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Beginnings: Stories of God's Creation and Promises

Major Concepts

- A. Stories of the Origins.** The first eleven chapters of Genesis portray the one God bringing forth goodness out of chaos and creating humankind in God's own image. Catholics believe the Creation story does not contradict the theory of evolution. Genesis also describes how sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's attempt to be equal to God. The stories of Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, and the Tower of Babel illustrate how sin continued to spread. God extended the first covenant to Noah because he obeyed God's Word. See the *Catechism*, nos. 54, 374–379 (humans in Paradise); 55, 311, 385–390, 396–409 (the Fall and Original Sin); 56–58 (the covenant with Noah); 159 (faith and science); 269 (the omnipotence of God); 279–297, 299–301, 337–339, 355, 373, 1700 (the goodness of God's Creation); 280, 288, 293–294 (God creates out of love); 301 (God sustains Creation); 345–349, 2168–2172 (the Sabbath); 401–402, 1865–1869, 2259, 2317 (sin's ripple effect); 458 (God's love shown in Jesus); 1730–1739, 1749, 1853 (human freedom); 2569 (Noah and prayer).
- B. Abraham: The Father of Biblical Faith.** God calls Abraham to leave everything behind and go to an unknown land, where his many descendants would become a great nation. Responding obediently, Abraham becomes the father of biblical faith for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Abraham has a son, Ishmael, with his concubine, Hagar, because his wife, Sarah, seemed to be barren. But God's plan for Abraham to conceive a son with Sarah prevails, and Isaac is born. Later Abraham is tested when God asks him to sacrifice Isaac. An angel stays Abraham's hand at the last moment, confirming that God forbids human sacrifice. See the *Catechism*, nos. 59–61 (the call of Abraham); 64, 489 (Sarah); 144–146, 165, 1080–1081, 1819, 2570–2572 (the faith of Abraham); 201 (the one God); 422, 2619 (the fulfillment of a promise); 705–706, 709, 762, 1222, 1716 (the promise to Abraham); 841 (Abraham and the Muslims); 1150 (circumcision); 2260–2261 (human sacrifice is forbidden); 2390 (the biblical ideal of monogamy); 2572 (Abraham's test).
- C. Jacob: A Man Named Israel.** The stories about Isaac and Rebekah's son Jacob show how God remains faithful to the promise to Abraham and his descendants. Because Rebekah believes God wants Jacob to be Isaac's principal heir, she helps Jacob in a deception that gains him what should have

been his brother Esau's birthright. Jacob flees to Haran, where he stays for many years before returning to the Promised Land. On his way back, he meets a mysterious stranger who, after wrestling with him all night, gives Jacob the name Israel. Jacob initiates his family into the worship of the God of Israel, carrying on the blessing God gave to Abraham and Isaac. See the *Catechism*, nos. 63 (Israel); 2573 (Jacob, ancestor of the twelve tribes, wrestles with an angel).

- D. **Joseph: Treachery, Triumph, and Forgiveness.** Joseph's resentful brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt, where he becomes governor. During a severe famine, his brothers come to Egypt to buy grain, but do not recognize Joseph, who insists that his brother Benjamin be brought to him. An anguished Jacob sacrifices Benjamin for the sake of his people. Eventually Joseph reveals his true identity and reconciles with his brothers. Like so many other stories in Genesis, Joseph's tale shows how our all-powerful God works with sinful human beings to save the world. See the *Catechism*, nos. 312–314 (God brings good out of wrongdoing).



Opening Teacher Prayer

Call to prayer. Be still within and without. Be aware that you are the focus of God's creative love. Center yourself in that love.

Read. Psalm 104

Reflect. Recall memories and moments in your life that speak of the wonder of Creation and the loving care of God, our Creator. Which gifts from God are you most thankful for? Which gifts do you take for granted? How is God creating in your life now?

Hold in your heart. "Bless the LORD, O my soul" (Ps. 104:35).



Concept A: Stories of the Origins



Review Questions: Stories of the Origins

Question. How did the Book of Genesis lift the hearts of the exiles as they returned to their homeland, Judah?

Answer. The Book of Genesis helped remind the Jews that from the beginning their God had been in charge, bringing forth goodness out of everything. Genesis also helped them understand their origins, who they were, and why they should have hope.

Question. Summarize the difference between the Jewish view of the origins of the world and the Babylonian view.

Answer. In the Jewish view, the one God brings forth goodness—order, beauty, and abundant forms of marvelous life—out of chaos. Human beings are made in God's image and are partners with God in loving all Creation. In

contrast the Babylonians believed that self-serving, violent, and destructive gods had made the earth for their own pleasure, and humankind for their slaves. It was a chaotic world where human beings were caught in the middle of the gods' wars and tried to avoid the gods' wrath.

Question. In the Creation story, why is it said that God rested on the seventh day?

Answer. The Jews' custom of resting on the Sabbath marked them as unique and reminded them during the exile that they were God's people. So the Creation story writer included God's own resting on the seventh day to emphasize the importance of keeping the Sabbath holy as a day to rest, praise God, and be refreshed together.

Question. What is the Catholic understanding of how the biblical Creation account relates to the theory of evolution?

Answer. Catholics believe the biblical story does not contradict the theory of evolution. The Church's affirmation that much scientific evidence supports the evolution theory does not shake the religious truth of the Creation account—that God is the source of all goodness.

Question. What do Adam and Eve desire by eating of the tree of the "knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:17)?

Answer. To be equal to God and to know all things

Question. According to the story of the Fall, who is responsible for suffering and injustice in the world—God or human beings?

Answer. God does not create injustice in the world; human beings do so by their own bad choices.

Question. Which Genesis stories tell about the spread of sin after the first sin?

Answer. Cain and Abel, a story of hatred between brothers that ends in murder; Noah and the Flood, a story about society's depravity; and the Tower of Babel, a tale of arrogance among nations.

Question. To whom does God offer the first covenant? Why is it offered, and what is the sign of that event?

Answer. God offers the first covenant to Noah because he obeyed God. The rainbow is the sign of that covenant, God's promise that the world will never again be destroyed by a flood. It is also a sign of God's love for every earthly creature.



Text Activities: Stories of the Origins

- What difference do a people's beliefs about their origins make to their attitudes about life? Make two columns, one headed "Babylonians' Attitudes" and the other "Ancient Jews' Attitudes." In each column, list the attitudes toward life you might expect to see in each group because of the beliefs its members held about how the world and humans came about.
- "[God] rested on the seventh day" (Gen. 2:2). When was the last time you rested? Create a chart of your typical week, noting how much time is given to schoolwork, school activities, job, family, friends, sleep, and other things you're involved in. Write a paragraph or two about how much time you spend relaxing and unwinding, and how you use that time. If you could say no to one "extra" activity in your life so that you would have more room for relaxing, what would you give up?

- In the Fall, Adam and Eve try to be equal to God. List three situations in the world today where human beings are trying to be equal to God and refuse to acknowledge their dependence on him. Write about one of them that you find interesting or inspiring.
- “Am I my brother’s keeper?” What does it mean to be responsible for another person? Perhaps someone in your school, neighborhood, family, or workplace, or some group in your community is at risk or in trouble. Is it your job to help them? Share your thoughts on this in a one-page essay.
- In a paragraph, compare the story of Babel, which illustrates the effect of sin, to the story of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–21), which illustrates the effect of the Holy Spirit. Find a newspaper clipping showing the effect of sin in our society, and another that shows the effect of good.



Additional Activities: Stories of the Origins

Folk Songs

The first eleven chapters of Genesis are like folk songs that capture the spirit of the history of Israel. Tell your students each to bring in the words to a song that centers on an important part of their own country’s history and that has been or probably will be sung for many generations. In addition, direct them to write a short explanation of why the song is significant. Invite some students to share their songs and ideas.

Other Creation Stories

Select some students to find the creation stories of other ancient peoples—for example, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Japanese, and a Native American tribe. After the students have found and rehearsed their stories, invite them to retell them to the class. Then lead the class in a discussion of how the stories compare with the account in Genesis.

Debate on the Theory of Evolution

Choose two small teams to prepare a debate on how the world came into being. Have one team advocate the theory of creationism and the other the theory of evolution. When the students are ready to debate, you may wish to set up a fishbowl discussion (see the introduction of this teaching manual for a description of this technique).

What Is Dominion?

1. Ask your students these questions:
 - ◆ What does the Book of Genesis mean when it says that God gave humankind “dominion” over all living things on the earth [1:26]?
 - ◆ We could easily misunderstand dominion in Genesis as the right of human beings to dominate the earth for their own purposes. What could this misunderstanding lead to?

2. Divide the class into two groups. Direct each group to recite alternate verses of Psalm 8. Then ask your students what this psalm tells us about the biblical view of human beings' relationship to the earth.

Sin, Guilt, and Nakedness

Pose these questions for discussion:

- ◆ In the story of the Fall, Adam and Eve try to hide their nakedness after they have sinned. When people sin and feel guilty, how is their experience like that of being naked in a crowd?
- ◆ When people feel guilty, how might they try to cover up, hide, or make excuses for their guilt?
- ◆ Can you think of stories from television, films, or literature that illustrate people hiding their guilt or excusing their sin? [*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, *The Simpsons*, etc.]
- ◆ What qualities of God are shown in the story of the Fall? [God knows all things and is more merciful than we might expect.]
- ◆ If we cannot hide from God, why do we even bother trying to hide from other people when we are guilty? Or do we really think that somehow we can hide from God?

Cain and Abel: More Questions

The story of Cain and Abel raises many questions for discussion. If your students did the text activity on page 36, you might wish to explore the concept further with these questions:

- ◆ Considering God's punishment of Cain, what do you think is God's answer to Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" [Gen. 4:9]?
- ◆ What might be a better word than *keeper* to describe the relationship that God wants us to build with one another?
- ◆ What are some implications of being a "brother" or a "sister" to someone?
- ◆ Is it possible to destroy someone without laying hands on them? Explain.
- ◆ What is it like to be on the receiving end of destructive behaviors like ridicule and gossip?
- ◆ Jealousy is Cain's motivation for killing Abel. Is jealousy one of the chief motives for hate and destruction between persons? between schools? between nations?
- ◆ How can we cope with our jealousy of other people? with their jealousy of us?

Bill Cosby Tells the Story of Noah

Play for the class Bill Cosby's account of Noah and the Lord from *The Best of Bill Cosby* (Warner Brothers Records). As you would imagine, this version of Noah's tale is highly amusing and can serve as a break from serious study. It is not a theological interpretation! However, Cosby's account does have a serious side. Here is one question that could start a discussion of the story as told by Cosby:

- ◆ Can you think of situations today when doing what God asks can provoke ridicule from classmates, neighbors, or others?

2

Comic Strips of Noah and the Flood

This activity can be a source of review and fun, if carried out with a sense of humor.

1. Before class write the following panel topics on the chalkboard or a transparency:

- a. Noah looking about in distress at his sinful neighbors
- b. Noah building the ark according to God's specifications
- c. Noah moving his family into the ark and herding in the pairs of animals
- d. the rain coming down, with Noah and crew waiting for it to stop
- e. Noah letting out the dove
- f. the dove returning with an olive branch
- g. the release of the animals, the family getting off the ark at last
- h. Noah offering a sacrifice on an altar, with the rainbow of the covenant appearing

2. Divide the class into groups of six to eight people and give these instructions:

- ◆ In our next class, your group will be given eight pages of perforated computer paper that are still connected. [Hold up and unfold some continuous-form computer paper as an example.] Each member of your group will be expected to draw one or two panels in a multipanel comic strip that tells the story of Noah and the Flood. You may use markers or crayons; just make sure that the colors are deep enough for the class to see the drawing at a distance. I encourage you to be creative and even humorous if you like. [Either plan to provide markers and crayons for the project or ask the students to bring them from home.]
- ◆ [Direct the students' attention to the eight panel topics that you wrote on the chalkboard.] Please take about 5 minutes to decide who will draw each of the listed panels. If you have fewer than eight people in your group, decide which panels to eliminate, or assign some people more than one panel. Tonight mull over the panel you will draw. Let your creativity loose.

3. At the next class session, form the small groups once again. Give an eight-page length of continuous-form computer paper to each group at a long table or on the floor. Distribute markers and crayons if the groups do not have their own. Allow about 15 minutes for the groups to draw their comic strip.

4. Provide spaces in your classroom where the groups can hang the comic strips. After the drawings are hung, allow time for the students to admire each of the masterpieces. Then ask this question:

- ◆ In looking at the comic strips, did you see any differences in how the groups interpreted the story of Noah?

The Rewards of Evil Are, Finally, Evil

The story of Noah relates the destruction of wicked people and the survival of the just man, Noah, and his family. But in real life we do not always see such a neat correspondence between goodness and good fortune, between evil and disastrous lot.

Have the students read Psalm 73 and reflect on the reality that goodness does not necessarily “pay off” in this life. The psalmist cannot see any payoff for his righteous living; he complains that all the prosperity is enjoyed by wicked people, while he is afflicted with suffering. Yet in the end, he knows that the rewards of a life well lived are far greater than any good fortune the wicked might enjoy. Also, wickedness, it seems, has built-in negative consequences, even though these might not be apparent in the short term.

In the story of the Flood, Noah’s rewards for all his troubles are integrity, harmony with God, and finally, God’s love. He becomes stronger and wiser because of his obedience to God. These are his long-term rewards.

Starting Over

In the story of the Flood, Noah and his family are saved by God, but after they leave the ark, they must face the task of completely rebuilding their world, which has been destroyed. Here are some questions for discussing the post-ark life of Noah and his family:

- ◆ Put yourself in the position of Noah at the end of the Flood. Your whole world has been destroyed, but you and your family have been saved. When you leave the ark and walk onto dry land, how do you feel?
- ◆ When people go through a rough period and come out safely, how does the experience change them?
- ◆ After the Flood what source of security makes Noah’s situation hopeful rather than awful? [the covenant with God]

To end this activity, you may wish to play the rock song “Flood,” from the album *Jars of Clay*, by the band Jars of Clay as a meditation on Noah’s and our own dependence on God. Invite the students to listen to the song and join in on the chorus.

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Concept B: Abraham: The Father of Biblical Faith



Review Questions: Abraham: The Father of Biblical Faith

Question. Who is called the father of biblical faith?

Answer. Abraham

Question. What does God promise to Abram as the covenant? What is the sign of that covenant for Abram’s people?

Answer. God promised Abram that he would bring forth a multitude of descendants and that all the land of Canaan would eventually be his people’s. The sign of this covenant is circumcision.

Question. Why are Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed?

Answer. Abraham made a bargain with God that the just people in the cities would not be destroyed along with the wicked. But in Sodom the wicked inhabitants proposed the rape of some young men (or angels) to whom Lot had given shelter. Lot offered his own daughters in order to protect his guests—to no avail. So while Lot and his family are rescued by angels, Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed because of their wickedness.

Question. Who is traditionally known as the father of the Arab peoples?

Answer. Ishmael, son of Abraham and Hagar

Question. What is emphasized as a forbidden act in the story of Abraham's test?

Answer. Human sacrifice

Question. Which of Abraham's sons is destined to become an ancestor of the Israelites? Whom does that son marry?

Answer. Isaac. He marries Rebekah.



Text Activities: Abraham: The Father of Biblical Faith

- Create a story that shows the destructive nature of sin, especially how one act of sin can lead to another and another.
- Identify someone you know of who left behind all that was familiar to him or her in order to follow the call of some good purpose. If possible, ask the person what the experience was like and write it up in one page.
- "Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?" Sarah laughs when she hears she will have a child in her old age. But with God nothing is impossible, nothing is too wonderful! Write about a wonderful event from your life. What were the circumstances? Did you expect it to happen?

When Abraham said yes to God's call, he received the gift of expectant faith—knowing, with all his heart and soul, that God would take care of him, bless him, amaze him. This journey would be a wonder-filled, God-filled adventure. We, too, can expect that God is with us every moment of our lives.

- Expecting God's goodness to prevail, Abraham does not give up. Abraham pleads with him to protect Lot and his family. Who is someone you care about so much that you would plead with God on his or her behalf? Is it someone who is in trouble? hurting? lost or confused? angry? Write a conversation between you and God about this person dear to your heart.
- How do you define hero? Make a list of your "heroic ancestors," including family heroes as well as national ones. Pick three and write a brief reflection for each about what makes him or her a hero. Be sure to include the hero's imperfections as well as his or her good points. How has he or she made a difference in your life?
- Write your own reactions to the story of Abraham's test. What questions does that story raise for you?



Additional Activities: Abraham: The Father of Biblical Faith

“Spiritually, We Are All Semites”

The term *Semite* is explained on page 39 of the student text. Explain that today the term *Semites* generally refers to Jews and Arabs, particularly Jews. Pope John XXIII offered the insight that “spiritually, we are all Semites.” To help your students understand this comment, read aloud Matthew 1:1 and Luke 1:39–55. Then ask your students these questions:

- ◆ What did Pope John XXIII mean when he said that “spiritually, we are all Semites”?
- ◆ Given the passages from Matthew and Luke and the pope’s comment, what should the relationship between Christians and Jews be?

Abraham’s Sacrifice and the Eucharist

On the occasion of Abraham’s covenant with God in Genesis, chapter 15, Abraham makes an offering of several animals. Point out that the roots of the eucharistic celebration—the sharing of the body and blood of Christ—can be seen in Abraham’s sacrificial offering. In the sacrifices of the ancients, food was offered because food gave life to those who consumed it; offering food was equivalent to offering one’s life to God. In Abraham’s time the sacred offering was consumed by the participants if it did not burn completely, and it became a sacred meal. At the Last Supper, Jesus told the disciples that the bread and wine became his body and blood, the perfect sacrifice for the sins of many. Consuming the bread and wine—the food—became a sacred meal, giving eternal life.

The Bedouin Lifestyle

Genesis, chapter 18, opens with Abraham sitting at the entrance of his tent while the day is growing hot. It could be fascinating for the students to learn about present-day nomadic desert peoples, whose lifestyle has not changed much since Abraham’s time. Choose a team of students to research the lifestyle of today’s bedouins, or nomadic Arabs, including their shelter, food, means of travel, and so on. The team can give a report to the class, including visual aids such as a model of a bedouin tent (complete with sand and rocks), typical attire, and samples of food.

The Continuing Obligation of Hospitality

The New Testament reminds us to be hospitable. Read aloud to your students Hebrews 13:2, which is meant to remind us of Abraham and Sarah’s hospitality to the three strangers.

Then ask your students these questions:

- ◆ Why was hospitality vital in the time of Abraham and Sarah?
- ◆ Is there a great need for hospitality in our world today?
- ◆ In what sense might the persons who need our hospitality be like angels, or messengers from God, to us?

- ◆ How can we be hospitable at school? at home? in our parish? to hungry and homeless people?
- ◆ Describe the difference between these motives for offering hospitality to someone:
 - a. You are kind and welcoming to the person because you think that is what is expected of you.
 - b. You are kind and welcoming because you believe that in some mysterious way, you are meeting God in the person.

A Summary of Abraham's Role

Assign the following to your students:

- ◆ Write a short essay (about one hundred words) sketching Abraham's life and explaining why he is called the father of biblical faith.

Ask several students to read their completed essays to the class.

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Concept C: Jacob: A Man Named Israel



Review Questions: Jacob: A Man Named Israel

Question. Why does Rebekah try to maneuver Jacob into the position of principal heir of Isaac?

Answer. Rebekah believes that God wants Jacob, not Esau, to be Isaac's principal heir. She strives to obey what she believes to be God's will at great personal risk.

Question. What strange encounter does Jacob have on the way back to Canaan? What new name is he given then, and what does it mean?

Answer. While staying alone Jacob meets a mysterious being, which Scripture translators have called a stranger, a man, an angel—some even suggest a demon. This “someone” wrestles with Jacob until daybreak, when Jacob, refusing to let go, asks for a blessing. In reply the stranger asks his name, and when he says that it is Jacob, he is told that from now on he will be known as Israel, meaning “one who has contended with divine and human beings.”

Question. How does Jacob initiate his family into the worship of the God of Israel?

Answer. He builds an altar on the spot where he heard God's promise at Bethel, and orders his family to rid themselves of their pagan religious trappings in a purification rite.



Text Activities: Jacob: A Man Named Israel

- In the Israelites' understanding, things would work out the way God wanted them to—no matter what or who tried to get in the way. God could bring good out of situations that were weird, puzzling, unfair, or evil. Write a one-page reflection on this idea, including examples from your own life, if possible.

- Imagine a young person “wrestling” with God. What issues might he or she be struggling with? Write a story describing the situation.



Additional Activities: Jacob: A Man Named Israel

The Unusual Ways of God

God’s will can come about in unusual ways. An example of this is Rebekah and Jacob’s deviousness to ensure that Jacob obtains Esau’s birthright. Rebekah and Jacob, however, are not just or blameless in that incident.

1. Direct the students to read Genesis 27:1–45. Then have one student find and read aloud Hosea 12:2–3, and another, Jeremiah 9:4.
 2. Ask all the students these questions:
 - ◆ What do the passages from Hosea and Jeremiah say about Jacob’s dishonesty?
 - ◆ Why do you think this story was told? [To show God’s mysterious ways in salvation history: God sometimes uses weak and sinful people to accomplish his purposes.]
 - ◆ Can you think of an incident, either from history or from your own experience, when some good effect came about in spite of, even because of, someone’s weakness or sin?
 3. As a summary, refer the students to Mark 8:31–33, which quotes Jesus on how different God’s standards and methods are from those of human beings.

World Happenings

The “World Happenings from 2000 to 1700 BC” sidebar in chapter 2 of the student text describes some of the developments going on in the world around the time of the patriarchs. If the students filled in the map on handout 1–D, “World Map,” during their work on chapter 1, ask them to refer to that map and perhaps insert a word or a small symbol for each development in its respective area of the world, writing “2000 to 1700 BC” nearby. Ask them if they were surprised to learn that any of these developments happened at the time of the patriarchs.

A Summary of Jacob’s Character

When the students have read the story of Jacob’s struggle with the mysterious being (p. 49 of the student text), begin this activity.

The character of Jacob is the most skillfully drawn of any in the Old Testament. Although his story is not over until the end of this chapter of the student text, tell your students to write a hundred-word portrait of Jacob, based on their knowledge of him to this point. Tell them that later, when they have completed the story of Jacob, they will write fifty more words, commenting on the development of Jacob’s character. After your students finish their

initial portraits, encourage volunteers to read aloud their essays. File their papers for safekeeping.

(This writing exercise is continued with the activity "Completing the Portrait of Jacob" on p. 62 of this manual.)

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Concept D: Joseph: Treachery, Triumph, and Forgiveness



Review Questions: Joseph: Treachery, Triumph, and Forgiveness

Question. What do Joseph's brothers do to him as a young man, and why?

Answer. They sell Joseph as a slave to traders on their way to Egypt. The brothers stain Joseph's coat with blood so that their father, Jacob, will believe Joseph has been killed. They did this because they resented Joseph for being Jacob's favorite and for being a tattletale.

Question. How does Joseph gain the pharaoh's favor?

Answer. By doing so well at explaining the pharaoh's dreams to him

Question. How does Jacob become a hero?

Answer. By agreeing to part with his beloved son Benjamin, so his other sons can get more grain and rescue the brother they left in Egypt as a pledge that they would return

Question. In what ways do Joseph and his brothers grow through the story?

Answer. Joseph, who in his youth was boastful and proud, gets the heart to forgive his brothers for selling him into slavery. The brothers grow by becoming ready to make sacrifices for the well-being of those they love. The whole family develops from bitterness and hate to tender appreciation of one another.



Text Activities: Joseph: Treachery, Triumph, and Forgiveness

- Do you identify with the feelings of any of the characters in the beginning of this story: the favorite son? the brothers? Reuben? Write a paragraph describing how families can be harmed by jealousy or favoritism.
- In Joseph we find a beautiful example of forgiveness: Joseph forgives his brothers for the extremely hostile and jealous act of selling him into slavery and abandoning him. Write about a person or group in our world who is in need of forgiveness. What was the wrongdoing? Describe any obstacles to forgiving. What could be the outcome of forgiveness in this situation? What might happen if forgiveness is withheld?



Additional Activities: Joseph: Treachery, Triumph, and Forgiveness

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat

You may wish to play the musical interpretation of the Joseph story entitled *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (a rock cantata by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, MCA). The musical is quirky and fun but captures the drama of Joseph's story. The words to the songs are generally sold with the recording.

Have the students discuss or write about their favorite character in the musical.

Joseph, Dreams, and God's Help

Joseph says that he can interpret dreams only with the help of God because dreams are revelations from God. Point out to the students that in almost all cultures, dreams have been viewed as one way that God tells us things. Modern spiritually oriented psychology, in fact, sees dreams as God's way of showing us what we may not want to know about ourselves and so block out of our consciousness.

1. Ask the students this question:

- ◆ How does a superstitious approach to dreams differ from an approach that sees dreams as revealing deeper truths about ourselves? [A superstitious approach interprets dreams rigidly, seeing them as predictors or omens, whereas a spiritual-psychological approach sees dreams as having many possible interpretations, all directed toward discovering some aspect of our personality or our struggle to grow.]

Emphasize that all experiences—perhaps especially dreams—are ways that God speaks to us, if we simply listen with an open mind and heart.

2. Have the students each write down a dream they can remember and what they think God might have tried to reveal to them in the dream.
-

Famine Today

Assign some students to find the names of countries today where a significant portion of the population suffers from a food shortage or famine. Explain that they should mark each of the countries on a world map. Then they should give an oral report to the class on what happens to the human body when it is malnourished, what happens to families in famine-stricken areas (e.g., migration, the destruction of cultural patterns of living), and what happens to the countryside during a famine.

Select other students to find the names and research the efforts of international relief agencies that aid famine-stricken countries. To tie the reports on famine into the story of Joseph's family going to Egypt, ask the students to imagine the desperation of Jacob and his sons when they faced starvation in Canaan—with no relief agency to help them.

Headlines from Egypt

Direct the class in creating an ancient Egyptian tabloid newspaper. Assign the following stories:

1. news items, complete with headlines, on the arrival of Jacob's sons in Egypt and Joseph's accusation that they are spies
2. a people column with the name, background, and parentage of each of the ten sons of Jacob who have come to Egypt; also, a physical description of each brother (from the imaginations of the writers)
3. an editorial praising the governor of Egypt (Joseph) for his wisdom in storing grain during the plentiful years and for his vigilance in watching out for foreigners who might be spies
4. a news summary of the grain shortage in the known world, reporting the kinds and amounts of grain that the Egyptian storehouses sell to visitors from abroad
5. a society item reporting an awards ceremony at which Joseph receives the Egyptian Medal of Honor for his valor and diligence in the service of Egypt and his administration of the national grain supply; also, coverage of the attendance of Joseph's wife and children, how all were dressed, and so on
6. a review of Psalm 105:1-22, a new poem written to praise Joseph

Tell the students that they may include sketches or any other means of bringing the material to life. Photocopy the tabloid and give a copy to everyone in the class.

Completing the Portrait of Jacob

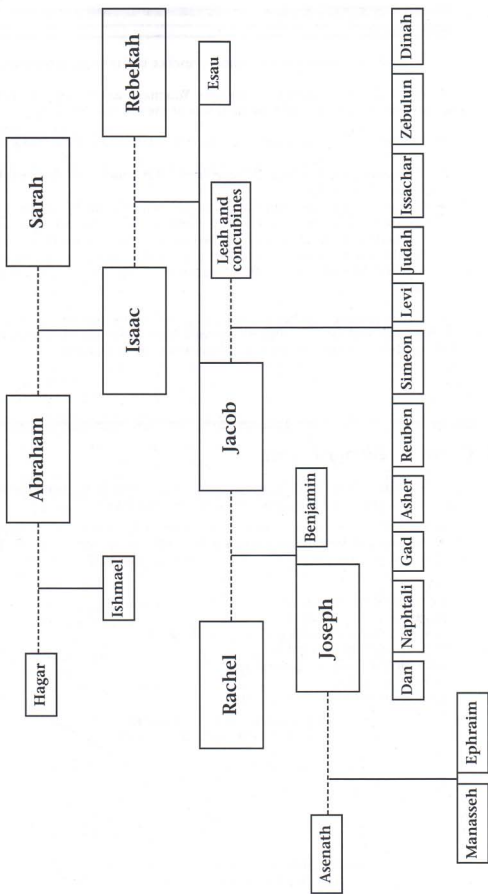
If you used the activity "A Summary of Jacob's Character" on page 59 of this manual, instruct the students to complete the essays they started by adding approximately fifty words about the development of Jacob's character at the end of his life. Then invite the students to share their ideas, particularly their assessment of Jacob's struggle for greatness.

A Family Tree

The students have been exposed to many biblical characters and blood relationships in this chapter. To help them process this information, have them diagram a family tree from Abraham through Joseph and his brothers, indicating all the family members' names and the unions from which they came. Or you might want to simply present the family tree to your class as a way of summarizing the chapter. (Abraham's family tree appears on page 63. You could copy the diagram onto the chalkboard or photocopy it onto an overhead transparency.)

Note: Neither Dinah nor Asenath is mentioned in the student text. In ancient Israelite culture, a woman could not be the head of a tribe. Thus, Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, does not receive the same scriptural coverage that her brothers do. Asenath, the mother of Joseph's children, is simply not a significant figure in the Old Testament.

Abraham's Family



Closing Prayer

1. Remind the students of God's holy presence in the world around us.
 2. Pray Psalm 8 aloud with the students. You may want them to alternate verses between the left side and the right side of the room.
 3. Read or have a student read Genesis 1:26–31.
 4. With words such as the following, invite the students to offer thanks for God's gift of the world:
 - ◆ God said that all Creation is good. Let us each give thanks for one special part of Creation, a part of the world or our life for which we are particularly grateful. You are invited to voice that for which you are thankful. Simply say, "For (fill in the blank with whatever you are thankful for), let us pray." We will answer, "Thank you, God, for your gifts."
 5. End by praying together Psalm 98, singing "All the Ends of the Earth," by Robert Dufford (based on Psalm 98, from *Glory and Praise 3*), or playing "All Good Gifts," by Stephen Schwartz, from the musical *Godspell*.
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Closing Teacher Prayer

Call to prayer. Be still within and without. Be in touch with a remembered moment of God's love. Center yourself in the creative love of God.

Reflect. What have you learned in the process of teaching this chapter? Was it a learning of the head or the heart? Does this reveal God more fully to you? How? What effect could this learning have on your life?

Pray.

God of all creation, we ask your blessing on each of us
as we enter into the mystery
of your ongoing molding and shaping of our life.
May the spirit of God gift us
with the grace of loving receptivity
to your living Word
eager to be born within us. Amen.

(Bergan and Schwan, *Taste and See:
Prayer Services for Gatherings of Faith*)