

## **Introduction**

Among the primary aims of Hillsdale College are the teaching of the Christian religion “by precept and example” and the “diffusion of sound learning.” These aims rest upon a tradition that views faith and reason as an integrity and affirms their capacity to discover truth about man’s relationship to the divine.

Genesis is a book of fundamental importance for the Jewish and Christian faiths and has exerted a profound influence on Western Civilization. In addition to being a great religious text, it is also a literary masterpiece.

## 2

### **Adam and Eve Gen 1-3**

Genesis is dominated by four types of relationships: God and creation, God and human, human and human, and human and creation. Adam and Eve’s transgression in the Garden of Eden transforms the relationship between God and man and sets the stage for the remaining narratives of Genesis.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are the four types of relationships displayed in the opening of Genesis, and in what ways do they mirror each other?
2. How does the face of God enter into the human-to-human relationship?
3. How does a rupture of the God-to-human relationship affect one’s relationship with other human beings?
4. Why was Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden necessary? NOTES

## 3

### **Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar Gen 15-21**

The story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar illustrates the rivalry and pain that arise as humans struggle with divine promises. In spite of their failings, God remains faithful to His covenant and responds to the suffering of mankind.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is a type-scene, and what is its purpose in Biblical literature?
2. How is laughter employed as a complex representation of the human response to God's promises?
3. Does the text allow Abraham’s laughter to be interpreted as indicating either scorn or joy?
4. Does God respond to human suffering? If so, how?

## 4

## **Abraham and Isaac Gen 22-24**

The binding of Isaac is the Genesis passage that generates the most commentary—though it is frequently misunderstood. The narrative presents two acts of faith: Abraham offering his son to God and Isaac offering himself to his father. Abraham submits to God’s command, knowing full well that God will keep His promise.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Examine the competing interpretations of the binding of Isaac in Hebrews 11:17 and in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*. How might a close reader understand Abraham’s act of faith here?
2. Does God intend for Abraham to transgress the moral law in sacrificing his son?
3. Is Isaac oblivious to the approaching act of sacrifice? If not, how does he willingly participate in offering himself up to God? In what way is this an “active passivity”?

## **5**

## **Jacob and Esau Gen 25-33**

Genesis is filled with sibling rivalries, beginning with the tragic story of Cain and Abel. The decades-long rivalry between Jacob and Esau demonstrates how such conflicts can be resolved and how the face of God is made visible through a beautiful act of forgiveness.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is the significance of Jacob’s new name?
2. What is the significance of Jacob saying to Esau, “Have I not seen your face as one might see God’s face?” (Gen. 33:10)
3. What is needed to disrupt the cycle of deception and rivalry?

## **6**

## **Joseph Gen 37-50**

Genesis concludes with the long and complex Joseph story. Employing a series of parallel structures, this penitential narrative—a pinnacle of literary achievement in Genesis—serves as a fitting transition to Exodus.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How is Genesis – and more specifically, the Joseph story – a penitential narrative?
2. In what ways does the story create parallels? How could this poetic effect function within a penitential narrative?
3. How might Judah be considered the hero of the Joseph story?