

GENESIS

**An Explanation
with Notes and Quotes,
Illustrations and Applications**

G. Michael Cocoris

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PREFACE

The purpose of this commentary is to provide a practical explanation of Genesis. The objective is a balanced exposition—explaining the passage in context and applying its truths to life with illustrations. Some commentaries are, by design, of a technical nature, delving into the meanings of words and phrases even outside their use in the book under consideration. Those commentaries tend to ignore the context of the book and its application. Other commentaries go to the other extreme and concentrate on the application, often not fully expounding the passage. Commentaries should do both. They should offer a contextual exposition of the book and apply the truths of that book to life. Adding illustrations facilitates clarity.

First and foremost, this is a contextual exposition. The context is not just the paragraph or the chapter but the whole book. In studying any book of the Bible, the first question that should be asked is: “What is the subject of this book?” Each natural literary unit, whether a paragraph or a narrative, develops a subject. A legitimate exposition will show how the author develops his subject. That, and only that, is contextual Bible study. All details in a book must be explained in light of the message and structure of the entire book. Words only have meaning in a context. A detailed explanation of words and phrases ripped from their sentence and the broader context is not exposition. The flow of the thought of the passage in the context of the book is the message the author intends to convey.

The Bible was written for living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Even the most brilliant explanation that stops short of the applications is an abortion of what God intended. Thus, the practical ramifications of every passage must always be considered.

The procedure of study I use is to first divide the biblical book into its natural literary units (narratives or paragraphs). Then, I analyze each unit. The analysis includes an outline of the development of thought in that unit (major points and sub-points), an explanation of each sentence, and a summary statement. After I have personally analyzed each unit, I read commentaries, deliberately reading commentaries from different theological perspectives. I credit commentators’ comments by putting their names in parenthesis, even if I had seen that point in the text during my study before I read their comments. Thus, each chapter of this material expounds a natural literary unit of the book of Genesis.

In the process of study, I also wrote a tentative title, introduction, and conclusion as if what I was working on was a sermon. If I stumble across an illustration, I include it, but, at this point, I do not search for illustrations. I write all of this for each literary unit in the book before preaching the first sermon in the book. As a result, when I begin speaking through the book, I have the whole book in mind.

As I prepare to preach each literary unit, I may change the tentative title, introduction, and/or conclusion. I rarely change the explanation of the text. It is as I preach each unit that I search for illustrations. Again, having studied the whole book first is helpful here. I sometimes found an illustration I knew would fit better later in the book.

The introduction of each chapter briefly relates that section to life and/or the context. The captions throughout the chapters are divisions of that portion of Scripture and correspond to the main points of a sermon. The italicized headings correspond to the sub-points of a sermon. Rather than footnotes, the author’s name is in parenthesis in the text. While applications are made throughout the exposition, the passage as a whole is summarized and applied at the end.

May the Lord be pleased to use this approach to the Scripture to enlighten, encourage, and edify believers, thus glorifying His Son.

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INTRODUCTION

Genesis has been called “the book of beginnings,” “the book of election” (Ironsides in *Except Ye Repent*, p.19), “the indispensable introduction to the entire Bible” (Unger), “the seed plot of the whole Bible” (Bullinger), “the most important books in the Bible” (Lee), “One of the most interesting and fascinating portions of Scripture. There is no more beautiful and lovable little book” (Melancthon).

The name “Genesis” was taken from the Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation of the Old Testament, made in Alexandria at the order of Ptolemy Philadelphus about 285-247 BC. Josephus says seventy-two priests did the translation in seventy-two days. Supposedly, there were six priests from each of the twelve tribes. The word “Genesis” is derived from a Greek word that means “birth, beginning, origin, descent.” This Hebrew book has a Greek name! Genesis does record the beginning of the earth, man, sin, and Israel.

Author

Nowhere in Genesis does it say Moses wrote it. Bible-believing Christians affirm, however, that Moses was the author. There are several reasons for that.

1. The Pentateuch is a unit (see “and” in Ex. 1:1; the narrative of Exodus is a natural continuation of Genesis (cf. Gen. 50:22 with Ex. 1:7) and the Pentateuch claims Moses is its author (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; 7, 34:27; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 31:9). Therefore if Genesis is part of a unit and if Moses wrote the unit, it is safe to assume that he wrote Genesis.
2. Other Old Testament books testify to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (Josh. 1:7-8; 8:32, 34; 22:5; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 21:8; Ezra 6:18; Dan. 9:11-13; Mal. 4:4).
3. The New Testament confirms the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (Mt. 19:8; Mk. 12:26; Jn. 5:46-47; Rom. 10:15).
4. Tradition supports the Mosaic authorship.

Technically, Moses was the compiler and editor. The structure of Genesis is marked by “these are the generations of.” The use of the word “book” in one of these (Gen. 5:1) indicates these records were written. Thus, the events recorded in Genesis are firsthand testimony and Moses was the compiler and editor, which is not incompatible with the doctrine of inspiration (Kings and Chronicles indicate the use of sources).

The critical theory is that Genesis (and the entire Pentateuch) was composed from a number of documents dating centuries after the time of Moses but containing Mosaic traditions. A man named Wellhausen speculated that an unknown author who called God “Jehovah” wrote some of the material in Genesis. He designated that author as “J.” Other material came from the pen of another unknown author who knew God as “Elohim.” That author was given the code “E.” Wellhausen went on to say that the basic content of Deuteronomy came from still another ghostwriter whom he called “D.” Finally, the material that deals with the priesthood was originally the work of still another author whom Wellhausen called “P.” Thus, the “J-E-D-P theory” was formulated. It is assumed that these authors did not write in the second millennium BC but wrote much later, as late as the fourth century before Christ, or even later.

Archeological discoveries since World War I, however, have found that customs practiced in the second millennium BC were not practiced in the first millennium BC (for example, the price of a slave). How would an author have known of these customs unless he had lived during the earlier period? The critical theory on these and other grounds has been proven false.

Recipients

Who were the original recipients of Genesis? The obvious answer is the Jews, but which generation of Jews first received it? It is not likely that Moses wrote it before the Exodus. Most agree that it was written sometime during the 38 years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness. Leupold suggests that the bulk, if not practically all, of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers were written after the fashion of a journal, especially the parts embodying specific words of direction given by God. Perhaps Moses wrote Genesis on the journey between Egypt and Sinai and when he finished it, he began Exodus and continued writing like keeping a daily journal. If so, the date of the writing of Genesis is about 1446 BC. The Exodus generation no doubt had questions. They probably wanted to know, “Where did we come from? How did we get to Egypt? Why is Moses leading us out of Egypt? Where is he taking us? Why is he taking us there?”

Message

Most say the subject of Genesis is “beginnings” or “origins.” If that is the subject of the book, it does not make sense. Out of 50 chapters, only 10 or 12, at the most, contain information about beginnings. Is not the name of the book Genesis? Does that not mean beginning or origin? Yes, but the name “Genesis” is from the Septuagint, not the book itself. So, what is the subject? The subject is election. Moses told the Jews that God had chosen the patriarchs to give them the land of Canaan. The message is that God, the universe’s Creator, chose the patriarchs and their descendants to give them the land of Palestine and bless the world through them, but they ended up in Egypt.

Structure

The phrase “this is the generations of” occurs eleven times in Genesis. Some say these refer to what has preceded. For example, Genesis 2:4 refers to Genesis 1:1-2:3, but that does not seem to be the case throughout the book. The traditional view says these phrases refer to what follows them, but that too, has its problems. The solution is to understand the meaning of the word “generation.” It comes from a Hebrew word which means “to produce.” In other words, these headings delineate the *historical result of the beginning point*. Ross suggests it could be paraphrased: “This is what came of.” Therefore, Genesis 2:4 starts with the created earth and Genesis 2:4-4:26 records what happened, that is, the development of sin. Likewise, the generation of Terah does not primarily concern him but what became of his line, namely Abraham and his kin. Thus, the structure of Genesis is as follows.

Introduction	1:1-2:3
Generation of Heaven and Earth	2:4-4:26

Generation of Adam	5:1-6:8
Generation of Noah	6:9-9:29
Generation of Sons of Noah	10:1-11:9
Generation of Shem	11:10-26
Generation of Terah	11:27-25:11
Generation of Ishmael	25:12-18
Generation of Isaac	25:19-35:29
Generation of Esau	36:1-36:8
Generation of Esau	36:9-37:1
Generation of Jacob	37:2-50:26

Those sections can be grouped together, resulting in the following outline.

I. God's Election in the Primeval History of Humanity	1:1-11:26
1. The Creation of the Earth	1:1-2:3
2. The Development of Sin	2:4-6:8
3. The Judgment of the Flood	6:9-9:29
4. The Descendants of Noah	10:1-11:26
II. God's Election in the Patriarchal History of Israel	11:27-50:26
1. The Story of Abraham	11:27-25:11
2. The Story of Isaac	25:12-26:35
3. The Story of Jacob	27:1-37:1
4. The Story of Joseph	37:2-50:26

Purpose

Moses wrote Genesis to the exodus generation to remind them that God gave their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a promise. God promised that their descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. Moses also reveals who this God is and how the children of Israel got to Egypt. That explains why so much material is devoted to Abraham and Joseph. There are other purposes and benefits of this book, but the main purpose is to inform Israel about where they came from and where they are going.

Summary: Moses wrote to the exodus generation to tell them that the sovereign Creator elected to give Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants the land of Palestine and bless the world through them, but they ended up in Egypt (Gen.12:1-3).

The book ends with a coffin. Nevertheless, the Jews belong to God and Palestine belongs to the Jews, though they were not in it yet. What was true then is true now.

HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

As a small boy, I looked at the moon, planets, and stars at night and wondered: “How did all of this begin?” “How did the earth come into existence?” “How did humans get here?” These are not “childish” questions. Geniuses have grappled with the question of origins for centuries. Scientists today still speculate about how it all began. Periodically, a spokesman for the American space program will say something like, “with this flight, we shall gain more information and insight into the origin of the universe.”

Those who know the Lord believe the answers are in Genesis 1, but biblical scholars disagree about exactly what Genesis 1 is saying. Some say there is a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. Others counter, “There is a gap in the gap theory.” Some claim the days of Genesis 1 are literal 24-hour days. Others contend the days are long periods of time. Some believe that man evolved and, at the appropriate moment, he was made in God’s image. Others reject evolution and teach direct creation.

How did it all begin? Was there a big bang? Did it happen a long, long time ago or relatively recently? Was man created, or did he evolve? How did all this get started?

Genesis 1:1-2:3 records the creation and formation of the heavens and the earth. This portion of Scripture, which forms the introduction to the book of Genesis and, for that matter, the whole Bible, mainly consists of a description of what happened in seven days. The first day does not begin, however, until verse 3. Therefore, verses 1 and 2 are an introduction. Of the seven days, God only works the first six. So the last day could be called a conclusion. Thus, the seven days of Genesis 1:1-2:3 can be summarized in three parts: 1) introduction (1:1-2), 2) a description of God’s work in six days (1:3-31), and 3) conclusion, the Sabbath of God (2:1-3). This chapter will deal with the introduction and the question of how it all began. Later chapters will deal with the rest of Genesis 1 and the other questions related to origin.

The Introduction: God Created the Universe

The Bible begins with the simple yet sublime statement, “**In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth**” (1:1). The beginning here is not the beginning of all things; it is the beginning of the creation of the cosmos (Constable). The Bible does not offer arguments for the existence of God. It assumes His existence! In English grammar, a word can either be singular or plural, but in Hebrew, a word may be singular, dual, or plural. The Hebrew word for “God” is plural. Most commentators say the plural signifies the majesty of God (Ross). While the Trinity may not be explicitly revealed in the plural, it could be implied. Ryrie says the plural indicates majesty, but it allows “for the NT revelation of the triunity of the Godhead.” The rest of verse 1 sounds simple on the surface, yet there are three interpretations of it, including the next verse.

The Traditional View (original creation alone) The Traditional view is that Genesis 1:1 is a statement and verse 2 consists of three circumstantial clauses describing the conditions of the earth when it was first created. The classic Hebrew grammars concur that verse 2 contains circumstantial clauses and the majority of the commentators, both Jewish and Christian, claim that this view is the correct interpretation of these verses. It is a declaration of fact, that is, the act of God of creating the universe (Keil; Leupold; Ryrie). Constable says it is a “topic sentence that introduces the whole creation account that follows” (see also Bush, Young; Waltke; Ross).

The Gap Theory (original creation and recreation) The gap theory teaches that Genesis 1:1 is an independent coordinate clause describing the original creation. There is a gap between verses 1 and 2. Verse 2 reveals what happened sometime after the original creation of verse 1. According to this view, the word “was” should be translated “became” and “without form and void,” as well as “darkness” are terms of judgment. Elsewhere, the expression “without form” is used in an evil sense. The only two other places in the Bible where the phrase “without form and void” occurs, namely in Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23, are passages that speak of judgment. Therefore, between verses 1 and 2, there was an indeterminate period of time during which Satan fell. Thus, the earth is very old and verses 3-31 describe the recreation of the earth (*The Scofield Reference Bible*; C. S. Lewis; M. R. DeHaan; Barnhouse).

Constable points out that the gap theory is very old. He says some early Jewish writers and church fathers held it. In 1814, Thomas Chalmers promoted it not to harmonize Scripture with science but Scripture with Scripture (Darwin’s *Origin of Species* first appeared in 1859).

An Alternative Explanation (recreation only) An alternative explanation teaches that Genesis 1:1 is not original creation (the traditional view), nor does it describe creation and recreation (the gap theory). It is a record of recreation and nothing more. Some within this school of thought claim Genesis 1:1 is an independent clause, while others contend that it is a dependent temporal clause. They all insist that the grammar of verse 2 will not allow for a gap between verses 1 and 2. Verse 1, therefore, is translated “when God began to create.” In other words, Genesis 1 begins with chaos (1:2) and describes recreation (Waltke). If asked where the chaos came from, they will answer that it is not within the purpose of Genesis to answer that question (Ross). Thus, Genesis 1 says nothing about the original creation; it only describes recreation.

Which of the three interpretations is correct? The gap theory lacks conclusive contextual proof. The Hebrew word translated “was” is used 264 times in the Pentateuch and is translated “was” not “became” 258 of those times. Only six times is this Hebrew word rendered “became” in the writings of Moses. Granted, it *could* be translated either way, but there is nothing in the context of Genesis 1 to *require* that it be translated “became.” No English version has ever translated this Hebrew verb “become.” Furthermore, the clearest way to convey the concept of a change of state in Hebrew would be to follow this verb with the preposition “to,” as is done in the Hebrew of Genesis 2:7 (“and man became a living being”), but that construction does not occur in Genesis 1:2. “Without form and void” simply means formless and empty. “Without form” does not always refer to something evil (see Job 26:7, where it is translated “empty space”). Granted, the context of Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23 is judgment, but even in those passages, the meaning of “empty and uninhabited” fits well. The result of the judgment was the land was empty, but that was good, not evil, because the evil was removed (Lk. 8:35; Mt. 12:4). Nor does “darkness” demand an interpretation of evil. God created darkness (Ps. 104:20). In Genesis 1, the evening involves darkness and it is pronounced “good” (1:31; etc.). Be all of that as it may, there is nothing in the context of Genesis 1 that requires that verse 2 describes judgment. Constable says that although “many evangelicals still hold the gap theory, few Hebrew scholars do because the Hebrew grammar does not favor a chronologically sequential reading of verses 1 and 2.

The alternative explanation is not convincing. While those who hold that position insist that the grammar of the passage requires it, not all Hebrew scholars agree. Most disagree! Besides, somehow, it just doesn’t seem right that Genesis 1 says nothing at all about the original creation.

The traditional view that Genesis 1:1-2 describes the original creation of the material universe, which was first created unformed and uninhabited, is the correct interpretation. The objection that said God did not create the earth “without form” (see Isa. 45:18 where “without form” is rendered

“vain”) is not valid because Isaiah goes on to say that God formed it to be inhabited. Isaiah’s point is that God did not create the earth in vain but that His ultimate intent was that the earth be inhabited with people. The last clause of Isaiah 45:18 shows that this passage is talking about the *purpose* of creation, not the *state* of it. Also, Exodus 20:11 supports the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:1. It says the Lord made the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is in them in six days.

Assuming the traditional view, Genesis 1 begins with the absolute beginning of the created material universe. Heaven and earth, the material universe, have not existed from all eternity but had a beginning. God, not matter, is eternal. Matter was made (Heb. 11:3). Theologians call this *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), a Latin expression that means God did not use any preexisting materials when He created the universe. The universe no more came into being by change than did your car!

Moreover, God did it out of nothing. The distinguished astrophysicist Professor Hannes Alfvén of the Swedish Institute of Technology, Stockholm, once stated that Genesis should start, “In the beginning, there was an original cloud, magnetized and perhaps a light-year (six trillion miles) in diameter.” How could he possibly know that?

Two men, Joe and Charlie, were arguing about Genesis 1:1. Joe said he believed the record of creation was just as it was written. Charlie, an unbeliever, went to great lengths in giving his theory of how the world began and developed from a primordial cell through reptiles, monkeys, and up to humans. When he was all through, Joe looked at him and said, “Were you there, Charlie?” Charlie replied, “Of course, I was not there.” Joe replied, “Well, God was there. He was the only one there and I’ll take the word of the eyewitness.”

Since God created the universe out of nothing, He is absolutely sovereign over all matter; He created it and, therefore, has the right to it, as an author has the copyright over His work.

Description: Originally, it was Unformed and Uninhabited

The “heavens” mentioned in verse 1 are not considered in verse 2; only the earth is discussed. Genesis 1:2 describes the earth when it was originally created.

Without Form and Void “The earth was without form and void” (1:2a). The phrase “without form and void” indicates that originally, the earth was lacking in form and lacking in content. It was unformed and uninhabited. It was a formless, lifeless mass. The earth had to be shaped and peopled before it could be declared “good.” The remainder of the chapter shows how God formed the earth (1:3-13) and inhabited it with living things (1:14-31).

Senator Warner of Virginia, who at one time was married to Elizabeth Taylor, tells of a doctor, an engineer, and a politician discussing which of their professions was the oldest. The doctor said that his was because it would have taken a doctor to remove Adam’s rib and fashion a woman from it. The engineer argued, “An engineer was required to make order out of chaos.” The politician said, “But it took a politician to create the chaos.”

Darkness “and darkness was on the face of the deep” (1:2b). The Hebrew word translated “deep” means “to roar, to rage” and here denotes raging waters, as is apparent from the next clause where the word “waters” is substituted for it. The material mass called the earth was covered with surging water and wrapped in darkness.

The Spirit of God “and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (1:2c). The Spirit of God is not the wind of God nor the power of God; He is the Holy Spirit. As Constable points out, in the Old Testament, the Spirit is identified as God (2 Kings 2:9; Ps. 104:30; Ezek. 3:12-14; 11:1; Zech. 4:6; Ross; Morris). The Holy Spirit was “hovering” over the water-covered

planet. The Hebrew word rendered “hovering” means “to flutter, fly.” It is used in Deuteronomy 32:11 of an eagle fluttering over its young. In a similar fashion, the earth was under the care of the Spirit of God, who was posed for its future development.

God created the earth like a potter fashions a vase. The potter begins by placing a lump of clay on his wheel to mold it as he will. Likewise, God created a lump of raw material of the earth with a view to giving it shape. At first, it was unformed and uninhabited. At this point, the earth was like a block of marble waiting for the sculptor’s creative touch.

Summary: God created the material universe, but originally, the earth was unformed and uninhabited.

In light of the overall purpose of Genesis, the point of this passage is that the Creator of the universe is the God who made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Either the universe just happened, or God created it. Some, of course, insist that it all just happened. The other possible answer is that God created the heavens and the earth, which is the view of Genesis 1. God chose to create and God alone created. That means He created everything and everything belongs to Him. He is sovereign. As the psalmist says, “The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it, upon the seas, and established it upon the waters” (Ps. 24:1-2).

If that is true, it eliminates a number of other theories.

1. Atheism because God does exist.
2. Pantheism because God is distinct from creation.
3. Polytheism because one God created the universe.
4. Materialism (matter is eternal) because matter was created.
5. Dualism because God alone created everything.
6. Humanism because God, not man, is the ultimate reality.
7. Fatalism because of personal God created the world.

If this is true and we believe it, it is easy to believe everything else in the Bible. The first four words of the Bible “form the foundation for faith. Believe these words, and you can believe all that follows in the Bible” (MacDonald). If God is powerful enough to create the world, He could part the Red Sea, create a fish big enough for Jonah to live in for three days and nights, and make a virgin pregnant. If it is true, all humans are accountable to Him.

And it is true! “Dr. A. Cressy Morrison, former president of the New York Academy of Sciences, said it is possible to demonstrate that the universe could not have just happened. Design demands a ‘Master Mind.’ The earth rotates on its axis at 1,000 miles per hour. If it rotated at only 100 miles per hour, our days and nights would be ten times as long as they are now, and the earth would alternatively burn and freeze. Under such circumstances, vegetation could not live. The sun has a surface temperature of 12,000 degrees Fahrenheit and the earth is at the exact distance necessary to get just enough heat and yet not too much. The earth is tilted 23 degrees. If it were not tilted at this angle, vapors from the ocean would move north and south, piling up continents of ice. If the moon were not at the exact distance it is from the earth, the ocean tides would inundate the landmass completely twice a day. If the ocean were just a few feet deeper than it is, the carbon dioxide and oxygen in the earth’s atmosphere would be completely absorbed and no vegetable life could exist on earth. If the earth’s atmosphere were just a little thinner, many of the meteors that

are now burned out in space would bombard us, setting great fires everywhere. Did this delicate balance just happen? Not a chance in ten million!” (*Our Daily Bread*, November 8, 1958).

Sir Isaac Newton had a model of the solar system. At its center was a large gold ball representing the sun. Revolving around it were smaller spheres attached at the ends of rods of varying lengths. These smaller balls represented the other planets. The model was constructed in such a way that the planets moved around the “sun” in perfect harmony. Newton had a friend who did not believe in the biblical account of creation. One day, as he was marveling at the model, the friend asked, “My, Newton, What an exquisite thing! Who made it for you?” Without looking up, Sir Isaac replied, “Nobody.”

“Nobody?” his friend asked. “That’s right! I said nobody. All of these balls and cogs and belts and gears just happened to come together and, wonder of wonder, by chance, they began revolving in their set orbits with perfect timing.” Newton was a deeply spiritual man as well as a scientist. He knew both from scientific reasoning and Scriptural revelation that the universe could no more just happen than a model could just appear.

DID GOD CREATE IN SIX LITERAL DAYS?

In science classes, students are taught that the earth is billions of years old and that mankind is millions of years old. The Bible says God created both in six days. The most natural question any Bible reader would ask is, “Are the days of Genesis 1 literal, 24-hour days?” What does the word “day” mean in Genesis 1? There are three basic answers to that question. The traditional view teaches that the days of Genesis 1 are literal, 24-hour days. The “day-age” theory argues that the Hebrew word translated “day” can mean a long period of time (2:4). Therefore, the days of Genesis 1 are successive epochs, geological ages. The “revelatory day” view contends that God revealed His creative process in six days. In other words, God did not create in six days; He *revealed* the creation in six days. Which interpretation of the days of Genesis 1 is correct?

An explanation of Genesis 1 using the principles of interpretation, as in any passage of Scripture, will indicate what Moses meant when he used the word “day.” The conclusion of such a study should be compared to the conclusions of science. The two are either comparable or contradictory. If they are contradictory, one must choose which one to believe.

Genesis 1:3-31 records God’s work of forming and filling the earth in six days. The expression “without form and void” (1:2) gives the key to these six days. After the creation of the heavens and earth, the earth was “without form.” So, in the first three days, God formed it. The earth was “void” (empty). So, in the next three days, God filled it. Hence, there are two sets of three days, one describing how God formed the earth and the other detailing how He filled it. There is a parallel between the two sets of three days.

First Three Days	Last Three Days
Light	Sun and Moon
Sky	Fish and Fowl
Land and Plants	Animals and Man

There is also a pattern within each day. Each day begins with a command followed by a comment (or commands) and a conclusion. This chapter will explain the first three days. The next chapter will expound the last four days.

The First Day

The Command “Then God said ‘Let there be light’ and there was light” (1:3). The light created on the first day was the *element* of light in distinction from *light-bearing* bodies (“lights”) such as the sun, moon, and stars, which were created on the fourth day (1:14-19). Light can exist apart from the stars and our sun. Lightning is an illustration. God also separated the light from the darkness. That does not mean that they were entangled and He untangled them. Instead, at a point in time, God caused light to shine and later let darkness dominate (see “evening and morning” in 1:5; Job 38:19-20).

The Comment “And God saw the light that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light day and the darkness He called night. (1:4-5a). The light was good in that it was adequate for its purpose; it was useful. In the ancient Near East, the act of naming

was an act of “sovereign dominion” (Ross). In this verse, the word “day” is used for the twelve hours of light (see also 14, 16, 18).

The Conclusion “So the evening and the morning were the first day” (1:5b). Does the word “day” in this verse mean 24 hours, or does it mean a long period of time? The word “day” in this verse seems to be a 24-hour day, but later in this passage, the word “day” is used for a period longer than 24 hours (2:4).

The Second Day

The Command “Then God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters” (1:6). The Hebrew word translated “firmament” means “firmament, expanse.” The earth was covered with water (1:2). Apparently, there was a cloud cover, a dense fog, covering the whole earth. The atmosphere consisted of water! There was little light shining through the atmosphere to the surface of the earth. By a spoken word, God created the firmament, that is, an expanse between the waters above and the waters below.

The Comment “Thus, God made the firmament and divided the waters, which were under the firmament from the waters, which were above the firmament and it was so, and God called the firmament Heaven” (1:7-8a). In other words, the firmament of Genesis 1:6-8 is the sky. Pagan mythology considered the heavens to be the dominion of the high gods. Moses records that God created the heavens and named them, thus demonstrating His dominion, His sovereignty over them. This is not called “good” because God’s work with the water is not yet complete.

The Conclusion “So the evening and the morning were the second day” (1:8b). As on the first day, the second day began with evening instead of the morning, which seems to suggest a 24-hour day. The word “day” is definitely used for a 24-hour day in verse 14, where “day” is in contrast to year.

The Third Day

The First Command “Then God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear’ and it was so” (1:9). The command of the third day is twofold. The first command on the third day involved the separation of the land and the water. On the second day, the surface fog had risen, making clouds with a sky between them. The surface of the earth was still covered with water. Thus, on the third day, God formed the continents. He gathered the “waters under the heavens,” that is, the waters on the surface of the earth were gathered together so that dry land could be formed. Genesis does not indicate whether the dry land was formed by a depression in the deep so that the waters were drawn off by rushing down into them or by elevation of land forming rifts and dry land. Psalm 104:7-9 implies the latter (see the marginal reading of the NKJV).

The Comment “And God called the dry land Earth and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good” (1:10). Most say “seas” include the oceans, rivers, and lakes. He also pronounced the formation of landmasses “good,” that is, good for what He wanted to accomplish, namely, to create a place for man.

The Second Command “Then God said Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself on the earth and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the

tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good” (1:11-12). Three words are used to describe the plant life that appeared on the land: grass, herbs, and trees. Some interpret these as three different kinds of plant life (Keil; Leupold), while others argue that grass, that is, vegetation is a general term and herbs and trees are sub-divisions (see 1:29-30 where there are only two kinds: plants and trees; Cassuto; Ross). Assuming the threefold division, grass was designed to “carpet the earth” (Leupold). Herb includes everything between grass and trees and trees include shade trees as well as fruit trees. All were self-perpetuating according to their kind.

The Conclusion “So the evening and the morning were the third day” (1:13). The conclusion is that the evening and the morning were of the third day, which again seems to be saying this was a 24-hour day.

On the third day, God formed the landmasses and put plant life on them. He set the boundaries of the sea (Ps. 104:9), demonstrating His sovereignty. The Canaanites worshipped Prince Yam, the ocean god. The creator of heaven and earth and sea is sovereign over the sea and, thus, superior to any pagan god.

Morris makes the interesting observation that although it is not mentioned in Genesis 1, angels were probably created sometime prior to the third day of creation since they were present when ‘the foundations of the earth’ were laid (Job 38:4-7), which is probably a reference to the establishment of land services on earth. He argues, “It is impossible that they could exist before the creation of the physical universe itself since their spirit of operation is in this universe and their every purpose is to minister to the ‘heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). Angels are called the ‘host of heaven,’ so they could not have been created before the existence of heaven.”

Summary: Although the word “day” is used in several different ways in Genesis 1:5 and in Genesis 2:4, taking Genesis 1 at face value indicates that the creation took place in literal 24-hour days. By His powerful Word, He transformed the chaos into a creation that He called “very good.”

Taking Genesis 1 at face value indicates that the creation took place in literal 24-hour days, but is that the correct explanation? Remember, the word “day” is used in different ways in the creation narrative. It is used as a 12-hour period of daylight (1:5, 14, 16, 18), as a 24-hour day (1:14), and as the entire seven-day period of creation (2:4). How long are the creation days in Genesis? There are three basic views.

1. The literal, 24-hour view. This is the traditional view. Constable notes, “The normal conclusion one would most likely draw from the terminology in the text (e.g., evening, morning, day, night, etc.) is that God created the world in six 24-hour days. This view is most consistent with the principles of literal, historical, and grammatical interpretation.... The main problem with this view is that the activity of some days (e.g., the sixth) seems to some to require more than 24 hours.”

2. The day-age theory. Constable says, “Advocates argue that the events recorded seem to require more than 24-hour days (e.g., v. 12). They also point out that solar days may not have begun until the fourth day.... The main problem with the day-age theory is that it interprets terms that seem to have obvious literal meaning figuratively.”

The literal days with intervening ages interpretation regards each day as a time of completion of creative activity only. It is an attempt to take the “morning and evening” references seriously but still allows the time that seems necessary within the days (e.g., v. 12). It is a combination of the two preceding views. However, it strains the text. Also, Moses could have described this

method of creating more clearly than he did if long ages had been interspersed over the six days. Few scholars have adopted this view.

3. The revelatory day interpretation. The argument used to support this interpretation is that the passage is literary, not literal. A major problem with this view is Moses says God made, not revealed, His creation in six days (Ex. 20:11).

An exposition of Genesis 1 using the principles of interpretation as in any other passage of Scripture indicates that the days are literal 24-hour days.

1. The normal meaning of the Hebrew word translated day is a 24-hour period (Ross). Skinner says, "The interpretation of *yom* (the Hebrew word for "day") as aeon, a favorite resource of harmonist, is opposed to the plain sense of the passage and has no warrant in Hebrew usage." Morris says, "The only proper way to interpret Genesis 1 is not to 'interpret' it at all. That is, we accept the fact that it was meant to say exactly what it says."

2. Granted, the word "day" in some passages may mean a period longer than 24 hours (see comment on 2:4), but in the Old Testament, everywhere "day" is used *with a number*, it means a 24-hour period of time (Ross).

3. The expression "evening and morning" indicates a 24-hour day. "Evening and morning cannot be construed to mean an age, but only a day" (Ryrie). "If the days of creation are regulated by the recurring interchange of light and darkness, they must be regarded not as periods of time of incalculable duration, of years or thousands of years, but as simple earthly days" (Keil).

4. "Day" in verse 14 is a 24-hour day because it is listed with "seasons" and "years."

5. The Ten Commandments base the teaching of the Sabbath on six days of creation and the seventh day of rest (Ex. 20:8-14; Ross). The *Lord*, not Moses, said, "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day" (Ex. 20:11). That comment certainly means God created in six literal days (see Frederic Howe, "The Age of the Earth: An Appraisal of Some Current Evangelical Positions, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):121; both parts 1 and 2 are very helpful).

How could there be a 24-hour "day" if the sun was not created until the fourth day (1:14-19)? There could be a 24-hour day without the sun because a 24-hour day is determined by one complete rotation of the earth on its axes, not the shining of the sun.

Thus, on the first day, God created light by His spoken word, separated it from darkness, and pronounced it good. A Rabbi said, "It is like the case of a king who wishes to build a palace, but the site is in darkness. To put things in order in a disarranged and dark room, the first thing to do is turn on the lights."

Some say that Genesis 1 is literary, not literal. They argue that the parallelism of the first three days with the second set of three days demonstrates a literary arrangement not intended to be interpreted literally. There is no doubt a literary arrangement in the six days of Genesis 1, as the chart at the beginning of the chapter demonstrates. On the first three days, God created light (day 1), liquid (day 2), and land (day 3). Then, on the following three days, He filled the universe with the sun (thus, day 4 corresponds to day 1), fish (thus, day 5 parallels day 2), and beasts and man (thus, day 6 correlates with day 3).

Does that literary arrangement mean that Genesis 1 is not literal? The answer is "No." Genesis 1 is literary and literal. If the parallelism were only literary, it would be perfect, but it is not. Fowl, as well as fish, were created on the fifth day, which corresponds to the second day on which the seas were formed. Genesis 1 is not poetry. Psalm 104 is the poetry of creation. The rest of Scripture views Genesis 1 as literal (2 Cor. 4:6; 2 Peter 3:5; Acts 4:24).

If the days of Genesis 1 are literal, could they not be revelatory days and not days of creation? The answer is there is nothing in Genesis 1 to suggest that these were revelatory days. Everything in Genesis 1 indicates these were days on which God did His creative work. Genesis 1 does not say God “showed” His work. It says God “made” the various parts of creation. When the author of Genesis wanted to say that God *revealed* something, he did it in plain language. For example, Genesis 15:1 states, “After these things, the Word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision.” There is no such statement, or even a hint of such, in Genesis 1.

Are science and the Scripture contradictory or complementary? The answer to that question depends on the meaning of the word science. The current standard scientific “theory” is that the earth is billions of years old and man evolved over millions of years. That view of science is clearly contradictory to Genesis 1. However, there are scientists who believe that while the *theories* of scientists contradict Genesis 1, the *facts* of science are compatible with Genesis 1 (Henry Morris; etc.). Thus, scientific *theory* contradicts Genesis 1, but scientific *facts* are compatible with Genesis.

For example, “science” argues that it has taken billions of years for light to get here from distant stars. Therefore, the universe is billions of years old, but that “theory” assumes light began at the star and traveled here. The Scripture, however, simply says God said, “Let there be light.” He did not say, “Let light begin from the star and travel to the earth at its own speed.” According to Genesis 1, light was created before the stars!

In other words, God created the universe with “apparent age.” That is certainly the case with man. Adam was not created a baby or a boy but as a full-grown adult with “apparent age.” The same seems to be true of the Garden of Eden. Did God plant seeds or make trees? The wine Jesus created in a moment from water appeared to be something that takes time to form, but it was created in a moment with apparent age.

One other observation. God created by His Word. Repeatedly, Genesis 1 says God spoke and it was so. The means of creation was the Word of God. The psalmist exclaimed, “By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth ... He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:6, 9). If God created and formed the world by His Word, His Word is powerful and His Word is creative. Furthermore, He doesn’t need long periods of time to do His work. The ultimate issue is, “Will you believe some scientists and their theories or will you believe God and His Word?”

Personally, I choose to believe God’s account of creation rather than the current scientific theories of the day. The truth of the matter is neither the scientists nor I was there when it happened (Job 38:4-7). By the nature of the case, both scientists and Christians must take their view of the formation of the world by faith. The writer to the Hebrews says, “By faith, we understand the worlds were formed by the Word of God so that the things which were seen were not made of the things which are visible” (Heb. 11:3).

Suppose a boy saw his father put his golf clubs in the car and drive away. Later, his sister asked, “Where is father?” The boy replied, “He went to play golf, but the mother, overhearing the conversation, said, “No, he did not. He went to the office.” The “fact” was the boy saw his father put the golf clubs in the car. The “theory” was he went to play golf. If I were the sister, I would believe the word of mother rather than the theory of brother.

There are great spiritual lessons from the opening verse of Genesis. First, a sovereign God created the universe. This Creator is “absolutely sovereign over all life and all pagan ideas that would contend for our allegiance” (Constable).

Second, God created light to shine in the darkness. The New Testament uses light shining in darkness as an illustration of conversion. Before people trust Christ, they are in spiritual darkness

(Eph. 5:8). Jesus Christ, the light of the world, shines in their darkness (Jn. 1:4-5). Paul says that when God makes people new creatures, He lets the light of the gospel shine on their dark minds (2 Cor. 4:5). He also wrote that we who have seen the light of who Jesus Christ is and what He did have been “delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13). We say, “I saw the light.”

Third, God formed the unformed earth into an inhabitable plant. Constable says, “The main point of the story of creation (1:1-2:3) is that God turned chaos into an orderly, blessed, good creation by His word. The original Israelite readers of Genesis would have found encouragement in this revelation to trust God. They would have hoped in Him to transform their national life from chaos in a pagan chaotic environment (Egypt) to order and blessing in an environment He would create for them (Canaan). God’s superiority over forces their pagan neighbors worshipped out of fear (gods of the darkness, the sun, moon, planets, stars, the watery deep, etc.) would have strengthened their faith (Finegan). Their God had also created them as a nation so that they could look forward to the future with confidence” (Constable).

Fourth, God created all of this by His Word. We should accept what God did by His Word and what He said in His Word by faith. If we learn these lessons in the opening pages of the Bible, they will serve us well as we read the rest of the Bible.

Pointing to Genesis 11, M. R. DeHaan wrote, “There it is! Take it or leave it! In the beginning, God created. You need read no further until you have decided whether you believe this opening verse of Scripture or not. All the rest of the Bible is settled by your acceptance or rejection of the first verse. Here, infidelity begins—here, faith comes to rest. If you do not believe the first verse of Scripture, then you can believe nothing else it teaches, for if it begins with a lie, you cannot accept anything else. If you believe Genesis 1:1, you can believe anything else in the Book. If you believe that God created from eternity before time began, nothing is impossible.

“There was a time when there was no time. Then God proposed to create the universe, but there was NOTHING to begin with but HIMSELF. So God began with nothing; when the moment to create comes, He merely speaks the word, reaches down the hand of His omnipotence into the abyss of emptiness, picks up a handful of nothing, and throws it out into nowhere; nothing becomes SOMETHING as far as His fingers streamed the myriad sparkling stars and the dazzling suns. He sprinkles the ceiling with the dust of planets, constellations, systems, and galaxies and sends them dancing on their way, singing the music of the spheres.

“If I can believe that—(“in the beginning God created”), I can believe all else in the Bible, including the fact that the creator God was Jesus Christ the living word (John 1:14). So, too, I can believe every promise in the Book, for my faith comes to rest at Genesis 1:1. If you do not accept the opening verse of the Bible, seek no further. You MUST begin at the BEGINNING!”

DID HUMANS EVOLVE?

Virtually everyone assumes that man evolved. Furthermore, evolution has not only permeated the public education system from kindergarten to post-graduate school, but it also has saturated society. Some time ago, Dr. Rene Dubos wrote in the *American Scientist*, “Most enlightened persons now accept as a fact that everything in the cosmos—from heavenly bodies to human beings—has developed and continues to develop through evolutionary processes. The great religions of the west have come to accept the historical view of creation. Evolutionary concepts are applied also to social institutions and to the arts. Indeed, most political parties as well as schools of theology, sociology, history, or art, teach these concepts and make them the basis of their doctrines. Thus, theoretical biology now pervades all of western culture indirectly to the concept of progressive, historical change” (*American Scientist*, vol. 3, p. 6, March 1965; see also *Bib. Sac.* No. 487, p. 254).

Evolution is the theory that all life developed from a single, simple cell through natural, uniform processes over millions of years. Atheistic evolution teaches that the evolutionary process was by chance. Theistic evolution preaches God guided the process. Did man evolve? Does the story of man’s origin, as recorded in the book of Genesis, teach evolution? Does it support theistic evolution? To answer the question about theistic evolution, Genesis needs to be interpreted like any other passage of Scripture. Then, and only then, should the conclusions be compared to the theory of evolution.

God began by creating the heavens and the earth (1:1). As the universe fell from His lips, it was “without form and void” (1:2). Then, He formed the formless earth in three days (1:3-13). Now, He fills the empty earth in three more days and rests on the seventh (1:14-2:3).

The Fourth Day

The Command “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament in the heavens and divide the day from the night’ “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth;’ and it was so” (1:14b-15). The command of the fourth day created the luminaries—the sun, the moon, and the stars (Ross). This passage poses several problems. The first problem is “God created light on day one and now He says let there be light.” The answer is that God created “light” (singular) on the first day (1:3) and “lights” (plural) on the fourth day (1:14). Light was in existence before day four. On day four, heavenly bodies (sun, moon, and stars) became the lights, that is, light-bearers (Keil), luminaries (Ross), “light-givers” (MacDonald; Morris).

The second problem is that “God created the heavens (1:1), apparently including the sun, the moon, the stars, and the earth, and now He is said to have created the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day. Some say these heavenly bodies only “appeared” on the fourth day, having been created earlier (Ross; JFB). This is phenomenological language (of appearance) that is common in the Old Testament” (Constable, who adds, “Even modern scientific textbooks use such language without fear of being criticized as unscientific when they refer to sunrise, sunset, etc.”).

If appearance is meant, why was the word “appear” not used as it is in verse 9? Yet, it is also possible and probable that these heavenly bodies were created originally before day one. In other

words, verse 1 describes the original creation of the heavens, including the sun, moon, stars, and the earth, but both were created “in the rough.” As the deficiencies or incompleteness of the earth were removed in six days after the original creation, so were the limitations of the sun, moon, and stars.

Keil says verse 14 is not saying that God “created all the heavenly bodies out of nothing, and in a perfect condition; on the contrary, we are told that in the beginning, God created the *heaven* and the earth, and on the fourth day that He made the sun, the moon, and the stars (planets, comets, and fixed stars) in the firmament, to be lights for the earth. According to these distinct words, the primary material, not only of the earth but also of the heaven and the heavenly bodies, was created in the beginning. If, therefore, the heavenly bodies were first made or created on the fourth day, as lights for the earth, in the firmament of heaven, the words can have no other meaning than that their creation was completed on the fourth day, just as the creative formation of our globe was finished on the third; that the creation of the heavenly bodies, therefore, proceeded side by side, and probably by similar stages, with that of the earth, so that the heaven with its stars was completed on the fourth day” (Keil, italics his).

Genesis gives the purposes of the sun, moon, and stars. Some commentators separate signs and seasons, giving a fourfold purpose (Luther, Calvin, Delitzsch; Constable) and others combine signs and seasons (Ross: “seasonal signs” in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, hereafter BKC), producing a three-fold purpose.

1. The sun, moon, and stars are given “to divided day and night” (1:14, 18a). God had already created light (1:3) and called the light day and the darkness night (1:5). This is the fourth day consisting of evening and morning. Therefore, the division of day from night by the sun and moon must mean that from the fourth day forward, the difference between day and night, which had already existed since the creation of light on day one, would be regulated by the sun and the moon.

2. The sun, moon, and stars are given “for signs” (1:14). The sun and moon serve as signposts to the very existence of a creator God (Ps. 8, 19). They are signs for navigation and they are signs for divine judgment (Joel 2:30; Mt. 24:29).

3. The sun and moon are given for “seasons,” more specifically, “days and years” (1:14). The shortest (“days”) and longest (“years”) measurements of time are determined by the movement of the heavenly bodies. The day is one rotation of the earth on its axis, which takes twenty-four hours. A year is one complete circle of the earth around the sun, which takes 365 days.

4. The sun, moon, and stars distribute light (1:15). The “lights,” called the sun and moon, are to give light (1:15, 17). The sun is to rule the day and the moon the night (1:18). God said they were great (1:16), that is, in comparison to the stars as they appear from the earth. God also said they were good (1:18), that is, perfect for their purpose.

“The narrative stresses their function as servants, subordinate to the interests of the earth.... This differs significantly from the superstitious belief within pagan religion that the earth’s destiny is dictated by the course of the stars” (Mathews, cited by Constable).

“Then God made two great lights: the lesser to rule the night. He made the stars also. And God saw that it was good” (1:16). The Hebrew word translated “rule” means “rule, dominion.” This verse emphasizes that God made the sun and the moon, which the pagans worshipped as gods (Constable).

The Comment “God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth and to rule over the day and over the night and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.” (1:17-18). These purposes are stated in more detail than any other creative activity in Genesis 1.

The Conclusion “So the evening and the morning were the fourth day” (1:19). Perhaps more detail is given to the creative work of this day because the pagans of Moses’ day worshiped the sun, moon, and stars. They thought of the heavenly bodies as objects of worship and forces of destiny (Ross). Egyptians worshipped the sun god and the Babylonians created astrology. Modern astrologers appeal to verse 14 for support of their claim that the celestial bodies were intended to influence the destiny of man. The heavenly bodies were not given to be astrological signs. Genesis 1 describes the purposes of these heavenly bodies, and that is not one of them. Because God created these “lights,” the worship of the sun, moon, and stars is not only idolatrous; it is ridiculous.

God created the heavenly bodies to testify of His glory. Unfortunately, people often reject the Creator and worship the creation (Rom. 1:20-25). The ancients said the heavenly bodies are gods. Today, we go to the other extreme. We say there is no god, only the sun and stars.

The placement of the sun, moon, and stars makes life on earth possible. This was not done by chance; it was done by a Creator. Those who know more about science than I do explain in great detail what would happen if the earth were closer to the sun or the earth were further from the sun. Without going into all of the scientific details, if the earth were closer to the sun, the glaciers would melt, raising the sea level and flooding most cities. If the earth were further from the sun, it would be covered with ice (see the article by Stuart E. Nevins, “Planet Earth: Plan or Accident?” <http://www.icr.org/article/planet-earth-plan-or-accident/> and the article about clearing out stray asteroids http://www.answers.com/Q/What_are_two_factors_that_make_earth_suitable_for_life). As is commonly known, the moon affects the tides.

The Fifth Day

The Command “Then God said, ‘Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens’” (1:20). The fifth day parallels the second in that the sky (and some say the sea) were formed on the second day and the inhabitants of the sky and sea were created on day five. The Hebrew text of verse 20 literally translated reads, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of souls.” The term “swarms” includes all creatures of the sea, both small and great. Further, the expression “swarm with swarms” seems to indicate that these creatures were not only created in a wide variety of species but also in large numbers. God created one man and from him came all others, giving unity to the human race. Apparently, that was not so with the sea life.

This is the first time life in living soul form appears. A soul creature is one that breathes, that is, has life. From a biblical point of view, plants do not have life (Ross), at least soul life; they do not breathe like people, animals, fish, and fowl. On this day, God not only created the fish of the sea, He created all species of birds of the air.

“So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind” (1:21a). Every living thing that moves in the sea or sky was created on the fifth day, but the “great sea creatures” are singled out for special attention. The root of the Hebrew word rendered, “great sea creatures,” indicates creatures of some length, including whales, snakes, crocodiles, etc. In Moses’ day, the people of the Middle East, especially the inhabitants of Canaan, worshiped the great sea creatures as dragons. The pagans may vindicate them as gods, but Israel knew they were just another creature created by the almighty, sovereign Creator (Ross). All the creatures of the sea and sky produced “according to their kind.” This phrase, which was used before (1:12), indicates that there was “no transmutation of species” (Leupold).

The Comment “And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth’ (1:21b-22). The blessing was “purely one of fertility and increase” (Cassuto). God is the source of light and fertility, not some pagan ritual. “The blessing of God is one of the great unifying themes of Genesis. God blesses animals (1:22), mankind (1:28), the Sabbath (2:3), Adam (5:2), Noah (9:1), and frequently the patriarchs (12:2-3; 17:16, 20; etc.). God’s blessing is most obviously visible in the gift of children, as this is often coupled with ‘being fruitful and multiplying.’ But all aspects of life can express this blessing: crops, family, and nation (Deut. 28:1-14). Where modern man talks of success, OT man talked of blessing” (Wenham, cited by Constable). “According to the account of creation in Gen 1, the chief purpose of God in creating man is to bless him. The impact of this point on the remainder of the Pentateuch and the author’s view of Sinai is clear: through Abraham, Israel and the covenant, this blessing is to be restored to all mankind” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

The Conclusion “So the evening and the morning were the fifth day” (1:23). On the fifth day, an entirely new type of being came into existence, namely animated creatures that breathe. Unlike plants, they have mobility. Of their own volition, they have the ability to go from place to place.

The mandate to “fill the earth” (1:22) has never been rescinded. The fears of a population explosion that might endanger present life on the planet are overdrawn. Evidently, the earth is well able to support a large population (9:1). Studies in animal life indicate that when a given kind grows in number, the optimum figure for its own ecological niche, the population tends to stabilize, not because of the struggle for existence but because of built-in, psychological and physiological mechanisms. The reproductive activity of that group slows down. Thus, there is no fear that overpopulation might endanger present life on the planet.

The Sixth Day

The Commands “Then God said ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creatures according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind,’ and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that *it was good*” (1:24-25). The sixth day parallels the third in that land and plants were formed on day two and the inhabitants of the land were created on day six. On the sixth day, God first created animals. The Hebrew word translated “creatures” means “soul, self, life, creature, person, living being.” The “Hebrew word and the English ‘soul’ imply conscious life, in contrast to plants that have unconscious life. So in the sense of having conscious life, animals, as well as people, have souls” (Constable).

Three kinds are listed: cattle, creeping things, and beasts of the earth. While the Hebrew word rendered cattle is sometimes used for all animals, here it seems to be used for domesticated animals (Morris; Constable) because it is contrasted with wild beasts. Creeping things are creatures, large or small, that creep on the ground, such as reptiles, insects, and worms (Morris). The beast of the earth refers to wild animals that freely move around the earth (Constable), including lions, elephants, and probably extinct reptiles known as dinosaurs (Morris). Genesis 1:24 is the plan to create animals and verse 25 is the execution of the plan. In this case, God spoke before He acted.

What about dinosaurs? “Before the Flood, dinosaurs and man lived together on our planet. Extinction of the great marine reptiles, along with the majority of all other types of sea creature,

would have been caused by the violent upheavals of the Flood, many being buried and preserved as fossils” (Ham, cited by Constable).

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (1:26-27). The climax and crown of God’s creation was man (Ross). “Man” is mankind (“them”), not Adam individually” (Morris; Constable). “Adam was not androgynous (i.e., two individuals joined physically like Siamese twins) or bisexual (i.e., one individual possessing both male and female sexual organs). There is no basis for these bizarre ideas in the text. God formed Eve from Adam’s rib, not from half of his body or from his genitals” (Constable).

The pattern for the creation of man was God Himself. Man was created in the very image of God, not only by His plan but also according to the pattern of His person. The Hebrew word translated, “image” means “image, likeness, resemblance” and the one rendered “likeness” means “likeness or similitude.” There is not a great deal of difference between the two words. They do not refer to two different things; rather, they are used synonymously and interchangeably (Berkhof, p. 203). The second word further explains and intensifies the first (Ross; Leupold says it supplements or explains the first word).

Precisely what does this mean? More specifically, what is the meaning of “us” and what is the meaning of “image”? The plural “us” has been explained in a number of different ways (see Constable). One view is that God took counsel with the angels (Keil says some modern commentators; Kidner says Delitzsch and von Rad), but that is in conflict with the facts that 1) God alone created the world, including man, and 2) man is not created according to the image of angels. If the “us” does not refer to angels (Keil; Morris), the only other possibility is that it relates somehow to God, but how? A common explanation of that is the plural of majesty (Constable), that is, God is speaking of Himself and with Himself in reference to the fullness of diverse powers and essences He possesses. One Jewish commentator says it is the plural of exhortation. God is exhorting Himself (Cassuto).

If this is a reference to God (and it must be), the most satisfying interpretation is that this is a reference to the Trinity. That is not to say that the truth of the Trinity is here explicitly and fully revealed, but the truth of the Trinity best explains the passage. As Luther said, “Therefore what is first presented more or less dark, difficult, and obscure, Christ has all made manifest and clearly commanded to preach” (Luther, cited by Leupold). The truth of the Trinity is not expressly revealed here, but it does allow for the doctrine’s development through the process of progressive revelation (Ross).

The root of the Hebrew word for image means “to cut out.” The piece “cut out” is like a large piece. A piece of a rock is like a large whole. Humans are “a chip off the old block.” Theodor Mopsuestenus offers this vivid illustration: “When God created man, his last and best work, this was as if a king, having built a great city, and adorned it with many and various works, after he had perfected all, should command a very great and beautiful image of himself to be set up in the midst of the city, to show who was the builder of it (Mopsuestenus, cited by Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, p. 182).

The concept of being created in God’s image has also been explained in a variety of ways. The likeness of God does not include man’s bodily form since God has no bodily form (for a detailed discussion, see Waltke, cited by Constable). According to the New Testament, the new man created in Christ is created according to God “in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24) and

in the knowledge of God (Col. 3:10). The image of God in man is man's capacity to know God and be righteous and holy. Adam was not like the animals; he was like God; he was a spiritual being with spiritual capacities (Ross).

That does not explain all that is involved in the image of God in man. After the fall, man retained the image of God, at least to some degree (Gen. 9:6; 2 Cor. 11:7), but after the fall, man no longer had the capacity for fellowship with God (1 Cor. 2:14). Therefore, the image of God in man involves something else, like personhood. God is a person, a being with mind, emotions, and will. Man created in His likeness has intellectual power, natural affection, and moral freedom. It includes "moral consciousness, the ability to think abstractly, an understanding of beauty and emotion, and, above all, the capacity for worshiping and loving God" (Morris). Adam named all the animals (Gen. 2:19-20). He could think, reason, speak, act, and no doubt feel. Man did not lose these capacities after the fall.

Two New Testament passages support this view. Colossians 3:10 says after regeneration, the new man is created with knowledge after the image of God who created him. This verse seems to say that at least part of the image of God is the ability to know. Ephesians 4:24 says that, after regeneration, the new man is created after God in righteousness and true holiness. The capacity for righteousness and holiness implies the ability to love God, understand His Word, and obey His commands. Therefore, perhaps it could be inferred that, originally, the image included the capacity to feel, think, and choose, including the ability to make moral choices.

"What is the image of God in man? The traditional view is that God's image is certain moral, ethical, and intellectual abilities. A more recent view, based on Hebrew grammar and the knowledge of the ancient Middle East, interprets the phrase as meaning 'Let us make man *as* our image' (the Hebrew preposition in this phrase can be translated *as*). In ancient times, an emperor might command statues of himself to be placed in remote parts of his empire. These symbols would declare that these areas were under his power and reign. So God placed humankind as living symbols of Himself on earth to represent His reign. This interpretation fits well with the command that follows—to reign over all that God has made" (*NKJV Study Bible*).

Thus, God created man in His image (1:26); more specifically, He created male and female (1:27).

A little girl asked, "Daddy, what color is God's hair?" Her father replied, "Honey, God is a spirit. He doesn't have any hair." The little girl insisted, "My Sunday School teacher says He looks like us." Her father replied, "You must have misunderstood your teacher. The Bible says we are made in God's image and likeness, but that doesn't mean that God looks like us. It means that, in some ways, we are like God. It means that God thinks and He made us so we can think. God loves and He made us so we can love." The little girl's face lit up, "I get it, Daddy, God is like us on the inside, not on the outside."

The Comments "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth' (1:28). The blessing consisted of reproduction as well as domination over the earth. God told them to multiply until they filled the earth. This mandate was given to Adam and Eve as heads of the human race, not as individuals (Constable). "Sexual union is God's ordained method of implementing His command to multiply descendants. Consequently, sex is essentially good" (Constable). God told them to subdue the earth, that is, have dominion over every living thing, the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and every living thing on the earth. The Hebrew word dominion signifies "to trample down, to master." Man is to master all of creation, all creatures of the sea, air, and land, as well as the inanimate earth. "People ('them')

are to rule over all that God has made (fish, birds, cattle, etc.) as God would: wisely and prudently” (Constable).

Man’s mastery extends over all created things, physical, chemical, and electrical. The whole creation comes under the broader charter the Creator has given to man (Morris).

In a sermon on Genesis, S. Lewis Johnson suggested that people are to study the creation of God, discover its underlying ideas, principles, and relations, organize the findings, and make them useful, as God intended them to be. This commission is one of the people’s basic activities here on the earth. The duty is to conquer and rule. This activity is to characterize humans in every sphere (Ps. 8:6-8; Heb. 2:8). The fall has made the task more difficult, for the complete subduing of the earth must await the Second Coming of Christ.

Jay Adams applies this to people’s personal problems. He says, “Sin brought the reversal of man’s rule over the earth so that the earth gained dominion over man.” He goes on to say that the problem in counseling is that “contrary to God’s mandate, clients have allowed the environment to control them” (Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, p. 128).

“And God said, ‘See, I have given you every herb *that* yields seed which *is* on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which *there is* life, *I have given every green herb for food;*’ and it was so” (1:29-30). Originally, God did not intend that either man or animals should eat animal food (Keil; Morris). After the flood, however, God gave man authority to eat meat (9:3). In the Millennium, carnivorous beasts will feed only on vegetation. Isaiah says, “The lion shall eat straw like the ox” (Isa. 11:7; 65:25).

“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was very good*” (1:31a). The details of creation taken separately were declared good (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), but the whole is very good (1:31). Like an artist, having completed his masterpiece, steps back a little to survey his work, both in detail and in its entirety, and says I like it, God contemplates the whole and pronounces it very good.

One warm autumn day, a man sat under a walnut tree observing his pumpkin vines. “How foolish God is!” He mused. “He puts a heavy pumpkin on a tiny vine that has no strength and hangs tiny walnuts on a tree whose branches can hold the weight of a man. If I were God, I could do better than that!” Just then, a breeze dislodged a walnut and it fell on the man’s head. Gently rubbing the point of impact, a sadder and wiser gentleman remarked, “Suppose there had been a pumpkin up there instead of a walnut! Never again will I try to plan a world for God, but I shall thank Him that He has done so well.

The Conclusion “So the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (1:31b). On the sixth day, God created the culmination of His creation, a creature like Himself was to have dominion. Von Rad suggests that just as kings set up statues of themselves throughout the border of their land to show their sovereign domain, so did God get His representatives on the earth (Von Rad, cited by Ross).

The Seventh Day

God Finished “Thus the heavens and the earth and all the host of them were finished” (2:1). The format employed for the first six days is not used for the seventh. There is no command, comment, and conclusion. Rather, the passage on the seventh day simply says that having finished the work, God rested on that day and blessed that day.

God finished all the work (2:1). As a result of the six days, the “host” of heaven and earth were finished. The word translated “host” refers to the stars in Deuteronomy 4:19 and to angels in 1 Kings 22:19. Based on the use of this word to refer to angels, some have concluded that it includes angels here (Morris), but because angels have not been mentioned and this is the concluding statement of what has taken place, that is unlikely (Leupold). The word “host” here refers to “the entire creation” (BDB). The Scriptures do not record when angels were created (Leupold). “The ‘host’ of heaven usually refers to the stars in the Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 4:19) more than the angels (e.g., 1 Kings 22:19), so the sun, moon, and stars are probably in view here” (Constable).

Moses does not begin with a statement of the works of God before creation because His purpose is to focus on the creation of human beings. Someone asked Luther what God was occupied with before He began His work of creation. Luther bluntly replied, “He was cutting switches to flog inquisitive questioners!”

God Rested “And on the seventh day God ended His work, which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done” (2:2). The Hebrew word rendered “rested” means “to cease, desist.” The word does not refer to resting in the sense of recuperating from the exhaustion of a tiring week of work. It describes the cessation, the completion of work. The work was finished (2:1); God ceased working (2:2). Later, God instituted a similar practice for the nation of Israel. The Jewish Sabbath was patterned after this creation Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11).

“Note that God did not command Adam to abstain from work on the Sabbath; this came later with the Mosaic Law. However, Scripture does teach the importance of periodic rest (Exod. 20:8-10; 23:10-12; Lev. 25:2, 4; Deut. 15:1-18; Heb. 4:1-11; et al.). Part of bearing the likeness of God involves resting as He did after completing His work” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable). “The writers of Scripture used the Sabbath to anticipate the hope of Messianic redemption throughout the Old Testament. In the creation account, the Sabbath points forward to the time when God will bring ‘a perfect and complete cosmos out of chaos.... The weekly rest-experience of the Sabbath [under the Mosaic Law] served to epitomize the future peace and rest of the Messianic age” (Constable, who is citing Bacchiocchi).

God Blessed the Seventh Day “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (2:3). Prior to this, God blessed the creatures of land and sea (1:22) and man (1:28). Now, He blessed the seventh day and “sanctified it” (2:3), that is, set it apart to Himself. Later, God instructed Israel to set apart one day for Him.

Nothing is said about the seventh day having an evening and morning, but there is no doubt that the seventh day, like the other six, was “earthly days of ordinary duration” (Keil). Moses, who penned the passage, regarded this seventh day as an ordinary day of 24 hours (Ex 20:11; 31:17).

Summary: Studying Genesis, like any other passage of Scripture, indicates that God filled the earth in three days and rested on the seventh, including directly creating man.

Several questions need to be addressed. Does the data in Genesis 1 allow for evolution, even theistic evolution? When Genesis 1 is interpreted using the principles of interpreting Scripture elsewhere in the Bible, the answer is man did not evolve. Several things in Genesis 1 are contrary to the concept of evolution.

1. Everything was created in six literal days. The evolutionary process demands millions and billions of years, which cannot be fitted into the framework of Genesis 1. Even those who take Genesis 1 at face value but concede that there are large gaps of time in the genealogies of Genesis

5 and 10 concede that humans have been on the planet earth no longer than ten to twenty thousand years. The very longest anyone is willing to go is fifty thousand years. That kind of time frame is a far cry from the millions of years required by the evolutionists.

2. The order of creation was plants, the sun, and animal life. Genesis teaches that God created plant life on the third day and the sun on the fourth day. Animals were created on the fifth day. Evolution teaches an entirely different order, insisting that marine organisms existed first. Also, notice that God created marine animals and birds on the same day. Evolution claims that birds evolved from reptiles and the process took millions of years.

“Both Scripture and science cannot be true. For example, the text says God created the trees before marine life (1:11, 20), but most evolutionists believe that trees developed after marine life. Also, the Bible implies that marine life and birds came into existence about the same time (1:20), but evolutionists hold that they evolved millions of years apart (Klotz). No theory explains the conflict between biblical statements and scientific statements adequately. In the end, one really comes down to the question, Do I put more confidence in what God says or in what scientists say? (Gish)” (Constable).

3. Plants and animals were created as mature, self-producing units. By definition, evolution demands that all life was developed from a single, simple cell.

4. Man was created directly by God. There is no hint or suggestion in Genesis that man came from sea life or plant life, but that God used dirt to create his body and breathed life into him. Evolution teaches something entirely different about the origin of human beings.

The concept of creation given in Genesis and the theory of evolution as to the origin of life simply cannot be reconciled without destroying the plain meaning of Genesis. There are simply too many differences.

What about the scientific arguments for evolution? There are basically three main arguments used by some scientists to support evolution: comparative anatomy, embryology, and the data from geology.

The argument from comparative anatomy for evolution contends that the similarity of humans to certain animals indicates a common ancestry. The fact is there is a similarity between humans and certain animals. For example, they have vertebrae. The “theory” is that similarity demands a relationship. That is not necessarily true. The similarity could be nothing more than an indication of the same designer.

The argument from embryology is that the embryo passes through the same stages in its development that human beings have gone through in their evolution. For example, it is argued that when an embryo is a month old, it has folds that suggest the gills of a fish. The resemblance, however, is superficial. The folds of the embryo never function as gills, nor do they have the material of gills. They gradually develop into the jaw and neck of the fetus. Someone has said, “The gill split argument offers about as much proof that man evolved from the fish as the moon-shaped face of a young Chinese is proof that he evolved from the moon” (Thomas F. Heinze, *Creation vs. Evolution Handbook*, 1970, p. 18).

The argument from geology states that older rock formations contain fossils of simple life forms while younger rocks contain fossils of more complex life forms. The assumption is that life could only have progressed from the simple to the complex. Radioactive dating is used to determine the age of the various rock formations. The problem is that the geological column is totally man-made; it cannot be found in any one place on the surface of the earth in all of its layers.

Actually, fossil records are a problem for evolution. Before the Cambrian explosion, most organisms were simple, composed of individual cells occasionally organized into colonies. *The*

Cambrian explosion was the rapid appearance of most major groups of complex animals in the fossil record. Charles Darwin knew that the fossil record was contrary to his theory! He blamed it on the imperfection of the fossil record (Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of the Species by Natural Selection*. London: Murray, see chapter 9 “On the Imperfection of the Geological Record”). He wrote, “For my part, following out Lyell’s metaphor, I look at the natural geological record, as a history of the world imperfectly kept, and written in a changing dialect; of this history, we possess the last volume alone, relating only to two or three countries. Of this volume, only here and there a short chapter has been preserved, and of each page, only here and there a few lines. Each word of the slowly—changing language in which the history is supposed to be written, being more or less different in the interrupted succession of chapters, may represent the apparently abruptly changed forms of life, entombed in our consecutive but widely separated formations (Darwin, pp. 310-311). He also wrote, “All these causes taken conjointly, just have tended to make the geological record extremely imperfect, and will to a large extent explain why we do not find interminable varieties, connecting together all the extinct and existing forms of life by the finest graduated steps. He who rejects these views on the nature of the geological record will rightly reject my whole theory” (Darwin, p 342):

Many reputable scientists have pointed out that radioactive dating is not reliable beyond 10,000 years. Some would say a few more thousand, but not millions of years.

Are there scientific arguments against evolution? The ultimate problem for evolution is that time is not a cause. Moreover, evolution violates the second law of thermodynamics. The second law of thermodynamics states that energy tends toward entropy, that is, every system tends to move from order to disorder. Available energy becomes less and less until a state of complete randomness is reached. Thus, all systems are running down. If all systems moved toward disorder, life cannot evolve from so-called simple orders. The clock of the universe is not being wound up. It is winding down, suggesting that it was wound by someone and now is ticking down.

The complexity of the simplest cells refutes evolution. Michael Behe, a biochemist, argues that there is an “irreducible complexity” that cannot be explained by chance mutations over time. He defines “irreducible complexity” as a single system, which is composed of several parts where the removal of anyone would cause the system to cease functioning. The mousetrap is an illustration. All of the parts must be in place at the same time for the mousetrap to work. Removal of any one piece destroys its function. Natural selection could not have created such an irreducibly complex system because the selectability function is present only when all parts are assembled.

Are there scientists who question evolution? Many secular scientists today are questioning evolution. For example, an Australian biologist and agnostic, Michael Denton, has written a book entitled *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*. Denton claims that not one single discovery since 1859, when Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, has supported Darwin’s theory. He calls evolution “the great cosmogenic myth of the twentieth century.” In his book, he says, “Is it really credible that random processes could have constructed a reality, the smallest element of which—a functional protein or gene—is complex beyond our own creative capacities, a reality which is the very antithesis of chance, which excels in every sense anything produced by the intelligence of man.” Dr. Murray Edan, professor emeritus at MIT, said that Denton’s book “should be made required reading for everyone who believes what he was taught in college about evolution.”

In 1981, Colin Patterson, senior paleontologist for the British Museum of Natural History, told biologists at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, “I woke up and realized that all my life I have been duped into taking evolutionism as revealed truth in some way.” He went on to say that no real transitional forms have ever been found anywhere in the fossil record and “I

don't think we shall ever have any access to any form of a (evolutionary) tree which we can call factual." At the Evolutionary Morphology Seminar at the University of Chicago, a very prestigious body of evolutionists, Patterson challenged them to tell him one thing they knew for sure about evolution. He said that all he got was silence for a long time and eventually, one person said, "I do know one thing—it ought not to be taught in high school."

Charles Thaxton, Walter Bradley and Roger Olsen, former evolutionists with doctorates in chemistry, geochemistry, and materials science, have written a book entitled *The Mystery of Life's Origins: Reassessing Current Theories* in which they conclude that a "Creator beyond the cosmos" is the most plausible explanation for life's origin. Evolutionist Dean Kenyon of San Francisco State University wrote after reading that book that many scientists hesitate to admit or study the theory's problems because they would "open the door to the possibility (more than necessity) of a supernatural origin of life."

The conclusion is clear: neither Genesis nor the objective study of science teaches evolution.

"Life did not evolve; God created it. The great hurdles of evolution are insurmountable. What exists today had to go from nothing to something (matter), from the inorganic to the organic (life), and from organic to man (human life). Or, to put it all another way, 'The history of the universe began with a stupendous miracle—the creation of all matter out of nothing by the Word of the Lord! Right here, all infidelity begins, and right here, faith comes to rest. If you do not receive as truth the first verse of the Scriptures, you cannot believe anything else God says. God does not stop to prove that opening statement concerning creation. He expects us to believe and accept it by faith. To this, the atheists and evolutionists object, for, say they, 'We do not believe in miracles!' How stupid for them to talk this way when they gullibly swallow all the unproved assumptions of evolution. If anyone believes in miracles, they do! Instead of admitting the fact that God created the universe, evolutionists either accept the unproven 'spontaneous generation' theory, or they subscribe to the idea that 'the life-germ came from other worlds'—despite the fact that they cannot explain how it originated in those far-off places.

"That Christ arose from the dead is too great a miracle for evolutionists to believe, but they swallow without a wince the theory that life developed in an orderly fashion from a dead blob of protoplasm or originated in a fire mist. That God could make three men 'fireproof' in a flaming furnace is considered impossible and ridiculous, yet evolutionists believe that the organic germs of life could survive for millions of years in a glowing fire-mist or remain unharmed inside molten granite" (source unknown).

Because this is a serious subject, I hesitate to use sarcasm, but this humor makes a serious point, namely that humans are different than animals. That should be obvious to any observant human. These silly little poems make that same point from the animal's point of view.

Three monkeys sat in a coconut tree
Discussing things as they're said to be
Said one to the other, "Now listen, you two,
There's a certain rumor that can't be true
That man descended from our noble race
The very idea is a disgrace
No monkey ever deserted his wife, starved her babies, and ruined her life. And
you've never known a mother monk To leave her babies with others to bunk, Or
pass them on from one to another Till they scarcely know who is their mother.

And another thing you'll never see, A Monk build a fence 'round a coconut tree
And let the coconuts go to waste, Forbidding all other monks a taste, Why, if I'd
put a fence around a tree, Starvation would force you to steal from me.
Here's another thing a monk won't do,
Go out at night and get on a stew,
Or use a gun or club or knife
To take some other monkey's life.
Yes, man descended, the ornery cuss,
But brother, he didn't descend from us!" Anon.

A church bulletin carried this humorous poem, "The Monkeys' Jamboree," by an unknown author:

One day, the monkeys had a big jamboree. Their leader sat up in the tallest palm tree And said with a chuckle, "My good fellow Monk, If you want a good laugh, just give ear to this junk. The teachers of men in a place they call 'school' are training each youngster to grow up a fool. The kids all run wild and never get spanked. If our babies did that, their tails would be yanked. No well-mannered monkey dictates to his teacher, beats up the policeman or shoots at the preacher, poisons the baby, or kills with a gun, And then laughs and says: 'We are just having fun!' Monkeys, my friends, have respect for each other. We hand out no sass to our father or mother. The picture I've painted, you'll agree, is quite sad. But listen my brothers, I'm boiling mad, For here's what they're taught—that miserable flunky, That creature called Man was at one time a monkey! An ape just like us, and what's more, if you please, He claims that at one time, he swung thru the trees. Fellow monkeys, I think this is going too far. We don't envy their home, their wealth, or their car. But when they spread such a horrible rumor It's time for all monkeys to lose their good humor. So, come, you must help me prepare a big sign, Protesting that man's no descendant of mine, If evolution be true, then boys, we are sunk; For I'd sooner be father to weasel or skunk."

The point is plain. Humans were originally created in God's image, making them free moral agents. Animals were not. The sin entered the human family and ever since, human history has been that of devolution rather than evolution.

Genesis 1 teaches several significant spiritual lessons. 1) God sovereignly created the universe. God chose to create and God created alone. He created everything; everything is under His control. He is sovereign. One indication of His sovereignty is the fact that He named the parts of creation. 2) God created by His Word. Repeatedly, Genesis 1 says God spoke and it was so. The means of creation was the Word of God. The Psalms exclaimed, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.... He spoke and it was done; He

commanded and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:6, 9). The writer to the Hebrews echoes the same truth: “By faith, we understand that the worlds were formed by the Word of God so that the things which were seen were not made of the things which are visible” (Heb. 11:3). 3) God gives life. The sovereign God creates, redeems, and gives life by His Word. God changes darkness to light, chaos to blessing, and death to life. God is the source of light and life.

Cushman wrote, “To me, it seems when God conceived the world, that was Poetry; He formed it, and that was Sculpture; He colored it, and that was Painting; He peopled it with living beings, and that was the grand, divine, eternal Drama” (Charlotte S. Cushman, 1816-1876). Another has written, “Is it not logical to believe that the only one who can recreate us is the One who created us in the first place? If your watch were out of order, you wouldn’t take it to a blacksmith. If your car needed overhauling, you wouldn’t take it to a plumber. If you needed an operation, you wouldn’t go to a machine shop” (source unknown).

For life and answers on handling life, see the Creator of life and His instruction manual.

PARADISE

The *Los Angeles Times* once surveyed people in Orange County in Southern California concerning what they thought about where they lived. One described Orange County as “paradise.” As compared to the hard winters elsewhere, sunny Southern California, where the sun shines 80-85% of the year, is indeed paradise. Many have felt that paradise would be living on a South Sea island like Hawaii. For others, paradise is a small cabin on the shore of a mountain lake or a desert home with horses. If you could create your own paradise, what would it be like?

If God created a paradise, what would it be like? Your response is probably “heaven.” What would it be like if He designed and developed a paradise on earth? He once did just that. It’s called the Garden of Eden. Sin has since ruined God’s paradise for mankind, but a study of the original paradise teaches us what God thinks a paradise for people should be like—apart from sin.

The Creation of Man

The Conditions Moses begins the account of the creation of the Garden of Eden by describing the conditions of the earth before the formation of the garden (2:4-6) and the creation of man (2:7). He says, “This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created” (2:4a). The phrase “this is the history of” occurs eleven times in the book of Genesis (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). It is the key to the structure of the book. Genesis is a series of “histories.”

The interpretation of this phrase is not without its difficulties. A few have said that these phrases refer to what precedes them (MacDonald). For example, Genesis 2:4 seems to refer to Genesis 1:1-2:3. The problem with that view is that it does not fit every occurrence of this phrase throughout the book. The traditional view is that it always refers to what follows both in and outside of Genesis (Num. 3:1-4:18; 1 Chron. 1:29; Ross, p. 70; R. K. Harrison, p. 548). The traditional view also has difficulties. In no incidence whatsoever is it used of the birth or origin of the person named. For example, “The genealogy of Terah” (11:27) is not the history of Terah but the history of his offspring.

The Hebrew word “this is the history of” in Genesis 2:4 and rendered “genealogy” elsewhere in Genesis comes from a Hebrew word which means “to produce, beget.” It means “generations, successive generations.” In other words, these headings delineate the *historical result of the beginning point*. Ross suggests the paraphrase of “this is what became of” or “this is where it started from.” Kidner says this word can have a wider sense of “family history.” Constable renders it “what became of.” The person mentioned after this expression is usually not the central figure in the section but the person who originated what follows (Constable). Thus, Genesis 2:4 gives the title of the next section of Genesis, namely Genesis 2:4-26. This is what became of the heavens and the earth. God created a paradise (2:4-25), but it was cursed through disobedience (3:1-24), and deterioration spread from there (4:1-26).

Genesis 2:4 goes on to say, “In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens” (2:4b). The day, in this case, could be a reference to a literal 24-hour day. If so, this is referring to the last day of creation (2:1-3). The Hebrew word translated “day,” however, can mean a period longer than a 24-hour period (2 Sam. 21:1; Isa. 61:2) as it possibly does here. Even if “day” is used here as a period longer than 24 hours, that still would not justify interpreting Genesis 1 as a long

epic (Ross, p. 109). The unusual order of “earth and heaven” (Ps. 148:13) indicates that the author is about to focus on the earth.

At this point in Genesis, a new name for God appears. God (Elohim), the Creator, is also the LORD (Yahweh, Jehovah). “LORD” is the personal name for God, the covenant God of Israel. The God who created the universe is the God who called Abraham (12:1) and the God who delivered Israel from Egypt (Exod. 3:15), “In Genesis 1, Elohim (God) refers to God’s transcendence over the world, while in Genesis 2-3, Yahweh (LORD) speaks of God’s immanence with His elect. When the narrator combines the two names, he makes a bold assertion that the Creation God is the LORD of Israel’s history. Just as God ordered creation, he orders history. All is under God’s sovereign control, guaranteeing that Israel’s history will end in triumph, not in tragedy” (Waltke, cited by Constable).

Moses adds, “Before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground” (2:5-6). The conditions before the formation of the Garden of Eden were that there were no plants or herbs of the field (2:5). The Hebrew word translated “plant” means “bush, plant, shrub” and the one rendered “herb” means “herb, grass, green plants.” A “plant of the field” is not a “plant of the earth” as a “beast of the field” (2:19) is not a “beast of the earth.” These plant and herbs of the field (Hebrew: “cultivated field”) are those, which grow as a result of cultivation (Ross; Leupold). Evidently, the former was not edible and the latter was (Constable, who cites Wenham).

The explanation (“for”) is that it had not rained, nor was there a man to till the ground (2:5); only a mist from the earth watered the ground (2:6). Local evaporation and compensation provided the daily water supply (Morris). The absence of “rain” and the presence of the “mist” could be a reference to a canopy of water that covered the earth until the flood (7:11; Morris; see also Whitcomb and Morris, *The Genesis Flood*). “Such a water canopy covers Venus” (Constable).

Verse 5 creates a problem. Genesis 1 states plants were created *before* man was created, but Genesis 2 seems to be saying that there was *no plant life before* man was created (2:5-7). This passage is not talking about the *creation* of the plants but simply the *planting* of the garden in Eden. The growing of plants is different from their creation (Keil). Plants and herbs *of the field* were not yet formed. They needed rain and the tilling of the soil by man. In other words, this passage is talking about the growth of cultivated plants (the meaning of “field” is “cultivated field”). These statements serve as an introduction to the creation of man in the Garden of Eden and even the curse that followed. The point is there was no man to till the ground.

The Creation In one statement, Moses describes the creation of man. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (2:7). Genesis 1 simply says, “So God created man in His own image” (1:27). Genesis 2:7 describes the process in more detail (Constable). The Hebrew word translated “formed” means “to form, fashion, frame.” It describes the work of an artist (Job 10:8-9). The material God used to form man was the “dust of the ground.” The Hebrew word rendered “dust” means “mud, clay.” Man was made from the earth (1 Cor. 15:47) and he returns to the dust (3:19).

The means by which God made man a living being was His breath. God breathed into man’s lifeless material body the breath of life. The Hebrew word translated “breath” means “wind” or “spirit.” The breath of life is the principle of life. Thus, man became “a living being” (1 Cor. 15:35). The Hebrew text says, “living soul,” but “soul” is often equivalent to “life.” Living being is the idea (Ross).

Animals, as well as people, have this element of life (7:22; the same expression is used of animals in 1:24). Both people and animals consist of a material body and an immaterial life. People, however, are different from animals. While it is true that people and animals breathe and both have a soul, only people received their breath of life directly from God breathing into them (Ross). The animals were created solely by the Word of God. Thus, humans arrived in a way that distinguishes them from animals. This breath of God gave him something the animals do not possess—understanding (Job 32:8) and a conscience (Prov. 20:27). In the words of Genesis 1, man was created in the image of God.

The assumption of evolution is that man received his body and life from animals. Genesis declares he received his body and life and divine image from God. Life can only come from life; God, the only eternal, self-existent being, is the only One who can start life, not some inanimate matter.

It has been pointed out that this account is chemically accurate. It says that man was made out of the dust of the earth and that is scientifically true. Dust contains at least 16 different chemical elements and those same 16 chemical elements are in the body of man.

The Construction of a Garden

The Trees God constructed a garden. “The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (2:8-9). God planted a garden, a Hebrew word which means “enclosure,” that is, a protected place. The Septuagint translators used a Greek term “paradise” that suggests a royal park. The Hebrew word translated “Eden” means “delight.” From the author’s point of view, this delightful garden paradise park lay eastward, that is, east of Israel.

In this garden, God planted trees that were pleasant to look at and good for food. The garden was beautiful and beneficial. Two trees received special notice. If eaten, the tree of life would enable man to live forever (3:22). This tree will be in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:2). When eaten, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would endow man with the awareness of the difference between good and evil (3:5; for a discussion of what God had in mind in the two trees, see Keil, pp. 84-86). The second tree in the middle of the garden presented man with a choice. As long as Adam ate the fruit of the tree of life, his existence in the beautiful, bountiful, beneficial, blissful garden was preserved, but if he were to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would be disbelieving and disobeying God and lose his place in paradise.

The God who was powerful enough to create the cosmos with a word was also good and gracious in that He placed Adam in a garden that He had prepared for him (Constable). In the garden, man was innocent, like a baby or small child. The garden furnished his needs without toil or trouble, without guilt from the past, nor fear of the future. Man enjoyed fellowship with God, peace, and prosperity in the garden. Adam’s first and foremost responsibility was to obey the Lord (2:9, 16-17).

The Rivers An abundant water supply guaranteed fruitfulness and freshness of the garden. “Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four river heads” (2:10). One river became four. Each of the four is now named.

“The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which encompasses the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there”

(2:11-12). The location of Pishon is unknown. “Encompassed” does not mean to flow entirely around (Num. 21:4; Judges 11:18). The land of Havilah is also unknown (Constable says it seems to have been in southwestern Arabia; see 25:18). The Hebrew word Havilah means “sandy.” Gold is often found in sandy regions. The gold of Havilah was good gold meaning it was of excellent quality. Bdellium was apparently a precious gem resin (Hebrew: “gum resin”), although some say it was a pearl (Kidner) and onyx was probably a beryl (BDB).

“The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which encompasses the whole land of Cush” (2:13). Like the first river, the location of Gihon is unknown. Constable says it may be the pre-flood Nile since Cush is usually said to be Ethiopia (10:6-8; Num. 12:1; 2 Sam. 18:19-33; 2 Kings 19:9; 2 Chron. 14:9-15; Isa. 37:9; Jer. 13:23; 38-39; J. Daniel Hays, “The Cushites: A Black Nation in Ancient History,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611, July-September 1996: 270-80; and “The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612, October-December 1996: 396-409). In fact, many insist that Cush is south of Egypt and is Ethiopia (Leupold). If, however, Eden was east of Israel (2:8), Cush could not be in Ethiopia. Others claim this Cush is the Kassite territory east of the Tigris (Keil). Kidner points out that in Genesis 10:7, Havilah is linked with Cush and Cush is linked with Babylon (10:8, 10). Ross says this site was in the land of the Cassites east of Mesopotamia (Ross in the BKC).

“The two lands of Cush, ‘the one at the rising (the Arabian Cush) and the other at the setting sun’ (the African), were distinguished in Homer’s day, and it is not difficult to see how the African Æthiopians came from the Arabian, or Sabæan, Cush, by crossing the lower narrow part of the Red Sea” (Lange).

“The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates” (2:14). The Hebrew word rendered “Hiddekel” here is translated “Tigris” in Daniel 10:4. All agree the last two rivers are the Tigris and the Euphrates, which are in Babylon.

So, where was Eden? The location of Eden has been placed in the Armenian Islands (Leupold). The present source of the Tigris and Euphrates is not the same, but they are only about two thousand paces apart (Leupold). There are no four rivers, two of which are the Tigris and Euphrates, which flow from one source today. The earth has undergone enormous changes since Eden graced the earth. The flood changed things. The Garden of Eden was destroyed. The rivers of the Antediluvian world no longer exist. Thus, the exact location of Eden has been lost (Morris).

Although two of the four rivers cannot be identified today, the naming of them and the fact that the two can be located today indicate that the Garden of Eden was a literal place. Eden was as real and literal as the Tigris Euphrates rivers. It was an actual, not an allegorical, place. Also, “It can hardly be a coincidence that these rivers, along with the ‘River of Egypt,’ again play a role in marking boundaries of the land promised to Abraham (Ge 15:18)” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

The Gardener God’s garden included a gardener: “Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (2:15). The Hebrew word translated “put” in verse 8 means “to put, place, set,” but the one rendered “put” in verse 15 means “to rest.” Constable says it “connotes rest and safety (19:16; Deut. 3:20; 12:10; 25:19) as well as dedication in God’s presence (Exod. 16:33-34; Lev. 16:23; Num. 17:4; Deut. 26:4, 10). God put man in the garden where he could be safe and rest and where he could have fellowship with God (3:8).” His primary responsibility there was to worship and obey God rather than to cultivate and keep the garden, as many English versions state” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable). Adam served and thereby worshipped God by tending the garden (Bauckham, cited by Constable). “The Garden of Eden is a temple-garden, represented later in the tabernacle. Cherubim protect its sanctity (Gen. 3:24; Ex.

26:1; 2 Chron. 3:7) so that sin and death are excluded (Gen. 3:23; Rev. 21:8)” (Waltke, cited by Constable). Remember: Adam’s first and foremost responsibility was to obey the Lord (2:9, 16-17).

Adam was given the responsibility for Eden. He had to tend it and keep it. The Hebrew word translated “tend” means “to work, serve, to labor, do work” and the one rendered “keep” means “to watch, to guard, to have charge of.” Adam worked in and was responsible for the Garden of Eden. Even in God’s perfect paradise, work was necessary for man. The ideal world was not an idle world (Rev. 22:3). The garden had to be cultivated and cared for properly. The ground was so fertile growth needed to be channeled and controlled. Adam had to tend the garden to keep it from “growing in exuberant disorder” (Leupold).

Genesis 2:15 seems to suggest that God created Adam outside of Eden, then created the garden and placed Adam in it (Morris on verse 8). If so, perhaps Adam watched God plant the garden (2:8). Adam’s first knowledge of God was of a sovereign, powerful Creator who graciously, carefully, and abundantly provided for him (Morris). The two verbs of verse 15, “to toil” and “to keep,” are used throughout the Pentateuch for spiritual service. The Hebrew word “till” can mean “serve.” “Keep” is used for keeping God’s commandments. Adam’s activity in paradise is described in terms of spiritual service for the Lord. God’s paradise consisted of work!

The Egyptians said, “Labor is degrading; idleness is desirable.” In the ancient world, slaves were assigned menial tasks. Today, many downgrade work, but humans were created to work. Work was one of the benefits of the Garden of Eden. God’s paradise was not a place of idleness or indulgence in pleasure. Later, sin resulted in toil, but work was part of the original paradise. Work is a good gift from God, not a punishment for sin.

In the movie “The Solid Gold Cadillac,” a man who was unemployed (but had money) proposed to a girl. She refused, saying, “If you don’t have a job, you’ll not think much of yourself and pretty soon, you’ll think I don’t think much of you either. Then you’ll start to hate me.” God intended for man to work and he is better off when he does.

The Command for Adam

The Positive Command God gave Adam a command containing a positive and negative side. First, there is the positive command. “**And the LORD God commanded the man saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat’ (2:16).**” God graciously provided a wide variety and large quantity of food for Adam. This verse does not limit Adam’s diet to fruit grown on trees. Genesis has already recorded that Adam could eat herbs as well as fruit from trees (1:29). Only the trees and not the herbs are mentioned here because of the prohibition concerning the trees (Leupold). This is the first commandment in the Bible and it concerns life or death (Ross).

The Negative Command The negative side of the command states, “**But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (2:17).** “That famous tree symbolizes the ability to discern good (i.e., what advances life) and evil (i.e., what hinders life). Such knowledge belongs to God alone because, as Agur inferentially argues in Prov. 30:1-6, one must know comprehensively in order to speak absolutely about what is good and bad” (Waltke, cited by Constable). Adam had knowledge of good (Morris). If he disobeyed God’s Word, he would learn the difference between good and evil from his experience.

The result of disobedience was to be dead the day he disobeyed. “The phrase ‘in the day’ in Hebrew is an idiom meaning ‘for certain’ (cf. Exod. 10:28; 1 Kings 2:37, 42)” (Constable). Death is separation. The death mentioned here includes physical death (see chapter 5) and spiritual death,

that is, separation from God (Ross). The moment Adam disobeyed, he lost his fellowship with God. He died spiritually. He also began to deteriorate and eventually die physically (Morris).

Someone posted on their church marquee: “Forbidden fruits create many jams.”

This is the first commandment in the Bible and it concerns man’s relationship with God, good and evil, life and death. The issue is whether man would believe and obey the Word of a loving and gracious God.

Constable explains the theological implications of this passage. “The covenant in 2:16-17 has been called the Edenic Covenant. A covenant is a divine pronouncement by which God establishes a relationship involving responsibility. The relationship may involve Himself and an individual (e.g., Adam in the Edenic Covenant; Gen. 2:16-17) or Himself and humankind in general (e.g., humanity in the Noahic Covenant; Gen. 9:9-17). It may involve Himself and a nation (e.g., Israel in the Mosaic Covenant; Exod. 19:3-8) or Himself and a human family (e.g., David’s family in the Davidic Covenant; 2 Sam. 7:12-17). A covenant of one type may overlap with another covenant or other covenants of a different type. For example, the Noahic Covenant overlaps the Mosaic Covenant, and the Davidic Covenant overlaps the Mosaic and New Covenants.

“The biblical covenants normally involved unconditional promises in which God obligated Himself to accomplish certain purposes despite human failure, though they may contain conditional elements. An exception is the Mosaic Covenant, in which the fulfillment of the promises contained in the covenant depended on Israel’s obedience. The Edenic Covenant was also different in that God promised death for failure to obey His command to abstain from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

“The three universal covenants, which affect the whole human race, are the Edenic, Adamic, and Noahic Covenants. All the subsequent covenants affect Israel primarily, though they all affect the rest of humanity secondarily. There are eight major biblical covenants, and they help us understand how God works out His purposes for humankind. These are the Edenic (Gen. 2:16), the Adamic (Gen. 3:15), the Noahic (Gen. 9:16), the Abrahamic (Gen. 12:2), the Mosaic (Exod. 19:5), the Palestinian (Deut. 30:3), the Davidic (2 Sam. 7:16), and the New (Heb. 8:8).

“The Edenic Covenant required five things from Adam. He was to propagate the human race, to subdue the earth for human habitation, to exercise dominion over the animal creation, to care for and enjoy the Garden of Eden and its fruits, and to abstain from eating from one tree in the garden.”

The Companion for Adam

The Contemplation of God God’s garden was not yet complete. “And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper compatible to him’ (2:18). God Himself said it was not good for man to be alone, but didn’t He say that the creation of Genesis 1 was “very good” (1:31)? Yes, but the “very good” of Genesis 1:31 included the creation of woman (1:27). “Not good” does not mean “evil.” It only indicates that it was unfinished and, therefore, not perfect (Morris). Man without woman was not what God planned. The only thing “not good” in creation, in God’s opinion, was for man to be alone.

God declared that He would make a helper for Adam. The Hebrew word translated “helper” means “help, succor.” “The term ‘helper’ does not mean a servant. Jesus Christ used the same word (the Greek equivalent) to describe the Holy Spirit, who would help believers following the Lord’s ascension (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). It means one who supports us in our task of doing the will of God (cf. Deut. 33:7; Ps. 33:20; 115:9-11; 146:5; Hos. 13:9). It is not a demeaning term

since Scripture often uses it to describe God Himself (e.g., Ps. 33:20; 70:5; 115:9)” (Constable). “The word helper, used for God sixteen of the nineteen times it appears in the Old Testament, signifies the woman’s essential contribution, not inadequacy” (Waltke, cited by Constable).

Adam’s “helper” was “compatible” to him. The Hebrew word translated compatible means “what is in front of, corresponding to, parallel to” (NASB and NIV: suitable; ESV: fit for him). This helper was to be “agreeing to him” (Leupold), his “counterpart” (Kidner; Leupold; Ross), “corresponding to him” (Cassuto; Ross), “like him” (Cassuto). “‘Suitable to him’ or ‘corresponding to him’ means ‘equal and adequate.’ What was true of Adam (cf. v. 7) was also true of Eve. They both had the same nature. She was comparable to him, in contrast to the rest of the animal creation” (Constable). She corresponded with him physically, socially, and spiritually (Ross). She was not inferior to him; she was like him.

Yet, she was to submit to him to help him. Nothing is said of her being a child-bearer. She is to relate first and foremost as a counterpart, companion, and coworker, equal yet supportive of him.

Are you your husband’s helper, or are you his judge, teacher, and adversary? Charlotte Perkins Gillman said, “Where young boys plan what they will achieve and attain, young girls for whom they will achieve and attain.”

The Creation of Animals After declaring He would make Adam a helper, God brought beasts and birds to Adam. “Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them and whatever Adam called each living creature that was its name. So Adam gave names to all the cattle, to the birds of the air and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him” (2:19-20). These two verses raise several questions. For example, is there a contradiction between the order of creation of animals and man in Genesis 1 and 2? Genesis 1 indicates that animals were created first; Genesis 2 seems to be saying man was created first. The solution is that “formed” could be translated “had formed” (Leupold).

How could Adam name all the beasts and birds in one day? The answer is that he did not name all the beasts of the earth (1:25), only the beast of the field (2:19), that is, the domestic animals of the garden (Leupold). Morris suggested that assuming that God brought the animals to Adam, it is not unreasonable that Adam could have noted and named about ten kinds of animals per minute so that, say, in five hours, he could have named about 3000 animals.

Why did God bring the animals to Adam for him to name them? It was not for him to find a helper comparable to him but to arouse in him the awareness of his not having a mate like the other creatures and to make him appreciate his mate more (Leupold).

Adam’s naming of the animals indicates he had a high level of intelligence and that he was their master (Num. 32:38; 2 Kings 23:34; 24:17; 2 Chron. 36:4). God named the parts of the universe and its time divisions (1:5, 8, 10). He allowed man to name the creatures over which He had given him dominion.

The Creation of Woman God then created woman. “And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man” (2:21-22). First, God put Adam to sleep like an anesthesiologist for an operation. Then, He removed the rib and, no doubt, skin as well. Adam said, “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh (2:23). Adam gave part of himself for Eve to be created. Companionship requires an investment of yourself.

From the rib and the flesh, God created woman. “That woman was taken from man no more implies the inferiority of woman to man than the taking of man from the ground (‘*adam* from ‘*adamah*) implies the inferiority of man to the ground” (Merrill, cited by Constable).

The woman was not created from the dust of the ground but from the rib of the man. She was taken from him and formed for him. “The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved” (Matthew Henry).

“Similarly, it was observed [by the Rabbis], that God had not formed woman out of the head, lest she should become proud; nor out of the eye, lest she should lust; nor out of the ear, lest she should be curious; nor out of the mouth, lest she should be talkative; nor out of the heart, lest she should be jealous; nor out of the hand, lest she should be covetous; nor out of the foot, lest she be a busybody; but out of the rib, which was always covered. Modesty was, therefore, a prime quality” (Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, p. 146, cited by Constable).

After God created woman and Adam awoke, God brought her to him like a father escorting his daughter down the aisle to the altar. “And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man’ (2:23). Adam proclaimed that this creature, unlike all the animals, was like him: bone of his bone and flesh like his flesh. Adam’s response has been called an “expression of astonishment” (Keil). The words “this is now” (literally, “this time”) have been rendered by the phrase “at last” (Kidner; Cassuto). Adam was now beside himself! (Pardon the pun.)

In Hebrew, the word “woman” is not from the same root as man, but the two words sound alike. The one who named all the animals and found none like himself called the woman by a name resembling his own. This creation of God deserved a name corresponding to his. “Though they are equal in nature, that man names woman (cf. 3:20) indicates that she is expected to be subordinate to him, an important presupposition of the ensuing narrative (3:17)” (Wenham, cited by Constable).

The Comments of God The account of Genesis 2 concludes with two observations. First, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (2:24). Obviously, this is not Adam’s comment. At the time, neither he nor Eve had a father or mother. Verse 24 is either the editorial comment of Moses (Keil) or the pronouncement of God. Several editorial comments occur in Genesis (26:33; 32:32). Jesus said God spoke these words (Mt. 19:4-5). Moses wrote the Word of God.

“Since woman came from man, man should unite himself with woman to recapture their original unity” (Robert H. Gundry, *Mark*, pp. 531-32; see Charles A. Clough, “Responding to Government’s Declaration that ‘Marriage’ Is Merely a Social Construct: A Proposal to Reform the Wedding Service in Bible-Believing Churches,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 18:53 (Spring 2014):7-46).

Genesis 2:24 expresses God’s design for marriage. Marriage consists of leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh. The leaving/cleaving is universally marked by some kind of ceremony. “One flesh” is the physical consummation, although expositors from ancient rabbis on have understood it to include a spiritual relationship as well (Ross). The fact that they left their parents indicates that more than a physical union is involved (Keil). “‘Becoming one flesh’ involves the complete identification of one personality with another in a communion of interest and pursuits, a union consummated intercourse” (Leupold).

It could be argued from the story that God intended for this to be a permanent relationship. After all, at the time, there were no other people! Jesus said this verse implied that marriage is to be permanent (Mt. 19:5). Man is to leave and cleave, not leave, cleave, and then leave.

“Leaving and cleaving probably means both psychological and physical separation and union under normal conditions. A newly married couple is wise to establish relative independence from both sets of parents emotionally, physically, financially, and in other ways. The couple also needs to establish a commitment to one another. Cleaving resembles weaving two threads into one new piece of cloth. The word suggests the ideas of passion and permanence. In marriage, a man’s priorities change. Before, they were primarily to his parents, but now they are primarily to his wife. Moses was probably correcting cultures that gave parental bonds priority over marital bonds (Waltke). Marriage also involves physical consummation that unites two individuals as ‘one flesh.’ ... This is a strong argument for monogamy. ‘One flesh’ is not the same as marriage (1 Cor. 6:16). For a marriage to exist, there must also be a commitment to ‘leave’ parents and ‘cleave’ to one’s spouse from then on (cf. Matt. 19:5; et al.). The bond of marriage (spouse) also takes priority over the bond of procreation (children)” (Constable).

The second concluding observation is, “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (2:25). Adam and Eve were literally physically naked. There was no shame because there was no sin. There was no guilt (Leupold). They were at ease with no distrust, disrespect, dishonor, no selfishness, greed, exploitation, or betrayal (Kidner). “They were at ease with one another, without fear of exploitation for evil” (Ross). They were in paradise. The nakedness also indicates that they were experiencing harmony (Leupold) and intimacy.

“The naked condition of Adam and Eve does not just describe their unclothed physical appearance. It also refers to the physical and psychological oneness and transparency that existed in their relationship. Physically, they were naked; they shared their bodies with each other openly. Psychologically, they were not ashamed; they hid nothing from each other. They were at ease with one another without any fear of exploitation for evil. Transparency should increase with trust, commitment, and friendship. It involves communicating what we know, think, feel, and are with the person or persons we choose. We should not be transparent with everyone; however, we should be transparent only with people who commit themselves to us. A transparent person is an open and vulnerable person” (Constable).

Man and woman were created for each other. It is humiliating to a woman to know she was created for man, but glory for her to know she alone can complete man. Likewise, it is humiliating for a man to know he is not complete without the woman, but glory to him to know that she was created for him.

Summary: The Garden of Eden consisted of a man and a woman, both of whom were put there to obey God and attend to the garden.

From man’s point of view, paradise is a garden he likes, a God he can live for, and a girl he loves. In short, paradise is work, worship, and a wife. For a woman, it is having a relationship with God and her guy in a garden. Personal paradise is having a proper relationship with God, your mate, your job, and having these relationships in balance. To have any one of these areas not right or to have them out of balance is to miss the peace of your personal paradise. Most people are looking somewhere else for the perfect life.

Dr. John Perkins has pointed out a man was made to find his cave with a bear in it and drive out the bear to take over the cave. A woman was made to find her security in the love of a strong man. When that relationship exists, there are secure, growing children. When asked why he had

been so successful, Tom Landry, the famous coach of the Dallas Cowboys, responded to a crowd of more than 2,000 students at Baylor University, “In 1958, I did something everyone who has been successful must do. I determined my priorities for my life. God, family, and then football” (*The Dallas Morning News*, March 2, 1978). Years ago, Homer in the *Odyssey* said, “There is nothing mightier and nobler than when man and wife are of one heart and mind in a house, a grief to their foes and to their friends, great joy, but their own heart knows it best.”

Paradise consists of having a proper relationship to God, a mate, some form of work and having those things in their proper place and balance.

GOD'S MARRIAGE PLAN

When couples contemplate getting married, they envision what their marriage will be like. Some couples can't wait to have children. For one reason or another, some couples must wait to have children. When God contemplated the concept of marriage, what did He have in mind? What was His plan? Genesis 2:18-25 describes the creation of a woman. It also gives the foundation of the instruction of marriage (Ross).

Marriage is God's Creation

God The first thing that needs to be noted about marriage is that God created it. It was His idea. "And the LORD God said, '*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him' (2:18).

Government To put this in perspective, God created marriage, not the government. Since God created it, He is the One who determines what it is to be, not the government. The government does not have the right to change anything God said. The government does not have the right to change "You shall not murder."

Marriage is Monogamous

God "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man" (2:21-22). Notice the Lord took *one* rib and made *one* woman. God's design was for marriage to be between two people. (Mt. 19:8). More and more people forget Henry Ford's sage advice when asked on his 50th wedding anniversary for his rule for marital bliss and longevity. He replied, "Just the same as in the automobile business, stick to one model."

Men Some Old Testament men violated God's design for marriage. Solomon, the wisest man on earth at the time, did a very foolish thing; he married multiple wives. Just because some men violated this does not make what they did right or the standard. David committed murder, but that does not make murder right.

Once, when Mark Twain was lecturing in Utah, a Mormon acquaintance argued with him about the subject of polygamy. After a long and rather heated debate, the Mormon finally said, "Can you find for me a single passage of Scripture which forbids polygamy?" "Certainly," replied Twain. "No man can serve two masters."

Marriage is Heterosexual

God "So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (1:27). "Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man" (2:22).

Homosexual Many preachers have jokingly, yet accurately, remarked that God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.

The Old Testament contains stories (Gen. 19:1-13; Judges 19:16-30) and statements condemning homosexuality. Here are the statements. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination” (Lev. 18:22). “If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood *shall be upon them*” (Lev. 20:13). “And there were also perverted persons (Hebrew: “male temple prostitute”) in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel” (1 Kings 14:24). “And he banished the perverted persons (Hebrew: “male temple prostitute”) from the land and removed all the idols that his fathers had made” (1 Kings 15:12). “Then he tore down the *ritual* booths of the perverted persons that *were* in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the wooden image” (2 Kings 23:7).

The New Testament also condemns homosexuality. “For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise, also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.... Knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them” (Rom. 1:26-27, 1:32). “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). “But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:8-10). “As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7).

Marriage Creates a New Family

God: Leave and Cleave “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife” (2:24a). The King James Version says marriage involves leaving and cleaving. Marriage creates a new family. Leaving is not just geographical; it is psychological.

Children At this point, children are not mentioned. “A woman can be a complete person without bearing children. A wife’s primary function in marriage is to complement her husband, not to bear children” (Constable). While that is true, God intended marriage to create a family with children. This family *usually* includes children. “So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ (1:27-28). “Normally, a couple, following the lead of their representatives, Adam and Eve, should ‘be fruitful and multiply’ (1:28). God did not specify how early in the marriage and to what extent. He left

this up to the couple. Couples may choose when and how many children they plan to have, though God may sovereignly overrule their plans” (Constable).

“We were visiting friends when they received a telephone call from their recently married daughter. After several tense minutes on the phone, the mother told the father to pick up the extension. The newlyweds had had their first big fight. In a few moments, the father rejoined us and tersely explained, ‘Said she wanted to come home.’ When asked, ‘What did you tell her?’ the father said he told her she was home” (Larry Cunningham of Billings, Montana, *Reader’s Digest*).

Marriage is to be a Union

God “And they shall become one flesh” (2:24b). This “one flesh” is generally considered to be both physical and spiritual. “God intended that the man and the woman be a spiritual, a functional unity, walking in integrity, serving him, and keeping his commandments” (Ross). Believers are not to marry unbelievers (1 Cor. 7:39).

Man To leave the spiritual union out of marriage is to have a marriage less than the ideal God intended. To be untied physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually is to experience the God-designed ideal.

Barclay wrote, “The basis of all marriage is *togetherness*, and the basis of togetherness is nothing other than *considerateness*. If marriage is to succeed, the partners in it must always be thinking more of each other than of themselves. Selfishness is the murderer of any personal relationship with other people and that is truest of all when these people are so linked that they cannot get away from each other but are bound together.” He also says, “There could be no finer tribute. The true basis of marriage is not elaborate and complicated and recondite—it is simply the love that thinks more of the happiness of others than it thinks of its own, the love that is proud to serve, the love that is able to understand, and therefore always able to forgive. That is to say, it is the Christ-like love, which knows that in forgetting self it will find self and that in losing itself it will complete itself” (Barclay on Mt. 19).

Summary: God’s plan for marriage is that one man is united to one woman to form a new family unit.

This plan excludes polygamy and homosexuality. This family unit is to become the most basic unit of society. Later, the Lord will add government and, still later, the church so that the three units of society are the family, government, and the church.

I was speaking in a small town in Idaho when I met a young couple from another state who had been married a short time. They explained that when they got married, they decided to move away from home for a year to establish themselves as a couple. Their plan was to move back home after a year. They wanted their kids to be near their grandparents.

HOW SATAN TEMPTS US

Bob Vernon, assistant chief of police for the LAPD, told the men at a Church of the Open Door breakfast meeting about an officer who stopped a limo for a minor traffic violation. The officer approached the driver and asked for his driver's license. As he looked through the dark window of the passenger end of the limo, he saw what looked like signs of drugs. The driver said to the officer, "I am going to pop the deck of the trunk. In it, you will find a suitcase with \$250,000 in cash. If you would just take the suitcase and drive off, I will not look at your badge number!"

That's temptation! Yours may not be as dramatic, but it's just as real. We have all been tempted. You may be tempted to have an affair when nobody would ever know. You may be tempted, like a police officer, to take money. You may be tempted to repeat something that you should not repeat.

We have all been tempted, but we have probably never analyzed temptation. Perhaps if we understood the nature of temptation, we would be better equipped to resist it. What is a temptation like? How does it work? How does one withstand temptation?

There is no better explanation of temptation in all of the Bible than the temptation of Eve. Genesis 3:1-5 describes in detail her temptation. Satan tempted her and Satan tempts us. Genesis 3 delaminates exactly how he does that. The dialog between Satan and Eve reveals the devices of Satan, which include disguise, doubt, denial, and deception.

Disguise

The Disguise "Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made" (3:1a). The Tempter in the garden was a serpent, one of the creatures God had created! This was no ordinary snake. This one talks and reasons. Obviously, this was more here than a talking snake (Morris). This snake is none other than Satan (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). Apparently, the serpent was upright (3:14) and perhaps bright and shining, one of the possible meanings of the Hebrew word for serpent (*Pulpit Commentary*). Beyond that, Genesis says nothing concerning the nature of the serpent, nor does it say anything about the origin of Satan. The point is Satan disguised himself. "Temptation came to Eve disguised (Ross), unexpectedly, and from a subordinate, as is still often true" (Constable).

The Wisdom The Tempter was cunning. The Hebrew word translated "cunning" means "subtle, shrewd, crafty." Constable points out that it does not mean wicked as much as wise (see also Mt. 10:16). Leupold says the idea is clever and cleverness is not evil in itself. The book of Proverbs was written to make the simple shrewd, but here, craftiness is used for an evil end. Satan cunningly came to Eve disguised as an animal (2 Cor. 11:14) and when she was alone. That was clever.

Today, Satan is up to his old tricks. Paul says he disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Satan does not hang out in bars. He does not get people drunk; the flesh can do that without him. Satan's favorite hangout is a church disguised as a preacher.

Doubt

The Question The Tempter, having deceived Eve with the clever disguise, now enters into a dialog. He asks a question, “And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” (3:1b). Again, Satan is clever. He did not at first directly deny the Word of God. He engaged the woman in a discussion and planted doubt. One of Satan’s tactics is doubt (Eph. 6:16).

What was the doubt? The Tempter’s question subtly cast doubt on *God’s Word*: “Did God *really* say?” Beyond that, it is an implied doubt about God’s goodness. “You could not eat of *every* tree?” “God reveals His character through His word. When we do not retain His word precisely, a distorted concept of God is often the result. This led Eve to *doubt* God’s *goodness*” (Constable, italics his). Adam and Eve had been given abundant proof of God’s love. They had been given a garden, a domain, companionship, and permission to eat of every tree but one. Satan highlights the one prohibition. Casting doubt on God’s love and goodness (Morris), Satan is suggesting God has unduly restricted man.

“The pattern of temptation observable here is one Satan has used often and still uses (cf. the temptations of Achan, David, and Jesus Christ). Satan’s first step was to plant a seed of doubt in Eve’s mind concerning God’s ways (vv. 1-3). The key phrase is ‘from any’ (v. 1). Satan focused Eve’s attention on God’s one prohibition. He suggested that God did not really want what was best for Adam and Eve but rather was withholding something from them that was essentially good” (Constable).

Satan’s “preacher” cast doubt on God’s Word. (Would a loving God send people to hell?) and God’s goodness (Jesus never condemned homosexuality.).

The Answer “And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die’”(3:2-3). Eve’s response should have been an emphatic disavowal of any suggestion that God had been withholding good from her. She does say, in essence, that the serpent is wrong, but her reply allows room for doubt and suspicion that God has been less generous and more restrictive than He really was.

Specifically, Eve mishandled God’s Word and, thus, misrepresented the goodness of God. She subtracted from the Word. God said, “*Of every tree* of the garden you may *freely* eat” (2:16). Eve said, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden” (3:2). She omitted the words “every” and “freely.” She also added to the Word of God. God said, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (1:17). Eve supplied, “nor shall you touch it” (3:3; see Prov. 30:6). Furthermore, she changed God’s Word. God said, “For in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die” (2:17). Eve changed that to “lest you should die” (3:3). She changed the penalty from “surely die” to just “die.”

By subtracting from the Word of God, she minimized the provision of God. By adding to the Word of God, she maximized the prohibition of God, and by slightly changing the Word of God, she weakened the penalty of God. Paraphrasing God’s Word is legitimate, but Eve did more than paraphrase. She changed and altered the intent of what God had said. Her statement does not clearly retain the certainty of punishment. Doubt has entered Eve’s mind. She has lost sight of the abundant goodness and grace of God. She has focused on the prohibition. At the bottom of all temptation is doubt concerning the goodness of God.

“In her reply to [the serpent’s] question, she perverted and misquoted *three times* the divine law to which she and Adam were subject: (1) She disparaged her privileges by misquoting the

terms of the Divine *permission* as to the other trees. (2) She overstated the restrictions by misquoting the Divine *prohibition*. (3) She underrated her obligations by misquoting the Divine *penalty*” (W. H. Griffith Thomas, italics his, cited by Constable).

Denial

The Denial “Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die’ (3:4). Satan began with doubt. Now, he moves to denial. God said, ‘In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die’ (2:17). Satan says, ‘You will *not surely* die’ (3:4). He first cast doubt on the prohibition; he now denies the punishment. One of Satan’s major tactics is denial.

The Lie Satan lied, particularly about the consequences of disobedience. He is the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). Here, the father of lies is so filled with lies that he calls God a liar. Note: the first doctrine to be denied was judgment. Satan’s preachers not only cast doubt on God’s Word; they deny it! (There is no eternal hell.)

Luther observed that at this point, Eve was like a wall that began to totter. Satan now braces himself against it so as to push it over and crush it.

Deception

The Deception “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (3:5). Satan deceived Eve by promising her a new dominion, even deity. As soon as people deny God’s Word and God’s goodness, they set themselves up as God and God is regarded as a rival and an enemy.

The Irony “What the serpent said about Eve being as God was a half-truth. Ironically, she was already like God, having been made in His image (1:26). She did become like God, or divine beings (Heb. ‘*elohim*), in that she obtained a greater knowledge of good and evil by eating of the tree. However, she became less like God because she was no longer innocent of sin. Her relationship with God suffered. Although she remained like God, she could no longer enjoy unhindered fellowship with God (3:24). The consequent separation from God is the essence of death (2:17)” (Constable).

“The first doctrine Satan denied in Scripture was that sin results in death (separation from God); on the negative side, the first false doctrine was that God will not punish sin. This is still the truth that Satan tries the hardest to get people to disbelieve” (Constable).

Satan’s preachers are deceitful workers (2 Cor. 11:13-14). They deceive people into thinking that doing or being, not trusting, is the way to get to heaven (2 Cor. 4:4).

Satan sometimes deceives by mixing truth and error. Donald Gray Barnhouse says, “Duveen, the famous English art connoisseur, took his little daughter to the beach one day but could not get her to go into the chilly water. After persuasion failed, he borrowed a teakettle, built a fire, and heated the teakettle until it streamed. With much fanfare, he poured the water in the teakettle into the ocean. Greatly impressed, his little daughter went into the water without a murmur.” Barnhouse said Satan “dilutes an ocean of unbelief with the teakettle of Christian ethics and people go waiting in self-satisfied, but unaware that they are bathing in unbelief” (*Our Daily Bread*, June 29, 1980).

Summary: Satan’s devices for temptation include disguise, doubt, denial, and deception.

He disguised himself as a serpent, a beautiful creature at the time. He cast doubt on God's Word and God's goodness by questioning what God said. He denied the Word of God by denying the certainty of death. He deceived Eve by concerning the consequences of disobedience and by promising her a new dominion, even deity.

It is interesting and, perhaps, helpful to understand temptation, but the issue is not analyzing temptation; it is knowing how to answer temptation. How should we handle temptation?

First, know the Word (Ps. 119:11). When Satan saw that Eve had not retained precise knowledge of God's Word, he denied the penalty of sin (Ross). "One natural tendency that we have when we do not understand or recall God's word precisely is to make it more restrictive than He does. This is what Eve did. This is a form of legalism" (Constable). When Jesus was tempted by Satan, He resisted it by quoting Scripture. The first thing you need to know about temptation then is the way to handle it is knowing the Word.

Second, pray. Jesus taught that in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus practiced that in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Third, do not make provision for the flesh. Temptation is serious business, but a joke illustrates this point. After starting a new diet, I altered my drive to work to avoid passing my favorite bakery. Then, I accidentally drove by the bakery, and as I approached, all these wonderful bakery goodies were in the window. I felt this was no accident, so I prayed, "Lord, it's up to You; if You want me to have any of those delicious goodies, create a parking place for me directly in front of the bakery." And sure enough, on the eighth time around the block, there it was! God is so Good!

PARADISE LOST

God created a paradise for Adam called the Garden of Eden. Then He pronounced His creation “very good” (1:31). There was integrity and intimacy, harmony and happiness, peace and prosperity in that garden. There was no struggle, suffering, or sin. Above all, there was no death (Morris). Then, the garden became a ghetto. As a result, today, the world is full of selfishness and separation, hate and hostility, crime and corruption (Morris). What happened? How did man lose his paradise? The answer is in Genesis 3. Adam was tempted, chose to disobey God, and fell into sin. Genesis 3 not only records the first temptation but also reveals the fall, sin, and the consequences of disobedience.

The Fall: Disobedience

Satan tempted Eve (3:1-4). She was told that she should doubt God’s goodness, deny the consequences of disobedience, and become deity herself. Thus far, she has been tempted. What follows is the fall itself. It consists of deliberation, decision, and disobedience.

Deliberation At this point, Eve does not reply to the serpent. She utters not a word; instead, her focus is now fastened on the forbidden fruit. She contemplates it carefully. The next verse says, “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, a tree desirable to make one wise” (3:6a). She gave the tree careful consideration. To Eve, it seemed that the tree was “good for food.” It appealed to bodily pleasure. The tree was also “pleasant to the eyes.” Seeing it made her want to possess it. Moreover, to her, it appeared that the tree was able to “make one wise,” that is, be like God. Many have pointed out the parallel between Genesis 3:6 and 1 John 3:16. John says the world consists of “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life” (1 Jn. 2:16). “Good for food” is the lust for flesh, “pleasant to the eye” is the lust of the eye, and “make one wise” is the pride of life. All temptation consists of an appeal for pleasure, possessions, and pride (power) outside the will of God. Eve’s first move toward the fall was to deliberate these possibilities.

“All three avenues of fleshly temptation are present in verse 6. She saw that the tree was ‘good for food’ (the lust of the flesh: the desire to *do* something contrary to God’s will, i.e., eat the tasty fruit). It was a ‘delight to the eyes’ (the lust of the eyes: the desire to *have* something apart from God’s will, i.e., possess the beautiful fruit). It was ‘desirable to make one wise’ (the pride of life: the desire to *be* something apart from God’s will, i.e., as wise as God, or gods). It was the quest for wisdom that led Eve to disobey God” (Constable, who cites Sailhamer). “In view of Jesus’s statement that a lustful look is as sinful as an overt act of sin (Matt. 5:27-28), did Eve commit the first sin when she desired the forbidden fruit? Sinful desires are sinful, but temptations are not sins until we respond by giving in to them. Eve did this when she ate the fruit. Until she did that, she was only experiencing temptation” (Constable).

Decision “She took of its fruit and ate” (3:6b). The woman decided to disobey. Technically, the Genesis account does not say that. It simply says she eat, but obviously, the decision to act came before the act itself. Sin is first an internal decision. Then, it is an external action. Eve sinned when, in her heart, she decided to eat the forbidden fruit.

Disobedience “She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate” (3:6c). Eve solicited Adam. Eve was deceived; Adam was not (3:3; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14). Adam knew the goodness of

God, yet he knowingly disobeyed Him. Adam willfully, deliberately disobeyed (Rom. 5:19). He chose to obey his wife rather than God. “It is interesting to observe that when this sin is referred to throughout Scripture, it is not referred to as the sin of Eve—but rather as the sin of Adam! The phrase in verse 6, ‘with her,’ seems to suggest that Adam was at Eve’s side when she was tempted by Satan. As God’s theocratic administrator and as the appointed head of the family, it was Adam’s responsibility to safeguard Eve and to ensure that she remained in submission to the command of God. But Adam failed in his God-given responsibility and permitted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit” (Pentecost, cited by Constable).

“Ignorance or disregard of God’s word makes one very vulnerable to temptation (Ps. 119:11). These conditions produce distrust, dissatisfaction, and, finally, disobedience. Failure to appreciate God’s goodness leads to distrust of His goodness. God’s prohibitions, as well as His provisions, are for our good” (Constable).

Sin cannot be blamed on heredity or the environment.

The Consequences: Death

The fall has taken place. Now, the natural consequences immediately follow. Sin carries consequences. Some consequences are immediately apparent. Some consequences come later. The consequences of the fall, including destruction, devastation, and death, are described in verses 7 and 8.

Destruction The first consequence of their disobedience was the destruction of their innocence. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (3:7). The tempter promised that the eyes would be opened, that is, that their understanding would increase (3:5). That came true (3:22), but instead of leading to dominion and deity, it produced destruction. Their innocence was destroyed; they knew they were naked. They lost the “ignorance of innocence” (Keil) and replaced it with the knowledge of nakedness. They passed from innocence to consciousness of guilt and shame. Their sin affected them individually; it destroyed their innocence.

Devastation Furthermore, their disobedience resulted in devastation, “And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings” (3:7). The intimacy between each other deteriorated at best and was devastated at worst. Now, there was something between them—fig leaves. They lost the security of intimacy and replaced it with the emotion of shame. The fig leaves were designed to cover their shame (Job 31:33). Thus, their sin affected their relationship with each other; it devastated their intimacy.

“Verse 7 marks the beginning of the second dispensation, the dispensation of conscience (or moral responsibility). Adam and Eve had failed in their responsibility under the dispensation of innocence; they were now sinners. They had rebelled against a specific command of God (2:16-17), and this rebellion marked a transition from theoretical to experiential knowledge of good and evil. Their new responsibility now became to do all known good, to abstain from all known evil, and to approach God through blood sacrifice, which anticipated the sacrifice of Christ. As a period of testing for humanity, the dispensation of conscience ended with the Flood. However, people continued to be morally responsible to God as He added further revelation of Himself and His will in succeeding ages (cf. Acts 14:14-16; Rom. 2:15; 2 Cor. 4:2)” (Constable).

Death Finally, their disobedience produced death, “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (3:8). The Hebrew word rendered

“cool” is the word “wind.” Keil says the wind of the day means “towards the evening when a cooling wind generally blows.” Apparently, at evening each day, God assumed some form analogous to humans and “took a walk,” so to speak, with Adam and Eve (5:22), but on the day Adam and Eve sinned, God came to meet them and they hid from Him. Instead of running to Him, they ran from Him. Their fellowship with God was broken and they were now alienated from God.

“Jeffrey Niehaus has proposed a different translation of the verse, as follows: ‘Then the man and his wife heard the thunder of Yahweh God as he was going back and forth in the garden in the wind of the storm and they hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden’ [Jeffrey Niehaus, “In the Wind of the Storm: Another Look at Genesis III 8,” *Vetus Testamentum* 44 (1994): 263-67, cited by Constable; Douglas K. Stuart, “The Cool of the Day” (Gen. 3:8) and “The Way He Should Go (Prov. 22:6),” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:683 (July-September, 2014): 259.] “Though unlikely to be adopted by published Bibles anytime soon and not seen by all scholars as proving the presence of a storm theophany in the passage, Niehaus’s translation of Genesis 3:8 remains the correct one. The verse is about God’s appearance in the wind of a storm, not the cool of the day” (Stuart, p. 263).

God had said that the day they eat, they would die (2:17). Death is separation. Physical death is the separation of the person from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the individual from God. The day they sinned, they experienced separation from God.

Conscience is now working, evidenced by the fact that they hid. Cassuto suggests that the wording of verse 8, “among the trees of the garden,” is intended to hint that though the sinner was trying to forget his sin, he was unable to “silence the voice of his conscience.” At each step, he encountered objects that reminded him of his sin. He was forced to hide among the very trees in the center of which he had sinned.

As a direct consequence of their disobedience, Adam and Eve’s innocence was destroyed, their intimacy with each other was devastated, and their involvement with God died. Sin affected them individually, socially, and spiritually.

Summary: When Satan tempted Adam and Eve, they deliberated and deliberately disobeyed God, which resulted in the destruction of their innocence, the devastation of their intimacy, and the death of their involvement with God.

Genesis 3 reminds us that sin results in destruction and death, not just for Adam and Eve but for all of us (Rom. 5:12). Paschall has said, “Man is the glory and the shame of the universe. God created man in His own image and put Him in paradise. Man fell and paradise was lost.”

Sin produces death. “Eve did not die at once physically, but she did die at once spiritually. She experienced alienation in her relationship with God. Death means separation in the Bible, never annihilation. Sin always results in alienation: theologically (between God and man), sociologically (between man and man), psychologically (between man and himself), and ecologically (between man and nature). We might also add, sexually (between men and women) and martially (between husbands and wives)” (Constable).

The greatest lesson of all is that temptation could have been and can be today, overcome by unwavering trust in God’s goodness and unfailing obedience to His Word. “The timeless lesson of these verses is that victory over temptation to violate God’s goodwill depends on a thorough knowledge of God’s word and unwavering confidence in God’s goodness. As Israel faced temptations to depart from God’s revealed will from the pagans she encountered, this record would have provided a resource for remaining faithful, as it does for us today. Often, these temptations attract because they promise superior blessing and fulfillment, even divinity. Therefore, knowing

God's word is extremely important (cf. Deut. 6:5-9, 13-25; Ps. 119:9-16). Satan tempted Jesus similarly to the way he tempted Eve. However, Jesus overcame victoriously by accurately using the word of God to remain faithful to the will of God. True wisdom comes by obeying, not disobeying, God's word" (Constable).

A small boy wandered into the woods and was lost for two hours. Finally, he found his way back, but instead of going home, he decided to hide in the barn until morning. He was afraid that his parents would not welcome him back. Because he doubted his parents, he deliberately disobeyed them. As a result, he lost the paradise of a warm, comfortable bed and spent the night in the cold, uncomfortable barn. That is what Adam and Eve did and that's what we do. Because of doubt and disobedience, we lose the paradise of God's fellowship and blessing.

GOD'S RESPONSE TO PARADISE LOST

Suppose you were wealthy enough to be able to get your son or daughter a brand-new automobile for graduation. Imagine that he or she immediately, *willfully*, totally wrecked it. What would be your response? Something similar happened to our Heavenly Father. He gave Adam a paradise on earth. It contained everything he needed to be fulfilled in life. His response was to immediately, willfully, and totally wreck it. What was God's response?

God Confronted Adam and Eve

Adam "Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?' (3:9). Adam ran from God, not to Him. God ran after him. God approached Adam first because, having received the divine command first, he was primarily responsible. God asked Adam, "Where are you?" Obviously, an omniscient God knew where Adam was. This is clearly a rhetorical question. God knew exactly where Adam was. The verb "called" is used in the sense of a summons to give an account of one's self (12:18; 20:9; 26:9-10; Cassuto).

God was not seeking information for Himself; He was seeking insight for Adam. The meaning of the question is something like, "Look where you are. What are you doing there?" This is like a father questioning his small son who has misbehaved and hidden behind the door or under the bed to avoid facing his father. The father, who is well aware of the child's hiding place, enters the room and says to the son, "Where are you?" meaning, "Why are you there?" God confronted Adam to get Adam to confess his disobedience.

Adam didn't confess his sin. "So he said, 'I heard your voice in the garden, and was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself' (3:10). He did not lie, but neither did he confess. He was preoccupied with his present state. He was more conscious of the effects of sin than the sin itself. This is the first mention of fear in the Bible. In this case, fear is the result of guilt.

Since Adam did not confess, God probed still further: "And He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?' (3:11) Again, this is not a question of one who is ignorant of what happened. Adam's admission of fear and acknowledgment of nakedness proves he had eaten of the forbidden tree. The purpose is to lead him to a confession.

Adam admits he ate, but he attempts to lessen the seriousness of his sin by blame-shifting. "Then the man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate' (3:12). He rationalized his action by pointing to the woman. Implied in his answer is also the concept that, ultimately, it was God's fault (Morris). People excuse themselves by blaming others, circumstances, and even God.

Eve God now turns to the woman: "And the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' (3:13). The pronoun "this" is emphatic. Ross says the force is, "What in the world have you done?" Or "Do you realize what you have done?"

"And the woman said, 'The serpent deceived me and I ate' (3:13). In the Hebrew text, the word "serpent" is emphasized (Leupold). She said, "It was the serpent!" Of course, she did not mention that she should have resisted the snake. The woman endeavors to exonerate herself by blame-shifting to the serpent. She learned how to do this from her husband.

Thus, when confronted by God, both Adam and Eve first practiced blame-shifting and finally confessed, “I ate” (3:12-13). Will Rogers said that the history of the United States could be divided into two eras: 1) the era of the passage of the buffalo and 2) the era of the passing of the buck. That’s not just the history of the USA; it’s the history of the human race and US.

“The text records several effects of the Fall on Adam and Eve. 1. They felt guilt and shame (v. 7). 2. They tried to change these conditions by their own efforts (v. 7). 3. They fled from God’s presence out of fear of Him (vv. 8, 10). 4. They tried to blame their sin on another rather than confessing personal responsibility (vv. 12, 13). The fact that Adam viewed God’s good gift to him, Eve, as the source of his trouble shows how far he fell (v. 12). He virtually accused God of causing him to fall by giving him what he now regarded as a bad gift. Contrast David’s proper response in 2 Samuel 12:13” (Constable).

College Professor: “Such rawness in a student is a shame; poor high school preparation is to blame.” High School Principal: “It’s plain to see the boy’s a perfect fool! The fault lies strictly with the Elementary school.” Elementary Teacher: “I would that from such dolts I might be spared; they send them up to me so unprepared!” Kindergarten Teacher: “Ne’er such a lack of training did I see! What sort of person can mother be?” Mother: “You stupid child! But, you’re not to blame; your father’s folks, I know, are all the same!”

God Condemned

When God confronted Adam, he pointed to Eve (3:12). So God confronted Eve, who pointed to the serpent (3:13). Now God addresses the serpent (3:14-15). In verses 9-13, God confronted the man and the woman, beginning with the man whom He held to be primarily responsible. In verses 14-19, God speaks to the serpent (3:14-15), the woman (3:16), and the man (3:17-19) in the order in which they sinned. In verses 9-13, God interrogated the man and the woman. In verses 14-19, God indicts the serpent, the woman, and the man. First, He confronted to establish guilt. Now, He condemns and even curses.

The Serpent “So the LORD God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this you are cursed more than all cattle and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go and you shall eat dust all the days of your life’ (3:14). God does not interrogate the serpent. There is no need to confront to elicit a confession because the serpent and the one behind the serpent are beyond salvation. God cursed the serpent more than all the animals in general and more than the wild beast in particular. The serpent was more cunning (3:1) and more cursed (3:14). The serpent surpassed all the animals in cleverness and used it for an evil purpose so it would surpass all in its condemnation.

The punishment of the serpent corresponds to the crime. It exalted itself above the man. Therefore, it shall crawl on its belly and eat dust. Apparently, the posture of the serpent was changed from walking upright to crawling on its belly. Keil says the serpent is the only animal having a bony skeleton that goes on its belly. “Some commentators take this literally and conclude that the snake had legs before God cursed it (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1:1:4). Others take it figuratively as a reference to the resultant despised condition of the snake (Leupold; Kidner; Mathews). “Josephus wrote that God also deprived the serpent of speech at this time (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1:1:4), but there is no biblical support for this conclusion” (Constable).

The phrase “You shall eat dust” does not mean the serpent’s diet was dust, but only that while crawling in the dust, it shall swallow dust. “Since snakes do not literally feed on dust, many interpreters take this statement figuratively” (Constable). “Eating dust” is used figuratively in the

Scripture of the plight of a conquered foe. That is, as a symbol of humiliation (Ps. 122:9; Isa. 49:23; Micah 7:17).

Chrysostom said, “Just as a loving father, when punishing the murderer of his son might snap in two the sword or the dagger with which the murder had been committed, so God cursed the serpent.”

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel” (3:15). Genesis 3:14 speaks specifically of the serpent. The grammar of verse 15 seems to continue the discussion, but the content of what is said seems to go beyond the serpent. Enmity is only used of people, not animals. Verse 15 refers to the seed of the woman and says an individual within that category (see “he”) shall “bruise your head,” that is, deliver a fatal blow. These are the first hints in Genesis 3 that something more than a snake was involved in the temptation of Eve. Many commentators, both ancient and modern, insist that Genesis 3:15 goes beyond the serpent and speaks directly to Satan, who was the one acting through the snake (Rev. 20:2).

Satan no doubt believed that since he had persuaded Eve to believe and obey his word rather than God’s Word, she and her seed would be loyal to him (Morris). God says, “Not so.” He promised to put hostility between Satan and Eve and between Satan’s seed and Eve’s seed, but Satan does not have physical descendants. Who is the seed of Satan? This must refer to the spiritual descendants of Satan, that is, unbelievers (Jn. 8:44). The seed of the woman (actually, women do not have seed; men do), in the broadest sense of the term, would include all mankind, but in this verse, the seed of the woman is opposite to the seed of Satan. Therefore, the “seed of the woman” here is a reference to the spiritual seed of the woman, that is, believers. This, then, is a forecast of hostility and conflict between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God. The fall introduced a spiritual war into the human family.

The conflict now narrows to two individuals. “He” shall bruise Satan’s head. The imagery here is taken from a man stepping on a snake’s head. To bruise the head is to deliver a fatal blow. The “he” is an individual from the seed of the woman. This is a reference to the Messiah, who will ultimately defeat Satan. Some have suggested that there is even an implied reference to the virgin birth here and that “he” is of the seed of the woman, not the seed of the man (Morris).

Satan will bruise his heel. The imagery is taken from a snake biting a man’s heel, a minor injury as compared to a head wound. The word “bruised” is used in both cases because each intended to destroy the other. At the cross, Satan bruised Christ’s heel, but Christ bruised Satan’s head (Heb. 2:14). At His Second Coming, Christ will completely win the victory won at the cross (Rom. 16:20). Genesis 3:15 is known as the “Pro-Evangelium,” that is, the first proclamation of the gospel (Kidner).

Satan used the woman to destroy man. God will use the seed of the woman to destroy him. Satan used the woman to bring sin into the world. By His grace, God will use the seed of the woman to conquer sin, death, and the Devil himself.

Morris makes the interesting observation that the predicted conflict between the serpent and the seed of the woman is “reflected in the legends and mythologies of the ancients, filled as they are with tales of heroes engaged in a life-and-death struggle with serpents and dragons and other monsters. The star figures by which early people identified the heavenly consolations repeat the same story, especially in the so-called signs of the zodiac and their accompanying ‘decans’ [subdivisions within each zodiac sign]. There is the picture, for example, of Hercules battling with the serpent. The constellation Virgo, with the spike of wheat in her hand, may refer to the promised ‘seed of the woman.’ The king of animals, Leo, is shown clawing the head of a great fleeing

serpent. The scorpion is illustrated as stinging the heel of the great hero Ophiuchus. These and other similar representations in the ancient myths are most likely merely distorted remembrances of the great primeval prophecy. Mankind, from the earliest ages, has recorded its hopes that someday a Savior would come who would destroy the devil and reconcile man to God.”

The Woman “To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow in your conception; in pain, you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be to your husband and he shall rule over you’ (3:16). The Hebrew construction of the first part of verse 16 may be rendered, “I will greatly multiply your sorrow *in* your conception. “Since there is no sorrow or pain in conception itself, most interpret conception here as an idiom for the whole child-bearing process (Kidder; Cassuto; Keil does not agree; Ross says it is a synecdoche). The next phrase, “in pain, you shall bring forth children,” is in apposition to the first part of the verse. The woman sought the pleasure of food for her body; she was punished with pain in childbearing.

What is the meaning of “Your desire *shall be* for your husband?” Several factors must be considered to answer that question. First, the meaning of the Hebrew word translated “desire” means “desire, longing, craving” (BDB). One commentator says “desire” means “a violent craving for a thing,” a “desire bordering on disease” (Keil). Another renders the word “desire” by the word “yearning” (Leupold). It only appears three times in the Old Testament: Genesis 3:16, Genesis 4:7, and Song of Solomon 7:10 (*Englishman’s Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament*, p. 1359; according to BDB, it is used “of a man for a woman, a woman for man, and of a beast to devour”).

Second, the sentence does not have a verb. Notice that in the English translation, the verb “shall be” is in italics, indicating those words are not in the Hebrew text. The traditional approach to this verse has been to supply the *future* tense verb “shall be” (KJV; ASV; NKJV; NASB; NIV; ESV). A more recent suggestion is to supply a *past* tense verb (“your desire *was* to your husband”).

Third, the context of Genesis 3:16 is the Lord pronouncing judgment on Eve. The Lord tells her, “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain, you shall bring forth children; Your desire *shall be* for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Three things are stated: 1) the Lord will increase her pain in childbirth, 2) her desire will be (was) and for her husband, and 3) her husband will rule over her.

So, what is the meaning of “desire?” There are four interpretations.

The first explanation of “desire” is sexual desire. Although the first judgment (pain in childbirth) and the second judgment (desire for your husband) are not grammatically connected to each other, this interpretation connects them and concludes that since she will have additional pain in childbirth, she might want to avoid sexual relations with her husband. Nevertheless, she will have a sexual desire for her husband. Clarke (a Methodist commentator) says, “Thou shalt not be able to shun the great pain and peril of child-bearing, for thy desire, thy appetite, shall be to thy husband.”

The second explanation of “desire” is the husband’s desire. Although the second judgment (desire for your husband) and the third judgment (husband shall rule) are not grammatically connected to each other, this explanation connects them and concludes that her desire will be subject to her husband’s desire because he will rule over her. In other words, the third statement is the explanation of the second.

Calvin says, “As if he had said that she should not be free and at her own command, but subject to the authority of her husband and dependent upon his will; or as if he had said, ‘Thou shalt desire nothing but what thy husband wishes.’ As it is declared afterward, unto thee shall be his desire, (Gen. 4:7.) Thus, the woman, who had perversely exceeded her proper bounds, is forced back to

her own position. She had, indeed, previously been subject to her husband, but that was a liberal and gentle subjection; now, however, she is cast into servitude.”

Gill (a Baptist commentator) says, “This is to be understood of her being solely at the will and pleasure of her husband; that whatever she desired should be referred to him, whether she should have her desire or not, or the thing she desired; it should be liable to be controlled by his will, which must determine it, and to which she must be subject.” Barnes (a Presbyterian commentator) says this is evidently a piece of that retributive justice that meets us constantly in the administration of God. The woman had taken the lead in the transgression. In the fallen state, she is to be subject to the will of her husband. “Desire” does not refer to sexual desire in particular. Gen. 4:7. It means, in general, “turn,” determination of the will. “The determination of thy will shall be yielded to thy husband, and, accordingly, he shall rule over thee. The second clause, according to the parallel structure of the sentence, is a climax or emphatic reiteration of the first and, therefore, serves to determine its meaning. Under fallen men, women have been more or less a slave. In fact, under the rule of selfishness, the weaker must serve the stronger. Only a spiritual resurrection will restore her to her true place, as the help-meet for man.”

Keil says, “The woman had also broken through her divinely appointed subordination to the man; she had not only emancipated herself from the man to listen to the serpent but had led the man into sin. For that, she was punished with a *desire* bordering upon disease (תְּשׁוּקָה from שׁוּק to run, to have a violent craving for a thing), and with *subjection* to the man.” Bush says, “Thy desire should be subject to the will and pleasure of thy husband; thine obedience regards shall be to thy husband.”

Lange says, “This sentence obtains its full significance in its embracing that which follows and in its contrast to it. It is emphatically stated that her desire should be to the man as though she were magically bound to him. תְּשׁוּקָה [“desire”] may denote the longing of the woman’s dependence upon man. תְּשׁוּקָה comes from שׁוּק, to run, run after, pursue, want. It is further emphatic that the man shall rule over her in a strong way and finally that she, in her bound and destined adherence to man, shall find in him a strong and severe master. The woman had specifically sinned, ‘not for the sake of earthly enjoyment merely’ (Delitzsch), but in high-flown aspiring, as though she would emancipate herself from man, get before him, and take him under her guardianship. Her punishment, therefore, must consist in this, that she must become subject in the normal line of her sexual being, her consciousness, adhesiveness, and dependence.”

Young says, “Her desire, whatever it may be, will not be her own. She cannot do what she wishes, for her husband rules over her like a despot and whatever she wishes is subject to his will.”

The third explanation of “desire” is a natural desire. Since *three* different things are said, the desire is not interpreted by the first judgment or the third judgment. Therefore, the statement about desire is nothing other than a woman’s natural desire for her husband. In support of this view is the use of the word “desire” in the Song of Solomon 7:10.

Ryle (in *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*) says, “Doubtless, there is a reference to the never-ending romance of daily life, presented by the passionate attachment of a wife to her husband, however domineering, unsympathetic, or selfish he may be.”

Leupold (a Lutheran commentator) says, “It [desire] is not merely sexual yearning. It includes the attraction that a woman experiences for a man, which she cannot root from her nature. Independent feminists may seek to banish it, but it persists in cropping out.”

Cassuto (a Jewish commentator) says, “You influenced your husband and caused him to do what you wished; henceforth, you and your female descendants will be subservient to your husband. You will yearn for them, but they will be heads of the family and will rule over you.”

Morris says, “She who had acted independently of her husband in her fateful decision to taste the desired fruit must henceforth exercise her desire only to her husband and he shall bear rule over her.”

Morris III says, “The woman will also ‘long’ for her husband.

Busenitz says, “It may be concluded that, in spite of the Fall, the woman will have a longing for intimacy with a man involving more than sexual intimacy” (Irving Busenitz, “Woman’s Desire for Man: Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered,” *Grace Theological Journal* 7:2, Fall 1986, p. 203).

The fourth explanation of “desire” is a desire to dominate. Based on the fact that the verb is missing and that the word “desire” is used in Genesis 4:7 for a desire to dominate, this view says the verb “was” should be supplied and the desire of the woman in Genesis 3:16 must be connected to the third statement in the verse and concludes that the desire was to dominate her husband. The support of this view is the meaning of “desire” in Genesis 4:7.

Ross (a DTS Hebrew Professor) says, “It has traditionally been translated with the supplied future tense: “your desire shall be for your husband.” In such a construction, however—a nominal sentence without a verb—the tense of the supplied verb must be drawn from the context. To determine what the context suggests requires a careful study of ‘desire.’ The Hebrew word ‘desire’ has some of the same uses that the English word has. In this passage, it is commonly explained to mean that the woman would be drawn to her husband, probably so explained on the basis of the usage in the Song of Solomon. But the word also occurs in this context of Genesis with quite another meaning. According to its use in Genesis 4:7, ‘desire’ probably should be interpreted to describe prompting to evil. The idea of this verse would then be that because the woman prompted the man to sin and gave him something to eat, that is, taking the lead rather than maintaining a partnership, the man would have dominion over her. I would thus translate, “Your desire was to your husband, but he shall have mastery over you.” The punishment, then, would be talionic [punishment must be equivalent to the offense] for the woman. This view also finds support in verse 17 (‘because you obeyed your wife’).”

Kidner says the phrase “your desire shall be for your husband” (RSV), with the reciprocating “he shall rule over you,” portrays a marriage relationship in which control has slipped from the fully personal realm to that of instinctive urges, passive and active.”

Constable says, “This view rests on the parallel Hebrew construction in Gen. 4:7. This view seems best to me.”

The *NKJV Study Bible* says The word desire (Heb. teshûgâ) can also mean “an attempt to usurp or control,” as in Gen. 4:7. We can paraphrase the last two lines of this verse this way: “You will now have a tendency to dominate your husband, and he will have the tendency to act as a tyrant over you.” The battle of the sexes has begun. Each strives for control and neither lives in the best interest of the other (Php. 2:3-4). The antidote is for the restoration of mutual respect and dignity through Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:21-33).”

The *MacArthur Study Bible* says, “Just as the woman and her seed will engage in a war with the serpent, i.e., Satan and his seed (Gen. 3:15), because of sin and the curse, the man and the woman will face struggles in their own relationship. Sin has turned the harmonious system of God-ordained roles into distasteful struggles of self-will. Lifelong companions, husbands and wives, will need God’s help in getting along as a result. The woman’s desire will be to lord it over her husband, but the husband will rule by divine design (Eph. 5:22-25). This interpretation of the curse is based upon the identical Hebrew words and grammar being used in Gen. 4:7 (see note there) to show the conflict man will have with sin as it seeks to rule him.”

The *Ryrie Study Bible* says, “Your desire may mean that the wife would have a deep attraction

to her husband, perhaps to compensate for the sorrow of childbirth. Or this may mean that her desire would be to rule her husband. See Genesis 4:7, where the same word is used in this sense of ruling.”

So, which interpretation is correct? There are several problems with the “desire to dominate” view. In the first place, the other two judgments are future. Except for a few recent commentators, virtually all translations and commentators supply a future tense verb (“shall be”) rather than a past tense verb. In the second place, the word “desire” simply means “desire.” There is nothing in the word that necessitates the meaning of a “desire to dominate.” Granted, it is used that way in Genesis 4:7, but the use of a word in another passage does not necessarily determine the meaning of that word in the passage under consideration. Most commentators do not mention the connection between Genesis 3:16 and Genesis 4:7. Leupold mentions it and rejects it. He calls it an “accidental similarity.” In the third place, a desire to dominate is not a punishment. Those who hold “the desire to dominate” view would argue that in their view, domination is not a punishment; it is connected with the third statement, which is a punishment, but in the Hebrew text, the second and the third statements are not connected. In the fourth place, Eve was deceived; she was not trying to dominate Adam.

The problem with the “natural desire” view is that for a wife to desire her husband is not a punishment. The “your desire will be subject to your husband’s rule” explanation makes sense in that the punishment of being subservient to her husband and her desire for him is part of that, but it seems forced.

The sexual desire interpretation makes the most sense. In the context of verse 16, it would be logical to say that even though a woman will have increased pain in childbearing, she will still have a sexual desire for her husband. According to this interpretation, the punishment is the increased pain in childbearing and the desire for her husband is part of that punishment. In this case, the desire might not be limited to sexual desire; it could also include her being drawn to her husband, even though she will experience pain in childbearing and being “ruled” by him.

A woman’s desire shall be for her husband, but he shall “rule” over her. The Hebrew word translated “rule” describes “dominion, mastery, lordship” (Ross). The woman sought to control the man. Now, the penalty is she shall be controlled. Before the fall, the woman, being created for the man, was made subordinate to him. After the fall, man is made to rule her. Without Christ, this rule can easily become harsh. In Christ, this rule is not canceled, but the husband is to exercise it in a loving way (Eph. 5:25).

The Man “Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you saying, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; for thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you shall return” (3:17-19). Adam’s punishment was two-fold: painful toil and physical death. Because Adam submitted himself to his wife when he should have submitted to God, his punishment was to experience insubordination of the soil. God cursed the ground, man’s realm, not man. Prior to the fall, the ground spontaneously yielded fruit and food for man’s needs. Now, it yielded thorns and thistles. Whereas once the ground cooperated with man, now it resisted him. Creation was cursed. It was subjected to futility (Rom. 8:20) and began to experience degeneration and decay. Before the fall, man worked to tend the garden, but that work was done with relative ease. Now, man would gain his food by painful toil (the word translated “toil” in verse 18 is the same one rendered “pain” in verse 16). All his life, man will now eat bread by the sweat of his face

(3:19). Because man aspired to be deity, his penalty was death and a return to dust. He was made from dust; he is dust and will return to dust (3:19). So much for his being deity.

“These punishments represent retaliatory justice. Adam and Eve sinned by eating; they would suffer in order to eat. She manipulated her husband; she would be mastered by her husband. The serpent destroyed the human race; he will be destroyed” (Ross in the BKC).

“Verses 14-19 reveal the terms of the second major biblical covenant, the Adamic Covenant. Here, God specified the conditions under which fallen man was to live (until God lifted His curse on creation in the messianic kingdom; Rom. 8:21). The elements of this covenant can be summarized as follows. God cursed the serpent (v. 14) but promised a redeemer (v. 15). He changed the status of the woman in three respects: she would experience multiplied conception, sorrow, and pain in motherhood, and continuing headship by the man (v. 16). God also changed Adam and Eve’s light workload in Eden to burdensome labor and inevitable sorrow because of His curse on the earth (vv. 17-19). Finally, He promised certain physical death for Adam and all his descendants (v. 19)” (Constable).

Summary: When the serpent deceived Eve and Adam deliberately disobeyed, God confronted Adam and Eve to get them to acknowledge their sin and He condemned to different degrees the serpent, Satan, the woman, and the man, that is, all involved.

God was just in confronting and condemning those who first sinned. The serpent, who exalted himself over the woman, was humiliated under her to crawl on the ground and eat dust. Satan, who used the woman to defeat God’s plan, was told that God would use the seed of the woman to destroy him. The woman who sought pleasure in eating received the penalty of pain in childbearing. She sought to control the man and ended up being controlled by man. The man, who was insubordinate to God, received the punishment of experiencing the insubordination of creation. He, whose ambition was to be deity, ended up with death and dust. In each case, the punishment was commensurate with the crime. God was just in His judgment.

God was also merciful. He proclaimed victory before He pronounced punishment. He allowed the woman to bear children, guaranteeing the future of the race. He permitted the man to live and labor. Even death was a blessing. The thorns and thistles and human rebellion thrived unchecked, while plants and wicked people would have increased until the planet was overrun and consumed.

A comedian (Bill Cosby) suggested that what God said after the first sin was, “All right. Everyone out of the pool!” That’s not exactly what happened. God didn’t deal with everyone alike. He judged justly and even manifested His mercy at the same time. The serpent was cursed. Satan was crushed. The woman and the man were condemned to pain during life and physical death at the end of it, but He permitted them to live, labor, love each other, bear children, and believe victory was coming. Even death was a blessing.

God’s response to Paradise’s loss was justice and mercy. God’s response to us when we sin is justice and mercy. In justice, He pronounces death. In mercy, He gives His Son to die to save us.

When Harry A. Ironside was a young man, he sometimes played with his small children, pretending to be a bear. He would make a “den” by placing some chairs in a corner. Then, he would get on all fours, growl, and chase his children around the room. On one occasion, his small son ran into the corner, covered his face, and began to scream in fear of the bear, which was breathing down on him. Suddenly, he turned and rushed into his father’s arms, saying, “I’m not a bit afraid, ‘cause you’re not really a bear; you’re are my own papa!” (*Our Daily Bread*, 11/6/1975). God is just, but He is also a loving father. Don’t run from him like Adam. Run to Him and experience His loving embrace.

IS PARADISE REGAINABLE?

As the earthquake came rumbling through, it measured 5.5 on the Richter Scale. Having lived in Southern California for more than a decade, I was used to earthquakes, even earthquakes of this size. This one, however, was different. The epicenter of the 5.5 quake that hit Upland, California, was closer to my house than any other earthquake I had experienced. It affected my house more than any other earthquake I had experienced. Cabinet doors flew open; pictures fell off the wall, and walls cracked. When I got home and saw the damage, I had one major question, “Was it repairable?”

God put a man in a garden, but his’s disobedience was like an earthquake that destroyed the Garden of Eden. Man’s relationship with God was broken. His relationship with his wife was fractured. His relationship to the very earth itself was permanently damaged. He was put out of the Garden and prohibited from returning. The question is, “Is paradise regainable?”

Adam Believed God

Eve At first glance, the verse after Genesis 3:19 seems out of place. It says, “And Adam called his wife’s name Eve because she was the mother of all living” (3:20). Indeed, some have concluded that it is misplaced! When Donald Grey Barnhouse preached on these verses, he called attention to the apparent problem and told the story of his children, who sometimes entertained themselves by listening to one radio program and pushing the bottom to quickly change the station. When the family was listening to the marriage of Princess Elizabeth and Philip, the minister said, “Do you, Philip, take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?” At that moment, one of the children pushed the button and the radio speaker was heard saying, “Shake hands, go to your corners and come out fighting at the bell. These verses seem incongruous” (Boice).

Several suggestions have been offered as to why it is here. One is that since God decreed that Adam should rule over Eve (3:16), he gave her a name as a token of his rulership (Cassuto). To name something is to have dominion over it.

The more common explanation, however, is that this is an indication of Adam’s faith, not his lordship. He named his wife Eve, a Hebrew word that means “life.” The author of Genesis adds, “because she was the mother of all living.” Eve was named “life,” that is, “life-giver.” We would say, “mother.” When Adam named his wife, they had no children, but God had said she would bring forth children in pain (3:16), and Adam believed Him. By faith, he gave his wife a name that signified that God’s Word would come true. This is particularly significant in light of the fact that God had just said in the previous verse that Adam would die. Adam believed that God would fulfill His Word to Eve before he died. “He believed life would continue in spite of God’s curse. This was an act of faith and an expression of hope. He believed God’s promise that she would bear children (v. 16)” (Constable).

The Deliverer Perhaps, in this faith, there is also the belief that God would send an individual (see “He” in 3:15) from the seed of the woman to mortally wound Satan and bring salvation. Adam believed God’s Word and possibly believed the promise of a coming deliverer. Faith is believing God’s promise (Rom. 4:16-25, esp. 20-21).

God Clothed Them

An Animal Skin Then God clothed them. “Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them” (3:21). Adam and Eve had clothed themselves with fig leaves sewn together (3:7); God clothed them with animal skins. Adam would never have thought of doing this. Death is familiar to us, but not to Adam. He had not seen anything die. God revealed the death of this animal to him. Adam and Eve did know that death was punishment for sin (2:17; 3:3, 3:19). When they saw the animal slain, they recognized that it died because of their disobedience. Blood was shed because of sin. Was the animal God killed a lamb?

Salvation Adam and Eve were clothed with the one who died for them. The clothing of Adam and Eve with this animal skin is a picture of salvation. An innocent animal died because of disobedience. The Lamb of God died for our sin (Jn. 1:29). The guilty was covered in the skin of another. Sinners who trust in Christ are clothed with His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). All of this was to be revealed to us by God. Left to ourselves, we would cover ourselves with unacceptable attire. We would clothe ourselves, so to speak, with good works. Good works are good in man’s economy but totally unacceptable for salvation in God’s.

Boice illustrates this by saying, “Good works are a bit like Monopoly© money. It is good for the game of Monopoly©, but it is no good in the real world. Suppose your family has a good Monopoly© player and every time you play the game, this person tends to accumulate all the property and collect all the money. Suppose that after one of these games, he takes his Monopoly© money and goes down to the First National Bank to open an account. Steps up to the teller and says, ‘I’d like to open an account in your bank.’

“‘Very good,’ says the teller. ‘How much would you like to deposit?’ ‘\$472,984!’ He pushes the Monopoly© money across the counter. If that ever happened, I am sure the teller would quickly call someone to come and take this person away. Monopoly© money serves well in the ‘game’ of Monopoly©, but it has no value in the real world. In the same way, although good works are sufficient to make us acceptable before other men and women, they are not sufficient to gain an acceptable standing before God.”

The clothing of Adam and Eve was an act of God’s care, concern, and charity for them. He was gracious.

God Denied them Access to the Tree of Life

The likeness of God “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold the man has become one of us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (3:22-24). The “us” of Genesis 3:22 is a reference to God. Early in this story the statement was made that if they ate, they would be like God (3:5). Now God says they are like “us” (3:22). Although the Trinity is not explicitly revealed here, the language of the verse allows for it (see 1:26). In one respect, Adam and Eve had become like God. They were now aware of good and evil. God knows good and evil by virtue of His omniscience, not by His experience. People know evil by experience. Other than that, Adam and Eve were anything but divine. In fact, some have understood verse 22 as being ironic.

The Tree of Life God put Adam and Eve out of the garden and placed a double guard of cherubim and a revolving flaming sword (or revolving sword-like flame) to prevent them from eating from the Tree of Life. This was an act of mercy. If they had eaten of the Tree of Life, they would have lived perpetually in their current state. God had something better in mind, namely, death, resurrection, and a resurrected body.

Summary: When Adam exercised faith in God's promise, God clothed him and his wife and mercifully denied them access to the Tree of Life.

Does this mean that paradise cannot be regained? The answer to that question from this passage is both "Yes" and "No." Genesis 3:20-24 indicates that man's relationship with God was restored, but his residence in the garden was permanently hindered.

What does the remainder of the Scripture teach? What happened to Adam has profoundly and permanently affected the human race down to us today. In the words of Paul, "Through one man sin entered the world and death through sin and thus death spread to all men because all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Adam's posterity inherited a corrupted nature. All are now born sinners.

Some object it is not their fault. They argue they were not in the garden. Adam sinned, not them. They did not even vote for Adam. True, but a lot of people we didn't vote for have acted for us. Besides, had we been in the garden, we would have done as Adam did.

At any rate, the question really becomes, not only can people have a relationship with God, which Genesis 3 answers, but "Can the image of God be restored in them and can they ultimately be placed back in the garden?" The answer is "Yes." Again in the words of Paul, "As through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation even so through one man's righteous act the free gift came to all men resulting in justification of life" (Rom. 5:18). In short: "As in Adam all died, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22), that is, *all* who are in Christ will be made alive (1 Cor. 15:23). All are made alive when they trust in Him for the gift of eternal life. Like Adam, our relationship with God can be restored through faith.

What about the Garden of Eden? Is that paradise regainable? Yes. All believers will one day enter a new heaven, a new earth, and a holy city called the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22). There will be no curse there (Rev. 22:3), but the Tree of Life will be (Rev. 22:14). Paradise is regainable! In the meantime, we must work (Gen. 3:23) and wait (Rev. 21-22).

The Upland earthquake damaged my house. The damage repairable, but only a skilled repairman could do that. Likewise, paradise can be restored, but only God can do it.

One commentator put it like this, "With the expulsion of man from the Garden of Eden, paradise itself vanished from the earth. God did not withdraw from the Tree of Life its supernatural power, nor did He destroy the garden before their eyes, but simply prevented their returns to show that it should be preserved until the time of the end when sin should be rooted out by the judgment, and death abolished by the Conqueror of the serpent (1 Cor. xv. 26), and when upon the new earth the tree of life should flourish again in the heavenly Jerusalem and bear fruit for the redeemed (Rev. xx. and xxi.)" (Keil).

The fall of man is like the ancient coliseum of Rome. It once stood as a spectacular, awe-inspiring structure. Now, it stands in ruins in a dilapidated state. Sin ruined humanity; it destroyed them. In the case of humanity, however, there is hope. It would be like one man moving into the coliseum and slowly rebuilding it. When an individual trusts Jesus Christ, God moves in and as that individual cooperates with Him, God slowly begins the rebuilding process. To carry the analogy a step further, when the coliseum is rebuilt, God places it in a restored Rome. Paradise is regainable through Christ.

A TALE OF TWO BROTHERS, CAIN AND SETH

This is the tale of two brothers, Cain and, most would say, Abel. It's true that Cain had a brother named Abel, but he died. The real story is about the other brother who took Abel's place, so to speak. It is the story of Cain and Seth. This tale of two brothers is more than a story of two siblings. These two set the pace for the human race. Understanding what they did gives insight into the history of humanity down to you and me, yes, you. You're very much like one of these two brothers; whether you be male or female, young or old, as you look at them, you will see yourself. What does the tale of these two brothers teach us about ourselves?

The Ungodly Line of Cain: One Line from Adam followed Sin

The Occupations of the Two The story begins with the birth of two brothers. "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD" (4:1). "Know" is a biblical euphemism for sexual intercourse (Leupold; Kidner). Eve conceived and gave birth to a boy named Cain. Her response was to exclaim, "I've gotten a man from the Lord," meaning with the Lord's help (Ross). God had said she would bear children (3:16). She now acknowledges that by His faithfulness to His Word and by His grace, she has been given a baby boy. This statement indicates that Eve was a believer but does not necessarily prove that she thought Cain was the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15.

After the first son came a second: "Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground" (4:2). The name of the second son, Abel, means "breath, vapor, vanity." Somehow, the vanity of life impressed his parents. "As things turned out, his life was short, like a vapor. Perhaps his parents gave him this name after his death, in view of the comparative shortness of his life" (Constable).

Abel was a shepherd and Cain became a farmer. God instituted both occupations (1:26; 2:15). Adam, no doubt, had already commenced both occupations. Both endeavors are honorable; both are necessary. The farmer raised food for the family and livestock; the shepherd provided skins for clothing and sacrifices for worship. Animals were not used for food until after the flood (1:29; 2:6; 3:9; 9:3). There is no indication of any conflict between the two vocations. Jesus seems to call Abel a prophet (Mt. 23:35; Lk. 11:50-51) and clearly speaks of Cain's murder of Abel as a historical fact (Mt. 23:35).

The Offerings of the Two The story continues. "And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat" (4:3-4a). In the Hebrew text, the phrase "in the process of time" says "after the end of days." The expression is admittedly vague. If a specific time is intended, the end of the agricultural year is the most natural possibility (Leupold). Both brothers brought offerings to the Lord. When did that originate? God killed an animal and clothed Adam and Eve with its skin (3:21). Perhaps, from that example, God taught them to sacrifice. Or God could have communicated this concept to them after they were expelled from the garden. No doubt, Adam and Eve practiced bringing offerings to the Lord, and their sons learned it from them.

Cain brought an offering to the Lord, which consisted of the fruit of the ground. Technically, even under the Mosaic system, such an offering was an acceptable one. Bloodless offerings were also acceptable (Lev. 2:1, 4, 14, 15). Abel brought an offering, which was an animal. The expression

“and of their fat” does not mean he brought the fat portions as in the Mosaic system. It indicates that Abel brought the fattest of the flock. He brought the best! (Keil). The text does not say he sacrificed this animal, though that is probably what he did.

God responded differently to the two men and their offering, “And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering” (4:4b-5a). The Lord regarded *Abel, the person and his offering, with favor*. He did not so regard either Cain or his offering. Why? The reason God respected *Abel* is explained in Hebrews, which says, “By faith, Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks” (Heb. 11:4). Abel had faith; Cain didn’t.

The reason God respected *Abel’s offering* and not Cain’s is more difficult to explain. One suggestion is that Abel brought his best, which is true, and Cain didn’t, that is, he didn’t bring the first fruits. Many have concluded that Abel brought a bloody offering, whereas Cain’s was bloodless. Granted, the text does not say that, but Hebrews 11 does say that Abel offered “a more excellent sacrifice.” Although a bloodless offering was appropriate in the Mosaic system, perhaps in this situation, they had been told by God and taught by their parents to bring a blood sacrifice and Cain didn’t *believe* it was necessary.

How they knew God respected one and not the other is not stated. The ancient theory that fire fell from heaven and consumed Abel’s offering does not fit the fact that God respected *Abel* and his offering (Keil). How did they know God respected Abel himself? God must have communicated with them somehow. “Faith always presupposes a Divine revelation” (Thomas, cited by Constable).

Abel, who inherited a sin nature and no doubt sinned, trusted God, offered a blood sacrifice, and was declared righteous (Heb. 11:4). God was pleased. Cain was unbelieving and offered a bloodless sacrifice. The way of Cain is the way of unbelief (Jude 11).

Think about it. Both Cain and Abel came to God, wanted to worship, brought a sacrifice, and brought the best they had. God accepted one and rejected the other. Why? Abel went God’s way, the way of sacrifice, the way of death and blood. Cain said, I’ll worship God, but I’ll do it my way.

The Outrage of Cain Instead of God getting angry, Cain got angry! “And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell” (4:5b). Cain was not just upset and angry. He was very angry. He was so angry his countenance fell, at least signifying sadness and perhaps even depression.

God graciously approached Cain, “So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it’” (4:6-7). Cain was angry because his offering was not accepted. The Lord asked a question to get Cain to admit his problem. The Lord reasoned with Cain, showing him the possible paths he could take.

The first option is to do well and be “accepted.” The Hebrew word translated “accepted” means “exaltation, dignity, swelling, uprising.” If the meaning is the idea of “lifting up” (see verse 5; NASB: “will not your countenance be lifted up;” Ross), the Lord is saying if you deal with the anger, a smile will replace the sad look upon your face. Your countenance will be lifted instead of cast down. If the Hebrew word translated “accepted” is rendered “accepted” (40:13; NIV; ESV; Leupold), the Lord is saying if you do well, that is, trust Me and bring an acceptable sacrifice, you will be accepted by Me and instead of a frown and fallen face, there will be a happy heart and a happy face.

The second possibility was for him not to do well, which either meant he didn't trust the Lord, didn't deal with his anger, or both. Then, the Lord warns that if he doesn't deal with the unbelief or unrighteous anger, worse sin will overtake him.

This is the first occurrence of the word "sin" in the Bible. It is said to "desire" Cain. Sin is personified as a wild beast (Kidner) crouching at Cain's door, ready to pounce on him (Ross). Could the animal have been a snake? Cain is told that he should control it instead of it controlling him. Constable says it "probably means that the power and tragic consequences of sin could master the person who opens the door to it (cf. 3:16)."

The wording here is reminiscent of Genesis 3:16, where God said to Eve, "Your desire should be to your husband and he shall rule over you." Some think that is significant (Ross: "The Lord was warning Cain by reminding him of the fatal outcome of the earlier conflict;" Kidner); others claim that it is an "accidental similarity" (Leupold). At any rate, "The consequences of his reaction to God's correction are more far-reaching than the initial sin itself, for if he pursues sin's anger, it will result in sin's mastery over him. This is his decision. It is possible for Cain to recover from sin quickly if he chooses the right thing" (Matthews, cited by Constable).

Notice God's counseling procedure in dealing with anger. First, He tried to get Cain to confess the root cause. When that did not work, He described possible future actions and the consequences of each.

The Offence of Cain Notice, Cain did not respond; he did not say anything to the Lord. He did not heed God's warning. "Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him" (4:8). The text does not record what Cain said to Abel, but the following statements strongly suggest that Cain argued with Abel. Two brothers met in a field, safe from observation. There, Cain "rose up against" Abel, meaning he attacked him and killed him. The wording of the text seems to suggest that this was premeditated murder. Cain prearranged a meeting in the field where he planned to kill Abel. "Under the Mosaic Law, the fact that a killing took place in a field, out of the range of help, was proof of premeditation (Deut. 22:25-27)" (Constable). The addition of the words of his brother "highlights" the hideousness of the sin.

John says Cain was "of the wicked one and murdered his brother" (1 Jn. 3:12a). The Greek word translated "murder" means "to slaughter, to butcher" (A-G, p. 803; A-S; Plummer). It was used of the slaughter of animals for sacrifice by cutting the throat. Cain brutally butchered his brother. Does being of the wicked one imply that Cain was proud? John adds, "And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 Jn. 3:12b). Abel's sacrifice was acceptable. His action was righteous. Thus, Cain was jealous. The reason Cain killed Abel was that he was jealous of his brother's superior righteousness (Gen. 4:2-7; Heb. 11:4; Hodges). Thus, this proud man was jealous of his brother Abel. The jealousy led to hatred (see 1 Jn. 3:13). Hatred culminated in anger.

The first murder was fratricide. Sin has now dramatically displayed the potentialities that lie in it. Sin, which entered the human race through the mere eating of a piece of forbidden fruit, has quickly escalated into a much more bitter fruit, violence, and death. Cain, because of his sin nature inherited from his parents, refused to trust God. His pride produced envy, which led to hatred (Morris), which in turn culminated in anger and depression and ultimately resulted in violence and murder. "Violence in a culture often reflects and results from rebellion against God and self-assertion" (Constable).

The first murder was the outcome of a church meeting. Someone has said, "A minister sees the best side of a man, the lawyer the worst, and the physician the real man." Actually, it takes a

religious dispute to bring out the very worst in a person, probably because, in that context, we expect the best.

As C. S. Lewis has pointed out, “If being cowardly, conceited, and slothful, you have never yet done a fellow-creature great mischief, that is only because your neighbor’s welfare has not yet happened to conflict with your safety, self-approval, or ease. Every vice leads to cruelty. Even a good emotion, pity, if not controlled by charity and justice, leads through anger to cruelty. Most atrocities are stimulated by accounts of the enemies’ atrocities; and pity for the oppressed classes, when separated from the moral law as a whole, leads to a very natural process to the unremitting brutalities of a reign of terror” (C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 53).

Research has revealed that fifty percent of the homes in America are the scenes of family violence at least once a year. Parents abuse children, husbands beat their wives, wives attack their husbands, and siblings fight with each other. Some have gone so far as to say that the American family is more violent than any other single institution or setting, with the possible exception of the military in a time of war. Consequently, Americans run the greatest risk of physical injury and even murder in their own homes by members of their own families.

The Outcast of Cain The Lord once again graciously approaches Cain. “The LORD said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’” (4:9a). The Lord did not ask this question because He needed information. He knew exactly where Abel was. As verse 10 clearly reveals, this is a rhetorical question implying rebuke and design to get a confession from Cain (Ross). God used the same approach to Adam when he asked, “Where are you?” (3:9). Now he asks Cain, “Where is your brother?”

This time, Cain answered the Lord. “He said, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’” (4:9b). “Although Adam and Eve were given to evasion and excuses, they never denied what they had done. Cain blatantly lied, insisting he did not know where his brother was. Furthermore, he was defiant, asking God if he was supposed to be his brother’s keeper. Cain’s response challenges God’s right to even question him. He repudiates all responsibility for his brother.... In all probability, the answer to Cain’s question should be yes. If a nation or family is to survive, the people must be responsible for the well-being of one another. Of course, the answer that Cain expected was a decisive no” (Ross). Dr. Wilson, a professor at Yale Divinity School, said that nowhere in the Old Testament is man said to be the “keeper” of another person, but God is said to be man’s “keeper.” Therefore, Cain was blaming God.

Since Cain rejected God’s gracious approach to get him to confess his guilt, God no longer speaks to Cain in mercy. Now, He speaks in judgment (Morris). “And He said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground’” (4:10). The question “What have you done?” means “See now what you have done!” (Cassuto). Blood has no voice, but here it is personified. This is the first occurrence of the word blood in the Bible. Abel’s blood from the ground speaks as a witness in the heavenly court. God reminds Cain that he is guilty.

Having established Cain’s guilt, God pronounces judgment on him: “So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth” (4:11-12). Prior to this, God had only cursed the serpent (3:12) and the ground (3:17). Now, He places a curse on Cain himself. The curse on Cain was not eternal damnation (Leupold). He could have still trusted God to forgive him (Morris), although there is no evidence he ever did. This curse explained in verses 11 and 12, was experienced during Cain’s life on the earth.

Cain shed innocent blood on the ground. Therefore, he was cursed “from the earth” (4:11), that is, out of the earth. This is further explained in the next verse. From now on, when Cain tills the ground, it will not “yield its strength” (4:12). When Adam sinned, the ground was cursed (3:17). This is an advancement on that curse (Ross). Cain will have even greater difficulty in raising food. He was sentenced to hard labor. Furthermore, he will be a fugitive and a vagabond. Cain would be a ceaseless, wandering fugitive (Leupold), perhaps looking for a fruitful land to get a decent yield.

Cain’s punishment included being expelled from God’s presence (4:16) and broken relationships with others. Constable says, “Cain’s punishment consisted of his being banished from God’s presence and unable to enjoy his family’s company and the fruitfulness of a settled pastoral life (vv. 11-12, 14). He would have to wander from place to place, seeking food rather than living a sedentary life. This punishment was just since he had alienated himself from his brother and God” (Constable).

“Cain is not being condemned to a Bedouin-like existence; the terminology is too extreme to describe such a lifestyle. Rather, it seems likely that the curse on Cain reflects the expulsion from the family, that was the fate in tribal societies of those who murdered close relatives.... ‘To be driven away from the land’ (cf. v. 14) is to have all relationships, particularly with the family, broken. Moreover, it is to have one’s relationship with the LORD broken” (Wenham, cited by Constable).

Cain complained about the punishment! “And Cain said to the LORD, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely you have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me’ (4:13-14).” Cain does not grieve over his sin. He is only sorry that the punishment is so severe. He deplores the consequences of his actions and sinks into despair. He recognized that he would be driven from the blessing and benefit of God’s favor, that the way of the transgressor is hard, and that his own life might be in danger from either a descendant from Adam already in existence or one yet to be born. “Sin results in broken relationships and alienation, and alienation from God leads to fear of other people (cf. Job 15:20-25)” (Constable).

God, in His grace, responded to Cain’s concern, “And the LORD said to him, ‘Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.’ And the LORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him” (4:15). Killing Cain would not be murder; it would be assuming the position of divine judge or at least augmenting divine judgment. As a warning to others and as a promise to Cain, the Lord set a mark on Cain. The nature of the mark is impossible to determine (for the suggestions that have been given, see Constable). God did not approve of revenge, so He protected Cain. Nevertheless, Cain became an outcast.

The Offspring of Cain Genesis 4:16-24 traces the outcome and offspring of Cain to Lamech and his sons. The descendants of Cain developed civilization and culture. They also degenerated morally and spiritually.

The text continues the saga of Cain himself with the observation. “Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city and called the name of the city after the name of his son—Enoch” (4:16-17). Cain left the place (4:11, 14) and the presence of God. The location of Nod is unknown (Leupold). Apparently, he did not seek God’s forgiveness and favor; he pursued his own desires and direction.

Cain and his wife had a son they named Enoch. Where did Cain get his wife? Obviously, he married his sister, who followed him into exile (5:4; Leupold). That is the explanation given by all

commentators from the Jewish Talmud to the present (Cassuto). Later, such incestuous marriages were forbidden because the weaknesses in the physical bodies of the human family were such that the marriage of two from the same line was likely to produce deformed children, but Cain and his wife had perfect parents and that was not a problem. There were no mutant genes in Adam or their immediate children so no genetic harm could have resulted from a close marriage.

Cain built a city and named it after his son. This city was not necessarily a large town but simply “an enclosed space with fortified dwellings in contradistinction to the isolated tents of shepherds” (Keil). The city was nothing more than a walled enclosure with a few houses (Leupold). The Hebrew text suggests “he was building,” indicating that he began to build the city, not that he actually finished one (Leupold; Morris). Many have detected in the statement defiance of God. God told him he would be a fugitive and a vagabond (4:14), and he promptly commenced building the city (Morris). He did not believe God would protect him, so he defied God’s Word and attempted to protect himself.

According to the *Targum*, an ancient Jewish paraphrase of parts of the Old Testament into Aramaic, Cain says, “There is no judgment, no judge, no future life; no good reward will be given to the righteous, nor will judgment be inflicted on the wicked” (*Targum* on Gen. 4:7; see Green on Jude 11).

The next several generations are listed without comment. “To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methushael, and Methushael begot Lamech” (4:18). It is obvious that the author deliberately passes over these men to quickly get to Lamech, who demonstrates the direction and degeneration of the line of Cain. Anything said concerning the men mentioned in verse 18 is conjecture, usually based on the meaning of their names. Irad means townsman. He followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather and was a citizen of the town. Mehujael means God smites or God gives life. Methushael means man of God. These two names are compound names with the Hebrew word for God, but not His personal name. Perhaps these men were devout or at least had spiritual or religious aspirations. Morris suggests that these names “perhaps indicate that even those in the line of Cain continued to believe in God though they were disobedient to Him.” Lamech probably means conqueror.

Verses 19-24 focus on Lamech: “Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah” (4:19). By the time the line of Cain got to Lamech, there was open rebellion against God. Lamech defied God’s ordained pattern of the monarchy (2:23-24). By taking two wives, he was the first bigamist. The practice of bigamy originated among those who were in the line of Cain, those who were estranged from God.

The names of Lamech’s wives seem to suggest that these women were physically attractive. Adah means ornament. When this pretty little girl was born, she was the ornament of the family. Zillah means “shade” or “sheltered.” The shade of the trees was pleasant, especially on hot days. She was either pleasant to look at or be with. Was Lamech motivated to take two wives because of their physical beauty? Was bigamy born of the lust of the eye, that is, what he saw he desired to possess?

Each of these two wives bore children “And Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother’s name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute” (4:20-21). Cain and his kin first developed cities (4:17-18; Irad means townsman) and culture (4:20-21). They were the developers of civilization. Jabal was the father, that is, the originator and ancestor of tent-dwellers and cattle-raisers. He originated tent living and renewed Abel’s sheep-rearing occupation. He died without leaving sons to carry on his trade. The word “livestock” is used of camels and donkeys (Ex. 9:3; etc.). These animals were used as beasts

of burden and their skins were used for clothes. Jubal invented both string and wind musical instruments.

“And as for Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron. And the sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah” (4:22). Tubal-Cain was the inventor and originator of metallurgy, both in bronze and iron. “The reference to forging (lit. sharpening) iron implements appears anachronistic since, as far as we know, the smelting of iron was not common until the Iron Age, in the second millennium B.C. Perhaps this is a reference to the cold forging of meteoric iron, which was common earlier. Later, workers with iron could look back on Lamech as the father of metallurgy” (Constable).

Naamah means “pleasant.” Her name is symbolic. This talented family certainly knew how to make life pleasant. Ancient tradition says Naamah was the leader of female players and singers. According to the sages, “she made music on the drum for idolatry” (Cassuto). The children of Lamech were gifted, but they were also godless. That is illustrated by a poem Lamech wrote his wives.

“Then Lamech said to his wives: ‘Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold’ (4:23-24). This poem describes something that actually happened (“I have killed”). Apparently, a young man hurt Lamech, wounding him slightly (see Ex. 21:23-25, where the words for wounding and hurting are translated, wound and strife, that is, not fatal blows or grave injuries). Lamech then killed him and vowed vengeance upon him seven times seventy-fold, signifying more than his due.

Constable suggests that “We could paraphrase the idea in Lamech’s mind as expressed in verses 23-24 more clearly as follows. ‘If I am threatened again, I will retaliate again, much more forcefully than God retaliated against Cain.’ Lamech may have been claiming that he had killed in self-defense. Nevertheless, he was boasting and showing himself thereby to be more barbaric than his forefather Cain (cf. Exod. 21:25).”

Jesus said we should forgive like that (Mt. 18:22). Lamech hated like that and wrote a poem to his wives to glory in it. In his poem, he bragged that a young lad slightly hurt him and for that minor slap, he slew him. The single act of disobedience has now degenerated into a cultured civilization that has gotten further and further away from God. Lamech’s “sword song” signifies the swift progression of sin. Cain sinned, but Lamech exults in it. Cain sought protection (4:14-15); Lamech seems to be seeking provocation.

The family of Cain had ability, achievement, and accomplishment, but they also drifted away from God and degenerated into bigamy and murder. The family of Cain is a microcosm of the human family. It is a picture of technical success and moral failure. Material progression does not mean moral advancement.

The Godly Line of Seth: One Line of Adam Followed The Lord

The Offspring of Adam Genesis 4 is clearly divided into two parts. Verse 1 says, “Now Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain. Verse 25 parallels that statement. It states, “And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth” (4:25a). Hence, Genesis 4 is the tale of two brothers, Cain and Seth. It is a story of two branches of humanity. One “went out from the presence of the LORD” (4:16). The other “began to call on the name of the Lord” (4:26). The name Seth means “appointed.”

The reason Eve named her third son Seth is “for God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel who Cain killed” (4:25b). Seth was the substitute son for the slain Abel. Notice, too, that unlike anything said concerning the clan of Cain, Eve acknowledged that Seth was from the gracious hand of God.

The Offspring of Seth The text now traces the line of Seth, but only for one generation. “And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD” (4:26). The line of Seth, in contrast to the line of Cain, was godly. Seth named his son Enosh, a word that means “weak, frail.” In Genesis, sometimes the mother names the child and sometimes the father does. In this case, both the mother and the father did (cf. 4:25 with 5:3). Perhaps Seth named his son “frail” because he was physically weak or sickly. Many have not hesitated to point out that maybe this was an acknowledgment that men, in general, are frail and mortal (Ps. 8:4; 103:15). If so, Seth was so impressed with the weakness of mortals he gave his son a name indicative of that truth (Keil; Leupold). He humbly acknowledged man is weak. The line of Cain, on the other hand, was proud and arrogant (4:23-24).

During Enosh’s generation, men began to call on the name of the Lord. The phrase “call on the name of the Lord” denotes prayer (12:8; 13:4; Constable says that many commentators regarded verse 26 as the first reference to prayer as we know it in the Bible) and proclaiming His name (Ex. 33:19; 34:5; Constable says that “call on the name of the Lord” usually refers to proclamation rather than prayer in the Pentateuch). Many have concluded that this is the commencement of public worship (Keil; Leupold; Morris; Ross; Constable). It is also likely that this statement means that the name of God (Yahweh) was known from this time (Ross), or at least He was known in the character of Yahweh whether the word Yahweh, as such, was known at this time or not (Leupold).

Perhaps the line of Seth is traced no further than Enosh because that is sufficient to make the author’s point, namely that the line of Seth was godly. On the other hand, by listing so many generations from Cain and only two from Adam through Seth, maybe the story implies that many more will follow the way of Cain than will follow the way of Seth.

Summary: The history of humanity is that many moved further and further away from the Lord while a few moved toward Him. Humanity can develop materially, building cities, inventing new things, and even making music while morally degenerating in their marriages and even committing murder.

“Cain prospered even though he rebelled against God. This is another indication of God’s grace. Cain’s descendants took the lead in building cities, developing music, advancing agriculture, creating weapons, and spreading civilization. However, the descendants of Seth made an even more important advance, the worship of God” (Constable). Constable also says, “Chapter 4 also teaches that it is important for the righteous to preserve the knowledge of God when they live in an ungodly society. The Israelites needed this encouragement as they anticipated entering the Promised Land, as we do today. Jesus taught His disciples the same lesson (Matt. 5:14-15).”

This section began in Genesis 2:4. It is the history of humanity after the creation of the earth. God put man and woman in a paradise. They chose to disobey and consequently lost their garden. Within one generation, the simple act of disobedience degenerated into violence, family violence, and murder. It didn’t take long after that for man to violate the divine institution of marriage and sin with open pride and arrogance. Unbelief led to disobedience, disobedience to murder, immorality, and defiance. Man produced an affluent, self-gratifying society.

In Genesis 3, Satan, disguised as a snake, is the enemy. In Chapter 4, the enemy is the flesh, as illustrated in Cain, and the world as demonstrated in his descendants. Yet, in the midst of a disobedient, degenerate, defiant man, some call on the name of the Lord. One line built cities, the other cathedrals. Eve gloried in giving life; Lamech bragged about taking life. Will you follow the flow of the many or stand (or bow) with the few?

Twenty years after man first set foot on the moon, Julian Scheer wrote an article in which he explained that NASA designed a plaque to be placed on the Lunar Lander and left on the surface of the moon. It read, "Here, men from the planet earth first set foot upon the moon, July 1969 AD. We came in peace for all mankind." Neil A. Armstrong, Michael Collins, Edwin E. Aldrin, Jr., and Richard Nixon, President of the United States, signed it.

When the plaque was shown to an aide of President Nixon, he picked up his pen and inserted the words "under God" so that the plaque read, "We came in peace under God for all mankind." When asked why he did that, the aide said, with a bit of irritation, "under God, under God, we came in peace under God."

Julian asked, "What God?" The aide responded, "God, God, we came under God!" Julian responded, "But this is a universal thing. What about the people on the earth who do not worship our God—Buddhists, Muslims, and..." "Damn it, Julian, the President is big on God," the aide snapped. "Listen," he said, "Billy Graham is here every Sunday. We have to go to church services here with Billy Graham! I tell you, the President will want God."

With the addition "under God" on the plaque, the aide took the booklet explaining the proposal directly to Richard Nixon. When it came back to Julian, he noticed that the President himself had put his initials on certain pages, including the one that contained the inscription of the plaque with the additional words, "under God," but NASA had already made the plaque and attached it to the Lunar Lander. He did nothing to correct the inscription on it.

Julian concluded the article with these words, "Today, on the sea of tranquility, sits a monument to man's incredible journey to the moon. The plaque commemorating that event says, 'Here, man from the planet earth first set foot on the moon—July 1969 AD—We came in peace for all mankind'" (Julian Scheer, *The Orlando Sentinel*, "What about God?" July 20, 1989).

That's but one illustration of what happened in Genesis 4 and what has happened in every generation of mankind since. Man has made stupendous accomplishments but, by and large, has left God out; only a few include Him. To which group do you belong?

THE OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUALS IN LIFE

In every field of endeavor, some people are outstanding individuals. The senior class has an outstanding student called the valedictorian. He or she is the one who has the highest grade point average and gets to deliver an address at commencement. Companies recognize the employee of the month by putting his or her picture on the wall or giving them a special parking space for 30 days. Baseball has an all-star team. Several sports have a Most Valuable Player award and a Hall of Fame. *Time* magazine selects a Man of the Year. Then there is the Nobel Peace Prize. As there are outstanding individuals in every area of life, there are outstanding men and women spiritually. Who are they? What does one have to do to be spiritually outstanding? What happens to them? How are they recognized?

These questions are answered in Genesis 5. Genesis 5 contains a long list of names. There is a crowd of people in this chapter. In the midst of the crowd, there is one outstanding individual. The author obviously intends to point out this individual. We can learn spiritual truth from this chapter, the crowd in it, and especially from the outstanding individual named Enoch.

The subject of Genesis 5 is the genealogy of Adam through Seth. The line of Seth, not of Cain, had the spirituality of Adam. The structure of Genesis 5 consists of ten generations of Adam through Seth to Noah, with Noah's sons listed at the end. The pattern of each generation is the same. Someone lived x years, fathered a son who carried on the line, and lived x more years, during which time he fathered more children, including sons and daughters, and the total number of years he lived. The record closes with the observation that he died. Thus, the pattern consists of 1) a man's name, 2) his age at the birth of his son who carried on the family line, 3) the length of his remaining years, and 4) his age at his death.

Genesis 5 contains the record of historical men who actually lived, had children, and died. These men are named in the first four chapters of 1 Chronicle and Luke 3:36-38, meaning they are accepted as historical by both the Old and the New Testaments.

The Genealogy of Adam: The Line of Seth to Enoch

The Family of Adam "This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years; and he had sons and daughters. All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died" (5:1-5). Genesis 5:1 begins a major section of the book. The statement "This is the book of the genealogy of Adam" marks the second major section of Genesis (see 2:4). Of the eleven occurrences of the phrase "this is the genealogy of" in Genesis, this is the only one that contains the word "book."

The word "book" refers to anything written. It was used of a certificate of divorcement (Deut. 24:1) or a deed (Jer. 32:12). Was this book written long before Moses and incorporated by Moses into Genesis? Histories contain stories that can be written or recited by heart. Numbers, like the ones recorded in this chapter, are best transmitted in written form. Did Noah, who lived before the flood and who also lived after it, originally write this material?

This book begins with a reminder that God created man, both male and female, in His likeness and He blessed them (5:1-2). Then it points out that after Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he begat a son named Seth in his likeness and after his image (5:3). Seth was a being in the image of his father, which means that even though man fell, something of the divine image remained (Gen. 9:6; Jas. 3:9).

After the birth of Seth, Adam lived another eight hundred years, during which time he bore more children, including sons and daughters (5:4). Then, after living a total of nine hundred and thirty years, he died (5:5). God said disobedience would bring death (2:17) and it did. It produced spiritual death that very day and physical death nine hundred thirty years later.

The Family of Seth “Seth lived one hundred and five years and begot Enosh. After he begot Enosh, Seth lived eight hundred and seven years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died” (5:6-8). Like Adam, his father, Seth lived over one hundred years before he begot a son who carried on the line. Then he had other children, including sons and daughters and he died. Genesis 4:17-18 traces the family line of Cain. Genesis 5:1-32 traces the line of Seth. Thus, Genesis 4 and 5 contrast each other. Genesis 4 is the story of the ungodly line of Cain, which is the history of the earth (2:4). Genesis 5 is the history of the godly line through Seth, which is the history of the spiritual lineage from Adam (5:1).

The Family of Enosh “Enosh lived ninety years and begot Cainan. After he begot Cainan, Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died” (5:9-11). Throughout this chapter, a man’s life is divided into two parts. His years before, he fathered a son who carried on the line, and the years after, he bequeathed life to a new generation.

The Family of Cainan “Cainan lived seventy years and begot Mahalalel. After he begot Mahalalel, Cainan lived eight hundred and forty years and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died” (5:12-14). Like the other men mentioned in this chapter, Cainan lived a normal life. He married, had children, including a son to carry on the family line, and he died. Even his long life was normal for the period. In fact, he was about average. Including Enoch, who lived three hundred and sixty-five years, the average during the period was nine hundred and twelve years.

The Family of Mahalalel “Mahalalel lived sixty-five years and begot Jared. After he begot Jared, Mahalalel lived eight hundred and ninety-five years; and he died” (5:15-17). Mahalalel fathered the son who carried the line at a younger age than anyone listed in Genesis 5. Except for Noah, of whom it is said he fathered three sons at age five hundred, the ages of begetting in the chapter range from sixty-five through one hundred and eighty-seven years. All of these men may have fathered children before the first son is mentioned. Adam did (5:3). Mahalalel means “God is praised” or “praise of God.” The line of Seth was the godly line from Adam.

The Family of Jared “Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years and begot Enoch. After he begot Enoch, Jared lived eight hundred years and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years; and he died” (5:18-20). Except for Methuselah, Jared lived longer than anyone listed in Genesis 5. In the genealogy of Cain, no ages are given since that family had no spiritual future (Keil), but the years of the line of Seth are counted. When people live a life calling on the Lord, their years count.

The Genealogy of Adam: Enoch

“Enoch lived sixty-five years and begot Methuselah. After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years and had sons and daughters” (5:21-22). Of all the other men in this chapter (except Noah, whose story is not finished here), it is said that he lived x years, fathered a son, and lived x more years, but, of Enoch, it is said he lived sixty-five years, begot a son, and walked with God three hundred years. Enoch stands out from all the others. They may have called on the Lord (4:26); he walked with God. Enoch was outstanding.

Walked with God In Genesis, only Enoch and Noah (6:9) are said to have walked with God. The prefix “with” seems to indicate “intimacy, fellowship” (Leupold). It has been said that walking with God is “the closest communion” (Keil). “‘Walked with God’ is metaphorical and indicates that Enoch had a lifestyle characterized by his devotion to God. The sense of ‘walk’ (*halak*) in its verbal stem indicates a communion or intimacy with God” (Mathews, cited by Constable).

God told Abraham to walk before Him (17:1; 24:40), which means to live blamelessly before God in terms of His commands (17:1). Deuteronomy 13:4 speaks of walking after God, which again seems to mean following Him in the sense of obeying Him and serving Him (Deut. 13:4; 1 Kings 14:8). The only other passage in which the expression “walk with God” occurs is Malachi 2:6, where it refers to the priest who stood in a closer relationship to God than the rest of the Israelites. They were permitted to enter the Holy Place and hold direct intercourse there with God. Thus, walking with God describes the most intimate communion with Him.

The Septuagint renders this phrase by Greek words, which mean “he was well-pleasing to God.” The writer of the Hebrews apparently refers to the Septuagint rendering (Heb. 11:5). To walk with God is to be pleasing to Him. Believers in Christ are to walk with Him (Col. 2:6) and abide in Him (1 Jn. 2:28).

Spoke for God The New Testament reveals something about Enoch not mentioned in Genesis. It says, “Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him’” (Jude 14-15). Enoch walked with God and spoke for God.

Enoch was the seventh from Adam through Seth. Lamech was the seventh from Adam through Cain. Did Enoch and Lamech live at the same time? Did Enoch have Lamech in mind when he spoke the words recorded by Jude? If not, Lamech individually at least typifies the degenerate line of Cain.

Enoch prophesied the Second Coming of Christ! Actually, his prophecy is an exposition of the promise of Genesis 3:15. At the cross, Christ crushed Satan (Col. 2:15). The victory will not be fully accomplished until the Second Coming (Rev. 20:1-3).

Transported to God The Genesis account of the life of Enoch concludes with, “So, all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years and Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him” (5:23-24). Enoch lived many more years than men do today, but he lived many years less than anyone mentioned in Genesis 5. He only lived three hundred and sixty-five years. All the others lived more than nine hundred years except Mahalalel, who lived eight hundred and ninety-five years (5:17) and Lamech, who lived seven hundred and seventy-seven years (5:31). As compared to the others in this chapter, he was taken young. Before he had reached half the age of the normal life span of the time, God took him.

The most amazing thing about Enoch was that “he was not for God took him.” Enoch was the exception to the dismal oft-repeated, “and he died.” Enoch did not die. He was transported directly to heaven. The New Testament says he was translated (Heb. 11:5). The same thing happened to Elijah (2 Kings 2:11).

The reason he lived a short life and God took him is that he walked with God. The wording of the text implies that. “Enoch walked with God” was stated in verse 22. The repetition of that statement in verse 24 seems to be saying, the reason God took him was indeed that he walked with *Him*. Hebrews 11:5 confirms that. It says, “Enoch was translated so that he did not see death, and was not found because God had translated him; *for* before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”

“The double repetition of the phrase ‘walked with God’ indicates Enoch was outstanding in this pious family” (Wenham, cited by Constable). Seen on a church marquee: “Exercise daily. Walk with God.”

“The sense of the author is clear. Enoch is an example of one who found life amid the curse of death. In Enoch, the author is able to show that the pronouncement of death is not the last word that needs be said about a person’s life. One can find life if one ‘walks with God’” (Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch*, p. 118; 3:8; 6:9; 15:6; 17:1; 24:40; 48:15; Deut. 30:15-16; Mic. 6:8; Mal. 2:6; see also Timothy J. Cole, “Enoch, a Man Who Walked with God,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:591, July-September 1991:288-97).

The Genealogy of Adam: The Line of Seth to Noah

The Family of Methuselah “Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and begot Lamech. After he begot Lamech, Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years, and had sons and daughters. So, all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died” (5:25-27). After the extraordinary experience of Enoch, Genesis again records the ordinary experience of other men in the line of Seth until Noah. Methuselah, like the others before him except Noah, lived, had a son who carried on the family line, fathered other children, including sons and daughters and died.

Many commentators, both ancient and modern, have interpreted Methuselah’s name as “when he dies, it shall be sent.” Did Enoch prophesy the coming judgment of the flood and name his son to signify the prophecy? If so, there is in it a promise and a warning. The promise is it will not come until his son dies. The warning is that it will come when his son dies. Methuselah lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years, longer than any other man whose age is recorded. God is patient (2 Pet. 3:9). The year Methuselah died, the flood came. Both the promise and the warning came true.

The Family of Lamech “Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. And he called his name Noah, saying, ‘This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed.’ After he begot Noah, Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years, and had sons and daughters. So, all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years; and he died” (5:28-31). Lamech named his son Noah, a word that means “rest.” The reason he gave him that name is also given, namely, he would bring comfort concerning the curse on the ground. This prophecy was fulfilled in that after the flood, God said He would never again curse the ground or destroy every living thing (8:21-22).

Noah's brothers and sisters, as well as others in the line of Seth, may have perished in the flood. Perhaps not all in the line of Seth were godly. On the other hand, they may have died before the flood began.

The Family of Noah “And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (5:32). The pattern followed in this chapter is not used of Noah because the author is not finished with his story.

Summary: From Adam to Noah in the line of Seth, men lived, had children, and died, except one outstanding man named Enoch, who walked with God and was translated.

This chapter raises several questions and teaches a great lesson about one outstanding individual.

Does this chapter give the actual number of years between creation and the flood? The total number of years covered in this chapter is 1656. Does that mean there were 1656 years from the creation to the flood? Some have suggested that this list contains selected names and, therefore, there are gaps (Mathews, cited by Constable). There are ten names in this list from Adam to Noah and ten names in the list from Noah to Abram (11:10 ff.). Does not that indicate a deliberate design? Matthew 1 consists of a scheme of three groups of 14 each and verse 8 omits three successive kings. Thus, Joram begot his great-great-grandson. Could the same thing be true of Genesis 5?

Constable marshals the arguments. “Some commentators have seen evidence in the text that this genealogy is not complete (Matthews). 1. The word ‘father’ can just as accurately be translated ‘ancestor’ (v. 3, et al.). It does not require a literal father-son relationship (Kenneth Kitchen). 2. The fact that Lamech, the sixth name in Cain’s list (4:16-24), corresponds to Enoch, the sixth name in Seth’s list (5:6-24), is suggestive. It indicates that God wanted to point out the contrast between the generations of these two sons of Adam. One was ungodly and the other godly. This purpose seems to some writers more dominant than that God wanted simply to preserve a complete record of all the generations between Adam and Noah. Lamech and Enoch were each the seventh generation, as recorded in this list, from Adam (Jude 14). Matthew 1:1-17 contains another genealogy in which 14 men from each of three historical periods appear, and it is not complete. 3. The writer did not list Noah’s sons in the order of their birth (5:32 and 9:24). 4. The genealogy in chapter 11 may not be complete [See my comments on 11:12. For the defense of the view that the Scriptures do not fix and were not intended to fix the dates of any events before the time of Abraham, see W. H. Green, “Primeval Chronology,” in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 13-28; and B. B. Warfield, “On the Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race,” *Princeton Theological Review* 9:1 (January 1911):1-25.] The careful recording of the age of each man when he fathered the next man in the list strongly suggests that this list is complete (Furthermore, the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1:1-4 and Luke 3:36-38 are identical to the one in Genesis 5. There are probably no missing generations. Keil and Delitzsch, 1:120-27. Wenham, pp. 130-34, wrote an excursus on the ages of the antediluvians that is the best discussion of this issue that I have found.)”

How is the longevity described in this chapter explained? These men also experienced long life. The shortest life span was three hundred and sixty-five years (5:23) and the longest was nine hundred and sixty-nine (5:27). Life span began to decline after the flood, indicating that climatic conditions before the flood probably contributed to men living longer lives (1:7). Perhaps, the effect of sin took several centuries to wear down man’s original physical constitution, which was created for long life. Besides, these godly men lived sanely and temperately.

In his book, *The 120 Year Diet*, Dr. Roy L. Walford, a professor at the UCLA School of Medicine, says, “It can be shown mathematically that if *all* diseases were eliminated and aging itself completely halted, but the accident rate remained at today’s level, maximum life span would extend to about 600 years” (Walford, p. 198).

How does this chapter contribute to the theme of blessing? “The author’s return to the theme of God’s ‘blessing’ man (cf. v. 2) is also a part of his overall scheme to cast God’s purposes for man that will recall a father’s care for his children. Throughout the remainder of Genesis, a recurring theme is the father’s blessing His children (9:26-27; 27:27; 48:15; 49:1-28). In keeping with such a theme, the author shows at each crucial turning point in the narrative that God Himself renewed His blessing to the next generation (1:28; 5:2; 9:1; 12:3; 24:11). Seen as a whole, the picture that emerges is that of a loving father ensuring the future well-being of his children through the provision of an inherited blessing. In this way, the author has laid a theological foundation for the rest of Scripture. God’s original plan of blessing for all humanity, though thwarted by human folly, will nevertheless be restored through the seed of the woman (3:15), the seed of Abraham (12:3), and the ‘Lion of the tribe of Judah’ (49:8-12; cf. Rev 5:5-13). It is on this same foundation that the apostle Paul built his view of Jesus as the one through whom God has ‘blessed us’ (Eph 1:3) and ‘adopted us as his sons’ (v. 5) so that ‘we have obtained an inheritance (v. 11, KJV) from the one we may call ‘*Abba*, Father’ (Rom 8:15)” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

There was life, good life, long life, and the power to produce life in the line of Seth. All of these men lived in the line that began to call on the Lord (4:26). They all married and had children, including a son who carried on the family line. Each of these did not die until he had propagated life. The life of the race was preserved. The hope of the seed was sustained.

Nevertheless, Genesis 5 teaches that death reigned from Adam on, even in the godly line of Seth (Rom. 5:14). In spite of human achievement (chapter 4) and long life (chapter 5), death conquered all. “And he died” is the predominant refrain in the chapter (it occurs eight times). This portion of Scripture covers a period of 1656 years. For all those years, men died. After the fall under the curse, the human race multiplied continually and died just as regularly. They fulfilled God’s command to be fruitful and multiply (1:28) and they experienced God’s promise that man would die (2:17). Genesis 5 is a biblical boot-hill. For those 1,656 years, the funeral song was sung. However, there was one exception. An outstanding individual named Enoch. He did not die! His translation indicates that God could conquer death and there is life after death.

Enoch was an outstanding individual because he didn’t just live like the rest. That is, get married, have children, and die. He walked with God. You can live like Enoch and walk with God. To walk with God: 1) You must walk in His direction. After a service, someone said to me, “May I walk with you?” I said, “I am not going in your direction; I’m going to my car.” That individual said, “That’s okay, I’ll walk with you.” To walk with God, you need to go in His direction. 2) You must walk with Him and listen to Him. Even when someone walks with me to my car, we talk! Both of us talk. To walk with God, you must listen to what He has to say in His Word and you should talk to Him in prayer. 3) If you fall, get up and continue to walk and talk.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee imagined that every day, Enoch and the Lord took a walk together. He suggested that they enjoyed each other’s company so much that the walks got longer and longer. Finally, one day, after a long walk, God said to Enoch, you are closer to my house than yours. Why don’t you come home with me instead of walking all the way back to your place? So it was that God just took Enoch to His house.

The most outstanding people are those who walk with God and who speak for God. God is so pleased with those individuals that He is eager to take them home to be with Him.

BAD NEWS, GOOD NEWS

Several years ago, a series of good news, bad news jokes swept the country. These jokes passed off the scene, but the expression still lingers. It is used to describe all kinds of real-life situations. For example, a mechanic may say, “I have good news and bad news. Which do you want first?” I usually say the bad news. He then tells me something like this: “Your car has a serious problem and it is going to be expensive to fix. The good news, however, is that we can get the parts and it will not take long to do the job.” Or, “The good news is the problem is not serious; the bad news is we can’t do it until next week.” In the meantime, the car cannot be driven.

Years ago, the spiritual condition of individuals and, for that matter, the population of the whole world could be described as bad news, good news. What was true then is true now and will be true in the future. What was the bad news and what was the good news of long ago that is still true today?

The Perversion of Humanity: Angels Cohabited with Women

The Population After simply surveying one generation after the another from Adam to Noah, the book of the genealogy of Adam describes in more detail the days of Noah: “Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose” (6:1-2). By Noah’s time, people began to multiply on the earth. Based on several assumptions, such as each family in Genesis 5 having six children (three sons and three daughters), Henry Morris calculates that there would have been 120,000 people after the first 800 years. He says if those same assumptions are made, but the calculation extends over the 1,656 years listed in Genesis 5, the population of the world would have been at least 7 billion! Even if that estimate is not correct, by Noah’s time, there was a large population on the earth. As a general rule, it is often true that more people mean more problems. As the population increases in a city, problems inevitably multiply.

The Perversion As the population increased, many of the women were beautiful. Then, the sons of God saw these beautiful women and took all they chose for themselves.

Who were these “sons of God?” One interpretation of the sons of God is that they were the sons of princes (Klein; Skinner; Ross; and Waltke, who says fallen angels, demons, may have indwelt or, at least, controlled them). This view argues that the Hebrew word god or gods is used in the Old Testament to refer to the rulers or judges of Israel because of the authority they received from God and exercised in His name. According to this view, royalty married commoners (Morris). Or rulers abused their power and position and arrogantly and unethically took whomever they desired to be their wives, whether or not they were already married to someone else (Hocking). This explanation became the traditional view in orthodox, rabbinical Judaism (Keil). The problem with this interpretation is that the phrase “the sons of God” is extremely obscure to express the idea of royalty or rulership. At this point in history, God had not appointed judges!

A more common interpretation is that the sons of God were the godly line of Seth (Keil; Constable). The phrase “the sons of God” simply means belonging to God. According to this notion, the daughters of men were from the line of Cain. Those holding this position claim it best fits the context. Genesis 4 reports the ungodly line of Cain and Genesis 5 reveals the godly line of

Seth. Thus, Genesis 6 is saying that the two steams began to commingle and, as a result, the godly line became so badly contaminated that the world had to be destroyed by the flood. The problem with this view is that the sons of Seth were not all sons of God. All of them except Noah and his sons and their wives perished in the flood! Furthermore, why would the children of such unions be “giants” (6:4) and why would mixed marriages cause God to destroy the whole earth?

The other major interpretation contends that the sons of God were fallen angels (the book of Enoch; Philo; Josephus; Justin Martyr; Tertullian; Cyprian; Ambrose; Pember; Morris, M. R. DeHaan, Boice; *NKJV Study Bible*). There are a number of arguments used to support that view: 1) The phrase “sons of God” only occurs three other times in the Old Testament and, in all three, it means angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). They are called sons of God because they were created, not born. Kidner points out that the usual meaning of the term “sons of God” is angels. He also suggests that while this view defiles the normalities of experience, the other view defiles the normalities of language. And he adds, “Our task is to find the author’s meaning.” 2) This view best explains the flood. Technically, there were no express prohibitions of marriage between the nobility and the commoner or between the line of Cain and the line of Seth. Why would God destroy the earth by the flood because of the inner marriage of the two lines? On the other hand, if angels contaminated the human race, only total destruction was appropriate. 3) The New Testament confirms this interpretation (1 Pet. 3:19; 2 Pet. 2:4-5; Jude 6). Jude refers to “angels who did not keep their proper dominion but left their own habitation” (vs. 6). In the next verse, Jude says, “As Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh” (vs. 7). The expression “in a similar matter to these” indicates that the angels of verse 6 committed *sexual* sins. Like Sodom and Gomorrah, the angels went “after strange flesh.” In his commentary on Jude, Michael Green says, “Justin comments, ‘The angels who transgressed their command mingled with women and thus fell’ (Justin, Apol. ii. 5), and that this point is in Jude’s mind is clear from the words that follow in the next verse ‘in a similar way.’” This interpretation was “usually accepted, with slight variations, both among Jews and Christians until the close of the 4th century AD” (Mayor on Jude and 2 Peter, p. clxiii).

The objection to this view is that Jesus said in the resurrection that angels would neither marry nor be given in marriage (Mt. 22:30), but the Lord was speaking of marriage in eternity, not sex in time. The fact that angels will not marry in eternity future does not mean that they could not have taken on human flesh and had sex in the past.

Why would fallen angels want to have sex with human women? Many expositors have related this activity to Genesis 3:15, where God said the seed of the woman would bruise Satan’s head. According to this theory, Satan wanted to completely corrupt mankind before the promised seed could defeat and destroy him (Morris).

Thus, Genesis 6:1-2 is saying that fallen angels saw beautiful women and were tempted like Eve, who saw that the fruit was pleasant to the eye. Likewise, like Eve, they took. This explains Greek mythology. Boice says, “What would be more probable than that this is the origin of those stories of half-human-half-divine figures presented in virtually all ancient mythologies? The stories of Homer and other writers would be embellished, of course, but they probably reflect memories of these ancient outstanding figures of the pre-Flood period.”

The Pronounced of Judgment God was displeased. **“And the LORD said, My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh” (6:3a).** The Hebrew word rendered “strive” occurs only here in the Old Testament (Ross). It means “judge, contend, strive” (BDB). Its meaning has been much debated (Kidner). It has been translated “judge” (Leupold), “abide” (Kidner), and

“strive.” The point seems to be that God’s Spirit would not do His work among men indefinitely (Ross). The reason is that man is “indeed flesh.” The implication is now that humanity is corrupt, it is nothing more than flesh, no better than animals, dominated by his flesh (Morris).

Man is now beyond the reach of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing left but destruction. Thus, God told Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me.... I will destroy them from the earth” (6:13). Indeed, He did. In the flood, all flesh “died” (7:21), including both men and animals. Thus, God has pronounced judgment.

The Provision of Grace Nevertheless, God manifested His grace. He said, “Yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years” (6:3b). The 120 years are the years that God gave people before the flood (Keil; Constable). This statement indicates two things: First, God has definitely set a limit. He will judge. Secondly, He will be gracious first. Grace always does more than is required or even expected. So, before judging, God, in His grace, will be long-suffering, giving at least some who have not been corrupted time to turn to Him.

The bad news is the perversion of humanity; the good news is the patience of God’s grace. As the inhabitants of the earth were perverse in the days before the flood, so humanity on the earth today is exceedingly sinful. As God was patient and gracious in those days, He is patient and gracious today. If we who know the Lord look realistically at our own hearts, we would have to confess that, like those men of old, we too are sinful and God has been gracious to us.

John Newton once said, “When I get to heaven, I shall see three wonders there. The first wonder will be to see many people there whom I did not expect to see. The second wonder will be to miss many people whom I did expect to see. And the third and greatest wonder of all will be to find myself there.”

The Pollution of Humanity: All were filled with Evil

Giants There is more. “There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown” (6:4). Who were these giants? The Hebrew translated “giants” is *nephilim*. It comes from a verb that means “to fall.” It appears only here and in Numbers 13:33. Were these *nephilim* “giants”? Those who claim the sons of God were the line of Seth tend to interpret the *nephilim* as “men who fell upon” others, that is, attack them. In other words, they were men who inspired fear, robbers, and bandits (Leupold). Those who explain the sons of God are angels interpret the *nephilim* as giants. The Septuagint rendered the Hebrew word as “giants.” The expression “mighty men” (Gen. 6:4), together with the wording of Numbers 13:33, seems to support that conclusion. Morris suggests that these giants were called *nephilim* from the verb “to fall” because their parents were fallen angels. Could the large human footprints archeologists have found be from these “giants?” These *nephilim* were “mighty,” that is, men of strength and men of renown. Their exploits of strength and violence made them infamous. They were revered as great heroes.

God The next three verses report three reactions of God: the Lord saw (6:5), the Lord was sorry (6:6), and the Lord said (6:7).

The Lord saw. “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (6:5). When the Lord completed the six days of creation, He saw that it was very good (1:31). Now He looks again and sees that His creation was degenerate and it was very bad. Wickedness was great. This is probably a reference to external acts of wickedness. Later, God told Noah, “The earth is filled with violence”

(6:11, 13). The internal attitude was also wicked. Every intent was on evil. The Hebrew word translated “intent” means “to form” (2:7) and implies design or purpose. The purpose of every thought was evil. These people were completely evil. Furthermore, they were continually evil. Internally and externally, completely and continually, men were wicked, and that type of wickedness was widespread on earth. That’s what God saw.

“Near the turn of the 19th century, F. W. Farrar wrote a book entitled *Seekers After God*. The book was a popular seller and was in considerable demand. A certain Western bookseller had a number of requests for the volume but had no copies available. He sent a telegram to the dealers in New York requesting them to ship him a number of the books. After a while, a telegram came back, which read, ‘No seekers after God in New York. Try Philadelphia’ (Hiebert, cited by Constable).

The Lord was sorry. “And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (6:6). When men’s hearts were filled with evil (6:5), God’s heart was filled with sorrow and grief (6:6). “God was sorry that He had made humankind because people generally did not want a relationship with God. They insisted on living life independent of God and, consequently, destroying themselves in sin. He was sorry for what His special creation had become. This is an *anthropopathism*: Moses described the Lord as having human emotions (cf. 9:15, 16). Luther said that such expressions were in the Scripture so that mortals with feeble understanding might catch hold of a divine truth according to the measure of their poor human ability (Luther, cited by Leupold). Sin causes pain. Calvin said, “God is hurt no less by the atrocious sins of man than if they pierced His heart with mortal anguish” (Calvin, cited by Keil).

“God is no robot. We know him as a personal, living God, not a static principle, who, while having transcendent purposes, to be sure, also engages intimately with his creation. Our God is incomparably affected by, even pained by, the sinner’s rebellion. Acknowledging the passibility [emotions] of God does not diminish the immutability of his promissory purposes. Rather, his feelings and actions toward men, such as judgment or forgiveness, are always inherently consistent with his essential person and just and gracious resolve (Jas 1:17)” (Mathews, cited by Constable).

The Lord spoke. “So the LORD said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them’ (6:7). The Hebrew word translated “destroy” is elsewhere in the Old Testament rendered “wipe out” or “blot out” (Ex. 32:32; Ps. 51:1; 2 Kings 21:13). Like wiping a dish of its dirt, God said He would wipe out what He had created, including humans, wild beasts, domesticated animals, and birds. The One who created life would now destroy it. As the Creator, He has supreme sovereignty over all He made.

The decision to destroy life on the earth was not a cold, calculated, capricious decision. For one thing, the severity and universality of the judgment demonstrate the seriousness of the situation. Besides, God grieved over people’s sin. This was no tyrant acting arbitrarily. This was a holy, righteous God deeply hurt and grieved over what had happened to His crowning creation. Humans had missed their purpose and were beyond reach. There was nothing else to do but wipe out the dirt and start over.

Grace Even though God, in His justice, decided to judge, He was still willing to be gracious toward any and all who would turn to Him. One did. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (6:8). In the midst of wrath, at least one (several others would follow) found grace. Grace means unmerited favor. That means Noah did not earn or deserve grace. He deserved judgment, too! He was a sinner like the others of his day. No doubt, his sin was not as extreme as those described in verse 5, but nevertheless, he was a sinner.

How, then did Noah find grace and others did not? This passage does not say, but the Bible is clear that God is gracious to those who turn to Him in faith. Noah trusted God to save him from his sins and God graciously did (Heb. 11:7). The fact that Noah found grace indicates that the destruction mentioned in verse 6 was not the end of humanity. God would preserve and restore the human race.

Summary: When fallen angels cohabited with women and men were completely and continually filled with wickedness, God decided to destroy the human race, but one man found God gracious.

“There were two major reasons for the flood: the sins of the sons of God (vv. 1-4) and the sins of humankind generally (vv. 5-8)” (Constable). Worldwide wickedness brought pain to God and judgment to the world, a judgment that would be escaped by God’s grace.

The bad news is sin. In the days before the flood, the bad news was really bad. Every individual’s intent, desire, design, and purpose were evil. People were completely wicked. Their minds and hearts were not only wholly given to devising wickedness. That was their conduct continually. Furthermore, the sin was extensive. Wickedness wrapped the whole world. On top of all of that, fallen angels cohabited with women who gave birth to mighty men. The result was vice, viciousness, and violence.

The bad news gets worse. The wickedness was so widespread that God had no choice but to destroy what He had made. It grieved Him deeply, but He decided to do it.

I do not want to suggest that things are as bad today as they were in the days of Noah, but things are as bad today as I have ever seen or could have ever imagined: terrorists beheading people, crucifying Christians, and slaughtering innocent people, who are doing nothing more than eating dinner in an outside café and listening to a music concert.

Lawlessness is loose in our land. We have moved from the land of law to a land of lawlessness. We have moved from a land of doing what is right because it’s right to a land of doing what feels good. In his 1932 book about the art of bullfighting titled *Death in the Afternoon*, Ernest Hemingway wrote, “What is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.”

The English historian Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) said that we are the first generation of man to try to build a society without a moral reference point. David Breese wrote, “The world has devised thousands of means to produce moral destruction in the lives of its individuals. This generation is being pressed upon with more opportunities to sin at a younger age and in increasingly clever ways.... In our time, we have seen statesmanship become politics, music become noise, enthusiasm become cynicism, love become sex, and sex become sodomy (David Breese, *Living for Eternity*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1988, p. 54).

The good news is that God is gracious. He will save all who come to Him in faith. Noah did just that and He found God’s grace. He was saved. The bad news was really bad. In this situation, it is hard to imagine that it could be worse, but the good news is very good. It can’t get any better. God, by His grace, repairs, restores, and rebuilds.

When you hear the bad news, look for the good news. A man in my church, who is a mechanic, offered to pick up my car, do some minor repairs on it as well as some maintenance, and return it to me. I dropped it off at his house on a Monday night. He was going to return it to me Tuesday afternoon. Tuesday morning, he called and said, “I have bad news and good news.” In the few fleeting seconds between that comment and his next, I thought to myself, “Oh no, my car has a serious, expensive problem, like the transmission needs to be rebuilt.” The bad news was worse.

He said, "I just had a wreck in your car. While I was stopped at a red light, a young man plowed into the back of your car." My first response was, "Are you okay? Was anyone hurt?" No one was seriously injured. The bad news concerning my car was really bad. The mechanic said, "I believe it is totaled." His words were prophetic; the car was destroyed.

The voice on the phone that day said, "I have good news and bad news. "The good news is that I have insurance." As it all turned out, I ended up with a car much better than the one that had been wrecked.

That's the story of Noah's day, our day and, according to Jesus, the days of the Tribulation before He comes will also be like the days of Noah. The bad news is sin, which brings destruction. The good news is that there is insurance. God is gracious!

LIVING IN A WICKED WORLD

We live in a wicked world. Murder and mugging, rape and robbery, drunkenness, and drugs are daily occurrences. You might argue that there has always been lawlessness and lewdness. That's true. Yet, it seems as if our society has sunk to an all-time low. Nothing is sacred.

Item: At Forest Lawn Cemetery in Covina, there is a sign that reads, "Flower theft is a crime punishable by imprisonment." Is there no respect for the dead anymore?

Item: Churches need guards for their parking lots to prevent theft during services. One church in Gary, Indiana, had an armed guard in the lobby of the church to prevent drug addicts in the neighborhood from stealing the offering during the services. Is there no respect for the church anymore?

Item: Fathers desert their children. Mothers kill their unborn in the name of pro-choice. Then, there is the case in Southern California of the father who is accused of convincing his 14-year-old daughter to kill her stepmother. Then, he tried to kill his daughter! Is there no respect for life anymore?

How do we live in a wicked world? Are there any particular principles that apply? Consider a man who managed to live in a very wicked world.

The Character of Noah: Noah was a Godly Man

The third of the eleven sections of Genesis begins in chapter 6. "This is the genealogy of Noah" (6:9). What follows from here to the end of chapter 9 is the story of Noah. It is what happened to him. It is his story, not the story of the flood (Leupold).

First, this section begins with a description of Noah's character: "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God" (6:9). "This is the first time the important words 'righteous' and 'blameless' (perfect) appear in the Bible" (Constable). Verses 8 and 9 mention four spiritual qualities that characterize Noah. Consider them in their chronological order, not the order in which they appear in the text.

Noah Trusted God Verse 8 says he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. People find God's grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). Thus, Noah was a man of faith (Heb. 11:7). He trusted God for the forgiveness of sin and began a life of believing what God said.

Noah Walked with God This statement is only made of Enoch (5:24) and now Noah. "The same explanation for Enoch's rescue from death ('he walked with God') is made the basis for Noah's rescue from death in the Flood: 'he walked with God' (6:9)" (Sailhamer, cited by Constable). Here, the word order of the Hebrew text emphasizes "with God" (Leupold). It was *with God* that Noah walked. Noah's personal communion with God was the source of his other spiritual qualities.

"Noah is depicted as Adam *redivivus* (revived). He is the sole survivor and successor to Adam; both 'walk' with God; both are the recipients of the promissory blessing; both are caretakers of the lower creatures; both father three sons; both are workers of the soil; both sin through the fruit of a tree; and both father a wicked son who is under a curse" (Mathews, cited by Constable).

Noah was a Just Man A just person, that is, a righteous person, is one who conforms to a standard. Noah met God's requirements. He trusted Him and walked with Him. That is basically what God requires as far as a relationship with Him is concerned. Noah was also just in his relationship with others.

Noah was Perfect in His Generation The Hebrew word translated “perfect” means “complete, blameless.” In Leviticus, it is used of sacrificial animals who were without blemish. “Perfect” describes Noah’s character and conduct and does not mean that he was perfect, only that he was a mature, complete, godly man. The phrase “in his generation,” which could be rendered “among his contemporaries,” involves a contrast. Noah’s peers lacked these qualities. Thus, in the midst of a wicked, violent day, Noah walked with God and lived a godly life.

This godly man had three sons. “And Noah begat three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (6:10). These three sons also believed God and helped their father build the ark, which indicates that Noah’s godly life had an impact on his sons. These three boys grew up in a wicked world but followed their faithful father and not the sinful society.

The Contemporaries of Noah: Contemporaries were Godless

The Condition of the Earth In contrast to Noah: “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence” (6:11). The word “earth” in this verse means “the inhabitants of the earth” and “before God” means “in God’s judgment.” From God’s point of view, the population of the world was corrupt. The Hebrew word translated “corrupt” is often translated “destroyed.” To corrupt is to destroy. Because of their selfish, sinful lifestyle (6:5), the men of the earth were experiencing degeneration, decay, destruction, and death. God commissioned man to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth with people (1:28). Instead, mankind filled the earth with violence. These were not just isolated cases of violence. The earth was filled with it. The word rendered “violence” indicates violating the rights of others (Leupold). In short, anarchy prevailed.

The Conclusion of God “So God looked upon the earth and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth” (6:12). Genesis 6:5 says the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great. Now, He sees the corruption that has resulted from that wickedness. “All flesh,” that is, the whole human race, was corrupt. The totality of man had forgotten God, but God had not forgotten them. He contemplated their corruption.

Then, God reached a conclusion. “And God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth’” (6:13). There is a play on words in verses 12 and 13. God saw the destruction. All flesh had destroyed its ways. So, God decided to destroy (the same Hebrew word is in verse 12) all flesh. They destroyed their ways and each other, so God decided to destroy them.

Noah was godly; his generation was godless. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Sin destroys relationships and, ultimately, the person who commits it.

The Commission to Noah: Noah was to Build an Ark

The Prescription for an Ark God commissioned Noah “Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks” (6:14-16). A brief description of the ark is given. It was made of gopher wood, a Hebrew word that only occurs here. From ancient times translators have not known the kind of wood meant (Leupold). Evidently, it was some type of hardwood. Many have suggested Cypress (Keil; Kidner). There were three

decks in the ark (6:16), each containing “rooms” (6:14), a Hebrew word that means “nest.” It had a window (6:16), which some have suggested extended completely around the ark (Kidner), and a door, a single door, on its side (6:16). The ark was covered with “pitch” inside and out. Whatever the pitch was, possibly asphalt (Keil), it rendered the ark watertight.

The ark was 300 x 50 cubits and 30 cubits high. The length of an ancient cubit was the difference between the elbow and the longest finger; thus, it varied from 17.6 inches to 24 inches. Most conclude that a biblical cubit was 18 inches (Morris). Assuming an 18-inch cubit, the ark was 450 feet long (1½ times a football field; the Queen Mary is 1,018 feet long), 75 feet wide (7 standard parking spaces), and 40 feet high, analogous to a four-story building.

Many commentators claim that it was not shaped like a ship but like a chest with a flat bottom (Keil), a box (Leupold), or a barge (Morris). Morris adds, “It can be shown hydrodynamically that a gigantic box of such dimensions would be exceedingly stable, almost impossible to capsize. In 1609-21, Peter Jansen, a Dutchman, built a vessel the size of the ark to satisfy himself concerning its trustworthiness and storage capacity (Leupold).

A vessel the size of the ark would have a displacement of about 20,000 tons and a gross tonnage of about 14,000 tons. Its capacity would equal 522 standard railroad stock cars. One stock car can carry 240 sheep. Thus, the ark could have held 125,000 sheep (Morris; *Ryrie Study Bible*). Today, it is estimated that there are 17,600 species of animals. The average size is less than that of a sheep. Two of each kind would total 35,200 animals. In other words, there would have been plenty of room for that many animals and room for food, Noah, and his family. Keil says, “Every objection that has been raised to the suitability of the structure, and the possibility of collecting all the animals in the ark and providing them with food, is based on arbitrary assumptions and should be treated as a perfectly groundless fancy” (Keil, p. 143, fn.).

The Promise of a Flood God commissioned Noah to build an ark and told him, “And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die” (6:17). This is the first time the word “flood” appears in the Scripture. It comes from a Hebrew word that means “to destroy.” A flood is the “destruction of water.” The Genesis flood was unique in history. This word for flood is only used in Geneses 6-9 and Psalm 29:10. Instead of the usual Greek word for “flood,” the New Testament uses another word, which is reserved for the flood of Genesis 6-9 (Mt. 24:39; Lk. 17:27; 2 Pet. 2:5-3:6). The purpose of the flood was to destroy all flesh with the breath of life, that is, people and beasts. The phrases “all flesh, under heaven” and “everything that is on the earth” emphasize the universality of the destruction.

The Passengers in the Ark There were exemptions to the extermination. God told Noah, “But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. and of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive” (6:18-20). This is the first mention of a covenant and refers to the covenant God established with Noah after the flood (9:9-17; Constable). The immediate issue is that God provided an ark to save the human race and the animal world from the destruction of the flood. Thus, he instructed Noah, his wife, their sons, and their wives, eight individuals plus two of every species of animal, to enter the ark to “keep them alive” (6:20).

How did Noah get two of every kind of animal and creeping thing in the ark? Verse 19 says, “You shall bring,” and verse 20 says they “will come to you.” Could they not have come voluntarily and Noah brought them aboard? There are animal migrations today that no one can

fully explain. Noah did not have to hurt or trap the animals; they came to him (6:20). They all fit in the Ark (see Morris, p. 185).

The Provisions in the Ark What about food? “And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them” (6:21). God did not miraculously provide. Noah and his family were to grow it and/or gather it. How much food was needed? The flood lasted more than a year. How could Noah store food for all the animals for a year? For one thing, animals adapt their food supply to their needs. When they have no physical exercise, they cut down promptly on the amount of food they consume (Leupold). It is also possible that the animals hibernated while on the ark. In such a state, the animals could have survived in confined quarters with little or no food or bodily excretion. If that were the case, perhaps the food Noah stored was for one good meal when entering the ark and one good meal when they exited the ark (Morris).

The Performance of Noah “Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did” (6:22). Noah believed God (Heb. 11:7) and, therefore, obeyed Him (Gen. 6:22), which is no doubt the essence of walking with Him (Ross). For 120 years (6:3), Noah walked with God (6:9), built an ark (6:22), and preached (1 Pet. 3:18-20).

Summary: In the midst of a corrupt and violent world, God commissioned Noah to obey Him and he did.

There are seven recorded occasions when God spoke to Noah (6:13; 7:1; 8:15; 9:1, 8, 12, 17). He listened and was saved from judgment on the world and, moreover, was blessed. Psalm 29, which deals with the flood, records that “the voice of the Lord” spoke judgment seven times to a world that had rejected Him (Ps. 29:3, 4b, 5, 7, 8, 9). You will either hear the Word of God now, respond in faith and obedience, and, as a result, be saved and blessed, or you will hear the Word of God later in judgment.

Resisting the world and obeying God is difficult. That was true for Noah. Before the flood, it had never rained on the earth (9:26). God told Noah to prepare for something he had never seen! The world no doubt laughed at Noah, but he chose to believe God, even though it was difficult.

The New Testament says, “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness, which is according to faith” (Heb. 11:7). You can be condemned *with* the world, or you can be like Noah and condemn the world.

This story is an illustration of salvation. The ark is salvation, the door is Christ, and Noah entered by faith. Thus, he was saved from the flood, that is, the judgment of God.

A float on the sea of the judgment of God,
Righteous Noah had nothing to dread;
With eyes fixed above, he was kept from alarm,
Though without all about him was death.

The story is an illustration of obedience. “The author’s purpose in drawing out the list of specifications for the ark in chapter 6, as with the details of the building of the tabernacle, is not that readers might be able to see what the ark or the tabernacle looked like, but rather that readers might appreciate the meticulous care with which these godly and exemplary individuals went about their tasks of obedience to God’s will. They obeyed God with ‘all their hearts’ (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

WAS THE FLOOD LOCAL OR UNIVERSAL?

The Genesis flood has generated a flood of controversy. One of the great debates concerning the flood is over the question, “Was it local or universal?” From the earliest times, Christians said that it was universal, but skeptics scoffed, saying that the Genesis flood was only a local rainstorm. The debates subsided during the Middle Ages but heated up again during the Renaissance (Allen, *The Legend of Noah*, pp. 74-75). Today, even evangelicals argue for a local flood. One author goes so far as to say, “Although many Christians still believe in the universal flood, most of the recent conservative scholarship of the church defends a local flood” (Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and the Scripture*, p. 162).

The debate whirls around several critical issues. For example, is there enough water in the world to cover the earth? A book defending the universal flood admits, “If all the water in our present atmosphere were suddenly precipitated, it would only suffice to cover the ground to an average depth of less than 2 inches” (Morris and Whitcomb, p. 121). Another author points out that mountains on the earth today are five to six thousand feet high. To cover them requires eight times more water than we now have (Boice, p. 277). Thus, many conclude the flood of Genesis was restricted to a local area somewhere in the Middle East.

What does the Bible say? Is there evidence outside the Bible to settle the debate? What difference does it make? What is the point of the story of the flood anyway?

Apparently, the author of Genesis considered the flood to be important. It occupies three and a half chapters of the eleven chapters of Genesis on universal origins. Only two chapters are devoted to the creation! What is the truth concerning this important issue?

The Directive to Noah: Get Aboard

Get Aboard The ark has been built (6:22). No doubt the food had been gathered and animals assembled. Perhaps Methuselah was on his deathbed. The period of grace had passed (6:3). Now, after more than a century of silence, God speaks again. “Then the LORD said to Noah, ‘Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation’ (7:1). God invited Noah and his household to “come into the ark” as if to say, “I’m already in and, thus, I will be with you in the ark throughout the flood.” The reason God invited Noah and his family into the ark was that Noah was righteous “in this generation” (7:1). Noah’s generation was wicked, exceedingly wicked (6:12-13), but Noah was righteous. He walked with God (6:9) and obeyed Him (6:12). Therefore, God did not judge Noah with his generation. Noah’s family also escaped judgment because of Noah, which is not the only case of someone being blessed because of their association with a righteous man.

Take the Animals “You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth. For after seven more days, I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made” (7:2-4). Originally, God commissioned Noah to take two of every animal (6:19-20). Now He says seven of the clean and two of the unclean. What’s the difference between clean and unclean and why seven of one and two of the other? This passage does not answer those questions, but it becomes apparent that the difference between clean and unclean is that the clean is suited for sacrifice (Lev. 11; etc.) and the extra clean animals were for that purpose

(8:20). The reason (“for” in 7:4) God told Noah to load the ark now was because, in seven days, the flood would begin. All outside the ark would be destroyed in 40 days and 40 nights of deluge on the earth. The only place of safety was in the ark with the Lord.

Noah did as Directed “And Noah did according to all that the Lord commanded him. Noah was 600 years old when the flood of water was on the earth so Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood. Of clean beasts, of beasts that are unclean, of birds, and of everything that creeps on the earth, two by two they went into the ark to Noah, male and female, as God had commanded Noah” (7:5-9). Verses 5-9 emphatically declare that Noah did all God directed him to do. This subsection begins with that comment (7:5) and ends with it (7:9). The specifics are also listed. God directed Noah to enter the ark with his household (7:1). That is exactly what Noah did (7:7). God instructed Noah to take clean and unclean animals aboard (7:2-3) and Noah did (7:8-9) down to the creeping things (7:8). Noah did all God commanded (7:5), being 600 years old at the time (7:6). Noah was completely obedient.

Tennyson wrote,

Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do or die;
Into the valley of death rode the 600
(Tennyson, “The Charge of the Light Brigade”)

Noah did not reason why, nor did he make a reply. He simply did what God told him to do and instead of dying, he lived while all around him perished.

The Description of the Flood

The Time of the Flood The account of the flood (7:10-24) begins with the time of the flood (7:10-12). “And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth” (7:10). God had said, “After seven more days, I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights” (7:4) and seven days later, the flood began (7:10).

To be more specific, “In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the foundations of the deep were broken up and the windows of heaven were opened” (7:11). The year of the flood depends on the interpretation of the chronology of chapter 5. Since there were probably gaps in that chronology, the exact year is unknown other than it was when Noah was 600 years old. Which month of that year depends on the calendar the author had in mind. The civil or agricultural year began in the autumn at the beginning of sowing time. The second month, according to that reckoning, would be our October/November (Keil). Less likely, is the ecclesiastical year, which begins in the spring, our April. The ecclesiastical year did not come into being until the Exodus (Ex. 12-13:4). One other time factor is mentioned. The rains lasted as promised (7:4) for forty days and nights (7:12).

The Source of the Flood “On that day, all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened” (7:11). The water came from below and from above. The “great deep” is a reference to subterranean water. The Hebrew word translated “deep” is used of subterranean waters in Genesis 49:25 and Deuteronomy 33:13. This was the water from below. Morris and Whitcomb claim that this verse implies “great volcanic explosions and eruptions” (Morris and Whitcomb, p. 122). If that is true, the whole surface of the earth was changed during the flood. Were mountains formed during this time? The second source was rained from above.

“The windows of heaven were opened” is a figurative expression for a torrential downpour from heaven. The canopy of water that was around the earth at creation(1:6-8) fell to the earth during the flood (Morris).

Genesis 7:11 is critical in the debate over the extent of the flood. It answers the question of the source of the water. If there was a canopy of water above the earth before the flood and it fell to the earth during the flood, that would explain the source of so great an amount of water. Furthermore, if there was a great amount of water in the subterranean earth and the very surface of the earth was altered during the flood, there was enough water to cover the surface of the earth. “If the earth were a perfect sphere, the ocean would cover the land to a depth of two-and-a-half to three miles” (Boice).

“And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights” (7:12). For forty days and nights, a torrent of rain continued incessantly. Given the data of Genesis 7:11, a universal flood was possible, but was it?

The Security of the Inhabitants of the Ark The next four verses sound like a repetition of what has already been said. “On the very same day Noah and Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark—they and every beast after its kind, all cattle after their kind, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, every bird of every sort. And they went into the ark to Noah, two by two, of all flesh in which is the breath of life. So those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the Lord shut him in” (7:13-16). This is not “idle repetition” but a “solemn repetition characteristic of all epic poetry of the days of old” (Leupold). The author repeats this information to assure the reader that the inhabitants of the ark are safe and secure. The fact is firm and finally established with the statement that the Lord shut the door. In the book of Revelation, it is said that God opened the door and nobody could shut it (Rev. 3:8). In this case, God shut the door and no one could open it. As Noah and his family were secure in the ark, so believers are secure in Christ.

The Extent of the Flood “Now the flood was on the earth forty days. The water increased and lifted up the ark and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and greatly increased on the earth, the ark moved about on the surface of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered. The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered” (7:17-20). This passage describes the increase of the water until it covered the mountain. Notice, “the waters increased” and the ark was lifted up (7:17). The waters “greatly increased” and the ark moved about (7:18). The waters “prevailed exceedingly” and covered all the high hills (7:19). The water “prevailed 15 cubits upward” and covered the mountains (7:20). The fifteen cubits to the height above the mountains, not the total depth (Kidner). Many have suggested that the ark drew fifteen cubits of water (Keil; Kidner). Fifteen eighteen-inch cubits equal 22.5 feet.

This passage clearly teaches a universal flood over the whole earth, not a local flood. The water covered “all the high hills under the whole heaven” (7:19) and the mountains (7:20). Keil declares, “To speak of such a flood as partial is absurd.” Advocates of a local flood argue that “all” is sometimes used in a relative sense than the Scripture, which, of course, is true, but the addition here of the phrase “under the whole heaven” indicates that “all” in this passage is not being used in a limited sense. Furthermore, whereas a single “all” may be used in a relative sense, a double “all” is never used that way and verse 19 contains a double “all” (Leupold).

The Effect of the Flood “And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the

breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died. So He destroyed all living things, which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive. And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days” (7:21-24). The effect of the flood was that all living things that breathed air outside the ark died. Only the fish and those in the ark survived. That is what God said He would do (6:7, 13; 7:4) and that is what God did. The description of the flood concludes with a notice that water prevailed for 150 days, which includes forty days of rain. It is also further proof that all perished. No living thing outside the ark could survive the water 22½ feet above the highest mountains for 150 days.

Summary: After God directed Noah to load the ark, He destroyed all breathing life on the earth with a flood.

Genesis 7 indicates the flood was not local; it was universal. Actually, there are many arguments to support a universal flood. The arguments for a universal flood can be summarized as follows.

1. The plain statement of Genesis. Genesis says the floodwater covered “all the high hills under the whole heaven” (7:19) and was 15 cubits higher than the mountains (7:20). While it is true that the word “all” in Scripture can be used in a limited sense, that cannot be the case in Genesis 7:19 because of the phrase “under the whole heaven.”

2. The need and nature of the ark. Had the flood been local, there would have been no need for an ark. Noah and his household could simply have migrated to some other place. After all, they had a 120-year notice. The animals could have migrated too. Animal migration is common even today. The very need for an ark indicates that the flood was not local; it was universal. Furthermore, the size of the ark was much too massive for a mere local flood. It was analogous to a four-story building, 450 feet long and 75 feet wide. “For Noah to have built a vessel of such magnitude simply for the purpose of escaping a local flood is inconceivable” (Whitcomb and Morris, p. 11).

3. The promise to Noah. After the flood, God promised Noah He would never again destroy the earth by water (8:21, 22; 9:11, 15). He specifically says, “Never again shall there be a flood to destroy the Earth” (9:11) and he gave the rainbow as a reminder of His covenant (9:16). If the Genesis flood was simply a local flood, this covenant is broken because there have been many local floods since Noah’s time. It is much more natural to understand that the Genesis flood was universal. Therefore, God promised not to destroy *the whole earth* again by water. The universal phenomenon of the rainbow reminds us of a universal flood, which will never again take place.

4. The statements of the New Testament. Jesus said the flood “destroyed them all” (Lk. 17:27), meaning all outside the ark. Peter states, “The *world* that then existed perished being flooded with water” (2 Pet. 3:6). Peter goes on to declare the destruction of the heavens and the earth by fire (2 Pet. 3:7). It is not likely that he is arguing that because there was a local flood, there will be a universal destruction of the earth. It is much more likely that Peter is arguing that in contrast to the whole world being destroyed by water, the earth will be judged by fire in the future. Thus, both the statements of the Lord and Peter, especially taken together, indicate a worldwide, not a local flood.

5. Flood traditions from all over the world. Hundreds of universal traditions have been found in every part of the world in both eastern and western hemispheres. One author “describes over 100 traditions from Europe, Asia, Australia, the East Indies, Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, South America, Central America, North America, and East Africa” (Whitcomb and Morris, p. 48, fn. #3; see 270 flood stories from all parts of the world in *Ryrie Study Bible*, note on Gen. 7:19).

Another author goes so far as to say that probably the majority of the human nations had a flood tradition (cited by Morris, p. 52).

“Stories of a great flood sent in primeval times by gods to destroy mankind followed by some form of new creation are so common to so many peoples in different parts of the world, between whom no kind of historical contact seems possible, that the notion seems almost to be a universal feature of the human imagination” (Whybray, cited by Constable; Josephus cited Berosus, a Chaldean historian, as one such writer, in *Against Apion*, 1:19).

This fact becomes more impressive when one realizes that there are no traditions of other great miracles recorded in the Bible, such as the crossing of the Red Sea. The traditions of a universal flood vary in their details, but common to most is a flood that covered the earth and destroyed all but a few of the human race. Many include the story of an ark that finally landed on a mountain.

Flood traditions do not prove a universal flood. These legends, however, do provide “circumstantial evidence.” If, in fact, a flood such as the one described in Genesis did actually occur, universal traditions would be what one would expect to find. If there were no such traditions, opponents of the Genesis flood would argue that a lack of such circumstantial evidence is a great argument against the Genesis account.

COMPARISON OF FLOOD STORIES					
	Biblical	Berossus (Greek)	Atrahasis (Akkadian)	Gilgamesh (Akkadian)	Sumerian
Date of Account	Earliest possible: 15 th century B.C.	ca. 275 B.C.	16 th century (copy of earlier work)	ca. 1500 B.C. (copies, not the original)	19 th century B.C. (copy, not the original)
Author of Flood	Yahweh		Enlil	Council of gods	Assembly of gods
Intercessor	Yahweh	Kronos	Ea	Ea	Enki (probably)
Reason for Flood	Wickedness of mankind, violence, corruption.		The clamor, uproar of man disturbs Enlil’s sleep.	No reason given at first. In the end, the “sin of man” implied as the cause.	None given.
Hero	Noah (rest)	Xisouthros (Greek for Ziusudra)	Atrahasis (all wise)	Utnapishtim (finder of life)	Ziusudra (he saw life)
Intended for Whom	All mankind.		All mankind.	City of Shurippak particularly, but all mankind.	All mankind.
Reason Hero Spared	“Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” “A righteous man. Blameless. Walked with God.”				Ziusudra was “humbly obedient,” reverent; one who seeks revelation by dreams and incantations.

Means of Escape	Ark	Boat	Large ship	Ship	Huge boat
Description	Detailed: 3 stories, 1 door, 1 window at least.		(Text destroyed)	Detailed: 6 stories, 1 door, 1 window at least.	
Occupants	Noah, wife, 3 sons, their wives. 7 pairs of all clean animals (male and female). 1 pair of all unclean animals (male and female).	Xisouthros, family, others, all species of animals.	Atrahasis, wife, family, relations, craftsmen. Grain, possessions, foods. Beasts and creatures of the field.	Utnapishtim and all his family and kin. Craftsmen. Beasts and wild creatures of the field.	
Duration of Storm	40 days and nights		7 days and nights	6 days and nights	7 days and nights
Landing Place	Mountains of Ararat	Mountains of Armenia	(Text missing)	Mt. Nisir (Mt. of Salvation)	
Birds Released	Raven, dove, dove, dove	Birds	(Text missing)	Dove, swallow, raven	
Sacrifice	Hero offers. "Lord smelled the pleasing odor."	Hero offers.	(Text missing)	Hero offers. "Gods smelled the sweet savor."	Hero offers, bows to Utu, Anu, Enlil.
Blessing	God blessed Noah and charged him to populate the earth.	Hero disappears but his voice instructs others.		Enlil blesses Utnapishtim. Hero and his wife then become as gods.	Ziusudra granted "life as a god" and "breath eternal"; called "preserver of seed of mankind"

This chart is from an appendix by Constable. He says it a condensation of James M. Boice, *Genesis*, 1:37-68, with additions.

6. The nature of sedimentary strata. Moving water has formed almost all the sedimentary strata of the earth. Indeed, sedimentary strata, by definition, were deposited by sediments! There are only two theories. One theory is these layers were formed one at a time by moving water over many centuries. The other theory is that a catastrophic flood produced them.

The power of floodwaters should not be underestimated. In their book, *The Genesis Flood*, Morris and Whitcomb cite numerous quotations and data to illustrate the power of floodwaters. For example, they quote one author who described a flood as follows: "it had stood a few days previously; the rush was tremendous—huge blocks of rock measuring some feet across were rolled along with an awful rushing, almost as easily as pebbles in an ordinary stream. In one night, a block of granite, which I calculated to weigh upwards of 350 tons, was moved for more than a hundred yards" (Morris and Whitcomb, p. 259). They go on to say, "One might visualize flood action like this, not in a limited locale but worldwide, not for a few days or hours but continuing for weeks and months, to appreciate the character of the Biblical Deluge" (Morris and Whitcomb, p. 259).

They quote another author: "Waves are seldom more than twenty-five feet high, but violent storms may raise them to sixty feet and there are unverified reports of even greater heights.... The

immense striking power of a wave cannot be realized until it hits an object that cannot float with it. Waves striking the shore of Tierra del Fuego can be heard for twenty miles.... The force of waves striking the shore can be measured and has been found to reach three tons per square foot” (Morris and Whitcomb, pp. 261, 263).

Morris and Whitcomb cite another author, a leading oceanographer, who tells of waves exceeding 100 feet in height. This oceanographer described waves that hurled seven thousand ton stones over a breakwater composed of large rocks and capped with a wall twenty feet high. Those same waves at Cherbourg, France, moved sixty-five tons of concrete blocks sixty feet. In 1872, at Wick, Scotland, a breakwater capped by an 800-ton block of concrete and secured to the foundation by iron rods 3.5 inches in diameter (it was estimated that both the cap and the foundation weighed a total of 1350 tons) was moved and deposited in the water the wall was built to protect. A similar structure was built, weighing an estimated 2600 tons, and it received a similar treatment by a storm a few years later (Morris and Whitcomb, pp. 263, 264).

7. The formation of fossils. The very presence of a fossil argues forcefully for a catastrophe. If an animal dies and its carcass lies on the ground, it simply deteriorates until it disintegrates and disappears. The only way a fossil can be formed is by some kind of catastrophe, whereby an animal suddenly dies and is preserved. In hundreds of places all over the world, fossil graveyards contain fossils of hundreds and thousands of animals. How is this to be explained apart from a flood? A universal flood is the most logical explanation of such fossil graveyards.

Numerous examples could be cited. One of the most well-known is a huge collection of whole animals preserved in frozen ground in Siberia. Fifty thousand ivory tusks have been collected from this single site alone (Morris and Whitcomb, p. 289). There are even cases of whole animals found frozen in ice with undigested food in their stomach. Perhaps a local flood could explain some of these cases, but the presence of so many of them scattered all over the world, combined with flood traditions from all over the world and the biblical data, is a persuasive case of circumstantial evidence for a universal flood.

“The scientific community seems to be more open to catastrophism of some kind than it used to be” (Constable, who cites Henry Morris, “Biblical Catastrophism and Modern Science,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:498, April-June 1968:107-15).

One question remains. What difference does it make? What is the point of the story of the flood anyway? In the first place, the flood is a witness to the sovereignty and power of God in the affairs of men and the course of nature. Secondly, the flood is a warning that a sovereign, just God judges unbelieving men. The universal flood is a graphic reminder that there will be universal judgment. Perhaps that is why some want to argue for a local flood. Morris and Whitcomb wrote, “The concept of such a universal judgment on man’s sin and rebellion, warning as it does of another greater yet to come, is profoundly offensive to the intellectual and moral pride of modern man and so he would circumvent it if at all possible” (Morris and Whitcomb, p. xxii).

“WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE”

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the famous English poet, penned those memorable words:

All in a hot and copper sky,
the bloody sun, at noon,
right up above the mast did stand,
no bigger than the moon.
Day after day, day after day,
we struck nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
upon a painted ocean
water, water, everywhere,
and all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
nor any drop to drink.

Those lines from “The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner” do not describe the Genesis flood, but no better description could be found. In the poem, from the standpoint of men aboard a sailing ship with no wind, there was “water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink.” As Noah floated atop a shoreless ocean in an ark, there was literally water, water, everywhere over the surface of the earth. What happened to all that water? How long did it take the water to recede after the rain ceased? What are the spiritual lessons in all of this for us?

The Decrease of the Water

God Remembered From above and below, the waters of the flood covered the earth (7:11). The waters increased (7:17) and greatly increased (7:18) until the mountains were covered (7:20). The waters prevailed over the earth for 150 days, that is, it rained for forty days and the water remained constant for 110 days after that. Genesis 7 describes the gradual increase of water. Now, chapter 8 describes its decrease.

After 150 days, “Then God remember Noah and every living thing and all the animals that were with him in the ark” (8:1a). To say that God remembered does not mean that God forgot. When used with God as the subject and man as the object, the Hebrew word “remember” means “remembering with kindness, granting the request, protecting, delivering” (BDB). It always implies “movement toward the object (Kidner; Ross). In other words, God began to act on their behalf (Morris). He began to intervene (Kidner).

God Acted God did several things to providentially cause the flood waters to recede. First, “And God made a wind to pass over the earth and the waters subsided” (8:1b). God employed natural means to cause the water to rise and He did the same to make them recede. Thus, He sent a wind, which caused the waters to subside (8:1). Morris suggests that the canopy of water above the earth before the flood produced uniform temperatures, which precluded strong winds. Now, with the canopy gone, there were great differences in the temperature between the equator and poles, and, consequently, great wind movements began. Those wind movements, further

complicated by the earth's rotation, initiated the present complex system of atmospheric circulations. He concludes, "With nothing but a shoreless ocean, these winds generated tremendous waves, currents, and vast quantities of water could be evaporated, especially in the equatorial regions."

God did other things as well. "The fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were also stopped, and the rain from heaven was retained" (8:2). To cause the waters to rise, God opened the fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven (7:11). Now, to get the waters to recede, God turned off the fountain and closed the window.

The Waters Decreased The wind blew (8:1) and the sources of the water stopped (8:2). "and the waters receded continually from the earth. At the end of the 150 days, the waters decreased" (8:3). The 150 days mentioned here are the same as those mentioned before in 7:24 (Leupold). In other words, the flood began when it started to rain (7:10-11). It rained for forty days (7:12) until the water covered the mountains (7:20). The water dominated the earth for 110 days after that, totaling 150 days from the beginning of the flood (7:24, 8:3). As soon as the 150 days were up, the waters began to recede "continually" (8:3).

Byron C. Nelson states: "Here is described some ebb and flow, some notable back and forth movement of the Deluge water, as they slowly retreated into the ocean depths. Whether the ebb and flow was that of tides or some extraordinary movement, the Scriptures do not say ... but that there were sufficient movements, tidal or otherwise, to stir up the immense quantities of soil, which perhaps covered the old earth to an enormous depth, certainly seems plain. And a little forward in the Scriptural account, in brief yet expressive narrative, it says, 'and the waters decreased continually' or 'were going and decreasing' (Gen. 8:5) (Nelson, *The Deluge Story in Stone*, p. 5, cited by Whitcomb and Morris in *The Genesis Flood*, p. 100).

Morris and Whitcomb contend that such passages as Genesis 8:3 and Psalm 104:6-9 "suggest that ocean basins were deepened after the flood to provide adequate storage space for the additional waters that had been 'above the firmament' from the second day of creation to the time of the flood, while mountain ranges rose to heights never obtained during the antediluvian era" (Whitcomb and Morris, p. 77).

"Then the ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat" (Gen 8:4). The highest peak in the Ararat Mountains is Masis, commonly called Mount Ararat, which is 16,254 feet high. The Ararat Mountains are located in Armenia. In fact, the Hebrew word for Armenia is Ararat. Numerous "sightings" of the ark on Mount Ararat have been reported during ancient, medieval, and modern times. Computer studies have demonstrated that the geographical center of the earth's land areas is located within a short distance of Mount Ararat (*The Center of the Earth*, San Diego: Institute for Creation Research, 1973, p. 18, cited by Whitcomb and Morris).

"And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month. In the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen" (8:5). Seventy-four days after the ark rested on a mountain, the tops of the mountains were seen. Apparently, the ark landed high on one mountain and now the tops of the other mountains could be seen from the ark.

The Dispatch of the Doves

The Release of the Raven Just because Noah could see the tops of the mountains did not mean that the water had decreased enough for him and the others to disembark from the ark. "So it came to pass, at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the windows of the ark which he had made.

Then he sent out a raven which kept going to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth” (8:6-7). Evidently, the raven flew away from the ark and kept returning to it without being taken in it. Being a scavenger, it would eat carcasses floating on the water and perched on any slimy surface (Keil).

The Release of the Dove Next, “He sent out from himself a dove to see if the waters had abated from the face of the ground. But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot and she returned into the ark to him, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her and drew her into the ark to himself” (8:8-9). This time, Noah did not wait 40 days (8:6), only seven (“another” in 8:10). Moreover, he didn’t send a raven but a dove. Unlike the raven, the dove would only land on a clean, dry place (Keil). She found no such spot, so she returned to the ark and Noah took her inside.

The Second Release “And he waited yet another seven days and again he sent out the dove out of the ark. Then the dove came to him in the evening and behold, a freshly plucked olive leaf was in her mouth and Noah knew that the water had abated from the earth” (8:10-11). This time the dove returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf, indicating the waters had abated at least into the valleys. This did not mean, however, that the ground was perfectly dry because an olive tree can produce leaves underwater (Keil).

The Third Release “So he waited yet another seven days and sent out the dove which did not return again to him anymore” (8:12). The failure of the dove to return indicated the ground was dry.

The Genesis record carefully traces the chronology of the flood. It began on the seventeenth day of the second month of Noah’s six hundredth year (7:11). It rained 40 days (7:12). And the water stood on the earth 110 days after the rain stopped (7:24). Then the water began to recede (8:3). The ark landed (8:4) and 74 days later, the tops of the mountains could be seen (8:5). Noah sent the raven 40 days after that, or 264 days after the beginning of the flood and the first release of the dove on the 271st day. The second release was on day 278 and the third was on day 285. After 285 days, Noah and his family were still aboard, but at least the water was abated. The account of the decrease of the waters illustrates that God works through natural means. It also illustrates God often works slowly.

The Departure of Noah

Noah Removed the Roof The story continues, “And it came to pass in the 601 year, in the first month, the first day of the month, that the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked and indeed the surface of the ground was dry. And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dried” (8:13-14). Noah waited 29 more days after releasing the dove for the third time. Then, after being on the ark for 314 days, he removed the “covering of the ark,” that is, the roof (8:13). He could see for himself the ground was dry, but he still did not disembark from the ark. Fifty-seven days later “the earth was dried” (8:14). The earth was now completely dried. Vegetation had sufficiently grown to sustain life. The occupants of the ark had been aboard 371 days (53 weeks).

God told Noah to Unload the Ark “Then God spoke to Noah saying ‘Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons, and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you, birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth so that they may abound on the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth” (8:15-17). God told Noah to “come into the ark” (7:1). Now God says, “Go out of the ark” (8:16). He also told Noah

to “bring out” the animals. They were not to be abandoned in the ark to exit themselves, which might have caused harm or even death to the smaller, weaker ones. God wanted the animals to abound, be fruitful, and multiply (1:22).

Constable claims that “Verse 15 introduces the third dispensation, the dispensation of human government. When Noah and his family stepped out of the ark to begin life on earth anew, God laid down new rules for humanity, including a new test. Previously, no one had the right to take another human life (cf. 4:10-11, 14-15, 23-24). Now, though man’s direct moral responsibility to God continued, God delegated to man certain areas of His authority. Man was now to express his obedience to God not only by obeying God directly but also by obeying the human authorities God would set over him, namely, human governors (cf. Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-2). The highest function of human government is the protection of human life” (see Constable for details concerning government).

All Departed the Ark “So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him, every beast, every creeping thing, every bird and whatever creeps on the earth according to their families went out of the ark” (8:18-19). Everyone who entered the ark departed safely from the ark. God remembered (8:1). “Verses 18 and 19 may seem like needless repetition to the modern reader, but they underline Noah’s obedience to God’s words, which Moses stressed in the entire Flood narrative” (Constable).

The Devotion of Noah

Noah Sacrificed Having been safely delivered from the flood, “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (8:20). This is the first mention of an altar. Others offered sacrifices, but no mention was made of an altar until now. A sacrifice on an altar signifies a propitiation for sin (Jn. 1:29) and praise to God (Heb. 13:15). Noah’s sacrifice was an expression of gratitude for God’s gracious protection. Considering the number of animals Noah had in his “flock,” this was a generous sacrifice. It has been called “the most liberal sacrifice ever offered” (Leupold). Noah was dependent on and devoted to the Lord.

Ross says, “How could Noah best express his gratitude to God? According to Maurice, he wanted to say, ‘We confess that Thou hast made us rulers; help us to govern; we know that the world can crush us; help us not to fear it, but Thee; we are sure that we have rebelled against Thee; we bless Thee that Thou upholdest us and unitest us to Thee.’”

The Lord was Pleased “And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done while the earth remains seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer and day and night shall not cease” (8:20-22). Because the Lord was pleased with Noah’s sacrifice, He made two promises. First, God promised that He would never again “curse the ground for man’s sake,” that is, that He would not destroy the earth again with a flood (Leupold). This promise is discussed in more detail in Genesis 9.

God promised He would not destroy the earth again with a flood “although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (8:21). This has been interpreted to mean 1) because evil is innate in man. He needs the forbearance of God (Keil; Morris). 2) For man’s sake (Kidner), that is, even though they are filled with evil (Ross). Since God destroyed the earth because every intent of the thoughts of his heart was on evil continually (6:5), this most likely means God has now

decided that from henceforth, even though the imaginations of man's heart are evil from his youth, He will not destroy the earth with a flood. The flood solved the problem of the perversion and pollution of the sons of God co-habiting with the daughters of men. It did not solve the problem of men dwelling on evil continually.

Second, God promised that natural processes would continue (8:22) as long as the earth remains and it will someday be destroyed by fire (2 Pet. 3:7). God will not again destroy every living thing "as I have done," that is, with a flood (9:15), which doesn't mean He will not destroy it with fire. God will not intervene with the natural processes of planting and harvest and the seasons of day and night, summer and winter, which bring the heat and the cold that make crops possible.

Summary: When God graciously and patiently decreased the waters of the flood and instructed Noah to empty the ark, Noah gratefully sacrificed to Him.

When God remembers you, you should remember Him. God remembers His own, even when they don't see Him doing anything. God is working (19:29; 30:22; Ps. 9:12; 136:23). We should remember God. It is not our nature to remember God or His goodness, but we should (Eccl. 12:1; Jer. 51:50; Jonah 2:7).

When I made the airplane reservations, I knew the schedule would be tight. The Sunday morning service was not over until noon. The airport was 50 miles away and the flight left at 1:30. I managed to get out of the church close to noon, jumped in a waiting car and sped off to the airport. Fortunately, there were no glitches and I made it to the plane. As I settled in my seat, I began working on this very sermon. I was reading what others had said about Genesis 8 when the stewardess served the meal (they actually served meals in those days). I automatically began to eat as I continued to read. Halfway through the meal, I realized I had not thanked the Lord for the food. How prone we are to forget that God remembers to provide for us.

The next time you see water, water, everywhere, and nothing but problems, and God remembers to deliver you, don't forget to remember Him.

THE VALUE OF LIFE

How valuable is life? Hinduism teaches all life is sacred and, therefore, nothing should be killed. Thus, in India, cows are sacred and are not slaughtered for food, while millions of humans starve to death. On the other hand, terrorists seem to feel that life is cheap. They think nothing of killing humans at random. Just how valuable is life? Human life? Animal life? In America, at the moment, there is certainly no consensus, only confusion. Apparently, the majority wants the right to kill the unborn and those near death, but they do not want the government to execute murderers. In other words, they want the right to abortion and euthanasia, but they do not want capital punishment. Where is the consistency? To add to the confusion, an increasing number of people might support abortion and euthanasia, that is, the killing of young and old, picket and politick for animal rights!

What is the value of human life? What is the value of animal life? Is all life sacred so that we should not practice any kind of killing, including abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, and animals for food? That position seems to be consistent. Or is no life sacred, so anyone can kill at will? If you take a view somewhere between those two extremes, on what basis do you do it? God once destroyed all living humans and animals except for an ark-full. What does that say about life? God Himself clarifies that question and in doing so, gives us the basis we need to think through the issues of the value of life.

At the end of Genesis 8, God said to Himself that He would never again destroy every living thing with a flood (8:21) and He would allow life to continue in natural processes (8:22). In a sense, Genesis 9:1-17 is a repetition of that decision. God gives commands to Noah concerning life (9:1-7). Life is to continue (8:22) and He makes a covenant concerning life (9:8-17), that is, life will not be destroyed (8:21).

God's Commands Concerning Life

The Promotion of Life The water had receded. The ark is empty. The animals are scattering over the earth. Noah has offered a sacrifice. **“So God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth’ (9:1).** Leupold comments, “When God ‘blesses,’ He not merely wishes well but imports good.”

When God created Adam and Eve, He “blessed them” and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (1:28). Now He repeats part of that commission to Noah and his sons. Like His command to Adam, God commissioned Noah to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. God does not, however, tell Noah to subdue and have dominion. The Fall affected man’s place on the earth. He is no longer to subdue it and have dominion over it like he could have and should have before the Fall. Perhaps that is because Satan now has dominion (1 Jn. 5:19) and only the Son of Man will be able to conquer him and exercise dominion over the earth as God intended. In the meantime, man is to populate the earth. He is to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth with his kind. No place is to be unoccupied and uncultivated.

The Provision of Life God not only commanded man to populate the earth, He also provided animal food to sustain human life on the planet. **“And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, and on all that moves on the earth and on all**

the fish of the sea. They are given in your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood” (9:2-4). Beasts, birds, bugs, and fish of the sea will now fear and dread humans. Without this, the animal population might control humans and maybe even eliminate them. Humans are not to fear animals; animals are to fear humans. No matter how big or strong, animals do dread human presence.

God told Adam, “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you, it shall be food” (1:29). Nothing was said about eating meat. If humans ate meat before the flood, it was not by divine sanction. Now God gives humans permission to eat meat. He does not explain why the change. Explanations are only speculation. At this point, God makes no distinction between clean and unclean. Noah could eat bacon and pork chops; Moses was told not to do that, but that Mosaic restriction is once again lifted (Acts 10; Rom. 14:14; 1 Tim. 4:4-5).

With the new provision, there was also a prohibition. People could now eat meat, but not blood (9:4). This probably excludes both eating living animals as the Abyssinians did and slain animals from which the blood had not been properly drained (Keil). The significance of the prohibition is beyond the physical act of not eating flesh with blood. The life (literally “soul,” which is translated “life” in this verse) is in the blood (Lev. 17:11). The blood in a human and animal carries the necessary chemicals from the air and food to the body and the brain. Thus, “the point of the prohibition is that people may eat flesh as long as it no longer has life in it (Ross). Life is valuable and it is to be respected.

The Protection of Life Moving from the subject of animals’ blood to human blood, God says, “Surely for your life blood I will demand a reckoning from the hand of every beast and I will require it and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man” (9:5). People may kill animals (9:3), but neither animals nor humans may kill humans (9:5). Animals’ blood is not to be eaten (9:4); human blood is not to be shed (9:5)! “Require” is a judicial term. God, as a judge, pronounces punishment on an animal or a human who sheds the blood of a human. The punishment is the death of the guilty one. God requires the life of the taker of life. Earlier, God promised to directly inflict punishment on anyone killing Cain (4:15). Now He does it indirectly, saying, “From the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man.” When God said this, all men were literally “brothers” (except, of course, for Noah). Since all humans came from one of three brothers, there is a sense that all men are brothers.

This command establishes government (Keil; Morris). Luther said, “This was the first command having reference to the temporal sword. By these words temporal government was established, and the sword placed in its hand by God” (Luther, cited by Keil). If a beast kills a human, the beast is to be killed (Ex. 21:28). If a human willingly kills another human, that person is to be executed (Ex. 21:12). This divine commission is still in force (Rom. 13:4).

There are two extremes in regard to human government. One is to disregard the government. The other extreme is to regard government more highly than God intended, believing that government can solve problems government was never designed to solve (Boice, p. 307).

Why can humans kill animals, but neither animals nor humans kill humans? God explains, “Whoever sheds man’s blood by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man” (9:6). Humans are more valuable than animals because humans are made in the image of God. Thus, the sin/crime of taking another human’s life is so great that justice demands that the killer dies. Though not stated here, the latent principle involved is not only justice but prevention.

If practiced properly, capital punishment would prevent killing and, thereby, protect life (Eccl. 8:11).

This subsection concludes as it began. God again says, “And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it” (9:7, see 9:1). This kind of restatement is called an “inclusio.” It is employed to strengthen the unity of a passage and maintain the prominent idea (Ross). Humans are not to take life. They are to produce, promote, and populate the planet with life. Human life, which is in the image of God, is valuable.

God’s Covenant Concerning Life

The Covenant After giving commands to Noah, God makes a covenant. “Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, ‘And as for me, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the field with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth’ (9:8-10). Verse 7 says, “As for you;” verse 9 says, “And as for me.” This is God’s covenant with Noah and all humans, as well as all creatures with him. It has been argued that the phrase “of all that go out of the ark” indicates a universal flood, or otherwise not all animals would be included (Leupold; Morris).

What was the content of the covenant? “Thus, I establish my covenant with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (9:11). God unconditionally promises that He will never again destroy all flesh on the earth with a flood. Local floods may occur; a universal flood shall never occur again.

The Sign “And God said, ‘this is the sign of the covenant which I made between Me and you and every living creature that is with you for perpetual generations: I establish My rainbow in the clouds, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud and I will remember my covenant, which is between Me and you and every creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. “ And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth” (9:12-17). Throughout this section, God assures and reassures us that He will not destroy all flesh with a flood. First, He establishes a covenant (9:8-11). Then, as if to reassure us, He establishes a sign to that covenant, a rainbow. (The repetition in 9:12-17 is perhaps also designed to give reassurance.) Verses 12-13 emphasize that the rainbow is for us, and verses 14-16 indicate it is for God, too!

God takes no pleasure in destruction and death. Life is what is precious to Him. Hence, He makes an unconditional (9:8-11), universal (9:11), everlasting (9:16) covenant with all flesh to never again destroy the earth with a flood.

Wordsworth said, “The bow in the hand of a man was an instrument of battle; the bow bent by the hand of God has become a symbol of peace” (Wordsworth, cited by Leupold). Actually, with due respect to Wordsworth, the bow in a man’s hand was an instrument of death; the bow bent by the hand of God is a sign of life.

Summary: After God commanded man to promote and protect human life, He made an unconditional, everlasting covenant with all flesh to never again destroy the earth with a flood, and He established the rainbow as a sign of that covenant.

This passage gives us a basis for formulating a view of the value of life: 1) Human life is valuable because humans are made in the image of God. 2) Human life is so sacred that anyone, human or animal, who takes human life forfeits life. 3) Animals can be killed for food.

This view avoids the extremes of all life being sacred and, therefore, animals cannot be killed and no life is sacred and, therefore, it is cheap. The determining factor is humans, and humans alone are made in the image of God. Animals are not.

Our society has it backward. We kill the unborn and want to kill the elderly, but we object to killing killers and animals.

THE CURSE ON CANAAN

One of the strangest stories of the Scripture is a tale told concerning the curse on Canaan. The story goes like this. Ham saw the nakedness of his father (Noah) and, consequently, his son (Canaan) was cursed! Strange indeed. A man sees his father without clothes on, something most today would not consider a problem, and, as a result, his son has a curse put on him. What exactly did the man do? Why was his son cursed for something his father did? This strange story has been used to teach that there is a curse on all black people. According to this view, the Hebrew word “Ham” means “black” and, thus, the curse produced the black race! Is that true? Why should a whole race be cursed because of the sin of one member? What is the meaning of the story concerning the curse on Canaan? Why is it in the Bible?

The Occasion: Ham Saw His Father’s Nakedness

Introduction “Now the Sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated” (9:18-19). These verses introduce the main characters of the story, namely, the sons of Noah. The central figure is Ham and his importance, at least in this incident, is that he was the father of Canaan.

The significance of the story involves more than just the individuals involved or the immediate situation. From these individuals came families, tribes, nations, and ultimately the whole human race. Thus, the significance of this incident is much bigger than the individuals involved. In other words, these opening statements alert the reader to what is coming. Ham is the father of Canaan, like father, like son. Canaan produced a family, like a father, like the family. That family became a tribe and a nation, like family, like the nation. Those people were the Canaanites. Thus, this event is deeply significant.

Every time the three sons of Noah are mentioned, the same order is given (5:32; 6:10; 7:13; 9:18; 10:1; 1 Chron. 1:4), perhaps indicating the order of their age. If that is the case, Shem was the oldest and Japheth was the youngest (Leupold; see verse 24).

Incident The story begins, “And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard” (9:20). Noah, the preacher of righteousness and a boat builder before the flood and a sea captain during it, became a farmer afterward. As a farmer, he began to cultivate the vine.

“Then he drank of the wine and was drunk and became uncovered in his tent” (9:21). Noah got drunk! What happened? Was he inexperienced and ignorant? Was he willful and sinful? Some have excused and even exonerated what he did (Keil). Others have charged and condemned him (Leupold). This is the first mention of wine in the Bible, but it is not the first time in history man drank and got drunk (Mt. 24:38). While technically, God had not as yet warned against wine or declared drunkenness a sin, Noah was not ignorant. He had seen the effects of wine on men before the flood. Leupold says, “It is not the young or the untried Noah who sins. It is the seasoned man of God, ripe in experience, who is here brought low. The sober tone of the detailed narrative points strongly to Noah’s guilt.” Yet the drunkenness is not the issue. It is almost incidental to the story (Kidner).

The drunkenness caused the nakedness. Did the heat induced by the wine impel him to throw off his clothing (Leupold; Morris)? The text does not say. This much is clear. Excessive use of

wine leads to excesses such as drunkenness and nakedness (Hab. 2:15; Lam. 4:21). “Noah’s shame was not that he drank wine but that he drank to excess and thereby lost self-control that resulted in immodesty (Eph. 5:18). Certainly, this incident should warn the reader of the potential harm of drunkenness both for the drinker and for his or her family. The stumbling block for Adam and Eve had also been food” (Constable).

“Whatever the actual nature of his [Noah’s] conduct might have been [in becoming drunk and uncovering himself in his tent], ... the author presents his deed as one of disgrace and shame (‘nakedness,’ as in Ge 3), and he seems intent on depicting the scene in such a way as to establish parallels between Noah’s disgrace (he took of the fruit of his orchard and became naked) and that of Adam and Eve (who took of the fruit of the Garden and saw that they were naked)” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

Although not a point of the story, this incident teaches that anyone can sin. Prior to this experience, Noah was described as “a just man, perfect in his generations,” who “walked with God” (6:9). He was “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5). That such a man could sin proves that any saint is capable of sin, a major sin. “Take heed when you think you stand lest you fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

The plot thickens. “And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside” (9:22). The Hebrew word translated “saw” means “to see, look at, inspect, perceive, consider” (BDB). Leupold says this was not harmless or accidental. Ham “looked at:” He “gazed with satisfaction.” What does the phrase “saw the nakedness” mean? Precisely, what did Ham do? Many interpretations have been suggested (Allen P. Ross, “The Curse on Canaan,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July-Sept 1980, pp. 229-30).

Most explain the expression “uncovered the nakedness” as a reference to sexual sin. For example, one ancient rabbi said that Ham committed a gross sexual violation like homosexual lust or even a homosexual act with his father. Another ancient rabbi says that Ham castrated his father. A modern scholar claims that Ham engaged in sexual intercourse with Noah’s wife and that Canaan was cursed because he was the fruit of that union. “Because the expression ‘to see one’s nakedness’ is sometimes used of sexual intercourse, it is possible that sexual immorality was involved” (Constable, who cites Wolf; Constable thinks the sin was sexual). The problem with all of these interpretations is that Ham did not uncover his father’s nakedness. His father was already naked and he simply saw it. One writer argued that Ham’s sin was that he failed to cover his father’s nakedness. (Nicholas Odhiambo, “The Nature of Ham’s Sin,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:678, April-June 2013:154-65).

A better explanation is that nakedness in the Old Testament depicts shameful and defenseless exposure. In other words, seeing nakedness was a “gross violation of honor.” Herodotus relates the story of Gyges, who, when he saw the nakedness of Candaules’ wife, had to either kill Candaules or be killed (Ross). So, when Ham came upon his naked father, instead of looking the other way, he grossly violated his honor by looking at him. His sin was that he had no respect, nor did he honor his father. There is more. He told his brothers. Many claim he told them with delight (Leupold). If the meaning of what he did was to dishonor his father, telling others added to his act.

“It is difficult for someone living in the modern world to understand the modesty and discretion of privacy called for in ancient morality. From the beginning, nakedness in the Old Testament was a thing of shame for fallen humankind. To Adam and Eve as sinners, the state of nakedness was both undignified and vulnerable.... To see someone uncovered was to bring dishonor and to gain advantage for potential exploitation” (Ross).

Boise, who suggests that Ham apparently made fun of his father's drunkenness and uncovered state, said, "The only thing that is worse than committing a specific sin is the devilish delight of finding out and reveling in that sin in others." That is what Ham did. His brothers, by contrast, grieved for their father and did what they could to remove the indignity. Candlish makes the fascinating suggestion that Ham did not just merely dishonor his father as a parent; he disliked him as a preacher of righteousness.

The point is Ham saw his father's nakedness and dishonored him, either as a parent or as a preacher. He did not commit any kind of sexual act with his father.

What did the brothers do when they heard? "But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away and they did not see their father's nakedness" (9:23). The brothers covered their father's nakedness without seeing it. In the Hebrew text, there is an article before the word "garment," giving the impression that Ham had brought the garment to them. What the two did manifested their piety and purity, respect and reverence. The sum of the story seems to be that Ham dishonored his father, but his two brothers honored him.

"Shem, the father of Abraham, is the paradigm of later Israel and Ham of their archenemies, Egypt and Canaan (10:6). Lying behind this is the ancient concept of corporate personality. Because of this unity of father-son, the character of the father is anticipated in the deeds of the sons. Hebrew theology recognized that due to parental influence, future generations usually committed the same acts as their fathers, whether for ill or good. In this case, the curse is directed at Ham's son as Ham's just deserts for the disrespect he had toward his own father, Noah" (Mathews, cited by Constable).

"The root of the depraved Canaanite culture was looking at someone's nakedness. We need to be very careful about viewing nudity. It can lead to an addiction that results in complete corruption and ends finally in divine judgment" (Constable).

The Oracle: Noah Cursed Canaan

The Curse on Canaan The second half of this passage is about an oracle Noah delivered. It begins with, "So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him" (9:24). How Noah found out what happened is not recorded. Perhaps when he woke up, he realized his garment was not lying on him as he would have placed it and he began to inquire. At any rate, he learned what his younger son had done.

"Then he said: Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren" (9:25). After this curse on Canaan (9:25), Noah pronounced a blessing on his son Shem (9:26) and his son Japheth (9:27). Thus, verse 25 relates to his son Ham, but it is also to Ham's son Canaan. Ham is the one who sinned against Noah, but the curse fell on his son, not him! Is that fair to the son?

Perhaps the son was also guilty. He might have seen Noah and told his father (*Ryrie Study Bible*). Actually, both this curse and the two blessings that follow are fulfilled in the descendants. The oracle springs from the incidence of Ham seeing Noah's nakedness, but the oracle itself goes much beyond the sons of Noah or their immediate sins. Canaan is to be a servant. The name Canaan means "submissive one." Canaan was not only to be a servant but a servant of servants, the lowest of servants (Keil). This curse was fulfilled in the Canaanites who later inhabited Palestine (Jos. 9:23; 1 Kings 9:21, fn. 15; Keil; Ross).

If this curse was fulfilled in the Canaanite race, it was not a curse on the black race. It is true that the Hebrew word "Ham" means dark, but that name was given to him before the curse! The

curse was not that Ham was black; it was that his descendants would be servants. Furthermore, Leupold points out, “Canaan is the fourth son of Ham (10:6) and so may roughly be said to represent one-fourth of the Hamitic race. He alone is under consideration here. The rest of the Hamitic stock, apparently, does not come under consideration because it is neither directly blessed nor cursed. Its influence on the development of the rest of the human race is practically nil and, therefore, need not be mentioned here.” Furthermore, Boice says, “Not until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the slave trade was at its height, did anyone ever imagine that Ham was the father of the black race or that there was a curse on them.”

The Blessing on Shem “And he said: Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant” (9:26). Noah blesses the Lord, that is, Yahweh. This is the only time within the oracle the personal name of God is used. Shem and his descendants, the Jews (see chapters 10 and 11), knew the Lord. Because they knew the Lord, they were blessed. The blessing is that they will be served by and not be subservient to the Canaanites. This is the first time “servant” is mentioned in the Bible.

The Blessing on Japheth Noah continues, “May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant” (9:27). Japheth means “enlargement.” Thus, there is a play on words: May God enlarge the one who is named enlargement. This is to be fulfilled in the growth and spread of the descendants of Japheth.

Japheth is also to dwell in the tents of Shem. “To dwell in the tents of” someone implies “friendly sharing of his hospitality and so of his blessing (Leupold; see “dwell in the tents of the wicked” in Ps. 84:10, which seems to mean partaking of wickedness). Since it is Shem who knew the Lord (9:26), to share his tent is to share his spiritual blessing of the knowledge of God. The Jews were to give God’s Word to the world. The Gentiles were to respond to it. Shem was to open his tent and Japheth was to enter it. Canaan was to be the servant.

This passage closes with the notation that “And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died” (9:28-29). After the pattern that repeatedly occurs in chapter 5, the story of Noah comes to a close.

Summary: The occasion of Ham disrespecting his father provided an opportunity for Noah to pronounce a curse on Canaan and a blessing on the descendants of Shem and Japheth.

This passage does not teach that God has cursed the black race. Ham does mean dark or black, but Ham was not cursed; *one* of his sons was. “The writer’s choice of material shows that he had a particular interest in presenting Israel’s neighbors” (Constable). The curse was fulfilled in the Canaanites who inhabited Palestine when Israel conquered the land. The *Ryrie Study Bible* states, “The Canaanites long ago became extinct; the curse, therefore, cannot be applied to anyone today.”

“Moses stressed the themes of blessing and cursing. God cursed Canaan with slavery because Ham showed disrespect toward Noah, whereas He blessed Shem and Japheth for their regard for their father’s vulnerable condition” (Constable).

The husband of a former student told me that his ancestors, many generations back, were mainly believers. Several generations ago, 11 of 12 children became Christians. The head of his branch of the family was the twelfth child, the only unbeliever in that generation of the family. As the years passed, those 11 believing children produced many other Christian descendants who became preachers, teachers, pastors, doctors, missionaries, and other godly people who became a blessing to multitudes of people. His unbelieving ancestor produced several alcoholics, criminals, and blights on society. My student’s husband was the first person from that branch of his family

in five generations to become a Christian. Jonathan Edwards's family tree also produced much good fruit (Constable).

The primary point of the passage is that the Israelites were to realize that the Canaanites had been cursed. Therefore, they were to conquer them and not hesitate to render them servants. That does not mean that the Canaanites were cursed to servitude simply because Ham saw his father's nakedness. Ham seeing his father's nakedness was simply the *occasion* for Noah's oracle, his prophecy that such would be the case.

The Canaanites deserved the curse to servitude because of their own sin. The fathers' sins are indeed punished in their children, but that is because the children are guilty of the fathers' sins. God says He visits "the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who *hate Me*" (Ex. 20:5, italics added). The addition of "who hate Me" indicates that the children are guilty too. The Canaanites were a ruthless, wicked group of people. They practiced prostitution as part of their religion, orgies, homosexuality, and child sacrifice.

In his doctoral dissertation on Genesis, Ross states, "Therefore, in answer to this difficulty concerning curse on Canaan instead of Ham, the text is informing the reader that the future Canaanite people, known for their shameless depravity in sexual and sensual matters, posing a continual threat to Israelites holiness, find their actual and characteristic beginning in Ham, Yet those descendants are not cursed with bondage because of what Ham did; they are cursed because they acted exactly as their ancestor had" (Ross, dissertation, pp. 356-58).

In his book on Genesis, Ross concluded, "In all probability, the event and its oracle were recorded to remind the Israelites of the nature and origin of the Canaanites, to warn them about such abominations, and to justify their subjugation and disposition through holy warfare. Israel received the blessing, but Canaan received the curse."

Though the primary point concerns the curse on the Canaanites, other spiritual truths are reflected in this story. In the words of Ross, "Drunkenness, nakedness, and moral abandonment are all decried by this story. Accordingly, sobriety, modesty, and filial honor are enjoined by Moses."

The passage teaches sin leads to slavery. We become slaves of sin when we practice sin (Jn. 8:34). Ross wrote, "The account shows that the beginning of wine and its earmarks are less than divine. It has the earmarks of depravity, rather than festive joy, cursing, and slavery proceed from the exploration. Any nation delighting in thy vices of vices and nakedness, the polemic would say, is already in slavery (Ross, dissertation, p. 332).

Finally, this passage highlights that God blesses. An old nursery prayer states,

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.
Four corners to my bed,
Four angels round my head;
One to watch and one to pray
Two to bear my soul away.

It is not Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, or angels who bless; it is God. One of His blessings is that we get to share with others. Dorothy Dix says, "Make no mistake about it: responsibilities toward other human beings are the greatest blessing God can send us."

Is the Lord your God? Has He blessed you? Are you blessing others? Are you blessing Him?

THE TABLE OF NATIONS

The world is divided into continents, the continents into nations, and the nations into languages. The continents were either formed at creation or during the flood, but where did the nations come from and what is the origin of languages? These questions are answered in Genesis chapters 10 and 11.

Concerning Genesis 10, Dr. William F. Albright, a universally recognized authority on the archeology of the Near East, said, “It stands absolutely alone in ancient literature without a remote parallel, even among the Greeks, where we find the closest approach to a distribution of peoples in genealogical framework... The table of nations remains an astonishingly accurate document” (William F. Albright, “Recent Discoveries in Bible lands,” *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, p 25). Dr. James M. Boice said of Genesis 10 that it is “surely one of the most interesting and important in the entire Word of God.”

What is so interesting and important about a chapter of the Bible that consists of a long list of names? One conservative commentator wrote, “It may very well be questioned whether a man should ever preach on a chapter such as this” (Leupold).

Genesis 10 contains a delineation of the descendants of the three sons of Noah: Japheth (10:2-5), Ham (10:6-20), and Shem (10:21-31). Each section contains 1) an introduction in which all the sons are listed, 2) a description of some of the sons and their sons, and 3) a summary statement. In each case, the summary statement concludes with the observation that these sons produced families, which ultimately produced nations. Genesis 10 is known as the Table of Nations.

The Sons of Japheth Produced Families that became Nations

The Son of Japheth “Now this is the genealogy of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham and Japheth. And sons were born to them after the flood” (10:1). This verse begins a new section (2:4; 5:1; 6:9). It also bridges the flood. Before the flood, Noah had three sons. After the flood, Noah’s sons also fathered sons and, no doubt, daughters. This section traces the descendants of the sons of Noah.

“The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras” (10:2). These seven sons of Japheth were the progenitors of families and nations in various lands and languages (10:5). Ancient writings and monument inscriptions found in modern times enabled scholars to identify peoples who descended from these sons. Gomer was identified by Herodotus, Plutarch, and other ancient writers with Cimmeria, a district north of the Black Sea. Evidently, some of Gomer’s descendants moved westward to Germany and Cambria, that is, Wales (Morris).

Josephus identified Magog with the Scythians, who were found originally southeast of the Black Sea (Leupold). Magog possibly refers to Georgia or regions near the Black Sea (Morris).

Madai was apparently the ancestor of the Meds, who later settled in Persia. Some of this line also migrated to India, where they became the progenitors of the Indian people (Morris).

Javan produced the Ionians, a name that was applied to all Greeks by Alexandria the Great. The Hebrew word is repeatedly translated “Greece” in the Old Testament (Dan. 8:21; 10:20; 11:2; etc.; Leupold).

Tubal is known as the Tibareni in the Assyrian monuments and they have probably been preserved in the modern Russian city of Tobolsk (Morris).

Herodotus said Meshech dwelt in the southwestern corner of the Black Sea. On their monuments, the Assyrians coupled them with Tubal (Leupold). Meshech is preserved in the name of Muskovi, the former name of Russia and Moscow (Morris).

According to Josephus, Tiras was the ancestor of the Thraceans (Morris). He may also be identified with the later Etruscans of Italy (Leupold).

Three of these sons, Magog, Meshech, and Tubal, were the progenitors of the Russian people. One, Madai, became the progenitor of the Indian people. Another, Javan, the Greeks, another, Tiras, the Italians, and still another, Gomer, the Germans, and Wales. These were the ancestors of the Indo-European peoples (Morris).

The Sons of Gomer Having mentioned all the sons of Japheth (10:2), two are now singled out and their sons are listed (10:3-4). “The sons of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah” (10:3). Jewish tradition identified Ashkenaz with Germany. Some connected it with the names Scandia and Saxon (Morris). Josephus identified Riphath as the ancestor of the Paphlagonians (Morris). Togarmah is probably the ancestor of the Armenians, as they themselves claim (Morris).

The Sons of Javan The other son of Japheth to have his sons listed is Javan. “The sons of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim” (10:4). Elishah is the name that came to be applied to Greece as a whole (“Hellas”). The Iliad mentions the Eilesian people (Morris). Tarshish probably settled in the place that became the city of Tarshish in Southern Spain (Leupold). Kittim went to Cypress and probably to Greece as well. Ma-kittim (the land of Kittim) may be the origin of the name of Macedonia. Dodanim is also related to Greece, probably Northern Greece (Leupold).

The passage on the sons of Japheth concludes with, “From these, the coastland peoples of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations” (10:5). These *sons* (10:1; etc.) were the progenitors of people who spread all over Europe and even eastward into Persia and into India and became *nations* (10:5). How they ended up speaking different languages is explained later (11:1-9).

Japheth was the father of Indo-European people. The term “Indo-European” refers to India (Indo) and, of course, the European continent. These two parts of the world are not usually thought of as having a common origin or history. Yet Genesis 10 indicates that they do. The descendants of Japheth populated India, Russia, Greece, Germany, etc.

“In the nineteenth century, linguists discovered that the languages of the east and west were related, meaning they must have a common language ancestor. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* states that the Indo-European languages are ‘the most important linguistic family of the globe, comprising the chief languages of Europe, together with the Indo-Iranian and other Asiatic tongues.’ In the nineteenth century, comparative and historical studies of these languages, also called Indo-Germanic or Aryan, established their descent from a common ancestor, spoken in the late stone age, probably in Eastern Europe, by a people or group of people of unknown, perhaps mixed race. This unrecorded language and, to some degree, the civilization and religion of those who spoke it have been largely hypothetically reconstructed by the scientifically philological method. The prehistoric dialects of the primitive Indo-Europeans accompanied their migrations into India, Persia, Greece, Rome, and the western borders of Europe, where they are found at the beginning of history. The parent speech was highly inflected, but historically the general tendency of the Indo-European languages has been toward the analytic type, as in French or English” (Boice).

The Sons of Ham Produced Families that became Nations

The Sons of Cush Moses now turns to the sons of Ham. “The sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan” (10:6). The descendants of Cush settled in Ethiopia. According to Hayes, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman represent the Cushites as black. In addition, numerous ancient literary texts also refer to the black skin color and other Negroid features of the Cushites (J. Daniel Hayes, “The Cushites: A Black Nation in Ancient History,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 153, July-September, 1996, 270-280; see also Jer. 13:23).

The descendants of Mizraim became the Egyptians (Egypt is called “The Land of Ham” in Ps. 105:23). Put was the Progenitor of those in North Africa, west of Egypt, namely Libya and Canaan’s children were the Canaanites. The descendants of three of these four sons are now listed.

“The sons of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabechah, and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan” (10:7). Sabbeans are known in both Arabia and Africa (Sudan). The other sons of Cush, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabechah settled in Arabia. The sons of Raamah, Sheba, and Dedan are listed because they were “usually well known” (Morris).

Cush had another son. “Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, ‘Like Nimrod, the mighty hunter before the LORD’” (10:8-9). The name “Nimrod” means “let us rebel.” Perhaps Cush himself was rebellious, so he named his son and taught his son after the desire of his heart. At least the implication of Nimrod’s name is that he was spiritually rebellious.

Nimrod began to be a “mighty” one on the earth. To be “mighty” was to be “renowned” (6:4). It “denotes a man who made himself renowned for bold and daring deeds” (Keil). This is further explained as being “a mighty hunter before the Lord” (10:9). The word “hunter” is used, of course, for hunting animals (Gen. 27). Many have pointed out that to say Nimrod was a renowned animal hunter in the sight of God certainly sounds strange. Leupold comments, “For man’s little hunting exploits are hardly sufficient to arouse the wonder and admiration of the Almighty.” Apparently, this expression depicts more than a harmless hunter. Ross says, “The word involving the hunt is an unusual word, often used for hunting men” (Ross’ Dissertation on Genesis; Lam. 3:15; Jer. 16:16; 1 Sam. 24:12). Others have concluded something similar, that Nimrod was hunting for men (Leupold) to get them to revolt against God with him (Morris). Some have even suggested that since “mighty” can mean “tyrant” or “despot,” Nimrod was “a tyrant or a despot of the hunt” (Leupold). Thus, the phrase “before the Lord” means that Nimrod’s activity “aroused the interest of the Lord” (Ross’ Dissertation, p. 220, fn. #6) or that Nimrod was a renowned hunter “in opposition” to the Lord (Keil).

Nimrod’s fame was so great that a proverbial expression arose concerning him, “When people wanted to pay the highest tribute to anyone for his prowess in the chase, they used to say of him that he was ‘like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord’” (Cassuto).

Nimrod was not only a hero (10:8) and a hunter (10:9), he was a founder of cities (10:10-12) and even a kingdom (10:10). “And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar” (10:10). First, Nimrod went to the land of Shinar, that is, Babylon. Four cities in the land of Shinar are mentioned. The implication is that Nimrod founded these cities. Since verse 11 specifically says he *built* Nineveh, it may be that he merely took over these existing cities (Leupold). Babel became the well-known city of Babylon on the Euphrates River. From Nimrod’s time, Babylon has been “the symbol of the power of the world in its hostility to God” (11:1-9; Keil). Erech is slightly more than 100 miles southeast of Babylon (Leupold). Accad

was immediately north of Babylon (Morris). Calneh was probably northeast of Babylon (Keil). These four cities were Nimrod's first kingdom.

Nimrod then moved. "From that land, he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is, the principal city)" (10:11-12). Nimrod built four more cities in Assyria, which is east of the Tigris River. Nineveh was about 200 miles north of Babylon on the Tigris River. It later became the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Rehoboth Ir was probably a suburb of Nineveh (Leupold). Calah was approximately 20 miles south of Nineveh. It is still called "Nimrod" after the one who founded it (Morris). Resen has not been definitely identified, but it was between Nineveh and Calah. The phrase "principal city" probably describes Nineveh and means "great" (Jonah 3:3). These four cities formed "a large composite city, a large range of towns" (Keil), "a large metropolitan area" (Morris). The Assyrian legends speak of the founder of Nineveh as "Ninus, " evidently a form of "Nimrod."

The Sons of Mezraim The second son of Ham was Mizraim (10:6). "Mizraim begot Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, and Cashuhim (from whom came the Philistines and Caphtorim)" (10:13-14). Mizraim produced the Egyptians (10:6). In the Hebrew text, the names in verses 13 and 14 are in the plural (see "im") and, therefore, "must represent peoples or tribes rather than individual sons" (Ross' Dissertation, p. 174; Morris). The Ludim may have dwelt west of the Nile Delta (Leupold). The Anamim are either in the Delta or in Northern Egypt (Keil). The Lehabim are in Libya, west of Egypt, or the north coast of Africa (Leupold). The Naphtuhim are either in the northern coastline of Egypt or in Memphis and vicinity (Keil; Leupold), the Pathrusim south or upper Egypt (Leupold), and the Cashuhim east of the Delta of the Nile (Leupold).

From Cashuhim came the Philistines and Caphtorim. The Philistines eventually settled in Philistia and the Caphtorim in the Isle of Crete. The problem is that Amos says the Philistines hailed from Caphtor, that is, the Isle of Crete (Amos 9:7). In Deuteronomy, Moses, the author of the passage, speaks of "the Caphtorim who from Caphtor" (that is, Crete) destroyed the Avim who dwelt in Palestine (Deut. 2:23). Could not the Philistines have migrated to Crete and then to Philistia? (Morris; Kidner). Amos is obviously referring to migration if not origin, because he says Israel is from Egypt! (Leupold says that the Philistines migrated from Crete to Egypt and in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Ross contends that the Philistines of this passage are different than the Philistines of the 13th century BC). Knowing the "roots" of the Philistines would have been of interest to the Jews to whom Moses wrote.

The Sons of Canaan The third and final son of Ham, whose descendants are described, is Canaan. "Canaan begot Sidon his first born, and Heth; the Jebusite, the Amorite, and the Girgashite; the Hivite, the Arkite, and the Sinite; the Arkite, and the Sinite; the Arvadite, the Zemarite, and the Hamathite" (10:15-18). The descendants of Canaan inhabited the land of Canaan. The first two names on the list are individuals. Canaan's firstborn, Sidon, might have been the one who founded the city of Sidon. At any rate, the city of Sidon became the oldest capital of Phoenicia. The other individual, Heth, was the father of the Hittites. For years, nothing was known of the Hittites apart from the Scripture. Some even criticized the Bible as being historically inaccurate because of what it said about the Hittites. More recently, archeological discoveries have demonstrated that the Hittites not only existed but were a formidable nation.

The other nine names are not the names of individuals. No doubt these were not originally sons of Canaan, but the tribes of people they produced are listed, not the individual sons. The Jebusites, evidently descendants of a son named Jebus, settled in Jerusalem (Josh. 15:63). The Amorites dwelt in the mountains. This tribe was so prominent that sometimes all Canaanites were simply called Amorites.

The Girgashites are mentioned frequently in the Scripture, but their exact location is unknown. The Hivites settled in the central portion of the land of Canaan. The Arkites seem to have settled in Syria. The Simites located near the Arkites. The Arvadites settled in Arvad, a port city of Phoenicia. The Zemarites apparently lived in a town called Sumur, six miles south of Arvad. The Hamathites lived in a prominent Syrian city named Hamath. The sons of Canaan were the progenitors of the Canaanite tribes that inhabited the land of Canaan when the Israelites entered it.

There are two suggestions as to where the Orientals and even the American Indians fit in Genesis 10. The Hittite empire endured for 800 years and suddenly fell. There are indications that the survivors fled to China. There was, for example, an ancient trade route between Europe and China. There are also a number of similarities between the Hittites and the Mongrels, including “shoes whose toes turned up, the custom of doing hair in a pigtail, pioneer work in the smelting and casting iron, and the domestication of horses” (Boice). The other suggestion concerns the Simites. The location of the Simites, other than Canaan, is unknown, but the name Sin is found widely in the East, including China (Tsin Dynasty and Sino-American). The theory is that either one of these ancient peoples migrated to China and some of them crossed the Bering Strait and became American Indians (Boice; see also Morris).

The boundaries of the tribes are also given. “Afterward, the families of the Canaanites were dispersed. And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; then as you go toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, as far as Lasha” (10:18-19). The Canaanites spread south from Sidon to Gaza and then east to the southern end of the Dead Sea. Pointing out that the statement is made only of the Canaanites, Morris suggests that these tribes eventually spread out more than the others. He says that they perhaps ultimately spread north and east into Asia and then via the Bering Sea Land Bridge, which existed during the ice age into North and South America.

The description of the sons of Ham concludes with, “These were the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands and in their nations” (10:20). Genesis 11:1-9 describes the origin of languages. Therefore, Genesis 10 took place and was written after the events of Genesis 11:1- 9. Ham’s sons became tribes and eventually nations.

The Sons of Shem Produced Families that became Nations

Introduction Genesis 10 listed the descendants of the three sons of Noah (10:1). The first major division of the chapter begins with the words “The sons of Japheth were” (10:2) and the second with “The sons of Ham were” (10:6). Now the third section begins with, “And children were born also to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder. The sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram” (10:21-23a). Before all the sons of Shem are mentioned, Eber is singled out, obviously for emphasis. His sons and their descendants will be discussed in detail shortly (10:25-29), but before anything else is said about Shem’s sons, it is stated that he was the father of Eber and all his children.

What is so important about Eber? It is from Eber that the term “Hebrew” is derived (see comment on 11:16). Abraham was a Hebrew (13:14). Thus, Hebrew is a much broader term than either Israelite or Jew. Shem is mentioned as the brother of Japheth, the firstborn of Noah, because he was more directly associated with Japheth in Noah’s prophecy (9:2). Both Japheth and Shem were blessed; Canaan was cursed.

Five sons of Shem are listed (10:22). Elam was the ancestor of the Elamites. The ancient city of Susa or Shushan, east of the Tigris River, was their capital. One of their kings, Chedorlaomer,

led a confederation that invaded Canaan during Abraham's time (14:4-5). Later, the Elamites eventually merged with others, especially the Medes (that is, of Madai, the son of Japheth), to form the Persian Empire (Morris). Asshur was the founder of the Assyrians. Nimrod, however, invaded the land of Asshur and founded Nineveh (10:11). Thus, the Assyrians are a mixture of Semitic and Hamitic stock culture and language. Arphaxad settled in northern Assyria and was in Abraham's direct line. Lud was the ancestor of the Lydians in Asia Minor (modern western Turkey). Aram was the father of the Aramaeans (the Syrians). Their language was Aramaic.

The Sons of Aram Three of Shem's sons are now singled out, beginning with Aram. "The sons of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash" (10:23b). Uz apparently settled in the Arabian Desert toward Babylon. The land of Uz was Job's homeland (Job 1:1). Hul eventually settled in Syria. Essentially, nothing is known concerning Gether and Nash. They perhaps settled near or north of Syria.

The Sons of Arphaxad The second son of Shem to be discussed is Arphaxad. "Arphaxad begot Salah, and Salah begot Eber" (10:24). From the time of Josephus, Arphaxad has been connected with the Chaldeans and, if that connection is correct, he settled northeast of Nineveh. Nothing is known of Salah except that he was the father of Eber (10:21).

Now Eber's line will be traced. "To Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and his brother's name was Joktan" (10:25). Peleg means "division." During Peleg's day, the earth was divided into various languages (11:1-9). Eber's other son produced the Arabic tribes.

Joktan is the father of all the Arabian tribes. "Joktan begot Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were the sons of Joktan" (10:26-29). Joktan had thirteen sons, all of whom settled in Arabia. Almodah settled in south Arabia. Sheleph did the same. Hazarmaveth moved to the southeast, a region from which Myrrh used to be exported. Jerah is a name for the moon. Perhaps that tribe worshipped the moon. Hadoram also settled in the south. Uzal is an old name for the capital city of Yemen. Diklah is related to the Arabic name for a date palm. Nothing is known of Obal and Abimael except that they belong to Arabia. Sheba is located in southwestern Arabia. Ophir probably lived in southern Arabia, a region famous for its gold. Havilah dwelt in a district between Sanaa and Mecca. Jobab is unknown.

After the sons of Joktan are listed, their location is given. "And their dwelling place was from Mesha as you go toward Sephar, the mountain of the east" (10:30). Too little is known about these locations to pinpoint them, except that they are in southern Arabia. The Arabians were not nomads; they settled.

The delineation of the descendants of Shem concludes with, "These were the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, according to their nations" (10:31). Shem's sons produced families that eventually became nations.

A summary statement concludes the whole account. "These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these, the nations were divided on the earth after the flood" (10:32). Noah's sons produced families and these families produced nations that were eventually scattered over the earth. This statement not only sums up the content of Genesis, chapter 10, but it also serves as a transition to chapter 11.

Summary: After the flood, the three sons of Noah produced families that eventually became nations dwelling in different lands and speaking different languages.

Genesis 10 is appropriately called “The Table of Nations” because it gives the origin of the first nations. The focus is on the nations with which Israel had to deal.

The number of nations depends on how the list is counted. The Jewish Midrash concluded that there were seventy (14 from Japheth, 31 from Ham, and 25 from Shem, but the rabbis reckon 14 from Japheth, 30 from Ham, and 26 from Shem). Others calculated seventy-two (Keil) and some sixty-eight or seventy-one (Leupold). Apparently, Moses thought there were seventy (Deut. 32:7-8; Constable: “Evidently 70 nations descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth: 26 from Shem, 30 from Ham, and 14 from Japheth”).

Genesis 10 is not the origin of the races. For example, Asshur, a son of Shem, was the progenitor of the Assyrians (10:22), but Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, invaded Assyria and founded Nineveh. Therefore, the Assyrians became a racially mixed people. Morris and Whitcomb state, “According to Genesis 10, descendants of all three sons of Noah were living in western Asia after the Tower of Babel. Therefore, it is impossible to say from which son or sons of Noah the Negroid and Mongoloid peoples have descended” (Morris and Whitcomb, p. 46).

How, then, are “races” to be explained? Again, Whitcomb and Morris state, “The racial differences we know of today were probably brought about by mutations that “occurred in small, isolated groups which, because of their small size and isolation at rather extreme positions in the European-Asia-Africa land areas, inbred the new factor” (Morris and Whitcomb, p. 45).

Modern Germany is an illustration. After World War II, Germany was divided. Several decades later, they were united. After a relatively short separation, the two groups of Germans were very different. The East Germans “ emphasized traditional German values, such as punctuality, orderliness, good manners, and modesty.” West Germans gave higher ratings to “personal grooming and a good figure.” The Easterners described the Westerners as “loud, arrogant, impatient, superficial, and full of material values.” The Westerners viewed the Easterners as “unsophisticated, ill-motivated, and occasionally, just plain lazy.” As a rule, the West German heads tended to be higher, their faces more open, and their walk and manner generally more confident (Tyler Marshall, “Germany: One Nation, Two People,” *LA Times*, September 5, 1990). Geographical separation produces differences in people, even physical differences. Differences in languages and more time would no doubt produce even greater differences.

Genesis 10:10 contains the first use of the word “kingdom” in the Bible. The kingdom here was in rebellion against God. The nations of the world are in revolt against God. They want to exclude God, not be responsible to anyone, and rule themselves.

The thrust of Genesis 10 is that God is working through the nations to accomplish His will. The emphasis in Genesis 10 is on Shem. The very arrangement of the chapter indicates that. Japheth (Indo-European), less remote in dealing with Israel, comes first. Then Ham (Egypt, Africa, Arabs), with whom Israel had direct dealings, and finally Shem (Arabs and the Canaanites, including Eber, the original Hebrew) comes last for emphasis. The line of Japheth is traced to the second generation and dismissed. Ham’s descendants are described to the third generation, but Shem is followed through five.

So, although not stated, what becomes clear in the remainder of the book is that from among the rebellious nations, God chooses a nation to bring a redeemer to the world. The nations did not want to be responsible to God; they wanted to rule (11:1-9; Ps. 2). Nevertheless, even amid rebellion, God began to work to choose a nation to bring to the earth a redeemer. God is preparing a promised seed and a promised land that will displace the disobedient, rebellious nations.

This chapter was designed to get us to see the world from a spiritual point of view. Nimrod is highlighted as an example of rebellion and later, Eber is emphasized. As you look at the world,

what do you see: geography, culture, languages? If you look at the world from God's point of view, you will see that people are in rebellion against God and that God wants to redeem rebellious people.

“The table's figure of ‘seventy’ for the world's nations is alluded to by Jesus in the sending forth of the seventy disciples, as recounted by Luke (10:1-16). Here, the evangelist emphasizes the mission of the church in its worldwide evangelistic endeavors” (Mathews, cited by Constable).

As a tourist, I saw Big Ben in London, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Coliseum in Rome, the Parthenon in Athens, etc. On a missionary trip, I saw the natives in the Amazon Jungle and the Eskimos in Alaska. It is easy to look at the world and see the surface things. God wants us to see the spiritual, namely, that people are in rebellion against Him and God wants to redeem them.

Do you stroll through life as a tourist or as a missionary?

THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES

The filling station attendant speaks Spanish, the bank teller speaks Korean, and the clerk at the cleaners speaks Chinese. One of the most basic observations of humanity is languages. Where did they come from and what is the reason for them? The origin of languages is even more intriguing if you accept that all humans come from a common ancestor. Creationists believe all humanity descended from Adam. If all humans descended from one person, why don't all speak the same language?

The answer to the origin of languages is in Genesis 11:1-9. In Genesis 10, Moses repeatedly said that the nations of the world were scattered and each spoke their own language. Now, in a "flashback," he explains the origin of those languages. Thus, Genesis 11:1-9 historically occurred before Genesis 10.

The Design of the Human Race: Defiance of God

Their Description: "Now the whole earth had one language and one speech" (11:1). "The whole earth" is a reference to "all the inhabitants of the earth." Everyone spoke the same language and used the same vocabulary ("one speech"). The Table of Nations indicated that the different nations spoke different languages (10:5, 20, 31). Therefore, Genesis 11:1-9 predates much of chapter 10. This story begins at a time when all humanity was unified by a common language. What language did they speak? Morris speculates that it was a Semitic language, probably even Hebrew. He reasons that the proper names of men and places in the pre-Babylon period only have meaning in Hebrew or its cognate languages. Moreover, it seems unlikely that Shem participated in Babylon and so his language was not affected by the confusion of the tongues.

The story continues, "And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there" (11:2). The ark landed on Mt. Ararat. Man "journeyed" eastward from there. The Hebrew word rendered "journeyed" means "to pull up stakes," indicating that they moved by stages like Bedouins in tents. They settled in a plain on the land of Shinar, that is, Babylon (11:9; modern Iraq). Chapter 10 indicates that Nimrod settled in the land of Shinar and, perhaps, was the one who founded Babel. At least Babel was "the beginning of his kingdom" (10:10). Nimrod may well have been the instigator of what followed.

Their Design Once settled in Shinar, "Then they said to one another, 'Come let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'" (11:3-4). They decided to bake bricks and construct the city with a tall tower. Apparently, conventional construction in antiquity was stone with clay mortar. When bricks were used, they were only sun-dried (Morris). These people, however, baked their bricks in a furnace and used asphalt for mortar. Asphalt pits abound in the Tigris-Euphrates valley and archeologists have discovered that this type of furnace-fired brick and asphalt construction was common in ancient Babylon. The brick was to build a city and a tower. The Hebrew construction "and a tower" could be translated "with a tower" (Ross), or perhaps, "and in particular a tower" (Leupold). The emphasis is on the tower.

Their design was to make a name for themselves lest they be scattered. The expression "make a name" signifies acquiring fame or a reputation (see Ps. 14:1; 12:2-3, God made a name for

Abram). The motive behind the aim to be famous was that they not be scattered. “The object was to establish a noted central point which might serve to maintain their unity” (Keil). Both their purpose and plan were in defiance of God’s will. God instructed them to “fill the earth” (1:28). He repeated His intention for man to Noah after the flood (9:7). The Babylonian builders were arrogantly defying God.

Did the tower have religious significance? The text of Genesis does not attribute a religious significance to the tower. It simply says that the people were fearful lest they be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth (11:4) and they were ambitious to build “a tower whose top is in the heavens” (11:4). Many have concluded, however, that the tower they built was for the purpose of worship. They claim that the reference to its top extending into heaven indicates a religious meaning. Luther and many others have concluded that this was to be a place of worship. Furthermore, many have suggested that the Ziggurats discovered in the Middle East were modeled after the original tower of Babel (Candlish), although not all agree (Morris). There is a sense in which the Bible traces all false religions to Babylon (Rev. 17:5). Whether their sin was simple disobedience or idolatry, they were in defiance of God’s will.

The Division of the Human Race: God Scattered Them

The Lord Came to See Genesis 11:5-9 reveals the Lord’s response to the deliberate disobedience of defiance of the Babylon builders: “the LORD came down” (11:5), “the Lord said” (11:6), and “the Lord scattered” (11:8).

“But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built” (11:5). In what sense did the Lord “come down?” Later in the Old Testament, the Lord came down in a visible form to interact with individuals (Ex. 19:20; 34:5; Num. 11:25; 12:5). In the New Testament, God came down in the person of Jesus Christ to indwell a human body (Jn. 1:1, 14). In Genesis 11, the Lord simply came down to inspect the city and the tower being built. “The builders undoubtedly expected to ascend to heaven to meet God. Instead, God descended to earth to meet them, another anthropomorphism here referring to God’s omniscience” (Constable).

The Lord Said “And the LORD said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them’” (11:6). After this inspection and investigation, God concluded that their unity of language would make it possible for mankind to be unified in one location, which was contrary to His will. Then, once unified in violation of God’s will, that is, in one place, nothing sinful they proposed to do would be withheld from them.

So, God decided to act. “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech” (11:7). The people of the plain of Shinar said, “Come, let us make bricks” (11:3), and “Come, let us build” (11:4). With “ironical imitation” (Keil), God mockingly responded, “Let Us go down and confuse” (11:7). The plural “let Us” is an indirect reference to the Trinity (1:26 and 3:22; Leupold). No details are given concerning the confusion of languages. It could have been immediate, or it could have been gradual. All that is known is that God did it and it happened at Babel (11:9).

When people had radically sinned before (6:1-8, 11, 12), God destroyed the earth with the flood, but He promised Noah that He would never again send a worldwide deluge (9:11). So this time, He confused their languages, even though their thoughts and their hearts were still the same.

The Lord Scattered “So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building a city” (11:8). The Lord used the confusion created by the people

speaking different languages to scatter them over the earth. The scattering caused the building projects in Babylon to cease.

Many have tried to imagine exactly what happened when languages were confused, especially if it happened all of a sudden. Apparently, members of the same family can still speak the same language, but no doubt workers could not communicate with each other. Surely, that was frustrating. Perhaps some thought they were being mocked. No doubt, arguments interrupted and, eventually, chaos reigned. Finally, there was nothing to do but separate, which is what God had intended them to do in the first place.

Everything that is known today about the ancient world from history and archeology seems to indicate that “civilization appeared more or less contemporaneously in all parts of the world, only a few millennia ago” (Morris).

Once scattered, the various language groups developed distinctive cultures and even physical characteristics. Morris suggests, “Since they could communicate only with members of their own family unit, there was no further possibility of marrying outside the family. Hence, it was necessary to establish new families composed of very close relatives for several generations at least. It is well-established genetically that variations take place very quickly in a small inbreeding population but only very slowly in a large inbreeding population. Thus, in a very few generations of such inbreeding, distinct characteristics of skin color, height, hair texture, facial textures, temperament, environmental adjustments, and others could come to be associated with particular tribes and nations.”

The narrative closes with a conclusion, “Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (11:9). The Hebrew word “Babel” means to confuse, hence, the place where God confused languages is called Babel, that is, Babylon. Keil estimated the population of the world at the time of the Tower of Babel was at least 30,000 people. Many have claimed that the ruins of the Tower of Babel are still extant. Some point to the temple of Nebo at Borsippa southwest of Babylon on the west bank of the Euphrates. Others insist that the honor goes to the temple of Marduk in the city of Babylon itself. No one knows for certain, of course, whether either of these towers or any other are the ruins of the original Tower of Babel (see Leupold).

Summary: When the human race defied God and united to build a city and tower, God confused their language and scattered them over the earth. Later, when Israel disobeyed God, she, too, was scattered. Disobedience produces division.

“The Bible doesn’t tell us what skin color our first parents had, but, from a design point of view, the ‘middle [color]’ makes a great beginning. Starting with medium-skinned parents (AaBb), it would take only one generation to produce all the variation we see in human skin color today. In fact, this is the normal situation in India today. Some Indians are as dark as the darkest Africans, and some—perhaps a brother or sister in the same family—as light as the lightest Europeans. I once knew a family from India that included members with every major skin color you could see anywhere in the world.

“But now notice what happens if human groups were isolated after creation. If those with very dark skins (AABB) migrate into the same areas and/or marry only those with very dark skins, then all their children will have very dark skins. (AABB is the only possible combination of AB egg and sperm cells, which are the only types that can be produced by AABB parents.) Similarly, parents with very light skin (aabb) can have only very light-skinned children since they don’t have any A or B genes to pass on. Even certain medium-skinned parents (AA bb or aaBB) can get

‘locked-in’ to having only medium-skinned children, like the Orientals, Polynesians, and some of my ancestors, the Native Americans.

“Where people with different skin colors get together again (as they do in the West Indies, for example), you find the full range of variation again—nothing less, but nothing more either, than what we started with. Clearly, all this is *variation within kind*....

“What happened as the descendants of medium-skinned parents produced a variety of descendants? Evolution? Not at all. Except for albinism (the mutational loss of skin color), the human gene pool is no bigger and no different now than the gene pool present at creation. As people multiplied, the genetic variability *built right into* the first created human beings came to visible expression. The darkest Nigerian and the lightest Norwegian, the tallest Watusi and the shortest Pygmy, the highest soprano and the lowest bass could have been present right from the beginning in two quite average-looking people. Great variation in size, color, form, function, etc., would also be present in the two created ancestors of all the other kinds (plants and animals) as well” (Parker, italics his, cited by Constable).

God caused the origin of languages in response to man’s disobedience of His will to scatter over the earth. God will one day unify human languages (Zech. 3:9). Pentecost was a foretaste (Acts 2).

Sin leads to servitude (9:18-29). Sin also leads to separation (11:1-9). They wanted to unite, but apart from God. Indeed, they did it in defiance of God. They ended up separated from each other. They wanted to make a name for themselves. They ended up not being able to speak each other’s names.

The twenty-five-year-old acrobat set out to make a name for himself. In 7½ hours, he scaled what was at the time the world’s tallest building, the 110 stories, 1454 foot, Sears Tower in Chicago. He carried fifty pounds of climbing equipment and fought off 40-mile-an-hour wind. When he reached the top, he was greeted by the police, handcuffs, and put in city jail. He was charged with disorderly conduct, trespassing, and damage to property. He set out to make a name for himself, violating the law in the process and ended up separated from society.

Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Sin leads to alienation, not unity. In this passage, the inhabitants of Babel said, “Come, let us make bricks” (11:3). God then said, “Come, let Us go down and confuse their language” (11:7), almost as if the story is written in such a way as to suggest that God has the last word.

THE VALUE OF A BIBLICAL GENEALOGY

Not long after I became a believer, I decided to read the Bible from beginning to end. With curiosity and anticipation, I jumped into Genesis. It was not exactly what I expected. I drown in the flood, being overwhelmed by the number of animals, the size of the ark (what's a cubit?), and the length of the flood. After I made it through the flood, I got lost in those long lists of names (I couldn't even pronounce them). By the time I arrived at the rituals and regulations of Leviticus, I gave up. I have since talked to others who have had a similar reaction to reading their Bible.

Why are those long lists of names in the Bible? What is the value of a genealogy? Should we eliminate them so that people will not be so discouraged from reading their Bible? Would the Bible suffer if we took those lists out of it? The issue is, what is the value of a biblical genealogy? More specifically, what is the purpose of Genesis 11:10-26?

The Caption of the Genealogy of Shem

The long list of names in Genesis 11:10-26 begins with the caption, "This is the genealogy of Shem" (11:10a). That alone is significant. The structure of the book of Genesis revolves around the phrase, "This is the genealogy of." It has occurred thus far in Genesis in 2:4, 5:1, 6:9, and 10:1. That puts this passage on a par with the earth (2:4), Adam (5:1), Noah (6:9), and his sons (10:1). This section must be important. It is one of the major divisions of Genesis! The expression "This is the genealogy of" means "This is what became of Sham." So why is it so important that we know what became of the line of Shem?

The Content of the Genealogy of Shem

The content of the genealogy of Shem begins with Shem. "Shem was one hundred years old, and begot Arphaxad two years after the flood. After he begot Arphaxad, Shem lived five hundred years, and begot sons and daughters" (11:10b-11). Genesis 10 reveals that Shem begot Arphaxad as well as four other sons (10:22). This passage adds to that information the age of Shem when he begot Arphaxad, the length of time that occurred after the flood, how long Shem lived afterward, and the fact that he had daughters as well as sons. The pattern of the genealogy of Genesis 11 is similar to the genealogy of chapter 5. Both mention an individual, the number of years he lived before he begot a son, and the number of years after the birth of his son. Genesis 5 adds the total number of years each person lived and the fact that he died.

Arphaxad Shem begot Arphaxad. "Arphaxad lived 35 years and begot Salah. After he begot Salah Arphaxad lived 403 years and begot sons and daughters" (11:12-13). The age for fathering a son dropped dramatically at this point. In chapter 5, the youngest man to become a father was at age 65 (5:15, 21); the oldest was 187. Even at the beginning of this list, the age is 100, but Arphaxad was only 35 when he begot Salah, a dramatic drop from the previous low of 65. Apparently, the flood produced profound changes that affected humanity. This is further illustrated by the fact that Arphaxad only lived a total of 438 years, except for Enoch, who was translated at 365 years of age (5:23). The shortest life span in chapter 5 was 895 years. Arphaxad lived 438 years, that is, 339 years less than the shortest life span before the flood.

There is no doubt that the genealogies of Genesis skip names. For example, Luke 3:36 lists Cainan, but his name is missing in Genesis 11:12 (conversation with Zane Hodges). The problem is that Genesis gives the ages of when these people gave birth to their sons. How can the skipping of Cainan in Genesis 11 be explained? Hodges suggests that Arphaxad was about 17 years old when he had Cainan and that Cainan was about 17 or 18 when he begot Salah. Therefore, Genesis 11:12 is correct in saying that Arphaxad was 35 when he begot Salah because begot doesn't necessarily mean a direct father-son relationship. It could be father to grandson or father to great-grandson. Thus, Luke 3:36 is correct in that Cainan was "of Arphaxad." Hodges further suggests that this was skipped because he and his father had sons at such a young age, which, at the time, was culturally disapproved.

On the other hand, it has been argued that "The genealogies in Genesis 11:10-26 and 1 Chronicles 1:17-27 are identical, but the one in Luke 3:34-36 inserts the name Cainan between Arphaxad and Shelah. The inclusion of Cainan may indicate that Luke used the Septuagint to compose his genealogy since this name appears in this translation but not in the Hebrew Bible genealogies. Cainan appears elsewhere in Luke's list as Adam's great-grandson (Luke 3:37-38), so this may be a scribal error" (Constable who says see M. S. Mills, "A Comparison of the Genesis and Lukan Genealogies (The Case for Cainan)" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978). "It is statistically unlikely that there are gaps in the genealogies in Genesis Chapter 11" (William L. Seaver, "A Statistical Analysis of the Genesis Life-Spans," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 20:2, September 1983: 80, cited by Constable).

Salah Arphaxad fathered Salah. "Salah lived thirty years, and begot Eber. After he begot Eber, Salah lived 403 years and begot sons and daughters" (11:14-15). Salah lived five years less than his father. The lifespan is definitely shorter now.

Eber Salah had a son named Eber. "Eber lived 34 years and begot Peleg. After he begot Peleg Eber lived 430 years and begot sons and daughters" (11:16-17). Eber outlived his father by 31 years but still did not live as long as men before the flood. Eber was the first Hebrew (see commentary on 10:21). "Most scholars regard 'Eber' (v. 14) as the individual from whom the Jews received the name 'Hebrew'" (Constable; who says see Matthew Akers, "What's in a Name? An Examination of the Usage of the Term 'Hebrew' in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55:4, December 2012: 685-96).

Peleg The next name on the list is Peleg. "Peleg lived thirty years, and begot Reu After he begot Reu, Peleg lived 209 years and begot sons and daughters" (11:18-19). Peleg lived a total of 320 years, considerably less than even his father; he lived 144 years less.

Reu Reu was the son of Peleg. "Reu lived thirty-two years and begot Serug. After he begot Serug, Reu lived 207 years and begot sons and daughters" (11:20-21). Reu demonstrates another dramatic drop in the total number of years men lived. He lived 81 years less than his father.

Serug Serug came next. "Serug lived thirty years, and begot Nahor." After he begot Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and begot sons and daughters" (11:22-23). Serug lived almost as long as his father. There was only a nine-year difference between their life span.

Nahor Then there was Nahor. "Nahor lived 29 years and begot Terah. After he begot Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and begot sons and daughters" (11:24-25). Terah only lived 148 years. That is the shortest lifespan to date! (You have to study this passage with a calculator.)

This section concludes with the words, "Now Terah lived seventy years and begot Abram, Nahor and Haran" (11:26). This genealogy, like the one in chapter 5, closes with the birth of three sons (5:32).

Keil points out that “The patriarchs after the flood lived on an average only half the number of years of those before it and that with Peleg, the average duration of life was again reduced by one half.” He concludes, “The two catastrophes, the flood and the separation of the human race into nations, exerted a powerful influence in shortening the duration of life; the former by altering the climate of the earth, the latter by changing the habits of men. For a while, the length of life diminished, the children were born proportionately early.”

Morris offers an explanation, “It seems evident that this decline must have been triggered by the flood. The radiation-filtering vapor canopy had been dissipated, and both genetic and somatic mutations must have increased significantly, though it would no doubt take a number of generations before the effect of mutations in the genetic system would have caused a significant impact on hereditary longevity. The increase of somatic (body cell) mutations, however, would have caused an immediate acceleration of the aging process. Other factors might have included the more rugged environment, inadequate nourishment in food, inbreeding, or greater stress of living.”

On average, people today live even fewer years than they did in the time of Abraham, although there are those who live past 100. In 1971, an Iranian farmer claimed to be 140 years old. At the time, he was the father of a month-old daughter born to his third wife, who was 30 years of age (*The Herald Examiner*, May 24, 1971, B-1). According to the *Guinness Book of Records*, the oldest person in modern times was a Japanese man named Shigechiyo Izumi, who lived to be 120. He died in 1986. Before that, the oldest living person was Fanny Thomas, who lived to be 113. She was a member of the Church of the Open Door, which I pastored when she died.

Commentators have also attempted to calculate the population of the earth at the end of this period. Keil suggests that it was somewhere between 25,165,824 and 292,968,750. Morris likewise concluded that the population of the world would have been at least 300 million at this point.

The Context of the Genealogy of Shem

What is the significance of this passage? Is it simply to reveal that life spans were shorter after the flood? The obvious answer is “No.” There is more here than a record of life spans. The purpose of Genesis 11:10-26 is to trace the family line from Shem to Abram. This genealogy begins with Shem and concludes with Abram, who hereafter becomes the central figure in Genesis. There are two major types of genealogical lists: those that trace lineage and those that chart alliances. This genealogy is of the first type (Ross). In the ancient Near East, this kind of list was used to document legislative claims to thrones inheritances (Ross). Now, the point becomes clear. Abram was related to Shem, who was told he would be blessed and part of that blessing was that Canaan would be his servant (9:26).

Abram was related to Shem and that means he was related to Adam. If Abram was related to Adam, that means Abram inherited the commands and the promises to Adam. Ross elaborates, “This genealogy from Shem to Abram seems on the surface to be an uninteresting list. Its meaning comes from its purpose in the book, especially in the first eleven chapters. By the two vertical genealogies (Gen. 5 and 11), Abram was connected to Adam. This link was important in the argument of the writer because of the divine purpose and commission for Adam. Adam was blessed; he was to rule and have dominion in the earth; his seed was to restore peace and righteousness through a bruising conflict with evil and now, Abram was shown to be the heir of the promises and the commission. The genealogy, thus, authenticates the direct link to the blessing at creation.”

This is deeply significant. Adam fell and God promised a Redeemer (Gen. 3:15). If Abram is related to the line of blessing through Shem to Adam, the Redeemer will come through Abram, which is exactly what the New Testament claims (Mt. 1:1; Lk. 3:34-38). This genealogy is important because, by it, we know we have in Christ the promised Redeemer to come through the line of Adam, Shem, and Abram.

Summary: The genealogy in Genesis 11 is important because it traces the line of blessing from Shem to Abram, which ultimately leads to the promised Redeemer, Christ.

The genealogies demonstrate that the Bible is rooted in actual, factual history. That may not seem significant to you and what you have to face next week, but it is incredibly important in the overall scheme of things. You need to know the Bible is a book of factual history.

Last week, I had a conversation with a man who did not believe that Jesus actually lived. After several hours of conversation, I asked him, “Do you believe that Jesus Christ actually lived?” He said, “Probably not.” Then, I asked, “Do you believe that Julius Caesar actually lived?” His answer to that was, “Probably.” After that, I asked, “of the two, Jesus Christ and Julius Caesar, which do you think was more likely to have lived?” He said, “Julius Caesar.” Granted, not many people in America doubt that Jesus Christ actually lived, but it is essential for us to know that there is historical evidence to indicate that He did. There are first-century documents outside the Bible that demonstrate that Jesus Christ lived. The genealogies of the Bible demonstrate He was the promised Messiah.

This week, the proof of Jesus Christ came up again. My wife was witnessing to a lady who had a Buddhist background. When Patricia told her that Jesus was the Son of God who died for our sins and rose from the dead, she said, “What is the scientific proof for that?”

The Bible’s genealogies are essential to prove that Christ is the Savior of the world. Without them, we could not demonstrate that Christ fulfilled the promises to Adam, Abram, and later David. Those genealogies are critical. We don’t get to heaven without them.

I had been invited to speak at the National Booksellers Convention in Canada. I was told that I needed a passport to get into the country. I had been to Canada before and I did not need a passport, but I was told that to fly from Boston to Toronto, as I was planning to do, I must have a passport.

On the Saturday before the Monday morning, I was to fly to Canada, I was already in Boston when I discovered I did not have my passport with me. I tried to find out if there was any way that I could get into Canada without a passport. I talked to every kind of official I could find on a Saturday night. I even talked to a lawyer. Would my driver’s license do? No, I had to have my passport.

How could I possibly get my passport from LA to Boston between late Saturday night and early Monday morning? I discovered that American Airlines had a service to get it to me on the next flight for a fee of \$60.

I got to Canada because I had a passport proving my citizenship. Likewise, I get to heaven because I’ve trusted Jesus Christ, who has a genealogy proving that He is the Savior of the world.

GOD WANTS TO BLESS YOU

Melvin Dummar claims he met the reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes in the Nevada desert in 1967. When Hughes died in April of 1976, Dummar claimed that Hughes had left him in his handwritten Will, meaning he was to inherit 150 million dollars. A court case followed. The issue was, did Howard Hughes intend to leave Melvin Dummar millions of dollars? Imagine being Melvin Dummar? Suppose you were to benefit from the estate of Howard Hughes! What an experience. Imagine Howard Hughes wanting to bless you.

As wealthy men choose to benefit people, so God elects to bless people. God wants to bless you. The question is, what do I have to do to get God to bless me? From the opening chapters of Genesis, it becomes immediately obvious that God wants to bless. He blessed Adam. He blessed Noah. He blessed Shem. He wants to bless you. His blessing to Abram illustrates that.

“Chapters 1-11 are set in Babylonia; chs. 12-36 are set in Palestine; chs. 37-50 are set in Egypt. (The same kind of tripartite geographical focus emerges from Exodus: [1] 1:1-12:36, in Egypt; [2] 12:37-18:27, to Sinai; [3] 19:1-40:38, at Sinai.) In other words, each part of the Mediterranean world is highlighted in some parts of Genesis. The crucial center section of Genesis (chs. 12-36) is bracketed geographically by two sections of the Near Eastern world with whose history that of Israel would be constantly interlocked.... In chs. 1-11, we read of individuals who had land but were either losing it or being expelled from it. In chs. 12-50, the emphasis is on individuals who do not have land but are on the way toward it. One group is losing; another group is expecting. Genesis is moving us progressively from generation (chs. 1-2), to degeneration (chs. 3-11), to regeneration (chs. 12-50)” (Hamilton, cited by Constable).

The Clan of Abram: Abram Came from Idolatrous Background

Description of Terah Having traced the line of Shem to Terah, Moses now turns his attention to Terah. He writes, “This is the genealogy of Terah” (11:27a). The phrase “This is the genealogy of” introduces a new section in Genesis. This one extends to Genesis 25:11. It develops what happened to Terah by focusing on his son Abram. This section has been called the most important section in Genesis (Constable).

Terah lived in Ur of Chaldeans (11:28). Some scholars contend that Ur was north or northwest of Haran, but the majority locate it 125 miles southeast of Babylon (Leupold). The site south of Babylon is probably the correct location. Extensive excavations indicate that the worship of the Moon God Sin prevailed there. Terah was, at least at one time, an idolater (Joshua 24:2).

“In the ruins of Ur at about this time [2070-2060 B.C.], there are some twenty houses per acre. Assuming six to ten persons per house, there were 120 to 200 people per acre, the average figure of 160 being exactly the same as the population density of modern Damascus [in 1959]. Ur covered 150 acres, and it may therefore be estimated that the population was approximately 24,000 inhabitants” (*The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, cited by Constable).

Descendants of Terah Terah had three sons. Moses records, “Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran” (11:27b). In this introductory paragraph, a brief comment is made about each of these sons.

First, “Haran begot Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans” (11:27c-28). “A later writer probably added the reference to the Chaldeans in verse 28 since the Chaldeans did not enter Babylonia until about 1,000 B.C.” (Constable, who refers to

Wenham). The significant thing about Haran is that he had a son named Lot, who is a prominent figure in the life of Abram.

Next, Moses comments on Abram and Nahor. “Then Abram and Nahor took wives: the name of Abram’s wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor’s wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no children” (11:29-30). Abram married his half-sister (20:12), which means Terah either had a second wife after his first one died or he was a polygamist as well as an idolater. Nahor married his niece. At this period, such incestuous marriages were not prohibited.

The Decision of Terah “And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there” (11:30-31). Stephen said God called Abram while he was in Ur (Acts 7:2-3). At some point in his life, Terah became a worshiper of the true God (31:53). He converted his family from paganism and they all left Ur for Canaan as God had instructed Abram.

Terah didn’t make it to the land of Canaan. His personal story ends with the notation, “So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran” (11:32).

“The function of this genealogy is not so much to connect Abram with the preceding events, as the previous genealogies have done, but to provide the reader with the necessary background for understanding the events in the life of Abram” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable). This brief introduction to the lengthy account of Abram reveals that Abram had two brothers, a niece, and a nephew. Further investigation indicates that Abram came from a pagan, idolatrous background. As one commentator notes, “After an introduction like this, it comes as a shock to learn that the first thing said about Abram is that there was nothing in Abram himself that commended him to God” (Boice).

The Call of Abram: Abram Responded to God’s Call

The Call The next item in the Genesis narrative is the call of Abram, “Now the LORD had said to Abram: Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you” (12:1). The Hebrew construction here translated “had said” normally means simply “said.” If the normal rendering is followed, it makes Genesis appear to be indicating that Terah died (11:32) and then the Lord called Abram (12:1), but Stephen said, “God appeared to Abram in Ur which was before Terah died” (Acts 7:2-4). One solution is to translate “said” as “had said” (Kidner). According to this view, God called Abram in Ur. Thus, Genesis 12:1-3 occurred before Terah’s death (11:32). This would not be unusual for the author of Genesis because Genesis 11:1-9 occurred before much, if not most, of Genesis 10 (cf. 11:1-9 with 10:5, 20, 32). This position does not necessarily depend on translating “said” as “had said” (Ross). Another possible solution is to conclude that Genesis 12:1-3 is a renewed call to Abram in Haran (Thomas; Boice).

Constable states, “This section begins with a *waw* disjunctive in the Hebrew text translated “Now.” ... It introduces an independent circumstantial clause (cf. 1:2). Probably, the revelation in view happened in Ur. The NIV and NKJV capture this with the translation ‘The Lord had said to Abram.’ So, the beginning of chapter 12 flashes back to something that happened in Ur, even though chapter 11 ends with Abram in Haran. Stephen’s statement in Acts 7:2 supports this interpretation. Stephen quoted the Septuagint translation of this verse in Acts 7:3.”

Ur of the Chaldeans was a lovely, luxurious land. Ur was a seaport in ancient times, which was undoubtedly enriched by the trade moving through it. Two great rivers also watered it. Its rich soil

produced abundant crops of corn and date palms. Apples, grapes, and pomegranates grew wild. It was a lovely and luxurious land compared to the nearby Arabian Desert. God called Abraham to leave this desirable place for some unknown place (Boice; see Lk. 9:23-25).

“The focus of God’s command was that Abram should uproot himself and follow His leading. God called him to leave three things, which were progressively more difficult: his country, his family, and his father’s house. His country was his home region, his family was his clan, and his father’s house was his branch of his clan. In Abram’s world, such a move was unheard of” (Constable). “Only the poverty-stricken or the defeated would wander; only the landless and the fugitive would move about and leave their ancestral homes” (*NKJV Study Bible*).

The Promise “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:2-3). The call of Abram consists of commands (12:1) and promises (12:2-3). God commands Abram to leave his homeland and not take his relatives with him. He was to journey to a land he had never seen. God promised Abram a number of blessings.

These promises are not the formal Abrahamic covenant. That comes later (Ross). In a sense, these promises are to Abram personally (“you” is used six times and “your” once). Yet, they are to the future *nation* of Israel. The first promise is “I will make you a great nation” (12:2) and all the rest relate to that one. Actually, these promises can be classified as individual, national, and universal (Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 72).

The promises were individual. God promised to 1) bless Abram, 2) make his name widely known, 3) use him to bless others, and 4) bless his blessers and curse his cursers. Clearly, blessing is a central concept in these and other promises in the passage. To bless is to benefit or prosper. It “essentially conveys spiritual and physical enrichment and within the narratives of Genesis the gift of fertility in accord with God’s program” (Ross). Thus, at least part of what is meant by blessing here is that Abram would bear a child (11:30).

God not only promised Abram fertility but also fame. That promise has certainly been fulfilled until this day. Abram is one of the most well-known names in the world. All Jews, Christians, and Muslims know and honor his name.

God promised to use Abram to bless others, no doubt spiritually. Constable points out that “The Hebrew text says, ‘be a blessing’ (v. 2), not ‘you shall be a blessing.’ This was a command rather than a prediction.” At any rate, God blessed Abram so that he might bless others. God revealed himself to Abram so that he might make the Lord known to others. Abram is to be God’s servant and spokesman.

Consequently, God will bless the one who blesses Abram. God will judge the one who curses Abram. Abram is to be so closely identified with God and His program that to curse Abram is almost equivalent to cursing God (Leupold).

One expositor has gone so far as to say, “I believe at least part of the reason the United States has been blessed is that it has been a haven for persecuted Jews and other minorities.” He goes on to quote Donald Gray Barnhouse, who said, “When a man dies, a physician has to write on the death certificate the cause of death. When a nation dies, more often than not, the cause of death is that that nation has mistreated the Jews. When Ham rebelled against Shem, one by one the tribes of him were destroyed or reduced to a minor state: Egypt, Canaan, and the Hitites. When the Greeks overran Palestine and desecrated the altar in the Jewish temple, they were soon conquered by Rome. When Rome killed Paul and many others and destroyed Jerusalem under Titus, Rome fell. Spain was reduced to a fifth great nation after the inquisition against the Jews; Poland fell

after the Pogroms; Hitler's Germany went down after his orgies of anti-semitism; Britain lost her empire when she broke her faith with Israel" (Barnhouse).

The promise was national. Needless to say, God indeed made a great nation of Abram. Out of Abram came Israel. A great nation means more than great numbers. A large number of descendants would come from Abram and be formed into a great nation, of which would come the Ten Commandments and the Scriptures. Israel's greatness was not in the production of philosophers like Greece or in great governments like Rome; it was spiritual. At the time God told Abram this, he had no sons.

The promise was universal. All the families of the earth were promised spiritual blessing through Abram. God fulfilled this promise by using the line of Abram to bring the Messiah to the world. "The third promise takes on its greatest fulfillment in the fact that Jesus Christ became the means of blessing to the world" (MacDonald).

The Response Abram responded to God's call. Though Genesis does not say so here, the first thing Abram did was believe God (Gen. 15:6; Heb. 11:8). As a result, He obeyed, "So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan" (12:4-5a). Like Noah, Abram obeyed as the Lord had spoken (6:22; 7:5, 16). Abram didn't leave because of a natural migration, such as a famine, but because God had spoken to him. Abram traveled approximately 400 miles from Haran to Canaan.

Yet his obedience was not exactly perfect. God specifically told Abram to leave his country, his family, and his father's house (12:1), but when he departed, "Lot went with him" (12:4). Lot's father, Haran (11:27), had died (11:28), but there is more. Apparently, when Abram left Ur, he took his father with him (11:32) and now, when he leaves Haran, he takes Lot with him (12:4). Abram's obedience at this point is partial. His faith and obedience matured during his lifetime (see chapter 22). In short, God said, "Leave your country." Abram said, "Yes." God said, "Leave your father's house." Abram said, "Yes." God said, "Leave your kindred." Abram said, "No." In a sense, partial obedience is obedience. In another sense, partial obedience is disobedience.

Constable disagrees with that analysis. He says, "That Abram's family chose to accompany him does not imply an act of disobedience on Abram's part. God did not forbid others from accompanying Abram. Lot chose to accompany Abram; Abram did not choose to take Lot with him." Constable also says, "Since Lot voluntarily chose to accompany Abram, he probably believed the promises as well (cf. Ruth). Abram's call had been to separate from his pagan relatives, so he was not disobedient by allowing Lot to accompany him (see Waltke). Probably Abram viewed Lot as his heir (cf. 11:27-32; 12:4-5; 13:1-2)."

Abram not only took Lot, but he also took "all their possessions that they had gathered" and "the people whom they had acquired in Haran" (12:5b). Evidently, Abram was a wealthy rancher, herdsman, or businessman. The people they acquired were either slaves (Keil) or proselytes (Cassuto; Ross).

Thus, when God called him, Abram believed Him and obeyed Him, at least partially. What Abram did illustrates that "one does not need to be a spiritual giant to become a follower of God" (Boice).

The Confirmation to Abram: God Confirmed His Call to Abram

The Confirmation to Abram According to the writer of Hebrews, when Abram “went out, “he did not know where he was going” (Heb. 11:8). He has now journeyed to Canaan (12:5). More specifically, “Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh and the Canaanites were in the land” (12:6). Shechem was in the pass between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. “Town on the main caravan route southwest-ward from the Euphrates, which figure significantly in the Abram stories, are Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and Gerar” (Albright, cited by Constable). When Abram arrived in Shechem, the terebinth tree of Moreh was there. Moreh, a Hebrew word that means “teacher” or “instructor,” was a Canaanite who at one time either owned the property on which the notable terebinth tree stood, or he made the spot a landmark by teaching there. Abram camped at the site.

Later, several significant events would take place there. As the Israelites gathered there, they heard the blessings and the cursings (Deut. 11:29-30; 27:11 ff.; Jos. 8:30-35). Joshua gave his farewell message there (Joshua 24), and the kingdom was divided there (1 Kings 12).

Moses notes in passing that the Canaanites were in the land. Was their presence cause for pause for Abram? God had promised him a land (12:1). He came to the land of Canaan (12:5) and he found it inhabited (12:6)! Is this the land? What about the people living there? Abram needed confirmation or direction.

“Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants, I will give this land’ (12:7a). This is the first time the Bible says God appeared to someone. He had spoken to Adam, Noah, and others. He had “walked” with Enoch. Perhaps He had also appeared to him, but the Scripture does not say that. The purpose of the appearance is to confirm to Abram that Canaan was the land He had promised to give him. The Lord also clarified that it is to his descendants that the land is given. The point is God clarified and confirmed His promise.

God has promised all who believe in Christ the gift of eternal life. He confirms those promises today, not by His personal appearance but by His Word (1 Jn. 5:13). I began by saying Melvin Dummar claimed Howard Hughes had put him in his will. In June of 1978, the court threw out that will. Dummar got nothing from the Hughes estate. Hughes, if he ever intended to give Dummar anything, did not confirm it legally. God made promises and confirmed them. Later, He will make a legal covenant with Abram.

Abram’s response is, “And there he built the altar to the LORD who had appeared to him” (12:7b). The word “altar” means “a place for slaughter” (Leupold). In response to God’s confirmation, Abram sacrificed. Today, we do not build literal altars nor offer animal sacrifices. Jesus Christ is our sacrifice for sin (Jn. 1:29). We do respond to God with sacrifices—the sacrifices of praise (Heb. 13:5) and giving (Phil. 4:16-18).

Abram kept moving and responding, “And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD” (12:8). Bethel is about 35 miles south of Shechem. At Bethel, he pitched his tent, built an altar, and called on the name of the Lord. To “call on the name of the Lord” refers to prayer and, perhaps, public proclamation (4:26; see Ross). Luther translated this expression “preached.” Part of responding to God is proclaiming His name to others.

The Lord promised to make Abram’s *name* great (12:2). Abram responded by proclaiming the Lord’s *name* (12:8). God promised to make Abram well known. Abram made God’s name known in Canaan. The inhabitants of Babel wanted to make a name for themselves (11:4). Abram wanted to make a name for the Lord.

From Bethel, Abram moved again, “So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south” (12:9). The Hebrew word translated “south” is “Negev,” a word used in the Old Testament for the region south of Hebron. Coming to the Negev region, Abram has now traveled the entire length of the land of Canaan. Abram came to Shechem, Bethel, and the Negev (12:6, 8-9). Later, the Israelites would begin in the Negev and go to Bethel, Ai, and Shechem.

Summary: When God called Abram to be blessed and be a blessing, Abram responded with faith, obedience, praise, and proclamation. In a day filled with idolatry and little information, Abram simply took God at His Word and, as a result, he was blessed and was a blessing. God blesses those who trust Him and obey Him.

This passage is significant for several reasons. Constable points out that “The fourth dispensation, the dispensation of promise, extended from Abram’s call to the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19-24). Man’s stewardship rested on God’s promises to Abram, which appear first in 12:1-3 but receive confirmation and enlargement in 13:14-17, 15:1-7; 17:1-8, 15-19; 22:16-18; 26:2-5, 24; 28:13-15; 31:13; and 35:9-12.”

In a sense, Genesis 12:1-3 is what Genesis is all about. Indeed, it is the seed plot of the Bible. It has been said, “The migration of Abram is one of the most important events in all history. In one sense, one might say that Genesis 12:1 is the first verse in the Bible, the preceding portion of the book being simply the introduction. The great historical development that leads through Israel up to Christ and the Christian church begins when Abram heeds the divine call to leave Ur of the Chaldeans” (Pieters, p. 139).

This passage introduces the story of Abram. The story of Abram is the story of a man of faith. More specifically, it is the story of a man who faced obstacles. Each obstacle tested his faith and provided an opportunity for him to grow stronger in faith. Each episode also reveals something about God’s power and faithfulness. Constable says one writer calls Abram’s story an “obstacle story.” Constable also says, “In Genesis 12-25, the problems of possessing the land and obtaining an heir dominate the story of Abram’s life. How will Abram obtain the promised land, and who will be Abram’s promised heir? ... At least one of these questions is central in every incident in Abram’s life that God has chosen to record in Genesis. These questions form the unifying theme of the Abram narrative.”

Constable adds, “Twelve crises arise as the story of Abram’s life unfolds. Each of these must be overcome and is overcome by God.... Each of these problems constituted a challenge to Abram’s faith. Is God faithful and powerful enough to provide what He promised? ... Each problem Abram encountered is typical of problems that every believer has to deal with in seeking to live by faith. Consequently, each episode in Abram’s life teaches us something about God’s power and faithfulness and should enable us to live by faith more consistently. Moses originally recorded these lessons for Israel’s benefit so the Israelites would emulate Abram’s faith.... The problems Abram’s faith encountered were these.

1. Sarai was barren and incapable of producing an heir (11:30).
2. Abram had to leave the Promised Land, which God said he would inherit (12:10).
3. Abram’s life was in danger in Egypt (12:11-20).
4. Abram’s nephew (heir?) Lot strove with him over the land (ch. 13).
5. Abram entered a war and could have died (14:1-16).
6. Abram’s life was in danger from retaliation in the Promised Land (15:1).
7. God ruled Eliezer out as Abram’s heir (15:2-3).

8. Hagar, pregnant with Abram's son (heir?), departed (16:6).
9. Abimelech threatened Sarai's reputation and child (heir?) in Gerar (ch. 20).
10. Abram had two heirs (21:8-11).
11. God commanded Abram to slay his heir (ch. 22).
12. Abram could not find a proper wife for his heir (24:5).

This passage sent a message to Israel. "The nation of Israel in Moses' day shared the same call that God had extended to Abram. She was to leave her place of residence, Egypt, and go to a Promised Land to worship and serve God there with the promise of blessing. This required faith. We have a similar calling. Believers who walk by faith will forsake much to become part of God's program to bless the world" (Constable).

This passage also tells us how to be blessed. "Abram's example of obedience is a model for all believers to forsake all else to obtain the promised blessings of God and to serve Him by becoming a blessing to others" (Constable). God sovereignly blesses. Yet, there are things we can do.

First, believe God. The promise of blessing in this passage is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:8, 13, 14). It relates to all who will trust Christ (Gal. 3:9). Trust Christ and God will bless you by declaring you righteous (Gal. 3:6) and giving you the Holy Spirit, Himself! (Gal. 3:14). Abram did not do anything to receive this blessing. God certainly did not bless him because of his background. He came from an idolatrous family. Abram simply believed.

Secondly, obey the Lord. Abram received more than the blessing of eternal life. He was abundantly blessed in this life. That blessing comes through obedience. Believers often excuse themselves from obedience by thinking they have too many things to worry about or are too old. Consider Abram. He had many possessions (12:5), yet he obeyed. He was also 75 years old when God called him. He lived to be 175 years old. He was a middle-aged man when he trusted the Lord and began to obey Him.

Thirdly, bless others. Abram praised God and proclaimed His name to others. If God has blessed you, bless others. Or, as someone has sarcastically said, "Some people make others happy when they come, and others make people happy when they leave." Be the kind of person that makes others happy when you walk into their life. Divine favor has been bestowed upon us not just for our benefit but for the benefit of others.

You have a choice. You can go your way and benefit yourself, or you can trust and obey God and be blessed by Him. In chapter 11, Nimrod and his followers "said to one another" (11:3). In Genesis 12, "the Lord said to Abram" (12:1). In chapter 11, "they found a plain" (11:2). In chapter 12, the Lord told Abram to go "to a land that I will show you" (12:1). In chapter 11, "they said, 'come let us build ourselves a city and ... make a name for ourselves'" (11:4). In chapter 12, God told Abram, "I will bless you and make your name great" (12:2). Would you rather make your blessing or have God bless you?

WHEN BELIEVERS FAIL

As a believer in Jesus Christ, have you ever failed? Have you ever failed God by breaking His moral law, such as lying? Have you ever failed your family by not being the kind of partner or parent you should be? Have you ever failed non-Christians by not being consistent before them and not giving them the gospel? Have you ever failed as a believer?

What happens when believers fail? Obviously, others can and do suffer. A simple illustration is a family failure. Divorce affects the children. The ultimate issue is how the failure affects the individual who failed and how it affects God. For example, some teach that if believers lapse into sin, they can lose their salvation. Is that true? To answer these questions, consider a story in the life of Abraham.

The Failure of Abram

The Famine The story begins with a famine. “Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land” (12:10). At the time, Abram was in the southern part of Canaan (12:5, 8-9). Thus, this verse is saying there was a severe famine in the land of Canaan. Canaan has been visited by famine throughout the centuries (Leupold). This one was particularly severe. No rain meant no crops to feed his family and his flock (12:5).

Perhaps Abram should have stayed in Canaan and trusted God to supply their food somehow. Abram has indeed been chided for going to Egypt. Said one critic, “To rely on Egypt means trusting human resources rather than God. It is something believers must avoid. If they find themselves in Egypt through lack of faith in God’s strength or promises, the only solution is to get out as quickly as possible—and not go back” (Boice). Going to Egypt, however, was not always wrong (Gen. 46:3; Mt. 2:13). This much is sure: Abram did not intend to remain in Egypt. He only went there to “sojourn,” meaning he would only be there temporarily.

The Female Beauty The story continues. “And it came to pass when he was close to entering Egypt that he said to Sarai, ‘Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance’” (12:11). Abram had a beautiful wife. Some have objected that she was 65 years old. She was ten years younger than Abram (17:17), who was 75 at the time (12:4). She lived to be 127 (23:1). So, at 65, she was middle-aged and had not had children. She was like a beautiful, well-preserved 35-year-old today.

On my first trip to Israel in 1972, a guide explained that men paid for wives and the more beautiful, the more expensive. A very beautiful woman might cost, he said, ten camels, five donkeys, and three sheep, while a not-so-good-looking woman would only go for a few goats. Sarai was a ten camel woman (12:16). She was a Miss America type. She was model material. She was a gorgeous girl, a fabulous female, simply a beautiful woman—a raving, beautiful woman.

The Falsehood Because of his wife’s raving beauty, he said to her, “Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his wife’ and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you” (12:12-13). The ancient Egyptians were “polytheistic, cruel, and immoral. Polygamy and sexual promiscuity were common” (Morris). Yet, they could not marry a woman who was married to someone else. So, if they wanted a woman to be a wife (or another

wife), they would have to kill the husband. That was particularly true if the man was a foreigner (Leupold).

Fearful of his life, Abram concocted a plan. He would simply say that Sarai was his sister. Now, there was some truth to that. She was his half-sister (20:12), but when used to deceive, a half-truth is a whole lie. He was thinking only of himself. He said, “that it may be well with me” (12:13). He probably rationalized this to Sarai, saying, “In Egypt, wives are made widows. So, say you are my sister and they will have to negotiate for you and I will not sell.” At this point, Abram failed. Instead of trusting God and telling the truth, he took refuge in subterfuge.

It would be easy to criticize and condemn Abram. The heroic was absent; the cowardly was present. He was sinful and selfish. He acted on fear rather than faith. He failed, but the truth is rather than criticize Abram, we should see ourselves in him. As one commentator has said, “There is no knowing how low a saint will sink once he gets out of touch with God” (Phillips). Let’s face it. We are all guilty of failure, even as believers.

The Fascination of Pharaoh

Pharaoh took Sarai The plot thickens. Abram’s failure led to trouble for him and his wife. “So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. The princess of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh’s house” (12:14-15). Constable says, “The Pharaoh Abram dealt with in Egypt was probably Inyotef II (2117-2069 B.C.), a ruler of the eleventh dynasty, Middle Kingdom period. His capital was in Memphis, very near modern Cairo.” Sarai was a beautiful woman, but in Egypt, her beauty was even more apparent. Ancient authors said Egyptian wives were generally ugly and faded early (Keil). The populace noticed Sarai’s beauty immediately (12:14). The princess of Pharaoh eventually discovered this beauty and wanted to impress their king, so they brought Sarai to his house. Pharaoh had almost absolute authority. Whatever woman he wanted was promptly brought to him (Leupold). Perhaps Abram’s scheme might have worked if he had to deal with someone who would negotiate with Sarai, but Pharaoh didn’t have to negotiate (Ross). Just because Sarai was in Pharaoh’s house doesn’t mean she was his wife or concubine—yet (Esther 2:12).

Pharaoh Rewarded Abram “He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels” (12:16). Abram conceived to deceive that it might be “well” with him (12:13). It was “well” with him, all right. Pharaoh treated him “well” (12:16). In exchange for Sarai, Pharaoh showered Abram with animals and servants. Abram is no longer a sojourner but an honored guest (Ross). The order of the list of possessions may be the order of their acquisition. Abram had (or was given) sheep, oxen, and male donkeys. Then he acquired servants and, after that, came female donkeys and camels (Leupold).

This is the first reference to camels in the Bible. “For many years, scholars believed that the ancients did not domesticate camels until much later than the patriarchal period. They believed that references to camels in Genesis indicated historical inaccuracies. However, the archaeological evidence for the early domestication of camels has proved these critics wrong. The Hebrew word does not distinguish whether these were one or two-humped camels” (Constable). “They represented great wealth; to have a camel in this period was like having an expensive limousine” (NKJV Study Bible).

Abram was rich and miserable. He had wealth but no wife. Moreover, the ill-gotten gain plagued him for years to come, first in strife with Lot and later through an Egyptian maid named

Hagar (Ross). Notice that Abram got out of the will of God (he lied) and ended up rich! It is possible for a believer to fail and end up wealthy from the world's point of view. At the same time, he was in deep trouble. He has disobeyed the Lord and is in trouble with his wife. When believers fail, it not only affects their relationship with their heavenly Father. It almost always affects their relationship with their earthly family.

The Faithfulness of God

God Plagued Pharaoh At this point, God intervened. "But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife" (12:17). Exactly what the Lord did and how Pharaoh knew it was because of Sarai is not stated. The word "plagued" is used for disease. Apparently, Pharaoh became ill and was thus prevented from approaching Sarai (Leupold). Sarai probably told Pharaoh that she was Abram's wife (Keil).

Pharaoh Rebuked Abram "And Pharaoh called Abram and said, 'What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister?' I might have taken her as my wife. Now, therefore, here is your wife. Take her and go your way" (12:18-19). Abram should be standing before Pharaoh, revealing God to him. Instead, he is standing before Pharaoh being rebuked by him. His opportunity to witness to the king is lost because of his previous failure. Compromise with the world destroys one's witness to the world. Thus, the people in the world, instead of being drawn to the Lord through believers, are used by God to rebuke believers.

Pharaoh sent them away "So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had" (12:20). God protected Sarai and Abram. Pharaoh could have killed them both. Instead, he had them safely escorted to the border.

This incident has a parallel in Israel's later history. Ross puts it like this: "The Israelites living in Egypt at the time of the great plagues, who knew about this incident in Abram's life, certainly would have identified with the situation very well. God's plagues on Egypt under Moses not only brought ruin to the nation of Egypt, but they protected and preserved the Israelites in their houses" (Ross, p. 276).

The same author also points out, "This parallelism is close and must be more than a coincidence. Moses has carefully worded the account of Abram's sojourn in and deliverance from Egypt with the greater sojourn and deliverance in mind. The effect has the demonstration that the great deliverance out of bondage by the plagues that Egypt experienced had previously been accomplished in the life of the ancestors of the nation. Knowing this history would have been a comfort and an encouragement to the people under Moses, for if God, who made the promise to Abram, delivered Abram from Egypt to return to the Land, then God, who confirmed the promises to the descendants of Abram could surely deliver them as well. Even Abram bringing the dilemma on himself through deception would also be encouraging, for the people could see the program of God was too important to let anyone bring it to ruin" (Ross, pp. 273-74).

Summary: When Abram's deception jeopardized God's promise, God delivered Abram. God remains faithful, even when believers fail.

"One cannot miss the deliberate parallelism between this sojourn of Abram in Egypt and the later event in the life of the nation in bondage in Egypt. The motifs are remarkably similar: the famine in the land (12:10; 47:13), the descent to Egypt to sojourn (12:10; 47:27), the attempt to kill the males but save the females (12:12; Ex. 1:22), the plagues on Egypt (Gen. 12:17; Ex. 7:14-

11:10), the spoiling of Egypt (Gen. 12:16; Ex. 12:35-36), the deliverance (Gen. 12:19; Ex. 15), and the ascent to the Negev (Gen. 13:1; Num. 13:17, 22). The great deliverance out of bondage that Israel experienced was thus already accomplished in her ancestor, and probably was a source of comfort and encouragement to them” (Ross in the BKC; Waltke, cited by Constable).

There is no doubt that this event in the life of Abraham illustrates well that believers fail. Adam failed. Noah failed. Now, Abram fails. Believers throughout the ages have failed and believers today fail. Thus, the Scripture warns, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man” (1 Cor. 10:12-13a). When believers fail, God disciplines them. The discipline may come in many forms. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul said that because of sin at the Lord’s Table, some believers were weak, some were sick, and some were even physically dead (1 Cor. 11:30).

The great truth of this passage is that God remains faithful even when believers fail (Ez. 36:22; 2 Tim. 2:13). Leupold states, “In any case, Abram’s lie does not make him a worthy recipient of divine mercy, but God’s mercy outruns man’s merit, as the Pentateuch emphasizes with particular instances. Since Abram is the father of the seed of promise, Sarai, the mother, must be safeguarded. Man’s sin almost defeats God’s purpose, but God’s mercy prevails.”

Ross agrees, saying, “The basic point of the story in Genesis is the divine preservation of the purity of Sarai for the sake of the promise. It is an account of God’s protecting the future of the covenant. Israel would learn that. Even when they are unfaithful, there were aspects of the promise that God would not relinquish through their failure. This deliverance in no way condones deception; rather, it embarrassed it.”

A pastor dramatized this saying: God promised to bless Abram. Abram could have said, “But suppose I stop at Haran and wait there until my father, Terah, dies.” Be that as it may, God said, “I will bless you.” Suppose Abram said, “I found myself in Egypt and am so afraid the Egyptians will kill me to take Sarai that I will tell her to lie and say she is my sister. And suppose she is almost violated because of my cowardice?” God still said, “I will bless you.” Again, Abram objects, “Suppose I am distrustful of your promise to make me a nation and take Sara’s servant, Hagar, as a concubine to have children by her?” Again, God is emphatic. “I will bless you.” But why, Lord? Why should you bless me?” In the words of the pastor who dramatized the story, “God’s answer is because He chooses to do so and for no other reason. This is grace.”

That same pastor suggests that Abram might protest, “But suppose I misunderstand your leading and get out of your will?” God says, “I will make you a great nation.” Abram might say, “Suppose the time comes when my descendants become idolaters like those from whom I have come? Suppose they fall down and worship images made of gold?” Again, God’s statement remains, “I will make you a great nation.” But Abram could say, “Suppose my people become so hardened against you that they crucify your Son?” God replies, “I will make you a great nation.” The pastor concludes, “In its unconditional nature, the promises of God to Abram does not depend on Abram’s ability to see how it can or will be fulfilled, nor on the ability or inability of himself or his descendants to live up to it.”

When believers fail, they pay the consequences and are disciplined, but God remains faithful. His promises are unconditional and believer’s failures do not break them.

HOW TO AVOID STRIFE AND BE BLESSED

Two Christian ladies worked in the same office. One always wanted the window open; the other wanted it closed. “I feel I’m going to suffocate in here!” said one. “I’m going to catch my death of cold!” responded the other. Sarcasm, someone in the office suggested, “Why don’t you keep the window closed until one of you dies of suffocation and keep it open until the other dies of pneumonia. Then we’ll have some peace around here!” (Phillips).

Strife is common, too common. Unfortunately, it even exists among Christians. If you’ve ever gone through serious strife, you, no doubt, came out on the other side asking, “How could I avoid experiencing that again?” A story taken from the life of Abram illustrates how to avoid strife with people and be blessed by God.

The Strife between Abram and Lot

Abram was Rich and Spiritual Leaving Egypt, Abram journeyed back to the Promised Land, “Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South” (13:1). “The South” is a reference to the southern part of Palestine. Initially, God told Abram to depart from his “kindred” (12:1), but Lot, his nephew, went with him to Canaan (12:4) and apparently to Egypt (13:1).

At this point in his life, “Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold” (13:2). Not all of Abram’s wealth was obtained in Egypt (12:5), although no doubt some of it was (12:16). Nomads, like Abram, normally did not have a great deal of silver and gold (Leupold). Abram did.

Abram was not only materially rich, but he was also spiritually wealthy as well. “And he went on his journey from the south as far as Bethel, the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD” (13:3-4). Abram returned to Bethel (12:8). Bethel was significant because Abram built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord (12:8), which he did again here (13:4). To call on the Lord was an act of worship and witness (4:26; 12:8). For Abram, coming back to Bethel was both a physical and spiritual return.

“Back to Bethel” has become a slogan signifying the need for a wandering saint to return to the Lord. Have you wandered away from the Lord? If so, you need to come back to Bethel and call on the name of the Lord, which means confessing your sins to the Lord (1 Jn. 1:9) and confessing the Lord to the world. Donald Gray Barnhouse compared the believer wandering away from the Lord with the prodigal son who, when he found himself eating pig’s food, came to his senses. He said, “Swine husks are often the hors d’oeuvres before the fatted calf. The only way to get back into the will of God is to go back to the very cause of the departure, confess it, forsake it, and return to the place of fellowship (Barnhouse, cited by Boice).

Lot was Rich and Carnal “Lot also who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents” (13:5). Like Abram, his uncle, Lot was rich but probably not as rich as Abram. Nothing is said about silver and gold (13:2). The reference to “tents” probably includes servants (12:5; Leupold). Nothing is said about an altar. Abram had riches (13:2) and an altar (13:4). Lot had riches (13:5). Abram was rich and spiritually minded. Lot was rich and carnally minded. The problem is not wealth but one’s attitude toward it (1 Tim. 6:17-19). Abram had possessions, but his possessions did not have him. Lot was possessed by his possessions. Lot knew the Lord. Peter said Lot was

righteous (2 Pet. 2:7-8), but as subsequent events will reveal, he was carnally minded. He is the prototype of many believers today who put their business life, family life, or social life before their spiritual life.

Strife Developed The wealth of Abram and Lot eventually caused a problem. “Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land” (13:6-7). These verses emphasize that their great wealth and livestock produced great tension in dwelling together in the land. It is stated twice that they could not dwell together. The reason is their riches.

The original inhabitants of the land were the Canaanites and the Perizzites. The Perizzites are not listed among the descendants of Canaan in Genesis 10:15-17. The origin of the name is “involved in obscurity” (Keil). The Perizzites, no doubt, occupied the best land for grazing. Abram had to survive on the remainder of the land and there just wasn’t enough left in the area to sustain their combined flocks and herds.

The lack of land caused strife between the servants of Abram and the servants of Lot. The Hebrew word rendered “strife” signifies claim and counterclaim and was used later for legal disputes. It is also used for the Israelites’ strife with God over the lack of water in the wilderness (Ross).

If there was a legal dispute over the land, the question is, who owned it? The answer, of course, is Abram. God promised him the land (12:1, 7).

Abram and Lot were not the first to get into a conflict, nor were they the last. Strife is as old as Cain and Abel and as up-to-date as this morning’s newspaper. You probably have had tensions even with other believers as late as last year, last month, or maybe even last week. The question is how such strife can be prevented.

The Separation of Abram and Lot

Abram Suggestion Separation “So Abram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you go to the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left’ (13:8-9). Abram had the right to the land. God promised it to him. He also had the right to make the first choice as to where to dwell. He was and the leader of the clan (Keil). Yet, he was motivated not by what was rightfully his but by the spiritual values of unity and peace. He said, “We are brethren,” that is, we are related. Relatives should live in peace and harmony; strife and contention are of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-20). Abram chose spiritual values over carnal values. He chose spiritual values over his rights.

Abram learned a very valuable lesson when he went to Egypt. He had chosen for himself and had gotten into great difficulty. Now, he is content to leave the choice with God and to trust the Lord with his future (Boice). Abram suggested separation and he let Lot choose whatever he wanted! Sometimes, separation is the way to solve a problem (Acts 15:36-41).

One commentator put it like this, “This was the solution proposed by Abraham. Rather than seeking to perpetuate a forced and artificial union, he saw that it would be better to have a complete geographical break with Lot and his herdsmen. There was still plenty of open land in Canaan, so there was no reason for them to strive over the same land. Likewise, there is more than enough work to be done by two (separate churches, student groups, or other Christian organizations)

working apart, so there is no reason for them to argue over which has priority in a given field. Far better to separate with each working to reach as many as possible in different areas, than to continue debating with each other in the same area” (Morris).

Another commentator pointed out, “At the same time, this incident has always served in the church, which is a typical case of how to deal in a practical way with the problem of incompatibility. If people simply cannot get along together, nothing is gained by attempting to force the issue or by discussing the point until a solution is reached. Incompatibility is best dealt with by separation: let those that cannot agree to get out of one another’s way” (Leupold).

Unity is the ideal. Separation, however, is acceptable, at least in some cases. In those situations where one party is not retractable, perhaps separation is the only solution. Strife is unacceptable and unrighteous (1 Cor. 7:12-16, especially verse 15). Though not stated, perhaps Abram was trusting God. Several commentators have suggested that such was the case (Keil; Kidner).

Lot took the Plain Lot’s response was that he lifted up his eyes, saw (13:10), chose (13:11), journeyed (13:11), and dwelt (13:12).

First, he surveyed the scene, “And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar” (13:10). The plain of Jordan is a reference to a portion of the land that extends “from about Jericho down to and including the northern end of the Dead Sea to Zoar” (Leupold). Today, this is a hot, desolate piece of real estate, but before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, it was a beautiful, well-watered spot like the Garden of Eden or the land of Egypt around the Nile.

“Due to the combination of water (emerging from underground springs fed by the limestone hills farther west [of Jericho]), soil (deposited on the plain from the same hills), and climate (warm and sunny during most of the year), the region is known for all types of agricultural products, especially dates and balsam (used in ancient ointments)... It is not surprising that Lot, who with Abraham had lived for a short time in the lush Nile Valley of Egypt [chose as he did]... His choice appears to have been made from the mountains northeast of Bethel, with a view of the Jericho oasis or the Plains of Moab” (Monson, cited by Constable).

“In any given situation, what you are determines what you see, and what you see determines what you do” (Haddon Robinson, *Leadership* 3:1, Winter 1982: 104, cited by Constable).

“Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan” (13:11a). The implication seems to be that Lot chose the most desirable portion. Abram was thinking of Lot and Lot was thinking only of himself. He chose the plain of Jordan “for himself.”

“And Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other” (13:11b). Lot followed through with his desire and decision and, as a result, journeyed to the land he had chosen. He decided to move east into the Jordan Valley. Earlier, Adam, Eve, and Cain traveled east after they sinned (3:24; 4:16) and the people of Babel went east and rebelled against God (11:2). Where Lot chose to settle was on the eastern frontier of the Promised Land. No doubt, Abram, at least, grieved over this separation.

This portion concludes with the observation: “Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD” (13:12-13). “The location of Sodom is still uncertain. There are three primary possibilities: northeast of the Dead Sea (Collins), southeast of the Dead Sea, or under the southern basin of the Dead Sea. The second option seems most probable” (Constable).

Lot may have chosen the most desirable portion of the land, but his choice was not spiritual. In the first place, it was selfish. It was also based on sight, not on faith. The comment that this area was well watered before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah indicates that “Lot’s choice on the basis of sight was a temporary benefit” (Ross). Finally, it was spiritually dangerous. The men of the area were “exceedingly wicked and sinful,” a phrase meaning “wicked sinners,” that is, “a step below normal sinners” (Ross).

Calvin observed, “Therefore, seeing that he was led away solely by the pleasantness of the prospect, pays the penalty for his foolish cupidity. Let us then learn by this example that our eyes are not to be trusted but that we must rather be on our guard lest we be ensnared by them and be encircled, unawares, with many evils, just as Lot, when he fancied that he was dwelling in paradise, was nearly plunged into the depths of hell” (Calvin, cited by Ross).

Another has stated, “He did not ask: is this a good place to raise children? He asked, is this a good place to raise cattle? The first question that comes to a soul is heaven or hell. The second is heaven or earth. Lot had answered the first question when he left Mesopotamia and the second question when he chose Sodom” (Phillips).

The Surety of the Lord

God Gave Abram the Whole Land Forever After the separation, the Lord appeared to Abram, “And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: ‘Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land that you see I give you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you” (13:14-17). God first appeared to Abram and told him to leave his country “to a land that I will show you” (12:1). Then, the Lord said the land of Canaan is the land (12:7), but the Lord did not tell him how much of the land. The Lord told Abram He would make him a great nation (12:2) and that his descendants would get the land (12:7). Now the Lord appears to Abram for the third time and He expands on some of what he said before. “This promise was more specific than God’s previous promises regarding the seed and the land” (Constable).

God now informs Abram that 1) he is to receive the land as far as he can see in every direction. Much of the land can be seen from some places in the land (Leupold). On a clear day, the Mediterranean can be seen from Mt. Nebo, east of the Jordan. 2) His descendants will receive the land forever. The Jews will possess the land during the Millennium, possibly in the new age of Revelation 21 (Morris). 3) His descendants will be enumerable. The dust of the earth cannot be counted; thus, this expression is hyperbole for a number no one can count (Leupold). That promise was given to a childless man!

Constable says this promise contained three specifics: “1. Abram’s heir would be *his own seed* (offspring; vv. 15-16). 2. God would give the land to Abram and his descendants *forever* (v. 15). 3. Abram’s descendants would be *innumerable* (v. 16)” (Constable, italics his). Constable also says, “The figure of ‘dust’ suggests physical seed and is hyperbole (v. 16; cf. 2:7). The ‘stars’ figure given later (15:5) suggests heavenly or spiritual seed, in addition to physical seed, and is also hyperbole.”

Then, the Lord invited Abram to walk through the length and width of the land (13:17). In other words, the land is yours. I’ve given it to you; now roam around and rejoice over it. “God’s encouragement to walk through the land (v. 17) implied that Abram should claim the promise by

treading the land under his feet. In the ancient Near East, victorious armies claimed defeated territory by marching through it” (Constable).

Abram Praised God: “Then Abram moved his tent and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to the LORD” (13:18). Abram settled down in Hebron and built an altar there. “Hebron is the highest town in the Promised Land with an elevation of about 3,050 feet. Its site is strategic, lying midway between Jerusalem and Beersheba” (Constable). Hebron became the chief center of Abram’s movements. Near there, he purchased the cave of Machpelah, where he was buried (Kidner). Leupold comments, “This new permanent home is to be sanctified by an altar for sacrifices to Yahweh, and is to have in that altar a means of worship as well as a testimony to all men that Abram had nothing in common with the Canaanites and their idolatrous worship.”

Summary: When, because of their large herds, Abram and Lot had to separate and Abram trusted God and unselfishly gave Lot his choice, God enlarged and enriched His blessings to Abram.

There are two issues in this passage. It is tempting to read this passage and see strife, separation, and resolution. Those themes are in the passage, but there is another issue in the context of Genesis. The primary point concerns the land, which is mentioned seven times. God promised Abram the land and Abram is willing to trust Him to do it. In Egypt, he tried to work things out his way. This time, he trusted the Lord. It was when Abram trusted (see the altar at the beginning and the end of the story, 13:4, 18) and unselfishly gave up his rights that God *enlarged* His promise of the land.

The contrast between Lot and Abram highlights what God did. Lot walked by sight and chose what was selfish. Abram walked by faith and chose what was spiritual. Walking by faith kept him close to the Lord and the recipient of even greater and more permanent blessings (2 Cor. 4:18). Abram avoided strife and inherited a great blessing (1 Pet. 3:8-9).

Don’t make winning the quarrel your goal. Focus on doing what is loving and God will bless you abundantly above everything you “see” or imagine. Abram had been to an altar. He’d learned how to sacrifice. Spurgeon said, “It takes more grace than I can tell to play second fiddle well” (Spurgeon, cited by Phillips), but Abram did and God blessed him for it.

One commentator summed up the situation well: “Abram, therefore, had the freedom to act generously, righteously, and mercifully in resolving the dispute. Those who believe in the promise of God’s provision may be generous with their possessions. But those who are greedy, anxious, and covetous have not understood the nature of God’s covenant” (Ross).

In the fall of the year, Dale, who had been my associate for better than a decade, resigned. One of the results was an unusually large amount of work fell on my shoulders. For several months, I worked without a whole day off. At one point early in December, an elder saw me on a day when I was particularly tired. He concluded that it was time for me to get out of town for a few days.

At first, I resisted him. I thought that I shouldn’t go, particularly during the Christmas season. About that time, I had an opportunity to take a quick trip to Dallas for a meeting that I thought would be very profitable. I suggested that maybe, after all, I should take a few days off. Of course, for a pastor, what is critical is that he takes a day off, including a Sunday. Actually, I had the right to do this without asking anybody. The church allowed me to be gone six Sundays a year and that year, I had taken only two Sunday mornings to be away, but at the end of a committee meeting where several elders were present, the issue came up. One elder felt strongly that I should not be gone on a Sunday during the Christmas season. Frankly, I felt that if I weren’t gone on a Sunday,

I might as well not go at all, but although I had the right to do it, I didn't press the issue. I simply decided to take a day or two and not a Sunday.

Within thirty days, I was given a free trip to Israel. In this case, there would not have been a lot of strife between the elders and me, as there was between Abraham and Lot. However, the principle is the same. The way to avoid strife is to simply trust the Lord for Him to bless you in His good time.

ACKNOWLEDGING GOD'S BLESSING

Has God blessed you? If you believe in Jesus Christ and have walked with Him, without a doubt, the answer is "Yes." God's spiritual blessings include a relationship with Him, peace, joy, and victory. That is only the beginning! His material blessings include family and friends, food, and shelter.

Have you acknowledged these divine blessings in your life? How do you do that? Perhaps the first thing that comes to mind is simply saying, "Thanks." We do that daily over meals. By saying grace, we're acknowledging that God ultimately provided the food and we're grateful for His provision. Are there other ways to acknowledge God's blessing? Table Grace covers what's on the table. What about all the other blessings God has bestowed? How do you acknowledge those?

God blessed Abraham. He promised to do that and He did. Abraham was aware that God's hand was open and extended to him. On one occasion, when God especially blessed him, Abraham acknowledged it in a particular way, which should be a part of the life of everyone who is blessed by God.

The Invasion of Foreign Kings

The Invasion After Abram and Lot were separated, foreign kings invaded the land. "And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations, that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). All these joined together in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea)" (14:1-3). Genesis 14:1 describes a coalition of four kings who reigned east of Palestine. It was once customary to identify Amraphel as Hammurabi, but scholars today have concluded that Hammurabi did not reign until after the events of this chapter (Leupold; Kidner; Morris). None of these kings can be identified (Ross; Kidner). These kings ruled over kingdoms, which were probably not much more than city-states (Morris).

The *places* where these kings reigned can be identified to some degree. Shinar was Babylon (10:10), that is, modern Iraq. Ellasar was a Babylonian city (Leupold), or perhaps a Babylonian tribe living in several cities (Morris). Elam (10:22) corresponds roughly to Persia, that is, modern Iran (Leupold). "Nations" probably refers to "tribes" also in Babylon (Morris). Maybe they were a nomadic people (*Ryrie Study Bible*). "People living around Babylon initiated this first war mentioned in the Bible" (Constable).

Verse 2 delineates five kings in Palestine. The cities over which they ruled, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar, were located in the Valley of Siddim, which Moses further defines as "the Salt Sea" (14:3). This sea came to be known as the Dead Sea in the second century AD (Morris). "The Old Testament calls this body of water the "Salt Sea" because its average 32 percent saline content is about ten times more than the three percent average of the oceans" (Constable).

In 1918, Albright, the famous archeologist, wrote that the historical view of this chapter "has no foundation" (Joseph P. Free, "Archeology and the Historical Accuracy of Scripture." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113, July 1956, pp. 216-219). In 1955, He changed his mind. He wrote, "Genesis 14 can no longer be considered as unhistorical, in view of the many confirmations of details which

we owe to recent finds.” He mentions a number of discoveries, including the fact that such names as Chedorlaomer have been found in Mari sources from the Patriarchal Age (Albright, *Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands*, p. 32).

Furthermore, on the Lisan peninsula of the Dead Sea, a 10-acre town from the Early Bronze Age (3200-2000 BC) has been excavated. A cemetery containing an estimated 500,000 individual burials was found. In 1973, surveys in the area indicated that there were four other Early Bronze Age settlements in an area, “which was noted in the OT for its five cities of the valley (Gen. 14:2)” (E. M. Yamauchi, “Archeology of Palestine and Syria.” *ISBE*. vol. 1, p. 276).

In fact, there are “five and only five sites located in the Dead Sea area.” All five date to the same period and there is no other evidence of occupation in the area until the Roman period (146 BC-476 AD). An hour’s drive away, a mosaic map found in the floor of a 6th-century AD church designates one of these cities as Zoar, which the Bible says was another name for one of the five cities. Without excavation, it is evident that several of the cities were burned. Spongy charcoal was found on the top of the ground! Excavations of one of the cities revealed that it was “consumed in a fiery destruction.” Two archeologists, Walter E. Rast and R. Thomas Schaub, excavating two of the sites, believe that they have found the five cities mentioned in Genesis, including Sodom and Gomorrah (Hershel Shanks, “Have Sodom and Gomorrah Been Found?” *Biblical Archeology Review*. September/October 1980, pp. 27-36).

The Reason for the Invasion The reason for the invasion of the eastern kings was the revolt of the five kings who dwelt in the Valley of Siddim. Moses explains, “Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer and in the thirteenth year they rebelled” (14:4). For twelve years, the five kings in the Valley of Siddim paid tribute in produce and money to the Babylonian kings and their allies. In the thirteenth year, they didn’t send anything. Thus, Chedorlaomer, the leader of the coalition, led an invasion into the area.

The Route of the Invasion The confederation of the four eastern kings did not go directly to the five rebellious kings of Canaan. First, they conquered their neighbors. “In the fourteenth year, Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him came and attacked the Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh Kirathim and the Horites in their mountain of Seir, as far as El-paran, which is by the wilderness and they turned back and came to El-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and attacked all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazezon Tamar” (14:5-7). The Rephaims dwelt on both sides of the Jordan (Leupold). They were defeated at Ashteroth Karnaim, which was located about twenty miles east of the Sea of Galilee (Leupold). The Zuzims lived east of the Jordan and south of the Rephaims (Leupold; *Ryrie Study Bible*). Ham has not been located. The Emims dwelt in the land of the Moabites (Deut. 2:10-11). The site of their defeat is about seven miles east and slightly north of the middle of the Dead Sea (Leupold). The Horites live still further south in a land southwest of the Dead Sea, later inhabited by the Edomites. The Horites, whose name means “cave dwellers,” were driven to and finally overcome at El-paran, which is in the northern half of the Sinai Peninsula. The route of the conquering kings thus far was from north to south in an almost straight line. They bypassed the rebellious cities.

Then, the coalition turned northwest. Passing through Kadesh Barnea, they defeated the country of the Amalekites and the Amorites. The Amalekites were descendants of Amalek, a grandson of Esau (36:12). Thus, they did not exist at this time. They later dwelt in the area conquered at this point, that is, the country between the desert area of southern Judea and Sinai. The Amorites were scattered throughout Canaan. The ones defeated in the invasion dwelt in

Hazezon Tamar, that is, En Gedi (2 Chron. 20:2). En Gedi is on the western shore of the Dead Sea. The invaders defeated all the cities around the rebellious five to eliminate any attack from them.

“And the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out and joined together in the battle in the Valley of Siddim against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of nations, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. Now the Valley of Siddim was full of asphalt pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; some fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains” (14:8-10). The five kings of the plain no doubt thought that they had an advantage. One commentator imagines a general listing the arguments for why they would win, “There are six things in our favor. First, there is logistics. The enemy’s supply lines are extended all the way from here to the Euphrates. Moreover, their troops are heavy with plunder and that makes for unstable and double-minded troops. Then there are five of us and four of them, so we have the advantage of numbers. Fourth, we are fighting from four to five positions and their troops will be exposed. In addition, our men are fighting for family, for home, and for dear life. That alone should put backbone into them. Last of all, we know the terrain and the enemy doesn’t. We can make the slime pits fight for us; with luck, we’ll get their infantry and cavalry bogged down there. I don’t see how we can lose” (Phillips).

The two Confederate forces met in the valley that is now the southern part of the Dead Sea (14:3). The area was full of asphalt pits (14:10), which made it difficult for them to flee (Keil). The people who earlier built the tower of Babel in the land of Shinar (11:2; 14:1) used asphalt for mortar (11:3). Perhaps the eastern kings wanted this area to use its resources in its building projects (Ross). At any rate, the rebellious kings were defeated there. This has been called “poetic justice.” Those who were vile and filthy on the inside are now filthy on the outside (Phillips).

The Results of the Invasion The victors got the spoils of war. “They took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. They also took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed” (14:11-12). The conquerors plundered Sodom and Gomorrah, taking everything of value, including people, to be used as servants, animals, and material goods.

Nelson Glueck, a leading Palestine archeologist, has said, “I found that every village in their path had been plundered and left in ruins, and the countryside laid waste. The population had been wiped out or led away into captivity. For hundreds of years thereafter, the entire area was like an abandoned cemetery, hideously unkempt, with all of its monuments shattered and strewn in pieces on the ground” (Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1959, pp. 72-73).

Glueck concluded that the kings of the east “savagely liquidated” the area (Glueck, p. 11). Thus, the land God gave Abram was invaded and conquered. Furthermore, the narrator reminds the reader that Lot was taken captive and he was Abram’s nephew.

When Lot first separated from Abram, he pitched his tent *near* Sodom (13:12), but by the time of this campaign, he was living *in* Sodom (14:12). Had Lot not been living in Sodom, he would not have been captured and Abram would not have had to rescue him. Lot is an illustration of a carnal believer. Carnal believers are captives of the world. Had Lot stayed next to Abram, he would have been blessed with him (Gen. 12:2), but now he finds himself a prisoner of war. Carnal believers lose the blessing and end up captive.

The Intervention of Abram

The Report Abram heard about Lot's capture. "Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they were allies with Abram" (14:13). Abram was still living by the terebinth tree of Mamre when he heard about Lot (13:8). Abram is described as "the Hebrew," which is the first mention of that name in the Bible. It means "the man from across the river," that is, the Euphrates. Most scholars assume that the word itself is derived from the name Eber, the great-grandson of Shem (10:21, 24-25). Abram had entered into an alliance with three Amorite brothers: Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner. The Hebrew word rendered "allies" indicates that they had made a covenant with each other, probably a defense treaty (Keil).

The Response "Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus" (14:14-15). The Hebrew word translated "brother" means "brother of same parents, half-brother (same father), relative, kinship, same tribe" (BDB; see "relative" in the NASB and NIV and "kinsmen" in the ESV). Abram's response was to pursue the invading army all the way to Hobah to rescue Lot. The location of Hobah is unknown, except for what is given here, namely, that it is north of Damascus.

This episode raises several questions. First, how could such a small force overcome what had been a large invading army? If five kings could not defeat four kings, how could one man conquer a victorious army of four kings? The answer is that this was not simply 318 against a much larger army. Abram's trained servants were joined by the men of the three Amorite brothers (14:13, 24). This combined force executed a well-planned surprise attack. Abram "divided his forces" (14:15). He separated them so that they could attack the enemy from different directions. Then, he fell upon them at night while they were sleeping. The sleeping army was likely drunk and not suspecting a counter-attack might not have had a guard posted (Leupold). Besides, the Lord was with Abram (14:20). "Abram also had confidence in God's promises to him (12:2-3, 7)" (Constable).

"The situation that Abraham faced taking his 318 men and going into battle against an alliance of four armies was similar to the one Gideon faced in leading 300 men against 135,000 Midianites (Judg. 7:6; 8:10). The lesson of both passages is similar: God is able to give a trusting and obedient minority victory over ungodly forces that are overwhelmingly superior in numbers" (Constable).

The other question concerns Dan. Critics charge that Dan did not receive its name until the period of the judges (Judges 18:29). Therefore, they claim that this could not have been written until after that time. The answer to that problem is that the Dan mentioned in this verse was not Dan Laish but Dan Jaan (Deut. 34:1). Dan Jaan is the most likely Dan mentioned here because it was on the route a returning army going to Babylon would take (Keil; Leupold). Had the retreating army been at Dan Laish, it would not have fled toward Damascus because of intervening rivers (Leupold).

Abram could have responded to the news of Lot's capture by saying, 1) Lot should not have moved to Sodom; he got what he deserved. 2) The world is filled with tragedy and injustice; that's how it is. 3) God is judging and punishing Lot. Good! 4) There is no way I can get involved. If the five kings of the plain could not conquer the kings of the east, I surely can't. Even if I did, I would make them an enemy for life. They would come back later to execute revenge. There would be an end to this conflict.

Cain asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9), implying he was not. Abram was his nephew’s keeper. Lot, a fellow believer, was in trouble and he felt he must help (Gal. 6:1). In his book on the life of Abraham, F. B. Meyers said, “Faith makes us independent, but not indifferent. It is enough for it to hear that its brother is taken captive; and it will arm instantly to go into pursuit” (F. B. Meyer, *Abraham: or, the Obedience of Faith*. New York: Revell, n. d., p. 60). When a carnal believer gets in trouble, spiritual believers will not be indifferent; they will get involved.

The Result The result of Abram’s victory is impressive. “So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people” (14:16). Abram rescued Lot and his property, but that was only the beginning. He also rescued the women and “the people” of Sodom and restored “all the goods.” The Hebrew word translated “the people” signifies people bearing arms (BDB). These were the “people of war,” that is, the soldiers.

Abram chased the invaders all the way out of the land as well as rescued his nephew.

The Insight of Abram

The Reception by Two Kings Two kings received the victorious Abram. “And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley), after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him. Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High” (14:17-18). The King of Sodom, last seen fleeing (14:10), met Abram in the Valley of Shaveh, later called the King’s Valley, probably because of this event. The Valley of Shaveh has been traditionally identified northeast of Jerusalem in the Kidron Valley (2 Sam. 18:18; Keil; Leupold).

Melchizedek, king of Salem, that is, Jerusalem, met Abram with bread and wine to refresh the warriors and show appreciation for what they had done. Melchizedek is a king and a priest. He is a priest of the Most High God, meaning the God of gods, the true God. As a king, he is God’s representative to the people; as a priest, he is the people’s representative to God.

These two kings are in stark contrast. Melchizedek means “King of Righteousness.” He is a king of Salem, that is, peace. The king of Sodom was king of unrighteousness (13:13) and conflict. The striking figure is Melchizedek. He appears on the pages of Genesis, unexpected and unexplained. Then he disappears. Who is he? Ancient Jews and Martin Luther said he was Shem, Origen, an angel, and Ambrose, as well as a few modern commentators, Jesus Christ, in pre-incarnate form (Boice). Most say he was merely a man who was a type of Christ (Ps. 110; Heb. 7).

The Response to Melchizedek Melchizedek not only received Abram, but he also blessed him. “And he blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand’” (14:19-20). Actually, Melchizedek blessed Abram and God. The Most High God is defined as the possessor of heaven and earth, that is, the Creator and is described as the one who gave Abram the victory over his enemies. Invaders conquered the land and Abram chased them all the way out. God gave Abram the victory and kept His promise.

Abram responded to Melchizedek’s blessing. “And he gave him a tithe of all” (14:20). By giving Melchizedek a tithe of all the spoils (Heb. 7:4), Abram is expressing his gratitude to God for the victory and recognizing Melchizedek as the genuine priest of the true God.

Boice observed that Abraham “was returning from the battle with the kings, flushed with success. This is the point where, if this were a film, the orchestra would break into strains of ‘See, the conquering hero comes’ and Abram would be expected to throw his weight around and boast

of victory. Abram might even be supposed to use this period to consolidate his conquest of Canaan. The cities of the plain were now his. The hills were his. Everything was his. Few people have ever had such a sublime chance to float forward on a cloud of triumph, but no! Abram does not throw his weight around. He does not consolidate his gains; he does not put down Melchizedek. Instead, he returns as he went out, a faithful and humble servant of the Most High God. He even acknowledged the greatness of Melchizedek for presenting him with a tithe of his possessions (v. 20).”

The Response to the King of Sodom The king of Sodom not only received Abram, he also desired to benefit him. “Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, ‘Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself’ (14:21). The conqueror Abram had the right to the spoils of war and the king of Sodom recognized that right. He only asked that the people be allowed to return to Sodom.

Abram responded to the proposal. “But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’—except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion” (14:22-24). The expression “I have lifted up my hand to the Lord” signifies taking an oath (Ex. 6:8; Num. 14:30; Deut. 32:40; Ez. 20:23; Dan. 12:7; Leupold). Abram had decided that he wanted God’s blessing and not the benefits of the world. Thus, he refused to take “the smallest or the most worthless thing” (Keil), such as a thread or a sandal strap belonging to the worldly wicked king of Sodom. He feared that the king of Sodom would twist what had happened and claim he had made Abram rich. Abram wanted God’s blessing and God should be blessed for it (14:19-24). On the other hand, he would let those who fought with him, including the Amorites, have their rightful spoils of war. Those who blessed Abram received a blessing (12:3).

In Egypt, Abram took material things from Pharaoh for virtually doing nothing (12:16). Now, he takes nothing from the king of Sodom for doing a great deal. The Egyptian experience taught Abram a great lesson: he now desires God’s blessing (12:2) and he wants God to receive glory and honor for it. As Leupold says, “Abram desires to stand out clearly as a man who prospers only because of God’s blessing.”

Kidner observed, “Such a climax shows what was truly at stake in this chapter of international events. The struggle of kings, the far-ranging armies and the spoils of a city are the small change of the story; the crux is the faith or the failure of one man.”

Summary: When foreign kings invaded the land, Abram intervened and won, acknowledging God’s blessing and refusing the world’s benefits. Seek God’s blessing and bless Him when He gives it.

Lot selfishly took what looked good to him (13:10) and eventually dwelt in wicked Sodom (14:12). Consequently, he ended up with his property confiscated and his person captured. He followed the flesh and ended up defeated.

Abram unselfishly let Lot choose the best and he took the rest (13:12). He ended up victorious (14:16), honored by men (14:17-18), and blessed by God (14:19). Abram acknowledged God’s blessing by giving him money (14:20) and the credit for what had happened (14:22-23). “Confidence that God will preserve and provide for His own as He has promised should encourage believers to decline worldly benefits and wait for God’s blessings” (Constable).

Lot took the path of unrighteousness and ended up in conflicted defeat. Abram took the road of righteousness and ended up with peace, victory, honor, and blessing, but the great lesson of the

episode is that when God blessed Abraham, he acknowledged God's blessing by giving Him through his servant Melchizedek a tithe.

We should acknowledge God's blessing by praising and giving.

HOW GOOD ARE GOD'S PROMISES?

Your father promised you that he would take you fishing Saturday, but something “came up,” and he didn't. Your mother promised you that she would wash your favorite shirt for school, but she forgot. The doctor's office said your appointment was for 2:00, but you didn't get in until 2:45. The mechanic promised the car would be ready by Tuesday, but after not getting it for two more days, you begin to wonder if he meant Tuesday of next week. He promised to divorce his wife and marry you. Well, he divorced his wife all right and married his secretary. She stood at the altar and vowed she would be faithful until death separated the two of you. She was faithful until David came between the two of you.

Have you ever had someone promise you something but not do it? It makes you wonder not just about men and women but about God. How good are His promises? Is He as good as His Word? God promises to protect us. Have you ever felt like He didn't protect you? He promises to answer prayer. Have you ever felt like He let you down? What about the future? What about heaven? He promises eternal life to those who believe. How good is that promise? Some say it's as good as your good behavior. If that's the case, what does that have to say about God's promises?

Abram received several promises from God. After receiving one of them, he asked how good those promises were and God dramatically answered his question.

The Vision: God Will Be Abram's Protection and Provision

The Vision The king of Sodom (14:17) and the king of Salem (14:18) were not the only ones to meet Abram after he returned from defeating the eastern kings. Abram received a visit from the King of Kings, “After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid Abram, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward’” (15:1). God did not appear to Abram, nor did He communicate to Abram through a dream at night. Instead, the Lord gave Abram a vision while he was in an ecstatic state during the day (Keil; Leupold). Many commentators contend that the vision extends throughout the chapter (Keil; Leupold; Morris). It is also possible that the vision ends with verse 1. When Abram speaks in verses 2-3 and when God speaks again in verse 4, it does not state that it is in a vision. Or the vision could have concluded with verse 9. Verse 10 says Abram brought the animals, not Abram saw himself bring them. At one point, Abram fell asleep (15:12) and God continued to speak (15:13). Was that part of the passage in a dream?

Do Not Be Afraid This encounter began with the Lord saying three things to Abram. First, he told Abram not to be afraid. The words “after these things,” which refers to the defeat of the eastern kings and the visit of the two kings, indicate that Abram was not to fear retaliation from the eastern kings. The next thing God says, “I am your shield,” supports that conclusion. Some, however, claim that God was telling Abram not to fear being childless (Leupold).

Constable says that retaliation was a real possibility in the ancient Middle East. Abram had a legitimate fear. “By his bold intervention and rescue of Lot, Abram exposes himself to the endemic plague of that region—wars of retaliation (Sarna). This fear of retaliation is the primary reason for the divine oracle of 15.1, which could be translated: ‘Stop being afraid, Abram. I am a shield for you, your very great reward.’ Yahweh's providential care for Abram is to be seen as preventing the Mesopotamian coalition from returning and settling the score” (Helyer, cited by Constable).

God will Protect The second message God delivered to Abram was “I am your shield” (15:1). God Himself protected Abram against any retaliation from the eastern kings.

God will Provide Finally, God told Abram that He was His “exceedingly great reward” (15:1). God Himself was to be Abram’s reward! (Leupold; Kidner). Such a reward would indeed be “exceedingly great.” After Abram let Lot choose the best, God promised him innumerable descendants in all the land (13:14-17). Now, after Abram refuses to be enriched by the king of Sodom (14:21), God tells him, “I Myself will be your reward” (15:1). Friendship with the world is enmity with God (Jas. 4:4). Rejecting the friendship with the world and seeking the friendship of God gains the believer intimacy with God.

Constable, however, says, “The promise of reward (Heb. *shakar*), coming just after Abram’s battle with the kings, resembles a royal grant to an officer for faithful military service (Kline). God would compensate Abram for conducting this military campaign even though he had passed up a reward from the king of Sodom. The compensation in view consisted of land and descendants (cf. Ps. 127:3).”

Given the events of the last chapter, Abram had two great concerns at this point in his life. One was the military situation and the second was the monetary situation. Concerning the first, God assures him that He is Abram’s shield; pertaining to the second, He is Abram’s reward.

God had made promises before (Gen. 12:1-3) that He had not yet fulfilled. So, Abram wanted to know just exactly what God had promised.

The Promise: God Promised Descendants and the Land

The Question Upon hearing God say that He Himself would be a reward to Him, Abram raised a question. “But Abram said, ‘LORD God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ Then Abram said, ‘Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir’” (15:2-3). “Abram used a new title for God, calling Him Master (Adonai) Yahweh (i.e., Sovereign LORD). Abram had willingly placed himself under the sovereign leadership of God” (Constable). God had promised to make Abram a great nation (12:2), to give his descendants the land (12:7), and to make his descendants as the dust of the earth (13:16), but Abram had not had any children. Abram emphatically tells God (“look”), “You have given me no offspring” (Ps. 127:3).

If Abram and Sarah were to die under the prevailing custom, his household servant would be his heir (Ross; Prov. 17:2). In Abram’s case, that would be Eliezer of Damascus. “The wordplay between the Hebrew words *mesheq* (“heir”) and *dammeseq* (“Damascus”) highlights the incongruity that Abram’s heir would apparently be an alien (cf. Jer. 49:1)” (Constable). It has been suggested that the parallel of Eliezer today would be Abram’s banker or business manager. Damascus was a center of commerce. “Eliezer of Damascus” might have been something like a banking house (Boice).

The Promise God answered. “And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘This one shall not be your heir but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’ Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, so shall your descendants be” (15:4-5). God insists that “this one,” that is, Eliezer, will not be Abram’s heir. Abram’s heir shall come from his “own body.” Abram was not to adopt a son to be his heir. His heir would be his literal son. From this son would come a great multitude. God dramatically communicates the countless number of Abram’s descendants by taking Abram outside and showing him the stars. God had compared Abram’s

descendants to the dust of the earth (13:6). Now, He compares Abram's descendants to the stars of the heavens (15:5). Does this subtly signify that there are two types of descendants of Abraham, one physical and the other spiritual? Constable thinks so but adds, "Abram may not have caught this distinction since he would have more naturally taken the promise as a reference to physical children."

At this point, Moses notes Abram's reaction (15:6), which will be considered shortly, but first note that God's promise of rewards/blessing includes the land. "Then, He said to him, 'I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it' (15:7). God called Abram from one land to give him another. God's promise to Abram includes *land* (Gen. 12:1, 7, 14-17).

In the midst of this discussion, Moses records, "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (15:6). This remark by Moses is indeed striking. In Genesis, he usually reports facts without any "subjective" opinions (Keil). Abram believed in the Lord. The Hebrew word rendered "believed" means "to trust" (BDB). The form of the Hebrew construction here indicates that Abram did not necessarily come to faith here (Ross; Leupold; Constable explains, "When *waw* occurs with the perfect tense verb following, as we have here with a *hiphil* perfect, it indicates disjunctive action and could read, 'Now Abram had believed.'). Abram left Ur by faith (Heb. 11:8). This comment is inserted here to indicate that although Abram asked God pointedly about His promise (15:2), he had believed. Notice this comment is inserted just after God's promise that Abram would personally bear a son (15:4), not after the promise concerning the land (15:7).

God accounted Abram's faith for righteousness. Righteousness is conformity to what is right, in this case, by God's standard (Ross), "measuring up to the demands of God" (Leupold). No man, of course, does that or can do that, but when one trusts the Lord, the Lord counts him righteous, a "purely forensic act" whereby God renders a verdict of "not guilty" (Leupold; Deut. 25:1). This one is reckoned righteous.

Noah found grace (6:8) and was pronounced righteous (7:1). Abram believed and was considered righteous (15:6). Grace and faith come before righteousness. Grace is God's act; faith is man's response. Both are necessary (Eph. 2:8). Spurgeon said, "A trembling hand may grasp the cup, which bears the healing draught to the lip, but the weakness of the hand shall not lessen the power of the medicine."

Genesis 15:6 is quoted in Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, and James 2:23. Moses, Paul, and James believe in justification by faith!

Thus, Abram clarifies the promise God gave to him. We sometimes blame God because we thought He promised us something He didn't. It is always good to clarify exactly what God said He would do.

The Covenant: God made a Covenant

The Question Abram asks another question. "And He said, 'LORD God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?' (15:8). The fact that Abram asked the question does not mean he doubted the Lord (Keil; Leupold; Morris). Abram was in a state of faith (15:6). Here, he is simply seeking reassurance. In response to Abram's question, God makes a covenant with him (15:9-21). The Lord begins by giving Abram instructions to prepare for the covenant.

The Preparation "So He said to him, 'Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, turtledove, and a young pigeon' (15:9). The five animals chosen for

this covenant would later be acceptable animals for sacrifice. The requirement that they be three years old, apparently, has no further significance than that they are “full of strength and beauty” (Leupold).

Abram did it. “Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two” (15:10). The Chaldeans made a covenant by killing animals, dividing them into pieces, laying the pieces opposite one another, and then the individuals making the covenant would pass between the pieces. Those who broke such a covenant would be treated like animals that were cut into pieces (Jer. 34:18; Keil). To confirm His promise to Abram, the Lord condescended to follow the custom of the Chaldeans, except he passed through the animals alone (15:17). If He and He alone did not keep this covenant, He would be killed!

“And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away” (15:11). The vulture represented the foe of Israel who would seek to destroy her (Keil). All such attempts will fail. “The birds of prey are unclean (Lev. 11:13-19; Deut. 14:12-18) and represent foreign nations (Ezek. 17:3, 7; Zech. 5:9), most probably Egypt.... Thus, Abram driving off the birds of prey from the dismembered pieces portrays him as defending his descendants from the attacks of foreign nations” (Wenham, cited by Constable).

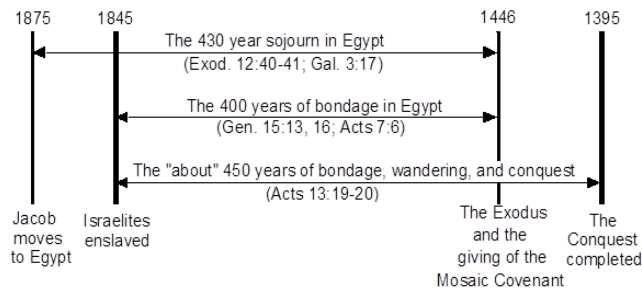
“Now when the sun was going down a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him” (15:12). As the vultures symbolized Israel’s enemy, the darkness, deep sleep, and dread signify that Israel passed through a horrible period of opposition and suffering (Keil; Leupold; Kidner) in Egypt (Morris).

Prophecy After the preparation of the animals for the covenant, God gives a prophecy to Abram. “Then he said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs and will serve them and they will afflict them four hundred years, and also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions’” (15:13-14). Abram asked how he could *know* he would inherit the land (15:8). God told him he needed to *know* for certain that first, his descendants would be strangers, servants, and sufferers in a land that was not theirs. Furthermore, this period would last four hundred years! God would judge the nations and descendants of Abram would depart rich.

This prophecy was fulfilled when the children of Israel were in Egypt (the Hebrew word rendered “afflicted” in verse 13 is used in Exodus 1:11 to describe the experience of the Israelites in Egypt). The four hundred years is a round number for four hundred and thirty years (Ex. 12:40; Gal. 3:17; Keil; Leupold; Morris). God did indeed judge the Egyptians (Ex. 7:1-12:34) and the Israelites did depart with great possessions (Ex. 12:35-36). Abram and his descendants needed to know that the diversion into Egypt was not a threat to the fulfillment of the promise of the land; it was part of the divine plan (Ross).

Constable says, “The 400 years of enslavement were evidently from 1845 B.C. to 1446 B.C., the date of the Exodus. This promise, read by the first readers of Genesis after the Exodus, would have encouraged them greatly (cf. Exod. 12:40-42). They experienced the fulfillment of this promise. That generation did indeed come out from Egypt with many possessions, also promised here, having “spoiled” the Egyptians (cf. Exod. 12:31-36).” He adds a chart.

REFERENCES TO ISRAEL'S YEARS IN EGYPT



There is more to the prophecy. “Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age but in the fourth generation they shall return here for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (15:15-16). The expression “go to your fathers” is more than death and burial. Abram’s ancestors were not buried in Canaan; Abram was (Gen. 25:9). This, then, is a reference to life after death (Leupold). “The ancients conceived of death as a time when they would rejoin their departed ancestors (cf. 2 Sam. 12:23)” (Constable).

Abram will not suffer the experience prophesied of his descendants (“in peace”) and will live a long time (“a good old age”). Abram’s descendants will return in the fourth generation, which is four hundred years (15:13). Thus, a generation is one hundred years, which is not too much for Abram’s time (Keil).

The reason for this delay is the iniquity of the Amorites will not be complete until that time. The “Amorites” were the most powerful tribe in Canaan and their name is used here as elsewhere for all the Canaanite tribes. “The Amorite” serves as a synecdoche for the ten Canaanite nations listed in verses 19 and 20. A synecdoche is a figure of speech in which one part of a whole represents the whole, as here, or the whole represents a part” (Constable). As God delayed the judgment of the flood for one hundred and twenty years, so He will delay the judgment of the Canaanites for four hundred years to give them time to return to Him (2 Pet. 3:9). If they do not turn to Him and they persist in their sin, they forfeit their right to live and will be replaced by the Israelites (Leupold). Thus, Joshua’s invasion was not an act of aggression; it was an act of justice (Kidner).

In the ancient world, restful internment and burial were left to the son (Ross). Abram’s death and burial “in peace” implies again the birth of a son.

God promised trouble!

Passing Through “And it came to pass when the sun went down and it was dark that behold there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces” (15:17). At the end of the preparation of the animals, the sun was “going down” (15:12). Now the sun was set (15:17), making it dark. The darkness makes what is about to happen stand out and contrast even more.

The “oven” was a firepot (Keil; Leupold) with a “burning torch,” that is a flame coming out the top. The smoking fire pot and flaming torch represent the Lord (15:18), who appears later in a burning bush (Ex. 3:2-6), a consuming fire (Ex. 19:18), and a pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21).

Covenants are confirmed in different ways in different cultures. In America, in court with a hand on a Bible, we swear to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” In the office of a notary public, you are asked to confirm an oath by raising your name. In Muslim lands, an oath is confirmed by reference to the beard of the prophet. In Genesis 15, God passing through divided animals confirmed the covenant.

The passing through the divided animals ratified the covenant (Keil). “This was the formal ‘cutting’ of the Abrahamic Covenant. God now formalized His earlier promises (12:1-3, 7)” (Constable). God alone went through indicating that He alone contracts any obligation; thus, this is an unconditional covenant as far as humans are concerned (Heb. 6:13-15). “Note that the conditional promise of Gen. 12:1-3 becomes an unconditional covenant in Gen. 15:18” (*NKJV Study Bible*).

Immediately after the death of Alexander the Great, a dispute arose concerning who should succeed him. The horse guards and the rest of the cavalry under Perdiccas made up one party, while the infantry under Neleager made up the other. The dispute became so fierce that it seemed that only a war would settle the issue. Finally, a compromise was agreed upon and a covenant was made. A dog was cut in two, with the whole army passing between the two halves.

Provisions The provisions of the covenant are now given. “On the same day, the LORD made a covenant with Abram saying, ‘To your descendants, I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites’ (15:18-21). The covenant grants the land to the descendants of Abram and gives the boundaries geographically and in terms of the nations or tribes inheriting it at the time of Abram. The geographical boundaries are from the River of Egypt to the Great River. All agree that the Great River is the Euphrates. There are two interpretations of the river of Egypt. One is that it is the Nile (Keil; Leupold; Morris). The other is that it is the Wady El ‘Arish (Rhinacolura), a small brook in Gaza (Num. 34:5). Many argue that it must be the Nile because it is in contrast to the great river and, thus, it is not likely that a small stream is the other river (Leupold). Constable, however, says, “God later specified the Wadi El ‘Arish, ‘the geographical boundary between Canaan and Egypt (Charles Pfeiffer and Howard Vos, *Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands*, p. 88. as the exact border; Num. 34:5; Josh. 15:4, 47). That seems to be the river in view here too.... These borders appear to coincide with those of the Garden of Eden (cf. 2:10-14). Thus, the Garden of Eden may have occupied the same general area as the Promised Land.”

At the time of Abram, ten nations inhabited the territory. Some of these names only occur here in the Scripture (for example, Kenizzites and Kadmonites). Most of the others are well known and their general location can be identified. “The longest of the 27 lists of pre-Israelite nations that inhabited the Promised Land names 12 entities (1 Chron. 1:13-18). Sometimes, as few as two receive mention and most of these lists identify six (Mathews). ‘Canaanites’ is both a general name for all these tribes (a synecdoche) and, as used here, the name of one of them. These ‘Hittites’ lived near Hebron (23:10); they are probably not the same Hittites that lived in Anatolia (Asia Minor, modern western Turkey; cf. 10:15) (Finegan). Again, the first readers of Genesis would have been greatly encouraged to read this promise (cf. vv. 13-14). God repeated the promises of this covenant frequently in Genesis (17:1-22; 18:1-15; 22:15-18; 26:23-24; 35:9-15; cf. 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17)” (Constable).

For a brief period, the children of Israel occupied the territory during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 8:65) and again in the days of Jeroboam (2 Kings 14:25). Some say these possessions were not the final fulfillment but only a token of the permanent possession in the future (Morris). Constable, however, cites Edersheim as saying that the Euphrates River has never been Israel’s border.

Summary: God promised Abram protection, countless descendants, and the land, confirming the land's provision with a covenant. God's promises are as good as His Word. He is willing to make a covenant, to "put it in writing." He is willing to stake His life on it.

God promises to justify all who trust Him (Rom. 3:21-22). He made a covenant to confirm that (Lk. 22:20). Once people trust Christ, their justification is settled, sealed, and secure.

God promises protection, yet affliction. He promised Abram protection against the eastern kings and yet prophesied that Abram's descendants would suffer affliction. Both protection and suffering are in His plan. If you believe that God *always* protects you, you will be disappointed and maybe even disillusioned when He does not protect you. Suffering does not mean that God has broken His promises. It means He kept it! "God's people can rely on His promises even if they have to experience suffering and death before they experience them" (Constable).

God promises future glory. God promised the *physical* descendants of Abram (15:4) would inherit the land (15:7, 18-21). He confirmed that promise with a covenant (Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Covenant with Abraham and Its Historical Setting," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:507, July-September 1970: 241-56). They have never fully, permanently possessed the land. "This covenant has not yet been fulfilled as God promised it would be" (Constable). That provision still waits for a little fulfillment in the future. Believers today are also promised future glory (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17-18). They will not inherit the land. They are not the physical descendants of Abram! God has blessed all believers with all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:13).

One other observation. Abram experienced and enjoyed some of God's promises, such as justification and protection, during his lifetime and he lived in expectation of some of God's promises even after his death. Likewise, believers today experience some of God's promises and expect others in the future.

How good are God's promises? The answer is as good as a written contract. Or to say the same thing another way, as good as the character of God Himself (Heb. 6:13-18). Before God can break His promise, the sun, moon, and stars will fall from heaven (Jer. 31:31-36).

DOES GOD REALLY CARE?

The Scripture emphatically declares that God loves us, watches over us, and is deeply concerned about all that happens to us. Experience seems to put a lie to that declaration and we begin to doubt that God really cares. Did you ever pray and *not* get an answer? You begin to wonder if God knows who you are. You wonder if He hears your prayers or remembers your address! In the face of unanswered prayer, you ask, “Does God really care?” Have you ever been treated unjustly and thought, “Why doesn’t God do something?” When He doesn’t, you wonder if He sees what is going on in your situation. In the face of unjust treatment, you ask, “Does God really care?” Have things ever gotten so bad you felt like running away? Some of the mess you were in was your fault, but some was not. You felt alienated and alone. In the face of an unbearable situation, you ask, “Where is God? Does He really care about me?”

If you think of yourself as “low man on the totem pole” socially, educationally, or occupationally, the whole issue is compounded. You then ask, “Why *should* God care about me?” I’m not anyone special. Does God really care about you? Give an ear to an interesting story that illustrates the answer.

The Idea of Sarai: Have a Son by Hagar

Sarai’s Barrenness The next recorded episode in the life of Abram begins with two observations. First, “Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children” (16:1a). God had said He would make Abram a great nation (12:2). He promised Abram that his descendants would be like the dust of the earth (13:16) and as the stars of heaven (15:5). He even made a covenant granting the land to Abram’s descendants (15:18). He also specifically said, “One who will come from your own body will be your heir” (15:4), yet Sarai was childless. At this point, Abram was 85 years old (16:16) and Sarai was 75. They had been in the land for ten years (12:4; 16:3). They had the promise of God and plenty of time, but Sarai was barren.

“It was a serious matter for a man to be childless in the ancient world, for it left him without an heir. But it was even more calamitous for a woman: to have a great brood of children was the mark of success as a wife; to have none was an ignominious failure. So throughout the ancient East, polygamy was resorted to as a means of obviating childlessness” (Speiser, cited by Constable).

Sarai, no doubt, felt the pressure. All childless women who want children do. In Sarai’s case, it was worse. God Himself said Abram was to have an heir from his own body. What was she to do? She was barren. Humanly speaking, the divine promise could not be fulfilled through her. Perhaps she began to doubt God. Maybe she asked, “Did God forget His promise? Does He really care anymore?”

Second, “And she had an Egyptian handmaid whose name was Hagar” (16:1b). This Egyptian maid was probably acquired during their visit to Egypt (12:10-20).

Sari’s Bright Idea Putting these two factors together, Sarai came up with an idea. “So Sarai said to Abram, ‘See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her’” (16:2a). The idea that a wife gave her maid to her husband to bear children sounds strange and farfetched to us, but according to the custom of Abram’s day, the maid was the personal property of the wife. If a wife gave her maid to her

husband, the maid was considered a wife (16:3), but not on the same social status as the original wife. If the maid were to bear children, the children could be the heir if the father declared them so (Ross). This was law number 146 in the code of Hammurabi (Ross). This was a noble gesture on Sarai's part (Leupold). Nevertheless, she was walking by sight, not by faith.

One commentator imagined Sarai saying something like this, "My dear, I have discovered that the code of Hammurabi, the most civilized, progressive, and decent legislative code so far proposed for civilized man, is honored here in Canaan. Well, according to the code, it would be in order for you to marry Hagar, my slave, then when a son is born to her, I can legally make it my son. In this way, we can get around the problem of my inability to have children. I can have them by proxy, so to speak" (Phillips).

"And Abram heard the voice of his wife" (16:2b). Abram could have reasoned: 1) According to the custom of the day, there was nothing wrong with this idea (Keil). 2) God said my heir would come out of my body (15:4), so why not? Like Eve, Sarai blames someone else; like Adam, Abram obeyed his wife's voice.

Sari's Action With Abram's consent, Sarai implemented her idea. "Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar, her maid the Egyptian, and gave her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan" (16:3). The wording of this statement highlights the situation. The reader is reminded that Sarai is "Abram's wife," that Hagar is "her maid, the Egyptian," and that Abram is "her husband." Furthermore, they had waited ten years to have a child. It was a painful, stressful situation. Notice Hagar became Abram's wife, not just his concubine (Leupold).

"The account of Sarai's plan to have a son has not only been connected with the list of nations in chapter 15 but also appears to have been intentionally shaped with reference to the account of the Fall in Genesis 3. Each of the main verbs (*wayyiqtol* forms) and key expressions in 16:2-3 finds a parallel in Genesis 3" (Sailhamer, cited by Constable). "Abram and Sarai here repeated the failure of Adam and Eve, namely, doubting God's word. This episode ended in total disaster for everyone involved. Hagar lost her home, Sarai her maid, and Abram his wife's servant and his child by Hagar" (Constable).

"So he went into Hagar and she conceived" (16:4). Sarai's plan worked. Hagar got pregnant.

No sooner did Hagar conceive than problems began. "And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes" (16:4). The Hebrew text reads, "became little in her eyes" (Keil). Since Sarai had not conceived, Hagar considered herself superior and Sarai inferior. As one commentator says, "Now, at this point, the evil of polygamy begins to rear its ugly head. It is always bound to be the fruitful mother of envy, jealousy, and strife" (Leupold). Or, as another points out, "There are many instances of polygamist marriages in the Bible ... but none of a happy polygamist marriage" (Morris).

I once talked with a man from Africa whose uncle was a polygamist. His uncle had four wives. The husband bought a Mercedes for one of his wives, but when he did that, each of the wives had to have one. The irony is two of them could not drive, but jealousy among them demanded that they all have one. Polygamy doesn't work because of human nature.

Sarai's Bitterness "Then Sarai said to Abram, 'My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me' (16:5). The statement "My wrong be upon you" means "the wrong done to me is your fault" and the statement "The Lord judge between you and me" means "let the Lord decide the controversy between us" (Leupold). Sarai is talking like she wants justice, but she is bitter and she is practicing blame-shifting (Kidner). Sarai's logic is twisted and warped. It was

her idea! Now, she blames Abram. Her logic is like the note a young fellow received from his girlfriend. “Dear John, I hope you’re not still angry. I want to explain that I was really joking when I told you I didn’t mean what I said about reconsidering my decision not to change my mind. Please believe I really mean this. Love, Jean” (Phillips).

“So Abram said to Sarai, ‘Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please’ (16:6).

Abram’s response was to remind Sarai that Hagar was still her maid and, as her master, Sarai could do whatever she wanted to do. That does not mean that Abram is suggesting anything unfair or cruel. It does mean Abram was telling Sarai to deal with the situation.

“And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence” (16:6). Exactly what Sarai did is not stated, only that she dealt “harshly.” Perhaps to get Hagar to realize she was arrogant, Sarai made her perform more menial tasks or made her live with the servants. Or she may have simply dealt with Hagar with a harsh attitude (Leupold). Whatever Sarai did caused Hagar to flee, that is, run away.

Imagine how Hagar felt. She probably felt that she had been treated unjustly. Yet, to some degree, it was her fault. Leupold describes her as self-willed, independent, and refusing to accept correction. The whole situation was unbearable. No doubt, she asked, “Does God care?” After all, she was just a slave. Did God even know she existed? Did He know about her situation?

Hagar was guilty of pride and Sarai practiced blame-shifting and harsh treatment of someone under her. Perhaps Abram was too passive. What a mess! “Thus, instead of securing the fulfillment of their wishes, Sarai and Abram had reaped nothing but grief and vexation and apparently lost the maid through their self-concerted scheme” (Keil). Or, as someone else has suggested, Hagar failed as a maid, Sarai failed as a mistress, and Abram failed as a man (Phillips). Phillips summarizes the situation by saying, “Abram wanted a son, an heir, more than anything in the world. Sarai was frustrated beyond words at her inability to have him one. Added to that witches’ brew were an attractive slave girl, a legal loophole, some worldly reasoning and a carnal resolve. The result was an entanglement so ensnarled and twisted that 4000 years have not unraveled it.”

The Intervention of The Lord: The Lord Heard Hagar’s Plea

His Interrogation “Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness by the spring on the way to Shur” (16:7). “On the way to Shur” is on a road that runs from Hebron past Beersheba (Keil). Hagar was headed to Egypt! The Lord Himself met her. The expression “the Angel of the Lord” in this passage is a reference to God (16:13) and, thus, implies a plurality in the Godhead (Leupold). This is an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ (Morris). “This is the first of 48 references to “the angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament. Sometimes, as here, the Angel is deity, and in other places, he appears to be an angelic messenger from the Lord” (Constable).

“And He said, ‘Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from and where are you going?’ (16:8a). The Lord called the runaway by name. He knows everyone and is interested in each individual as a person. He also mentions the fact that she is Sarai’s maid. Her plight had not altered her position, her duty, or her responsibility (Leupold). Being God, the Angel of the Lord knew where Hagar had come from and where she was going. So, obviously, He is not asking these questions to gain information. He asked these questions for her benefit. He wanted her to face responsibility.

“She said, ‘I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress, Sarai’ (16:8b). Hagar acknowledged that Sarai was still her mistress. That relationship and her responsibility to it had not been canceled

(Leupold). She also admitted she was fleeing from where she was supposed to be. How often it is true that we run away and God runs after us!

His Instruction “The Angel of the LORD said to her, ‘Return to your mistress and submit yourself under her hand’ (16:9). Because Sarai was still Hagar’s “mistress,” the Lord instructed her to return and submit to her. “Under her hand” is an idiom for “under her authority” (Leupold). Hagar was not to live a life of self-will but a life of submission to authority. Besides, the fruit of her womb was the seed of Abram (Keil). Returning and submitting was the right thing to do because of her relationship with Sarai and Abram.

“Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, ‘I will multiply your descendants exceedingly so that they shall not be counted for multitude’ (16:10). God had promised Abram descendants “as the dust of the earth so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered” (13:16) and as the stars in the heavens (15:5). Hagar’s child is Abram’s. So, God promised that his children would produce an innumerable number of descendants, although not the fulfillment of God’s original promise to Abram. “For Abram’s sake,” this son would be blessed with countless posterity (Keil).

There is more. “And the Angel of the LORD said to her, ‘Behold, you are with child and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael because the LORD has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man; his hands shall be against every man and every man’s hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren’ (16:11-12). The Lord instructed Hagar to name her son Ishmael, which means “God hears.” He explains that she is to give the child that name because the Lord heard her affliction. Evidently, Hagar learned about the Lord from Abram and Sarai and when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she called on the Lord (Leupold).

The Lord indicated that Ishmael shall be a “wild man.” The Hebrew text says, “a wild ass of a man.” In other words, Ishmael and his line will be like untamable animals (Keil). Such an animal is described in Job 39:5-8. Consequently, he shall be against others and they shall be against him. He and his descendants shall be in an “incessant state of feud” (Keil), “continually at loggerheads with others” (Leupold); “their destiny will be filled with tension and strife” (Ross), “perpetually in conflict with others” (Morris).

Nevertheless, he will dwell “in the presence of all his brethren,” which literally translated means “to the east of” here, indicating maintaining “an independent standing before all the descendants of Abram” (Keil). Or it can be translated “against all his brethren,” meaning there will be hostility between him and other descendants of Abram (Leupold; Kidner; Morris).

Hagar’s Response: “Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, ‘You-are-the-God-who-sees;’ have I also here seen Him who sees me?” (16:13). She acknowledged that she had an encounter with God Himself calling Him the “God who sees.” “Some alter the Hebrew text slightly and interpret this to mean the ‘God of seeing,’ that is who allows Himself to be seen” (Keil). The Masoretic text, however, does not “yield such an interpretation” (Ross). The text reads “a God of seeing” and means “a God who sees.” Leupold argues that “see” may also mean “consider, have regard to, concern oneself about” (39:23; Ex. 4:31; 1 Kings 12:16; Isa. 5:12). Hagar acknowledged that God heard her plea, saw her plight, and cared about her person.

“The Lord named Ishmael (v. 11), whose name means “God hears,” and Hagar named the Lord (v. 13) “the One who sees.” These two names constitute a major revelation of God: He hears and He sees. “This may be the only instance in Scripture of a human being conferring a name on God” (Constable).

“The well was called Beer Lahal Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered” (16:14). In verse 7, the location was called “a spring of water.” Here, it is called the well. No doubt, the spring

was walled in so that it became a well (Leupold). Beer Lahal Roi means “a well of the Living One who sees me.” Kadesh is usually taken to be Kadesh Barnea, 40 miles due south and a bit to the west of Beersheba; the location of Bered is unknown (Leupold).

God did care about Hagar. Abram and Sarai were perhaps relieved to be rid of her, but the Lord was deeply concerned about her and He wanted her back where she was supposed to be. God cared about her and she was a mere slave, a runaway, guilty slave (Ps. 34:6). As Phillips points out, “It is remarkable, to say the least, that the first occurrence of the Jehovah Angel (probably none other than the Lord Jesus Himself in one of His pre-incarnate angelic appearances) should be not to Abram, but to Hagar; not to the heir of all the promises, but to an Egyptian fugitive; not to a man, but to a woman; not to a saint but to a sinner; not to a person of high rank, but to a slave; not to one seeking God, but to one fleeing toward Egypt, the friend of the friendless.”

The story concludes with, “So Hagar bore Abram a son and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram” (16:15-16). Hagar obeyed the command to return to Hebron. When she bore her son, Abram obeyed the command to name him Ishmael.

Summary: When Sarai didn’t patiently wait on the Lord, a conflict resulted, but when Hagar called on the Lord, He graciously heard and blessed her with a son who was to have innumerable descendants.

“Paul wrote that this story contains (not is) an allegory (Gal. 4:24). An ‘allegory’ today means a story without a factual basis. Paul did not deny the factuality of Genesis 16 but used this story as the basis for a comparison. ‘Illustration’ or ‘comparison’ would be better words to use. Hagar represents the Mosaic Covenant, and Ishmael is its fruit (slaves). Sarai is the Abrahamic Covenant, and Isaac is its fruit (free sons). Children of the flesh persecute children of the promise (Gal. 4:29)” (Constable).

The story begins with Sarai being barren. She took matters into her own hands, which didn’t solve a thing; it only caused complications and conflicts. The story ends with Sarai barren. The problem of Sarai’s barrenness is not solved. The relationship between Sarai and Hagar is not resolved. What a mess! “Resorting to fleshly means rather than waiting for God to provide what He has promised always creates problems. This story also shows that human failure does not frustrate God’s plans ultimately” (Constable).

As a result of Sarai’s idea, Ishmael was born and from him came the Arabs. Just as God predicted, Arabs have been in conflict with the Jews ever since. That was true throughout the Old Testament period. The Arabs constantly conquered the land during the Middle Ages and the Israeli-Arab hostilities over the land have been heating up for the past 100 years. What a mess! All because one woman didn’t trust the Lord and wait for Him to fulfill His promise His way.

In contrast to Sarai, Hagar called on the Lord, which is what Sarai should have done. When Isaac’s wife was barren, he prayed (25:21). Hannah did the same (1 Sam. 1:5, 10).

When we call on the Lord, He hears our plea, sees our plight, cares about our person, and intervenes by His power through His Word. God really does care about you!

Leonardo da Vinci’s “Mona Lisa” hangs in the Louvre in Paris. It is a masterpiece that people from all over the world come to see. The portrait is of the wife of a merchant from Florence, Italy. The extraordinary thing about her picture is that you can never escape her mysterious smile wherever you stand in the room. She is always looking intently at you. The guide will say, “She sees all and knows all.”

God loves you so much He can't keep His eyes off you. So, keep your eyes on the Lord. He will never take His eyes off of you.

WHEN FACED WITH AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION

When they first got married, they decided to wait for several years before having children. Then, when they decided they would have a child, they were disappointed. After years of trying and consulting medical experts, they agreed they faced an impossible situation. There was no way they would have a child of their own.

He had worked for a large company for several years. Then, suddenly, he was laid off because of a recession in the industry. At first, he thought getting another job would be a simple matter. He was qualified and experienced. He soon realized the situation was much worse than he had imagined. The downturn was industry-wide. After several fruitless and frustrating months of failure, it looked like finding another job in his field would be impossible before his savings account was depleted.

What do you do when you are faced with an impossible situation? Abram found himself there more than once. The most trying situation concerned a child. He and his wife tried everything, including a surrogate mother, but God said that would not do for what He had in mind. Then, years, more years, frustrating years passed. What do you do then? “Where is God?” you ask.

The Oracle of God: God Gave a Message to Abram

Introduction Genesis 16 concludes by giving the age of Abram as 86 (16:16). Chapter 17 begins thirteen years later. “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly’ (17:1-2).” When God appeared to Abram on this occasion, He identified Himself as El Shaddai, meaning, as it is translated here, “Almighty God.” The explanation of El Shaddai is debated. Some say it comes from “mountain,” while others contend it means that “God is sufficient.” Another view says it comes from the Hebrew word “breast.” Most trace it to the root for “to be strong” or “powerful.” Constable says, “God called Himself by a new name: El Shaddai (the Almighty God). This was appropriate in view of the thing God proceeded to reveal to Abram that He would do. It would require supernatural power.”

One commentator contends that Elohim is God as Creator and Preserver of the world, but El Shaddai belongs to the sphere of salvation, describing God as “possessing the power to realize His promises, even when the order of nature presented no prospect of their fulfillment, and the powers of nature were insufficient to secure it” (Keil). This name of God appears again in Genesis (28:3; 35:11; 48:3), thirty-one times in Job and forty-eight times altogether in the Old Testament (Ross).

The Almighty God commanded Abram to walk before Him and be blameless. Enoch and Noah walked *with* God (5:24; 6:9). Abram was to walk *before* God. Driver says the idea here is to live in such a way as to deserve His approval and favor (Driver, cited by Ross). The image is of a child in front of his father doing what pleases him. Don’t walk behind God to avoid His observation. Walk before Him to please Him.

The Hebrew word translated “blameless” means “complete, whole, without fault” (Ross). It implies that “no vital feature of a godly life is absent” (Leupold). Leupold says the first command demands a “God-conscious life” and the second “faithful observance of all duties.”

God promises to make a covenant with Abram and multiply his descendants exceedingly. God made the covenant earlier (see chapter 15). The Hebrew word rendered “make” here signifies “to set in operation the things promised in the covenant” (Keil), “to put into force or to make operative” (Leupold), which means, as this verse indicates, that a son will be born to Abram and Sarai.

The point of these opening verses is that God is powerful enough to fulfill His promise, that is, to enable Abram and Sarai to do the impossible, namely, have a son. Therefore, Abram should be conscious of the Lord and faithfully obey Him. The admonitions to Abram are not conditions of the covenant but simple commands (Morris). As Leupold says, these demands do not allow Abram to receive divine blessings, but they “warn him against doing those things whereby he renders himself unfit.”

When faced with an impossible situation, make sure you are God-conscious.

Concerning God Verses 1 and 2 form the introduction to God’s oracle to Abram. Verses 3 to 22 contain the oracle itself. It concerns God (17:3-8), Abram (17:9-14), and Sarai (17:16-15) and when Abram brings up Ishmael, God speaks to that issue (17:17-22, especially 17:20).

After God appeared to Abram and spoke to him, “Then Abram fell on his face and God talked with him saying” (17:3a). In response to God’s appearance and revelation, Abram fell face downward on the ground. Abram is humbled and he assumes the posture of honor and worship. His response has been called “humble adoration” (Leupold).

God continues speaking, reiterating what He (“as for Me”) has covenanted to do.

1. God will make Abram a father of many nations. “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you” (17:3b-6). In Haran, God promised to make Abram a great nation (12:2). Now He promises to make Abram a father of many nations and that kings shall come from him. Kidner says Genesis tells of these, including the Midianites (25:2), Ishmaelites (25:12), and kings of Edom and Israel (36:31). As an indication of this, God changed his name from Abram, which means “exalted father,” to Abraham, which means “father of a multitude.”

2. God will establish an everlasting covenant for Him to be the God of Abraham and his descendants. “And I shall establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you” (17:7). Morris reminds us, “God is, of course, the God of all men whether they acknowledge Him or not; but He undertook here to be in a special and unique way the God of Abram’s seed. This promise no doubt applied primarily to those who are His seed according to the flesh but also encompassed the spiritual seed of Abraham who is the father of all them that believe.”

3. God will give Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. “Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (17:8). God had promised the land to Abraham (13:15; 15:7, 18-21). Here He promises to give Abraham the land as an *everlasting* possession. This promise has never been fulfilled.

Concerning Abraham “And God said to Abraham: ‘As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you’” (17:9-11). The wording at the beginning of this subsection (“you shall keep My covenant” in verse 9 and “this is My covenant” in verse 10) sounds like

circumcision itself is the covenant, which it is not. It is only the sign of the covenant (see “sign of the covenant” in verse 11). The expression “this is the covenant” is a metonymy for “covenant sign” (Leupold). Every male is to be circumcised (17:10), beginning with Abraham himself (17:11).

After informing Abraham of the sign of the covenant, God gave details concerning it.

1. When. “He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised” (17:12a). Modern medical science has concluded that the eighth day of a child’s life is the first safe day to perform circumcision. Newborn infants are particularly susceptible to bleeding between the second and the fifth days of life because Vitamin K, an essential blood-clotting element, is not formed in the normal amount until the fifth to seventh days. Furthermore, Prothrombin, another element necessary for the normal clotting of blood, is only 30% of normal on the third day, but on the eighth day, it skyrockets to better than 110% of normal and then levels off to 100% (S. I. Mc Millen, *None of These Diseases*, pp. 17-21).

“Designating the eighth day after birth as the day of circumcision is one of the most amazing specifications in the Bible, from a medical standpoint. Why the eighth day? At birth, a baby has nutrients, antibodies, and other substances from his mother’s blood, including her blood-clotting factors, one of them being prothrombin. Prothrombin is dependent on vitamin K for its production. Vitamin K is produced by intestinal bacteria absent in a newborn baby. After birth, prothrombin decreases so that by the third day, it is only 30 percent of normal. Circumcision on the third day could result in a devastating hemorrhage. The intestinal bacteria finally start their task of manufacturing vitamin K, and the prothrombin subsequently begins to climb. On day eight, it actually overshoots to 110 percent of normal, leveling off to 100 percent on day nine and remaining there for the rest of a person’s healthy life. Therefore, the eighth day was the safest of all days for circumcision to be performed. On that one day, a person’s clotting factor is at 110 percent, the highest ever, and that is the day God prescribed for the surgical process of circumcision. Today, vitamin K (Aqua Mephyton) is routinely administered to newborns shortly after their delivery, and this eliminates the clotting problem. However, before the days of vitamin K injections, a 1953 pediatrics textbook recommended that the best day to circumcise a newborn was the eighth day of life” (L. Holt Jr. and R. McIntosh, *Holt Pediatrics*, pp. 125-26, cited by Constable).

2. Who. “Every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant” (17:12b). Circumcision includes those born and those bought. Including slaves indicates that the sign and, thus, the covenant was open to Gentiles (Kidner). “God wanted Abraham to circumcise his male servants as well as his children. The reason was that the Abrahamic Covenant would affect all who had a relationship with Abraham” (Constable).

3. Where. “He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant” (17:12c-13). Circumcision was to be “in the flesh” (17:13), a euphemism for the foreskin (17:11). The sign was not just something on the body like a piece of jewelry, nor any mark in the flesh like a tattoo, but the cutting away of the foreskin.

4. If not done. “And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant” (17:14). If a parent failed to have a child circumcised, it was the child’s responsibility to have it done when he was old enough to know. The text says if this is not done, “he has broken my covenant.” Some insist that the expression “cut off” does not denote simple rejection or banishment but death (Ex. 31:14; Keil; Leupold), although others say it can mean exile (Morris). “This expression

undoubtedly involves a wordplay on *cut*. He that is not himself cut (i.e., circumcised) will be cut off (i.e., ostracized). Here is the choice: be cut or be cut off” (Hamilton, cited by Constable).

Why was circumcision chosen as the sign of the covenant? Apparently, others practiced it before this (for details, see Constable), although not with covenant significance, nor on infants. The promise was for descendants to inherit the land; the sign, therefore, was sexual (Ross). Constable says, “Circumcision was a fitting symbol for several reasons. 1. It would have been a frequent reminder to every circumcised male of God’s promises involving seed. 2. It involved the cutting off of flesh. The circumcised male was one who repudiated “the flesh” (i.e., the simple physical and natural aspects of life) in favor of trust in Yahweh and His spiritual promises. 3. It resulted in greater cleanliness of life and freedom from the effects of sin (i.e., disease and death).”

The Old Testament also mentions a spiritual circumcision (Deut. 30:6; see also Rom. 2:28-29), which is the removal of the “body of the sins of the flesh” (Col. 2:12).

Many have argued that as circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, baptism is the sign of the New Covenant, but the Lord’s Supper is the sign of the New Covenant (1 Cor. 11:25; Ross). “God has not commanded circumcision of the flesh for Christians. Some Christians in the reformed traditions of Protestantism regard baptism as what God requires of us today in place of circumcision. They practice infant baptism, believing that this rite brings the infant into the ‘covenant community’ (i.e., the church) and under God’s care in a special sense. Some believe baptism saves the infant. Others believe it only makes the infant a recipient of special grace. The Bible is quite clear, however, that baptism is a rite that believers should practice after they trust Christ as their Savior as a testimony to their faith. There are parallels between circumcision and baptism, but God did not intend baptism to replace circumcision. God did command circumcision of the Israelites in the Mosaic Law, but He has not commanded it of Christians. We do not live under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 4:10-13; 6:14-15; 7:1-4; 10:4)” (Constable).

Have you kept God’s signs and symbols? When concerned about an impossible situation, perhaps you should think about God and His Word.

Concerning Sarai “Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai, your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name’ (17:15). Some commentators say there is no difference in meaning between Sarai and Sarah. Both mean “princess.” Sarah is simply a newer form of Sarai (Kidner). The modernization of her name marks a new beginning (Ross). There is, however, a difference. Sarai means “princess” (BDB) and Sarah means “noblewoman” (BDB). Constable says, “He changed the name ‘Sarai’ (my princess [perhaps a reference to her noble descent]) to ‘Sarah’ (royal princess [from whom kings would come, v. 16]). Abraham’s name emphasized the number of his seed. Sarah’s evidently stressed the royal nature of their line (vv. 6, 16, 20; cf. 12:2).”

“And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her” (17:16). Although God had promised Abraham descendants from His body (15:4), He had not specifically said a son would come from Sarai. She could have died and Abraham remarried. Now God says He will give Abraham a son by Sarah. He promises that nations and kings shall result. “Abram undoubtedly assumed that Ishmael would be the promised heir until God told him that Sarai would bear his heir herself (v. 16). That revelation is the most important feature of this chapter. God gave the name changes and circumcision to confirm the covenant promise of an heir and to strengthen Abram’s faith” (Constable). God promises to bless her by giving her a son. If she were to have a son, God would have to bless her because she was past child-bearing age. God promises to bless Sarah twice. His

second blessing is that nations and kings shall come from this son. She shall be the mother of a son and nations. The nations were Judah, Israel, and Edom (Morris).

Concerning Ishmael When God said Sarah would bear a son, “Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’” (17:17). Was Abraham’s laughter the laughter of doubt (Kidner) or the laughter of joy (Keil; Leupold; Morris)? Abraham’s laughter was not the laughter of doubt, uncertainly, or ridicule. For one thing, he fell on his face first, which was an act of adoration (17:3). For another, God does not rebuke him as he did Sarah when she laughed (18:13). Finally, Romans 4 seems to eliminate any doubt on Abraham’s part (Rom. 4:19-21). Abraham’s laughter was “joyous amazement” (Keil), “happy wonder” (Leupold), and “with joy and surprise” (Morris). Calvin captured the spirit of it when he said, “Not that he either ridiculed the promise of God, or treated it as a fable, or rejected it altogether; but as often happens when things occur which are least expected, partly lifted up with joy, partly carried out of himself with wonder, he burst into laughter” (Calvin, cited by Keil).

Charles Haddon Spurgeon told of riding home after a heavy day’s work feeling weary and downhearted. Suddenly, 2 Corinthians 12:9 came to his mind: “My grace is sufficient for you.” Spurgeon said that when he reached home, he looked it up in the original and, at last, it came to him in this way, “My grace is sufficient for YOU.” Then, he said, “I should think it is and I burst out laughing. I never understood what the holy laughter of Abraham was until then. It seemed to make unbelief so absurd.”

“And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’” (17:18). Abraham was not necessarily requesting that Ishmael be his heir in rebuttal to God’s just-stated promise. To “live before” means “to have his favor.” Abraham is simply asking God to bless Ishmael as well as the promised son.

“Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him’” (17:19). The Hebrew word rendered “No” is translated “most assuredly” by Leupold. He says that rendering this word as “No” is “false exegesis,” adding, “Since nothing in Abraham’s remark suggests a substitute suggestion, God has nothing to reject. God reaffirms that Sarah will have a son named Isaac. “Isaac” means “he laughs.” Abraham laughs for joy at the birth of his son (Morris). God also reaffirms that an everlasting covenant will be established with Isaac and his descendants.

“And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation” (17:20). God promises that Ishmael will not only be fruitful but have multiple descendants. The twelve princes and a great nation shall come from him. Genesis records the fulfillment of this promise in Genesis 25:12-16. Although blessed, Ishmael and his descendants are not recipients of the covenant for the land.

“But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year” (17:21). God again states that He will establish His covenant with Isaac, adding at this time next year.

“Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham” (17:22). Clarke says He ascended “so that he had the fullest proof that it was no human being, no earthly angel, or messenger, that talked with him.”

Constable says, “This fifth revelation from God advanced God’s promises in six particulars. 1. Part of God’s blessing would depend on Abraham’s maintaining the covenant of circumcision,

though the Abrahamic Covenant as a whole did not depend on this (vv. 1-2). 2. Many nations would come from Abraham (vv. 4-6). 3. The Abrahamic Covenant would be eternal (vv. 7-8). 4. God would be the God of Abraham's descendants in a special relationship (vv. 7-8). 5. Sarah herself would bear the promised heir (v. 16). 6. This is also the first time God identified the Promised Land as Canaan by name (v. 8)."

The Obedience of Abraham: Abraham Did All God Told Him

The Summary As soon as God departed, Abraham did what God had told him to do. Moses first gives a summary statement. Then, he delineates the details. "So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him" (17:23). Abraham circumcised "every male" the "very same day." That was an act of faith. All the men were incapacitated for at least several days, leaving Abraham with no protection except the Lord (Morris). Obedience requires faith.

The Details After the summary statement, an itemized list of the recipients of circumcision is given. "Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael, his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael: and all the men of his house, born in the house or brought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him" (17:24-27). Abraham immediately (see "that same day" in 17:26) and completely (see "all the men of his house" in 17:27) obeyed. All the men, young and old, were circumcised. Abraham did not hesitate or procrastinate. He did not say I'll do it on my day off, during my leisure time, or at some more convenient time.

If the covenant was to continue through Isaac, why was Ishmael circumcised? He did not inherit all the promises from Isaac, but he could receive the spiritual blessing in the covenant (Morris). God allows all who trust Him to receive spiritual blessings by His grace.

Phillips puts it like this, "Look there in the kitchen! There is a lad whose job it is to rake out the fire, remove the ashes, and lift the hot and sooty pans. He is grubby and sweaty, pushed and shoved around, the lowest of the low, a slave of slaves. Here comes the great master himself. He puts his hand on the boy's shoulder, and the little fellow is scared half out of his wits, 'Son,' says Abraham, 'never mind these pots and pans, I've something to tell you. I want to tell you about the living God and the exceeding greatness of His promise. I want to share with you the spiritual blessings that have come to me.'"

The Arab descendants of Ishmael still wait until their children are about thirteen years old before they have them circumcised (Leupold).

Summary: When the all-powerful God promised to do the seemingly impossible and gave Abraham a command, Abraham immediately and completely obeyed.

This episode in the life of Abraham adds more details to God's already-announced intention. For the first time, it is specifically stated that Abraham's promised son shall come from Sarah and his name shall be Isaac. The time of his birth is given and a sign of the covenant is established, but the issue revolves around God's oracle and Abraham's obedience. God introduced Himself by another name and gave Abram a new name.

God reaffirms His covenant. It is unilateral, that is, it is one-sided. When He made the covenant, Abraham was asleep (chapter 15). Here, Abraham hears the reaffirmation of it in a state

of silence and subjection. The covenant is unconditional and does not depend on the cooperation of Abraham or his descendants. Nor does any failure, flaw, or forgetfulness on their part nullify the covenant.

In the words of Boyce, “This means that the covenant comes from God alone, not from God and man getting together to decide what the conditions of their future relationship are to be. We do not bargain with God in the same way we might bargain over the sale of a house.”

From Abraham’s point of view, the covenant, at least at this time, was impossible. Sarah was past childbearing age. What was he to do? In that situation, God gave him a reaffirmation of His promise, a sign of it, and a timetable. Abraham was to look to the Lord and do the impossible, trust Him, obey Him, and wait for the fulfillment.

The covenant was not conditioned on Abraham’s obedience. In fact, it meant the exact opposite. Boice points out, “The cutting away of the flesh meant the renunciation of human effort which arises out of the flesh” (Boice).

In an impossible situation, trust God, obey what you know to do, and wait for God to work. Someone may object that Abraham could do that in this passage *because* God had made a specific promise in that case and He has not necessarily done so in ours. There is a sense in which that is true. Yet God has promised to provide for His own (Mt. 6:31). We need to walk *before* the Almighty God, who has the power to work in impossible situations.

God is powerful enough to do what He promises, even if it seems impossible. On the letterhead of the well-known Chinese evangelist Leland Wong are three verses from the Bible: “The sun stood still” (Josh. 10:13), “The iron did swim” (2 Kings 6:6), and “This God is our God” (Ps. 48:14). By putting those three sentences on his letterhead, Wong was affirming that God does the impossible.

In an impossible situation, make God your focus. Walk before Him. Trust Him and obey Him.

DEALING WITH DOUBT

Have you ever doubted the Lord? Most believers do not seriously entertain intellectual doubts such as: “Does God exist? Is the Bible the Word of God? Did God perform the miracles mentioned in the Scripture?” Many do, however, struggle at times with profound doubts. For example, have you ever doubted that God would forgive you? Maybe you feel that your sin was inexcusable and, therefore, different. Your abortion was the killing of an innocent infant who did nothing wrong. Or, your affair was after you were married to a faithful wife who didn’t deserve such unfaithfulness.

Take another illustration. Have you ever doubted that God could make you happy in your situation? You feel stuck in a job or trapped in a marriage. You don’t doubt that God can and does make others happy, but not you, at least not in the circumstances in which you live every day. You see no way these circumstances could possibly change. Some situations are simply beyond hope.

How does a *believer* deal with such personal doubts? How would a *counselor* deal with doubts? How would a *divine counselor* deal with those kinds of doubts? God Himself once temporarily took human form to deal with such a case. Here’s what happened.

The Appearance of the Lord

The Lord Appeared “Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day” (18:1). The story begins with the Lord appearing to Abraham. The fact that Abraham was not mentioned by name until verse 6 indicates that this account is closely associated with the previous one. A major issue in chapter 17 is that Sarah would give birth to a son (17:16, 19). That is the major issue in this episode (18:10-14). On this occasion, Abraham was sitting in his tent door by the terebinth trees of Mamre when the Lord appeared. This grove of trees was in Hebron (13:18). Abraham was resting during the hot part of the afternoon, which was customary (Leupold).

“So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground” (18:2). Apparently, Abraham’s eyes were cast toward the ground and as he sat in the door of his tent, he could have been dozing, meditating, or perhaps even praying. Three figures approached and stood, which was an ancient oriental custom. There would have been no thought of drawing near until invited to do so. Standing like this was the equivalent of our knocking (Leupold). Becoming aware of the presence of others, he looked up to see three men. Verse 1 says the Lord appeared; verse 2 says Abraham now saw three men. This is not a reference to the Trinity. The three were the Lord (18:1, 13) and two angels (18:22 and 19:1; Constable). At this point, Abraham thought them to be three men. Abraham’s response of running and bowing was either reverence because he recognized the Lord (Keil) or oriental custom (Leupold).

Abraham Invited them to a Meal “And said, ‘My LORD, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass by me or Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that, you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant.’ They said, ‘Do as you have said’” (18:3-5). Abraham invited them to stay for a meal. Washing the feet was a customary courtesy extended to guests necessitated by the dirt roads and open sandals. “A morsel

of bread” is a humble reference to a meal (Leupold). “Inasmuch as” could be rendered “because of this purpose” (Keil). Abraham at least knew that they had come specifically to see him and probably for a special purpose. That does not mean, however, that at this point, he knew that one of them was the Lord Himself. The expression “My Lord” was used to address humans (Morris). They accepted Abraham’s invitation.

Abraham Served them a Meal “So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Quickly, make three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.’ And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them and he stood by them under the tree as they ate” (18:6-8). The visitors arrived during the midday siesta. No meal was prepared. So, Abraham personally supervised the quickly prepared meal for his guests. Bread was never prepared until immediately before it was eaten. He had Sarah bake plenty. He chose a tender and good calf, his best, and had a servant prepare it. He set the bread, meat, butter, and milk before the men and “stood by them” as they ate. “To stand by “could be rendered “he served them” (Leupold).

Can heavenly beings in human form literally eat? Apparently. The Lord did after His resurrection (Lk. 24:43). In the resurrection, we shall be like angels (Mt. 22:30) and we shall eat (Rev. 22:2, 14). Augustine explained it by saying, “That he ate was rather a power than a necessity. The earth absorbs water by drinking it in. Different is the mode of absorption by the glowing rays of the sun. The one is because of need, the other by virtue of power.”

What is the point? Why did they eat, that is, why is it recorded that they ate? More than one commentator has suggested that eating in the Scriptures is associated with fellowship. Ross says eating here “meant to convey intimate fellowship.” Constable says that eating together was “a sign of intimate fellowship in Abraham’s culture.” Leupold says, “The Almighty sought to draw near to Abraham in intimate contact. The friendliest contact among the sons of men are often made over a friendly meal” (Leupold; see Rev. 3:20). Abraham was called the friend of God (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; Jas. 2:23). God was fellowshiping with His friend.

When God fellowshiped with friends, He reveals Himself and His secrets to them (18:14-15; cf. Jn. 15:15 with Gen. 18:17). Abraham knew these men had come on a special mission (18:5). He knew they were about to tell him something. He was in a hurry because he was eager to know what they had come to say (Morris). “In the presence of God, he at once puts himself in a position that told the Lord ‘I’m ready to hear whatever you have to say,’” is the observation of one commentator (Phillips).

God wants to have dinner with you. He desires your fellowship. He wants to reveal His Word and will to you, so talk to Him and obey Him (Jn. 15:14).

The Announcement of the Lord

The Lord made an Announcement “Then they said to him, ‘Where is Sarah your wife?’ (18:9a). This is a rhetorical question. In the first place, as Leupold points out, “Sarah was where wives were usually found when guests were outside the tent—in the tent.” In this case, they no doubt knew that because they called her by name. She had made the bread in the tent (18:6). The question is asked because the message they have come to deliver concerns Sarah. This question “recalls God’s earlier questions about Adam (3:9) and Abel (4:9)” (Constable).

“So he said, ‘Here in the tent.’ And He said, ‘I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son’ (18:9b-10:a). All three men were involved in the question (see “they” in 18:9a). Now, the Lord (“He”) alone announces that He will

return and Sarah will bear a son. In other words, this birth will take place through His intervention (Leupold; Ross). The expression “according to the time of life” probably means “at this time next year” (Keil; Leupold; Ross). The Lord had told Abraham this before (17:21). Those two appearances must not have been very far apart.

Sarah Laughed The plot thickens. “Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in years, and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore, Sarah laughed within herself, saying, ‘After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my LORD being old also?’” (18:10b-12). Abraham was 99 years old (17:24). Sarah was 90 (17:17). She knew she was past menopause and could not bear children. So, when she heard the visitor say she would have a child a year later, she laughed to herself, thinking we’re too old for sex! (Notice, sex is called pleasure.)

Sarah isn’t necessarily scoffing. She calls her husband “lord,” a term of respect (1 Pet. 3:6). She simply didn’t believe she could or would have a child. As far as she could conceive, there was an “insurmountable physical obstacle” (Leupold). Apparently, Abraham had not told her what God had told him earlier (17:16, 19), or he did not convince her when he did (Kidner). Sarah simply didn’t believe. She doubted. Abraham laughed at the same announcement (17:17), but his laughter was an outburst of joyful amazement; Sarah’s was a chuckle of doubt. She doubted because she focused on her circumstances and only viewed them from a human point of view.

Barnhouse points out, “God made water flow from a rock in the wilderness, yet the people doubted that He would furnish bread. Although He reigned manna from heaven, they questioned whether He would furnish flesh” (Barnhouse, cited by Boice).

The Lord Reveals the Doubt “And the LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, saying, I shall surely bear a child since I am old. Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time, I will return to you according to the time of life and Sarah shall have a son’” (18:13-14). Here, the divine counselor deals with doubt.

First, what He said amounts to a revelation of the nature of Sarah’s doubt. The Lord had been talking with Abraham. So, addressing him, the Lord said out loud what Sarah was thinking to herself and asked a rhetorical question, “Is there anything too hard for the Lord?” He not only reveals the doubt, He reveals the true nature of it. Sarah’s doubt was unbelief! She also doubted and disbelieved that the Lord could do what He promised. Needless to say, unbelief is a sin. John Stott has written, “Unbelief is not a misfortune to be pitied; it is a sin to be deplored. Its sinfulness lies in the fact that it contradicts the Word of the one true God and thus attributes falsehood to Him” (Stott, *The Epistles of John*, p. 182).

Second, what the Lord said reminded her of His nature. It revealed His omniscience. No mere human could have known what she was thinking. She had not said anything (18:12). Moreover, she was behind Him (18:10). So, He could not see the expression on her face yet. He instantaneously knew what she was thinking and said so out loud. If not before, certainly at this moment, Sarah realized her guest was God, the all-knowing God. Furthermore, the Lord’s brief speech revealed His omnipotence. The point of the rhetorical question, “Is there anything too hard for the Lord?” is “With God, all things are possible” (Mt. 19:27). This chapter is closely linked with the previous chapter (see 18:1), for God revealed Himself as El Shaddai, the Almighty God.

Finally, the Lord’s words contain a reiteration of what He had said before, adding that it would happen “at the appointed time.” God will be faithful to fulfill His promise.

Sarah looked at the circumstances and doubted. The Divine Counselor revealed the nature of her doubts as disbelief in the power and promise of God. He then reminded her that He was powerful and faithful. The Lord could have said, “Well, since you doubt Me, I’ll desert you. If you

don't think I can do what I said I'll do, I'll find someone else who will," but He didn't. He dealt with her doubt to get her to repent of disbelief and rest in His Word.

Did Sarah get it? It certainly was not her response recorded here. The text goes on to say, "But Sarah denied it saying, 'I did not laugh,' for she was afraid. And He said, 'No one but you laughed' (18:15). Out of fear, she denied her disbelief. She lied! She attributed a lie to the Lord and now she lies about herself. The Lord turns directly to her for the first time in the passage and rebukes her again, insisting that she did laugh and, with that, the episode ends!

Summary: When the Lord appeared to Abraham and announced to him and his wife that she would bear a son and she laughed, He revealed her unbelief and reminded her that with God, all things are possible. The way to deal with doubt is to remember God's promise and power.

Have you ever doubted the Lord? Have you ever doubted that He would forgive you? He promised He would (1 Jn. 1:7, 9). Is there any sin the blood of Christ cannot cleanse? Moses was a murderer, but he was forgiven. David was an adulterer, but he was forgiven. Peter denied Christ, but he was forgiven. Paul killed Steven, but he found the grace of God sufficient for cleansing. If you look at your sin, you will doubt; if you focus on God's Word, you won't.

Have you ever doubted the Lord would make you happy in any situation? He promised joy. His joy is so great He can make you take pleasure in the pain (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Did Sarah learn her lesson? Yes! (Heb. 11:11). Have you dealt with your doubt?

WHY DOESN'T GOD JUDGE AMERICA NOW?

America is a wicked place. Its people do not fear God. They sin without fear. Some want to eliminate God from the nation altogether. Prayer is no longer allowed in schools. The nativity scene cannot appear in front of the city hall. The Ten Commandments and the cross are being removed from buildings. That is only the beginning.

Life in the United States is no longer sacred. If you eliminate God, you don't believe man is made in His image and, therefore, life is cheap. So, Americans kill better than a million children a year through abortion. Motorists kill each other over a minor traffic infraction. Drive-by shootings are a common occurrence in several cities in America. Immorality is rampant. Teenage pregnancy is an epidemic that fosters and feeds abortion clinics. Pornography is a multi-billion dollar business. Homosexual marriage is now the law of the land. More could be said about violence, including wife-beating and child abuse, stealing by thieves from without and employees from within, lying, and the fact that the heart of most Americans is filled with covetousness. Materialism is the god of the American consumer.

Why doesn't God judge America? Someone has suggested that if He doesn't judge America, He needs to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah! Why then doesn't He judge America now? At least part of the answer is in Genesis 18:16-33.

The Intention of the Lord

Concerning Abraham After the meal with Abraham, "Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way" (18:16). Tradition says Abraham escorted them about three miles from Hebron to a place called Caphar Barucha (Jerome). From there, the Dead Sea and perhaps the sight of Sodom can be seen through a ravine (Keil; Leupold).

"And the LORD said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring Abraham what He has spoken to him' (18:17-19). In a monologue, no doubt spoken so Abraham could hear, the Lord contemplates telling Abraham what He is about to do (18:17). He reasons that He should tell Abraham because Abraham himself would become a great nation and all the nations of the earth are to be blessed through him (18:18). This is explained ("for" in 18:19) in more detail.

The expression "I have known him" has been explained in several different ways. Some say it means "I have chosen him" (Keil). Others argue, however, that it means "I have acknowledged him as an intimate friend" (Leupold) and "I have made him my friend" (Kidner; Ross; Morris). Both the Old and the New Testaments refer to Abraham as a friend of God (Isa. 41:8; 2 Chron. 20:7; Jas. 2:23). Jesus explained that His friends are those who obey Him and He reveals to them all things He has heard from the Father (Jn. 15:14-15).

God has chosen Abraham as an intimate friend, that is, He has revealed Himself and His will to him so that he will teach his children the way of the Lord. The way of the Lord is described as to do righteousness and justice. Ross defines righteousness as living in conformity with the will of God and justice as making the right decisions based on His will. Constable says that righteousness

and justice “may be a *hendiadys* meaning ‘genuine righteousness’ (cf. Mic. 3:1; 4:8).” As Abraham himself walks in the way of the Lord, he will be blessed (18:19), but the point of the monologue is that the Lord is going to tell Abraham what He is about to do because He has become intimate friends with him so that he will reveal the way of the Lord to his children (18:19) and ultimately the nations (18:18). Morris says God could trust Abraham “with the information He was to give and could know that he would use it faithfully as a vehicle for instruction to his descendants.” Abraham was a friend God could trust. God reveals the truth for us to experience ourselves and expose to others, beginning with our children.

These verses, then, teach several deeply significant truths, namely, that God reveals His truth to His friend and He reveals that truth to be shared with others. More specifically, God intends to judge sin and told Abraham about this incident of judgment so he could use it as an example to motivate others to walk in the way of the Lord, that is, in righteousness and justice. The destruction of Sodom was to be a “permanent memorial ... to keep the fate of the ungodly constantly before the mind of Israel” (Keil).

“In this section [vv. 1-21] We have an illustration of fellowship with God and some of its essential features. Fellowship is the crowning purpose of God’s revelation (1 John 1:3). There is nothing higher than this, for man’s life finds its complete fulfillment in union and communion with God. Notice the following elements: 1. *Sacred Intimacy*.... 2. *Genuine Humility*.... 3. *Special Revelation*.—Fellowship with God is always associated with the knowledge of His will. Servants do not know their master’s purposes, but friends and intimates do.... 4. *Unique Association*.—The man who is in fellowship with God does not merely know the Divine Will, but becomes associated with God in the carrying out of that will” (Thomas, cited by Constable).

Concerning Sodom What was God about to do that He decided to reveal to Abraham? The text continues. “And the LORD said, ‘Because the outcry against Sodom is great and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see what they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to me; and if not, I will know’ (18:20-21). The expression “the outcry against” means “the appeal for vengeance and punishment which ascends to heaven” (Keil; see 4:10). The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were very grave and cried out for “divine interference” (Leupold).

Boice vividly illustrates this truth by saying, “Listen! Can’t you hear those cries in your imagination? I think I hear the cry of a child—wretched, hurt, and terrified—being beaten by a drunken father. There is another cry. It is a cry of an old man being assaulted by a gang of tough street youths. I hear the painful cry as they beat him around the face and shoulders. There is the cry of the teenage girl being raped in an abandoned car and there ... the cry of a wife abandoned by her husband. I hear the cry of a broken man so trapped by our dehumanizing welfare system that he has given up. I hear the cry of sinful pleasures: raucous cries of the thousands of bars that scar the faces of our cities, the cries of prostitutes and those who patronize them, the soft cries of the drug addicts, the arrogant cries of those who have been able to defeat their enemies or ruin their competitors. But wait! These cries are only a fraction of those millions of cries arising every minute of every day from every street and every city and village of our land. Cries are all heard and felt by God. Must God’s judgment not fall on us, too, and quickly? How shall we escape? How shall we excuse ourselves when the only righteous God comes down to see if what we have done is as bad as the accusation that has reached Him?” Sin cries out to God for punishment and God hears the cry.

So the Lord says He will go down and see if the situation is as bad as the cry. The expression “Go down and see” refers to the descent from where they are standing to the cities in the valley

below (Leupold). Or it may be a figure of speech for a divine inspection as in Genesis 11:5. In either case, the description is “very anthropomorphic” (Ross), indicating that the Lord’s judgment will be based on “full and accurate information” (Ross; Leupold). The point is that if the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were as bad as the cry indicated, they would be judged (15:16).

God will judge sin, but God will judge justly. Was He not just in His dealings with Hagar (chapter 17) and Sarah (chapter 18)? Has He not been gracious to Sodom thus far? They had witnessed the power of God when they saw the defeat of the kings of the east who had enslaved them (chapter 14). They had heard, no doubt, the testimony of Melchizedek and had seen how Abraham had honored God. Lot was a witness to Sodom, at least to some degree (2 Pet. 2:7-8). God had been just in His dealings with Sodom, but Sodom had refused to hear. So, His judgment on them would be just.

The Intercession of Abraham

The Initial Plea “Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham stood still before the LORD. Abraham came near and said, ‘Would you also destroy the righteousness with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city. Would you also destroy the place and not spare it for fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing as this to slay the righteous with the wicked so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from you! Should not the judge of all the earth do right?’ So the LORD said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city then I will spare all the place for their sake” (18:22-26). The two men, that is, the two angels (19:1), departed for Sodom, leaving Abraham and the Lord alone. Then, Abraham approaches the Lord and begins to intercede for Sodom. Abraham was undoubtedly concerned for Lot, his nephew, and Lot’s family. He also knew others in Sodom. He had rescued them from the kings of the east several years before this time (chapter 14), but his primary concern was the safety of the righteous, which he assumed included Lot.

Abraham recognizes that God is the judge of all the earth (18:25) and, therefore, has the right to judge. He also knows God is righteous (18:19) and argues that it would not be right to destroy the righteous with the wicked (18:23). He is sure God would not do something as unrighteous as that. So, he asks if God would spare Sodom if fifty righteous people were in it. God agrees to do that (18:26).

Who are the righteous? It has already been stated in Genesis that righteousness is by faith (Gen. 15:6). God is also concerned that those who trust Him “do righteousness and justice” (18:19). Ross defines the righteous as “those who are joined to the Lord by faith and follow His standards in obedience” and the wicked as “those who have no part with the covenant and no interest in obeying the Lord.” Keil defines the righteous as those “who, through the fear of God and conscientiousness, have kept themselves free from the prevailing sin and iniquity of those cities.”

The concession by the Lord indicates that the unrighteous are sometimes spared for the sake of the righteous. That does not mean that the unrighteous would escape judgment permanently. It does mean that they can temporarily avoid the judgment of God because of the righteous. Leupold says, “The ungodly are frequently spared for the sake of the righteous, though, of course, there is a limit to what they may thus achieve for others.”

These verses contain several deeply significant truths, namely, that God will not judge the righteous with the wicked or the wicked until the righteous are removed. Meyer wrote, “Ungodly men little realize how much they owe to the presence of the children of God in their midst” (Meyer, cited by Boice).

The Persistent Prayer “Then Abraham answered and said, ‘Indeed, now I, who am but dust and ashes, have taken it upon myself to speak to the LORD. Suppose there were five less than fifty righteous. Would you destroy all the city for the lack of five? So He said, ‘If I find there are forty-five I will not destroy it.’ He spoke to Him yet again and said, ‘Suppose there should be forty found there?’ So He said, ‘I will not do it for the sake of forty.’ Then he said, ‘Let not the LORD be angry and I will speak. Suppose thirty should be found there?’ So He said, ‘I will not do it if I find thirty there.’ And he said, ‘Indeed I have taken it upon myself to speak to the LORD. Suppose twenty should be found there?’ So He said, ‘I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty.’ Then he said, ‘Let not the LORD be angry, I will speak but once more. Suppose ten should be found there?’ And He said, ‘I will not destroy it for the sake of ten.’ So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place” (18:27-33). Having established the principle that the Lord would not destroy the wicked city of Sodom if fifty righteous people were in it, Abraham now negotiates the number. He speaks with a humble attitude, saying he is but “dust and ashes” (18:27). “I have taken it upon myself to speak” (18:27, 31). “Let not the Lord be angry” (18:30, 32) and “I will speak but once more” (18:32). The intercessor must always remember who God is and who he is. God is the sovereign judge of the earth (18:25) and we are but dust and ashes (18:27), that is nothing.

At the same time, Abraham was persistent, not presumptuous. He repeatedly asked God to reduce the number from fifty to 45 to 40 to 30 to 20 to 10. One commentator says, “It would be easy to say that this prayer comes near to haggling, but the right word is ‘exploring’ (Kidner). Perhaps the word that best describes what Abraham did is “persistence.” Constable says, “Abraham’s shameless, bold persistence with God illustrates what Jesus had in mind when he taught the importance of these qualities in prayer (e.g., Luke 11:5-10; 18:1-8). Threefold repetition is common in Scripture, but Abraham’s doubling of it gives his request even more solemnity and weight.”

The kind of bargaining that Abraham did with God in prayer is practiced in shops throughout the Middle East. The merchant says the price of an item is, say, \$10 and the buyer says that’s entirely too high. I can get it down the street for \$5. At first, the merchant acts indignant. Then he comes down to \$9. The buyer acts insulted and comes up to \$6 and in such a fashion, they work their way toward the middle from where they began.

This story taught George Mueller to use arguments in pleading his case before God. He would remind the Lord that orphaned boys and girls entrusted to his care were not his orphans but God’s. Had He not declared Himself to be the father of the fatherless? Was it not God’s work, etc., etc., etc.?

This interchange demonstrates Abraham’s friendship with God. On the other hand, this exchange also illustrates that God does not want to judge (Jn. 3:18). So any intercession “within the framework of His holiness and justice” (Morris) can easily influence Him. He came to get all the facts (18:21). Now Abraham’s persistence in prayer is a factor.

One other observation. It has been suggested that Abraham thought he knew of at least ten righteous people in Sodom: Lot, his wife, their four daughters, two sons, and two sons-in-law (19:8, 12, 14). Maybe he began with fifty, assuming if there were ten righteous in one city, there would be fifty in five (though this passage only mentions Sodom, actually five cities were in the plain; 14:2). Whatever Abraham’s rationale, he stopped at ten, knowing the judge of all the earth would do right (18:25). The Lord would have done it for only one righteous person (Jer. 5:1)! The Lord went His way and Abraham returned “to his place” (18:23), that is, the Grove of Mamre near Hebron.

Summary: When God told Abraham that He was about to judge the wicked so that Abraham would teach God's ways to others, Abraham interceded with Him to judge righteously and, therefore, not destroy the righteous but the wicked. God will judge the wicked, but the judge of all the earth will judge justly.

Constable says, "This chapter illustrates a progression in Abraham's relationship with God that is normal for those who have a relationship with Him. 1. God revealed Himself to Abraham (v. 1). 2. Abraham welcomed God's revelation (vv. 2-3). 3. Fellowship resulted (vv. 4-8). They ate together. 4. This fellowship led to further revelation and a greater understanding of God's will (vv. 9-22). 5. Having learned of God's purpose to judge the sinners, Abraham's response was to intercede for those under God's judgment (vv. 23-33)."

The later part of this chapter indicates that God does not overlook sin indefinitely. He ultimately will judge sin, but God is just in His judgment, so He will remove the righteous before He judges.

Why, then, doesn't God judge America now? No doubt, one answer to that is that He is waiting for sinners to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9). The answer from Genesis 18 is that believers are still here. Frankly, the best thing to do for America is to win people to Christ and teach them the Word of God.

America's spiritual and moral situation is so bad that scores, hundreds, and perhaps thousands of organizations have been formed to try and stem the tide of unrighteousness in this land. Who knows how many organizations there are to fight abortion, abuse, alcoholism, addiction, and AIDS, and that's just the first letter of the alphabet. One frustrated believer told me, "There are so many good causes out there and so much pressure to support each one that you don't know what to do." I do not doubt that all of these organizations are needed and helpful, but if we manage to wipe out all of those evil practices, America would still be ripe for judgment unless people in this country come to faith in Jesus Christ and walk in the truth of the Word of God. Therefore, the greatest thing that a believer can do for America today is win people to Jesus Christ and teach them the Word of God.

THE DANGER OF LIVING IN THE WORLD

In case you have not noticed lately, living in the world is dangerous. On any given day in the modern world, you could die from a plane crash, an automobile accident, or a stray bullet. Eating may be hazardous to your health. Sleeping under an electric blanket or a high-powered electrical line can shorten your life. Even breathing air or drinking water may not be good for you. As there are the physical dangers of living in the physical world, there are also spiritual dangers. James warns us not to be spotted by the world (Jas. 1:27). John exhorts us not to love the world (1 Jn. 2:15-16), and Paul pleads with us not to be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2).

What is the “world” from a spiritual point of view? What is the danger of living in the world, that is, of worldliness? If you are worldly, do you lose your eternal life? If not, what is the danger? An Old Testament story graphically illustrates the danger of worldliness. Consider Lot and his family.

The Depravity of Sodom

Angels Visit Lot In Genesis 18, three men visited Abraham (18:2). One was the Lord (18:1, 13). After a meal together, the two men journeyed toward Sodom (18:22). Chapter 19 opens with their arrival in Sodom. “Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the Gate of Sodom” (19:1a). For the first time, it becomes apparent that the two men with the Lord in chapter 18 were angels appearing as men. From Hebron to Sodom was at least 35 miles (Leupold).

When the two angels arrived in Sodom, they met Lot *in* the gate. Lot first pitched his tent as far as Sodom (13:12). Then, he dwelt in Sodom (14:12) and now he sits *in* the gate of Sodom (19:1). The city gate of an ancient city was “an arch entrance with deep recesses and seats on either side” (Keil). The residents of the town assembled there for social interaction, business transactions, and even legal actions (Gen. 34:20; Deut. 21:19; 22:15; etc.). The phrase “sitting in the gate” can also mean that Lot was a magistrate (Kidner; Morris).

Lot was a righteous man. Sodom vexed him (2 Pet. 2:8), yet he edged closer and closer to sinful Sodom until he was at last living and doing business there and, perhaps, was even a leader there. Living in Sodom and being a leader in Sodom is not in and of itself wrong. Joseph did that in Egypt and Daniel did that in Babylon. Lot in Sodom is not a problem. Sodom in Lot is.

When Lot met the two angels, he insisted that they spend the night with him. “When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. And he said, ‘Here now, my lords, please turn in to your servant’s house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way.’ And they said, ‘No, but we will spend the night in the open square.’ But he insisted strongly; so they turned in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate” (19:1b-3). Lot’s address, “My lords,” his bow, and his calling himself their servants were marks of oriental graciousness. At this point, he probably did not know they were angels. His invitation was either simple hospitality or, perhaps, he was concerned for those travelers because he knew what kind of treatment they would receive in Sodom (19:8). At first, the stranger said they would spend the night in the square. The square was a broad, open space within the gate. It served as a marketplace; travelers frequently

spent the night there wrapped in robes. The climate permitted that without discomfort (Leupold). When Lot, however, insisted that they come to his house, they accepted his hospitality.

Lot was a righteous man. His hospitality and concern for these strangers are indications of that. He lived in Sodom and, as will become evident, some of Sodom lived within him. He was worldly, which is by definition, leaving God out of your life; it is that which is opposite of God and/or is opposed to God (Jas. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-16).

Morris says, “What a perfect picture of a modern-day carnal Christian! He thinks he has the best of both worlds—the eternal benefit of knowing the Lord as Savior, all the temporal benefits that result from worldly influence and possessions, and the acceptance by and fellowship with men of the world. Their gross wickedness may vex his soul a bit, and he may not wish to enter into quite *all* of their activities, but, in general, he gets along with them just fine and is quite pleased with himself that he does. However, a day of reckoning will come” (Morris, italics his).

The Men of Sodom Demand the Visitors After dinner and before bedtime, the visitors received a visit. “Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot and said to him, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we know them carnally’ (19:4-5). When the men of the city said they wanted to “know” these visitors, they were not just talking about getting acquainted (Kidner). “Know” in the Bible is used for sexual intercourse, as it is here (19:8). The men of the city clearly had homosexual rape in mind. Lot calls what they intended to do wicked (19:7). Jude leaves no doubt that Sodom and Gomorrah were given to homosexuality (Jude 7). The Mosaic Law regards all homosexual behavior as a capital offense (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; see also Rom. 1:26-27).

Homosexuality had permeated Sodom. The text indicates just how widespread it was. All the men from every quarter of the city, young and old, were at Lot’s house to participate. God said the sin of the city was very grievous (18:20). The angels had come to investigate (18:21). It was indeed worthy of judgment. All practiced it and they were in the street demanding a homosexual orgy. God was just in judging the whole city.

Lot attempted to protect his visitors. “So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, and said, ‘Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! See now how I have two daughters who have not known a man; please let me bring them out to you and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof’ (19:6-8). Lot said these men came to his house for protection, so he offered his virgin daughters to homosexual men to “do to them as you wish” to guard his guests! And he had the nerve to call what they wanted to do to the men wicked! He “committed the sin of seeking to avert sin by sin” (Keil).

Luther suggested that Lot was shrewd. He knew these homosexual men would refuse the daughters, but as Keil points out, “Even if he expected that his daughters would suffer no harm, as they were betrothed to Sodomites (19:14), the offer was a grievous violation of his parental duty.” His offer is inexcusable. Constable comments, “Compromise distorts values. Lot considered his duty to his guests greater than his duty to his children.”

The men of Sodom were unimpressed. “And they said, ‘Stand back!’ Then they said, ‘This one came in to sojourn, and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them.’ So they pressed hard against the man Lot and came near to break down the door” (19:9). The Sodomites accused Lot of repeatedly acting as a judge (sound familiar?). Lot probably reproved them for their perversion (2 Pet. 2:7-8) and they had probably put up with it because they

had been delivered from the eastern kings for Lot's sake (14:13ff.). Now, they threaten Lot with physical harm and maybe death.

The would-be rescuer needs rescuing! "But the men reached out their hands to pull Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary trying to find the door" (19:10-11). Those Lot attempted to rescue ended up rescuing him. The Hebrew word rendered "blindness" only occurs here and in 2 Kings 6:18. It might refer to a "dazzled state" (Kidner) or "a blindness of confusion" (Morris) and not sightlessness. The world is wicked.

The Angels told Lot to Leave "Then the men said to Lot, 'Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city—take them out of this place! For we will destroy this place, because of the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it'" (19:12-13). Perhaps, for the first time, the men indicated they were messengers from the Lord. The message is simple, "You and your family need to get out of town." Those associated with Lot, for example, by marrying one of his daughters, are included. The explanation is equally plain—the cry against the city, meaning the cry for judgment (4:10; 18:21), has come before the Lord, and He has sent these men (angels) to destroy it. God is going to judge the wicked and wretched world.

"So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law who had married his daughters and said, 'Get up, get out of this place for the LORD will destroy the city!' To his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking" (19:14). The men of Sodom had either departed or were standing there blinded, allowing Lot to tell his sons-in-law to leave town. The sons-in-law, however, did not take him seriously. They thought it was a joke. Leupold comments, "There are types of all such as have had all sense of justice and judgment erased by growing callous in sin. The nearer the judgment comes, the less men will believe it is pending."

This first portion of Genesis 19 illustrates that the world is a system that leaves God out. It is wicked and wretched. Believers who leave God out to one degree or another are acting like the world. They are worldly.

The Deliverance of Lot

Lot Lingered "When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, 'Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city.' And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city" (19:15-16). The next day when the angels "urged Lot to hurry," he lingered! In chapter 17, when God told Abraham to circumcise every male child (17:10), he immediately completely complied (17:23), but Lot lingered.

Was Lot clinging to his material possessions? Were his wife and daughters reluctant to leave their house and home? Were they all having a difficult time departing because of the benefits of the big city? Was the issue their friends? Whatever the reason for the hesitation, the angels took the situation "in hand" and dragged Lot and his willing, though reluctant, family out of the city. The Lord was indeed merciful.

Lot Negotiated "So it came to pass when they had brought them outside that he said, 'Escape for your life. Do not look behind nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains lest you be destroyed.' Then Lot said to them, 'Please know, my lords! Indeed, now your servant has found favor in your sight and you have increased your mercy, which you have shown me by saving my

life, but I cannot escape to the mountains lest some evil overtake me and I die. See now the city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live” (19:17-20). Lot and his family were given four specific instructions: 1) Flee. 2) Don’t look back. 3) Don’t stay in the plain. 4) Go to the mountains. These instructions were given so that they would not be hurt or killed in the coming judgment of Sodom. Looking back would slow their departure and could cause them to pause and, thus, be hurt. Staying in the plain would definitely put them in danger.

So what does Lot do? He negotiates! He acknowledges the mercy shown to him but expresses fear that if he goes to the mountains, he will die. So, he requests that he be able to go to Zoar, a small city nearby whose name means “a little one.” God has delivered him from the eastern kings (chapter 14), an angry mob (chapter 19), and an about-to-be-destroyed city (chapter 19). Could he not protect him in the mountains? Abraham interceded for others (18:23-33). Lot negotiated for himself.

“And he said to him, ‘See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar’ (19:21-22). One of the angels (19:15), speaking with the authority given to him by God, grants the request to go to Zoar and exempts Zoar from the destruction about to come to Sodom and Gomorrah. He told Lot to flee lest he be consumed (19:15), but he could do nothing until Lot was safe. The Lord was indeed merciful.

The Lord Destroyed the Cities As soon as Lot was safe, the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. “The Sun had risen upon the earth when Lot entered Zoar. Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah from the LORD out of the heavens. So, He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground” (19:23-25). Actually, there were five cities in the area (14:2, 9) and four were destroyed (all the plain in 19:25; see also Deut. 29:23; Hosea 11:8). Zoar was spared because of Lot (19:21-23). The wording “the Lord rained brimstone and fire ... from the Lord” (19:24) is unusual. The phrase “from the Lord” seems unnecessary. One interpretation is that the construction is simply an emphatic expression (Calvin; Keil). Another explanation is that this verse indicates two members of the Godhead. Luther said, “This expression indicates two persons in the Godhead” and the counsel of Sirmium worded the statement, “God, the Son, brought down the rain from God, the Father” (Luther, cited by Leupold). If the Trinity is here, it is veiled, as it is elsewhere in the Old Testament.

Many have explained the brimstone and fire as natural phenomena, including earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and lightning (see Morris). Josephus said God sent a thunderbolt to set the city on fire (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1:11:4). While God could have used natural means, it is also possible that the account is supernatural. “The heaven’s rain cannot be explained solely as a natural phenomenon, such as an earthquake; it was exceptional, never again repeated, providing the parade illustration of the fiery eschatological judgment against the wicked (e.g., 2 Pet. 2:6-9). The twin calamities of Noah and Lot illustrate Jesus’ teaching on the suddenness of the coming of the Son of Man (Luke 17:26-30)” (Mathews, cited by Constable).

Whatever means were used, the Lord “overthrew” (19:25) the cities of the plain. Only that which stands upright can be thrown over to the ground. This verb, then, is used in the Scripture to depict the judgment of God on the proud (Deut. 29:23; Amos 4:11; Jer. 49:18; 50:40; Isa. 13:19; Leupold). In this case, God destroyed the cities, the people and “what grew on the ground” (19:25). The sight of these cities was filled with asphalt pits (14:10); the asphalt-saturated soil burned (Keil).

Many archeologists believe that the location of these four destroyed cities is now covered by the waters of the south end of the Dead Sea (Morris). The Dead Sea is 40 miles long and 10 miles wide. It is divided into two parts. The northern section is deep, very deep, and in some places, the depth is 1400 feet. The southern segment, which is only about 10 miles long, is about 10-20 feet deep. Archeologists theorize that these four cities were in this southern segment. As the Dead Sea evaporated because of the intense heat, the silting-up of the bed of the sea caused the water level to rise, creating the southern section and covering the site of the destroyed city. It should also be noted that archeologists have recently discovered five large cities on the eastern side of the southern portion of the Dead Sea and some are suggesting that these are the destroyed cities (Morris). Brimstone is associated with sulfa, though it is used for any inflammable substance. To this day, the Dead Sea smells of sulfur.

“All that Lot had gained by living in Sodom burned up like wood, hay, and stubble (1 Cor. 3:10-15). The Apostle Peter cited Lot as an example of the Lord’s deliverance of the godly from trials that He uses to punish the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:6-10). John called believers not to love the world or the things in the world because they will pass away (1 John 2:15-17)” (Constable).

Lot’s Wife Perished As Lot and his family fled, Lot lost his wife. **“But his wife looked back behind him and she became a pillar of salt” (19:26).** Lot’s wife lingered behind her husband and children as they fled the city. “Looked back behind him” can be translated “looked back from behind him” (Keil). The Hebrew word rendered “looked” means to “gaze intently” (Ross) or “looking intently” (Morris). Thus, as she lingered behind and longingly looked at Sodom, Lot’s wife lost her life.

The text says Lot’s wife became a pillar of salt. It does not say how it happened. Was it natural or supernatural? Was it instantaneous or gradual? The text does not say. Perhaps she was killed “by the poisonous flames and the fiery destruction raining down from heaven” and “once overcome, there she lay, apparently not reached by the fire, but salt-encrusted by the vapors of the salt sea. Lot and his daughters could not have seen this at the time, for to look back would have involved them in the same destruction” (Leupold).

“We are not to suppose that she was actually turned into one, but having been killed by the fiery and sulfurous vapor with which the air was filled and afterward encrusted with salt, she resembled an actual statue of salt, just as even now, from the saline exhalation of the Dead Sea, objects near it are quickly covered with a crust of salt” (Keil and Delitzsch).

“The dashing spray of the sulfurous salt rain seems to have suffocated her and then encrusted her whole body. She may have burned to a cinder in the furious conflagration. She is a memorable example of the indignation and wrath that overtakes the halting and the backsliding” (Barnes). “Aventinus (h) reports that in Bavaria, in 1348, more than fifty peasants, with the cows they had milked, at the time of an earthquake, were struck with a pestilential air, and stiffened into statues of salt, and which he himself saw” (Gill).

When Lot and his daughters returned, they found “a pillar of salt.” There are many pillars of salt in this region, even today. Her body may have been petrified from the fallout of the fire and brimstone like the inhabitants of Pompeii who were buried by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius (Morris)

What made Lot’s wife look back? Curiosity? Pity for her friends? Sorrow for her loss? Jesus said, “Remember Lot’s wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life will preserve it” (Lk. 17:32-33). Lot’s wife may have known the Lord, but her “life” was in Sodom. “Her heart was in the city” (Leupold). She looked longingly at her house and home, at the comfort and convenience of Sodom.

In the meantime, the text continues, “And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace. And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt” (19:27-29). The day before the destruction of Sodom, Abraham stood with the Lord overlooking Sodom, interceding for the city for Lot’s sake (18:16, 22-23). Early the next day, the day of the destruction, Abraham returned to where he had interceded before the Lord and witnessed the destruction of the four cities of the plain. In a summary statement that closes this subsection, Moses reminds the readers that the Lord spared Lot because “He remembered” Abraham (see 18:1).

Lot and his wife were worldly. They lived in Sodom. Lot’s wife looked longingly to return to the city about to be destroyed and, as a result, lost her life. The danger of living in the world, that is, being a worldly believer, is the loss of physical life (1 Cor. 11:30). Believers who live in the world will not lose their eternal life (Jn. 5:24), but they are in danger of losing their physical life. God will not judge believers with the world (1 Cor. 11:32), but he will judge believers (2 Cor. 5:10). Remember Lot’s wife.

The Degeneration of Lot

The Setting The story is not finished. Moses adds an epilogue. “Then Lot went up out of Zoar and dwelt in the mountains and his daughters with him for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar. And he and his two daughters dwelt in a cave” (19:30). The angels had told him to escape to the mountains (19:17) and he pleaded for permission to flee to Zoar (19:18-20). Even though his request was granted (19:21-22), Lot ended up in the mountains because of fear. He feared that God would destroy Zoar like Sodom (Keil; Leupold), even though he was told that Zoar would be spared. He had fear instead of faith. He ended up in a cave instead of the city.

The Scheme Once alone with his daughters in the cave, they schemed to get pregnant by their father! “Now the firstborn said to the younger, ‘Our father is old, and there is no man on the earth to come into us as is the custom of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father.’ So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. It happened on the next day that the firstborn said to the younger, ‘Indeed I lay with my father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father.’ Then they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose” (19:31-35). Like almost all young girls, Lot’s daughters wanted to get married and have children, but alone in the cave with their father, they concluded that was not possible. The oldest daughter said, “There is no man on the earth to come into us as the custom of all the earth” (19:31), that is, there is no man for them to marry (Keil). They knew there were men still alive. They had just left Zoar (19:23, 30). They didn’t think any man would marry them, or maybe they didn’t want to marry any of them. There were no eligible men “on the earth!” Many young unmarried girls feel that way.

Of course, God, who had provided for them thus far, could have supplied husbands, but they, like their father Lot, were not strong believers. So, like Sarah, they hatched a scheme. They would have children with their father! That is revolting. Apparently, their scheme was not born of sexual

lust. They were still virgins (19:8). Nor was there at this time a prohibition against incest and a close marriage had occurred in their own family. Abraham married his half-sister. With their brothers, sisters, and mother dead, neither they nor their father had any descendants who would provide for them when they were old. Nevertheless, what they did was wrong and they knew it. They had to get their father drunk to do it. They had been influenced by the Sodomites “who had cast all sense of decency aside” (Leupold).

In a sense, Lot was innocent. “He did not know” what happened (19:33, 35). However, he had chosen to live in Sodom, where his daughters were at least influenced to some degree. The one who offered his daughter to the Sodomites for an illicit sexual relationship now becomes the one to have an illicit relationship with them.

The Significance The result was children and a whole lot more. “Thus, both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. And the younger, she also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the people of Ammon to this day” (19:36-38). Both daughters had sons who became the ancestors of nations. The Hebrew word “Moab” means “from the father.” “Ben-ammi” means “son of my people.” These sons were the progenitors of the Moabites and the Amorites.

Thus, the epilogue ends. Lot is never mentioned again in Genesis. The Moabites and the Amorites are not only mentioned again, they end up at war with Israel. The Moabites and the Amorites eventually “provide the worst carnal seduction in the history of Israel” (that of Ball-Peor, Num. 25) and the cruelest religious perversion (that of Malech, Lev. 18:21; Kidner).

Yet, God is gracious. Israel was ordered not to touch the territory of the Moabites and the Amorites (Deut. 2:9, 19). Ruth was a Moabite who became one of the ancestors of Jesus. Naamah was an Amorite who was a wife of Solomon, the mother of Rehoboam, and an ancestor of Jesus. God promises to “bring back the captivity of Moab in the latter days” (Jer. 48:47). Today, the Moabites and the Amorites have mingled with the Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael. The ancient territory of Moab and Ammon is modern Jordan.

Lot again demonstrates the danger of worldliness in the life of a believer. His wife lost her physical life. Lot lost his spiritual life (not his eternal life).

Summary: God delivered Lot from Sodom before He judged it, but Sodom influenced Lot and his family. The danger of living in the world and becoming worldly is losing your life. You will lose your spiritual life and you may lose your physical life, but you will not lose your eternal life.

Lot was a carnal believer (1 Cor. 3:3). “First, he lifted up his eyes and saw Sodom (13:10). Then he chose for himself (13:11). Then he moved his tent as far as Sodom (13:12). Then he sat in the gate of Sodom as one of its judges (19:1, 9). Then, he hesitated as Sodom’s destruction loomed (19:16). Finally, he ended up committing incest with his daughters in a cave (19:30-38). How far it is possible for a believer to depart from God’s will when we keep making carnal decisions!” (Constable).

Lot lived in Sodom. As a result, he lost several of his children eternally. They died in the destruction of Sodom. He lost his wife physically and he lost his other two daughters spiritually. They didn’t trust the Lord for husbands and they committed incest. “Lot was able to take his daughters out of Sodom, but he was not able to take ... Sodom out of his daughters” (Davis, cited by Constable). The danger of living in the world is losing your life, not your eternal life, but your business life, your family life, your social life, your spiritual life, and, maybe, your physical life.

“The story of Lot and his family should provide a sobering reminder that all of our decisions are significant, even that of where we live. Our moral environment significantly influences our lives. For this and many other reasons, the New Testament constantly implores the believer to fellowship with those of like precious faith” (Davis, cited by Constable).

The devotional booklet *Our Daily Bread* tells the story of a pastor who had three sons. One day, a strange dog came to their house. The dog’s tail had three white hairs in it. An advertisement appeared in the paper asking for the return of a dog with three white hairs in its tail. In the presence of his boys, the pastor carefully separated the three white hairs and removed them. The real owner heard where the dog was staying and came over to claim him. The pet seemed to recognize his owner, but the pastor said, “Didn’t you say the dog had three white hairs in its tail?” The owner, of course, said, “Yes.” Since the hairs were missing, he was unable to claim his dog. The pastor later said, “We kept the dog, but I lost my three boys to Christ.” As he explained, his sons no longer had any confidence in what he preached because of what he practiced.

REPEATED FAILURE

She admitted that she had sinned. She was not trying to hide it or deny it. I assured her others had sinned like she had and God was faithful, and even just, to forgive. Then is when she said to me, “But I’ve done this before!” In her mind, the fact that she had committed the same sin more than once made her situation different than a case of simple sin and forgiveness.

Have you ever committed the same sin more than once? Have you failed repeatedly? Does God forgive repeated sin? Does God reject you after repeated failure? The issue of repeated sin raises the issue of eternal security. Can repeated failure cause believers to lose their eternal life? Consider a saint in the Scriptures who committed the same sin twice. He repeatedly failed.

The Inconsistency of Abraham

Abraham Moved After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham moved. “And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar” (20:1). Abraham migrated south from the Terebinth trees of Mamre near Hebron (18:1) and dwelt temporarily between Kadesh Barnea and Shur. From there, he moved northward about 40 to 50 miles to Gerar, which is about ten miles south of Gaza. Several suggestions have been offered to explain why Abraham moved: 1) To seek better pasture (Keil), 2) to conduct business in the prosperous city of Gerar, which was on a lucrative trade route (Morris), 3) to leave the scene of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Phillips). The text does not reveal why Abraham moved, only that he did.

Abraham Practiced Deceptions Again “Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, ‘She is my sister.’ And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah” (20:2). When Abraham arrived in Gerar, he practiced deception again! He said Sarah was his sister. He had done this same thing before when he went to Egypt (12:13). When Abraham did this before, Pharaoh took Sarah into his house (12:15). This time, Abimelech took Sarah into his harem. Abimelech was a title rather than a proper name (26:1; Constable), like Pharaoh was the term for the king in Egypt. Abimelech’s reason for taking Sarah was either personal, Sarah was a beautiful woman (12:11) or political. Taking Abraham’s sister into his harem would give him a strong tie to this new wealthy chieftain named Abraham. Sarah was 90 years old when this happened, but 90 years then was 40 or 50 today. There are some lovely-looking ladies at that age.

This is an incredible turn of events. Abraham was a man of faith (15:6) and a man of prayer (18:23-32). In fact, the last time Abraham was mentioned, he was interceding for Sodom! Now he commits the same sin he committed previously! He didn’t just commit this sin before in secret; he was openly rebuked for it. Yet, he does it again. Even patriarchs commit the same sin twice.

The fact that Abraham repeatedly sinned is a puzzle for some. One commentator said, “In many respects, Genesis 20 is one of the most difficult chapters in the Bible to understand. The narrative is simple enough, of course, but how could Abraham and Sarah, at this time, repeat the very same sin they’d committed many years before in Egypt. It might be understandable that, in those days when their faith had not yet really been tested and God’s faithfulness fully confirmed, that they could have fallen into such a trap, but how could they do it again? They had, over and over again, seen many wonderful answers to prayer, many miraculous proofs of God’s care and protection. Their faith had stood many tests, and God had never failed them and now, finally, they were about

to have their long-promised son! Sarah may even have been pregnant with Isaac, and it would only be a few months more. This is what the Bible records, however, so it must have happened just this way (Morris).

F. B. Meyer entitled this chapter in the life of Abraham “A Bit of Old Nature.” That’s the issue. It’s hard for even a patriarch to lay aside besetting sin. Thomas Brooks said of David, “His heart was more often out of tune than his harp.” Boice captures the issue by saying, “What is the point of the second passage? After all, is it not an old sin committed in one’s youth that often recurs later in life if it is not firmly dealt with and constantly resisted? Is it not that it is possible to be spared the evil consequences of an early sin and still not profit from that deliverance?”

There is also another lesson here. F. B. Meyer stated, “It would almost appear as if the Spirit of God took delight in showing that the original texture of God’s saints was not higher than that of other men, nor indeed so high. What they became, they became in spite of their natural selves. So marvelous is the wonderful working of the grace of God that He can graft His rare fruits on the wildest stock. He seems to delight in securing His choicest results in natures, which men of the world might reject as hopelessly bad. He demands no assistance from us, so sure is He that when one’s faith is admitted as the root principle of character, all other things will be added to it.... We do not deny the inconsistencies of a David, a Peter, or of an Abraham, but we insist that those inconsistencies were not the result of God’s work but in spite of it. They indicate the hopelessness of the original nature—the moorland waste to which He had sent His cultivating hand” (Meyer, cited by Boice).

The Intervention of God

The Revelation of God “But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, ‘Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife’ (20:3). Abimelech received an unexpected visitor—in the middle of the night—in his dreams. The unexpected visitor gave an even more unexpected message. The woman you have taken into your house is married! The greatest surprise of all is that God told Abimelech that because of his actions, he was going to die; his deed was worthy of death. God spoke to Abimelech. Was he a believer? Luther said he was (Leupold).

The Reaction of Abimelech “But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, ‘LORD, will You slay a righteous nation also? Did he not say to me, ‘She is my sister?’ And she, herself, said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands, I have done this” (20:4-5). Abimelech had taken Sarah into his harem, but he had not approached her sexually. Moreover, he did not know she was married and he had the right, according to the custom of his day, to do what he had done and even more. So, his reaction was based on what Abraham and Sarah had said. Abimelech said he was innocent and had integrity. Besides, a righteous God would not kill a righteous man.

Was God right in telling Abimelech his deed was worthy of death? After all, he was ignorant (20:6-7). The answer is, “Yes.” As Leupold has pointed out, “Sin is sin and involves guilt even when the perpetrator may have sinned in ignorance.” Even today, ignorance of the law excuses none. Many motorists have received a ticket, although they were unaware they were speeding.

The Response of God “And God said to him in a dream, ‘Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against me; therefore, I did not let you touch her. Now, therefore, restore the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are

yours” (20:6-7). God responds that He knew that Abimelech had proper motives and pure conduct because He had prevented Abimelech from having a sexual relationship with Sarah. How did He do that? He made Abimelech, his wife, and others sick (20:17).

Now, God instructs Abimelech to restore Sarah to Abraham and requests that Abraham pray for him. God informs Abimelech that Abraham is a prophet. A prophet receives direct revelation from God (Keil). Having a special relationship with God put Abraham in a position to intercede for others as he had done before this occasion (chapter 18). The consequence of not following these instructions would be physical death.

Why did God intervene in this case when He did not intervene in others? God stepped in to protect Sarah’s purity, but there is more here than that. God had promised Abraham and Sarah a son through whom He was to bless the world. In this case, God moved so that He could fulfill His promise. He said Sarah would have a son by Abraham, not Abimelech. He intervened to guarantee that would happen (Kidner).

The Integrity of Abimelech

Before His Servants Abimelech received all this information at night in a dream (20:3). He could have quietly done what God told him to do and not said a word about it to anyone, but he didn’t. “So Abimelech arose early in the morning and called all of his servants and told all of these things in their hearing, and the men were very much afraid” (20:8). For Abimelech’s servants, Abimelech’s dream was a nightmare. They were afraid God would kill them all. They were at least God-fearing people. By revealing his dream to his servants, Abimelech demonstrates his integrity before them.

Before Abraham “And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, ‘What have you done to us? How have I offended you that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.’ Then Abimelech said to Abraham, ‘What did you have in view that you have done this thing?’” (20:9-10). Abimelech demonstrated his integrity not only before his servants but also before Abraham. With three penetrating questions, Abimelech confronted Abraham with what he had done. All three indicate Abimelech’s concern for others. The first concerns what Abraham did to Abimelech and what Abraham had done “to us.” The second involves not just Abimelech but his kingdom. The third focuses on Abraham. Abimelech was concerned about the effects of all this on others.

“And Abraham said, ‘Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. But indeed, she is truly my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother and she became my wife. And it came to pass when God caused me to wander from my father’s house that I said to her, “This is your kindness that you should do for me in every place wherever we go, say of me, ‘He is my brother”’ (20:11-13). Abraham offered three explanations that do not correspond to Abimelech’s three questions. First, he was afraid they would kill him. Second, Sarah was, in fact, his sister. Third, he and Sarah agreed to do this years before when they began to travel. This explanation perhaps shifts the blame away from Sarah. He asked her to do it, but it implied it was all God’s fault! Sounds like Adam. Abraham didn’t even refer to God by His personal name; he referred to Him only as God.

Abraham disobeyed God, dishonored his wife, and deceived his neighbor. Abraham’s deception consisted of a half-truth designed to wholly protect him without regard for others. A half-truth is a whole lie. Furthermore, Abraham was only concerned about himself. Abimelech and

Abraham are in sharp contrast to each other. In this instance, Abimelech was a man of integrity who was open and obedient. Abraham was deceptive and disobedient.

Abimelech not only confronted Abraham, he conferred gifts upon him. “Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen and male and female servants and gave them to Abraham; and he restored Sarah, his wife, to him. And Abimelech said, ‘See, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you’” (20:14-15). Abimelech not only restored Sarah untouched and unharmed, he gave Abraham animals, servants, and lands. While some suggest that Abimelech had a selfish motive—he still needed Abraham’s intercession (Kidner), others say these gifts were “tokens of goodwill” (Leupold). The extent of the gifts suggests they were tokens rather than levers.

Abraham had refused the spoils of war (14:21-23), but he took gifts from pagan kings (12:16; 20:14-15). Had Abraham refused the gifts from Abimelech, he would have offended him further (Morris).

Before Sarah Next, Abimelech addressed Sarah. “Then to Sarah, he said, ‘Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who are with you and before all others. Thus she was rebuked’” (20:16). The thousand pieces of silver were either the value of the gifts to Abraham or an additional gift (Morris). In the Hebrew text, the word rendered “vindicates” is “covering of the eyes.” This is a difficult expression to interpret. Perhaps the idea is that these gifts will demonstrate the high esteem Abimelech has for Abraham and Sarah (Leupold) and, thus, “will preclude all criticism” (Kidner). Hence, the gifts will cover the eyes of others from seeing wrong. They would see that Sarah was not a concubine but an honored guest. Thus, by these gifts, Sarah was vindicated. The Hebrew word translated “rebuked” means “you were judged, that is, justice has been done thee” (Keil). One commentator translates it, “In all respects, thou art justified” (Leupold) and another “approved” (Kidner).

Abimelech demonstrated his integrity before his servants, before Abraham, and before Sarah. Ross observes, “These verses confirm that Abimelech had integrity. He restored the woman in good conscience to her husband and made reparation payments to ensure release from the threat of death. Those who have integrity are eager to prove it by their actions.... Abimelech rightly did everything in his power to set things straight.” Kidner says, “In offering the compensation, Abimelech owned his error (though the term *thy brother* reemphasized his innocence), and in accepting it, Abraham acknowledged the matter as settled.”

The Intercession of Abraham

Abraham’s Prayer “So Abraham prayed to God” (20:17a). God had told Abimelech in a dream that if he restored Sarah, Abraham would pray for him and he would live (20:7). So, at least part of this prayer was for Abimelech himself, but as the remainder of the chapter indicates, Abraham also prayed for the healing of others as well (20:17b-18).

God’s Answer “And God healed Abimelech, his wife and his maid servants. Then they bore children; for the LORD had closed up the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife” (20:17b-18). When Sarah ended up in Abimelech’s harem, God sent a sickness (see “healed”) on all the women so none could conceive. The disease prevented intercourse and, thus, conception. That was appropriate. This was God’s way of “rendering the mother of the promised seed safe” (Leupold).

As a result of Abraham’s prayer, Abimelech lived and the women of the household were healed so that they could conceive. Incredible! Abraham deceived Abimelech, put his wife in danger, and disobeyed God and now *he* prays and God answers. Be encouraged. James says, “Pray for one

another that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced its fruit” (Jas. 5:16-18).

Summary: When Abraham again failed and practiced deception, God intervened to protect Sarah’s purity and, thereby, preserve His promise.

Repeated failure does not negate God’s promises. Man’s sin does not prevent God’s promises from being fulfilled. Repeated failure does not nullify the promises of God. God said Abraham would have a son by Sarah and He intervened to see to it that nothing interfered with that promise. Abraham’s repeated failure did not negate God’s promise to him. “This incident shows God’s faithfulness to Abraham compared to Abraham’s unfaithfulness to God (cf. 2 Tim. 2:13)... Abraham learned that Yahweh will maintain His covenant and fulfill His promises in spite of the opposition and interference of influential and powerful individuals” (Constable), or our sin! God promises believers eternal life (Jn. 5:24) and their repeated failure, even their unbelief, will not negate that (2 Tim. 2:13). Neither a man’s character nor his conduct is the ground of acceptance before God. The blood of Christ is and that atoning work is applied by faith.

Repeated failure has consequences. This passage does not focus on that, but the Bible teaches that God disciplines His children (Heb. 12:5-6).

Repeated failure does not eliminate a believer’s usefulness. One of the most surprising events in this story is that Abraham fails, prays, and gets an answer! God said Abraham was a prophet (20:27). Abraham’s failure did not erase that gift from him. The gifts and callings from God are irrevocable! (Rom. 11:9). If you have repeatedly failed and repent, use your spiritual gift.

There is no better illustration of this truth than Abraham himself. In the words of Boise, “When Abimelech learned the truth about Sarah, he must have thought of Abraham as a cowardly, hypocritical, two-faced charlatan—or worse. He had cause to. But this is not the way God spoke of Abraham to Abimelech. God said, ‘Return the man’s wife for he is a prophet, he will pray for you, and you will live’ (v. 7). God was not indifferent to Abraham’s sin. He would deal with it as he had on other occasions of its appearance in Egypt, but the sin did not change God’s view of Abraham. Abraham was still ‘a prophet.’ He was still God’s man. Moreover, in all the references to Abraham that we have in the remainder of the Bible, God never brings up this incident as if to highlight Abraham’s failure—not in Romans, not in Galatians, not in Hebrews 11.” It is good to serve a God like that, a God who remains sovereign even when we doubt his ability to care for us, a God who remains gracious even when we sin. To serve a God like that is the world’s greatest joy and opportunity. To know that He is like that is the greatest incentive you will ever have to keep from sinning.”

As was pointed out before (see the comments after 11:27-12:9), Abraham was a man of faith, but that faith was tested and grew. Peter speaks of our faith being like gold: “tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7). The purpose of putting gold through fire is not to see whether or not it is genuine. It is to purify and refine it; the fire burns out the dross. The purpose of trials is to develop our faith. What is the dross mixed with faith that needs to be burned out? In Abraham’s case, it was disobedience. He was a man of faith and disobedience all at the same time. His response to his repeated disobedience and its consequences burned out the disobedience, thus refining his faith.

David is another illustration. In 1 Samuel 21, David is fleeing from Saul. In the process, he lied to a priest and deceived a king. At the same time, he wrote Psalm 34 (the superscription says,

“a psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away and he departed). If all you do is read 1 Samuel 21, all you see is sin. If all you do is read Psalm 34, what you see is faith. After practicing deception, David learned not to deceive. Listen to what he says, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD *is* good; blessed *is* the man *who* trusts in Him! Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! *There is* no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger, but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good *thing*. Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Who *is* the man *who* desires life and loves *many* days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit” (Ps. 34:8-13).

WHEN GOD FULFILLS HIS PROMISE

They had dated for several years. During that time, he told her he loved her and wanted to marry her. She loved him and she wanted to be married very badly. It was “understood” between the two of them that they would get married. He even gave her a promise ring, but he had never proposed.

One night, he took her to dinner. That was not unusual. He had done that many times. After dinner, they went for a walk on the beach. That was not unusual either. They had strolled on the sand before, too. In fact, it was one of their favorite spots. On this occasion, he paused. The sky was clear, the stars were bright, and the moon was full. Looking at her lovely face, he pulled his right hand out of his pocket and, slipping a ring on her finger, asked, “Will you marry me?” She was beginning to wonder if he would ever ask. Now, at last, he had. What should she do? Should she immediately say, “Yes,” or should she say, let me think about it for a week?

Like a young man promising a young lady that he will propose years before he does, God made promises before He performed them. What should be the response when He finally does what He said He would do? Abraham had the experience. Let’s see what his response was.

The Birth of Isaac

God Fulfilled His Promise “And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him” (21:1-2). God had specifically said that Sarah would give birth to a son (17:16) in her old age (17:17-19). He also specified the time (18:10-14). Now God provided the son He had promised, exactly as He had promised, that is, by Sarah in her old age at the time that He said. The emphasis of the report is on God fulfilling His Word (see “as He had said” in 21:1, “as He had spoken” in 21:1, and “at the set time of which God had spoken to Him” in 21:2).

“The Hebrew word translated “visited” (*paqad*) also appears when God intervened to save the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (50:24-25; Exod. 4:31) and when He ended a famine (Ruth 1:6). It also occurs when He made Hannah conceive (1 Sam. 2:21) and when He brought the Jewish exiles home from Babylonian captivity (Jer. 29:10). Thus, its presence here highlights the major significance of Isaac’s birth” (Constable).

Evidently, God supernaturally rejuvenated Sarah’s body because she was past childbearing age (18:11). She not only had a child, but she also nursed him (21:7). Abraham had six other children after this with another wife (25:1-2).

God waited a number of years to fulfill this promise, but He did it. He first appeared to Abraham before he was 75 years old (12:4). Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born (21:5). God waited, but He exactly did what He said He would do. When God fulfills His promises, He precisely does what He says He will do. He said His Son would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and He was (Mt. 2:1). He said the Messiah would heal the sick (Isa. 53:4) and He did (Mt. 8:17). God said His Son would die for sin (Isa. 53:6) and He did (1 Cor. 15:3). God even gave the time of the coming of His Son (Dan.9:26).

Abraham Obeyed “And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old,

as God had commanded him” (21:3-5a). God had told Abraham to name his son by Sarah Isaac (17:19). He had also said that every male child should be circumcised when he was eight days old (17:10-12). Abraham obeyed “as God commanded him” (21:4), that is, “to the letter” (Leupold).

At this point, the text says, “Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him” (21:5b). Why mention that here? When Abraham first heard that he would have a son with Sarah, he laughed and said, “Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old?” (17:17). The author of Genesis is reminding the reader that God exactly did what He said He would do. Thus, when God fulfilled His promise precisely as He had spoken, Abraham obeyed precisely as God had instructed. When God fulfills His promise, our response should be obedience.

Sarah Rejoiced “And Sarah said, ‘God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me.’ She also said, ‘Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age’ (21:6-7). When Abraham first heard that he was to have a son, he laughed (17:15-17). God had instructed him to name the son Isaac, which means “laughter” (17:19). When Sarah first heard that she was to bear a son, she too laughed. Unlike her husband’s laugh, hers was a laugh of unbelief. She now laughs for joy, saying, “God has made me laugh,” that is, rejoice and “all who hear will laugh with me,” meaning, rejoice with me (Keil; Leupold). Ross says, “In contrast with the doubting laughter described in 18:12, Sarah’s laughter here is full of praise.”

When God fulfills His promise, our response should be praise. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the angels appeared to shepherds, saying, “For there is born to you this day in the City of David a Savior who is Christ, the Lord” (Lk. 2:11). The shepherds responded with praise to God (Lk. 2:20).

The Banishment of Ishmael

Abraham Made a Feast There is more to the story. “So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned” (21:8). Sarah nursed Isaac (21:7) and Isaac grew (21:8). According to the custom of the day, a child could be nursed until he was two or three (Leupold; Morris; see 1 Sam. 1:22-24; Hosea 1:8). When the day came for Isaac to be weaned, Abraham marked the occasion with a feast, also a custom of the time (Leupold).

Ishmael Mocked The feast was the occasion of what happened next. “And Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing” (21:9). Ishmael was “scoffing” Isaac. The word rendered “scoffing” is the intensive form of the Hebrew word “laugh.” Here, it means “to ridicule” (Keil), “mock” (Leupold; Ross). Paul’s inspired interpretation is “persecuted” (Gal. 4:29). “Ishmael disdained Isaac as Hagar had despised Sarai (16:4)” (Constable).

Ishmael was sixteen or seventeen years old (16:16). Isaac was two or three (21:5-7). Until the birth of Isaac, Ishmael was Abraham’s only son. Since his birth, Isaac has received all of the attention. Now, there is a party to celebrate the baby’s weaning. Everyone was having fun and laughing. Ishmael laughed all right, not with the others, but at Isaac. He didn’t have fun; he made fun of his half-brother.

Sarah wanted Ishmael cast out Sarah saw Ishmael scoffing and reacting, “Therefore she said to Abraham, ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman should not be the heir of my son, namely with Isaac’ (21:10). Hagar had been Sarah’s maid for over twenty years. Sarah had suggested that Abraham have a child by Hagar (16:2). Now Sarah insists that Hagar and her son be cast out! Is this a simple case of “maternal jealousy?” (Keil)? Perhaps. The ultimate issue is heirship. Sarah says Isaac shall not be an heir with “my son.” She knew only Isaac

was to share in Abraham's inheritance and wanted no rivals. In light of Ishmael's attitude, the only solution was that he and her mother be thrown out.

Abraham was Displeased "And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son" (21:11). Abraham was grieved. Ishmael was his flesh and blood (16:3, 11). Abraham, no doubt, loved his son. He had even asked God if Ishmael might not be his heir! (17:18). Sarah saw the ultimate heirship issue and said, "Cast out Ishmael." Abraham focused on his son and was greatly grieved.

God Said cast out Ishmael "But God said to Abraham, 'Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac, your seed shall be called. Yet I also will make a nation of the son of the bondwoman because he is your seed'" (21:12-13). Sarah may have been jealous, but she was right about the heirship. In this case, there could not be two heirs. God speaks clearly, "In Isaac, your seed shall be called." God had promised Abraham a son by Sarah (17:19) and now He is reminding Abraham of His Word (see Rom. 9:6-7). Thus, God tells Abraham to listen to Sarah because of heirship (Gal. 4:30). This banishment was not the punishment of Ishmael; it was the protection of Isaac (Ross).

Constable says, "He [God] encouraged Abraham to divorce Hagar. 'But how could God ask Abraham to do evil if divorce is always a sin? The answer must be that divorce, in this case, is either not a sin or else is the lesser of two evils.'" (Joe M. Sprinkle, 'Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:4, December 1997, 535). For other instances where God apparently commanded divorce, see Deuteronomy 21:10-14 and Ezra 9-10. Since God makes the rules, He can also alter them according to His sovereign will. 'The key to Sarah's demand lies in a clause in the laws of Lipit-Ishtar where it is stipulated that the father may grant freedom to the slave woman and the children she has borne him, in which case they forfeit their share of the paternal property' (Sarna). The laws of Lipit-Ishtar were laws that governed life in Mesopotamia that antedated the Mosaic Law."

Nevertheless, God will provide for Ishmael. God promised that He would make Abraham a great nation (12:2). Now, because Ishmael is Abraham's son, even though he is not the son of Sarah, God will make a nation of him too. God had already promised to do this (17:20). Although God agrees Ishmael has to leave, He will see to it that this lad not only survives but will also prosper. "This gracious reassurance makes obedience easier" (Leupold).

Abraham Obeyed "So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar and sent her away" (21:14). Even though Abraham was deeply disturbed, he immediately, instantaneously obeyed. "The birth of Isaac seems to have produced a much stronger faith in Abraham (cf. v. 14). Note his immediate response to God's instructions to him from then on (cf. 22:3)" (Constable). Early the next day, he provided for them as much as he could and sent them away. They had enough food and water to reach another settlement. Frankly, apart from the Lord, no matter how much Abraham gave them, it would not be enough (Morris).

Doing God's will is not always fun, but it is necessary. Practicing church discipline is not fun, but it is essential. Leaving home and homeland to go to the mission field may be grievous, but it is necessary to carry the gospel to the ends of the world.

God Provided Hagar and Ishmael had no choice. "Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba. And the water in the skin was used up and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat across from him at a distance of about a bow shot; for she said to herself, 'Let me not see the death of the boy.' So she sat opposite him and lifted up her

voice and wept” (21:14b-16). Apparently, Hagar and Ishmael got lost. They “wandered” into the wilderness. Then, they ran out of water. Hagar placed Ishmael, who was about sixteen or seventeen years old at the time (16:16; 21:5, 8), under a shrub to give him shade from the heat. She sat down, “a bow shot away,” that is, the distance an archer could shoot an arrow. Hagar was convinced Ishmael would die. She couldn’t bear to watch the slow death of her son, but she was still near him. Hagar and Ishmael wept in despair and grief. God allowed them to come to the end of their strength, so they would have to trust Him (Morris).

“And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, ‘What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand for I will make him a great nation” (21:17-18). Ishmael prayed to God for deliverance (21:17). God heard and sent an angel to reassure Hagar and Ishmael that He would be faithful to His promise (17:20; 21:13, 18). The angel of God is the Angel of the LORD (Gill; Ross).

“God,” not the Lord, “the angel of God,” not the angel of the Lord, heard and helped. “God” designates the Creator; “Lord” is His covenant name. God made a promise to Ishmael, but not a covenant. He will fulfill the promise because He will keep His Word. Technically, there is no covenant for Him to keep.

“Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink. So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt” (21:19-21). God, then, supernaturally or providentially, showed Hagar a well. From then on, God was with Ishmael (21:20). He became an archer and his Egyptian mother found him an Egyptian wife. Ishmael did become a great nation (25:13-15). Again, God did exactly what He said He would do.

“Ishmael became the father of 12 sons (25:13-16) as Jacob did. From his sons came the Arab nations that have ever since been the chief antagonists of the Israelites. The term ‘Arab’ (someone from Arabia) came into use for the first time in the ninth century B.C. (Wenham). Hagar chose a wife for her son from her homeland, Egypt. In this respect, she does not display the wisdom used by Abraham in choosing, as he did, a god-fearing wife for his son” (Leupold).

God made a promise and He gave provisions. God provided for Ishmael because He said He would. At the same time, He desires to be the God “of the outcast, the rejected, the abused, the dying” (Ross).

Summary: When God fulfilled His promise precisely as He had spoken, Abraham obeyed and Sarah rejoiced and when Abraham cast out Hagar and Ishmael, He again fulfilled His promise precisely as He had spoken.

As one commentator put it, “When God fulfills His promises, His saints experience a rare joy” (Leupold).

This passage is quoted several times in the New Testament. Genesis 21:12, “In Isaac, your seed shall be called,” is quoted in Romans 9:7 and Hebrews 11:18. In Romans 9, Paul’s point is that being a physical descendant of Abraham does not mean inheriting God’s promises to Abraham. God says Abraham’s son would inherit the promises made to Abraham and He specifically said it would be a son by Sarah, who was Isaac. Not just any son by Abraham would do. God fulfills His Word exactly.

In Galatians 4, Paul turned the whole passage in Genesis into an illustration. Isaac was born of God’s promise and Ishmael was not; he was born simply of the flesh (Gal. 4:23). Likewise,

believers are born by God's Spirit, of God's promise (Gal. 4:28) and those keeping the Law are born of the flesh and they persecute believers (Gal. 4:29). Paul concludes by quoting Genesis 21:10, "Cast out the bondwoman with her son" (Gal. 4:30). Paul's point is believers should throw out the Law!

While Genesis 21 can be turned into an allegory, its primary lesson is indicated in Romans 9 and Hebrews 11, namely, that God fulfills His Word exactly. When God fulfills His Word, we, like Abraham, should obey and, like Sarah, rejoice.

God fulfills His promises to save all who believe, to answer prayer, and to make all things work together for good. When God fulfills His promise, there is laughter and joy (Lk. 15:10; 1 Pet. 1:8). The same thing is true of answered prayer (Ps. 126:1-3).

In Charles Dickens's famous novel, *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge finally realizes what Christmas is about. At that point in the novel, Scrooge says, "I don't know what to do. I am light as a feather. I am as happy as an angel. I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man." Dickens writes, "Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrative laugh, the father of a long line of laughs." When God fulfills His promise, we should shout for joy and be more motivated than ever to obey Him.

LIVING IN PEACE

The Christian lady began to pour out her heart to me. She described several conflicts with others and some confusion about what to do. She had trouble without and tension within. She concluded by saying, “All I want is peace.” Many are seeking the same thing. How does one obtain peace with others? If you have it, what do you do with it? What must you do to obtain it if you don’t have it?

The Request of Abimelech

The Recognition “And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, ‘God is with you in all that you do’ (21:22). Earlier in the Genesis narrative, Abimelech was introduced as “king of Gerar” (20:2). This scene took place about 25 miles from Gerar (21:31; Kidner). Phicol’s presence as commander of the army indicated that this was an important occasion (Leupold). Constable says that Phicol “seems to have been a title rather than a proper name, probably of Anatolian origin.”

Abimelech begins by recognizing that God is with Abraham in all he does. God had appeared to Abimelech in a dream to protect Abraham’s wife (20:6-7). The Lord also told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet (20:7) and answered Abraham’s prayers to heal Abimelech and his family (20:17). “The writer may have included this incident in the text partially because it records the testimony of a Gentile king to God’s faithfulness (v. 22) and Abraham’s strong testimony to God’s faithfulness (vv. 32-33). It also sets the stage for Isaac’s dealings with Abimelech (ch. 26)” (Constable).

Is God with you in all that you do? James says, “Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you” (Jas. 4:8). If you include the Lord, He will be with you. Does He answer your prayers? Jesus said, “If you abide with Me and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you desire and it shall be done unto you” (Jn. 15:7). When you draw near to the Lord and include Him, He answers your prayers. Is there enough evidence of God’s blessing in your life for others to take notice?

The Request “Now, therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have sojourned” (21:23). Abimelech reminded Abraham that he had dealt kindly with him and, indeed, he had. He restored Sarah to Abraham and gave Abraham gifts (20:14). He also allowed Abraham to dwell in the land (20:15). Now, Abimelech asked Abraham to swear that he would not deal falsely but kindly with him and all his future descendants.

Abimelech knew two things about Abraham: God was with him—21:22 and he was capable of dealing falsely—10:23 (Ross). Abraham had deceived Abimelech before (20:2) and he feared that he would do it again. The other factor was that God had blessed Abraham to the point that he was a prominent and powerful person. Thus, Abimelech wanted a non-aggression pact with him.

The Response “And Abraham said, ‘I will swear’ (21:24). Abraham was willing to live in peace with Abimelech (Rom. 12:18). Abraham, whom the Lord promised the land, was thus willing for the Lord to give it to him in His time and not try to take it by force.

Do you want to live in peace, or do you want justice and punishment? Some people have been hurt, and they want the person who hurt them to be punished. They want justice. Those kinds of

people are very often bitter and angry. They do not have peace within themselves nor live in peace with others. To live in peace, one must seek peace. That may necessitate laying aside the bitterness and anger and letting God deal justly with those who have hurt you.

If you are to live in peace, it must be your aim. You must seek it.

The Reproof of Abraham

The Reproof If they were to live in peace, there was an issue that had to be dealt with first. So, “Then Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech’s servants had seized” (21:25). Abraham had dug a well at Beersheba and, although it was not in Abimelech’s territory (Morris), his servants had seized the well by force. They stole it from Abraham. An injustice had been done to him. So, he confronts Abimelech about the issue. If there is to be peace, there needs to be confrontation. An appeaser is a troublemaker, not a peacemaker. A confronter is a peacemaker.

The Response “And Abimelech said, ‘I do not know who has done this thing. You did not tell me nor had I heard of it until today’” (21:26). Abimelech simply said he did not know that it had been done, nor did he know who did it. He also reminds Abraham that he didn’t tell him either (20:4-5). Leupold suggests, “This seemingly puts Abraham partly in the wrong; he should have had confidence in Abimelech to complain before this day.” Often, conflict arises because someone does not communicate. Therefore, if there is to be peace, there must be confrontation. Although the text does not say so, Abimelech undoubtedly returned the well to Abraham (21:27-31).

The Resolution “So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech and the two of them made a covenant” (21:27). Apparently, these animals were slaughtered to establish the covenant (see 15:9-11; Leupold). The covenant was that they would live in peace in the land.

“And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. Then Abimelech asked Abraham, ‘What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves?’ And he said, ‘You will take these seven ewe lambs from my hand that they may be my witness that I have dug this well’” (21:28-30). After slaughtering the animals to establish the covenant (21:27), Abraham gave seven lambs to Abimelech to establish his ownership of the well (21:28-30).

“Therefore, he called that place Beersheba because the two of them swore an oath there. Thus, they made a covenant at Beersheba. So Abimelech rose with Phichol, the commander of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines” (21:31-32). Beersheba means “the well of seven” (Keil). The name of the well indicated how the dispute was settled. They also made the covenant, after which Abimelech and Phichol returned home.

Constable says, “Critics of the historicity of the patriarchal narratives have pointed out references to the Philistines in Genesis (vv. 32, 34; 26:1) as evidence that the Bible contains errors. It is common knowledge that the Philistines did not invade Palestine until about 1200 B.C., whereas Abraham lived about 800 years earlier. One explanation is that since the Philistines of Genesis were peaceful and those of Judges and later were warlike, perhaps the same name describes an earlier group of people. They may have resembled the later thirteenth-century Philistines who also emigrated from the Aegean area into Palestine (Kitchen). On the other hand, perhaps the Philistines of 2000 B.C. were Minoan and peaceful, whereas those of 1200 were Mycenaean and warlike (Barker). ‘I suggest that the Philistines of Genesis represent the first wave of Sea Peoples from the Aegean and that the later Philistines represent the last wave (cf. 1200 B.C.)’ (Hamilton).”

The Residence of Abraham

Planting “Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba” (21:33a). The tamarisk tree is a hardwood tree with long, narrow, thickly clustered evergreen leaves that lives a long time (Keil). It resembles the cypress (Leupold). It was a memorial to “the ever-enduring grace of the faithful covenant God” (Keil), “a lasting landmark to God’s provision” (Ross). “By planting a tree, Abraham indicated his determination to stay in that region.... This tree was an appropriate symbol of the enduring grace of the faithful God whom Abraham recognized as ‘the Everlasting God’ (El Olam)” (Constable).

Planting a tree is a memorial. Harry Truman’s father planted an oak tree the day Harry was born. The house where Truman was born and the oak tree still stands in Missouri. As a result of having visited the spot, I did the same for my mother. Planting a tree can still be a memorial today.

Calling “And there called on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God” (21:33b). Calling on the Lord includes prayer and proclamation (4:26; 12:8). This time, the Lord is identified as “the everlasting God” (14:18; 16:13; 17:1). Abraham made a covenant with an earthly king, but he had an eternal covenant with the eternal God (17:7).

Sojourning “And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days” (21:34). Some say the land of the Philistines included Beersheba (Keil). Others see Abraham returning to and dwelling in the land of the Philistines (Morris). “The reader is forced to ask why the author constantly draws attention to the fact that Abraham was dwelling with the Philistines during this time [v. 34]. The purpose of such reminders may be to portray Abraham as one who had yet to experience the complete fulfillment of God’s promises” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

“Abraham now owned a small part of the land God had promised him” (Constable). “By granting Abraham rights to a well, Abimelech had made it possible for Abraham to live there permanently and had acknowledged his legal right at least to water. In other words, after so many delays, the promises of land and descendants, at last, seem on their way to fulfillment” (Wenham, cited by Constable).

Summary: Abraham and Abimelech made a covenant to live in peace and Abraham confronted Abimelech to ensure peace and use the peace to serve the Lord. Believers should seek peace and use it for God’s glory.

You can ignore a problem that probably will not go away. Or you can go to court and battle with each other and walk away with a severed relationship. Or you can take the biblical approach. Confront the person individually. If that does work, take someone with you. Try reconciliation through a church. Or involve a group such as the Christian Coalition Service. Go the Scriptural route, not the secular route. Following biblical principles is the only way you will live in peace.

A group of believers formed an organization called the Christian Coalition Service. They aim to arbitrate disputes among believers that might otherwise end up in court. One article about them gave samples. A man blamed his accountant for a bad twenty-thousand-dollar investment. A young mother who gave her newborn up for adoption changed her mind and wanted her child back from the adoptive family. A church elder is upset with a neighbor whose dog barks at night. Most of their cases are marital disputes.

Their attitude of who is at fault and who gets the money is secondary to the spiritual rebuilding of shattered relationships. As a result, people often end up friendly and decide that whatever they were fighting about initially was not that important. That doesn’t happen in court where one party “wins,” usually, the attorneys and the parties are forever hostile to each other.

GOD'S TEST

In the latter part of the 1960s, many students in America rebelled against the “Establishment,” as they called it. Their main target was the Vietnam War, which was not their only target. They wanted to change other parts of “the system.” Some of those students came to Christ. The Jesus Movement was born during that time. In a strange turn of events, some saved hippies went to seminary to enter the ministry. They knew the Lord and wanted to serve Him, but their generation had influenced them. So, when they got to seminary, they tried to change “the system” there.

During that period, I taught for a semester at Dallas Seminary. A group of students on campus wanted to change the system by eliminating exams! In response to their campaign, Dr. Walvoord, the seminary president, met with them to discuss the issue. I was in the meeting. Dr. Walvoord patiently listened as they presented their case. When they were finished, he calmly explained that tests were a fact of life. So, they might as well get used to it. I recall him saying that as pastors, they would be “graded” every time they preached. The seminary did not eliminate exams.

Dr. Walvoord was right. Tests are a fact of life. Teachers give exams in school. The State tests us to see if we qualify for a driver’s license. People grade us all the time. Even God tests us!

What is God’s test like? Why does He test us? How do I prepare for His exam? What do I have to do to pass? What do I get if I pass? These answers are in Genesis 22.

The Revelation to Abraham

Introduction The story begins with an editorial comment. “Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham” (22:1a). The reader is informed ahead of time that this is a test, but Abraham did not know that. Had Abraham known that God was only testing him to see if he would obey, it would not have been much of a test (Ross).

Why did God test Abraham? Why does God test anyone? The story in Genesis 22 does not answer that question, but a reference to it in the New Testament does. James says, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works and by works, faith was made perfect” (Jas. 2:21-22). Simply put, works mature faith. Constable says this was “to test Abraham’s faith (i.e., to prove its character and strength; cf. James 2:21-23).... Such testing (Heb. *nsh*) shows what someone is really like, and it usually involves difficulty or hardship (cf. Exod. 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2, 16; 13:3; Judg. 2:22; 3:1, 4; 1 Kings 10:1; Dan. 1:12, 14).”

To say the same thing another way, in the Greek New Testament, the same word, which means “trial,” also means “to tempt.” God tries or tests believers (Jas. 1:2). Satan tempts us (1 Cor. 7:5). God tests us to bring out the faith in us (Jas. 1:2-3). Satan tempts us to bring out the flesh in us.

Instruction How does God test believers? Genesis 22 illustrates the answer to that question. “God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ and he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’” (22:1b-2). How God communicated to Abraham is not revealed. Perhaps it was through a night vision. The next verse says Abraham rose early in the morning (22:3; Leupold). When God addressed Abraham directly, Abraham responded with “Here I am” as if to say Your will is my command, but to think that, or even say that, and follow through with that attitude are two different things.

To the attentive Abraham, God commanded to take Isaac to the land of Moriah and offer him on a mountain to be revealed. The mountain was about 45 miles north of Beersheba. “Moriah” was probably the name the Israelites gave this area after this event. On these mountains, God later appeared to David, who built an altar to the Lord (2 Sam. 24:16-25). Here also Solomon built the Temple (2 Chron. 3:1), and Jesus Christ died” (Constable).

Human sacrifice is a detestable, repugnant thing. Why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son? In his novel *Jerusalem Diamond*, Noah Gordon has one of his characters say, “I don’t believe in sacrifice. If the story of Abraham and Isaac is true, Abraham was insane, not religious” (Boice). As we have seen, the purpose of God’s test was not to destroy Isaac but to develop Abraham’s faith. God did not want Isaac’s life; He wanted Abraham’s loyalty.

During the Napoleonic Wars, in a meeting of the emperors of Prussia, Austria, and Russia, the discussion turned to the question of the obedience of their soldiers. They agreed that each would call in his bodyguard and command him to leap out of a second-story window. When the Prussian monarch gave the order to his bodyguard, the bodyguard complained, “Your majesty, it would kill me.” When it was the Austrian soldier’s turn, he said, “I’ll do it if you really mean what you say. “Like the Prussian soldier before him, he was dismissed and the Russian soldier was called in. Upon hearing the order to jump out the second-floor window, the Russian officer immediately started to obey. They stopped him as he put one leg over the window ledge. These emperors did not intend for these soldiers to plunge to their death. It was only a test. Abraham did not know this was “only a test.”

The wording of the text in Genesis 22 indicates how critical and painful this must have been to him. He was to offer his son ... his only son (Recently, he had sent Ishmael away, 21:14.) ... the son he loved! When Abraham lost Ishmael, he was deeply grieved (21:11). In that case, he could have had some comfort in the fact that he had another son, but in this case, he had no other son. Furthermore, this son would be heir to the promises God had made. God, indeed, “seemed to be totally out of character and completely destroying His program” (Ross). Isaac did not have a son yet; he wasn’t even married yet!

God tests us by giving us commands. He sometimes tests us by asking us to sacrifice what is most treasured by us (Lk. 14:26-27). “God called on Abraham to make five great sacrifices: his native country, his extended family, his nephew Lot, his son Ishmael, and his son Isaac” (Constable).

The Reaction of Abraham

Obedience “So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son and split the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then, on the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off” (22:3-4). With “eloquent simplicity,” the author describes Abraham’s instant obedience. His thoughts or feelings are not mentioned, only his prompt compliance (Ross). For example, he arose early in the morning. The Hebrew construction could be rendered early “the next morning” (Leupold). He did not procrastinate, delay, or waste any time. He immediately began to obey. God did not set a time. Abraham could have waited at least a day, if not longer, but he didn’t. At the same time, he was not in such a hurry that he did not adequately prepare to comply completely. He took the wood for the burnt offering! He did not know whether there would be anywhere he was going and he wanted to make sure he could do what he was told (Morris). He even took fire and a knife (22:6).

On the third day, Abraham, Isaac, and Abraham's servant arrived in the general area of Moriah and Abraham could now see the mount where he was to go (22:4). They had traveled from near Beersheba to somewhere near what was later to become the city of Jerusalem, a distance of about thirty miles (Morris; Constable says it was 45 miles) or about 20½ hours (Keil). These three days make this a protracted test (Kidner).

Abraham immediately and completely obeyed the Lord.

Faith The narrative continues, "And Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey, the lad and I will go yonder and worship and we will come back to you. So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son, and he took the fire in his hand and a knife and the two of them went together" (22:5-6). This is an incredible story! Abraham continues to methodically and meticulously take steps to obey. He leaves the servants behind at this point telling them that he and Isaac are going to "worship." Indeed, the servants would not have understood this "worship" (Keil). "Abraham probably told his servants to stay behind (v. 5), so they would not try to restrain him from killing Isaac. The three verbs that Abraham used (v. 5) are all intensive in Hebrew (12:2): "We are determined to go," "We are determined to worship," and "We are determined to return" (Constable, italic his).

Abraham then had young, strong Isaac carry firewood and he carried the live coals in a container as well as a knife. Together, fully prepared, they continue up the mountain of sacrifice. Isaac was probably about 18 to 20 years old (Leupold: Josephus said he was 25 years old; Josephus, 1:13:43, cited by Constable).

Why did Abraham so immediately, completely, and continually obey? The answer is faith. Abraham obeyed because he believed God. Notice that Abraham told the servant, "We will come back to you." He planned to sacrifice Isaac, yet he believed Isaac would return! He believed God would resurrect Isaac. He must have reasoned that if God promised descendants through Isaac and Isaac was sacrificed, God would raise him from the dead.

The writer to the Hebrews says, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac and he who had received the promise offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac, your seed shall be called,' accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense" (Heb. 11:17-19).

Another indication of Abraham's faith is the conversation between him and Isaac on the way up the mountain. Abraham took the firewood and knife, "but Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father, and said, 'My father!' and he said, 'Here I am, my son.' And he said, 'Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' And Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering' and the two of them went together" (21:7-8). Abraham believed that God would provide a lamb for Himself even if Isaac were sacrificed and resurrected.

Unwavering Faith "Then they came to the place of which God had told him and Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son" (21:9-10). Abraham did not get to the designated spot and look for the animal. He was sure God would provide (22:8). He built the altar and bound his son (22:9). Nor did he raise his voice in anxious prayer to God; he raised his son on the altar and raised the knife in his hand. Abraham's faith was unwavering.

"If Abraham displays faith that obeys, then Isaac displays faith that cooperates. If Isaac was strong and big enough to carry wood for a sacrifice, maybe he was strong and big enough to resist or subdue his father" (Hamilton, cited by Constable).

The Response of the Lord

The Lord Provided a Sacrifice Abraham reached for the knife to slay his son, “but the angel of the LORD called to him and said, ‘Abraham! Abraham!’ and he said, ‘Here I am.’ And he said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (22:11-12). God stopped Abraham from slaying Isaac by speaking directly from heaven—at the last possible moment. The Angel of the Lord (22:11) is God. God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (22:1) and now the Angel of the Lord says, “You fear God. You have not withheld your son from Me” (22:12).

“Then Abraham looked at his eyes and there behind him was the ram caught in the thicket by his horns so Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son” (22:13). God did not want any harm done to Isaac, which demonstrated to Israel that God did not desire child sacrifice as was practiced by other nations at the time (Keil; Ross). God had now finished the test. Abraham demonstrated to all that he feared God because he did not withhold his most treasured possession from Him. God also provided a substitute sacrifice in the form of a ram caught in a nearby thicket.

“And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided’” (22:14). Abraham apparently named the place “The-Lord-Will-Provide” and Moses adds the editorial note that there was a proverbial saying to his day that “In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided.” This could be translated “the Lord sees,” but “the Lord provides” is also possible and fits the context better (22:8; Ross). This is a prophecy that in that same mountain, God would one day provide a person to die for man’s sins as He had provided a ram to die in the place of Isaac (Morris).

This passage proclaims and illustrates that the Lord will provide a sacrifice to be a substitute. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). God provided a ram for Isaac, but Abraham was right. God will provide a lamb (22:8). He has! His Son! It should also be pointed out that Paul alludes to this passage in Romans 8:32. The word translated “spared” in that verse is a verb from the same root as the one used in the Greek translation of Genesis (the Septuagint) for “provide” (Ross).

During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln realized that thousands were killed so others could live. He chose one soldier for himself. In Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, there is the grave of a Civil War soldier. The tombstone bears the date of his birth and his death, plus the words “Abraham Lincoln’s Substitute.” [His name was John Summerfield Staples.] There could very well have been written across the cross of Christ the words “My Substitute.”

Jehovah-Jireh (“The-Lord-Will-Provide”) is one of the names of God in the book of Genesis. It indicates that He will provide a substitute sacrifice and that the Lord is a provider for His people. He provides salvation for sin, life for death, strength for weakness, joy for sorrow, and heaven instead of hell. Do you know Him as your provider?

The Lord Promised to Bless “Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: ‘By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore’” (22:15-17a). For the last time in Abraham’s life, God speaks to him, reiterating promises He made before with a few additions. God promised to 1) bless Abraham (22:17; see 12:2), 2) multiply and bless Abraham’s descendants (22:17; see 12:2, etc.), and 3) bless all nations (22:18; see 12:3).

In addition, 1) God swears by Himself (22:16; Moses referred to this oath: 24:7; 26:3; 50:24; Exod. 13:5, 11; 33:1; et al.; see also Heb. 6:13-15). This was unnecessary, but God did it to “give all possible assurance to man” (Leupold). 2) These promises were made because Abraham obeyed (22:16). This is the first occurrence of the word “obey” in the Bible. 3) God promises to multiply Abraham’s descendants as the stars (15:5) and as the sand on the seashore (22:17; cf. “the dust of the earth” in 13:16), that is, that Abraham’s descendants will be innumerable (Keil). The naked eye can count about 3,000 stars—at most (Morris). The sand is impossible to count! 4) God also promises that Abraham’s descendants shall possess the gates of their enemies.

God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:9-18). Genesis 22:16 suggests that God made the covenant *because* Abraham obeyed. Is the covenant unconditional or conditional? As Steve Dolson-Andrew, a friend of mine, points out, this passage is not saying God made the covenant *because* Abraham was obedient, but *because* Abraham was obedient, God *confirmed* His covenant with an oath (see God “confirmed” it in Heb. 6:17).

“and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies” (22:17b). The gate of a city was the key point in the control of the city. To say that Abraham’s descendants will possess the gates indicates they would conquer their enemies and capture their cities (Keil; Leupold).

“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (22:18). Abraham’s “seed” refers not only to Isaac but also to Messiah (Gal. 3:16). Constable lists the four seeds of Abraham: the natural seed (all physical descendants of Abraham, 12:1-3, 7; et al.), the natural-spiritual seed (believing physical descendants of Abraham; Rom. 9:6, 8; Gal. 6:16), the spiritual seed (believing non-physical descendants of Abraham, Gal. 3:6-9, 29) and the ultimate seed (Jesus Christ; Gal. 3:16). Abraham’s obedience resulted in blessings for himself and others.

“So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba” (22:19). Abraham returned to Beersheba and dwelt there (22:19), which means he made his home there (Leupold).

The Record of Nahor

The Message “Now it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, ‘Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel. And Bethuel begot Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah” (22:20-24). Abraham had two brothers, Nahor and Haran (11:27). Haran died in Ur before Abram had left his native city (11:28). Abraham had not seen his other brother for about sixty years (Morris). Someone told Abraham that his brother had twelve sons, eight from his wife Milcah and four from his concubine Reumah. This information was probably given to Abraham by a traveler in a caravan (Leupold).

The Point Why is that recorded here? The answer is that one of Nahor’s sons, Bethuel, had a daughter named Rebekah (22:23), who later became Isaac’s wife (chapter 24), but why insert this information here? Why not place it in the narrative concerning Isaac marrying Rebekah? This information is placed here to introduce the next phase of the overall story (Ross). God is going to fulfill His promise to give Abraham enumerable descendants through Isaac. Isaac shall not have to marry a Canaanite woman. Constable points out that it also shows that Rebekah was the daughter of Bethuel’s wife, not the daughter of Bethuel’s concubine. The point is that the Lord will provide the means to fulfill His promise.

Summary: When God tested Abraham by giving him a command and, Abraham immediately and completely obeyed because he believed God, God blessed him and others because of him. In short, when believers pass God's test by trusting and obeying, God abundantly blesses them.

God tests believers by giving them commands to obey. These commands sometimes involve sacrificing a believer's most valued possession, such as a son or silver. Constable notes that "what God called Abraham to give back to Him was something that He had provided for Abraham supernaturally in faithfulness to His promise. Sometimes, God tests our faith by asking us to give back to Him what He has supernaturally and faithfully provided, not just what He has provided through regular channels.

The irony is that some hold back their son and, in the end, lose him. Some hoard their silver and end up losing it. How many have not worshipped and ended up with nothing to sacrifice? How many have never obeyed and, consequently, have never been blessed? It is the fear of loss that makes us hold back, especially when we fear the loss of life or our most valued possessions. Then, we struggle with the Lord the most and resist submitting to Him. Resistance leads to loss and death. Submission leads to life and blessing.

Wolves sometimes fight over territorial boundaries. When one wolf realizes he cannot win, he surrenders by exposing his jugular vein to the teeth of his adversary. For some unexplained reason, the victor does not kill him but allows the conquered to go free. In the case of a believer's struggle with the Lord, when he exposes his jugular, God does not kill him. He not only lets him go free, but He abundantly blesses him.

God blesses obedient believers. Notice all Abraham received because he obeyed: 1) God allowed him to keep his most precious possession, his son. 2) God provided a sacrifice for worship. 3) God reaffirmed His covenant and even added to it. 4) God put Abraham in the hall of faith. More space is given to Abraham in Hebrews 11 than any other man. 5) God made Abraham His friend (Isa. 41:8, Jas. 2:21-23).

God abundantly blesses all who obey. Constable points out, "Every time Abraham made a sacrifice for God, the Lord responded by giving Abraham more. 1. Abraham left his homeland; God gave him a new one. 2. Abraham left his extended family; God gave him a much larger family. 3. Abraham offered the best of the land to Lot; God gave him more land. 4. Abraham gave up the King of Sodom's reward; God gave Abraham more wealth. 5. Abraham gave up Ishmael; God made Ishmael the father of a multitude of Abraham's posterity. 6. Abraham was willing to give up Isaac; God allowed him to live and, through him, gave Abraham numerous seeds. In each case, God gave Abraham a deeper relationship with Himself and more material prosperity. Note the closeness of this fellowship in Abraham's response to God's revelations: 'Here I am' (vv. 1, 11). God has not promised Christians great physical blessings (cf. 2 Tim. 3:2), but whenever we make a sacrifice for Him, He gives us a deeper relationship with Himself at least (cf. John 15:14). For this reason, we should not fear making personal sacrifices for God."

This test of Abraham's faith is the climax of his history. It is the last major incident in the record of his life.

God tests you to see if He can trust you with more of His blessing. As the hymn says,

Nothing between my soul and the Savior,
So that His blessed face may be seen,
Nothing preventing the least of His favor,
Keep the way clear! Let nothing between.

DEALING WITH A DEATH IN YOUR FAMILY

We don't like to talk about it. So, we rarely do, but sooner or later, we will all have to deal with death. I don't mean our own death; I mean the death of a family member or friend. The death of a loved one can be sudden. An accident can quickly take someone who you thought had years to live. I've conducted funerals for babies, children, and teenagers. The departure of someone near and dear can, of course, be a slow process as in one with a gradually working terminal disease, but regardless of the speed with which it happens, it is sure to happen. In *Marmion*, Sir Walter Scott wrote, "And come he slow, or come he fast, it is but death who comes at last." As Benjamin Franklin observed, "In this world, nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes." Some, of course, have managed to avoid taxes, but few have successfully avoided death.

When death comes, you need to know how to deal with it. How should you deal with the death of a loved one? There are many death notices in the Bible and a few accounts of someone dying. These reports are usually brief and, therefore, do not offer much insight into how to handle death. There is, however, one extended description of a man dealing with the death of his wife that can be helpful to others dealing with this heartrending issue. It is the story of the death and burial of Sarah

The Death of Sarah

Sarah Died "Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is Hebron) in the land of Canaan" (23:1-2a). At the end of the last episode, Abraham and Sarah were living in Beersheba (22:19). Apparently, they moved back to Hebron, where they lived years earlier (13:18; 14:13; Morris). Hebron is called Kirjath Arba, the City of Arba (35:27; Keil).

Sarah was 90 years old when Isaac was born (17:17; 21:5) and was probably around 108 or 110 when Isaac was nearly sacrificed (22:5-6; Leupold). She died when she was 127 (23:1), which means that Abraham was 137 (17:17) and Isaac was 37 (21:5) at the time. Sarah is the only woman whose age (Keil) and death (Leupold; Morris, who says "whose age at the time of death") is given in the Scripture (she is also the only woman in the Bible whose name God changed; see 17:15). Perhaps, this distinction is granted to her because she is the mother of all believing women (Leupold; Morris) and obedient wives (1 Pet. 3:5-6). The addition of the phrase "in the land of Canaan" is a reminder that she died in the land of promise (Keil). It is repeated in Genesis 23:19. She died in the land of promise, "not having received the promise" (Heb. 11:13).

Abraham Mourned "And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her" (23:2b). The wording suggests Abraham was not with his wife when she died (Leupold). If she had a terminal illness, he would probably have been with her (Morris). At any rate, when she died, he "came" from the field where he was with his flocks (Keil). Abraham mourned and wept for Sarah. The Hebrew word translated "mourn" means "to beat one's breast, to lament." It involves an audible expression of grief. Weeping and wailing were customary oriental expressions of grief (Leupold). It is not just oriental; it is natural to cry and talk about one's grief.

The Deliberation of Abraham

Abraham Requested a Burial Place in the Land It might be expected that Abraham would return to his ancestral home for the burial (Ross). Neither of these things is recorded next. Rather, the reader is informed, “Then Abraham stood up from before his dead and spoke to the sons of Heth saying “I am a foreigner and a sojourner among you. Give me property for a burial place among you that I may bury my dead out of my sight” (23:3-4). Significantly, Abraham does not return to his native country. Ancient Near Easterners would have normally buried family members in their native land. Abraham’s desire to bury Sarah in the Promised Land shows that he had turned his back on Mesopotamia forever. Canaan was his adopted homeland (see Constable). Sarah’s death was another situation in which Abraham would exercise faith (Ross). So, he secured property for a burial site. Abraham spoke to the sons of Heth (23:3), that is, the Hittites who owned the city and surrounding territory (Leupold). He acknowledges that he is a “foreigner” and “sojourner,” words that describe a resident alien who does not own land (Kidner; Leupold). He then requests a burial place, not just for Sarah, but for others (23:4), anticipating that others may die before the promise is realized (Leupold). Hebrews refers to this passage as an illustration of faith (Heb. 11:13-16).

“And the sons of Heth answered Abraham saying to him, ‘Hear us LORD: You are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial place that you may bury your dead” (23:5-6). The Hittites acknowledged that Abraham was a “mighty prince” (Hebrew: “a prince of God”). They recognized that God had blessed him and because they, too, respected him, they were willing to let him select whatever burial place among them he wanted. “Abraham has put himself at the bottom of the social ladder, and they put him at the top” (Roop, cited by Constable).

Abraham Requested the Cave of Machpelah Abraham knew which burial place he wanted. “Then Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth, and he spoke to them saying, “If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has, which is at the end of his field. Let him give it to me at the full price as property for a burial place among you” (23:7-9). Abraham wanted the cave of Machpelah. It was customary to mediate the purchase. Hence, the request that they do that (Morris; Leupold). The cave of Machpelah was at the end of Ephron’s field (23:9). His property would not have to be divided (Leupold). Nor was Abraham asking for a favor; he was willing to pay full price.

“Now Ephron dwelt among the sons of Heth and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the presence of the sons of Heth, all who entered at the gate of his city saying, ‘No my LORD, hear me I give you the field and the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. I give it to you. Bury your dead” (23:10-11). Ephron offered to give Abraham the field and the cave. Again, this was the custom. The intent was to either obtain a gift, which would abundantly compensate for the land or to preclude any abatement in the price being asked (23:15; Keil). Ephron’s offer was an “empty gesture.” The Oriental custom was to offer someone what he admired. They did not expect the person to take it without compensation.

“Why did Ephron want to sell Abraham the entire plot of ground where the cave lay rather than just the cave as Abraham requested (vv. 8-11)? Hittite law specified that when a landowner sold only part of his property to someone else, the original owner had to continue paying all the land taxes. However, if he sold the entire tract, the new owner was responsible for paying the taxes (cf.

1 Chron. 21:24). Consequently, Ephron held out for the entire tract, knowing that Abraham needed to make his purchase quickly so he could bury Sarah” (Barker, cited by Constable).

Abraham Purchased the Cave of Machpelah “Then Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land; and he spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land saying ‘If you will give it please hear me. I will give you money for the field; take it from me and I will bury my dead there’” (23:12-13). Understanding the customs, Abraham insisted that Ephron accept payment for the burial place.

“And Ephron answered Abraham saying to him ‘My LORD, listen to me; the land is worth 400 hundred shekels of silver. What is that between you and me? So bury your dead’” (23:14-15). Ephron does not directly ask for a particular price. He does not ask to be paid. He says the land is worth 400 shekels of silver and suggests it is a small amount. Evidently, the value put on the property was not at all small. It was “very considerable for the time” (Keil), “heavy” (Kidner), and “no doubt considerably more than the field was worth” (Morris). “Jeremiah paid only seventeen shekels for a field (Jer. 32:9), and David fifty for a threshing floor and oxen (2 Sam. 24:24). On the other hand, David paid 600 gold shekels for the whole Temple site (1 Chron. 21:25), and Omri bought the virgin hill of Samaria for two talents (6,000 shekels) of silver (1 Kings 16:24). Kidner says without details of these properties or current prices, no certainty is possible, but citing Nichol, Constable says, “An average field cost four shekels per acre, and garden land cost 40 shekels per acre. Abraham was willing to pay 400 shekels. Of course, the text does not give the exact area of the property, but it appears to have been relatively small.” If the property’s value was inflated, Ephron was doing what Orientals did. First, offering the object as a gift, not expecting the offer to be accepted. Then, giving a price. They say it is modest, but it is exorbitant. Everyone understands this is a starting point for the bargaining process. Orientals engage in the process with delight (Leupold).

“And Abraham listened to Ephron and Abraham, weighted out of the silver for Ephron which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, 400 shekels of silver, the currency of the merchants” (23:16). No doubt, to the surprise of Ephron and all the others, Abraham immediately paid the suggested price without haggling (Morris). He weighed the silver, not counting it out because coins were not in circulation then. He also used the higher standard of the “currency of the merchants,” not the currency of the itinerant merchant or peddler (Leupold). No reason is given for why he did this.

“So the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah which was before Mamre, the field and the cave which were in it, and all the trees that were in the field which were within all the surrounding borders were deeded to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the sons of the Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city” (23:17-18). These verses describe a Hittite land contract, which characteristically references the trees (Kidner, p. 146). It was a legal contract before all who entered at the gate.” The whole narrative repeatedly points out that this was done publicly before all the people (23:3, 7, 10, 12, 13, 16, 18).

The reason Abraham wanted the cave of Machpelah was that it was “before Mamre,” which is where he lived (14:13). Sarah would be buried as near as possible to his residence (Leupold).

“Abraham’s purchase of the cave of Machpelah (lit. double cave, or split cave) indicates his continuing faith in God’s promise to give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants. Similarly, Jeremiah purchased property in the Promised Land on the eve of the Babylonian captivity to express his belief that God would bring the Israelites back there eventually (cf. Jer. 32:6-15). One does not usually bury his family in a place unless he considers it his home and plans to be there a long time” (Constable).

The Burial of Sarah

Abraham buried Sarah “And after Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre (that is Hebron) in the land of Canaan” (23:19). Sarah died in the land of Canaan (23:2) and was buried in the land of Canaan (23:19). She died in faith, not having received the promise (Heb. 11:13).

Abraham received a deed “So the field and the cave that is in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of Heth as property for a burial place” (23:20). “This verse [v. 20] is a conclusion to vv. 2-19. It seems strange appearing after v. 19—which would have been a reasonable note on which to conclude. Its placement here points out that the crucial element in this chapter is not Sarah’s death but Abraham’s acquisition of land from outsiders. As such, it is a harbinger of things to come” (Hamilton, cited by Constable). The strict legal procedure (23:18) and the deed are important in demonstrating Abraham’s “strong faith in the promises of God and their eventual fulfillment” (Keil).

The cave of Machpelah became the burial place not only for Sarah but for Abraham (25:9), Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah (49:31), as well as Jacob (50:13).

Summary: When Sarah died, Abraham purchased a burial place in the land of Canaan as a demonstration that he believed that God would fulfill His promise and give him the land.

The significance of the chapter is that it demonstrates Abraham’s faith in the face of death (50:25; Heb. 11). The seemingly unimportant event of this passage, which could have been reported far more briefly, is given at greater length because it is an act of outstanding faith (Leupold). Abraham wanted his descendants to know that he believed in the divine promise. The burial place in the land was his eloquent testimony to all that he was sure of the validity of God’s promises (Leupold). “The time of death should be the time when the godly proclaim their faith most loudly in the view of our hope in God’s promises” (Constable).

The problem simply stated is this: God promised Abraham and Sarah many descendants and the land, but the recipients of the promises began to die. What, then, is to become of the promises? It becomes evident that the promises will not be fulfilled within the lifetime of Sarah or later Abraham. Abraham has to prepare for the future. The genealogy of Nahor was a reminder that Abraham’s ancestral home was in the east (22:20-24). This burial account in the land rather than in the east indicates that for Abraham, there was no going back to Ur. He believed his future was in Canaan (Rose).

Death does not destroy the promises of God. God will fulfill His promises by resurrection. Therefore, believers should exercise faith even in the face of death. Believers should believe in resurrection and that God will fulfill His promises beyond resurrection.

The importance of the chapter lies in this. By leaving their bones in Canaan, the patriarchs gave their last witness to the promise, as Joseph’s dying words made clear (50:25). “While they themselves were silent ... the sepulcher cried aloud, that death formed no obstacle to their entering on the possession of it” (Calvin, cited by Kidner).

This passage contains three practical principles for us to practice. Like Abraham, we should purchase a burial site. Unlike Abraham, we should do it before we need it. Like Abraham, we should use the death of a loved one to proclaim our faith (Rom. 8:38-39). Like Abraham, we should persevere to the very end. As Job said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15).

NOT ALL GOD'S WORK IS SUPERNATURAL!

God supernaturally created the universe. God miraculously gave Abraham and Sarah a son named Isaac. God dramatically parted the waters of the Red Sea. Today, people claim that God supernaturally heals. Missionaries tell of dramatically escaping death. TV evangelists report God working miracles. Are we to conclude that God *always* works in a dramatic, miraculous, supernatural way? Does He ever do anything that could be described as ordinary and natural? The answer is “Yes.” The Bible (and life today) is full of illustrations of God working through natural means. Not all of God’s work is supernatural! For a particularly instructive illustration, consider how God worked to get Isaac a bride. The story is recorded in Genesis 24, the longest chapter in Genesis. “The length of this story and the amount of detail included suggests that this incident played an important part in fulfilling the Author’s purpose” (Constable).

The Proposal of Abraham

The Responsibility The story of Isaac’s wedding begins with a proposal *from his father*. “Now Abraham was old advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house who ruled over all that he had please put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD the God of heaven and the God of earth that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, but you shall go to my country and to my family and take a wife for my son Isaac” (24:1-4). At this point, Abraham was 140 years old (24:20) and had been blessed as God had promised (12:2). The mention of God’s blessing is a reference to God’s promise to Abraham. It seems to suggest that since Abraham’s part of the promise had been fulfilled, Abraham felt the necessity to make provision for another part to be fulfilled (Leupold). Thus, this story is not about romance and matrimony but God’s promise of an heir and faith (Keil; Leupold; for romance, see 29:9-12). Abraham is acting not just as a concerned father to find a wife for his son but as a man of faith (24:7).

As a man of faith, Abraham was concerned that Isaac have a believing wife. So he commanded his oldest servant to swear that he would not take a wife for Isaac from the Canaanites but from his family. The Hebrew word translated “oldest” could refer to rank rather than age (Leupold). Be that as it may, this servant was the biggest one in authority, for he ruled over all Abraham had (24:2). It is generally assumed to be Eliezer, whom Abraham wanted to make heir 60 years before this event (15:2; Keil).

Placing the hand under the thigh in making an oath is only mentioned here and in Genesis 47:29. Since “thigh” means “loins,” that is, the seat of the procreative powers (“body,” 46:26), this type of oath has been taken to be concerning one’s descendants (Leupold). Jewish commentators claim it is connected to the rite of circumcision (Keil; Morris) and Christians have related it to the Savior coming from Abraham’s line (Leupold). By getting this trusted servant to swear to get a wife from his family and not the Canaanites, Abraham assures that Isaac would have a believing wife (Leupold; Kidner; Morris).

As a wealthy man living in a foreign land, Abraham could have arranged a marriage for his son based on social standing or political connection (Leupold). Instead, he desired a wife from his own family, even though they were few and far away. He did not choose temporal advantage but

spiritual concerns (Morris). “Abraham’s insistence on a non-Canaanite wife for Isaac (v. 3) was not racial; it was theological. The Canaanites worshipped Baal and Asherah (cf. 15:16; Deut. 7:3). But Abraham’s extended family evidently worshipped the true God (v. 31; 11:27-12:4; Josh. 24:2)” (Constable).

Fathers of faith should be concerned that their children marry believers (Deut. 7:3-4; Ezek. 9; 1 Cor. 7:39). Abraham, who had the right and responsibility to provide a wife for Isaac, could do that by issuing a command to his servant. Fathers today can fulfill this responsibility by instructing their children in the way of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Begin early!

The Bible gives definite instructions about the marriage of believers. There is to be no marriage with an unbeliever. H. V. Morton, the renowned traveler, once saw a camel and a donkey harnessed to the same plow. The camel did not like being so closely tied to the donkey. The donkey was having a difficult time. It had all the weight of the yoke chafing its shoulders. Neither one nor the other could get in step. God forbids such an unequal yoke in marriage.

The Reaction “and the servant said to him, ‘Perhaps the women will not be willing to follow me to the land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you come?’” (24:5). The servant was not concerned about finding a woman with the spiritual and social qualifications. He was worried that she would be willing to follow him to find the man of promise. He suggested taking Isaac along.

The Response “But Abraham said to him ‘Beware that you do not take my son back there. The LORD God of heaven who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my family and who spoke to me and swore to me saying to your descendants I give this land. He will send His angel before you and you shall take a wife for my son there. And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath only do not take my son back there. So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter” (24:6-9). Abraham flatly refused. Since God had promised the land to his descendants, it must not be forsaken. Since God had promised the land to his descendants through Isaac, a wife was essential, and Abraham was sure God would provide it (Leupold). He trusted God to intervene (24:9; Ross).

“This angel may be either understood of a created angel, such being frequently made use of in the affairs of Providence, directing and succeeding men, or of the uncreated Angel, the Son of God, since the servant attributes his direction and success wholly to the Lord” (Gill; see “the Lord led me” in 24:27). The expression “He will send His angel before you” means that God would prepare the way for Abraham’s servant’s arrival” (Constable). Again, this narrative is about Abraham not as a concerned father but as a man of faith. He trusted God. He released the servant from the oath if the women refused to come rather than have Isaac leave the land. Under that condition, the servant took the oath.

The Plan of the Servant

The Trip “Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, for all his master’s goods were in his hand. And he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the City of Nahor” (24:10). Ten camels were regarded as proper for a caravan and still are (Leupold). In this case, they were required for the necessary provision of the trip, the customary presents for the bride (24:22, 53), as well as the needs of the attendants (24:59). Fully equipped and prepared, he journeyed to the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia, probably Haran (11:31; 12:4; Keil; Leupold).

The Prayer “And he made his camel kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. Then he said, ‘O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day and show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold here I stand by the well of water and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, ‘Please let down your pitcher that I may drink and she says, ‘Drink and I will give your camel a drink—let her be the one You have appointed for your servant Isaac. And by this, I will know that you have shown kindness to my master” (24:11-14). To find a wife for Isaac, the servant designed a plan. He went to where the women of the city would be and prayed. His plan was simple enough. He would ask for water and if she went beyond his request and offered to water the camels, he knew she was the kind of wife Isaac needed. This was not an arbitrary test. Watering ten camels was no small task. “Camels could drink 25 gallons of water (Constable).

This test would reveal a kind and industrious woman. (Ross). Watering the camels required good health and strength. Her willingness to serve would indicate courtesy, cheerfulness, and readiness to work (Leupold). “It tested Rebekah’s kindness, hospitality, industry, and willingness to help a stranger” (Constable). Would she follow through with the whole test and would she do it without grumbling (Morris)? The test was designed to find a woman with a servant’s heart. The servant, however, was not just relying on the test; he was depending on the Lord.

The Answer “And it happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder” (24:15). God answered the servant’s prayer before he finished praying (24:15; Isa. 65:24)! When he finished, behold Rebekah, a second cousin of Isaac (22:23), was there with a pitcher on her shoulder. In Mesopotamia, women carried pitchers on their shoulders; in Egypt and elsewhere, they carried them on their heads (Leupold).

“Now the young woman was very beautiful to behold, a virgin; no man had known her. And she went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up” (24:16). Rebekah was not only beautiful (see also 12:11), she was a *very* beautiful virgin who had never known a man. The name “Rebekah means “ensnarer” (BDB; Constable says it means “Ensnaring Beauty”). The top of the well was below the surface of the ground. Rebekah descended the stairs to the well, filled her pitcher, and ascended the stairs to ground level again.

“And the servant ran to meet her and said, ‘Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher.’ So she said, ‘Drink, my LORD.’ Then she hastened and let her pitcher down to her hand, and gave him a drink. And when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, ‘I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking” (24:17-19). When the servant approached and asked for a drink, she not only *hastened* to give him a drink but also gave all the camels a drink. This was a difficult chore. She had to descend and ascend stairs many times, carrying a heavy pitcher of water. Camels drink twenty gallons (Boise; Constable says they could drink twenty-five gallons; see comment on verse 14).

“Then she hastened and emptied her pitcher into the trough, ran back to the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels. And the man, wondering at her, remained silent so as to know whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not” (24:20-21). While Rebekah hastened to water the camels, even running to do it, the servant wondered if she was the answer to his prayer. He did not know. He did not jump to any conclusions. He silently pondered the possibilities. He did not blindly follow his first impressions (Keil). He was cautious to avoid self-deception (Leupold). Until the woman and her family were in agreement, this mission was far from successful.

“So it was, when the camels had finished drinking, that the man took a golden nose ring weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels of gold, and said, ‘Whose daughter are you? Tell me, please, is there room in your father’s house for us to lodge?’ (24:22-23). When she was finally finished, he gave her three rings: one for her nose and one for each wrist. These expensive gifts were not bridal gifts; they were gifts in return for her kindness (Keil). Then the servant asked whose daughter she was and if there was room in her father’s house for him and his party to spend the night.

“So she said to him, ‘I am the daughter of Bethuel, Micah’s son, whom she bore to Nahor.’ Moreover she said to him, ‘We have both straw and feed enough, and room to lodge’” (24:24-25). Rebekah identified herself and acknowledged that her family could accommodate them.

“Then the man bowed down his head and worshipped the LORD. And he said, ‘Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master’s brethren’” (24:26-27). Upon hearing who she was, the servant burst forth in praise, thanking God for His “mercy and truth” toward his master Abraham. The Hebrew word translated “mercy” means “kindness” and the one rendered “truth” means, “faithful.” These two should probably be taken together, indicating God’s faithful, loyal love (Ross).

The servant was deeply grateful that God had providentially guided him to the proper woman. Gill says, “By the way of the well; in the right way, as Jarchi, in which he was directed; in the way of his duty, following the steps of divine Providence, and observing them.” Clarke comments, “By desire of his master, he went out on this journey; and as he acknowledged God in all his ways, the Lord directed all his steps.”

“So the young woman ran and told those of her mother’s house these things (24:28). When Rebekah heard all this, she ran home to tell everyone.

The Permission of the Family

Laban was Hospitable “Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban, and Laban ran out to the man by the well. So it came to pass, when he saw the nose ring and the bracelets on her sister’s wrists and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah saying ‘thus the man spoke to me’ that he went to the men. And there he stood by the camels at the well. And he said, ‘Come in, O blessed of the LORD! Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels’” (24:29-31). The servant stood by the well while Rebekah informed her family. Laban, Rebekah’s brother, being “the senior active male in the house” (Morris), went to meet the servant. No doubt hearing from his sister that the servant was from Abraham, a fact she learned listening to the servant pray, motivated Laban to run out to the servant, but the text says, “When he saw the nose ring and the bracelets on his sister’s wrist and when he heard” (24:30). The jewels did not go unnoticed (Kinder). As will be revealed later in his dealings with Jacob, Laban had possibly had an underlying element of greed in his attitude (Morris). At any rate, he greeted the servant as one blessed of the Lord and invited him to lodge with them.

The Servant made a Request “Then the man came to the house. And he unloaded the camels, and provided straw and feed for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. And food was set before him to eat, but he said, ‘I will not eat until I have told about my errand.’ And he said, ‘Speak on’” (24:32-33). It was customary to care for the animals, wash, and eat. They provided for the animals, washed, and sat down to eat. The servant took his commission so seriously, he did eat until he delivered his message (Leupold).

The Servant gave a Report “So he said, ‘I am Abraham’s servant. The LORD has blessed my master greatly, and he had become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys. And Sarah my master’s wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and to him he has given all that he has. Now my master made me swear, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell; but you shall go to my father’s house and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son.’ And I said to my master, ‘Perhaps the woman will not follow me’. But he said to me, ‘The LORD, before whom I walk, will send His angel with you and prosper your way; and you shall take a wife for my son from my kindred and from my father’s house. You will be clear from this oath when you arrive among my kindred; for if they will not give her to you, then you will be released from my oath.’ And this day I came to the well and said, ‘O LORD God of my master Abraham, if You will now prosper the way in which I go, behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass that when the virgin comes out to draw water, and I say to her, Please give me a little water from your pitcher to drink. and she says to me, ‘Drink, and I will draw for your camels also.’—let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master’s son.’ But before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah, coming out with her pitcher on her shoulder, and she went down to the well and drew water. And I said to her, ‘Please let me drink.’ And she made haste and let her pitcher down from her shoulder and said, ‘Drink, and I will give your camels a drink also.’ So I drank, and she gave the camels a drink also. ‘Then I asked her and said, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ And she said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor’s son, whom Micah bore to him.’ So I put the nose ring on her nose and the bracelets on her wrists. ‘And I bowed my head and worshipped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master’s brother for his son. “Now if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me. And if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left” (24:34-49).

In a long speech, Abraham’s servant reviews all the pertinent data. Since he is there to obtain a wife for Abraham’s son Isaac, he gives an account of 1) Abraham’s financial status (24:35). He does not ascribe Abraham’s wealth to Abraham’s business acumen but to the Lord (Morris). 2) Isaac’s birth (24:36), which explains “how the son of one brother should be a candidate in marriage for the granddaughter of another brother” (Leupold). 3) Isaac’s status as the sole heir of his father’s wealth (24:36). 4) the oath to take a wife from Abraham’s family (24:37-41). 5) God’s providential guidance (24:42-48). All of this is a repetition of what has already been recorded. The repetition is deliberately designed to emphasize this material (Ross). “As with most repetitions in biblical narrative, the retelling is not a mere repeating. It is rather a reassertion of the central points of the first narrative” (Sailhame, cited by Constable). “Repeating an event confirmed its truthfulness in Scripture (cf. 41:32)” (Constable).

The servant concluded with a request for them to tell him one way or the other how they would respond to the invitation for Rebekah to become Isaac’s wife. (24:49). He asks them to deal kindly and truly with Abraham as the Lord had done with his master (24:27). There is “no flattery, no pressure” (Kidner), just a simple and straightforward presentation of the facts.

They gave their Permission. “Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, ‘The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you either bad or good. Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master’s son’s wife, as the LORD has spoken” (24:50-51). Laban, Rebekah’s brother, and Bethuel, her father, immediately granted their permission for Rebekah to go and be Isaac’s wife. This is the first time Rebekah’s father is mentioned in this narrative and he is mentioned after his son Laban. Some say it was the custom for the brother to take part in the

decision (34:5, 11, 25; Judges 21:22; 2 Sam. 13:22; Keil). Some suggest that Bethuel was too old to do more than be roused to give his permission (Kidner). Whatever the explanation, both brother and father acknowledge that it came from the Lord (24:50) and that the Lord had spoken (24:51). They could not speak “bad or good” (24:50), that is, add a word (Keil), say anything at all (Leupold).

“And it came to pass, when Abraham’s servant heard their words, that he worshipped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth. Then the servant brought out jewelry of silver, jewelry of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. And he and the men who were with him ate and drank and stayed all night. Then they arose in the morning, and he said, ‘Send me away to my master’” (24:52-54). When the servant heard that, he prayed for the third time in this chapter. Then he gave gifts to Rebekah, her brother, and her mother. This was a kind of dowry or wedding present (Leupold). After all this, they eat and sleep. The next morning, the servant was eager to return to Abraham. He requested that they send him and, of course, Rebekah on their way.

The Brother and Mother made a Request “But her brother and her mother said, ‘Let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least ten; after that, she may go.’ And he said to them, ‘Do not hinder me since the LORD has prospered my way; send me away so that I may go to my master.’ So they said, ‘We will call the young woman and ask her personally’” (24:55-57). The servant’s request to leave was surely a shock. He had been there less than twenty-four hours! To leave so soon was too sudden for them. So they suggested that they wait a few days, at least ten. Their suggestion certainly seems reasonable. They all needed time to adjust to Rebekah being married and leaving the area. They at least need a going away party. The servant, however, insisted on leaving. The Lord had indeed blessed his journey. He was personally anxious to report to Abraham and Isaac.

Marriage proposals often produce family conflicts. Even the wedding arrangements cause conflict. How were they to resolve their differences? They decided to ask the bride! Constable says it was customary in Hurrian society to consult the bride before completing the marriage plans. As a Pastor, I follow this rule when I perform a wedding. When asked which way to do something, I say, “Ask the bride. The wedding day is her day!”

Rebekah agreed to go “Then they called Rebekah and said to her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ And she said, ‘I will go.’ So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham’s servant and his men” (24:58). Rebekah’s response was to go—without delay. She was ready to go immediately! “Rebekah demonstrated her faith in Abraham’s God by decisively choosing to leave her family to marry Isaac (cf. the similar choice of Ruth; Ruth 1:16)” (Constable). So, they decided to send her and her nurse. Her nurse’s name was Deborah (35:8). Actually, she not only took her nurse, but she also took her maids as well (24:61).

“And they blessed Rebekah and said to her: ‘Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the gates of those who hate them.’ Then Rebekah and her maids arose, and they rode on the camels and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and departed” (24:59-61). Before the wedding party departed, they blessed Rebekah. Their conventional blessing (Leupold; Kidner) echoed God’s words to Abraham (22:17). It called for Rebekah to have exceedingly numerous and victorious descendants.

The Meeting with Isaac

Isaac Meditated In the meantime, Isaac was still in Canaan. “Now Isaac came from the way of Beer Lahai Rai, for he dwelt in the South. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening, and he lifted up his eyes and looked and there, the camels were coming” (24:62-63). Isaac lived at Beer Lahai Rai (25:11; Constable), which was in the South. It was where God met Hagar (16:4) and had previously answered prayer (16:14). In the evening, Isaac went into the field to meditate. Meditation here is often taken to include prayer (Keil; Leupold). The implication is that Isaac was a deeply spiritual man (Morris). While meditating, Isaac saw the caravan coming.

Rebekah Dismounted and Covered Herself “Then Rebekah lifted her eyes and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from her camel, for she had said to the servant, ‘who is the man walking in the field to meet us?’ And the servant said, ‘It is my master.’ So she took a veil and covered herself” (24:64-65). Rebekah dismounted to meet Isaac, which, according to oriental custom, was the respectful thing to do (Joshua 15:18; 1 Sam. 25:23; Keil; Leupold). Putting on a veil, which covered both face and body (Leupold), was the custom for a bride meeting the bridegroom (Keil; Kidner; Morris; Constable agrees and adds that Israelite women did not normally wear veils; 12:14; 38:14).

The Servant Reviewed “and the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done” (24:66). The servant’s review before Rebekah’s family was recorded in detail.

Isaac and Rebekah were Married “Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death” (24:67). Isaac took Rebekah to his mother’s tent, which had been vacant for three years (Morris). Then Isaac and Rebekah were married. His care for her grew and he was completely comforted over the loss of his mother (Leupold).

Summary: When Abraham, believing God would fulfill His covenant, commanded his servant to find a wife for Isaac among his people and the servant trusted the Lord for a woman with a servant’s heart, God providentially worked to provide Rebekah.

“The significance of this long story in the larger context of special revelation is fourfold, at least. 1. Primarily, it demonstrates God’s faithfulness to His promise to provide descendants for Abraham and, therefore, His trustworthiness. Along with this is the assurance that even though Abraham was soon to die, God would fulfill His promises in the future. 2. It reveals that God guides people who are seeking His will so they discover it. 3. It illustrates God’s selecting a bride for His Son out of the world through the agency of His Spirit, which the New Testament teaches. 4. It provides a good model, in the servant, of one who responded properly to the work of God. Abraham’s servant prayed before he acted, praised when God answered his prayers, and lived believing that God controls all the affairs of life” (Constable).

God does not always work supernaturally. He sometimes providentially works through circumstances in the lives of His believing, praying people to accomplish His program. “The details show how God provided a wife and seed-bearer for Isaac and, thus, remained faithful to His promises to Abraham. God’s working providentially through the natural course of events to accomplish His purposes clarifies His ways with humankind” (Constable).

“Although the Lord elects both Abraham and Rebekah, His mode of revelation to them is strikingly different. To Abraham, he speaks (12:7) in visions and auditions, to Rebekah, he communicates through answered prayer and providential acts (24:27, 48, 50)” (Waltke, cited by Constable).

In 2011, I had a spinal cord injury that left me unable to walk. I prayed that the Lord would heal me or direct me to people who could help me walk again. After five weeks in in-house therapy at UCLA, I was discharged and told to go to physical therapy. To make a long story short, instead of going to physical therapy at UCLA, I managed to get assigned to the physical therapy department connected with Northridge Hospital. That program was excellent, but it only lasted as long as my insurance. At Northridge Hospital, we met someone who told us about a program on the Cal State University campus in Northridge. It was called the Brown Center of Achievement. It is designed to help people with a disability and, at the same time, train students. I ended up in that program. In several years, I was able to get out of the wheelchair. Then, I was able to walk with the aid of a walker. After that, I could walk with the aid of two canes and now I can walk with one cane and sometimes with none. The program at the Brown Center has been a significant part of my recovery. In answer to prayer, the Lord providentially directed me to that place. The Lord does not always work supernaturally; He also uses natural means.

HOW TO GROW OLD AND DIE

Everyone, it seems, wants to stay young. Men used to search for the fountain of youth. Today, we eat the proper diet, exercise, and take supplements to stay young, but the fact is all humans grow old and die. We don't like to think about old age. So, we try to look as young as possible as long as possible. People will do anything to look young, from the way they dress to plastic surgery, but the fact is, all of us grow old and die and most of us cannot hide behind clothes or make-up when it happens.

Instead of trying to stay young or look young, why don't we give some thought to how to grow old and die? It's not just "older" people who should think about this subject. "Younger" people should too. After all, all are going to grow old and die someday.

The Scripture records some things about Abraham's old age and death, which should give us some helpful insights into how we should depart this life. His old age and death are recorded in Genesis 25:1-11.

The Decision of Abraham

Abraham got Married The last chapter in the life of Abraham begins with the observation that "Abraham again took a wife and her name was Keturah" (25:1). Some argue that the fact that Keturah is called a concubine (25:6; see also 1 Chron. 1:32) suggests that Sarah was alive when Abraham took Keturah (Kidner), but that is not conclusive (Keil). On the other hand, the verbs imply that Abraham's second marriage was after Sarah's death (Ross), which is generally accepted (Keil).

Abraham was 137 years old when Sarah died (23:1; 17:17). After Sarah died when Abraham was "old, well advanced in years" (24:1), he sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac (24:2-9). Even if Abraham married Keturah before Sarah died, he was an old man when he got a second wife. If his second marriage was after Sarah's death, he was definitely an old man, even by the standards of those days. For after Sarah's death, he is said to be "old, well advanced in years" (24:1).

Why did he get married when he was so old? Did he begin "to feel his loneliness and isolation as a pilgrim patriarch, wandering, a homeless stranger in a land pledged to him but not yet possessed?" (Phillips). Was he guilty of lust? Abraham might have been lonely but married again because of God's will. God had promised, "You shall be a father of many nations" (17:4). In obedience to God's will, Abraham got married again so he could have more children and be the father of many nations (Leupold; Morris).

Abraham had more Sons Abraham had children by his second wife, "and she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbok and Shuah. Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan, and the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. And the sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoah, Abidah and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah" (25:2-4). Abraham had six more sons and from them, seven grandsons and three great-grandsons. Tracing the descendants of these six sons of Abraham is difficult, if not impossible. These became Arabian tribes (25:6; Keil). Some of the people lived in Sheba. Dedan and Midian came from Abraham (25:2-4) and some did not (10:7; Ross). Morris suggests that through thousands of years of migrations and intermarriages, it is likely that all of these peoples, together with the descendants of Ishmael, Lot, Esau, and descendants of Shem and, in some cases, Ham, have gradually merged and become the modern-

day Arabic peoples. The descendants of Midian are mentioned frequently in the Old Testament. They became the enemy of Israel, but enough information is given to demonstrate that God made Abraham of many nations and tribes (Leupold; Ross).

Abraham Provided for all, but made Isaac his heir “And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubine which Abraham had; and while he was still living, he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the East” (25:5-6). While he was still alive, Abraham disposed of all his property. He divided his property in such a way as to include the will of God. Isaac, Abraham’s heir according to the Lord, received the bulk of Abraham’s estate (25:5). Yet Abraham provided for all his other sons by his two concubines, Hagar and now Keturah (Morris). He gave each of them enough cattle and goods to make a good start in life (Leupold). He also separated the other sons from Isaac so that there would be no dispute after his death. “‘The land of the East’ (v. 6) to which Abraham sent his sons other than Isaac was Arabia. It lay to the east and south of Canaan. God’s promise that ‘through Isaac, your descendants shall be named’ (21:12) led Abraham to act as he did” (Constable). There would be no questions or quarrels. No one could dispute Isaac’s claim to the land (Phillips).

As an older man, Abraham was still concerned about the will of God. He got married, had more children, and provided for Isaac. The way to grow old is to be concerned about God’s will—even when you are old. Decide before you die where your property should go after you die. Donald Grey Barnhouse said, “How often parents parcel out property as though it were theirs’ to dispose of! It is a trust from God for which they will be held strictly responsible” (Barnhouse). You can die in the will of God by leaving God in your will.

Ross says, “Abraham had the responsibility of ensuring that the blessing, as God planned it, would pass to Isaac. The message in this part is straightforward: believers will die, and so they must ensure that the work begun in them by God will continue as God desires. It may be through their children, or it may be through some other means, but no one may personalize the program so that no thought is given to the next generation.”

The way to grow old is to walk in the will of God, even in your old age. Titus 2:2 lists the characteristics older men should have. Older men are to be sober (Titus 2:2). The Greek word translated “sober” means “sober,” that is, not given to overindulgence in wine. It is used figuratively of being morally alert, sober, calm, circumspect, and temperate. A sober-minded person is not given to excess, as in the use of wine. His pleasures are not those primarily of the senses, like the pleasures of the drunkard, for instance, but those of the soul and the spirit. He is characterized by moral and spiritual alertness. He is moderate, sane, and steady.

The older men are to be reverent (Titus 2:2). There is no English equivalent for this word. It includes the idea of being serious, grave, august, reverent, dignified, and even inspiring. Dignified is the best English translation. Yet, that falls short. The man with this attribute is not only dignified, he invites reverence. Barclay says this word describes the man who is stately and dignified in conduct and speech and carries himself with the perfect blend of dignity, courtesy, independence, and humility.

The aged are also to be temperate (Titus 2:2). This word describes a sane, sensible, sober-minded, self-controlled man. Therefore, he curbs his desires and impulses. This kind of man would not lose control of his temper and “fly off the handle.” When he gets angry, he controls it instead of it controlling him.

This sober, serious, sensible, and self-controlled man is also spiritual. Paul says he is to be sound in faith, in love, and in patience (Titus 2:2). The word “sound” has been used several times before in Titus and means “healthy.” Older men are to be robust in faith like Caleb, who, as an old

man, said, “Give me the mountain and I’ll trust God for the wisdom and the strength to conquer it.” They are to be wholesome in love, not letting it wax cold or deteriorate into sentimentality. Don’t grow in anger, bitterness, and criticism as you grow in years. Instead, increase in affection, blessing, and concern. The aged men are also to be healthy in patience, which is more accurately translated “endurance.” Endurance replaces “hope” in this trilogy. It pictures a man steadily bearing up in trials and tribulations without losing heart or courage. Senior citizens need to endure physical infirmities, disappointments, and loneliness. These three areas cover every relationship: God (faith), others (love), and one’s self (endurance).

The Death of Abraham

Abraham Died “This is the sum of the years of Abraham’s life which he lived: 175 years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years and was gathered to his people” (25:7-8). “Isaac would have been 75 years old and Jacob 15 when Abraham died (v. 7; cf. 21:5; 25:26; Fisher, cited by Constable). Abraham lived 100 years in the Promised Land (12:4). He lived a very long time, but more importantly, he lived a full life. The expression “full of years” implies “that all wants and all expectations” had been satisfied (Leupold). After a large meal, a person pushes away from the table—full! He cannot eat another thing. Abraham was fully satisfied at the end of his life (Leupold). God promised Abraham that he would die in peace and be buried at a good old age (15:15). God kept His promise. As Abraham believed God’s promises (Heb. 11:9), God was faithful to do what He promised.

When Abraham died, he was “gathered to his people” (25:8), an expression which cannot refer to his burial because he was buried only with his wife (25:10). It denotes “reunion in Sheol with friends who had gone before” (Keil). This is clearly an indication of life after death (Leupold). Jesus called the location of departed saints “Abraham’s bosom” (Lk 16:22).

Abraham was Buried “And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried and Sarah his wife” (25:9-10). “Abraham was buried in the Cave of Machpelah near Mamre, the old site that later became a part of Hebron” (Constable). Isaac and Ishmael buried their father together. That is significant. Many years before, there had been animosity between them that resulted in Abraham sending Hagar, Ishmael’s mother and Ishmael away (21:9-14). Perhaps Isaac and Ishmael had been reconciled before this occasion (Leupold), or maybe Abraham’s death brought them together again for the first time (Kidner; Morris). Ishmael was excluded from the blessings of the covenant but was elevated above the sons of Keturah in that he was promised a distinct blessing (17:20).

God Blessed Isaac “And it came to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi” (25:11). After Abraham’s death, Isaac continued in his father’s heritage. God had promised to continue Abraham’s line through Isaac and after Abraham’s death, He blessed Isaac. “It is only said of Isaac among Abraham’s children that ‘God blessed’ him (v. 11; cf. 24:1, 35); this language is used rarely in Scripture, appearing in creation narratives (1:22, 28; 2:3; 9:1)” (Mathews, cited by Constable). Archaeologists have yet to find Beer Lahai Roi; it was evidently south of Beersheba in the Negev (Constable).

Abraham believed God and walked in His will all his life to his last breath. The way to grow old and die is to endure to the very end (Heb. 3:14). God buries His workers and carries on His work. By walking in the will of God until the day you die and being concerned about the will of God after you die, you can be part of God’s work even after you die.

Summary: As Abraham grew old, he walked in the will of God to his last breath and was concerned about the work of God, even after his death. Abraham was concerned about the will of God in his old age, until his death and after his death.

The way to grow old and die is to be concerned about fulfilling God's will until, and even after, you die. One commentator summed up the spiritual truth of the passage by saying, "God's servants must do all they can to ensure that God's program of blessing continues from generation to generation without interruption" (Ross; Constable). As God promised, Abraham was buried at a good old age. "A good old age begins with a good youth and a good manhood" (Phillips).

Here is how not to grow old. On the first day, God created the dog and said: "Sit all day by the door of your house and bark at anyone who comes in or walks past. For this, I will give you a life span of twenty years." The dog said: "That's a long time to be barking. How about only ten years and I'll give you back the other ten?" So God agreed.

On the second day, God created the monkey and said: "Entertain people, do tricks, and make them laugh. For this, I'll give you a twenty-year life span." The monkey said: "Monkey tricks for twenty years? That's a pretty long time to perform. How about I give you back ten like the Dog did?" And God agreed.

On the third day, God created the cow and said: "You must go into the field with the farmer all day long and suffer under the sun, have calves, and give milk to support the farmer's family. For this, I will give you a life span of sixty years." The cow said: "That's kind of a tough life you want me to live for sixty years. How about twenty and I'll give back the other forty?" And God agreed again.

On the fourth day, God created man and said: "Eat, sleep, play, marry, and enjoy your life. For this, I'll give you twenty years." But the man said: "Only twenty years? Could you possibly give me my twenty, the forty the cow gave back, the ten the monkey gave back, and the ten the dog gave back; that makes eighty, okay?" "Okay," said God, "You asked for it."

That is why we eat, sleep, play, and enjoy ourselves for the first twenty years. For the next forty years, we slave to support our family. For the next ten years, we do monkey tricks to entertain the grandchildren. And for the last ten years, we sit on the front porch and bark at everyone.

There are not many who die in a good old age. Phillips tells of a preacher who heard that the devil has no happy old men. He decided to test the theory. He asked every old man he saw if he was happy. He failed to find one. He helped one old man carry a heavy suitcase. When they parted, he asked, "Sir, are you a happy old man?" and was cursed. He found one happy old man—a blind man who was a Christian. Phillips ended by saying, "This world is a great thief. It robs men not only of their youth and health, it robs them of peace and joy and innocence and everything else."

It is never too late to start doing what you know to do. In an assisted-living facility in Cincinnati, an 87-year-old resident named Patty Ris swallowed a piece of meat and was struggling to breathe. A 96-year-old man immediately sprang into action. He applied the Heimlich maneuver and saved her life. The 96-year-old man was Dr. Henry Heimlich, the man who invented it in 1974! Among the celebrities the technique has since saved are President Ronald Reagan, New York Mayor Ed Koch, and Cher. In this case, the inventor himself did it for the first time!" The doctor said, "That moment was very important to me. I knew about all the lives my maneuver has saved over the years and I have demonstrated it so many times, but here, for the first time, was someone sitting right next to me who was about to die." His first test subjects were dogs. He had never done it on a human in a real life and death situation. It is never too late to start doing what you know to do.

DOES GOD SOVEREIGNLY ELECT?

If you believe the Bible, you have to believe in election. The Bible teaches that God elects some people to salvation. It speaks of God choosing “you for salvation” (2 Thess. 2:13). Whether or not the Bible teaches election is not a debatable question. The issue is on what basis does God choose? Some argue that He chooses based on foreknowledge of who will believe. In support of their claim, they quote 1 Peter, which says, “elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pet. 1:2). Others contend that God chooses based on His sovereign will. They quote Ephesians to support their position. Paul says, “having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5) ... “being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:12). Well, is Peter right? Is election based on foreknowledge? Is Paul right? Does God sovereignly choose based on His will, not human will? Interestingly, the issue is settled in the first book of the Bible—Genesis. The subject of the book of Genesis is election. In the process of developing that subject, the author reveals how God chooses.

The Genealogy of Ishmael

The Genealogy of Ishmael As God promised, Ishmael had sons. “Now this is the genealogy of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s maidservant, bore to Abraham. And these were the names of the sons of Ishmael by their names, according to their generations: The first born of Ishmael, Nebajoth; then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadar, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These were the sons of Ishmael and these were their names by their tours and their settlement, twelve princes according to their nations” (25:12-16). The expression “this is the genealogy of” is the literary device that divides Genesis into its varied sections. It appears 11 times: six times in the first 11 chapters (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27), four times in the heart of the book, and (25:12, 19; 36:1, 9), and once in the introduction to the last section (37:2; Boise). The four occurrences of this expression in the heart of the book follow a pattern. The first two of these four concern the two brothers Ishmael (25:12-18) and Isaac (25:19-35:24). The next two of the four trace the lineage of the two brothers Esau (36:1-37:1) and Jacob (37:2-50:26). In each of these, the line that was not chosen is recorded before the line of the chosen. Furthermore, the line that was not chosen is discussed briefly and dismissed (Ross). The structure indicates that the main concern of Genesis is the development of the divinely chosen line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

From the structure and purpose of the book, as well as the amount of material, it is evident that Ishmael’s genealogy is not of major importance in Genesis. Nevertheless, the material is included for a reason. What is it? To understand the significance of Genesis 25:12-18, remember that God promised to bless Ishmael with 12 sons (17:20). The point of Genesis 25:12-18 is that just as God promised, Ishmael had 12 sons! (25:12). It may also be related to God’s promise to make Abraham a father of many nations (19:6). The passage labors the point that Ishmael was a son of Abraham (25:12).

The 12 sons of Ishmael settled in the general region of central and north-central Arabia (Morris) and became Arab nations (Boise). Nebajoth, the eldest son, was probably the ancestor of the Nabateans, who, after the exile, made Petra in Edom their stronghold (Leupold). Kedar

evidently had many descendants. His name is often used in the Old Testament as a synonym for all Arabs (Isa. 21:17; Jer. 49:28; etc.; Morris; Boise). Both Nebajoth and Kedar are mentioned in Isaiah 60:7. Not much, if anything, is known about Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadar, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah (for what little is known, see, Keil; Leupold; Morris; Boise).

The Death of Ishmael “These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people (they dwelt from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt, as you go toward Assyria) and he died in the presence of all his brethren” (25:17-18). The last phrase of 25:18 has been translated and, thus, interpreted several different ways. The Hebrew word rendered “died” means “fell down.” So it has been concluded that the verse is not saying Ishmael died in the presence of his brethren, but that he settled down in their presence (Keil; Leupold). The word translated “in the presence” of has been rendered “to the east of” suggesting that Ishmael settled down east of his brethren because he was a loner (Morris). At any rate, Genesis 25:18 probably does not speak of Ishmael’s death. It is speaking of where Ishmael lived. It gives a summary of the territory inhabited by Ishmael. Havilah is the sandy region east of Egypt (10:7), and Shur is still nearer the Egyptian border. Ishmael settled between Egypt and Assyria (Leupold).

When Ishmael was 137 years old, he died and “was gathered to his people,” which suggests that Ishmael was a believer (Morris). He did not share in the material provisions of the Abraham Covenant, but he grew up in Abraham’s house, under his influence and God did make a promise to him (16:11, 12; 17:20; Leupold). He certainly knew about the Lord and probably knew the Lord.

The Genealogy of Isaac

The Birth of Isaac “This is the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham’s son. Abraham begot Isaac” (25:19). The expression “this is the genealogy of” introduces the next major section of Genesis, this time concerning Isaac (25:12). Since a new section has begun, there is a restatement of the fact that Abraham begot Isaac; (Leupold). It has also been suggested that the repetition emphasizes Isaac’s connection to the one who received the promise (Ross). God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many descendants through Isaac (15:4; 17:4; 18:7), which means that Isaac would have to have at least one son.

The Bride of Isaac There is also a restatement of Isaac’s marriage and Rebekah’s family. “Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as his wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Paddan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian” (25:20). Isaac’s age at the time of his marriage is added. Paddan-aram was the area near Haran. “People from this region became known as Arameans, and later the Greeks called them Syrians. Bethuel was a semi-nomadic herdsman and probably lived in the open fields at least part of the year” (Constable).

The Barrenness of Rebekah “Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived” (25:21). Like Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah were unable to have children. Rebekah’s barrenness continued for 20 years (25:20, 26).

There is a contrast between Ishmael and Isaac. God promised Ishmael that he would be a great nation (16:10), which means he would have many descendants. God also promised that he would have many descendants through Isaac (15:4; 17:4; 18:9) and made an unconditional covenant with him to guarantee the promise (15:8-21). Evidently, Ishmael had 12 sons without delay or difficulty (25:12-16), but Isaac waited 20 years without a son.

What was God doing? No doubt Isaac himself asked that question. Have you ever felt that God had forgotten you? Sometimes God allows delays and difficulties to teach us faith (2 Cor. 1:8-9) and patience (Jas. 1:2-3). “God closed her womb so the chosen family would recognize her children as the fruit of His grace rather than simply the fruit of nature” (Constable).

Isaac could have failed the test. His father did. Abraham decided to help God by having a son by Hagar (16:1-16), but Isaac didn’t follow his father’s failure. Isaac was apparently the only monogamous patriarch among the first three: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He emulated his father’s good example, not his bad example. Abraham once prayed for a barren womb to be healed (20:17). So, Isaac prayed. God heard and answered. Rebekah conceived. Even though God promised that Isaac would have children, Isaac didn’t get children until he prayed (Jas. 4:2). God fulfills His promises through prayer.

The Burden of Rebekah God sovereignly chooses individuals. “But the children struggled together within her and she said ‘If all is well, why am I this way?’ So, she went to inquire of the LORD” (25:22). Rebekah conceived and sensed a problem. She felt more than the normal movements of a fetus. The Hebrew word translated “struggled together” signifies “crushing or oppressing.” This was more than a mild discomfort (Ross). Was there an “evil omen?” (Keil)? “Rebekah’s pregnancy was so painful that she wondered if there was any point to going on living. She expressed the same thought when her sons had grown up (27:46)” (Constable). How often have couples struggled to have children and when finally the wife conceived, there were complications? Like her husband, Rebekah prayed.

Life is a drama. A drama consists of characters, a conflict, a complication, a climax, and a conclusion. In this case, the conflict is barrenness. The complication is the unusual movement in the womb. Also, in this scenario, prayer was at every development in the drama. Learn to pray when there is a problem and persevere in prayer when there are perplexities.

God answered Rebekah’s prayer. “And the LORD said to her ‘Two nations are in your womb. The peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger’” (25:23). God informed Rebekah that she didn’t have a problem pregnancy; she had twins! Isaac prayed for a child and God gave him more than he asked for and then some (Eph. 3:20).

Actually, God told Rebekah more than that she would have twins. He revealed: 1) The two would both become nations. 2) One nation would be stronger than the other. 3) The younger would be the stronger and the older would serve the younger. Normally, the firstborn receives the pre-eminence, greater honor, and greater inheritance. Here, God reverses the rule (Leupold; Morris).

This incident indicates several truths we need to ponder. For one thing, babies in the womb have temperaments or tendencies (Morris) that mothers can detect. For another, these two twins produced Edom and Israel; sure enough, Israel had priority over Edom (Ross). For still another, the young not only produced Israel but the line of the Messiah (Morris).

The greatest truth is that God sovereignly chose the younger over the older (Ross; Kidner; Morris). Paul quotes the passage and expounds on it in Romans. He said the younger owed his selection “not to natural order or human will but to divine election” (Rom 9:10-12; Ross). Boice puts it this way: “The gist of the Genesis account is that Esau, the more vigorous of the two boys, was born first but was not God’s choice for carrying on the messianic line. He was a natural choice, being the Firstborn. He was his father’s choice, as the subsequent events indicate. But he was not God’s choice. God chose Jacob. This fact teaches us that God has a sovereign right to choose whom He will and reject whom He will.”

The Birth of the Twins “So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb, and the first come out red. He was like a hairy garment all over, so they called his name Esau. Afterward, his brethren came out and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel. So, his name was called Jacob. Isaac was 60 years old when she bore them” (25:24-26). Just as God had said, Rebekah had twin boys. The first one, the older one, out of the womb was red with hair all over his body. They named him Esau, a Hebrew word, which means “hairy.” The second son, the younger one, came out of the womb holding the heel of his elder brother. They named him Jacob, a Hebrew word, which means “heel, holder.” These names were chosen to reflect the appearance and activity of these two boys at birth (Ross), but later, Jacob’s name took on a negative connotation. Just as a wrestler attempted to throw an opponent by grabbing the heel, Jacob outwitted Esau (24:36; Keil).

The Birthright of Esau “So the boys grew and Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents” (25:27). “Abraham died when the twins were 15 (25:7), so they grew up knowing their grandfather and undoubtedly hearing his stories of God’s promises to their family” (Constable). Esau and Jacob were radically different. Esau was a “skillful hunter, a man of the field.” In other words, he was an “outdoorsman, a cunning hunter roaming the fields” (Ross). He has been described as one loving excitement, activity, change, and freedom and, consequently, being undisciplined (Leupold).

Jacob was a “mild man dwelling in tents.” The Hebrew word translated “mild” means “complete, perfect, sound, wholesome.” It is used of being morally innocent and having integrity (BDB; Job 1:2). It “probably means civilized and domesticated” (Hamilton, cited by Constable). He has been described as a sound, solid, levelheaded, dependable fellow (Kidner), an even-tempered, resolute man with things under control (Ross). He was an indoors man. The expression “dwelling in tents” means “sitting in tents” (Keil). He was a “homebody (Hamilton, cited by Constable). The two were “utter opposites” (Kidner). “Esau became a nomadic hunter, but Jacob remained in his tents” (Constable).

“And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob” (25:27-28). Esau was his father’s favorite. Isaac’s love of Esau is because “he ate of his game!” (25:28; 29:1-4). The favoritism was based on natural senses rather than spiritual qualities (Ross). Jacob, on the other hand, was his mother’s favorite. No reason is given for why Rebekah loved Jacob. Some speculate that it is because he was spiritually minded (Morris). Luther said, “Just as mothers are wont to love the sons who are of more quiet and friendly disposition rather than those who are wild and bold, so fathers love those sons who are a bit more lively and bold” (Luther, cited by Leupold).

“Now Jacob cooked stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, ‘Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.’ Therefore, his name was called “Edom” (25:29-30). The twins are different spiritually. Once, Esau came in from the field weary and hungry. Jacob was cooking “red stew” (Constable says, “the Hebrew word translated ‘stew’ literally means ‘lentils’). Esau smelled a red lentil stew and asked for some. The wording of the Hebrew text seems to indicate that he didn’t just politely ask for something to eat. The Hebrew word translated “feed” denotes “gulping.” The word “red” is repeated. It’s like he is saying, “I’m famished! Let me gulp that red, that red stuff” (Leupold). The picture is of a wild, impatient man panting and gasping, “Red stuff, red stuff.” (Ross). Moses adds that this is how Esau got the name Edom, a word that means “red.” The Edomites descended from Esau (25:23).

“But Jacob said, ‘Sell me your birthright as of this day.’ And Esau said, ‘Look, I am about to die; so what profit shall this birthright be to me?’ Then Jacob said, ‘Swear to me as of this day’ (25:31-33). Jacob replied that he would sell Esau a bowl of soup for his birthright. A birthright

was the right of the firstborn. It included the headship of the family (27:29) and the heirship of the promise, meaning the future possession of the land (28:4; Keil). Under the Mosaic Law, it included a double portion of the father's inheritance (Deut. 21:19).

Constable says, "The birthright was the privilege of being chief of the tribe and head of the family (27:29). In Isaac's family, it entitled the bearer to the blessing of Yahweh's promise (27:4, 27-29), which included the possession of Canaan and covenant fellowship with God (28:4). It included a double portion of the inheritance (Deut. 21:17) and the privilege of being the priest (spiritual leader) of the family (Sarna). Judah, Joseph, and Levi later received the privileges of the birthright. Judah obtained leadership among the tribes, eventually through David and Messiah. Joseph received the double portion through his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Levi became the priestly tribe. In the New Testament, we learn that Christ is the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Heb. 12:23). He is the great birthright bearer."

Actually, God had predetermined that the birthright would go to Jacob (25:23). If Isaac were to believe God, he would give the birthright to Jacob in due time. Jacob, however, like his grandfather Abraham (chapter 16), decided to help God. There is a lack of complete faith on his part. Nevertheless, he is demonstrating a spiritual-mindedness that values the spiritual nature of the birthright. He could have let God work it out, but at least he valued what God valued (Morris; Leupold).

"The way Jacob stated his demand suggests that he had long premeditated his act and ruthlessly exploited his brother's weakness. His insistence that Esau swear to him strengthens this impression. Jacob's lack of compassion and hospitality contrasts with that of Abraham (18:1-8) and Lot (19:1-8). It was right that he valued the birthright, but it was wrong that he obtained it as he did" (Constable).

"So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils, then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright" (25:34). Esau agreed to do it! He rationalized that he was about to die anyway. This has been taken to mean that he thought he was dying of hunger (Ross). It has also been interpreted to mean "I am going to die soon" (because of my dangerous activity, Leupold) or "I am going to die someday anyway" (Morris). Whatever the exact meaning of his rationalization, the point is that he did not value his birthright. Sensual enjoyment was of more value than spiritual blessing (Keil).

When Jacob asked for an oath to seal the deal, Esau gave it. Jacob then gave Esau bread for a birthright and soup for a spiritual blessing. Esau ate, drank, arose, and departed. The rapid series of verbs shows that he had no interest in the birthright. Indeed, the episode ends with the observation that he despised the birthright. He treated it as worthless and held it in contempt (Ross).

The writer of the Hebrews calls Esau a profane person, that is, a godless, irreligious person. The lesson of Esau is more than a sensual, sinful man. It is that he valued momentary pleasure more than eternal things (Ross).

"How often do we put the question to ourselves, 'What is my mess of pottage?' It is important to verbalize the question. We are in constant danger of being tempted to give up something very precious in order to indulge a sudden strong desire. The desire may involve greedy eating and drinking, lusting after money or material things, letting loose our anger in the abandonment of reason, succumbing to depression without check, cursing God in despair or disappointment without even thinking of the trap Satan set for Job and is setting for us, giving in to a sweeping sexual desire without waiting for the right framework. The mess of pottage that is dangerous to you and to me is any temptation to gratify the 'feelings' of the immediate moment in a way that

shows we ‘despise’ the promises of the living God for our future” (Edith Schaeffer “What Is My Mess of Pottage?” *Christianity Today*, March 14, 1975, p. 50, cited by Constable).

Summary: God sovereignly makes choices and the people involved also make choices.

“Scripture does not give the reason God chose Jacob over Esau. What we do know is that His choice did not rest on the superior merit of Jacob but on the sovereign prerogative of Yahweh (Rom. 9:10-13). In ancient Near Eastern culture, the firstborn normally became his father’s heir. So, in designating Jacob as Isaac’s heir, God sovereignly overruled natural custom by supernatural revelation. The response of the members of Isaac’s family to this revelation demonstrates their faith or lack of it. However, the main point of the narrative is to trace God’s faithfulness and power in bringing to pass what He had promised” (Constable).

Jacob and Esau also made choices. “Because Esau despised his birthright, Jacob obtained it and became what God had promised He would become, the stronger son who would lead (v. 23). Explicit moral commentary is rare in the Bible, so the writer’s inclusion of it here marks something about Esau that he did not want the reader to miss” (Constable).

“The writer showed that the natures of the two sons were very different; they were not identical twins. Esau cared only for physical and material things, whereas Jacob valued the spiritual. Esau gave priority to the immediate satisfaction of his sensual desires, but Jacob was willing to wait for something better that God had promised in the future (cf. Heb. 12:16)” (Constable).

“In reading this pericope, many have concluded that God chose Jacob over Esau because He foresaw that Jacob would value the promises and the birthright, whereas Esau would not. This is not correct. Jacob valued the spiritual because God gave him the grace to do so. In the previous generation, Isaac was the recipient of God’s grace, while Lot and Ishmael were not. Abraham was, too, whereas his brothers were not” (Constable).

Both sovereignty and free will are true. In John 6, the crowd is told that the Father gives some to the Son (Jn. 6:37, 39), and “no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (Jn. 6:44, 65). Yet, the crowd is constantly urged to believe in Christ (Jn. 6:27, 29, 35, 40, 47, 50, 51, 54, 58). They are even told, “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (Jn. 6:37).

There is a balance in the Bible between election and free will. Both are taught and both are true. One moment Jesus says, “You will not” (Jn. 5:40) and the next moment, He says, “You cannot” (Jn. 6:44). There is a blend and balance between those two doctrines. The multitude is told about the election of the Father (Jn. 6:37), and yet they are invited to believe (Jn. 6:40).

In 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul says, “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:13-14). Salvation is something that God did and something He did “from the beginning,” that is, from eternity past. He chose them “for salvation.” The word translated “for” in the Greek text indicates that this was the purpose for God’s choosing. He chose them so that He might save them.

He accomplished this salvation “through sanctification by the Spirit” (2:13). The Holy Spirit worked in us to set us apart unto the Lord. He convicted us of sin (Jn. 16:8) and testified of Christ (Jn. 15:26). Then He regenerated (Titus 3:5) and sealed us (Eph. 4:30). In short, God chose individuals for salvation and accomplished it through the work of the Holy Spirit, but salvation is not solely and only of the Lord. Man has a part. In the latter part of verse 13, Paul says, “and belief in the truth.” Man’s part is to believe.

When it comes to salvation, who chooses—God or the individual? The answer is both. God chooses. God calls. God convicts. God converts and God crowns with glory. Nevertheless, the individual must believe.

The Bible believer should not be surprised that two facts that apparently contradict each other are true and taught in the Scripture (Mt. 26:24; Acts 2:23). The Bible teaches that there is one God and yet He exists in three persons. How can there be one in three and three in one? It is the mystery of the Godhead. The Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ is 100% God and 100% man. That is 200%! It is the mystery of the person of Christ. The Bible teaches that it was written by God and yet by men. How can it be both? That is the mystery of inspiration. Likewise, the Bible teaches that God chooses people, that people are saved because He does, and that if people choose, they can be saved if they will. How can both of those things be accurate? It is the mystery of election and free will.

The problem is not with these truths. It is with the nature of people's perception. God and His truth are so big they cannot fit into the pea-sized brains of people. People can see one truth and then another. They cannot see both truths at the same time. It is like looking at a coin. One can see that there are "heads" on one side and "tails" on the other, but people cannot see both sides simultaneously. The problem is not with the coin; it is with us humans.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND OUR FICKLENESS

During the week, as I was studying this passage, two people asked me the same question. "What happens if I sin? Will I still go to heaven?" There are two vastly different answers to that question. Theologians debated it. Christians discuss it. What is the biblical answer to it?

Many Bible passages speak of the saints' sins and many talk about God's work in salvation. Only a few passages talk about both. There is a passage that illustrates both sides of this coin at the same time. At the same time, "The chapter before us is full of illustrations of how difficulties should and should not be met" (Thomas, cited by Constable).

The Famine

The Problem "There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar" (26:1). The famine in the land of Canaan created a crisis for Isaac like a similar famine had created a crisis for his father Abraham years before (12:10). The mention of Abraham invites a comparison between Abraham and Isaac (Ross). In fact, "The many parallels between this chapter and the story of Abraham (esp. chs. 12-14 and 20-21) show that the writer wanted the reader to compare and contrast the two men (Sailhamer, cited by Constable). Isaac was headed for Egypt (26:2; Morris) and got as far as Gerar. Gerar was between Hebron and Beer-lahai-roi. "Being a believer does not exempt a person from the ordinary disasters that overtake humanity. If a Christian builds his home on a geographical fault line, the earthquake, when it comes, is just as likely to shake down his house as that of the atheist next door" (Phillips).

The Prohibition "Then the LORD appeared to him and said: 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you' (26:2). At Gerar, the Lord appeared to Isaac for the first time, telling him not to go to Egypt but to live in a land that He would tell him.

The Promise "Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father" (26:3). The Lord informs Isaac that if he dwells in that land, He will be with him and bless him because He promised to give all these lands held by the various Canaanite tribes (Constable) to his descendants and perform the oath He swore to Abraham.

"And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (26:4-5). The Abrahamic blessing will pass to Isaac. Abraham being obedient (22:18) implies Isaac should be obedient. "The point of the speech is clear: Isaac and his family enjoyed the blessing of God because Abraham was obedient; therefore, Isaac and his family should obey what God instructed in order that they might enjoy further blessings from the Lord that would, in turn, be passed on to the next generation" (Ross). The seed that will bless the world refers to the Messiah (Leupold).

It is interesting the Lord says Abraham obeyed His voice and kept His charge, commandments, statutes, and laws, all of which seem more characteristic of the Mosaic Law than what happened during the lifetime of Abraham. Ross says, "The terminology used to describe his obedience is striking—words are legal designations from the law and presupposes a knowledge of

Deuteronomy. Use of these words to describe Abraham's obedience has led some to explain that Abraham obeyed the entire law before it was given" (see Mishnah). Ross goes on to say that the Lord elaborated on Abraham's obedience "by using a variety of legal terms with which the readers would be familiar" and by so doing "He raised Abraham as the model of obedience to the law as if to say that had Abraham had the laws, statutes, and commandments, he would've obeyed them." Leupold says the various forms of divine commandments that are enumerated to make prominent thought that Abraham conscientiously did all that God asked.

The Performance "So Isaac dwelt in Gerar" (26:6). Isaac did not go to Egypt. In that, he obeyed the Lord. "Isaac's attention was thus turned away from the situation in which he found himself and regarding which he was about to make a wrong move, and it was directed instead to the word of God" (Phillips).

At the same time, God did not tell him to stay in Gerar. "Isaac should have had more sense. The very same reason that prevented him from going to Egypt should have prevented him from going to Gerar. Now, instead of repeating Abraham's mistake in going to Egypt, he was about to repeat Abraham's mistake in going to Abimelech. Abraham stumbled twice, once by going to Egypt and once by going to Gerar, and although Isaac knew about both these mistakes, he chose to ignore what he knew. To act thus, to get as close to the world as possible without actually going into it, was going to force Isaac to learn by bitter experience what we refuse to learn from God's word. Gerar was the halfway house to Egypt" (Phillips).

God operates according to His covenant. Believers should obey. This is the way to meet difficulties.

The Falsehood

The Deception "And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, 'She is my sister'; for he was afraid to say, 'She is my wife,' because he thought, 'lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold'" (26:7). When faced with the same situation as his father (20:1-18), Isaac did the same thing his father did—he lied! This is a clear-cut case of "like father, like son." At the same time, there is a difference. Abraham's deception was partially true. Isaac's was not (Ross). Moreover, as Leupold points out, Isaac must have known how this turned out in his father's case, but then sin is never logical. "A harbor of lies is no real port in a storm" (Phillips). Rebekah is probably childless at the time (Constable).

The Discovery "Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife" (26:8). The lie went undetected for a long time, but, eventually, it was exposed. After Isaac and Rebecca had been in Gerar for a long time, Abimelech saw they were showing "endearment" to each other. The Hebrew word translated "endearment" means "to laugh, play, jest, sport, toy with" (BDB; NASB, NIV, and Leupold: "caressing;" ESV: "laughing with;" Ross: "'playing' with his wife in such a way that signified she was not his sister;" Morris: "making love"). In Abraham's case, the lie was revealed by the Lord. In this case, the detection came by the observation of the king, not by divine intervention (Ross).

As time passed, "Isaac became so used to living with his lie that he became careless in his behavior and acted in such a way that his deception was instantly exposed. Nothing is harder than consistently maintaining a lying position over a lengthy period of time.... One day, Isaac forgot himself, was caught, and his deception pounced upon by the Philistine king" (Phillips).

“A period of between 70 and 97 years had elapsed between Abraham’s sojourn in Gerar and Isaac’s. Abimelech could have been the same man in both cases since lifespans of 150 years were not uncommon at that time.... Abimelech is a title rather than a personal name.... Thus, this may have been another ruler than the one Abraham dealt with” (Constable; Leupold says the two can hardly be the same).

“Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, ‘Quite obviously she *is* your wife; so how could you say, ‘She *is* my sister’?’ Isaac said to him, ‘Because I said, ‘Lest I die on account of her” (26:9). When confronted, Isaac admitted his lie and explained the reason he lied was that he was afraid that he might be killed.

“And Abimelech said, “What *is* this you have done to us? One of the people might soon have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us” (26:10). “Abimelech administers a well-deserved rebuke” (Leupold). Abimelech recognized that adultery was sin (see “guilt”). This demonstrates that the work of the law is written in the hearts of Gentiles (Rom. 2:15). Lies affect the liar and others.

The Decree “So Abimelech charged all *his* people, saying, ‘He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death” (26:11). Abimelech’s obedience to the moral law stands in stark contrast to Isaac’s disobedience. Sometimes unbelievers are more moral than believers (1 Tim. 5:8). “Abimelech demonstrated pious conduct in both cases (Abraham and Isaac). In the first, however, Abimelech took Sarah into his harem, but in the second, he wanted to protect Rebekah from his people” (Constable).

Isaac was not only fickle, he failed. This is what believers should not do in a difficult situation. In the final analysis, Isaac’s lie was unnecessary.

Summary: God was faithful to do as He promised in His covenant with Abraham, but Isaac’s failure did not forfeit the covenant.

This passage contains several vital spiritual truths.

1. Do not follow your father’s flaws (1 Kings 15:3).
2. Do not lie; tell the Truth (Col. 3:9). “I have a pastor friend who came out of the business world into the ministry. He held a financial position within the company where he worked. One day, his boss asked him to make an untrue disclosure to a customer to maintain this customer’s business. My friend refused. His boss insisted that he do so. My friend replied, “If I do this, then you will never be able to trust me. You will never know whether I am lying to you or not.” His boss was infuriated at my friend’s defiance and threatened to fire him. But he did not budge. They ended up losing the customer. However, my friend kept his job. A few weeks later, he was called into his boss’s office. A higher position had become available and he was offered the promotion. The reason was explained by his boss. “You are the only one here that I can truly trust” (Larry Turner, “God’s success. Isaac’s Turmoil,” “Whitestone ministry”).
3. Obey the Lord. When faced with a difficult situation, believers should obey the Lord. It is possible to obey the Lord one minute and disobey Him the next.
4. God is faithful, even when we are fickle. God is faithful. Believers are fickle, but the failure of believers does not forfeit the covenant of God. “God prevented Isaac from leaving the Promised Land and renewed the covenant with him, but then He had to protect Rebekah when Isaac lied about his relationship with her to Abimelech” (Constable). “God’s faithfulness in the past can be counted on in the present and the future. What he has done for the fathers, he will also do for the sons” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable). Believers today have a covenant, the new covenant, which

is a blood covenant. No matter what believers do, they can't nullify the covenant of God (2 Tim. 2:13).

Solomon loved many foreign women and married them (1 Kings 11:1-3). When Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away from the Lord to other gods; his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God as was the heart of his father David (1 Kings 11:4). "Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as *did* his father David" (1 Kings 11:6). "So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded" (1 Kings 11:9-10). "Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, 'Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant' (1 Kings 11:11). "Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son" (1 Kings 11:12). "However, I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen" (1 Kings 11:13).

OPPOSITION AND OPPORTUNITY

Some Christians get the idea that if the Lord blesses them, all will be well. That is not the case. As Job said, “Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). That trouble often comes in the form of opposition from other people, even when you are walking with the Lord and are being blessed by Him. In fact, the opposition may come *because the Lord is blessing you!* How do you handle that? An episode in the life of Isaac demonstrates that there is opportunity in the midst of opposition.

The Opposition

Isaac’s Prosperity “Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him” (26:12). Leupold says that the Hauran, east of the Jordan, claimed such remarkable fertility, but here the rich harvest is a token of divine favor. The word “Lord” instead of “God” indicates that Isaac was blessed because of his covenant relationship and trust in the Lord.

“The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous” (26:13). Isaac continued to prosper until he became “very prosperous.” In other words, the abundant crop mentioned in verse 12 did not just happen in one year. It happened year after year. Ross says a literal translation would be, “and the man became great and he continually became great, until he became very great.” He got “richer and richer until he was very wealthy” (Jewish Publication Society’s translation, cited by Ross).

“For he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants” (26:14a). The Lord materially blessed Isaac, but that does not mean God blesses all believers in that way. Ross states, “A narrative report that God blesses someone a certain way is no guarantee that he will do so for all. In fact, wisdom literature later dealt with the problem of why the righteous, at times, suffer and face poverty and famine. Narrative literature allows us to say that since God promised Isaac, he is *able* to do so. For this reason, I have worded the point to say that God *may* richly bless His people” (Ross, italics his).

Isaac’s Problem “So the Philistines envied him” (26:14b). Isaac’s prosperity caused a problem: the Philistines envied him. The Hebrew word translated “envied” means “to envy, be jealous, be envious, be zealous” (BDB). Ross says this word describes “intense jealousy and impassioned zeal that leads to some action.” Isaac was rich and resented (Phillips). The resentment led to retaliation. Resentment (26:14), fear (26:16), and hatred (26:27) led to one problem after another for Isaac.

Following the Lord does not eliminate all problems; it can cause problems.

The Opportunity

The First Problem “Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth” (26:15). The Philistines filled with dirt the wells Abraham dug to stop them from functioning. Apparently, the Philistines didn’t need the water, but they didn’t want anyone else to have it! In a land where water was a necessity, to destroy a well was considered an act of war, “a deliberate encroachment on the

territorial rights of another.” Furthermore, in effect, they were tearing up the treaty they made with Abraham (21:22-24; Phillips).

“And Abimelech said to Isaac, ‘Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we’ (26:16). With words similar to the Egyptians in the Exodus (Ex. 1:9), Abimelech told Isaac to leave because his household was so numerically stronger that it constituted a threat to safety (Leupold).

“Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there” (26:17). The Valley of Gerar is southeast of Gerar (Leupold). For Isaac, the opposition against him was an opportunity for him to trust the Lord. Rather than fight (and could have won; see verse 16), he left. As much as is within you, live at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18).

The Second Problem “And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them” (26:18). Isaac called these wells by the names his father gave them to emphasize his rights to them by way of inheritance (Morris). To give a well a name was “a recognized way of publicly advertising a property right in the area” (Phillips).

“Also Isaac’s servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there” (26:19). In addition to reopening the wells his father had dug, Isaac had his servants dig new wells. In the process, they found running water, that is, an artesian well (Morris).

“But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen, saying, ‘The water is ours.’ So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him” (26:20). The new wells called strife between Isaac’s servants and the herdsmen of Gerar. Isaac named that well Esak, a Hebrew word that means “contention.” This was the “Quarrel Well” (Leupold; Morris).

The Third Problem “Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that *one* also. So he called its name Sitnah” (26:21). When the servants of Isaac dug another well, the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled over it. Isaac called that well Sitnah, a Hebrew word that means “strife.” Leupold says the opposition was even more spiteful, indicated by a stronger name (hostility) given to this well. This was the “Hatred Well” (Mars).

“And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, ‘For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land’” (26:22). Because of the contention and strife, Isaac moved from there and dug still another well. This time there was no quarrel, so he called it Rehoboth, a Hebrew word that means “a wide place or street.” This was the “Well of Ample Room” (Morris). He gave the well that name because the Lord had made room for him and he was fruitful in the land. Isaac did not have to move. When asked to leave, Isaac could have resisted since Abimelech had given Abraham the right to dwell anywhere in the land he chose (20:15) and the wells belong to Abraham by right of construction (Morris). Furthermore, he could have defeated the Philistines. After all, he was mightier than they were (26:16). “The incident also reveals the peaceful character of this patriarch who did not battle his neighbors for the wells, even though he was stronger than they (v. 16). His actions expressed his trust in Yahweh” (Constable).

Isaac took the opportunity to trust the Lord and deal graciously with his neighbor, who opposed him.

The Outcome

With the Lord “Then he went up from there to Beersheba” (26:23). Isaac moved from Gerar to Beersheba, where Abraham had lived occasionally.

“And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, ‘I *am* the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I *am* with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham’s sake” (26:24). At the moment, for the fulfillment of the promise that Isaac’s descendants would be multiplied, he had to walk by faith, as did his father Abraham (Leupold).

“So he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac’s servants dug a well” (26:25). Building the altar was, of course, for sacrifice and calling on the Lord was an act of public worship (Leupold). “While there was probably at least one well at Beersheba already, Isaac dug another for his own use or perhaps because he needed more water. His ability to dig wells indicates both his wealth and his intention to establish permanent residence in the land” (Constable). These verses seem to confirm that Isaac’s decision to move out of Philistine territory pleased God (Constable).

With His Neighbor “Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phichol the commander of his army” (26:26). As Abimelech was the title of the Philistine king, so Phichol seems to bend the title for the captain of the army (Leupold).

“And Isaac said to them, ‘Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?’” (26:27). Given the treatment that Isaac had received from Abimelech, he asked Abimelech why he had come. The Hebrew word translated “sent” means “to send away, let go” (BDB). Leupold says that it is stronger than “send away.” They had “ribbon” him away.

“But they said, ‘We have certainly seen that the LORD is with you.’ So we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you’” (26:28). Abimelech, Ahuzzath, and Phichol responded by saying that they had seen how the Lord was with Isaac, which motivated them to make a covenant with Isaac. They “winked at” their hostility and opposition to Isaac (Ross).

“that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You *are* now the blessed of the LORD” (26:29). The reason they wanted to make a covenant with Isaac was they did not want him to do them harm. They argued that they had not harmed Isaac (remember the incident with Rebekah); they had helped him and sent him away in peace. They acknowledged that Isaac was now being blessed by the Lord. In fact, they begin and end their speech by referring to the fact that the Lord had blessed Isaac. They did not think it was safe to be on bad terms with one standing in the Lord’s favor (Leupold).

“So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank” (26:30). Graciously, Isaac made a feast and the three of them partook of it. “Eating together was often a sacred rite in the ancient Near East (cf. 27:3; 4; 31:46, 54)” (Constable). Morris considers this a “ceremonial feast” in light of their covenant.

“Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace” (26:31). Isaac and Abimelech made a “mutual non-aggression.... This covenant renewed the older one made between Abimelech and Abraham (21:31)” (Constable).

“It came to pass the same day that Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, ‘We have found water’” (26:32). After the departure of Abimelech and Phichol, Isaac’s servants informed him that the well they were digging had water.

“So he called it Shebah. Therefore, the name of the city *is* Beersheba to this day (26:33). Shebah means “oath” (BDB; Leupold: “seven”). The city was called Beersheba, down to the day Moses penned Genesis. The Hebrew word translated “Beersheba” means “well of the sevenfold

oath.” Constable suggests that Isaac’s naming of the town Beersheba (21:31) strengthened the agreement he had made with Abimelech and Phichol.

Years before, Abraham had made a covenant with the Philistines at Beersheba and built an altar there (21:32-34).

Summary: When Isaac was faced with opposition, he trusted the Lord and graciously dealt with his neighbors, the Lord blessed him materially with prosperity and spiritually with peace with his neighbors.

The Lord is faithful. “This section of verses shows God’s faithfulness in blessing Isaac as He had promised (cf. v. 3; 24:1; 25:11). Isaac enjoyed a bountiful harvest (v. 12). Abimelech testified to Isaac’s power (v. 16), which was another testimony to God’s faithfulness” (Constable).

Isaac exercised faith. “In this passage, Isaac never wavered on his confident trust. He quietly and resolutely obtained water for his flocks and crops, and God blessed him” (Ross). “God’s people must maintain confident trust in God’s promise of His presence and provision despite the envy and hostility of unbelievers that His blessing sometimes provokes” (Constable). “*In spite of the hostility from the world over the Lord’s blessing, the people of God must maintain their confident trust in the Lord’s promise of his presence and his provision*” (Ross, italics his).

“The similarities between Genesis 26 and Genesis 21 show a deliberate attempt by the writer to parallel Isaac and Abraham” (Ross). “This account of Isaac’s dealings with the Philistines portrays Isaac as walking in his father’s footsteps very much. He receives similar promises, faces similar tests, fails similarly, but eventually triumphs in like fashion. Indeed, in certain respects, he is given more in the promises and achieves more. He is promised ‘all these lands [v. 4],’ and by the end of the story, he is securely settled in Beersheba and has a treaty with the Philistines in which they acknowledge his superiority” (Wenham, cited by Constable).

“If opposition should come, believers can take the lead from the example of Isaac on how to live in peace with all people. If believers were truly confident that God would supply their needs no matter what hostility they face from the world, the proclamation of the faith would be far more substantive and convincing” (Ross).

This illustrates the Lord’s making one’s enemies to be at peace. “When a man’s ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies will be at peace with him” (Prov. 16:7). When people live in ways that please the Lord, which includes pursuing peace (the second half of the proverb; Heb. 12:14), they may still have enemies, but the Prince of Peace makes their enemies be at peace with them. This is a proverb, not a law; exceptions exist, such as persecution (JFB on Prov.). God turns enemies into friends (Clarke, on Prov.). “A righteous life disarms opposition” (MacDonald, on Prov.).

MacDonald illustrates, “Stanton treated Lincoln with utter contempt. He called him a ‘low cunning clown’ and ‘the original gorilla.’ He said there was no need to go to Africa to capture a gorilla when one was available in Springfield, Illinois. Lincoln never retaliated. Instead, he made Stanton his war minister, believing he was the best qualified for the office. Years later, when an assassin’s bullet killed Lincoln, Stanton looked down on his rugged face and said tearfully, ‘There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen.’”

A TALE OF TWAINS: ESAU AND JACOB

My brother and I have the same parents, grew up in the same environment, and have a number of the same experiences. While we are alike in many ways, there are also many ways in which we are radically different. It's always been fascinating to me how two siblings can be so similar, on the one hand, and so radically different on the other. In the case of my brother and me, perhaps, the differences can be explained, at least in part, by the fact that we were born four years apart. That doesn't explain everything because what is true of my brother and me is also true of twins. They can be alike in some ways yet radically different in others.

In the book of Genesis, there is the story of twins. It's a fascinating story, but it's also a story that can teach us things about ourselves. Like the story of Cain and Abel, you may be like one of these twins, whether male or female, young or old. As you look at them, you will see yourself. What does the tale of these twins teach us about ourselves?

“Two reports of Esau's marriages (26:34-35 and 28:6-9) frame the major account (27:1-28:5), providing a prologue and epilogue. Esau's marriages are significant because Rebekah used them to persuade Isaac to send Jacob away to get a wife (27:4b) and because they were the reason Isaac did so (28:1). The main account centers on Isaac giving the blessing” (Constable).

Esau's Departure from God's Plan

The Wives “When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite” (26:34). In the meantime, when Esau, Isaac's oldest son, was 40 years old, he took wives from the Hittites. Knowing how cautious God had been in selecting a wife for his own father, “a selection which carefully guarded the integrity of the line of the promised seed, Esau nevertheless proceeded to take a Hittite woman for his wife.... No doubt also knowing that God's will for the marriage relationship with monogamy, he compounded the insult to God and took another could type woman for his second wife he was both presumptuous and unconcerned about God's promised blessing associated with the patriarchal line” (Morris). Esau was not concerned about “conserving the spiritual heritage of the family” (Leupold). He “showed no interest in the special calling of his family but sought to establish himself as a great man in the world by marrying Canaanite women (cf. 11:4)” (Constable).

Evidently, these were the daughters of Canaanite lords (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1:18:4). The Canaanites were under God's curse (9:25-27). “These preliminary notices [in verses 34 and 35] put into perspective the cunning deed of Jacob and Rebekah. They demonstrate that Esau was not fit to inherit the blessing” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

The Worry “And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah” (26:35). Esau's choice of wives grieved his parents, Isaac and Rebecca. Abraham had carefully avoided taking one of the “daughters of the Canaanites” (24:3) as a wife for Esau's father. The corrupting influence of heathen wives was the source of grief (Leupold). Spiritually-minded parents grieve over their children's wrong choice of a mate.

Isaac's Disobedient Plan

Isaac's Desire "Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his older son and said to him, 'My son.' And he answered him, 'Here I am.'" (27:1). At this point, Isaac was 137 years old (Luther, cited by Leupold; Ross says he was at least 100; see Morris for more details). At any rate, he had lost his eyesight. In preparation for bestowing a blessing on Esau (27:4), Isaac called for him.

Isaac's Disobedient Plan "Then he said, 'Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death. Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring *it* to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die" (27:2-4). To commemorate the occasion, Isaac requested that Esau prepare his favorite meal. This is a situation where "a festive meal expresses the dignity and importance of an occasion" (Leupold).

Surely Isaac knew that God intended for the blessing to be given to Jacob (25:23). Leupold says the duplicity and treachery of the human heart circumvent the word of God, "no matter how clear it may be if it is really set on what is at variance with that word." "In spite of God's instruction concerning Jacob before he was born, in spite of the plainly obvious superiority of Jacob's character and spiritual discernment and convictions over those of Esau, in spite of Jacob's further legalization of his claim to the patriarchal blessing through his purchase of the birthright from Esau, confirmed by Esau's solemn oath, in spite of Esau's obvious indifference to his spiritual heritage and to the will of God—in spite of all of this, Isaac nevertheless determined he was going to give the blessing to Esau" (Morris).

Rebekah' Deception

Rebekah's Decision "Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game and to bring *it*" (27:5). In the Hebrew text, the word "Rebekah" is emphatic and it indicates she was listening all while Isaac was speaking so that she heard everything that was said (Leupold). In the meantime, Esau complied with his father's wish.

"So Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, 'Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying, 'Bring me game and make savory food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death" (27:6-7). Again, in the Hebrew text, the word "Rebekah" is emphatic, indicating that she promptly acted in speaking to her son Jacob, who was about 77 years old (Leupold on verse 1). The first thing she did was inform Jacob about his father's plan. The text does not record that Isaac said, "in the presence of the Lord" (27:4), but if he did not say it, it was implied.

"Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you" (27:8). Rebekah quickly made up her mind, as she had done earlier when Abraham's servant invited her to be Isaac's wife.

"Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for your father, such as he loves. Then you shall take *it* to your father, that he may eat *it*, and that he may bless you before his death" (27:9-10). Her scheme was simple. Jacob was to bring her two young goats, which she would use to fix his father's favorite dish. Jacob was to take it to his father so that he could receive the blessing instead of his brother. In that the Lord had promised to bless Jacob, Rebekah's scheme demonstrates a lack of faith. "She reminds us of Sarai, who tried to obtain what God had promised illegitimately, namely, through Hagar (16:1-3).

Rebekah tried to ‘pull the wool’ over Isaac’s eyes” (Constable). She should have confronted Isaac (Ross).

Jacob’s Doubt “And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, ‘Look, Esau my brother *is* a hairy man, and I *am* a smooth-skinned man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing” (27:11-12). Jacob had serious doubt about his mother’s scheme. He thought that the fatal flaw in it was that his brother was a hairy man and he had smooth skin. The Hebrew word translated “deceiver” means “to deceive, to mock” (BDB; NASB: “deceiver;” NIV: “tricking him;” ESV: “mocking”). Morris thinks that Jacob feared his father would think he was mocking his blindness.

“Jacob is clearly less concerned with the rightness, the morality, of his mother’s suggestion than he is with what happens to him if his disguise is discovered and his impersonation revealed” (Hamilton, cited by Constable). Since Jacob did not worry about his father recognizing his voice, his voice must have been similar to that of his brothers (Leupold).

“But his mother said to him, ‘Let your curse *be* on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get *them* for me” (27:13). At this point, Rebekah’s response is if it is a curse, she will take it. Later she will devise a plan to cover this eventuality.

“And he went and got *them* and brought *them* to his mother, and his mother made savory food, such as his father loved” (27:14). Satisfied with his mother’s response, Jacob provides the two goats and his mother prepared his father’s favorite meal.

Rebekah’s Deception “Then Rebekah took the choice clothes of her elder son Esau, which *were* with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. Then she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob” (27:15-17). More details of Rebekah’s scheme are now given. She had Jacob put on Esau’s clothes and she put the skin of a young goat on his hands and neck. Since the garments were sleeveless, the goatskin probably covered the whole forearm (Leupold). The Romans used the black, silk-like hair of the camel-goat of the East as a substitute for human hair (Keil).

Jacob’s Deception “So he went to his father and said, ‘My father.’ And he said, ‘Here I am. Who *are* you, my son?’” (27:18). Apparently, when Jacob spoke to his father, his father did not recognize his voice, so he asked who the visitor was. Perhaps there is a “trace of suspicion” here (Leupold). Isaac voiced his suspicion three times (27:20, 22, 24).

“Jacob said to his father, ‘I *am* Esau your firstborn; I have done just as you told me; please arise, sit and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me” (27:19). Jacob lied! Here, he lies about his identity and, later, his success in hunting (27:20). He tells his father that he is his brother, gives him the meal prepared by his mother, and asks for the blessing. The words “arise, sit, and eat” suggest urgency in Jacob’s voice.

Isaac’s Doubt “But Isaac said to his son, ‘How *is it* that you have found *it* so quickly, my son?’ And he said, ‘Because the LORD your God brought *it* to me” (27:20). Isaac had a number of doubts. For one thing, he doubted that what you had requested of Esau could be done so quickly. Jacob’s response was that the Lord intervened. Obviously, that was a lie. Leupold says it is “almost the most flagrant instant of abuse of the divine name recorded anywhere in the Scriptures.” The lie about his identity was deception; this lie was blasphemy (Ross).

“Isaac said to Jacob, ‘Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you *are* really my son Esau or not” (27:21). Jacob’s response may have answered that question, but Isaac still doubted that it was his son Esau. So he asked the visitor to come closer so that he could feel his

hands (27:22). Luther said that had he been Jacob, he would drop the dish and run away (Luther, cited by Leupold).

“So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, ‘The voice *is* Jacob’s voice, but the hands *are* the hands of Esau” (27:22). When Jacob complied with his father’s request, Isaac remarked that the voice he heard was the voice of Jacob, but the hand he felt was the hand of Esau.

“And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him” (27:23). So being deceived, Isaac blessed Jacob. The blessing is given later (27:26-29). In accordance with Hebrew style, “the result is reported first the details are given afterward” (Leupold).

“Then he said, ‘*Are you really my son Esau?*’ He said, ‘*I am*” (27:24). To get rid of the suspicion about the voice (Keil), Isaac asked once more if the visitor really was his son Esau. Jacob lied again, saying that he was Esau.

“He said, ‘Bring *it* near to me, and I will eat of my son’s game, so that my soul may bless you.’ So he brought *it* near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank” (27:25). Having received answers to his doubts that satisfied his suspicion, Isaac asked for the meal so that he might eat it and bless his son. Jacob gave him the meal and wine.

Isaac’s Decree “Then his father Isaac said to him, ‘Come near now and kiss me, my son” (27:26). Thinking the person before him was Esau, Isaac requested a kiss.

“And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him and said: ‘Surely, the smell of my son *is* like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed” (27:27). “Jacob’s kiss was a ‘deceptive show of affection’ like Judas’ kiss of Jesus (Mt. 26:48-49)” (Constable). The kiss allowed Isaac to smell the clothing of the one kissing him. It was the smell of the field, “the clothing of Esau, which were thoroughly scented with the odor of the fields” (Keil). Isaac was deceived by touch (27:16, 27:23) and smell (27:27). “Isaac uttered his blessing (vv. 27-29) in poetic language and God’s Spirit doubtless inspired it since it proved to be prophetic (cf. 49:1-27; Deut. 33; et al.). It was an oracle” (Constable).

“Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine.” (27:28). Since the recipient of the blessing is from the field, the blessing is that field would receive adequate dew, be fertile soil (Leupold), and produce an abundance of grain and wine.

“Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed *be* everyone who curses you, and blessed *be* those who bless you!” (27:29). The blessing also included people bowing down and serving him as well as blessing and/or cursing on those who bless and/or curse him. This was the same blessing given to Abraham and Isaac (Morris).

Ross says there were four parts to this blessing: 1) the smell of the field, a symbol of fertility, was an indication of the blessing of the Lord, 2) the futility of the field, 3) Jacob was made Lord over his brethren and over nations, and) 4) a reiteration of the protection of the blessing first given to Abraham that those who cursed him would be cursed.

Isaac thought he was giving this blessing to Esau. In so doing, he was doing the opposite of what God had said. Esau was to serve Jacob (25:23). So this blessing was in defiance of God (Leupold). In Genesis 28:4, Isaac blesses Jacob intentionally.

“An oral blessing was as legally binding as a written will in the ancient Near East (Davis). It finalized, and perhaps altered, the terms of the birthright” (Constable). “As in modern society, inheritance under Nuzi law was affected by testamentary disposition, although the [Nuzi] tablets indicate that such a testament was often made orally. One of the tablets tells of a lawsuit between

brothers concerning the possession of their late father's slave girl, Sululi-Ishtar. The youngest of three brothers, Tarmiya, was defending his elder brothers' claim to Sululi-Ishtar and the tablet sets out his testimony: 'My father, Huya, was sick and lay on a couch; then my father seized my hand and spoke thus to me. 'My other sons, being older, have acquired a wife; so I give herewith Sululi-Ishtar as your wife.' In the end result the Court found in favor of Tarmiya, upholding his father's oral testamentary disposition. It also appears from another Nuzi tablet that even an oral testament commenced with an opening introductory statement such as: 'Now that I am grown old' ... which was the legal phraseology to indicate that what was to follow constituted a testamentary disposition. In similar manner, Isaac indicated to his elder son Esau that he wished to bestow upon him his testamentary blessing: 'Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death' (Genesis 27:2)" (West, cited by Constable).

Esau's Discovery

Esau's Discovery "Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting" (27:30). Within moments of Isaac's departure from his father, Esau returned.

"He also had made savory food, and brought it to his father, and said to his father, 'Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that your soul may bless me'" (27:31). Meanwhile, Esau prepared the meal his father had requested and brought it to his father so that he would be blessed. He uses virtually the same words as Jacob had used (27:19).

"And his father Isaac said to him, 'Who *are* you?' So he said, 'I *am* your son, your firstborn, Esau'" (27:32). Isaac was surprised. He thought that just moments before, he had blessed Esau. So he asked this visitor who he was. Esau, of course, identified himself as Isaac's firstborn son.

"Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, 'Who? Where *is* the one who hunted game and brought *it* to me? I ate all *of it* before you came, and I have blessed him—and indeed he shall be blessed'" (27:33). Isaac was shocked. The Hebrew word translated "trembled" means "to tremble, quake, be startled, be terrified." Leupold renders the Hebrew text literally: "He trembled a trembling, a great, unto exceedingly. Isaac was horrified! Isaac burps out, 'Who! Where is the one I blessed?' Isaac adds, "and in that I blessed him, the blessing stands!"

"Isaac evidently knew that he had been resisting God's will and finally accepted defeat submissively (v. 33). Besides, in that culture, a paternal blessing, much more a divine oracle, such as the one Isaac had uttered, was irrevocable (Thiselton). 'By showing that the blessing was irrevocable, even by the father who gave the blessing, the writer underscores an important feature of the blessing—its fulfillment is out of human hands'" (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

"When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, 'Bless me—me also, O my father!'" (27:34). Esau violently reacted. His "anguish was unbearable" (*NKJV Study Bible*). He screamed like a woman and cried like a baby (Morris). In agony, he asked his father to bless him.

"But he said, 'Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing'" (27:35). Isaac had to inform Esau that he had been deceived by Jacob, meaning that Jacob got Esau's blessing.

"And *Esau* said, 'Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!' And he said, 'Have you not reserved a blessing for me?' (27:36). Esau's response was to say that his brother was just like his name. The name "Jacob" means "heel holder" or "supplanter" (BDB). "If someone overtakes another by tripping him up by the heel, then he will supplant him in the race" (Morris). He explains

(“for”) that his brother had supplanted him twice, once he took away the birthright and now he has taken away his blessing. Actually, Esau sold his birthright. Esau was far more at fault in the selling of the birthright than Jacob was in the buying of it (Leupold). Esau despised it (Morris)! Moreover the blessing he had been destined for Jacob by God and Esau knew it. Nevertheless he asked his father if there is a blessing left for him.

“Then Isaac answered and said to Esau, ‘Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?’” (27:37). Isaac reviews with Esau the blessings he gave Jacob. In other words, the blessing that Esau wanted could not be bestowed upon him because it would require the cancellation of the blessing that was just bestowed upon Jacob (Leupold).

“And Esau said to his father, ‘Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me—me also, O my father!’ And Esau lifted up his voice and wept” (27:38). Esau persisted, begging his father with tears to give him at least one blessing.

Isaac’s Decree “Then Isaac his father answered and said to him: ‘Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above’” (27:39). The text does not say that Isaac “blessed” Esau. What Isaac said was a prophecy, not a blessing (Leupold; Constable). The Hebrew word translated “of” in the phrases “of the fatness” and “of the dew” should be translated “away from” (Leupold, who cites BDB, p. 578a; NASB; NIV; ESV). Jacob is saying that Esau would dwell in the land of Edom, which, in spite of fertile spots, is “mostly very bleak, rocky and barren, allowing a scant opportunity for cultivation” (Leupold). “The mountains of Edom are some of the most desolate and barren of any on earth today. They stand to the southeast of the Dead Sea (Constable).

“By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; and it shall come to pass, when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck” (27:40). Isaac predicted that Esau would live by the sword, implying “violence and continual conflict” (Leupold). Esau’s descendants would subsist by hunting people, just as Esau had subsisted by hunting game” (Constable). Isaac also predicted that Esau would serve his brother, Jacob, but when Esau became restless, he would break that yoke. Leupold says, “These words describe attempted freedom rather than achieved freedom.... His people shall at least occasionally be rid of Israel’s yoke.”

“The Edomites served, revolted from, and were conquered by the Israelites repeatedly during their history. Saul defeated them after they enjoyed a long period of independence (1 Sam. 14:47). Then David made them his vassals (2 Sam. 8:14). They tried to revolt under Solomon but were unsuccessful (1 Kings 9:14 ff.). The Edomites were subject to Judah until King Joram’s reign when they rebelled successfully. In Amaziah’s reign, Judah again subjugated them (2 Kings 14:7). They finally achieved permanent freedom from Judah during Ahaz’s reign (2 Kings 16:6). John Hyrcanus conquered Edom about 129 B.C., forced the Edomites to submit to circumcision, and incorporated them into the Jewish nation. Later, though, Antipater and Herod established the Idumean dynasty over Judah that lasted until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The writing prophets sometimes used the Edomites as the epitome of Israel’s enemies” (Constable).

The writer to the Hebrews says, “By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come” (Heb. 11:20). When the deception was discovered, Isaac did not rescind his blessing but confirmed it (Gen. 27:33; Kent). “In the end, what he did was an act of faith” (Leupold). Isaac blessed Esau, but he did not violate God’s will; he believed God’s Word.

Isaac's Departure

Esau's Desire "So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (27:41). Envy over Jacob's blessing resulted in Esau hating his brother. Esau's hatred was so great he thought to himself ("said in his heart") that he would kill his brother Jacob, but not wanting to cause his aged father further grief, he decided to wait until his father was dead, which he thought was not far off.

Rebekah's Decision "And the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, 'Surely your brother Esau comforts himself concerning you *by intending to kill you*'" (27:42). Evidently, Esau expressed his thoughts about killing his brother to someone and, as a result, his intentions were made known to Rebekah, who immediately told Jacob.

"Now therefore, my son, obey my voice: arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran" (27:43). To prevent Esau from killing Jacob, Rebekah told him to flee to her brother Laban in Haran. The words "now, my son, obey my voice, arise, flee" indicate how sure she was of the need of immediate action (Leupold).

"And stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury turns away, until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of you both in one day?" 27:44-45). Rebekah thought that it would only take a few days for Esau's fury and anger toward Jacob to subside. When Esau forgot what Jacob had done to him, Rebekah intended to send a message for him to return (it took 20 years). She feared the loss of both of her sons (she ended up losing both of them). "Esau might have killed Jacob, and Esau then might have fled, or the avenger of blood might have slain him (cf. 9:6)" (Constable).

Rebekah's Deception "And Rebekah said to Isaac, 'I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these *who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?*'" (27:46). The Hebrew word translated "weary" means "to be grieved, loathe, abhor, feel a loathing or abhorrence or sickening dread" (BDB; NASB: "I am tired of living;" NIV: "I am disgusted with living;" ESV: "I loathe my life;" Leupold: "I abhor," "I am disgusted with").

When Esau took foreign wives, Isaac and Rebekah were grieved (26:35). So it is understandable that the possibility of Jacob marrying a foreign wife distressed Rebekah, "Sending Jacob to Mesopotamia to get a wife was a splendid idea. Inducing Isaac to take steps in that direction by her complaints about Esau's wives was not the most frank procedure in achieving her purpose" (Leupold).

Jacob's Departure "Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan (28:1). Based on the information that Rebekah had given him, Isaac called Jacob, blessed him, and charged him not to marry a Canaanite woman. Constable says, "Isaac evidently realized that his desire to give the blessing to Esau was not God's will, so having given it to Jacob (27:27-29), he blessed him further (28:1-2).

"Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother" (28:2). Esau tells Jacob to go to Padan Aram, an area around Haran (Constable). Once there, he is to go to his mother's father's house, his grandfather, and take away from one of his uncle's daughters. Isaac's advice about not marrying one kind of wife and choosing another is not just a helpful suggestion; it has "full

patriarchal authority” (Leupold). Isaac’s wife, Jacob’s mother (Rebekah), came from this family. Rebekah had her flaws and failings, but she was superior to other wives because of her faith (Leupold).

“May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples” (28:3). Isaac asked Almighty God, the God who has all power, to bless Jacob, multiply his descendants that he may be an assembly of peoples, a blessing that was fulfilled in the tribes that came from Jacob, each tribe viewed poetically as the equivalent of a “people” (Leupold).

“And give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham” (28:4). Isaac adds that he asked God to not only give Jacob multiple descendants but also the land promised to his father Abraham.

“So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Padan Aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau” (28:5). So Isaac sent Jacob to Laban.

Esau’s Marriages

Esau’s Realization “Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, *and that* as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram’ (28:6-7). Esau became aware that his father had blessed his brother, Jacob, and sent him to get a wife from his uncle rather than a wife from the Canaanites, and, of course, he was aware that Jacob had left to do what his father told him to do.

“Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac” (28:8). The Hebrew word translated “did not please” is the word that means “bad, evil, displeasing” plus the word for “eye” (BDB; Leupold: “evil in the eyes of”). Esau got the message that marrying a Canaanite woman was not pleasing, even evil, to his father, which is what he had done (26:34)

Esau grew up in a household where it was well known that his grandfather Abraham had taken pains to secure a non-Canaanite wife for Isaac, his father, but apparently, he never seemed to have understood why this was done. So this was either the first time he understood or at least began to reckon with the fact that a Canaanite wife did not please his father (Leupold, who exclaims, “What a dullness of spiritual perception!”).

Esau’s Reaction “So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had” (28:9). Apparently, in the attempt to do what would be pleasing in his father’s eyes, Esau went to uncle Ishmael’s house (Ishmael was dead) to take another wife in addition to the ones he already had. Esau married Mahalath, probably the same as Bashemath in 36:3, Morris). Leupold comments, “Even in his attempt to go right, Esau still goes at least half wrong, for he takes a wife from the stock which had already been cast off from by God.” This was “a last desperate attempt to regain the favor of his parents and of God” (Morris).

Constable says there are three purposes for this brief section. “1. Moses explained and justified the reason for Jacob’s later departure for Paddan-aram (27:46-28:2). 2. Moses identified the ancestors of the Edomites, who later played a major role in Israel’s history. 3. Moses revealed Esau’s carnal character again.”

Summary: Reacting to Isaac's disobedient plan to bless Esau, Rebekah and Jacob deceived Isaac and when Esau became angry with Jacob, Jacob had to depart.

This episode teaches us something about God, Jacob and Esau, and ourselves.

God accomplishes His purposes despite people's sins. Isaac was disobedient. Rebekah was a manipulator. Jacob was a deceiver. Esau was carnal. Yet through it all, God accomplished His purpose. "This account is another remarkable demonstration of God's ability to use the sins of men and women to accomplish His purposes and at the same time punish the sinners for their sins" (Constable). "This chapter offers one of the most singular instances of God's overruling providence controlling the affairs of sinful men and so disposing of them that the interests of God's kingdom are safeguarded" (Leupold). "What man intends for evil, God utilizes for good" (Davis).

This is the third round of Jacob's battle with Esau. The first was at birth (25:21-28), the second was over the birthright (25:29-34), and the third was over the blessing. In all three incidents, Jacob manipulated his brother. Given God's promise, the manipulation was not necessarily (25:23).

The manipulation and deception of Rebekah and Jacob did not gain them anything because God had promised the birthright would go to Jacob. Actually, "they lost a great deal. The mother lost her son, Jacob had to flee for his life, and, for all we know, Rebekah never saw him anymore. And Jacob lost all the comforts of home and all those possessions his father had accumulated. He had to flee with nothing but his staff and outcast to begin the world for himself. From this first false step onward to his death, he was pursued by misfortune, until his verdict on his own life was, 'Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life'" (Dods, cited by Ross).

You might say that Rebekah and Jacob won, but actually, they did not gain anything they would not have received because God had promised it to them. It looks like they won, but they lost. These winners were losers. They were separated from each other for the rest of their lives. "Their success was soured by fearful separation.... *God's people who know God's will must not stoop to deceptive, manipulative schemes to gain spiritual success but must strive to achieve God's will righteously*" (Ross, italics his).

This story illustrates that it is the second birth, not the first birth, that God blesses. It also teaches us that deception and lying do not gain an advantage in the end. Actually, deception can be dangerous. "The comparison can be made between Cain and Abel and Esau and Jacob. In both cases, the older brother became angry over the younger brother's possession of God's blessing. In the story of Cain and Abel, Abel's actions were completely righteous and got Cain to slay him. In the story of Jacob and Esau, Jacob's actions were anything but righteous; what he saw only threatened to kill him" (Ross).

Paul admonishes believers to renounce the hidden things of shame and live transparently without deception (2 Cor. 4:2).

GOD'S ENCOURAGEMENT

Thomas Carlyle, the historian, spent two years writing a book on the French Revolution. On the day he finished it, he gave his only copy to a colleague, John Stuart Mill, to read and critique. Then the unthinkable happened. Mill's servant used Carlyle's manuscript as kindling to start a fire. As Mill reported the devastating news, Carlyle's face paled. Two years of his life were lost. Thousands of long, lonely hours he spent writing had been wasted. He could not imagine writing the book again. He lapsed into a deep depression.

Have you ever been discouraged? Perhaps I should ask, "When was the last time you were discouraged?" People get discouraged looking for a job. People get discouraged when they get the job and things don't go right on the job. People get discouraged trying to get ahead financially. When they save a little money, the transmission goes out of the car. People get discouraged with other people who do not keep their promises. People get discouraged with themselves when they fail to keep their own resolutions, such as the resolution to lose weight.

Let me tell you a story about a man in the Bible who was, no doubt, discouraged and how God encouraged him. Jacob had just deceived his father to steal his brother's birthright. When his brother threatened to kill him, he fled. He was facing an uncertain future. He was far from home and unsure he would ever return. He had no assurance of finding a wife, job, home, or even meeting his basic needs. He was seemingly all alone in a hostile world with no guarantee that he would not be hunted down and killed by his brother Esau or that a bandit or wild animal would not harm him. At this point, he was undoubtedly "tired, anxious, frustrated, and afraid" (Phillips). He "was lying in solitude, poor, helpless, and forsaken by men" (Keil). Feeling alone and fearing for his life. Jacob needed a word of encouragement.

The Dream

The Land "Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep" (28:10-11). Haran was 500 miles from Beersheba (Morris). His first stop was at "a certain place," which is later identified as Bethel (28:19). As the crow flies, Bethel is about 70 miles from Beersheba. The trip probably took three days (Leupold). Abraham had built an altar at Bethel (12:8; 13:3, 4) and, years later, returned to Bethel (13:5). Although not identified yet, where he was is important, because the Lord promised to give him the land where he was at the moment (28:15). At nightfall, he decided to spend the night at Bethel. Using a stone for a pillow (NASB, NIV, and ESV: "put it under his head;" Morris), he lay down and went to sleep. Leupold says shepherds often spent the night sleeping with a stone for a pillow, but the stone was probably not his pillow here. It was his "headpiece" (also Ross).

The Ladder "Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it" (28:12). The author calls attention to the ladder ("behold"). The Hebrew word translated "ladder" has been said to mean "ladder" (BDB; Leupold), "staircase" (Strong), "staircase or ramp" (Constable). It only appears here in the Old Testament. "The ladder was a visible symbol of the real and uninterrupted fellowship between God in heaven and His people upon earth. The angels upon it carry up the

wants of men to God, and bring down the assistance and protection of God to men” (Keil). “The ladder symbolizes the uninterrupted communion between heaven and earth, mediated through God’s holy angels and instituted for the care and needs of God’s children on earth” (Leupold). Jesus alludes to this vision (Jn 1:51). The Lord communicates to us through His Word.

The Declaration

His Promise “And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: “I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants” (28:13). Next, the author calls attention (“behold”) to the Lord standing above the ladder. The Lord identifies Himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac (see 48:3) and promises to give Jacob and his descendants the land on which Jacob was laying. “Other passages contain promises of the land (12:7; 13:14-16; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7), but this one (vv. 13-14) is closest in terminology to the one in chapter 13” (Constable).

“Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (28:14). The Lord not only promises to give Jacob and his descendants the land (28:13), He adds that Jacob’s descendants will be multiplied as the dust of the earth, his descendants will be spread from east to west and north to south, and his “seed” will bless all the families of the earth, a reference to the Messiah. This first part of the Lord’s promise guarantees that Jacob would receive the blessings first promised to Abraham (Ross). The Lord encourages His children by reminding them of His promises (Rom. 8:28).

His Presence “Behold, I *am* with you” (28:15a). The author calls attention (“behold”) to the last provision of the Lord’s promise, namely that He will personally be with Jacob and bring him back to the land. “He may have felt that God would abandon him since he was leaving the land that God had promised his forefathers” (Constable). “Jacob was the second person in the Bible to hear the assurance ‘I am with you’ (v. 15). Isaac was the first (cf. 26:3, 24). This was a promise that God later repeated to Moses (Exod. 3:12), Joshua (Josh. 1:5), Gideon (Judg. 6:16), regarding Immanuel (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23), and to all Christians (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5)” (Constable). The Lord encourages His children by reminding them of His presence. I can’t think of anything more encouraging them to be told that the Lord is with you (Heb. 13:5).

His Provision “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 spoken to you” (28:15b). The dream’s message must have encouraged Jacob. The Lord encourages His children by reminding them of His provision (Heb. 4:16).

A pastor friend (Greg Roberts) called me to talk about a sermon he was going to preach. In fact, he sent me a manuscript, asked me to read it, and give him my evaluation. I was impressed with the message and told him so. At the end of our conversation, he thanked me for my encouragement. What struck me about that comment is that he knew before he even talked to me that he had prepared an outstanding sermon and yet he needed a word of encouragement. Everybody needs encouragement.

Jacob's Decision

His Realization “Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it’ (28:16). He does not say “God” is in this place; he says “the Lord” is in this place. “He had never imagined that this rather ordinary place could be a holy place” (Ross).

“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!’ (28:17). The Hebrew word translated “afraid” is the same one that is translated “awesome.” It means “to fear, to reverence, to stand in awe.” In other words, “he was awed saying, “How awesome” (Leupold). Ross says the term “fear” describes a mixture of terror and adoration, a worshipful fear. He cites Bush, who says, “His feelings upon awakening with those of grateful wonder mingled with emotions of reverential awe, bordering close upon dread.”

Jacob called the place “Bethel” (28:19), a Hebrew word that means “house of God.” The house of God, of course, is where God dwells. God was there and, for Jacob, it was where he entered into fellowship with the Lord in heaven. This does not mean that there was an actual house or gate there. Instead, it was “a place where people could find access to God, where God could be worshiped” (Ross).

His dream made more sense than what he thought when he was awake. Awake, he thought, “I am alone.” In his dream, he was reminded that the Lord was with him. “A young fella once told his girlfriend: ‘I dreamed about you last night.’ Naturally, she was intrigued and wanted to know all about it. He said, ‘I dreamed I proposed to you. I wonder what that means?’ She said, “That’s very simple. That means you have more sense when you are asleep than when you are awake” (Phillips). Jacob had a dream that made more sense than what he thought when awake.

His Memorial “Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it” (28:18). In other words, he did not build an altar in response to God’s revelation as his forefathers had done. Instead, he set up a memorial. “Pouring oil on it constituted an act of consecration (Lev. 8:10-12)” (Constable; also Leupold, who cites Ex. 40:9-11). Ross says that “pouring the oil before the Lord was a gift to God, for it conveyed much the same attitude is making a sacrifice. It was a symbolic ritual act by which Jacob demonstrated his devotion to the Lord and consecrated the spot is holy to him.” Morris also thinks this was an altar.

“And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously” (28:19). Before Jacob’s visit, the city where he had spent the night was called Luz, a Hebrew word that means “almond tree.” Jacob changed the name to “Bethel,” a Hebrew word that means “house of God” (28:17). Except for Jerusalem, Bethel is mentioned more than any other city in the Old Testament (Constable).

His Vow “Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You’ (28:20-22). Jacob vowed that if God would be with him, protect him, provide food and clothing for him so that he could return to his father’s house in peace, he would convert the pillar to an altar (Constable; see 35:1-7), make the Lord his God, designate Bethel as God’s house, and give a tenth of all that he had to the Lord.

Leupold says Jacob’s vow was not made in a mercenary spirit, bargaining with God for food. He says if that were the case, it would “be the cheapest case of arrogant bargaining with God

recorded anywhere.” Constable says Jacob’s vow can be translated “since rather than “if” (also Morris). Constable adds, “This was probably not as crass a bargain as it appears to have been, though the record of Jacob’s life shows that he typically was keen on negotiating deals.” Ross says, “His gratitude and submission to God would be expressed in the paying of a tithe.” Morris says Jacob is not making a bargain with God; this is an expression of gratitude and love. Jacob’s vow was given in appreciation of God’s promise.

In one of the Dennis the Menace cartoons, Dennis and his parents were leaving the church with the pastor standing at the back door. Dennis turns to the preacher in front of the other worshippers and he asks loudly, “Pastor, what are you going to do with that dollar my dad gave you this morning?” Don’t be like Dennis’s dad; be like Jacob.

Summary: When Jacob was discouraged, the Lord reminded him of His promises, presence, and provision. Jacob responded by making sacrifices for the Lord.

In the context of Genesis, this passage reaffirms the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob. In Jacob’s life, this passage encouraged him. “Yahweh appeared at the top of an angel-filled stairway, restating the promise to Abraham and adding more promises of blessing and protection for Jacob. The patriarch acknowledged God’s presence, memorialized the place with a monument stone and a name, and vowed to worship the Lord there if He did bless and protect him” (Constable). God’s promise of His presence, protection, and provision should inspire devotion and worship (Ross).

The Lord encourages His children. The Lord has said He is with us and will never leave us. He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). Our response should be to walk pleasing to Him (see the last half of Ephesians).

In our case, it might not be this dramatic; it may take time. At the time, Carlyle was discouraged. Walking down a city street, he noticed a stone wall under construction. He was transfixed. That tall, sweeping wall was being raised one brick at a time. It was a moment of inspiration for him. He could write the book again if he wrote one page at a time, one day at a time. And that is exactly what he did. We need to put the pieces back together one brick at a time.

When Willie Mays began his major league baseball career, he only had one hit in his first 26 times at-bats. His debut was so unimpressive that it seemed unlikely he would last more than a few weeks in the big leagues, let alone become one of the greatest to play. He had an uncertain future in baseball.

The turning point for Mays occurred when his manager, Leo Durocher, found him crying in the dugout after yet another miserable performance at the plate. The coach put his arm around Mays and said, “What’s the matter, son?” Mays said, “I can’t hit up here. I belong in the minor leagues.” Durocher told Mays: “As long as I’m the manager of the Giants, you’ll be my centerfielder.”

It wasn’t long before Mays began hitting the ball, and he was on his way to becoming a game legend. He hit 660 home runs (third on the all-time list) and stole over 300 bases. Someone was there to encourage him and tell him, “I am behind you; this will work out.”

During those times of discouragement, we need the same thing that Willie Mays needed. We need a word of encouragement. We need to know that the “coach” is with us.

“WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND”

Someone has said, “What goes around comes around. That’s what people say. So all the pain you caused me will come back to you someday.” Some call that karma. Is karma true? One of the most outstanding examples of “karma” is in the book of Genesis. Let’s listen to that story so we can learn from it. The story begins in Genesis 28. With the help of his mother, Jacob deceived his brother Esau to get the blessing from their father. When Esau threatened to kill Jacob, Jacob had to flee. The next chapter in the story of deception is in Genesis 29, where Jacob meets Laban. “The long account of Jacob’s relationship with Laban (chs. 29-31) is the centerpiece of the Jacob story (chs. 25-35). It is a story within a story” (Constable).

Meeting Rachel

The Well “So Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the East” (29:1). In the Hebrew text, the expression “went on his journey” is “lifted up, foot.” Ross says, “How did Jacob respond to the promise he had received at Bethel? A literal translation of the first verse will clarify his attitude: ‘and Jacob *picked up his feet* and went to the land of the people of the east.’ After the vision at Bethel, there was a new spring in Jacob’s walk. Esau no longer concerned him; now he was on a mission with the Lord’s promise of protection and provision” (Ross, italics his). The expression “the land of the people of the East” is vague, but it usually refers to land west of the Euphrates (Leupold). In this case, it refers to Haran (29:4).

“And he looked, and saw a well in the field; and behold, there *were* three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks. A large stone *was* on the well’s mouth” (29:2). Moses calls attention to the fact (“behold”) that Jacob saw a well with three flocks of sheep lying by it. Jacob spotted the well because of the unusual circumstance that, although it was still early in the afternoon, three flocks of sheep were already waiting to be watered. The Lord providentially led Jacob to the very well where the sheep belonging to his relatives were watered. (Morris).

The well’s opening was probably covered by a large, flat stone with a smaller opening in the center, which in turn was covered by a smaller stone (Leupold). “The remark in Gen. 29:2 that the stone on the well’s mouth was large does not mean that the united strength of all the shepherds was required to roll it away, whereas Jacob rolled it away alone (Gen. 29:10); but only that it was not in the power of every shepherd, much less of a shepherdess like Rachel, to roll it away. Hence, in all probability, the agreement that had been formed among them, that they would water the flocks together” (Keil)

“Now all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone from the well’s mouth, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the well’s mouth” (29:3). Moses explains that the three flocks of sheep were gathered there, waiting for the men to move the stone from the mouth of the well and after the sheep were watered, they replaced it.

The Shepherds “And Jacob said to them, ‘My brethren, where *are* you from?’ And they said, ‘We *are* from Haran’ (29:4). Being older than the shepherds (Leupold: he was about 77), Jacob spoke first. When he asked where the shepherds were from, they told him they were from Haran.

“Then he said to them, ‘Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?’ And they said, ‘We know him’ (29:5). Jacob identifies Laban as the son of Nahor. Actually, Nahor was Laban’s grandfather, not his father (22:20-23; Constable). Nahor was, no doubt, “the more lustrous ancestor” (Leupold).

“So he said to them, ‘Is he well?’ And they said, ‘*He is* well. And look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep” (29:6). When Laban asked the shepherds if Laban was in good health, they not only told him that Laban was well, they added that his daughter Rachel was coming to water the sheep. “This was very providential to Jacob” (Gill).

“Then he said, ‘Look, *it is* still high day; *it is* not time for the cattle to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go and feed *them*” (29:7). Jacob tells the shepherds that there is still time left in the day for the cattle to graze, so they should water the sheep and go feed them. Perhaps the efficient Jacob does not want them to waste time. Maybe he is trying to remove the onlookers from the scene when Rachel arrives (Leupold).

“But they said, ‘We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well’s mouth; then we water the sheep” (29:8). The shepherds explained to Jacob that they could not water the sheep that were there until all the sheep were gathered together and then they would water them all at the same time. Their inability to water the sheep was not the physical inability to move the stone. It was moral, not physical (Constable, who cites Bush). In other words, they had agreed to act in unison (Leupold).

Rachel “Now while he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a shepherdess” (29:9). While Jacob and the shepherds were still conversing, Rachel appeared with her father’s sheep. She was a shepherdess, which explains why she brought the sheep to the well and not a male shepherd.

“And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother’s brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother’s brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well’s mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother’s brother” (29:10). The phrase “Laban his mother’s brother” is repeated three times in this verse. The repetition emphasizes that Jacob had found his uncle, the man he had come to find. Now he is standing before his uncle’s daughter and his uncle’s sheep. He takes the initiative to roll the stone from the well’s mouth and water the sheep.

“Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept” (29:11). Besides, Rachel was a beautiful woman (29:17). This is a case of love at first sight (Leupold). Jacob wasted no time (29:7). On their first “date,” he kissed her (although Morris says this was a kiss of greeting). “This is one of the few places in Scripture that we read of a man kissing a woman. Jacob acted solely based on Rachel’s physical attractiveness” (Constable). Jacob wept for joy but did not praise God (Constable). When Abraham’s servant discovered Rebekah, he worshiped the Lord (24:24, 26).

“And Jacob told Rachel that he *was* her father’s relative and that he *was* Rebekah’s son. So she ran and told her father” (29:12). After the kiss, Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s relative, the son of her father’s sister. She ran to tell her father, not to her mother like Rebekah.

“Notice the absence of prayer for divine guidance to the woman of God’s choosing, which dominates the story of Abraham’s servant’s visit to the same area for the same purpose (ch. 22)” (Constable). “This scene [29:1-14] is chiefly about God’s providence versus Jacob’s prayerlessness (Waltke, cited by Constable).

Meeting Laban

The Occasion “Then it came to pass, when Laban heard the report about Jacob his sister’s son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. So he told Laban all these things” (29:13). When Laban realized that his nephew Jacob had come, he was excited (Morris). His sister Rebekah had left almost a hundred years before and he had never

met his nephew (Leupold). Laban ran to meet Jacob. He embraced Jacob, kissed him, and brought him to his house. His greeting was “warm and enthusiastic” (Ross). Once in Laban’s house, Jacob told his uncle all the things that had happened to him. The “all things” included everything recorded in chapters 27-28 (Leupold).

The Offer “And Laban said to him, ‘Surely you *are* my bone and my flesh.’ And he stayed with him for a month. Then Laban said to Jacob, ‘Because you *are* my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what *should* your wages *be*?’” (29:14-15). Keil says this means “After a full month (“a month of days,” Gen. 41:4; Num. 11:20, etc.), during which time Laban had discovered that he was a good and useful shepherd.”

The Options “Now Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder *was* Leah, and the name of the younger *was* Rachel. Leah’s eyes *were* delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance” (29:16-17). Laban’s oldest daughter, Leah, had “delicate” eyes. The Hebrew word translated “delicate” means “tender, soft, delicate, weak, timid.” Some interpreters say Leah had “weak” eyes (the NASB, NIV, and ESV all say “weak”). If weak is meant, her eyes were “dull and lacking in luster rather than bright” (Constable; JFB: “soft blue eyes—thought a blemish”). Weak eyes meant she was not so good-looking since bright eyes, with fire in them, are regarded as the height of beauty in Oriental women” (Keil). Constable says, “However, the Hebrew word translated ‘weak’ can also mean ‘delicate,’ so Leah may have had lovely eyes.” Clarke says her eyes were “soft, delicate, lovely... beautiful.”

Rachel was the younger of the two, beautiful in form (Hebrew: “shape, form, figure”) and appearance. She was stunningly beautiful (see 12:11, Sarai was “a woman of beautiful countenance” and 24:16, Rebekah was “very beautiful). “Rachel was beautiful in both face and form” (Morris).

The Overture “Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, ‘I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter’” (29:18). Keil suggests that Jacob may have been motivated to offer this kind of a long-term deal partly because he didn’t have the customary dowry and partly because the situation concerning Esau compelled him to remain some time with Laban. Jacob was not purchasing Rachel. “The customary dowry money was regarded as proof of financial competence on the bridegroom’s part” (Leupold). Besides, Jacob was “clearly not risking a refusal” (Kidner).

Seven years is a long engagement, even by today’s standards. Jacob’s price was a “handsome offer” (Kidner). “Casual laborers received between one-half and one shekel a month in old Babylonia, which was a large marriage gift in exchange for Rachel’s hand” (Driver, cited by Constable). This is like saying that if he made \$50,000 a year, he was willing to pay \$350,000 for Rachel.

The Outcome “And Laban said, ‘*It is* better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me’” (29:19). Laban agreed to the deal, for after all, it was better for her to be married to Jacob than a stranger. Besides, “Seven years of free service, by a man who was an exceptional worker, was surely a fine windfall for Laban, especially since he would have been happy to have Jacob marry into the family regardless” (Morris).

Marrying Leah

The Discharge “So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed *only* a few days to him because of the love he had for her” (29:20). For the privilege of marrying Rachel, Jacob worked for his uncle Laban for seven years, but his love for her was so great the seven years seemed like a few days.

“Then Jacob said to Laban, ‘Give *me* my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her” (29:21). At the end of seven years, Jacob reminded his uncle that he had fulfilled his part of the bargain and now it was time for him to marry Rachel. Laban should have taken the initiative; selfishness let him wait (Leupold).

The Dinner “And Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast” (29:22). As was the custom, Laban gathered the men of Haran together for a feast to celebrate the wedding. “All the men” may be hyperbole “unless Haran had still been but a tiny place, which is not very likely” (Leupold).

The Deception “Now it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her” (29:23). That evening, after dark, Laban took Leah, instead of Rachel, to Jacob and they slept together. Phillips uses Charles Dickens’ description of Ebenezer Scrooge to describe Laban. He was “a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, secret and self-contained as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait” (Dickens, cited by Phillips).

Laban deceived Jacob, but Leah was part of the plot. Why did she go along with the scheme? Leupold suggests several possibilities, including submission to parental authority according to the conception of the day. She secretly loved Jacob. She considered this was her one chance to get a husband, or she may have considered this an opportunity to steal a march on her sister.

“And Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah *as a maid*” (29:24). “It was customary for the bride’s father to give her a large present when she got married: a dowry. In the ancient world, the gift normally consisted of clothing, furniture, and money, and it served as a nest egg for the wife in case her husband died or divorced her. Some dowries were exceptionally valuable, such as slave girls (24:61; 29:29) or a city (1 Kings 9:16). Laban was being generous” (Wenham, cited by Constable). This event almost seems out of place, but it becomes deeply significant in the next chapter.

The Discovery “So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it *was Leah*” (29:25a). The following day, Jacob realized that he had spent the night with Leah instead of Rachel. How could he not have figured that out before mourning? Leupold suggests some factors that may have contributed to Jacob’s unawareness. He had absolutely no reason for suspicion, she was brought into the cover of darkness (see also Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1:19:6-7), she was veiled (24:65), the two sisters had a physical resemblance as to size and stature, and the conversation between them might have been entirely whispered. Morris speculates that Leah wore Rachel’s clothes and had on her perfume. Constable surmises, “Perhaps Jacob’s eating and drinking at the feast had clouded his mind (v. 22).” Diamond says that one of his Indian students said his father did not see his mother’s face for three days after their wedding and adds that it is still customary among some Indians for the bride to remain veiled even after the consummation of the marriage (Diamond, cited by Constable).

The Discussion “And he said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?’” (29:25b). Needless to say, Jacob was upset. He asked Laban, his father-in-law, why he had deceived him. Ross points out that the Hebrew word translated “deceived” is cognate to the noun used in Genesis 27:35 that describes Jacob’s deception. The deceiver has been deceived. What goes around comes around.

“And Laban said, ‘It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn’” (29:26). Laban explained that it was the custom in his country not to give the younger daughter in marriage before the firstborn daughter was married. “Everyone recognizes at a glance

that if this really was the ironclad rule of this ‘community,’ that the elder is given in marriage before the younger, then the time for saying so would have been at the time the agreement was originally made” (Leupold). “When Laban offered his explanation to Jacob, he used the word ‘firstborn’ to describe his older daughter. That word would recall the major motif of chapter 27, the blessing of the firstborn” (Ross, who also says, “How these words must have brought back Jacob’s own deception!”).

“Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years” (29:27). Then, Laban had the nerve to suggest that if Jacob fulfilled the bridal week with Leah and served another seven years, he could marry Rachel. “The ‘bridal week’ was the week of feasting that followed a marriage (v. 27; cf. Judg. 14:12, 17)” (Constable). “For downright, galling meanness, these terms could hardly be surpassed” (Leupold).

“The motif of serving figures prominently in this chapter—Jacob served Laban for his daughters. The blessing that Jacob had gained by deception from Isaac said that his brother would serve him (27:29), but here was one brother (29:12) who beat Jacob at his own game and seemed to nullify the benefits of that stolen blessing. This painful experience was God’s rebuke of Jacob for deceiving his father to obtain the blessing” (Ross).

Marrying Rachel

The Marriage “Then Jacob did so and fulfilled her week. So he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife also” (29:28). Jacob fulfilled the bridal week with Leah and, at the end of the week, was allowed to marry Rachel with the understanding that he would serve seven years for her. “Jacob married two women in eight days.... The Mosaic Law later prohibited marrying two sisters at the same time (Lev. 18:18). Bigamy and polygamy were never God’s will. At the same time, it should be pointed out that polygamy was common in the days of the patriarchs. Jacob’s brother, Esau, had two wives, and his grandfather, Abraham, had Hagar and Sarah as his wives. “Nevertheless, many problems did develop later in Jacob’s home and family because of it, thus showing again that monogamy is the better way (Morris).

The Maid “And Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as a maid” (29:29). As in the case of Leah (29:24), Laban gave one of his maids to Rachel as a maid. Also, as in the case of Leah, this statement seems out of place, but it becomes an important factor later.

The deceiver was deceived. Jacob had pretended to be his older brother, and now Leah pretended to be her younger sister. Laban and Leah deceived Jacob as Jacob and Rebekah had deceived Isaac. As Jacob had deceived Isaac by taking advantage of his inability to see due to poor eyesight (27:36), so Laban deceived Jacob by taking advantage of his inability to see in the dark tent (29:25). Laban was just as deceitful as Jacob. “This was about one of the meanest pranks ever played on a man” (Leupold).

Summary: The Lord providentially led Jacob to his relatives in Haran so he could get a wife and, simultaneously, allowed the deceiver to be deceived to teach him not to deceive.

God blesses His children. He is faithful to fulfill His promises. He even worked through Jacob’s deception and prolonged service to fulfill His purpose.

God disciplines His children. “God brought the patriarch-to-be to Laban for discipline that would bring his deception before his eyes” (Ross). God disciplines “in kind” (i.e., with talionic judgment; cf. Prov. 3:12; Gal. 6:7; Heb. 12:5-6)” (Constable; “talionic” means the extraction of

compensation in kind, the legal principle of making the punishment correspond to the crime; see also Mt. 7:2).

“Jacob was getting what he deserved. In this light, the seven extra years that Jacob had to serve Laban appear as a repayment for his treatment of Esau. By calling such situations to the reader’s attention, the writer begins to draw an important lesson from these narratives. Jacob’s deceptive schemes for obtaining the blessing did not meet with divine approval. Through Jacob’s plans, God’s will had been accomplished; but the writer is intent on pointing out, as well, that the schemes and tricks were not of God’s design” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

We reap what we sow (Prov. 11:18; 22:8; Hosea 8:7; 10:12-13; Gal. 6:7). What Jacob did to Esau was underhanded, despicable, and mean. What Laban did to Jacob was “underhanded, despicable, and mean” (Phillips). In other words, what goes around comes around, but it should be noted that the principle is often true but not always the case. There are exceptions. Some people do not get “caught” in this life, but they have to face the Judge of all the earth in the next life. By the way, the principle of what goes around comes around actually means whatever you do in this life to other people, *whether it is good or bad*, the same will return to you.

God teaches us through discipline. At Bethel, Jacob learned what God is like; at Haran, he learned what man is like (Phillips).

God blesses His children and disciplines them—at the same time. We tend to think that God either blesses or disciplines. The truth is *in the process of blessing*, He disciplines. “God remains faithful to His promises to bless His people, but in the process, He may discipline them for their previous unresolved sins” (Constable). The Lord took care of His children in the wilderness.

The great lesson of this episode is that the deceiver gets deceived. Aesop lived about 600 years before Christ (620-564 B.C.). One of his fables is about a fox, a donkey, and a lion. The fox and the donkey agreed to look for food together. They hadn’t gone far before they saw a lion coming their way. They were both dreadfully frightened. The fox thought of a way he could save his own skin. He whispered in the lion’s ear, “I arrange for you to get the donkey without having to stalk him if you promise to let me go free.” The lion agreed and the fox then rejoined his companion, the donkey. Then the fox led the donkey to a hidden pit, which some hunter had dug to trap wild animals and into which the donkey fell. When the Lion saw that the donkey was safely caught and couldn’t get away, he turned his attention to the fox and soon finished him off. Then, the lion proceeded to feast upon the donkey. The moral of the story is the deceiver was deceived. The fox who deceived the donkey was deceived! The trickster was tricked. He was trapped by his own treachery.

A TALE OF TWO WOMEN

Dickens had his tale of two cities and the book of Genesis has a tale of two brothers and even a tale of two twins, but one of the most interesting tales of all is the tale of two women. It, too, is recorded in the book of Genesis and gives us insights into God, the history of Israel, two women in particular, and even ourselves. What can we learn from the tale of two women? The relationship between these two women resembles a four-round boxing match.

Round One: Leah has Four Sons

Reuben “Then *Jacob* also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served with Laban still another seven years” (29:30). Jacob consummated the marriage with Rachel and he loved her more than his first wife Leah, which indicates that he had at least a measure of love for Leah (Leupold). Notice that by favoring one of his wives above the other, Jacob was behaving like his parents, who each favored one son above the other. In both cases, serious family problems followed (Constable). He served seven more years for Rachel to fulfill his agreement with Laban. He was as good as his word (Leupold).

“When the LORD saw that Leah *was* unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel *was* barren” (29:31). Verse 29 says, “Jacob loved Rachel *more than* Leah, but verse 31 says, “Leah was unloved.” The Hebrew word translated “unloved” means “to hate, be hateful” (see KJV; ESV). Leupold says the word means “less to be loved” or “slighted.” As verse 30 indicates, Jacob did not hate her; he loved Leah less than Rachel. Constable claims that in the Bible, the terms “love” and “hate” often referred to someone’s choice to bless or not bless them (Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13). So, “the statement that he hated Leah reflects his comparative affection for her, and his purpose to bestow less blessing on Leah than he would give to Rachel.” Be all that as it may, the Lord saw that Leah was loved less than Rachel and opened her womb so that she would bear a son. “When the clause ‘the LORD saw’ occurs (v. 31), His acting decisively, often for the weak and oppressed, follows soon (cf. 6:5; 7:1; 18:21; 31:12; Exod. 2:25; 4:31)” (Constable).

“So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, ‘The LORD has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me’” (29:32). Leah named her first son Reuben, a Hebrew word that means “behold a son.” She had two responses to the birth of her firstborn. First, she acknowledged that it was a blessing of the Lord, who looked upon her affliction. The use of the word “Lord” (Yahweh) indicates her faith and spiritual understanding (Leupold). Second, she thought that the birth of a son would make her husband, Jacob, love her.

Simeon “Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, ‘Because the LORD has heard that I *am* unloved, He has therefore given me this *son* also.’ And she called his name Simeon” (29:33). Leah named her second son Simeon, a Hebrew word that means “heard.” Again, she demonstrates her spirituality, recognizing that the Lord heard her and gave her a son because she was unloved. In other words, she had asked the Lord to give her another child (Leupold).

Levi “She conceived again and bore a son, and said, ‘Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.’ Therefore his name was called Levi” (29:34). Leah named her third son Levi, a Hebrew word that means “joined to.” Leah thought Jacob would be attached to her now that she had given him three sons. “How poor Leah must have thirsted for

the love that was denied her. Leah now stands on pretty firm ground; any man would be grateful for three healthy sons; especially are men in the Orient minded thus” (Leupold).

Judah “And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, ‘Now I will praise the LORD.’ Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing” (29:35). Leah named her fourth son Judah, a Hebrew word that means “praised.” Apparently, this time, she felt that she was no longer “love but little” (Leupold), for which she praises the Lord. At this point, she stopped bearing children.

Notice the meaning of the names of Leah’s sons: behold the son, heard, joined to, praise. These names reflect her anxious relationship with her husband and, at the same time, her acknowledgment of the blessing of the Lord. Leah seems to have been a godly woman who spent much time praying for her marriage and her children. She acknowledged that the Lord gave her sons in response to her prayers and her difficult position in the home (Morris).

Round Two: Rachel’s Maid has Two Sons

Dan “Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or else I die!’” (30:1). When Leah wanted another child, she prayed (29:33; see also verse 32). When Rachel was childless, she did not pray; she blamed her husband! “Her impatient demand is positively sinful, though it very accurately reflects her spiritual state” (Leupold).

“And Jacob’s anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, ‘Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?’” (30:2). With anger, Jacob responded by informing his wife that he was not God. “He struck back at her with a strong suggestion that there was something wrong in her own life since God had not judged her worthy of being blessed with children” (Morris). Jacob loved Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel more than he loved Leah (29:30). Yet he was angry with Rachel. Love does not preclude anger. God loves His children, yet He can be angry with them. By the way, Jacob didn’t pray either (Keil). He did not follow his father Isaac’s example (25:21; Leupold).

“So she said, ‘Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear *a child* on my knees, that I also may have children by her” (30:3). Like Sarah, Rachel came up with the plan of having her husband bear a child with her maid. “Sarah resorted to a custom acceptable in her culture, though contrary to God’s will, to secure an heir for Abraham (16:1-2). Isaac prayed that God would open Rebekah’s womb and waited (25:21). Rachel and Jacob followed the example of Sarah and Abraham” (Constable). The expression “go in to her” is a euphemism for sexual intercourse and the expression “she will bear a child on my knees” was another way of saying that Rachel would take the child born of her maid, lay it upon her knees, and treat it as her own. It may also be a formal mode of adoption (Leupold).

“Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, and Jacob went in to her” (30:4). “God’s instruction of the order of marriage is ignored. The lesson taught to Abraham is not heeded. Human expedients are trusted in rather than God’s blessing” (Leupold). “The terms *wife* and *concubine* are used more loosely in the patriarchal period. Three women in the patriarchal period are called both *wife* and *concubine*: Hagar (Gen. 16:3; 25:6 indirectly), Keturah (25:1; cf. 25:6; 1 Chron. 1:32), and Bilhah (Gen. 30:4; 35:22). Each of these concubines is an auxiliary wife to the patriarch, not a slave, but subordinate to the wife who is her mistress. After the patriarchal period, the term *wife* is never used as a synonym for concubine. Zilpah, though never called a concubine (cf. 30:9), has the same social position as Bilhah (cf. 37:2)” (Waltke, italics his, cited by Constable).

“And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said, ‘God has judged my case; and He has also heard my voice and given me a son.’ Therefore she called his name Dan” (30:5-6). Rachel’s response to the birth of her maid’s son by her husband Jacob was that God had judged her case, heard her voice, and given her a son, whom she named Dan, a Hebrew word that means “judge.” Apparently, this time she prayed, but unlike Leah, she does not attribute the child to “the Lord.” She “thinks of God only as the Creator and Source of life. The higher covenant issues involved do not seem as yet to be discerned by her” (Leupold).

Naphtali “And Rachel’s maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, ‘With great wrestlings, I have wrestled with my sister, *and* indeed I have prevailed.’ So she called his name Naphtali” (30:7-8). This time Rachel responded that she had wrestled with her sister and won! So she named the son Naphtali, a Hebrew word that means “wrestling.” In the Hebrew text, the word translated “great” means “rulers, judges, angels, gods.” The “wrestlings of God” can either mean “mighty wrestlings” (KJV: “with great wrestlings have I wrestle with my sister;” NASB: “with mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister;” NIV: “a great struggle with my sister;” ESV: “with mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister;” Ross) or “wrestlings with God (Leupold).

In desperation, Rachel resorted to Sarah’s scheme: having a child through her maid. Granted, what she did was according to the day’s custom (Morris), but surely both she and Jacob knew of the unhappy results of Sarah’s venture. Barnes says, “Rachel, though looking first to Jacob and then to her maid, had at length learned to look to her God and then had prevailed.”

Round Three: Leah’s Maid has two Sons

Gad “When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife” (30:9). In the meantime, since Leah had stopped bearing children, she took her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob to be his wife.

“And Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, ‘A troop comes!’ So she called his name Gad” (30:10-11). The Hebrew word “Gad” means “troop” (BDB; Leupold: “luck” or “fortune;” NASB: “How fortunate!; NIV: “How happy I am!; ESV: “happy am I!”).

Asher “And Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, ‘I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed.’ So she called his name Asher” (30:12-13). The Hebrew word “Asher” means “happy.” Other women would call her blessed because sons were deemed the finest gift the wife could give to her husband.

“The actions of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah in this chapter, and those of Abraham and Sarah in chapter 16, raise questions about surrogate parenting. Today, husbands and wives who cannot have children naturally sometimes choose to secure the services of a third person who can provide a needed function and thus enable them to have children. For example, if the wife cannot carry a baby in her womb for a full-term pregnancy, some doctors recommend that the couple use the services of another woman. If acceptable, they implant the couple’s fertilized egg in her womb that she agrees to ‘rent’ for the nine-month gestation period. Another example is the securing of sperm from a donor if the husband is sterile. There are many ways in which childless couples can now become parents with this kind of help from a third and sometimes fourth party. These situations are somewhat similar to what we find in Genesis 16 and 30. The common tie is that in all these cases, someone other than the husband and wife is essential to the conception of the child. I do not believe that adoption is similar because in adoption, a husband and wife simply agree to

rear a child that has been or will be born. They do not require a third party for the conception of the child as in surrogate parenting” (Constable).

Round Four: Leah has three more and Rachel has one more

Issachar “Now Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, ‘Please give me *some* of your son’s mandrakes” (30:14). Leopold says Ruben may have been “about four years old, just old enough to toddle out into the field after the reapers. Childlike, he gathered what especially attracts the eye, the yellow berries of the mandrake about the size of a nutmeg.” Morris, however, points out that Jacob had eight sons. So, the eldest son, Ruben, was probably about seven years old.

“The mandrake, a member of the potato and tomato family, is a plant that bears bluish flowers in winter and yellowish plum-size fruit in summer. The fruit has a strong, pleasant fragrance and was thought to help barren women conceive. Some Arabs still use it as an aphrodisiac and call it ‘devil’s apple’ (cf. Song of Sol. 7:13)” (Constable, who cites von Rad). Leopold says the root of the Hebrew name signifies “love-apples,” and Morris says that in Western countries this plant is called the “May-apple.” Concerned about her futility, Rachel asked Leah for some of the mandrakes.

“But she said to her, ‘*Is it* a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son’s mandrakes also?’ And Rachel said, ‘Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son’s mandrakes’ (30:15). Apparently, Leah’s hope that Jacob would love her after she bore several sons (29:32) had not been fully realized. So, she unjustly charges Rachel with alienation of affection (Leopold). So when Leah objected that Rachel had taken her husband and now wants her son’s mandrakes, Rachel offered to give Leah the night with Jacob if Leah would give her some of the mandrakes.

“When Jacob came out of the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, ‘You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son’s mandrakes’ and he lay with her that night” (30:16). So, that evening when Jacob came home, Leah almost triumphantly claimed him as a result of her bargain (Leopold). Jacob spent the night with Leah. “Sleep, as a euphemism for sex, is never used for loving marital intercourse in this book, only for illicit or forced sex: Lot’s daughters with Lot (19:32-35); the Philistines with Rebekah (26:10); Shechem with Dinah (34:2, 7); Reuben with Bilhah (35:22); Potiphar’s wife with Joseph (39:7, 10, 12, 14)” (Waltke, cited by Constable).

“And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Leah said, ‘God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband.’ So she called his name *Issachar*” (30:17-18). Leah was praying that she would get pregnant and the Lord heard her prayer. She conceived and bore a fifth son. It was the Lord, not the mandrakes, that caused her pregnancy. Since she viewed the birth of the son as payment for giving her maid to her husband, she named him *Issachar*, a Hebrew word that means “there is recompense” (BDB; Leopold: “there is reward;” Morris: “reward”).

Zebulun “Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. And Leah said, ‘God has endowed me *with* a good endowment; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons.’ So she called his name *Zebulun*” (30:19-20). Sometime later, Leah bore a sixth son. Since he felt that God had given her a good endowment (Hebrew: “endowment, gift) and, therefore, her husband would dwell with her because God blessed her with six sons, she called the sixth son *Zebulun*, a Hebrew word that means “exalted.”

Dinah “Afterward she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah” (30:21). Leah not only bore six sons, but she also gave birth to a daughter, whom she called Dinah, a Hebrew word that means “judgment” (Leupold: it could mean “vindication”). Jacob had other daughters (37:35; 46:7, 15), but Dinah is the only one whose experience is recorded (see chapter 34).

Joseph “Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb” (30:22). Childless Rachel continued to beseech the Lord for more children. He remembered her, listened to her, and opened her womb. In other words, her conception was not due to the mandrakes but to the Lord (Ross), the author of life (Leupold).

“And she conceived and bore a son, and said, ‘God has taken away my reproach.’ So she called his name Joseph, and said, ‘The LORD shall add to me another son’ (30:23-24). When Rachel bore this son because God had taken away her reproach and given her another son, she named him Joseph, a Hebrew word that means “Jehovah has added.” Joseph was born at the end of Jacob’s 14th year in Laban service (Constable).

This passage reveals the problem with bigamy. Later, it is forbidden in the Mosaic Law (Lev. 18:18). “One object of the narrative, without a doubt, is thus to portray the evils of bigamy in a dramatic fashion” (Leupold). “The house of the bigamist is a house divided against itself and the fruitful source of much mischief and the effectual disruption of all true discipline” (Leupold, who points out that even though the two wives were sisters, or perhaps all the more because of that, rivalry and jealousy prevailed in the household). Constable says Jacob’s wives lived in envy and friction.

In 1910, Jung met Antonia Wolff (“Toni”) as a patient (Bair, p. 195). She became a lifelong intimate and colleague. When Emma, Jung’s wife, insisted that he give up the extra-marital affair with Toni, he insisted that Toni was far too important for him to do without her. Emma gave in “as much out of fear for his sanity as a determination to preserve her marriage” (Stevens, pp. 17-18). He treated his mistress, Toni, as a second wife (Bair, p. 266) and insisted upon a discrete triangular relationship that lasted their entire lives (Bair, p. x.). The three often appeared together in public, but in private, the tension between the two women “intensified to such a degree that both found it difficult to keep it under control in public.” They became increasingly openly sarcastic to each other (Bair, p. 327).

Summary: With four wives, two of whom were jealous of each other, Jacob bore twelve children.

This passage contains the contrast and conflict between two women. Leah was a woman of faith who longed for the affection of her husband. Rachel had faith, but it was not as strong as Leah’s. She had the affection of her husband but “anxiously desired the blessing of God in childbirth (Ross).

The anxiety, envy, and jealousy of these two women led to conflict. Believers should put away envy and strife that leads to conflict and trust the Lord for His blessing, which He dispenses in His sovereignty, wisdom, justice, and compassion (Ross). “Whatever a lot in life—whether we are hated or ignored, oppressed or challenge, troubled or anxious—our attitude should not be one of jealousy, nor efforts those of bitter rivalry. Rather, we must cultivate a wholehearted trust in God, waiting patiently for His blessing on us” (Ross, who cites Romans 13:13-14).

This passage records God’s faithfulness in providing Jacob with descendants as He promised at Bethel. It “centers on the fulfillment of Yahweh’s promise to be with Jacob and to bless him” (Leupold, vol. 2, p. 800). In spite of the envy, jealousy, and superstition of the wives involved, the

Lord opened the womb of these women. Their sons become “the tribal heads of Israel” (Constable), “the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel (Leupold).

“God chose the despised mother, Leah, and exalted her to be the first mother. The kingly tribe of Judah and the priestly tribe of Levi were traced back to her, in spite of Joseph’s love for Rachel and his later favoritism toward Rachel’s son Joseph.... God characteristically works for things or people that humans reject—the downcast, the afflicted, the troubled, the oppressed, and the rejected. Those who find themselves in such predicaments can by faith rely on God, who in his sovereign plan will bless them. His blessing, however, cannot be gained by bargaining or striving” (Ross).

GETTING RICH

People are forever coming up with schemes to get rich. “Get rich quick” schemes are as common as trees. The problem, of course, is that not all trees are fruit trees. Genesis contains the story of the man who came up with a scheme to get rich and was successful! What can we learn from his experience?

The Deal

Jacob “And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, ‘Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country’ (30:25). After the birth of Joseph, Jacob asked Laban to send them back to his homeland.

“Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done for you” (30:26). Having fulfilled the 14 years of service he promised, Jacob adds that he wants to take his wives and children with him. In other words, this amounts to Jacob asking Laban “to acknowledge the fulfillment of his contract by giving him his wives and children that he might depart” (Leupold).

Laban “And Laban said to him, ‘Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the LORD has blessed me for your sake’ (30:27). Laban begins his reply with the “somewhat elaborate oriental courtesy” (Leupold: “if I have found favor in your eyes”) He then asked Jacob to stay because he had learned from experience that the Lord had blessed him for Jacob’s sake. Leupold thinks that the use of Yahweh is “merely a case of accommodating himself to Jacob’s mode of speech. Laban did not know Him as such or believe in Him” (Leupold). Morris thinks that Laban had become to some degree a pagan mystic (the Hebrew word translated “experience” can mean “practice divination;” see NASB: “I have divined:” NIV and ESV: “I have learned by divination”). Perhaps, but it is equally possible that Laban knew the Lord.

“Then he said, ‘Name me your wages, and I will give it’ (30:28). Laban was willing to make almost any bargain that would keep Jacob working for him (Morris). “Laban is ready to go almost any limit to retain the man whose services have been so advantageous to himself. Laban is an eminently selfish man” (Leupold). He was probably expecting Jacob to ask for a number of animals to begin his own flock and herbs (Morris). This was like a manager wanting to keep his most successful salesman because it meant he would make more money.

Jacob “So Jacob said to him, ‘You know how I have served you and how your livestock has been with me.’ For what you had before I came was little, and it has increased to a great amount; the LORD has blessed you since my coming. And now, when shall I also provide for my own house?” (30:29-30). Jacob responds to Laban by reminding him of how he had served him, how the Lord had blessed him with an increased flock because him, and the need to provide for his own household. Jacob is saying, ‘I have done all in my power to provide for you and all my work very successfully; when am I to ride for my own house also?’ The fairness of the demand can hardly be questioned” (Leupold).

“So he said, ‘What shall I give you?’ And Jacob said, ‘You shall not give me anything. If you will do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep your flocks. Let me pass through all your flock today, removing from there all the speckled and spotted sheep, and all the brown ones among the

lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and *these* shall be my wages. So my righteousness will answer for me in time to come, when the subject of my wages comes before you: every one that *is* not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the lambs, will be considered stolen, if *it is* with me” (30:31-33). “In the Orient, sheep are normally white, goats are normally black or brown-black, and exceptions are not numerous. Thus, this plan “puts the possibility of acquiring wealth entirely in the providence of God.... When Jacob was still at Bethel, God had promised to care for him.... This was a fine act of faith on Jacob’s part. He cast himself wholly upon God’s mercy” (Leupold). Morris suggests that Laban’s flock consisted of white sheep, black goats, and brown cattle. Under Jacob’s plan, in the future, the odd-colored animals would demonstrate that he had done right by Laban.

Laban “And Laban said, ‘Oh, that it were according to your word!’” (30:34). The Hebrew word translated “Oh” expresses “a kind of eagerness” (Leupold). “Laban agreed to this arrangement because he thought it could work only to his advantage” (Ross).

The Division

The Division “So he removed that day the male goats that were speckled and spotted, all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had *some* white in it, and all the brown ones among the lambs” (30:35a). There are three indications that Laban did not trust Jacob. The “he” in this verse refers to Laban (see 30:34). In verse 32, Jacob had stipulated that he would divide the flock, but verse 36 says *Laban* separated the ones that were to be kept apart from the rest. “Laban’s interference indicates his mistrust of Jacob” (Leupold).

The Delegation “and gave them into the hand of his sons” (30:35b). Another indication that Laban did not trust Jacob is that he put the abnormally colored animals in the care of his sons, lest Jacob tamper with them and perhaps use them for breeding purposes. The original agreement had no such provision (Leupold).

The Distance “Then he put three days’ journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban’s flocks” (30:36). Still another indication that Laban did not trust Jacob is that he put three days’ journey between himself and Jacob, who fed the rest of his flock. “Laban made sure that Jacob would have a difficult time succeeding. In general, Laban represents clever, deceptive opponents who ensure their own success by taking unfair advantages” (Ross).

The Deception

The Increase “Now Jacob took for himself rods of green poplar and of the almond and chestnut trees, peeled white strips in them, and exposed the white which *was* in the rods. And the rods which he had peeled, he set before the flocks in the gutters, in the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink, so that they should conceive when they came to drink. So the flocks conceived before the rods, and the flocks brought forth streaked, speckled, and spotted” (30:37-39). Keep in mind that Jacob only had Laban’s sheep. Jacob took branches from the poplar, almond, and chestnut trees, peeled back the bark so that the white branch appeared, and placed those stripped branches in the watering trough so that when the Laban’s normal colored sheep conceived, they would bring forth abnormal colored offspring.

Is it possible that stripped branches in drinking water can product odd-colored sheep? This plan has been called a “popular superstition” that “certain experiences of the mother during

pregnancy influenced the condition of her offspring” (Constable), a “common belief that a vivid site during conception or pregnancy would leave its mark on the embryo.” That belief is not based on facts. “All marking of the offspring such as that which Jacob thought he was accomplishing in Laban’s flocks, is completely impossible.... In the placenta and umbilical cord, which constitutes the only connection between the mother and the fetus, there are *no nerves*.... Thus, absolutely no mechanism exists whereby the mother can mark her offspring in the way that Jacob thought he was accomplishing the marking” (Marsh, italics his, cited by Constable).

On the other hand, Calvin says, “It is well known that the sight of objects by the female has great effect on the form of the fetus.” Keil says this was “founded upon a fact frequently noticed, particularly in the case of sheep, that whatever fixes their attention in copulation is marked upon the young.” Citing Keil, Languet says, “This crafty trick was based upon the common experience of the so-called fright of animals, especially of sheep, namely, that the representations of the senses during coition are stamped upon the form of the fetus” (Keil and Languet cite Boch., *Hieroz.*, i. 618, and Friedreich upon the Bible, i. 37, etc.). “The device is said to be well known to shepherds” (Ryle in *Cambridge Bible*).

It has also been suggested that chemicals in the wood of these trees may be capable of affecting the animals (Morris: Jacob knew something modern biologists do not; Ross in the BKC: new genetic evidence suggests this has a scientific basis; Phillips), that water treated this way may have served as an aphrodisiac and fertility promoter, a technique used in both ancient and modern times, or that Jacob could have used selective breeding (animals have dominant and recessive genes, Morris and Phillips), which could eventually develop a flock of predominantly spotted and speckled animals (Morris). “Perhaps the peeled rods were just a trick to hide his breeding secrets from others” (Ross, in the BKC).

Whatever the explanation of Jacob’s scheme, the point is that it was an act of deception that was designed to mislead Laban. “When Jacob originally made his bargain, he certainly meant that the varicolored sheep and goats were to be his, but only those that would be born under perfectly normal circumstances” (Leopold).

The Separation “Then Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the streaked and all the brown in the flock of Laban; but he put his own flocks by themselves and did not put them with Laban’s flock” (30:40). Jacob separated these abnormally colored lambs from Laban’s flock. By agreement, they were his (30:31-34), but they were supposed to be under the care of Laban’s sons (30:35). Leopold suggests that although these “lambs” were to be turned over to Laban’s sons, the shepherds would wait until they were weaned and had gotten old enough to be moved, which was some distance away.

“And it came to pass, whenever the stronger livestock conceived, that Jacob placed the rods before the eyes of the livestock in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods” (30:41). Jacob placed the script branches before the stronger sheep so that they would produce abnormally colored lambs. The flocks bore offspring twice a year. Leopold says apparently, the stronger sheep reproduced in the fall, but Morrison says stronger members of the flock mated in the summer and the weaker in the fall (Morrison, cited by Constable).

“But when the flocks were feeble, he did not put *them* in; so the feebler were Laban’s and the stronger Jacob’s” (30:42). Jacob did not use his scheme when the feebler sheep reproduced. The results were that Jacob ended up with the stronger sheep and Laban with the weaker sheep. The explanation of Jacob’s success was not his scheme but the “overruling providence of God” (Leopold). “Whether Jacob was very smart or very superstitious, the success of Jacob’s plan was due to the grace of God ultimately (cf. 31:10-12)” (Constable).

The Result “Thus the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks, female and male servants, and camels and donkeys” (30:43). Jacob not only ended up with stronger sheep, but he also ended up with lots of them. He became exceedingly prosperous with large flocks, a multitude of male and female servants, as well as camels and donkeys. “Jacob’s ownership of camels (v. 43) shows that he was very rich since these animals were rare and costly” (Constable, who cites Mathews). “As with many of the tricks which Jacob attempts in these narratives, God blessed Jacob in spite of them, not because of or through them” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable). God fulfilled His promise (28:15) beyond anything Jacob could ever have anticipated (Leopold).

Summary: Jacob and Laban made an arrangement that each took advantage of, but God overruled to bless Jacob and make him a wealthy man.

Jacob worked for his wealth. As the flocks grew, he had to manage the servants who cared for them. In many cases, the way to wealth is work.

Jacob’s scheme did not work, which is almost always the case in “get rich quick” schemes.

The Lord worked. Success is not always the result of hard work; it is the result of God’s blessings. “God blessed Jacob in spite of his actions, not because of them. Many carnal Christians prosper materially for the same reason. Material prosperity is not necessarily a reward for godliness. Jacob made his own fortune, but the text says that God made Abraham rich. God allowed Jacob to become wealthy through his own toil and deception. God probably would have done more for Jacob than he could have done for himself if Jacob had placed himself under God’s authority. This is what God usually does. The lesson of this section is that people who experience God’s material blessing need to acknowledge that it comes from Him rather than from their own abilities” (Constable).

Jacob acknowledged that it was the Lord who blessed him. “Those who experience material prosperity must acknowledge that it is the blessing from the Lord not the product of their own limited abilities.... The lesson is not so much a rebuke for the use of superstitious practices as it is a call for acknowledging the true source of success. If God promises to bless his people, nothing can hinder him, and if God determines not to bless, nothing can alter his decision” (Ross).

During the First World War, a businessman visited a factory where munitions were made. As he approached the gate, he saw a huge sign which read “IADOM.” It puzzled him, but he soon forgot about it and went about his business. He noticed, however, the same sign everywhere. It was posted on the walls. It appeared on doors. It was even on display in the director’s office. As he was being escorted to the factory gate by the director’s secretary, he discovered the meaning of the sign. It was an acrostic meaning, “It all depends on me!” That should be changed to IADOL, that is, “It all depends on the Lord.

A CALL TO DUTY

Sometimes it's difficult to do all that we know we're supposed to do. It's easy not to fulfill all of our duties. That's true in life and that's true in our spiritual lives. God, of course, wants us to do what He has told us to do. Sometimes, He uses interesting ways to get that done. An incident in Jacob's life illustrates the point. What does God use in your life to get you to do what you're supposed to do?

The Conflict

The Decision A number of factors made Jacob decide to return to Canaan: the hostility of Jacob's sons, the tension between him and Laban, the command of the Lord, and the encouragement of his wives.

1. Laban's Sons. "Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, 'Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth' (31:1). This was simply not true. Leupold says jealousy led them to overstate the case and the implication is that Laban had become impoverished because Jacob had been guilty of some form of theft. Their words have "the ring of bitterness" (Ross). They could see their inheritance slipping away (Morris).

2. Laban. "And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it *was not favorable* toward him as before" (31:2). Furthermore, Jacob could tell from Laban's facial expression that he was not pleased with him. Jacob's prospering under God's hand was at Laban's expense, and Laban resented it (Ross).

3. The Lord. "Then the LORD said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you' (31:3). This is a renewal of the promise the Lord made to Jacob at Bethel (28:15). "The increasing antagonism of Laban's household encouraged Jacob to obey God's command to return to the Promised Land" (Constable).

4. The Wives. "So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock" (31:4). As a result of the hostility, tension, and the commandment of the Lord, Jacob called his wives to the field to discuss the matter. This is the first indication that Jacob was determined to flee secretly. If the plan had been permissible, it should have been carried out openly, which would have been the honorable thing to do (Leupold).

"and said to them, 'I see your father's countenance, that it *is not favorable* toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me. And you know that with all my might I have served your father' (31:5-6). Jacob begins by telling his wives about the declining relationship with their father. Their father's countenance communicated his displeasure with him (31:2) in contrast to the Lord who has been with him (31:5). He reminded them that they knew he served their father with all that was within him. In other words, the treatment he is receiving from Laban is undeserved and they know that (Leupold).

"Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. If he said thus: 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked.' So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given *them* to me" (30:7-9). Yet despite all that He has done, their father had deceived him and changed his wages ten times. Originally, Jacob and

Laban agreed that all the unusually colored sheep belonged to Jacob (30:32), but Laban had altered the terms of the deal so that one particular class of off-colored sheep or goats should be Jacob's, such as only the speckled ones. When the flock produced only speckled sheep, Laban changed the deal again so that Jacob could only get the speckled sheep. Jacob credited God with his wealth and with his own survival. "This is the first time in the narrative that Jacob emerges as a man of public faith. He finally takes the leadership in his home, and his wives, for the first time, follow his lead" (Constable).

"And it happened, at the time when the flocks conceived, that I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the rams which leaped upon the flocks *were* streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted. Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks *are* streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I *am* the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar *and* where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family" (30:10-13). Next, Jacob tells his wives about his dream when the flocks are conceived. In the dream, Jacob saw the streaked, speckled, and gray spotted rams leaping upon the flocks. Then, the Angel of God appeared to Jacob. He calls attention to what Jacob is looking at, identifies Himself as the God of Bethel, where Jacob had made a vow to him, and tells Jacob to return to the land of his family.

The dream was given to Jacob at the breeding time to make them aware of the fact that God's providence was regulating breeding and that "Jacob could put full confidence in God to guard his best interest.... (Now the Lord tells Jacob) "the time for departure is at hand. This land of adoption must be forsaken. The land of birth must be sought" (Leopold). "In this revelation, Jacob learned that God had been responsible for his becoming richer" (Constable).

"Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, 'Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?' Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us and also completely consumed our money. For all these riches which God has taken from our father are *really* ours and our children's; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it" (32:14-16). Rachel is named first, "indicating that the initiation lay with her," but the two wives are of one mind (Leupold). Rachel and Leah ask Jacob if any portion of their inheritance is still in their father's house. The obvious answer is no, as they go on to explain that their father has treated them like strangers, selling them and consuming their money, which belongs to them and their children. They conclude by telling Jacob to do whatever the Lord has told him to do.

Rachel and Laban's response revealed that they had long resented how their father essentially "sold" them to Jacob. He had treated them as strangers rather than daughters. "The exorbitant price Jacob had paid for them—fourteen years of free service to Laban—made them love Jacob but resent their father. Rather than treating this payment like a dowry to provide a financial basis for their daughter's future well-being and security, as should have been done, he had 'devoted' all himself, using it probably to build up his own holdings and had given nothing to them personally" (Morris).

"The true character of Laban is clearly seen from the fact that his daughters entirely sided with Jacob against their own father.... They too had experienced their father's selfishness and greed and were ready to approve of their husband's project and to go with him" (Thomas, cited by Constable). "This is another case of the 'Ruth effect,' where the foreign wife commits herself and future to the God of her adopted family" (Mathews, cited by Constable).

The Departure "Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels. And he carried away all his livestock and all his possessions which he had gained, his acquired livestock which

he had gained in Padan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan” (31:17-18). From the field (31:4), Jacob and his wives went to Laban’s house (see Rachel’s thief in 31:19). Jacob then took his wives, Rachel and Leah and his concubine wives, Bilhah and Zilpah (33:6), his sons and daughter, all his livestock, and all his possessions and departed for Canaan to his father Isaac. This included his servants, his gold, and his silver, which he had obtained in Mesopotamia, as well as his children, all of whom were “young; his eldest son Reuben could not be much more than twelve years of age, and his youngest son Joseph about six” (Gill).

“Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father’s. And Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee. So he fled with all that he had. He arose and crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead” (31:19-21). Being away to shear his sheep, Laban was unaware that Rachel had stolen his household idol and that Jacob had stolen away to return to Canaan, crossing the river (Leopold: the Euphrates) and heading toward the mountains of Gilead. The plural (idols) may be the plural of excellence, so only one image was taken (Leopold). “These gods were usually small figurines (two to three inches long), sometimes carried on the body as charms, many of which archaeologists have discovered. They may have represented departed ancestors or gods that their makers venerated” (Wenham, cited by Constable).

Why did Leah take her father’s idol? Jewish commentators and church fathers speculated that she was either playing a prank on her father, taking them for their intrinsic worth, or seeking to break her father’s idolatry. Based on the Nuzu tablets escalated around 1930, Rachel may have stolen these items thinking that possessing them would somehow help vindicate her husband’s legitimate title to the flocks he had acquired while serving Laban and the inheritance she had a right to expect (Morris).

It has also been suggested that she took them for her personal use. Leupold says that even though Rachel had a measure of faith in the true God (30:23-24), “yet it would seem that is a true daughter of her father she had been addicted to his religion and now have a kind of divided allegiance, trusting in Jehovah and not wanting to be deprived of the good luck teraphim might confer” (also Kitchen, cited by Constable). “Apparently, Laban’s family worshipped false gods as well as the true God (cf. Josh. 24:1-3)” (Constable). Morris says, “Though she trusted Jacob’s God, she also was reluctant to give up her previous superstitions completely, and she thought that taking these images along would in some way help them on their long journey and in their new home to which they were going. Her attitude was little different from that of many a new Christian today, happy to know the Lord but not yet willing to enter a life of separation from the world” (Morris).

The Confrontation

The Race “And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled. Then he took his brethren with him and pursued him for seven days’ journey, and he overtook him in the mountains of Gilead” (31:22-23). Taking some of his relatives with him, Laban pursued Jacob. It took seven days for him to catch up with Jacob, which he did in the mountains of Gilead (for an explanation of the distance traveled, see Leupold).

The Revelation “But God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, ‘Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad’ (31:24). The Lord told Laban not to say anything good or bad to Jacob (see 24:50), meaning not to say anything to influence Jacob to return or to say anything by way of reproach (Leupold; Luther: “speak only in a timely fashion”). The

Lord was protecting Jacob. “Although outside the land of promise, he was not outside the hand of promise” (Mathews, cited by Constable).

The Reprimand “So Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains, and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountains of Gilead. And Laban said to Jacob: ‘What have you done, that you have stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters like captives *taken* with the sword? Why did you flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp? And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have done foolishly in *so* doing. It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, ‘Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.’ And now you have surely gone because you greatly long for your father’s house, *but why did you steal my gods?*” (31:25-30). When Laban caught up with Jacob in the mountains of Gilead, with “righteous indignation” (Leupold), he asked Jacob to explain why he had left in secret, taking his daughter as though the sword had captured them and not allowing him to say goodbye to his daughters and grandchildren (Leupold). Laban adds that if he had known Jacob was going to leave, he would send him off with the party and that now he could harm Jacob, but God had told him not to do that. He concludes by saying he understands Jacob wants to return to his father’s house but asks why he wants to steal his gods. “Laban presented himself as the hurt father who was not given the chance to send off his daughters with a celebration, as well as the frustrated avenger who was not permitted to harm his enemy—physically or legally” (Ross).

The Response “Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, ‘Because I was afraid, for I said, ‘Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force. With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours and *take it* with you.’ For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them” (31:31-32). Jacob responded by saying that he was afraid Laban would take his wives by force and, as for his gods, not knowing that Rachel had stolen them, he says may whoever took them be killed, and you can search my things for yourself to see that I have not taken them. He unwittingly put Rachel under the death penalty (Ross). The code of Hammurabi stipulated that the theft of temple gods was a capital crime (Morris). Rachel died a short time after this event. The ancient rabbis felt that her death fulfilled Jacob’s prediction, but Leupold says it was merely an “accidental coincidence.”

The Rummage “And Laban went into Jacob’s tent, into Leah’s tent, and into the two maids’ tents, but he did not find *them*. Then he went out of Leah’s tent and entered Rachel’s tent. Now Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel’s saddle, and sat on them. And Laban searched all about the tent but did not find *them*. And she said to her father, ‘Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women *is* with me.’ And he searched but did not find the household idols” (31:33-35). First, Laban searches Jacob’s tent. Then, he searches Leah’s tent. After that, he searches the tents of the maids of Leah and Rachel. Finally, he searched Rachel’s tent. No one knew, except Rachel, that she had stolen her father’s idols, hid them in the camel’s saddle, and sat on it. When her father entered the tent, she excused herself for not rising by saying she was not feeling well because of her menstrual cycle.

Consequently, Laban did not find his idols. By the way, according to the Mosaic law, her act of sitting on the idol during her menstrual period contaminated it (Lev. 15). “Rachel is a match for her father’s craftiness” (Leupold). “Jacob and Rachel are again two of a kind. This time both almost bring ruin on the family by their risk-taking: she by her rash theft, he by his rash vow ([v. 32] cf. his sons’ rash vow in 44:6-12)” (Constable, who cites Waltke). Laban justified his deception of

Jacob by an appeal to custom (29:26) and now Rachel deceives him by appealing to the “custom of women” (Ross).

The Rebuke “Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: ‘What *is* my trespass? What *is* my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me? Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found? Set *it* here before my brethren and your brethren, that they may judge between us both!’” (31:36-37). With justifiable anger, Jacob proclaims his innocence and challenges Laban to produce what he thinks has been stolen. Then, with indignation, Jacob reviews Laban’s treatment.

1. “These twenty years I *have been* with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young” (31:38a). Jacob worked fourteen years for Laban’s daughters and six years with Laban’s flock (31:41). Because of Jacob’s careful care of Laban’s lambs and goats, there were no miscarriages.

2. “and I have not eaten the rams of your flock” (31:38b). During those twenty years, Jacob had never used any of Laban’s flock for his own food while caring for them, although that was the right of every shepherd (Morris).

3. “That which beasts tore I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night” (31:39). “Under traditional ancient Near Eastern law, a shepherd was not held responsible for losses to his master’s flocks due to attacking wild beasts and, in some cases, thieves” (Wenham, cited by Constable). If a shepherd brought a torn animal to his master, it was regarded as evidence that he had driven the beast away. “Under these circumstances, the master bore the loss rather than the shepherd. Jacob, however, had borne all the losses himself, evidently by replacing the lost animal from Laban’s flock with animals from his own flock” (Morris).

4. “There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes” (31:40). The Hebrew word translated “drought” means “dryness, drought, parching heat.” Jacob had faithfully served Laban during the parching heat of the day and the freezing (Hebrew: “frost, ice”), sometimes sleepless nights. “The more intense the heat of the day in the near-tropical regions, the more acute of the cold” (Leupold). “The hotter the day, the colder the night, as a rule” (Keil).

5. “Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times” (31:41). For twenty years, Jacob served Laban; Laban changed his wages ten times (31:7).

6. “Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked *you* last night” (31:42). Except for the blessing of God, the God of Abraham, the one Isaac revered (Leupold; Constable: the fear of Isaac means the God whom Isaac feared), Laban would have sent Jacob away empty-handed, but God intervened. “God has corked the bottle of his [Laban’s] aggressiveness” (Fokkelman, cited by Constable).

The Covenant

The Claim “And Laban answered and said to Jacob, ‘*These* daughters *are* my daughters, and *these* children *are* my children, and *this* flock *is* my flock; all that you see *is* mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne?’” (31:43). Laban’s response to Jacob’s charge that he had been treated unfairly is to claim, “in a grandiose fashion” (Leupold), that he has “complete parental control” (Ryle in *Cambridge Bible*) over Jacob’s wives,

children, and flock. Calvin says that, being convinced, Laban saw that he had no further ground for contention. Constable says that Jacob's defense of his own actions and his accusation of Laban's deceit silenced Laban. Ross says that Laban could not counter Jacob's argument; he could only appeal for a peace treaty. Morris, however, says, "Though he realized he was in the wrong, a self-seeking hypocrite such as Laban could not bring himself to repent or make public acknowledgment of his guilt.

"Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me" (31:44). Based on the fact that all that Jacob has is his (31:43; "therefore"), Laban says that he and Jacob should make a covenant together. Leopold says that Laban feared Jacob would seek revenge. So, he proposes a covenant, which would deter Jacob.

The Construction "So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar" (31:45). Ready to preserve the peace, Jacob took the initiative to seal the deal with a memorial.

"Then Jacob said to his brethren, 'Gather stones.' And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there on the heap" (31:46). Jacob instructed his kinsmen to gather stones to build a table on which they ate.

"Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed" (31:47). Laban named the place Jegar Sahadutha, which means "witness heap" and Jacob called it Galeed, which means "witness heap." Leopold says Laban's name is Aramaic and Jacob's name is Hebrew. He adds that the two names are not absolutely identical, but the difference is slight ("heap of testimony" and "heap of witness").

The Covenant "And Laban said, 'This heap is a witness between you and me this day.' Therefore its name was called Galeed also Mizpah, because he said, 'May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from another' (31:48-49). Mizpah is a word that means "watchtower," adding that it is the Lord who will watch between the two of them in their absence from one another. The use of the word "Lord" (Jehovah) indicates that Laban thought that it was Jacob who needed watching and that Jacob's God would keep Jacob from harming him (Leopold).

"It is impossible to avoid noticing the curious misconception of the term 'mizpah,' which characterizes its use today. As used for a motto on rings, Christmas cards, and even as the title of an organization, it is interpreted to mean union, trust, and fellowship; its original meaning was separation, distrust, and warning. Two men, neither of whom trusted the other, said in effect: 'I cannot trust you out of my sight. The Lord must be the watchman between us if we and our goods are to be kept safe from each other' (Thomas, cited by Constable).

"If you afflict my daughters, or if you take *other* wives besides my daughters, *although* no man is with us—see, God is witness between you and me!" (31:50). The first provision of the covenant is that even though no man will be around to check on them, God would be a witness between Laban and Jacob if Jacob afflicted Laban's daughters or took more wives. Leopold calls this "harsh and unjust slanders."

"Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Here is this heap and here is *this* pillar, which I have placed between you and me. This heap is a witness, and *this* pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm' (31:51-52). The second provision of the covenant was that neither of them would pass beyond the heap of stone they had constructed to harm the other. Laban puts this provision in because he suspects Jacob is capable of doing what he would have done (Leopold). This "was not really a promise between friends but a warning between antagonists who did not trust each other" (Constable). It might be called a "nonaggression pact" (Vos, cited by Constable).

“‘The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us.’ And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac” (31:53). Laban concludes by saying that the God of Abraham, the God of Nahor (Leopold: Laban’s idol), and the God of their fathers would be not only a witness between him and Jacob but also a judge between them. Jacob agrees with the covenant’s provisions, swearing by the God of his father Isaac (Constable: the “Awesome One of Isaac”).

The Celebration “Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain” (31:54). In thanksgiving to the Lord, Jacob offered a sacrifice, after which he called the brethren together for a feast of celebration. They spent the night on the mountain.

The Conclusion “And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place” (31:55). Early the next morning, Laban kissed and blessed his grandsons and daughters, Rachel, Leah, and Dinah (Gill), and departed for Haran.

Summary: As a result of a conflict with Laban and the call of the Lord, in agreement with his wives, Jacob departed and when Laban caught up with him, Jacob defended his faithful service and accused Laban of deceitful practices that resulted in a peace treaty.

The Lord is faithful to keep His promises. Having promised to give Abraham and his descendants the land, the Lord appeared to Jacob in a dream to return to the land. At Bethel, He promised to protect Jacob and He did that, giving Laban a dream to accomplish that.

Years ago, in the days when a country’s flag still stood for something, an Anglo-American was traveling abroad and had the misfortune to be seized by an extremist who held him hostage under the threat of death. An American and a British consul asked to see the prisoner as a prelude to negotiations. At a favorable moment, the British consul stepped forward and threw the British flag over the prisoner and the American did the same with the Stars and Stripes. ‘Now them,’ they said, ‘fire on those flags if you dare!’ Thus God threw His banner over Jacob and warned Laban not to touch him” (Phillips).

The Lord calls His people to their obligation in His program. He sometimes uses people’s jealousy and His Word to accomplish that end. See the motivation issue in Philippians 1.

PREPARING FOR THE COMING DANGER

Facing danger is part and parcel of life. One source of danger is nature in the form of hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes. Another form of danger is people in the form of accidents, such as an automobile accident, and a deliberate decision to harm you. Sometimes, there is no warning that danger is approaching, which happens with earthquakes and automobile accidents. At other times, there is a warning, which is the case with hurricanes and some threats on your life by people. What do you do when you know there is a possibility of a danger to your life and limb?

Jacob encountered such a situation. At one point in his life, he deceived his father into giving him his brother's blessing. His brother, Esau, was so angry Jacob fled. Twenty years later, Jacob returned home, knowing he faced his brother Esau's wrath. How he prepared for that meeting teaches us how to prepare for coming danger.

The Messengers of God

The Meeting "So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him (32:1). It has been suggested that at this point, Jacob crossed the border into the land of Canaan. If that is the case, the appearance of the angels of God was appropriate to re-assure Jacob (Leopold).

The Name "When Jacob saw them, he said, 'This is God's camp.' And he called the name of that place Mahanaim" (32:2). Mahanaim is a Hebrew word that means "two camps." "The host of God joined his host as a safeguard" (Keil). The location of Mahanaim is unknown, although it is said to be east of the Jordan (32:10; BDB; Leupold). Ross points out parallels between Jacob's earlier encounter at Bethel and this one. For example, the expression "messengers of God" occurs only here and in Genesis 28:12 and nowhere else in the Old Testament. The expression "met him" occurs here and in Genesis 28:11. Ross concludes that this is the same kind of event that took place at Bethel. Jacob had similar experiences when leaving the land and when reentering the land. "This appearance of angels necessarily reminded him of the vision of the ladder on his flight from Canaan. Just as the angels ascending and descending had then represented to him the divine protection and assistance during his journey and sojourn in a foreign land, so now the angelic host was a signal of the help of God for the approaching conflict with Esau of which he was in fear and a fresh pledge of the promise" (Keil).

Jacob needed reassurance because, in returning home, he was to face Esau, the brother he had cheated out of his birthright. Rebekah was supposed to have notified Jacob when Esau's anger had subsided, but she had not sent such a message. Either she was ill or deceased and, therefore, unable to call him back home, or Esau was still threatening vengeance (Morris).

Believers get this reassurance from the Word (Heb. 13:5).

The Messengers of Jacob

The Message "Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom" (32:3). Not knowing Esau's intention, Jacob sent messengers to Esau, who dwelt in Edom.

“And he commanded them, saying, ‘Speak thus to my lord Esau, ‘Thus your servant Jacob says: ‘I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now’” (32:4). The delegation is to diplomatically address Esau as “lord” and refer to Jacob as his “servant.” By calling Esau “Lord” and himself “servant,” Jacob was sending the message that he was not seeking political sovereignty and was “quite content to regard Esau as his master in that regard” (Morris). They are to inform Esau that Jacob had been dwelling with their uncle until now.

“I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight” (32:5). The delegation is also to inform Esau that Jacob has herds, flocks, and servants, indicating that Jacob is not coming as a beggar depending on Esau’s charity (Leopold) or suggesting that he has no desire to claim any of Esau’s possessions (Morris). The statement “that I may find favor in your sight” seems to indicate “a humble request for permission to enter the land” (Leopold).

The Reply “Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, ‘We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men *are* with him” (32:6). When the delegation returned to Jacob, they informed him that Esau was coming to meet him and bringing 400 men with him, but, apparently, there was no message from Esau.

The Method of Jacob

The Plan “So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed, and he divided the people that *were* with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies” (32:7). Hearing that Esau was coming with 400 men (32:6) was cause for alarm. Jacob was not just afraid; he was *greatly* afraid (Hebrew: “fear”) and distressed (Hebrew: “distressed”). “Jacob naturally jumped to the conclusion that Esau still intended to make good his threat to kill him and seemed to have temporarily forgotten the encouragement he received by the site of the Angels at Mahanaim” (Morris). In preparation for Esau’s visit, Jacob divided his people and possessions into two groups.

“And he said, ‘If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape’” (32:8). The reason for dividing his people and possessions into two groups was that if Esau attacked one, the other could escape, a custom often used by endangered caravans (Morris). He had not learned the point of the vision, for he was willing to sacrifice part of his possessions so that the other half could escape (Ross). Although Ross criticizes Jacob for not entirely trusting the Lord, it is just as probable that Jacob realized he would have to trust the Lord for protection, but he also realized it was “wise as well as in keeping with God’s will” for him to take the natural precautions that were open to him (Morris). What he did was “justifiable prudence” (Leupold).

The Prayer “Then Jacob said, ‘O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you’” (32:9). After taking practical steps, Jacob prayed. He addresses God as the God of his grandfather Abraham, his father Isaac, and the One who promised to be with him when he returned to the land. He is appealing to the power and faithfulness of God (“God”), who has been faithful to his ancestors and His promises (“Lord”). It is perfectly proper to remind God of His promises when you pray. Leupold asks, “Is not that the approach of all true prayer, taking one stand firmly on divine promises?” In the words of the hymn writer, Jacob was standing on the promises of God.

“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies” (32:10). In the Hebrew text, “I am” is in the perfect tense, indicating “I always have been and still

am” (Leopold). He rehearses what he did in crossing the Jordan with his staff, dividing them into two companies.

“Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me *and the mother with the children*” (32:11). Jacob requests that the Lord deliver him from any harm that his brother Esau might do to him, being afraid that his offended brother would attack him and the women “with the children” (Hebrew: “women upon children;” Leopold: women bending over children to shield them).

“For You said, ‘I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude’” (32:12). Jacob concludes his prayer by reminding God of the specific promise that God would make his descendants as the sand of the sea (22:17; 28:13-14).

“Jacob’s reaction to Esau’s apparently hostile advance against him was to try to protect himself (vv. 7-8). This was Jacob’s standard response to trouble. Yet this time, he knew it would not be enough. So, he called on God for help (vv. 9-12). We need to be right with God before we can be right with our brothers” (Constable).

Jacob’s prayer is a model prayer that acknowledges his unworthiness and God’s faithfulness to His promises. Constable puts it like this: “Jacob’s prayer (his first recorded prayer) reflects his deeply felt need for God’s help and his own humility (vv. 9-12). One writer likened its form to the penitential psalms (Waltke). He reminded God of His past dealings with his forefathers and with himself (v. 9). He confessed his personal unworthiness and lack of any claim upon God’s favor (v. 10). By calling himself ‘your servant,’ he became ready to serve others. He requested divine deliverance and acknowledged his own fear (v. 11). Finally, he claimed God’s promise of a continuing line of descendants (v. 12). This is an excellent model prayer.” It is a pattern of prayer for believers under similar circumstances; for one thing, he based his prayer on God’s Word (Morris).

George Mueller is one of the greatest examples in church history of knowing how to pray. He is well known for building orphanages and feeding orphans in answer to prayer. In his biography, A. T. Pierson tells how he piled up one argument after another in prayer. He reminded the Lord that orphans were *His* kids, the orphans and their needs are *His* responsibility, and that *He* was the “father of the fatherless.” Pierson commented, “Of course, God does not need to be convinced: no argument can make any plainer to Him the claim of trusting souls of His intervention, [and] claims based upon His own Word.”

The Presents “So he lodged there that same night, and took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother, two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals” (32:13-15). Jacob spent the night at a place later identified as the river of Jabbok (32:22). He prepared a sizable gift (580 animals) for Esau as a token of goodwill. (Leopold). The size of the gift indicates Jacob’s enormous wealth. “Prayer does not necessarily result in inaction”

“Then he delivered *them* to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, ‘Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves’” (32:16). Jacob shrewdly arranged the gifts, dividing them into groups and telling the servants to place them in such a way that Esau would receive the first group and, after traveling some distance, he would receive the next group, etc.

“And he commanded the first one, saying, ‘When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose *are* these in front of you?’ Then you shall say, ‘They *are* your servant Jacob’s. It is a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold,

he also *is* behind us” (32:17-18). Moreover, Jacob told the shepherds that when Esau asked about their identity, destination, and the ownership of the flock, they were to inform him that the flocks belonged to his servant Jacob as a present to him from Jacob, his master, and that Jacob was behind them. These gifts were not a bribe on Jacob’s part but rather an expression of goodwill and conciliation (Morris). “Jacob is actually ready to accord to Esau any external advantage of position and any honor that he may desire if only peace and concord be preserved” (Leopold).

“So he commanded the second, the third, and all who followed the droves, saying, ‘In this manner, you shall speak to Esau when you find him’” (32:19). The shepherds of each group were to give that same message to Esau. In the ancient world, the shepherds usually went before the flock, but here, the shepherds are described as following the flock, perhaps to impress the recipient before the shepherd could deliver his message (Leopold).

“and also say, ‘Behold, your servant Jacob *is* behind us.’ For he said, ‘I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me’” (32:20). Jacob wanted to make sure that each shepherd told Esau that Jacob was behind him because he wanted to appease Esau with presents before Esau met him face-to-face, hoping that Esau would accept him.

“So the present went on over before him, but he himself lodged that night in the camp” (32:21). After Jacob put his plan in place, he spent the night in the camp.

Jacob planned to protect his people, pray, and present presents to Esau. It was a balanced plan that considered his people, Esau, and the Lord. It was also a thorough plan that covered all the bases. Some commentators, however, see it differently. “In view of God’s promises, believers can pray with confidence for His deliverance and do not need to give away His provisions to appease their enemies” (Constable). “Jacob’s behavioral response was classically narcissistic” (Shepperson, cited by Constable). “Faith does not mean trusting God to work for us in spite of our irresponsibility; that is presumption. Faith means trusting God to work for us when we have acted responsibly, realizing that without His help, we will fail” (Wenham, cited by Constable).

The Wrestling of Jacob

Wading the River “And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok” (32:22). After planning and praying, Jacob displays confidence that all of this will work by taking his wives, servants, and sons across the river Jabbok. “This site was probably just a few miles east of the Jordan Valley (v. 22). The Jabbok joins the Jordan River about midway between the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee) and the Salt (Dead) Sea” (Constable).

“Hebrew narrative style often includes a summary statement of the whole passage followed by a more detailed report of the event. Here, v. 22 is the summary statement, while v. 23 begins the detailed account” (*The NET Bible* note on 32:22, cited by Constable; Rose).

“He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had” (32:23). In addition to his family, Jacob sent the rest of his animals and all of his possessions across the river. The river was about 30 feet wide and at the most hip-deep (Leopold). “By this action, he obviously indicated that it was certainly not his intention to retreat before a possible attack by Esau” (Morris).

Wrestling with the Lord “Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day” (32:24). Luther said that this was one of the most obscure texts in the Old Testament. Morris says this section is “one of the most difficult to understand in the Bible. Did he

actually wrestle with the man or with an angel, or is the entire description simply an allegory of spiritual battle through which he passed that night?"

What exactly happened? Calvin says this was a vision. This is not a vision; Jacob is not dreaming. He actually wrestled with someone (Ross; Constable), but with whom? It was the Angel of the Lord (32:28-30; Hos. 12:3-4; Constable; Morris: "the pre-incarnate Christ; Clarke: "doubtless the Lord Jesus Christ"). Constable says, "Note that God took the initiative in wrestling with Jacob, not vice versa. God was bringing Jacob to the end of himself. He was leading him to a settled conviction that God was superior to him and that he must submit to God's leadership in his life (cf. Rom. 12:1-2)." "The great encounter with God came when Jacob knew himself to be exposed to a situation wholly beyond him" (Kidner).

This describes struggling with God in prayer that involved both body and soul (Leopold). "Having done everything he could, Jacob then decided to spend the rest of the night in prayer. Though the text does not say so specifically, the implication is that Jacob returned to the north bank of the Jabbok in order to be completely alone" (Morris).

"Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him" (32:25). The idea that the Lord could not prevail against Jacob does not impugn God's omnipotence; it portrays the power of prayer (Leupold). At any rate, the Lord touched Jacob's hip so that it was out of joint. Jacob then had a dislocated hip.

"And He said, 'Let Me go, for the day breaks.' But he said, 'I will not let You go unless You bless me!'" (32:26). When the Lord told Jacob to let Him go because it was daybreak, Jacob said he would not let Him go until He blessed him. "Jacob's refusal to release the man indicates the sincerity of his felt need for God's help (v. 26; cf. John 15:5). Again, Jacob demonstrated his strong desire for blessing" (Constable). "Jacob completed, by his wrestling with God, what he had already been engaged and even from his mother's womb, viz. his striving for the birthright; in other words, for the possession of the covenant promise and the covenant blessing" (Keil).

"So He said to him, 'What *is* your name?' He said, 'Jacob.' And He said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed'" (32:27-28). Jacob means "heel-holder" or "supplanter." Israel means "God prevails." "The transformation pertains to the way in which Jacob prevails. Heretofore, he prevailed over people by trickery. Now he prevails with God, and so with humans, by his words, not by the physical gifts conferred on him at birth or acquired through human effort" (Waltke, cited by Constable).

"With his wrestling with God, Jacob began a new stage in his life (v. 28); he was a new man because he now began to relate to God in a way new for him. As a sign of this, God gave him a new name that indicated his new relationship to God... Jacob's new name introduced a new phase of his life. Thereafter, he behaved either carnally or spiritually. Note which of his names Moses used from here on. When Jacob behaved like the "old Jacob," Moses referred to him as "Jacob," but when he behaved like Israel ... Moses referred to him as 'Israel'" (Constable).

"Then Jacob asked, saying, 'Tell *me* Your name, I pray.' And He said, 'Why *is* it *that* you ask about My name?' And He blessed him there" (32:29). Then Jacob asked the Man His name and instead of giving an answer, He was asked a question and blessed Jacob. Perhaps the reason for the question was that Jacob already knew the identity of the Man with whom he was wrestling (Leupold). "One wonders if 'Why is it that you inquire about my name?' [v. 29] is another way of asking, 'Jacob, don't you realize who I am?'" (Hamilton, cited by Constable). The substance of the blessing is not recorded.

“So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: ‘For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved’ (32:30). Jacob called the place where he wrestled with the Lord Peniel, a Hebrew word that means “facing God.” As Jacob explains, he saw the Lord face-to-face and lived to tell about it. “Jacob believed that he had seen God face to face (v. 30). The ancients believed that anyone who saw God face to face would die (cf. 16:13; Exod. 33:20; Judg. 13:21-22)” (Constable). The verb “preserve” is the same one used in Jacob’s prayer when he asked God to deliver him (32:11). The immediate blessing was being delivered from Esau’s wrath. His prayer for deliverance (32:10-13) was answered. “Meeting God face-to-face meant he could now look Esau directly in the eye” (Ross).

“Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip” (32:31). As Jacob crossed over (Hebrew: “to pass over or by or through”) Peniel, the sun rose, perhaps indicating that a new day had dawned in his life. He had a limp in his hip. Nothing is known about the duration of the limping hip. “The result of this spiritual crisis in Jacob’s life was obvious to all who observed him from then on (v. 31). It literally resulted in a change in his walk” (von Rad, cited by Constable). “When God touched the strongest sinew of Jacob, the wrestler, it shriveled, and with it Jacob’s persistent self-confidence” (Allen P. Ross, “Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:568, October-December 1985, p. 350).

“Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob’s hip in the muscle that shrank” (32:32). As a result of Jacob’s experience, from that day until the time Moses wrote the book of Genesis, the children of Israel did not eat the muscle that covers the hip socket. This ritual is not demanded in the Mosaic Law, but the descendants of Israel instituted the practice on their own because they recognized the importance of Jacob’s experience for Jacob as well as themselves (Leopold).

Summary: The way Jacob prepared for meeting Esau was to develop a thorough plan and prevail in prayer until God blessed him.

Jacob developed a plan to protect his family. Some commentators feel that Jacob’s planning for protection was an indication that he was not completely trusting in the Lord. For example, Ross summarizes this passage by saying God’s people can pray for deliverance from their enemies because of God’s promise it to them and they need not seek to appease their enemies by giving away God’s blessing on them, which Ross feels Jacob was willing to do (Jacob called Esau lord). He cites Hezekiah sending tribute from the Temple to foreign invaders. Doing all we can do, however, is not wrong.

Growing up in Florida, I saw people preparing for the danger of a coming hurricane. I remember people boarding up their windows with plywood. I didn’t know the Lord at the time, but I imagine the believers prayed. Proper preparation includes both. Imagine preparing for a hurricane by only praying or by only boarding up the windows.

Jacob deeply desired God’s blessing. “Every Christian does not need to have this type of drastic experience. Abraham and Isaac did not. God has told us that we can do nothing without Him (John 15:5) and that we should believe Him. Only when we do not believe Him must He teach us this lesson. Sometimes, He has to bring us very low to do it. Every Christian should yield himself or herself to the lordship of God (Rom. 6:13, 19; 12:1-2)” (Constable).

Jacob depended on the Lord for protection (Zech. 4:6). Believers must preserve in prayer (Lk. 18:1, 7). “If only the swimmer yields to the water, the water keeps him up, but if he continues to struggle, the result is disastrous. Let us learn to trust, just as we learn to float” (Thomas, cited by Constable).

Jacob was determined. George Mueller prayed for five of his friends at one point in his life. After many months, one of them came to the Lord. Ten years later, two others were converted. It took a quarter of a century before the fourth man got saved. Mueller never gave up. He persevered in prayer until his death for the last one. He prayed for the man for 52 years. Soon after his funeral, the fifth man came to Christ.

The Lord protects us. John Wesley spent 52 years in the saddle, riding through muck and mire, facing dangers along the way. In those days, bandits made highways dangerous places for lone riders. Stagecoaches traveled with armed guards. One day, as Wesley was traveling alone along a lonely stretch of road, he noticed a shadowy form ahead, which vanished behind a hedge. Wesley knew what that meant. He also knew there was no hope for human help on that deserted section of the road, so he prayed. Almost at once, he heard hoofbeats coming up from behind him. He turned to see another traveler who rode up alongside him. Wesley gave the newcomer a cheery greeting and the two of them continued silently down the road past the place where the robbers lay concealed. Seeing two men instead of one, the robbers let them pass. Wesley then turned to say something to his companion, only to discover that there was no one there! The mysterious rider had vanished into thin air. Apparently, Wesley had received an unusual glimpse of an angel who escorted him along the way. How many times have we, as believers, been protected by an angel *we didn't see?*

WHEN YOU NEED TO BE RECONCILED

Have you ever had a falling out with someone with whom you needed to be reconciled? Have you ever had a falling out with a family member with whom you needed to be reconciled? Have you ever had a falling out *with a family* member and the falling out lasted for 20 years, during which time you did not see or speak to one another? You can only imagine that if that happened when the two got together, it would not go well. However, there is a story in the Bible about that exact situation that went very well. How did that happen? Let's look at the story and see if we can find the explanation.

The Meeting

The Preparation “Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants” (33:1). The wording of this verse seems to suggest that at daybreak, as Jacob crossed the stream, he looked ahead and saw Esau coming (Leupold). Still uncertain of what would happen, he made one last preparation before meeting Esau, putting each wife with her children in a different group.

“And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last” (33:2). Having divided into groups, each mother with her children, he put the two maidservants and their children in front, followed by Leah and her children, and then Rachel and Joseph, who was probably about six years old. “He arranged his wives and children in climactic order so that the most beautiful and best beloved came last and so may be spared if none else will” (Leupold). “Jacob arranged his family to preserve those who were most precious to him if his brother proved to be violently hostile” (Constable). “This kind of ranking according to favoritism no doubt fed the jealousy over Joseph that later becomes an important element in the narrative. It must have been painful to the family to see that they were expendable” (*The NET Bible*; see Ross).

“Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother” (33:3). The Hebrew word translated “crossed over” means “to pass over, pass on before” (NASB: “passed on ahead of them;” NIV: “went on ahead;” ESV: “went on before them”). Jacob had already crossed the stream (Leupold). Jacob bowed, took a few steps, bowed again, and took more steps and bowed again until he had bowed seven times. This was a token of respect rendered to a king, but here, it probably means nothing more than Jacob giving Esau due respect and consideration (Leupold).

The Meeting “But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept” (33:4). Considering what had happened 20 years before this, surprisingly, Esau *ran* to meet Jacob, hugged him, kissed him, and wept. The dreaded encounter with thoughts of vengeance evaporated (Leupold). “This warm welcome shows clearly that Esau had forgiven his brother and held no grudges against Jacob, either because it was also much water under the bridge to Esau or because God had mellowed his attitude toward his brother over the years by prospering him” (Ross).

The First Question “And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, ‘Who are these with you?’ So he said, ‘The children whom God has graciously given your servant’”

(33:5). When Esau saw the maidservants (33:6) and children, he naturally inquired about them. Jacob said that God had graciously given these children to Esau's servant.

"Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and bowed down. And Leah also came near with her children, and they bowed down. Afterward Joseph and Rachel came near, and they bowed down" (33:6-7). At that point, the maidservants and their children approached Esau, respectfully bowing as Jacob had done. After them, Leah and her children also bowed down. Then Joseph and Leah did the same.

The Second Question "Then Esau said, 'What *do you mean* by all this company which I met?' And he said, '*These are to find favor in the sight of my lord*'" (33:8). Next, Esau asked about all the animals that had been sent to him. Jacob's servants had told Esau that Jacob intended all of these animals to be a present to him (32:17-20), but by ignoring what they said, Esau implies that he could not be the recipient of so great a gift (Leupold). Jacob explains that the purpose of the gifts was to find favor in the sight of his lord.

"But Esau said, 'I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself' (33:9). Technically, Esau does not say, "I have enough." The Hebrew word translated "enough" means "much, many, great" (NASB: "I have plenty;" NIV: "I already have plenty;" ESV: "I have enough"). Not needing the gift, Esau tells Jacob to keep what he has for himself.

"And Jacob said, 'No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me' (33:10). Jacob insists that if he has found favor in Esau's site, he should receive the presents that he has given him. When Jacob says, "As I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God," he means that in the expression on Esau's face, he has seen the reflection of divine favor; he knew that God had changed Esau's heart (Leupold; 1 Sam. 29:9; 2 Sam. 14:17; see also Constable, who says it means, "I see in your face, as expressive of your whole attitude toward me, the friendliness of God. I see this friendliness demonstrated in His making you friendly toward me").

"Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.' So he urged him, and he took *it*" (33:11). Pressing his plea, Jacob adds that Esau should receive these gifts because God has dealt graciously with him and because he has "enough," a Hebrew word that means "all, everything."

Jacob gave God the glory for giving him his family; he confessed that his family was a gift from God (vv. 4-5). This attitude is evidence of a basic change in Jacob's approach to life. Whereas he had previously been dishonest and devious, now he was honest and forthright about his intentions (v. 10)" (Constable). "Previously, Jacob had taken Esau's blessing, but now he gave Esau a blessing" (Constable). Esau accepted the gifts. For thousands of years, oriental customs was that the most certain way to be assured of reconciliation was to have the gift accepted by the one whose favor he seeks (Morris).

The Separation

Esau's Suggestion "Then Esau said, 'Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you' (33:12). Esau suggested that he and Jacob journeyed together as Jacob and his large entourage traveled deeper into the land.

Jacob's Suggestion "But Jacob said to him, 'My lord knows that the children *are* weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing *are* with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die' (33:13). In response, Jacob explains that Esau knows that from the trip

they had just taken, his children and animals were not able to make a strenuous trip. His children were weak. The oldest child, Ruben, could not have been more than 12 years old (Leopold). Many of his cattle were young. Therefore, the speed at which he and his entourage had to travel was not compatible with Esau's party of unencumbered soldiers.

“Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir” (33:14). So Jacob suggested that Esau go ahead of him and that he would follow behind slowly to accommodate his livestock and children until he came to Esau's homeland. This does not mean that “Jacob planned to go directly to Seir, where he did not go immediately.... Perhaps Jacob meant that he would visit his brother in his own land in the future. Scripture does not record whether Jacob ever made such a trip” (Constable).

Esau's Suggestion “And Esau said, ‘Now let me leave with you *some* of the people who *are* with me.’ But he said, ‘What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord’” (33:15). Esau suggested that he leave some of his people with Jacob, perhaps to serve as guards (Leopold), but Jacob replied there was no need for that.

The Separation “So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir” (33:16). With that, Esau returned home. By the way, Luther says that Esau had come to faith and was saved. Leopold, a Lutheran, tends to doubt that but says it is possible.

“And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth” (33:17). After Esau's departure, Jacob may have realized that his cattle needed more extensive care, which would have postponed his journey to Seir (Leopold). So, crossing Jabbok again and heading north, Jacob settled at Succoth, a Hebrew word that means “booths.” It describes a hut or booth built for the shelter of cattle. At Succoth, Jacob built a house for himself and booths for his cattle.

“Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which *is* in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel” (33:18-20). The time period is unknown, but Jacob crossed the Jordan, entered the land, and made his way to Shechem, where he pitched his tent before the city. Later, he bought a parcel of land where he pitched a tent and erected an altar there (see 12:6-7) that he called El Elohe Israel, a name which means “the mighty God of Israel.” Ross says this means that the God of Israel is a strong, mighty God who keeps His promises. He adds that it signifies the successful fulfillment of God's promise to bring the patriarch back to Bethel in safety. “The name of the altar embodies the sum of Jacob's spiritual experience” (Leopold).

Summary: Jacob and Esau reconciled and lived peaceably together in the same land.

What does this passage teach us about reconciliation? Resolving details is not always necessary! Leopold points out that the two brothers did not discuss the issues that had separated them. He adds, “There are persons who believe that the all-essential thing is *discussions*. However, there may be a perfect and a satisfactory harmony between men who had failed to agree, and the basis of such harmony may be the tacit agreement to let bygones be bygones” (Leopold, the emphasis his).

To be reconciled, make the first move, especially if you are guilty.

Humility is needed. Jacob approached Esau with an extremely humble attitude calling Esau Lord and calling himself Esau's servant. Humility begins with acknowledging the Lord.

Throughout their first meeting, Jacob acknowledged the Lord's blessing on his life (33:5, 11). After that first meeting was over, Jacob gave praise to the mighty God of Israel.

Prayer is vital. The previous chapter, however, gives the ultimate reason they were able to be reconciled, namely the prevailing prayer of Jacob. "As the narrative unfolds, however, it was not Jacob's plan that succeeded but his prayer. When he met with Esau, he found that Esau had a change of heart. Running to meet Jacob, Esau embraced and kissed him and wept (33:4). All of Jacob's plans and schemes had come to naught.

The Lord can change even the most stubborn heart to make it inclined to peace (Leopold). "The narrative portrays the reconciliation of the brothers as an answer to Jacob's prayer (32:11)" (Ross). In spite of them all, God had prepared Jacob's way" (Sailhamer, cited by Constable). God is the God of reconciliation. When seeking to be reconciled to an alienated brother, first seek the Lord. "Reconciliation is a work of grace, to be sought by faith and acknowledged in praise" (Ross). "Only the restraining intervention of God kept Laban from retaliation against Jacob (31:24, 29). Esau is apparently in no need of a similar divine check. His own good nature acts as a check on him. Since his rage and hate of ch. 27, Esau himself has undergone his own transformation. No longer is he controlled by vile passions" (Hamilton, cited by Constable).

"A major lesson of this chapter is that those who have received God's grace may trust in God's promise of protection when they seek reconciliation with others" (Constable).

RESPONDING TO WICKEDNESS

As you know, we live in a very wicked world. One of the things we need to think through is how to respond to that wicked world. What is the proper response? What is an improper response? As with other things, it is possible to go to extremes. What is the wise way to make your way through a wicked world?

The Rape

The Visit “Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land” (34:1). At the time, Dinah was a teenager, probably between 13 and 15 (Keil), 14 and 15 (Leupold), or 15 and 16 (Davis, cited by Constable). Teenagers need companionship with others of their own age. In the case of this family, the 11 sons probably had enough fellowship among themselves, but the only daughter must have longed to be with other girls her own age (Morris).

The Violation “And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her” (34:2). In the city of Shechem, there was a man named Shechem who was the son of the leader of the town. He violated Dinah, a Hebrew word that means “afflict, oppress, humble” (BDB; Ross: “humble, defile, rape”). Perhaps, the fact that he was the son of the prince made him feel he had special privileges in reference to unattended girls (Leupold).

Jacob should not have been in Shechem in the first place (see note on 35:1), but be that as it may, he should have exercised more parental protection over his teenage daughter. He surely knew that “the Egyptians and the Canaanites regarded unmarried women abroad in the land as legitimate prey and should not have gone about unattended” (Leupold). When you live in a wicked world, you must be watchful.

The Vision “His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman” (34:3). Shechem was strongly attracted, loved, and sought to comfort Dinah (Leupold, who refers to Amnon in 2 Sam. 13), probably with the promise to marry her. She stayed at his house, or, at least, he kept her at his house (34:26).

“So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, ‘Get me this young woman as a wife’ (34:4). Shechem asked his father to take the necessary steps to secure Dinah as his wife.

This incident illustrates the low standard of morals among the Canaanites. “Any unattended female could be raped and in the transaction that ensued neither father nor the son feels the need for apologizing for or excusing what has been committed” (Leupold).

The Request

Jacob “And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter. Now his sons were with his livestock in the field; so Jacob held his peace until they came” (34:5). In the meantime, Jacob somehow heard of the defilement of his daughter Dinah. Dinah is not the one that told him (34:26). Jacob did not do anything until his sons came home from the field that evening. His inactivity is unusual (Ross). Jacob’s reaction to the violation of his daughter is in stark contrast to his great

distress upon hearing that Joseph had apparently been killed (37:34-35). Some commentators censure Jacob for being passive (Waltke, cited by Constable), or indecisive (Ross, who points out that in verses 6-8, his sons took over the negotiations and Jacob does not speak again until his protest in verse 30). Leupold, however, says it was according to the custom of the day that the father could do nothing without the consent of the girl's brothers.

Hamor "Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him" (34:6). The father of Shechem came to the father of Dinah to arrange the marriage between his son and Jacob's daughter.

The Sons "And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard *it*; and the men were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing which ought not to be done" (34:7). Unlike their father, when Dinah's brothers heard of what happened, they were incensed, as Jacob should have been (Ross). They considered what had happened to their sister to be a disgraceful thing in *Israel*. "Moses used the name 'Israel' here for the first time as a reference to God's chosen people (v. 7). The family of Jacob had a special relationship to God by divine calling reflected in the name 'Israel' (prince with God). Therefore, Shechem's act was an especially 'disgraceful thing' having been committed against a member of the family with the unique vocation (cf. Deut. 22:21; Josh. 7:15; Judg. 20:10; 2 Sam. 13:12; et al.)" (Constable). It polluted the family and was a sacrilege incriminating the whole community (Ross).

Hamor "But Hamor spoke with them, saying, 'The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife'" (34:8). Hamor, Shechem's father, spoke to Jacob ("your daughter") and his sons ("them"), asking that Dinah be given to Shechem as a wife.

"And make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to yourselves. So you shall dwell with us, and the land shall be before you. Dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions for yourselves in it" (34:9-10). Hamor goes beyond making arrangements for this one marriage. He suggests that the Israelites and his people enter into an agreement to have their sons and daughters marry each other. As far as he is concerned, one of the advantages of such an arrangement would be increased trade between the two groups. This is a diplomatic speech, promising advantages for both sides (Ross), but he had no intention of carrying through with this bargain because he told a different story to his people in Shechem (34:23).

Shechem "Then Shechem said to her father and her brothers, 'Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. Ask me ever so much dowry and gift, and I will give according to what you say to me; but give me the young woman as a wife'" (34:11-12). Shechem tells Jacob and Dinah's brothers that he is willing to give a dowry and gifts of whatever amount they wish if he can only have Dinah as his wife. "Marriage was always preceded by betrothal, in which the bridegroom's family paid a *mhd* 'marriage present' to the bride's family (1 Sam 18:25). In cases of premarital intercourse, this still had to be paid to legitimize the union, and the girl's father was allowed to fix the size of the marriage present (Ex. 22:15-16 [16-17]; limited by Deut. 22:29 to a maximum of fifty shekels)... Here it seems likely that Shechem is offering both a 'marriage present' to Jacob and 'a gift' to Dinah" (Wenham, cited by Constable).

The Response

The Proposal "But the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father, and spoke deceitfully, because he had defiled Dinah their sister" (34:13). "As was customary in their culture, Jacob's sons took an active part in approving their sister's marriage (v. 13; cf. 24:50)" (Constable).

The sons of Jacob responded to Hamor and Shechem with a proposal, but the proposal was not what it appeared to be. It was a deceitful tactic to retaliate because of the defilement of their sister. “In their deception, they show themselves to be ‘chips off the old block,’ Jacob. The Hivites negotiated in good faith, but the Jacobites renegotiated treacherously (vv.13-17; cf. Prov. 3:29; Amos 1:9)” (Constable).

“And they said to them, ‘We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that *would be* a reproach to us. But on this *condition* we will consent to you: If you will become as we *are*, if every male of you is circumcised” (34:14-15). The brothers of Dinah explain to Hamor and Shechem that it would be a reproach for them to allow their sister to be married to an uncircumcised man. So they proposed that not only those two but all the men in the community be circumcised. Circumcision “was already customary in different nations (according to *Herod.* 2, 104, among the Egyptians and Colchians), as an act of religious or priestly consecration” (Keil). “Normally circumcision was practiced on adults rather than on infants before God told Abraham to circumcise the infants born in his family (17:12-14)” (Constable). It was “sometimes an initiation into marriageable status” (Kidner). So this was not a suggestion that these men be converted from one religion to another (Milgrom, cited by Constable).

“Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us; and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people” (34:16). As the sons of Jacob make clear, they are proposing that all the men of Shechem get circumcised so that intermarriage could take place between the two groups and they become one people.

“But if you will not heed us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone” (34:17). The sons of Jacob conclude the proposal by saying that if the people of Shechem do not agree to circumcision, they would not agree to the intermarriage between the two groups. Had the Israelites not insisted on the Canaanites being circumcised, their descendants would have “disappeared among the numerous Canaanites and their spiritual heritage would’ve been sacrificed” (Leupold).

The Acceptance “And their words pleased Hamor and Shechem, Hamor’s son. So the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob’s daughter. He *was* more honorable than all the household of his father” (34:18-19). Hamor and Shechem were pleased with the proposal. Shechem was so pleased that he immediately got circumcised because he was so in love with Dinah. Among all the members of the household of Hamor, Shechem was the most honorable.

“And Hamor and Shechem his son came to the gate of their city, and spoke with the men of their city, saying: ‘These men *are* at peace with us. Therefore let them dwell in the land and trade in it. For indeed, the land *is* large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us as wives, and let us give them our daughters” (34:20-21). Hamor and Shechem then went to the city gate, where public issues were decided (Leupold), to ask the men of the city to be circumcised. They argued that the Israelites were at peace with them, that this would increase trade, that the land was large enough for both groups, and that they could take the Israelites as wives. Apparently, the Hivites predominated in numbers, “so there was no danger that they would become submerged in the process” (Leupold).

“Only on this *condition* will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people: if every male among us is circumcised as they *are* circumcised. Will not their livestock, their property, and every animal of theirs *be* ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us” (34:22-23). To add to their argument, Hamor and Shechem said this was the only condition and again pointed out the economic advantage of the proposal.

“And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and Shechem his son; every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city” (34:24). The men gathered at the gate accepted the proposal and all the men of the city were circumcised.

The Retaliation

The Slaughter “Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males” (34:25). Simeon and Levi probably took their servants along to help them with the slaughter (Leopold). “Dinah, Simeon, and Levi were the children of Jacob and Leah, the unloved wife (v. 25). Simeon and Levi doubtless felt closer to Dinah than some of her other half-brothers did for this reason. But Reuben, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun were also Leah’s children and Dinah’s full brothers. The fact that only Simeon and Levi reacted as they did against the men of Shechem suggests that they responded with excessive recklessness (Mathews). Perhaps Jacob’s indifference to Dinah’s plight, evidenced by his lack of action, encouraged the violent overreaction of her brothers (Wenham, cited by Constable). While Simeon and Levi took the lead in this atrocity, all of Jacob’s sons evidently participated with them in the looting of the city (v. 27; cf. vv. 28-29). This was only the first of several notorious incidents that took place at Shechem (Judg. 9:30-49; Jer. 41:4-8; Hos. 6:9)” (Constable).

“And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem’s house, and went out” (34:26). The slaughter, of course, included Hamor and Shechem. Simeon and Levi also retrieved Dinah from Shechem’s house and took her home.

The Plunder “The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled” (34:27). Only two of the sons of Jacob participated in the slaughter, but all the sons of Jacob participated in the plunder of the city in the name of the fact that their sister had been defiled.

“They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what *was* in the city and what *was* in the field, and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; and they plundered even all that *was* in the houses” (34:28-29). They plundered everything, including the animals in the city, the animals in the field, the women, the children, and all that was in their houses. The women and children were probably used as slaves (Leupold).

The Reaction “Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, ‘You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I *am* few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I’ (34:30). The Hebrew word translated “trouble” means “trouble, disturbed.” Jacob was disturbed. He was disturbed because what they had done made him obnoxious (Hebrew: “to have a bad smell, stink”) among the Canaanites and the Perizzites and since his household was small by comparison, he was concerned that they would kill him and all in his household.

“Of course, fear is natural in such a situation, but the reasons Jacob gives for damning his sons betray him. He does not condemn them for the massacre, for abusing the rite of circumcision, or even for breach of contract. Rather, he protests that the consequences of their action have made him unpopular. Nor does he seem worried by his daughter’s rape or the prospect of intermarriage with the Canaanites. He is only concerned for his own skin” (Wenham, cited by Constable).

“But they said, ‘Should he treat our sister like a harlot?’ (34:31). The sons of Jacob told her father that they responded as they did because their sister had been treated like a harlot, whose

body could be purchased (34:11-12). “It is interesting that Simeon and Levi referred to Dinah as ‘our sister’ (v. 31) rather than as Jacob’s daughter, which would have been appropriate in addressing Jacob. This implies that since Jacob had not shown enough concern for Dinah, her blood brothers felt compelled to act in her defense. This is an early indication that Jacob’s family was already crumbling dysfunctionally, which becomes obvious when Joseph’s brothers turn on him, sell him as a slave, and lie to their father (37:12-36)” (Constable).

Summary: When their sister was violated, her brothers deceived the family involved, destroyed all the men in the city, and plundered the property of the city.

What is the point of this sad story? It is not given in approval of what the sons of Jacob did, as is evident by the contrast between it and the other stories in Genesis. “Abraham had dealt honorably with the Hittites (ch. 23), and Isaac had behaved peacefully with the Philistines (26:12-33). But now, Jacob’s sons became the aggressors in conflict with the Hivites. Simeon and Levi’s unrepentant treachery stands in stark contrast to Esau and Jacob’s recent moral transformations. In contrast to the Isaac incident in chapter 27, this chapter contains no prayer, no divine revelation, no promised blessing, and no explicit mention of God” (Mathews, cited by Constable).

For one thing, in the context of the book of Genesis, this episode explains why later Jacob passed over Simeon and Levi for a special blessing. “Deception proceeded to murder and pillage. As a result of this sin Jacob passed over Simeon and Levi when he gave his primary blessing (49:5-7). It went to Judah instead” (Constable).

This story also shows the importance of keeping the Israelites, the chosen seed, separate from the Canaanites (Carmichael, cited by Constable). Had they intermarried, Israel would have been “swallowed up” by the Canaanites (Ross, p. 569). It was necessary for the nation of Israel to remain pure and not intermarry with people from other countries. The use of the name “Israel” (34:7) indicates Jacob’s sons had “a substantial comprehension and recognition of the deeper values and implications of this event” (Morris). Later the Mosaic Law would make it clear that Israel was not to play the harlot with Canaanites (Lev. 20:5; Num. 25), nor defiled themselves with the Canaanites by intermarriage (Lev. 18:24; Deut. 7:1-5), nor by covenant treaties. In fact, the Israelites were to completely destroy the abominable and the defiling Canaanites (Ross).

In this regard, it demonstrates again the sovereign control of God. “While the story in this chapter operates at a level of family honor and the brothers’ concern for their ravaged sister, the story nevertheless also carries along the theme that runs so clearly through the Jacob narratives, namely, that God works through and often in spite of the limited self-serving plans of human beings. The writer’s purpose is not to approve these human plans and schemes but to show how God, in His sovereign grace, could still achieve His purpose through them” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

The profound personal message embedded in this passage concerns the right response to living in a wicked world. The people in this passage went to one of two extremes. Jacob was indifferent and indecisive. His sons sought justice but were ruthless and excessive. The right response is between the two extremes. We should be watchful (teenagers need to be supervised) and seek justice when appropriate, but at the same time, we should not be excessive in executing justice. “Attempting to destroy or punish evil through lawless or unrighteous acts should not be confused with righteous indignation. Rather, the righteous must seek justice and oppose evil in a manner that brings honor to God and His covenant” (Ross).

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE

Some people suggest that if you were a deeply spiritual Christian, you would live on a mountaintop. God would constantly bless you and you would simply not have the problems that most people have, or at least, your problems would not be as serious as those experienced by unbelievers. Is that true? Let's look at the life of a godly man, no less than one of the patriarchs, to see what a life filled with God's blessings and promises is like.

To Bethel

The First Command "Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother' (35:1). At this point, it has been about ten years since Jacob returned from Padan Aram, an area around Haran (28:2; Constable). He has been back ten years but has yet to return to Bethel to fulfill his vow there (28:20- 22). "He should have headed there immediately rather than settling near Shechem. Evidently, his negligence was due in part to the continuing presence of the idols that Rachel and probably others had brought from Haran. Perhaps their allegiance to these gods restrained Jacob's total commitment to Yahweh (cf. 1 Kings 11:3-4)" (Constable). Another exclamation is that he kept putting off going back to Bethel until a more convenient season (Leupold). Bethel was about 15 miles south of Shechem (Morris).

So, God told Jacob to go to Bethel, live there, and build an altar to fulfill his vow. "This is the first and only time God commanded a patriarch to build an altar. The command constituted a test of Jacob's obedience similar to Abraham's test when God instructed him to offer up 'a burnt offering' on Mt. Moriah (22:2)" (Constable).

The Cooperation "And Jacob said to his household and to all who *were* with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that *are* among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments' (35:2). Jacob prepares to comply with the command to return to Bethel by telling everyone who is with him to put away their idols, purify themselves, and change their garments. Apparently, Rachel stole her father's idols (31:19) to, at least occasionally, engage in worshiping them. It is also "highly probable" that the servants Jacob acquired in Mesopotamia were still idolaters and that the sons of Jacob who sacked Shechem kept some of their idols (Leupold). At any rate, the idols were to be put away. All were to purge their hearts and lives and put on new clothes, symbolizing putting off the old and putting on the new (Leupold).

"Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone" (35:3). "Jacob was in constant distress; yet, in each instance, God remained faithful to His promise and delivered him" (Sailhamer, cited by Constable; see 28:15).

"So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which *were* in their hands, and the earrings which *were* in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which *was* by Shechem" (35:4). The people in Jacob's household wholeheartedly cooperated, giving him their idols and their earrings, which were probably part of some idolatrous practice (Leupold). Jacob buried all of these items under a terebinth tree near Shechem. The tree seems to have been the oak of Moreh, where God had appeared to Abraham shortly after he had entered the land (12:6; Constable; Morris).

“There are certain things in connection with the spiritual life that must be entirely given up and destroyed, for it is impossible to sanctify or consecrate them.... Evil habits have to be broken. Sin must be put away. There are things that are beyond all reclamation” (Thomas, cited by Constable). The people in Jacob’s household were like some believers today who worship God while, at the same time, hanging on to some of the “superstitions and practices of the world around them” (Morris). To ascend in a hot air balloon, it is necessary to throw out the ballasts. The more ballasts that are thrown out, the higher the balloon rises. We need to throw out things that weigh us down so that we may rise higher and higher spiritually.

The Compliance “And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob” (35:5). As Jacob and his household journey toward Bethel, the cities along the way did not attempt to harm them in any way because of the fear of God. The inhabitants of these cities had no doubt heard of the exploits of Simeon and Levi in the city of Shechem. Some commentators suggest that God expressed His approval of the purging of idolatry by putting restraint on the Canaanite projected revenge for the Shechemites (Leupold; Constable; Prov. 16:7).

“Throughout his life, Jacob has had to contend with his own fears—fear of God (28:17), fear of Laban (31:31), fear of Esau (32:8, 12 [Eng. 7, 11]). Nobody had been in fear of him. Angry, yes; fearful, no” (Hamilton, cited by Constable).

“So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him” (35:6). Jacob’s return to Bethel demonstrates how God had fulfilled His promise to bring Jacob back to Bethel unharmed.

“And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother” (35:7). Once back in Bethel, Jacob built an altar there and called it El Bethel (God of Bethel; Leupold: “the Strong God of Bethel) in commemoration of the fact that God had appeared to him there when he was fleeing from Esau.

The Casket “Now Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. So the name of it was called Allon Bachuth” (35:8). When Rebekah left home to marry Isaac, her unnamed nurse went with her (24:59). The name of that nurse is now given; it was Deborah. After Rebekah passed away, Deborah stayed with Jacob until he arrived at Bethel, where she died.

Deborah was the nurse who tended to Jacob in his infancy and his youth; she was his nanny. Since Jacob was about 110 years old at this time, Deborah could have been as old as 170 when she died (Leupold). Luther says, “She was a wise and godly matron, who had served and advised Jacob, had supervised the domestics of the household and had often counseled and comforted Jacob in his dangers and difficulties.”

Jacob buried his beloved nanny Deborah under the terebinth tree below Bethel. The name of the site where she was buried was Allon Bachuth, a Hebrew phrase that means “oak of weeping.” This spot “became a monument to a godly servant whose loss was deeply mourned by all” (Leupold). “The fact that a tree was named and that the naming was recorded in tradition shows that this person was sorely missed” (Ross).

The Second Command “Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him” (35:9). Once Jacob was settled in Bethel, God appeared to him again and, once again, blessed him. This was 30 years after the first time God blessed Jacob at Bethel and, this time, rather than in a vision, God appeared to him in bodily form (Constable, who cites 35:13). “Bethel occupies something of the same focal place in Jacob’s career that the birth of Isaac

occupied for Abraham, testing his fluctuating obedience and his hold on the promise, for more than twenty years” (Kidner, Constable).

“And God said to him, ‘Your name *is* Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.’ So He called his name Israel” (35:10). “Here God summed up all the long-range promises that He had made to Jacob at various times in his life” (Constable). He reaffirms Jacob’s name change (32:28).

“Also God said to him: ‘I *am* God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land” (35:11-12). Reminding Jacob that He is the Almighty God, God commands Jacob to bear many children and promises that a company of nations and kings will come from him. This, too, is a reaffirmation. This time, the reaffirmation is of the promises formally given to Jacob at Bethel (28:13-15), with the addition that kings would also come from him as well. God also reaffirms His promise to give the land of Canaan to Jacob and his descendants. Abram’s name was changed to Abraham “as a sign of the surety of the promise (see 17:5-8). The name change to Israel was proof of the promises, and here the promises include nations, royalty, and the land” (Ross).

“The importance of God’s words to Jacob in vv. 11-12 cannot be overemphasized. First, God’s words ‘be fruitful and increase in number’ recalled clearly the primeval blessing of Creation (1:28) and hence showed God to be still ‘at work’ in bringing about the blessing to all mankind through Jacob. Second, for the first time since 17:16 (‘kings of peoples will come from her’), the mention is made of royalty (‘kings,’ v. 11) in the promised line. Third, the promise of the land, first given to Abraham and then to Isaac, was renewed here with Jacob (v. 12). Thus, within these brief words, several major themes of the book have come together. The primeval blessing of mankind was renewed through the promise of a royal offspring and the gift of the land” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

“Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him” (35:13). After reaffirming the promises made to Jacob, the Lord and Jacob had a long conversation.

“So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it” (35:14). As a memorial to the place where he and the Lord commune together, Jacob set up a second pillar (28:18) that “perpetuated the memory of God’s faithfulness for the benefit of his descendants” (Constable).

“And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel” (35:15). Jacob renamed the place Bethel.

To Ephrath

Rachel’s Labor “Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored *in childbirth*, and she had hard labor” (35:16). The Lord told Jacob to go to Bethel (35:1). So, was he being disobedient by leaving Bethel? “God may have wanted Jacob to establish permanent residence there. This seems unlikely, however, since Jacob remained a semi-nomad” (Constable). Jacob was on his way to see his father (Leopold). When they got to within a short distance of Ephrath, Rachel went into labor and was having a difficult time with it.

Rachel’s Son “Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, ‘Do not fear; you will have this son also’ (35:17). The midwife who was attending to Rachel informed her that she was having another son, as she had prayed earlier that he might be (30:24).

“And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin” (35:18). The Hebrew word translated “soul” means “soul, life, desire, passion.” Rachel’s life departed from her. She died in childbirth. “Ironically, Rachel, who had cried in desperation to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or else I die’ (30:1), died giving birth to a child” (Constable). Before she passed away, Rachel named her son Ben-Oni. Ben-Oni means “son of my sorrow.” Since it would have been “almost morbid to allow a son to bear such a name through life (Leopold), Jacob promptly changed his name to Benjamin, which means “son of my right hand.” That name may signify “a child of good fortune,” because the right hand was commonly regarded as more honorable and so became to symbolize good fortune (Leopold).

Rachel’s Burial “So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)” (35:19). “Jacob buried Rachel somewhere between Bethel and Ephrath, an older name for Bethlehem (house of bread; vv. 19-20). Both Bethlehem and Kiriath Jeraim became known as Ephrath (a) because the clan of Ephrath settled in both places (cf. 1 Chron. 2:50). Later references suggest that Jacob buried Rachel at or near Ramah, which was south of Bethel and north of Jerusalem and Bethlehem (cf. 1 Sam. 10:2-3; Jer. 31:15) (Edersheim). Since the fourth century B.C., another site, still covered with a mausoleum a mile north of Bethlehem, has been venerated as the burial place of Rachel” (Constable).

“And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which is the pillar of Rachel’s grave to this day” (35:20). To commemorate Rachel’s grave, Jacob placed a pillar over it, which was still in place 400 years later at the time Moses wrote Genesis.

To Eder

The Stop “Then Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder” (35:21a). After the death and burial of Rachel and the birth of Benjamin, Israel continued his journey, next pitching his tent beyond the tower of Eder. Jacob is here called Israel to point out that Ruben’s sin dishonored Israel (Leupold). “The tower of Eder (‘Migdal-eder’) was simply a watchtower built to help shepherds protect their flocks from robbers (v. 21; cf. 2 Kings 18:8; 2 Chron. 26:10; 27:4). Since the time of Jerome, the early church father who lived in Bethlehem, tradition has held that this Eder lay very close to Bethlehem” (Constable).

The Sin “And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine; and Israel heard about it” (35:21b). Reuben committed adultery with Bilhah, his father’s concubine. Before this, she was described as Rachel’s handmaid, but after Rachel’s death, she is described by her relationship with Jacob. “A concubine was sometimes a slave with whom her owner had sexual relations. She enjoyed some of the privileges of a wife, and people sometimes called her a wife in patriarchal times, but she was not a wife in the full sense of the term” (Constable). Israel heard about the sin of his son, but nothing is said about his reaction to it, at least here. There were profound consequences of the sin (49:4).

“Reuben’s act constituted a claim against (a challenge to) his father as well as being an immoral act (cf. Deut. 22:30; 2 Sam. 16:21-22; 1 Kings 2:13-25). In the ancient Near East, a man who wanted to assert his superiority over another man might do so by having sexual relations with that man’s wife or concubine (cf. 2 Sam. 16:21-22). Ancient Near Easterners regarded this act of physical domination as evidence of personal superiority.... Reuben’s act, therefore, manifested rebellion against Jacob’s authority as well as unbridled lust. It resulted in his losing his birthright. Judah obtained the right to rule as head of the family, and Levi got the right to be the family priest

eventually. The double portion of his father's inheritance went to Joseph, who realized it through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. 1 Chron. 5:1-2)" (Constable).

The Sons Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: the sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin; the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali; and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram" (35:21c-26). Since Benjamin's birth completes the list of Jacob's 12 sons, it is appropriate to list the names of all 12 sons. The sons are listed according to their mother rather than according to their age, with the sons of the wives listed first and then those of the handmaids.

Mamre

Jacob's Arrival "Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt" (35:27). At last, Jacob arrived at Hebron to see his father, Isaac. This paragraph is important because it records the entrance of Jacob into his father's inheritance. Jacob presumably visited Isaac in Hebron on various occasions following his return from Paddan-aram. However, he moved his family to his father's encampment on this occasion and evidently remained there as Isaac's heir" (Constable).

Isaac's Departure "Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him" (35:28-29). At this point, Moses reports that Isaac died, although, technically, it did not take place for another 12 or 13 years (Leopold, who gives the details to support this conclusion). Isaac was 180 years old when he died. The expression "gathered to his people" implies that he went to heaven (Leopold). The once estranged brothers were still united, burying their father together.

"The end of the Jacob narrative is marked by the death of his father, Isaac. The purpose of this notice is not simply to record Isaac's death but rather to show the complete fulfillment of God's promise to Jacob (28:21). According to Jacob's vow, he had asked that God watch over him during his sojourn and return him safely to the house of his father. Thus, the conclusion of the narrative marks the final fulfillment of these words as Jacob returned to the house of his father, Isaac, before he died" (Sailhame, cited by Constable).

Summary: Jacob returned to Bethel to fulfill his vow, was reassured of God's promises, had another son, and saw his father before he died, but amid his growth and blessings, he experienced three deaths and the rebellion of his son Reuben.

Life is filled with failures and funerals, but God is faithful. Genesis 35 is an illustration. In that chapter, "There were sad deaths that marked the end of an era, but the promises continued. There was sin that ruined an inheritance, but it could not nullify the obvious blessing of God. And there were forgotten vows, but God ensured that they would be kept, and when they were kept, He confirmed His promises" (Ross). God blesses undeserving people!

Although life is filled with funerals and failures, we must be faithful. "At a time when Deborah, Rachel, and Isaac all passed off the scene and Ruben, through sin, relinquished his right to inheritance, God called for vows to be kept, items to be removed, and worship to be purified.... God continually calls each generation of believers to rekindle their faith, to revitalize it as if they were in the greatest of spiritual struggles—for they are and dare not let down" (Ross).

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ____?

We have all done it. We've done it in regard to classmates we knew in high school or college. We have done it regarding people we worked with years ago. We've even done it regarding movie stars who are no longer well-known. We have asked the question, "What happened to?" For example, we ask, "Whatever happened to so-and-so, the child star I enjoyed watching years ago?" In a sense, Genesis revolves around that question. Eleven times it uses the phrase "this is the generation of." The difference between what it does and what we do is that it is not asking what became of an *individual*, but what became of that individual's *family*. In Genesis 35, the question is, "Whatever happened to the family of Esau?" That question is answered in Genesis because of what happens later in the Old Testament.

Esau's Personal History

His Person "Now this is the genealogy of Esau, who is Edom" (36:1). Earlier in Genesis, Isaac prophesied Esau would dwell in the land of Edom (27:39), which, despite fertile spots, is mostly a rocky and barren land southeast of the Dead Sea. It is some of the most desolate and barren land on the earth. Isaac also predicted that Esau would live by the sword, implying he would live in continual conflict and that Esau would serve his brother Jacob, but when Esau became restless, he would break that yoke (27:40).

His Wives "Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite; Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite and Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebajoth" (36:2-3). Esau had three wives, all of which were from the land of Canaan. The names of Esau's wives listed here differ from the names recorded earlier.

Genesis 26:34	Judah, daughter of Beeri Bashemath, daughter of Elon
Genesis 28:9	Mhalath, daughter of Ishmael
Genesis 36:2-3	Adah, daughter of Elon Aholibamah, daughter of Anah and daughter of Zibeon Bashemath, daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebajoth

These differences do not present any "irreconcilable discrepancies." They "may be explained from the ancient custom in the East, of giving surnames, ... founded upon some important or memorable event in a man's life, which gradually superseded the other name (e.g., the name Edom, as explained in Gen. 25:30); whilst as a rule, the women received new names when they were married" (Keil; Leupold; Constable).

Adah is said to be the daughter of Elon the Hittite. Adah is the Basemath of Genesis 26:34. Both are said to be the daughter of Elon (Leupold). It is not uncommon for one person to have two names (Morris).

Aholibamah is listed here (36:2), but her name does not appear in the two previous passages. She is, no doubt, the Judith of Genesis 26:34. If that is the case, her father is named Beeri in

Genesis 26:34 and Anah in Genesis 36:3. What is strange is that she is said to be the daughter of two different men! She is said to be the daughter of Anah and the daughter of Zibeon. Later, in this passage, she is said to be the daughter of Anah (26:25). Therefore, she must have been the daughter of Zibeon in the sense of being his descendent, probably his granddaughter (Leupold; Morris).

In Genesis 26:34, Anah is said to be a Hittite, but in this passage, he is said to be a Hivite. Since the Hittites were a very prominent group among the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, it came to be used of all the people of the land. Therefore, Hittite is another name for Canaanite (Leupold). To complicate matters, in Genesis 36:20, Anah is said to be a Horite, a Hebrew word that means “cave-dweller.” So, Anah dwelt in caves, as did all the people of the city of Petra.

Basemath is said to be the daughter of Ishmael, the sister of Nebajoth. Basemath is the Mahalath of Genesis 28:9. Both are said to be the daughter of Ishmael and the sister of Nebajoth (Leupold).

Adah was a Hittite. Aholibamah was a Hivite and Basemath was an Ishmaelite. Thus, Esau married a Hittite, a Hivite, and an Ishmaelite. All three were from Canaanite tribes scattered throughout Canaan. Evidently, there was much intermarriage among them (Morris).

His Children “Now Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel. And Aholibamah bore Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah. These *were* the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan” (36:4-5). Esau had five sons. Two of his sons were by wives who bore one each and his third wife gave birth to three. All of his sons were born in the land of Canaan. He also had daughters (36:3), but they are not named.

His Move “Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob” (36:6). After having five sons and an unknown number of daughters, as well as amassing many servants and many cattle, Esau moved from the land of Canaan to get away from his brother Jacob.

“For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land where they were strangers could not support them because of their livestock” (36:7). The explanation (“for”) for wanting to get away from Jacob was that both of their possessions together were too great for them to dwell in the same place; the land could not support all of their lives stock.

“So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir. Esau *is* Edom” (36:8). Esau moves south of the land of Canaan to dwell in Mount Seir, that is, the mountainous region southeast of the Dead Sea (Morris). The region into which Esau migrated had been settled by the descendants of Seir but later became known as Edom. “Esau’s sons were born in Canaan and then moved out of the Promised Land to Seir. Jacob’s sons, except for Benjamin, were born outside Canaan in Paddan-Aram and later moved into the Promised Land” (Constable).

Esau’s Political History

His Grandchildren “And this *is* the genealogy of Esau the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir” (36:9). As has been pointed out, the expression “this is the generation of” forms the organization of the book of Genesis. In the case of Esau, that expression is used twice (36:1, 9), which is the only time that happens. In the first instance (36:1), the expression designates the history of Esau in the land of Canaan. The second instance introduces the history of Esau in Mount Seir. The first section (36-8) focuses on Esau’s immediate family and homeland and the second

(36:9- 37:1) centers on his “offspring is a developing nation” (Mathews, cited by Constable). The point here is that Esau is the father of the Edomites.

1. By Adah. “These *were* the names of Esau’s sons: Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, and Reuel the son of Basemath the wife of Esau. And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. Now Timna was the concubine of Eliphaz, Esau’s son, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. These *were* the sons of Adah, Esau’s wife” (36:10-12). Esau and his wife Adah had a son named Eliphaz. Eliphaz had five sons. Eliphaz and his concubine Timna had a son named Amalek. The descendants of Esau from his wife Adah were her son Eliphaz and six grandsons, one of whom was born through the concubine of her son of Eliphaz. Eliphaz’s concubine is named, but his wife is not. This was probably because of the future prominence Timna’s son Amalek, the ancestor of the notorious Amalekites, the enemy of Israel (Morris).

“The Kenizzites (vv. 11, 15) later affiliated with the tribe of Judah (Milgrom). The Amalekites separated from the other Edomites and became an independent people early in their history (v. 12). A group of them settled in what later became southern Judah as far as Kadesh Barnea and the border of Egypt (14:7; Num. 13:29; 14:43, 45). Another branch of the tribe settled in the hill country of Ephraim that was in central Canaan (Judg. 12:15). The largest group of Amalekites lived in Arabia to the southeast of Canaan and Edom. They united on occasion with their neighbors, the Midianites (Judg. 6:3; 7:12) and the Ammonites (Judg. 3:13). Saul defeated the Amalekites (1 Sam. 14:48; 15:2) as David did (1 Sam. 27:8; 30:1; 2 Sam 8:12). Some Simeonites finally exterminated them during Hezekiah’s reign (1 Chron. 4:42-43)” (Constable).

2. By Basemath. “These *were* the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These *were* the sons of Basemath, Esau’s wife” (36:13). Esau and his wife Basemath had a son named Reuel (36:10) and Reuel had four sons.

3. By Aholibamah. “These *were* the sons of Aholibamah, Esau’s wife, the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon. And she bore to Esau: Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah” (36:14). Esau and his wife Aholibamah had three sons.

His Tribes “These *were* the chiefs of the sons of Esau” (36:15a). All the descendants of Esau (36:9-14) became the heads of tribes. This may mean “ruler over a thousand” (Leupold).

1. By Adah. “The sons of Eliphaz, the firstborn *son* of Esau, were Chief Teman, Chief Omar, Chief Zepho, Chief Kenaz, Chief Korah, Chief Gatam, and Chief Amalek. These *were* the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom. They *were* the sons of Adah” (36:15b-16). The son of Adah, Eliphaz Esau’s firstborn son, had seven sons who became chiefs.=

2. By Basemath. “These *were* the sons of Reuel, Esau’s son: Chief Nahath, Chief Zerah, Chief Shammah, and Chief Mizzah. These *were* the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom. These *were* the sons of Basemath, Esau’s wife” (36:17). The son of Basemath, Reuel, had four sons who became chiefs.

3. By Aholibamah. “And these *were* the sons of Aholibamah, Esau’s wife: Chief Jeush, Chief Jaalam, and Chief Korah. These *were* the chiefs *who descended* from Aholibamah, Esau’s wife, the daughter of Anah” (36:18). The three sons of Aholibamah also became chiefs.

“These *were* the sons of Esau, who is Edom, and these *were* their chiefs” (36:19). Thus, Esau, the father of the Edomites, had sons who became chiefs.

His Predecessor “These *were* the sons of Seir the Horite who inhabited the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. These *were* the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Seir, in the land of Edom” (36:20-21). Seir was a Horite, as was Anah (36:2). As was pointed out, the Hebrew word translated “Horite” means “cave-dweller.” Thus, “some commentators connected the Horites with cave dwellers” (Constable, who cites Speiser and Sailhamer). The inhabitants of

Petra dwell in caves, which can be seen in the ruins of Petra to this day. Seir, the man who inhabited the land before Esau, had seven sons, who also became chiefs in the land. The sons of Seir, as well as the sons of Esau, made up the Edomites (Leopold). The two groups intermarried, making one people, the Edomites (Morris).

1. The Sons of Lotan. “And the sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam. Lotan’s sister was Timna” (36:22). Seir had a son named Lotan, who had two sons. His sister was Timna.

2. The Sons of Shobal. “These were the sons of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam” (36:23). Seir had a son named Shobal, who had five sons.

3. The Sons of Zibeon. “These were the sons of Zibeon: both Ajah and Anah. This was the Anah who found the water in the wilderness as he pastured the donkeys of his father Zibeon” (36:24). Seir had a son named Zibeon, who had two sons. One of Zibeon’s sons, Anah, is the one who found water in the wilderness as he pastured his father’s donkeys.

4. The Children of Anah. “These were the children of Anah: Dishon and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah” (36:25). Seir had a son named Anah, who had a son and a daughter.

5. The Sons of Dishon. “These were the sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran” (36:26). Seir had a son named Dishon, who had four sons.

6. The Sons of Ezer. “These were the sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan” (36:27). Seir had a son named Ezer, who had three sons.

7. The Sons of Dishan. “These were the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran” (36:28). Seir had a son named Dishan, who had two sons. Perhaps Uz may have given the land where he dwelt the name Uz, which is the land from which Job came (Job 1:1; see Leopold).

“These were the chiefs of the Horites: Chief Lotan, Chief Shobal, Chief Zibeon, Chief Anah, Chief Dishon, Chief Ezer, and Chief Dishan. These were the chiefs of the Horites, according to their chiefs in the land of Seir” (36:29-30). All the sons of Seir became chiefs who ruled simultaneously (Luther; Leopold).

His Successors “Now these were the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel” (36:31). At some point, the system of having kings replaced chiefs. Moses points out that Edom had kings before Israel had kings. Israel did not have a king before Moses died, but Moses knew that Israel would have kings (35:11; see 17:4 ff.; Deut. 17:14-20; Leopold).

“Verse 31 is probably a post-Mosaic explanation written after Israel had kings to show that the Edomites were also a powerful people with kings, even before there were kings in Israel” (Mathews, cited by Constable). Leopold reasons that if the kings began to rule in Edom about the third generation after Esau, about a generation after the chiefs began to rule in 1850 BC, and Moses wrote about 1450 BC, the eight kings in this list ruled 400 years. Leopold points out that the chiefs and the kings in Edom ruled simultaneously (cf. Ex. 15:15 with Num. 20:14 ff.).

1. Bela. “Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city was Dinhabah” (36:32). Bela, the son of Beor, was king in Dinhabah. Three of the kings in this list are said to have had “his city” (36:32, 36:35, 36:39), which means his royal city, his capital, where he established himself as king. The other five kings either did not have a royal city or continued to use their predecessor’s royal city (Leopold).

2. Jobab. “And when Bela died, Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his place” (36:33). When Bela died, Jobab, the son of Zerah, reigned in the city of Dinhabah.

3. Husham. “When Jobab died, Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place” (36:34). When Jobab died, Husham of the Temanites reigned in the city of Dinhabah.

4. Hadad. “And when Husham died, Hadad the son of Bedad, who attacked Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his place. And the name of his city was Avith” (36:35). When Husham died, Hadad reigned. Bedad is the one who attacked Midian in the field of Moab. Hadad’s royal city was Avith.

5. Samlah. “When Hadad died, Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his place” (36:36). When Hadad died, Samlah reigned in the city of Avith.

6. Saul. “And when Samlah died, Saul of Rehoboth-by-the-River reigned in his place” (36:37). When Samlah died, Saul of Rehoboth-by-the-River reigned in the city of Avith. Leupold says Rehoboth is a city and the river is probably the Euphrates, but it might refer to almost any stream.

7. Baal-Hanan. “When Saul died, Baal-Hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his place” (36:38). When Saul died, Baal-Hanan reigned in the city of Avith.

8. Hadar. “And when Baal-Hanan the son of Achbor died, Hadar reigned in his place; and the name of his city was Pau. His wife’s name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab” (36:39). When Baal-Hanan died, Hadar took his place and the name of his royal city was Pau.

The line of succession in Edom was not hereditary. None of the eight kings succeeded their father. “This list of Edomite kings demonstrates the partial fulfillment of God’s promise that kings would come from Abraham’s loins (17:16)” (Constable).

His Chiefs “And these were the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their families and their places, by their names: Chief Timnah, Chief Alvah, Chief Jetheth,” Chief Aholibamah, Chief Elah, Chief Pinon, Chief Kenaz, Chief Teman, Chief Mibzar, Chief Magdiel, and Chief Iram” (36:40-43a). A list of the Edomite chiefs appeared in verses 15-19. Only a few of the names of the earlier list occur in this list. In the book of Job, Eliphaz came from Teman (Ross).

“These were the chiefs of Edom, according to their dwelling places in the land of their possession. Esau was the father of the Edomites” (36:43b). The difference between the earlier list and this list is this list is according to the place of residence (Leupold). The point of this chapter is Esau was the father of the Edomites.

His Brother “Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan” (37:1). Because Genesis 37:2 clearly begins the tenth and final division of Genesis, commentators place Genesis 37:1 with chapter 36 (Leupold; Ross). “Verse 1 [of chapter 37] belongs structurally to the preceding narrative as a conclusion to the Jacob story. It shows Jacob back in the Land of Promise but still dwelling there as a sojourner like his father before him. The writer’s point is to show that the promises of God had not yet been completely fulfilled and that Jacob, like his fathers before him, was still awaiting the fulfillment” (Sailhame, cited by Constable). However, it serves as a transition to the next major section of Genesis.

In contrast to Esau, who settled in the land of Edom, Jacob dwelt as a stranger in the land of Canaan, as his father Isaac was also doing, for he was not yet dead. Jacob had no tribes, kings, or lands to govern. “Jacob was living at Hebron when Joseph’s brothers sold him, and he may have continued living there until he moved to Egypt (37:1; cf. 35:27)” (Constable).

Summary: Esau became the father of the Edomites.

This chapter serves several purposes. For one thing, it provides information concerning the descendants of Esau, who later came into contact with Israel, namely the Edomites (36:8) and the Amalekites (36:12). “It might seem unusual that such detail concerning the descendants of Esau is included, but the relationship between Esau and Jacob, and then between the nations of Edom and

Israel, is a theme of the entire Old Testament” (Davis, cited by Constable). “What Israelites did to Canaanites, Esauites did to Horites. Thus, Gen. 36 is moving backward from the conquerors (vv. 9-19) to the conquered (vv. 20-30)” (Hamilton, cited by Constable).

This chapter demonstrates God’s faithfulness in blessing Esau as He had promised (27:39-40). God blessed Esau. He became a powerful overlord over tribes, kings, and districts (Ross). No wonder he had a company of 400 men to meet Jacob. He was both powerful and wealthy. The Lord is faithful to us (1Jn. 1:9; 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Thess. 5:24; Heb. 10:23).

This chapter illustrates that believers must be patient in waiting for the blessing of God. “Secular greatness, in general, grows up far more rapidly than spiritual greatness” (Delitzsch, cited by Ross). “The promised spiritual blessing demands patience and emphasizes that waiting while others prosper is a test of faithfulness and perseverance” (Ross; Ps. 49; 73). Don’t compare yourself with others.

HOW TO HANDLE HATRED

Have you been the object of envy, jealousy, or hatred? It is a common experience among children, teenagers, and adults. The consequences can be cruel. Children and teenagers who were teased and bullied have ended up committing suicide. How do you handle hatred?

The Hatred of Joseph

The History “This is the history of Jacob” (37:2a). The expression “this is the history” introduces the eleventh and final section of Genesis. Jacob remains the main character (his death is recorded in chapter 49), but “the emphasis now shifts from Jacob’s personal struggles to receive the blessing promised to Abraham and Isaac, to the events in Jacob’s life that lead up to the formation of Israel as a nation” (Aalders, cited by Constable).

“Nevertheless, Joseph replaces Jacob as the focus of the writer’s attention at this point. These chapters are not entirely about Joseph, however. The writer showed interest in all the sons of Jacob and among them especially Judah” (Constable, who says see Bryan Smith, “The Central Role of Judah in Genesis 37-50,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:646, April-June 2005, pp.158-74). “One writer concluded that the genre of the Joseph story in chapters 37-50 is a court narrative. He provided many observations on the narrative features of the story” (Constable, who cites Richard D. Patterson, “Joseph in Pharaoh’s Court,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:654, April-June 2007, pp. 148-64).

The Report “Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father” (37:2b). For several reasons, Joseph’s brothers hated him. For one thing, he told their father about their bad behavior. Evidently, Joseph’s brothers were involved in “serious wicked behavior,” which is not hard to believe given their former treatment of the Shechemites and their latter treatment of Joseph (Constable). Joseph informed his father, which did not sit well with his brothers. Joseph was faithful to his father. He was the faithful son among the unfaithful sons (Ross).

The Hatred “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors” (37:3). A second reason for the hatred of Joseph’s brothers toward him was the favoritism of their father for him. “Favoritism had a long history in Jacob’s family (Isaac’s preference for Esau, Rebekah’s for Jacob, and Jacob’s preference for Rachel). In every case, it created major problems. Leah was hated, and her sons hated (cf. 29:31, 33)” (Constable).

Joseph loved Joseph more than all of his children because Joseph was the “son of his old age,” that is, a son born to him when he was an old man (Ross). “It is commonly observed that children of old age enjoy preference and are pets” (Leupold). Constable, however, says, “Son of his old age” means wise son. Joseph had the wisdom of age in his youth. He had intelligence beyond his years (Morris).

Jacob gave Joseph a “tunic of many colors,” which was probably a long robe that extended to his waist or ankles (Ross). Therefore, it was not adapted for work. Instead, it was suitable to distinguish a person as a superior or overseer. By giving this garment to Joseph, Jacob expressed the thought that this son would have preeminence over the rest. Ruben had sacrificed his claim by incest. Simeon and Levi were not candidates for leadership because of their headstrong cruelty

(Leupold). “The sons of nobles wore long robes with long sleeves and ornamentation, like Joseph’s, as did Tamar, King David’s daughter (2 Sam. 13:18)” (Constable). “It was a mark of distinction that carried its own meaning, for it implied that exemption from labor which was the peculiar privilege of the heir or prince of the Eastern clan” (Thomas, cited by Constable). “Such a garment as Joseph wore identified the possessor of the birthright” (Constable; Bush), that is, leadership and a double portion (Ross).

“But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him” (37:4). The favoritism of Jacob toward Joseph provoked the hatred of his brothers to the point that they could not speak peaceably to him. “This sign of Jacob’s love for Joseph constantly irritated the jealous brothers. Sibling rivalry continues to mark Genesis, from Cain and Abel to Joseph and his brothers” (Constable). “Jacob’s partiality for Rachel and for her two sons doomed his family to the same strife he had experienced in his father’s household” (Mathews, cited by Constable).

The First Dream “Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more” (37:5). To add fuel to the fire of their hatred, Joseph had a dream. When Joseph told them about the dream, they hated him more than they already did. They already hated him so much they could not speak to him peaceably (37:4).

“So he said to them, ‘Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf’ (37:6-7). No wonder Joseph’s dream irritated and aggravated his brothers. He told them he saw bound sheaves in the field; the sheave that represented him was higher than theirs, and theirs bowed down to his! He related the story dramatically and emphatically. In the Hebrew text, the word “behold” appears three times (see “please,” “behold,” and “indeed”). Ross says he reported the dream “in his boyish naïveté.” Morris says that Joseph was foolish and arrogant to tell it.

In the ancient world, dreams were highly regarded as of divine origin (Ross). “Joseph’s dreams were revelations from God (cf. 40:8; 41:16, 25, 28). Joseph, his brothers, and his father did not grasp their significance fully until God brought them to pass. Joseph regarded his dreams as important, however, and did not hesitate to make them known to his family” (Constable). The point of this dream is that Joseph’s brothers would come to him for bread.

“This is the first dream in the Bible in which God does not speak (cf. 20:3; 28:12-15; 31:11, 24). It forms a transition in the dominant means of God’s revelation from theophany in Genesis 1-11, to dreams and visions in Genesis 12-35, and now to providence in Genesis 36-50. These three stages resemble the three parts of TaNaK (i.e., the OT). In the *Torah* (‘Law’), God speaks to Moses in theophany; in the *Nebiim* (‘Prophets’), he speaks in dreams and visions; and in the *Ketubim* (‘Writings’), he works mostly through providence” (Waltke, cited by Constable).

“And his brothers said to him, ‘Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?’ So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words” (37:8). When Joseph’s brothers heard the word “bow,” they immediately jumped to the conclusion that he was saying that he would rule over them. The result was they hated him more than they already did.

The Second Dream “Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, ‘Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me’ (37:9). In the Hebrew text, the word “behold” appears twice (see “look” and “this time”). To make matters worse, Joseph had another dream and repeatedly told his brothers about it. This time, instead of mere sheaves in the field, the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. The sun and the moon represented Joseph’s parents and the eleven stars, eleven brothers

(37:10). In other words, it indicates that Joseph would be “supreme over the whole house of Israel” (Constable; see also Morris).

“So he told *it* to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What *is* this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?’” (37:10). The way that this is stated implies that the previous dream had not been told to his father (Leupold). His father reacted, rebuking Joseph for thinking that even he and his mother would bow to Joseph. Joseph’s pride and self-satisfaction deserved Jacob’s rebuke (Leupold).

“And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter *in mind*” (37:11). The net result of the two dreams is that Joseph’s brothers not only hated him (37:8) but also envied him. “Many people today also are offended by God’s election of some to special prominence and usefulness, especially close family members” (Constable). “Envy is the root of almost every sin against our brethren. And whenever it is harbored, there is an end to all peace, rest, and satisfaction. Envy is ‘the rottenness of the bones’ (Prov. xiv. 30), and no one can stand against it (Prov. xxvii. 4). ‘Where envying is, there is confusion and every evil work’ (James iii. 16)” (Thomas).

While his father did not say much, he did not forget what Joseph had said. After all, Joseph intimidated something like this when he gave Joseph the coat of many colors (Leupold).

“Joseph’s motives are not completely clear in the text. Consequently, students of his life have made judgments about his character that are both positive and negative” (Constable). A few commentators have concluded that he was selfish and manipulative (Samuel, cited by Constable). “Joseph is depicted as morally good but immature and bratty. His tattling, boasting, and robe parading inflame his brother’s hatred against him” (Waltke, cited by Constable). “God’s future agent and mouthpiece in Egypt could hardly make a worse impression on his first appearance: spoiled brat, talebearer, braggart” (Sternberg, cited by Constable).

Most commentators contend that Joseph was one of the greatest men in history (Mann, cited by Constable). Constable favors this view, adding, “Though some of his early actions seem unwise at best and arrogant at worst.” If Joseph realized that these dreams were from the Lord, the fact that he related them to his family may indicate his faith (Erdman; Constable). “More than likely, the dream and its recounting is to be understood as an unsuspecting prophecy uttered by Joseph. God has a plan for his life, a destiny in his future, and Joseph spontaneously shares the enthusiasm that revelation spawns” (Hamilton, cited by Constable).

“The Genesis account presents Joseph as a very unusual young man, possessed of a strong and sterling character, of high morality and fidelity to God and his superiors. He was also characterized by gentleness in human relations. Remarkably, Joseph’s spiritual and moral strength does not appear to be based on or related to God’s periodic and direct revelations, as was true of Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. Presumably, then Jacob must have put a lot of character-building truth into the young man’s life at an early time. It does not appear that he could have obtained such information from any other source. If this is the case, Jacob did a much better job with Joseph than with his other sons” (Vos, cited by Constable). “They [Joseph’s older brothers] had been brought up under the influence of the old Jacob, while Joseph had been the companion of the changed Jacob or ‘Israel’” (Thomas, cited by Constable).

Ross says the lesson here is that God has chosen a faithful, righteous person for a position of leadership despite the jealousy of others (or those whom God chooses for leadership may encounter jealous hatred). As for the brothers, rather than recognizing their father’s choice (the tunic of many colors) and God’s choice (the dreams) of Joseph, their jealousy, envy, and hatred

controlled them. Rather than submit to the will of God, they followed their emotions. Obviously, we should not let our emotions control us; we should respond rationally, even in the face of hatred.

The Sale of Joseph

The Commission “Then his brothers went to feed their father’s flock in Shechem” (37:12). Joseph’s eleven brothers were tending the flock in Shechem. “It was not uncommon for shepherds to lead their flocks many miles from home in search of pasture” (Constable).

“And Israel said to Joseph, ‘Are not your brothers feeding *the flock* in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.’ So he said to him, ‘Here I am.’ Then he said to him, ‘Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me.’ So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem” (37:13-14). When Joseph wanted to know how the sons and flocks were doing, he sent Joseph from the Valley of Hebron to Shechem to find out how they were doing. He sent Joseph because he knew he could depend on him for reliable information (37:2; Leupold). “Shechem was about 60 miles north of Hebron. Jacob owned land there (33:19)” (Constable; Morris says it was at least 50 miles). “So Joseph leaves the pleasant valley in Hebron and unsuspectingly goes to Shechem” (Leupold). Without objection (Ex. 3:11), Joseph was obedient (Ross).

The Conversation “Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, ‘What are you seeking?’” (37:15). When Joseph got to Shechem, he did not find his brothers. While wandering around Shechem’s fields looking for his brothers, a stranger asked him what he was seeking.

“So he said, ‘I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding *their flocks*. And the man said, ‘They have departed from here, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’ So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan” (37:16-17). Joseph told the man he met in Shechem that he was seeking his brothers and having overheard them saying where they would go next, the man in Shechem told Joseph that his brothers were in Dothan. In the providence of God, a stranger overheard Joseph’s brothers talking about where they were going next and Joseph just happened to meet that stranger while he was warming around looking for his brothers.

When Joseph traveled the 24 miles from Shechem to Dothan (Leupold; Morris says it was about 20 miles; Constable says the distance was 17 miles; Ross says it was 12 miles), he found his brothers tending the flock. Joseph diligently obeyed his father’s commission to find and report on his brothers.

The Conspiracy “Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. Then they said to one another, ‘Look, this dreamer is coming! Come, therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, ‘Some wild beast has devoured him.’ We shall see what will become of his dreams!’” (37:18-20). Calling Joseph a “dreamer” (Morris: suggesting he was good for nothing else), they schemed to kill him. Their purpose was to prevent his dream from coming true. The brothers were not just motivated by personal hatred springing from jealousy (see 4:9); they wanted to alter the will of God as revealed in Joseph’s dreams (Constable). “The brothers’ hate is, therefore, a rebellion against the matter contained in the dreams, against the divine power itself, standing behind them, who had given the dreams. The expression ... ‘the dreamer’ [v. 19] means much more than our English word, namely, the one empowered to prophetic dreams” (von Rad, cited by Constable).

“But Reuben heard *it*, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, ‘Let us not kill him’ (37:21). When Reuben heard what his brothers were planning on doing, he took Joseph out of their hands and told them not to kill him.

“And Reuben said to them, ‘Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit which *is* in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him’—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father” (37:22). “Reuben, as the first-born, looked after his father’s interests and, knowing what sorrow Joseph’s death would bring to Jacob, sought to spare Joseph’s life and release him from the pit later. Perhaps Reuben wanted to get back in the good graces of his father (cf. 35:22)” (Constable).

The Confinement “So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of *many* colors that *was* on him. Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit *was* empty; *there was* no water in it. And they sat down to eat a meal” (37:23-25a). With their plan in place, when Joseph arrived, they stripped him of his tunic of many colors and cast him into a dry well (40:15). Then they sat down to eat (37:25a). “It is ironic that they had planned to say that an evil beast had devoured Joseph and after they attacked him, they sat down to eat. The text thus signifies that evil beast attack Joseph” (Ross).

The Crime “Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry *them* down to Egypt” (37:25b). “Dothan lay on a caravan route that ran from Damascus to Egypt. The next time the brothers would eat a meal in Joseph’s presence, he would sit at the head table (43:32-34)” (Constable).

“So Judah said to his brothers, ‘What profit *is there* if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh.’ And his brothers listened” (37:26-27). Seeing the traders on the way to Egypt gave Judah an idea. He reasoned with his brothers that if they killed Joseph, there would be no profit, but if they sold him to the Ishmaelites, the blood of their brother would not be on their hands and they would make a profit besides. After all, he added, he is our brother, our flesh, which underscores how wicked their deed really was; they sold their own flesh and blood (Ross).

“Judah, like Reuben, did not relish killing Joseph. Yet, he was not willing to let him go free either. Probably he dreaded the prospect of Joseph receiving the rights of the firstborn since he, Judah, was in line for Jacob’s blessing. His suggestion that the brothers sell Joseph implies that he knew slave trading was common in Egypt” (Constable). “Judah enters (the pages of sacred history) as a slave trader who has turned his back on Abraham’s God-given vision. He is callous toward his father and cynical about the covenant family” (Waltke, cited by Constable).

“Then Midianite traders passed by; so *the brothers* pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt” (37:28). “The price agreed on for Joseph was the same price that God later specified the Israelites should pay for a slave between the ages of five and 20 years under the Mosaic Law (Lev. 27:5). These prices were evidently standard in the ancient Near East at this time. Shepherds employed by others earned about eight shekels a year” (Wenham, cited by Constable).”

“The significance of the action of Joseph’s brothers was greater than may appear at first. ‘They had not only sold their brother, but in their brother, they had cast out a member of the seed promised and given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from the fellowship of the chosen family, and sinned against the God of salvation and His promises’ (Constable, who cites Keil).

The traders are called both Midianites and Ishmaelites. Constable explains, “Probably the caravan contained a mixture of both of these groups of Abraham’s descendants who were nomadic

caravan merchants (cf. 39:1; Judg. 8:24). Residents of this area sometimes used these names interchangeably. ‘Ishmaelite’ is the more generic term for a Bedouin nomad. It became a general designation for desert tribes. ‘Midianite’ is the more specific ethnic term (Hamilton). Alternatively, ‘Ishmaelites’ may designate a league of tribes with the Midianites constituting one element (cf. 25:13-17; Wenham). Rather than agents of death, the traders proved to be God’s instruments of deliverance.” Leupold points out that in Judges 8:24, the Midianites are called Ishmaelites.

The Discovery “Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes” (37:29). Evidently, when Joseph’s brothers sold him to the traders, Ruben was not there. So, anticipating rescuing Joseph from the dry well and returning him to his father Jacob, Reuben went to the well only to discover that Joseph was not there. Since Ruben was the oldest, Jacob could have held him responsible for Joseph’s safety (Constable; Morris). Reuben tore his clothes. “His grief expressed itself in the conventional fashion of the rending of the garment, seizing the inner garment, the tunic, at the neck and rendering downward a few inches” (Leupold).

The Confrontation “And he returned to his brothers and said, ‘The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?’” (37:30). Ruben asked his brothers what happened to Joseph. The expression “where shall I go” shows “his complete bewilderment. Shall he attempt a rescue? Shall he hastened home? Shall he call a rescue party?” (Leupold).

The Conclusion “So they took Joseph’s tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, ‘We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son’s tunic or not?’” (37:31-32). Joseph’s brothers dipped his many-colored tunic in the blood of a goat and sent it to his father, telling him they found it and asking him whether or not it belonged to Joseph. They did not overtly lie (Morris), but they lied nonetheless. Notice they did not say “our brother” but “your son.” “The message accompanying the cloak has a certain blunt brutality about it. They did not try to soften the blow” (Leupold). A degree of callousness came from their hatred (Ross).

“And he recognized it and said, ‘It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces’” (37:33). Recognizing the coat is the one he gave to Joseph, Jacob jumped to the conclusion that the wild beast had killed his son. Jacob had deceived his father with the skin of a goat (27:16). Now his sons were deceiving him with the blood of a goat. The deceiver was deceived by his sons. In this family, deception was a family tradition. This is also an example of reaping what was sown. “A family that so easily deceives to win their way cannot hope for anything but pain and grief” (Ross).

The Consequences “Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days” (37:34). “Had Jacob believed more strongly in God’s revelations in Joseph’s dreams, he might not have jumped to the conclusion that Joseph was dead, and his sorrow might not have been as great (cf. 2 Sam. 18:33). Jacob’s fears were groundless, but he did not realize this because he chose in this instance to live by sight rather than by faith” (Constable).

“And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, ‘For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.’ Thus his father wept for him” (37:35). All of Jacob’s children tried to comfort their father (Morris: the sons hypocritically), but he refused to be comforted. The consequences of jealousy, hatred, and deception are pain and grief.

Commending on the statement, “For I shall go down into the grave (Sheol) to my son in mourning,” Gill says, “The meaning is not that he would by any means hasten his own death, or go down to his son in the grave, strictly and literally taken; since, according to his apprehension of his son’s death he could have no grave, being torn to pieces by a wild beast; but either that he

should go into the state of the dead, where his son was, mourning all along till he came thither; or rather that he would go mourning all his days “for his son,” as some render it, till he came to the grave; nor would he, nor should he receive any comfort more in this world.” Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown concur, “not the earth, for Joseph was supposed to be torn in pieces, but the unknown place—the place of departed souls, where Jacob expected at death to meet his beloved son.”

“Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh *and* captain of the guard” (37:36). The Hebrew word translated “officer” means “official, eunuch.” Citing Kitchen as his source, Constable says the meaning of this word changed the eunuch in the first century BC. Morris says that its meaning no doubt partially explains his wife’s later attempt to seduce Joseph.

“The Pharaoh referred to (v. 36) was probably Ammenemes II (1929-1895 B.C.), and the capital of Egypt during this period (the twelfth dynasty) was Memphis. This is where Joseph was taken. Potiphar, as Pharaoh’s bodyguard captain, would have been in charge of the king’s executioners who carried out the capital sentences ordered by Pharaoh. ‘Potiphar’ is a shortened form of Potiphera (41:45), meaning ‘he whom Ra [the sun-god] has given’ (Constable).

Summary: The consequence of envy, jealousy, hatred, and deception is pain on the part of the perpetrators, but it can be part of God’s plan for the victim.

God’s chosen are hated, sometimes because they are chosen! “Joseph faithfully served his father even bringing back a bad report of his brothers’ behavior to him for which Jacob expressed his love by giving Joseph preferential treatment. However, his brothers envied and hated him. God confirmed His choice of Joseph as a leader, an event that perplexed Jacob and infuriated Joseph’s brothers” (Constable).

God providently worked out His will (remember the dreams) in spite of the sins of Joseph’s brothers. “The theme of the Joseph narrative concerns God’s hidden and decisive power, which works in and through but also against human forms of power. A ‘soft’ word for that reality is *providence*. A harder word for the same reality is *predestination*. Either way, God is working out His purpose through and in spite of Egypt, through and in spite of Joseph and his brothers” (Wenham, italic his, cited by Constable).

“This chapter is the first of many in the record of Joseph’s experiences that demonstrates God’s ability to cause the wrath of men to praise Him (Ps. 76:10). He can make even bad situations work for the accomplishment of His purposes and for the blessing of His elect (Rom. 8:28)” (Constable). “The Joseph story, though different in style from that of the patriarchs, continues the theme of the patriarchal narratives—God overcomes obstacles to the fulfillment of the promise” (Longman and Dillard, cited by Constable). “Rarely has God’s providence been so evident in such an extended passage” (Wolf, cited by Constable). “The books of Ruth and Esther also emphasize divine providence. Human responsibility is as much a revelation of this section as divine sovereignty” (Constable). In the story of Joseph, “the unusual display of divine providence” shines forth more brilliantly than perhaps anywhere else in sacred history (Leupold, vol. 2, p. 949).

As for the victim of hatred in this story, Joseph ends up in Egypt, which is a problem for him in the short run, but as his story unfolds, it will be seen that it was part of God’s plan in the long run. It was in Egypt that Joseph eventually fulfilled his destiny (Ross). “Ironically, by selling Joseph into Egypt, his brothers actualized the dreams they sought to subvert” (Constable). “People who serve faithfully as unto the Lord often experience severe persecution, but God will preserve them so they can fulfill their God-given destiny” (Constable).

The point is the way to handle hatred is to recognize God’s plan in the midst of it, which may be an opportunity for service or a trial to bring us to spiritual maturity.

GOD'S UNBELIEVABLE FAITHFULNESS

God is faithful. The Bible states that in plain language. For example, it says, “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9). “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13). The Bible illustrates that in numerous ways, but even so, many miss the unbelievable extent to which God will go to fill His promise. Just how far would God go? Genesis 37 is an illustration of the unbelievable faithfulness of God.

“This chapter seems at first out of place since it interrupts the story of Joseph, but we must remember that this is the *toledot* (history) of Jacob. This is the story of what happened to his whole family, not just Joseph. The central problem with which the chapter deals is childlessness. The events of the chapter must span at least 20 years, years during which Joseph was lost to his family (cf. 37:2; 41:46-47; 45:6)” (Constable). “The following sketch from the life of Judah is intended to point out the origin of the three leading families of the future princely tribe in Israel [Shelah, Perez, and Zerah] and at the same time to show in what danger the sons of Jacob would have been of forgetting the sacred vocation of their race, through marriages with Canaanitish women, and of perishing in the sin of Canaan, if the mercy of God had not interposed” (Keil). This chapter is rarely read in public (Phillips).

Judah's Sons

His Departure “It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah” (38:1). After the sale of Joseph (“at that time”), Joseph departed from his brothers “in vexation over their treatment of their brother Joseph and over their hypocrisy in the sight of their father (Leupold). Judah went to Adullam, which was in the western part of what later became the territory of the tribe of Judah (Leupold). Morris says Judah did not go very far from the family. Adullam was only about 8 miles northwest of the family home. There, he met an Adullamite named Hirah.

His Three Sons “And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and went in to her. So she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name Shelah. He was at Chezib when she bore him” (38:2-5). Away from his family among the Canaanites, Judah met and married a Canaanite woman. Judah and his Canaanite wife had a son he named Er. They had a second son, whom she named Onan, and a third son, whom she named Shelah. When they had their third son, they were living at Chezib. The name of that city means “false” (BDB) or “town of lies” (Leupold).

His Firstborn “Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him” (38:6-7). When Judah's firstborn son was old enough, he secured a Canaanite wife named Tamar for him. Er was a wicked man, so wicked that the Lord killed him. Genesis does not record the nature of his wickedness, but Morris makes the interesting suggestion (speculation) that Er's sin was somehow related to the spiritual responsibility as Judah's firstborn. He says, “In view of Onan's specific sin,

which later resulted in *his* death also, it seems most probable that Er's sin had to do with his refusal to consummate the marriage with Tamar as arranged for him by his father. Judah wanted Tamar to be his son's wife so that she might produce a son herself to carry on the Judic line. Er, however, rebelled against this intention, not wanting to have a wife and son who would follow Jehovah. Consequently, he refused to 'go in unto' Tamar. For this overt rebellion against God's purpose in Israel, 'the Lord slew him.' Exactly how the Lord put him to death, we are not told, but it was in some way which clearly tied his death to his own wickedness against God" (Morris, italics his). The soul that sins shall die (2:17; Ps. 90:7 ff.; Prov. 10:27).

His Second Born "And Judah said to Onan, 'Go in to your brother's wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother" (38:8). When his firstborn died, Judah told his second-born to marry his brother's widow so that his brother might have an heir. The marriage of a man to the widow of his brother to provide his brother with an heir is called a Levirate marriage. "Levir" is a Latin word that means "brother-in-law" (Morris). A Levirate marriage was a common custom in the ancient world (de Vaux, cited by Constable, who adds that it was also common in Asia, Africa, and other areas; Deut. 25:5-10). It was universally practiced in ancient times and has been practiced among many nations in modern times (Leupold).

Leupold explains how a Levirate marriage works when he says, "If a man died without leaving a son, the next brother of the deceased, if unmarried, would take the widow to wife with the understanding that the first son born would carry on the line of the deceased, but all of the children would be accounted to his own."

"But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother" (38:9). Onan married Tamar (Morris), but deliberately disobeyed the command of his father and the custom of the day. When he had sex with Tamar, he interrupted the process (it is called onanism; onanism also means "masturbation") so that she would not get pregnant. This is not a one-time event; it was a "persistence practice" (Kidner, who says "when" should be translated "whenever"). Onan refused to have children by his brother's widow because he did not want his brother to have an heir. "If Tamar had borne him a son, that child would have been the perpetrator of Er's name as well as that of Onan (Ruth 4:5, 21-22)" (Constable).

"And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also" (38:10). Onan's sin was not the practice of birth control. "God leaves the choice of how many children we have and when up to us, though He sovereignly controls this, of course" (Constable). Onan's sin was an unloving act toward his deceased brother; he was not allowing his brother to have an heir. It was also a selfish and greedy act. He was preventing the division of the inheritance into smaller units (Leupold). Beyond that, it was a serious sin against the Lord but the covenant God of Israel. "Onan was frustrating the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Constable).

His Third Born "Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, 'Remain a widow in your father's house till my son Shelah is grown.' For he said, 'Lest he also die like his brothers.' And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house" (38:11). Judah told Tamar, her firstborn's widow and his daughter-in-law, to remain a widow until his third-born son was old enough to marry her. When Shelah was grown, however, Judah did not arrange for him and Tamar to be married (38:14). Shelah did, however, get married, as is evident from the fact that he became the ancestor of the Shelanites in the tribe of Judah (Num. 26:20; Morris).

"Judah comes across again at the beginning of this incident as a hard and callous man. He had previously suggested selling Joseph into slavery to make money from him and deceiving Jacob

despite Reuben's protests (37:26-27, 29-30). Now, the writer portrayed him as showing no grief over the deaths of his sons, in contrast to Jacob, who mourned inconsolably over Joseph's apparent death (37:34-35). Judah also ordered the burning of his daughter-in-law (38:24)" (Constable).

Judah's Sin

Judah's Plan "Now in the process of time the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite" (38:12). After Judah's third-born son was grown (38:14), Judah's wife died. Judah went through a period of grief and was comforted (Leupold: "recovered from his grief"). Then, since it was the time of sheep shearing, he went to Timnah to have his own sheep sheared. Hirah, his Canaanite friend, went with him.

Tamar's Plot "And it was told Tamar, saying, 'Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep.' So she took off her widow's garments, covered *herself* with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place which *was* on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife" (38:13-14). Tamar was upset with Judah because his third-born son was now grown, but she had not been given to him as a wife. So, she conceived of a sinister plot. "As a last resort, Tamar deceived him into having sexual intercourse with her by masquerading as a prostitute" (Constable). It is possible that she put on the garb of the Temple prostitute (38:21-22), a respectable profession (Morris). Ross says, "When the time was right, that is, after the death of Judah's wife (when there would be no more chance of Judah having an heir through her) and at the time of the sheep-shearing festival (when people would be in a festive mood), Tamar lured Judah into what was for him an immoral union with a prostitute."

"Although Tamar's actions in this regard may seem strange to us, there is evidence that among ancient Assyrian and Hittite peoples, part of the custom was that the levirate responsibility could pass to the father of the widow's husband if there were no brothers to fulfill it. Thus, Tamar was only trying to acquire that to which she had a legal right" (Aalders, cited by Constable). "The fact that she sought to obtain seed by Judah shows her legitimate desire for children at least. It probably also reveals her desire to enter into the Abrahamic promises by bearing children for Judah and his sons" (Constable). Morris agrees with that, saying, "It seems most likely that, having been converted through Judah to faith in God's covenant promise, she truly long to play a part in God's plan which Judah had promised her."

Judah's Proposition "When Judah saw her, he thought she *was* a harlot, because she had covered her face. Then he turned to her by the way, and said, 'Please let me come in to you;' for he did not know that she *was* his daughter-in-law" (38:15-16a). When Judah saw Tamar sitting on the side of the road, he did not recognize her because her face was covered. He thought she was a prostitute. So, not realizing it was his daughter-in-law and thinking she was a prostitute, Judah propositioned Tamar.

Tamar's Proposal "So she said, 'What will you give me, that you may come in to me?' "And he said, 'I will send a young goat from the flock'" (38:16b-17a). When Tamar asked what price he was willing to pay, Judah said he would give her a young goat. This was the customary fee (Leupold, who cites Judges 15:1).

"So she said, 'Will you give *me* a pledge till you send *it*?' Then he said, 'What pledge shall I give you?' So she said, 'Your signet and cord, and your staff that *is* in your hand.' Then he gave *them* to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him" (38:18). Tamar then asked for a security deposit. When Judah asked what she required, she told him his signet (Hebrew: "seal, signet,

signet-ring”), cord (KJV and Morris: “signet and bracelet;” NIV: “seal and its cord”), and the staff that was in his hand. He accepted the proposal. They had sex and she conceived. When Judah deceived Jacob (37:31-32), a goat and an item of clothing featured in the trick, and here a goat and an item of clothing again figure in Tamar’s deception of Judah” (Constable). Once again, the deceiver was deceived. You reap what you sow.

Judah’s Pursuit “So she arose and went away, and laid aside her veil and put on the garments of her widowhood” (38:19). After the affair, Tamar took off the veil and put on the clothes of a widow, which custom demanded (Leopold).

“And Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive *his* pledge from the woman’s hand, but he did not find her” (38:20). As he had promised, Judah sent Hirah (38:12) to give a young goat to the woman and to retrieve his pledge, the signet, cord, and staff. Hirah could not find her.

“Then he asked the men of that place, saying, ‘Where is the harlot who *was* openly by the roadside?’ And they said, ‘There was no harlot in this *place*’ (38:21). In an attempt to find the woman he thought was a prostitute, Hirah asked the men at that location where she was, Hirah uses a different word for prostitute from the one that appears in verse 15. The one he uses means “female temple prostitute, harlot.” Leopold says he tried to give the case a “better color.” At any rate, he was told there was no harlot in that place.

“So he returned to Judah and said, ‘I cannot find her. Also, the men of the place said there was no harlot in this *place*’ (38:22). Hirah returned to Judah, informing him that he not only could not find the woman, but the men of the place said there was no prostitute there at all.

“Then Judah said, ‘Let her take *them* for herself, lest we be shamed; for I sent this young goat and you have not found her’ (38:23). Having done what he could to fulfill his part of the bargain, Judah decided to let her keep the pledge for herself.

The Conclusion “And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, ‘Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she *is* with child by harlotry.’ So Judah said, ‘Bring her out and let her be burned!’ (38:24). When Judah was told that Tamar had not only been a prostitute but had also gotten pregnant as a result, his response was to order that she be burned at the stake.

“When she *was* brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, ‘By the man to whom these belong, I *am* with child.’ And she said, ‘Please determine whose these *are*—the signet and cord, and staff’ (38:25). Tamar’s response was to send the signet ring, cord, and staff to her father-in-law, informing him that the owner of those items was the father of her child.

“So Judah acknowledged *them* and said, ‘She has been more righteous than I because I did not give her to Shelah my son.’ And he never knew her again” (38:26). Judah admitted the items were his and, therefore, the child was his. He conceded that she was more righteous than he was because he had not given his third-born son to be her husband. Judah never again had sexual relations with Tamar.

This passage does not contain any moral judgment on Tamar. One commentator called her a saint (Delitzsch, cited by Ross). Ross says it is not appropriate to judge her by Christian ethics because her actions were within the law at that time in her culture, although very dangerous for her. “She had the right to have a child by the nearest of kin to her deceased husband” (Ross).

“Judah’s response to his sins against God and Tamar seems to have been genuine repentance (v. 26). He confessed his wrong and repented by ceasing further sexual relations with her, his daughter-in-law. It is evident that because his repentance was genuine, Jacob did not exclude him from receiving a special blessing, as he excluded Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Because he humbled

himself, God raised him to be the chief of the house of Israel and blessed the children that he fathered even though they resulted from his sin. Compare God’s blessing of Solomon even though he was the fruit of the unlawful union of David and Bathsheba” (Constable).

Judah’s Seed

The Twins “Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins *were* in her womb” (38:27). Tamar was pregnant—with twins!

The Firstborn “And so it was, when she was giving birth, that *the one* put out *his* hand; and the midwife took a scarlet *thread* and bound it on his hand, saying, ‘This one came out first. Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly, and she said, ‘How did you break through? *This breach be upon you!*’ Therefore his name was called Perez” (38:28-29). As Tamar was giving birth, the midwife put a scarlet thread around the hand of the first one out of the womb as an identification tag, but instead of coming completely out of the womb, that son drew back his hand and the other son came out first. When the second son came out first, the midwife exclaimed, “How did you break through?” She also told him the breach was upon him; therefore, his name was Perez, a Hebrew word which means “breach.” “Perez (meaning a breach or one who breaks through) was the first of the twins born (vv. 27-30). He became the ancestor of David and Messiah (Ruth 4:18-22; Matt. 1:3, 16)” (Constable).

The Second Born “Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand. And his name was called Zerah” (38:30). After the birth of the firstborn, the second son, the one with the scarlet thread around his hand, was born. His name was Zerch, a Hebrew word that means “rising.”

“A key to this story is the remarkable similarity between the births of Perez and Zerah and of Jacob and Esau. Both births involve twins; in both, the younger thrusts ahead of the elder and displaces him; and in both, the one who is naturally expected to get the birthright but loses it, is associated with red: red stew in the case of Esau and a red string in the case of Zerah” (Waltke, cited by Constable).

Summary: God faithfully fulfills His promise despite the sins of His servants.

This chapter is filled with sin, unbelievable sins such as incest. “This chapter records the compromise of the Israelites, specifically Judah, with the Canaanites, Shua, and Tamar, which resulted in the confusion of seed, the chosen with the condemned. This is the first time one of the chosen seeds selected a wife outside the preferred families of the patriarchs. Like Esau, Judah chose a wife from the women of the land, even one of the cursed Canaanites (cf. 24:3-4; 27:46-28:2). It is perhaps the basis for the prohibition against mixing various kinds of seed, yoking two different kinds of animals together, weaving two kinds of thread into cloth, etc., in the Mosaic Law” (Carmichael, cited by Constable).

This chapter is an illustration of the unbelievable faithfulness of God. “Just as in chapter 20 where the seed of Abraham was protected by the ‘righteous’ (*saddiq*, 20:4; NIV, ‘innocent’) Abimelech (cf. also 26:9-11), it is the woman Tamar, not Judah, the patriarch, who is ultimately responsible for the survival of the descendants of the house of Judah” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable). “He [Judah] and his brothers sold their younger brother into Egypt, thinking they could thwart God’s design that the elder brothers would serve the younger Joseph. Yet in Judah’s own family, despite his attempts to hinder Tamar’s marriage, God’s will worked out in a poignant confirmation of the principle that the elder would serve the younger” (Ross, “Genesis”).

This chapter is another indication of the unbelievable grace of God. Tamar was the mother of the messianic line from Judah (Morris; Ruth 4:5, 21-22). She is named in the genealogy of Jesus (Mt. 1:3). The women who are named in the genealogy of Jesus are: Tamar, who poses as a prostitute to become pregnant by Judah, Rahab, who was a harlot by profession until she married Salmon after the Israelites captured Jericho, Ruth who persuaded Boaz to marry her by the questionable device of spending the night with him as he slept intoxicated on the threshing floor, and Beersheba who became the wife of King David by first committing adultery with him (Morris). Rahab, who in her early life was probably the most irreligious and carnal of them all, is included in the heroes of faith (Heb. 11:31; Morris). These women illustrate that God forgives sin and gives people a new life.

WHEN YOU HONOR THE LORD

What happens when believers decide they will honor the Lord in all they do—at home and work? Does that prevent problems, or does that produce problems? Joseph was a man who made up his mind that he was going to honor the Lord in his life (39:9). What happened to him? For one thing, “After the Judah-Tamar incident, chapter 39 provides the second story of a patriarch’s temptation by a married woman.” Neither of the seductresses was an Israelite (Constable). There is more, much more, to the story.

Joseph’s Promotion (He was Trusted)

Joseph’s Success “Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there” (39:1). Reviewing the events recorded in chapter 37, Moses mentions that Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh and captain of his guard, had bought Joseph and took him to his house in Egypt.

“The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian” (39:2). The phrase “the Lord was with Joseph” occurs four times in this chapter (39:2, 3, 21, 23) and explains the reason for his success. The divine name ‘Lord’ appears seven times in this chapter (39:2, 3 [twice], 5 [twice], 21, 23) and only one other time in Jacob’s history (37:2-50:26), that is, in Genesis 49:18. The Lord had previously promised to be with Isaac and Jacob (26:3, 24, 28; 28:15, 20; 31:3). So even though this son of Jacob was far from home and in the house of an Egyptian, the covenant-keeping God of the patriarchs was with him (Constable). Joseph stayed in Potiphar’s house, not the servant’s quarters (Leupold).

Joseph’s Promotion “And his master saw that the LORD *was* with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand” (39:3). Potiphar realized that Joseph’s success was more than human ingenuity (Leupold). No doubt, Joseph acknowledged the Lord so that Potiphar knew that the Lord made Joseph prosperous.

“So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority” (39:4). As a result of the blessing of God on his life, which was the reason for his success, Potiphar took note and promoted Joseph to the position of manager over all that he had. Given Potiphar’s official position as “captain of the guard” (39:1), his estate must have been considerable. Thus, Joseph’s position was significant. He rose as high as he could in that situation. “He proved faithful in a little and, therefore, the Lord placed him in charge of much (cf. Luke 16:10)” (Constable).

Joseph’s Blessing “So it was, from the time *that* he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field” (39:5). After the promotion of Joseph, the Lord blessed Potiphar’s house because of Joseph, including blessing Potiphar’s house and field. This is an illustration of the promise that whoever blesses the seed of Abraham will be blessed (12:1-3; Ross).

“Thus he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance” (39:6). Joseph honored the Lord and the Lord honored Joseph with promotion and blessing. Joseph was so in charge of all

of Potiphar's affairs that Potiphar did not know what was going on except for what he ate for dinner. He was only interested in what he ate (Leupold). Potiphar did not have to be concerned about anything he had, including his wife. Joseph was the faithful servant par excellence (Ross). "Potiphar evidently came to trust Joseph so implicitly that he no longer even bothered to check up on his own business" (Morris).

It should also be noted that Joseph was a handsome man in form and appearance. "Joseph had a fine physique and a handsome face, features that he seems to have inherited from his mother Rachel (cf. 29:17)" (Constable). He was "well-built and good-looking" (Leupold, who points out that only two other men of the Scripture were said to be beautiful, David and Absalom). "The description reminds the reader of the appearance of Sarai and Rebekah (12:11 and 26:7) that made them susceptible to the sexual advances of potentates, and Egyptian in the case of Sarai and then Abimelech, a Philistine" (Ross).

Joseph's Principles (He was Tempted)

Joseph's Temptation "And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, 'Lie with me'" (39:7). At this point, Joseph was evidently in his mid-20s (Constable). He was young and "handsome in form and feature" (Keil). Potiphar's wife looked at Joseph with a lustful eye and invited him to lie with her, a euphemism for sexual intercourse (Leupold). Egyptian women were noted for their unfaithfulness (Keil, cited by Leupold).

"But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (39:8-9). Joseph was in a "no-win" situation. "As a slave, he had to obey her, but as a trustworthy and moral servant of Potiphar, he had to refuse her" (Constable). He had to make a choice and he did. He refused her invitation, explaining because Potiphar had trusted him with everything he had except his wife, he could not betray that confidence and decided he could not sin against God. "Joseph regarded obedience to God as his primary responsibility (v. 9) and, therefore, chose as he did (cf. Ps. 51:4)" (Constable).

"So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her *or* to be with her" (39:10). Potiphar's wife's invitation was not a one-time event. Day after day after day, she hounded him to lie with her or be with her. "She was as persistent in her solicitations as he in his steadfastness" (Leupold).

"Note that Potiphar's wife's invitation was for Joseph to lie 'beside' [Heb. *'esel*; (NASB; ESV)] her (v. 10; cf. vv. 15, 16, 18; 41:3), not to lie 'with' her, the more common phrase that describes sexual intercourse (cf. 34:7; 39:14). Evidently, she invited his physical familiarity, which she hoped would lead to intercourse. Joseph, realizing where this first step might lead, wisely set a boundary for himself and refused even to be alone with her (v. 10)" (Constable, who cites Mathews). Joseph avoided her altogether (Morris).

Joseph's Choice "But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house *was* inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside" (39:11-12). After repeated refusals on Joseph's part, Potiphar's wife got more aggressive. So when they were alone in the house with no one else around, she grabbed his garment, insisting that he lie with her. Joseph slipped out of his garment, leaving it in her hand and ran out of the house. "The typical male

clothing in patriarchal times consisted of mid-calf-length shorts and a tunic that resembled a long T-shirt (cf. 3:21; 37:3)” (Wenham, cited by Constable). See Proverbs 7:6-27.

“Joseph simply refused. There was no debating, no flirtatious conversation. He refused to lie with her or be with her” (Ross). “Success in temptation depends more on character than on circumstances. Character rests on a commitment to the will of God. We can see Joseph’s character in his loyalty to Potiphar concerning what his master had entrusted to his care (v. 9). We also see it in his responsibility to God for what belonged to someone else (v. 9). It is further obvious in his responsibility to God, respecting his special personal calling (37:5-9; 45:5-9). Additionally, we see his responsibility to God concerning his sacred vocation as a member of the house of Israel” (Constable).

Just because you decide to honor the Lord does not mean you will prevent all life’s problems. You will be tempted. When that happens, do what Joseph did. He refused the temptation and he refused to make provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14).

Joseph’s Punishment (He was Tested)

The Wife’s Lies “And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, ‘See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside” (39:13-15). “The passionate desire of Potiphar’s wife suddenly turned into the rage of a woman scorned” (Morris). As the saying goes, “Hell has no fury like the women scorned.” With Joseph’s garment in her hand, she summoned the men in the house and told them that the Hebrew her husband had brought to the house came to mock them (Hebrew: “to laugh, mock, play”) and he had tried to lie with her. Leupold says that the expression “mock us” (“to make sport of”) implies attempted rape and that she included all the other females in the household as potential objects of rape (“us”). Ross agrees: Potiphar’s wife is saying it was as if Joseph had attempted to rape her, holding her in contempt and not taking her seriously. Also, note that she blamed her husband (Morris).

At any rate, as she tells the story, when she resisted with a loud voice, he fled, leaving his garment with her. “It is not reported that the men of Potiphar’s household made any response when his wife explained to them how she came into possession of Joseph’s coat. They may not have been unduly impressed by her protestations of innocence” (Leupold).

“So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, ‘The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside” (39:16-18). She lied to the men of the house, and when her husband came home, she told him the same lying story. “In effect, she seemed to place the blame on Potiphar for giving a foreign slave such authority and freedom around the house that he would try to take advantage of his own fateful and long-suffering wife!” (Morris).

The Husband’s Anger “So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, ‘Your servant did to me after this manner,’ that his anger was aroused” (39:19). Naturally when Potiphar heard the story, he was angry.

Joseph’s Punishment “Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison” (39:20). Potiphar put Joseph in prison, a relatively light punishment in light of the charge against him (Leupold). The

most severe punishment for adultery was capital punishment (Morris). Joseph's integrity had obviously impressed Potiphar, but he may also have had questions about his wife's chastity (cf. Ps. 105:18)" (Constable). Although Genesis does not explicitly say so, "one gets the impression" that this was not her first such experience (Morris).

It is important to note that Joseph was put into the king's prison, reserved for political rather than criminal prisoners (Morris). That becomes an important issue later in the story of Joseph. In the meantime, Joseph is suffering for righteousness' sake (Leupold). "Joseph did the right thing even though he suffered for it" (Ross).

This was not "a comfortable, country-club type of prison. The king's political prisoners were not normally favored, but, if anything, were treated more severely than others" (Morris). The psalmist says, "He sent a man before them—Joseph—who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of the LORD tested him" (Ps. 105:17-19).

The Lord's Blessing "But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (39:21). Once in prison, the Lord was with Joseph, showed mercy toward him, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

"And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing" (39:22). As a result, the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners.

"The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper" (39:23). The keeper of the prison did not interfere with Joseph's work because the Lord was with him, blessing him so that whatever he did prospered. "Because God was still with Joseph (vv. 21, 23), and because his character had not changed, Joseph experienced the same kind of favor at the hand of the chief jailer that he had from Potiphar. The Lord honored Joseph as one who had honored Him (1 Sam. 2:30). It is easier to depart from God's will when we are alone and when there is not much hope for the immediate future" (Constable). If you honor the Lord, you may suffer for rightness' sake, but the Lord will also bless you (Mt. 5:10-12).

Summary: Because Joseph honored the Lord, the Lord was with him in his job (39:2), in his temptation (39:9), and prison (39:21). If you honor the Lord, He will honor you.

In the context of the book, "This story about Joseph reverses a well-known plot in the patriarchal narratives. Whereas before it was the beautiful wife ... of the patriarch who the foreign ruler sought, now it was Joseph, the handsome patriarch ... Himself who was sought by the wife of the foreign ruler. Whereas in the earlier narratives, it was either the Lord (12:17; 20:3) or the moral purity of the foreign ruler (26:10) that rescued the wife rather than the patriarch, here it was Joseph's own moral courage that saved the day.... Whereas in the preceding narratives, the focus of the writer had been on God's faithfulness in fulfilling His covenant promises, in the story of Joseph, his attention is turned to the human response. The Joseph narratives are intended then to balance the narratives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Together, the two sections show God's faithfulness in spite of human failure and the necessity of an obedient and faithful response" (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

"Each scene in the record of Joseph's life reveals some distinctive trait of character elicited by means of a crisis" (Thomas, cited by Constable). "Joseph experienced God's blessing as he served faithfully in Potiphar's house. His master's wife repeatedly seduced him, but he refused her offers because he did not want to sin against God and betray Potiphar's trust. Joseph continued to enjoy

God's abundant blessing even when imprisoned because of her false charge" (Constable). A similar Egyptian story has been discovered. It is the tale of two brothers, one of whom the other's wife solicits, but he refuses her advances (Leupold).

"Yokes borne in youth have at least three results; they prove personal integrity, promote spiritual maturity, and prepare for fuller opportunity. In nature and in human life, the best things are not the easiest but the hardest to obtain.... How nobly Joseph comported himself amidst all these trials and hardships! He might have sulked and become embittered, but instead of this, his spirit was unconquerable by reason of its trust in God. He steadfastly refused to be unfaithful to his God, whatever might be the consequences. In duty, he was loyal, in temptation, he was strong, and in prison, he was faithful. When this spirit actuates our life, difficulties become a means of grace and stepping-stones to higher things. On the other hand, if difficulties are met in a fretful, murmuring, complaining, disheartened spirit, not only do we lose the blessings that would otherwise come through them, but our spiritual life suffers untold injury, and we are weakened for the next encounter of temptation whenever it comes. There is scarcely anything in the Christian life which reveals more thoroughly what our Christianity is worth than the way we meet difficulties by the use of the grace of God" (Thomas, cited by Constable).

Charles Evans Hughes was Secretary of State under Harding and Coolidge. While attending a Pan-American conference, he told the interpreter to give him a summarized translation of whatever was spoken in Spanish and Portuguese. He emphasized, "While a running translation is ample for my purpose, I want you to give me every word after the speaker says 'but.' He explained, "What follows "but" is most important. That is true in this passage. Verse 21 begins with "but." It says, "But the LORD was with Joseph.

THE DUNGEON OF DISCOURAGEMENT

What do you do when you experience one discouragement after another? You get a car, but it's not exactly the car you wanted. After you get it, it starts having trouble. Or worse yet, you didn't get the anticipated raise. Then you got demoted and then you got laid off. That's what happened to Joseph. He was sold into slavery by his own brothers. Then he was cast into prison because his boss's wife said he tried to rape her when he had not. Joseph ends up in a dungeon, which surely must have been discouraging. The way he handled it is recorded in Genesis 40.

The Prisoners

The Offence "It came to pass after these things *that* the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt" (40:1). The Hebrew word translated "butler" means "butler, cup-bearer." The cupbearer was responsible for the king's drink. He was responsible for seeing that all the drinks served to the king were safe and of the best quality (Morris). Nehemiah was a cupbearer (Neh. 1:11). The baker was responsible for the king's food. Both the cupbearer and the baker did something that offended the king. Leupold says the word "offended" implies guilt, "they sinned" (see 41:9, where the word sin is used; also Morris). Perhaps someone had tried to poison the king and he could not immediately determine which of the two men was responsible (Constable).

The Outcome "And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker" (40:2). Whatever the cupbearer and the baker did infuriated the king, here called Pharaoh.

"So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph *was* confined" (40:3). The king was so angry he had them thrown in prison. They were in the custody of "the captain of the guard," who was none other than Potiphar (39:1). Apparently, the prison was in some way connected to Potiphar's house (Leupold). "The place of confinement was the state prison: a round, wall-enclosed building probably attached to Potiphar's house, as was customary in Egypt" (Constable).

It just happened to be the same prison where Joseph was confined. The Hebrew word translated "confined" means "to tie, bind, imprison." Joseph was kept in bonds (Ps. 105:18-19) until he was freed from his fetters to serve in the jail (Ross).

The Oversight "And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while" (40:4). Potiphar put Joseph in charge of the two prisoners. The Hebrew word translated "served" was used for a higher form of service, not the menial task of a slave (Leupold). The Hebrew word translated "for a while" means "day, time, year." Although it can mean "days," here it probably signifies "quite a while" (Leupold). The outcome of whatever offense they committed was the indignation of the king, incarceration, and an introduction to Joseph.

The Dreams

The Dreams "Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who *were* confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night *and* each man's dream with its

own interpretation” (40:5). While in prison, the cupbearer and the baker each had a dream, but they did not have the same dream. Dreams may be divine, influenced by the devil, or result of poor digestion. In this case, the Lord was involved (40:8; Leupold). “The dreams of the cupbearer and baker were revelations from God” (Constable).

The Question “And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they *were* sad. So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who *were* with him in the custody of his lord’s house, saying, ‘Why do you look *so* sad today?’” (40:6-7). The next morning, the minute Joseph saw them, it was obvious to him that they were sad. So, naturally, he asked them why they were sad. Joseph’s attentiveness indicates his kindness (Leupold).

The Answer “And they said to him, ‘We each have had a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it” (40:8a). The prisoners explained that they were sad because each of them had had a dream, but neither of them understood what their dream meant.

The Response “So Joseph said to them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *them* to me, please” (40:8b). He meant, of course, the true God (Leupold). “Realizing that God had given him the ability to interpret their divine revelations, Joseph invited the two prisoners to relate their dreams to him. He was careful, however, to give God the glory for his interpretative gift (v. 8; cf. 41:16, 25, 28, 39)” (Constable).

In the Bible, dreams are one of the ways God communicates to people. Freud felt that dreams were a reflection of the subconscious desires and frustrations of the dreamer’s experience. “From a scientific point of view, dreams are to a large degree still not understood, either as to cause or significance” (Morris).

The Butler’s Dream

The Dream “Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, ‘Behold, in my dream a vine *was* before me, and in the vine *were* three branches; it *was* as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. Then Pharaoh’s cup *was* in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand” (40:9-11). The cupbearer’s dream was of a three-branch vine that produced grapes. In the dream, the cupbearer had the Pharaoh’s cup in his hand and when he pressed the grapes in the cup, he gave the cup to Pharaoh.

The Interpretation “And Joseph said to him, ‘This *is* the interpretation of it: The three branches *are* three days. Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler” (40:12-13). The expression “to lift up the head” signifies a restoration to favor (Ross).

The Request “But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house” (40:14). After giving the cupbearer the interpretation of his dream, Joseph requested that when the cupbearer is restored to his position before the Pharaoh, he tell Pharaoh Joseph’s story so that he would get out of his confinement. Joseph is simply requesting that his case be brought to the attention of the Pharaoh.

“For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon” (40:15). Joseph explains (“for”) his situation. “Joseph has done no wrong; wrong was done to him” (Leupold). Perhaps Joseph made this request of the cupbearer because, as the remainder of the story reveals, the cupbearer was innocent and would understand Joseph’s case.

The Baker's Dream

The Dream “When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, ‘I also *was* in my dream, and there *were* three white baskets on my head. In the uppermost basket *were* all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head” (40:16-17). Seeing Joseph’s interpretation of the cupbearer’s dream was good for the dreamer, the chief baker gave Joseph his dream, expecting the same result.

The Interpretation “So Joseph answered and said, ‘This *is* the interpretation of it: The three baskets *are* three days. Within three days, Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you” (40:18-19). Leupold thinks that the lifting of the baker’s head is a reference to beheading, which was a common form of capital punishment in Egypt. Ross, however, says the expression probably does not mean beheading; rather, Pharaoh would hang him. “The baker would not simply suffer execution, but his corpse would then be impaled and publicly exposed” (Constable). Josephus called this ‘crucifixion,’ impaling being an early form of crucifixion (Josephus, *Antiquities* 2:5:3 and 4).

The Fulfillment

Their Release “Now it came to pass on the third day, *which was* Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants” (40:20). The meaning of “lifted up their head” is explained in the next two verses. At this point, they were released from prison.

The Butler “Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand” (40:21). Pharaoh restored the cupbearer to his former service.

The Baker “But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them” (40:22). As Joseph had interpreted the dream, Pharaoh had the baker hung.

The Broken Promise “Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him” (40:23). Joseph had requested of the cupbearer that once he was restored, he would remind the Pharaoh of Joseph’s case, but the cupbearer forgot all about Joseph. Leupold thinks this was not an accidental forgetting. The cupbearer either put off talking to the Pharaoh for a more convenient season or he was not a man of his word. At any rate, this was a case of culpable forgetting.

At this point, Joseph surely must have been discouraged. He was already in prison because of something he did not do and now his one hope evaporates.

Summary: When Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker were put in prison, where they had disturbing dreams, Joseph interpreted the dreams to mean that the cupbearer would be restored and the baker would be executed, but his request that the cupbearer remember him before Pharaoh did not come to pass because the cupbearer forgot him.

When you’re in the dungeon of discouragement, be faithful in using your gifts and opportunities to serve the Lord. “God tests his people’s faith in the promises before He entrusts them to positions of greater responsibility. Those who are convinced that God desires to use them in greater capacities will demonstrate their unwavering faith in the midst of discouraging situations” (Ross). “Those who faithfully use the abilities that God has given them, even in discouraging circumstances, demonstrate unwavering faith in God’s promises to them” (Constable).

Be patient when you're in the dungeon of discouragement; you never know what God is doing. "The significance of this chapter lies in Joseph's God-given ability to interpret dreams. This gift and Joseph's use of it on this occasion prepared the way for Pharaoh calling for Joseph to interpret his dreams two years later and exalting him in the government (ch. 41)" (Constable).

"Young people often feel that they should be promoted to leadership positions in the Lord's work, especially those who feel they have spiritual gifts as evangelists or teachers, almost as soon as they become witnessing Christians and begin to acquire a rudimentary knowledge of the Bible. They tend to become impatient with what they regard as irrelevant attitudes and programs of their churches and Christian training institutions. They would rather develop new methods of their own and get immediately into the active ministry (supported financially, of course, by those same outdated churches and Christians whose methods they regard as anachronistic" (Morris; see Morris, pp. 567-568 for more material along this line).

"Trials may be viewed from two standpoints, and it will make all the difference to our spiritual life and peace which of these two points of view we take. From the human side, Joseph's suffering was due to injustice on the part of Potiphar and ingratitude on the part of the butler. From the Divine side, these years were permitted for the purpose of training and preparing Joseph for the great work that lay before him. If we look only at the human side of the trial, we shall become discouraged, and it [*sic*] may be irritated and angered, but as we turn to look at it from the divine side, we shall see God in everything and all things working together for our good" (Thomas, cited by Constable).

ALL BECAUSE OF A DREAM

It is not unusual for us to experience what we think at the moment is a minor matter, only to discover that it turns out to be a major event in our lives. For example, a fellow happens to meet a girl. Neither of them thinks much of it, but later, they get married. Similar things have happened with people getting jobs, etc.

What might strike some as unusual is that God uses those kinds of events to accomplish His will in the world. Theologians call that providence. How does providence work? Genesis 41 is an illustration of the providence of God. It is the incredible story of a man who goes from prisoner to Prime Minister overnight!

The Problem with Two Dreams

The First Dream “Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river” (41:1). Joseph had been in prison for two full years when Pharaoh had a God-given dream (41:25). This Pharaoh was Sesostrius III (Constable on 45:16). In the dream, Pharaoh was standing by the river, which is probably the Nile (Leupold). “The dreams were communication to Pharaoh from the true God, concerning what he was about to do in the earth” (Ross).

“Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow” (41:2). Ross says the Egyptian context of this dream indicates the cows stood half-submerged in the Nile in refuge from the heat and the flies and then came up out of the water for pasture.

“Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the *other* cows on the bank of the river” (41:3). Then, as the seven good-looking cows were grazing in the meadow, seven ugly and gaunt cows came out of the river and stood by them on the bank of the river. The Hebrew word translated “gaunt” means “thin, small, gaunt.” So there are seven fat cows and seven thin cows.

“And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke” (41:4). In an unusual turn of events, the ugly, thin cows ate the seven fine-looking, fat cows. The thin cows eat the fat cows! These thin cows were carnivorous cows. At that point, Pharaoh awoke from sleep.

The Second Dream “He slept and dreamed a second time; and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good” (41:5). Instead of getting out of bed, Pharaoh fell asleep again and, for a second time, had a dream. In this second dream, seven heads of plump, good grain came up on one stalk. The Hebrew word translated “plump” means “fat.” It is the same Hebrew word translated “fat” in verse 2. Seven ears on a stalk were not uncommon (Leupold).

“Then behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them” (41:6). Since the text does not say that these ears were upon a single stalk, the implication is that each grew on its own stalk (Leupold).

“And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads. So Pharaoh awoke, and indeed, *it was* a dream” (41:7). Then the thin heads devoured the seven fat and full heads. This time, Pharaoh woke up, realizing he had been dreaming.

The Magicians “Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but *there was* no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh” (41:8). When Pharaoh woke up, he was troubled (Hebrew: disturbed) because he did not understand the meaning of his dreams. So he called all the magicians and the wise men and told them his dreams, but none could interpret them.

The Hebrew word translated “magicians” means “diviner, magician, astrologer.” They were “men of the priestly caste, who occupied themselves with the sacred arts and sciences of the Egyptians, the hieroglyphic writings, astrology, the interpretation of dreams, the foretelling of events, magic, and conjuring, and who were regarded as the possessors of secret arts” (Keil). God withheld the Egyptian diviners from comprehending the meaning of Pharaoh’s dreams even though the clue to their interpretation lay in the religious symbols of Egypt” (Constable). “For the cow was the symbol of Isis, the goddess of the all-sustaining earth, and in the hieroglyphics, it represents the earth, agriculture, and food; and the Nile, by its overflowing, was the source of fertility of the land” (Keil). On the other hand, “these symbols had multiple meanings to the Egyptians, which probably accounts for the difficulty of interpretation” (Wenham, cited by Constable).

The basic message of both dreams seems to be that poverty will destroy plenty (Ross), but they did not understand the dream. Perhaps what threw them off was that in Egypt, at the time, a cow was the emblem of Isis, the revered Egyptian goddess of fertility (Morris). If that is the case, a preconceived idea prevented them from understanding a God-given dream. As magicians and wise men of Egypt could not understand the God-given dream to Pharaoh, so unbelievers today cannot understand the Word of God. Preconceived ideas are often what prevents them from understanding the message.

The Interpretation of the Dreams

The Cupbearer “Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying: ‘I remember my faults this day. When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, *both* me and the chief baker, we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his *own* dream” (41:9-11). The chief cupbearer remembered his faults (Hebrew: “sin”), Pharaoh’s anger, being put in prison along with the chief baker, and the two of them having a dream.

“Now *there was* a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his *own* dream. And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him” (41:12-13). The cupbearer explained that a Hebrew, who was a servant to the captain of the guard, interpreted their dreams and his interpretation came to pass, namely his restoration and the execution of the chief baker. God providentially works His will in the world.

The Conversation “Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh” (41:14). “The upmost of meticulous cleanliness was essential for those who were to be presented to the Pharaoh” (Leupold). The Hebrew word translated “quickly” means “to run, to bring or move quickly, hurry.” Joseph was brought to Pharaoh as quickly as possible.

“And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I have had a dream, and *there is* no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you *that* you can understand a dream, to interpret it” (41:15). Pharaoh

concisely “formulates the problem which led to this unceremoniously summons of Joseph” (Leupold).

“So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, ‘*It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace*’ (41:16). Joseph’s attitude is commendable. He does not take advantage of the situation to point out his superiority over all of Egypt’s magicians and wise men. He humbly acknowledges that it is not him but God who will interpret the dreams. “As far as Joseph was concerned, absolute truthfulness in guarding God’s honor was far more important than personal advantages” (Leupold).

The Explanation “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph: ‘Behold, in my dream I stood on the bank of the river. Suddenly seven cows came up out of the river, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. Then behold, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such ugliness as I have never seen in all the land of Egypt. And the gaunt and ugly cows ate up the first seven, the fat cows. When they had eaten them up, no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they *were* just as ugly as at the beginning. So I awoke’ (41:17-21). Leupold points out the slight differences in the two accounts: “The poor cows were merely ‘ugly and skinny; ‘now they are ‘thin, very ugly and poor looking.’” Pharaoh also adds the commentary that he had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt and that no one would have known that the ugly cows ate the good-looking cows.

“Also I saw in my dream, and suddenly seven heads came up on one stalk, full and good. Then behold, seven heads, withered, thin, *and* blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. And the thin heads devoured the seven good heads. So I told *this* to the magicians, but *there was* no one who could explain *it* to me” (41:22-24). Then Pharaoh revealed the details of the second dream and the fact that the magicians were not able to explain it to him. Again, the two accounts have only slight differences (Leupold).

The Interpretation “Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, ‘The dreams of Pharaoh *are* one; God has shown Pharaoh what He *is* about to do” (41:25). Joseph begins his interpretation by explaining that the two dreams have the same meaning and that God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do.

“The seven good cows *are* seven years, and the seven good heads *are* seven years; the dreams *are* one” (41:26). Joseph explains that the seven good cows and the seven good heads of grain represent seven years. In other words, both dreams are saying the same thing.

“And the seven thin and ugly cows which came up after them *are* seven years, and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine” (41:27). Joseph goes on to explain that the seven thin and ugly cows and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind represent seven years of famine.

“This *is* the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what He *is* about to do. Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt; but after them, seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will deplete the land. So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it *will be* very severe. And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing *is* established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass” (41:28-32). After explaining the details, Joseph informs Pharaoh that God is about to give all the land of Egypt seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine when the years of plenty will be forgotten and the famine will severely deplete the land (Leupold: “It shall be extremely grievous”). Joseph adds that the dream was given twice to firmly establish what God will shortly bring to pass.

The Advice “Now, therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do *this*, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-

fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine” (41:33-36). Based on the dream, Joseph gave Pharaoh “a comprehensive plan to meet this unusual emergency” (Leupold). He advises Pharaoh to place a discerning and wise man as the chief administrator over the entire land of Egypt. The new “Secretary of Agriculture” is to appoint officers over Egypt to collect one-fifth (a double tithe) of what is produced in Egypt over the next seven years. Under the authority of Pharaoh, all that food is to be kept in the cities as a reserve for the seven years of famine that would follow the seven years of planning. The result will be that the people of the land will not perish during the famine. This is a sound concept beyond this situation (Prov. 6:6-11).

The Result of the Dreams

His Promotion “So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is the Spirit of God?*’ (41:37-38). Not only Pharaoh but all of his servants thought that Joseph’s advice was a good idea. So Pharaoh told his servants to find a discerning and wise man in whom was the Spirit of God. “Pharaoh probably did not identify the ‘spirit’ in Joseph as the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. There is no evidence that Pharaoh understood or believed in the God of Israel, much less comprehended His Triunity. Most likely, he thought some deity had manifested himself or herself through Joseph” (Constable).

“Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, *there is* no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.’ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt’ (41:39-41). It occurred to Pharaoh that Joseph was the man for the job. After all, God had revealed the interpretation of the dream to him. Joseph was the discerning and wise man Pharaoh was seeking. Pharaoh told Joseph that since God had revealed the meaning of the dreams to him and there was no one in Egypt as discerning and wise as he was, he would be over Pharaoh’s house and rule over the entire land of Egypt. The only higher authority would be Pharaoh himself. So Pharaoh told Joseph that he was now over the entire land of Egypt. Leupold says his position was as influential as that of a Secretary of State.

“Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, ‘Bow the knee!’ So he set him over all the land of Egypt” (41:42-43). As Leupold explains, all of this has a “strictly Egyptian coloring.” The signet ring was used to make an impression in clay as a signature. It gave the possessor the authority to sign documents with the equivalent of royal authority. Robes made of fine Egyptian linen were considered the most eloquent. The gold chain seems to have been a general symbol of authority. The second chariot must have been sufficiently splendid to be recognized as second only to Pharaoh’s. Thus Joseph received all the outward trappings of authority.

“Pharaoh also said to Joseph, ‘*I am* Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt’ (41:44). As the supreme ruler of the land, Pharaoh told Joseph

in no uncertain terms that without his consent, no one in the entire land of Egypt was to lift the hand or a foot, obviously hyperbole. “He practically appoints Joseph dictator” (Leupold).

His Marriage “And Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over *all* the land of Egypt” (41:45). Joseph was not only given political power, he was given social standing. Pharaoh gave him an Egyptian name and an Egyptian wife of priestly extraction. “His Egyptian name means “treasury of the glorious rest” (BDB; Leupold: “abundance of life” or “the god speaks and he lives”). His wife was the daughter of a priest from the city of On. On was the well-known center of the worship of the sun god Ra (Leupold). It was ten miles northeast of modern Cairo” (Constable). “The high priest at On held the exalted title ‘Greatest of Seers.’ Joseph thus marries into the elite of Egyptian nobility” (Frankfort, cited by Constable).

“Joseph’s marriage to an Egyptian seems to have been Pharaoh’s order, and God permitted it. The patriarchs generally avoided marrying Canaanites because of God’s curse on Canaan (9:25), but marriage to non-Canaanite Gentiles was less serious. Joseph’s wife and in-laws did not turn him away from his faith in Yahweh or his high regard for God’s promises to his forefathers (cf. Moses)” (Constable). “Although Joseph married a pagan priest’s daughter, he trained his sons to worship the living God. Probably Asenath also became a worshiper of the Lord” (*The NKJV Study Bible*). Their children were given Hebrew names (Ross).

Joseph took “an initial tour of inspection. Only by securing first-hand information would Joseph be able to estimate rightly the problems involved in his gigantic task” (Leupold). “Only a man like Joseph, schooled by adversity in sorrow, could meet a sudden elevation like this without pride and self-exaltation. His rigorous training enabled him to encounter success without succumbing to its blandishments” (Leupold).

His Administration “Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt” (41:46). To stand before Pharaoh is an expression that means he entered into Pharaoh’s service (Leupold). Joseph was thirty years old. The fact this verse mentions that Joseph took a tour is not a duplication of the previous verse. The verb is different and the territory covered is greater. After the “first trip of exploration and investigation, there followed extensive journeys leaving no part of the land untouched” (Leupold).

“Now in the seven plentiful years, the ground brought forth abundantly” (41:47). Just as Joseph had interpreted the dreams, the next seven years were years of plenty. The land of Egypt produced a bumper crop.

“So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them” (41:48). Just as Joseph had advised, he gathered one-fifth of all the food that was produced in the land of Egypt during those seven years and stored it in the cities of Egypt.

“Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for *it was immeasurable*” (41:49). What Joseph gathered was enormous. It was as the sand of the sea, another obvious hyperbole. At any rate, he gathered so much, he stopped counting because it was immeasurable.

His Children “And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: ‘For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.’ And the name of the second he called Ephraim: ‘For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction’ (41:50-52). During the seven years of plenty, Joseph had two sons by his Egyptian wife

who was the daughter of an Egyptian priest. He named his firstborn Manasseh, a Hebrew word which means “causing to forget.” He gave his firstborn that name because God had made him forget the injustice done to him by his brothers and the toil and trouble he had experienced in Egypt. The sting had gone out of the remembrance (Leupold). He named his second son Ephraim, a Hebrew word which means “double ash-heap: I shall be doubly fruitful.” He gave his second-born that name because God had caused him to be fruitful in Egypt.

His Success “Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, ‘Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do’ (41:53-55). Just as Joseph had said in his interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams, after seven years of plenty, there were seven years of famine. The famine described here is not unique. It has happened in the United States! In his novel, *Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck describes the terrible dustbowl era in the United States. He describes the sun bearing down on corn in Oklahoma until it withered where it stood. The simple passing of a wagon would stir up dust as high as the fence tops. The winds were so strong, they picked up the topsoil and carried it away. The famine was extensive; it covered the entire land of Egypt, but when the people asked Pharaoh for bread, he sent them to Joseph and told them to do whatever he said, that is, completely comply with whatever plan he put into operation whole thing. (Leupold).

“The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt” (41:56). In the providence of God, two famines occurred simultaneously, one in Egypt due to the failure of the annual inundation of the Nile and the other throughout Syria due to the lack of rain (Leupold). It was severe in Egypt, but out of the large storehouses, Joseph was able to sell food to the Egyptians. Leupold thinks that the expression “over all the face of the earth” is probably hyperbole because the distance beyond Syria would forbid attempting to get grain from Egypt to Mesopotamia and beyond, but does not deny the possibility of a worldwide famine. He adds that an Egyptian famine that parallels Joseph’s famine occurred in 1071-1064 AD.

“So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy *grain*, because the famine was severe in all lands” (41:57). As the famine extended beyond Egypt into all the lands and since Egypt was the only one that had stored grain, people from other places came to Egypt to buy food.

Summary: The Lord providentially used the interpretation of a dream to put Joseph second in command in Egypt, to give him two sons, and to make him the successful administrator of an international food program.

The doctrine of providence says that God works “behind the scenes.” He hides Himself from view, but He works things out to take care of His own. It is God using natural means to accomplish His will. In the providence of God, He trains His children and places them in a position of influence and service. Ross says the point of the passage is that God controls the fortunes of nations to protect and provide for His covenant people.

God used seemingly ordinary things to work out His will. What is more natural than a dream? As Phillips has pointed out, “Miraculous displays of power are used very sparingly by God in His dealings with man. There are only four biblical periods when such miracles are prominent. They are the *emancipating* miracles that in the days of Moses smashed Egypt’s power and led to the liberation of the enslaved Hebrew people and that in the days of Joshua facilitated the conquest of Canaan. There the *educational* miracles that in the days of Elijah and Elisha were intended to recall

an apostate nation back to God and set the stage for the dawning of a complete prophetic era. There are the *evidential* miracles by which the Lord Jesus sustained His claim to be the Son of God and by which the early church attested the message to a reluctant Jewish world. There are the *eschatological* miracles of the apocalypse, those mighty miracles by which Satan will popularize the beast and the counter miracles of the two witnesses by which God will expose Satan's Messiah as false. Apart from those, there are hardly any other miracles in the Bible at all. God usually brings His purposes to past by such normal and natural means that only the eye of faith see that He is at work at all. It was in that way God prepared for the coming of Joseph" (Phillips, italics his).

Our job is to be faithful to exercise our spiritual gift and trust the Lord for the results. There is no telling what God will do. Joseph exercised his spiritual gift in prison and ended up Prime Minister. When I began my ministry of itinerant evangelism, I "happened" to meet a man in a lunch line. He was a pastor who invited me to preach in his church. As a result of that "chance" encounter, I ended up being the keynote speaker in a regional denominational meeting that opened numerous doors for me. Looking back, it was evident that in the providence of God, I met a pastor in the lunch line.

William Cowper was a frail man who was a bundle of nerves. He constantly suffered from swollen eyes due to chronic inflammation. He attempted suicide. He spent time in an asylum where, in those days, contempt and cruelty were the order of the day. Yet, throughout his long ordeal, he became one of England's literary geniuses. It was William Cowper who wrote:

God moves in mysterious ways,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm

Deep in the unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs
And works His sovereign will

HOW TO HANDLE A GROSS INJUSTICE

We have all experienced injustice. Have you ever experienced a gross injustice? When One of the definitions of “gross” is “flagrant and extreme.” The example that was given for that definition was “gross injustice.” The question is, how do you handle a gross injustice? Let me tell you the story of a man who experienced a gross injustice and how he handled it. The man was Joseph and his “gross injustice” was being sold into slavery. The way he handled it is recorded in Genesis 42.

The Commission

The Command “When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, ‘Why do you look at one another?’ And he said, ‘Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die’ (42:1-2). The severe famine described in Genesis 41 affected Jacob, his sons, and their families, who were, at the time, dwelling in the land of Canaan. News reached them that food was available in Egypt, but instead of talking about the possibility of going to Egypt to get food, Jacob’s sons just looked at each other, perhaps because they remembered the fate of Joseph (Leupold; Morris) or because each was waiting to see what the others were thinking (Morris). Realizing the perilousness of their plight and the paralysis of his sons, Jacob prodded his sons by asking them why they just looked at each other instead of doing something. “These are words of a man frustrated with his sons inactivity” (Ross). He commanded them to go to Egypt to buy food unless they all die.

The Compliance “So Joseph’s ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt” (42:3). Complying with their father’s command, ten of Jacob’s sons went to Egypt. Instead of referring to the ten as Jacob’s sons, they are called Joseph’s brothers. Joseph had twelve sons. One of them, Joseph, was in Egypt. That means that eleven were with him in Canaan, but only ten went to buy grain in Egypt. Why only ten?

The Caution “But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, ‘Lest some calamity befall him’ (42:4). Benjamin had replaced Joseph in Jacob’s affection (Constable). He did not want to risk losing the other son of Rachel (Ross).

“And the sons of Israel went to buy *grain* among those who journeyed, for the famine was in the land of Canaan” (42:5). So it was the ten of Jacob’s sons went to Egypt to buy food because of the famine in the land of Canaan.

The Confrontation:

Round One “Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down before him with *their* faces to the earth” (42:6). Joseph “personally managed the sale of grain in every detail with such care that he could well be said to have done all the selling himself” or “He superintended all selling and was at hand particularly to give personal attention to all extraordinary cases, especially those that had to do with the sale of grain to foreigners” (Leupold). Supervising the stores of grain was critical for the survival of Egypt. Under the cloak of purchasing food, foreigners might come for subversive purposes. Foreign kings wanted what Egypt had. So Joseph’s carefully screened all foreign

travelers to be sure of their purpose (Morris). So his brothers had to come before him. Not realizing who he was and out of respect for his office, they bowed before him (see 37:7, 9, where the same Hebrew word is used for bowing down).

“Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, ‘Where do you come from?’ And they said, ‘From the land of Canaan to buy food.’ So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him” (42:7-8). Joseph’s brothers did not recognize him at all, which is understandable since it had been twenty-one years after they had sold him into slavery (Constable). Furthermore, it would never have occurred to them that their brother would be the governor of Egypt (Leupold).

“To forestall all possibility of recognition, Joseph used a harsh mode of address. The ancients had noted that the Egyptians were inclined to view all foreigners with suspicion” (Leupold). The Hebrew word translated “roughly” means “hard, cruel, severe, obstinate.” This was not a pleasant conversation in word or tone. Joseph began by asking where they came from. This is the first of many questions he will ask them. There are dozens of questions in this exchange.

His brothers answered that they had come from the land of Canaan to buy food. To disarm suspicion, they gave Joseph more information than he asked for, giving him the purpose of their visit. “Surely, theirs was a harmless purpose. Dozens of such purchasers were appearing daily” (Leupold).

Round Two “Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, ‘You *are* spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!’” (42:9). The dreams Joseph had indicated that one day his brothers would bow before him. That day has arrived. “People who sell their brother into slavery are not trustworthy. Therefore, Joseph retained power over his brothers until he could trust them.... He played a role before them charging them with a crime punishable with death in Egypt. Such a serious accusation encouraged his brothers to be as honest as possible, which is what Joseph wanted” (Constable; see “honest” in verse 11).

“And they said to him, ‘No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. We *are* all one man’s sons; we *are* honest *men*; your servants are not spies” (42:10-11). The point of being the sons of one man is that no father would send all of his sons on the dangerous mission of being spies (Leupold; Constable).

Round Three “But he said to them, ‘No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land’” (42:12). Instead of accepting his brother’s explanation, Joseph holds to his original contention that they have come to spy out the land.

“And they said, ‘Your servants *are* twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and in fact, the youngest *is* with our father today, and one *is* no more” (42:13). In response to Joseph’s tenacious insistence that they had come to spy out the land, his brothers get even more explicit. They explain that their father and the land of Canaan had twelve sons, that the youngest is still with their father, and that one has died. That “one” was, of course, Joseph, the one to whom they are speaking.

Round Four “But Joseph said to them, ‘It *is* as I spoke to you, saying, ‘You *are* spies! In this *manner* you shall be tested: By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether *there is* any truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you *are* spies! So he put them all together in prison three days” (42:14-17). Joseph gives his brothers a dose of their own medicine. “As they had once refused to listen to a brother’s plea, so now their pleas must be rudely rejected” (Leupold). Joseph dogmatically insists that they are spies but gives them a test to prove their honesty. He will put nine of the ten in prison

and send one of them to Canaan to bring the youngest brother back. If the youngest brother shows up, they are telling the truth. If he does not, they are spies. Joseph probably wanted to make sure that his brothers had not killed Benjamin since they had contemplated killing him (Constable). Joseph felt that he had to test his brothers further. “Before he could really accept them and proceed to a reconciliation, he would have to know the truth about his younger brother” (Morris).

To demonstrate his seriousness, he swears by the life of the Pharaoh (see also 1 Sam. 17:55; 2 Sam. 11:11), which gives his words as distinctive and Egyptian cast as possible (Leupold) and puts them in prison for three days.

Round Five “Then Joseph said to them the third day, ‘Do this and live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the famine of your houses. And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die.’ And they did so” (42:18-20). They complied. What other choice did they have?

“Then they said to one another, ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us’ (42:21). Thinking that Joseph did not understand them because they were speaking in their language, not Egyptian (42:23), they confessed their guilt to one another for what they had done to their brother, concluding that the situation had come upon them because of their guilt. They viewed what was happening to them as “divine retribution” (Constable).

At the age of fifteen, Robert Garth hit an elderly man on the head to steal money for an athletic uniform. He didn’t intend to kill him, but the blow proved to be fatal. The police had no clues. Garth knew that it was very unlikely he would be caught, yet he was miserable. Finally, after fifteen years of mental anguish, he confessed to the police. He was tried, given a relatively light sentence, and sent to prison. There he trusted the Lord as his Savior. Some people said his sentence was too lenient. Robert’s reply was, “I’ve been incarcerated in a cell for six months. I’ve been incarcerated in my mind for fifteen years. There was no comparison. The mind was far worse” (*Our Daily Bread*, June 1, 1987).

“And Reuben answered them, saying, ‘Did I not speak to you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us’ (42:22). Ruben said, “I told you so, but you would not listen. Therefore, we are paying for our sins.”

“But they did not know that Joseph understood them, for he spoke to them through an interpreter” (42:23). Joseph’s brothers, of course, did not know that Joseph understood everything they were saying.

“And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes” (42:24). Joseph left their presence and wept. “Joseph’s heart had not become hard toward his brothers because of their treatment of him. He did not hate them.... Rather his heart remained tender, and his brothers’ confession moved him” (Constable). “There is nothing more striking in the character of Joseph than the utter absence of revengeful feeling, whether it was against his brothers, or against Potiphar, or against the chief butler” (Thomas, cited by Constable).

Joseph tested them though. After he composed himself and came back, he talked with them, took Simon from them, and bound him before their eyes. “Reuben as the eldest and most responsible son would have been the logical choice to retain as a hostage. Yet because Joseph had overheard that Reuben had talked his brothers out of killing Joseph (v. 22), Joseph passed him over and selected Simeon, who was the next oldest. Perhaps Joseph also remembered Simeon’s cruelty and callousness toward his father (34:25; cf. 49:5-7)” (Constable).

The Return

The Preparation “Then Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, to restore every man’s money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. Thus he did for them. So they loaded their donkeys with the grain and departed from there” (42:25-26). So, with donkeys loaded with grain, Joseph’s brothers departed from Egypt.

The Discovery “But as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the encampment, he saw his money; and there it was, in the mouth of his sack” (42:27). On the way back to Canaan, a distance of 250 miles or more taking three weeks (Morris), as they stop one night, one of them opened his sack to get some grain to feed his donkey. When he did, he discovered the money he had paid for the grain was in the sack! It was not buried deep in the grain. It lay on top of the grain so it would be seen as soon as the bag was open (“in the mouth of the sack”).

“So he said to his brothers, ‘My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!’ Then their hearts failed *them* and they were afraid, saying to one another, ‘What *is* this *that* God has done to us?’” (42:28). The Hebrew word translated “afraid” means “to tremble, quake, be afraid, be startled, be terrified.” They regarded this as divine punishment (Constable).

The Report “Then they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them, saying: ‘The man *who is* lord of the land spoke roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. But we said to him, ‘We *are* honest *men*; we are not spies. We *are* twelve brothers, sons of our father; one *is* no *more*, and the youngest *is* with our father this day in the land of Canaan.’ Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, ‘By this I will know that you *are* honest *men*: Leave one of your brothers *here* with me, take *food* for the famine of your households, and be gone.’ And bring your youngest brother to me; so I shall know that you *are* not spies, but *that you are* honest *men*. I will grant your brother to you, and you may trade in the land” (42:29-33). When Joseph’s brothers arrived back in Canaan, they told Jacob all that it happened. Apparently, they did not tell him they had spent three days in prison. “Joseph’s brothers soften the news considerably, making it sound like Simeon was a guest of Joseph ... instead of being bound in prison. They do not mention the threat of death and do not at this time speak of the money in the one sack” (*The Net Bible*, cited by Constable).

The Fear “Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man’s bundle of money *was* in his sack; and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid” (42:34-35). The Hebrew word translated “afraid” here is the normal word for “fear, be afraid;” it is not the one that appears in verse 28.

The Grief “And Jacob their father said to them, ‘You have bereaved me: Joseph is no *more*, Simeon is no *more*, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me” (42:36). Jacob immediately realized the potential consequences of the discovered money. He anticipated losing three sons: Joseph, Simeon, and Benjamin. He felt everything was against him, but all things were working together for good (Rom. 8:28). In the end, he not only received Benjamin back but Joseph as well.

The Proposal “Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, ‘Kill my two sons if I do not bring him *back* to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you” (42:37). At that point, Reuben makes a startling proposal. He proposes that he be allowed to take Benjamin back to Egypt and if he does not bring him back, may his two sons be killed. Luther says that he spoke without rhyme or reason (Luther, cited by Leupold). After all, how could the murder of grandchildren compensate for the loss of a son? (Leupold).

The Refusal “But he said, ‘My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave’” (42:38). Jacob categorically refuses to have Benjamin go to Egypt. He simply could not bear another loss. If Benjamin died, he would be steeped in great grief under the load of which he would die (Leupold). “The loss of Benjamin would be the death of him” (Ross).

Summary: When, because of the famine, Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt for food, without knowing it, they encountered Joseph, who kept Simon until they brought Benjamin back to prove that they were telling the truth and could be trusted, but Jacob refused to let Benjamin go to Egypt.

Joseph did not retaliate. He remained tender, but he tested them. What was Joseph’s motivation? Why did he withhold his identity, put his brothers in prison for three days, and insist that they bring Benjamin back out of revenge? There are indications in the story the Joseph was not vindictive. His weeping indicates that he had a tender heart toward them. He returned the money they paid for the grain. Even his insistence on bringing Benjamin back was not retaliation or retribution; it ultimately was an attempt at reconciliation. “He was more anxious for reconciliation with his brothers than for vengeance” (Morris).

Notice the character change in Genesis. Abram becomes Abraham; Jacob becomes Israel. Reuben, the violator of his father’s concubine, later shows great concern for both Joseph and his father. The cocky Joseph becomes the wise statesman who forgives his brothers.

The Lord used all the injustices done to Joseph to put him in a place where he could save the nation from starvation. In an article on this passage, M. R. DeHaan addressed those “bowed down with sorrow.” He wrote, “Believe that God has a good reason for permitting your testing and someday, maybe soon, we’ll understand” (*Our Daily Bread*, December 23, 1965).

You never know what comes after tragedy. Louis Pasteur made some of his greatest discoveries after a stroke threatened to cut his life short. John Milton wrote some of his best poetry when he was blind. Beethoven composed some of his most beautiful music after he was totally deaf. To those who love the Lord, all things work together for good.

ON THE WAY TO RECONCILIATION

When two people have been alienated, reconciliation can sometimes be an easy matter. On the other hand, the road back can be long and difficult, depending on the nature of the alienation. What are the things that have to happen for there to be complete reconciliation? The reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers illustrates some of the items that should be present for complete reconciliation to take place.

The Conversation

The Command “Now the famine was severe in the land” (43:1). After the brothers had returned from Egypt and Jacob had refused to let them go back with Benjamin, the famine became severe. The Hebrew word translated “severe” means “heavy, great, very oppressive.”

“And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, ‘Go back, buy us a little food’ (43:2). Without the ability to produce more food because of the famine, it was only a matter of time before they ran out of food. The food the brothers brought back from Egypt probably only lasted a few months at best (Leupold). Facing starvation, Joseph told his sons to go back to Egypt to buy “a little” food. He requested a little because Egypt was probably only selling limited quantities and, besides, it was only a little as compared to the enormity of the need (Leupold).

The Reminder “But Judah spoke to him, saying, ‘The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you’ (43:3). Judah reminded his father Jacob that the man in Egypt told them not to return unless they brought Benjamin with them. Judah took the lead because Simon was in Egypt, Reuben had forfeited his father’s confidence by incest (35:22), Levi had displayed bloodshed (34:25), and Jacob had already refused Reuben (42:37-38).

The Refusal “If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. But if you will not send him, we will not go down; for the man said to us, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you’ (43:4-5). In light of what “the man” in Egypt said, Judah told his father that they would go back to Egypt to buy food if they could take Benjamin with them and if he did not permit Benjamin to go with them, they would not go. Judah is speaking for all of the brothers (“we”).

The Reaction “And Israel said, ‘Why did you deal so wrongfully with me as to tell the man whether you had still another brother?’ (43:6). Jacob reacted to Judah’s refusal by saying, why did you treat me wrong by telling the man in Egypt that you had another brother. The Hebrew word translated “wrongly” means “to be bad, be evil” (NASB and ESV: “badly;” NIV “bring this trouble”).

The name “Israel” has not been used since Genesis 37:13. “It seems that, as long as Jacob seemed completely broken and defeated by virtue of Joseph’s apparent death, his own name, Jacob, is used (37:34; 42:1, 4, 29, 36). Now, for the first time, he begins to consider the possibility of allowing Benjamin to go; his faith is in the process of revival, so he is called Israel again” (Morris).

The Response “But they said, ‘The man asked us pointedly about ourselves and our family, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?’ And we told him according to these words. Could we possibly have known that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’” (43:7). In response, several brothers (“they”) explain that the man in Egypt, pointedly asked about the family,

including the status of their father and the existence of another brother. Genesis 42:13 seems to say they volunteered the information about the family, but Genesis 44:19 confirms the statement of this verse. Besides, how could they possibly have known that he would say bring the brother to Egypt? They had acted in ignorance (Ross).

The Request “Then Judah said to Israel his father, ‘Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you *and* also our little ones. I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him *back* to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. For if we had not lingered, surely by now we would have returned this second time” (43:8-10). At this point, Judah speaks up, requesting that he be allowed to take Benjamin with him when he returns to Egypt. Leupold translates Judah’s statement as “Let the lad go along with me.” He argued that by allowing Benjamin to go with him back to Egypt, neither them, he, nor their children would die from starvation. Moreover, Judah offers to be the surety for Benjamin and bear the responsibility of whatever happens to him. He adds that had they not lingered, they would have returned from Egypt by now. “From this point on, Judah becomes the leader of Jacob’s sons (cf. 49:8-10; Matt. 1:2, 17; Luke 3:23, 33)” (Constable).

The Resolution “And their father Israel said to them, ‘If *it must be* so, then do this: Take some of the best fruits of the land in your vessels and carry down a present for the man—a little balm and a little honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. Take double money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. Take your brother also, and arise, go back to the man. And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!’” (43:11-14). Realizing he had no choice (“if it must be so;” Ross), Jacob tells his sons to 1) as a present to the man in Egypt, take some of the best fruits of the land, as well as of little balm, honey, spices, pistachio nuts, and almonds, 2) double money (Leupold: “more money;” Morris: the “double money” was the original money plus new money to buy more food), 3) the money you found in the sacks, which he says was probably done as an oversight, and 4) take Benjamin.

Balm, myrrh, and spices of the same articles were mentioned in Genesis 37:25 as being carried into Egypt by the Midianites. “Apparently, the Egyptians considered these valuable imports. Pistachios, almonds, and honey (probably great honey) were not produced in Egypt (Morris).

Ten brothers were involved in two purchases of food in Egypt. That means there were twenty bundles of money involved. “It seems possible that the brothers themselves may have noted the ironical connection between the fact that they had sold their brother for twenty pieces of silver (Genesis 37:28) into Egypt and that now they had to pay into the treasury of Egypt not merely twenty pieces of money but twenty bundles of money” (Morris).

Jacob once sought to appease Esau’s wrath with gifts (32:13 ff.). Now, he orders that gifts be prepared for the man in Egypt. The purpose of these lavish gifts was to obtain mercy from the man in Egypt (Ross; see Prov. 18:16). Jacob adds the prayer that God Almighty may give them mercy before the man in Egypt so that he releases Simeon and Benjamin. The name he uses for God is the covenant God of Abraham and suggests the unlimited power of God (Leupold).

Jacob concludes that if his greatest fear should come to pass, namely that all of his sons were killed and he would be deeply grieved, that is the way it will have to be (Leupold: “If it so please God, so let it be;” Esther 4:16; 2 Kings 7:4). In these words, there is a resignation that he might have to live with bereavement (Ross). Although Jacob prayed for God’s mercy, he did not assume that God almighty would intervene. “Jacob has no guarantee El Shaddai will do anything” (Hamilton, cited by Constable). “Compare also Rebekah’s complaint when she thought she might

lose both Jacob and Esau (27:45)” (Constable). On the other hand, Morris says, “Israel’s faith seems to have become strong again and he spoke at this time with the same spirit as that of Job (Job 1:21). Having done everything that he could do, humanly speaking, now he simply had to trust the Lord to work things out according to His own goodwill.”

Judah succeeded where Ruben had failed (42:37-38).

The Return “So the men took that present and Benjamin, and they took double money in their hand, and arose and went down to Egypt; and they stood before Joseph” (43:15). As instructed, Joseph’s sons took the presents, Benjamin, and double money and returned to Egypt to see Joseph.

This passage demonstrates that Joseph’s brothers were realistic in assessing the situation in Egypt and responsible in their response to Jacob. From the man in Egypt’s point of view, they were demonstrating not only their responsibility but also their truthfulness and trustworthiness. By bringing Benjamin back, they would demonstrate that they came in truth and could be trusted. These elements, namely responsibility, truth, and trust, are necessary for a complete restoration of a relationship.

The Confession

The Feast “When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, ‘Take these men to my home, and slaughter an animal and make ready; for these men will dine with me at noon’ (43:16). The moment Joseph saw Benjamin, he was assured that they had not harmed him (Leupold). That was one of the major things he wanted to know. Satisfied that was the case, he ordered the steward of his house to take the men to his house and slaughter an animal for lunch.

“Then the man did as Joseph ordered, and the man brought the men into Joseph’s house” (43:17). The steward, of course, did as Joseph commanded. He brought Joseph’s brothers to Joseph’s house.

The Fear “Now the men were afraid because they were brought into Joseph’s house; and they said, ‘It is because of the money, which was returned in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may make a case against us and seize us, to take us as slaves with our donkeys’ (43:18). When Joseph’s brothers realized that they were being taken to Joseph’s house, they were afraid because they thought that the money that had been found in their sacks would be used as a case against them and, as punishment, they would become slaves.

The Fortrightness “When they drew near to the steward of Joseph’s house, they talked with him at the door of the house, and said, ‘O sir, we indeed came down the first time to buy food; but it happened, when we came to the encampment, that we opened our sacks, and there, each man’s money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; so we have brought it back in our hand. And we have brought down other money in our hands to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks’ (43:19-22). Instead of waiting for their worst fear to be realized, Joseph’s brothers were forthright with the steward “at the door of the house.” They humbly explained that when they had come the first time to buy food, on the way back, they discovered the money that they had paid for the food was in the sacks of food and that they were bringing that money back and had money to buy more food. They added they had no idea who put the money in their sacks.

“But he said, ‘Peace be with you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money.’ Then he brought Simeon out to them” (43:23). Evidently, the steward knew what had happened. So he told them not to be afraid, explaining that their God and the God of their father had blessed them with that money. He knew they had not stolen it. Then he brought Simeon to them.

The Preparation “So the man brought the men into Joseph’s house and gave *them* water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys feed” (43:24). The steward took Joseph’s brothers into Joseph’s house, gave them water to drink, washed their feet, and gave their donkeys food. They were treated as honored guests (Leupold).

“Then they made the present ready for Joseph’s coming at noon, for they heard that they would eat bread there” (43:25). Having been informed that Joseph was coming to have lunch at noon with them, they prepared presents they had for him. The Egyptians had their more substantial meal at noon; the Hebrews had theirs in the evening (Leupold).

Part of reconciliation is confession. In this case, they did not actually sin, but they were upfront and forthright about what had happened rather than it being revealed by someone else.

The Encounter

The Presents “And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which *was* in their hand into the house, and bowed down before him to the earth” (43:26). When Joseph came home for the noon meal, his brothers gave him the presents they had brought for him and bowed before him, which was the customary gesture of respect (Leupold). “Again, the brothers fulfilled God’s prophecy in Joseph’s dreams by bowing before Joseph (vv. 26-28; cf. 37:5-9)” (Constable).

The First Questions “Then he asked them about *their* well-being, and said, ‘*Is* your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? *Is* he still alive?’” (43:27). Joseph asked about their well-being and the status of their father. He particularly wanted to know if their father was alive.

The Answer “And they answered, ‘Your servant our father *is* in good health; he *is* still alive.’ And they bowed their heads down and prostrated themselves” (43:28). Referring to their father as Joseph’s servant, they informed Joseph that their father was alive and in good health and again bowed before him, an acknowledgment of the courtesy of his questions (Leupold).

The Second Question “Then he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother’s son, and said, ‘*Is* this your younger brother of whom you spoke to me?’ And he said, ‘God be gracious to you, my son’” (43:29). Next to his father, Joseph’s greatest concern was for his brother Benjamin, the one who was the son of the same mother he had, not like the other brothers who were half-brothers. So he asked them if the new person with them was the younger brother they had told him about on their first visit. When Joseph last saw his brother Benjamin, he was perhaps a-year-old and now he was twenty-two (Leupold; Constable says, however, “Benjamin was 16 years younger than Joseph, so he would have been 23 at this time [v. 29]. Joseph was 39 [41:46; 45:6].” When Joseph was assured that it was Benjamin, he said, “God be gracious to you.”

The Tears “Now his heart yearned for his brother; so Joseph made haste and sought *somewhere* to weep. And he went into *his* chamber and wept there” (43:30). The Hebrew word translated “yearned” means “to yearn, grow warm and tender.” Joseph’s tender heart toward his brothers brought him to the place of tears. “Having blessed Benjamin, Joseph could not refrain emotionally responding. The tender mercy for which Jacob prayed (43:14) came naturally from one who was moved by compassion for his brother” (Ross). Not wanting to cry in front of them, Joseph departed from the dining room, went to his room, and wept.

“Then he washed his face and came out; and he restrained himself, and said, ‘Serve the bread’” (43:31). Then he washed his face, returned to the dining hall, and restraining himself ordered the meal begin.

The Meal “So they set him a place by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that

is an abomination to the Egyptians” (43:32). Joseph and his brothers ate together, but they did not sit together. Since the Egyptians considered it an abomination for an Egyptian to eat with a foreigner, Joseph ate by himself, his Egyptian companions ate together, and his brothers ate together alone. “The caste system in Egypt required that Joseph, as a member of the upper class, eat at a table separate from his Egyptian companions. The Hebrews sat at a third table since they were foreigners” (Constable).

Constable explains some of the reasons for this separation. “The Hebrews and other foreigners ate animals the Egyptians regarded as sacred (Herodotus, *Histories*, 2:18, 41). The Egyptians also followed strict rules for the ceremonial cleansing of their food before they ate it. This made the Hebrews ‘loathsome’ to the Egyptians. The Egyptians also shaved off all their body hair (cf. 41:14), so the hairiness of the Hebrews may have been another reason for the Egyptians’ distaste (*NKJV Study Bible*). This segregation later allowed the Israelites to develop into numerous nations within the borders of Egypt (46:34).”

“And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked in astonishment at one another” (43:33). The Hebrew word translated “astonishment means “to be astounded, be stunned, be amazed, be dumbfounded.” The fact that they were arranged according to their birth order “impressed them with the idea that this great man had been supernaturally enlightened as to their family affairs” (Keil). “How can they think otherwise?” (Leupold). “There were no less than 39,917,000 different orders in which eleven individuals could have been seated! Thus, for the servants to select the *one* correct order by chance is almost impossible. The odds were 40 million to 1 against it” (Morris, italics his).

“Then he took servings to them from before him, but Benjamin’s serving was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him” (43:34). When Joseph’s brothers were served, Benjamin was given five times as much as any of the others, not to be eaten but to be regarded as an honorary distinction (Leupold). “Special honorees frequently received double portions, but a fivefold portion was the sign of highest privilege” (Constable).

This was a further test of Joseph’s brothers. “With this favor, Joseph sought not only to honor Benjamin but also to test his other brothers’ feelings toward Benjamin. He wanted to see if they would hate him as they had hated himself, his father’s former favorite” (Constable). Had his brothers had the same feelings against Benjamin as they had against Joseph, such preference would have stirred resentment they could not have hidden (Leupold; Ross). They passed the test. They were “merry” with him.

Summary: On the way to reconciliation, people need to be realistic, assume responsibility for their actions by demonstrating their trustworthiness, and have a tender rather than a hard heart.

The sum of this story is simple: “Upon returning to Canaan, the brothers had to persuade Jacob to let Benjamin accompany them on their next trip to Egypt, which they did with considerable difficulty. When they returned to Egypt and tried to return the money they had found in their sacks, Joseph received them graciously and dealt with them peacefully. He also showered Benjamin with lavish favoritism to test his brothers for jealousy” (Constable). In this story, Joseph’s brothers were realistic in assessing the situation in Egypt, responsible in their response to Jacob, and wise in dealing with the money that was found in their sacks, but most importantly, they had the right feelings toward their brother. Joseph was tender-hearted. “Those who would participate in God’s program must be willing to take responsibility for their actions, make restitution when they are culpable, and accept their lot gratefully and without jealousy” (Ross).

TO BE COMPLETELY RECONCILED ...

When you have been alienated from another person, what does it take to be reconciled? One of the greatest stories of reconciliation between alienated brothers is the story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph's brothers contemplated killing him and ended up selling him into slavery. Joseph wanted to be reconciled with his brothers. He forgave them but needed to know they could be trusted. For their part, the brothers needed to demonstrate their trustworthiness.

To a degree, that was accomplished when Joseph kept Simeon until they brought Benjamin back and they brought Benjamin back. Yet, there was one thing lacking that still needed to be done. It is perhaps the most critical issue in reconciliation. What is the one thing demonstrating trustworthiness that needs to be done in reconciliation?

The Conspiracy

The Directive “And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, ‘Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s money in the mouth of his sack” (44:1). After the banquet recorded in chapter 43, Joseph sent his brothers back to their father in Canaan. He commanded the stewards in his house to fill their sacks with as much food as possible and put their money in them.

The Deception “‘Also put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his grain money.’ So he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken” (44:2). “Joseph’s steward cooperated perfectly with his master in a very discreet way” (Leupold). The Hebrew word rendered “cup” means “cup, bowl.” It refers to a “chalice or goblet, not to a common drinking cup” (Constable; but he did drink from it; see verse 5).

The Departure “As soon as the morning dawned, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys” (44:3). The next day, Joseph’s brothers and donkeys departed for Canaan. Why did Joseph plant his cup in Benjamin’s bag? It was done “to create the impression that he (Benjamin) had fetched it, and so, of course, the brothers would be put to the test as to whether they were ready to abandon him (Benjamin) to his fate” (Leupold). “Joseph’s strategy, already brilliantly successful in creating the tensions he acquired during the two visits of his brothers, now produces his masterstroke. He tests their concern for Benjamin by giving them the opportunity to recall their evil and not repeat it. If they should have no compassion for their brother, then they had no place in developing the promise. The test involved placing Joseph’s cup in Benjamin’s sack and then pursuing them to arrest Benjamin” (Ross).

In the case of alienation between Joseph and his brothers, the issue was the lack of compassion and concern for members of their own family. Joseph is testing them to see if they have reportedly dealt with the issue that was the problem.

“Joseph wanted to discover if his brothers would sell Benjamin as a slave as they had sold him and possibly kill Jacob with sorrow. Their alternative was to submit to slavery for Benjamin’s sake. This discovery seems to have been the object of Joseph’s actions, as Moses related them in this chapter. As God had tested the genuineness of Abraham’s faith (22:1), so Joseph tested the genuineness of his brothers’ repentance” (Constable).

“He (Joseph) still was not sure what their attitude might be if forced to choose between their own personal welfare and that of Benjamin and their father” (Morris). Hence, the test was to see if they had dealt with the issue that caused the problem in the first place.

The Confrontation

The Directive “When they had gone out of the city, *and were not yet* far off, Joseph said to his steward, ‘Get up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid evil for good? Is not this *the one* from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination? You have done evil in so doing” (44:4-5). Joseph’s brothers had not traveled far out of the city when Joseph told the steward to overtake them and charge them with stealing his cup, which he used to practice divination. “They had been greatly favored in Egypt but now were accused of responding to that good with an evil act. On a deeper level, these words would have struck a responsive chord concerning the evil that they had earlier done to someone who was good” (Ross).

The Hebrew word translated “divination” means “to practice divination, practice fortunetelling” (BDB; Wood, cited by Constable, says this is not the usual word for divining). It was a heathen custom. (Leupold lists some possible ways the cup was used in such a practice). “It is known that the Egyptians used such cups, as did other ancient peoples, for the purpose of predicting, professing to see tokens of future events in the reflection of water in the cup or in the arrangements assumed by small particles of gold or silver in it. They believe that the spirits who knew the future events would act on the cup’s contents in such a way as to form these messages” (Morris).

So the question is, “Did Joseph practice divination?” Leupold lists three possibilities (he did it and it was sinful; he feigned it; God actually did it in this case) and concludes that we do not have enough information to pass judgment one way or another. Constable claims that practicing divination would have been inconsistent with his character as a man of faith. Waltke says it was a ruse (Waltke, cited by Constable). Joseph’s later statement demonstrates that he did not practice divination with the cup (44:15).

The Defense “So he overtook them, and he spoke to them these same words. And they said to him, ‘Why does my lord say these words? Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing. Look, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord’s house? With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord’s slaves” (44:6-9). When the steward overtook them and told them what Joseph told him to say, they defended themselves. Their defense was they brought back the money put in their sacks, demonstrating their honesty. They added that if the steward found anything stolen among them, the person who stole them should die and the rest of them should become his master’s slaves. It was a passionate and forceful defense that “bears all the earmarks of sincerity: strong assertion of innocence coupled with a respectful attitude” (Leupold). “They were so confident of their innocence they put a death penalty on the one in whose sack it might be found” (Ross).

“The brothers’ promise was not only rash but foolish since the contents of their sacks had surprised them previously (v. 9). Years earlier, Laban had searched through Jacob’s possessions for his teraphim that remained hidden in Rachel’s tent. Jacob had rashly pronounced a death sentence on the guilty person (cf. 31:23, 25, 33, 35). Now, the Egyptians searched for Joseph’s

cup of divination and found it in the sack of Benjamin, Rachel's son. The brothers here also rashly pronounced a death sentence on the guilty person" (Constable).

The Deal "And he said, 'Now also *let it be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and you shall be blameless*" (44:10). "Joseph's steward did not hold the brothers to their promise but simply stated that the 'guilty' person would become a slave (v. 10). Joseph had set his brothers up with a perfect excuse to abandon Benjamin and free themselves from slavery" (Constable).

"Then each man speedily let down his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. So he searched. He began with the oldest and left off with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack" (44:11-12). "As sack after sack was emptied without disclosing the cup, they must have felt more and more vindicated and resentful" (Morris). Then, the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. This presented them with the opportunity to rid themselves of this brother, just as they had gotten rid of Joseph years before (Morris).

The Difference "Then, they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city. So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he *was still there; and they fell before him on the ground*" (44:13-14). "Tearing one's clothing was a sign of great personal distress in the ancient Near East (v. 13; cf. 37:29). Here, it expresses the brothers' sincere agony at the prospect of having to turn Benjamin over to the Egyptians and return to Jacob only to break his heart. They tore their clothes in anguish, as Jacob had done when he received news of Joseph's apparent death (37:34)" (Constable).

They did not suspect that they had been deceived. "The brothers did not suspect that they were the victims of fraud any more than Jacob did when his sons gave him Joseph's bloody coat" (Constable, who cites Hamilton). They did not question Benjamin or seem to think he was guilty (Leupold).

They had a changed attitude. These are different brothers. "They were no longer greedy, jealous, or disloyal.... They acted together rather than fighting among themselves, as they had done previously" (Constable). "That all the brothers suffered such distress is a telling sign of the new sense of unity they had developed. They had already been informed that the innocent would be released (v. 10). Moreover, that they all return to Egypt underscores their commitment to Benjamin. The brothers are of one accord without any grumbling or dissent.... They were guilty [previously] but did not show remorse; now they are innocent and demonstrate the deepest agony" (Mathews, cited by Constable). "The idea of Benjamin's remaining alone in Egypt simply could not enter the mind of one of them. If one stays, they all stay" (Leupold). "This decision on their part speaks volumes about the change in character that had taken place in their lives in the past twenty years" (Morris).

The Denunciation "And Joseph said to them, 'What deed *is this you have done? Did you not know that such a man as I can certainly practice divination?*'" (44:15). With the tone of rebuke, Joseph asked questions concerning what they had supposedly done and what they surely should have known. The point that he was known for divination is probably a reference to the fact that he received revelations from on high, such as in interpreting Pharaoh's dream (Leupold). This statement demonstrates that Joseph did not depend upon the cup for his prophetic powers. "He could 'divine' who had stolen the cup even without having it" (Morris).

The Concession

The Submission “Then Judah said, ‘What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord’s slaves, both we and *he* also with whom the cup was found” (44:16). Judah was the spokesman. He promised his father that he would take responsibility for Benjamin’s safety (43:8-9; 44:16). Judah is helpless as he stands before Joseph. He begins by asking how they can clear themselves. At the same time, he seems to admit to guilt! He is even willing to say that God has revealed their sin. It has been suggested that the sin he refers to is their treatment of Joseph and Jacob years earlier (Daube, cited by Constable). “They do not actually confess their wrong against Joseph here, but that is what they all thought of these words of Judah. They felt that divine retribution had caught up with them” (Leopold).

What is significant is that all the brothers are willing to take the blame and the punishment for what Benjamin is supposed to have done. “Judah did not try to get rid of the privileged son this time. Instead, he volunteered to share his fate at great personal sacrifice. Joseph allowed Judah and the other brothers to depart and return home without Benjamin (v. 17). However, Judah’s refusal to do so demonstrated the sincerity of the brothers’ repentance” (Constable).

The Sentence “But he said, ‘Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my slave. And as for you, go up in peace to your father” (44:17). Joseph rejects Judah’s proposal, insisting that only the guilty person be punished. The rest are free to go to their father in peace.

The Story “Then Judah came near to him and said: ‘O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord’s hearing, and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you *are* even like Pharaoh” (44:18). Joseph’s only hope is to tell the whole story. “For depth of feeling and sincerity of purpose, it stands unexcelled. What makes it most remarkable, however, is the fact that it comes from the lips of one who once upon a time was so calloused that he cared nothing about the grief he had caused his father” (Leupold).

“My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father or a brother?’ And we said to my lord, ‘We have a father, an old man, and a child of *his* old age, *who is* young; his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother’s children, and his father loves him” (44:19-20). Judah begins by reminding Joseph that he was the one who asked about their father and brother. They had told Joseph that their aged father had a young son who was still alive and they had a brother who was dead. Therefore, the father dearly loved the surviving son. “Judah’s appeal to Jacob’s old age and Benjamin’s youth (v. 20) are designed to stress each one’s vulnerability and so elicit Joseph’s pity” (Constable).

“Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.’ And we said to my lord, ‘The lad cannot leave his father, for *if* he should leave his father, *his father* would die.’ But you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.’ So it was, when we went up to your servant my father, that we told him the words of my lord” (44:21-24). Then Judah reminded Joseph that he was the one who insisted that the youngest son he brought to Egypt. They had told him that if that young son left his father, the father would die, but he insisted that unless the youngest brother came, they would not see his face again and that is what they told their father.

“And our father said, ‘Go back *and* buy us a little food.’ But we said, ‘We cannot go down; if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we may not see the man’s face unless our youngest brother *is* with us.’ Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife

bore me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said, 'Surely he is torn to pieces'; and I have not seen him since. But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.' Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad *is* not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, it will happen, when he sees that the lad *is* not *with us*, that he will die. So your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave. For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him *back* to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever" (44:19-32). Judah continues by relating the story of what happened when they ran out of food and the father suggested they go back to Egypt to buy a little food to survive. When Judah told his father that they could not go without Benjamin, his father said that his wife had borne him two sons and one of them had disappeared, surely torn to pieces, and if Benjamin goes and something happens to him, he would grieve to the day he died. Judah explains to Joseph that the life of his father is bound up in the life of his son so that if they return without him, their father will surely die. So Judah says he became a surety for his brother, and if he didn't bring them back, he would bear the blame before his father forever.

Judah's speech contains some information that had not been recorded before (see 44:22, 27-28), but it is an emotional, chronological presentation of what had happened. "This is the longest speech in Genesis" (Constable). "No orator ever pronounced a more moving oration" (Bush, cited by Constable). "His intercession on behalf of Benjamin, a fine and moving appeal, demonstrated great love for his brother and great concern for his father. This was not the Judah of old" (Ross).

The Suggestion "Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad *is* not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?" (44:33-34). Judah concludes with the startling suggestion that he take Benjamin's place. He requests that Benjamin be allowed to return to his father and that he be Joseph's slave. His explanation is that he cannot go back to his father without Benjamin because of the great harm that would be done to his father. "Judah was a transformed man" (Leupold). "The supreme proof of Judah's repentance, and the moral high point of his career, was his willingness to trade places with Benjamin and remain in Egypt as a slave (33-34; cf. John 15:13). This is the first instance of human substitution in Scripture (22:13).... Jesus Christ, Judah's descendant, demonstrated the same attitude" (Constable).

"A spiritual metamorphosis for the better has certainly taken place in Judah.... He who once callously engineered the selling of Joseph to strangers out of envy and anger is now willing to become Joseph's slave so that the rest of his brothers, and especially Benjamin [whom Jacob loved more than Judah], may be freed and allowed to return to Canaan to rejoin their father" (Hamilton, cited by Constable).

Summary: To be reconciled, the offender needs to demonstrate his trustworthiness in general and that he has dealt with the issue that caused the alienation.

This story teaches that the root cause of the alienation must be resolved for complete reconciliation. "Joseph next tested his brother's loyalty to Benjamin by framing Benjamin and charging him with stealing Joseph's cup. These events prompted the brothers to acknowledge that God was punishing them for their treatment of Joseph many years earlier. Judah's plea for Benjamin voiced the genuineness of the brothers' loyalty to Benjamin. It contrasts with their former disloyalty to Joseph" (Constable). "In this final and great test, the brothers thus demonstrated that they had changed and repented over their sin against their brother. There was now concern for the father and self-sacrificing love for the half-brother" (Ross).

“If believers have been envious and hateful of others in the past, then God might have to put them through stressful situations to make them realize how much they must do for their fellow believers to prevent great evil in the family of God” (Ross).

Ultimately, this story illustrates what it takes to rule according to God’s ideal. “Jacob will crown Judah with kingship [49:10] because he demonstrates that he has become fit to rule according to God’s ideal of kingship that the king serves the people, not vice versa. Judah is transformed from one who sells his brother as a slave to one who is willing to be a slave for his brother. With that offer, he exemplifies Israel’s ideal kingship” (Waltke, cited by Constable).

This story illustrates self-sacrificing love.

WHAT MAKES RECONCILIATION POSSIBLE?

When someone has wronged you, it is easy to be angry, bitter, and unforgiving. Alienation produces apprehension, anxiety, and anger. When that happens, how is reconciliation possible? What makes reconciliation possible? A man who experienced a hideous, horrible wrong can teach us what makes reconciliation possible. The story of his reconciliation is recorded in Genesis 45.

Joseph was sold into Egyptian slavery by his brothers. In Egypt, Joseph became the ruler of the land, second only to Pharaoh. Because of a famine, Joseph's brothers end up standing before him, needing food. Joseph had Benjamin arrested for stealing one of his cups. Judah made a passionate plea, including an offer to replace Benjamin and let the others go back to their father because if they go back without Benjamin, your father will die. Genesis 45 records what happened next.

The Communication

The Reaction "Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, 'Make everyone go out from me!' So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers" (45:1). Seeing the change in his brother's attitude and especially Judah's self-sacrifice to spare his father, Joseph could not restrain himself. "Judah so impressed Joseph with the sincerity of his repentance and the tenderness of his affection that Joseph broke down completely" (Constable). Overcome with emotion, Joseph empties the room of all except his brothers. This is a family matter. Perhaps, more importantly, what he has to say to his brothers, they would not understand.

"And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it" (45:2). These were tears of joy (Leupold). "He wept tears of joy uncontrollably (cf. 2 Sam. 13:9)" (Constable). The Egyptians, outside of the room, told the people in the house of Pharaoh what they heard.

The Revelation "Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph; does my father still live?' But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence" (45:3). Joseph reveals himself to his brothers by simply saying in Hebrew rather than an interpreter (Morris), "I am Joseph." He also asked if his father was still alive. He knew, of course, that his father was still alive. They had told him that (chapter 44). He is now asking the question as a son, not a stranger. They were dumbfounded upon hearing that the one they thought was an Egyptian was their brother. They did not say a word because they were "dismayed." The Hebrew word translated "dismayed" means "to disturb, alarm, terrify, be anxious, be afraid, be nervous." They were terrified (Leupold; Ross: "confused and terrified").

The Review "And Joseph said to his brothers, 'Please come near to me.' So they came near. Then he said: 'I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not, therefore, be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years, the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt' (45:4-8). Having revealed himself as their brother, Joseph drew them closer to him and began to tell them what had happened since they sold him into slavery.

He explains (“for”) that the two-year famine will last five more years. During this time, there will be neither planting nor harvesting of crops. In other words, he tells them that although they sold him into slavery, it was God who sent him to Egypt to save their lives by making him a father to Pharaoh, a master over all his house, and a ruler throughout the land of Egypt. His relationship with Pharaoh is that of a “parental advisor.” His relationship with the royal household is that of the “supreme controller.” His relationship with Egypt is that of a “ruler” (Leupold). This is one of the clearest statements of the sovereignty of God in Genesis and Joseph’s speech also forms a classic expression of the providence of God, namely that God’s will, not the will of human beings, was the controlling reality of the events in his life (Ross).

Three times, Joseph says that God sent him (45:5, 7, 8). Discerning the hand of God in human affairs is the basis of reconciliation. “Without it, there would be only bitterness, blame, rancor, and revenge. The principle is that whoever spiritually perceives the hand of God in the course of events can forgive what others have done. No one who believes in the sovereignty of God in the affairs of life can bear a grudge or take revenge. Joseph magnanimously confronted his brothers with this sound doctrine” (Ross).

The Return “Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph: ‘God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children’s children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for *there are* still five years of famine. And behold, your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that *it is* my mouth that speaks to you. So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here” (45:9-13). “Four times he [Joseph] stated that God, not his brothers, was behind what had happened (vv. 5, 7, 8, 9)” (Constable). “Happy is the man whose eye is open to see the hand of God in everyday events, for to him life always possesses a wonderful and true joy and glory” (Thomas, cited by Constable).

The brothers are to tell Jacob that when he comes to Egypt with all that he has, they will dwell in the land of Goshen near Joseph. “Goshen (a Semitic rather than an Egyptian name) was the most fertile part of Egypt (cf. v. 18). It lay in the delta region northeast of the Egyptian capital, Memphis” (Constable). He will also provide food for them lest they come to poverty because the famine will last five more years. Joseph closes his instructions, assuring them that he is their brother (he is speaking in Hebrew), urging them to tell the father of his glory in Egypt, all they have seen, and telling them to bring his father to Egypt.

The Reunion “Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck” (45:14). After his instructions to them, Joseph hugs his full brother Benjamin’s neck and weeps and Benjamin weeps as well.

“Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that, his brothers talked with him” (45:15). “Joseph then embraced Benjamin and all his brothers to express his love and to confirm his forgiveness (vv. 14-15). The writer highlighted the genuine reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers by recording that they talked with him (v. 15). Much earlier they could not speak to him (37:4)” (Constable).

“An appreciation for God’s sovereign control produced in Joseph a character marked by graciousness, forgiveness, and acceptance. No one can force us out of God’s will. I have known people who became bitter because they lost a good job, or a close family member, or a prized possession. But these events are all part of God’s sovereign plan to bring blessing. Even having suffered abuse in the past, as Joseph did, is no excuse for holding bitterness” (Constable).

The Command

The Command “Now the report of it was heard in Pharaoh’s house, saying, ‘Joseph’s brothers have come.’ So it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: Load your animals and depart; go to the land of Canaan. Bring your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land. Now you are commanded—do this: Take carts out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and your wives; bring your father and come. Also do not be concerned about your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt *is* yours” (45:16-20). The Hebrew word translated “best” means “good” (BDB; Keil; Leupold). “Pharaoh proposes to deal very liberally with Joseph’s family out of gratitude for the great deliverance Joseph wrought for Egypt” (Leupold).

The Compliance “Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them carts, according to the command of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. He gave to all of them, to each man, changes of garments; but to Benjamin, he gave three hundred *pieces* of silver and five changes of garments. And he sent to his father these *things*: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and food for his father for the journey. So he sent his brothers away, and they departed; and he said to them, ‘See that you do not become troubled along the way” (45:21-24). The sons of Israel are, of course, the sons of Jacob’s. The Hebrew word translated “troubled” means “tremble, quake, quiver, be agitated, be excited, be perturbed.” “Joseph was telling them not to let doubts or fears arise again to trouble them after they had left him. Every one of his promises was genuine and he wanted them all to move down to Egypt with minimum delay” (Morris; Ross thinks Joseph was telling them not to quarrel on the way in the sense of accusing one another).

The Conclusion

The Report “Then they went up out of Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to Jacob their father. And they told him, saying, ‘Joseph *is* still alive, and he *is* governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob’s heart stood still, because he did not believe them” (45:25-26). Jacob’s heart standing still is a figure of speech (Morris). The Hebrew word translated “stood still” means “to grow numb, be feeble” (see “stunned” in the NASB and the NIV; “became numb” in the ESV).

The Reaction “But when they told him all the words which Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob, their father, revived” (45:27). “The old energy began to assert itself. The customary gloom of resignation vanished. Old ‘Jacob’ again became ‘Israel,’ as a significant change of name indicates, an aggressive combatant in the battle of life, ready to overcome obstacles in the power of God” (Leupold).

“Then Israel said, ‘*It is* enough. Joseph my son *is* still alive. I will go and see him before I die’ (45:28). The evidence convinced Israel that Joseph was alive. “When he believed that Joseph was alive and ruling over Egypt, his spirit revived and he returned to a position of trust in God. For this reason, Moses called him ‘Israel’ again in the text (v. 28). Often in Genesis, a final comment by a chief actor in the drama anticipates the next scene, as here” (Constable).

Summary: The recognition of the hand of God in even evil human affairs makes reconciliation possible.

“Though the Bible never identifies Joseph as a type of Christ, many analogies are significant. Both were special objects of their father’s love. Their brethren hated them both, rejected their

superior claims, and conspired to kill them. Both became a blessing to the Gentiles. Both received a bride. Joseph reconciled with his brethren and exalted them, and so will Christ” (Constable). “Both Abraham and Jacob figuratively receive their sons back from the dead. Both sons prefigure the death and resurrection of Christ, but Joseph even more so. Both are not only alive but rulers overall (cf. Acts 2:32-34; Phil. 2:6-11). Jacob’s response on hearing the incredibly good news prefigures the response of the disciples when the women tell them that Christ is alive, having been raised from the dead. They too greet the news at first with stunned disbelief and finally with unspeakable joy when it is proved with many infallible proofs (cf. Luke 24:9-49; John 21:1-9, 24-25; Acts 1:3). Their faith, like Jacob’s, revives them, reorients their lives, and makes them pilgrims venturing from land plagued by famine to the best land imaginable” (Waltke, cited by Constable).

In this passage, Joseph says four times that God was involved in what happened. “Outstanding in this section is the way in which Joseph’s perception of God’s ways made him gracious, forgiving, and accepting rather than bitter and vindictive. He saw the loving hand of his God behind the cruelty of his brothers. He had accepted all that had come to him as the will of God, and therefore he experienced the blessing of God. Reconciliation is possible when there is forgiveness, and forgiveness is possible when there is recognition of God’s sovereignty” (Constable).

Ross says, “Reconciliation comes through forgiveness, and forgiveness through the recognition of God’s sovereignty. When one who has been wronged can see things as God sees them, can perceive them as God planned them and can communicate the understanding is the basis for compassion and forgiveness, then reconciliation is possible. But anyone who bears a grudge or hopes to retaliate has not come to appreciate the meaning of the sovereignty of God. Without the forgiveness that comes from such an appreciation, there can be no reconciliation.”

A SIMPLE BASIS FOR DECISION-MAKING

Some decisions are simple. The man who proposed was the man she wanted to marry. His dream job was offered to him. The menu contains your favorite dish. Some decisions are more complicated because they contain conflicts. Two men are dating her and she can't make up her mind which one to favor. Yes, two job offers, both of which have advantages. Your two favorite meals are on the menu.

Jacob was faced with that kind of situation. At the time, he was living in Canaan with an invitation to move to Egypt. On the one hand, he knew that Canaan was the land God had promised Abraham, Isaac, and even him. He had lived in Canaan for many years and was uncomfortable with the thought of leaving it. On the other hand, there was a famine in Canaan and the son he thought he had lost had been found in Egypt.

What should he do? If it was the will of God for him and his descendants to inherit the land of Canaan, God was certainly able to break the famine in Canaan and bring Joseph to Canaan. Or, it was the will of God for him to go to Egypt to escape the famine and be reunited with his son. The basis of his decision illustrates the way some decisions should be made.

The Return to Egypt

The Decision “So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba” (46:1a). Jacob, here called Israel, made the decision to go to Egypt. Israel packed up everything and left Hebron (37:14; Leupold) to begin his journey. He is called “Israel” because this is a national, not a personal, venture (Leupold). At this point, his decision was probably made on nothing more than common sense. There was a famine in the land. His family was facing starvation. Moving to Egypt was a matter of survival. Furthermore, his lost son Joseph was in Egypt and he wanted to see Joseph before he died (45:28). It was the one thing on his bucket list. “All the circumstances indicated that was what he should do and so he went out (of Canaan)” (Morris).

The Dedication “and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac” (46:1b). On the way, he stopped at Beersheba to offer sacrifices (see 21:23; 26:24-25; 28:13). He had lived there with his father Isaac (28:10). Jacob made a decision based on common sense, but he was still dedicated to the Lord. His commonsense decision was not contrary to his commitment to the Lord.

The Vision “Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, ‘Jacob, Jacob!’ And he said, ‘Here I am’” (46:2). “This move was as momentous for Jacob as Abram’s journey from Ur (12:1-3), Jacob’s flight to Paddan-aram (28:1-22), or his return to Canaan (31:3-54), all of which God encouraged with visions.... Jacob was probably aware of the prophecy that Abraham’s descendants would experience slavery in a foreign land for 400 years (15:13). Consequently, he must have found it even more difficult to cross into Egypt (vv. 2-4)” (Constable). So while Israel was at Beersheba, God spoke to him in a night vision. This was the eighth and last time, as far as a record goes, that God appeared to Jacob in a vision (28:13; 31:3, 11; 32:1, 30; 35:1, 9; 46:2). When God called his name, Jacob responded with, “Here I am.”

“So He said, ‘I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes’” (46:3-4). Identifying Himself as the God of Israel’s father Isaac, God told Israel not to fear to go to Egypt because He would make him a

great nation in Egypt, He will be with him in Egypt, He will bring Israel out of Egypt, and he will see Joseph in Egypt. While it is the will of God for Isaac to go to Egypt, God does not intend for the Egyptian sojourn to be a permanent settlement (Leupold). The reference to Joseph putting his hand on Jacob's eyes "refers to a custom that Jews still practice. The eldest son or closest relative would gently close the eyes of the deceased" (Constable, who cites Sarna).

This confirmation is important because when Abraham went to Egypt, he fell into sin (12:10 ff.). Isaac had been forbidden to go to Egypt (26:2). So why was it the will of God for Israel to go to Egypt? Leupold suggests a number of reasons. The immediate reason was to preserve the nation during a time of famine. Beyond that, Israel's distinction as a nation was nurtured in Egypt because they were isolated in Egypt, where because of the Egyptian disdain for all foreigners (see 46:34), intermarriage was out of the question (see verse 10; Waltke: "Egypt was the womb God used to form His nation). Also, because of their isolation in Egypt, Israel was guarded against falling into idolatry. Constable says, "Jacob's sons had failed to stay separate from the Canaanites, so God temporarily removed them from the land He had promised them." Ross says all of this was the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to make Israel a great nation (12:2) and that He would deliver his people from Egypt (15:14).

The Trip "Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the carts which Pharaoh had sent to carry him" (46:5). Using the carts provided by Pharaoh for the purpose, the sons of Isaac carried Jacob, their wives, and their children to Egypt.

"So they took their livestock and their goods, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him" (46:6). They also took all of their possessions, namely the livestock and goods that they had acquired in Canaan. All of Jacob's descendants accompanied him to Egypt.

"His sons and his sons' sons, his daughters and his sons' daughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt" (46:7). The descendants of Jacob included his sons, daughters, and grandsons. "The word 'daughters' cannot refer to his son's wives, as those who are enumerated are said to be his seed (descendants). Evidently, neither the daughter's in-law nor any of the servants are included in the various numerical totals given in this chapter" (Morris).

The Relatives in Egypt

Descendants by Leah "Now these were the names of the children of Israel, Jacob and his sons, who went to Egypt" (46:8a). The names of the children of Israel, meaning Jacob and his sons who went with him to Egypt, are listed according to the children Jacob had by each wife, beginning with the children he had by Leah (46:15).

1. "Reuben was Jacob's firstborn. The sons of Reuben were Hanoah, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi" (46:8b-9). Israel's first-born son, Reuben, had four children.

2. "The sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman" (46:10). Simeon had six children, one of whom was the son of a Canaanite woman. Both Simeon and Judah married Canaanite women (46:10, 12; see 38:2). The mention of Shaul marrying a Canaanite wife suggests that it was the exception for one of Jacob's sons to marry a Canaanite (Leupold).

3. "The sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari" (46:11). Levi had three sons.

4. "The sons of Judah were Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan). The sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul" (46:12). Judah had seven sons, two

of whom died in Canaan and one of whom (Perez) had two sons. These two sons were probably not born in Canaan. Perez was “born after his brother Shelah was a grown man (38:14, 29). Since Judah could not have been more than about forty-seven at the time, Pharez was still only a boy. The names of his sons are evidently included to point out, so far as Judah’s inheritance was to be reckoned, they had taken the place of Er and Onan who died in Canaan” (Morris).

The list includes the grandsons and great-grandsons of Jacob, who were born afterward in Egypt, and “who, therefore, according to a view which we frequently meet with in the Old Testament, though strange to our modes of thought, came into Egypt *in lumbis partum* (Latin: “in the loins of their father). That the list is really intended to be so understood is undoubtedly evident from a comparison of the “sons of Israel” (Gen. 46:8), whose names it gives, with the description given in Num. 26 of the whole community of the sons of Israel according to their fathers’ houses, or their tribes and families. In the account of the families of Israel at the time of Moses, which is given there, we find, with slight deviations, all the grandsons and great-grandsons of Jacob whose names occur in this chapter, mentioned as the founders of the families, into which the twelve tribes of Israel were subdivided in Moses’ days” (Keil).

5. “The sons of Issachar *were* Tola, Puvah, Job, and Shimron” (46:13). Issachar had four sons.

6. “The sons of Zebulun *were* Sered, Elon, and Jahleel” (46:14). Zebulun had three sons.

Sum “These *were* the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Padan Aram, with his daughter Dinah. All the persons, his sons and his daughters, *were* thirty-three” (46:15). The sons listed thus far were the sons of Leah whom she bore to Jacob when they were in Padan Aram. Jacob also had a daughter named Dinah. The total number of the people who went to Egypt was thirty-three, but the number given totals thirty-two [Reuben (5), Simeon (7), Levi (4), Judah (6; 2 died in Canaan, but one of his sons had 2 children), Issachar (5), Zebulun (4), Dinah (1)]. There was, at least, one more daughter (see “daughters” in verse 15). Dinah is named because of her “unique contribution to Israel’s history” (Morris; see chapter 34).

To arrive at 33, Keil adds Jacob. “Of Leah, there are given 6 sons, 23 grandsons, 2 great-grandsons (sons of Pharez, whereas Er and Onan, the sons of Judah who died in Canaan, are not reckoned), and 1 daughter, Dinah, who remained unmarried, and was, therefore, an independent member of the house of Jacob; in all, therefore, $6 + 23 + 2 + 1 = 32$, or with Jacob, 33 souls” (Keil). Barnes does the same; he adds Jacob. “The descendants of Leah are in all thirty-two: six sons, one daughter, twenty-three grandsons, and two great-grandsons. ‘All the souls, his sons and his daughters, were thirty and three.’ Here, ‘all the souls’ include Jacob himself, and ‘his sons and his daughters’ are to be understood as a specification of what is included besides himself.” Leupold says, “A count of names reveals: Ruben 6, Simeon 7, Levi 4, Judah 8, Issachar 5, Zebulun 4 = 33. Consequently, Dinah, though mentioned, is not counted” (Leupold; his math does not add up; it is a misprint; Ruben 6 should be Ruben 5).

Descendants by Zilpah Beginning with verse 16, Jacob’s children by Zilpah are listed (46:18).

7. “The sons of Gad *were* Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli” (46:16). Gad had seven sons.

8. “The sons of Asher *were* Jimnah, Ishuah, Isui, Beriah, and Serah, their sister. And the sons of Beriah *were* Heber and Malchiel” (46:17). Asher had five children, one of whom had two sons.

Sum “These *were* the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and these she bore to Jacob: sixteen persons” (46:18). These are the children of Jacob by Zilpah, who was the maid Laban gave to Leah, his daughter. Zilpah had sixteen descendants: Gad (8) and Asher (8). “The descendants of Zilpah are sixteen: two sons, eleven grandsons, one granddaughter, and two great-grandsons” (Barnes).

Descendants by Rachel Beginning with verse 19, Jacob's descendants by Rachel are listed (46:22).

9. "The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife, were Joseph and Benjamin" (46:19). Rachel had two sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Unlike the other wives, Moses points out that Rachel was Jacob's wife.

"And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him" (46:20). Joseph, who was already in Egypt, married an Egyptian wife by whom he had two children.

10. "The sons of Benjamin were Belah, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard" (46:21). Benjamin had ten children.

Sum "These were the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob: fourteen persons in all" (46:22). Rachel had fourteen descendants. "The descendants of Rachel are fourteen: two sons and twelve grandsons" (Barnes).

Descendants by Bilhah Beginning with verse 23, Jacob's descendants by Bilhah are listed (46:25).

11. "The son of Dan was Hushim" (46:23). Dan had one son.

12. "The sons of Naphtali were Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem" (46:24). Naphtali had four sons.

Sum "These were the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and she bore these to Jacob: seven persons in all" (46:25). These are the children of Jacob by Bilhah, who was the maid Laban gave to Rachel, his daughter. Bilhah had seven descendants. "The descendants of Bilhah are seven: two sons and five grandsons" (Barnes).

Totals "All the persons who went with Jacob to Egypt, who came from his body, besides Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all. And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt were two persons. All the persons of the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were seventy" (46:26-27). The point of this subsection (46:26-27) is to record the number of people that went to Egypt with Jacob (46:8). The number of his direct descendants that went with him to Egypt totals sixty-six (46:26). On top of that, Joseph and his two sons were already in Egypt, making a total of sixty-nine descendants of Joseph in Egypt. If Joseph is added to that number, the total is seventy. The numbers given in verses 15, 18, 22, and 25 total seventy.

Barnes: "All the souls that went with Jacob into Egypt, 'that came out of his loins,' were eleven sons, one daughter, fifty grandchildren, and four great-grandsons; in all, sixty-six. Jacob, Joseph, and his two sons are four; and, thus, all the souls belonging to the family of Jacob which went into Egypt were seventy." Keil: Verse 27 includes "the patriarch himself, and Joseph with his two sons, who were born before Jacob's arrival in Egypt. If we reckon these, the house of Jacob consisted of 70 souls; and apart from these, of 66, besides his sons' wives." JFB: "Strictly speaking, there were only sixty-six who went to Egypt; but to these add Joseph and his two sons, and Jacob the head of the clan, and the whole number amounts to seventy." Morris: The seventy include "Jacob, his twelve sons, fifty-one grandsons, two grandsons, one daughter (Dinah), one granddaughter (Serah), one other unnamed daughter of Leah, and one unnamed grandson of Leah (verse seven indicates Jacob had more than one daughter and more than one granddaughter)." Leupold: Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh are omitted in verse 26 because they were already in Egypt.

BKC: "The first number represents those who traveled with Jacob to Egypt, and the second number includes the children and grandchildren already in Egypt. The following tabulation shows how these two figures are determined" (see also Kidner).

Jacob's Descendants	
Leah's children and grandchildren (46:15)	3
Zilpah's children and grandchildren (46:18)	6
Rachel's children and grandchildren (46:22)	4
Bilhah's children and grandchildren (46:25)	7
Total	70
Dinah (46:15)	1
Total	71
Er and Onan (who died in Canaan (46:12) Joseph and his two sons in Egypt (46:20)	-5
Those who went to Egypt with Jacob (46:26)	66
Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, Jacob (46:27)	+4
Jacob and his progeny in Egypt (46:27)	70

“Shortly after the children of Israel had come to Egypt, there were to be found those seventy fathers from whom were derived the seventy clans that were the prevailing clans throughout Israel’s early history” (Leupold).

The Hebrew text of Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5 say 70 went to Egypt, but Stephen (Acts 7:14) and the Septuagint say Joseph called 75 people. Wiersbe suggests the Septuagint includes Joseph’s grandchildren (1 Chron. 7:14-15, 20-25). Constable agrees saying, “He must have added Joseph’s three grandsons and two great-grandsons (Acts 7:14). These five were born later, as were some or all of Benjamin’s 10 sons (v. 21), in all probability.” One possible explanation is that Joseph called 75 (Acts 7:14), but only 70 actually made the trip (see Alexander on Acts). Another possibility is that the 75 omits Jacob and Joseph and includes the remaining seven of Joseph’s nine sons (Marshall on Acts 7:14).

“It can hardly go without notice that the number of nations in Genesis 10 is also ‘seventy.’ Just as the ‘seventy nations’ represent all the descendants of Adam, so now the ‘seventy sons’ represent all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the children of Israel. Here in narrative form, is a demonstration of the theme in Deuteronomy 32:8 that God apportioned the boundaries of the nations (Ge 10) according to the number of the children of Israel. Thus the writer has gone to great lengths to portray the new nation of Israel as a new humanity and Abraham as a second Adam. The blessing that is to come through Abraham and his seed is a restoration of the original blessing of Adam, a blessing which was lost in the Fall” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

The Reunion in Egypt

The Place “Then he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out before him *the way* to Goshen. And they came to the land of Goshen” (46:28). Jacob sent Judah ahead to see Joseph for directions to Goshen. Thus, they came to their new home in Goshen.

The Meeting “So Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; and he presented himself to him, and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while” (46:29). As soon as Jacob and the clan had arrived in Goshen, Joseph prepared his “splendid state

chariot” (Leupold) for the journey, traveled to Goshen to meet his father, presented himself to his father, hugged his father, and wept a long time.

The Hebrew word translated “meet” means “to encounter, befall, meet.” Leupold says that it is unusual for that word to be used here because it is usually used for a divine appearance, which indicates that their experience was like having the Lord appear or an appearing in which at least the hand of the Lord was manifest. At any rate, after twenty-three years, and Jacob and Joseph were reunited (Ross).

“And Israel said to Joseph, ‘Now let me die, since I have seen your face, because you *are* still alive” (46:30). When Israel finally spoke to his long-lost son, he said, in essence, knowing you are alive and having seen you, I can now die (Leupold).

Summary: Based on common sense, Jacob made a decision that was not only in the will of God but also furthered the will of God in his life.

A simple basis for making decisions is common sense. Jacob used common sense when he got out of Dodge, worked for Laban, and went to Egypt. “Assuming there is no Scripture to the contrary, one should proceed according to his best judgment and at the same time continue in prayer for guidance. He can have confidence that the Lord will either bless the decision or overrule and redirect” (Morris). When there is no clear statement, principal, or example in Scripture for making a decision, use common sense. One of the things I have discovered as a pastor is that common sense is not common.

A pastor I knew asked if he could come to see me because he needed some advice. I was more than happy to meet with him but could not imagine why he needed my advice. He was an older man (57), highly intelligent with a seminary degree, and had a great knowledge of the Scripture. The church he had been pastoring was not an easy church to pastor. It had some problems that would’ve been a challenge for any pastor. After being there for some time, by mutual consent, he agreed to resign. Without a job, he lived on his severance pay for a while and then the money he had put into retirement. His story had many complications, but the bottom line is that he had run out of money and was fearful of losing his house.

As I listened to him describe the details of his dilemma, I learned that because he had lived in his house for so long, he had an extremely low house payment (the neighborhood of \$700 a month) and would have it paid off in a few short years. Except for one possible glitch, it occurred to me he was a perfect candidate for a reverse mortgage. At the moment, it seemed to me that if that worked, that would be the perfect solution. He would have his house paid off with a small income for the rest of his life. As it turned out, that solution didn’t work because he was a few years shy of qualifying for a reverse mortgage.

My next suggestion was that to save his house, he should get a part-time job until he qualified for the reverse mortgage. In other words, the basis of the decision was common sense. It was survival! In the meantime, he could pray that the Lord would open the door for another ministry, but he should not wait for the Lord to open a door for ministry and lose the house he could not ever replace.

I am amazed at how many times people asked me for advice, and the advice was nothing more than common sense. In other words, I’ve been amazed at how uncommon common sense is. When there is no clear indication in Scripture as to what you should do, use some sanctified common sense.

STAYING FOCUSED

Staying focused is a challenge. With deep determination, we decide to do something, only to get distracted. Staying focused is important. It is important for accomplishments in life, especially in our spiritual life. The problem is that when you focus on accomplishments in this life, you tend to lose focus on your spiritual life. Is it possible to do both at the same time?

The Preparation

Joseph “Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father’s household, ‘I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘My brothers and those of my father’s house, who *were* in the land of Canaan, have come to me’ And the men *are* shepherds, for their occupation has been to feed livestock; and they have brought their flocks, their herds, and all that they have” (46:31-32). After the reunion with his father (46:30), Joseph gathered together all of his brothers and his father’s household to explain to them that he was going to see Pharaoh to tell him that they had come from Canaan, that the men were shepherds, and that they had brought their flocks with them.

His Brothers “So it shall be, when Pharaoh calls you and says, ‘What is your occupation?’ that you shall say, ‘Your servants’ occupation has been with livestock from our youth even till now, both we *and* also our fathers,’ that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd *is* an abomination to the Egyptians” (46:33-34). Joseph tells them that when Pharaoh asks about their occupation, they must say to him they have a long history of being shepherds. This is so important because Pharaoh would permit them to stay in the land of Goshen because shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians.

“Egyptians loathed shepherds because agriculture was the basis of Egyptian society and the Nile River sustained it (Constable). “The dislike of the Egyptians to shepherds arose from the fact that the more completely the foundations of the Egyptian state rested upon agriculture with its perfect organization, the more did the Egyptians associate the idea of rudeness and barbarism with the very name of a shepherd” (Keil). Probably, too, the more civilized Egyptians distrusted any nomadic peoples (Constable, who cites Wenham). “Rameses III is said to have employed 3,264 men, mostly foreigners, to take care of his herds” (Wenham, cited by Constable).

In one sense, the point is that Joseph is encouraging his family to be completely honest with Pharaoh. “Dishonesty long plagued Jacob’s family, but now Joseph led them out of this destructive behavior. Believers should respond to divine providence by making their decisions in response to the initiative of His wise leaders. They should do so with confidence in His promises and dependent on His continuing guidance and provision. Providence is God’s guidance and care He exercises through circumstances” (Constable).

At the same time, because of the Egyptian’s attitude toward shepherds, this is a delicate situation. Therefore, frankness and “securing for them a position of comparative isolation geographically was the happiest solution to the problem” (Leupold). Joseph had informed Pharaoh they were coming and Pharaoh had approved that, but the issue of exactly where they would settle was left open (45:16-20).

“This resulted in the Israelites living separately from the Egyptians where they increased and developed a distinct national identity and vocation as God had promised” (Constable). Whitelaw summarizes the advantages of living in Goshen: “(1) It was suitable for their flocks and herds; (2)

It would secure their isolation from the Egyptians; (3) It was contiguous to Canaan and would be easier vacated when the time arrived for their return” (Whitelaw, cited by Leupold).

Joseph was focused on the immediate issue of providing for his family. Given the severity of the situation, this was essential. So, keeping his focus, he prepared his brothers to meet Pharaoh.

The Presentation

Joseph “Then Joseph went and told Pharaoh, and said, ‘My father and my brothers, their flocks and their herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; and indeed they *are* in the land of Goshen” (47:1). As Joseph had promised (46:31-32), he personally went to see Pharaoh, telling him that his fathers and brothers, flocks and herds, and all their possessions had come from Canaan and had settled in Goshen. Pharaoh had already promised that when they came, he would give them the best part of the land (45:17 ff.). Nevertheless, it was wise “have Pharaoh publicly confirmed what he had originally suggested and so let it appear that the settlement of Israel was Pharaoh’s work.... Another diplomatic move on Joseph’s part was to settle his brethren in Goshen first and then tell Pharaoh about it. To settle them in their flocks and herds and all the possessions of Goshen was the simplest way of getting Pharaoh’s confirmation” (Leupold).

“And he took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh” (47:2). The Hebrew word translated “presented” means “to place, set, establish.”

Pharaoh “Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, ‘What *is* your occupation?’ And they said to Pharaoh, ‘Your servants *are* shepherds, both we *and* also our fathers” (47:3). Joseph had anticipated that Pharaoh would ask this question (46:33) and he had instructed his brothers to be honest when they gave their answer (46:33).

“And they said to Pharaoh, ‘We have come to dwell in the land, because your servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine *is* severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen” (47:4). “In other words, they had left their native land only as a matter of utter necessity” (Leupold). “This straightforward answer, although slightly different from Joseph’s advice, was intended to achieve what Joseph’s advice wanted to achieve—a separate life in the land of Goshen” (Ross).

“Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, ‘Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt *is* before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know *any* competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock” (47:5-6). Turning his attention to Joseph, Pharaoh permitted him to settle his family in the best part of the land, the land of Goshen. This is according to his original promise (45:18), and even, perhaps, more generous in that he suggests they might settle whatever they please (Leupold). In addition, he told Joseph to let the competent herdsmen among his brothers be the chief herdsmen over his own livestock.

Jacob “Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh” (47:7). After presenting his brothers to Pharaoh (47:2), Joseph took his father to see Pharaoh and Jacob blessed Pharaoh, which is fascinating because the lesser is blessed by the better (Heb. 7:7). “A true child of God has more to offer by his blessing than any earthly mother can offer him” (Leupold).

“Pharaoh said to Jacob, ‘How old *are* you?’ And Jacob said to Pharaoh, ‘The days of the years of my pilgrimage *are* one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage” (47:8-9). Jacob’s pilgrimage had taken him from Canaan to Paddan-aram,

back to Canaan, and now to Egypt. Jacob adds that his days had been few; he had not lived this long as his father (see Heb. 11:13-16). “His years were fewer than his fathers: 130 compared with Abraham’s 175 and Isaac’s 180. This comparison also suggests that neither Abraham nor Isaac had experienced Jacob’s difficulties and distresses during his lifetime” (Constable).

Jacob also adds that his pilgrimage through life had been filled with evil. The Hebrew word translated “evil” means “bad, evil, distress, misery, calamity.” Ross says this word emphasizes the calamitous times he had experienced. Morris favors “difficult.” Leupold suggests the idea might be “wretched” or “unhappy.” He goes on to say that Jacob had many hardships and disappointments, including being compelled to flee from home, being treated wretchedly and deceitfully by his father-in-law, living with the rape of his daughter Dinah, the murders by his sons Simon and Levi, and the incest of Ruben, encountering the hostility Esau and grieving the loss of Joseph, Rachel, and Benjamin.

“So Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh” (47:10). Leupold says before leaving, Jacob blessed Pharaoh again. Others seem to think there was one blessing (Ross; Constable). “Since he (Jacob) was the recipient of the promised blessing, his words here were more than a wish; he spoke for God in granting the blessing to Pharaoh, one that began shortly through the wise administration of Joseph” (Ross).

Constable comments, “Jacob’s blessing of Pharaoh (vv. 7, 10) is unusual since it implies that in one sense (i.e., as one of God’s elect), Jacob was superior to Pharaoh. Pharaoh was a man of immense worldly power and influence. ‘The lesser is blessed by the greater’ (Heb. 7:7). Jacob became a blessing to a Gentile world ruler and so partially fulfilled God’s promise of becoming a blessing. This event also foreshadowed the future complete fulfillment of Israel’s worldwide blessing of the nations.”

The Conclusion **“And Joseph situated his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded” (47:11).** As Pharaoh had commanded, Joseph gave his father and brothers the best part of the land of Egypt, here called the land of Rameses. “The text describes the area where Jacob’s family settled ‘the land of Rameses’ here rather than Goshen (v. 11). ‘The land of Rameses’ could have been another name for Goshen, or a larger area encompassing Goshen, or a district within Goshen” (Constable). “It was probably in the eastern delta” (Ross). Morris says the children of Israel settled in “Egypt’s northeast corner, more or less isolated from the bulk of the Egyptian population, which tended to concentrate more to the south and west.

Assuming that the land of Rameses derived its name from Rameses II, critics claim that the Exodus took place about 1300 BC instead of the biblical chronology, which places it about 1447 BC (Leupold, who gives the biblical date as 1449 BC). As Leupold points out, “A city may be named after a king; but so might a king be named after a city or both king and city after some of the person or other object carrying a familiar name.”

“The use of the name ‘Rameses’ here and elsewhere (Exod. 1:11; 12:37; Num. 33:3, 5) has become a kind of “red herring” for many interpreters. It led them to conclude that these events occurred after one of the Pharaohs, Rameses, lived. Rameses I reigned about 1347-1320 B.C. However, the biblical chronological references (1 Kings 6:1; Exod. 12:40; et al.) point to a date for Israel’s move to Egypt near 1876 B.C. How can we account for the use of the name Rameses here, then? It is possible that the name Rameses (also spelled Raamses) was in use when Jacob entered Egypt, even though extra-biblical references have not confirmed this (Merrill). ‘Raamses’ simply means ‘Ra [the sun god] has created it’ (ISBE). Second, Rameses may have been the name of this district later, in Moses’ day, when he wrote Genesis. He could have used the modern name

when writing Genesis rather than an older one that was in use in Jacob's day. A third possibility is that Rameses was the district name even later in history (e.g., after Pharaoh Rameses). A later scribe may have substituted 'Rameses' for an older name that was in use when Moses wrote or when Jacob entered Egypt. Other late names appear in Genesis. For example, the town of Dan (14:14), formerly Laish (Judg. 18:29), received the name 'Dan' during the period of the Judges (ca. 1350-1050 B.C.). Evidently, after Moses' day, someone substituted the modern name 'Dan' for the older name in Genesis 14:14. This may also account for references to the Philistines in Genesis" (Constable).

"Then Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, according to the number in *their* families" (47:12). In addition to the land, Joseph, the distributor of food, gave food to his father's household according to the number of people in each family.

"The point of this brief section (47:1-12) is to affirm that Egypt's ruler gave the best land to Israel, despite any feelings he might have had about shepherds" (Ross). Joseph's brothers stayed focused on what they had to do to meet the immediate situation. Jacob stayed focused on the spiritual.

The Plan

The Lost "Now *there was* no bread in all the land; for the famine *was* very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine" (47:13). Joseph provided food for his family (47:12), but as the famine grew very severe, there was no food in all of Egypt or Canaan, so the people languished.

The Loot "And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house" (47:14). Since they were not able to produce food, the people of both the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan used what money they had to buy food from Joseph, who had wisely stored food for seven years. Joseph put the money in Pharaoh's house, that is, he put it in the royal treasury (Leupold).

The Livestock "So when the money failed in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, 'Give us bread, for why should we die in your presence? For the money has failed'" (47:15). When the people of Egypt and Canaan used all the money they had to buy food, they came to Joseph begging for bread lest they die. "The emergency of those days called for emergency measures" (Leupold).

"Then Joseph said, 'Give your livestock, and I will give you *bread* for your livestock if the *money is gone*'" (47:16). Joseph's response was that if they had no money, they could give him livestock in exchange for food. This proposal sounds harsh, but taking the cattle off their hands was a relief because they didn't have to feed them. Leupold says, apparently, the government could care for the cattle during the famine better than the individuals and "Apparently afterward Joseph restored their cattle and livestock and provided Egyptians with seed and grain and merely charged but was not an exorbitant tax for the fertile land."

"So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread *in exchange* for the horses, the flocks, the cattle of the herds, and for the donkeys. Thus he fed them with bread *in exchange* for all their livestock that year" (47:17). Having no other choice, the people of Egypt and Canaan (47:15) gave their horses, flocks, herds, and donkeys for food, which lasted another year.

The Land “When that year had ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, ‘We will not hide from my lord that our money is gone; my lord also has our herds of livestock. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants of Pharaoh; give *us* seed, that we may live and not die, that the land may not be desolate” (47:18). At the end of the year, the people ran out of food again. This time, they came to Joseph, explaining that since they had neither money nor livestock, the only thing left was their labor and lands. They were willing to sacrifice their land and themselves for food lest they die.

“Then Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for every man of the Egyptians sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. So the land became Pharaoh’s” (47:20). This time, Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. “Outright donations have no place in his relief measures” (Leupold).

“And as for the people, he moved them into the cities, from *one* end of the borders of Egypt to the *other* end” (47:21). Joseph bought the land (47:20) and he moved the people to cities to simplify the distribution of food (Leupold).

“Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had rations *allotted to them* by Pharaoh, and they ate their rations which Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their lands” (47:22). There was an exception to Joseph’s plan, namely, it did not involve the land the Pharaoh had given to the priest. Pharaoh had given the priest land to live on and food to eat. “In effect, Egypt had an official state religion, and the members of its hierarchy were essentially state employees. Thus, they received an ample allocation of grain for their own needs in return for the services, and it was unnecessary for them to sell their lands” (Morris). The exception made “shows that Joseph’s action was not a crass land grab without regard for Egyptian tradition and society’s welfare” (Mathews, cited by Constable).

The Labor Then Joseph said to the people, ‘Indeed I have bought you and your land this day for Pharaoh. Look, *here is* seed for you, and you shall sow the land. And it shall come to pass in the harvest that you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh. Four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and for your food, for those of your households and as food for your little ones” (47:23-24). Then Joseph gave the people seed to sow Pharaoh’s land. The condition was they would give one-fifth of the harvest to Pharaoh and keep four-fifths of the harvest for their families.

“So they said, ‘You have saved our lives; let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh’s servants” (47:25). Because Joseph had saved their lives, people gladly became Pharaoh’s servants. They only ask that Joseph’s goodwill continue to rest upon them (Leupold).

The Law “And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt to this day, *that* Pharaoh should have one-fifth, except for the land of the priests only, *which* did not become Pharaoh’s” (47:26). Joseph made his plan the law of the land, which stayed in effect for hundreds of years down to the day when Moses penned the Pentateuch. The standard tax rate was twenty percent, except for the priest, who had an exemption from Pharaoh himself. “Twenty percent is a high tax rate but quite moderate for the Orient where one third and one half have been demanded (1 Macc. 10:30). It was small since the average was 33⅓ percent” (Waltke, cited by Constable).

“Both Egyptian and Mesopotamian slavery differentiated generally between formerly free people who became debt slaves and foreigners (usually war captives) who were bought and sold as chattel. Mesopotamian laws and contracts indicate that creditors obtained the service of the debt slave until the debt was covered, but chattel slaves belonged to their owners without much chance of release. Although we cannot know from Genesis, there is reason to believe that the voluntary submission of the people assumes that the enslavement was not permanent (cp. the law established

by Joseph, 47:26)” (Mathews, cited by Constable). “The idea of slavery is not attractive to the modern mind, but in the ancient world, it was the primary way of dealing with the poor and destitute. If people became slaves of Pharaoh, it was Pharaoh’s responsibility to feed them and care for them. It was the best way for them to survive the famine” (*The NET Bible* note on 47:19).

“So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly” (47:27). Thus, during a severe famine, the children of Israel lived in the land of Egypt, had material possessions, and multiplied exceedingly. “They were beginning to grow into a great nation.... They were fruitful and multiplied; these verbs recall the plan of the Creator (1:28) and anticipate the greater fulfillment in the Exodus (1:7). Here, then, the predominant theme of blessing moves from promise to fulfillment. God blessed Abraham’s seed and Pharaoh and his land for the sake of the people, all in accordance with the promise” (Ross).

Again, Joseph stayed focused on his responsibility to Pharaoh as well as his family. Joseph “fulfilled God’s promises to bless through Joseph and to bless the whole world through Abraham’s descendants” (Constable).

The Promise

Jacob’s Life “And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the length of Jacob’s life was one hundred and forty-seven years” (47:28). Joseph lived in Egypt for 17 years. His total lifespan was 147 years.

Jacob’s Request “When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, ‘Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place’” (47:29-30a). When Jacob realized that he was about to die, he called for his son Joseph to come see him. He asked Joseph to put his hand under his thigh, a gesture used in connection with administering an oath (Leupold; see 24:2-3; Constable says it was a “ritual connected with making a solemn promise) and promise that he would not bury him in Egypt but with his father’s in the land of Canaan. He wanted to be buried in the cave that was purchased by Abraham because “he knew that the fulfillment of the promise was in Canaan, not in Egypt” (Ross).

“Jacob believed God’s promises in reference to Israel, the land of Canaan, and the blessings of all the nations of the world through the Savior to come. His deepest hopes were tied up with these promises of the word of God. Jacob wanted even his burial to give testimony to his faith” (Leupold).

“And he said, “I will do as you have said” (47:30b). Joseph agreed to do as his father had requested.

“Then he said, ‘Swear to me.’ And he swore to him. So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed” (47:31). Not satisfied with a mere agreement, Jacob asked Joseph to swear that he would do as he asked and Joseph complied. Having made his funeral arrangements, Israel bowed his head on the head of the bed, which indicates “that he proceeded and wants to worship” (Leupold). “Many commentators conclude that this was a reverent act of thanksgiving” (Ross). “He may have been too weak to bow down on the ground (cf. 48:12; 1 Kings 1:47)” (Constable).

Following the Septuagint, Hebrews 11:21 says Joseph leaned on the top of his staff. Hebrews 11:21, however, does not refer to Genesis 47:31. Hebrews 11:21 refers to Genesis 48. Genesis 48:1 says, “After these things. Jacob “sat on the bed” when he blessed Joseph’s sons. (48:2). Leupold says there were at least several months between the two events (see Leupold, vol. I, p. 1144).

Throughout the process of getting settled in Egypt, Jacob never lost his spiritual focus. He blessed Pharaoh and made provisions to be buried in the land promised to him by the Lord. “Joseph wanted even his burial to be a testimony to his faith in God’s promises” (Morris).

Summary: Both Jacob and Joseph stayed focused on the immediate situation, as well as on the spiritual.

God blesses those who bless the children of Israel. “Because the new King (Ex. 1) did not know Joseph, he “began to enslave the Israelites to work on his projects. Had he remembered Joseph, he would have realized how loyal and faithful Israel could be in their sojourn in the land. Because this Pharaoh (in Gen. 47) treated Israel well, they flourished, and he became powerful and wealthy, but because the new King treated Joseph harshly, he would have none of the blessings of God, nor would he be able to hinder the prosperity of the people of God. From the beginning to the end of the Egyptian sojourn, prosperity and growth came from God’s blessing. Those who acknowledge its share in it” (Ross on 47:13-27).

God provides for His children.

It is important to stay focused on the immediate and the spiritual, all at the same time. This world is not our home. We are just passing through. Abraham and Sarah “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13).

LIVING BY FAITH

Bible-taught believers know they are to live by faith, but what does that look like? An Old Testament story is an example of a man doing something by faith. What is significant about that particular story is that the New Testament says what he did, he did by faith. The Old Testament records the story in Genesis 48 and the New Testament pronounces it as an act of faith in Hebrews 11:21. What does walking by faith look like? Jacob gives us an illustration.

“It is appropriate that the end of Genesis should draw to a close with repeated references to the thematic word of the book (*b-r-k*, ‘to bless’)” (Mathews, cited by Constable).

The Adoption: Believing God’s Word

The Preparation “Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, ‘Indeed your father *is* sick;’ and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim” (48:1). Several months (at the most, Leupold) after his family settled in Goshen, Joseph was informed that his father was ill. Beyond the weakness of old age described at the end of chapter 47, Jacob was sick. Although the text does not mention it here, when Joseph heard of his father’s illness, he decided to visit him (see the next verse). Leupold says this was and not a chance encounter. The plan to bless Joseph’s sons had been discussed between Jacob and Joseph on a previous occasion.

“And Jacob was told, ‘Look, your son Joseph is coming to you’; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed” (48:2). The change of names from Jacob to Israel implies that Jacob received the message of the coming visit as the head of the race (Leupold).

The Reasons “Then Jacob said to Joseph: ‘God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, ‘Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you *as* an everlasting possession’” (48:3-4). Jacob told Joseph about the Lord appearing to him and blessing him at Luz in Canaan (Leupold: later named Bethel; 35:6-13 rather than 29:10-19). The blessing was “great posterity and permanent possession of the land” (Leupold).

“And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, *are* mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine” (48:5). Since Joseph’s descendants were to greatly multiply, he is justified in taking steps toward that end by formally adopting Joseph’s sons, who were now at least 18 to 20 years old (Leupold, who cites 41:50 and 47:28; Constable says Manasseh would have been between 20 and 26 years old at this time and cites 41:50; 47:28; Morris says Joseph had married when he was about 30 and he was now about 56). Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were to be as much Jacob’s sons as Reuben and Simeon.

“Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance” (48:6). Any further sons of Joseph are to be counted as Joseph’s own, but when it comes to an inheritance, a special provision is to be made. Joseph is probably thinking primarily of the land he knew would be distributed according to tribes. “By adopting Joseph’s first two sons as his own and giving them equal standing with Joseph’s brothers, Jacob was bestowing on Joseph the double portion of the birthright (v. 5; cf. v. 22; 1 Chron. 5:1-2). He was also, in effect, elevating Joseph to the level of himself. Joseph was the first son of Jacob’s intended first wife. Jacob’s reference to Rachel (v. 7) shows that she, as Joseph’s mother, was on

his mind in this act. This act honored her. The other sons of Joseph received their own inheritances” (Constable). “This meant, of course, that there would actually be thirteen tribes, although God inevitably only counted twelve in any given list” (Phillips).

“But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when *there was* but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)” (48:7). This comment seems out of place. In blessing Joseph’s sons, Jacob abruptly begins to talk about Rachel. There is, however, a logical progression. Jacob is explaining more fully his choice of Joseph’s sons. Joseph’s sons were adopted not only because of God’s promise to make Jacob fruitful but also because Rachel, his beloved wife, from whom he anticipated more descendants, had died prematurely at Ephrath when he had returned from Padan (Leupold).

“Verse 7 has long puzzled biblical interpreters. Why the mention of Rachel at this point in the narrative, and why the mention of her burial site? If we relate the verse to what precedes, then the mention of Rachel here could be prompted by the fact that just as she had borne Jacob ‘two sons’ (44:27, Joseph and Benjamin) at a time when he was about to enter (48:7) the land, so also Joseph gave Jacob ‘two sons’ (v. 5) just at the time when he was about to enter Egypt” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

“It was customary that the oldest son receive a double portion of the inheritance, but the father, as the head of the family, could change this arrangement if the situation, in his opinion, warranted such a change. Jacob, therefore, was perfectly within his rights to transfer this birthright from Reuben (who had clearly shown by both his incestuous relationship with Bilhah and general weakness of character that he was not really fit for such a responsibility) to Joseph, who should have been the firstborn and who had shown beyond question that he was indeed fit for the responsibility. ‘(Reuben) was the firstborn; for as much as he defiled his father’s bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel (1 Chron. 5:1). Jacob decided that it would be most effective to convey this double inheritance directly to Joseph’s two sons rather than to Joseph himself. He would do this by adopting them as his own sons so that they would each be equal in rank with Reuben and Simeon, the two who were firstborn chronologically, and to his other sons. As far as the division of the inheritance (especially the future division of the land of Canaan when they would return to inherit the land promised to them for an inheritance), both Ephraim and Manasseh, therefore, would be counted as two of Jacob’s sons. Their sons, in turn, would then be accounted as though they were actual sons of Joseph. The resulting tribes, moreover, would be called the tribe of Ephraim and the tribe of Manasseh and would be equal in eternal rank to any of the other eleven tribes” (Morris).

The Blessing: Understanding God’s Ways

The Question “Then Israel saw Joseph’s sons, and said, ‘Who *are* these?’” (48:8). Jacob knew that Joseph’s two sons were Ephraim and Manasseh (48:5). So this question is for confirmation, not information (Leupold). “Jacob was identifying the beneficiaries as part of the legal ritual of adoption and or blessing (27:18)” (Constable). At the same time, Jacob’s eyes were failing him (48:10).

The Answer “Joseph said to his father, ‘They *are* my sons, whom God has given me in this *place*.’ And he said, ‘Please bring them to me, and I will bless them’” (48:9). When Joseph told his father that the two men with him were his sons, Jacob told him to bring them to him so that he might bless them.

“Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, *so that* he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them” (48:10). Jacob was not totally blind, but because of old age, his eyesight was failing; he could not see well (Leupold).

The Remark “And Israel said to Joseph, ‘I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!’” (48:11). Jacob remarks that he thought he would never see his son Joseph’s face again and now God has allowed him to see not only Joseph but also Joseph’s sons, his grandsons. “Jacob gave God the credit that he could see Joseph’s sons. He had come to acknowledge God’s providential working and grace in his life as he realized how faithful God had been to him in spite of his unfaithfulness” (Constable).

The Positioning “So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth” (48:12). Positioning his sons for the blessing, Joseph placed his sons beside his father’s knees and bowed his head. “Ancient Near Eastern adoption ritual included placing the adopted child on the knees of the adopting parent to symbolize giving him birth in place of the birth mother” (Mendelsohn, cited by Constable).

“And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel’s right hand, and brought *them* near him” (48:13). Joseph arranged his sons by age for his father to bless them. He placed his oldest son, Manasseh, at Jacob’s right hand and his youngest son, Ephraim, at Jacob’s left hand.

“Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid *it* on Ephraim’s head, who *was* the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh *was* the firstborn” (48:14). Knowing full well what he was doing, Jacob placed his right hand on Ephraim, Joseph’s youngest son, and his left hand on Manasseh, Joseph’s oldest son. In other words, he crossed his hands, reversing the order of blessing. As Isaac was preferred before his oldest brother Ishmael and Jacob before Esau, now Ephraim is before Manasseh.

“This is the first of many scriptural instances of the laying on of hands (v. 14). By this symbolic act, a person transferred a spiritual power or gift to another. This rite was part of the ceremony of dedicating a person or group to an office (Num. 27:18, 23; Deut. 34:9; Matt. 19:13; Acts 6:6; 8:17; etc.), offering sacrifices, and the healings Jesus Christ and the apostles performed. In this case, Jacob symbolically transferred a blessing from himself to Joseph’s sons. Once uttered, blessings were irreversible (cf. Num. 23:20; Rom. 11:29)” (Constable).

The Blessing “And he blessed Joseph, and said: ‘God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth’” (48:15-16). Invoking God, the God of Abraham and Isaac, the God who has fed him all of his life, the God whose Angel has redeemed them from evil (Hebrew: “bad, evil;” Ross: “trouble”), Jacob blesses Joseph by blessing his sons. The Hebrew word translated “fed” means “to pasture, tend, feed, shepherd.” In the threefold reference to God, Leupold sees the three members of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit (shepherd), and God the Son (redeemed). “These remarkable descriptions reveal Jacob’s faith—one that had matured through the years and learned to trust the Lord and the difficulties of life” (Ross).

The blessing is that Jacob’s name and the name of his father, Abraham and Isaac, would be upon Joseph’s sons. Leupold says the term “name” signifies “character;” thus, Jacob is saying that his and his father’s characters may find expression in them or that they may be conscious of the responsibilities involved. The blessing also includes their great growth.

“Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head” (48:17). When Joseph realized that his father had crossed his arms so that his right hand was on the head of Ephraim instead of Manasseh, he was displeased (Hebrew: “to be bad, be evil, to be displeasing). So he grabbed his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head.

“And Joseph said to his father, ‘Not so, my father, for this *one is* the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.’ But his father refused and said, ‘I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations’ (48:18-19). “Under the inspiration of God, Jacob deliberately gave Ephraim the privileged first-born blessing and predicted his preeminence. This was the fourth consecutive generation of Abraham’s descendants in which the normal pattern of the firstborn assuming prominence over the second born was reversed: Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben, and Ephraim over Manasseh. We can see this blessing in the process of fulfillment during the Judges Period when the tribe of Ephraim had grown very large and influential. The combined tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh increased from 72,700 in the second year after the Exodus (Num. 1:32-35) to 85,200 40 years later (Num. 26:28-37). By contrast, the tribes of Reuben and Simeon decreased from 105,800 to 65,930 during the same period. The Ephraimites took the lead among the ten northern tribes and flourished to the extent that the Jews used the name Ephraim equally with the name Israel. The Ephraimites occasionally demonstrated an attitude of superiority among the tribes that we can trace back to this blessing (e.g., Judg. 12:1; et al.). The Hebrew phrase translated “a multitude (group) of nations” (v. 19) appears only here in the Old Testament and probably means a company of peoples, namely, numerous. The reference to Israel in verse 20 applies to the nation in the future from Jacob’s viewpoint” (Constable).

“So he blessed them that day, saying, ‘By you Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!’ And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh” (48:20). Jacob concludes the blessing by saying that in the future, Israel will pronounce a blessing by saying, “May God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh.” In other words, both will be blessed, but he insists that Ephraim will be more blessed than Manasseh.

“Joseph, and many others like him, expected God to work in a certain way but found that He chose to work in a different and unconventional way” (Ross).

The Promise: Trusting God

Back to the Land “Then Israel said to Joseph, ‘Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers’ (48:21). Realizing that he is about to die, Jacob tells Joseph that God will be with him and bring him to the land of his fathers. “Egypt is not the land of their destiny” (Leupold). This indicates that Jacob believed God’s promise concerning the land and that he made plans for his burial.

A Portion of the Land “Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow” (48:22). Furthermore, Jacob gives Joseph a blessing above that of his brothers. “When God would restore the family to the land, the double portion would go to Joseph” (Ross). Joseph was to receive the portion Jacob took from the Amorites by sword and bow. The Hebrew word translated “portion” means “shoulder, back.” “Jacob’s prophetic promise to Joseph is a play on words. The word for ‘portion’ means

ridge or shoulder (of land) and is the same as 'Shechem.' Shechem lay in Manasseh's tribal territory. The Israelites later distributed the land among the tribes (Josh. 24:1) and buried Joseph at Shechem (Josh. 24:32)" (Constable).

The land to which Jacob is referring is the land that he had purchased (33:18-20). In Jesus' day, Shechem was said to be what Jacob had given to Joseph (Jn. 4:5). The problem is that Jacob said he took Shechem by force, but that is not exactly what happened. One possible explanation is that Jacob viewed Simeon and Levite's slaughter of the Shechemites as his own taking of the city (Waltke, cited by Constable). Another possibility is that the perfect tense ("took") is speaking of the future as if it had already taken place, meaning that Israel (Jacob) would take Canaan from the Amorites through his posterity (Keil). Still, another explanation is that "the property which Jacob owned at Shechem was taken away by the Amorites after he left the region (cf. 35:4, 5) and that he eventually returned and repossessed it by force of arms?" (Davis, cited by Constable; see also Leupold). "Apparently, Jacob gave Joseph Shechem, which he regarded as a down payment of all that God would give his descendants as they battled the Canaanites in the future" (Constable).

"For Joseph, it was an honor that his father entrusted him with his funeral in Palestine (47.30f.). In 48.21f., the implication in family law is finally drawn: Joseph, instead of Reuben, receives the double heritage as a sign of his primogeniture (48.22a). Just as the son is commanded to bury the father in Palestine, so it is in Palestine that the priority of Joseph within the family takes effect. These two scenes thus enclose a detailed blessing for Joseph and his sons, so filling out the promise of his superiority in Palestine (48.22a)" (see William J. McIlwain Jr., "My Ways Are Not Your Ways," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988): 92-100, cited by Constable).

Summary: By faith, Jacob adopted Joseph's two sons and blessed them, giving the younger a double portion of the blessing and promising Joseph himself a portion of the land.

"This very important section explains how Ephraim and Manasseh came to have equal standing with Joseph's brothers and why Joseph did not become the head of a tribe" (Constable).

Jacob illustrates living by faith because he believed God's Word, understood God's ways, and trusted God to carry out what He promised. Hebrews uses this episode in Jacob's life to illustrate his faith. "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worship leaning on the top of his staff" (Heb. 11:21). Ross summarizes this passage: "Believers who have matured in faith through a lifetime of experience in which the covenant God has shepherded and delivered them—no matter how difficult the maturing process may have been—can discern with confidence the purpose and plan of God for the future." Ross adds, "This statement does not say that the believer will have the ability to predict; it merely says that the mature believer is familiar with God's ways, knows God's plans, and can prepare for the future with certain expectations."

Ross quotes a homily by Dods: "We meet with these crossed hands of blessing frequently in Scripture; the younger son blessed above the elder—as was needful, less grace should become confounded with nature, and the belief gradually grows up in man's mind that natural effects could never be overcome by grace, and that in every aspect grace waited upon nature. And we still meet these crossed hands, for how often does God quite reverse our order and bless most that about which we have the least concern, and seem to put a slight on that which has engrossed our best affections.... Is it not a perpetual encouragement to us that God does not merely crown what nature has successfully begun, that it is not the likely and the natural good that is most blessed, but that God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty, and the base things of the world and the things which are despised as God has chosen, yea, and things which are not to bring to naught the things that are?"

NOT ALL INHERITANCE IS EQUAL

All the children gathered in the lawyer's office to hear the will being read. Some were thrilled, and some were shocked as they learned that not everyone received an equal share of the estate. That is not always the case. Parents prefer to deal with their children equally, but there are cases where that is not true and, for that matter, should not be true because of the children's behavior. It is not true and is not always the case spiritually. How different are the differences? Why are there differences? The answers are illustrated in Genesis 49.

“Having blessed Pharaoh (47:7-10), Ephraim, and Manasseh (48:15-20), Jacob next blessed all 12 of his sons and foretold what would become of each of them and their descendants. He disqualified Reuben, Simeon, and Levi from leadership and gave that blessing to Judah. He granted the double portion to Joseph. Jacob, by divine inspiration, foretold major characteristics of each of the twelve tribes that would issue from his twelve sons (v. 1). Each blessing contains at least one of these elements: 1) a synopsis of the son's personality, 2) a hint as to his potential, and 3) a prophecy of his future” (Constable)

This is the first long poem in the Bible. “This chapter, in that it is poetry, seems to be intended to be a high point of the *toledot ya'aqob* (i.e., chaps. 37-50), if not the whole book of Genesis” (Longacre, cited by Constable).

The Call of Jacob

Come “And Jacob called his sons and said, ‘Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days’ (49:1). Before he died (49:33), Jacob gathered his sons together to tell them what would happen to them in the last days. In other words, what he had to say was a prophecy (49:1). Yet, at the same time, what he says is called his blessings (49:28). It has been called “a prophetic blessing” (Leupold).

The expression “in the last days” has been interpreted to mean “in future days” (Luther) and future days, including the messianic future (Leupold). “Most interpreters are ready to concede that the messianic age is involved in some passages where this expression occurs and that it, therefore, in those passages bears a messianic connotation” (Leupold). It “notes not the future generally, but the last future, the messianic age of consummation.... It embraces the whole history of completion which underlies the present period of growth” (Keil). Ross says in this chapter, “The time of fulfillment differs with each tribal saying, extended from the near future to the eschatological kingdom of the Messiah.”

Listen “Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father” (49:2). The parallel structure of this verse indicates that it is at this point that the poem properly begins (Leupold). The use of the two names of Jacob (Jacob and Israel) indicates that he is speaking in the double capacity as a father and as a prophet.

The names of the sons are not given in the order of their birth (29:32-30:24; 35:18). While not in the chronological order by their mothers (46:8-25), they are, however, listed by their mothers: the six sons of Leah, the one son of Bilhah; the two sons of Zilpah, the one son of Bilhah; and the two sons of Rachel. Other than the reversal of Leah's fifth and sixth sons, the list is in chronological order by their mothers.

“Jacob predicted how things would turn out for each of his sons and their descendants, should they continue to display the character they had displayed thus far” (Heck, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29:4, December 1986:385-96, cited by Constable).

The Children of Leah

Reuben “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power” (49:3). Jacob calls his firstborn son, Reuben, his might and strength. The Hebrew word translated “might” means “might, power, strength” and the one rendered “strength” means “vigor, generative power, wealth, physical strength.” As Jacob’s firstborn, Reuben was the beginning of his strength (Deut. 21:17; Ps. 78:51; etc.), “the first sprout of the full virile power of Jacob” (Keil), his “manly strength in procreation” (MacDonald), his “dignity and power” (Morris). Reuben is described as having “excellency of dignity and power,” which Leupold says refers to the dignity and honor due him as the firstborn.

“Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father’s bed; then you defiled it—He went up to my couch” (49:4). The Hebrew word translated “unstable” means “recklessness, unbridled license” (see NASB: “uncontrolled; NIV: “turbulent;” ESV: “unstable”). Seething lust was within him (Leupold). Because of his sin with Bilhah, his father’s concubine (35:22), he would not excel (Hebrew: “excel, show pre-eminence”). “By going to his father’s bed, Reuben was attempting to solidify his claims as the firstborn son. In fact, he doomed his cause” (*NKJV Study Bible*; Ross). “As the first-born, Reuben could have anticipated preeminence among his brothers, the leadership of the tribes, priesthood within the family, and the double portion of the birthright [Deut. 21:17; 1 Chron. 5:1-2]. However, he forfeited these blessings preferring rather to give free rein to his lust (35:22; cf. Esau).

“The leadership of the tribes, therefore, went to Judah, the priesthood to Levi eventually (Exod. 32:25-29; Num. 3:12-13), and the double portion to Joseph. Joseph was the first-born of the favored Rachel, whereas Reuben was Leah’s first-born. Joseph’s priority was not due solely to Jacob’s preference, however, but to the will of God as revealed in Joseph’s dreams.... No priest came from Reuben either. Irresolution marked the Reubenites in the time of Israel’s judges (Judg. 5:15-16). This forfeiture is fulfilled historically in later times when the Reubenites living in Transjordan are integrated into the tribe of Gad” (Constable). “Essentially, Reuben destroyed his right to inherit” (Ross).

“About no other tribe do we know so little as about *Reuben*.... The tribe produced no significant man, no judge, no king, no prophet” (von Rad, cited by Constable). “From this first oracle, the teaching is clear that the behavior of one individual affects the destiny of his descendants” (Hamilton, cited by Constable). “One more outbreak of his licentious lack of restraint appears in his descendants when Korah’s rebellion flares up in the wilderness (Num. 16).

When the children of Israel reached the Promised Land, the Reubenites were the first tribe to ask for a place to settle, not even waiting to cross the Jordan with the others (Num. 32). They erected an unauthorized place of worship (Joshua 22:10-22). In the days of Debra and Barak, they failed to answer the call to arms (Judges 5:15-16). The tribe of Reuben never excelled in anything (Morris).

Simeon and Levi “Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place” (49:5). Simeon and Levi were sons of Leah. Therefore, they were blood brothers, but they were also brothers in the sense of having “one mind and disposition” (Leupold). Since all the sons were brothers, here the word “brothers” probably stresses their similar nature (Ross). They were

brothers “by temper as well as by birth” (Barnes). They were in complete agreement in taking vengeance on the Shechemites because a prince of that city had violated their sister Dinah. Jacob had previously strongly condemned what they did (34:30). “As Reuben had manifest weakness and lust, these two had manifest anger and cruelty” (Morris).

The Hebrew word translated “dwelling place” has been interpreted in several different ways. It means “swords, weapons, devices.” Taking it as a reference to “counsel,” Barnes says it “refers to the plot they formed for the destruction of the inhabitants of Shechem.” Saying that it means “knives” and was used for circumcision, Ross concludes it means “their circumcision knives are instruments of violence.”

“Let not my soul enter their council; let not my honor be united to their assembly; for in their anger, they slew a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox” (49:6). In his innermost being (“soul”), Jacob abhorred their crafty schemes (Leupold). For emphasis, Jacob repeats the thought in the parallel statement. He does not want his honor to be united with them (Leupold). “With deep emotion, Israel disassociated himself from their motives and actions” (Morris). Jacob explains (“for”) that what he detested was that in their anger, they slew a man and in their self-will, they hamstrung an ox, which was a wanton destruction of property (Morris).

“Cursed *be* their anger, for *it is* fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel” (49:7). Jacob curses the anger of Simeon and Levi. Their anger was fierce (Hebrew: “strong, mighty, fierce”) and cruel (Hebrew: “to be hard, be severe, be fierce, be harsh”). “They were violent, wicked men (34:25-31). Because of their wickedness, they would have no independent tribal territory, but their descendants would live scattered among the other tribes.... This tribe received only a few cities within the allotment of Judah rather than a separate geographical territory (Josh. 19:1-9). The Simeonites eventually lost their tribal identity and lived among the other tribes, especially Judah (1 Chron. 4:27, 38-43). The Levites also received no large land grant, but Joshua gave them several cities in which they lived among the other tribes (Josh. 21:1-42). The Levites gained a special blessing at Mt. Sinai by siding with Moses when the other Israelites apostatized (Exod. 32:26-28; Num. 3:5-13; 18:6-32). This resulted in their becoming a tribe of priests in Israel” (Constable).

Morris points out that Simeon was given an inheritance “within the inheritance of the children of Judah” (Josh. 19:1), but some of the sons of Simeon were captured and dwelt outside of Canaan (1 Chron. 4:39-43) in the days of the divided kingdom many of them left Israel to join Judah (2 Chron. 15:9). Eventually, they were either assimilated by Judah or scattered outside of Israel. Little is heard of them after the days of Asa. The Levites largely redeemed themselves by standing against idolatry (Ex. 32:26). Moses was a descendent of Levi and the Levites were chosen to be the priestly tribe.

Leupold suggests this rebuke was a blessing in disguise. “Even though these first three tribes suffered punishment for their sins, Jacob’s prophecies about them were still a blessing. They retained a place in the chosen family and enjoyed the benefits of the patriarchal promises as Jacob’s heirs” (Constable). Separating the two brothers was for their own good; they would not be allowed to band together to do more damage (Morris). “By demoting Reuben for his turbulence and uncontrolled sex drive, Jacob saves Israel from reckless leadership. Likewise, by cursing the cruelty of Simeon and Levi, he restricts their cruel rashness from dominating” (Waltke, cited by Constable). Their “ruthless and violence eliminated those tribes from leadership of the nation” (Ross).

“There are two important instances of first-born sons relinquishing the rights of primogeniture in Genesis: Esau and Reuben. Esau considered his birthright of so little value that he sold all his

rights as firstborn to Jacob to realize an immediate physical gratification. Reuben forfeited his birthright through sexual promiscuity (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4). In Esau's case, his entire birthright went to Jacob. In Reuben's, his went to three of his brothers. Judah obtained the regal right, Levi eventually received the priestly right, and the blessing of the double portion went to Joseph, who realized it through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh" (Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, pp. 138-40, cited by Constable; see his comments on 25:27-34).

Judah "Judah, you *are he* whom your brothers shall praise; your hand *shall be on the neck of your enemies*; your father's children shall bow down before you" (49:8). Judah will be praised. The opening statement concerning Judah contains a play on words. The Hebrew word translated Judah means "praise." He whose name means "praise" will be praised by his brothers." Judah will put his hand on the neck of his enemies, meaning he will be victorious over them (for example, see 2 Sam. 5:1-3) and when he is, his brothers will bow down before him in awe and respect. This is the reason his brothers will praise him (Leupold; Ross).

The expression "your father's children" includes more than the "sons of your mother." In other words, his half-brothers, as well as his brothers, will bow down before him. Since the brothers bowed before Joseph in Egypt, this probably speaks not of the immediate family but of the future tribes (Ross).

"Judah *is a lion's whelp*; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?" (49:9). Judah will be mighty (Ross). Judah is compared to a young lion, the king of the beast. The Hebrew word translated "whelp" means "cub, whelp, young." Here it refers not to a young cub but to a young lion in "the freshness of his just matured strength" (Leupold). "He was as strong as a young lion that has overwhelmed and eaten its prey, as secure as a mature lion resting in its den, whom no one would dare to rouse" (Morris). As a young, fierce lion, he will pounce on his prey. As a full-grown lion, he will be an irresistible force seizing his prey and then ascending to his mountain den, he will repose and "undisturbed security" (Barnes; Ross).

"Judah possessed a lion-like nature. As such, he became the leader of the other tribes (43:3-10; Judg. 1:1-2; 3:9; 20:18; etc.). Through him came David and then Messiah, 'the Lion of the Tribe of Judah' (Rev. 5:5). Judah led the other tribes in the march through the wilderness (Num. 2:1-3) and in the monarchy" (Constable).

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him *shall be the obedience of the people*" (49:10). The scepter (Hebrew: "rod, staff, club, scepter"), the symbol of "rule and dominion" (Leupold; Constable: "the symbol of royal command, the right to rule; Ross: a symbol of kingship), will not depart from his descendants. Nor will a lawgiver (Hebrew: "to cut out, decree, engrave, govern"), the "ruler's staff" (Leupold) depart from between his feet. This is a reference to the ruler's staff. As the ruler sat on his throne, his staff was placed between his feet and either rested on his shoulder or was held in his hand (Leupold). Scepter and lawgiver are parallel statements (Ross).

Originally, leaders in Israel came from the other tribes: "Moses from Levi, Joshua from Ephraim, Gideon from Manasseh, Samson from Dan, Samuel from Ephraim, and Saul from Benjamin.... Judah did not actually receive the 'scepter' of leadership for over 640 years after Jacob's prophecy. Once David became king, however, Judah was the dominant tribe from then on" (Morris).

No one will remove Judah's dominion until Shiloh (Hebrew: "he whose it is, that which belongs to him, tranquility; Constable: the "bearer of rest") comes. As the last part of this verse indicates ("Him"), Shiloh is a name (Morris). Judah will continue until a ruler, who is so competent

that He will achieve perfect rest, comes (Leupold). “Judah was to exercise leadership among the tribes until Shiloh came, at which time Shiloh would extend Judah’s rule to worldwide dominion. Judah’s leadership was not consistently preeminent in the history of Israel, however” [Constable, who also says, “a person who would arise in the tribe of Judah and bring peace to the world, namely, Messiah (cf. 3:15; Num. 24:17)"]. The One who will bring peace (Morris) is the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

The Rabbis said Shiloh was the Messiah. “The Rabbis said this verse was about the Messiah. “Kings and rulers shall not cease from the house of Judah ... until King Messiah comes” (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, which may have been written as early as the second century). “Rabbi Johanan said, ‘The world was created for the sake of the Messiah; what is this Messiah’s name?’ The school of Rabbi Shila said, ‘His name is Shiloh, for it is written until Shiloh comes (Genesis 49:10)” (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b)” (G. Michael Cocoris, *Jewish Prophecies of the Messiah*). “All from the days of the Septuagint onward felt very strongly the Messianic implications” (Leupold).

When Shiloh comes, the people will obey Him. He shall be so great that not only men but “peoples” will readily yield him obedience; the nations of the world will willingly submit (Leupold). “God selected one family with a view to the restoration of rulership.... The theocratic administration would remain in the tribe of Judah until the one comes to whom it belongs” (Ross).

“Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes” (49:11). Constable claims that everything after the word “until” in verse 10 describes the Millennium (see Kidner’s comment on verse 12). No Judean would tie donkeys to a vine because the donkey would eat the vine, nor did they wash their clothes in wine. Yet this verse says donkeys will be tied to vines, colts will be tied to the choice vine, and clothes will be washed in wine. Therefore, this is a picture of prosperity. The blessing “will be so plentiful that even the choicest vines we put to such everyday use as tethering the animals of burden and vintage wine will be as commonplace as wash water (Sailhamer, cited by Constable). “This prophecy is the first of many that follow in the Old Testament that associates bumper crops with the golden age of future blessing” (Constable). “It will be a golden age” (Ross).

“His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk” (49:12). Does this verse refer to the king of Judah (Sailhamer, cited by Constable) or the Messiah? Barnes says, “Judea is justly described as abounding in the best of wine and milk. This fine picture of Judah’s earthly abode is a fitting emblem of the better country where Shiloh reigns.” Ross says, “With the coming of Messiah there will be paradise-like splendor.... For Judah, grapevines will be so abundant that they will be used for hitching posts; wine will be as abundant as wash water. In Judah, people’s eyes will be red or bright from wine and their teeth will be white from drinking much milk. These are picturesque ways of describing the suitability of Judah’s territory for vineyards. Such opulence will be evident in the Millennium (Isa. 61:6-7; Isa. 65:21-25; Zech. 3:10). Kidner, however, says that every line of Gen. 49:11-12 “speaks of exuberant, intoxicating abundance: it is the golden age of the Coming One, whose universal rule was glimpsed in Gen. 49:10.”

“Because Reuben, Simeon, and Levi had disqualified themselves, Judah received the leadership of the tribes and the blessing that normally went to the firstborn. This is how the leadership of the tribes and the Messianic line fell to Judah. Jacob evidently forgave Judah’s earlier sins because he repented and later sacrificed himself for Jacob’s wellbeing” (Constable). “In Genesis, the promise of the kingdom went to Judah because (1) the sons of the line before he defaulted their right by sin and (2) Judah had shown himself responsible and praiseworthy. Participation in the blessing thus depended on obedience to God” (Ross).

Zebulun “Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea; he *shall become* a haven for ships, and his border shall adjoin Sidon” (49:13). The Hebrew word translated it “haven” means “seashore, coast, shore.” Translating the word “by” as “toward,” Leupold says, “For though Zebulun’s territory touched the Sea of Galilee on the east and spread westward over a big portion of the Plain of Esdraelon. It went only two-thirds of the way to the Mediterranean coastline having Asher between it and the sea. Yet the people of Zebulun were to have contact with those whose ships touched the shore as the further statement indicates.”

“Zebulun later obtained territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. This was a thriving commercial area, though Zebulun may never have had permanent ‘waterfront property.’ It is possible, however, that Zebulun and Issachar shared some territory (cf. Deut. 33:18-19), so Zebulun could have bordered the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps the men of Zebulun worked for the Phoenicians in their maritime trade (cf. Deut. 33:19). Zebulun will extend to the sea in the Millennium when its borders will reach as far as Sidon on the Mediterranean coast (cf. Ezek. 48:1-8, 23-27). An important caravan route from Mesopotamia to Egypt passed through his territory” (Constable).

“Scholars have been bothered by the mention of Sidon this early, but archaeological evidence supports the antiquity of Sidon.... Tyre is the latter city (Isa. 23:12 refers to Tyre as the daughter of Sidon). At any rate, Zebulun would dwell close to the commercial shoreline” (Ross).

Issachar “Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between two burdens” (49:14). What was true of Issachar (“is”) became the characteristic of the entire tribe (Leupold). Issachar was a strong donkey, figurative language for “a generous amount of sturdy physical strength” (Leupold). The Hebrew word translated “burdens” means “sheepfold” (BDB; NASB; NIV; ESV: “sheep pens.” Lying between two sheepfolds means that either they settled in the country where sheepfolds abound, or they were situated between tribes where sheepfolds were (Leupold). “Issachar would prefer an agricultural way of life and what it produced rather than political supremacy among the tribes” (Constable).

“He saw that rest *was* good, and that the land *was* pleasant; he bowed his shoulder to bear a *burden*, and became a band of slaves” (49:15). Issachar saw that rest was good (Hebrew: “good, pleasant, agreeable”). He was utterly unambitious and, perhaps, even lethargic (Leupold). He was “strong, but docile and lazy” (Morris).

Issachar saw the land was pleasant, a Hebrew word which means “pleasant, beautiful, sweet, delightful, lovely.” This tribe would rather surrender other advantages to be in a pleasant place (Leupold). “Lower Galilee, including the valley of Jezreel, which Issachar obtained, was a pleasant and productive farming area” (Constable; who says see Joel D. Heck, “Issachar: Slave or Freeman? [Gen. 49:14-15],” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29:4, December 1986:385-96).

Issachar bowed his shoulder to bear a burden. This tribe would do work that required only the exertion of brute strength (Leupold). Issachar’s descendants became a band of slaves. They would “readily become a ‘toiling labor band’ for others as long as a fair measure of ordinary creature comfort could be enjoyed (Leupold).

Leupold considers Jacob’s words to Issachar a mild rebuke. “Issachar is thereby warned against aiming too low, against burying his talent in a napkin” (Leupold). Ross says that “because Issachar preferred abundance and luxury, he was willing to trade his liberty for the material things of life.... Instead of using his ability to work for himself, Issachar would work for the Canaanites for food and rest. This gain was considered a mockery by the oracle, for it is a reversal of the relationship that should prevail between Israel and the Canaanites” (Ross later says Issachar “preferred a relatively easy life”).

The Children of Bilhah and Zilpah

Dan “Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel” (49:16). The next four sons were the sons of Jacob by his concubines Bilhah and Zilpah, but they are not grouped according to their mother or in chronological order. Morris suggests that Jacob dealt with them in the order they happened to be standing around his bedside.

Dan was the son of Bilhah. As in the case of Judah, there is a play on words with Dan’s name. In Hebrew, “Dan” means “judge.” The descendants of the one who is named judge will be supply judges of his people, that is, to the people within his tribe (Leupold). Constable, however, says that Dan would be a judge in Israel, a prophecy that was partially a reality during Samson’s judgeship, where Dan’s victories benefited all of Israel.

“Dan will vindicate his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Issachar, like a large-boned ass, was equipped to get the job done but preferred a relatively easy life; Dan was born of a concubine and not as privileged as the others, would help its people get their rights” (Ross).

“Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse’s heels so that its rider shall fall backward” (49:17). Leupold considers this to be a reference to the tribal trait, which was displayed in the case of the Danites striking like a serpent and capturing the inhabitants of Dan-Laish in Judges 18. Morris says Dan is compared to a venomous snake that would defeat a mounted soldier by striking at the heel of his horse, which is probably a reference to the fact that the tribe of Dan, while apparently unimpressive because it occupied the smallest area of any tribe, “nevertheless was a dangerous adversary, well able to protect Israel’s northern border against invaders.” Constable, however, says this tribe led Israel into idolatry (Judges 18) and, therefore, was similar to a serpent. Morris says this is a possibility. He points to 1 Kings 12:28-30, says this may be why Dan is not listed among the tribes in Revelation 7:4-8, and suggest the next verse supports this possibility (the reference to the serpent reminded Jacob of the promise in 3:15).

“I have waited for your salvation, O LORD!” (49:18). What does Jacob mean by waiting for the Lord’s salvation? Leupold suggests, “repeatedly Jacob has spoken of self-help on the part of the tribes: of Judah the lion, of Issachar the strong-boned ass, of Dan the deadly serpent. Yet Jacob would not be misunderstood. Not from that source does he expect true salvation. Even when men help themselves, only then is it a true deliverance if God helps them. On the latter help, Jacob has grounded his personal salvation in every deliverance, hard though it was for him to learn that submission and trust. On that help, he would have his sons ground their every hope.” Kidner says this verse is enigmatic and perhaps it could arise from a father’s prayer like the one Abraham prayed for Ishmael (17:18) or possibly from the sudden memory of his own treachery, which the reference to “heel” (49:17) reminded him. Constable simply says, “Jacob asked Yahweh to deliver his other descendants from Dan’s influence in the future.” Ross says Dan’s blessing would come true by the power of God.

Gad “Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last” (49:19). Gad was the son of Zilpah. The Hebrew word translated “Gad means “troop.” He whose name means troop shall have a troop tramp on him. The Hebrew word translated “tramp” means “to invade, attack,” but it comes from the same root as does “Gad.” Leupold tries to capture the nuance by translating, “a troop shall troop against him,” adding, “that Jacob foresees that Gad “will be especially exposed to the raids of marauding bands,” from the desert, the Midianites, the Ammonites, and the Arabian (Leupold).

In the end, Gad will triumph (the same Hebrew word that is translated “trump”). Gad will be affected in battle (Constable). Dwelling east of the Jordan, on the edge of the kingdom of the

Ammonites and other desert people, Gad was open to attack but was well able to fight (1 Chron. 5:18; 12:8; etc.).

Asher “Bread from Asher shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties” (49:20). Asher was the son of Zilpah. Hebrew word translated “Asher” means “happy” (Leupold: “lucky, fortunate one” (Leupold). Located along the seacoast north of Carmel, Asher “contained some of the most fertile land in Canaan” (Constable). From the rich farmland, Asher was able to produce delicacies worthy of the king (Leupold; see Deut. 33:24). The tribe of Asher “failed even to take possession of the Tyre-Sidon region and the tribe soon became insignificant, possibly deteriorating because of their love of ease and proximity to the Phoenicians” (Morris).

Naphtali “Naphtali is a deer let loose; he uses beautiful words” (49:21). Naphtali was the son of Bilhah. The Hebrew word translated “Naphtali” means “wrestling” (Leupold: “a liberated deer” or “a hind let loose”). This liberated deer will speak beautiful (Hebrew: “beauty, goodness”) words. He “would be a messenger with a message of victory” (Ross). He delivered a message of good news. Morris says, “his descendants would be known for swiftness, as warriors fleet of foot” ... (and) “as composers of eloquent speech and beautiful literature. Evidently, Naphtali himself was of this temperament, although nothing specific is said about him in Scripture.... The prediction regarding “goodly words” was, no doubt, fulfilled in measure by the victory song of Deborah and Barak (Judges 5:1-31).”

“Naphtali is a hind let loose. The hind or “gazelle” is agile and nimble. When free on its native hills, it roams with instinctive confidence and delight. It is timid and irresolute in confinement. This is probably the character of Naphtali. “He giveth goodly words.” Here we pass from the figure to the reality. Eloquence in prose and verse was characteristic of this particular tribe. The only important historical event in which they are concerned is the defeat of Jabin’s host, which is celebrated in the song of Deborah and Barak Jdg. 4:5” (Barnes). “Naphtali evidently would enjoy the admiration and appreciation of the other tribes in a special way (cf. Judg. 4 and 5)” (Constable).

The Children of Rachel

Joseph “Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall” (49:22). The Hebrew word translated “Joseph” means “Jehovah has added.” Jacob predicts that Joseph will be a fruitful son (Hebrew: “bough” = “son”). Because he will be situated by a well, his branches run over the wall. “Such a healthy, thriving, full-grown, well-supported, fruit-bearing vine well portrays the fruitful tribe of Joseph or Ephraim and Manasseh” (Leupold). “Joseph’s blessing was especially abundant” (Constable). He, actually Ephraim and Manasseh, would be strong and numerous (Morris). “Joseph is blessed by including Ephraim and Manasseh in one” (Leupold, vol. 1, p. 1161).

“The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him” (49:23). Even though Joseph will be abundantly blessed (49:22), he will also have archers bitterly grieved him because of their hatred toward him. This problem began with his brothers, but this oracle extends into the future (Ross).

“But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)” (49:24). Nevertheless, even though Joseph will experience opposition (49:23), the Almighty God will strengthen him to make him strong (see 49:18). His bow, used for defensive purposes, will be strong because his strong arms will be strengthened by God, who is also called the Shepherd and

Stone of Israel. As a Shepherd, He is able to lead and defend His people and, as a stone, He is stable and unchanging (Ross). He would both nourish and protect Joseph (Morris).

“By the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you *with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb*” (49:25). The God of Jacob will help Joseph and abundantly bless him. God will supernaturally assist him (Ross). These abundant blessings will come from heaven (Leupold: “rain, sunshine and pleasant breezes”), the deep (Leupold: “waters stored in the earth that are so essential to all the vegetable growth as well as the source of much-needed streams), and beast and womb (Leupold: “abundant offspring of man and beast”).

“The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers” (49:26). Jacob adds that the blessings on him (“your father”) have exceeded the blessings of his ancestors. His blessings extended to the borders of the everlasting hills, indicating they filled the land. “Abraham had one son of promise; Isaac had two children; Jacob had twelve sons destined to be heads of tribes” (Leupold). Jacob says his blessing should be on the head of his son Joseph on the crown of the head of the one who was separated from his brothers. Ross says that to bless someone means to give success to that person and especially success in futility and here it is a blessing in agricultural pursuits, livestock, and descendants.

“Blessing is one of the keywords of Genesis occurring some eighty-eight times in the book. Here in two verses [25 and 26], like the finale of a fireworks display, the root occurs six times (verb 1x, noun 5x), making a brilliant climax to the last words of Jacob. The God-given blessings of the future will far outshine those already experienced” (Wenham, cited by Constable). Leupold points out that no spiritual blessings are mentioned, adding, “spiritually they never excelled. It was among the tribe of Ephraim that one of the sons, Jeroboam, instituted the camp worship, whereby he ‘made Israel to sin.’”

Benjamin “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil” (49:27). Benjamin will be like a ravenous (Hebrew: “to tear, rend, pluck”) wolf, who will devour his prey in the morning and divide the spoils at night. “The tribe of Benjamin would be bold and strong, successful in warfare, but at the same time might become cruel and voracious” (Morris). The expressions morning and night cover the entire intervening period. In other words, Benjamin will always be successful in spoiling his foes and, at the same time, when he encounters his foes, he is fierce like a wolf (Leupold).

The fierce descendants of Benjamin include Ehud (Judges 3:15), Saul (1 Sam. 9:1), and Jonathan. “The whole tribe displayed this attitude, though not in a holy cause, in Judges 20” (Leupold). “Benjamin produced many warriors in Israel’s history (e.g., Ehud, Saul, Jonathan, et al.) and demonstrated a warlike character among the tribes (Judg. 5:14; 20:16; 1 Chron. 8:40; ch. 12; 2 Chron. 14:8; 17:17; et al.)” (Constable).

The Conclusion “All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel, and this *is* what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own blessing” (49:28). Moses summarizes the situation by simply saying that Jacob blessed the twelve tribes of Israel individually according to each individual’s particular blessing. This observant father knew his sons probably better than they knew themselves. “He gives to each man the counsel that he needed most” (Leupold). “In his twelve sons, Jacob blessed all the future tribes of Israel” (Constable, who says see Darby, 1:80-82, for further observations concerning the fulfillment of these prophecies).

“Within Jacob’s words to each of the sons (after Judah), the theme of blessing has been evident in two primary images. First, the reverse side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of the victorious warrior. The defeat of the enemy is the prelude to the messianic peace. Second, the positive side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of great prosperity and abundance. Behind such imagery of peace and prosperity lies the picture of the Garden of Eden—the Paradise Lost. The focus of Jacob’s words has been the promise that when the one comes to whom the kingship truly belongs, there will once again be the peace and prosperity that God intended all to have in the Garden of Eden” (Sailhamer, cited by Constable).

Sailhamer also proposed that this poetic section plays a significant role in the larger structure of the Pentateuch. “At three macrostructural junctures in the Pentateuch, the author has spliced a major poetic discourse onto the end of a large unit of narrative (Ge 49; Nu 24; Dt 31). A close look at the material lying between and connecting the narrative and poetic sections reveals the presence of a homogeneous composition stratum. It is most noticeably marked by the recurrence of the same terminology and narrative motifs. In each of the three segments, the central narrative figure (Jacob, Balaam, Moses) calls an audience together (imperative: Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:28) and proclaims (cohortative: Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:28) what will happen (Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:29) in ‘the end of days’ (Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:29).... In sum, the apparent overall strategy of the author in these three segments suggests that one of the central concerns lying behind the final shape of the Pentateuch is an attempt to uncover an inherent relationship between the past and the future. That which happened to God’s people in the past portends future events. To say it another way, the past is seen as a lesson for the future.... The narrative texts of past events are presented as pointers to future events. Past events foreshadow the future. It is not hard to see that such a hermeneutic leads to a form of narrative typology. We should, then, look for signs of such a typology in the composition of the smaller units of narrative in the Pentateuch as well as in the arrangement of the legal material” (Idem, cited by Constable, who adds, “A believer’s works during this life significantly determine the extent of divine blessing that he or she and their descendants will receive in the future”).

Summary: The Lord blesses all of His children (49:28), but the extent of their blessing depends on their obedience and dependence on the Lord (49:24).

Each individual and, therefore, each tribe had its distinctive characteristic. Morris lists these as industrious or slothfulness, puritanical or licentious, peaceful or aggressive, philosophical or mechanical. He adds that this does not preclude many individual exceptions, “but it does usually seem possible to define in general terms at least the dominant nature of such a group.”

This passage illustrates that it is not necessarily true that “like father like son.” Some of Jacob’s sons were not like him at all; they did things he abhorred. In those cases, they acted out of their sinful nature, not out of their upbringing. Nature won over nurture.

This chapter illustrates the concept of inheritance. All inherited entering the land, but not everyone received an equal share of the estate. “All twelve sons received the benefits of the covenant; all are blessed in that they were all allowed to go into the land” (Leupold). They were all blessed to carry on the Abrahamic covenant by becoming founders of tribes (Ross). All of God’s children are blessed in that they will all be with Him for eternity.

At the same time, a greater inheritance is based on obedience. All of Jacob’s sons were blessed in that they were allowed to enter the land, but in the land, they were not equally blessed. Ruben is censured (49:4). Simeon and Levi’s anger is cursed (49:7). “Some were passed over, and some were elevated to leadership and double blessing. Joseph and Judah come to the fore, as indeed they

had of the story of Joseph. Joseph receives a double portion so that Ephraim and Manasseh would have equal shares with the other sons and out of the promises given to Abraham, kingship was reserved for Judah” (Ross).

“The scope of his prophecy extends into the millennial age. God did not fulfill these prophecies completely during the lifetime of Jacob’s sons. He did not do so during Israel’s years in the land, beginning with the conquest of Joshua and ending with the captivities either. Moreover, He has not done so since then” (Constable).

All believers inherit heaven (1 Pet. 1:3-4), but some will have an abundant entrance into the kingdom (2 Pet. 1:5-11), and some will be disinherited (Gal. 5:19-21).

In Genesis 49, Jacob gave one son a double portion (Joseph) and three were disinherited (Reuben, Simeon, and Levi). As the firstborn son, Reuben should have been given preeminence among his brothers, the leadership of the tribes, priesthood within the family, and a double portion of his birthright (Deut. 21:17), but because of his sexual immorality with his father’s concubine (35:22), he was disinherited (1 Chron. 5:1-2). Jacob told him he was “unstable as water” and would “not excel” because he “defiled his father’s bed” (49:4). The leadership of the tribes went to Judah, the priesthood to Levi (Exod. 32:25-29; Num. 3:12-13), and the double portion to Joseph. Reuben lost his right to inherit.

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

Sooner or later, funeral arrangements will be made for you. That is not something we usually think about, but it is something we should seriously consider. Some questions need to be answered. For example, who is going to make these arrangements? Either you will make the arrangements for your funeral, or you will leave that to those who survive you. What details need to be covered?

The story of the funeral arrangements and funeral for Jacob serves as an illustration for us. It will help us answer some of the questions concerning our funeral arrangements.

The Faith of Jacob

The Charge “Then he charged them and said to them: ‘I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that *is* in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that *is* in the field of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place” (49:29-30). Before this, Joseph had been placed under oath to see to it that Jacob was buried in Canaan (47:29-30). Now, that responsibility is given to all of his sons. Jacob charges them to bury him with his fathers, who are buried in the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron the Hittite, which Abraham brought from him as a burial plot.

“There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah” (49:31). Jacob explains that his people (49:29) who are buried in that cave (49:30) include Abraham (chapter 35) and Sarah (chapter 23), Isaac and Rebekah, and his wife Leah.

“The field and the cave that *is* there *were* purchased from the sons of Heth” (49:32). “Jacob’s desire to be buried in Canaan is an act of faith, as was true of Abraham when he purchased the grave for Sarah’s burial.... All three patriarchs wanted their children to have clear testimony that they had believed God’s promise in reference to the land that was ultimately theirs. These clear directions help to carry this testimony down to successive generations, clear-cut and correct” (Leupold).

The Death “And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people” (49:33). Having sat up in bed to pronounce the blessings (48:2), he now draws his feet up into the bed, breaths his last, and is gathered with his people. “Jacob died peacefully and was ‘gathered to his people’ (i.e., reunited with his ancestors, implying life after death, in the place of departed spirits; cf. 25:8)” (Constable). The expression “gathered to his people” indicates that his people were still living though dead (Leupold; Morris).

After 147 years of struggle and sorrow, Jacob died. His “infirmities were many and his sins were not a few, but through it all, he retained an unquenchable desire for the blessing of God (Ross). “Jacob’s desired burial in the land of promise, thereby testifying to his faith in the promise” (Leupold, vol. 2, p. 1204). “Jacob again expressed his faith in God’s promises that Canaan would be the Israelites’ homeland by requesting burial in the Cave of Machpelah near Hebron (cf. 47:29-32; 48:21-22)” (Constable).

One of the major things you can do to arrange for your own funeral is to provide the place where you are to be buried, which means purchasing a burial plot. Beyond the burial plot, you

could arrange to pay for the funeral service by purchasing a burial insurance policy. Some go even a step further and give details about what they want in the service itself.

The Funeral of Jacob

Grief “Then Joseph fell on his father’s face and wept over him, and kissed him” (50:1). Closing verses of the previous chapter indicate that all of Jacob’s sons were present when he passed away and they no doubt grieved, but Joseph’s grief is particularly mentioned “because he had all his days stood closer to his father than the other sons. Consequently his pain was greater” (Leupold, who adds, see 46:4). Joseph fell on his father’s face, wept, and kissed him. “Natural grief usually finds an outlet in tears” (Leupold).

Embalming “And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel” (50:2). Joseph had his father embalmed. Jacob and Joseph are the only two Israelites of whom it is said in the Scripture that they were embalmed. In Joseph’s case, embalming was necessary because the body was to be transported to Canaan (Leupold). Jacob’s body was preserved as a mummy (Constable).

Mourning “Forty days were required for him, for such are the days required for those who are embalmed; and the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days” (50:3). Embalming seldom took less than a month and normally took forty days (Ross). The mourning lasted for seventy days, just two days less than the Egyptians would normally mourn the death of a Pharaoh (Ross). “It is the grandest state funeral recorded in the Bible, appropriate since Jacob’s story spans more than half of Genesis” (Constable).

Permission “Now when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, ‘If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the hearing of Pharaoh, saying, My father made me swear, saying, ‘Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.’ Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back” (50:4-5). After the seventy days of mourning, Joseph diplomatically first gained the support of Pharaoh’s officers and then asked them to convey the request for permission to bury his father in Canaan to Pharaoh (Morris). Joseph appealed to the Egyptians’ strong respect for the dead by pointing out that his father had made him swear he would bury him in Canaan (Morris). Joseph also wanted to convey to Pharaoh that he would return to Egypt after the burial.

“And Pharaoh said, ‘Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear” (50:6). Pharaoh graciously granted the request.

Processional “So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s house. Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds they left in the land of Goshen” (50:7-8). Joseph took an entourage with him to bury his father in Canaan, including the chief courtiers (not slaves, but “servants of Pharaoh,” Leupold), staff officials (“elders of his house;” Leupold), leaders of the land of Israel (“all the elders of the land of Egypt), and all of Joseph’s brothers. The only people who did not go were those unable to make the trip, such as the children, the flocks, and the herds, all of whom were left in Goshen. This would assure any Egyptians skeptical that they would not return (Morris).

“And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and it was a very great gathering” (50:9). Thus, a large group of people went with Joseph to Canaan to bury Jacob. Such a large group, no doubt, numbering into the hundreds, needed food and protection. Therefore, chariots

(Leupold: wagons) carrying the provisions and horsemen providing military protection accompany the processional to Canaan (Leupold). That was a long funeral procession!

Pause “Then they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which *is* beyond the Jordan, and they mourned there with a great and very solemn lamentation. He observed seven days of mourning for his father” (50:10). The expression “beyond the Jordan” is a reference to the east side of Jordan (Leupold). In other words, instead of going directly to the Promised Land, they crossed the Sinai desert, south of the Dead Sea, and ended up on the east side of the Jordan (Morris). When they arrived at the threshing floor of Atad, they mourned for seven days. Apparently, an Egyptian custom required an additional seven days of lamentation near or at the point of burial (Leupold).

“And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, ‘This *is* a deep mourning of the Egyptians.’ Therefore its name was called Abel Mizraim, which *is* beyond the Jordan” (50:11). Atad beyond Jordan was named Abel Mizraim, a Hebrew word that means “meadow of Egypt” (BDB; Leupold), “Mourning of Egypt” (Constable). Ross says the place probably once meant “meadow of Egypt,” but the very mention of the name would recall the “mourning of Egypt” (Ross). “The Canaanites were so impressed with the party of mourners that they named the place for them” (*NKJV Study Bible*).

Burial “So his sons did for him just as he had commanded them. For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place” (50:12-13). Joseph’s sons carried out their father’s wishes; they buried him in the cave of Machpelah in the land of Canaan many years before Abraham had purchased as a burial place. The description of the field where Jacob is buried is almost verbatim with the charge he gave when he was dying (49:29-30). Jacob’s sons “did not treat the father’s request as an unimportant whim but executed it with fine conscientiousness” (Leupold).

Return “And after he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who went up with him to bury his father” (50:14). All who went to Canaan returned to Egypt, as Joseph had promised Pharaoh he would do (50:5).

Those who survive us should carry out the wishes we give concerning our funeral arrangements.

Summary: Burial arrangements should include a testimony to your faith and those carrying out the arrangements should follow those instructions.

“The record of Jacob’s burial in the land is important to the purposes of Genesis. God had promised Abraham the land and given the patriarchs small portions of it. The faith of these men that God would fulfill His promises and do for their descendants all that He had promised is obvious in their view of Canaan as their homeland. They counted on the future faithfulness of God who had proved Himself faithful to them personally during their lifetimes” (Constable).

The burial of believers should be “in such a way as to give testimony that the one who died believed in the future resurrection of the body and the fulfillment of all God’s promises” (Morris).

Make plans for your burial and funeral. You will be motivated to do it when you see what happens if you don’t, as I have.

MATURE FAITH

The Bible speaks of faith and it also speaks of a mature faith. James speaks of the faith that was made perfect (Jas. 2:22), meaning, of course, mature. What does a mature faith look like? There is an example of mature faith at the end of the book of Genesis.

The Discernment of Joseph

Guilt “When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him’ (50:15). Believing that their father was a restraining influence on the retaliation of Joseph when their father died, they became concerned that Joseph’s hatred for them for all the evil they had done to him would cause him to get even with them. Their feeling of guilt was their problem; it made them suspect Joseph (Leupold).

Confession “So they sent *messengers* to Joseph, saying, ‘Before your father died he commanded, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph: ‘I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.’ Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.’ And Joseph wept when they spoke to him” (50:16-17). To protect themselves, Joseph’s brothers sent messengers to him informing him that before their father died, he told them to ask Joseph to forgive them. It has been suggested that the messenger (“messengers” is in italics, indicating it is not in the Hebrew text) was Benjamin (Leupold) or either Judah or Benjamin (Morris).

Did Jacob actually tell his sons to do this? Some commentators think this is probably not true because since Moses did not record such a statement, he probably intended for the readers to conclude that Joseph had not made such a statement (Constable; Ross). Other commentators, however, think that Jacob actually gave this commandment to his sons before he died (Leupold; Morris). Keil says, “There is no reason whatever for regarding the appeal to their father’s wish as a mere pretense. The fact that no reference was made by Jacob in his blessing to their sin against Joseph merely proved that he, as their father, had forgiven the sin of his sons since the grace of God had made their misdeed the means of Israel’s salvation; but it by no means proves that he could not have instructed his sons humbly to beg for forgiveness from Joseph, even though Joseph had hitherto shown them only goodness and love.”

If Jacob told his sons to ask Joseph to forgive them, did he tell them they should do that before or after he died? Should they not have done it when he told them to do it? Did they delay doing it until after their father died? This was either deception or delay. Morris says, “Actually, they never fully confessed their sin to Joseph, although they had shown by their actions that they were sorry. Joseph, of course, had not indicated that he held any grudge, but he may have wondered why they were still silent. A combination of pride and fear seemed to inhibit them from saying anything further as long as Jacob was living.” At any rate, the brothers acknowledged their sin and asked for forgiveness. Joseph wept.

Submission “Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, ‘Behold, we are your servants’ (50:18). Evidently, the messengers related Joseph’s reaction to his brothers. So they went to see him and fell before him as his servants. This was the literal fulfillment of the dream Joseph had many years before they sold him into slavery.

Assurance “Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God?’ (50:19). Joseph alleviated their fears by telling them he did not think he was in the place of God. This has been taken to mean that Joseph does not think he is in the place of God to judge. “‘Am I in God’s stead?’ that I should take the law into my own hands, and take revenge” (Barnes). It has also been taken to mean that Joseph did not want to interfere with God’s plan. “What could I do to interfere with God’s plan even if I desired to do so” (Leupold). Support for this explanation is found in Genesis 30:2, where the same thought is found. There, it means “Do I have the power to interfere with God’s doing,” whereas here, the meaning is “Do I have the right to do so” (Delitzsch, cited by Leupold).

Genesis opens with a couple, Adam and Eve, trying to become like God. It closes with a man, Joseph, denying that he is in God’s place” (Constable, who cites Lowenthal).

Discernment “But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive” (50:20). With profound spiritual insight, Joseph tells them that the evil they intended to do against him, God used for good to save many people. “God had used their evil deed and turned it for good.... A remarkable example of God’s concurrence, overriding the evil consequences of the wicked deed to bring about results remarkably blessed” (Leupold; see Ps. 76:10).

Joseph “regarded God as sovereign over him and the One who had providentially guided all the events of his life. He knew God’s purposes for him, his family, and all people were good (cf. chs. 1-2). Consequently, he behaved with tender compassion toward his brothers. He proved to be his brothers’ keeper (cf. 4:9)” (Constable).

Kindness “‘Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them” (50:21). For a second time (59:19), Joseph tells his brothers not to be afraid. This time, he adds that he would provide for them and their families. He comforted them and spoke kindly (Hebrew: “He spoke to their hearts” (Leupold), too.

“Each sentence of his threefold reply is a pinnacle of Old Testament (and New Testament) faith. To leave all the righting of one’s wrongs to God (19; cf. Rom. 12:19; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 4:19); to see His providence in man’s malice (20; cf. on 45:5); and to repay evil not only with forgiveness but also with practical affection (21; cf. Luke 6:27ff.), are attitudes which anticipate the adjective ‘Christian’ and even ‘Christ-like’ (Kidner).

A famous Dutch sculptor went to Rome to work because of the choice of marble that was available there. When he prepared his work for shipping, he put hay and straw in the crates to protect them. The day his work arrived, he was not home. After uncrating the statues, his resentful servant deliberately scattered the packing material over the well-tilled garden, hoping the seeds would take root in the fertile soil. Instead, exotic plants native to Rome sprang up and today, they are some of Copenhagen’s most beautiful flowers (*Our Daily Bread*, February 18, 1975).

Death of Joseph

Dwelling “So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father’s household. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years” (50:22). Joseph lived the rest of his life in Egypt and died when 110 years old. Lifespan was slowly shortening. Isaac lived to be 180, Jacob 147, and Joseph 110 (Leupold).

Descendants “Joseph saw Ephraim’s children to the third *generation*. The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph’s knees” (50:23). The expression “to the third generation” indicates that Joseph saw his grandchildren, that is, children born to Ephraim. In other words, it includes Joseph, which is proven by Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9 because if

it meant great-grandchildren, then those two passages would have omitted grandchildren (Leupold). “Joseph lived to see God’s blessing on his children’s children” (Constable). Joseph also lived long enough to see his grandchildren by Manasseh, who were brought up on his knees.

Desire “And Joseph said to his brethren, ‘I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob’” (50:24). Ross explains that the verb “visit” signifies “divine intervention for the sake of blessing or cursing—in the case of the Exodus, in which Israel was delivered at the expense of the Egyptians. The word usually carries the connotation of destinies, which the visitation would change from on high. It is interesting to note that the book of Genesis falls silent on this note of expectation of the visitation, just as the Old Testament itself does until Zacharias identifies the birth of Jesus as the long-awaited visitation (Luke 1:68). The New Testament also ends with the expectation of the visitation from heaven for the ultimate redemption and final fulfillment of God’s promise blessing—‘Come, Lord Jesus’ (Rev. 22:20).”

“Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here’” (50:25). Then, like his father, he made them take an oath that when they went to the land, they would take his bones with them. The book of Genesis ends with an unfulfilled promise but with the expectation of a visitation from on high (Ross).

Death “So Joseph died, *being one hundred and ten years old*; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt” (50:26). After his death, there was no one influential enough to make the needed arrangements, as was the case with his father Jacob (Leupold). Like his father, being buried in the land indicated his faith (Heb. 11:22).

“Joseph probably could have experienced burial in a pyramid or had some other grand burial in Egypt. Like Moses, Joseph chose God’s promises over the world’s privileges. He is a model for all believers, Israelites in the past and present Christians alike. However, he wanted his family to embalm him and place his body in a coffin in Egypt. Later, his descendants could bury him in the Promised Land near Shechem. They did so in the parcel of land his father had bought and given to him, perhaps under Abraham’s oak (48:22; cf. Josh. 24:32). This expression of Joseph’s faith in God’s promises to his forefathers provides a fitting climax for the Book of Genesis and the formative period of Israel’s history. Verse 24 contains the first reference to the three patriarchs together” (Constable).

Summary: Believers with mature faith trust the Lord to fulfill His promises in this life and the next life regardless of the circumstances.

Ross says, “Those who trust the Lord to bring about His promised blessings in His own inscrutable way will demonstrate their faith through adverse circumstances of life. If believers wholeheartedly trust in the sovereignty of God, death will lose its power over them, and persecution and antagonism will fade into His sovereign plan, providing a spirit of confidence and kindness.”

Samuel L. Brengle was a godly man who was an official in the Salvation Army in Boston. One day, a drunk man threw a brick at him, hitting him in the head. As a result of the injury, he was unable to preach for 18 months. During this time of recuperation, he began to write the articles that would form the basis of his book *Helps to Holiness*. That book turned out to be his best and most helpful work. His wife remarked, “Had there been no brick, there would have been no book.” She was convinced that the Lord had allowed the tragedy so her husband would have time to write. She preserved the brick and painted on it the words of Genesis 50: “But as for you, you thought evil against me, but God meant it for good.”

AN OVERVIEW OF GENESIS

When most people think about the Bible, they think about a verse or maybe a passage, such as John 3:16, the Ten Commandments, or the Sermon on the Mount. But as we know, the Bible was written in “books.” The verse and chapter divisions were added many years later. If God wrote the Bible in “books,” perhaps we should consider the Bible in terms of the book as a whole. A simple illustration is the book of Acts. Acts 1:8 is an overview of the book. That verse says that the apostles were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world. One way to get an overview of Acts is to see that it begins in Jerusalem and moves to Judea, Samaria, and Rome. That book is simple. Some books of the Bible are more complex. What is the overview of the book of Genesis?

SUBJECT

What is the subject of this book? Most say it is beginnings, origins. That subject does not explain the total content of the book. It is supposed to be a book of beginnings, the beginning of creation, man, woman, family, work, sin, races, languages, and civilization, but it only contains a few chapters on those subjects. It has 11 chapters on the creation of the earth, man, and sin but has 39 chapters on Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What kind of book of beginnings is that? Just look at it.

- 1 chapter on the creation of the earth!
- 1 chapter on the creation of man!
- 1 chapter on the origin of sin
- 3 chapters on the flood
- 13 or 14 chapters on Abraham
- 1½ chapters on Isaac
- 10 chapters on Jacob
- 13 chapters on Joseph, who was *not* a patriarch!

Isn't the name of the book Genesis? Doesn't that mean beginning or origin? Yes, but Moses didn't name the book. The name was taken from the Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation of the Old Testament made in Alexandria at the order of Ptolemy Philadelphus *ca.* 285-247 BC. Josephus says that 72 priests did the translation in 72 days. There were six priests from each of the 12 tribes. This Hebrew book has a Greek name. Genesis is derived from a Greek word that means “to give birth to or beget.” The LXX translates it as the Book of Beginnings.

So, what is the subject? The subject is election. Moses is telling the Jews that God chose the Patriarchs to give them the land of Canaan. God chose one nation through whom He would bless all nations.

STRUCTURE

There are as many outlines of Genesis as there are authors who have written on it, but what was the outline in the mind of Moses? The phrase “this is the generations of” or something very similar occurs eleven times in Genesis. Some say these refer to what has preceded. For example, Genesis 2:4 refers to Genesis 1:1-2:3, but that does not seem to be the case throughout the book. The traditional view says these phrases refer to what follows them, but that also has problems. The solution is to understand the meaning of the word “generation.” It comes from a word that means to produce. In other words, these headings delineate the *historical result of the beginning point*. Ross suggests paraphrasing it as “this is what came of.” So Genesis 2:4 starts with the created earth and Genesis 2:4-4:26 records what happened, that is, the development of sin. Likewise, the generation of Terah does not primarily concern him but what became of his line, namely Abraham and his kin. The structure of Genesis then is as follows.

Introduction	1:1-2:3
Generation of Heaven and Earth	2:4-4:16
Book of Generation of Adam	5:1-6:1
Generation of Noah	6:9-9:29
Generation of Sons of Noah	10:1-11:9
Generation of Shem	11:10-26
Generation of Terah	11:27-25:11
Generation of Ishmael	25:12-18
Generation of Isaac	25:19-35:29
Generation of Esau	31:1-36:8
Generation of Esau	36:9-37:1
Generation of Jacob	37:2-50:26

A more formal outline would look like this.

I. God’s Election in the Primeval History of Humanity	1:1-11:26
A. The Creation of the Earth	1:1-2:3
B. The Development of Sin	2:4-6:8
C. The Judgment of the Flood	6:9-9:29
D. The Descendants of Noah	10:1-11:26
II. God’s Election in the Patriarchal History of Israel	11:27-50:26
A. The Story of Abraham	11:27-25:11
B. The Story of Isaac	25:12-26:35
C. The Story of Jacob	27:1-37:1
D. The Story of Joseph	37:2-50:26

The Problem

If you look at the book as a whole, it appears to be out of balance. As was pointed out earlier:

1 chapter on the creation of the earth!
1 chapter on the creation of man!
1 chapter on the origin of sin
3 chapters on the flood
13 or 14 chapters on Abraham
1½ chapters on Isaac
10 chapters on Jacob
13 chapters on Joseph, who was *not* a patriarch!

Why is so much material given to Joseph? To appreciate what is going on in Genesis, you need to know about the author, the recipients, and the purpose of the book, as well as the subject and structure.

Author

Moses wrote the book of Genesis, as indicated by: 1) The Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) is a unit (see “and” in Ex. 1:1) and the Pentateuch claims Moses is its author (Ex. 17:14; 24:4, 7; 34:27; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 31:29). 2) Other Old Testament books testify to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (Josh. 1:7, 8; 8:32, 34; 22:5; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 21:8; Ezra 6:18; Dan. 9:11-13; Mal. 4:4). 3) The New Testament confirms the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (Mt. 19:8; Mk. 12:26; Jn. 5:46, 47; 7:19; Rom. 10:15). 4) Jewish and Christian traditions claim Moses wrote it.

The structure of Genesis is marked by “these are the generations of” (“book” in Gen. 5:1 indicates these were written records). Moses used these sources, which is not incompatible with the doctrine of inspiration (see comments on the Books of Kings and Chronicles). Thus, the events recorded in Genesis came from firsthand testimony.

Recipients

If Moses was the author of Genesis, it had to have been written during his lifetime. It is unlikely that he wrote it before the Exodus. Perhaps he wrote it sometime during the wanderings in the wilderness or maybe even in the plain of Moab. He probably wrote it between Egypt and Sinai. (Leupold suggests that the bulk, if not nearly all of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, was written after the fashion of a journal, especially the parts embodying specific words and directions given by God.) If so, the date is about 1446 BC.

The exodus generation, no doubt, had many questions. They probably wanted to know, “Where did we come from? How did we get to Egypt? Why is Moses leading us out of Egypt? Where is he taking us? Why is he taking us there?”

Purpose

The purpose of Genesis is to inform the Israelites in the wilderness about God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (that they would get the land of Canaan) and to explain how they got to Egypt.

Message

The subject is the election of God. The message is God, the Creator of the universe, chose the Patriarchs and their descendants to give them the land of Palestine and bless the world through them, but they ended up in Egypt.

Summary: Moses wrote to the Exodus generation to tell them that the sovereign Creator elected to give Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their seed the land of Palestine and bless the world through them, but they ended up in Egypt (Gen. 12:1-3, which is the seed plot of the Bible). God, the Creator, elects, justifies, and blesses. Justification is by faith (Gen. 15:6), that is, faith is accounted for righteousness.

Spiritually, some of the lessons of this book are as follows: 1) God creates us. We are not robots, machines, animals, or accidents. We are humans in His image. 2) We have fallen. We are not gods nor all mighty. 3) We have been chosen. We are children by choice. 4) All must respond by faith (Gen. 15:6)

In Newsweek magazine, George F. Will pointed out that millions passed through Chicago's O'Hare Airport "obedient to disembodied voices, electronically amplified, telling them to get into cylindrical membranes of aluminum to be hurled by strange engines through the upper atmosphere. The passengers were content not to understand how any of it worked. And we think of the twelfth century as an age of faith."

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