Priestly author likely spent some time in Babylon and was influenced by the Babylonian genealogies, the ages of those in the Israelite genealogy were likewise exceptionally long. Some commentators speculate that the shorter lives of those after the Flood show the weakening of the relation-

ship between human beings and God. It is difficult to determine that this was the intention of the authors, who most likely inflated the ages for the sake of some message, whatever it was.

Some commentators speculate that there was a book of genealogies which the Priestly editor used for the lists he presents in Genesis. Significant in the list is Enoch, whom the author describes as one who “walked with God and he was no longer here, for God took him” (5:24). From this, some speculate that Enoch, like Elijah, did not die, but that God took him. Enoch’s name will appear again in later scriptural texts. Enoch fathered Methuselah, who lived to the age of 967, the longest age in the genealogy. From this came a popular expression which refers to an elderly person as being “as old as Methuselah.”

In Genesis 3:17, God cursed the ground because of Adam’s sin and declared that tilling it will demand great toil. When the genealogy names Noah, it adds a line from the Yahwist author which states that Noah will bring relief from the curse God placed on the ground (5:29). This could be a reference to Noah’s successful planting of a vineyard (9:20). The genealogy ends by naming Noah’s three sons, who continue to play a role in the Yahwist saga.

6:1–13 The Corruption of Sin

The Yahwist author draws from legends about heavenly beings, some of whom were evil and defiant and who saw how beautiful the daughters of the human beings were. Apparently these women were mighty as well as beautiful, so the heavenly beings (sons of God) took them as wives. The Hebrews referred to a group of giant heroes who existed around this time as the Nephilim, who were men of renown. The Nephilim were not the ones referred to as the “sons of God,” as some later writers thought. The sons of God who marry the daughters of men produce offspring different from the Nephilim. As a result of the rebellious union between the sons of God and the daughters of human beings, God apparently punishes human beings by allowing them to live only 120 years, far shorter than the previous life span.

The story of the Flood comes from a mingling of the Yahwist and Priestly accounts which have their origins in Mesopotamian flood stories. The

Yahwist author describes God's great disappointment with human beings who are prone toward evil. The author notes that their actions disturbed God who regretted creating them. Because God sees a link between human beings and the total environment, God intends to destroy human beings, animals, crawling creatures, and birds of the air. After the Flood, God will make a covenant with the surviving human beings and all living creatures. A note of salvation appears in the narrative as the author tells us that Noah found favor with God.

6:14—7:5 Preparation for the Flood

At this point, the Priestly author takes over the narrative, reminding the reader that Noah, who walked blamelessly with God, had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. When God sees that the rest of the earth was corrupt and filled with lawlessness, God informs Noah about the impending destruction of all mortals with the earth.

God directs Noah to build an ark with an assortment of compartments and to cover it inside and out with pitch, which is a substance made from tar, still used today for waterproofing. In a Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, which provides some aspects of Noah's story, Gilgamesh receives the order to build a similar type of houseboat and to cover it with pitch. God describes the length and width of the ark, referring to its measurements in cubits. A cubit was about eighteen inches and was measured from the forearm to the tip of the middle finger. The size of the ark in our form of measuring would be about 440 by 73 by 44 feet. It is to have three floors (as found in the Gilgamesh epic), with an opening for daylight about a cubit below the roof and a side door.

In the midst of predicting the devastation of the flood, God promises to make a covenant with Noah. Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives are to go into the ark. The Priestly author who is writing this section has God direct Noah to bring two of every animal, bird, and crawling creature, male as well as female. The author makes no mention of clean or unclean animals but seeks to provide for the continuation of all living creatures. On a practical note, God states that they are to bring food and to store it as provisions for all. The Priestly author, who sees all as taking place according to God's command, notes that Noah did as God directed. Since divine

speech is important as we saw in the first creation story, God speaks to Noah seven times in the Flood story.

The story of the Flood as presented by the Yahwist author and the Priestly author now becomes more closely entwined. Since Noah is the only one found righteous by God, God tells Noah and his household to enter the ark. The hand of the Yahwist author is seen clearly here as God directs Noah to take seven pairs of clean animals and one pair of unclean animals, male and female, into the ark. He is also to take seven pairs of birds to assure that their species continues to exist. The reason for taking seven pairs of clean animals is that some of them will be used for sacrifice. Since the unclean animals will not be sacrificed, one pair of each would suffice to continue the species. God decreed that in seven days rain will fall on the earth for forty days and forty nights.

7:6—8 The Great Flood

For a second time, the author repeats that Noah and his family went into the ark. This second entry into the ark illustrates that two separate sources are being used here. All the animals, clean and unclean, enter the ark as God commanded. When Noah was 600 years old, the waters of the Flood came upon the earth. The Flood follows the Priestly image of the world as found on the second day of creation, as the water wells up from below and the floodgates of heaven open up. For forty days the rains came.

Evidence of the Priestly author continues to show as the Lord shuts Noah, his family, every kind of animal, crawling creature, and bird into the ark. Since the Priestly author believes that the distinction between clean and unclean animals and sacrifice does not take place until God gives the Law to Moses on Sinai, the author allows for pairs of all types of living creatures to come into the ark. The Flood continued for forty days, and the ark floated to fifteen cubits above the highest mountain—just enough room for the ark to float above them. And every living thing on earth was destroyed.

After 150 days, a new creation began as God made a wind sweep over the waters in a manner similar to God breathing over the waters in the first story of creation. The fountains of the abyss and the floodgates of the sky were closed, as happened on the second day of the first story of creation. Noah released a raven that flew over the waters until they subsided. Af-

terward, he released a dove that returned after finding no place to land. He waited a week and sent out that same dove who came back with an olive branch, which indicated that the water was subsiding. A week later, he sent out a dove that did not return.

When Noah, his family, and all living creatures left the ark, a new creation was begun. They were to travel over the earth, be fertile, and multiply. Noah, who brought with him the ritually clean animals for sacrifice, built an altar and offered burnt sacrifices to the Lord. In the Gilgamesh epic, the gods smelled the sweet odor of Gilgamesh's burnt offering and they repented of destroying the human race. In the same way, the author pictures God as smelling the sweet odor of Noah's burnt offering and promising never again to curse the ground because of human beings. So God pledges never again to obliterate living beings with a flood. According to the text, all days, all seasons, and day and night shall never cease; and the seasons will continue as before.

Review Questions

1. What answer would God give to Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"
2. Why did God choose only Noah and his family?
3. What comparisons do you see between the two creation stories and the story of the Flood?

Closing Prayer (SEE PAGE 16)

Pray the closing prayer now or after *lectio divina*.

Lectio Divina (SEE PAGE 9)

Relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

The meditations that follow are provided only to help group participants use this prayer form, but note that *lectio* is intended to bring one to a place of prayerful contemplation where the Word of God speaks to the hearer from his or her heart. (See page 9 for further instruction.)

Cain and Abel (4:1–16)

Jesus teaches that we are all neighbors (brothers and sisters to each other), and tells a story of a good Samaritan who lives up to his call as a neighbor by having concern for a stranger in a ditch. He washes his wounds and takes him to an inn, telling the innkeeper that he will pay the stranger's bill in full on his return (see Luke 10:25–37). The first two neighbors who ignored the man in the ditch did not see themselves as neighbors to the man. They were not their brother's or sister's keeper. In God's creation, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are meant to have a loving concern for one another.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

The Corruption of Sin (6:1–13)

The serpent in this story tempts Adam and Eve by enticing them to eat the forbidden fruit, suggesting that they will be like God. Strangely, sin makes us less like God. We are called to love as God loves and to use our life for the sake of God and others. The problem that happens when evil is rampant is that people forget that all life belongs to God. There were many good people in the world when Jesus came, but none of them had the power to overcome evil. We needed that one good person to save us. Jesus' ark was not a boat, but a cross. In Jesus, a new creation is begun just as a new creation began when Noah saved his family and the animals in the ark.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

The Great Flood (7:6—8)

A child and an adult come to the font for baptism. The presider welcomes them in the name of the community and a few moments later blesses the baptismal water. Then, the presider recalls the waters of the great Flood which brought about a new creation. Now, in the waters of baptism, a new creation is about to begin. Paul the Apostle says that in baptism, we die in Christ and are raised to a new life in him. Each of us who celebrates the sacrament of baptism has the call to make this new creation in Christ a living reality by loving God and our neighbor as ourselves. The waters lead us to a new creation.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

PART 2: INDIVIDUAL STUDY (GENESIS 9—15)

Day 1: Covenant With Noah (9)

In the first story of creation, God tells human beings to be fertile, multiply, and fill the earth. Now, in this renewed creation, God gives the same directive to Noah and his sons. God gives humans dominion over the animals in both creation stories, but God speaks here of the fear and dread of human beings experienced by the animals, birds, crawling creatures, and fish of the sea. God places them all in the control of humans.

Because of the human propensity to violence, God permits humans to consume meat, whereas before they were to eat only vegetation. Since the ancients regard blood to be sacred, the Israelites were banned from consuming meat with blood in it. Because Noah, who is now the new father of humanity, received this law about not eating meat with blood in it from God before God established specific rules for Jews at the time of Moses, they saw this law as binding on all people.

In the Acts of the Apostles, when the Jewish Christian leaders exempt the Gentile Christians from some of the regulations of the Mosaic Law, they explicitly mention that the Gentiles must still follow the rule of not eating meat of animals with the lifeblood still in it (15:20, 29). Because human beings have the dignity of being made in the image and likeness of God, God will demand an accounting of any animal or human who kills a human being. This accounting could demand that some human being kill that animal or person.

God establishes a covenant with Noah and all his descendants and with every living creature that was with Noah in the ark. The covenant assures that God will never again destroy the earth by waters. As a sign of the covenant between Noah and every living creature for all ages to come, God sets a bow in the clouds. The bow will serve as a reminder of the covenant to humans and to God. The bow, which is sometimes seen as a rainbow during or after rainstorms, represents a weapon used in hunting with a bow and arrow. God's bow is large and beautiful. The author makes use of a literary device known as doublets to reinforce his message. He speaks

of establishing a covenant in verses 9, 11, 12, and 17, and of God laying down God's bow in verses 14 and 16.

The author names Noah as a man of the soil who was the first to plant a vineyard. Noah, after drinking some of the wine from the vineyard, becomes intoxicated and was lying naked in his tent when his son Ham saw him. When Ham tells his brothers about his father's nakedness, apparently in the form of ridicule, the brothers take a robe and, holding it on their shoulders, walk backward into the tent and cover Noah's nakedness without looking at him. When Noah awakens and learns from Ham's brothers what has happened, he curses Ham's offspring, Canaan, predicting that Ham's offspring would be the lowest of slaves to his brothers. Noah rewards Shem and Japheth with a blessing, making Canaan a slave to the offspring of the brothers.

In the Ancient Near East, the son had the duty of protecting the honor of his father when his father was drunk. Ham dishonors his father with a twofold sin, first by looking on his father's nakedness, and second by telling his brothers about it. Although it may seem wrong that Noah curses Ham's son, Canaan, the story apparently looks to later events in the life of Israel, when the Israelites were in habitual clashes with the Canaanites. The other two brothers are blessed since they refused to dishonor their father and covered his nakedness without looking upon him in his disgrace.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

In ancient times, honoring one's father and mother was the most important after one's relationship with God. When Noah's son, Ham, dishonored him, Noah cursed his son. From the story, we learn a lesson for our world today. When we teach children to honor their parents, we must also remind adult children of the need to honor and care for their elderly parents, no matter what their condition. After the first three commandments that treat one's relationship with God comes the next most important command, namely to honor our parents. This command is that important.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

The Table of Nations (10)

(Read “Note About Genealogies” in the “Introduction: Pentateuch I,” page 19. You may skip or scan the biblical text in this section.)

Noah received the command to be fertile and multiply and fill all the earth. The table of nations, as this section is sometimes called, tells of the offspring of Shem, Ham, and Japheth and how their families multiplied and filled the earth. The family of Japheth had their center in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). The family of Ham lived in a vast area in and around Egypt. Shem is the father of the Semitic peoples, which includes Israel. He is the father of Eber, whose name may be related to the name “Hebrew.” If this is true, then this postulates a wider group of Eber (Hebrews) of which the Israelites were a part.

Day 2: The Tower of Babel (11:1–9)

When human beings were evicted from the Garden of Eden, they departed east from the Garden (see 3:14). Chapter 11 begins as though all the events from being expelled out of the Garden to the present did not take place, since the people are not migrating toward the east, but from the east. This story about building the Tower of Babel stands alone. In contrast to the Lord’s command to be fertile, multiply, and fill the earth, the people who all speak the same language decide not to fill the earth but to build a city and a tower and then remain there. The human image of the Lord as found in the writings of the Yahwist author continues as the Lord comes down, like a human being, to see the city. The Lord worries that the people will be able to do whatever they wish unless the Lord confuses their language so that they will not be able to understand each other. The author is pointing to sin as a reason for different languages.

The temptation of humans wanting to be like gods continues, a theme also presented in the second creation story. As a result of not understanding each other, the people do not finish the tower and scatter all over the earth. The name Babel means the “gate of god” to the Babylonians, but the Hebrew word “Babal” means “the confused.” In our current-day idiom, when we do not understand someone who is speaking, we may sometimes use the expression, “What are you babbling about?”

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Jesus' message touches every part of the world today, and people who speak different languages share a common belief in Jesus. Just as disunity came as a result of the building of the Tower of Babel, unity comes through the gift of the Holy Spirit given to people of faith throughout the world. With Christ, we are not alienated from each other but are spiritually joined as one.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Descendants From Shem to Abram (11:10–32)

(Read “Note About Genealogies” in the “Introduction: Pentateuch I,” page 19. You may skip or scan the biblical text in this section.)

The Priestly author continues to provide continuity in the story. Up until this point, the primeval history concerned all nations. With the current genealogy, we move from Seth to Abram, who will eventually have his name changed to Abraham. Abraham will eventually be recognized as the father of the Israelite nation. The genealogy, like that of Noah, begins with Seth and ends with Abram, Nahor, and Haran, three sons of Terah. The theme of ending genealogies with three significant names follows the format of genealogies found in Genesis.

Once the story reaches Abram, it now becomes the story of the ancestors of Israel. The author repeats the names of the sons of Terah as Abram, Nahor, and Haran, the father of Lot. When Abram's wife, Sarai, is named, the author states that she was barren, setting the groundwork for a later miracle in the life of Abram. Haran dies before his father, Terah. Terah sets out from Ur of the Chaldeans with his grandson Lot, his son Abram, and Abram's wife. The planned destination was the land of Canaan, but when they reach Haran, they settle there. Terah dies at Haran.

Day 3: Abram's Call and Sojourn in Egypt (12)

God directs Abram to set out from his land, his relatives, and his father's house to a land that God promises to give him. With this, the saga of Abram begins. Most of his story comes from the Yahwist author, which makes it more ancient than some later stories. Leaving his land, relatives, and father's house could symbolize Abram's break from his past and his journey from paganism to the one God. Leaving was not his choice, but he was directed by God. His destination is also established by God, since he is to travel to the land God will show him. It seems that the blessing from the Lord for Abraham depends on his willingness to go to Canaan. God promises to bless those who bless Abram and curse those who curse him. Just as God confused the languages of the people and scatters them over the earth, God now promises that blessings will flow to all families of the earth through Abram.

Abram leaves Haran at the age of seventy-five and takes with him his wife, Sarai, and his brother's son, Lot, to the land of Canaan. In the land of Canaan, they travel to Shechem and then to Bethel, building an altar at each place. The dedication of the altars may symbolize God's claim over the pagan holy sites, and Abram's journey through Canaan may represent his claim on the land for his ancestors. Abram then journeyed to Negeb.

A story from the Yahwist author interrupts the story of Abram's journey to Negeb with a story about Abram and Sarai in Egypt. In this story, Abram and Sarai go to Egypt to avoid a famine that swept over the land. Abram tells Sarai to lie by saying that she is his sister. He feared that the Egyptians would kill him in order to take Sarai. The passage shows that Abram does not yet fully trust that the Lord would bless him and his offspring. When Pharaoh sees the beauty of Sarai, he takes her into his house. Abram prospered in Egypt because Pharaoh thought that Sarai was in the care of her brother Abram. When Pharaoh and his household become victims of a severe plague, Pharaoh discovers that Sarai is Abram's wife, and he rebukes Abram for lying. He has him sent away with his wife and all their belongings.

The story of the deception of Abram and Sarai will appear again in chapter 20. A similar story will also appear in a later story about Jacob and his

wife Rebecca in 26:1–11. The duplication of events found in Genesis is not surprising since the stories were passed on through different traditions for a long period of time before someone wrote them down. There is also a subtle reference in the story to a later event in Genesis when the family of Jacob comes to Egypt to avoid a famine and centuries later leaves after a series of plagues afflict Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Genesis 45, 46, and Exodus 14).

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

We believe that the Lord is with us, but there are times when we lose confidence in God's presence and commit a sin to solve our situations. We can sometimes say within our hearts, "Lord, I trust you, but not in this situation." The good news about God is that God did not abandon Abram when Abram showed a lack of trust in God, who promised to be with him.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 4: Abram and Lot Part (13–14)

The story continues from verse 9 of the previous chapter. Abram returns to Negeb. The blessings God bestows on Abram become visible through the abundant wealth Abram accumulated. Abram's nephew, Lot, travels with Abram's family, and he too has become rich. Disputes were erupting between the herders of Abram's livestock and those of Lot, possibly over watering places that were valuable areas to shepherds. To avoid a family conflict and recognizing that they could not remain together, Abram and Lot agree to split from each other. Abram allows Lot to choose where he wishes to settle and Lot chooses to set up his tent on the Jordan plain near Sodom. This passage stresses the wickedness of Sodom.

After Lot leaves Abram, God directs Abram to look around at all the land in every direction. Just as Abram allowed Lot to lift up his eyes and look at the land he wanted, so God has Abram lift up his eyes to see the land God promised to give to his descendants. God's promise is that Abram's descendants will be as numerous as the dust. Here, God directs Abram to

walk over this entire land, and Abram settles in Hebron where he builds an altar to the Lord. In this passage, Abram is fulfilling the command of God to “go to the land that I will show you” (12:1).

This is a difficult chapter that lacks extra-biblical support and which speaks about battles between various kingly factions. Four eastern kings join together and defeat five Canaanite kings from the Dead Sea region where Lot has settled. For twelve years, the Canaanite kings were subjected to an eastern coalition under the leadership of the Shemite king named Chedorlaomer. When the Canaanite kings revolt, the eastern kings crush the rebellion and capture Lot and his household. Then, Abram hears of the capture of Lot and musters an army of 318 men of his household, pursuing the retreating kings to the vicinity of Dan. In a nighttime assault, he wins the battle. He then pursues those fleeing to a city north of Damascus named Hobah. There, Abram recovers Lot and his possessions, including his women and children.

Upon Abram’s return, Melchizedek, the king of Salem, brings him bread and wine. The reference to the king of Salem, written in Psalm 76:3 as Jerusalem and Mount Zion, says, “On Salem is God’s tent, his shelter on Zion.” This is the only place where Genesis associates a patriarch with Jerusalem and the only reference in the entire Torah to Jerusalem. Melchizedek blesses Abram, who offers Melchizedek a tenth of all he has. Then Abram refuses to return the captives to the king of Sodom who requests them, but not the supplies. Since he did not battle to be enriched by his victory, Abram returned the supplies, entrusting God to enrich him.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Jesus tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves. The story of Lot and Abram offers an insight into love of neighbor. They certainly love each other, but in their wisdom, they realize that sharing the same land and water supply will jeopardize their relationship, so they decide to part from each other. Love of neighbor can mean that we make boundaries in order to respect them. Respecting both the rights of our neighbors and our own rights is essential. Love of neighbor

demands that we attempt to live in peace with those who surround us—our brothers and sisters in Christ.

✂ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 5: Covenant with Abram (15)

A period of time passes and the word of the Lord speaks to Abram in a vision, directing Abram to have no fear because the Lord promises to be his shield. Abram asks what the Lord will give him since he has no offspring. It appears that his servant Eliezer will become his heir. The Lord promises Abram that he will have an heir from among his offspring and that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. In this section, Abram put his faith in the Lord, an act of righteousness.

After Abram has received a promise of offspring as numerous as the stars, the message now turns its attention to the land. This passage comes from a different tradition than that found in the first six verses of this chapter. God leads Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans to this land that God has promised to him. When Abram asks how he will know that he will possess the land, God prepares for a covenant with Abram. God directs him to bring a heifer, a female goat, and a ram, all three years old, along with a turtledove and a small pigeon. Abram does so, cutting the animals in half with the exception of the birds. The cutting in half signified a commitment made in a treaty whereby a person is saying, “May the same happen to me if I break the treaty.” The voice of the Lord offers a veiled prediction of the sojourn of the Israelites who will live in slavery in Egypt for four hundred years. The nation enslaving them will face God’s wrath and they will leave the land with great wealth and return to the land where Abram resides. God promises Abram that he will be buried with his ancestors in peace, a significant and important prediction for people of Abram’s era.

In the darkness, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passes between the divided carcasses as a sign of God’s sealing of the covenant. God promises to give the land from the Wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates to Abram’s descendants. The Wadi of Egypt was a dividing point between the Sinai desert and the area of the promise. But the land promised here is more than the Israelites later inhabited. The list of ten nations occupying this area is similar to other lists found in the Scriptures.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Abram will have offspring as numerous as the stars, which is a foolish idea to a man and woman who are too old to have children. The foundation of Judaism and Christianity is that God is a God of history, a companion on the journey through life for all believers. The New Testament teaches that Jesus is our companion through life, and we seal that belief through the covenant of baptism. As long as Christ is with us, we can expect the impossible to happen, even when we are not aware of it or when it seems foolish.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Review Questions

1. What message can be understood from the passage where God grants permission for human beings to eat meat?
2. What is the relationship between Abram and Lot? Explain the significance of their relationship in Scripture.
3. Why did God choose Abram and make a covenant with him?