

THE OLD TESTAMENT

A new, cutting-edge translation
of the Septuagint

VOLUME 1
THE PENTATEUCH

NICHOLAS KING

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For Noreen and Craig

Many translations of the Bible opt for a uniform style; they iron out irregularities and try to amplify the text or produce easy-flowing reading or modern English. Nicholas King's fresh rendering of the Old Testament is not only innovative, but also illuminating; it will also strengthen the faith of readers. His translation is of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew text, because that was the Bible that the New Testament authors knew. His aim is to keep as close to the original Greek as possible, frequently incorporating idiomatic or grammatical peculiarities.

This results in a translation which is exceptionally stimulating, sometimes startling; readers will find that it shakes off the dust which often settles on passages that have become tired from overfamiliarity or frequent quotation. Nicholas King's translation is infused with raw power. Readers will gain new insights and find the Bible imbued with renewed meaning and vigour.

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About the author

Nicholas King is a Jesuit priest who, after many years in South Africa, now teaches New Testament at Oxford University. He is frequently in demand all over the world to lecture on biblical subjects.

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Preface

Some people have asked me: Why translate the Old Testament from the Greek? Was it not originally written in Hebrew? Indeed it was, but the Greek text of the Old Testament is of interest to ordinary readers, for a number of reasons. In the first place, perhaps, one should mention that the Greek text (called the Septuagint, abbreviated to LXX, for reasons that we shall explain later) is the ‘bible’ of the New Testament authors. For the most part, this was the text that they knew, often by heart, and which they quote.

Secondly, the manuscripts of the Greek Old Testament are older than those of the Hebrew Bible, and often preserve an original reading, when the Hebrew Text (known as Masoretic Text, or MT) has forgotten it. We know from the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran, and elsewhere in the Judaean desert, that the community that hid those documents knew several different forms of what we call the ‘Old Testament’. There were at least three types of manuscript of Old Testament documents: those which resemble the text of our Hebrew Bible (‘proto-Masoretic’), those which resemble the Greek Bible (‘proto-Septuagint’), and those which resemble the Samaritan version of the first five books, or ‘Pentateuch’. So Jews of roughly the time when Jesus lived and taught, and when the New Testament was evolving, did not have a fixed form of their Scriptures; that was a later development. If you find that surprising, that is because you are used to the printed word, rather than manuscripts.

Thirdly, most Jews in the centuries on either side of the birth of Christ will have spoken not Hebrew or Aramaic, but Greek; so it is quite important for us to be able to see how they read their Old Testament texts. Different readings often arise in response to new needs; and, indeed, we can see something like this happening with regard to the Targumim, the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible, which often have new interpretations added, to deal with new situations that have arisen in the life of the believing community.

So it is my hope that in reading through this translation of the Greek Old Testament you will find something different and fresh in a text that is not ‘set in stone’, but alive and flexible, and prepared to address what is happening to God’s people today. That same word of God is alive and permanently new in our time also.

What is this ‘Septuagint’, and why do its friends call it LXX? ‘Septuaginta’ is the Latin for 70, and LXX (which you will frequently meet in the following pages) is the way the Romans wrote the number. There is a charming legend, preserved for us in various forms, that a committee of 72 (rather than 70) learned Jews miraculously produced an identical translation, in response to the request of King Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 BC), who greatly admired the wisdom of his Jewish subjects. The earliest version of the story

in fact has the 70 scholars agreeing the translation verse by verse, which is perhaps more likely than the tale of simultaneous divine inspiration. Sometimes the telling of the story suggests that it was the entire Bible that was translated at that time, but it looks as though only the first five books of the Old Testament were translated into Greek, probably in the 3rd century BC, and that the rest of the Bible followed later, in no particular order.

It is most likely that the initial translation was done in Alexandria, by Jews who were no longer at ease in Hebrew. So the translations (and one must speak in the plural, for there are clear signs that several different scholars were at work, probably in different centuries) were probably a response to the liturgical and educational needs of Greek-speaking Jews. This move away from Hebrew was a momentous shift, of course, and eventually led to all the rest of the Bible getting translated into Greek, a language that had much the same function in that world as English does today, a 'common language' that can be used all over the known world, and whose elegance and complexities are sacrificed in the process.

There was clearly a great explosion of Jewish writing in Greek in the three centuries before the birth of Jesus. Later on, Jewish thinkers started to reject the LXX. This was for various reasons: it was partly because the LXX became the 'Christian Bible'. But earlier than that, a trend had started of revising the LXX to bring it into line with the 'official' form of the Hebrew text. As early as the first century AD new Greek versions started to appear, and eventually the Hebrew Bible took on its present official status within Judaism. So for several centuries the Septuagint was the biblical text known to most Jews. We do not know who they were, these thinkers who first put the Bible into Greek; but they were clearly trying to produce a text that was both faithful to the original Hebrew and intelligible to their contemporaries, a gallant attempt which we must admire even while we try to do the same in our own day. It was also, of course, the version of the Bible known to the first Christians, although it is important to stress that we do not know precisely what text they used. The LXX is, it cannot be too strongly stressed, a more ancient witness to the text of the Old Testament than any surviving Hebrew manuscript; and we need to recall that both the Hebrew and the Greek tradition continued to undergo developments of various kinds. And we need to reflect on the implications of that fact.

Since this project began, another translation of the LXX has appeared in English; it is called '*A New English Translation of the Septuagint*' (known by the splendid acronym of NETS), and the reader may like to look at it, for purposes of comparison. The scholars who did this translation have taken a very different approach. It is very useful indeed, and I have found it helpful to see what they have done on occasional difficult passages. Their style has been different from mine, in that, for example, they have left Greek names in the Greek, whereas I have opted for the more familiar Hebrew forms of the names. There is something to be said for both these approaches.

My heartfelt thanks go to Peter Dainty, Yolande Trainor, Prof John Barton, Sr Jennifer Dines and Dr Alison Salvesen.

Nicholas King

Introduction to the Pentateuch

‘Pentateuch’ is a Greek word, and it simply means, in this context, and in the Greek spoken in the lively intellectual centre of Alexandria in Egypt, ‘five volumes’. It refers to the first five books of the Old Testament, what Hebrew readers would have called Torah, a word that we translate, not wholly successfully, as ‘Law’. Those five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, are known to us, you might like to know, by their Greek, not their Hebrew names, which is a helpful indicator of how much the LXX has affected our reading of the Bible.

You can regard these five books quite helpfully as the story of God and the people of God in the time of Moses, with an introduction in the form of the first volume, what we call Genesis. It is more accurate to call it a ‘story’ than a ‘history’. Scholars have over the last two or three centuries come to see several different traditions brought together in the Pentateuch. One difficulty here is that there is no universal agreement about where one tradition ends and another begins, nor about the dates from which they originate. And there is no evidence that our LXX translators were alive to these different traditions. So I do not propose to say anything very much about them, except to encourage you to read the Pentateuch attentively and reflectively, looking out for puzzles or oddities, and then allowing them to speak to you. And always remember that it is a story, and stories operate upon us in their own particular way. Our task is to let the story happen to us, to allow ourselves to be ‘invited aboard’, and so feel the challenge of God’s word, as we follow the interplay between God and the people whom God has gathered. What we have here has been built up, probably over many centuries, and our task is to read it and see where we are led.

Genesis

Introduction

Scholars have in recent centuries had the habit of dividing Genesis according to its several 'sources' or 'traditions'; but it is worth noting that there is no hint that our translators thought that the book was anything but a unity, and they have presented it accordingly.

The name means 'origin' or 'birth' or 'coming to be'. It is the name given it by its Greek translators. In Hebrew, it is known by its first word, 'In the beginning . . .' It is not intended as a scientific treatise, but as a narrative indicating that our story begins, where it must also end, with God. We cannot be sure when it was written, though it seems to have a long and complex history; our task is to allow the text to lead us deeper into the mystery of God. It may be helpful if in the first eleven chapters you look out for how Israel fits into God's creation, and how human beings have tended to react to the God who made them. From chapter 12 onwards the reader's attention is drawn to the figure of Abraham and the odd things that he does; but the context, all the time, is the unfailing fidelity of God who never goes back on the promises that he makes to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants. At the end of the book (chapters 37–50), there is the story of Joseph, Abraham's great-grandson. Some people describe this racy tale as an early novel. Read it, and watch what God does in it. And see how effortlessly the story brings the people of Israel down into Egypt, from which in the next volume God is going to liberate them.

As you read this translation of the Septuagint, I should like to encourage you to keep your Bibles open, and see some of the differences between the Greek and the Hebrew versions from which your Bibles will normally have been translated.

First account of creation (1:1–2:3)

1:1 In the beginning God made heaven and earth.

1:1–
2:3 **First account of creation:** In our time, there is a good deal of speculation, not always well founded, about alleged incompatibilities between what 'the Bible says' and what 'Science says'. Those who put Genesis together have offered us two separate accounts of creation, to remind us that we do not know precisely how our world came to be; but for those who believe, Jews and Christians, the world is God's gift to us, for us to look after as good stewards.

1:1 *In the beginning*, this is one of the most famous first lines in literature, and it is of course deliberately echoed by the opening of John's Gospel ('in the beginning was the Word . . .'), and perhaps also by the first line of the Gospel of Mark, 'the beginning of the good news . . .'.
made: all the way through this chapter, the translator uses this word rather than the word for 'created', which is what the Hebrew has.

- 2 And the earth was invisible and unformed; and darkness was upon the abyss, and the Spirit of God was rushing upon the water.
- 3 And God said, 'Let there be light' – and light came to be!
- 4 And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided between the light and the darkness.
- 5 And God called the light 'Day'; and the darkness he called 'Night'. And there was evening, and there was morning – Day One.
- 6 And God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the middle of the water; and let it divide between water and water' – and it came to be!
- 7 And God made the firmament; and God divided between the water which was below the firmament and the water which was above the firmament.
- 8 And God called the firmament 'heaven'. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning – Day Two.
- 9 And God said, 'Let the water which is under heaven be gathered into one gathering place. And let the dry land appear.' And it came to be! And the water under heaven was gathered into its gathering places. And the dry land appeared.
- 10 And God called the dry land 'Earth'; and the system of waters he called 'Seas'. And God saw that it was good.
- 11 And God said, 'Let the earth produce herbage of grass, sowing seed according to its kind and according to its likeness, and a fruit-bearing tree which yields fruit, whose seed is in it according to its kind on the earth.' And it came to be!
- 12 And the earth brought out herbage of grass, sowing seed according to its kind and according to its likeness, and a fruit-bearing tree which yields fruit, whose seed is in it according to its kind on the earth. And God saw that it was good.
- 13 And there was evening and there was morning – a Third Day.
- 14 And God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to illuminate the earth, to divide between day and night; and let them stand as signs and for seasons and for days and years;
- 15 and let them stand for illumination in the firmament of heaven, so as to shine on earth.' And it was so!

1:2 *invisible and unformed*: the Hebrew here reads *tohu vabohu*, which is rhyming poetry, not easy to translate, but probably means something like 'disorganised matter'. The Greek translator has opted for more philosophical, less poetic language.

was rushing upon: the Hebrew here is a very rare word, and it seems as though it means something like 'hover over'. A related word in the Greek text is used at Acts 2:2, on that first Pentecost day. We notice that both these 'rushings' describe the coming of the Spirit of God.

1:5 *Day One*: this first account of Creation is interested in 'light' and 'darkness', and in the lights with which God performs the divine task of 'dividing' or 'separating', organising that which is disorganised. And to emphasise the imposition of a pattern, the poet who wrote this account divides creation into seven days. It is possible that the reason that people get so worried about this first account of creation is that it is the opening words of the Bible; but we should listen to what our poet is telling us, and try to see what is the real point that he is making.

1:6 *firmament*: this strange word comes to us from Latin, as a direct translation of the Greek word, which means something like 'firmness', 'strength', or 'solidity', referring to

the solid dome of the sky, the bit between earth and heaven, or the solid bit that separates the lower waters from the upper waters. It locates God's dwelling high above us, safe from all enemies (as in Psalm 8:1–2). But in English now the 'firmament' simply means 'the heavens'. Such is the power of translation.

1:6 *between*: in Hebrew the expression is 'between . . . and between . . .'. The Greek here has followed this construction slavishly; I have adopted the normal English construction. Readers may be interested to see a similar expression in the heavily Semitised Greek of Revelation (5:6, for example, where the Lamb is 'between the Throne . . . and between the elders').

1:9 *gathered into one gathering place*: the sound of this in Greek would have been 'synagogued into one synagogue'. The Hebrew simply has, 'Let it be collected into one place'.

And the water under heaven . . .: This part of the verse has no equivalent in the MT, and does not add a great deal to it; but it might be original.

1:10 *system*: it is difficult to find another English word here, 'gathering place' might do it, but we have already used that for *synagoge*. The Greek word here is *sustemata*.

- 16 And God made the two great lights, the great light for ruling over the day, and the lesser light for ruling over the night and the stars.
- 17 And God placed them in the firmament of heaven, to shine upon the earth,
- 18 and to rule over the day and the night, and to divide between the light and the darkness. And God saw that it was good.
- 19 And there was evening and there was morning – a Fourth Day.
- 20 And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth creepy-crawlies, that have living souls, and winged birds that fly over the earth, along the firmament of heaven.’ And it was so!
- 21 And God made the great sea-monsters, and every life of living creepy-crawlies, which the waters brought forth according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to their kind. And God saw that it was good.
- 22 And God blessed them, saying, ‘Increase and multiply; and fill the waters in the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth.’
- 23 And there was evening and there was morning – a Fifth Day.
- 24 And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth a living creature according to its kind, quadrupeds, and creepy-crawlies, and wild beasts of the earth according to their kind – and it was so!
- 25 And God made the wild beasts of the earth according to their kind, and cattle according to their kind, and all the creepy-crawlies of the earth according to their kind. And God saw that they were good.
- 26 And God said, ‘Let us make humanity according to our image, and according to our likeness. And let them rule over the fishes of the sea, and the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the earth and all the creepy-crawlies that crawl upon the earth.
- 27 And God made humanity; according to the image of God he made them; male and female he made them.
- 28 And God blessed them, saying, ‘Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and be lords over it; and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the birds of the air, and all cattle, and all the earth, and over all the creepy-crawlies that crawl upon the earth.
- 29 And God said, ‘Look – I have given you every [kind of] grass that sows seed which is upon all the earth, and every tree which has in itself fruit that sows seed; it will serve as food for you.
- 30 And to all the wild beasts of the earth, and to all the birds of heaven, and to every creepy-crawly that crawls upon the earth, which has life in itself, every green plant for food.’ And it was so!
- 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and look! It was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a Sixth Day.
- 2:1 And the heaven and the earth were completed, and all their array.
- 2 And God completed on the sixth day the works which he made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his works which he had made.

1:16 *for ruling over the day*: the Greek word for ‘ruling’ could also mean ‘beginning’. The Greek word here is plural, where the Hebrew is singular.

1:24 *a living creature*: the Greek here is a somewhat over-literal translation of the Hebrew, which means ‘a living soul’, but clearly refers to many different animals.

1:31 *everything that he had made . . . it was very good*: this formula emphasises the completeness and the perfection of God’s creation, in contrast to the formula used hitherto.

2:1 *array*: this is an attempt to capture one of the meanings of the Greek word that the translator has used, *kosmos*,

which in the New Testament often means ‘world’, but also ‘beauty’ and ‘adornment’ and ‘ornament’; but here it translates a Hebrew word meaning ‘array’. There is of course a connection with ‘cosmetics’.

2:2 *completed on the sixth day*: here the translator seems to have edited what he found in the Hebrew text, which at first blush implies that God actually worked on the 7th day, and the translator is evidently determined to preserve the Sabbath from divine labour.

- 3 And God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy, because on that day he rested from all his works which God began to do.

Second account of Creation (Genesis 2:4–25)

- 4 This is the book of the generation of heaven and earth, when they were generated, on the day [when] God made heaven and earth
 5 and every green thing of the field before it was generated on the earth; and all the grass of the field before it rose up, for God had not rained upon the earth; and there was no human being to work the earth.
 6 And a spring came up out of the earth, and was watering the whole face of the earth.
 7 And God fashioned the human being, dust from the earth; and God breathed into his face the breath of life; and the human being became a living person.
 8 And the Lord God planted an orchard in Edem in the East; and he placed there the human being whom he had fashioned.
 9 And God also made to grow out of the earth every tree that was beautiful to look at, and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the orchard, and the tree of knowing the knowledge of good and evil.
 10 And a river flows out of Edem to irrigate the orchard; from there it divides into four branches.
 11 The name of the first is Phison; this is the one which encircles the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold.
 12 The gold of that land is good, and there is also carbuncle there, and the stone that is green.
 13 And the name of the second river is Gihon; this is the one which encircles the whole land of Ethiopia.
 14 And the third river is Tigris; this is the one which goes over against the Assyrians. And the fourth river is Euphrates.
 15 And the Lord God took the human being whom he had fashioned, and placed him in the orchard, for him to work it and look after it.
 16 And the Lord God gave a command to Adam, saying, 'Of every tree in the orchard you (sing.) shall indeed eat;

2:4–25 **Second account of Creation:** here begins a second account of creation, a clear hint from the editor that we are not to take the creation narrative literally, but simply as asserting that all of the universe, and all human and animal life, come from the loving hand of God.

2:7 *human being, dust from the earth:* in the Hebrew there is a pun between 'Adam' (human being) and 'adamah' (earth). The translator here has ignored the pun.

breathed into his face the breath: here, on the other hand, the translator has inserted a pun which is not in the original Hebrew.

2:8 *the Lord God:* 'the Lord' (Kyrios) is the standard translation in LXX of YHWH, the sacred name of God, which we meet here for the first time. 'God' translates 'Elohim, which is what the Hebrew text has hitherto used for the divine name. In chapter 1, it is always 'Elohim.

orchard: the Greek word here is *paradeisos*, originally a Persian word that has travelled through Hebrew. It means a garden or orchard, and is the origin of our 'Paradise'.

Edem: here the translator has simply transcribed (with m for n as the last letter) the Hebrew word, which originally seems to have meant 'land of bliss' or 'happy land', but then came to be a place name, which we normally transcribe as 'Eden'.

2:12 *carbuncle:* this means a dark-red semi-precious stone. The word can also mean 'coal', but that is presumably not what the author has in mind here.

2:15 *him:* although as yet the human being is neither male nor female, English needs a personal pronoun here.

in the orchard: some manuscripts of the Greek have here 'garden of Delight', which is a possible translation of the Hebrew word 'Eden'.

2:16 *you shall indeed eat:* here the LXX translator has made an attempt at a Hebrew expression, which you could render 'eating you shall eat', and simply strengthens the verb. Oddly enough, he has taken his 'eating' words from two different Greek roots.

- 17 but from the tree of knowing good and evil you shall not eat; on the day when you (plur.) eat of it, you (plur.) shall die the death.’
- 18 And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the human being to be alone; let us make him a helper just like him.
- 19 And God fashioned again from the earth, all the beasts of the field, and all the birds of heaven; and God led them to Adam to see what Adam would call them; and whatever Adam called the living creature, that was its name.
- 20 And Adam called out the names for all the cattle, and all the birds of heaven, and all the beasts of the field. And yet for Adam there was not found a helper like him.
- 21 And God threw a trance on Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his sides, and filled up flesh in its place.
- 22 And the Lord God built the side which he had taken from Adam into a woman; and he led her to Adam.
- 23 And Adam said, ‘This now is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh. She shall be called ‘Woman’, because from her man she was taken.’
- 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and will stick to his wife; and the two shall be one flesh.
- 25 And the two were naked, Adam and his wife. And they were not ashamed.

The snake and the woman and the man. And the consequences (3:1–24)

- 3:1 And the Snake was the cleverest of all the wild animals that were on the earth, which the Lord God had made. And the snake said to the Woman, ‘Why did God say, “No way are you to eat of every tree in the orchard?”’
- 2 And the woman said to the Snake, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the orchard, we shall eat;
- 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the orchard, God said, “You shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die”.’
- 4 And the Snake said to the Woman, ‘You shall not die the death;
- 5 because God knew that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil.’
- 6 And the Woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and that it was pleasing for the eyes to look upon, and beautiful to look at; and she took its fruit, and ate; and she gave it to her Man with her. And they ate.

2:17 *you shall die the death*: again, the same grammatical expression as in the previous note. We might have translated this, ‘you shall certainly die’.

2:19 *again*: there is no equivalent to this in the Hebrew, but there is in the Samaritan Pentateuch. It may be that the translator wishes to acknowledge that there are two accounts of Creation in the first two chapters of the Bible.

2:21 *trance*: the Greek means, literally, ‘ecstasy’, but the idea here is closer to a ‘sleepiness’. The Hebrew means a ‘deep sleep’.

one of his sides: rather than ‘rib’. The Hebrew can mean either, and our translator had to opt for one.

2:23 *woman . . . man*: there is a pun in the Hebrew, which is obscurely (and unavoidably) there also in the English, but was not there in LXX.

2:24 *a man*: this is one of the rare occasions when the Greek word *anthropos* can safely be translated as ‘man’, rather than ‘human being’.

3:1 *And the Snake was the cleverest . . .*: this is a beguiling story about the human condition, and the ease with which we can slip into choosing what we know to be wrong, and then justifying it to ourselves. But the consequences of our frailty can be more catastrophic than we imagine. Is there something of this in our present attitudes to the environment?

‘Why did God say, “No way are you to eat of every tree in the orchard”: this was not, of course what God had said – rather the opposite, in fact. We, including at times the mass media, mangle what people have said, in order to attain unworthy objectives.

3:2 *tree*: the word in Greek here is singular, not plural, but it can also mean ‘wood’, in the sense of a collection of trees, so we are probably justified in translating it as a plural here.

3:3 *nor shall you touch it*: God did not actually say that; it is a gloss, or interpretative expansion, or, indeed, an exaggeration, to make it appear more absurd. We tend to do the same (and we read it in the daily newspaper).

- 7 And the eyes of the two of them were opened. And they realised that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves and made loincloths for themselves.
- 8 And they heard the voice of the Lord God as he walked in the orchard in the evening. And Adam and his Woman hid themselves from the face of the Lord God, in the middle of the tree[s] of the orchard.
- 9 And the Lord God called Adam, and said to him, ‘Adam – where are you?’
- 10 And he said to him, ‘I heard your voice as you walked in the orchard. And I was afraid, because I am naked. And I hid.’
- 11 And he said to him, ‘Who told you that you are naked? Unless it was from the tree, of which I told you not to eat just this one, you ate of it?’
- 12 And Adam said, ‘The Woman whom you gave to be with me, gave me something from the tree. And I ate.’
- 13 And the Lord God said to the Woman, ‘Why have you done this?’ And the Woman said, ‘The Snake tricked me, and I ate.’
- 14 And the Lord God said to the Snake,
 ‘Because you did this, you are accursed above all cattle,
 and all the beasts of the earth,
 and you will go upon your breast and your belly,
 and you will eat soil, all the days of your life.
- 15 And I shall put hostility between you and the Woman,
 and between your seed and her seed;
 he will watch your head, and you will watch his heel.’
- 16 And to the Woman he said,
 ‘I shall greatly multiply your griefs and your groaning;
 in pain you will bring forth children,
 and your inclination shall be for him.
 And he will lord it over you.
- 17 And to Adam he said,
 ‘Because you listened to the voice of your Woman,
 and ate from the tree which I commanded
 that you should not eat of this one alone,
 cursed be the land in your labours;
 in pain you shall eat of it, all the days of your life.
- 18 It will raise up thorns and thistles for you;
 and you will eat the grass of the field.
- 19 By the sweat of your face you will eat your bread,
 until you return to the earth from which you were taken;
 for you are earth – and to earth you will return.’
- 20 And Adam called his wife ‘Life’, because she was the mother of all who live.
- 21 And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and for his Woman; and clothed them.

3:8 *in the evening*: or in the afternoon, translating the Hebrew ‘in the breeze of the day’.

3:11 *of which I told you not to eat just . . .*: the syntax is a little awkward here, because the translator has been trying to follow the Hebrew quite carefully. The meaning is entirely clear.

3:12 *the Woman whom you gave*: here Adam manages neatly to blame both God and the Woman. In the next verse, the Woman does the same for the Snake.

3:14 *on your breast and your belly*: the Hebrew here simply has ‘on your belly’.

3:15 *watch*: this is how the Greek has translated a word whose

meaning is no longer clear to us: ‘bruise’ and ‘snatch’ are traditional translations of the Hebrew here.

3:16 *inclination*: or ‘return’, possibly reading a slightly different Hebrew word, *teshuvah* for *teshuqah* (=desire).

3:20 *And Adam called his wife ‘Life’*: The Greek for ‘life’ is the lovely name Zoë. If you are wondering what happened to ‘Eve’, the Hebrew word for life is Havvah, which comes into Latin as Heva, soon reduced to Eva, and so into English as Eve.

4:1–16 **Cain and Abel**: this is a mysterious story. Read it carefully, and try to decide what it is about.

- 22 And God said, 'Look! Adam has become like one of us, to know good and evil; and now, [we ought] to prevent him stretching out his hand at any time and taking from the tree of life and eating, and living forever',
- 23 and the Lord God sent him out of the orchard of delight, to work the land from which he had been taken.
- 24 And he expelled Adam, and made him live over against the orchard of delight. And he stationed the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Cain and Abel (4:1–16)

- 4:1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived and brought forth Cain. And she said, 'I have gained a man through God.'
- 2 And she went on to bear his brother Abel; and Abel became a shepherd of sheep – but Cain was tilling the ground.
- 3 And it happened after [some] days, Cain brought from the fruits of the earth a sacrifice to the Lord.
- 4 And Abel too brought from the first-born of the sheep, and from his fat portions. And God looked upon Abel and upon his gifts,
- 5 but he paid no attention to Cain and his offerings. And it grieved Cain greatly and his face fell.
- 6 And the Lord God said to Cain, 'Why have you become very sad, and why has your face fallen?
- 7 If you offered it rightly, but did not divide it rightly, have you not sinned? Be at peace; he shall turn to you, and you will rule over him.
- 8 And Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let us go out into the plain.' And it happened when they were in the plain that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and killed him.
- 9 And God said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I don't know – I'm not my brother's guard, am I?'
- 10 And God said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the earth.'
- 11 And now you are accursed from the earth, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand,
- 12 for you will till the earth, and it will no longer give you its strength. You will be groaning and trembling on the earth.
- 13 And Cain said to the Lord, 'My guilt is greater than can be forgiven.
- 14 If you expel me today from the face of the earth, I shall be hidden from your face, and I shall be groaning and trembling on the earth; and anyone who finds me will kill me.'

4:1 *I have gained*: there is a pun in the Hebrew here, on the name 'Cain', but it is not reproduced in the Greek.

4:2 *she went on to bear*: here the translator has rendered a Semitic expression literally, 'she added to bear'.

4:3 *after [some] days*: the Hebrew here has 'from the end of days', which the Greek has not attempted to translate. The Greek philosopher Philo thought that it meant that Cain was late in offering his sacrifice, and that was why it was not accepted.

4:5 *his face fell*: this is the literal meaning of the Hebrew; the Greek has translated, 'he fell with his face', which is a gallant attempt, so I have been guided by the text that our translator had before him.

4:7 *If you offered it rightly* . . . : this verse is quite difficult in Greek, far more so in Hebrew.

he shall turn to you: literally, 'his recourse shall be to you', an attempt at translating a Hebrew expression that seems to mean that 'sin's urge is towards you'.

4:9 *God*: some Greek manuscripts follow the Hebrew here in having 'the Lord God'.

4:13 *the Lord*: some Greek manuscripts likewise have 'the Lord God'. The Hebrew simply has *YHWH*, which goes into Greek as 'the Lord'.

My guilt is greater than can be forgiven: this is what the Greek means, a literal translation of the Hebrew, which can also mean 'greater than I can bear'.

- 15 And the Lord God said to him, ‘Not so – anyone who kills Cain will pay vengeance seven times over.’ And the Lord God placed a mark on Cain, so that those who found him should not destroy him.
- 16 Cain went out from God’s presence, and dwelt in the land of Nod, opposite Eden.

Cain’s descendants (4:17–24)

- 17 And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and brought forth Enoch. And [Cain] was building a city, and he named the city after his son Enoch.
- 18 To Enoch was born Gaidad, and Gaidad was the father of Maiel, and Maiel was the father of Methuselah, and Methuselah was the father of Lamech.
- 19 And Lamech took two wives to himself. The name of one was Adah, and the name of the second Zillah.
- 20 And Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and breed cattle.
- 21 And the name of his brother was Jubal; he was the one who invented harp and guitar-playing.
- 22 Zillah in her turn gave birth, to Tubal; and he was a hammer-worker, a copper-smith of bronze and iron. Tubal’s sister was Naamah.
- 23 And Lamech said to his own wives,
 ‘Adah and Zillah, listen to my voice
 Wives of Lamech, give ear to my words,
 for I have killed a man, for a wound against me,
 and a young man for a bruise against me,
 24 for Cain has been avenged seven times,
 and Lamech seventy times seven.’

Other offspring for Adam and Eve (4:25, 26)

- 25 Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore a son, and she called his name ‘Seth’, saying, ‘God has raised up another seed for me, instead of Abel whom Cain killed.’
- 26 And Seth had a son; and he called his name Enosh. He hoped to call on the name of the Lord God.

4:17 [*Cain*] was building a city: the idea that cities are the invention of the first-ever murderer is quite an interesting one.

4:18 *Gaidad*: the Hebrew here has ‘Irad, which might represent a very slightly different reading, likewise Maiel for Mehujael.

4:20 *those who dwell in tents and breed cattle*: it is interesting that the author of this genealogy regards cities as coming earlier than nomads and cowboys.

4:21 *Jubal*: in Hebrew, there is a pun between this name, and the ‘ram’s horn’ trumpet, which is not possible to render into Greek or English. In Hebrew, Jubal is the ‘father of’ harp and guitar, which is perhaps not far off being its ‘inventor’.

4:23 *for a wound against me . . . for a bruise against me*: in both Hebrew and Greek, this song could either mean that Lamech takes vengeance against anyone who damages

him, or that the vengeance damages Lamech. I have tried to keep both options open here.

4:24 *seventy times seven*: this is echoed, of course, in the Gospels. The contrast with Matthew 18:22 is very striking indeed, if this verse means that Lamech has taken vengeance on the family of someone who killed Cain, who was his great-great-great-grandfather. He has certainly inherited his ancestor’s violent spirit. Family feuds in all places and at all times have the potential to be very long-lasting.

4:25 *God has raised up*: the Hebrew here has a pun on the name ‘Seth’, meaning something like ‘placed’.

4:26 *hoped to call on the name*: the MT here has ‘began’. The LXX represents another possible reading of the Hebrew consonants; and it may have been encouraged by a desire to avoid a contradiction of Exodus 3:14, 6:3, where it is said that Moses was the first to know the Lord’s name.

A genealogy of humanity (5:1–32)

- 5:1 This is the book of the generation of humanity, on the day when God made Adam. In the image of God he made him,
 2 male and female he created them; and he blessed them, and he called their name 'Adam', on the day when he made them.
 3 Adam lived two hundred and thirty years; and he fathered [a child] according to his own form and image; and he called his name Seth.
 4 And the days of Adam after he fathered Seth were seven hundred years; and he fathered sons and daughters.
 5 And all the days of Adam which he lived were nine hundred and thirty years. And he died.
 6 And Seth lived two hundred and five years, and fathered Enosh.
 7 And after he fathered Enosh, Seth lived seven hundred and seven years. And he fathered sons and daughters.
 8 And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years. And he died.
 9 And Enosh lived a hundred and ninety years, and he fathered Kenan.
 10 And Enosh after he fathered Kenan lived seven hundred and fifteen years. And he fathered sons and daughters.
 11 And all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years. And he died.
 12 And Kenan lived one hundred and seventy years, and he fathered Mahalalel.
 13 And Kenan lived seven hundred and forty years after he fathered Mahalalel. And he fathered sons and daughters.
 14 And all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years. And he died.
 15 And Mahalalel lived a hundred and sixty-five years, and he fathered Jared.
 16 And Mahalalel lived seven hundred and thirty years after he fathered Jared. And he fathered sons and daughters.
 17 And all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years. And he died.
 18 And Jared lived a hundred and sixty-two years, and he fathered Enoch.
 19 And Jared lived eight hundred years after he fathered Enoch. And he fathered sons and daughters.
 20 And all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years. And he died.
 21 And Enoch lived a hundred and sixty-five years, and he fathered Methuselah.
 22 And Enoch was pleasing to God. [He lived] two hundred years after he fathered Methuselah. And he fathered sons and daughters.
 23 And all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years.

5:1 *This is the book of the generation:* this (or 'this is the book of the origin', or even 'this is the book of genesis') is how Matthew starts his Gospel, presumably deliberately echoing this passage, except that he continues 'of Jesus Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham'.

of humanity: the Hebrew here has 'of Adam'. There is an obvious echo here of Genesis 1:27, with the reference to 'in the image of God . . . male and female'. But we notice that the genealogy which follows is not compatible with the one we have just seen in chapter 4. What it does is to link the story of Adam and Eve to the story of Noah. There are those who think that the decreasing life-span of succeeding generations indicates the growth of evil in God's creation. That may be so, but the mathematics does not work out all that well. It is a masterpiece of careful composition, with the formulaic construction

giving a sense of comfort; it quietly offers the impression that God is in charge.

5:3 *two hundred and thirty years:* the Hebrew has 130, but the LXX gets the numbers right by having Adam live for 700, not 800, years after the birth of Seth. The same pattern continues down the generations.

5:22 *Enoch was pleasing to God:* the MT has 'walked with God', which may be very much the same idea, if you understand 'pleased' in an active sense. The translation of the same Hebrew verb is repeated in verse 24 below. We may note that if Enoch was pleasing to God, he nevertheless lived a shorter span than anyone else in this genealogy, and we may think of Jesus, who was also pleasing to God (Mark 1:11 etc.), but who lived only a little over 30 years (Luke 3:23).

- 24 And Enoch was pleasing to God, and he was not found, because God transferred him.
- 25 And Methuselah lived one hundred and sixty-seven years; and he fathered Lamech.
- 26 And Methuselah lived for eight hundred and two years after he fathered Lamech. And he fathered sons and daughters.
- 27 And all the days of Methuselah which he lived were nine hundred and sixty-nine. And he died.
- 28 And Lamech lived a hundred and eighty-eight years and fathered a son.
- 29 And he called his name Noah, saying, 'This one will give us rest from our works and from the toils of our hands, and from the earth which has been cursed by the Lord God.'
- 30 And Lamech lived, after he had fathered Noah, for five hundred and sixty-five years. And he fathered sons and daughters.
- 31 And all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and fifty-three years. And he died.
- 32 And Noah was five hundred years old. And Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Introducing the story of the flood (6:1–8)

- 6:1 And it happened when human beings began to be many on earth, and daughters were born to them.
- 2 And when the sons of God saw that the daughters of human beings were beautiful, they took wives for themselves from all whom they chose.
- 3 And the Lord God said, 'My Spirit shall not remain among these human beings for ever, because they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred and twenty years.'
- 4 And the giants were on the earth in those days; and after that, when the sons of God used to go in to the daughters of human beings, they produced children for them. Those were the giants from of old, the human beings of renown.
- 5 When the Lord God saw that the evils of human beings were multiplied on the earth, and everyone was thinking attentively in their hearts about evil, all day long,
- 6 God reflected that he had created humanity upon earth; and he thought [about it].

5:24 *he was not found*: this is a remarkable verse. Of all the other characters in this genealogy it is said, simply, 'And he died'; but of Enoch the Hebrew says 'and he was not, because God took him'. The Greek translator makes it even more astonishing, 'he was not found, because God transferred him'. This has given rise to all kinds of speculation in Jewish and Christian sources: did Enoch die, did he go straight to God, was he taken up like Elijah, or did he just live alone in the desert? Or was he converted? People also observed that Enoch comes seventh in the list of the ancestors, and relate him to the Sabbath, and eschatological rest. There was of course a substantial body of literature, Jewish and Christian, built upon this single reference.

God transferred him: this verb could also mean 'changed', in the sense of 'put him in a different place'.

5:29 *will give us rest*: the word 'Noah' could be connected to the word for 'rest', which is how the LXX takes it. Or it could come from a Hebrew word meaning consolation,

which is how the MT understands it, followed by most English versions of the Bible.

5:32 *Noah fathered three sons*: so the compiler of this material brings us neatly from Adam and Eve to the story of the flood.

6:1 *human beings . . . on earth*: in Hebrew there is a pun here (Adam . . . adamah), but the Greek translation has not attempted it.

6:2 *sons of God*: often understood as angels, but this expression (the Hebrew can be translated 'sons of the gods') may suggest that this strange episode is a fragment from much older, polytheistic material, where the gods actually had 'sons'.

6:6 *God reflected . . . thought*: the Hebrew has 'God repented . . . it grieved his heart'. Perhaps the Greek translator was not happy with the idea that God might change his mind or undergo emotions of this sort, although he uses the translation 'I am angry' in the following verse.

- 7 And God said, 'I shall wipe out from the face of the earth the human being whom I have created, not only humans but also cattle; not only creepy-crawlies but also birds of the air. For I am angry that I created them.'
- 8 But Noah found favour before the Lord God.

Noah pleased God (6:9–22)

- 9 These are the generations of Noah. He was a just man, since he was perfect in his generation. Noah pleased God.
- 10 And Noah fathered three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.
- 11 The earth was corrupted before God, and the earth was filled with injustice.
- 12 And the Lord God saw the earth; and it was corrupted, because all flesh had corrupted its way upon earth.
- 13 And God said to Noah, 'The Time of All Humans has come before me; because the earth is filled with injustice from them. And behold, I am destroying them and the earth.'
- 14 So make an ark for yourself, of square timber; you will make the ark in nests. And you will smear it, inside and outside, with bitumen.
- 15 And so you will make the ark like this: three hundred cubits the length of the ark, and fifty cubits the breadth, and thirty cubits its height.
- 16 You will gather the ark together, and you will complete it to a cubit above. The door of the ark you will make on the side, the ground floor, with two stories, and with three stories you will make it.
- 17 And, look, I am bringing a flood of water on the earth, to destroy all flesh in which there is the breath of life under heaven, and whatever is on the earth shall die.
- 18 And I shall establish my covenant with you; and you will enter into the ark, you and your sons, and your wife, and the wives of your sons with you.
- 19 And of all domestic animals, and of all the creepy-crawlies, and of all wild beasts, and of all flesh, two by two, from all of them you will lead them into the ark that you may feed them along with yourself. They shall be male and female.
- 20 And of all the winged birds, according to their species, and of all domestic animals, according to their species, and of all the creepy-crawlies that creep upon the earth, according to their species, two by two from all of them, they shall enter to be fed along with you, male and female.
- 21 You will take to yourself of all the foods which you eat; and you will gather to yourself, and it will be for you and for them to eat.'
- 22 And Noah did all the things that the Lord God had commanded him; so he did them.

6:9 *Noah pleased God*: here the Hebrew has 'walked with God'.

6:12 *corrupted*: notice that this word appears three times hereabouts, in circumstances where it appears redundant. This is the sort of evidence that led scholars to speak of different 'sources' or 'traditions' coming together here. Do you think that there might be some other way of looking at the matter? Could the original author have meant it to sound like this, slowing the narrative down, and inviting us to ponder the situation on earth as God sees it?

6:14 *in nests*: or 'compartments'.

6:16 *You will gather the ark together*: it has to be admitted that this verse would not provide a blueprint for the would-be ark-builder. I suspect that what the author has in mind is a three-story structure that narrows towards the top to a height of one cubit above the actual roof. Alternatively, you might think of two stories at each end, and three in the middle, where it is deeper. This third story would be then sitting on the deck, with the roof above it.

6:19 *you may feed*: the Hebrew here has 'for you to give them life'.

The story of the flood (7:1–24)

- 7:1 And the Lord God said to Noah, ‘You and all your house are to go into the ark; for I have seen that you are just in my sight in this generation.
- 2 And from the domestic animals that are clean, take seven by seven, male and female, but from the domestic animals that are unclean, two by two, male and female.
- 3 And from the birds of the air that are clean, [take] seven by seven, male and female, and from the birds that are unclean, two by two, male and female, to breed up offspring on all the earth.
- 4 For in seven days’ time I am bringing rain upon the earth, forty days and forty nights; and I shall wipe out from the face of the earth all that I caused to spring up.
- 5 And Noah did everything that the Lord God had commanded him.
- 6 Noah was six hundred years old. And the flood of waters came upon the earth.
- 7 Noah went in, and his sons and his wife, and his sons’ wives with him into the boat, because of the water of the flood.
- 8 And of the birds that are clean, and of the domestic animals that are clean, and of all the domestic animals that are not clean, and of all the creepy-crawlies on the earth,
- 9 two by two they went in to Noah, into the ark, male and female as God had commanded him.
- 10 And after the seven days it happened that the water of the flood came upon the earth.
- 11 In the six hundredth year in Noah’s life, in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, on that very day all the fountains of the abyss were broken, and the cataracts of heaven were opened.
- 12 And the rain came upon the earth, forty days and forty nights.
- 13 On that very day, Noah went in, [and] Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah’s wife, and the three wives of his sons with him into the ark.
- 14 And all the wild beasts, according to their kinds, and all the domestic animals, according to their kinds, and every creepy-crawly that moves upon the earth, according to their kinds, and every bird, according to their kinds,
- 15 went into Noah, into the ark, two by two, from all flesh in which there is the breath of life.
- 16 And those that went in, male and female from all flesh, went in just as God had commanded Noah.
And the Lord God closed the ark from outside [behind] him.
- 17 And the flood came, forty days and forty nights upon the earth, and the water multiplied, and it lifted up the ark; and it was raised up from the earth.
- 18 And the water prevailed and multiplied greatly on the earth. And the ark was carried upon the water.

7:3 *birds that are unclean*: the MT here omits any mention of unclean birds.

7:4 *all that I caused to spring up*: the Greek here has ‘all the rising-up that I made’, where the Hebrew just has ‘all the creatures’. But the word translated as ‘creature’ also has connotations of ‘raise up’. So our translator is working hard at fidelity to the original.

7:11 *six hundredth . . . second . . . twenty-seventh*: this precision about dating has often been attributed by scholars to the Priestly tradition in the Pentateuch. The Hebrew here

has ‘seventeenth’, not ‘twenty-seventh’. So if you count backwards from 8:14, the flood lasts for a year in LXX and a year and 10 days in the MT.

7:16 *And the Lord God closed the ark from outside [behind] him*: this line comes very strikingly after all the repetition of who had gone aboard, and makes precisely the point that the story seeks to make, that Noah, unlike the rest of the world, was obedient to God’s will. Compare verse 5: *And Noah did everything that the Lord God had commanded him*, for a similar effect.

- 19 And the water prevailed greatly, greatly upon the earth. And it covered over all the high mountains which were under heaven.
- 20 The water level was raised and it covered all the high mountains by fifteen cubits.
- 21 And all flesh that moved upon the earth died, of birds and of domestic cattle, and of wild beasts, and every creepy-crawly that moves upon the earth, and every human being.
- 22 And everything that has the breath of life, and everything that was on the dry land, died.
- 23 And [God] wiped out everything that was growing on the face of the earth, from human to animal, and the creepy-crawlies, and the birds of the air. And they were wiped out from the earth.
And Noah was left alone, him and those with him in the ark.
- 24 And the water-level was raised over the earth for one hundred and fifty days.

The flood comes to an end (8:1–22)

- 8:1 And God remembered Noah, and all the wild beasts, and all the domestic animals, and all the birds, and all the creepy-crawlies that were with him on the ark. And God brought a wind on the earth, and the water became calm.
- 2 And the fountains of the abyss were covered up, and the cataracts of heaven; and the rain from heaven was held back.
- 3 And the water subsided, going away from the earth; it subsided, and the water diminished, after a hundred and fifty days.
- 4 And the ark settled, in the seventh month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.
- 5 The water, as it was going, diminished until the tenth month; and in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.
- 6 And after forty days, it happened that Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made.
- 7 And he sent the raven, to see if the water had ceased; and it went out, and did not return until the water had dried off the earth.
- 8 And he sent the dove after it, to see if the water had ceased from the face of the earth.
- 9 And when the dove did not find any rest for her feet, she returned to him, in the ark, because there was water on the whole face of all the earth. And he stretched out his hand, and took her, and brought her in to himself, in the ark.
- 10 And he waited another seven days, and again sent the dove out of the ark.
- 11 And the dove returned to him towards evening, and she had the leaf of an olive-tree, a twig in her mouth. And Noah knew that the water had ceased from the earth.
- 12 And he waited another seven days, and again he sent the dove out; and it did not return to him any more.

7:19 *greatly, greatly*: here the Greek has (almost) exactly reproduced a Hebrew expression 'very much, very much'. The meaning is equivalent to a superlative, 'very much indeed', but the repetition has a similar effect, and makes a pleasing sound in English.

8:4 *the ark settled*: or 'sat'. Normally this Greek word is used

only of people. The only other non-person of which it is used in the LXX is the ark of the Covenant (1 Chronicles 13:14).

8:7 *did not return*: the Hebrew suggests that it 'went out and came back', or 'flew to and fro'.

- 13 And it happened in the six hundred and first year in the life of Noah, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the water ceased from the earth; and Noah uncovered the roof of the ark which he had made. And he saw that the water had ceased from the face of the earth.
- 14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dried out.
- 15 And the Lord God spoke to Noah, saying,
- 16 ‘Come out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons, and the wives of your sons with you,
- 17 and all the wild beasts that are with you, and all the flesh, from birds to domestic animals, and every creepy-crawly that moves upon the earth, bring them out with you; and increase and multiply on the earth.’
- 18 And Noah came out, and his wife, and his sons, and the wives of his sons with him.
- 19 And all the wild beasts, and all the domestic animals, and every creepy-crawly that moves upon the earth, according to their kinds, they came out of the ark.
- 20 And Noah built an altar to the Lord, and he took some of all the clean beasts, and of all the birds that are clean, and he offered whole burnt-offerings on the altar.
- 21 And the Lord God caught the scent of the pleasing smell. And the Lord God, having reflected, said, ‘I shall no longer return to curse the earth, because of the deeds of human beings, because the human intellect is diligently applied to wickedness from his youth. I shall not any more return to strike down all living flesh as I have done.
- 22 All the days of the earth,
seed and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and spring,
they shall not cease,
by day and by night.’

A new vision of God’s world (9:1–17)

- 9:1 And God blessed Noah and his sons; and he said to them, ‘Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and have dominion over it.
- 2 And the dread of you and the fear of you will be on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds of heaven, and on all those that move upon the earth, and on all the fishes of the sea; I have put them into your hands.
- 3 And every creepy-crawly which is alive shall be food for you; like the green herbs, I have given you all of them.
- 4 But you are not to eat meat with the blood of life.

9:1–7 *God blessed Noah and his sons*: this is a vision of a new world, after the catastrophe caused by sin, and how to keep God’s world intact.

9:1 *Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and have dominion over it*: here God simply repeats, to Noah and his sons, what he had previously said to Adam and Eve. God’s fidelity is not broken by human sinfulness; so the Flood has always to be read as an optimistic story, not a gloomy one.

9:2 *the dread of you and the fear of you*: this is not, as it is sometimes taken to be, a licence to kill. The animal kingdom’s fear of humankind is one of its most significant means of survival, part of God’s care for them.

9:4 *meat with the blood of life*: These verses (3–6) are not enormously easy to understand. It seems that the vegetarian commandment of 1:29–30 does not apply to Noah; but he and his descendants have to remove the blood from any meat that they eat.

- 5 For your blood of life I shall require at the hand of all the wild beasts, and I shall require the life of a human being at the hand of their fellow human being.
- 6 The one who pours out the blood of a human being, their own blood will be shed as the price of that blood; for I have made humanity in the likeness of God.
- 7 As for you, increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and multiply on it.’
- 8 And God spoke to Noah and his sons, saying,
- 9 ‘Look, I am setting up my covenant with you and with your offspring after you,
- 10 and with all the living creatures that are with you, birds and domestic animals, and all the wild beasts of the earth, as many as are with you, from all those who came out of the ark.
- 11 And I shall establish my covenant with you, and never again shall all flesh die because of the water of the flood; and no more shall there be a flood of water, to destroy all the earth.’
- 12 And the Lord God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant, the sign that I am giving you, between me and you, and every living soul which is on the earth, for all generations for ever:
- 13 I shall place my bow in the cloud; and it will serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.
- 14 And it shall be when I gather the clouds over the earth, my bow shall be seen in the cloud;
- 15 and I shall remember my covenant which is between me and you, and every living creature, in all flesh; and there shall no more be any water for a flood, so as to wipe away all flesh.
- 16 And my bow shall be in the cloud; and I shall look, in order to remember the eternal covenant between me and every living creature in all flesh which is upon the earth.’
- 17 And God said to Noah, ‘This sign [is the] of the covenant which I have made between me and all flesh that is on the earth.’

What happened to Noah’s sons (9:18–28)

- 18 The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan.
- 19 These three are the sons of Noah; from them [people] were scattered over all the earth.
- 20 And Noah was the first to be a farmer of the soil; and he planted a vineyard.
- 21 And he drank of the wine, and got drunk. And he was naked in his house.

9:14 *gather the clouds*: the Greek translator has cleverly invented a new word to catch a Hebrew expression, ‘to cloud the clouds’. The Greek word means ‘to co-encloud the clouds’, but you can hardly put that down in English.

my bow shall be seen in the cloud: this beautiful image of the rainbow makes us think of the Israelites looking up and being happily reassured that all will be well, that they are dealing with a kindly and loving God, not the unpredictably irascible deities of the surrounding cultures. The repetitions during these verses are not unnecessary tedium, but serve to hammer home the message.

9:20 *first to be a farmer*: the Hebrew is not easy to translate

here, but the Greek has got the gist of it. Here we have the tracing of the development that our ancestors knew had taken place. We notice that Noah, once out of the ark, marks a stage beyond that of Cain, who was ‘working’ or ‘serving’ the soil (Genesis 4:2), rather than farming it. In both places, there is a Hebrew pun, ignored by the Greek, on ‘Adam’ and ‘soil’ or ‘earth’. The ‘vineyard’ became something of a symbol for Israel, and for the prosperity given it by God.

9:21 *he drank of the wine, and got drunk*: the authors of Genesis here demonstrate their awareness that technological advances carry their own problems.

- 22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father; and he went out and announced it to his two brothers outside.
- 23 And Shem and Japheth took a cloak, and put it on their two shoulders, and they walked backwards and covered the nakedness of their father; and their face was backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness.
- 24 And Noah sobered up from the wine, and he realised what his youngest son had done to him,
- 25 and he said,
'Cursed be Canaan; he shall be a household slave to his brothers.'
- 26 And he said,
'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem.
And Canaan shall be his slave.
May God make space for Japheth,
and let him dwell in the habitations of Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.'
- 28 And Noah lived for three hundred and fifty years after the flood.
- 29 And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years. And he died.

The human family (10:1–32)

(See map on page 360)

- 10:1 These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth. And sons were born to them after the flood.
- 2 The sons of Japheth: Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Elisa and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras.
- 3 The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, and Riphath and Togarmah.
- 4 And the sons of Javan: Elishah and Tarshish, the Kittim, and the Rhodians.
- 5 From these the islands of the nations were divided in their land, each according to their language, in their tribes and in their nations.
- 6 The sons of Ham: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.
- 7 The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, Sabteca.
The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan.
- 8 Cush was the father of Nimrod. He was the first to be a giant on the earth.

9:22 *Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father:* various elements come together in this story. First, there is the problem of alcohol, and the way it removes inhibitions. Second, there is the problem of nakedness, regarded as dishonourable in Jewish culture, as the reaction of Shem and Japheth demonstrates. Third, there is the defence of Israelite treatment of the Canaanites, by way of Noah's double curse. Sadly, this story was used in South Africa to justify the subordination of black people to white people. There is no evidence in the text for the view, which is sometimes advanced, that Ham was engaging either in homosexual activity with his father or incest with his mother.

9:25 *Cursed be Canaan:* this seems a bit odd, given that it was his father, Ham, who committed the original offence; but this text is probably seeking to explain why the Israelites made the Canaanites into their slaves. Leviticus 18:1–30 justifies it in terms of their sexual immorality.

a household slave: the Hebrew here has 'slave of slaves', meaning 'lowest of the slaves'. The Greek, unless it has a different text here, has tried to translate this with two

words, one meaning 'slave' and the other meaning 'household servant'. We have tried to combine the two ideas.

9:27 *make space for Japheth:* here there is a pun in the Hebrew on a rather rare verb that is related to the name 'Japheth'.

10:2 *Elisa:* this name is not in the MT at this point.

10:4 *Rhodians:* this is probably an instance where the LXX has it correct. The MT has 'Dodanim', and should probably read 'Rodanim' (inhabitants of the island of Rhodes).

10:6 *sons of Ham:* where the sons of Japheth were, roughly speaking, those who spoke Indo-European languages, this group is Africa (with the addition of Canaan). Mizraim is Egypt.

10:8 *giant:* the Hebrew here has a word that means 'mighty warrior'. The Greek here uses the word that translated 'Nephilim' in 6:4, and this accounts for the apparent contradiction, between the statement that Nimrod was the first to be a giant on the earth, when Genesis 6:4 says that there were giants on earth *before* the Flood.

- 9 He was a giant hunter before the Lord God. Because of this they will say, 'Like Nimrod a giant hunter before the Lord'.
- 10 And the beginning of his kingdom was Babylon, and Erech and Accad, and Chalanne, in the land of Shinar.
- 11 Out of that land there came Assur; and he built Nineveh, and Rehoboth City, and Calah.
- 12 And Dasem, between Nineveh and Calah: this is the great city.
- 13 And Mizraim was the father of the Ludim and the Anamim, and the Lehabim, and the Naphtuhim
- 14 and the Pathrusim and the Casluhim, from which the Philistines came, and the Caphthorim.
- 15 Canaan was the father of Sidon, the first born, and Heth,
- 16 and the Jebusites, and the Amorites and the Girgashites
- 17 and the Hivites and the arkites and the Sinites,
- 18 and the Arvadites, and the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. And after this, the clans of the Canaanites were scattered.
- 19 And the frontiers of the Canaanites were from Sidon until [you] come to Gerar and Gaza, until [you] come to Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.
- 20 These were the sons of Ham, according to their languages in their countries and in their nations.
- 21 And to Shem also, to him also as the ancestor of all the sons of 'Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, sons were born.
- 22 The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, Aram, and Cainan.
- 23 And the sons of Aram: Uz and Hul, and Gether, and Mash.
- 24 And Arpachshad was the father of Cainan, and Cainan was the father of Shelah, and Shelah was the father of 'Eber.
- 25 And to 'Eber two sons were born; the name of the one was Peleg, because in his days the earth was divided; and the name of his brother was Joktan.
- 26 And Joktan was the father of Almodad, and Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, and Jerah, and Hadoram and Uzal and Diklah,
- 27 Obal, Abimael, Sheba,
- 28 and Ophir, Havilah and Jobab. All these were the descendants of Joktan.
- 30 And their dwelling was from Mesha until [you] come to Sephar, the mountain of the east.
- 31 These were the sons of Shem in their tribes, according to their languages, in their countries and in their nations.
- 32 These are the tribes of the sons of Noah according to their origins, according to their nations. From them the islands of the nations were scattered upon the earth, after the flood.

10:9 *giant hunter*: not a hunter of giants, but a hunter who was a giant, of course.

10:10 *beginning* or 'rule'.

Babylon: this is the Greek form of Babel, the Hebrew word for the same city.

Chalanne: you will not find this in your bibles, but it is a possible reading of a word that modern English versions read as 'all of them'.

10:12 *Dasem*: the MT reads Resen, which is not very far away in Hebrew. Either could have been the original reading.

10:16 *Jebusites* . . . *Hamathites*: here the LXX has a singular, and modern translations have a plural, which is a possible

reading. In keeping with our normal practice, we have kept the more conventional (Hebrew) forms of the names, rather than the Greek attempts at transcription.

10:22 *Aram* . . . *Cainan*: elsewhere in LXX Aram is translated as 'Syria' or 'Syrians', the form under which they would have been more familiar to Greek readers. Cainan is not in MT.

10:25 *Peleg*: the word means 'divide', but in related languages, it can refer to channels, and some scholars suggest that we may here have an echo of the origin of irrigation canals.

The tower of Confusion (11:1–9)

- 11:1 And the whole earth was a single tongue, and there was one speech for all.
 2 And it happened as they moved from the East, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they settled there.
 3 And they said to each other, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and bake them with fire.’ And the bricks turned to stone; and the clay was bitumen for them.
 4 And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top shall be up to heaven; and we shall make ourselves a reputation, before we are scattered on the face of all the earth.’
 5 And the Lord came down to see the city, and the tower that the people had built.
 6 And the Lord said, ‘Look – a single race, and one tongue for all. They have begun to do this, and now there will be no limit to anything that they might set themselves to do.
 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language, so that each one may not understand what their neighbour says.’
 8 And the Lord scattered them from there on the face of all the earth. And they ceased from building the city and the tower.
 9 Because of this, its name was called ‘Confusion’; because there the Lord confused the tongues of all the earth; and the Lord God scattered them from there on the face of all the earth.

The genealogy of Abraham (11:10–32)

- 10 And these are the generations of Shem. Shem was a hundred years old when he fathered Arpachshad, in the second year after the flood.
 11 And Shem lived for five hundred years after he had fathered Arpachshad, and he fathered sons and daughters. And he died.
 12 And Arpachshad lived a hundred and thirty-five years; and he fathered Cainan.
 13 And after he had fathered Cainan, Arpachshad lived four hundred years and he fathered sons and daughters. And he died. And Cainan lived for a hundred and thirty years and he fathered sons and daughters, and he fathered Shelah. And Cainan lived for three hundred and thirty years, after he fathered Shelah, and he fathered sons and daughters. And he died.
 14 And Shelah lived for a hundred and thirty years, and he fathered ‘Eber.
 15 And Shelah lived for three hundred and thirty years after he had fathered ‘Eber, and he fathered sons and daughters. And he died.
 16 And ‘Eber lived for a hundred and thirty-four years. And he fathered Peleg.
 17 And ‘Eber lived for three hundred and seventy years after he had fathered Peleg, and he fathered sons and daughters. And he died.

11:1– **The tower of Confusion:** the Greek here does not use the word Babel (Babylon), which the Hebrew relates to a similar word, *bill*, meaning something like to ‘confuse’. This story is an extraordinary, and well-constructed, tale, of humans developing cities and tall buildings, and operating out of an inappropriate arrogance. It reflects perhaps a nomad’s mistrust of city-dwellers, as well as an explanation for the mysterious fact of different human languages. Notice the laconic artistry of the story-teller: just the bare details are given, the tale is not elaborated at all, and yet there is a striking picture drawn, which allows space for the reader’s (or hearer’s) imagination to get to work. The story is held together by the three uses of the imperative/

adverb ‘come’, on the lips of humanity at vv. 3, 4, and on God’s lips at v. 7.

11:1 *tongue:* the Greek translation here uses the word for lip; this is following the MT, where it is a Semitic expression for ‘language’.

11:5 *the people:* literally, in both Hebrew and Greek, ‘the sons of men’.

11:10 *a hundred years old:* in both Hebrew and Greek, ‘the son of a hundred years’.

11:12 *Cainan:* as in 10:22 and 24, this name is added in, possibly in order to make ten generations from Shem to Abraham, just as there are ten between Adam and Noah.

- 18 And Peleg lived for a hundred and thirty years, and he fathered Reu.
 19 And Peleg lived for two hundred and nine years after he had fathered Reu, and he fathered sons and daughters. And he died.
 20 And Reu lived for one hundred and thirty-two years, and he fathered Serug.
 21 And Reu lived for two hundred and seven years after he had fathered Serug, and he fathered sons and daughters. And he died.
 22 And Serug lived for a hundred and thirty years, and he fathered Nahor.
 23 And Serug lived for two hundred years after he had fathered Nahor. And he fathered sons and daughters. And he died.
 24 And Nahor lived for seventy-nine years, and he fathered Terah.
 25 And Nahor lived for a hundred and twenty-nine years after he had fathered Terah, and he fathered sons and daughters. And he died.
 26 And Terah lived for seventy years, and he fathered Abram and Nahor and Haran.
 27 These are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram and Nahor and Haran. And Haran was the father of Lot.
 28 And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah, in the land in which he was born, the territory of the Chaldees.
 29 And Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sara; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, daughter of Haran. He was the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah.
 30 And Sara was barren; and she did not produce children.
 31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, the son of his son, and Sara his daughter-in-law, the wife of Abram his son. And he led them out of the territory of the Chaldees, to journey to the land of Canaan. And he came as far as Haran, and settled there.
 32 And the days of Terah in Haran were two hundred and five years. And Terah died in Haran.

The call of Abram (12:1–20)

(See map on page 361)

- 12:1 And the Lord said to Abram, 'Go out of your land, and out of your kindred, and your father's house, to the land which I shall show you.
 2 And I shall make you into a great nation, and I shall bless you and make your name great. And you will be blessed.
 3 And I shall bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I shall curse, and in you shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed.'
 4 And Abram journeyed, as the Lord had spoken to him. And Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he went out of Haran.
 5 And Abram took Sara his wife, and Lot the son of his brother, and all their possessions that they had acquired, and every soul which they had acquired in Haran. And they went out to journey into the land of Canaan. And they came to the land of Canaan.
 6 And Abram travelled through the land to its furthest length, as far as the place Shechem, to the high oak. And the Canaanites lived in the land at that time.

11:28 *territory*: where the MT, of course has *Ur* of the Chaldees.

12:6 *to its furthest length*: this phrase is not in the MT, but it is at verses 13 and 17.

- 7 And the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I shall give this land to your offspring'. And Abram built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.
- 8 And he departed from there to the mountain east of Bethel; and he pitched his tent there at Bethel by the sea, and Ai to the east. And he built an altar there to the Lord. And he called upon the name of the Lord.
- 9 And Abram departed and went and made his camp in the desert.
- 10 And a famine came upon the land; and Abram went down into Egypt to live there [as a foreigner]; for the famine prevailed upon the land.
- 11 And it happened when Abram was near to entering Egypt, Abram said to Sara his wife, 'I know that you are a woman who is pleasing to the eye.
- 12 So it shall be that when the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife". And they'll kill me and preserve you.
- 13 So say, "I am his sister", that it may be all right for you, and my life shall live because of you.'
- 14 It happened that when Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw his wife, [and saw] that she was very beautiful,
- 15 and the rulers of Pharaoh saw her; and they praised her to Pharaoh, and they brought her into the house of Pharaoh.
- 16 And they treated Abram well because of her; and he had sheep and calves and donkeys, male and female slaves, mules and camels.
- 17 And God afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great and terrible afflictions, because of Sara, Abram's wife.
- 18 And Pharaoh summoned Abram and said, 'What is this you have done to me, that you did not tell me that she was your wife?
- 19 Why did you say, "She is my sister", so that I took her for a wife? Now look: [here is] your wife before you. Take her, and run away.'
- 20 And Pharaoh commanded [his] men with regard to Abram, to join in escorting him and his wife, and all his possessions, and Lot with him.

Abram and Lot go their separate ways (13:1–18)

- 13:1 Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that was his, and Lot with him, into the desert.
- 2 Abram was very rich, with cattle and silver and gold.
- 3 And he went [to the place] from which he had come, as far as Bethel, as far as the place where his tent was previously, between Bethel and Ai,
- 4 to the place of the altar which he had made there in the first place. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord.
- 5 And Lot, who was journeying with Abram, had sheep, and cows, and tents.
- 6 And the land did not have room for them to live together, because their possessions were many; and they could not live together.

12:8 *by the sea*: this is what the Greek has, and it is a perfectly acceptable translation of the Hebrew. But since Bethel is nowhere near the sea, the translators tend to read it as 'from the West' (the Mediterranean Sea is west of the Holy Land).

12:9 *departed . . . went . . . made his camp*: the translator here is using technical military vocabulary.

12:13 *say, "I am his sister"* . . . : we find ourselves stirring uneasily at this, and wishing that Abram had been a little bit more courageous. Perhaps the point is that God's promise to

him cannot be cancelled even when Abram behaves as badly as he does here (and the same applies to us, of course). The theme is repeated in chapter 20 and (of Isaac) chapter 26. Pharaoh, we notice, behaves a great deal better here than Abram does.

12:15 *they brought her into the house of Pharaoh*: that means, of course, into Pharaoh's harem, so she became one of his wives, as Pharaoh indicates in verse 19, when he complains to Abram that 'I took her for a wife'.

- 7 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. (The Canaanites and the Perizzites lived in the land at that time.)
- 8 Abram said to Lot, 'Let there not be strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen. For we are kinsmen.
- 9 Look: is not the whole land before you? Separate from me. If you go to the left, I shall go to the right. And if you go to the right, I shall go to the left.'
- 10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw the whole neighbourhood of the Jordan, that it was all irrigated (before God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah), like the Paradise of God, and like the land of Egypt, as far as Zoar.
- 11 And Lot chose for himself the whole neighbourhood of the Jordan; and Lot departed from the East; and they each separated from his brother.
- 12 But Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived in a city of the neighbouring lands, and pitched his tents in Sodom.
- 13 And the people in Sodom were evil; and they were very sinful before God.
- 14 And God said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Lift up your eyes. Look from the place where you are now, to the North, and South, and East and to the Sea;
- 15 I shall give you and your offspring, forever, all the land which you are seeing.
- 16 And I shall make your offspring like the sand of the sea. If anyone can count the sand of the sea, so your offspring shall be counted.
- 17 Arise and make your way through the land, in its length and in its breadth. For I shall give it to you.'
- 18 Abram decamped, and went and dwelt by the oak of Mamre, which was at Hebron. And there he built an altar to the Lord.

A very odd chapter (14:1–24)

- 14:1 It happened in the reign of Amraphel, king of Shinar, Arioch, king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and Tidal king of the gentiles
- 2 made war with Bera king of Sodom, and Birsha king of Gomorrah, and Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is Zoar).
- 3 All of these united at the Salt Valley. This is the Dead Sea.
- 4 For twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year, they rebelled.
- 5 In the fourteenth year, Chedorlaomer and the kings with him came and cut down the giants in Ashteroth-Karnaim, and strong nations along with them, including the Ommaeans in the city of Saue,
- 6 and the Horites in the mountains of Seir, as far as the terebinth of Paran, which is in the desert.

13:8 *we are kinsmen*: literally, 'men brothers'. Here Abram is behaving graciously, but there may perhaps be a hint of the superiority of his nomad existence over against the more settled life that Lot opts for.

13:11 *they each separated from his brother*: the reader has a sense that this does not bode well.

13:14 *to the Sea*: this is what we have in both Hebrew and Greek. It refers, of course, to the Mediterranean, and therefore means 'The West'.

13:15 *I shall give you and your offspring . . . the land which you are seeing*: this is the second promise that God makes to Abram (see 12:2–3). The difficulty in reading this text today is that you can argue that God's promises can never

be revoked, and that God gave the land to Israel, in the person of Abram. And that leaves unanswered the question of justice for earlier inhabitants of the land.

14:1 **A very odd chapter**: the point of the first twelve verses seems to be to lead up to Abram's daring rescue of Lot, and perhaps an implicit judgement on him for making the wrong choice of where to live. The details of the military campaign that comes first are very hard to reconstruct, or to relate to the Abram story. And then there is the Melchisedek, which readers have always found equally mysterious, followed by Abram's conscientious refusal of gifts from the king of Sodom. Lot does not say anything after his rescue.

- 7 They turned back and came to the Spring of Judgement (this is Kadesh). And they cut down all the rulers of Amalek and the Amorites who dwell in Hazazon-Tamar.
- 8 And the king of Sodom came out, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is Zoar); and they drew up their formation against them for battle in the Salt Valley
- 9 against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of the gentiles, and Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five.
- 10 And the Salt Ravine has many bitumen wells. And the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah fled, and they fell in there; and those who were left fled to the hill country.
- 11 And they took all the cavalry of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their food. And they went away.
- 12 And they took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, and his baggage. And they went off, for he was living in Sodom.
- 13 And one of those who had been rescued came and reported to Abram the Wanderer. He, the Amorite, lived by the oak of Mamre, the brother of Eshcol and Aner, who were confederates of Abram.
- 14 And when Abram heard that Lot his brother had been made a prisoner, he counted his own household slaves, three hundred and eighteen, and chased after them as far as Dan.
- 15 And he fell upon them at night, he and his servants, and he struck them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is North of Damascus.
- 16 And he brought back all the cavalry of Sodom, and he brought back Lot his brother, and his possessions, and his wives, and the [rest of the] people.
- 17 The king of Sodom came out to meet him, after he came back from cutting down Chedorlaomer and the kings with him, at the valley of Shaveh. This was the King's Plain.
- 18 And Melchisedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was a priest of God Most High.
- 19 And he blessed Abram, and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, who created heaven and earth,
- 20 and blessed be God Most High, who gave over your enemies into your hands.' And he gave him a tenth of everything.
- 21 And the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the men, and take the horses for yourself.'
- 22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I shall stretch out my hand to God Most High, who created heaven and earth,
- 23 [that I shall not] accept [anything] of all your possessions, from a piece of string to a shoe-lace. I don't want you to say, "I made Abram rich".
- 24 Except what the young men ate, and except for the portion of the men who accompanied me: Eshcol, Aner, Mamre – these shall take a portion.'

14:12 *baggage*: our translator quite often uses Egyptian military terminology. This is the first appearance of this particular word. It translates a Hebrew word that in the previous verse was rendered by 'cavalry'. The translator is here backing two horses, since the Hebrew consonants can mean either 'cavalry' or 'possessions'.

14:13 *Abram the Wanderer*: this is the first appearance of a translation that will become quite common. The word for 'Hebrew' can also be understood to mean 'emigrant'

or 'wanderer', from a root meaning 'pass over' or 'cross'. The origin of the Greek word has to do with coming over from the 'other side', possibly of the River Euphrates.

14:20 *he gave him a tenth of everything*: despite the argument of Hebrews 7:4, which depends on it being Abram who paid the tithe, neither the Hebrew nor the Greek makes it clear who gave it to whom. You will find that English translations fill in the blank, and make it clear that it was Abram who gave to Melchisedek.

God's promise renewed: Abram will have offspring (15:1–21)

- 15:1 And after these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram; I am shielding you. Your reward will be very great.'
- 2 And Abram said, 'Master, what will you give me? I am dying childless, while the son of Masek, my home-born slave-woman, this Eliezer of Damascus'
- 3 And Abram said, 'Because you have given me no offspring, and my home-born servant shall inherit from me'
- 4 And immediately the voice of the Lord came to him, saying, 'This one shall not inherit from you. No – the one who shall come out of you, that one shall inherit from you.'
- 5 And he led him out, and he said to him, 'Look up now to heaven, and count the stars, if you can number them.' And he said, 'So will be your offspring.'
- 6 And Abram trusted in God. And it was reckoned to him for righteousness.
- 7 And he said to him, 'I am the God who led you out of the land of the Chaldeans, so as to give you this land to inherit.'
- 8 And he said, 'Master, Lord, how shall I know that I shall inherit it?'
- 9 And he said to him, 'Take a three-year-old heifer for me, and a three-year-old she-goat, and a three-year-old ram, and a turtle-dove, and a pigeon.'
- 10 And he took all these things for him, and divided them down the middle; and he placed them opposite each other; but he did not divide the birds.
- 11 And the birds came down on the bodies, onto their divided parts; and Abram sat down with them.
- 12 And around the setting of the sun, a trance fell on Abram, and, see, a great dark fear is falling on him.
- 13 And it was said to Abram, 'You shall know for certain that your offspring shall be sojourner[s] in a land that is not their own; and they shall enslave them, and they shall treat them badly; and they shall humble them for four hundred years.
- 14 And the nation whom they serve, I shall judge; and after this they shall come out here, with much baggage.
- 15 But you will depart to your fathers in peace, buried in a happy old age.
- 16 [In] the fourth generation they shall return here; for the sins of the Amorites are not filled up, even to the present moment.
- 17 And when the sun came to [its] setting, there was a flame, and, see, a smoking furnace; and fiery torches, which passed between those divided parts.
- 18 On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I shall give this land, from the River of Egypt to the River, the great River Euphrates,
- 19 [the land of] the Kenites, the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites,
- 20 and the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Rephaim,
- 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Evites, and the Girgashites and the Jebusites."''

15:2 *Master*: the Hebrew Adonai ('Lord') is so translated here and at verse 8, and nowhere else in the Pentateuch. Some Greek manuscripts have 'Master and Lord', reflecting the Hebrew 'YHWH Adonai'.

Eliezer of Damascus . . . : the sentence is unfinished, as it stands. But the Hebrew phrase translated as 'son of Masek my house' may possibly mean 'will inherit my house'. It is very obscure.

15:6 *Abram trusted in God. And it was reckoned to him for*

righteousness: Paul makes extensive use of this in Romans 4 (it is explicitly cited at verses 3, 9, 22 and 23, but the argument runs through the whole chapter), where Abram is a model of righteousness, while still a Gentile. Paul has observed that he is not circumcised until chapter 17. Galatians 3 has a preliminary sketch of this argument; the line is quoted at 3:6.

15:13 *it was said*: this is the 'divine passive', making it clear that God is the speaker.

The story of Hagar and Ishmael (16:1–16)

- 16:¹ Sara the wife of Abram had not borne him any children; but she had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar.
- ² And Sara said to Abram, 'Look, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. So go into my slave-girl, that you may have children by her.' Abram obeyed Sara's voice.
- ³ And Sara the wife of Abram took Hagar the Egyptian slave-girl, after Abram had lived for ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife for him.
- ⁴ And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and she saw that she was pregnant, and her mistress was dishonoured before her.
- ⁵ And Sara said to Abram, 'I am wronged by you: I gave my slave girl to be intimate with you; and when I saw that she was pregnant, I was dishonoured before her. May God judge between me and you!'
- ⁶ And Abram said to Sara, 'Look, your slave girl is in your power; deal with her as you please.' Sara treated her harshly; and she ran away from her.
- ⁷ An angel of the Lord found her at the spring of water in the desert, at the spring on the way to Shur.
- ⁸ And the angel of the Lord said to her, 'Hagar, slave-girl of Sara, where are you coming from, and where are you going?' And she said, 'I am running away from my mistress Sara.'
- ⁹ The angel of the Lord said to her, 'Turn back to your mistress, and be humbled under her hands.'
- ¹⁰ And the angel of the Lord said to her, 'I shall hugely multiply your offspring; they shall not be counted, because of their multitude.'
- ¹¹ And the angel of the Lord said to her, 'Look – you are pregnant, and you shall bear a son, and will call his name Ishmael, because the Lord listened to your humiliation.
- ¹² This one will be a wild one; his hands against all, and the hands of all against him, and he shall dwell over against his brethren.'
- ¹³ And Hagar called on the name of the Lord who had spoken to her, 'You are God who watches over me.' Because she said, 'I saw him face to face, the One who appeared to me.'
- ¹⁴ Because of this, she called the well, 'The Well before which I saw [him].'
Behold it is between Kadesh and Bered.

16:1 *Sara . . . had not borne him any children:* the reader instinctively knows that there is a drama here, especially when the second half of the verse mentions Hagar, who is Egyptian, of all races.

16:2 *go into my slave-girl:* a generous instinct on Sara's part, but not to be attempted at home.

16:4 *her mistress was dishonoured:* the passive here could mean either that God had dishonoured Sara, or that Hagar looked down upon her. The Hebrew means something like 'she was insignificant in her eyes'.

16:5 *I am wronged by you:* the drama continues; the reader feels that 'we saw this coming'.

16:6 *your slave girl is in your power:* once again, Abram turns out not to be very brave.

16:7 *an angel of the Lord found her:* we always knew that God would take a hand in the drama.

16:10 *multiply your offspring; they shall not be counted:* this repeats, of course, the promise to Abram, back in 15:5.

16:11 *because the Lord listened:* in Hebrew, the name Ishmael could be translated 'God will listen'.

16:12 *a wild one:* the Hebrew here means 'a wild donkey'. The Greek means 'rustic', often with the pejorative sense of 'boorish' or uncultivated.

he shall dwell over against his brethren: this is what the Greek means here, but it is translating a Hebrew idiom that implies something more antagonistic, 'he shall live in the face of', which scholars tend to understand as 'in opposition to' or 'in defiance of'.

16:13 *God who watches over me:* this is a possible translation of the Hebrew El-Roi, which might simply be a title of God. The Hebrew of the second half of the verse is somewhat obscure.

16:14 *'The Well before which I saw [him]':* the Hebrew has 'Beer-Lahai-Roi', which includes a reference to 'Life'.

- 15 And Hagar bore a son for Abram; and Abram called the name of his son which Hagar had borne for him, Ishmael.
 16 Now Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

Circumcision the sign of the covenant; Abram changes his name (17:1–27)

- 17:1 Now it happened that Abram was ninety-nine years old; and the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am your God – be pleasing before me, and be blameless,
 2 and I shall establish my covenant between me and you; and I shall multiply you greatly.'
 3 And Abram fell upon his face; and God spoke to him, saying,
 4 'And, look, as for me, my covenant [is] with you; and you shall be father of a multitude of nations.
 5 Your name shall no longer be called Abram; no – your name shall be Abraham, because I have made you father of many nations.
 6 And I shall increase you very greatly; and I shall make you into nations; and kings shall come out of you.
 7 And I shall establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you, to their generations, for an eternal covenant, that I shall be your God, and the God of your offspring after you.
 8 And I shall give you and your offspring after you the land in which you are living as a sojourner, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. And I shall be God for them.'
 9 And God said to Abraham, 'Now you are to maintain my covenant, you and your offspring after you, to their generations.
 10 And this is the covenant which you are to maintain, between me and you, and your offspring after you, to their generations: every male [among] you shall be circumcised.
 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be as a sign of the covenant, between me and you.
 12 And the child who is eight days old shall be circumcised [among] you, every male for [all] your generations, the slave born in your house, and the slave bought for money, from every son of a foreigner, who is not of your offspring.
 13 They shall be circumcised, the slave born in your house, and the one bought for money. And my covenant shall be on your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

17:1 *your God*: this is the translation in LXX of the Hebrew title El Shaddai, which appears here for the first time. It perhaps means 'God Almighty', though it is impossible to be sure.

17:5 *your name shall be Abraham*: in fact, scholars tell us, Abraham is a dialect variant of Abram, and they both mean 'my father {the deity} is exalted'.

father of many nations: 'nations' here is the word, in both Hebrew and Greek that turns into the English 'gentiles'. Paul quotes this line in Romans 4:17, as part of his argument about the person of Abraham, being the ancestor of the wider people of God, both Jews and non-Jews (or 'gentiles').

17:8 *all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession*: an obvious difficulty here is that one way (some would say the only way) of reading this text is that God promised Abraham's descendants that they should possess all the land of the Canaanites. The problem is that if you start

with this as a non-negotiable statement of God's will for the Holy Land, it is hard to find a workable solution to the modern problems of that land. One way round it might be to make God's covenant apply to all Abraham's descendants, including the children of Ishmael. You might think of Paul's argument in Galatians 3:6, 7 that all who believe are children of Abraham, and therefore have a share in the covenant and in the land.

17:10 *every male . . . shall be circumcised*: it was one of Paul's great achievements that he noticed that Abraham's circumcision, first mentioned here, took place after the moment in 15:6 when 'Abram trusted in God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'. It was because Abram believed God's promise that it was 'reckoned to him as righteousness', and that faith, as Paul points out, came before his circumcision, not after it. This was important to him in his argument with those who wanted to claim that Christians should be circumcised. Paul denies this, heatedly in Galatians, and in more measured fashion in Romans.