

Suzanne E. Lier

Journey Through the Old Testament



THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

A Family Storybook
with Masterpieces of Art

VERLAG
Bibel & Kunst



I will expound a theme,
hold forth on the lessons of the past,
things we have heard and known,
that our fathers have told us.
We will not withhold them from our children,
telling the coming generation
the praises of the Lord and His might,
and the wonders He performed
that they might put their confidence in God,
and not forget God's great deeds,
but observe His commandments.

(Psalm 78,2-4.7)

Children's Preface

Do you know someone who picks up a book and always starts reading at the end? I'm sure you do. Now, do you also know someone who reads NOTHING but the end? That is a bit strange, isn't it?

There is ONE book which is read almost exclusively like that: our Bible. It has two parts. The first part is quite long, and the second part is much shorter. People usually read only the second part. The last fifth. The New Testament. It is very obvious that those who only know the end of a book can only understand a little bit about the entire book. They've missed the most important part: the beginning—the basis—on which everything else is built.

Now, is it possible that our Bible is an exception? Will we really miss something if we don't read the first part? Well, I would think so! Otherwise, we will never understand why Adam and Eve had to leave Paradise, how Noah saved the animals from the Great Flood, who Abraham (the ancestor of Jesus) was, why the Ten Commandments were given to man, and so forth and so on...

I have therefore written a book for you with many stories from the beginning of our Bible. Each story is accompanied by a work of art. You should take your time with the works of art. Besides, you will come across picture puzzles now and then, so if you don't pay attention, you will be completely lost!

The first part of our Bible is called the "Old Testament." However, this title sounds very negative, as if everything in it is antique, outdated, and of no interest. That's why many people nowadays prefer to call it the "First Testament." In this way, no one will think of ignoring it any longer.

To make sure your parents and grandparents get started, too, I have written an introduction and several commentaries which they will find below each text. YOU will find explanations alongside the pictures. Sometimes, however, I'll leave you on your own. I want to make sure you keep thinking independently and keep asking many questions. Curiosity is the basis of all knowledge and progress! It is better to embark on a journey filled with questions than to remain at home with your own opinions.

Have fun reading, looking, and discovering (start on page 29)!

Suzanne E. Lier

An Introductory Word to the Adults

There is a deeply rooted prejudice held by nearly everyone: the Old Testament, the first part of the Christian Bible, can be ignored. If we want to understand something about Christianity, all we need to do is turn to the New Testament. The Old Testament is viewed as obsolete. Hasn't it long been superseded by the New? The terms "Old" and "New" seem to make it unmistakably clear. So why work through the bulky Old Testament?

Results in biblical research over the past few years, however, have shown how remote such thinking is from the core of Christian belief. We cannot understand the New Testament unless we know the Old. The New has its roots in the Old: it is one possible continuation of the Old which stands as an equal next to other alternatives such as the rabbinic tradition of exegesis in Judaism. Frank Crüsemann, a German Old Testament scholar, recently pointed out that there is no Christian truth which has not been gained by the Old Testament (Crüsemann 2011, 137). The wonderful "music" of the ONE Christian Bible can only start playing when the Old Testament serves as the sounding board for the New.

Therefore, it is very important for us to really know the Old Testament! What a great source of cultural wisdom would become lost, along with texts of wonderful poetry and valuable testimonies from various ages! We should not deprive our children of these profound stories about God and the people who sought to discover Him. Thus, this storybook, which will be published in three parts, is meant to be a family book. It aims

- to introduce the most important texts of the Old Testament in an intelligible way, book by book, in English translations close to the original texts;
- to accompany each text with a work of art as encouragement for family discussion;
- to provide theological background information through introductions, discussions, and text commentaries;
- to help children understand the works of art through easy-to-understand explanations;
- to be a read-aloud and picture book for the younger children from age five and up;
- **and especially** to be a book which helps open up the precious treasures of the Old Testament, a book which touches us deeply and can help us to enhance our hopes and beliefs!

So I now welcome you and your children on an exciting journey through the (perhaps) still unknown world of the Old Testament!

Suzanne E. Lier

Contents

A Plea for a New Appraisal of the Old Testament 14

The Books of the Old/First Testament 23

The Five Books of Moses –The Pentateuch – The Torah

Introduction 25



THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Introduction 28 – The Creation of the World 29 – **First Creation Story** - Creation in Seven Days 30 – **Second Creation Story** - The Creation of the First Human Being 46 – The Forbidden Tree in Paradise 49 – The Creation of the Animals 50
The Creation of Eve 53

A Few Thoughts on the Biblical Stories of Creation 54

In Paradise – The Temptation 59 – Paradise Lost 60 – The Expulsion from Paradise 63
Cain and Abel – Brother against Brother 64 – The First Murder 67
Building Noah's Ark 68 – Entering Noah's Ark 73 – The Flood 74
The Dove 77 – Noah's Family and the Animals Leave the Ark 78
The Bow of Peace 81 – Noah Drinks Too Much Wine 82

Afterword to the Flood Narrative 84

The Tower of Babel 88

You Shall be Blessed: The Story of Abraham 91

Abram Sets Out 92 – Abram and Sarai in Egypt 95 – Separate Ways 96
Abram Rescues Lot and Meets Melchizedek 99 – Look toward Heaven and Count the Stars! 100
Sarai and Hagar 103 – Help from an Angel 104 – An Everlasting Covenant with Abraham 109
Heavenly Visitors 110 – Will Sodom be Destroyed? 113 – Sodom Goes Up in Flames 114
The Birth of Isaac 119 – The Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael 120
Heavenly Help for Hagar 123

Preliminary Remarks on the Narrative of “Abraham’s Test“ 124

Abraham’s Greatest Test 128 – Sarah Dies 132 – Rebekah at the Well 135 – The Courtship 138
Rebekah on Her Way to Isaac 141 – Abraham Dies 142

The Jacob Narrative

The Birth of the Twins Esau and Jacob 144 – Esau Sells His Birthright 147
God’s Promise to Isaac – Isaac and Rebekah in Gerar 148 – Isaac Wants to Bless Esau 151
Rebekah’s Scheming 152 – The Stolen Blessing 155 – Bless Me, Too, O My Father! 158 – Jacob Has
to Flee 161 – Jacob’s Dream 162 – Jacob Meets Rachel at the Well 165 – A Tale of Two Sisters 166
Jacob’s Children 169 – Mysterious Magic Roots 170 – Jacob’s Prosperity 173
Jacob Flees from Laban 174 – Laban’s Stolen Gods 177 – Jacob Wrestles with God 180
The Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau 185 – The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac 186

The Story of Joseph



Joseph’s Dreams 188 – I am Looking for My Brothers 193 – The Bloody Tunic 194
Joseph in Potiphar’s House 196 – Joseph’s Temptation 198 – Joseph Interprets Dreams in Jail 200
Pharaoh’s Dreams 204 – Joseph Interprets Pharaoh’s Dreams 208 – Joseph Becomes Pharaoh’s
Deputy 211 – Joseph Collects Grain 212 – The First Journey to Egypt 215 Remorse 216
Return to Canaan 219 – A Difficult Farewell 220 – The Second Journey to Egypt 222
The Silver Goblet 224 – A Happy Reunion 227 – Jacob Sets Out for Egypt 228 – Audience at the
Pharaoh’s 231 – Jacob’s Last Will 232 – Jacob Blesses His Grandchildren 235
Jacob Dies and Is Buried 236 – Joseph Reassures His Brothers – Joseph Dies 239

Picture Puzzle Genesis 240



THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Introduction 244



The Israelites Oppressed in Egypt 246 – Two Midwives Show Courage 249

The Infancy Narrative of Moses

A Wonderful Rescue 250 – Moses Flees to Midian 253 – The Burning Bush 254

Digression: The Name of God 258

Moses Returns to Egypt 263 – Bricks Without Straw 264
The Egyptian Plagues 267 – Boils, Hail, Locusts, Darkness 268 – Passover 271
Departure to Freedom 274 – Miriam's Dance of Joy 279

The Wanderings in the Desert

Manna from the Heavens 280 – Water from the Rock 283 – The Amalekites Defeated 284

At Mount Sinai

Moses Climbs the Holy Mountain 287 – The Ten Commandments 288

God's Covenant with Israel

Moses Receives the Tablets of the Law 291 – The Golden Calf 292
Moses Smashes the Tablets of the Law 297 – Longing for God's Presence 298
The Radiant Face of Moses 301 – Bezalel Builds the Tabernacle 302

Picture Puzzle Exodus 304



Digression: Biblical Art in Spite of the Ban on Images? 306

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

Introduction 312

The Scapegoat 314 – You Shall be Holy 317



THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

Introduction 320

Exploring Canaan 322 – Korah's Rebellion 327 – Aaron's Staff Buds 328
The Bronze Serpent 331 – A Speaking Donkey 334 – Balaam's Oracles 337



THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

Introduction 340

Has Anything as Grand as This Ever Happened? 342 – Hear, O Israel 345 – God's Chosen People 346
Choose Life 349 – Joshua is Commissioned 350
Moses Sees the Promised Land and Dies 355 – Never Again 356

Picture Puzzle Numbers and Deuteronomy 358



Afterword: How Should I Read the Bible? 360

Appendix

Tracing the Old/First Testament in Museums and Churches 370 – Bibliography 373
Picture Credits 377 – Text Credits 379 – Clues for the Picture Puzzles 380 – Acknowledgements 381

How the Journey Will Continue 382



The Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael

But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.”

The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.”

So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

This next story leaves us dumbfounded. Can you understand Abraham? It is not easy. Abraham repudiates his slave Hagar and her son though the boy is his own son, too. He places them in mortal danger by sending them away with only some bread and water to keep them going. You can see Hagar’s desperation. She wipes away her tears with a cloth and is already on her way. Ishmael, too, with his back turned to us, is on his way into the unknown. Abraham raises his hands tentatively as if he wants to bless them before bidding them farewell. He stands between his wives and children. Rembrandt illustrates Abraham’s inner conflict: he loves both women, but has to decide on one of them. He looks depressed. This is not the case with Sarah behind him: she watches their farewell, relieved, almost mockingly. Isaac peeps around the door. He is the reason for all the trouble. And how about the dog? Will he accompany the outcasts? Rembrandt illustrated no other scene more often than this one: more than a hundred times! How deeply he must have been touched by this narrative! Take a look at Rembrandt’s drawing on the next page. Its mastery shows with only a few strokes how a human being can be pulled from the depths of despair and open up to a divine voice!

The merciless behavior of Abraham and Sarah casts a bad light on them. What was going on in Abraham’s mind when he sent Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness with hardly anything to eat or drink to their almost certain death? To brighten up this negative picture of Abraham, a few verses (21:11-13; 2nd paragraph in our account) were later inserted in the Postexilic Period. Abraham is portrayed as a compassionate human being. He only reluctantly acquiesces to Sarah’s demands and is deeply troubled for he loves his son. And only after God makes the comforting promise that a substantial future is awaiting Ishmael, does Abraham send Hagar and their son away the next morning. His action is divinely justified.

*Rembrandt, The Expulsion of Hagar, 1637.
Etching and dry-point, 12.6 x 9.7 cm. Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Kupferstichkabinett.*

arrivés
F. 1637



Jacob's Dream

Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said,

“I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.”

The notion of a staircase or ladder leading to heaven may be derived from the architecture of the pyramid temples in Mesopotamia (so-called “zigurat”). A series of ramps and stairways allowed access to the top. It is assumed that there was a shrine on the top, a “cella,” the holiest place where God would appear and talk to devout visitors. The significance of the sacred place of Bethel, 20 kilometers north of Jerusalem, was a matter of fierce debate in Israel’s history. Whereas some regarded it as a legitimate YHWH sanctuary (the prophet Amos and various passages in the Book of Judges), others denounced it as an illegitimate idolatrous sanctuary (cf. 1 Kings 12:25ff), especially after Jeroboam I, the first king of the northern realm of Israel, had established it as a rival sanctuary to Jerusalem and had set up a golden calf. King Josiah supposedly destroyed Bethel around 620 B.C. (2 Kings 23:15).



Jacob lies still, sleeping. His head is supported by his left arm, behind him a knobby trunk of a tree. He doesn't look very comfortable with the rough ground underneath him. But he doesn't seem to mind. Jacob's face is steeped in bright light. Behind him we see a light yellow weave of clouds contrasting with the dark brown colors beneath. If you look closely, you will see angels in the clouds. Jacob is dreaming. He dreams that he can see God way up on the stairs talking to him. It must be a wondrous dream! Jacob is suffused by his dream. The calmness he emits shows us that God is surely close to him. The ground can be as uncomfortable as it may be. Whoever senses God in himself can become light inwardly and cast off all heaviness, like Jacob here.

José de Ribera (1591–1652), Jacob's Dream, 1639. Oil on canvas, 179 x 233 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Digression

Biblical Art in Spite of the Ban on Images?

A true work of art will always have something of infinity in it to our minds, as well as a work of nature. We contemplate it, we perceive and relish its beauties, it makes an impression, but it cannot be thoroughly understood, nor its essence nor its merit be clearly defined by words.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE ("OBSERVATIONS ON THE LAOCOON," 1798;
ANONYMOUS TRANSLATION, GOETHE ON ART 1980, 78)

Do we need pictures in the Bible? And if yes, what kind of pictures? Or should we say that pictures are more harmful because they insinuate that the ineffable God can be defined and all the events described in the Bible are historically true?

Without a doubt, pictures have a formative influence, especially for children. The younger our children, the more intensely they absorb and memorize the text through the presented image. Their notions of biblical subjects are guided by what they perceive visually. It is all the more important to select pictures of high value, pictures which mirror the great biblical treasures in their artistic quality and stylistic variety.

Great masterpieces of art possess an infinite quality in themselves and therefore embody to some extent divine essence; any explanation will always fall short of its full meaning. Art as "Language of the Unspeakable" (Kandinsky, according to Goecke-Seischab 2010, 12) is excellently suited to express biblical content without destroying its transcendent value and aura of mystery. Children will intuitively grasp the precious beauty of the images and will be deeply touched.

Nevertheless, these pictures won't prevent stereotypes from being passed on. One of the most momentous stereotypes is the representation of God as a grandfatherly figure with a long gray beard, which emerged in art around the 12th century. It is possible that this image has positive connotations with young children at first, but it soon has fateful consequences. These images defraud the absolute otherness of God; they assign God to the archetype of the "dignified old man" and exclude all female aspects. They turn God into a human being who, furthermore, is foolish and frail. If such an early image is conveyed and memorized, it can later lead to a complete rejection of God. An adult will indignantly turn away from such a ridiculous notion of God and put his faith aside if he never has the opportunity to have his notions of God reassessed (Lange 2002, 49–67).

Once it is clear that we can't define God through an image and that He can only be understood indirectly, we will read the Bible with different eyes. As humans, we can only talk about God figuratively. No one has ever seen God. So why did He put up a strict ban on images in the first of His Ten Commandments ("You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below", Ex 20:4, Dt 5:8)? How is this divine injunction consistent with the wealth of figurative biblical language and especially the need of our children to see biblical content illustrated?

To answer this, we must first make a distinction: the ban on images referred to tangible objects, not to verbal images. The perceptible image itself was not to be revered. The ban on images did not entail a general ban on works of art, nor did it exclude the didactic use of them in teaching children. In the end, says Old Testament scholar Dohmen (1987, 22), the ban on images is only related to art indirectly, since it is primarily concerned with the question of the definition of the proper relationship between God and man. It guarantees that

people keep the proper distance from God and respect His unfathomable otherness.

Nevertheless, fierce debates have ensued about the question of how exactly the biblical ban on images should be interpreted. Thus, in the 8th and 9th centuries many Byzantine religious images were destroyed, and countless precious works of sacred art violently demolished in the iconoclasm of the 16th century Reformation. One side referred to the ban and rejected images categorically as idolatry and superfluous accessory, whereas others emphasized its educational benefit in particular.

Today, there is still a strict ban on images in Judaism and Islam, and Protestant Christians also tend to be skeptical of religious images because of the ban on creating images and prefer a plain interior in churches.

The following quotes are exemplary of the arguments of those who oppose sacred images and for those who support them (quotations taken from Lange 2002, 341–349):



What colorful chaos! Exuberant life wherever we look! As if we are dreaming! Everything seems thrown together at random. The artist Chagall was carried away by a boundless, childlike joy. What does it matter if the rules of perspective and order were abandoned? Whoever loves God and keeps his commandments will gain untold happiness and an abundance of life. Only one thing matters: delight in God and the wealth of His blessings! However, you may still have many questions. It is far from easy to understand these little scenes, icons, and symbols! It helps to know a little bit about Chagall's life. He liked to instill his paintings with important events from his life. Here, for instance, you can see his wedding with Bella, recognize his preference for the circus and music, and enjoy scenes from his stays in Paris. He also depicted important events from Jewish history: on the bottom you will find Jews as fugitives with all their belongings. Flight and persecution were the destiny of Jews throughout history. A little pictorial symbol on the top near the fish should be very familiar to you by now. No doubt you will know who the man with the Tablets of the Law is by now!

Marc Chagall (1887–1985), *La Vie*, 1964. St-Paul-de-Vence (Provence), Museum Fondation Maeght.

Choose Life

And Moses went on: “Surely, this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, ‘Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?’ No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.

The joyous undertone which is connected to keeping God’s commandment among the Jews is expressed in the liturgy of the synagogue in a moving prayer just before the recitation of the Shema: “With an eternal love have You loved the House of Israel, Your nation. Torah and commandments, decrees and ordinances have You taught us. Therefore LORD, our God, upon our retiring and arising, we will discuss Your decrees and we will rejoice with the words of Your Torah and with Your commandments for all eternity. For they are our life and the length of our days and about them we will meditate day and night. May You not remove Your love from us forever. Blessed are You, O LORD, Who loves His nation Israel.”*

*<http://wisdomintorah.com/wp-content/uploads/ebooks/english/Siddur1.pdf> (as of: April 19, 2012)

See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. For I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His laws, and His rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess.

But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods, I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live—by loving the LORD your God, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the LORD swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.”

Bibliography

The following list cites all books and essays which I have used to write this book. I wanted to be sure you can trace all the information, influences, and points of view I have put forward. Maybe there is one or two books on my list which you might want to read to deepen your understanding of a subject you are especially interested in.

1. Bible Translations

In the old days, only one English translation of the Christian Bible was considered standard: **The King James Version** (KJV). It came to be the first version of Scripture authorized by the Protestant Church and commissioned by England's King James I. It is a very beautiful, elegant, literary translation and contributed a lot to the formation of the English language as we know it. However, at the time of its translation in 1611, very few Hebrew and Greek manuscripts were available; meanwhile, thousands of additional manuscripts have been discovered. Furthermore, the English of the KJV is not at all the same language spoken today. Both the vocabulary and the grammar have changed considerably, and for many people, reading the KJV is like reading a foreign language. A book which has children among its readers will definitely have to look for more modern translations to make sure the texts can be understood and cherished. There is no such thing as a "perfect" translation; the KJV was not an infallible translation either, even though it is believed by millions. It is obvious that texts written by different people over a period of many centuries, in ancient languages, cannot be conveyed from one language to another without changes and deviations in meaning.

My selection of today's more recent translations covers a wide range of the choices we have; the objective was to have you get to know modern standard translations which are widely used and help develop an ecumenical spirit. We might all be partial to the version given to us by our parents. But this should not prevent us from looking at other versions; the biblical language has a decisive influence on our acceptance or refusal of its contents. To be sure: one can learn the Truths of God from ANY translation!

There are basically two primary approaches to translations: Those which present a word-for-word translation (a more literal translation) and those which primarily translate thought-for-thought (a freer translation); many translations combine both approaches. My choice entails examples of both. The different Bible translations will be introduced according to their sequence in my book. The year in the bracket indicates the edition used.

1. **The Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation** (NJPS **Tanakh**, 1999), commentaries and text in: **The Jewish Study Bible**, TANAKH Translation, ed. by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, Oxford 2004.

The NJPS is a completely fresh translation directly from the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Scriptures into modern English, independent of any earlier one. Commissioned and published by the Jewish Publication Society, it was begun in 1955, completed in 1982, and then revised several times. The translation emerged from a team of Jewish

scholars and rabbis representing the Conservative, Reform, and Orthodox branches of organized Jewish life. They strove for a faithful idiomatic rendering of the original scriptural languages, yet avoided obsolete words whenever possible and rendered Hebrew idioms by means of their normal English equivalents. Intelligibility and correctness were their utmost goals. The NJPS translation is the best and most widely read Jewish translation for contemporary English-speaking Jews. Christian readers should consider using this superb translation of the Hebrew Bible (containing all the books of the so called "Old Testament," except for the Apocrypha) into English more often. Who could better translate and understand the Hebrew original than its first addressees? The NJPS should become the preferred text for any Christian studying the Old/First Testament!

2. **New American Standard Bible** (NASB, 1995)

This translation, completed in 1971, is highly respected as the most literal English translation of the Bible. It strictly adheres to the original languages, and is therefore very literal in vocabulary and word order reflecting the grammar of the original. Nevertheless, it seeks to use contemporary English where possible and is more readable than the King James Version. It is very useful for Bible study.

3. **New Revised Standard Version** (NRSV, 1989)

This is an update of the highly regarded Revised Standard Version (RSV) of 1952. Its goal was to preserve the best of the older versions while incorporating modern English. The NRSV is published by the National Council of Churches. It is a translation by Bible scholars from many denominations; it received the endorsement of over thirty Protestant churches, the American and Canadian Catholic bishops and the Greek Orthodox Church. The language of the NRSV has much of the archaic language eliminated and uses gender-inclusive pronouns.

4. **English Standard Version** (ESV, 2001)

The ESV is a new literal translation developed by an international translation team of 95 outstanding evangelical Bible scholars and teachers representing nearly 20 denominations. Their goal was to combine faithfulness to the text and accuracy with literary excellence and beauty. It is a very readable translation and has become quite popular.

5. **New American Bible, Revised Edition** (NABRE, 2010)

This Catholic Bible was released only a year ago; it is the culmination of nearly 20 years of work by a group of nearly 100 scholars and theologians. The NABRE is an update of the meaning-based New American Bible (NAB), originally published in 1970, and includes a newly revised translation of the entire Old/First Testament; it is the official standard American Catholic edition of the Bible (incorporating the Apocrypha) approved by the Conference of Catholic Bishops and widely read in the American Catholic lectionary. The NABRE translation seeks to combine accuracy with easy-to-understand language that can be used in public worship.

6. **New International Version** (NIV, 1984)

First published in 1978, this ecumenical, completely original transla-

tion was strongly influenced by the King James tradition. An international, trans-denominational group of scholars were determined to start from scratch with the best available manuscripts in the original languages. The NIV seeks to provide the best possible blend of transparency to the original documents and comprehension of the original meaning in every verse. It offers a balance between a more literal and a freer translation; many consider it a highly accurate and smooth-reading version of the Bible in modern English. The NIV soon became the best-selling English version, a position it still holds. Its latest update was in 2011.

7. New Living Translation (NLT, 2007)

The translators of the NLT from various theological backgrounds and denominations set out to create a clear translation while remaining faithful to the ancient texts. As a result, this translation is indeed very readable and useful combining precise scholarship with contemporary idiom.

In addition, I have used the commentaries from the following Bibles:

Bibel 2000 (ed. Christian Riehl), in 18 volumes, Stuttgart 1997-2001.

Die Bibel erschlossen und kommentiert von Hubertus Halbfas, 4th edition, Düsseldorf 2003.

Die Chagall Bibel (Bilderläuterungen: Christoph Goldmann), Stuttgart 1998.

A vivid example of a medieval illustration of a major part of the First Testament is given in the manuscript of the Wenzel Bible (ca. 1400) which is available in a scaled down edition of the facsimile in eight volumes:

Wenzelsbibel. König Wenzels Prachthandschrift der deutschen Bibel. Erläutert von Horst Appuhn, Dortmund 2001 (according to the original in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Vienna Cod. 2759).

Children's Bibles and Youth Bibles

There is a great number of children's Bibles on the German market with different standards and aspirations (cf.: Frey, Astrid et al., 2002, *Mit der Bibel groß werden. Kinderbibeln im Vergleich*, Bonn, or other manuals for children's Bibles). I have only listed those children's Bibles which have helped me because of their illustrations, or have been mentioned in my text.

Frisch, Hermann-Josef, 2004, *Die Bibel. Das Buch fürs Leben*, Düsseldorf.

Heller, Hans, Biesenbach, Hans, 1999, *Die Nacht leuchtet wie der Tag. Bibel für junge Leute*, Frankfurt.

Kretschmer, Hildegard, 2003, *Wie Noah die Tiere gerettet hat. Berühmte Maler erzählen die Bibel*, Munich.

Oberthür, Rainer, 2004, *Die Bibel für Kinder und alle im Haus*, Munich.

Zink, Jörg, 2004, *Die Kinderbibel. Der Morgen weiß mehr als der Abend*, Stuttgart.

2. Encyclopedia

a) Theological Encyclopedia

Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche (LThK), 1st edition, Freiburg i.Br. 1957-1965 and 3rd edition, Freiburg 1993-2001.

Das große Salzburger Bibellexikon, 1985, Salzburg.

Herders Neues Bibellexikon, 2008, Freiburg i.Br.

Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet (www.wibilex.de).

b) Art Encyclopedia

Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie (LCI), Special Edition, 1990, Freiburg i.Br.

Lexikon christlicher Kunst, 1980, Freiburg i.Br.

Wörterbuch der christlichen Ikonographie, 9th edition, 2005, Regensburg.

3. Further Publications

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