

Genesis Commentary

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Genesis

Creation, Genesis 1:1 – 2:25

Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

This book is a book of beginnings. It tells us of the beginnings of all things, the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon, the stars and planets, the seas and the sky, the dry land, the plants and the animals, mankind, sin, and the beginnings of redemption. It is appropriate that this book should begin with the words, "In the beginning" because it does tell us of the beginning of all things in our material universe.

Everything begins with God. He created the heavens and the earth. It is stated as an established fact. There is no debate and no attempt to prove the statement. It is assumed that God created the heavens and the earth and that everything has its origin in Him. Intelligent design is assumed.

The origin of all things is always a matter of faith and assumption. Since we did not observe creation and cannot travel back in time to see it, we cannot know for certain what took place. We must make a faith assumption. We must make a decision about what we believe based on what seems most reasonable. If we assume that there is no God and that intelligent design is not an option, then we must explain how design sprung from nothing. We must explain how time and chance created a universe that indisputably contains structures that have great detail. I do not see how this can happen. When we see something that men have designed and built, we never say, "How amazing that this happened by chance!" Yet we say this about the earth and its creatures! We do not see the truth because we do not want to see it.

What does it mean here when we are told that "the earth was formless and void"? The Hebrew term for "formless" here is *tohuw*, "from an unused root meaning to lie waste; a desolation (of surface), i.e. desert; figuratively, a worthless thing; adverbially, in vain:--confusion, empty place, without form, nothing, (thing of) nought, vain, vanity, waste, wilderness."¹ The word for "void" sounds very similar. It is *bohuw* - "from an unused root (meaning to be empty); a vacuity, i.e. (superficially) an undistinguishable ruin:--emptiness, void."¹ So the idea is that the earth was desolate and empty. It was deserted. There were no creatures, no vegetation, no atmosphere, no clouds, nothing. There was water, and there was God's Spirit. He was "moving over the surface of the waters." God created the earth with water covering it.

After the heavens and the earth, God created light. At this point, He did not create the sun and moon. That does not happen until the fourth day of creation (verse 14). At this point, He simply created light. Light is a created thing. Years ago I recall reading an article in which someone was speculating that light was the very nature of God, that God and light were one and the same, that if you saw light you were seeing God. The Bible does say, "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). And Jesus is called the "true light" which "enlightens every man" (John 1:9). But

¹ Strong's Concordance

these passages are using light as a metaphor for God. They are speaking of His perfection and purity. They are not saying that God is actual physical light. As we see here in Genesis, God created light. Light is a thing that comes from Him, but is not to be equated with Him. If we worship light, we worship a created thing, and not the true and living God who created it.

God approved of light and saw that it was good. He separated the light from the darkness. He named the light and called it "day," and called the darkness "night." Evening and morning came, and the first day of creation concluded. The heavens and earth had been created, and light had been created and separated from the darkness. The cycle of day and night had been established, somehow even before the sun and moon were created.

Genesis 1:6-8

Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." 7 And God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. 8 And God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

On the second day of creation, God created an expanse that separates "the waters from the waters." This expanse is called "heaven" and it separates the waters below the expanse from the waters above it. This is the sky, the atmosphere. The waters below the expanse are the waters on the surface of the earth, and the waters above the expanse are the clouds in the sky. Though not a scientific description, it is a true description.

Genesis 1:9-13

Then God said, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so. 10 And God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, *and* fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with seed in them, on the earth"; and it was so. 12 And the earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit, with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

Now, on the third day, the dry land is created and the seas. It appears that the water completely covered the earth in the beginning, but now God causes the dry land to appear. On the dry land, God commanded that the earth should sprout vegetation. He spoke and commanded that it should be, and it was so, and it was good. God created many different species of plants, and they produced seed "after their kind." All the primary species were created and were there at the beginning.

Genesis 1:14-19

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; 15 and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. 16 And God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; *He made* the stars also. 17 And God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18 and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

The lights in the heavens were created on the fourth day. It is interesting that the sun was not created until after the plants were created on the earth. God had already created the light that the plants needed, and then He created the sun which would take over the task of providing light on the earth. The lights in the heavens had several purposes. First, they separated the day from the night. The sun would define the day and the moon and stars would define the night. Not only this, but they would also be signs for the seasons, days and years. The lights in the sky define time for us; daily, seasonally and annually. They are the tools God gave us to tell the time throughout the year. Third, they were created to "give light on the earth." The view here is very geocentric. The earth is indeed a tiny speck in a vast universe, but we are told here that the sun and moon and stars were created for the benefit of the earth and its inhabitants. The earth is not an insignificant little piece in God's creation. The earth is the central planet in all creation.

Genesis 1:20-25

Then God said, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." 21 And God created the great sea monsters, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. 22 And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." 23 And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

24 Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. 25 And God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.

On the fifth day, God created the swarming creatures of the seas and the birds of the air. He blessed them and commanded that they should multiply and fill the seas and that the birds should multiply on the earth. God made a start and commanded that the creatures should fill the earth. He wanted them to increase in number.

On the sixth day of creation, God first created the "beasts of the earth." This is the last day of God's activity in creation. Everything was created before man was created.

Genesis 1:26-30

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; 30 and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, *I have given* every green plant for food"; and it was so. 31 And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Up to this point we have seen a very distinct pattern in creation. Each time God is about to create something new it says, "Then God said..." and, "let there be..." or "let" this happen. Now there is a small variation in the pattern. We see some planning taking place here. God says, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our

likeness." To whom is He speaking? To the angels? I don't think so. God does not need to consult with the angels. We see here in the very beginning a hint that there is more than one personality in the nature of the one God. We have a hint of the trinity here.

God's plan was that man should be made in His image and according to His likeness. According to Strong's Concordance the word "image" is the Hebrew word *tselem* "from an unused root meaning to shade; a phantom, i.e. (figuratively) illusion, resemblance; hence, a representative figure, especially an idol."² The word is most often used to refer to an image of a false god, an idol. The term for "likeness" is *dmuwth*, "resemblance; concretely, model, shape; adverbially, like:--fashion, like (-ness, as), manner, similitude."² Man is an image, a representation of God in a finite form. One of the reasons that we are not to try to make for ourselves an image of God is that humans are already the closest representation of God that there is in creation. Jesus Christ is the ultimate and perfect image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15). We must remember this in our relationships with people. Each person has value because of this. A man is a picture of God and is like God. Of course, Scripture points out that there are critical differences between man and God, especially since the fall. We are finite, He is infinite. We are mortal, He is immortal. We are physical, He is spiritual. We are imperfect, He is perfect. We are, however, a representation of God in a human form. This truth has great implications for the way we treat others. James points this out when he talks about the tongue in James 3:8-9, "But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God." We must treat people as those who bear the image of God, however marred by sin and the fall. The image of God in us gives each of us intrinsic dignity and value, and we must remember this as we relate to others.

It was also God's plan that man should rule over all the other creatures of the earth, the fish, the birds and all the animals of the earth. One aspect of the image of God is that we rule over the earth. God is sovereign over everything, and under Him man was to rule the earth.

God carried out His plan. He created man in his own image. Verse 27 is careful to point out that both men and women are created in the image of God. The term "man" here is used of mankind, female as well as male. He blessed them and told them to be fruitful and multiply, just as He had said to the creatures of the earth. He told them to fill the earth and subdue it. The earth was a thing that needed to be subdued by man. The word means to bring something into subjection or to conquer something. The man and woman were to procreate and fill the earth and take it over. They were to make everything subject to them. This does not mean that we were to destroy the creatures of the earth and their habitat, but to live in harmony with them and to care for them. We have, of course, multiplied and filled the earth. But our dominion over creation has been corrupted by the fall. We have failed to be the kind of stewards that God intended for us to be. Our dominion has been cruel rather than kind.

It is evident that initially mankind and all the animals and birds and probably even the fish were vegetarian. God had given them the plants and trees for food. It was not until after the fall and the flood that man and animals were allowed to eat other creatures (see Genesis 9:1-4). There is, in vegetarianism, an echo of the non-cruelty

² Strong's Hebrew Bible Dictionary

that existed before the fall of man and creation. Since the fall, there is a sort of eat-or-be-eaten competition. The deaths of some creatures enables other creatures to live. This in itself is a consequence of sin, and shows us its severity. The kill-or-be-killed, eat-or-be-eaten process was unknown before sin entered the picture. When sin came along, then death and cruelty entered in.

When God looked at everything He had made, His conclusion was that it was very good. God had created nothing evil, but only that which was good. There was nothing about which He said, "I need to improve that." When God does something, He does a perfect job of it. He does not make mistakes and does not botch things up like we do. God had great satisfaction in everything He made, and it all gave Him pleasure.

Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. 2 And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

When we are told that God "rested" on the seventh day, it does not mean that He was tired and needed to rest in order to restore Himself. The word is *shabbath*, which means to cease from exertion. It simply means that on the seventh day He did no work. His work was completed, and so on the seventh day He did no work. God blessed the seventh day and set it apart from the other six days of the week because He had completed His work and rested on the seventh day. The principle of the sabbath rest is built into creation. It is part of the rhythm that God built into the week. One day out of the week we are to cease from our normal work and rest, because this is what God did. This is part of the ten commandments:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11.)

Because this was God's pattern, it is to be our pattern as well. We are to work for six days of the week, and stop working for one day. God is concerned that we rest from our labor. He wants us to stop for one day per week to rest and relax and enjoy His creation.

Genesis 2:4-15

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven. 5 Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth; and there was no man to cultivate the ground. 6 But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground. 7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. 8 And the LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. 9 And out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 10 Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 And the gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there. 13 And the name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole

land of Cush. 14 And the name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. 15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

Now Moses gives us more detail about the creation of man and man's environment. He tells us that conditions back then were different from what they are now. God had not sent rain on the earth, but a mist rose from the earth to water the surface.

Man was formed from the dust of the earth. After the man's disobedience, God reminded him that he was dust in Genesis 3:19. He told the man that he would return to the ground and again become dust. God breathed into the man's nostrils the breath of life. Here at the very beginning we see that God is the one who gives life. He is the source and sustainer of life. There is no life apart from Him.

God took the man He had created and put him in a garden, the garden of Eden. In the garden God had planted every kind of tree. These trees were beautiful and good for food. God cares about aesthetics. He cares about beauty and enjoying beauty. The trees God made were "pleasing to the sight" and they produced good food. Two special trees were put into the midst of the garden, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. These trees were freely accessible to the man. There is nothing here that says that God put a fence around either of these special trees or had angels guarding them at this point. We shall see that these trees were placed in the garden to give the man a choice.

The word "eden" means "pleasure" or "delight." The garden God planted was a place of pleasure and delight. It was meant to be a paradise for the man to inhabit. It was an ideal place for him. In this garden man would find pleasure and his life would be ideal.

The man's purpose was to cultivate the garden and to keep it. He was to tend to the plants and "keep" them or guard them. He was to watch over the garden to take care of it. It appears the garden was not self-sustaining, but God made it so that it would need the man's care. Gardens left to themselves quickly become overgrown and unproductive or dry up and die. We are needed to sustain the productivity of the earth.

Genesis 2:16-17

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."

In the garden the man had complete freedom. He could eat anything from any tree in the garden. There was only one restriction. God told him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned him that in the day that he ate from that tree he would die. In goodness and innocence there is true freedom. Adam could go anywhere he wanted and do anything he wanted and eat anything he wanted. The only regulation was that he not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Paul wrote to Titus, "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled." (Titus 1:15.) At this point, Adam was pure. He was undefiled. For him, everything was pure and he desired nothing that was impure. He had not experienced sin and evil. The one evil possible to him was that he should disobey God and eat from the forbidden tree.

Why did God create this possibility for the man? Why did He give the man a choice? We would still be pure and innocent if He had not given the man the possibility of disobedience. The reason is that God wanted the man to love Him freely, and this is not possible without a choice. Jesus said that to love Him was to obey Him (John 14:15). Moses challenged Israel to choose to choose life by loving the Lord and obeying Him in Deuteronomy 30:15-20:

"See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; 16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. 17 But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You shall not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

This passage makes it very clear that we love God by obeying His commandments. In the garden, God was setting the same choice before Adam. He was saying to Him, "I'm going to give you a choice between obeying Me and living, and disobeying Me and dying, between loving Me and turning away from Me." He did this knowing that the man would choose disobedience. This is the beginning of God's great drama of redemption, the story of His grace and love for a disobedient race.

The forbidden tree was the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." The word for "knowledge" here has to do with knowledge gained through the senses, through experience. If Adam ate from the tree, he would gain experiential knowledge of good and evil. At this point, Adam did not know anything about good and evil. Everything was "good" as God had proclaimed it, and there was no evil. Since evil did not exist in the man's experience, he did not "know" good from evil. These categories did not exist in his mind or experience.

Genesis 2:18-25

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." 19 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 And the man 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." 24 For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Up to this point God has pronounced everything in creation "good." Here, though, we run into one thing that God says is "not good." It was not good that the man should be alone. It wasn't good for him to be by himself. It is not good for people to live in isolation as solitary individuals. We are created for relationships with others.

Even before the fall and even in an ideal environment God said that it was not good for the man to live by himself.

God determined that He would make a "helper suitable for him." The man needed help, and the woman was created as his helper. This is not to say that the woman has a lesser position or is of lower value than the man. The same word is applied to God Himself in Psalm 33:20 and Psalm 70:5 and elsewhere. The woman was made to stand beside the man and work with him in their common tasks.

After God says that He will make a helper for the man, there is this passage in verses 19 and 20 that seems out of place. God made all the creatures of the field and birds of the sky and brought them to the man to be named. The end of verse 20 gives us the key, "but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him." God had Adam look over and name all the animals, but it became evident to Adam that there was no creature that was like him. Perhaps God showed Adam that for every species there were male and female versions, but no female version of himself. Perhaps this was God's way of showing Adam what he needed, and to create in Adam a longing for what the other species had.

God put the man to sleep and performed the first ever surgical procedure. He took one of the man's ribs and used it to make the woman. Adam had been made out of the dust of the earth, but the woman was made from a rib of the man. In a passage where he is discussing the subject of women having their heads covered, Paul wrote,

For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. 8 For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; 9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. 10 Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. 11 However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12 For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. (1 Corinthians 11:7-12)

Paul says that the woman originates from the man. God had a purpose in taking the woman out of the man rather than creating her out of the dust of the ground as He had created the man. The woman owed her existence to the man, and was, in a sense, a part of the man. They shared the same DNA. There is intimacy here and mutual dependence. Note that Paul points to the mutual dependence in this passage. The woman was created from the man and for the man, but the man is not independent of the woman nor the woman of the man. They are to be one.

When God brought the woman to the man, he at once realized that this was what he had been looking for and what he was lacking. He 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." As he had named all the creatures, now Adam also named the woman. She was a female version of himself, and he was excited to have her! There is delight and excitement in finding a person of the opposite sex with whom you can become one. There is a completeness that you find that you do not have when you are single.

This is the reason that marriage exists. This is the reason that a man will leave his parents and cleave to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Literally, it says in verse 24 that a man will leave his father and his mother and shall cleave "to his woman," to his *ishshah* (the Hebrew term), the same word for the name that he gave to the woman. Each man has his woman, and he is to leave his parents and adhere to his woman and they are to become one flesh. God is the one who thought up the idea of

having two sexes. He created sexuality and He created marriage. Marriage did not come about as a result of some evolutionary process, but is an institution conceived by God and established by God. As such, we may not simply do away with it or redefine it in any way we please. This passage is the foundation of marriage and family. This passage tells us why sex outside of the marital commitment is evil. The sexual relationship was created for a man and woman who have left their parents and committed themselves to each other. The "one flesh" relationship is not for people who are not married. God's pattern is leave – cleave – one flesh. If we get these out of order we corrupt His design.

Jesus commented on this passage when He was asked by the Pharisees about divorce in Matthew 19:3-9:

And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?" And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

The Pharisees had a liberal view of divorce and marriage. They felt that a man could, indeed, divorce his wife for any reason at all. If he felt like divorcing her, he could do so. They knew that this was the popular view at the time and were trying to test Jesus and make Him look bad with this question. Jesus pointed them right back to Genesis 2:24. He said, "Haven't you read this?" They should have been ashamed to even ask the question, because the answer is so obvious. Of course, they had read it, but they had not applied it. As they did with many things, they preferred their tradition over the plain command of God. When a man has left his parents and cleaved to his wife, they become one flesh. They are no longer two in God's sight, but are one flesh. God has joined them together. (Literally, He has "yoked" them together.) God is in the middle of marriage. If God has joined two people together in a one-flesh relationship, no man is to separate them. We are not to undo what God has done. God's intention was that in marriage a man and woman were to be yoked together permanently.

The Pharisees then played their trump card. They pointed to Moses and asked, "Why then did Moses command to 'give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?'" They are referring to Deuteronomy 24:1-4:

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

The basis for divorce mentioned in this passage is rather broad and open to interpretation. The word for "some indecency" is " `ervah, nudity, literally (especially the pudenda) or figuratively (disgrace, blemish):--nakedness, shame, unclean(-ness)."³ From this, no doubt, the Pharisees concluded that if there was anything that displeased them about their wives, they could divorce them. Note however that this passage is not a "command" that a man should divorce his wife, it is simply a recognition that it does happen and seeks to regulate it if it does happen. It is something that might happen, but does not have to happen. A man is not required to divorce his wife if he finds "some indecency" in her. Moses did not "command" men to divorce their wives.

Jesus pointed this out to the Pharisees. He said that divorce was not a command, but a concession. It was permitted because of the hardness of men's hearts. The fault lies with men and women who want to divorce, not with God or with His purpose in marriage. It is the condition of our hearts that makes divorce happen. Moses permitted it, Jesus said, because of this, but divorce was not in God's original design at the beginning. Jesus is pointing them back to God's original intention for marriage when He created it.

Moses permitted divorce, but Jesus says that if you divorce your spouse and marry someone else, you commit adultery. The only exception is for immorality. If your spouse has been unfaithful to you and has committed adultery, then you may divorce them and remarry. They have broken their covenant with you. You are not required to divorce them, but you may, according to Jesus. It is still preferable to maintain your marriage if possible.

Genesis 2:25 is a statement that I think is significant, "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." It is a surprising statement. They were naked, but were not ashamed. We would expect them to be ashamed. When people are naked in public these days it is a shameful thing. In our fallen world nakedness is a shameful thing. If we are normal and not perverted in some way, we want to cover ourselves up and not display our private parts. It is embarrassing to be naked and you can be arrested for indecent exposure if you are naked in public. But evidently Adam and Eve were not even conscious of being naked. In Genesis 3:7 we find that the first thing that happened after they ate the forbidden fruit was that their eyes were opened and they "knew that they were naked" and tried to cover themselves with leaves. In their innocence there was a lack of self-consciousness, but in their sin self-consciousness came alive. I don't think that we can fully understand what this was like because we are sinners who are completely self-conscious, sinfully self-conscious. Self is, for most people, the most important thing. But for Adam and Eve before the fall, there was some sort of lack of self-consciousness.

Genesis 3:1-7

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'" 4 And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! 5 "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they

³ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

The serpent here is to be identified with Satan. Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 make it clear that the serpent is Satan the deceiver. He is the most crafty of all of the beasts God made. He is scheming and subtle, and you can see it in the dialogue he has with the woman.

First, the serpent purposely misquoted God. He asked, "Has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" He was testing the woman and trying to sow a seed of doubt or confusion in her mind. What was it that God really said? Has He prohibited you from eating from any tree in the garden? Satan knows the word of God and misquotes it or quotes it out of context for his own purposes. To distort the word of God is one of his main tactics. Most cults that identify themselves as Christians do this. They distort the word of God to support a false doctrine. The Jehovah's Witnesses distort the word of God so that they can deny the deity of Jesus Christ. We must beware of distortions of scripture and verses quoted out of context.

The woman replied that they could eat from any of the trees of the garden except for the tree in the middle of the garden. She didn't have a clear understanding of the command of God, though, because she quoted God as saying, "You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die." God hadn't said anything about not touching the tree, He had just told them not to eat it's fruit. What He had said was, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:16,17.) It is important for us to understand exactly what God has said, precisely what He has commanded. One of the reasons that the woman was deceived was because she did not have a clear understanding of what God had commanded. She was susceptible to doubts about God's word because she was not familiar with it.

The second thing that Satan did was to directly contradict the word of God. He said, "You surely shall not die!" It was a flat-out lie. He told her that there would surely be no consequence for disobedience, that there would be no judgment. This is one of Satan's fundamental lies. He tries to get people to believe that they will not be accountable to God for their sin. He tells people that there will be no judgment. This is one of the most common lies that people believe. People believe that God is so loving that He could never judge and condemn anyone. But this is absolutely contrary to the word of God and the nature of God. Exodus 34:7b says that God "will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." He is holy and just. He cannot let the guilty go unpunished any more than a just legal system can overlook crime. If in our courts criminals must be convicted and punished how much more in God's court! But Satan says, "Go ahead and do what God has prohibited because He won't punish you!"

Satan then explained, "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." After all, God Himself had called it "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" when He warned them not to eat from it. Satan implies that the reason God had threatened them with death was because He did not want them to become like Him. Satan implies that God is withholding something good and desirable from them. When Satan tempts us he always tries to get us to focus on the desirability of evil rather than the consequences of disobedience. He told the woman that she would not die, as God said, but instead

would become like God and know good and evil. Instead of being closed, her eyes would be opened. He implied that God was being unreasonable and unfair and had lied to them.

We need to note that there is truth in what Satan said to the woman. If she ate of the fruit of the tree her eyes would be opened. She would become like God in the sense of knowing good and evil. But mixed in with the truth was the lie that there would be no consequences to her actions, that she would not die, and that the experience would be a good thing for her. Satan is a master at mixing truth with falsehood in order to deceive us and get us to disobey God.

The woman thought about what the serpent had said. She was there looking at the tree. She saw that it had good fruit on it. The tree also was beautiful. It was not an ugly tree, but was delightful. The tree also was desirable to make her wise. It would give her understanding that she didn't have. The woman focused on the tree. She was attracted by its fruit, by its beauty, and by its power to give wisdom. She turned her attention away from the command of God. Evil can be attractive. It can even appear beautiful. As we've seen, Satan plays up the benefits of disobedience. Sin is an attractive thing to us. If it were not, then it would not be a problem for us.

Believing the lie of the serpent and ignoring God's command, the woman took some of the fruit from the tree and ate it. Then we find that her husband was with her, and she gave some of the fruit to him as well. How much the man knew of the conversation between the woman and the serpent we cannot know. We do know that he willingly took the fruit and ate it. Evidently he knew it had come from the forbidden tree, because when God confronted him he acknowledged that it had come from the tree (verse 12). The woman ate the fruit because she was deceived, but the man knew what he was doing. The New Testament points this out, that the woman was deceived, but the man was not (1 Timothy 2:14). Adam followed his wife into sin. She sinned because she was deceived, but Adam sinned because of the influence of his wife. The will of his wife took precedence over the will of God.

The sexual relationship has a powerful influence over our choices and behavior. Spouses can exert a strong influence over one another for good or evil. It is likely that more people are drawn away from the Lord by the sexual relationship than by anything else. The influence of a member of the opposite sex can cause us to do things we never would do otherwise.

Just as the serpent said, when they had eaten the fruit, their eyes were opened. They saw what they could not see before. They had knowledge that they did not have before. There was a new awareness, a new consciousness. But this was not a good thing, but an evil thing. Guilt and shame came alive. Guilt is the awareness that we have done something forbidden, that we have crossed a line we shouldn't have crossed. The man and woman now experienced guilt and knew that they had violated God's command. This guilt manifested itself in the knowledge that they were naked. The new self-consciousness which is such a powerful part of our lives came into being.

Seeing that they were naked, they tried to cover themselves. They took fig leaves and sewed them together for loin coverings. Guilt causes us to try to "cover up" for ourselves. Their openness with each other and with God was gone. When we disobey God and do something we know is wrong, we are objectively guilty. We often deal with that guilt by trying to cover it up or by shifting blame to others. The man and woman did both of these things. Our guilt makes us "cover up" both literally and figuratively. Sin and guilt is the reason we must wear clothing. It is also the reason we

lie to each other and pretend to be something we are not. Since the fall we know good and evil, but we do not know each other.

Genesis 3:8-19

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." 11 And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom You gave {to be} with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." 14 The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; 15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." 16 To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you." 17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. 18 "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; 19 By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."

The Lord God Himself came to the man and woman in the cool of the day. It was no unusual thing for Him to do this. The thing that was unusual was that they were afraid of Him and hid themselves from Him among the trees. Instead of coming to meet Him and enjoying His company, they shrank from Him in fear. They wanted to avoid His presence. Sin is the thing that makes us want to avoid God. Our sinful nature makes us flee from Him. The holy presence of God is a dreadful thing for us in our sin and guilt.

Here we find the truth of our situation. God has not hidden Himself from us, but we have hidden ourselves from Him. He has not cast us from His presence, but we have fled from Him. He always takes the initiative to come looking for us. He pursues us and calls to us, but we do not pursue Him. In truth, there is no one who is a sincere seeker of God. In Romans 3:10-12 Paul quotes from Psalm 14, "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they have together become unprofitable, there is none that does good, no, not one." The word of God puts all of us in the same category. Not one person seeks for God. Not one of us is righteous and does what is good.

The question God asked when He came looking for the man was, "Where are you?" He did not ask this because He did not know where they were. He asked the question because He wanted them to know that He missed them, that He knew they were not in the place they should have been. This tells us not only that we cannot hide from God, but also that He misses us when we run from Him. He asks "Where are you?" because He wants us to think about where we are in relation to Him and why we are there. "Why have you fled from Me?" "Why are you hiding from Me and trying to avoid Me?"

The man answered, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." Adam had heard God coming, and it struck fear into his heart. We see this in scripture when sinful men encounter the holy presence of

God. When Isaiah encountered the Lord he said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (Isaiah 6:5.) When Peter realized that Jesus was the Messiah, he fell at His feet and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8.) When you are in God's presence, you will be terrified if your sin has not been forgiven. Hebrews 10:26-31 warns us:

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He who despised Moses' law died without mercy on the word of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy of punishment, the one who has trampled the Son of God, and who has counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who has said, "Vengeance belongs to Me, I will repay," says the Lord." And again, "The Lord shall judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Why was Adam afraid? He said it was because he was naked. He did not say, "I was afraid because I ate from the forbidden tree." Prior to this he had been naked and unashamed and unafraid. The awareness of being naked was a symptom or consequence of his sin, not the actual core problem. Often the thing we regret in our guilt is not the sin itself, but the consequence of our sin. Adam was willing to admit that he was naked and therefore fearful, but was not willing to admit that he had disobeyed God. In order to properly repent and make things right with the Lord, we must get to the real, core problem, which is our disobedience to God. We must name our sin and confess it, not just confess the consequence of it.

Adam's fear caused him to hide from the Lord. This is an unhealthy fear of the Lord. There is a healthy fear of God that causes us to turn from evil and is identified as wisdom (Job 28:28), but this was an unhealthy fear that caused Adam to hide from God. When we flee from God we flee from the only one who can solve our problem. We hide from the only one who has the true solution. Every solution we attempt on our own fails. We still have guilt and shame. Only God can wipe away our guilt through the blood of His Son.

The Lord asks two more questions in verse 11. First He asked, "Who told you that you were naked?" Where did they get the knowledge that they were naked? Again, this question is not for God's information. He undoubtedly knew what had happened. He knew what they had done. This question is for the man and woman. Who had informed them that they were naked? How had they come by this knowledge? He is trying to get them to admit what they have done. In the second question He comes to the point, "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" He knew they had. How will they answer? Will they admit what they have done? Will they confess their sin?

I think it is interesting that the Lord used questions as He confronted the man and woman. He did not search them out, drag them out of their hiding places and directly accuse them. He did not say, "You have eaten of the forbidden tree, and now you will face the consequences!" Instead He asked questions in order to get them to tell Him what had happened. He gave them the opportunity to confess their sin. This is a good strategy for parents in disciplining their children. Give them a chance to confess and to apologize.

Confronted with God's questions, the man pointed the finger at the woman. He

said, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Adam minimized his own responsibility and blamed Eve for his disobedience. In fact, Adam even implied that it was partly God's fault for giving him this woman who led him astray. In effect, he said, "You gave me this woman, and she gave me the fruit from the tree." He tried to justify his behavior by shifting the blame to the woman. He did admit to eating the fruit, but implied that he would not have done it if it hadn't been for the woman God gave him. This seems to be one of the first things we do when we are caught in some sin. We try to find someone else to blame. We point the finger at someone else and try to shift the focus from ourselves.

This entire encounter between God and the man and woman should sound familiar to virtually any parent. I know it does to me. One child comes running, saying that the other child has hit them. You ask the other child, "Did you hit your sister?" He says, "She did so-and-so to me!" You ask the sister, "Did you do so-and-so to him?" and she replies, "But he did so-and-so to me!" And so it goes.

The Lord God turned to the woman and asked, "What is this you have done?" He gave her a chance to confess to her wrongdoing. As Adam had pointed to her, she pointed to the serpent and said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." She implied that she wouldn't have eaten the fruit if she hadn't been deceived by the serpent. The serpent was the one who was at fault. She only ate the fruit because he tricked her. Nonetheless, she had eaten the fruit. She had done, and Adam had also done, the thing that God told them not to do. They would bear the consequences of their disobedience regardless of the culpability of others in the process. This is a very important point to note. We are responsible for our wrongdoing regardless of our reasons for doing it or of the involvement of others. Yes, maybe we were tricked; maybe we were influenced in a powerful way by those closest to us, but we are still responsible for what we do and still bear the guilt of choosing to disobey the commands of God.

In verse 14 the Lord turns to the serpent. He has no questions for the serpent. He did not follow the same pattern as He had for the man and woman. The serpent was a different sort of creature. The Lord did not bother trying to get him to confess his wrongdoing. He had come along with the express purpose of getting the woman to eat the fruit and die. He had come to destroy the relationship between the people and their God. He is the great deceiver. He is the great liar and "father of lies" (John 8:44). The Lord God only has words of condemnation for him. There is no opportunity for redemption for him. The serpent is cursed by God more than all the other animals. He is sentenced to crawl on his belly and eat dust all his life. The snake had been a tool of Satan to deceive the woman, and so took its present form.

In verse 15 we read that the Lord God will put "enmity" between the woman and the serpent and between the seed of each. There will be hostility and hatred between the serpent and the woman and between their offspring. This is perhaps the reason that people seem to have an innate fear of snakes for the most part. Indiana Jones' fear of snakes is the rule and not the exception. When I was a young man we went hunting on a large ranch in northern California. One of the men who hunted with us always carried a .38 revolver with snake load bullets so that he could kill any rattle snakes he came across. There does appear to be "enmity" between people and snakes. This of course applies in the spiritual realm as well. Satan is our enemy. He is hostile toward us and wants to destroy us. He appears as an "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14) but we must remember that it is just a ruse, a trick and a disguise in order to lead

us astray.

The serpent would be bruised on the head by the seed of the woman, and the serpent will bruise him on the heel. This prophecy in verse 15 is interesting. It speaks of one "seed" of the woman who would bruise the serpent on his head. This one would give the serpent a fatal wound. When you want to kill a poisonous snake (and you don't have a gun) you try to pin it's head down and then crush it's skull. When it's head is pinned down it can't strike and becomes helpless. This is what Jesus did to Satan. He issued a fatal blow to his head. This is the first prophecy in scripture of the defeat of Satan by the Lord Jesus. Right here just after the fall, God lets us know that Satan will be defeated by one who will be the "seed" of the woman, who is Jesus Christ. In the process of crushing Satan's head, Satan will "bruise" Him on the heel. Satan was allowed to wound Jesus Christ, but Christ has crushed Satan on the cross.

There are two great consequences for the woman. First, God says to her in verse 16 that He will "greatly multiply" her pain in childbirth, and it would be painful to bring forth children. It also appears possible here from the language that God is going to multiply her childbearing itself. She will bear more children in more pain. Perhaps God changed the woman's fertility cycle so that it would be possible for her to conceive more often than He had originally planned. This is only speculation about the meaning here. Clearly now the woman would be in much more pain as she bore children than originally intended.

The second thing for the woman has to do with her relationship with her husband. God said, "Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." The Hebrew word for "desire" is *tshuwqah*, which Strong's concordance defines as "a longing:--desire." It comes from *shuwq*, meaning to run after or over. She will go after her husband and pursue him, and he would rule over her. She would no longer lead him, but he would lead her. This is the basis for God's requirement of feminine submission. In 1 Timothy, Paul points to the fall as the basis for requiring submission on the part of women in the church:

Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness. Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. (1 Timothy 2:9-15.)

We cannot fully know how things would have been between men and women if Adam and Even had not been disobedient. It does appear that the "war between the sexes" is a direct result of the fall. The harmony that should exist between men and women has been shattered. It is now God's design for fallen humanity that the man should rule over the woman, the husband over the wife. The man is the one God will hold responsible in the relationship. It is God's command now to the woman that she should submit to her husband.

Last, the Lord spoke to Adam in verses 17 to 19. We find that God reveals two stages in Adam's disobedience. First, he listened to the voice of his wife. Second, he ate from the forbidden tree. There was more to the temptation of Adam than Eve simply handing him the fruit. She spoke to him about it and persuaded him. She

convinced him to eat it. We of course don't know what she said, but God reveals that Adam had listened to her. He paid attention to what she said and heeded her word instead of God's word. This is what happens in temptation. We listen to another, more insistent voice that tells us to do what God has told us not to do. It may be the voice of another person, it may be the voice of our own sinful nature, or it may be the voice of the Devil, but in any case it is a voice that contradicts what God has commanded. Maybe Eve said, "Adam, you've got to try this! It is so delicious, and it does give you wisdom and insight that we never had before!" She recommended the fruit as one who had tried it to one who had not tried it, like someone offering drugs to someone else for the first time. This is always a powerful sort of temptation, when it comes from one with experience that we do not have. They can say, "Don't knock it if you haven't tried it!" And, "I've done it and it hasn't hurt me at all!" Adam became the first victim of peer pressure, the first one to cave in to pressure from someone else to do something he knew was wrong.

God, in His discipline of Adam, clearly pointed out Adam's wrongdoing. Adam had done what God told him not to do. God made it clear to them that it was because of their disobedience to His specific and clear command that they would suffer the consequences He describes. Adam's disobedience led to the cursing of the ground. God was not being unfair and capricious. Adam brought his suffering upon himself.

Adam's disobedience has affected the whole earth. The earth has been cursed because of us. What this means for us is that growing food and making a living for ourselves requires toil and difficult labor. We don't realize today how dependent we are on the ground. We come from the ground; God made the man out of the dust of the earth. The ground grows our food. We will return to the ground. Now the ground is no longer friendly to us. It no longer grows what we need of itself, but we must work hard to cultivate it and to fertilize it and to plant the right kinds of plants on it, and to water those plants and see that they are protected from insects and heat and freezing and drought. We are at the mercy of the ground. On its own, God says, it will grow thorns and thistles for us. It seems that the earth easily grows worthless weeds, and is reluctant to grow good food. We need to understand that this is part of the curse upon the earth because of Adam's disobedience. Things are not the way that God originally intended. Life is much harder for us than it would have been if we had never disobeyed.

The man had come from the ground, and now God says that he will work hard all his life until he returns to the ground from which he was taken. God explained, "For you are dust, and to dust you shall return." This is a humbling thing for us to hear. We are mere dust. This principle evidently had a profound impact on Moses. He writes in Psalm 90:

Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

2 Before the mountains were born,

Or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting,

Thou art God.

3 Thou dost turn man back into dust,

And dost say, "Return, O children of men."

4 For a thousand years in Thy sight

Are like yesterday when it passes by,

Or as a watch in the night.

5 Thou hast swept them away like a flood; they fall asleep;

In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew.
6 In the morning it flourishes, and sprouts anew;
Toward evening it fades, and withers away.
7 For we have been consumed by Thine anger,
And by Thy wrath we have been dismayed.
8 Thou hast placed our iniquities before Thee,
Our secret *sins* in the light of Thy presence.
9 For all our days have declined in Thy fury;
We have finished our years like a sigh.
10 As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years,
Or if due to strength, eighty years,
Yet their pride is *but* labor and sorrow;
For soon it is gone and we fly away.
11 Who understands the power of Thine anger,
And Thy fury, according to the fear that is due Thee?
12 So teach us to number our days,
That we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.
13 Do return, O LORD; how long *will it be?*
And be sorry for Thy servants.
14 O satisfy us in the morning with Thy lovingkindness,
That we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
15 Make us glad according to the days Thou hast afflicted us,
And the years we have seen evil.
16 Let Thy work appear to Thy servants,
And Thy majesty to their children.
17 And let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us;
And do confirm for us the work of our hands;
Yes, confirm the work of our hands.

Similarly, David writes in Psalm 103:8-18:

The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.
9 He will not always strive *with us*;
Nor will He keep *His anger* forever.
10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.
12 As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
13 Just as a father has compassion on *his* children,
So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.
14 For He Himself knows our frame;
He is mindful that we are *but* dust.
15 As for man, his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
16 When the wind has passed over it, it is no more;
And its place acknowledges it no longer.
17 But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him,
And His righteousness to children's children,
18 To those who keep His covenant,
And who remember His precepts to do them.

Though we are dust and will return to dust, there is hope in God's lovingkindness and compassion. Forgiveness is available to those who fear Him, trust Him and keep His

covenant. We will rise from the dust in the resurrection to newness of life if our faith is in Christ.

Genesis 3:20-24

Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all *the* living. 21 And the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

22 Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"--
23 therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. 24 So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life.

As Adam had given names to all the animals, so now he names his wife. He called her Eve, which means "life-giver." All humanity would spring from her. She would be the mother of us all, our original mother.

We must not skip over verse 21. God made garments of skin for Adam and Eve. The fig leaf aprons that they had made for themselves were not adequate. They needed to have God cover their nakedness now, and He did it with animal skins. Animals had to die to cover their nakedness, their guilt and shame. Blood was shed because of their guilt. This is the first object lesson about the consequences of our sin. Only God Himself can atone for our sins. Only He can cover our guilt. Our efforts are inadequate and futile. These first animals who died for Adam and Eve foreshadowed the final and true sacrifice for all sins for all time, that of Jesus Christ on the cross. His death truly covers our sin and truly provides forgiveness for us.

Once again the Lord God speaks in verse 22, using the plural pronoun "Us." "The man has become like one of Us" He said. We recall what He said in 1:26, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." Again there is the hint that there is more than one personality in the nature of the one God. There is a dialog among the members of the trinity.

The fall of man has caused a problem. Adam has become like one of the members of the Godhead in that he now knows good and evil. The trouble is that man's nature is now evil and not good. God knows good and evil from the perspective of total and perfect goodness. We know good and evil from an evil and corrupt perspective. God knows good and evil as the one who has been disobeyed, we know good and evil as those who have disobeyed. He has made the rules, we have broken the rules. In a sense, man after the fall is more like God than man before the fall, in that we know something that we did not know before. We know about evil and guilt and shame. We understand the moral nature of God's creation. We see things that we could not see before. But this is knowledge that God did not intend that we should have. He did not intend that we should be like Him in this respect.

Before they disobeyed, Adam and Eve had free and open access to the tree of life, which would allow them to live forever. Now that they had instead chosen the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of death, they are barred from the tree of life. They may no longer have access to the tree of life. God points out the danger that they might, in their fallen state, reach out and take fruit from the tree of life and live forever. To prevent this, God drove the man and woman out of the garden of Eden and away from the tree of life. He stationed angels with a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life so that Adam and Eve could not return to it. If you eat from the tree of death, you cannot eat from the tree of life. God will not allow it.

The tree of life still exists, but it has been removed from the earth. The book of Revelation tells us that it is in the "Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). It is in the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 22 :

And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2.)

Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:14.)

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19.)

We will encounter the tree of life again and again have access to it if we are among those who have "washed their robes." Revelation 7:14 says that we wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. The blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, must cover our sins. If we are forgiven through His blood, then we have access again to the tree of life. We may eat and live forever.

Adam and Eve were sent away from the tree of life, but they were also sent out of the garden of Eden. Genesis 3:23 says that God "sent Him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken." God had planted and prepared the garden of Eden for the man. In chapter two, the sequence of events was that God formed the man, planted the garden in the east, and then put the man in the garden "to cultivate and keep it" (2:7,8, 15). The man was placed into a garden that was already perfectly established by God, healthy and fruitful. His job would be to maintain it. But after the fall, the man was kicked out of Eden and would have to start from scratch on planting his own garden and cultivating it. As God had said, he would have to work much harder to grow his food.

Genesis 4:1-16

Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with *the help of* the LORD." 2 And again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. 4 And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; 5 but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. 6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 "If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." 8 And Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. 9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" 10 And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. 11 "And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 "When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth." 13 And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear! 14 "Behold, Thou hast driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Thy face I shall be hidden, and I shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and it will come about that whoever finds me will kill me." 15 So the LORD said to him, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD appointed a sign for Cain, lest anyone finding him should slay him. 16 Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

The first mention of the sexual relationship is here in chapter 4. We do not know if Adam and Eve had intercourse before the fall, but if they did this is the first occasion that resulted in a pregnancy. We must not infer from this that sexual activity between man and wife is a product of the fall.

Cain was the first man to be born into the world. Adam and Eve were created by God, but Cain was the first to be born in the familiar manner. Eve said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord." She acknowledged the Lord's role in enabling her to conceive and give birth. We must not forget in the process of conceiving and delivering children that it is a divinely designed process. There is something wondrous and almost supernatural in it. We must not forget the words of Psalm 127:3, "Behold, children are a gift of the LORD; The fruit of the womb is a reward."

Since God had promised that the seed of the woman would defeat the serpent, it is possible that Eve placed great hope and confidence in Cain, that he would be the promised deliverer. He turns out, though, to be far from it. He becomes the first murderer.

Eve's second son was Abel. Abel became a rancher, and Cain became a farmer. Abel raised animals, but Cain tilled the ground and raised crops. When the time came to bring an offering to the Lord, Cain brought what he had produced from the "fruit of the ground." He brought grain, and perhaps some fruit and vegetables. Abel brought "of the firstlings of his flock and their fat portions." They must have had some instruction about this from their parents or from the Lord Himself, or they would not have known anything about offering anything to the Lord. The big difference between them, of course, is that Abel brought an animal sacrifice and Cain brought an offering of grain. Abel brought some of the firstborn of his flocks as a sacrifice to the Lord. Some of his first sheep he gave to the Lord as a sacrifice. Their lives were lost and their blood was shed, and I presume that Abel burned them on an altar to the Lord, or that perhaps the Lord was personally present to receive his offering.

God "had regard for Abel and for his offering." The word "regard" is *sha`ah* which means "to gaze at or about." God looked at Abel's offering. He inspected it and accepted it. Since Abel brought the right kind of sacrifice with the right attitude in the right way, he and his offering were accepted. Abel's heart attitude was more important than his actual offering. This is always true. A right attitude leads to a right offering. A wrong attitude with a technically correct offering will not gain God's acceptance. David mentioned this in his prayer of confession in Psalm 51:16-19, "For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. By Thy favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then Thou wilt delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Thine altar." A broken and contrite heart comes before sacrifice. When sacrifices and offerings became routine religious exercises devoid of significance to those who offered them, God was not pleased. Proverbs 21:27 says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, How much more when he brings it with evil intent!" The sacrifices may be right from a technical religious standpoint, but the heart was still wicked and estranged from the Lord. Abel and his sacrifice were accepted by the Lord because Abel came with the right attitude.

Things were different for Cain, however. God had no regard for Cain and for his offering. God did not "look upon" Cain's offering. There was something wrong with

Cain and so there was something wrong with his offering. Cain brought an offering that was unacceptable. I believe that both Cain and Abel knew that to cover their sin, they needed to bring an animal sacrifice. I think that they had been taught that they needed to shed blood in order to cover their guilt and sin. Abel complied with this requirement, but Cain did not. Cain thought that he should be able to approach God in his own way and on his own terms. He thought that God should be pleased with his own efforts. While Abel came to God on God's terms, Cain created his own religion and tried to please God in his own way. Cain was the first man to try to approach God on the basis of his own works. God will not accept this. God does not accommodate Himself to us, but we are to submit to Him. He makes the rules and we follow them, not vice-versa.

There is something else to consider here. Since Cain was a tiller of the ground and Abel was a keeper of flocks, Cain would have had to go to his brother to obtain an animal for sacrifice. Evidently Cain was not willing to do this. It would have required him to humble himself and depend on his brother in order to offer a proper sacrifice to the Lord. It would have required him to follow the example of his younger brother. His pride kept him from doing what was right. This is the root of our problem in approaching God. Our pride keeps us from humbling ourselves and doing what we need to do to approach God. Our pride causes us to think that God should accept our efforts and should be satisfied with whatever we bring to Him. But "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). God requires humility to obtain His grace.

Cain's response to the fact that God had no regard for him and for his offering was to become angry, very angry. His "countenance fell." That is to say, his "face fell." A dark cloud of anger came over his face. We've all seen this happen when someone gets angry. It angered him that God would not accept him or his offering, when He had accepted Abel and his offering. He may have thought, "I am just as good as Abel, why won't God accept me?" He may have even felt that he was superior to Abel; after all, he was the firstborn. He was older and wiser and more experienced. He could not see that it was not a matter of comparative goodness, but of coming to God with the right attitude and the right sacrifice. It is not true that it does not matter how you approach God. It does matter. You must approach Him in the way that He has prescribed, or not approach at all. This is true even on a human scale. If you want to approach the President, you must go through the established channels and procedures for gaining an audience with him. You don't just hop the fence at the White House and walk into the Oval Office. Trying that will get you arrested or killed! In a sense, Cain had tried to come to God in his own way, and God would not accept it. Cain had no one to be angry with except himself.

The Lord sought Cain out and confronted him. Again, God used questions to get to the heart of the matter and to get Cain to think properly. His first questions are, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?" He wanted Cain to think about the real reason that he had become angry. Cain needed to see that the problem was not with God or with Abel, but with himself. Cain was probably thinking that God was being unfair or unreasonable or showing favoritism. He refused to see and admit his error and instead became angry. This is what people will often do instead of admitting their faults and foolish choices. They will become angry and lash out and try to project blame onto others. When we are caught in sin and are tempted to use this tactic, we must remember Cain, and that his anger just led to something worse.

In verse 7, God has an exhortation and a warning for Cain. "If you do well, will

not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is for you, but you must master it." The NASB inserts "your countenance" here, which I'm not sure is what the Lord meant. His countenance had fallen, yes, but if he did well, he would be lifted up. He would be accepted. There was still an opportunity for Cain to change his attitude and offer the right kind of offering and be accepted by the Lord and be lifted up. Cain had two choices, to "do well" and be lifted up, or to "not do well" and be controlled by sin. God made it clear to him that he had these two options. There was still the opportunity for redemption and a right relationship with God, but there was also the danger of falling into sin. These same options still exist for all of us. The direction we take in life is largely determined by the choices we make.

One thing that is very interesting to note, and I think that we are meant to notice it, is that the same words are used in verse 7 about sin as are used in 3:16 when the Lord said to the woman, "Yet your *desire* shall be for your husband, and he shall *rule over* you." To Cain the Lord says, "sin is crouching at the door; and its *desire* is for you, but you must *master* it." The language is the same. As the woman's desire was for her husband, and he ruled over her, so sin's desire was for Cain, but Cain needed to rule over sin. Sin wanted to subdue Cain and possess him. Sin is personified here as a creature crouching at the door of Cain's house, ready to spring on him and overpower him, but Cain needed to tame it and control it. He must not allow himself to submit to it and be overcome by sin. Sin is always ready to spring on us and subdue us, but we must not allow it to happen. The New Testament talks in many places about resisting sin and submitting to God (Romans 6-8; James 4:7; Hebrews 12:4). James 4:7 says, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." We can do one or the other, but we cannot do both. We cannot submit to God while also submitting to sin or vice-versa.

Verse 8 tells us that "Cain told Abel his brother." What did he tell him? The word translated "told" here simply means that he spoke to his brother. He said something to him. It does not necessarily mean that he told him what had happened or what God had said. In fact, the NIV translates this verse like this, "Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him." According to the footnotes in the NIV, this text occurs in the Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac texts, but not in the Masoretic Text.

If the NIV text is the correct reading, Cain lured his brother out into the field in order to kill him. He set him up. It was a premeditated murder. It was not an impulsive thing, but a planned thing. Abel had done nothing that we know of to provoke or deserve his brother's wrath, so why was Cain so angry with him? Abel and his sacrifice had been accepted by God while Cain and his offering had been rejected. It was a case of jealousy. Cain had an irrational jealous anger toward his brother that drove him to murder him. The same sort of thing is behind the world's anger toward Christians. We have, for the most part, done nothing to provoke the anger of the world toward us, yet they hate us out of jealousy. They hate us because we have left their ranks and now belong to another kingdom and are citizens of heaven. Jesus told us that this would happen. In John 15:18-21 He says, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his

master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me."

Once they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel and killed him. Cain's anger was directed at his brother. For some twisted reason, Cain thought that Abel was the problem, and if he eliminated Abel, the problem would go away. The competition would be eliminated. There would be no one to show him up. He would again be the important person and not his brother. His intense anger kept him from thinking clearly. It is like the chief priests thinking that if they did away with the Son of God they would be able to retain their preeminent position. Jesus told a parable about this kind of thinking, recorded in Matthew 21:33-46:

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey. 34 And when the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35 And the vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. 37 But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and seize his inheritance.' 39 And they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?"

41 They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers, who will pay him the proceeds at the *proper* seasons."

42 Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner *stone*; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? 43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it. 44 And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." 45 And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. 46 And when they sought to seize Him, they feared the multitudes, because they held Him to be a prophet.

For some reason, Cain did not see that killing his brother would have dire consequences for him. Instead of making things better for himself, he made them much worse by murdering his brother.

Once again, when the Lord confronted Cain, He asked a question, "Where is Abel your brother?" The Lord knew what had happened and where Abel was. Again, He was giving Cain an opportunity to confess and to tell the truth. Cain lied, however, and said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" It sounds like Cain is still angry and irritated. He has shut himself off from the Lord. He disavows responsibility for his brother. He is not responsible to protect and guard his brother. No, in fact, he was his brother's murderer and not his keeper! Instead of protecting his brother, he was the one from whom his brother needed to be protected!

The Lord asked another question, "What have you done?" Cain must face it and be honest. The Lord knew what he had done. Cain was responsible. He could not blame anyone else. There was no justification or excuse for what he had done. The Lord said, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground." His crime could not be covered up. Abel's blood was crying out to the Lord from the ground. Our sins have a way of doing this, of not staying hidden and secret and

covered up. They have a way of coming back to haunt us.

God passed His sentence upon Cain, "And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth." It was not the ground that was cursed, but Cain who was cursed from the ground. He had been a farmer, but now his "green thumb" would be taken from him and the ground would not produce for him. He had spilled Abel's blood on the ground, and the ground is here personified as the blood of Abel had been personified. The ground had opened its mouth and drank the blood of Abel. Cain's hand had poured the blood of Abel into the ground's mouth. Cain had tainted the ground by what he had done. God declared that the ground would no longer cooperate with Cain as it had before. It would not yield its power to him, but would resist him. As a result, Cain would become a vagrant and wanderer. He would be down-and-out and would become like the trash-pickers and panhandlers of today who depend on others for their sustenance.

What was Cain's response at this point? Did he fall on his face, confessing his sin and seeking forgiveness? Did he see how horrible his sin was? No, he did not. Instead, he complained about the severity of his punishment! He said, "My punishment is too great to bear!" In effect, he accused God of punishing him too much! It was too much that he should be driven from the face of the ground and from the face of God. It was too much that he should be a vagrant and wanderer on the earth. He also felt sure that whoever found him while he was wandering would kill him. He did not hesitate to kill his brother, but he certainly did not want anyone to treat him the way he treated Abel. In truth, God was gracious to Cain in allowing him to live. Cain deserved to die for his sin, but God had mercy on him and did not punish him very severely. Sinners often fail to see the mercy and grace of God in their daily lives. We have all done things that deserve the death penalty from God, but he allows us to go on living, patiently waiting for us to come to repentance and faith in Him (2 Peter 4:9). Cain is the first in a long line of arrogant unbelievers who fail to appreciate God's grace toward them.

The Lord set aside Cain's fear of being killed. He promised him, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." God appointed some sort of sign that would warn people against killing Cain. God made sure that Cain was protected. I don't fully understand why God gave Cain this assurance. Later, after the flood, God declared "And surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man." (Genesis 9:5-6.) Here God gives us a solid foundation for capital punishment. This declaration came long after Cain was on the scene. Perhaps God protected Cain because He did not want to see a cycle of violence begin with the first men on the earth, but He wanted to put a stop to it right away.

Cain left the presence of the Lord. He went out from the Lord to another place, to the land of Nod, east of Eden. It was not the Lord who left him, but he who left the Lord. He moved away from God. This is what we have done. This is what our sin does, it estranges us from God. Sin drives us from His holy presence.

Before moving on, there is one more thing that grabs my attention here. Throughout this passage, Abel is referred to as Cain's brother. Verse 2, "she gave birth to his brother Abel." Verse 8, "And Cain told Abel his brother...Cain rose up against

Abel his brother." Verse 9, "Where is Abel your brother?" Verse 10, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground." Verse 11, "the ground...has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood." The point is clear. Abel was Cain's younger brother and Cain should have been one to watch over him and protect him and care for him. Cain should not have been his adversary and murderer. You don't treat your brother the way that Cain treated Abel. John points to Cain as a negative example in 1 John 3:10-12, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous." Brothers are supposed to love one another. If we are children of God, we must love other children of God because we are brothers and sisters in the Lord. We do not have the option of hating other believers.

Genesis 4:17-26

And Cain had relations with his wife and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son. 18 Now to Enoch was born Irad; and Irad became the father of Mehujael; and Mehujael became the father of Methushael; and Methushael became the father of Lamech. 19 And Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah. 20 And Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and *have* livestock. 21 And his brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. 22 As for Zillah, she also gave birth to Tubal-cain, the forger of all implements of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. 23 And Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, Listen to my voice, You wives of Lamech, Give heed to my speech, For I have killed a man for wounding me; And a boy for striking me; 24 If Cain is avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

25 And Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, *she said*, "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel; for Cain killed him." 26 And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then *men* began to call upon the name of the LORD.

Cain's wife must have been his sister. The girls born to Adam and Eve are not mentioned in Scripture. Cain had a son named Enoch, and Cain built a city and named it Enoch. Cain was supposed to be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, but he built a city. It may be that he was trying to defy the sentence that the Lord had handed down to him by building a city.

The line of Enoch is traced down to Lamech in verse 18. Verses 19-24 focus on Lamech. He is the first polygamist mentioned in the Bible. He had two wives, Adah and Zillah. Their children are mentioned as those who established certain lifestyles and occupations. Adah's son Jabal was the father "of those who dwell in tents and have livestock." He was the progenitor of a clan of nomadic herdsman. The other son of Adah, Jubal was "the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe." His descendents became a clan of musicians. Zillah's son Tubal-cain, was a metalworker. He made things of bronze and iron, and his sons probably followed in his steps.

Lamech, following the pattern of Cain, also was a murderer by his own admission. In fact, he boasted about it to his wives! He said that he had killed a boy for hitting him. He felt that if Cain was worth a sevenfold revenge, that he was worth seventy-sevenfold. In his inflated view of himself, he felt that if anyone harmed him, he deserved to retaliate with 77 times more force! Therefore, when a young man struck

him, he killed the young man. Rather than repenting of his murder, he boasted about it and said that he was justified in doing it! Lamech was a man with a calloused conscience who felt that his violence was justified. The more Lamechs there are in the world, the more dangerous the world will be for everyone.

Adam and Eve had sex again and Eve gave birth to Seth. It is interesting that according to Strong's Hebrew Concordance the name Seth means "put, i.e. substituted." Seth was the substitute for Abel. Eve explained, "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel; for Cain killed him." Her perspective was that God had replaced Abel with Seth. Cain started a line of violent unbelievers, and Seth would start a line of believers. Cain's son was Enosh. It is when Seth and Enosh came on the scene that "men began to call upon the name of the Lord." They started to call on YHWH. They worshipped the Lord and called on him. They were men who sought the Lord.

Genesis 5

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. 2 He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created. 3 When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth. 4 Then the days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years, and he had *other* sons and daughters. 5 So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.

6 And Seth lived one hundred and five years, and became the father of Enosh. 7 Then Seth lived eight hundred and seven years after he became the father of Enosh, and he had *other* sons and daughters. 8 So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died.

9 And Enosh lived ninety years, and became the father of Kenan. 10 Then Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years after he became the father of Kenan, and he had *other* sons and daughters. 11 So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years, and he died.

12 And Kenan lived seventy years, and became the father of Mahalalel. 13 Then Kenan lived eight hundred and forty years after he became the father of Mahalalel, and he had *other* sons and daughters. 14 So all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years, and he died.

15 And Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Jared. 16 Then Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Jared, and he had *other* sons and daughters. 17 So all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years, and he died.

18 And Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and became the father of Enoch. 19 Then Jared lived eight hundred years after he became the father of Enoch, and he had *other* sons and daughters. 20 So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, and he died.

21 And Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Methuselah. 22 Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had *other* sons and daughters. 23 So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. 24 And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

25 And Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and became the father of Lamech. 26 Then Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years after he became the father of Lamech, and he had *other* sons and daughters. 27 So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died.

28 And Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and became the father of a son. 29 Now he called his name Noah, saying, "This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands *arising* from the ground which the LORD has cursed." 30 Then Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years after he became the father of Noah, and he had *other* sons and daughters. 31 So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years, and he died.

32 And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

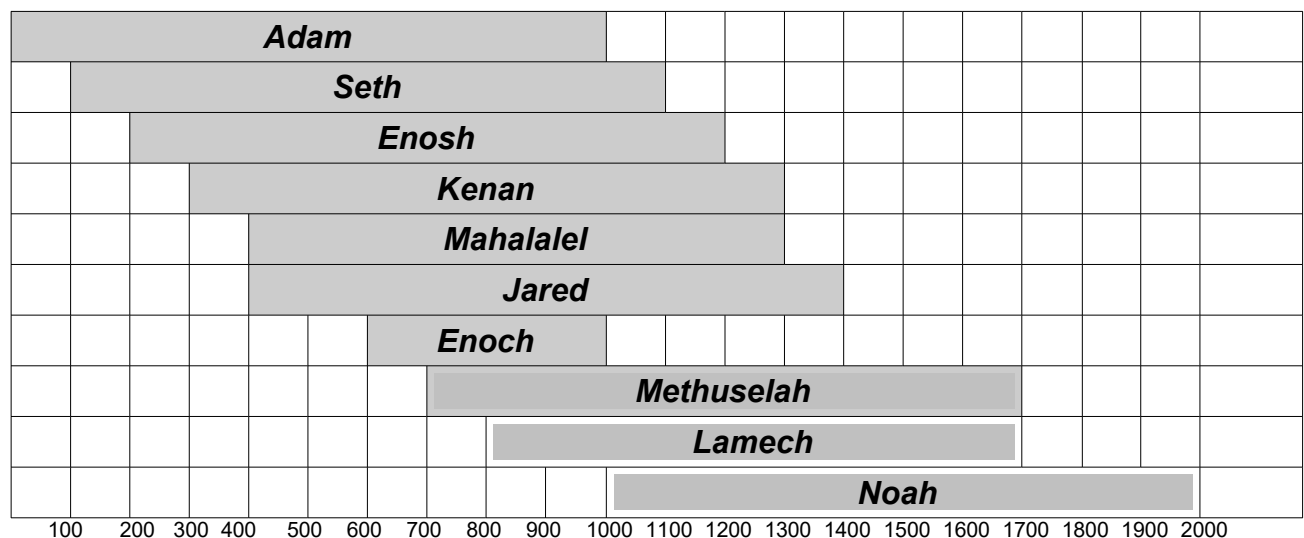
Chapter five traces the descendants of Adam through Seth down to Noah. Verses 1 and 2 repeat that God made Adam and Eve in His likeness. He created a male and a female version of man. He blessed them and named them "Man" when he

created them. The name "Man" does not only apply to the male, but to the female as well.

Seth was born when Adam was 130 years old, which was fairly young if we notice the ages to which these first men lived. Seth was a man in the likeness and image of his father. We all bear the image and likeness of Adam as fallen men and women. Paul says in Romans 5:12-14, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned-- for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come." Today, we still bear both the image of God in some measure and the image and likeness of Adam as well. We are valuable to God, but we are also sinners in the pattern of Adam.

We have ten men mentioned in this geneology, from Adam to Noah, listed below. The table is not meant to be precisely accurate, but simply to illustrate how their lives overlapped each other. Notice that Adam lived long enough to know Lamech, the father of Noah! Enosh, grandson of Adam, did know Noah! Here is a list of these men based on the passage, and the years they lived:

- Adam: Year 1 to 930 (930 years)
- Seth: Year 130 to 1041 (912 years)
- Enosh: 234 to 1138 (905 years)
- Kenan: 323 to 1232 (910 years)
- Mahalelel: 392 to 1286 (895 years)
- Jared: 456 to 1417 (962 years)
- Enoch: 617 to 981 (365 years)
- Methuselah: 681 to 1649 (969 years)
- Lamech: 867 to 1643 (777 years)
- Noah: 1048 to 1997 (950 years)



There are two men that especially stand out in this list. The first is Enoch. We are told that Enoch "walked with God." This was the unique thing about him. In chapter six we are told that Noah was also a man who "walked with God," (6:9) a trait

that was probably passed down from Enoch. But it appears that Enoch walked with God in a way that no other man did. What does this mean? When I think about this, I think of the walks I take each morning with my wife. We walk side-by-side for a couple of miles each day (6 days a week). This is prime time for both of us in our relationship. It is a time for talking and fellowshiping with each other. It is a time for us to communicate and share with each other. This is the sort of relationship that Enoch had with God. He walked with God side by side and talked with Him. The expression implies not only that Enoch walked in God's ways and obeyed him, but also that he had this sort of relationship and fellowship with God that others did not pursue. Enoch wanted to know God, to enjoy His presence and to communicate with Him. This is what God wants as well. Enoch sought for God and wanted to be with Him. This was the most important thing for Enoch, and it pleased the Lord.

The other thing to notice about Enoch is that he evidently did not die. In each case here, we are told that these men lived so many years and then they died. But when we come to Enoch we read, "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." The word translated "took" here according to Strongs Concordance is the Hebrew term *laqach* - "a primitive root; to take (in the widest variety of applications):--accept, bring, buy, carry away, drawn, fetch, get, infold, X many, mingle, place, receive(-ing), reserve, seize, send for, take (away, -ing, up), use, win." God took Enoch. He carried him away. God enjoyed Enoch so much that He decided simply to bring him home. Enoch delighted in God and God in Enoch, so God exempted Enoch from death. Elijah is the only other person that we know of in Scripture who did not die, but was taken up in a chariot of fire into heaven.

The second man who stands out here is Noah. The whole list is meant to trace the lineage of Noah. Cain and the other sons and daughters of Adam and Eve are forgotten. This geneology is simply tracing the line of Seth down to Noah.

The name "Noah" means "rest." When this son of Lamech was born, Lamech named him Noah and prophesied, "This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed." He named him Noah because of what he believed that he would do. Men had to toil and work hard because God had cursed the ground because of their disobedience. Lamech believed that Noah was the one who would give them rest from their toil. The word translated "rest" here is *nacham* - a primitive root; properly, to sigh, i.e. breathe strongly; by implication, to be sorry, i.e. (in a favorable sense) to pity, console or (reflexively) rue; or (unfavorably) to avenge (oneself):--comfort (self), ease (one's self), repent(-er,-ing, self).⁴ This term is often translated "comfort," but often it is also translated "repent." It is used in those passages that speak of God "repenting" and turning from His intention to bring His wrath down on people because of their rebellion. Here the word should probably be thought of in terms of "comfort" because Noah did not give us final rest from our work. Work and toil continued after the flood. It is Jesus that gives us the true "rest" from our work (Hebrews 3-4).

Noah is a type of Christ, however, in that he was a righteous man and a deliverer. He built the ark that saved the remnant of mankind from the flood. Jesus also has saved a remnant of mankind from the wrath of God.

Genesis 6:1-8

Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born

⁴ Strong's Hebrew Bible Dictionary

to them, 2 that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. 3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." 4 The Nephilim were 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. 5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 And the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

The big interpretive problem here is the question, "Who are these 'sons of God'?" It seems to me to be pretty straightforward to identify the "daughters of men." They are the daughters born to the men who were multiplying on the face of the land (verse 1). They are plain, ordinary women (albeit beautiful women). So let us consider who these "sons of God" might be.

Two possible answers to this question have been proposed. It is suggested that the "sons of God" are angels. It is also suggested that the "sons of God" are men from the godly line of Seth.

Support for the view that the "sons of God" are angels comes from the fact that the same designation is apparently applied to angels in the book of Job (Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7). This view maintains that somehow fallen angels married and procreated with the "daughters of men," producing the race of giants, the "Nephilim." This view is further supported by the context in that there is a contrast drawn here between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men." Those marrying the daughters were not "sons of men." It is not inconceivable that the fallen angels could have at that time had procreative powers. We find elsewhere in scripture that angels appearing in human form are capable of human bodily functions (e.g. eating - Genesis 18:1-8). The men of Sodom wanted Job to bring out the angels who came to him so that they might have sexual relations with them (Genesis 19:1-5). Obviously these angels appeared in every way to be fully human. Jude refers to this in verses 6 and 7 of his epistle: "And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they ***in the same way as these*** indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire." The men of Sodom and Gomorrah indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh just as the angels who did not keep their own domain had done.

Against this interpretation is the view that the "sons of God" here are men from the godly line of Seth who were attracted to the women of the ungodly line, intermarried with them and thereby corrupted the godly line. Thus all mankind (except for Noah) was corrupted. It must be noted that the whole context of our passage in Genesis 6 is emphasizing the wickedness of men and not that of angels. We are told that God saw the wickedness of man and that He was sorry that He had made man. Further, Jesus said that the angels in heaven do not marry nor are they given in marriage (Mark 12:25). The reference is not to fallen angels, however.

I find it difficult to choose between these two views. It is a puzzling passage. It is hard to see how a union between a human "son of God" and a human "daughter of men" would produce a race of giants. I think the statement "The Nephilim were on the

earth in those days" implies that things were different then from the way that they are now. Perhaps the "sons of God" are to be seen as "angels who did not keep their proper abode" and who at that time had the ability to procreate with women, but now they have been denied that ability or removed from the earth.

Observing that the "sons of God" were taking wives from the "daughters of men," the Lord said to Himself, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." The word here for "strive" (*diyn*) is most often translated "judge" in the Old Testament. God will not forever be entering into judgment with men. He has determined that He will not take issue with us for all eternity. There will be an end to His judgment. The reason for this is that man is flesh. Man is a mortal being, not an immortal. Therefore, God will not have to strive with man forever. God further determined that a man's lifespan would be 120 years. He would limit a man's lifespan. Up to this point, men were living to be 900 or more years in age. Now that would change. God would not allow men to continue living such long lives. One of the consequences of our wickedness is that our lifespans have been cut short. When the flood came, many things changed in our world. We will see this as we study the flood.

We are told in verse 4 that "the Nephilim were on the earth in those days," which implies that things were different then than they are now. Who are these "Nephilim"? Is the King James Version correct in translating this word "giants"? Here is a discussion of this term from Nelson's Dictionary:

NEPHILIM [NEFF ih lem] (*fallen ones*) — the offspring of marriages between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" (Gen. 6:4). The word "Nephilim" is translated as "giants" by the KJV and NKJV (Gen. 6:4; Num. 13:33; Nephilim, NIV, REB, NASB, NRSV). Some scholars believe the Nephilim were descended from famous rulers, outstanding leaders, and mighty warriors who lived before the Flood. These men, so the theory goes, gathered great harems and were guilty of the sin of polygamy. The Nephilim were the product of these marriages. Also see Giants.⁵

The word Nephilim, then, is a transliteration of the Hebrew word. Obviously from what the text tells us they were impressive people. They may have been giants, but it does not appear that the word requires that we accept that view. The word seems to emphasize their fallen state. They were corrupted beings. They were people who were strong and powerful, but wicked. The union between fallen angels and the daughters of men produced men who were powerful and corrupt.

The Lord saw all of this happening. The relations between the daughters of men and the sons of God was just one symptom of the wickedness of men. Man's wickedness was great. It was so great that we are told that "every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Every intent was evil. Every thought was evil. The thoughts and plans of men were continually and exclusively evil. These evil thoughts no doubt produced evil deeds. In verse 13, God told Noah that the earth was filled with violence because of the corruption of men. Evil deeds start in our hearts and in our thoughts. The Bible has always taught this. Even here in Genesis, God points to the basic problem of man being an internal problem, a problem with the condition of his heart. Jesus pointed this out in Matthew 15:18-20, "But the things that

⁵ Ronald F. Youngblood, general editor; F.F. Bruce and R.K. Harrison, consulting editors, *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary: An authoritative one-volume reference work on the Bible with full color illustrations [computer file], electronic edition of the revised edition of Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary, Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995.

proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man." Man's behavior is corrupt because his heart is corrupt. It will not do for us to merely try to change our behavior. Our hearts must be changed and transformed. There must be a supernatural renewal of our hearts through the power of Christ in us or there is no hope for us.

God's reaction to the corruption he saw in mankind was sorrow and grief. Verse 6 tells us, "And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart." In verse 7 He says to Himself, "I am sorry that I have made them." Is the Lord saying that He made a mistake, that He had done something He should not have done? The prophet Balaam, in Numbers 23:19 pointed out, "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind." (1 Samuel 15:28-29.) The point is clearly made that God does not make mistakes. He does nothing that He later regrets and wishes He had not done. However here and in other passages the scriptures do speak of God "changing His mind." It does sound as though God is admitting to having made a mistake. Evidently in this case God was grieved and sorrowful about having made man, but without having made a mistake. He did not err in making man, but was grieved at what man had made of himself, at the path that man had chosen.

God determined that He would blot man out. He would erase man from the face of the earth. Along with man, the animals, the creeping things of the earth and the birds of the sky would be wiped out. He was going to cleanse the corruption from the earth by removing mankind, and this would have consequences for the other creatures of earth. The entire earth is suffering because of the corruption of man. God cannot tolerate evil because He is holy and perfect. He is light and in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). He must deal with evil. The corruption of man at this time was so bad that it was time for God to act. Yet there was one man who found favor with God. There was one righteous man, Noah. Noah and his family would be spared.

Genesis 6:9-22

These are *the records* of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God. 10 And Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. 11 Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. 13 Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth. 14 "Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with rooms, and shall cover it inside and out with pitch. 15 "And this is how you shall make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. 16 "You shall make a window for the ark, and finish it to a cubit from the top; and set the door of the ark in the side of it; you shall make it with lower, second, and third decks. 17 "And behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish. 18 "But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark-- you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you. 19 "And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every *kind* into the ark, to keep *them* alive with you; they shall be male and female. 20 "Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of

every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every *kind* shall come to you to keep *them* alive. 21 "And as for you, take for yourself some of all food which is edible, and gather *it* to yourself; and it shall be for food for you and for them." 22 Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.

Noah was the one man on earth who found favor with God. Noah had been influenced by his godly ancestors. Enoch, who walked with God, was his great-grandfather. Though Enoch was taken by God before Noah was born, Enoch had no doubt had a powerful impact on Methuselah (grandfather of Noah) and Lamech, Noah's father.

Verse 9 tells us three things about Noah. It tells us that he was righteous, blameless, and that he walked with God. He was right with God and others and just. He could not be indicted for any wrongdoing. He was without blame. The Hebrew word for "blameless" is *tamiym*, meaning "whole, entire, complete, full, without blemish." Looking at Noah's life you would not be able to find a flaw in him. I think the third thing here is the key to the first two. He walked with God. This is the reason that he was righteous and blameless. When you walk with God it keeps you out of trouble. When God is present with you, you stay away from evil. He did not walk with God because he was righteous and blameless, but he was righteous and blameless because he walked with God. His focus was on fellowship with God, and righteousness and blamelessness followed along naturally. This is where we often get it wrong. We focus on trying to be good and to behave properly. Where we should focus is on our relationship with God and our walk with him, and goodness of character will come with it. This is because when we walk with God we walk in the light as He is in the light, and we cannot walk in the darkness if we are walking with Him (1 John 1:5-7).

In the sight of God the earth was corrupt and full of violence. When God looked at the earth he saw it in a state of decay and was appalled at the violence of men on the earth. He had created a perfect world, but it was now corrupted. It was like a dead body that is buried and decays. The explanation for the reason that it was corrupt is in verse 12, "for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth." And in verse 13, God explained that all flesh would be brought to an end, "for the earth is filled with violence because of them." God is not responsible for the corruption of mankind, but man himself is responsible. We have corrupted ourselves. We have chosen a corrupt path. We cannot blame God. We cannot even blame Satan. Certainly Satan played a key role in the fall of man, but man chose to listen to him and follow in his path.

It is interesting to note that there are two major indications of the corruption of man. The first, highlighted in verses 1-4, is the sexual corruption of man. The second indication is the violence of man. Sexual immorality and violence mark mankind since the fall. Isn't it interesting that these are major themes in our entertainment? It is a rare film or television program that has no sexual or violent content. We read about the corruption of our world every day in the paper and see it on the news. We see it in our own lives as well, in our propensity for violence and immorality and selfishness.

How does God deal with man's corruption? Man must be removed! It is not at all unfair or unjust of God to judge our sin and corruption. In fact, He must judge it because of His holiness. It would be unjust of Him to disregard it and overlook it and let it remain. If our courts routinely excused those convicted of horrible crimes, if those found guilty of murder and rape faced no punishment because of some liberal notion of "justice" and "fairness," we would be outraged! We would demand true justice! Yet

many expect God to do this! They expect God to simply overlook our corruption and sin. But God's judgment is perfect. He is patient, and gives us time to repent, and makes His forgiveness available, but when the time comes, He will "by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Exodus 34:7).

God told Noah of His plan to wipe out mankind from the earth. Only Noah and his family would be spared because of his righteousness. Noah was to build the ark for his salvation and the salvation of his family and all the species of animals on the earth. The ark was basically a big box. (The word "ark" means "box.") God told Noah what materials to use, the dimensions, the number of decks, and other details about the ark. The dimensions of the ark were 300 cubits in length, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. A cubit was about 18 inches, so the ark was about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It was made of gopher wood, covered with pitch for waterproofing, and had windows in the top for fresh air and for light. The three decks must have opened in the center somehow to allow for air and light from the windows to penetrate to the lower deck.

God tells His people about impending judgment. He told Noah, He told Abraham, He warned Moses, He told Jonah and He has told us. He does not keep it a secret when He is about to judge and destroy men for their wickedness. He lets us know so that we can avoid it ourselves and so that we can call others to repentance.

In verse 17 God told Noah specifically what He was going to do. He was going to bring a flood upon the earth to destroy all flesh on the earth. Everyone would be drowned except for Noah and his family. God underlined the fact that He was going to do this. He says, "I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth." The flood would not simply be some random disaster of nature, but God would bring it about and cause it to happen. He would be responsible for the flood. He was doing this deliberately as a judgment upon mankind.

In verse 18, though, there is a contrast. God says, "But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark-- you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you." All flesh on earth would perish, but Noah and his family would not. God would establish a covenant with Noah – He would make an agreement with him. God would commit Himself by a solemn agreement or contract to protect and preserve Noah. By saying that He was establishing a covenant with Noah, God was guaranteeing Noah's safety in the midst of the flood. He was reassuring Noah that all would be well with him and his family. He would not be swept away in the flood. God does not sweep away the righteous with the unrighteous. He does not judge the righteous along with the guilty. We will see this principle spelled out more explicitly in chapter 18 in God's discussion with Abraham about the judgment He was bringing upon Sodom and Gomorrah. God reassures His people of His care for them. Noah would experience the flood from the safety of the ark. This is an important point. The righteous are not exempt from floods, but God assures them of His protection in the midst of them. In Isaiah 43:1-2 we read, "But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you.'" Trusting in Christ does not mean that we will not suffer or face the storms of life, but it does mean that in the midst of them He is with us. He watches over us and we will not be overwhelmed.

A mating pair of every kind of land-dwelling creature was to be brought aboard

the ark with Noah. Contrary to popular myth, Noah did not have to go out and round up all the animals, but they came to him. God caused these animals to come, as is implied in verse 20. It is interesting to study in scripture how the animals obey the Lord and do as He bids them. Balaam's donkey spoke to him (Numbers 22:28). In the book of Jonah all of the creatures are obedient to the Lord except for the prophet himself!

Noah of course was also to take all kinds of food for himself and his family and the animals. They would have to eat while they were inside the ark during the flood, and they would also need seed to plant after the flood. Large quantities of food would be needed for both man and beast.

This was a huge task that God gave to Noah, but Noah did it. He did "according to all the God had commanded him." It took about 100 years for Noah to prepare the ark and gather the food. We do not have a record of how Noah went about the task of building the ark. We do not know what obstacles he encountered or how people reacted to him. In 2 Peter 2:5 we learn that Noah was a "preacher of righteousness." As he constructed the ark, he preached to the people around him and do doubt warned them of the judgment that was coming.

Genesis 7:1-5

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Enter the ark, you and all your household; for you *alone* I have seen *to be* righteous before Me in this time. 2 "You shall take with you of every clean animal by sevens, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female; 3 also of the birds of the sky, by sevens, male and female, to keep offspring alive on the face of all the earth. 4 "For after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made." 5 And Noah did according to all that the LORD had commanded him.

Once the ark was complete, it was time for judgment to come upon the earth. This is why the book of Hebrews tells us that by preparing the ark, Noah condemned the world, "By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." (Hebrews 11:7.) While Noah was building the ark, there was still time for men to repent, but once the ark was finished and Noah and his family entered it, the opportunity for salvation was over.

God explained again that only Noah was seen to be righteous before Him. His family was saved from the flood by virtue of their relationship to him. God saved them for the sake of Noah. Noah stood alone in his generation as the only man who was right with God. God looks for righteousness, but finds very little. He wants people to be right with Him, but very few pursue it.

God had Noah take with him seven each of "clean" animals and birds, but only one pair of "unclean" animals. Of the "clean" animals there were to be three pairs and one extra. The extra was for sacrifice when Noah exited the ark (Genesis 8:20). This distinction between the "clean" and the "unclean" was made before man was allowed to eat meat, which came about after the flood (Genesis 9:3-4). Clean and unclean animals were defined by the Lord in Deuteronomy 14, yet this distinction had already been established at the time of Noah. I think God wanted Noah to take more clean animals aboard so that they would have a reproductive advantage after leaving the ark. Men would need clean animals for food.

We must see that Noah and his family and the animals entered the ark seven days before God sent the rain on the earth. The people around Noah must have

thought that he had lost his mind, building this huge boat, bringing all of the animals aboard with him, and then entering into it with no sign of the great flood that he had been predicting. Noah must have faced a lot of ridicule. It is always safest to believe the Lord and trust in Him rather than listening to the world. God closed the door of the ark (7:16) and the opportunity for others to enter was cut off. The opportunity for salvation was shut off 7 days before the rain began.

God said, "For after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made." Note the emphasis on "I" here; "I will send rain;" "I will blot out...;" "...every living thing that I have made." God would do it. God had made every living thing, and He would blot out every living thing. As our creator He has the right to take our lives, and He is just in doing so. The potter has the right to destroy his pot and start all over if he chooses (Jeremiah 8:2-6). God is sovereign and can justly do whatever He wants with us.

As we were told in 6:22 here again in verse 5 it says that "Noah did according to all that the Lord had commanded him." Noah's actions were in accord with the commands of the Lord. Noah was obedient. He believed what the Lord had said and He obeyed. Obedience flows from faith. His obedience was also a thorough obedience. He did everything the Lord commanded. He did not leave anything out or overlook anything. His obedience was not partial. God is pleased by obedience that flows from faith and is complete. The first king of Israel, Saul, was displeasing to the Lord because his obedience was partial. He did some of what the Lord commanded, but stopped short of doing everything. Because of this, Saul's kingdom was removed from him and given to David (see 1 Samuel 15).

Genesis 7:6-24

Now Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of water came upon the earth. 7 Then Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him entered the ark because of the water of the flood. 8 Of clean animals and animals that are not clean and birds and everything that creeps on the ground, 9 there went into the ark to Noah by twos, male and female, as God had commanded Noah. 10 And it came about after the seven days, that the water of the flood came upon the earth. 11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened. 12 And the rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights.

13 On the very same day Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark, 14 they and every beast after its kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, all sorts of birds. 15 So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life. 16 And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him; and the LORD closed *it* behind him. 17 Then the flood came upon the earth for forty days; and the water increased and lifted up the ark, so that it rose above the earth. 18 And the water prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the surface of the water. 19 And the water prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered. 20 The water prevailed fifteen cubits higher, and the mountains were covered. 21 And all flesh that moved on the earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind; 22 of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died. 23 Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah was left, together with those that were with him in the ark. 24 And the water prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days.

The ark stood as a testimony and a warning to the people of earth that God was

going to flood the earth and destroy them. When it was completed, the time had come. Noah was 600 years old when the flood came.

The people saved were Noah and his wife, Shem, Ham, Japheth and their wives, just 8 people out of those who lived in those days. All the animals that God had told him to take onto the ark came and were loaded aboard as well.

We are told very specifically when it was that the flood came. It came on the 17th day of the second month of Noah's 600th year. Someone had been keeping careful records. God certainly had known this, but perhaps even Noah himself had kept a diary of these events. We don't know if Moses got this account by direct revelation from God or if the account passed down through the generations, but in either case we have a definite day that the flood began.

The floodwaters came not only from the great rain, but also from "the fountains of the deep." For forty straight days and nights the rain fell on the earth. God caused so much water to come upon the earth that it covered "all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens" (verse 19). This was not a "local flood," but clearly was a flood that covered all the earth. You cannot maintain from a biblical basis that the flood of Noah was merely a "local" flood. God made it clear that it was a universal flood. The waters rose fifteen cubits higher than the high mountains.

All the surface of the earth was covered by water so that all the creatures that lived on dry land would perish. Verses 21-24 emphasize that fact. All the animals on the earth died. All the men on the earth died. Every land-based creature except Noah and those with him on the ark died; they were "blotted out" by God. God did what He had said He would do. God does not make empty threats, like so many of us as parents do. He carried out what He had threatened. He is patient and slow to anger, but the day of His wrath does eventually come.

The waters of the flood prevailed over the earth for 150 days. For five months the earth was covered with water, and Noah and those with him floated on the surface in the ark. God was thorough in insuring that everyone on earth was blotted out.

Genesis 8:1-14

But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided. 2 Also the fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were closed, and the rain from the sky was restrained; 3 and the water receded steadily from the earth, and at the end of one hundred and fifty days the water decreased. 4 And in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. 5 And the water decreased steadily until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible. 6 Then it came about at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made; 7 and he sent out a raven, and it flew here and there until the water was dried up from the earth. 8 Then he sent out a dove from him, to see if the water was abated from the face of the land; 9 but the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, so she returned to him into the ark; for the water was on the surface of all the earth. Then he put out his hand and took her, and brought her into the ark to himself. 10 So he waited yet another seven days; and again he sent out the dove from the ark. 11 And the dove came to him toward evening; and behold, in her beak was a freshly picked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the water was abated from the earth. 12 Then he waited yet another seven days, and sent out the dove; but she did not return to him again. 13 Now it came about in the six hundred and first year, in the first *month*, on the first of the month, the water was dried up from the earth. Then Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the surface of the ground was dried up. 14 And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

God had sent the flood, and He also caused the floodwaters to subside. He remembered Noah and the animals with him and sent a wind to blow over the waters so

that they would subside. He closed the "fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky." The waters receded gradually and steadily from the earth. For five months the waters had covered the earth. The ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat in the seventh month of Noah's 600th year. The waters continued to subside for three more months, until the tenth month, when mountaintops became visible.

Noah used a raven and a dove as scouts to tell him if it was time to leave the ark. It was when Noah was 601 and one month that the water "was dried up from the earth." Noah took the cover off the ark and could see that the ground was dry. Noah and the others had spent nearly a year in the ark! It is hard to imagine the conditions aboard the ark and what it was like to live in that environment for a year. I'm sure that everyone was eager to get out and to stretch their legs on dry land once again. Though Noah and his family had escaped the judgment of God in the ark, they did experience a measure of suffering and austerity because of it. When God's judgment comes upon mankind, the godly will still suffer. Joshua and Caleb, the two faithful men who spied out the land of Canaan with their 10 faithless companions, still had to wander in the wilderness with the rest who were under God's judgment. They did not die in the wilderness as the others did, but they did have to put up with the wandering. Though the righteous are not swept away in the flood with the unrighteous, they will still face some of the consequences of God's judgment on man.

Genesis 8:15-22

Then God spoke to Noah, saying, 16 "Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives with you. 17 "Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you, birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." 18 So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. 19 Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by their families from the ark. 20 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. 21 And the LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. 22 "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease."

After a full year in the ark, on the 27th day of the second month of Noah's 601st year, God told Noah to exit the ark. God told him to bring out all the animals so that they might breed and multiply on the earth. God wanted men and the animals to repopulate the earth.

The first thing that Noah did was to build an altar and worship the Lord. Now we discover why Noah took the extra "clean" animals with him on the ark. They were to be offered in sacrifice and worship to the Lord when he left the ark. When he emerged from the ark, God's salvation was complete, and it was time to thank Him. Noah offered up some of the clean animals as burnt offerings on the altar. The offerings were a "soothing aroma" to the Lord. The smoke from the burnt offerings was a pleasant smell to Him. This is the first time in the Bible that this phrase "soothing aroma" occurs, and the only time in Genesis. This phrase occurs 42 times in the Old Testament and nearly every occurrence is in reference to burnt offerings. Burnt offerings are an indication to God that those offering them recognize their sin and guilt and the need for a death to atone for that sin and guilt. God is pleased when right offerings are offered in the right way. The offerings soothed Him and turned away His wrath. Paul picked up this

expression and applied it to the sacrifice of Christ in Ephesians 5:1-2, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." The most pleasing offering in God's sight was the offering of His own Son.

When the Lord smelled the soothing aroma, He spoke to Himself and made a commitment to Himself. He said, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease." He promised that He would never again do what He had just done. He would never again destroy all the living creatures. It was not because the evil of mankind had been eradicated. The nature of man had not changed. The offspring of Noah would again turn away from Him. God said that from his youth the intent of man's heart is evil. Our evil deeds and our evil words come from the evil intentions of our hearts. God judges our hearts and not just our outward deeds. The problem from the beginning has been an internal problem that leads to external problems. If we do not deal with the nature of our hearts, there will be no hope for transforming our behavior.

God has made a commitment that as long as the earth endures there will be no end to seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter and day and night. The cycles of nature that He created will continue until the end of the earth.

Genesis 9:1-7

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. 2 "And the fear of you and the terror of you shall be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. 3 "Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. 4 "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood. 5 "And surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man. 7 "And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it."

After Noah and his family had exited the ark, God blessed them and repeated to them the command He had given Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." Even after the fall and even after the flood, God still wanted man to multiply and fill the earth. This is the original command from the Lord, and He still wants us to carry it out. He wants men to fill the earth. He has not rescinded this command. God loves people and made us fertile so that we would be able to fill the earth.

There is a difference, though, in what God says next to Noah. In Genesis 1, God told Adam to be fruitful and multiply, and then He told Adam to rule over the animals and that He had given Adam every plant and tree for food. To Noah, God says that the animals are going to be afraid of man, and that man is now to eat animals as well as plants. Man will no longer be a vegetarian, but will now be a meat eater. Man will not just rule over the creatures of the earth, but will now eat them as well. I presume that before the flood the animals had no fear of man, but now they do.

In eating meat, God commanded that it not be eaten with the blood, because the life of a creature is in the blood. This is not simply a cultural requirement. It is not simply a command given to Israel. The prohibition against eating blood was given to Noah long before Abraham, the first Hebrew, came on the scene. God said to Moses in Leviticus 17:10-14:

"And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'No person among you may eat blood, nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood.' So when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.'"

This command was repeated by the church council at Jerusalem as they laid down requirements for the Gentile believers in Acts 15. They wrote that they should "abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell." (Acts 15:29.) The only "blood" we are to drink is the "blood" of Christ Himself when we observe communion. Of course, this is not literal blood, but is symbolic of our dependence upon the life of Jesus Christ. His blood gives us life.

God says that He will "require" the lifeblood of man from every beast and every man. The word for "require" is "*darash*, a primitive root; properly, to tread or frequent; usually to follow (for pursuit or search); by implication, to seek or ask; specifically to worship:--ask, X at all, care for, X diligently, inquire, make inquisition, (necro-)mancer, question, require, search, seek (for, out), X surely"⁶ God is going to keep track of the lifeblood of man. He is going to require an accounting for each man's blood, for each man's life. If his life is taken by a beast or by another man, that beast or man will be required to pay for taking the life of that man. I believe that God explains what He means by this in verse 6. He says, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." God instituted capital punishment. The world before the flood was a violent place, and God wanted to see it stop. He shows us here how important and valuable each human life is to Him. If one man murders another and takes his life, his life is to be taken as well. Each man is made in the image of God and is valuable. Capital punishment does not demonstrate a disregard for the value of human life, but just the opposite. It demonstrates that God cares about each life. The one who takes the life of another through premeditated murder forfeits his own life.

Again in verse 7 God repeats His command to Noah and his sons that they should multiply and populate the earth. God wants people to fill the earth. He wants abundant numbers of people. This is the one command that mankind has kept.

Genesis 9:8-17

Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, 9 "Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. 11 "And I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; 13 I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. 14 "And it shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud, 15 and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and

⁶ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 "When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 17 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."

God established a covenant with Noah and his sons and with all the creatures of the earth. In fact, this covenant is also with us today, because God said that He was establishing it with the descendants of Noah as well. In this agreement, He promised that He would never again destroy all living creatures with a flood. The sign of the covenant was the rainbow that He set in the clouds. This had never been seen before because of the canopy of cloud that covered the earth before the flood (the "waters... above the expanse" – Genesis 1:7). In fact, men had never seen the sun because of this cloud cover. Sunshine and the rainbow were new things. The rainbow would remind the Lord and also remind us of this covenant. God will never again use a flood to destroy all flesh on the earth. He will not again use this solution. We need not fear that another great flood will wipe out life on the planet.

Genesis 9:18-29

Now the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan. 19 These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was populated.

20 Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard. 21 And he drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent. 22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. 23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness. 24 When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him. 25 So he said, "Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brothers." 26 He also said, "Blessed be the LORD, The God of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant. 27 "May God enlarge Japheth, And let him dwell in the tents of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant." 28 And Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood. 29 So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died.

Shem, Ham and Japheth are again mentioned as the sons of Noah, but only Canaan is mentioned here as Ham's son. This is important in view of the fact that the land promised later to Abraham was the land occupied by the Canaanites (Genesis 12:5-7). The land given to Israel was the land which had been originally settled by the descendants of Canaan. When Israel entered the land after the exodus, they were under orders from God to completely wipe out the Canaanites and other inhabitants of the land (Deuteronomy 20:15-18). We must keep in view the fact that Moses wrote this account and he is looking back on things from the perspective of the man who had lead the Israelites out of Egypt and was on the verge of entering the land of the Canaanites.

Noah planted a vineyard and became drunk on his wine. This is the first time that wine and drunkenness is mentioned in the Bible, though we cannot infer from this that it was unknown prior to this. I doubt that Noah was the one who invented wine. We cannot infer either that it was Noah's intention to become drunk. He may not have realized the effect that the wine would have on him. In his drunken state, he unintentionally "uncovered himself inside his tent." He was probably laying on his bed asleep. Ham came in for some reason and saw his father's nakedness and was amused. He went outside the tent and told Shem and Japheth. He probably treated it as a great joke and mocked his father. Shem and Japheth, however, took pains to

avoid seeing their father's nakedness, and went in and covered him up. To see their father's nakedness would be a great shame to him and to them. Ham had a more modern attitude, however, and made light of it.

Nakedness is a serious thing in the Scriptures. Leviticus 18 and 20 have extensive regulations about not "uncovering the nakedness" of family members. This probably is a euphemism for sexual relations, and God strongly condemns illicit sexual relations between family members in these passages. The passage here in Genesis 9 is not saying that Ham had any kind of sexual contact with Noah, but that he saw his father's nakedness and reported it to his brothers. As we noted earlier, since the fall of man our nakedness is something of which we are now aware and it is now a shameful thing. We are not to entertain ourselves by looking upon the nakedness of others or by displaying our nakedness to others. Nakedness is a private thing between a man and his wife and is not to be public.

Somehow when Noah woke, he knew what Ham "had done to him." Perhaps in his stupor in his tent he was conscious enough to realize what was going on. When he awoke and was sober, his mind was clear and he was fully aware of what had transpired. Perhaps when he awoke and was covered by his garment he realized what had happened. He had been victimized by Ham when he was helpless in his tent. Ham had invaded his privacy and overstepped his bounds. Ham had looked at him and mocked him. Noah also knew that Shem and Japheth had covered him and had tried to preserve his dignity.

Speaking prophetically, Noah cursed Ham's son Canaan. This seems unfair to us, since it was not Canaan who had done anything wrong, but his father. But we must see that this is a prophetic passage. We must see that the sins of the fathers are passed on to the sons (Exodus 34:7). Indeed, the Canaanites became a corrupt people. Sodom and Gomorrah were settled by Canaanites (Gen. 10:19), cities that were destroyed by God because of their corruption and immorality. Our children and grandchildren and subsequent descendants will suffer because of our sins. Canaan would be a "servant of servants" to his brothers. That is, he would be the lowest of slaves. He would serve servants. Canaan and his descendants would be subject to the descendants of Shem and Japheth.

In verses 26 and 27, Noah blessed "the Lord, the God of Shem" and directed that Canaan should be the servant of Shem and of Japheth. It was through the descendants of Shem that Abraham and Israel would come, and thus would also come the Messiah and Savior, Jesus Christ. God had already chosen the line of Shem to bring salvation to the world. The Lord was the God of Shem, but not because Shem had chosen the Lord or because Shem was such a great man, but because of God's choice. Japheth is also blessed because of his association with and support of Shem. He would dwell in Shem's tents. Japheth would be blessed through Shem. Canaan would be his servant as well. It's wise to find out who is being blessed by God and then to associate yourself with them. In their blessing you will be blessed as well.

Noah lived for 350 years after the flood, and his total lifespan was 950 years. He was the third longest-lived man in the biblical record. (Methuselah had lived 969 years and Jared had lived 962 years.) God often rewards the godly man with a long life, and we see this is true in Noah's case.

sons were born to them after the flood.

2 The sons of Japheth *were* Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras. 3 And the sons of Gomer *were* Ashkenaz and Riphath and Togarmah. 4 And the sons of Javan *were* Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim. 5 From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.

6 And the sons of Ham *were* Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. 7 And the sons of Cush *were* Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah *were* Sheba and Dedan. 8 Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. 9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." 10 And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. 11 From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, 12 and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. 13 And Mizraim became the father of Ludim and Anamim and Lehabim and Naphtuhim 14 and Pathrusim and Casluhim (from which came the Philistines) and Caphtorim. 15 And Canaan became the father of Sidon, his first-born, and Heth 16 and the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite 17 and the Hivite and the Arkite and the Sinite 18 and the Arvadite and the Zemarite and the Hamathite; and afterward the families of the Canaanite were spread abroad. 19 And the territory of the Canaanite extended from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. 20 These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations.

21 And also to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, *and* the older brother of Japheth, children were born. 22 The sons of Shem *were* Elam and Asshur and Arpachshad and Lud and Aram. 23 And the sons of Aram *were* Uz and Hul and Gether and Mash. 24 And Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. 25 And two sons were born to Eber; the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and his brother's name was Joktan. 26 And Joktan became the father of Almodad and Sheleph and Hazarmaveth and Jerah 27 and Hadoram and Uzal and Diklah 28 and Obal and Abimael and Sheba 29 and Ophir and Havilah and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. 30 Now their settlement extended from Mesha as you go toward Sephar, the hill country of the east. 31 These are the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, according to their nations. 32 These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.

This chapter consists of "the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah." It is often called the "table of nations" because it traces the origin of the nations of the earth from these three sons of Noah.

The sons of Japheth are mentioned first, and they are covered quickly, only covering four verses (2-5). Seven sons of Japheth are mentioned, and then the sons of only two of his sons after that, Gomer and Javan. The sons of Magog, Madai, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras are not mentioned. The sons of Japheth became the nations of the "coastlands" (verse 5). The "coastlands" are depicted as distant lands in the scriptures. For example, Isaiah 66:18-19 says, "For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory. And I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Rosh, Tubal, and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations."

Quite a bit more space is devoted to the descendants of Ham, verses 6-20. This is probably because these people and these nations were closer neighbors to Israel than were the sons of Japheth, and so were more familiar to them. Four sons of Ham are mentioned, Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan. The sons of Cush are mentioned in verses 7-12. Particular attention is given to Nimrod, who was a famous "mighty hunter before the Lord." It appears that he was the founder of the Babylonians and the Assyrians, who would later take Israel into captivity. At least it was in that part of the

world that Nimrod established his kingdom. Canaan and his sons settled the land that is now Israel. Their territory went from Sidon down to Gaza along the coast of the Mediterranean.

The descendants of Shem are covered in verses 21-31. His sons were Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud and Aram. Of these five sons, he continues to trace out the lines of Aram and Arpachshad. Particular attention is given to Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Arpachshad. Verse 21 describes Shem as "the father of all the children of Eber." This is because it is through the line of Eber that Abraham and the Israelites come onto the scene. This line is further traced out in chapter 11, leading down to Abraham.

The concern in chapter 10 of Genesis is to show us the origin of the foundational nations of the earth. Verse 32 tells us this, "Out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood." From these three sons of Noah came all the nations and all the peoples of the earth.

Genesis 11:1-9

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. 2 And it came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn *them* thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. 4 And they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." 5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. 7 "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

At this point humanity was unified by a common language. They were able to easily communicate with one another. Because of this they settled together in the plain of Shinar and agreed on a plan to build a city with a tower that would reach into heaven. They decided that they would make bricks and use tar for mortar in their tower project. Someone made the suggestions and the others agreed and went along with the plan. It could be that Nimrod was the one who led this effort, since we are told in 10:10 that the "beginning of his kingdom was in Babel...in the land of Shinar." Three times we hear them say, "Let us...". "Let us make bricks" (verse 3); "let us build for ourselves a city" (verse 4); "let us make for ourselves a name" (verse 4). The purpose of building the city and the tower was to make a name for themselves and to keep themselves unified and together. They wanted to keep from being scattered over the "face of the whole earth." In other words, they were going to defy the command of God that they should fill the earth. They were going to stay in one place together as a unified people, as one nation. They were not going to spread throughout the earth as God had commanded.

The Lord Himself came to inspect the city and the tower. The Lord observed that since they were unified with one language there was nothing that would be impossible for them. Whatever projects they undertook they would be able to accomplish. It is not that God was threatened by men, but that the potential for evil was greater because of man's unity. Large groups of men unified in evil are much more dangerous than individuals or scattered small groups. We saw this in Germany in World War 2. We

see it today in Moslem extremists who believe that it is God's will that they destroy "infidels."

The Lord halted and thwarted the plans of these men by confusing their language. God created the different languages and instantly made it impossible for some groups to communicate with other groups. If they could not communicate, they could not cooperate on a common task. It must have been strange for people one day to have a common language and culture, and to find the next day that they were speaking different languages and could not communicate any longer. Language divides as well as unites. This was the means God used to scatter men over the face of the earth. The place was called Babel because of this. Babel means "confusion." God went down to mix up their languages and to cause confusion. If men would not willingly disperse and fill the earth, God would force them to do so.

Genesis 11:10-32

These are *the records* of the generations of Shem. Shem was one hundred years old, and became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood; *11* and Shem lived five hundred years after he became the father of Arpachshad, and he had *other* sons and daughters. *12* And Arpachshad lived thirty-five years, and became the father of Shelah; *13* and Arpachshad lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Shelah, and he had *other* sons and daughters. *14* And Shelah lived thirty years, and became the father of Eber; *15* and Shelah lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Eber, and he had *other* sons and daughters. *16* And Eber lived thirty-four years, and became the father of Peleg; *17* and Eber lived four hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Peleg, and he had *other* sons and daughters. *18* And Peleg lived thirty years, and became the father of Reu; *19* and Peleg lived two hundred and nine years after he became the father of Reu, and he had *other* sons and daughters. *20* And Reu lived thirty-two years, and became the father of Serug; *21* and Reu lived two hundred and seven years after he became the father of Serug, and he had *other* sons and daughters. *22* And Serug lived thirty years, and became the father of Nahor; *23* and Serug lived two hundred years after he became the father of Nahor, and he had *other* sons and daughters. *24* And Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and became the father of Terah; *25* and Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years after he became the father of Terah, and he had *other* sons and daughters. *26* And Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

27 Now these are *the records* of the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot. *28* And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. *29* And Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. *30* And Sarai was barren; she had no child. *31* And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. *32* And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

Here we have the line of Seth traced down to Abram. Moses is only concerned with showing us the lineage of Abram. He does not concern himself with any other sons of Seth nor of anyone else in this genealogy. The chart below lists these men and their age when their son was born and their lifespan.

Man	Son born at	Lifespan
Shem	100	600
Arpachshad	35	438

<i>Man</i>	<i>Son born at</i>	<i>Lifespan</i>
Shelah	30	433
Eber	34	464
Peleg	30	239
Reu	32	239
Serug	30	230
Nahor	29	148
Terah	70	205

One thing we notice immediately here is that men are living for shorter periods of time than they did before the flood. They are also having their children at younger ages. Changes have been made. John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, writing in The Genesis Flood, talk about the effect of the canopy of water vapor that covered the earth before the flood on man's longevity:

And, incidentally, the declining life-span after the flood seems to fit in perfectly with our concept of the dissipation of the earth's protective blanket during the Flood. As we have noted, this canopy of water vapor (with probably also large amounts of carbon dioxide and ozone augmenting the effect) provided a warm, pleasant, presumably healthful environment throughout the world. Perhaps the most important effect of the canopy was the shielding action provided against the intense radiations impinging upon the earth from space. Short wave-length radiation, as well as bombardment of elementary particles of all kinds, is known to have damaging effects – both somatic and genetic effects – on organisms and this is generally true for all types of radiations.⁷

Further on, they write:

But to return to the question of antediluvian longevity, it surely is quite reasonable in view of what is known about the somatic and genetic effects of radiations to infer that, over the centuries since the Flood, the accumulation of these effects in man in particular has resulted in gradual deterioration and decreasing life-span.⁸

When the "waters above the expanse" (Genesis 1:7) were removed in the flood, man was subjected to this harmful radiation that played the major part in shortening his lifespan. No longer would men live to be 900 or more years of age. Now men would live to be 70. When Abraham died at 175, he was said to have been a very old man (Genesis 25:7-8).

Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. Haran was the father of Lot. Haran died before his father, in Ur of the Chaldeans, which was down near the Persian Gulf, as the map below shows. After Haran died, Terah took Abram and Lot and went north to a place called Haran just above Aram. It may be that Terah settled this place and named it after his late son, or it may simply have been a coincidence that the names were the same. Abram by this time had married Sarai, and we are told that she was barren and had no child (verse 30). This was a great tragedy for that time.

⁷ Whitcomb, John C. Jr. and Morris, Henry M., The Genesis Flood, Baker Book House, page 399.

⁸ Ibid, page 404.



Genesis 12:1-3

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This passage is a pivotal one and very important, because it marks the call of Abram as the first Hebrew, and the founding of the Jewish nation. This is God's covenant with Abram that sets the stage for the creation of the nation through whom the Messiah will come.

This command and promise from God comes to Abram after Terah, his father died. Terah lived to be 205 years of age, and died in Haran. One gets the impression here that once Terah was off the scene, it was time for God to call Abram. It seems as though Terah was an impediment. Perhaps Abram was bound to care for his father until his father died, and then he was free to go his way as the new patriarch of his family.

As God speaks to Abram, He gives him one command and four promises. The command is that he is to leave his country and his relatives and his father's house and go to the land God would show him. God would show him where to go, but first he would have to leave. Hebrews 11:8 points out that Abraham obeyed this command by faith, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going." He left without knowing the destination. Seldom do we do this. We don't often set out on a trip without knowing where we're going, but this is what Abram did. He obeyed the command and so would inherit the promises.

The command called upon Abram to leave three things, a place, a people and

his family. He was to leave the familiar behind. He was to depart from the place and the people who were important to him. When Jesus came along He called upon His apostles to leave behind the things of the world in order to follow Him. Sometimes this meant leaving places, homes and property. Sometimes it meant leaving family. Sometimes it meant leaving behind the old values and what was important to them in the past. After Jesus told them that it was humanly impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, the disciples asked, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus replied, "The things impossible with men are possible with God." Then Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own homes, and followed You." And Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life." (Luke 18:27-30.) The Lord has a reward for those who will obey Him and leave the old life behind. When we leave things behind for the sake of the Lord and His kingdom, we have the promise that we will be compensated with much more.

God did not just call on Abram to leave things behind, but He promised that he would be going to a new place. God had a destination for him. He said "Go forth...to the land which I will show you." He was not just going away from something, he was going to a place. God had a land for him, a place set aside for him. The Christian life is not just about leaving the old life and old values and old habits behind. It is not just about quitting the evil we used to do. It is also about new things and new beginnings. It is about replacing the evil with the good. It is about a new life in a new relationship with God with new habits and behaviors. We go out from the ways of the world and go to God's kingdom.

The command to Abram was Abram's part of the covenant. If he would trust the Lord and obey Him, God promised that He would do four things. First, He would make Abram a great nation. Second, He would bless him, make his name great and make him into a blessing. Third, He would bless those who bless Abram and curse those who curse him. Fourth, He would bless all the families of the earth in Abram.

God's first promise is that Abram would be made into a great nation. It is singular here. God was thinking of one great nation that would come from Abram. Later, though, we find that from Abram came at least two great nations. One came through Ishmael and the other through Isaac. God said in Gen. 17:20 that Ishmael would be blessed and would become a great nation. But the nation that God had in mind here as He made the promise was the great nation that would come through Isaac. Genesis 17:21 says, "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year." The nation that would bring blessing to the world would be established through Isaac and not through Ishmael.

God promised to bless Abram and make his name great and the result would be that he would be a blessing. The Hebrew word for "bless" is *barak*, defined in Strong's Hebrew Dictionary this way:

barak - baw-rak' a primitive root; to kneel; by implication to bless God (as an act of adoration), and (vice-versa) man (as a benefit); also (by euphemism) to curse (God or the king, as treason):--X abundantly, X altogether, X at all, blaspheme, bless, congratulate, curse, X greatly, X indeed, kneel (down), praise, salute, X still, thank.

God would smile upon Abram and favor him and benefit him, and because of His blessing Abram would become great. It is the favor of the Lord that makes a godly man great in a good sense. God blessed Abram this way as well as Joseph and Moses and

others. They became great because of God's blessing and favor upon them. God's purpose in this was to make Abram and his nation a blessing to all the earth. God does not bless us just to make us feel good and to enhance our self-esteem. He blesses us in order to make us a blessing to others. He wants us to be a channel of blessings to others and not a reservoir.

Genesis 12:4-9

So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. 6 And Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land. 7 And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. 8 Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. 9 And Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev.

Abram "went forth as the Lord had spoken to him." Abram believed the Lord, trusted Him, and obeyed. He did as God had told him. He took a step of faith. This is the beginning of Abram's walk of faith with the Lord, and it required a risk on his part. He decided to trust the Lord and so he was blessed greatly.

Abram was no young man. He was 75 years old when he left Haran. The text makes a point of this. God does not always just call young men into His service. Older men are not disqualified from serving the Lord. It is sad that at this age many men in our culture are put out to pasture or put themselves there when they still have much energy and many more years of fruitful service in them. This idea that men over 65 should retire and stop being productive is surely an evil thing in most cases. It is not good for the men or their families, and it is not good for society or the church. At 75, Abram was just getting started. Don't think that you're ever too old to serve the Lord and to be obedient to Him.

When Abram reached the oak of Moreh in Shechem in the land of Canaan, the Lord spoke to him again and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." Abram had reached the land that God had promised to show him. God had fulfilled part of His promise to show Abram where to go. Abram's response was to build an altar there to the Lord. He put up an altar for sacrifice and for a memorial. He was going to remember the Lord's promise and he was going to worship and honor the Lord for His faithfulness. Abram acknowledged the Lord by building this altar. When God fulfills His promises and does something special for us, we need to pause to thank Him and acknowledge Him and His goodness. Our proper response to God's goodness to us is worship. One of the reasons we don't see more blessing in our lives is that we do not acknowledge those He has already given.

Abram did not remain there in Shechem, however, but went on to a point between Bethel and Ai. Once again, he built an altar there and worshipped the Lord. He "called upon the name of the Lord." What do you say when you call on the name of the Lord? We have an example in Psalms 116:4, "Then I called upon the name of the LORD: 'O LORD, I beseech Thee, save my life!'" When you call on the Lord's name you come to Him seeking Him and seeking His blessing. You ask for what you need or want from Him. We are most likely to call on the name of the Lord when we are in

distress or in great need. Abram called on the name of the Lord when things were going well. He did not wait for a crisis to come along before he called on the Lord. He sought fellowship with the Lord even when things were going smoothly for him.

Genesis 12:10-20

Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 And it came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; 12 and it will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 "Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you." 14 And it came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15 And Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels. 17 But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go." 20 And Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

Abram was not a perfect man. This is the first of two incidents where he asked Sarai to lie and to say that she was his sister and not his wife. He had to go to Egypt because there was a famine in the land of Canaan. As he went there he worried because Sarai was a very beautiful woman, and he was afraid that the Egyptians would kill him so that they could take her. He doesn't sound like much of a man of faith when he says, "It will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live." He felt this was inevitable. He could only see the negative. He thought the only way that he could live and that things would go well with him in Egypt was if they took this course of action. To save his own life he was willing to lie about his wife and have her be taken by another man. Sarai went along with the scheme.

When we walk in fear instead of faith we can only see the negative. We can only see the problems and the obstacles and the reasons why things can't be done. We forget that the Lord is watching over us. Abram at this point forgot that God's favor rested on him and that God had promised him descendants. God's promises to Abram could not be fulfilled if Abram were to be killed by the Egyptians. Abram could have confidently gone into Egypt, admitting that Sarai was his wife, and trusting that God would protect them. Instead Abram feared for his life, and it caused him to sin and to compromise and to be a bad witness to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Instead of respecting Abram as a man of God, they were angered by his lies and deception.

As Abram feared, the Egyptians took note of Sarai, that she was a very beautiful woman, and told Pharaoh about her. Pharaoh did indeed take Sarai into his house as his wife and did indeed treat Abram well because of her. It appears that Abram was right about the peril he faced. However, we must note what Pharaoh said after God struck his house with plagues because of Sarai. He confronted Abram and asked, "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,' so that I took her for my wife?" He implied that he would not have taken Sarai as his wife if Abram had been honest and said that she was his wife. It was because of Abram's lie that what he feared came to pass!

Despite Abram's deception, God still protected he and Sarai. Though Abram

would not protect Sarai, God would and did. They were His chosen people and He would not allow them to be harmed or killed. He did not abandon His commitment to them. He did not leave them, but continued to watch over them, even when they did what was wrong.

Fear is often the reason for a lie. A child may fear being punished for wrongdoing, so they will lie and deny that they have done anything wrong. We fear the consequences of telling the truth, so we lie. We must be careful about saying that lying is always wrong and always uncalled for. Most of the time it is, but sometimes a lie can be a lesser evil if we are protecting someone by lying. When Rahab hid the Israelite spies in Jericho, she lied to the men who were searching for them, and told them that they had escaped. She protected them by lying and was rewarded for what she did. She and her family escaped Jericho with their lives because she had protected the men.

Genesis 13:1-13

So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him; and Lot with him.

2 Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. 3 And he went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, 4 to the place of the altar, which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

5 Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6 And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together. 7 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land. 8 Then Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. 9 "Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me: if *to* the left, then I will go to the right; or if *to* the right, then I will go to the left." 10 And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere-- *this was* before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah-- like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. 11 So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. 12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom. 13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD.

Abram and Sarai were escorted out of Egypt by Pharaoh's men, and they left Egypt and came back to Bethel, where he had previously built the altar to the Lord between Bethel and Ai. There again he called on the name of the Lord. Again he worshipped the Lord and made his requests known to the Lord. Again he sought a relationship with the Lord.

Now there was a problem. Both Abram and Lot had prospered and they both had so much that the land in that area could not sustain both of them. They had so many flocks and so many herds that there was strife between the herdsmen over the resources that were there. Abram did not like the strife and said to Lot that there should be no strife between them because they were brothers. Brothers should get along and not fight with one another. So Abram proposed a solution. Lot should choose the place where he would live in the land, and Abram would go the other direction. They would separate from each other so that the strife would not continue. Sometimes this is the best solution when there is strife, to separate and not to try to live together any longer.

Lot decided to go for the valley of the Jordan because it was well watered like the garden of the Lord and like the land of Egypt. The Jordan kept everything there

green and lush. Lot chose the cities of the valley and Abram chose the wilderness. Lot chose to move to Sodom. Moses makes a point of saying that Lot moved to Sodom before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities in this plain. Lot chose the very place that God would destroy in the near future. Though it looked like a good place to settle, Lot chose poorly because of the corruption of the people who lived there.

The trouble with Sodom and Gomorrah was the men who lived there. They were "wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord." The land was good, but the people were not. It is people who have ruined the earth. These men in Sodom went beyond the normal sin of normal people. They were exceedingly wicked. Their wickedness was not standard, run-of-the mill wickedness, but it was excessive.

Genesis 13:14-18

And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; *15* for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. *16* "And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. *17* "Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you." *18* Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD.

It appears here that once Lot had departed, the Lord could freely speak to Abram. It appears that Lot may have been an impediment to Abram's progress. Sometimes family members can hinder our progress in our lives and in our relationship with the Lord. The Lord spoke to Abram initially after his father had died, and now the Lord speaks to him again after Lot left. Lot had chosen his place, and now the Lord is going to tell Abram what will be set aside for him and his descendants.

God told him to look in every direction and promised that He would give Abram all the land he could see. It would belong to his descendants forever. Also, God promised that Abram's descendants would be like the dust of the earth, which no one can number. This is God's covenant with Abram, and it has not been broken in the centuries since it was given. The land of Canaan was given to the Jews and will not be taken from them. God has committed Himself to this and He will not break His promise. Abram's descendants are like the dust of the earth for number. Even we who are Gentiles who believe in Christ are included as the spiritual descendants of Abram (Galatians 3:7).

God told Abram to get up and walk throughout the land, because He was going to give it to him. God wanted Abram to see all the land that would belong to his descendants, and so told him to walk through it. So Abram moved and settled by the oaks of Mamre in Hebron. Again, he built an altar to the Lord and worshipped Him.

Genesis 14

And it came about in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, *2* that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). *3* All these came as allies to the valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). *4* Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but the thirteenth year they rebelled. *5* And in the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim and the Zuzim in Ham and the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, *6* and the Horites in their Mount Seir, as far as El-paran, which is by the wilderness. *7* Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and conquered

all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, who lived in Hazazon-tamar. 8 And the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah and the king of Admah and the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) came out; and they arrayed for battle against them in the valley of Siddim, 9 against Chedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim and Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar-- four kings against five. 10 Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country. 11 Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply, and departed. 12 And they also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom.

13 Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram. 14 And when Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. 16 And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people.

17 Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19 And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tenth of all. 21 And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself." 22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, 23 that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' 24 "I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share."

What was once the "valley of Siddim" is now the Salt Sea. This is where the battle took place between the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela and Chedorlaomer, Tidal, Amraphel and Arioch. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were defeated, and Chedorlaomer and his allies took everything from Sodom and Gomorrah, including Lot and his family and things. Abram got word from a fugitive that Lot had been taken captive.

Because Lot had chosen to live in Sodom, he subjected himself and his family to this danger. Choosing the world will expose us to dangers that we would not face otherwise. This conflict had passed by Abram because he had chosen not to settle in with the sinners of the land.

Abram felt compelled to go to rescue Lot. He gathered his men, 318 of them who had been "born in his house," to go pursue those who had captured Lot. Abram would not have been involved at all if it had not been for Lot. Our sin can cause trouble for others that they would not have otherwise. If we are living in the wrong place and associating with the wrong people it can cause problems for our relatives and friends. Because of their concern for us they will be grieved and may have to go to great lengths to help us out of a jam we've gotten ourselves into.

Abram was allied with those who lived near him. He had a good relationship with Mamre the Amorite, Eshcol and Aner. They and their men evidently went with Abram to rescue Lot. They had such respect and love for Abram that they helped him. That they had helped is clear from verse 24. They were to receive a share of the goods they had taken from their enemies.

Abram and his men and allies were able to defeat Chedorlaomer and those with him and rescue Lot and his family and possessions. The king of Sodom came out to meet him, as did Melchizedek the king of Salem. Melchizedek is a very important figure in scripture. He was both king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He was a man

who truly knew and represented God. Melchizedek fed Abram and his men and blessed him. In his blessing, Melchizedek recognized that Abram was one chosen of God Most High who belonged to God. He and Abram both refer to God as the "Possessor of heaven and earth." God is ultimately the one who owns everything. He is the One from whom all things come and to whom all things belong. Also we must see from Melchizedek's blessing that God Most High got all the credit and glory for the defeat of their enemies. It was God who had delivered them into the hand of Abram. God gave him the victory and God enabled him to rescue Lot and restore him.

Abram gave a tithe to Melchizedek. This is a very important feature here, which is picked up in the New Testament. By giving him a tithe, Abram was recognizing the authority and position of Melchizedek. He was recognizing Melchizedek as a true priest of God Most High who represented God Most High. But Melchizedek was also a king as well as a priest. As such, Melchizedek is a type of Christ. Psalm 110:4 says of the Messiah, "The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, 'Thou art a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.'" Christ was a priest of the order of Melchizedek. Why is this? Jesus was not born in the line of the Levitical priests. He could not be a priest according to the order of Levi, because He was not descended from Levi. Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, from which the kings were supposed to be descended. He came from the kingly line, not the priestly line. How then can He be both? He can be a priest as well as a king because He is a priest in the order of Melchizedek. The book of Hebrews emphasizes this:

So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "THOU ART MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE"; 6 just as He says also in another passage, "THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." 7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, 10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:5-10.)

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, 20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. 3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually.

4 Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. 5 And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. 6 But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham, and blessed the one who had the promises. 7 But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. 8 And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. 9 And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, 10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

11 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? 12 For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. 13 For the one concerning whom

these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. 15 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is witnessed of Him, "THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." 18 For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. 20 And inasmuch as it was not without an oath 21 (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, 'THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER'"); 22 so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. 23 And the former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24 but He, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever. (Hebrews 6:19 – 7:28.)

It is important to note that the author of Hebrews is not saying that Melchizedek was Christ or was a being like Christ. He is using Melchizedek as a type of Christ to show that there was a precedent for a man who was both priest and king before the Levitical priesthood was established in the Law. Being from the tribe of Judah, Jesus could be king according to the Law but could not be a priest. Hebrews is saying that Jesus priesthood is a more ancient priesthood and a superior one as well. He has become an eternal High Priest and has been permanently installed in that office. Jesus is greater than Levi as Melchizedek was greater than Abram. It was Melchizedek who blessed Abram and it was to Melchizedek that Abram paid tithes. The lesser is blessed by the greater and the lesser pays tithes to the greater. In fact, even Levi himself, being in the loins of Abram, in a sense paid tithes to Melchizedek. The whole point of the book of Hebrews is to establish that Jesus is superior to the Law and the new covenant in His blood is superior to the old covenant. Melchizedek is one aspect of establishing this principle.

The king of Sodom thought he would be magnanimous and generous to Abram. He was grateful for what Abram had done, and so he told Abram to keep all the goods he had taken as spoil, and just to restore the people he had rescued. Abram flatly refused. He had taken an oath to the Lord that he would take nothing from the king of Sodom, not even a thread or sandal thong. He did not want the king of Sodom to say that he had made Abram rich. Abram knew the wicked character of the king of Sodom and his people, and he would not receive anything from them. He did insist that his allies get their share of the goods, and his young men had eaten from the spoil, but he personally would take nothing from the king of Sodom.

Genesis 15:1-6

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." 2 And Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." 4 Then behold, the word of

the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." 5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Here is another very important passage. God again speaks to Abram in a vision and reaffirms His promise to Abram. First, He tells him not to be afraid because He is a shield for Abram and that his reward will be very great. God assures him that He will protect Abram and reward him. Abram need not fear reprisals from the kings he had just defeated. Abram need not receive rewards from the pagan kings near him. God would both protect and reward him.

But Abram has a question. What will God give him as a reward? He has no child. Eliezer of Damascus is his heir and is not even his son. He pointed out that God had given him no offspring. God had given him wealth and riches. God had promised that his descendants would occupy the land where he was living. The question he asked was one you would expect him to ask. How can God fulfill His promise to Abram if He has given him no children? Abram could see no evidence that God had any intention of giving him a child.

God's answer is direct, "This man will not be your heir, but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." It can't be any clearer. Abram's own son would be his heir. His heir would come from his own body. Eliezer would not be the heir. Abram would yet have a son of his own.

God took Abram outside and showed him the stars and again promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens, a large number that no one can count. God had mentioned the descendants of Abram in 12:7 and in 13:15-16, and now He mentions them again. God's promise could not be fulfilled unless Abram had a son of his own.

Abram believed God's promise and God counted it as righteousness. Verse 6 is very important and is quoted three times in the New Testament because it establishes the doctrine of justification by faith. Paul quotes this verse and comments on it in Romans 4:1-5:

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.

He quotes it again in Galatians 3:6-7, "Even so 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham." James also cites this verse in James 2:21-24:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.

It appears at a glance as if James is contradicting Paul by saying that Abraham was justified by works when he offered up Isaac on the altar. But the justification of Abraham happened when he believed in Genesis 15:6, and the offering of Isaac was

the completion and fulfillment of his faith. He offered up Isaac because he believed. It was a "work" that sprang out of his faith. The offering of Isaac was a validation of his faith that had justified him. A man is justified by faith that produces works of obedience.

God considered Abram righteous because he believed in Him and trusted that God would indeed fulfill His promise. His faith was not simply in the promise, but in the God who made the promise. He believed that God could and would do what he promised even though it looked impossible from a human perspective. Our faith is not just in what God has said, but in God Himself. We believe in Him, we trust in Him because He is trustworthy. He will not break His word, even if it seems impossible to us.

Genesis 15:7-21

And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." 8 And he said, "O Lord GOD, how may I know that I shall possess it?" 9 So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. 11 And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. 12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror *and* great darkness fell upon him. 13 And God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. 14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions. 15 "And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 "Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." 17 And it came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, *there appeared* a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite 20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim 21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."

As the dialog continued, God reminded Abram of who He was, that He was the Lord who brought him out of Ur and into this land that he would possess. His purpose in bringing Abram out of Ur was to give him this land. The Lord had promised that Abram's own children would inherit the land, and Abram had believed Him, but Abram still asked, "O Lord God, how may I know that I shall possess it?" Abram would die long before the promise was fulfilled, so how could he know for sure that it would happen? It was a sincere question.

God's reply to his question is odd to us. God tells him to bring a three year old heifer, a three year old female goat, a three year old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon to Him. Abram cut each animal (except the birds) in half and laid the halves on the ground opposite each other. This seems very weird to us, but in those days this was the way that people made agreements and covenants with each other. Robert Deffinbaugh, in his commentary on Genesis, writes:

In the ancient world of Abram, legal and binding agreements were not put on papers written by lawyers and signed by the parties involved. Instead, the two parties would arrive at a mutually acceptable agreement, and then they would formalize it in the form of a covenant.

The covenant was sealed by the dividing of an animal (or animals). In fact, the technical term literally means 'go cut a covenant.' The animal(s) was cut in half and the two parties would pass between the halves. It seems that in this oath, the men acknowledged that the fate of the animal should be theirs if they broke the terms of their agreement.

So we see that these verses do not describe the process of animal sacrifice, but the legal act of making a binding agreement. Verses 9-11 set the stage for the final ratification of this covenant.⁹

As Abram was there before the Lord he fell into a deep sleep and experienced great darkness and terror. The presence of the Lord is a scary thing. He felt the fear of the Lord in that place. When you fear someone you will listen to them and you will do as they say. Abram was certainly listening to the Lord then! In that darkness and terror God spoke again to Abram and told him what would happen to his descendants. He told him that his descendants would be slaves in another land and would be oppressed there for 400 years, but after God judged that nation they would come out with many possessions. God told Abram beforehand about the slavery in Egypt that Israel would suffer. This was God's answer to Abram's question about how he could know that his descendants would possess the land. He told Abram about a specific thing that would come upon his descendants in the future, their slavery in Egypt. A real nation would truly be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years.

The Lord said that He wanted Abram to know this for certain, that this would take place and that this would happen to his descendants. There was to be no question in Abram's mind about this. A real, historical people would come from him and these things would happen to them. In the fourth generation they would return to the land where Abram was living and inherit it. Abram's descendants would not receive the land at once because the "iniquity of the Amorite" was not yet complete. The sin of the Amorites was not yet complete. It was still developing. They were not yet evil enough that God needed to remove them. When their iniquity was fully complete and mature, then Israel would be brought out of Egypt to remove and replace them. When the sin of a people group gets bad enough, they are in danger of God's judgment. We see this in the flood, we see it in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and we see it in the removal of the Amorites and other peoples in the land of Canaan.

God assured Abram that he would go to his fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. He would not be taken captive along with his descendants, but would live out his life in the land in peace.

When night came it was very dark, and a smoking oven and flaming torch appeared and passed between the pieces of the animals that Abram had divided. This represented the Lord walking between the pieces. God made a covenant and a commitment to Abram that He had given the land to his descendants. God Himself took part in this human covenant ceremony, as if He Himself were a man making a covenant with Abram. Abram would know this would happen because God had made a solemn covenant with him and an oath. God had taken part in cutting this covenant with Abram, and He will not fail to keep His word. We can be certain that God will do what He says He will do, because it is not possible for Him to lie or to break a commitment.

Genesis 16

Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no *children*, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing *children*. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 And after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. 4 And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. 5 And

⁹ Deffinbaugh, Robert, The Book Of Genesis, Biblical Studies Press.

Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms; but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me." 6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence.

7 Now the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." 9 Then the angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority." 10 Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they shall be too many to count." 11 The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, And you shall bear a son; And you shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction. 12 "And he will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand *will be* against everyone, And everyone's hand *will be* against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers." 13 Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "Thou art a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?" 14 Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered. 15 So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 And Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.

Sarai did not believe that she would ever have a child. She had given up on the idea that this would happen and that she would be the one through whom the promise of God would be fulfilled. No doubt Abram and Sarai tried and tried to conceive, but nothing had ever happened, and she was very frustrated. God had said that Abram's descendants would come from his own body, but God had not said that they would come from Sarai. She said to him, "Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children." God had kept her from having any children. She was right about that. She was frustrated and perhaps even bitter and resentful toward the Lord. But she was not right in thinking that it would never happen and that God would not use her. Sometimes we give up too soon. Sometimes we think that God has set us aside and will never again be able to use us for anything. We must not give in to this temptation to throw in the towel and give up. We must not believe the lie that we are useless and will never be fruitful.

Sarai's plan was that Abram would have relations with her Egyptian maid Hagar, and that they would then adopt that child as their own. Hagar would be the surrogate mother for Sarai's child. Sarai could see no other way of obtaining a son. Abram listened to her. He followed her idea. Probably it sounded good to him, as a man, to have another sexual partner, plus there was the possibility of having a son and seeing the promise fulfilled. But Abram made the same mistake that Adam had made. He listened to his wife and followed a bad idea. This does not mean that husbands should not listen to their wives, but that when they know the command and promise of God they need to stick with it even if their wives give up.

So Sarai gave Hagar to Abram as his second wife, and he had relations with her and she conceived. When she knew that she was pregnant, she "despised" Sarai. She held her mistress in contempt, because she was able to do something that Sarai could not do. I think that she must have exalted herself above Sarai and perhaps even tried to supplant her as Abram's favorite wife. Perhaps she even belittled her and mocked her. In any case, Sarai became angry. She had been wronged and she complained to Abram and even blamed him for the attitude of her maid. Sarai seems a bit hypocritical to me here, since the whole thing was her idea. She had lifted Hagar to the position of second wife of Abram, and now she expected her to still behave as her maid.

Abram told Sarai that as far as he was concerned, Hagar was still Sarai's maid

and in her power. He said that she could do whatever she thought was good. Abram would not stand up for Hagar as his second wife. He was not attached to her, but to Sarai. He would not replace Sarai with Hagar, as Hagar may have thought he would. He basically washed his hands of the situation and told Sarai that what happened to Hagar was up to her. So Sarai treated her harshly so that she fled.

I think it's true that people who pursue more and more sexual / romantic relationships with more and more people only cause more and more trouble for themselves. God created us to cleave to and settle down with one spouse. When we begin to add other people into the mix it causes jealousy, anger, strife and broken relationships. To follow God's pattern is always best for us.

When Hagar fled, the Lord found her. The Lord pursued her. Neither Sarai nor Abram pursued her, but the Lord did. He found her because He had "given heed" to her affliction (verse 11). He saw that she had been treated harshly, and cared about her.

The angel said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" He knew who she was, he pointed that out as he addressed her. She was "Sarai's maid." This was her identity. The question was, if she was Sarai's maid, what was she doing out in the wilderness? I think the angel's question was meant to point this out to Hagar. She knew where she had come from, but she didn't know where she was going. She had fled with no plan about where she was going to go. As Sarai's maid she belonged with Sarai and Abram. She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."

The angel's command was that she was to return to Sarai and to submit to her authority. She was not to despise her any longer. She was not to try to take Sarai's place as Abram's wife. She was not to exalt herself over Sarai, but to submit to her. She was to continue to serve her as her maid. The angel's command was that she should humble herself. She was partly responsible for her predicament because of the change in her attitude toward Sarai, so she is called upon to humble herself and to again submit to Sarai as a servant. Sometimes this is what we must do in order to restore a relationship. We must humble ourselves and change our attitude. Instead of running away from difficult relationships, we must do what we can on our part to bring about peace and reconciliation.

The angel also had a promise for her. He said that he would greatly multiply her descendants and that they would be too many to count, just as the Lord had said to Abram. She would have a son and name him Ishmael. The name Ishmael means "God will hear," and the angel explained that God had given heed to her affliction, and therefore he was to be named Ishmael. His name would always be a reminder that God had paid attention to her affliction and had come to help her. Our God is a God who hears and who pays attention to our affliction. The Psalmist wrote,

I love the LORD, because He hears My voice *and* my supplications.
Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I shall call *upon Him* as long as I live. (Psalms 116:1-2)

He loved the Lord because the Lord was attentive to him and his cries and to his requests. Because of this, he committed himself to calling on the Lord for his whole life. Because our God is a God who listens and pays attention, we can call on Him. We can let him hear our voice and our supplications.

The angel also told Hagar what sort of person Ishmael would be, and it is not a flattering picture. He said, "And he will be a wild donkey of a man, his hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; and he will live to the east of all his brothers." This is an interesting prophecy in light of the fact that Arabs today claim that they are the descendants of Ishmael, which well may be true. In the conflicts of Arabs against Israelis and Moslems against Jews and Christians we see this prophecy fulfilled. Moslems believe that non-Moslems are infidels and as such deserve to die. The ancient animosity between Israelis and Arabs apparently has its roots right here in the birth of Ishmael. How different the world would be today if Abram and Sarai had trusted the Lord that their long-awaited child would come through Sarai!

Hagar responded by giving the Lord a special name, "Thou art a God who sees." This is what she called Him. She realized that God had seen her and her affliction, and that she had met Him there through His angel. She was amazed that she was still alive after seeing Him. Because of this the spring was named Beer-lahai-roi, which means "well of a living (One) my Seer." The spring's name would memorialize Hagar's encounter with the Lord. When Moses wrote this, he could point to the very spring where Hagar met the angel. The Bible is rooted in historical fact. These were real people who had real encounters with the Lord in real places.

Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born to him. He was no young man. We see why Sarai had given up on the idea that she would be the mother of the promised descendants.

Genesis 17

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. 2 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly." 3 And Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 "No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 "And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. 7 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. 8 "And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." 9 God said further to Abraham, "Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 "And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 "And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a *servant* who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. 13 "A *servant* who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 "But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name. 16 "And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a *mother of* nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a *child*?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" 19 But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. 20 "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21 "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear

to you at this season next year."

22 And when He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. 23 Then Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all *the servants* who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's household, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the very same day, as God had said to him. 24 Now Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26 In the very same day Abraham was circumcised, and Ishmael his son. 27 And all the men of his household, who were born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Each time the Lord appeared to Abram He revealed more of His plan for Abram and his descendants. This time, Abram is 99 years old when the Lord appears to him and speaks to him. He tells him who He is and commands him to walk before Him and be blameless. The word for "blameless" is *tamiym*, which means "entire, without blemish, complete, full, perfect, sincerely (-ity), sound, without spot, undefiled, upright(-ly), whole."¹⁰ Abram is to be a complete man before the Lord. The KJV renders this "perfect." He is commanded to walk in the light of the presence of the Lord and to live as one who trusts in the Lord and obeys him. There is to be a consistent obedience in his life. This is Abram's part of the covenant.

As for the Lord and His part of the covenant, He promised to establish His covenant with Abram, and that He would multiply Abram exceedingly. Abram would not just be multiplied, but be multiplied excessively, if there is such a thing. His blessing would exceed that of others. His name was changed from Abram, "high father," to Abraham, "father of a multitude." His name would indicate who he really was – the father of a great multitude of people and nations. It is ironic that his names, both Abram and Abraham, have to do with fatherhood, and yet to this point he has fathered only one son, Ishmael, and he was from Hagar and not Sarai. At the age of 99 there was little evidence that the promise of God would be or could be fulfilled. Yet again, God promised that He would make Abraham "exceedingly fruitful," that nations and kings would come from him.

God says that His covenant with Abraham will extend to his descendants as well in verse 7. The covenant would be an "everlasting covenant." He would be their God and they would be His people. The land of Canaan would be given to them as an "everlasting possession" (verse 8). God took the initiative to establish this covenant, and men cannot undo it. He is the one who chose Abraham and his descendants. He is the one who said that the land would be theirs for all time. It was not Abraham who came to God and said, "Would you be my God and the God of my descendants?" It was God who pursued him. This covenant is still in force. Canaan still belongs to the descendants of Abraham and God is still the God of the descendants of Abraham. These things cannot be overturned.

After telling Abraham of all the things that He would do for him and his descendants, God commanded that Abraham and his descendants should keep their part of the covenant. Specifically, God said that this meant that all the males had to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham. Circumcision was for the Jews a sign of their covenant with God. Even servants and foreigners who became part of the household of Abraham were to be circumcised. To fail to be circumcised was to break the covenant (verse 14) and such a man was to be cut off from his people. Circumcision was a reminder to each man that he was part of a special nation that was set apart to God, that he belonged

¹⁰ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

to a nation that God had chosen and that they knew the true and living God. They were privileged men, and circumcision was a reminder of that.

In verse 15 the Lord turned his attention to Sarai. She would be renamed Sarah, which denotes a female noble, a princess or queen. She was named this because nations and kings would come from her. God promised that He would bless her and that He would give Abraham a son by her. This is the first time that God promised that the descendants of Abraham would come through Sarah. God had not planned that the son of Hagar should be the child of promise, but that the son of Sarah should be that son.

Abraham laughed when he heard God's promise that Sarah would have a son. He was incredulous. He said to himself, "Will a child be born to a man on hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" This was unheard of in Abraham's day, though men were still at that time living longer than we do today. He was amazed that it was really God's plan to give them a son through Sarah. Abraham said, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" It is as if Abraham was saying, "Let's just go with Ishmael and leave it at that. There's no need for another child." Why he would be less than thrilled with God's promise I don't know. Maybe he feared that childbirth would be too hard on his elderly wife. Perhaps he didn't feel like caring for an infant at 100 years of age. Whatever it was, he asked that God might just use Ishmael as the son of promise. Evidently he cared for Ishmael and Ishmael was important to him.

God said that no, Ishmael would not be the son of promise. Sarah would have a son and his name would be Isaac, and it would be with him that God would establish His everlasting covenant. It would be through Isaac that God's chosen people would come. By the way, the name Isaac means "laughter." He would be a cause for laughter for his parents in their old age. He was a living example of God's sense of humor in allowing these old people to have a child.

God heard Abraham, however, in his request about Ishmael. God said that he would bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly. Specifically, he would become the father of 12 princes and he would be made into a great nation. The 12 sons of Ishmael are listed in Genesis 25:13-15, Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. God clarified again, though, that His covenant would be established with Isaac, who would be born to Sarah in one year. The covenant would not continue through Ishmael, but through Isaac. Paul uses these two men as an illustration of the covenant of Law versus the covenant of promise in Galatians 4:21-31:

Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. 23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. 24 This is allegorically speaking: for these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. 25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 27 For it is written, "REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND." 28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

This is a very unusual passage and it is not like Paul to use Scripture in an allegorical

fashion, but it is interesting. Hagar stands for the covenant of the law, and her son was born according to the flesh. He was born as a result of Abraham's attempt to fulfill God's promise on his own. Sarah stands for the covenant of promise, and her son was born according to the promise by faith in the promise. It was impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have had a son on their own apart from the work of God, so they trusted God to do what He promised, and Isaac was born. We do not fulfill the will of God by the efforts of our flesh, but by walking in faith in God's promises. We are saved by faith in Him and we live by faith in Him.

As soon as the Lord was finished speaking to him, Abraham had himself and all the males in his household circumcised. He immediately kept the covenant with God. He obeyed immediately. This demonstrated his trust in the promise and his commitment to the Lord. He was 99 years old at this time and Ishmael was 13. This must not have been a pleasant experience for any of them, but they were obedient.

Genesis 18:1-16

Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 And when he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, 3 and said, "My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by. 4 "Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; 5 and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do, as you have said." 6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead *it*, and make bread cakes." 7 Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf, and gave *it* to the servant; and he hurried to prepare it. 8 And he took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed *it* before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate. 9 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Behold, in the tent." 10 And he said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. 12 And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" 13 And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear *a child*, when I am so old?' 14 "Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 Sarah denied *it* however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh." 16 Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off.

Once again, the Lord appeared to Abraham and spoke to him. Some have said that the Lord took the form of three men in order to represent the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This may be, but it may also be the case that the Lord appeared as one man with two angels accompanying Him. This may be more likely, because we are told that after meeting with Abraham, the two angels proceeded on to Sodom to rescue Lot (Genesis 19:1). I think it likely that one of these men was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in His preincarnate state appearing in human form. The other two were angels who were heading for Sodom.

It was a hot day and Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent in the afternoon. He saw the three men approaching and recognized them and ran to greet them, bowing down to the earth before them. This passage is full of the haste of Abraham to make his divine guests welcome and comfortable. He ran to meet them, he "hurried into the tent" to direct Sarah to make some bread, he "ran to the herd" to select a calf, and his servant "hurried to prepare it." He was eager to be hospitable to the Lord and His companions. He realized that it was a great privilege to have these visitors. We must

realize what a privilege it is to know the Lord and be in a relationship with Him! To have the Lord choose us and come to us is nothing to treat lightly!

Evidently Abraham saw that his visitors were on their way somewhere, because he asked them not to pass him by, but to stay and rest for a bit. He would bring water to wash their feet, and he would give them a meal before they proceeded on their journey. They agreed to stay and allow him to serve them. As they ate beneath the tree, Abraham was standing there beside them.

The Lord inquired as to where Sarah was, and Abraham told Him that she was in the tent. The Lord knew that she could hear them. She may at that time have come to the tent door. Perhaps she was standing there in the tent door behind Abraham listening. When the Lord knew that He had her attention, He promised that he would come back at the same time in one year and Sarah would have a son. Again we are reminded that they were old and that Sarah "was past childbearing." I think this means that she had passed through menopause, and that she was no longer ovulating. She had been unable to conceive during her childbearing years, and now she was beyond the ability to conceive. This is why the Lord would come back and visit them again. He would do a special miracle to enable Sarah to conceive their son. It would take nothing less than His work for her to have a son. Abraham and Sarah could not do it on their own, but God would do it for them.

Sarah's response was to laugh to herself. She was skeptical because of her advanced age and Abraham's age. Abraham believed the promise, but Sarah had a hard time doing so. She said, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" It would be an inconceivable pleasure to her to have a son at her age, but she couldn't see how it could possibly happen.

The Lord asked why Sarah had laughed. He asked, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" This is why Sarah laughed. She was skeptical of the ability of the Lord to fulfill this promise. She had given up on the idea that she would have a baby. She had said that the Lord had prevented her from giving birth (16:2) and that is why she gave Hagar to Abraham. Now God says that He is going to make her have a baby, and she laughs at the idea. But nothing is too hard for Him. He can make a 90 year old woman conceive if He chooses to do so. Whatever He promises, He can and will accomplish. We need to learn to step out in faith and trust the Lord to do things that are impossible for us. We need to see what He wants to do and move in that direction even if it involves impossible obstacles for us. He will get us through them or over them or around them if it is His purpose.

Sarah was afraid and denied that she had laughed, but the Lord knew the truth and refuted her. You don't win an argument with the Lord. You can't cover up your wrongdoing with Him. He knows the truth. He knows what you have done or haven't done, what you've said or haven't said, what you have thought or haven't thought. It is best to admit and confess your wrongdoing, because it is then that you find His compassion and forgiveness. "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion" (Proverbs 28:13).

Genesis 18:17-33

And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, *18* since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? *19* "For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him." *20* And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed

great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 21 "I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know."

22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. 23 And Abraham came near and said, "Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 "Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed sweep *it* away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 "Far be it from Thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are *treated* alike. Far be it from Thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" 26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account." 27 And Abraham answered and said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am *but* dust and ashes. 28 "Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, wilt Thou destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* if I find forty-five there." 29 And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do *it* on account of the forty." 30 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do *it* if I find thirty there." 31 And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* on account of the twenty." 32 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* on account of the ten." 33 And as soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed; and Abraham returned to his place.

Not only had the Lord come to tell Abraham that he and Sarah were to have a son, but He had come to bring judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham was His chosen man and was in His confidence, so He told him what He was going to do. Also, Abraham was concerned about Lot his nephew, who lived in Sodom. The Lord would not hide His errand from Abraham. There was a lesson for Abraham and his descendants in what the Lord was about to do. The Lord explained that He was telling Abraham these things because Abraham would father the nation that would be God's covenant people. They would be the people who would be commanded "to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19). They would need to avoid the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah in order to avoid the judgment that came upon them. The continued blessing of God upon Abraham's descendants depended on their obedience. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah would serve as a warning against unfaithfulness.

We should take closer note of verse 19 before we move on. We find here that God tells Abraham the purpose for which He chose him. He wanted Abraham to command his children and household, his descendants, to keep the way of the Lord. They were to know the "way," the road or pathway, of the Lord and stay on it. How would they do this? The Lord says, "by doing righteousness and justice." Righteousness has to do with our relationship with God, and justice has to do with our relationship to others. We are to do what is right in the sight of God in order to be righteous, and we are to treat others fairly in order to be just. Over and over in the Old Testament these two things are placed side-by-side. Here are some examples:

2 Samuel 8:15 - So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and righteousness for all his people.

1 Kings 10:9 - Blessed be the LORD your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness.

Psalms 33:5 - He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness

of the LORD.

Psalms 89:14 - Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne;
Lovingkindness and truth go before Thee.

Psalms 106:3 - How blessed are those who keep justice, Who practice righteousness at all times!

Proverbs 21:3 - To do righteousness and justice Is desired by the LORD rather than sacrifice.

Isaiah 5:7 - For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.

Isaiah 9:6-7 - For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 - Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 22:13-17 - "Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness And his upper rooms without justice, Who uses his neighbor's services without pay And does not give him his wages, 14 Who says, 'I will build myself a roomy house With spacious upper rooms, And cut out its windows, Paneling it with cedar and painting it bright red.' 15 "Do you become a king because you are competing in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink, And do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. 16 "He pled the cause of the afflicted and needy; Then it was well. Is not that what it means to know Me?" Declares the LORD. 17 "But your eyes and your heart Are *intent* only upon your own dishonest gain, And on shedding innocent blood And on practicing oppression and extortion."

Ezekiel 18:5-9 - "But if a man is righteous, and practices justice and righteousness, 6 and does not eat at the mountain shrines or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, or defile his neighbor's wife, or approach a woman during her menstrual period-- 7 if a man does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, does not commit robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry, and covers the naked with clothing, 8 if he does not lend money on interest or take increase, if he keeps his hand from iniquity, and executes true justice between man and man, 9 if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully-- he is righteous and will surely live," declares the Lord GOD.

There are a number of things to note from these passages. First, God loves and requires justice and righteousness, especially from leaders. These things are not optional. His throne is founded on justice and righteousness, and He demands them of those who know Him. Justice and righteousness are part of His character, and He cannot help but be just and righteous. It is impossible for God to be unjust or unrighteous, because to do so would be to violate His character.

Second, justice and righteousness are things that are "done" and are "practiced." You "do" justice. You "do" righteousness. They have to do with deeds that one does. The things you do are either righteous or unrighteous, just or unjust. When you do just and righteous deeds you are a just and righteous person.

Third, the reign of the Messiah will be one of justice and righteousness forever. His throne will be established and upheld with justice and righteousness (Isaiah 9:7). He will be a completely just and righteous ruler. There will be no unfairness with Him, no accepting bribes, no corruption, no tolerance of evil.

The last two passages quoted above give us some specifics about justice and righteousness. They tell us of what these things consist. In Jeremiah 22, the Lord was speaking through the prophet to Shallum, the son of Josiah. He did not practice justice and righteousness as his father had done. His father had "pled the cause of the afflicted and needy" and prospered. He had behaved as one who truly knew the Lord. In fact, the Lord says that to plead the cause of the afflicted and needy is what it means to know Him. Shallum, however, had built his house without righteousness and justice. He had used people's services without paying them. He had withheld the wages of his servants. This was not just nor right. His purpose was his "own dishonest gain" and he was intent on "shedding innocent blood and on practicing oppression and extortion."

Ezekiel 18:5-9 gives us both negative and positive aspects of justice and righteousness. The righteous and just man does not do certain things. He does not worship other gods and is not an idolater. He refrains from adultery and sexual sin. He does not oppress people. He does not keep a man's property that he might put up as security for a loan. He does not rob or steal. He does not lend money at interest. He keeps his hand from iniquity. There are certain things that the righteous man does as well. He gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing. He is concerned about the practical needs of others. He executes justice between man and man. He walks in the statutes and ordinances of the Lord and is faithful. Righteousness and justice are not only defined by what you don't do, but also by what you do.

The Lord had heard the "outcry" of Sodom and Gomorrah. He had noted that their sin was "exceedingly grave." The cities had cried out because of their sin. People were being victimized and were crying out. Children were being abused and were crying out. The land itself was crying out to be rid of these people who had corrupted themselves. Their sin surpassed ordinary sin and had become excessive and very serious. The word for "grave" here means heavy. Their sin was very heavy, a weight that laid on the land. There comes a time for people when they step over a line that calls for God's judgment. All sin is serious and is not to be treated lightly, but when you get to the point that these cities had gotten to, it is time for judgment.

The Lord was going down to Sodom and Gomorrah to investigate and to find out if they had really done those things that He had heard. It sounds as if He was hoping that what He had heard would prove to be false. If they had not done the things that He

had heard, He would know. But we must ask, "Doesn't God have perfect knowledge of all things? Didn't He already know that the outcry He had heard was true?" Of course He knew already that what He had heard was true. This incident is similar to the time when the Lord came down to look at the city and tower that men were building on the plain of Shinar in Genesis 11:5. He came down to discover the facts, to see for Himself. He came to learn the truth by experience. He is not some remote God who judges us from afar. He comes down to mingle with us and to even experience the evil treatment that we often give to one another. Hebrews 5:8 tells us that Jesus "learned obedience from the things which He suffered." This does not mean that Jesus was disobedient before He suffered, but that He learned *by experience* what it meant to obey as a human. He became a man and had to obey the Father as a man. He had never had to do this before. He was obedient to the point of death (Philippians 2:8). So God visited Sodom and Gomorrah in person to learn by experience the truth that He already knew.

As the two angels headed off to Sodom, the Lord still stood there with Abraham, and Abraham was troubled. He asked the Lord, "Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" This was a crisis point for Abraham. He could see God's intention. He knew that the Lord had come to bring judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. He also knew that his nephew Lot was there with his family. He was concerned that God would sweep away the righteous along with the wicked. The word for "sweep away" is *caphah*, which means "to scrape together or away." God was going to "scrape" the wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah off the earth, and Abraham was concerned that the righteous might be caught up with them. This of course would not be right. It would not be right for the Lord to wipe out the righteous with the wicked. 1 Thessalonians 5:9 says, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Abraham came up with a hypothetical scenario in which he proposes that there are 50 righteous people in Sodom. Will the Lord sweep them away with the wicked? Will He treat the wicked and the righteous alike? The Lord replied that He would spare the whole place if He found 50 righteous people there. Thinking he had perhaps been too optimistic, Abraham reduced his number to 45, then to 30, then to 20 and finally to 10. Abraham would go no lower than ten. He had his answer. The Lord will not kill the righteous with the wicked. He will spare an entire city from His wrath on account of the righteous who live there.

Jesus told a parable that illustrates this principle. In Matthew 13:24-30 we read the parable of the wheat and the tares:

He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 "But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. 26 "But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 "And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 "But he said, 'No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'""

The disciples asked Him to explain the parable, so in Matthew 13:37-43 it says:

And He answered and said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and *as for* the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil *one*; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 "Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 "Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

God will allow the wicked and the righteous to grow side-by-side until the end of the age, and then the harvest will come. The wicked will be removed from among the righteous, and then the righteous will be gathered together in His kingdom to be with Him forever.

Sodom was going to be destroyed because there were no righteous people there except Lot, and the Lord was going to evacuate he and his family. The entire city was corrupt and beyond redemption. They had reached a point where God would no longer allow them to live.

Genesis 19:1-11

Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw *them*, he rose to meet them and bowed down *with his* face to the ground. 2 And he said, "Now behold, my lords, please turn aside into your servant's house, and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way." They said however, "No, but we shall spend the night in the square." 3 Yet he urged them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he prepared a feast for them, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. 4 Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; 5 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 may have relations with them." 6 But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, 7 and said, "Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. 8 "Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof." 9 But they said, "Stand aside." Furthermore, they said, "This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them." So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door. 10 But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. 11 And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied *themselves trying* to find the doorway.

When the angels came to Lot he recognized them. He knew they were angels and he met them and bowed down before them. He prevailed upon them to come and spend the night in his house. They had intended to spend the night in the city square. There they would experience the wickedness of the men of the city. They experienced it in any case at Lot's house, because the men of the city came after them there. It is ironic that Lot tried to protect these strong angels who had come to protect him and to destroy the city. Instead, they were there to protect him.

When they were ready to go to bed for the night, all the men and boys of Sodom came to Lot's house. They had heard that there were strangers visiting him so they came to his house and demanded that he bring them out so that they might have sex with them. Can you imagine this? Suppose a neighbor had visitors come, and the word got out that some new people had come to town. Can you imagine everyone coming to your neighbor's house and demanding to have sex with the newcomers?

Even in our corrupt society this is unheard of! Yet this is what things were like in Sodom.

Lot went out to try to reason with the men and to restrain them. He pleaded with them, calling them "brothers" and asked them not to act wickedly. And then Lot did an unbelievable thing. He offered his virgin daughters to them instead of the angels! He said "do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof." As a father of a daughter I cannot imagine giving up my daughter to a bunch of violent rapists! Clearly Lot was acting out of great fear of these men. Lot tried to appease them by offering his daughters, but instead of being appeased they were enraged.

These men were not interested in women, evidently. They were intent on raping the "men" who had come to Lot. No doubt there were hundreds of men or even thousands who had surrounded Lot's house. It is clear that they all could not have sex with the angels. Perhaps the others were going to content themselves with just watching the spectacle. Their anger flared at Lot. He was an alien among them, and now he was acting like their judge. They decided that they would treat him worse than the angels. It is interesting that the accusation of the wicked against the righteous has not changed in all these centuries. The wicked still cry out, "You can't judge us!" They still condemn the godly for being "judgmental" and see this "judgmentalism" and "intolerance" as a greater evil than anything they do. We know that our world is going in the same direction as Sodom when we hear these kinds of objections. When "intolerance" of different "lifestyles" is considered the greatest "evil," then a society is in trouble!

The men of Sodom promised to treat Lot worse than they intended to treat the newcomers. They indeed intended to treat the men badly, and they would do worse things to Lot! They started to become forceful and violent with Lot. They would not reason with him any longer. They would not allow him to hinder them from their intention. They "pressed hard" against Lot and were going to break the door down to get at the angels. They were sexually corrupt and violent. These two things seem often to go together. Lust reaches a point where it will not be restrained, and it becomes violent to get what it wants. James explained this in James 4:1-4:

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Quarrels and conflicts come from our lusts, those strong evil desires for pleasure. They drive us to fight for what we want rather than turning to God and asking Him.

Fortunately for Lot, the men who had come to him were angels sent to rescue him. They pulled him into the house and shut the door. Then they struck the men at the door with blindness. Still these men groped for the door! Even though they had been struck blind they were still trying to get at the men inside the house! They became weary trying to find the doorway. Even the evidence of God's judgment upon them would not restrain their evil. Even the display of supernatural power from the angels would not keep them from trying to get to them. This is something that always

amazes me, when we read in scripture of people who saw miracles and the supernatural power of God on display and still refused to repent and turn from their evil. It happened when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Witnesses told the leaders what had happened, and instead of falling down before Jesus and worshipping Him, they plotted to kill Him!

Genesis 19:12-22

12 Then the men said to Lot, "Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring *them* out of the place; 13 for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the LORD that the LORD has sent us to destroy it." 14 And Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, "Up, get out of this place, for the LORD will destroy the city." But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting. 15 And when morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up, take your wife and your two daughters, who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city." 16 But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the LORD was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city. 17 And it came about when they had brought them outside, that one said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, lest you be swept away." 18 But Lot said to them, "Oh no, my lords! 19 "Now behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have magnified your lovingkindness, which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest the disaster overtake me and I die; 20 now behold, this town is near *enough* to flee to, and it is small. Please, let me escape there (is it not small?) that my life may be saved." 21 And he said to him, "Behold, I grant you this request also, not to overthrow the town of which you have spoken. 22 "Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there." Therefore the name of the town was called Zoar.

After pulling Lot back into the house and striking the men at the door with blindness, the angels disclosed their mission to Lot. They told him to take his family out of the city. They said that they were about to destroy Sodom because of the great outcry that had come before the Lord. When Lot told his sons-in-law, they thought he was joking. They did not take him seriously and would not go with him out of the city. They could not conceive of such a thing happening to Sodom. They were unbelievers and would not accept what Lot had to say. Because of their skepticism they lost their lives.

Lot and his family were in very real danger of being swept away in the judgment of Sodom. The angels emphasized this danger in verses 15 and 17 and Lot mentioned it in verse 19. It was possible that the disaster could overtake him and he would die. If he did not hasten to escape, he could be caught up in the overthrow of the cities. But the urgency of the angels is contrasted in this passage with the hesitation of Lot. He was not cooperating with the angels as he should have. He was in mortal danger, yet he hesitated. For some reason he was unwilling to leave Sodom. Maybe he was influenced by his wife, who later looked back. Maybe he had built a comfortable life there and had lots of possessions that he didn't want to leave behind. For whatever reason, Lot was not willing to move when the angels warned him.

The angels compassionately grabbed the hands of Lot and his wife and daughters and pulled them out of the city. They had to force them to leave, but it was out of compassion. God's severity is for our good, not for harm. The angels were severe and insistent, but it was because God's compassion was on Lot. The Lord disciplines us for our good (see Hebrews 12).

Once they were outside of the city, the angels told Lot what to do. They told him to keep going and to escape. They told him not to look behind him. They told him not

to stay in the valley, but to escape to the mountains. To stay in the valley meant that he might be swept away in the disaster. Lot contradicted the angels again. He said he could not escape to the mountains. I guess he thought it would be too hard and he would not have time to scale the mountains with his family and then they would be overtaken by the disaster. Still he was unwilling to leave the valley. He proposed that he could go to a small town nearby. The angels granted him his request and allowed him to flee to Zoar. (Zoar means "little".) Evidently it had been slated to be destroyed along with Sodom, but they would spare Zoar for the sake of Lot. These angels were very patient and gracious with Lot. Lot had made peace with the sinful and corrupt culture around him and had become comfortable there, even among men who would threaten his life in their wickedness. We are in trouble if this happens to us. We must not make peace with our own sin or the sinfulness of our culture. We must not accept it as normative.

The angels told him to hurry and escape to Zoar. They could do nothing until he arrived there. They allowed this compromise with Lot. Their hands were tied by Lot's stubbornness. They could not accomplish their mission until Lot cooperated. We can hinder God's work by our stubbornness. We can keep angels from doing their duties if we do not work with them!

Genesis 19:23-38

23 The sun had risen over the earth when Lot came to Zoar. 24 Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven, 25 and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. 26 But his wife, from behind him, looked *back*; and she became a pillar of salt.

27 Now Abraham arose early in the morning *and went* to the place where he had stood before the LORD; 28 and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the valley, and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land ascended like the smoke of a furnace. 29 Thus it came about, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot lived.

30 And Lot went up from Zoar, and stayed in the mountains, and his two daughters with him; for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; and he stayed in a cave, he and his two daughters. 31 Then the first-born said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of the earth. 32 "Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may preserve our family through our father." 33 So they made their father drink wine that night, and the first-born went in and lay with her father; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. 34 And it came about on the morrow, that the first-born said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve our family through our father." 35 So 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. 36 Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. 37 And the first-born bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. 38 And as for the younger, she also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the sons of Ammon to this day.

Once Lot had made it to Zoar in the morning, The Lord "rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." From the heavens came brimstone and fire. Here is what Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary says about brimstone:

Brimstone. A bright yellow mineral usually found near active volcanoes. Large deposits of this substance are found in the Dead Sea region. Highly combustible, it burns with a very disagreeable odor.

The Hebrew and Greek words for "brimstone" denote divine fire (Gen. 19:24; Ezek. 38:22; Luke

17:29). Brimstone (burning stone) is often associated with fire (Rev. 9:17–18; 20:10; 21:8), and with barrenness and devastation (Deut. 29:23; Job 18:15). Brimstone was considered an agent of God's judgment (Gen. 19:24). In the New Testament it is used symbolically to represent God's wrath and the future punishment of the wicked (Rev. 9:17–18; 14:10; 20:10). Another word for brimstone used in various translations of the Bible is sulphur, or sulfur.¹¹

It appears to me that this passage is saying God rained this flammable mineral on the cities and then ignited it with fire. It would be like dousing something in gasoline and then throwing a match on it. This was God's means of destroying these cities.

By doing this, the Lord "overthrew" Sodom and Gomorrah. All the valley was destroyed. All the inhabitants of the cities there were burned up as well as all the plants that were growing there. The whole place was a big inferno where nothing was left alive. When God overthrows a city, He does it completely. There were no POWs or survivors except for Lot and his family. No other exceptions were made. God's judgment is complete.

Unfortunately, Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. She did what she was warned not to do, and was caught up in the judgment as well. The Hebrew term for "looked back" is *nabat*, meaning, "to scan, i.e. look intently at; by implication, to regard with pleasure, favor or care:--(cause to) behold, consider, look (down), regard, have respect, see."¹² She was longing to return to her home in Sodom. It wasn't just that she glanced behind her, but that she regretted leaving and wished she were back there. She wanted her old life back in Sodom. Jesus used her as an example in Luke 17:28-33 when He talked about the day of His judgment:

It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; 29 but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. 30 It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day, let not the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house go down to take them away; and likewise let not the one who is in the field turn back. 32 Remember Lot's wife. 33 Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life shall preserve it.

Lot's wife was the one who "turned back" and sought to "keep" her life. She was not willing to leave the old life behind in order to obey the Lord. She probably was attached to her house and possessions in Sodom. She longed to return and so lost her life.

Verses 27 to 29 take us back to Abraham. He got up early in the morning and went out to the place where he had stood talking to the Lord. He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and looked into the valley. All he could see was smoke ascending like smoke from a furnace. The place had been burned to a crisp, and was still burning and smoldering. Verse 29 tells us why God had rescued Lot. He had remembered Abraham and so He rescued Lot. It was for Abraham's sake that Lot was rescued. The Lord knew that Abraham loved Lot and was concerned for him, so because the Lord loved Abraham, he saved Lot. If it had not been for Abraham, Lot would not have been there in the first place. He would still have been back in Ur. If it had not been for Abraham suggesting that they should go their separate ways, Lot

¹¹ Ronald F. Youngblood, general editor; F.F. Bruce and R.K. Harrison, consulting editors, *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary: An authoritative one-volume reference work on the Bible with full color illustrations [computer file], electronic edition of the revised edition of Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary, Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995.

¹² Strong's Hebrew Dictionary.

would not have been in Sodom. Abraham felt responsible for Lot, and therefore God delivered Lot for Abraham's sake.

Lot had negotiated with the angels so that he might escape to Zoar instead of the mountains, but after the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, he was afraid to stay in Zoar. When he saw the violence of what had happened, and what happened to his wife, he was afraid. He would not live any longer with these people. He fled to the mountains and lived in a cave with his daughters. I don't know why he didn't go back to Abraham and stay with him. I guess that he still had his flocks and herds to manage. In his cave in the mountains he was isolated from everyone.

Lot's daughters appear to have been corrupted by the people of Sodom where they had lived. They thought nothing of getting their father drunk and having sex with him so that they might preserve the family. They knew that he would not go along with this scheme willingly, so they in effect drugged him to get him to have intercourse with them. Both of them became pregnant by their father. The older daughter gave birth to Moab, whose name means "from father." The younger gave birth to Ben-ammi, meaning "son of my people." Moab was the founder of the Moabite nation, and Ben-ammi of the Ammonites. These two nations would turn to false gods and would cause all kinds of trouble for Israel in the future. Lot's folly in choosing to live in Sodom would have far-reaching consequences that would last for generations.

Genesis 20

Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar. 2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. 3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married." 4 Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, wilt Thou slay a nation, even *though* blameless? 5 "Did he not himself 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." 6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 "Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live. But if you do not restore *her*, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

8 So Abimelech arose early in the morning and called all his servants and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were greatly frightened. 9 Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." 10 And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What have you encountered, that you have done this thing?" 11 And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place; and they will kill me because of my wife. 12 "Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife; 13 and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother.'"" 14 Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him. 15 And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; settle wherever you please." 16 And to Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, it is your vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared." 17 And Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore *children*. 18 For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Once again Abraham succumbed to his fear and told the people in Gerar that Sarah was his sister. Technically the statement was true, as he explained in verse 12. But by saying she was his sister and she saying that he was her brother they were

implying that they were not married and that she was available. This is where the lie comes in. They were being deceitful in not admitting that they were married.

Sarah, though old, was still very attractive, and Abimelech took her to be his wife. Here again God intervened to protect them and to deliver them. God spoke to him in a dream and threatened him in very direct and fearful terms. He said that Abimelech was a dead man because of Sarah, because she was married. Abimelech pled his case before the Lord. He had not touched her. He had taken her believing that she was single. He had been deceived. He asked an important question, "Lord, wilt Thou slay a nation, even though blameless?" Abimelech took God's words to mean that the whole nation was in peril because he had taken Sarah. The question reminds me of Abraham's question before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" Abimelech's question is similar, "Will you judge a man who is blameless?" He claimed to have acted in integrity of heart and innocence of hands. He believed Abraham and Sarah when they said that they were brother and sister. The fact remained that he had taken a woman who was married to God's chosen man, the woman through whom God's promise would be fulfilled. Though he was ignorant, he was still guilty.

God replied that yes, He knew that Abimelech had acted in integrity, but that He had kept him from touching Sarah. It was God who had intervened in his life to keep him from sinning against Him. God had been gracious to Abimelech already by keeping him from sin. The Lord was protecting Abimelech as well as Abraham and Sarah. He put before Abimelech a choice – restore Sarah to her husband or die. A fairly easy choice in my view!

The Lord told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet, and that if he restored his wife, that Abraham would pray for him and he would live. The Lord lifted up Abraham in the sight of Abimelech. He involved Abraham in the process of protecting Abimelech. Abraham would become a mediator and advocate between Abimelech and the Lord as Moses was a mediator between the Lord and Israel. In this way the Lord both protected and promoted Abraham in the sight of Abimelech. He restored respect to Abraham and Abimelech and his people would fear Abraham and would do him no harm after this.

First thing in the morning Abimelech called in his servants and told them about his dream and what the Lord had said. They were all frightened. Then Abimelech called Abraham in and confronted him. He asked him a string of questions, "What have you done to us?" "How have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin?" "What have you encountered, that you have done this thing?" He declared, "You have done to me things that ought not to be done." Abimelech is right in this. Abraham had put him in this situation and caused him to get into trouble with the Lord. It was because of Abraham's deception that Abimelech's life was in danger and his whole kingdom was in danger. Abimelech realized that there was something in Abraham's history that caused him to behave this way.

Abraham revealed his fear in his answer to Abimelech. He was afraid that the people of the land did not fear God. He was convinced of it, in fact. He said to himself, "surely there is no fear of God in this place." In other words, he was convinced that the people of Gerar did not respect God. He believed that they did not believe in the Lord and would not behave as those who do. Indeed, this is the root of a lawless society. When we abandon the fear of the Lord we do away with the most basic and essential moral restraint. Proverbs 8:13 says "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and

arrogance and the evil way, And the perverted mouth, I hate." When people fear the Lord they hate evil and will turn away from it. When they have no fear of the Lord, they will in fact love evil and embrace it and pursue it. Abraham thought the people of Gerar were such people.

Because he believed the people of Gerar lacked the fear of God, he thought that when they saw Sarah and learned that she was his wife, they would kill him in order to take her. Again Abraham was looking at things negatively. Again he assumed that the worst would happen. Again he saw the obstacles in front of him instead of remembering God's promises to him. Again he trusted in a lie to protect him rather than trusting in the Lord. The Lord had said that Sarah would have a son, but now Abraham is thinking that he will be killed and his wife taken by another man if he does not lie about her. In times of irrational fear we must remember God's promises to us. We must trust in Him to protect us and not rely on trying to lie our way out of a dangerous situation.

The next thing Abraham did was to try to justify his actions by pointing out that what he had said was true. Sarah was his sister. She was the daughter of his father but not of his mother. She was his half-sister, and became his wife. What Abraham had failed to say was that she was his wife as well as his sister. He cannot justify himself by pointing to a technical truth. He has still deceived Abimelech.

We discover next that this was an ongoing policy and practice of Abraham from the time that he set out on his journeys. He said that when God caused him to wander away from his father's house, he asked Sarah to refer to him as her brother everywhere they went. No doubt this deception was repeated many times in many places. This was not just done before Abimelech and Pharaoh. Abraham was not treating Abimelech and his people any differently than he had treated others. He was merely carrying out his regular policy of self-protection. Abimelech should not feel specially insulted. He said that this would be the way that Sarah would show "kindness" or favor to Abraham. He was asking her to put herself and their marriage at risk for the sake of his wellbeing. This she did, I presume, because she loved him and because she herself was fearful.

Abimelech then gave gifts to Abraham of sheep and oxen and servants and a thousand pieces of silver. He said that his whole land was open to Abraham, and that he could settle wherever he pleased in it. He honored Abraham and welcomed him. He was more gracious to Abraham than Abraham deserved. Abimelech had a special word for Sarah. He said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, it is your vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared." The word translated "vindication" here is apparently an idiom meaning "a covering of the eyes" or a "veiling of the eyes." He seems to be saying that this payment would close her eyes and/or the eyes of others to any wrongdoing or impropriety in the matter. Both he and they would be cleared of wrongdoing or misunderstanding. In a dig at Abraham, he calls him "your brother."

Finally, Abraham prayed for Abimelech and his wife and maids, and they bore children again. Abraham had to intercede for Abimelech in order to heal him and his household. God had closed the wombs of the women in his household because of Sarah. This had been just a taste of the doom that would be upon him if he failed to restore Sarah to Abraham.

Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised. 2 So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. 3 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." 7 And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." 8 And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

The Lord took note of Sarah and fulfilled His promise to Sarah. Verse 1 does not say that the Lord took note of Abraham and fulfilled His promise to Abraham. The promise had been made to Sarah a year earlier and the Lord fulfilled His promise when He said He would fulfill it. God did what He said He would do. He had promised it to her and He did it for her. The result was that Sarah conceived and bore Isaac. Sarah is not just an insignificant actor in the drama of Abraham, but she is a central figure. God's promises were for her as well as for Abraham. The Lord related to her as well as to him. God made promises to her as well as to him. We must not think that women are less important than men in God's great drama of history.

The name Isaac means "laughter." He was born out of laughter and gave delight to Sarah and Abraham in their old age. In a sense Isaac was God's great joke in the lives of Abraham and Sarah. He had promised them descendants from the beginning, but only when they were old and past hope of having children did he fulfill the promise. He would smile with them in the birth of Isaac. He had done the impossible for them. He had proven that there is nothing that is too hard for the Lord.

Abraham circumcised Isaac when he was eight days old in accordance with God's command to him in Genesis 17:12, "And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants." Abraham was careful to fulfill this command and to pass on to his son the mark of the covenant. When Isaac was eight days old, Abraham was 100 years of age! God had done a remarkable miracle!

Sarah said two things. First, she said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." God had made a reason for her to laugh in Isaac. He had given her laughter after years of frustration and disappointment. Joy and fun came in the birth of Isaac and the fulfillment of God's promise. It was a laughter that she wanted to share with others. She saw that others would be amused by the story and by the goodness of God to her. They would not laugh at her any longer because she was no longer barren, but they would laugh with her because of the absurdity of a couple their age having a newborn son. The second thing she said explained the reason for the laughter, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." What human would have said, "Sarah is going to have a baby"? Yet this is what God had said. It is fun to see God do something for us that is impossible for us to do ourselves. We laugh at the incredible power and goodness of God.

As Moses writes this he is taking pains to be sure that we understand that Isaac was born to Sarah and not someone else. This is especially evident in verse 3, "And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac." Moses wants to make sure that we understand that Isaac was the son of Sarah.

The account of a woman whose womb had been shut all her life having a baby in her 90s would be difficult to believe, so Moses underlines it and puts it in bold. There is no question that this was a miracle.

When Isaac was weaned, it was a great day of celebration. There was feasting and fun. Abraham threw a big party for Isaac. Smith's Bible Dictionary says:

The period of nursing appears to have been sometimes prolonged to three years. Isa. 49:15; 2 Macc. 7:27. The time of weaning was an occasion of rejoicing. Gen. 21:8. Both boys and girls in their early years were under the care of the women. Prov. 31:1. Afterwards the boys were taken by the father under his charge.¹³

For Abraham, the day of weaning was the day that Isaac would begin to spend more time with him and would no longer be tied to his mother for feeding. Evidently it was customary to celebrate on the day a boy was weaned.

Genesis 21:9-21

Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. *10* Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." *11* And the matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. *12* But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. *13* "And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant." *14* So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave *them* to Hagar, putting *them* on her shoulder, and gave *her* the boy, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba. *15* And the water in the skin was used up, and she left the boy under one of the bushes. *16* Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, "Do not let me see the boy die." And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept. *17* And God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. *18* "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand; for I will make a great nation of him." *19* 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. *20* And God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness, and became an archer. *21* And he lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Ishmael was 14 years of age at the birth of Isaac and evidently was not impressed with this new baby. We have seen that Abraham was somewhat attached to Ishmael (Genesis 17:18), that Ishmael had been his only son until Isaac was born, and they had probably spent a lot of time together. Ishmael was probably aware that this new boy would supplant him as heir. So, at the weaning of Isaac, when Ishmael was perhaps 16 or 17, he was making fun of the whole thing. We can't be sure who or what was the target of Ishmael's mocking, but probably it was Isaac himself. It's interesting to note that the word used in verse 9 for "mocking" is the Hebrew root word *tsachaq*, from which the name Isaac is derived. Clearly, though, the laughter of Ishmael was derisive and mocking. It was not fun laughter, especially to Sarah. Sometimes people make fun of things and of people when they are afraid or intimidated. It can be a defense mechanism. Ishmael was threatened by Isaac. Isaac was going to take his place, so he made fun of the little toddler and all the fuss being made over him.

¹³ William Smith; revised and edited by F.N. and M.A. Peloubet, *Smith's Bible dictionary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997.

Unfortunately for Ishmael, Sarah saw him mocking Isaac, and she ordered Abraham to drive Hagar and Ishmael away. She said, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." She emphasized that this woman was a maid, and was not a wife. She emphasized also that the boy was the son of the maid and ignored the fact that he was also Abraham's son. She insisted that there was no way that Ishmael was going to be an heir along with Isaac. Originally Sarah's idea was that she would obtain a child through Hagar. Back in Genesis 16:2 she had said, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her." As we've seen, things did not turn out as she had planned and Sarah had completely disowned Ishmael. Isaac is her son and Ishmael will not stand alongside him as a brother and an heir.

Abraham did not feel the same way that Sarah did. He was greatly distressed because Ishmael was his son. When the Lord promised that Sarah would have a son, he had said to the Lord, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" (Genesis 17:18). Now he is distressed that his wife is insisting that he send his son away. To Sarah Ishmael was the son of her maid, but to Abraham he was his son, and he cared for him.

Sarah had done more than just vent her feelings, however. She had spoken prophetically. The Lord told Abraham to listen to Sarah. On this subject she was right. It was through Isaac that his "descendants shall be named." Literally here the word for "descendants" is "seed," and the word for "named" means "called out." Yes, in the next verse Ishmael is also called the "seed" of Abraham, but the true legitimate "seed" of Abraham would be "called out" of Isaac. God told Abraham to do as Sarah had ordered. She was right about this. Hagar and Ishmael should be sent away, but God assured Abraham that He would make a nation of Ishmael also because he was the seed of Abraham. In this case Abraham needed to listen to his wife.

So Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away with a skin of water and some food. They wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba until the water was exhausted and then gave up in despair. Hagar separated from him so she wouldn't see him die and they both wept. But God heard the boy crying. The Lord sent an angel who came to Hagar and asked, "What is the matter with you, Hagar?" Given their circumstances it seems a rather strange question. The matter was that they were about to die of thirst in the desert. He then reassured her that she need not fear because God had heard the voice of her son and was still committed to making a great nation of him. God had not sent them out to die in the desert. He had not abandoned them or forgotten his promise to them. She could take comfort in the fact that He had made this promise to them, and that He could be trusted to keep His promise. He would not allow them to die. The Lord told her to go get her son, lift him up, and that He would make a great nation out of Ishmael.

God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water there. I presume it had been there previously, but for some reason Hagar could not see it. God provided for their immediate need and their lives were saved. She filled the skin with water and gave it to Ishmael and he drank. Sometimes we are blind to the solution to our problem that is there and close at hand. Sometimes as we pray, the Lord will open our eyes to see the solution. It's not necessarily that He creates the solution, but just that He enables us to see it. This is one reason why it is so crucial that we always come to the Lord with our problems and frustrations. He sees solutions that we don't see. He is aware of resources that we overlook.

Ishmael grew and lived and became an archer because God was with him. He

survived in the wilderness of Paran. This wilderness is south of the Negev near the Sinai as seen in the map on the next page. Ishmael survived and prospered and became a nation because God was with him, and because God blessed him because



of the promises He had made to Abraham. We often see this in scripture, that a man's success is credited to the fact that God was with him. We are told this about Joseph (Gen. 39:2), Joshua (Josh. 6:27) Samuel (1 Sam. 3:19) and David (1 Sam. 18:14). Jesus told His disciples to abide in Him in John 15 because, He said, "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). If we want to prosper and be fruitful in our lives it will only happen if the Lord is with us in all we do.

Hagar got a wife for Ishmael from Egypt, which was nearby. So Ishmael was on his way toward becoming a nation, as God had promised.

Genesis 21:22-34

Now it came about 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; 23 now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me, or with my offspring, or with my posterity; but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me, and to the land in which you have sojourned." 24 And Abraham said, "I swear it." 25 But Abraham complained to Abimelech

because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. 26 And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; neither did you tell me, nor did I hear of it until today." 27 And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them to Abimelech; and the two of them made a covenant. 28 Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. 29 And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?" 30 And he said, "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand in order that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well." 31 Therefore he called that place Beersheba; because there the two of them took an oath. 32 So they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, arose and returned to the land of the Philistines. 33 And *Abraham* planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. 34 And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.

Abimelech and Phicol had noticed that God was with Abraham in all that he did. How this was evident, I'm not sure, but they could see that God watched over Abraham and provided for him and made him successful. Abimelech had been warned during the incident regarding Sarah, but he could see in other ways that God was with Abraham. Because of this, they feared and respected Abraham, and wanted to make sure that they had a good relationship with him. They wanted to make a covenant with him so that they might also prosper. You don't want to oppose men that God favors. You don't want to be the enemy of a man who is a friend of God. You want to find those who are being blessed by God and ally yourself to them and support them. Then you also will be blessed.

Abimelech asked that Abraham swear to him that he would not deal falsely with him and that he would show kindness to him as he had shown kindness to Abraham. He had treated Abraham well and he wanted assurance that Abraham would treat him and his people well. He did not want Abraham to deceive him or his descendants any longer. He wanted no more of that. He wanted Abraham to feel secure enough with him that he would not have to lie about anything. Abraham immediately agreed and swore that he would do so.

During this meeting Abraham had a complaint, however. Some of the servants of Abimelech had seized a well that Abraham had dug. Abimelech knew nothing about it, did not know who had done it and said that this was the first that he had heard of the incident. Obviously he had not authorized the seizure of the well, and obviously he would deal with the situation. The word for Abraham's "complaint" has the idea of reproof or of setting someone right. I think it is a stronger word than a simple complaint. He chastened Abimelech. He was upset about what had happened and may have even chewed him out. Abimelech was ignorant of the situation and was quick to assure Abraham that he would straighten it out.

Abraham and Abimelech made a covenant with each other there. Abraham gave Abimelech sheep and oxen. He set aside seven ewe lambs and gave them to Abimelech. Abimelech was puzzled by this, and asked Abraham what they meant. Abraham responded that if he took them from him, it would mean that Abimelech recognized that Abraham had dug the well and owned it. The lambs were a tool to witness the agreement that Abraham had dug the well.

Beersheba means "well of an oath." It was named that because of the covenant that Abraham and Abimelech established with one another there. Abraham lived there for a long time. He planted a tamarisk tree there and called on the name of the Lord. The tamarisk was a small tree, but a good shade tree. Abraham settled down here and worshipped here. He had a good relationship with the king of the land and the commander of his army. He had security and all that he needed. It was natural that Abraham should stay in this place for an extended period.

Genesis 22:1-19

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 And He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." 3 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 he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. 5 And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you." 6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 And Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there, and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. 10 And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 And he said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 13 Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind *him* a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. 14 And Abraham called the name of that place

The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the LORD it will be provided."

15 Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 "And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." 19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba.

God commanded Abraham to do a surprising and horrifying thing. He told him to offer up Isaac himself as a burnt offering on a mountain in the land of Moriah. There could be no mistaking who it was that the Lord was talking about. He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac...and offer him there as a burnt offering." Ishmael was gone and was living elsewhere. The only son that Abraham had, his only son by Sarah, his only legitimate son, was Isaac. He was the son that he loved. There could be no mistake about the command of God here.

We must note that this was a test for Abraham. God was testing him. Would Abraham trust Him and obey him even to the point of sacrificing his only son? Did he love God more than his son? When Abraham passed the test, the angel said, "Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Abraham proved that he feared God by being obedient even to this incredible command.

There is no hint of hesitation on the part of Abraham in the text. There is no suggestion that he argued with the Lord or questioned Him. He did not plead or bargain or beg. He simply did what God commanded. We are told that he rose early the next morning, saddled his donkey, took Isaac and two young servants and left. Some have imagined the anguish he must have felt, and the inner turmoil that he went through as he was on his way to sacrifice his only son. I'm not so sure about that. There is no hint of it in the text. Instead, what I see is complete confidence and trust in the Lord. He said to his young men, "We will worship and return to you." He was confident that he and Isaac would return together somehow. He knew that God had promised previously that his descendants would come through Isaac, and he still believed that promise. He knew that God does not change His mind nor renege on a promise. He believed that even if he offered up Isaac as a burnt offering, God would give him back. The New Testament book of Hebrews points to this, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, 'In Isaac your descendants shall be called.' He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type." (Hebrews 11:17-19.) The author of Hebrews gives us a look into the thought process of Abraham. In offering up Isaac he considered God's ability to raise him from the dead. Isaac then became a type of Christ.

On their way, Isaac could see that something obvious was missing. Abraham had been careful to provide everything they needed for a burnt offering. He had brought the fire, the wood and the knife, but not an animal. There was no lamb. He asked his father about this, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" If Abraham was going to fall apart emotionally, this would have been the time! But what does Abraham say? Did he dissolve in tears and cry out, "You are the lamb, my son!?" No, instead Abraham calmly said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my

son." The Hebrew word translated "provide" here is *ra'ah*, which means "see". So literally Abraham said, "God will see for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering." Abraham did not tell Isaac what he intended to do for obvious reasons. It is doubtful that Isaac would have wanted to go along with a plan that called for him to be offered up as the sacrifice. So the question must be asked. Was this a lie to keep Isaac going forward? Was Abraham deliberately deceiving his son? In fact, what Abraham said turned out to be true. God fulfilled his words by providing the ram caught in the thicket by his horns. Clearly Abraham believed that God would intervene in some way and that Isaac was in no danger. God had to fulfill His promise to multiply Abraham's descendants through Isaac. Also we must note that the words of Abraham here are prophetic. They do not simply refer to the ram that God supplied at that time, but the true Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who became the sacrifice for all sins for all time. John the Baptist called Jesus the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Abraham's words to Isaac were not a lie, but were a prophecy of what was to come.

Abraham got to the point that he built the altar, arranged the wood, tied up Isaac and put him on top of the altar on the wood, and had taken the knife to slay Isaac. I can imagine that Isaac at this point may have been voicing some objections, but there is no record of it. Maybe he trusted his father so completely that even with this happening he felt that he would still be safe. Abraham came to the point of killing his son before the angel intervened and stopped him. The angel could see that Abraham was going to carry out the command of the Lord. He was really going to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. From heaven the angel spoke and called his name. He told him not to kill his son. He said that now he knew that Abraham really did fear God, since he would not withhold his only son from Him. In obeying this extreme command, Abraham demonstrated that God could ask anything of him and he would do it. We show God that we fear Him by obeying His every command and by not withholding anything from Him. If there was anything in Abraham's life that could have been an idol and a rival for the love he should have for the Lord, it was Isaac. By offering him up as a sacrifice, Abraham showed that he loved and feared the Lord more than anything or anyone else. The person who truly fears the Lord is the person who will obey Him no matter what He commands. When we truly fear Him we will trust Him with everything, even the things that are most important to us.

God did provide a lamb, a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. Abraham took him and offered him up in the place of Isaac. The ram became the substitute for Isaac. The ram is also a picture of Christ, who was offered up as a sacrifice in our place. He is the substitutionary atonement for our sins. Instead of dying ourselves because of our sin, the Father provided His Son as the Lamb of God who died for our sins in our place. In Abraham and Isaac God provided a preview of what He would later do for us.

Abraham gave the place a new name. He called it "The Lord Will Provide." The Hebrew is *Yhovah yireh* meaning "Jehovah will see (to it)."¹⁴ When you're doing what God has told you to do, He will provide all the resources you need. If resources are lacking to do what you are attempting, maybe you should reconsider whether God told you to do it. God will give us what we need to do what He wants us to do.

The angel spoke to Abraham a second time after the ram had been offered. The Lord swore by Himself that He would greatly bless Abraham and greatly multiply his

¹⁴ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary.

seed because Abraham had not withheld his son from Him. His seed would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens and as the sand on the seashore. They would possess the gates of their enemies. This is a promise that must be fulfilled because God has sworn it. He must do it for Abraham, and has done it. This is a promise that no man and no nation can overturn. Because Abraham had obeyed the Lord, all the nations of the earth would be blessed in the seed of Abraham. This is a repeat of the promises He had made before to Abraham, but here the Lord adds His oath to it, swearing by Himself. The author of Hebrews noticed this and commented on it, "For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, 'I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU, AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.' And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us" (Hebrews 6:13-18). God's purpose in giving the promise with the oath was to show to those who came after the unchangeable nature of His purpose. This gives us hope today because by putting our faith in Christ, who is the promised "Seed" who would bless all the nations, we are trusting in the same promise. This same promise is the foundation of our hope.

Genesis 22:20-24

Now it came about after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, "Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: 21 Uz his first-born and Buz his brother and Kemuel the father of Aram 22 and Chesed and Hazo and Pildash and Jidlaph and Bethuel." 23 And Bethuel became the father of Rebekah: these eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. 24 And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah and Gaham and Tahash and Maacah.

Word came to Abraham that his brother Nahor had had children by his wife Milcah. His children were Uz and Buz, Kemuel, Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel. His concubine gave birth to Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maacah. I think the purpose of this is to show us where Rebekah came from. Rebekah was the daughter of Bethuel and would become the wife of Isaac.

Genesis 23

Now Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; *these were* the years of the life of Sarah. 2 And Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. 3 Then Abraham rose from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, 4 "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me a burial site among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." 5 And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, 6 "Hear us, my lord, you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead." 7 So Abraham rose and bowed to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. 8 And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your wish *for me* to bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and approach Ephron the son of Zohar for me, 9 that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he owns, which is at the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in your presence for a burial site." 10 Now Ephron was sitting among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the sons of Heth; *even* of all who went in at the gate of his city, saying, 11 "No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead." 12 And Abraham bowed before the people of the land. 13 And he spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If you will only please listen to

me; I will give the price of the field, accept *it* from me, that I may bury my dead there." 14 Then Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, 15 "My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between me and you? So bury your dead." 16 And Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, commercial standard.

17 So Ephron's field, which was in Machpelah, which faced Mamre, the field and cave which was in it, and all the trees which were in the field, that were within all the confines of its border, were deeded over 18 to Abraham for a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city. 19 And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field at Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. 20 So the field, and the cave that is in it, were deeded over to Abraham for a burial site by the sons of Heth.

When Sarah died at the age of 127, Abraham had a problem. He owned no property in the land. He had no place to bury her. So he asked the sons of Heth for a place to bury her. When he spoke to them, he said that he was a "stranger and a sojourner" among them. He had come from another place and was not native to the land. He was not one of them and was not related to them. He was a temporary resident among them. His life had been a life of wandering and now he was their guest in their land for a while. This is how he saw himself and how he lived his life. The book of Hebrews tells us:

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; 12 therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. 13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:8-16.)

Though Abraham was living in the land that God had promised to give to his descendants, he said that he was there as a stranger and sojourner. He did not plant his flag and claim the land as his own. Instead, he was looking for a better country, a heavenly country. He was an alien and his citizenship was in God's city. The same is true of believers in Christ. Philippians 3:20-21 says, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." Since we, like Abraham, are aliens and strangers on this earth, we are to live as such. Peter exhorts us, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). We are citizens of heaven who are fighting a war in this alien country. We are like the US soldiers who are now in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are far from home and are there temporarily, fighting the enemy. Just as our soldiers will not buy property and build houses and settle down in those foreign lands, neither should we settle down in this world. We are here temporarily. Our permanent

home is in heaven with the Lord. The foe in the war we are fighting is the lusts of the flesh. These lusts wage war against our souls, and therefore we must abstain from them. We live as aliens and strangers in this world by refusing to follow the fleshly lusts that the people of the world follow. Our former way of life in the world was dominated and directed by these lusts, but now we live on a different basis as citizens of a different country (Ephesians 2:1-7).

While Abraham saw himself as a "stranger and a sojourner" among the sons of Heth, they saw him differently. To them he was "a mighty prince" among them (verse 6). They had great respect for Abraham. They called him "my lord." They could see, as had Abimelech, that God was with Abraham and was watching over him. They would not refuse him anything he asked. They offered that he should take any of the choicest graves that they possessed in order to bury Sarah.

There in the gate of the city where such business was transacted among the elders of the city, Abraham negotiated for the field of Ephron the Hittite which contained a cave that Abraham wanted for Sarah's burial. Ephron offered to give it to Abraham, that it was a small thing between them, but Abraham was determined to pay the fair price for the property. In this matter he would not allow anyone to give him their land. He would make sure that he owned it outright. It was worth 400 shekels of silver, according to Ephron, but the friendship of Abraham meant more to him than the money. Abraham weighed out the silver before all the men present and gave it to Ephron. This was all carefully done before witnesses so that if there were any questions later on there could be no dispute. The men would all say that they all knew that this had taken place.

The field was deeded over to Abraham and became his possession. He buried Sarah there in the cave. This would be the burial site for Abraham, probably for Isaac, and for Jacob as well. This was the one piece of property that the family owned legally in the land of promise.

Genesis 24:1-9

Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in every way. 2 And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Please place your hand under my thigh, 3 and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, 4 but you shall go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac." 5 And the servant said to him, "Suppose the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?" 6 Then Abraham said to him, "Beware lest you take my son back there! 7 "The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me, and who swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. 8 "But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this my oath; only do not take my son back there." 9 So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

Sarah had died, Isaac had grown into a man, and it was time for Isaac to marry. But Abraham would not have him marry one of the Canaanite women where they were living, even though many of the people around there would have been happy to have been related by marriage to Abraham and Isaac. They were pagans and did not know the Lord, though they respected the God of Abraham. Abraham planned to get a wife for Isaac from his relatives back in his country of origin.

The task of finding a wife for Isaac was given to Abraham's oldest servant. This

man was his most trusted servant and his household steward. The man was in charge of all that Abraham owned. He was the manager of Abraham's possessions. He made him swear by the Lord that he would not find a wife from the Canaanites, but would go back to his country of origin to find a wife from among his relatives. But the servant had a question, "Suppose the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?" The only problem he anticipated was that the woman might not be willing to leave her family and come a long way into a distant country to marry a stranger. We must admit that this might be a problem. It would take an exceptional woman to agree to such a thing. The servant's solution to the problem was that he should take Isaac there to meet the woman so that she might know beforehand what she was getting into and who it was she was marrying. His solution seems logical, but Abraham would not hear of it. He would not allow Isaac to be taken back there. He said, "Beware lest you take my son back there!" That was the one thing that the servant must not do. I guess Abraham was afraid that Isaac would get stuck there and would not return.

Abraham explained that God had taken him from his father's house and from the land where he grew up and had sworn that the land where he was now would be given to his descendants. God had put him and his family in this land, and he would not send his son back. Isaac belonged in the land that God had promised to them. He also explained that this same God would send His angel in front of his servant and would make him successful. He would find a wife for Isaac because the messenger of the Lord would go before him and arrange things for him. Abraham had such confidence in the Lord that he could tell his servant these things. He knew that God wanted him to have descendants through Isaac, therefore Isaac needed a wife. It was not to be a Canaanite wife, though, but a woman from his own nation and family. Abraham trusted that God would work it out.

When God has a task for you, He will give you the help you need. He will send His angel before you and you will succeed. You can have confidence if you know that you are doing something the Lord has sent you to do that He will be with you in the effort.

Abraham assured his servant that he would be released from his oath if the woman proved to be unwilling to come back with him, so the servant took the oath and swore that he would do as Abraham asked.

Genesis 24:10-28

Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master's in his hand; and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. 11 And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. 12 And he said, "O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. 13 "Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; 14 now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also';-- *may she be the one* whom Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and by this I shall know that Thou hast shown lovingkindness to my master." 15 And it came about before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. 16 And the girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar, and came up. 17 Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar." 18 And she said, "Drink, my lord"; and she quickly lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink. 19 Now when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw also for your camels until they have

finished drinking." 20 So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, and ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. 21 Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence, to know whether the LORD had made his journey successful or not. 22 Then it came about, when the camels had finished drinking, that the man took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold, 23 and said, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father's house?" 24 And she said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." 25 Again she said to him, "We have plenty of both straw and feed, and room to lodge in." 26 Then the man bowed low and worshiped the LORD. 27 And he said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the LORD has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers." 28 Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things.

It is marvelous to see how the Lord fulfilled Abraham's words and orchestrated this whole encounter between the servant of Abraham and Rebekah. The servant arrived in the city of Nahor in the evening at the time when the women would be coming to the well for water. He had planned this much himself. He was a traveller in a strange land and a strange city. He may have been puzzled, not knowing how to proceed. So, he bowed before the Lord and prayed a very specific prayer which God answered immediately. He addressed the Lord as "the God of my master Abraham." He knew God as the God of his master. He will now see God work in answer to his prayer.

First, he asked for two general things. He asked that God might give him success. He did not want to fail on this errand, but to be successful he needed God's guidance. He did not know how to find the woman that was to be Isaac's wife, so he needed God to do it for him. He also asked that God would show His lovingkindness to his master Abraham by answering his prayer. This was the reason he gave the Lord for his request. Why should God do this for the servant? Because by doing so He would demonstrate that He loved Abraham. When we pray we can take the same approach to the Lord. We can tell Him what we want. We can tell Him we want to be successful in the tasks we are carrying out by faith in Him. We can tell Him why we want Him to do these things for us. We should tell Him why we think that it's in His best interest to grant our requests. God acts and answers our requests for His glory and not for ours. We need to demonstrate to Him that we are mindful of His purposes and not just our own. When you ask the Lord for something, think of why He should do it from His perspective. Will the thing bring Him honor and glory? Will it serve His purposes? Would it be something that He would be pleased to do? If our request does not pass this test, we are not likely to see it granted. We often ask with wrong motives (James 4:3).

The servant then set up a test whereby God could indicate which woman was the one who was to be Isaac's wife. His prayer was based on the assumption that God had already determined who was to become Isaac's wife. He also assumed that God wanted him to find her and bring her back with him. So all he had to do was make an arrangement with the Lord so that he could recognize her. He told God that he was there standing by the spring. He told Him that the young women from the city were coming out to get water. He told God that he would say to them, "Please let down your jar so that I may drink," and asked that the woman who was the right one might answer "Drink, and I will water your camels also." In this way he would know who was the wife God had chosen for Isaac. In this way he would also see that God had shown His lovingkindness to Abraham.

God had sent His angel before the servant. Before he finished his prayer, Rebekah came to the well with her jar. His specific prayer was answered in an undeniable and specific way. It was no mere coincidence. It was not an accident. The Lord had arranged the meeting in advance. Before the servant had even begun his prayer the Lord had already put the answer in motion.

Rebekah was the granddaughter of Abraham's brother Nahor. Her father was Bethuel, the son of Nahor and Milcah. So Isaac would be marrying his second cousin, the daughter of his cousin Bethuel. We are also told that she was a very beautiful virgin girl.

Rebekah went down to the well and filled her jar and the servant ran over to meet her as she came up with her jar. He asked for a drink from her jar, and she quickly gave him a drink. After he had his drink she indeed offered to draw water for his camels as well. She poured her water into the trough, and went back and got more water for the camels. God had indicated through her words and deeds that this was the woman. The servant would not need to look any further. The Lord had made it easy for him to find Rebekah.

As the servant watched her, he wondered if she indeed was the woman and if the Lord had given him success. He still didn't know who she was. He still didn't know if she was from the right family. He took a gold ring and two gold bracelets and gave them to Rebekah. Sometimes it pays off to serve strangers! Then the real test came as he asked, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father's house?" When Rebekah told him that she was the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah and Nahor, the servant knew that the Lord had answered his prayer. He bowed low and worshiped the Lord. This is what you do when you see God grant your prayer and give you success. Our proper response to His working for us is to bow low and worship.

When the servant worshiped, he did not do a lot of the things that we associate with worship. He did not sing a hymn. He did not offer a sacrifice. He did not tithe. He did not listen to a sermon nor did he deliver one. Rather, he blessed the Lord. He said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the Lord has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers." This was his worship. We worship when we bless the Lord for what He has done. Worship does not require a beautiful building and stained glass and choirs and altars and pews and hymnals. Worship grows out of a thankful heart that trusts the Lord and sees Him work. Worship is acknowledging God's involvement in our lives and our dependence upon Him. The servant blessed the Lord first on behalf of Abraham as he realized that the Lord had not turned away from His lovingkindness and truth toward Abraham. We do not just worship the Lord for what He does, but also for what He does not do. We should thank the Lord every day and bless His name because he has withheld His just wrath. We should daily bless Him for His patience and restraint with us. We should thank Him that He hasn't turned away from us completely, but is still gracious and compassionate toward us. Secondly, the servant blessed the Lord on his own behalf for what He had done for him. God had guided him right to the place he needed to go. He saw that God still favored Abraham and had worked on his behalf to provide a wife for Isaac.

Genesis 24:29-49

Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran outside to the man at the

spring. 30 And it came about that when he saw the ring, and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, "This is what the man said to me," he went to the man; and behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. 31 And he said, "Come in, blessed of the LORD! Why do you stand outside since I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels?" 32 So the man entered the house. Then Laban unloaded the camels, and he gave straw and feed to the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. 33 But when food was set before him to eat, he said, "I will not eat until I have told my business." And he said, "Speak on." 34 So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. 35 "And the LORD has greatly blessed my master, so that he has become rich; and He has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and servants and maids, and camels and donkeys. 36 "Now Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master in her old age; and he has given him all that he has. 37 "And 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 live; 38 but you shall go to my father's house, and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son.' 39 "And I said to my master, 'Suppose the woman does not follow me.' 40 "And he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you to make your journey successful, and you will take a wife for my son from my relatives, and from my father's house; 41 then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my relatives; and if they do not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.' 42 "So I came today to the spring, and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now Thou wilt make my journey on which I go successful; 43 behold, I am standing by the spring, and may it be that the maiden who comes out to draw, and to whom I say, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar"; 44 and she will say to me, "You drink, and I will draw for your camels also"; let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.' 45 "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew; and I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' 46 "And she quickly lowered her jar from her *shoulder*, and said, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'; so I drank, and she watered the camels also. 47 "Then I asked her, and said, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him'; and I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her wrists. 48 "And I bowed low and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had guided me in the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. 49 "So now if you are going to deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, let me know, that I may turn to the right hand or the left."

Rebekah ran home and told her family what had happened, and her brother Laban ran back to the spring to meet Abraham's servant. He urged him to come into the house and had prepared a place for the camels. Laban also believed in the Lord, as he called the servant "blessed of the Lord." Laban took care of the camels and the servant and his companions. We learn here in verse 32 that the servant had other men with him who had come on the journey. Obviously Laban and Bethuel and the family were pleased to have these men come from Abraham, and were impressed with the way that the Lord had blessed them and led them.

When dinner was served, the servant refused to eat until he had told them why he had come. They needed to know why he had come, that it was not just a friendly visit from Abraham's servant. They needed to know that he had come to find a wife for Isaac.

The servant started by telling them of Abraham and how the Lord had blessed him and made him rich. God had given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, servants and maids, and camels and donkeys. Note that he didn't say that God had given him property. Abraham only owned the little plot of ground where Sarah was buried. God had not given him any land, but had promised the entire area to his descendants. Abraham's wealth was in livestock, money and in servants. It was because God had blessed him that he was rich. Proverbs 10:22 says, "It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it." If God blesses you and makes you rich, you need not feel bad about it, nor should you feel superior. God blesses whom He will.

No one is deserving. If you are rich due to the blessing of God, then thank Him and use your wealth for His purposes.

In verse 36, the servant told them about Isaac. Isaac had been born to Sarah and Abraham in their old age, and Abraham had given him everything. Isaac was the one heir of Abraham and would inherit all of his wealth and would also inherit the promise of God. The covenant God had made with Abraham would be continued with Isaac. Ishmael was out of the picture.

This one heir needed a wife, and the servant explained that he was under oath from Abraham to find a wife from among his relatives in his father's house. This was the reason for his journey. He had an oath to fulfill to Abraham. He was a man with a mission and a definite purpose.

The servant proceeded to tell them the whole story of Abraham's assurance to him that the angel of the Lord would go before him and give him success and how he came to the well and prayed and then immediately met Rebekah who turned out to be the daughter of Bethuel. He explained how he gave her the ring for her nose and put the bracelets on her wrists and then bowed low and worshiped the Lord. He said, "And I bowed low and worshiped the Lord, and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had guided me in the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son" (verse 48). There was no doubt in the mind of the servant of the Lord's involvement in the whole process. He did not say "I think the Lord guided me," or "I believe the Lord guided me." There could be no mistaking the fact that God had guided him to the right place and the right family and the right woman. God had made it plain that Rebekah was to be the wife of Isaac. When God has guided you, you know it. There is no doubt in your mind. When He works, there is no mistaking it for something else, unless you deliberately do so.

In verse 49 the servant asked for a decision on the part of Laban and Bethuel. He said, "So now if you are going to deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, let me know, that I may turn to the right hand or the left." The challenge to them was to deal with kindness and truth (or trustworthiness) with Abraham. The servant was just Abraham's representative. They were dealing with Abraham at this point and not just the servant. He was not sure that they would treat Abraham with kindness and truth, so he asked them to tell him, to level with him and be honest with him. He wanted to know straight away if they would give Rebekah to be Isaac's wife or if they would refuse to do so. Sometimes people need to be confronted with a decision in this way. We need to ask them bluntly if they will do what is right and what is good or if they will do something else. We need to put it to them in these terms. Sometimes we need to ask, "Will you do what God wants you to do, or will you do something else?" It was obvious in this case what God wanted. He had set the whole thing up. Now the question was, would Laban and Bethuel and Rebekah cooperate with the Lord? Would they submit to Him? The servant made it plain that this was the issue.

Genesis 24:50-67

Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The matter comes from the LORD; so we cannot speak to you bad or good. 51 "Behold, Rebekah is before you, take *her* and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken." 52 And it came about when Abraham's servant heard their words, that he bowed himself to the ground before the LORD. 53 And the servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. 54 Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master." 55 But her brother and

her mother said, "Let the girl stay with us *a few* days, say ten; afterward she may go." 56 And he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the LORD has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master." 57 And they said, "We will call the girl and consult her wishes." 58 Then they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go." 59 Thus they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse with Abraham's servant and his men. 60 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "May you, our sister, Become thousands of ten thousands, And may your descendants possess The gate of those who hate them."

61 Then Rebekah arose with her maids, and they mounted the camels and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and departed. 62 Now Isaac had come from going to Beer-lahai-roi; for he was living in the Negev. 63 And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, camels were coming. 64 And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel. 65 And she said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?" And the servant said, "He is my master." Then she took her veil and covered herself. 66 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Laban and Bethuel saw the truth of what the servant said. They saw that the matter came from the Lord. They could not deny that the Lord had put this whole encounter together and that it was His intention that Rebekah should become the wife of Isaac. God had made the decision, so it was not theirs to make. They saw that they could only go along with His wishes. They said to the servant, "Behold, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken." When had the Lord "spoken" about this? Abraham had spoken and sent his servant. The servant had spoken – to Abraham, to the Lord in prayer, and when he told his story to Rebekah's family. But when had the Lord "spoken"? The Lord "spoke" in His deeds. By guiding the servant and answering his prayer, God had spoken. By leading Abraham to send his servant on this errand, God had spoken. By making sure that Rebekah was the first woman the servant encountered at the well, God had spoken. God does not always speak verbally. He often speaks this way, by His works and deeds, by answering prayer and guiding His servants. He speaks by setting up those "divine encounters" that could not happen if He had not worked.

Hearing their response, again the servant bowed low and worshiped. God had prospered his way and made him successful. They would allow Rebekah to go with him, and they did submit to the Lord's will. The decision was made and the matter was concluded. All that was left was to return with Rebekah to Abraham and Isaac. The servant bowed before the Lord. He was not bowing to Laban and Bethuel, but to the Lord. Being with Abraham, this servant had learned to worship and to honor the Lord. He had learned to trust the Lord and watch him work. He saw also at this point that his worries about failing were unfounded. God had taken care of everything.

The servant then gave gifts to Rebekah and to her brother and mother. He had brought with him some valuable things from his master's possessions just for this purpose. He had with him articles of silver and gold, garments and other things of great value. He demonstrated his gratefulness to them by giving them these things. He and his companions ate and drank and spent the night and then were ready to depart the next morning.

As I read this I get the feeling that Laban and Milcah (Rebekah's mother) are the people in charge here. It could be that Bethuel himself was infirm or incapacitated in some way, and so Laban was the patriarch of the family and made the important

decisions. Laban and Milcah wanted Rebekah to stay with the family for a few more days before departing with the servant. They suggested that she might stay with them for ten more days, but the servant wanted to get going right away. He said, "Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master." The servant had been prospered by God, God had indicated His will, the family had agreed, and now was the time to start back on the journey. If they had delayed for ten days, Abraham and Isaac would have started to become anxious about them, and might have wondered if some evil had overtaken the servant. Don't get in the way of those whom the Lord is prospering. Instead, help speed them on their way. Participate with them and you will be blessed as well.

The family left it up to Rebekah to decide if she would leave with the servant immediately, and she said that she would go with him. She is amazing because she was willing to go with men she had just met to marry a man she had never met! But she could see that this is what God wanted and submitted to His will. God had made her willing. When God makes His will plain, we must follow it, no matter how uncomfortable or even nonsensical it might seem.

Rebekah did not go alone. Verse 59 indicates that her nurse went with her, and verse 61 mentions "maids" that accompanied her. The word in verse 59 is for a woman who nurses a baby and literally means "to suck" or "to give milk"¹⁵. Rebekah's nurse, then, was probably a woman who had cared for her since she was a baby, a nanny. Her maids were probably younger women who were her servants. These women went with Rebekah. Their job was to serve her, and so when she decided to go, they were going as well.

Before Rebekah left her family blessed her. They looked to the future in their blessing and wished upon her that from her would come "thousands of ten thousands." Their vision for her was that her descendants should become a great nation with millions of people. Their vision also was that her descendants should prevail over their enemies and possess their gate. The idea is that her descendants should overrun the cities of their enemies and dwell in them. To control the gate was to control the city, so they wanted her descendants to rule over their enemies and subdue them.

When we bless someone we look to the future and envision the success that we want them to have. We need to do this with our children. They need a vision for the future, and we can help impart that to them with our blessing.

Rebekah followed the servant and rode on camels until they came to Isaac in Beer-lahai-roi. It was in the evening when Isaac had gone out into the field to meditate. We must not think of this "meditation" in the sense of Buddhist or eastern type meditation. He simply went out to think and to relax at the end of the day. Perhaps he was thinking about the death of his mother. Perhaps he was praying and talking to the Lord. Perhaps he was anticipating the return of the servant and was anxious to see if he had had success.

As he was there, he saw the camels coming from a distance. He "lifted up his eyes" and saw the caravan. At the same time Rebekah "lifted up her eyes" and saw Isaac. Immediately she dismounted from her camel. This would make a terribly romantic movie scene, wouldn't it? Rebekah asked the servant who this man was, and he told her that it was his master. Isaac was walking through the field to meet them. Perhaps Rebekah had an intuitive feeling that this was the man who would be her

¹⁵ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

husband. She covered herself with her veil.

The servant told Isaac the whole story about all he had done, and so Isaac took Rebekah as his wife and took her into his mother's tent. She was his comfort after his mother's death and he loved her.

Genesis 25:1-6

Now Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. 2 And she bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah. 3 And Jokshan became the father of Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim and Letushim and Leummim. 4 And the sons of Midian were Ephah and Epher and Hanoah and Abida and Eldaah. All these were the sons of Keturah. 5 Now Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac; 6 but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the east.

Isaac was not the only one who got a new wife after Sarah's death. Abraham himself remarried. This is something that is often overlooked. He married Keturah and had more sons. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. The descendants of Midian will figure prominently in the future of Israel. Joseph was sold to Midianite traders. Moses fled to Midian after killing the Egyptian and his wife was a Midianite. His father-in-law was a priest of Midian. The Midianites allied themselves with the Moabites and opposed Israel when they left Egypt and led them into idolatry and immorality. For a while Midian ruled over Israel in the time of the Judges, and it was Gideon who defeated them. If Abraham had refrained from marrying and having more sons, he could have spared his descendants who came through Isaac much trouble later on. We never know what long-reaching consequences may come from things that we do. We must always be prayerful and ask the Lord to keep us from grave mistakes that may impact our descendants for generations.

It may seem unfair to us, but Abraham made Isaac his sole heir. Everything he had was given to Isaac. Isaac became the new patriarch to follow Abraham. The sons he had by Keturah were given gifts and sent off to live to the east of Isaac. This was his prerogative and indeed was the command of God. It was God who had said, "through Isaac your descendants shall be named" (Genesis 21:12). Isaac was the son that God intended him to have, and the one God had chosen to bless.

Genesis 25:7-11

And these are all the years of Abraham's life that he lived, one hundred and seventy-five years. 8 And Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied *with life*; and he was gathered to his people. 9 Then his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, 10 the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth; there Abraham was buried with Sarah his wife. 11 And it came about after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac lived by Beer-lahai-roi.

Here is the summary of Abraham's life at its end. He lived 175 years and breathed his last at this ripe old age. Moses underlines the fact that Abraham was a very old man when he died. Moses says that he was old and "satisfied." The word for "satisfied" here means satiated or full.¹⁶ When you have eaten enough or more than enough, you say that you are "full." You are satisfied and are no longer hungry. Abraham finished his life. He had enough and more than enough. At the end he

¹⁶ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

lacked nothing. He did not look back and say, "I failed to do this and I failed to do that and I wish I had more time to do so-and-so." When he died he was ready to go. There was nothing more for him to accomplish.

Though the sons of Keturah were sent away, Ishmael was still around. Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham in the cave of Machpelah with Sarah. This was still the only property that they owned in the land. Abraham took his place alongside his beloved wife. This was where he belonged. We know nothing of what became of Keturah. She is not important to the story.

After Abraham's death God blessed Isaac. I think we are meant to understand that Isaac inherited the blessing of Abraham. God's blessing was transferred from Abraham to Isaac in a way that it was not transferred to Ishmael or any of Abraham's other sons. Isaac was the child of the covenant, the child of the promise, and God's covenant and promise would continue through Isaac.

Genesis 25:12-18

Now these are *the records* of the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham; *13* and these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the first-born of Ishmael, and Kedar and Adbeel and Mibsam *14* and Mishma and Dumah and Massa, *15* Hadad and Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. *16* These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages, and by their camps; twelve princes according to their tribes. *17* And these are 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. *18* And they settled from Havilah to Shur which is east of Egypt as one goes toward Assyria; he settled in defiance of all his relatives.

Ishmael had 12 sons who became 12 princes of 12 tribes. Ishmael died at the age of 137 and, as was said of Abraham, he was "gathered to his people." This appears to be a phrase that Moses uses when speaking of the deaths of godly men. When they die they join their people who went before them. There seems to be an implication that they are reunited with their ancestors and that they go to a place where they are welcomed home. When we die we join the great gathering of the redeemed in God's presence. Believers we have known and relatives who know the Lord will all be there. Death is not an end, but a great beginning.

The sons of Ishmael settled to the east of Egypt, from Havilah to Shur. I'm not sure what it means when it says here that he "settled in defiance of all his relatives." The NIV says, "His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt, as you go toward Asshur. And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers." The King James renders it, "And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that *is* before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: *and* he died in the presence of all his brethren." Literally it appears that the text says that he "fell in the face of his brothers." The meaning is not clear to me. God did tell Hagar, "And he will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand *will be* against everyone, And everyone's hand *will be* against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers" (Genesis 16:12). Perhaps this passage means that some of Ishmael's descendants defied this prophecy and refused to move further east of their brethren, but instead lived near Egypt.

Genesis 25:19-26

Now these are *the records* of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; *20* and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. *21* And Isaac prayed to the

LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I *this way*?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples shall be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger." 24 When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. 25 Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. 26 And afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them.

Twenty years is compressed into this paragraph. Note that Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah as his wife, and he was 60 when Esau and Jacob were born. He and Rebekah had 20 years of barrenness as God tested Isaac in the same way that He had tested Abraham. Isaac trusted the Lord and prayed, and the Lord answered and Rebekah conceived the twins. Note also that Abraham was still alive when Esau and Jacob were born. We mustn't think that just because this is recorded after the death of Abraham that Abraham died before Esau and Jacob were born. The text tells us that Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born (Gen. 21:5) and that Abraham lived to be 175 years of age. Therefore, Isaac married Rebekah when Abraham was 140, and the twins were born when Abraham was 160. Abraham lived for another 15 years after Esau and Jacob were born. Probably he continued to have a close relationship with Isaac, Esau and Jacob.

Rebekah conceived, but there was a problem. The twins growing within her struggled with each other even in the womb. The Hebrew word for "struggled together" is *ratsats*. Strong's Hebrew Dictionary says that it means, "to crack in pieces, literally or figuratively:--break, bruise, crush, discourage, oppress, struggle together." Esau and Jacob fought with each other even within the womb! Rebekah was distressed by this. I remember when my wife was pregnant with our second child, Emily. Emily was much more active in the womb than our son Ian had been, and sometimes at night Emily's activities in the womb would wake both of us! She could shake the whole bed! I can imagine what it might have felt like for Rebekah to have her two boys fighting in the womb!

Rebekah wondered what was going on, so she went to inquire of the Lord. She asked the Lord why she was this way, and the Lord answered her. His answer was prophetic. He said that the two boys were two nations. Two separate nations and two separate peoples would be separated from her body. One nation would be stronger and the older would serve the younger. Esau became the nation of Edom (Genesis 36:8). Jacob became the nation of Israel. All of this was already determined before they were born.

Esau was born first, and his name means "rough." He was red all over like a hairy garment. They named him "rough" because he was rough. Jacob was born just after Esau, holding onto Esau's heel. Jacob means "heel-catcher." From the beginning there was a rivalry between these twins. Obviously they were fraternal and not identical twins. They were two very different people.

Genesis 25:27-34

When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. 28 Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game; but Rebekah loved Jacob. 29 And when Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; 30 and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom. 31 But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." 32 And Esau

said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" 33 And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

The contrast between Esau and Jacob was seen when they grew into men. Esau was a hunter and a man of the field. He was an outdoorsman and sportsman. He loved to hunt. He was not one to stay at home and grow crops and tend fields. He was out in the wilderness stalking wild animals, a man's man. Jacob liked to stay at home. He lived in tents with his parents and didn't go far from home. He grew crops and probably tended livestock. Maybe he managed the servants or something. He was more of a stay-at-home businessman type. Kind of a white-collar worker.

The differences between Esau and Jacob caused a split between Isaac and Rebekah. They each had their favorite. Isaac's favorite was Esau because Isaac loved to eat game. He loved the meat of wild animals that Esau would prepare. Rebekah loved Jacob because he was a stay-at-home peaceful type. He wasn't a violent hunter. He was probably a "mama's boy" type of person as well. She was pleased with Jacob. Big problems arise when parents choose their favorites among their children. It can cause intense rivalry among the children when one is favored over another. That does not mean that we treat our children all the same, but that we must be careful not to communicate that one is more loved or more valued than another.

One day, Esau came back from hunting and was exhausted. He asked Jacob for some of his lentil stew because he was "famished." He felt he was about to collapse and die (verse 32). Perhaps he had been gone for several days and had eaten nothing. He was in dire need of a meal. Most brothers would have willingly taken care of one another, but Jacob saw it as an opportunity to gain an advantage over Esau. Jacob exploited his brother's weakness and need for his own gain. He offered to sell some stew to Esau in exchange for his birthright. The birthright was a very important and valuable thing. It made you the primary heir of your father's estate. Later, in the Law of Moses, it was spelled out that the first-born was to receive a double portion of the inheritance of the father:

"If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, if the first-born son belongs to the unloved, then it shall be in the day he wills what he has to his sons, he cannot make the son of the loved the first-born before the son of the unloved, who is the first-born. But he shall acknowledge the first-born, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the first-born." (Deuteronomy 21:15-17.)

Rather than establishing a new law, this is clarifying an existing law and custom that probably dates back to the time of Esau and Jacob and probably earlier. By obtaining the birthright, Jacob would be in line as Isaac's primary heir, and would receive the "double portion" of all of his possessions. The "double portion" means that Jacob would receive two-thirds of Isaac's estate, and Esau only one-third.

At that point, Esau saw no value in the birthright, because he thought he was about to die. He thought the birthright was worthless and of no value. In essence, Jacob had said, "I'll save your life if you sell me your birthright." Esau replied, "OK, this birthright is no good to me if I'm dead." So Esau agreed and sold the birthright to Jacob for some bread and stew. He traded half of the inheritance he was entitled to for one meal! The writer of Hebrews condemns Esau for what he did:

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. (Hebrews 12:15-17.)

Esau is called "immoral" and "godless" because he sold his birthright for one meal. The birthright that would have come to him through Isaac included the blessing of God given to Abraham. This is what he "despised." He did not value the covenant that God had made with Abraham and Isaac. He did not care about the blessing that God had promised to bring to the world through them. Jacob saw the value of it, however, and wanted it. I imagine that Abraham often told them of God's promise as they were growing up, giving them a vision of what they were to become and how God had promised that through them the whole world would be blessed. But evidently that was not important to Esau.

Esau swore to Jacob that the birthright would be exchanged for this one meal, and sold it to him, and so Jacob gave him bread and lentil stew. After eating and drinking, Esau departed, and the comment is made, "Thus Esau despised his birthright." Looking back, Moses comments that Esau considered his birthright worthless. Esau was a secular man and devalued the spiritual. He did not care about the blessing of God, but about the pursuit of worldly things.

Genesis 26:1-6

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. 2 And the LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 "Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. 4 "And I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; 5 because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws." 6 So Isaac lived in Gerar.

Once again, famine required Isaac to move, and he went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. This was natural since Abraham had a good relationship with Abimelech and Abimelech had respected and feared Abraham. This respect was extended to Isaac as well. God told Isaac not to go to Egypt. Evidently Egypt was the place that everyone thought to go when there was a famine. Egypt always had water because of the Nile river, so never had a drought that destroyed their crops. But God told Isaac to stay in the Gerar for a while and live with the Philistines.

In verses 3-5 God repeats to Isaac the promise and the covenant that He had made with Abraham. He promised to be with Isaac and bless him, to give his descendants the land where he now stood, and to fulfill the oath he swore to Abraham. The promise would pass to Isaac because he was the only son of Abraham and Sarah. God would multiply his descendants like the stars of the heavens. He would give the land to his descendants. He would bless all the nations of the earth through Isaac. All this God repeated to Isaac so that Isaac would trust Him and not be fearful. He would not die in Gerar, but God would be with him and fulfill His promise to him. God would do these things for Isaac for the sake of Abraham. It was because Abraham had obeyed Him that God would bless Isaac. Abraham had obeyed comprehensively. He

kept God's charge, commandments, statutes and laws. Though Abraham had slipped, had lied and deceived others and had not always acted in faith, nevertheless the pattern of his life had been that of obedience.

Genesis 26:7-11

When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say, "my wife," *thinking*, "the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful." 8 And it came about, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out through a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah. 9 Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, certainly she is your wife! How then did you say, 'She is my sister'?" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die on account of her.'" 10 And Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." 11 So Abimelech charged all the people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

Isaac followed the example and pattern of his father in sin. Like Abraham, Isaac lied about his wife. He said Rebekah was his sister in order to protect himself. He thought the same way that Abraham had thought, that the men of Gerar might kill him in order to get Rebekah. Here again, God had promised him that He would be with him and bless him and his descendants and give them the land, but Isaac was fearful and intimidated by the men of the land. His fear overcame his faith and he tried to protect himself in this way. Instead of trusting God and His promise, Isaac compromised and lied about his wife. Just like his father, this brought him into conflict with Abimelech.

Abimelech saw Isaac caressing Rebekah in a way that you don't caress your sister and knew that he had lied. He knew that Rebekah was his wife. The word for "caressing" is *tsachaq*. Strongs Hebrew Bible Dictionary says that it means "to laugh outright (in merriment or scorn); by implication, to sport--laugh, mock, play, make sport." Isaac was fooling around with Rebekah. They were being playful and frisky with each other. Abimelech called him in and confronted him. He said it was obvious that Rebekah was his wife, and asked why he said that she was his sister. Isaac responded honestly that it was because he was afraid that he might be killed because of her. It was kind of an insult to Abimelech and the Philistines. He was saying that they were unjust and violent men. But Abimelech knew how dangerous it was to fool around with these Hebrew men whom God favored. He had almost lost his life when he had taken Sarah (Genesis 20). He rebuked Isaac and pointed out that what he had done might have brought guilt upon them if one of the men had decided to take Rebekah. They might again have faced the wrath of God because of Isaac's lie. Abimelech took steps to make sure that this would not happen and decreed that if anyone touched Isaac or Rebekah that they would be put to death. If Isaac had been honest with Abimelech when he had arrived about his apprehensions, Abimelech would surely have given him protection.

Our children will have the tendency to follow our patterns of sin. My son will probably struggle with the same things I have struggled with. As Isaac did the same thing that Abraham did, so our children will probably do the same things that we have done and that our parents have done. Be aware of the patterns of sin in your life and in the life of your family and warn your children about them in particular. We need to warn our kids about all sin, but especially the sins that are passed down in our family.

Now Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the LORD blessed him, ¹³ and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; ¹⁴ for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵ Now all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped up by filling them with earth. ¹⁶ Then Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are too powerful for us." ¹⁷ And Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar, and settled there. ¹⁸ Then Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the same names which his father had given them. ¹⁹ But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of flowing water, ²⁰ the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with the herdsmen of Isaac, saying, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek, because they contended with him. ²¹ Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over it too, so he named it Sitnah. ²² And he moved away from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he named it Rehoboth, for he said, "At last the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

While Isaac was living in Gerar among the Philistines, God blessed him and made him prosper. Isaac planted grain and crops while he was there and reaped a hundredfold. He became very wealthy because of the blessing of the Lord. His wealth consisted of flocks and herds and a big household. He had many servants. The Philistines envied him. Proverbs 10:22 says, "It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it." It is not wrong or evil to be rich. If the Lord has made you rich, you need not feel guilty or sorrowful about it. The Scriptures do give very clear instructions to the wealthy, however, in their attitude toward wealth and their use of it. Paul gave Timothy some clear instructions about the rich in 1 Timothy. In 1 Timothy 6:9-11 he says, "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness." The desire for riches and the love of money leads us into all kinds of trouble, and Paul tells us to flee from it. For those who are rich, Paul has this to say, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed." (1 Timothy 6:17-19.) We have a tendency to try to find our sense of security and safety in wealth. We think that if we have enough money, or more than enough, then we can face anything. We do tend to fix our hope on riches. But they are uncertain. Riches are not trustworthy. The only One worthy of our hope is God, who supplies us with all things to enjoy. We should see our wealth as a tool that we may use to engage in good works, something to share with others to meet their needs. By using our wealth to bless others, we lay up treasure for ourselves in heaven.

Isaac grew more powerful as he grew more in wealth, and eventually Abimelech had to ask him to move away. He had become too powerful for the Philistines. I'm not sure what Abimelech was afraid of; perhaps he recognized that his people envied Isaac and was afraid that unrest would break out because of Isaac. Indeed, we see that there was strife between the Philistines and Isaac's men over the wells that Isaac and Abraham had dug in the land. The Philistines had stopped them up after Abraham died, and Isaac reopened them. He also dug some new wells to which the Philistines

laid claim. Isaac gave way to them and kept moving until he dug a well which the Philistines did not contest, and named it Rehoboth. He explained that the name means that the Lord had made room for them in the land at last, and that now, with this new well, they would be fruitful. Sometimes the best thing you can do when people contend with you is to simply give way to them and move on. Isaac did not press the issue of the wells, though he and his father had dug them and had the right to use them. He let the Philistines have the wells and went on to the next place. God finally opened up a place for them to live where they were free of strife from the Philistines. Sometimes being at peace with people means giving way to them and letting them have things their way. Sometimes it means we move to another location. Sometimes it means a change in jobs. We are called to be at peace with men. Paul says in Romans 12:18-21, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Many have been killed or injured because they resisted bullies when it would have been better to let them have their way and move on.

Genesis 26:23-31

Then he went up from there to Beersheba. 24 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 the sake of My servant Abraham." 25 So he built an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.

Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with his adviser Ahuzzath, and Phicol the commander of his army. 27 And Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me, and have sent me away from you?" 28 And they said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, 29 that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good, and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.'" 30 Then he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. 31 And in the morning they arose early and exchanged oaths; then Isaac sent them away and they departed from him in peace.

We should recall that Abraham was the one who originally named Beersheba. The word means "well of an oath," and it was there that Abraham and Abimelech swore an oath of peace to one another after a dispute over a well (see Genesis 21:22-34). Now, in the same place, Abimelech renewed the agreement with Isaac. But before Abimelech arrived, the Lord again spoke to Isaac. God identified Himself as "the God of your father Abraham." Abraham had had a relationship with the Lord, and it was time that Isaac establish the same relationship. It was time that the God of his father became his God as well.

The Lord had a command and a promise for Isaac. The command was, "Do not fear," and the reason given for the command is, "for I am with you." This is what God often says to His people. He reassures them with the promise that He is with them. It is the presence of the Lord that casts out fear in our lives. We must learn to live consciously in His presence in order to be fearless people.

Beyond His promise to be with Isaac, He also promised to bless him and multiply his descendants. He repeated this promise again which He had given him at the beginning of chapter 26 when Isaac first went to live with the Philistines. Though Isaac only had two sons, Esau and Jacob, God promised that his descendants would be

multiplied. But the reason that God would do this was for the sake of His servant Abraham. He had emphasized this at the beginning of the chapter as well. It was because Abraham had served Him and obeyed Him that God was going to bless Isaac and his descendants (26:5). Implicit in this promise is the idea that Abraham still existed. Abraham was in God's presence and was still in fellowship with God face-to-face. The Lord was not going to let him down, but for his sake was going to multiply and bless his descendants.

In response to the promise of the Lord, Isaac built an altar there and worshipped the Lord. He called on His name, pitched his tent there and lived there, and dug a well there. Isaac made the Lord his God and offered sacrifices and worshipped Him. Now we see that Isaac trusted the Lord as his father had done. He had inherited the faith of his father.

As he had done with Abraham, Abimelech and his advisors came to Isaac to establish a covenant or treaty of peace with him. I'm not sure we can say that Abimelech was a believer in the Lord in the sense of being saved, but he respected the Lord and witnessed His power in protecting Abraham and Isaac. He feared this God who provided for these men, prospered them and protected them.

Isaac was a bit antagonistic when they came, asking, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me, and have sent me away from you?" He was bitter about being asked to leave. He had had to move because of Abimelech's request that he leave, and there aren't many people who enjoy moving. Plus, when he did move, Abimelech's people continued to give him grief over the wells he dug. Isaac was peeved about these things and wondered why Abimelech would come to him now.

Abimelech explained, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good, and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.'" Abimelech did not see that he or his people had done any harm to Isaac. In fact, he says, they have "done you nothing but good" and had sent him away in peace. They had not driven him out violently; they had not even touched him. The reason they had come out to see him was that they could see plainly that the Lord had been with Isaac. They could see that God was blessing him. This is one of the reasons that God blesses His people, so that the world will sit up and notice, and His blessing can be passed on to them through His people. As God blessed Isaac the Philistines were blessed as well. God's strategy is to bless His people so that they will become a blessing to others.

Evidently this pleased Isaac because he made a feast for them and they ate and drank together. He was hospitable to them. The next morning they got up early and exchanged oaths with one another and made a covenant with each other so that there would be peace between them. They promised not to harm one another. Later, of course, these nations would be enemies, but for now they were at peace, pledged to do no harm. Much of the credit for this must go to Abimelech.

Genesis 26:32-35

Now it came about on the same day, that Isaac's servants came in and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water." 33 So he called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

34 And when Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and

Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; 35 and they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

The name "Beersheba" was renewed by Isaac when his servants dug the well and found water there. Ever since this time the city has been called Beersheba. Abraham and Isaac left their mark on the place.

Forty years of age seems to have been the time to marry. Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah (Gen. 25:20) and now Esau is forty when he marries Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. These two women brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah. We don't know what it was about them that grieved them. Perhaps they worshipped idols. Maybe they just had annoying habits and personalities. Maybe they were selfish and whining. We don't know.

Genesis 27

Now it came about, when Isaac was old, and his eyes were too dim to see, that he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." And he said to him, "Here I am." 2 And Isaac said, "Behold now, I am old *and* I do not know the day of my death. 3 "Now then, please take your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me; 4 and prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die."

5 And Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring *home*, 6 Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, 7 'Bring me *some* game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death.' 8 "Now therefore, my son, listen to me as I command you. 9 "Go now to the flock and bring me two choice kids from there, that I may prepare them as a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. 10 "Then you shall bring *it* to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death." 11 And Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. 12 "Perhaps my father will feel me, then I shall be as a deceiver in his sight; and I shall bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing." 13 But his mother said to him, "Your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get *them* for me." 14 So he went and got *them*, and brought *them* to his mother; and his mother made savory food such as his father loved. 15 Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. 16 And she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. 17 She also gave the savory food and the bread, which she had made, to her son Jacob.

18 Then he came to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" 19 And Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your first-born; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me." 20 And Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have *it* so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because the LORD your God caused *it* to happen to me." 21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." 22 So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." 23 And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. 24 And he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" And he said, "I am." 25 So he said, "Bring *it* to me, and I will eat of my son's game, that I may bless you." And he brought *it* to him, and he ate; he also brought him wine and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, "Please come close and kiss me, my son." 27 So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said, "See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed; 28 Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, And of the fatness of the earth, And an abundance of grain and new wine; 29 May peoples serve you, And nations bow down to you; Be master of your brothers, And may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, And blessed be those who bless you."

30 Now it came about, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had hardly gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. 31 Then he also made savory food, and brought it to his father; and he said to his father, "Let my father arise, and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me." 32 And Isaac his father said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, your first-born, Esau." 33 Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was he then that hunted game and brought *it* to me, so that I ate of all *of it* before you came, and blessed him?"

Yes, and he shall be blessed." 34 When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, *even* me also, O my father!" 35 And he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, and has taken away your blessing." 36 Then he said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" 37 But Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Behold, I have made him your master, and all his relatives I have given to him as servants; and with grain and new wine I have sustained him. Now as for you then, what can I do, my son?" 38 And Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, *even* me also, O my father." So Esau lifted his voice and wept. 39 Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, "Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, And away from the dew of heaven from above. 40 "And by your sword you shall live, And your brother you shall serve; But it shall come about when you become restless, That you shall break his yoke from your neck." 41 So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob." 42 Now when the words of her elder son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, "Behold your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you, *by planning* to kill you. 43 "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban! 44 "And stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury subsides, 45 until your brother's anger against you subsides, and he forgets what you did to him. Then I shall send and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?"

46 And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

In this chapter we see most clearly the trouble that favoritism can cause in a family. Isaac's favorite was Esau, and he intended to bless him despite what God had said about the older serving the younger (Gen. 25:23). Rebekah's favorite was Jacob, and she was determined to make sure that he was blessed rather than Esau. It does not appear that there was good communication between Isaac and Rebekah. Instead there was deception and subterfuge.

Isaac realized that he was getting old and that the day of his death might be coming soon, so he determined that it was time to pass his blessing on to Esau. He planned to have a special blessing ceremony involving just he and Esau after Esau hunted some game and prepared him his favorite meal. He planned a private blessing without the rest of the family knowing about it.

Rebekah, however, was eavesdropping on their conversation. No doubt she often did this sort of thing. It alarmed her that the blessing would be given to Esau rather than Jacob. She hatched a plot to disguise Jacob as Esau and have him intercept the blessing for himself. Isaac's eyesight had failed, so he would not be able to see that it wasn't Esau. Jacob did not object to the deception itself, but worried that his father might be able to tell that it was him and not Esau. He did not say to his mother, "Mom, we can't do that! That would be wrong!" He went along with her plot. But since he was "smooth" and Esau was "hairy," he was afraid that his father would feel his skin and realize that it was him and not Esau and that his father would curse him as a result. Rebekah had it all worked out, though. She took the skins from the kids they had slaughtered and put them on Jacob's hands and the back of his neck, so that he would feel hairy like Esau. She dressed him in Esau's clothing so that he would smell like Esau. She prepared food the way that Isaac liked it, so that he would think that it was game Esau had hunted. Twice in this chapter Rebekah says to Jacob, "obey my voice" (verse 13 and 43). It is because he obeyed her voice that he got into trouble.

Sometimes even parents need to be disobeyed if they hatch an evil plot and

expect us to go along with it. Jacob at this point needed to stand up to his mother and refuse to go along with her. Communication and integrity was needed very badly in this family.

Initially, Isaac was not sure that it was Esau who had brought the savory food and had come in for his blessing. First, he had returned very quickly, much sooner than Isaac had anticipated. Second, the voice he heard was the voice of Jacob. Jacob lied and said that he was Esau. He lied and said that the Lord had blessed him in his hunting and had given him success. His hands and neck were disguised and he wore the clothing of Esau so that he would smell like Esau. There is no honesty here, but a complete deception. When Isaac felt him and smelled him, he was convinced that it was Esau. He believed his senses of smell and touch rather than his sense of hearing and his common sense about hunting. And so the blessing Isaac had intended for Esau he gave to Jacob.

The blessing itself is in verses 28 and 29. First, Isaac expresses his desire that God might give his son the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth, and an abundance of grain and new wine. He wanted God to provide all of his physical needs and more, to make him rich and give him an overflow of prosperity. The abundance of grain and new wine was tied to and dependent upon the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth. Rain and fertile land yield abundant crops and lead to prosperity. This is still true today. Whatever else we need, we must have water and productive land, or we will all die of thirst or starve. In our modern age when most of us do not work in agriculture we lose sight of this basic truth.

Next, Isaac expresses the desire that other nations and peoples might serve Jacob and bow down to him and that he might be master of his brothers and that they might bow down to him. He wanted his son to rule over other nations and not to be ruled over by others. It is better to control than to be controlled. It is better to rule than to be ruled. At least that was the thinking at that time. The world is in better hands if men who are right with God are in control and the godless are held in check. If the godless rule, then we are all in big trouble.

Finally, Isaac says, "Cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you." There would be those who would curse Jacob, and Isaac expressed the wish that God would curse those who curse him. He wanted God to oppose those who would oppose his son. There would also be those who would bless him, who would be kind to him and friendly toward him. Isaac wanted God to bless those who would bless his son. You do not want to oppose those whom God blesses and you do not want to bless those whom God curses. Jacob would be blessed by God, and those who curse Israel will find that they themselves come under a curse by God. All those who have made the Jews their enemies have found themselves under God's heavy hand of judgment. True, He has used other nations to discipline His people, but those, like Hitler, who have attempted to wipe them out have themselves been wiped out. It is not wise to curse those whom God has chosen and blessed.

Soon after Jacob left, Esau came in. He also invited his father to arise and eat his game and bless him. Isaac asked who he was, and Esau told him. Isaac had a strong emotional reaction when the truth dawned on him. He realized that he had been deceived and he "trembled violently." This truth hit him very hard, that he had blessed someone he had not intended to bless. Prophetically, he said to Esau, "Yes, and he shall be blessed." Isaac had not just passed on his blessing, but the blessing of God. Jacob would enjoy the blessing of God as Isaac had said, even though he obtained it

deceitfully. That Isaac realized he had been deceived is made clear in verse 35, "Your brother came deceitfully, and has taken away your blessing." Jacob had taken it and it was gone. No further or additional blessing was available for Esau, much as he wanted it and much as Isaac wanted to give it to him. There was only one blessing for one son. Only one of the two sons would be blessed by God and carry on the blessing promised to Abraham and Isaac.

We must not think that God sanctioned or approved of what Jacob did. God does not inspire deceit and lying. God cannot be tempted by evil and does not tempt anyone to do evil (James 1:13). God does, on occasion, however, bend the evil deeds of men and evil spirits to fulfill His purposes. An example of this is in 1 Kings 22:19-23:

And Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.' And the LORD said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice *him* and also prevail. Go and do so.' Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you."

The evil spirit who deceived Ahab into going to Ramoth-gilead where he met his death carried out the purpose of the Lord. We must note in this passage that God also gave Ahab clear warning of this. He allowed Ahab, through the prophet Micaiah, to see exactly what was happening so that he might, even at that point, repent and turn back to God and not suffer this fate.

Predictably, Esau's reaction was strong as well. He "cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry." It was a great, loud cry, and it was very bitter, greater and more bitter than an average outcry. The language appears very intense here. His cry was probably heard throughout Isaac's compound. He pleaded with his father to bless him also. He was grieved and angry, crushed and disappointed. His blessing had been taken away by his brother. He bitterly complained about Jacob. He said, "He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." The first part of this statement is not true. Esau had sold his birthright willingly. He had despised his birthright. Jacob had not taken it from him, but he had sold it for a bowl of soup! He is right about the second part, however. Jacob had intercepted and taken away Esau's blessing by deception. Brothers should not treat one another this way!

Isaac had no additional blessing for Esau. He had given it all to Jacob. He had made Jacob master of Esau. He had given all of his relatives as his servants. He had sustained him with grain and new wine. There was nothing more for him to pass on to Esau. But Esau pleaded with him and wept and cried that he might bless him also, so Isaac answered him and said, "Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, And away from the dew of heaven from above. And by your sword you shall live, And your brother you shall serve; But it shall come about when you become restless, That you shall break his yoke from your neck." This was not the "blessing" that Esau was looking for, but evidently it was the best that Isaac could do. Isaac said that Esau would live in an infertile and dry place. He said he would live by his sword. He would be in conflict with others and would live a violent existence, having to fight and defend himself. He said that he would serve his brother, but that one day he would become restless and throw off his yoke. In Numbers 20 we read that Edom, the nation

descended from Esau, would not allow Israel to pass through their territory, and Israel turned away from them. Also, in 2 Kings 8 we are told that Edom revolted against Judah when Jehoram became king of Judah and appointed their own king. Isaac's prophecy came to pass.

As a result of Jacob's deception, Esau bore a grudge against him and planned to kill him once Isaac died. Esau loved his father and would not do anything that would grieve him while he was alive, but when he died, he would then kill the one who had taken his birthright and his blessing. He made this plan known to someone and word got back to Rebekah that this was his plan. She decided to solve this problem, too and called Jacob to her. She warned him and again told him to obey her voice and do what she said and had planned. Her plan was that Jacob should go stay with her brother Laban for a few days and then return when Esau cooled off and forgot about what Jacob had done. She did not suggest that Jacob should humble himself and go ask forgiveness of Isaac and Esau. Her solution was the solution that most people would take, that he should run from the problem and hope that the problem would just go away. She did not deny that he had done something evil to Esau, but her solution was not to deal with the root of the problem, but to escape from the consequences of the problem.

We do not deal with true guilt and responsibility by running away and hoping that things "blow over" so we can come back. We deal with our own guilt and evil correctly by humbly admitting it and seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. This family needed some honest communication. Isaac should have gathered them all together and had a family meeting to work through these issues. Instead there was backstabbing and strife and anger. They didn't talk through the big issues in their lives and so there was trouble.

Rebekah seems to lay all the guilt on Jacob, when it had been her plan all along. She talked about Esau forgetting "what you did to him," when it should have been "what we did to him." She was good at hatching plans and carrying them out, but not at taking responsibility for them. Those who plot evil and push others into it hold greater responsibility than those who go along with them in their plans. Rebekah led her son into her scheming and deceptive ways and did not set a good example for him.

Again Rebekah turned to a subterfuge to attain her goal. She complained to Isaac about the "daughters of Heth" whom Esau had married. They were a vexation to her, but she used that as an excuse to get Isaac to send Jacob away. Her concern was not so much that Jacob should marry the right girl, but that Isaac would send him away to Laban for his own protection. She would kill two birds with one stone. She would see that Jacob was protected and she would also see that he got the right kind of wife for himself at the same time.

Genesis 28:1-9

So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. 2 "Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. 3 "And may God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. 4 "May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you; that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham." 5 Then Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.

6 Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram, to take to

himself a wife from there, *and that* when he blessed him he charged him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," 7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram. 8 So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; 9 and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

Now Isaac willingly gives his blessing and his charge to Jacob. His charge was that Jacob was to go to the house of Bethuel, father of Rebekah, and take a wife from the daughters of Laban, brother of his mother. He was to marry a cousin from Laban's household. He was not to marry a Canaanite woman. Isaac wanted to make sure that Jacob did not make the same mistake that Esau had made. He was not to allow Canaanite blood to mingle with the godly line of Abraham.

The blessing of Isaac to Jacob was that he might be fruitful, multiply and become a "company of peoples." This was the vision for Jacob. Isaac wished that Jacob would inherit the blessing of Abraham and that he and his descendants would possess the land that God had promised to Abraham. This was the plan of God and so it was the blessing of Isaac. It was Jacob who would become the nation of Israel and it was through Jacob that Christ would come. It appears that now Isaac saw that God wanted to bless Jacob rather than Esau, that it was Jacob the Lord had chosen and not Esau.

Esau was still competing with Jacob, however, for his parent's love. He saw that Jacob had obeyed Isaac and had departed for Paddan-aram. He saw that his Canaanite wives displeased his parents and that his father had commanded Jacob not to take a Canaanite wife. He may have even realized that now the favor of the Lord rested upon Jacob. To try to remedy the situation he went to Ishmael and married one of his daughters, Mahalath. Ishmael, of course, was the older half-brother of Isaac. It seems that Esau thought that if he also married a cousin that his father would be pleased. He was a man who thought he could fix things on his own. He thought in shallow terms. The issue was not really what kind of women he married, but the state of his heart. He did not value spiritual things. He had despised his birthright and the promise of God. He would not gain God's favor by marrying a woman who was a granddaughter of Abraham. We do not gain God's favor by our own schemes. We receive God's favor by faith as a free gift, given to whom He pleases. It does not depend on how we perform.

Genesis 28:10-22

Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 And he came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. 12 And he had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14 "Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 "And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." 17 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." 18 So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on its top. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat

and garments to wear, 21 and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. 22 "And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house; and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee."

Now God Himself passes on to Jacob the promise and covenant He had given to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob had this dream where he saw a ladder up into heaven with angels going up and down on it. At the top of the ladder he saw the Lord standing in heaven above the ladder. The Lord was showing Jacob that He was involved in the affairs of the earth and of men. He was showing Jacob also that He was involved in Jacob's life and was watching over him.

This promise to Jacob was the promise that he and the nation were to build their lives upon. He promised to give Jacob and his descendants the land on which he lay. He promised that his descendants would be like the dust of the earth for number. He promised that they would spread out to the west, east, north and south. He promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed through his descendants. These are the same things that He had promised to Abraham and Isaac. Further, God promised His presence wherever Jacob went, and that He would keep him and guard him and then bring him back to the land, and that he would not leave him. The word used for "keep" in verse 15 means to put a hedge around something. It was a promise that God would protect and guard Jacob. Jacob would be safe and secure. He could count on it. Jacob needed to trust in this promise in view of the difficulties he would face in the coming years.

It is interesting to me to see that God did not rebuke Jacob. I sort of expected Him to do so because of the way that he had deceived his father and stolen the blessing from his brother. But God was gracious to him and did not even mention it, at least as far as we know. Instead God reassured him that He was watching over him and would protect him and would bring him back into the land. He need not fear the wrath of Esau.

Jacob was impressed and fearful. He marvelled and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." It was just an ordinary place. There was nothing about the place to suggest that God would be there. There was no magnificent temple, no grand majestic mountain views, nothing like that. We must not think that a place must be extraordinary before God will meet us there. God is in ordinary places and uses ordinary people. We do not need a special place with some sort of special vibe or feeling in order to meet God. We may meet Him anywhere and everywhere.

Jacob considered the place special after encountering the Lord there. He named the place Bethel which means "house of God." He said that it was the house of God and the gate of heaven. He thought it was the place where God lived and the place where one could access heaven. But it was not the place that was special to God, it was the person. God did not appear to Jacob in Bethel because Bethel was a special place, but because Jacob was a special person. He was there because Jacob was there. Jacob was His chosen man and it was time for God to appear to him and to say these things to him. Wherever Jacob had been at the time would have been the place where God spoke to him. One of the mistakes we make is to think that God will meet people only at certain special places. Some people think that if they go to the special place, to Bethel or Sinai or Mecca or wherever, that God will be there in a special way. Sometimes we think this way because of certain special events that happen in our lives. We may think that because we encountered God and our lives

were turned around at a summer camp that if we go back to that place we will be blessed again. But God is not a regional God. He can be present anywhere and everywhere. Whenever and wherever we call on Him, He is there.

Jacob made a vow to the Lord there at Bethel. It was a conditional vow. He said that the Lord would be his God and he would give a tenth of everything to the Lord if the Lord would be with him on his journey and protect him, provide for his needs in terms of food and clothing, and make sure that he returned to his father's house in safety. The Lord would have to prove Himself to Jacob by these things before the Lord would be his God. He said, "OK, God – if you will do what you promised, then you will be my God." He would not jump to make a commitment and trust the Lord immediately. He wanted to see if God would do as He promised. He would wait to see if the Lord would prove Himself trustworthy before he would trust Him. When Jesus appeared to Thomas after His resurrection He showed him His wounded side and hands because Thomas had refused to believe that Jesus had risen unless he could see the wounds and touch them. Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."(John 20:29.) Jacob was one who wanted to see before he believed, but the Lord is pleased when we believe before we see.

Genesis 29:1-14

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the sons of the east. 2 And he looked, and saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for from that well they watered the flocks. Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large. 3 When all the flocks were gathered there, they would then roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well. 4 And Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran." 5 And he said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know *him*." 6 And he said to them, "Is it well with him?" And they said, "It is well, and behold, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep." 7 And he said, "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them." 8 But they said, "We cannot, until all the flocks are gathered, and they roll the stone from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep." 9 While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. 10 And it came about, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went up, and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted his voice and wept. 12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father. 13 So it came about, when Laban heard the news of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Then he related to Laban all these things. 14 And Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him a month.

Rachel was in charge of her father's sheep. She, along with the other shepherds of the area, was bringing her sheep to the well to be watered after Jacob had arrived there. Evidently they did it differently in this place than elsewhere. They gathered the flocks at the well at "high day" and then someone removed the stone from the well and they all watered their sheep. I guess they had agreed to do it this way or someone had imposed this schedule on them. Jacob thought it was time that the sheep should be pastured and was the wrong time of day to water them. In any case, they waited until all the flocks were gathered and then they watered the sheep.

The shepherds there pointed Rachel out to Jacob, and Jacob removed the stone for her and watered the sheep for her. He kissed her and wept and told her who he was. He was overwhelmed with emotion. His first impulse was to serve her and to

serve her father and care for his sheep. Verse 18 tells us that Jacob loved Rachel, and when you love someone you want to serve them. You want to do special things for them. You want to lighten their load and give to them. From the outset Jacob did this for Rachel. Love is giving and serving and laying aside your own desire to be served.

Jacob told Rachel who he was and she ran to tell her father. Laban, when he heard, also ran back to meet Jacob and embraced and kissed him and welcomed him to his home. Jacob received a warm welcome from his uncle. Laban was happy to see his sister's son. There had been a strong and protective bond between Laban and Rebekah, and he was no doubt glad to have news of her. Jacob told him the whole story of how he had come to visit. Laban said, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." He accepted Jacob as a member of his own family. This was a good beginning in the household of Laban for Jacob. It appeared that things would go well for him there.

Genesis 29:15-35

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" 16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 And Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and face. 18 Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." 19 And Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man; stay with me."

20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her. 21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give *me* my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her." 22 And Laban gathered all the men of the place, and made a feast. 23 Now it came about in the evening that he took his daughter Leah, and brought her to him; and *Jacob* went in to her. 24 Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. 25 So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?" 26 But Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place, to marry off the younger before the first-born. 27 "Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for another seven years." 28 And Jacob did so and completed her week, and he gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. 29 Laban also gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid. 30 So *Jacob* went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years.

31 Now the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. 32 And Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben, for she said, "Because the LORD has seen my affliction; surely now my husband will love me." 33 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." So she named him Simeon. 34 And 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 he was named Levi. 35 And she conceived again and bore a son and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

After Jacob had been there for a month, Laban finally realized that his nephew and guest should not be treated as a slave, so he asked him what his wages should be for serving him. Jacob was quick to reply that he would work for him for seven years in exchange for his daughter Rachel. Rachel was younger and more beautiful in body and in face than Leah, and Jacob loved her. He was willing to spend seven years of his life working for Laban just to have her as a wife. To put it into perspective, if he had been working for \$30,000 per year, he would have made a total of \$210,000 over seven years. This gives us an idea of how much he valued Rachel. Laban agreed that it would be better to give her to Jacob than to anyone else, and so he invited Jacob to stay and work for him. The time went quickly for Jacob because of his love for Rachel. It is amazing that he was willing to wait for so long to see his desire fulfilled. Men today

are rarely willing to wait for this length of time to obtain the woman they want. Today we want instant gratification. We want full satisfaction right away or we will move on to someone or something else. Jacob was willing to work and to wait for the woman he wanted.

When it was time for him to marry and to consummate his relationship with Rachel, Jacob the deceiver was deceived, and the cheater was cheated. Instead of Rachel, Laban gave him Leah. He did it at night and Leah was probably veiled, so Jacob did not realize what had happened until morning. Imagine the shock of waking up to someone other than the person you thought you had married! Jacob was really upset! Laban proved to be a very dishonest and deceitful man. When Jacob confronted him, he replied that it was not their custom to marry off the younger daughter before the older. He had not told Jacob this earlier, but now that he had married Leah, this is disclosed. Probably the truth was that Laban was worried that Leah would never get married because she was not very attractive. Laban said that after the one week was completed for the honeymoon with Leah, he would give Rachel to Jacob as well in exchange for another seven years of service. Jacob had already served him for seven years for Rachel, but now he has to serve another seven for her. We do not read that he refused these terms or protested. He would not risk losing Rachel. He would serve Laban for another seven years.

Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, but clearly he continued to have a sexual relationship with Leah as well as with Rachel. The Lord took note of the fact that Leah was unloved. In fact, the Hebrew word the NASB translates "unloved" means to hate. Rachel was the one Jacob really loved, and Leah was "hated." But God had compassion on Leah and opened her womb. She was the one whom the Lord blessed with fertility, and she bore Jacob four sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. The Lord Himself was involved in the birth of these sons of Jacob, who would become the tribes of Israel.

Names were given for a reason and had meaning. The names of the four sons of Leah mentioned here are tied to her statements about them. The statements explain the reasons for the names. Reuben means "see – a son" and Leah explained that it was because the Lord had seen her affliction. The word for affliction carries the idea of depression and misery. Leah was depressed and miserable because she was unloved, and the Lord saw this. He saw how Jacob's attitude toward her impacted her emotionally, and had compassion for her. The Lord does take note of our suffering and of how others treat us and how it impacts us. In fact, there are many passages in scripture that indicate that God takes special note of those who are humble and downcast. Psalms 10:17-18 says, "O LORD, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble; Thou wilt strengthen their heart, Thou wilt incline Thine ear to vindicate the orphan and the oppressed, That man who is of the earth may cause terror no more." James 4:6 reminds us, "But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" We receive grace from God when we are humble, and He chooses the humble and the insignificant rather than those who are proud (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). The Lord took note of Leah's misery, and blessed her with children because of it.

Leah had the idea that now that Reuben had been born and she had blessed Jacob with a son, that now Jacob would surely love her. Unfortunately this did not prove to be true. Having children did not make her Jacob's favorite wife, although he clearly saw that she was able to bear children and so continued to have sex with her.

Men can have sex with women they do not love. Though Jacob had sex with Leah, he did not love her, and she knew it. For a man the emotional involvement does not have to be there. For women, the emotional component is crucial. They may be able to go through the motions with a man who doesn't love them, but I think they really long for real love and real giving from the men they are involved with. They want their man to truly care for them, and this is what Leah wanted.

Simeon's name means "hearing." Leah explained that God had heard that she was unloved. First she had said that He had seen her affliction, and now she says that He has heard as well that she was unloved. God is a God who hears and pays attention to the things that afflict us. God cares about the unloved wife. He cares about her suffering. He cares about the suffering that you put your spouse through. He pays attention and takes note of these things.

The third son she named Levi, which means "attached." She said that now Jacob would become attached to her, since she had borne him three sons. She is still thinking that bearing sons would make Jacob love her more. She thought that she could gain the advantage over her sister by bearing more sons. She wanted to be the primary wife in Jacob's eyes and wanted him to be attached to her.

Her fourth son she named Judah, meaning "celebrated," and she said, "This time I will praise the Lord." This time she would not hope that Jacob would love her more, she just celebrated God's gift of another son. Through the process of being unloved and wrestling with her misery because of it, she learned to praise the Lord who was the One who was good to her. While she was hated by her husband and her sister was her rival, she saw that it was the Lord who favored her and blessed her. When others were cruel to her, He was good and kind. While others hated and despised her, He loved her and cared for her. Sometimes we have to come to this realization that people will let us down and oppose us and despise us, but the Lord will always love us. Sometimes we have to just give up trying to please others and gain their love and attention and just thank and praise the Lord that He is always good no matter how people treat us.

Genesis 30:1-13

Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die." 2 Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" 3 And she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her, that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children." 4 So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. 5 And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. 6 Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son." Therefore she named him Dan. 7 And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8 So Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed." And she named him Naphtali.

9 When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 10 And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. 11 Then Leah said, "How fortunate!" So she named him Gad. 12 And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. 13 Then Leah said, "Happy am I! For women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.

Even though Rachel was the one that Jacob loved, she was jealous of Leah because Leah had given Jacob sons and she had not. She demanded that Jacob give her children or else she would die. She issued an ultimatum. Either he would give her children or she would die. She does not appear to be thinking rationally at this point.

Obviously it was not Jacob's problem that she did not bear children. He could not be blamed nor could he solve her problem. It was clear that he was fertile. This is why Jacob became angry. She was demanding something of him that he could not give. He asked, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" Only God could give her what she demanded. Jealousy can move us to think and to do all sorts of rash and foolish things. This childbearing competition between Leah and Rachel now gets ridiculous.

Rachel's idea was that she would get children of her own through her maid Bilhah, so she gave her to Jacob, who was only too willing to have another sexual partner, and she became pregnant and bore a son for Rachel. Rachel named him Dan, which means "judge." She explained that God had "vindicated" her and had heard her voice. The implication was that she had been praying and asking God for a son and He had heard her and given her Dan through Bilhah. The name Dan comes from the root word that she used earlier translated "vindicated" by the NASB. Strongs Hebrew Dictionary says that the word means "a straight course," but the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament defines it as to "judge, contend or plead."¹⁷ Rachel thought that God had judged that she also should have a son so that she might be treated fairly.

Bilhah's second son Rachel named Naphtali, which means "my wrestling." She explained that with great wrestlings she had been wrestling with her sister and she felt that she had prevailed. She was caught up in a great competition and struggle with Leah, and felt that she was getting the upper hand. Leah had been seeking to win Jacob over by bearing children, and now Rachel was striking back. She was no longer childless, but had two sons for Jacob through her maid. The name of Naphtali would always be a reminder of the great conflict between these two sisters in this family. We see here the problems with polygamy, and why monogamy is God's ideal. When a man has more than one wife, there is jealousy and great strife. There is conflict that will come to be the dominant characteristic of the household. Sisters who should have loved each other came to hate each other because they were competing for the love of the same man.

Leah was not going to be outdone by her sister, so she also gave her maid to Jacob as a wife, and he had sex with her as well. Now Jacob has four wives! Zilpah also bore two sons to Jacob, Gad and Asher. Gad means "to crowd upon" or "attack." Asher means "happy." Leah said she was fortunate to have had Gad, and happy with Asher and would be considered happy. Among the women, she thought that she would be called happy. Jacob now has 8 sons, four by Leah, two by Bilhah and two by Zilpah. But the competition is not over yet! Four more are yet to be born!

Genesis 30:14-24

Now in the days of wheat harvest Reuben went 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." ¹⁵ But she said to her, "Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son's mandrakes also?" So Rachel said, "Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." ¹⁶ When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then 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." So he lay with her that night. ¹⁷ And God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ Then Leah said, "God has given me my wages, because I gave my maid to my husband." So she named him Issachar. ¹⁹ And Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. ²⁰ Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good gift; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons."

¹⁷ Harris, Archer, Waltke, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Vol. 1, page 188, Moody Press.

So she named him Zebulun. 21 And afterward she bore a daughter and named her Dinah. 22 Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb. 23 So she conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." 24 And she named him Joseph, saying, "May the LORD give me another son."

Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob and Leah, was working in the wheat fields during the harvest and found some mandrakes, picked them or dug them up and brought them to Leah. Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia has this to say about mandrakes:

The Heb. Name means "loving" and suggests the nature of the mandrake or love apple. *Mandragora officinarum* is a narcotic plant of the potato family that has been esteemed for ages as an aphrodisiac or love philter (cf. Gen 30:14-16). The wide, dark green leaves of the mandrake form a large flat rosette on the ground, with purple flowers at the center. The fruit is small and bright red, shaped like a tomato but soft, pulpy, and somewhat poisonous. The plant has an enormous root, brown and rugged, which with some imagination looks like a human body. It has a heavy smell that may have been pleasant and even exhilarating to Orientals.¹⁸

Rachel evidently thought that the mandrakes might enable her to become fertile and have a baby, so she asked Leah for some of them. But Leah responded sarcastically and bitterly, "Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son's mandrakes also?" Here we see Leah's perspective. Rachel was a late-comer who had taken her husband away from her, and Leah resented her. She would not help Rachel unless she were compensated in some way. Probably Jacob had not slept with Leah for some time, since she had stopped bearing children and Rachel was his favorite. Rachel and Leah came to an agreement. If Leah would give her some of Reuben's mandrakes, Rachel would let Leah sleep with Jacob that night. Rachel was in the driver's seat as far as Jacob's sex life was concerned it appears. Rachel said, "Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." It sounds as if she was the one who coordinated Jacob's sexual calendar! She sold him to Leah for the night in exchange for the mandrakes.

Leah greeted Jacob as he came in from working in the field and informed him that he had to sleep with her that night because she had "hired" him with her son's mandrakes. Imagine having to "hire" your own spouse to sleep with you! She had paid Rachel for him, and he belonged to her for the night. He dutifully followed this scheme and lay with her that night. He does not appear to be in charge of his own household. Sometimes a man needs to assert his authority and take charge of his home. Sometimes he needs to say no to his wife. It looks like Jacob would not deny Rachel anything, and she took charge.

Again, the Lord listened to Leah and gave her a fifth son, whom she named Issachar, which means "he will bring a reward." She believed that God had paid her for giving her maid to Jacob. She thought that the more children she gave to Jacob, the more God rewarded her. Her sixth son she named Zebulun, meaning "habitation," saying she believed that God had given her a good gift and that now her husband would dwell with her. She believed that she won her husband's favor by bearing more sons. She thought that perhaps now he would be with her more often and have relations with her more than Rachel. He had been dwelling with Rachel, but now that she was bearing children again she believed that he would come over to her.

Finally, a daughter is born to Leah and she names her Dinah – "justice."

¹⁸ Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, Moody Press, Volume 2, page 1364.

In verse 17 we read that God "gave heed" to Leah and she conceived and gave birth to Issachar, then in verse 22 we read that God "gave heed" to Rachel and finally opened her womb. The same word is used of both women. God listened to them and granted their desire and their request. Perhaps Rachel had finally come to a place of humility so that God decided to bless her with a child. Or perhaps He felt compassion for her and the suffering caused by the reproach of being childless. Women were teased and persecuted in those days if they were childless. Leah herself probably persecuted Rachel about this. We saw in verse 1 how desperate Rachel was for a child. She felt she was going to die if she did not have a child. Now God finally listened to her and granted her request. Sometimes we have to wait a long time to see our desire and our petition granted by the Lord, but we must not give up. He may need to work on our attitude and motives before He grants our requests. We may have some rough edges that need to be smoothed before He does what we ask. Rachel needed to wait, but eventually the time came when God gave her what she wanted.

When Rachel gave birth to Joseph, she said that God had taken away her reproach, her shame. She had been shamed and reproached for not having a child, and now God had taken that away. God had vindicated her and she now felt a sense of worth that was lacking before. She named him Joseph, which means "let him add," because she wanted the Lord to give her another son. She wanted Him to add another son to Joseph, so she gave him this hopeful name.

Genesis 30:25-43

Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country. 26 "Give *me* my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me depart; for you yourself know my service which I have rendered you." 27 But Laban said to him, "If now it pleases you, *stay with me*; I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account." 28 And he continued, "Name me your wages, and I will give it." 29 But he said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you and how your cattle have fared with me. 30 "For you had little before I came, and it has increased to a multitude; and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?" 31 So he said, "What shall I give you?" And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this *one* thing for me, I will again pasture *and* keep your flock: 32 let me pass through your entire flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted sheep, and every black one among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and *such* shall be my wages. 33 "So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come concerning my wages. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, *if found* with me, will be considered stolen." 34 And Laban said, "Good, let it be according to your word."

35 So he removed on that day the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats, every one with white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the care of his sons. 36 And he put a *distance of* three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks. 37 Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white which was in the rods. 38 And he set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the gutters, *even* in the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink; and they mated when they came to drink. 39 So the flocks mated by the rods, and the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. 40 And Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban; and he put his own herds apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock. 41 Moreover, it came about whenever the stronger of the flock were mating, that Jacob would place the rods in the sight of the flock in the gutters, so that they might mate by the rods; 42 but when the flock was feeble, he did not put *them* in; so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's. 43 So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.

The time was up and Jacob felt it was time for him to return to his father after

Joseph was born. Evidently he had served his 14 years with Laban and had earned his wives, and now it was time for him to return home. He asked Laban to send him away with his wives and children and to let him depart for home. He pointed out that Laban was aware of the service that he had rendered to him, and that Jacob owed him nothing. Jacob had put in his time with Laban and probably had not been compensated in accord with his work.

Laban could see that God had blessed him because of Jacob. It was because of Jacob that Laban had prospered. Laban's blessings were second-hand blessings. He was blessed only because Jacob lived with him and worked for him. Second-hand blessings are OK, but you really want first-hand blessings. You want to know the Lord yourself and have His favor rest on you. You don't want to be dependent on someone else's blessings.

Since Laban could see that he was blessed because of Jacob, he wanted to negotiate a new contract with Jacob so that he would stay on with him and he would continue to prosper. Laban said, "Name me your wages, and I will give it." A wise employer will make sure that his most valuable employees are well compensated and are happy in their jobs. Laban was offering a virtual "blank check" to Jacob. Jacob reminded him how his cattle had fared under his care and how everything had increased to a multitude. All that he had had been multiplied because of Jacob, but Jacob owned none of it. He only had his wives and children, and that was all. He needed to provide for his own household, and not be dependent on Laban for the rest of his life. Jacob did not want to be a paid laborer for Laban, but wanted flocks and herds for himself.

Jacob would not allow Laban to "give" him anything, but he would take from the flocks and herds all the speckled and spotted sheep, all the black lambs, and all the speckled and spotted goats. These would be his wages. These were probably rare, and there were probably few among the sheep and goats that matched this description, so Laban thought he was getting a great deal and agreed immediately. Jacob said that if Laban later disputed his wages, he could himself see Jacob's honesty when he looked at his flocks and herds. If there were any animals among his that were not speckled or spotted, they would be considered stolen. This would be a "proof of performance" to Laban. When we enter into a contract with a shrewd negotiator, we do well to make sure that the understanding is very clear on both sides. They must know when we have done as we have agreed to do, and we must know that they have done what they have agreed to do. There should be some objective evidence that we can point to to prove that the contract has been honored.

Laban pulled out all the speckled and spotted animals and the black sheep and gave them to his sons to tend. Laban moved away a distance of 3 days journey and Jacob continued to tend Laban's flocks. This gave both Laban and Jacob the opportunity to manipulate the situation to obtain the outcome they desired. Jacob used what we would view as a superstitious means of trying to influence the outcome of the breeding of the flocks by putting these peeled, striped rods in front of the sheep and goats while they were breeding. He believed that this would influence the outcome and so did Laban and his sons. Indeed, the flocks brought forth striped, speckled and spotted offspring, probably not due to the rods, but due to divine intervention. By what he was doing, Jacob was saying, "Give me striped, speckled and spotted animals," and God heard him and answered and blessed him. Jacob also practiced selective breeding so that the stronger animals would be his and the weaker would belong to

Laban. In this way, over time, with God's blessing, Jacob "became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys" (verse 43). Jacob became a rich man.

Jacob, to me, does not seem to be the sort of man who deserves such blessing from the Lord. But then, who does deserve it? In truth, there is no one who deserves anything from the Lord. Whatever we have and whatever we enjoy is because of the grace of the Lord. It was because of God's gracious choice of him that Jacob prospered, not because he deserved it or earned it, and the same is true of us.

Genesis 31:1-16

1 Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth." 2 And Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not *friendly* toward him as formerly. 3 Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you." 4 So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field, 5 and said to them, "I see your father's attitude, that it is not *friendly* toward me as formerly, but the God of my father has been with me. 6 "And you know that I have served your father with all my strength. 7 "Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; however, God did not allow him to hurt me. 8 "If he spoke thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth speckled; and if he spoke thus, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth striped. 9 "Thus God has taken away your father's livestock and given *them* to me. 10 "And it came about at the time when the flock were mating that I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which were mating *were* striped, speckled, and mottled. 11 "Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.' 12 "And he said, 'Lift up, now, your eyes and see *that* all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. 13 'I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.'"

14 And Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father's house? 15 "Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has also entirely consumed our purchase price. 16 "Surely all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you."

Jacob heard Laban's sons and saw the change in Laban's attitude toward him. His sons were accusing Jacob of taking away everything that belonged to their father and of making himself rich at the expense of their father. They overlooked the fact that Laban had prospered in the first place because of Jacob. Laban himself no doubt thought the same thing and was not favorable to Jacob any longer. No longer does Laban appreciate the blessings that came to him through Jacob, but now he is hostile toward him, because he can see that God caused the flocks to bear animals that would belong to Jacob. Laban would still have had little if it had not been for Jacob.

The Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you." As He often does, the Lord gave him a command and a promise. The command was that he should go home and return to his land and relatives. The promise was that He would be with Jacob. God does not send us out to do something without going with us and providing what we need to fulfill His command. We must remember this when we come up against obstacles that hinder us from our task. Looming over Jacob was the memory of the hatred and threats of Esau. God's promise would see him through.

We hear Jacob's side of the issue when he talks to Rachel and Leah in the field. He saw that God had been with him and had protected him and provided for him. Though he had vigorously served Laban, Laban had cheated him and changed his wages ten times. Whenever Laban tried to change his wages, God made sure that the

flock brought forth the kind of animals that Laban had promised to Jacob. God was the one who had taken away Laban's livestock and had given them to Jacob, Jacob had not done it himself. He had seen God's hand at work in his life to provide for him and protect him. We need to learn to see this as well. We need to pray for discernment and open eyes to see what God is doing in the circumstances of our lives. He is working, but do we see it? Do we appreciate it? Do we thank Him for it?

As Jacob spoke to Rachel and Leah, he told them about the dream he had had and what the angel of the Lord had said to him. In the dream all the male goats which were mating were goats that belonged to Jacob, they were striped, speckled and mottled. The purebred goats were not mating. The angel explained, "for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you." The Lord caused this to happen, that the flock brought forth more and more striped, speckled and mottled animals, because God had seen how Laban was trying to cheat Jacob. The Lord did not allow Laban to take advantage of Jacob. God is a God who sees everything. He sees how we are treated and sees how we treat others. He cares about these things. He was concerned about how Laban was treating Jacob and stepped in to protect Jacob. He wanted Jacob to know that He was fulfilling His promise to be with him and protect him and bring him back to the land He had promised him.

God identified Himself as "the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me." He was the same God who had spoken to him at Bethel. He was not a regional God, a God only found in Bethel, but was God of all and of every place. He could speak to Jacob just as easily here in the land of Laban as He did in Bethel. Here God is saying that He is the same God Jacob met at Bethel.

The Lord reminded Jacob of the vow that he had made to Him at Bethel. Jacob had vowed that if the Lord would take care of him, then the Lord would be his God, that the pillar he had set up in Bethel would be God's house, and that he would give a tithe of all that God had given him back to the Lord (Genesis 28:20-22). The one remaining condition that Jacob had set down at that time still had to be fulfilled. The Lord had to make sure that Jacob returned to his father's house in safety. The time had come for him to return. God does not forget the vows and commitments we make to Him. Even if we forget, He remembers. This is why we need to be very careful about making vows and promises to Him about what we are or are not going to do. He will remember and He will hold us accountable.

Neither Rachel nor Leah gave Jacob any resistance to going to Jacob's country. They both agreed that they should go. In fact, it sounds like they were eager to leave. They said that their father had sold them and had used up the purchase price. He considered them foreigners anyway, so they might as well leave. They no longer had any portion or any inheritance in their father's house. Laban had caused his daughters to feel estranged from him by his attitude. They were devoted to their husband, and Laban had come to be hostile toward him. One of the biggest mistakes that a parent can make is to become an adversary of the spouse of their son or daughter. This is a sure way to drive your children away from you. If you are hostile toward your son's wife or your daughter's husband, you will drive them both away from you. Your child will (and should) support their spouse. When we marry we leave our father and mother and cleave to our spouse. This is the way it should be.

In addition to this, Rachel and Leah pointed out the fact that God had taken their father's wealth away from him and had given it to them and their children. Everyone could see this truth. Rachel and Leah saw it, Jacob saw it, Laban saw it and Laban's

sons saw it. Jacob hadn't stolen Laban's wealth, but God had taken it from Laban and given it to Jacob. It was God's doing and not Jacob's. We must not congratulate ourselves for the blessings that God has given us. His blessings come from His grace and we do not earn them.

Genesis 31:17-21

17 Then Jacob arose and put his children and his wives upon camels; 18 and he drove away all his livestock and all his property which he had gathered, his acquired livestock which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. 19 When Laban had gone to shear his flock, then Rachel stole the household idols that were her father's. 20 And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he was fleeing. 21 So he fled with all that he had; and he arose and crossed the *Euphrates* River, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.

Once again Jacob felt that he must rely on deception to attain his goals. Without telling Laban, he gathered together all of his things, his wives, his children, his livestock and property, and fled to return to his father. Again, he was acting in fear as Abraham and Isaac had done, and resorted to deception as they had done to protect himself. This deception ended up causing a very tense and dangerous confrontation with Laban. Things probably would have gone better if Jacob had told Laban that he was leaving. Certainly the Lord would have protected him as He did protect him. If we are walking with the Lord we need not fear what men might do to us. He will protect us and watch over us.

Rachel caused some additional trouble for Jacob. She stole the household idols while her father was out shearing his sheep. We are not told why she wanted them or thought they were important to have, but just that she took them. Evidently she herself did not fully know or trust the Lord and thought that they needed to have these idols for protection or for God's favor. She knew her father would not give them to her, so she stole them. In verse 30, Laban referred to these things as "my gods" using the Hebrew term *elohim*. They were images or representations of the deities that he worshipped. Clearly Laban and his family were idol worshippers, they were pagans and did not know the God of Jacob.

Genesis 31:22-30

22 When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, 23 then he took his kinsmen with him, and pursued him a *distance of seven days' journey*; and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead. 24 And God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad." 25 And Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen camped in the hill country of Gilead. 26 Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword? 27 "Why did you flee secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre; 28 and did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Now you have done foolishly. 29 "It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful not to speak either good or bad to Jacob.' 30 "And now you have indeed gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house; *but why did you steal my gods?"*

Laban didn't hear that Jacob had fled until the third day after he had left. As soon as he heard it, he gathered his relatives together and went off in pursuit of Jacob. For seven days he pursued Jacob until he caught up to him in the hill country of Gilead. Laban was not just going to let Jacob slip away. We don't know what he had intended

to do initially, but God warned him in a dream not to “speak to Jacob either good or bad.” Maybe his original intent was to bring Jacob back by force, or to kill Jacob and bring everyone and everything else back. But God stepped in and warned him not to mess with Jacob.

When Laban caught up with Jacob he indicted him. He said that Jacob had deceived him and carried his daughters away like captives of the sword. He asked why he had fled secretly without telling him and why he had not allowed him to kiss his grandchildren. He said that he would have sent them off with a great celebration and a party. Laban was angry and let Jacob know. He did, however, exaggerate the situation. Jacob had not “carried away” his daughters like captives, but they were willing and happy to go with him. They were very unhappy with their father and how he had treated them and their husband. Laban was not without blame in this, as Jacob will point out. Laban had created a hostile environment for Jacob. Jacob had little reason to trust that Laban would have sent him away in a friendly way, or would have allowed him to leave with anything but the clothes on his back.

Laban pointed out that he could harm Jacob if he wanted to. He had the power to overwhelm Jacob and take his family and things by force, but he was not going to do so because of the warning of God. The implication is, I think, that Laban had intended to harm Jacob, and he wanted Jacob to know it. He had gathered his forces and had rode out with his posse to take vengeance on Jacob. In his mind he was justified in doing this, because he saw Jacob as a thief who had taken his daughters and most of his wealth. He wanted Jacob to know that the only reason he refrained from doing him harm was because of the warning of God. He was not afraid of Jacob, but was afraid of Jacob's God! This is the same thing that restrained the Jewish Sanhedrin from killing the apostles as we read in Acts 5. The teacher Gamaliel warned them and said, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody; and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. And he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away *some* people after him, he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." (Acts 5:35-39.) You cannot overthrow a movement that God has initiated. You oppose a man that God favors at your peril.

The one thing that Laban understood about Jacob's motives is that he “longed greatly” for his father's house. Jacob had let it be known that he was longing to return home to see his father and family again, and Laban understood this. But, Laban finally asked, “why did you steal my gods?” He knew that Jacob wanted to go home, but could not understand why he had stolen his gods. Why would Jacob want those things? He had his own God who was taking care of him, why should he want to take Laban's images? Not only was Laban angry because of Jacob's deception, but he was also angry because he believed that Jacob had taken his gods, and he demanded an explanation.

Genesis 31:31-35

31 Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Lest you would take your daughters from me by force.' 32 "The one with whom you find your gods shall not live; in the

presence of our kinsmen point out what is yours among my belongings and take *it* for yourself." For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. 33 So Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two maids, but he did not find *them*. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. 34 Now Rachel had taken the household idols and put them in the camel's saddle, and she sat on them. And Laban felt through all the tent, but did not find *them*. 35 And she said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is upon me." So he searched, but did not find the household idols.

Jacob responded to Laban's questions by explaining that he was afraid of Laban, and that is why he fled secretly as he did. He spelled out his specific fear, "for I said, 'Lest you would take your daughters from me by force.'" He thought that if he told Laban that he was leaving, Laban would take Rachel and Leah and all his children from him. He knew Laban and knew that he would not be pleased that Jacob was leaving with his daughters and grandchildren and that he would probably never see them again. Jacob had fallen from favor with him and he had become hostile toward him, so Jacob was justified in feeling threatened. But Jacob also had the promise of God that he should have trusted rather than acting in fear.

Not knowing that Rachel had stolen the household gods of Laban, Jacob made a promise that the one found with them would die. Jacob did not know that these images were with him and thought he had nothing to hide. Rachel did have something to hide, however, and cleverly concealed them in the saddle of her camel and sat on it. Jacob invited Laban to look through their belongings and find whatever it was that belonged to him, to point it out to their kinsmen and to take it. He felt confident that nothing would be found, and sure enough, nothing was found, though Laban conducted a thorough search. Rachel told her father that she could not rise before him because she was having her period. Whether this was true or not, we don't know, but we do know that she was concealing these household idols and used her period as an excuse. Lying and deception and trickery seems to have been a way of life for these people.

Genesis 31:36-42

36 Then Jacob became angry and contended with Laban; and Jacob answered and said to Laban, "What is my transgression? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? 37 "Though you have felt through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set *it* here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. 38 "These twenty years I *have been* with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks. 39 "That which was torn *of beasts* I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself. You required it of my hand *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night. 40 "Thus I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. 41 "These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times. 42 "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, so He rendered judgment last night."

Laban's questions had been asked and answered. Jacob fled secretly because he was afraid. He knew the character of Laban and that Laban would have taken everything from him if he could have. Jacob had not stolen Laban's gods, and was ignorant of the fact that Rachel had. Now it is time for Jacob to ask his questions and to level his charges and complaints against Laban.

First, Jacob pointed out that Laban was pursuing him like a criminal though there was no justification for it. Laban could not point to any criminal action on the part of

Jacob. Jacob had not sinned nor transgressed against Laban. The kinsmen who came with Laban could judge this for themselves, they could see that he had done nothing wrong. Laban could produce no evidence of a crime committed against him. Yes, he deceived Laban by not telling him he was leaving, but he did it for what he thought were good reasons.

Second, Jacob pointed out the hardships and oppression that he had suffered while working for Laban. We learn here that Jacob had spent 20 years working for Laban. During that time, he had taken good care of Laban's flocks and herds. He had not eaten any of the rams of the flocks. He had himself borne the loss of animals that had been killed by beasts, because Laban required him to do so. Jacob went a bit over the top with the dramatics, I think, when he complained about being consumed by the heat of day and the frost by night and suffering sleepless nights. He was trying to paint a picture of great suffering at the hands of the slavedriver Laban. Further, though he had served Laban for 20 years, 14 for Rachel and Leah, and six years for his flock, Laban changed his wages ten times. Laban continued to try to cheat him out of his just earnings.

Jacob's final accusation was that if God had not favored him, Laban would have sent him away empty-handed. God rendered judgment between them when Laban could not find anything that belonged to him among Jacob's goods. That was Jacob's view and the reason that Jacob was so angry. Jacob said, "God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, so He rendered judgment last night." Jacob realized that God was watching over him and looking out for him and had not allowed Laban to exploit him. God is the God who sees. He takes note of how we are treated by others.

Genesis 31:43-55

43 Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and 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? 44 "So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me." 45 Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46 And Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." So they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. 47 Now Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. 48 And Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me this day." Therefore it was named Galeed; 49 and Mizpah, for he said, "May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. 50 "If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, *although* no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me." 51 And Laban said to Jacob, "Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me. 52 "This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. 53 "The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. 54 Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain. 55 And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

Laban responded by saying, in effect, "Mine, mine, mine!" Jacob's wives were his daughters. Jacob's children were his "children" (grandchildren). Jacob's flocks were his flocks. Everything Jacob had came from Laban. This was his perspective. He saw Jacob as a man who took away his things, and he was still possessive towards them. He would not admit that Jacob had earned these things as his wages as they both had agreed in the past. He had not let go of them. When we give something to someone, we must let that thing go. We must not come back later and try to reclaim it

as our own. Whether it is a possession, money, valuable item or even a son or daughter, they do not belong to us any longer once we have given them away. Especially when our children marry we must let them go and not resent their spouse. They belong to that person and no longer to us. Laban had agreed to Jacob's terms of employment, and now he could not go back on the agreement.

After stating his case, Laban said, "But what can I do?" He was most concerned about his daughters and their children. He couldn't do anything about it. He had to let Jacob go because God had told him not to interfere. But he did have a proposal. He suggested that he and Jacob could make a covenant with each other and come to an agreement. Laban was the one who put an end to the argument and proposed a solution. We must give him credit for this. When there is an argument someone at some point needs to do this, to propose an arrangement that both parties can agree to and live with. Laban proposed what we might call a "non-aggression" pact. He would not pass this particular spot to harm Jacob, and Jacob would not pass the spot to harm Laban. Further, Laban warned that he expected that Jacob would not mistreat his daughters or take any other wives for himself besides his daughters. He called on the Lord to be a witness between them. Jacob did not add anything to the covenant, but simply agreed to it and swore to it by the God of Isaac. The covenant sounded reasonable to Jacob. It allowed Jacob to go his way with no further hindrance from Laban. It gave Laban assurance that his daughters would be treated well and would be esteemed by Jacob, and that as Jacob grew in strength he would not come back to inflict some sort of vengeance on Laban.

Jacob set up a pillar and had all of his relatives there gather stones and pile them into a heap. Laban said that the heap would be a witness of their covenant. Laban and Jacob named the heap. Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed. Both words mean "heap of the testimony." The names have the same meaning. They also called it Mizpah, a watchtower. The heap would stand as a witness to their covenant. It would remind both of them of the vows that they had sworn to each other that day. The kinsmen who were there as well would be witnesses of this covenant. As they made this covenant, Laban invoked the name of the Lord and said, "May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other." He pointed out to Jacob that God was witness between them even when no man was around. He did not want Jacob to think that once he was out of Laban's oversight that no one was watching him. He reminded Jacob that the Lord was still watching him and would hold him accountable.

Once they had sworn their oath to each other, Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and he and all his kinsmen there ate together and spent the night together there. Jacob acknowledged the Lord and worshipped Him there on that mountain with Laban. The next day, early in the morning, Laban left after kissing his sons and daughters and blessing them. Jacob was on his way back home now with no further hindrances from Laban.

Genesis 32:1-12

Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. 2 And Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim. 3 Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4 He also commanded them saying, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: 'Thus says your servant Jacob, "I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; 5 and I have oxen and donkeys *and* flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.'"" 6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to

your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." 7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; 8 for he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape."

9 And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who didst say to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,' 10 I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which Thou hast shown to Thy servant; for with my staff *only* I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. 11 "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, the mothers with the children. 12 "For Thou didst say, 'I will surely prosper you, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"

After Jacob departed from the meeting with Laban and as he traveled, the angels of God met him. It seems as though they were waiting for him and as he came to the place where they were, they met him. Jacob said, "This is God's camp" and called the place Mahanaim, which means "double camp." The word for "camp" can mean "encampment" and can mean an army. I think that what Jacob was saying was that these angels were the host of God, God's forces encamped in that place. They had been waiting for him and met him as he came from Laban. I think what the Lord was doing was trying to reassure Jacob that he was safe, that he was well protected, that His forces were going with him as he faced the prospect of an encounter with Esau.

Clearly, Jacob was anxious about meeting Esau. He sent some of his servants ahead to tell Esau that he was coming and to seek his favor. He used very humble and conciliatory language in his message to Esau. He called Esau "my lord Esau" and referred to himself as "your servant Jacob." He told Esau how he had stayed with Laban and had become wealthy, acquiring oxen, donkeys, flocks, servants and so forth. He needed Esau's favor in order to re-settle in the land with him near Isaac. Jacob needed to humble himself before Esau and so he did. He didn't exactly ask forgiveness for the things he had done, but he did request Esau's favor, and expressed respect for his status.

When the messengers came back to Jacob they reported that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. Esau had become a powerful man. This really rattled Jacob. He was "greatly afraid and distressed." He divided his people and possessions into two groups, thinking that if Esau attacked one, then the other could escape. It seems that he was sure that Esau had a hostile intent toward him. He couldn't see another interpretation of what Esau was doing. Why would Esau bring 400 men with him if he did not intend to attack? It is possible that Esau was also fearful of Jacob. Esau knew that Jacob had schemed to supplant him, that Jacob had bought his birthright and had stolen his blessing, and maybe now he was afraid that Jacob was coming with forces of his own to overthrow him and take his place in the land. Maybe he wanted to show Jacob that this would not be an easy task!

In verses 9-12 we read Jacob's prayer. This is exactly what he needed to do at this time. He needed to stand by faith on the promises of God. Jacob addressed God as the God of his father Abraham and his father Isaac. There was continuity in this relationship. The same God who had spoken to Abraham and Isaac was now his God as well. Jacob had inherited the promises made to Abraham and Isaac.

Jacob reminded God of two things that He had said. God had told him to return to his country and relatives and had said that He would prosper him. It was because

God had commanded him that he had come and was now facing Esau and his 400 men. God had also promised that He would prosper Jacob and give him descendants like the sand of the sea, which could not be numbered. This could not happen if Esau killed them all. His requests in this prayer are based on God's command and on God's promises. He appealed to God on the basis of the promises and commands of God to him. When we ask things of the Lord, we need to base our requests on His purposes and not our own. We need to point out to the Lord that what we are asking is necessary to fulfill His purpose. This is for our sake, not His. We need to demonstrate that we are seeking His kingdom first, that we are walking in harmony with His purposes.

Jacob, in his prayer, also confessed his unworthiness. He realized that he had not deserved any of the blessings of God. God had shown him great lovingkindness and faithfulness. God had fulfilled His promises and protected him and provided for him. God always pours out blessings on people who are unworthy. There is no one who is worthy of God's blessing. We are blessed because God is gracious, not because we are worthy.

Jacob's specific request was that God would deliver him from the hand of Esau. He told God he was afraid that Esau would attack him and the mothers with the children as well. He had far more to lose now than he did when he left this land. He now had wives and children, and he was concerned about them as well as himself. He asked God to rescue him. He trusted in the Lord based on the Lord's promise to make him a multitude. Too often our prayers are too general. We need to ask specifically if we want to receive specifically. Jacob asked for deliverance from Esau. We must ask God to do what we want Him to do.

Genesis 32:13-21

So he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: 14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15 thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. 16 And he delivered *them* into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on before me, and put a space between droves." 17 And he commanded the one in front, saying, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these *animals* in front of you belong?' 18 then you shall say, 'These belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.'" 19 Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, "After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; 20 and you shall say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.'" For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me." 21 So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp.

Jacob got together a huge present of livestock for Esau. He was going to give him 220 goats, 220 sheep, 30 milking camels and their colts, 40 cows and 10 bulls and 30 donkeys, about 580 animals in all (assuming one colt per milking camel). He organized them into droves and had his servants maintain a space between each drove of animals. The servants were instructed to tell Esau that these animals were a present from his "servant" Jacob, and that Jacob followed behind them. The purpose of this present was to appease Esau. He saw the need to do this, to appease the anger of his brother toward him. He needed to turn aside the wrath he thought his brother still harbored toward him. Jacob had not forgotten what he had done to Esau, nor had he forgotten Esau's threat to kill him. You do not send presents to your enemies, and

Jacob was demonstrating to Esau that he had no hostile intent, but wanted to treat him as a brother and be treated as a brother. Sharing a generous gift from his wealth, he hoped, would do this. His hope was that Esau would accept him, and that the gift would open the door for him.

Genesis 32:22-32

Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 And he took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had. 24 Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 And he said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. 30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for *he said*, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved." 31 Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Peniel, and he was limping on his thigh. 32 Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.

Jacob sent his family and possessions ahead of him across the Jabbok river, and he stayed behind. I'm not sure why he did this, we are not told. Maybe he thought that Esau's dispute was with him and that Esau should meet his family and see all his livestock before encountering him. Maybe Esau's heart would be softened toward him when he saw Jacob's family.

While he stayed behind that night, he wrestled with a man all night. This is an odd thing, but clearly from the context we are to understand that this "man" was an angel of God. He had encountered the angels of God at their encampment at Mahanaim, so we understand that they were with him and were looking out for him. We are not told why this angel came to Jacob or how or why the wrestling match started. We do note, though, that Jacob would not let go of him until the angel blessed him. The angel for some reason could not prevail over Jacob. Jacob must have been a very strong man who was determined not to let this angel go until he blessed him. The angel touched the socket of Jacob's thigh and dislocated it, but still Jacob held on to him, telling the angel that he would not let go unless he blessed him. Jacob was determined to get God's blessing and would not give up until he got it. Too few of us have this determination! God would bless us abundantly but we don't seek it! We don't look for it. We believe Satan's lie that God's blessings are out of reach because we are too sinful or because God doesn't really care for us. Jacob demanded that the angel bless him and wouldn't let him go until he did. He wanted to know for sure that God was watching out for him and would keep His promises.

The angel asked Jacob what his name was, and Jacob told him. The angel then replied that he would now have a new name. He would no longer be called Jacob ("heel-catcher"), but now his name would be Israel. Israel means "strives with God." The word is from *sarah* - to prevail:--have power (as a prince) and 'el - strength; as adjective, mighty; especially the Almighty (but used also of any deity):--God.¹⁹ Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary says this about the name Israel:

ISRAEL [IS ray ell] (*he strives with God*) — the name given to JACOB after his

¹⁹ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

great struggle with God at Peniel near the brook Jabbok (Gen. 32:28; 35:10). The name Israel has been interpreted by different scholars as “prince with God,” “he strives with God,” “let God rule,” or “God strives.” The name was later applied to the descendants of Jacob. The twelve tribes were called “Israelites,” “children of Israel,” and “house of Israel,” identifying them as the descendants of Israel through his sons and grandsons.²⁰

The angel explained the name change by saying, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.” The word translated “striven” here is *sarah*. Jacob had striven and struggled with men; with Esau, with Laban, with Laban's sons, and no doubt with others, and had prevailed. Jacob now had even struggled with God and had prevailed! He had come out on top! Even God had, in a sense, conceded victory to Jacob! I think God was pleased to do this, though, because as we've seen, Jacob was seeking God's blessing. God is pleased to give you what you want if what you want is what He desires to give you! God wanted to bless and prosper Jacob for His purposes and for His name's sake, and Jacob came to insist that God do so and that God keep His promises.

The angel had asked for Jacob's name, so Jacob asked for his name as well. But the angel replied, “Why is it that you ask my name?” There was no need for him to know the name of the angel. Or perhaps the angel was saying that Jacob already knew his name. Maybe he was implying that he was the Lord God Himself! This would explain Jacob's statement, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.” On the eve of his encounter with Esau, at a time when Jacob faced the greatest fear of his life, it is possible that the Lord Himself came to him to reassure him that all would be well.

Jacob called the place where he wrestled with the angel Peniel. The word means “face of God.” Penuel is an alternate spelling of the same word. Jacob was amazed that he had seen God face to face and lived. Later, God would say to Moses, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” (Exodus 33:20 NASB.) Yet Jacob saw God, or so he thought. Abraham saw the Lord come to him in the form of a man in Genesis 18. Many saw Jesus, God incarnate, face to face and lived, even those who were unbelievers. God must mean that no man can see His glorified form and live. When He takes on human form, we may look on Him and survive. God has to accommodate Himself to us in order to communicate with us. He stoops low so that we might see Him face to face.

Jacob had prevailed over the angel and had been blessed, but it cost him. Now he was limping because the angel had touched his thigh and dislocated it. He was injured because he wrestled with God. God will sometimes injure us if we need it. He gave Paul a “thorn in the flesh” to humble him and keep him from exalting himself. When Paul asked the Lord to remove it, He refused and said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9.) Injury, weakness and pain is sometimes part of His gracious plan for us. We may not enjoy this truth or

²⁰Ronald F. Youngblood, general editor; F.F. Bruce and R.K. Harrison, consulting editors, *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary: An authoritative one-volume reference work on the Bible with full color illustrations [computer file], electronic edition of the revised edition of Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary, Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995.

desire it, but He does not always want us to be pain-free. Pain often is part of His purpose for us.

Jacob's injury impacted the practices of his descendants for generations. They would not eat the sinew of the hip on the socket of the thigh because that is the part of Jacob that God touched. It was a means of remembering that Jacob wrestled with God and how he got the name Israel, and why they were called the Israelites.

Genesis 33:1-11

Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. 2 And he put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. 3 But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. 4 Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. 5 And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children, and said, "Who are these with you?" So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." 6 Then the maids came near with their children, and they bowed down. 7 And Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down. 8 And he said, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met?" And he said, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." 9 But Esau said, "I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own." 10 And Jacob said, "No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably. 11 "Please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have plenty." Thus he urged him and he took *it*.

Jacob was greatly relieved when he saw that Esau was not going to attack him. His anxiety about Esau was set aside. They embraced one another and wept together. Esau was glad to see Jacob. Jacob humbled himself and bowed down before Esau seven times and called himself "your servant" and called Esau "my lord." His wives and servants and children also bowed down before Esau. He wanted to show Esau that he recognized Esau's power and authority in the land, and that he was submitting himself to him. He did not want Esau to think that he had returned to contest him in any way. For his part, Esau brought his 400 men perhaps as a show of power, to show Jacob who was in charge. Perhaps Esau was concerned that Jacob was going to attack him!

As they approached Esau we see an indication of Jacob's favoritism within his family in the way that he arranged them. He put the maids and their children first, then Leah and her children, then Rachel with Joseph last. When he thought that Esau might attack them, he wanted to protect Rachel and Joseph especially. He cared the least about the maids and their children. Rachel was the one he really loved and so Joseph was his favorite son. We will see the resentment this will cause later on. We need not treat all of our children the same, but we do need to show that they are all equally loved and equally valuable. We must be careful about communicating to one that they are not as important as the other, or that we will protect and provide for one but not the other.

Esau had some questions. First, he asked, "Who are these with you?" So Jacob introduced his family. Again, the maids and their children came first, then Leah and her children, and last Rachel and Joseph. Note that Joseph is the only child named.

The second question was, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met?" Esau was puzzled by all the droves of livestock that Jacob had sent ahead of him. Jacob replied that it was a gift he had sent in order to find favor in Esau's sight. He hoped by sending the gift to cause Esau to be gracious to him and spare his life.

Esau tried to refuse the gift, saying that he had plenty, but Jacob insisted, saying that it would be an indication that Esau would be gracious and favorable to him. In accepting the gift, Esau was saying that he would be gracious. It would relieve Jacob's fear and set him at ease if Esau would take the gift, and so he did.

Jacob gave two reasons for Esau to take his gift. First, he said that God had been gracious to him, and second, that he had plenty. It was because of God's graciousness that he had plenty. His material prosperity had come from God and was not earned nor deserved by Jacob. Jacob saw his blessings as the gracious gift of God. We must learn this lesson also. Every good thing we have is a gift of God's grace. Salvation is not the only thing we receive by the grace of God. Our very lives, the food we eat, the clothing we wear, the houses we live in, are all gifts of God's grace. We deserve nothing good from Him, so any good we have is because of His grace. James says, "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow." (James 1:17.) This is why we must thank Him for everything in our lives.

Genesis 33:12-20

Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you." ¹³ But he said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. ¹⁴ "Please let my lord pass on before his servant; and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir." ¹⁵ And Esau said, "Please 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." ¹⁶ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir.

¹⁷ And Jacob journeyed to Succoth; and built for himself a house, and made booths for his livestock, therefore the place is named Succoth. ¹⁸ Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city. ¹⁹ And he bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. ²⁰ Then he erected there an altar, and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

These brothers still do not see eye-to-eye on things. They are still very different men. Esau was still a man of action, and proposed that they get moving and get back home. Jacob was still a shepherd and livestock manager. He knew that if they drove the flocks and herds too hard they would die. He needed to take his time and could not hurry along at Esau's pace. They agreed that Esau would go on ahead and Jacob would take a slower pace that the children and livestock could manage. Jacob agreed that he would meet Esau again at Seir. Esau suggested that he could leave some of his men with Jacob to protect him and help him, but Jacob did not see the need. The personalities of these two men have not changed, but they both have mellowed it seems. Esau had laid aside his grudge toward Jacob and Jacob had been humbled and had come to see the need to make peace with Esau.

Esau went on to Seir and Jacob went to Succoth and built a house there. I believe this is the first mention of any of the descendants of Abraham building a house. He also built booths for his livestock, and so named the place "Succoth" which means "booths." Jacob was a man who took good care of his livestock.

For some reason Jacob did not stay at Succoth, but crossed the Jordan and camped near Shechem. He bought the land where he camped from the son's of Hamor, who was Shechem's father, for 100 pieces of money. Once he owned the land, he built an altar on it and called it El-Elohe-Israel, which means "God-the Mighty God of

Israel.” The Lord had fulfilled His promise to bring Jacob back safely to the land of his fathers, and so Jacob set up an altar to worship the Lord there and to honor the Lord for His faithfulness. He had seen God work for him, and worship was his response. Now the Lord was indeed his God. He belonged to the Lord and the Lord belonged to him.

Genesis 34:1-7

Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. 2 And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her by force. 3 And he was deeply attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. 4 So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this young girl for a wife." 5 Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; but his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob kept silent until they came in. 6 Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. 7 Now the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard *it*; and the men were grieved, and they were very angry because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done.

Dinah was the daughter of Jacob by Leah, and she went out to get acquainted with the women in the area around Shechem. While she was there Shechem, the prince of the land, saw her and took her and raped her. He evidently felt that since he was the prince, he could do whatever he wanted and have whatever he wanted. Since his father was king, he would not be punished for any wrongdoing. When those in power and in privileged positions feel that they are above the law and can do whatever they please, it opens the door to all kinds of abuses and atrocities. We see it often in history. Absolute power does corrupt. We see it in Hitler, in Saddam Hussein, Stalin and many others. Besides this, it appears to me that Shechem was spoiled by his father. His father would get him whatever he wanted. He wanted Dinah very badly. He was very attracted to her, and he loved her. He went to his father and said, "Get me this young girl for a wife." It was not a request, but a demand, an order. He ordered his father to get him the girl. This indicates to me that he was used to getting what he wanted from his father. Hamor had allowed his son to become a tyrant, and he and his son will pay for it.

Jacob heard about what had happened. Dinah had been defiled. She had been contaminated, polluted. What Shechem had done was like pouring toxic chemicals into a clean river. As far as other men were concerned, Dinah was now unmarriageable. She was no longer a virgin because of the selfishness and lust of this one man.

Though Jacob heard about the rape, he said nothing about it until his sons came in from working in the fields. I presume that he told his sons about the incident and they were grieved and angry. Shechem had done a disgraceful thing, a thing that should not be done. The word for "disgraceful" here means that he had done a foolish thing. The King James version says that he had "wrought folly" by raping Dinah. Rape is a foolish, disgraceful thing that ruins a woman.

Genesis 34:8-17

But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage. 9 "And intermarry with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. 10 "Thus you shall live with us, and the land shall be *open* before you; live and trade in it, and acquire property in it." 11 Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, "If I find favor in your sight, then I will give whatever you say to me. 12 "Ask me ever so much bridal payment and gift, and I will give according as you say to me; but give me the girl in marriage." 13 But Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor, with deceit, and spoke to them, because he had defiled Dinah

their sister. 14 And they said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. 15 "Only on this *condition* will we consent to you: if you will become like us, in that every male of you be circumcised, 16 then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live with you and become one people. 17 "But if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go."

Hamor came to Jacob and to his sons and asked that Dinah be given to Shechem as his wife. Shechem was with him and promised to give whatever bridal price they asked. Hamor explained that the soul of Shechem was longing for Dinah. He proposed not only one marriage, but that they merge as a people, that Jacob and his family should join them and intermarry with them and live in the land with them. He proposed that Jacob should become part of their culture and nation. This would have been a grievous mistake, because God had planned to make a great nation of Israel, not that they should merge with some other people. They were stay separate and distinct. Hamor presented a great temptation to Jacob that he was wise to decline.

I'm not sure where Jacob himself was in this negotiation, because it says in verse 11 that Shechem was speaking to "her father and to her brothers," then in verse 13 we find that it is Jacob's sons who answered Shechem and Hamor. Maybe they had taken some time apart to think it over and the sons had come up with their answer. It's clear that Jacob's sons conspired together, but it is also clear that Jacob did not know about their plan.

The response that Jacob's sons gave was deceitful. They said that they could not give Dinah in marriage to one who was uncircumcised. They said that it would be disgraceful to them to do this. They would consent to give Dinah to them and to intermarry with them if they would circumcise themselves. That was the condition they laid down. But they were lying. They had no intention of giving Dinah to them or intermarrying with them. This was not just an excuse for refusing to give Dinah to Shechem, but they were seeking an opportunity for revenge and even more.

Genesis 34:18-24

Now their words seemed reasonable to Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son. 19 And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. Now he was more respected than all the household of his father. 20 So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city, and spoke to the men of their city, saying, 21 "These men are friendly with us; therefore let them live in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters in marriage, and give our daughters to them. 22 "Only on this *condition* will the men consent to us to live with us, to become one people: that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised. 23 "Will not their livestock and their property and all their animals be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will live with us." 24 And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and to his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

Hamor and Shechem thought that what Jacob's sons said was reasonable and that they were not asking too much. They did not know their real intent in requiring this. Shechem circumcised himself immediately. He was eager to do what they required because of his love for Dinah. They went back to the elders of the city and convinced them that they all should do this. They thought that it would be to their advantage to absorb Jacob's family into their nation. They thought that all of their livestock and wealth would become theirs through intermarriage. They thought that these men were friendly towards them. They were completely deceived.

Deception is a powerful weapon against an enemy. If you can trick your enemy

into doing what you want him to do, you can more easily defeat him. This is especially true if your enemy thinks that you are his friend. If he is unaware of your hostile intent, you can easily surprise and defeat him. This is what Jacob's sons did, but they went overboard with it. They did not follow legal means to prosecute the one man who had committed a crime against their sister, but they wiped out an entire city of men because of the one man's crime.

Genesis 34:25-31

Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male. 26 And they killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went forth. 27 Jacob's sons came upon the slain and looted the city, because they had defiled their sister. 28 They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which was in the field; 29 and they captured and looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives, even all that was in the houses.

30 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I shall be destroyed, I and my household." 31 But they said, "Should he treat our sister as a harlot?"

Simeon and Levi came upon the city with their swords on the third day, when they had all circumcised themselves and were in pain, and killed all the men of the city. It must have been a small city if these two men were able to kill all the men there. They killed Hamor and Shechem as well and retrieved Dinah from Shechem's house. We find that Dinah was there with him. Whether she had consented to stay with him or he had taken her is not clear to me from this text. After Simeon and Levi had killed all the men, the others came and looted the city, taking their wealth, their livestock, their children and wives and all that they had. This seems a rather extreme response to the rape of their sister. They must have felt that they had no legal recourse against Shechem for what he had done, since his father was the king and was not taking any action against him. Their deception and murder, however, was far from reasonable.

Why had they done this? Twice we are told that it was because Shechem had "defiled their sister" (verse 13 and 27). It was an act of revenge, and not an act of justice. It was an angry and impulsive act. They were right to be angry, but they were not right to destroy an entire city because of one man's crime.

Jacob chewed out Simeon and Levi because of what they had done. He feared that now the people of the land would be hostile toward him and his family because of what they had done. He did not rebuke them for the wrongness of what they had done, but for the effect of what they had done. He feared that the other peoples of the land would rise up against him and destroy him. Jacob should have taken charge of the situation to begin with. He should have confronted Shechem and Hamor with the evil that they had done and refused to give Dinah to them. He should have directed his sons as to what they were and were not to do. Jacob was too "hands off" with his sons and they were uncontrolled. Ultimately the responsibility for what happened lay with him. He had failed to lead and so things were out of hand.

Genesis 35:1-5

Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and live there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." 2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves, and change

your garments; 3 and 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 wherever I have gone." 4 So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem. 5 As they journeyed, there was a great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

Once again Jacob is on the run, this time because of the impulsive violence of his sons. God told him to move, however, so this initiative came from Him. The Lord told him to move to Bethel and settle there and build Him an altar there. It was there that God had first appeared to him when he was running from Esau. There he had previously set up a pillar as a monument to the Lord and had named the place Bethel. He had promised when he was there that if the Lord kept His promises to him that the Lord would be his God and that the stone he set up would be God's house and that he would give a tenth of all he had to the Lord (Genesis 28:11-22). Now it was time for Jacob to go back to Bethel and build an altar to worship the Lord.

Jacob spoke to his family and all who were with him in his household. He called on them to put away their foreign gods. Up to this point he had tolerated them, but now it was time to clean his house. Now they would go to Bethel and he would formally take the Lord as his God, and he expected his whole household to follow him. There would be no more place for foreign gods among them. He called on them to purify themselves and to change their clothes. It was a new day for the household of Jacob. The old things were to be cast aside in order for the new commitment to the Lord to take hold. There is a time when we all must come to this point if we are going to follow the Lord. We cannot just add the Lord to our other gods and beliefs. He must take first place and other things must be cast aside. If we will not lay aside our "foreign gods" then He will not take first place in our lives.

The Lord protected Jacob and his household as they traveled to Bethel. He caused the people in the cities along the way to be terrified of them. We don't know how He did this, but this is something He can do. When God wants to protect His people, He is able to do it. These people may have wanted to pursue Jacob, but they did not because of the fear that the Lord had put in their hearts. The servant of the Lord does not need to fear those around him as long as he is doing the will of God. As long as God has a purpose for you on this earth He will protect you.

Genesis 35:6-15

So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. 7 And he built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him, when he fled from his brother. 8 Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; it was named Allon-bacuth. 9 Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. 10 And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; You shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name." Thus He called him Israel. 11 God also said to him, "I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, And kings shall come forth from you. 12 "And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, And I will give the land to your descendants after you." 13 Then God went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him. 14 And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a libation on it; he also poured oil on it. 15 So Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.

Jacob did as God had commanded. He went to Bethel and built an altar. He named it El-Bethel, "The God of Bethel." He called it this because it was there that God

had revealed Himself to him when he was running from Esau. This was a special place where Jacob encountered God. We must remember in our relationship to God, though, that He is not limited to one place. He can meet us anywhere. We don't have to go to a certain camp or beautiful mountain retreat to encounter Him. At the same time, we must remember those times when we have met Him in a special way and the challenges He has issued and the commitments we have made to Him. Bethel was the place where God made a covenant with Jacob, and when he returned, Jacob remembered his commitment.

While Jacob was at Bethel Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, died and was buried at Bethel under the oak that was there. They named the oak "Allon-bacuth," "Oak of weeping." Obviously this was a dear lady who had died and they mourned for her there. This is the first mention of Rebekah since chapter 29 verse 12 where Jacob told Rachel that he was the son of Rebekah. I am not sure why Deborah was with them here. It is possible that Isaac and Rebekah were there with Jacob and his family, though why they are not mentioned I am not sure. We are told that Jacob came to Isaac in this chapter in verse 27, but I don't know for sure why Deborah would have been there with Jacob apart from Rebekah.

Once again God Almighty appeared to Jacob at Bethel and again blessed him. God formally renamed him Israel. Jacob was to no longer be called Jacob, but Israel. He was no longer just Mr. "Heel-Grabber," but now would be known as the one who strives with God. This name will become the name of the nation. They would be known as those who struggle and strive with God. That will be their history and is still their history. The name is descriptive of the man and of the nation.

After changing his name, God gave Israel a command and a promise. The command was the same one He had given to the animals in Genesis 1:22, to man in Genesis 1:28, to Noah in 9:1 and 7, and now here to Israel. He said, "Be fruitful and multiply." His command was that the nation should grow and increase. It is a great blessing when God wants us to grow and increase. This is His command to His people. Those who do not want to grow and increase violate the command of God. This is His first command to us! Those who marry but choose not to have children should re-think their decision. God's command is that we be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and He prefers that the godly do so rather than the ungodly!

The promise was that Israel would become a nation and a company of nations, and that kings would come from him. He would be fruitful. Further, He promised that the land He had promised to Abraham and Isaac would be his. The land would be given to his descendants, not the descendants of Esau or anyone else. This is why the Jews have a claim on that land, because God promised it to them. It was and is His purpose that they should possess that land. That is why He keeps bringing them back there and it is also why efforts to destroy them and drive them out will not succeed. Israel is a living witness to the faithfulness of God and the trustworthiness of His promises. He has always left a remnant of Jews, and He has brought them back to their land.

Jacob again memorialized his conversation with God there at Bethel by setting up a stone pillar and pouring a libation and oil on it. His response to God's word was to worship and honor Him. He wanted everyone to know that here was the place that God had spoken to him.

Genesis 35:16-20

Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and she suffered severe labor. 17 And it came about when she was in severe labor that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for now you have *another* son." 18 And it came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. 19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). 20 And Jacob set up a pillar over her grave; that is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin, only her second son. A time that should have been a time of great joy became a time of great sorrow. The midwife tried to comfort Rachel by telling her that she had another son. Just as she was dying she named him Ben-oni, meaning "son of my sorrow." Jacob would not call him Ben-oni, but changed his name to Benjamin, "son of my right hand." This boy would become a very precious person to Jacob. He was his youngest son and the second son of his most beloved wife. Rachel would bear him no more children. The woman he loved left him one final gift, and he would not call him "son of my sorrow."



At the time that Moses wrote Genesis the pillar of Rachel's grave could still be seen. In fact, the tomb of Rachel can still be visited today. Here is a photograph of the structure that is built around Rachel's tomb near Bethlehem. Jacob and Rachel were real people who really existed in time and history. We cannot pass off the writings of Moses as mere mythology. These people really existed. Rachel really was buried where the Bible says she was buried. One of the great things about Christianity and Judaism is that they are built upon a solid historical foundation. The things we believe are not based on mere legends or made up stories. These things really happened.

Genesis 35:21-26

Then Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. 22 And it came about while Israel was dwelling in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard *of it*.

Now there were twelve sons of Jacob-- 23 the sons of Leah: Reuben, Jacob's first-born, then Simeon and Levi and Judah and Issachar and Zebulun; 24 the sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin; 25 and the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naphtali; 26 and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid: Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

We can only speculate about why Reuben had sex with Bilhah. We don't know if he raped her or if she consented to him. We don't know if she may have seduced him. We do know that he was Jacob's oldest son, the son of Leah. Bilhah was the maid of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife. It appears that this happened not long after the death of Rachel. This may have been a vulnerable time for Bilhah, having lost the one that she was there to serve. She may have been nervous about her place in the family and thought that if she got friendly with Reuben it would improve things for her. Perhaps Reuben may have desired Bilhah for some time, but Rachel was in his way. With her out of the way, the opportunity was opened for him to pursue her. Whatever the reasons, this was a great perversion. He was having sex with a woman who was, in effect, the wife of his father. She was the mother of his brothers Dan and Naphtali.

Later, in chapter 49, Jacob blessed his sons just before his death. Of Reuben

he said,

"Reuben, you are my first-born; My might and the beginning of my strength, Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled *it*-- he went up to my couch." (Genesis 49:3-4.)

Jacob did not forget what Reuben had done, and it came back to sting Reuben later. He would not be given preeminence in the family because of what he had done. What he had done indicated his uncontrolled nature. One immoral act can have dire consequences for us for the rest of our lives. A cloud and shadow is over the life of Reuben because of this.

Verses 23-26 summarize the sons of Isaac. Here is a table that will help keep everyone straight:

Leah	Rachel	Bilhah	Zilpah
Reuben	Joseph	Dan	Gad
Simeon	Benjamin	Naphtali	Asher
Levi			
Judah			
Issachar			
Zebulun			

Genesis 35:27-29

And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre of Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. 28 Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. 29 And Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Now finally Isaac is mentioned again. I don't know if this is the first time that Jacob had seen Isaac since he had returned from Laban or not. It seems to me that the first thing Jacob would have done upon his return would be to go see his father and mother. Perhaps he had done so and it just wasn't mentioned. We know that Rebekah's nurse had been with Jacob, so he had probably at least seen his mother.

Isaac died at the age of 180 years. He had had a very long life and was "gathered to his people." He departed to be with his fathers. Genesis 25:26 tells us that Isaac was 60 years old when Esau and Jacob were born, so when he died at 180, Esau and Jacob themselves were 120! Jacob and Esau got together to bury Isaac. Unfortunately sometimes the only times families come together is when someone dies.

Genesis 36:1-19

Now these are *the records of* the generations of Esau (that is, Edom). 2 Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite; 3 also Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, the sister of Nebaioth. 4 And Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel, 5 and Oholibamah bore Jeush and Jalam

and Korah. These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

6 Then Esau took his wives and his sons and his daughters and all his household, and his livestock and all his cattle and all his goods which he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to *another* land away from his brother Jacob. 7 For their property had become too great for them to live together, and the land where they sojourned could not sustain them because of their livestock. 8 So Esau lived in the hill country of Seir; Esau is Edom. 9 These then are *the records of* the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir.

10 These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Esau's wife Adah, Reuel the son of Esau's wife Basemath. 11 And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho and Gatam and Kenaz. 12 And Timna was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. These are the sons of Esau's wife Adah. 13 And these are the sons of Reuel: Nahath and Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. These were the sons of Esau's wife Basemath. 14 And these were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon: she bore to Esau, Jeush and Jalam and Korah. 15 These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz, the first-born of Esau, are chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, chief Kenaz, 16 chief Korah, chief Gatam, chief Amalek. These are the chiefs descended from Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Adah. 17 And these are the sons of Reuel, Esau's son: chief Nahath, chief Zerah, chief Shammah, chief Mizzah. These are the chiefs descended from Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Esau's wife Basemath. 18 And these are the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah: chief Jeush, chief Jalam, chief Korah. These are the chiefs descended from Esau's wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. 19 These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their chiefs.

Here is a table of the wives and sons of Esau:

Adah	Oholibamah	Basemath
Eliphaz	Jeush	Reuel
	Jalam	
	Korah	

Whereas Jacob had twelve sons, Esau only had five. Nevertheless Esau prospered and he and Jacob parted ways because they had too much livestock between the two of them. Esau went southeast to the hill country of Seir and settled there. Esau became known as Edom, and his nation was called Edom. Edom means "red." It probably was kind of a nickname for Esau that stuck. It's interesting that Strong's Hebrew Dictionary says that the word Seir means "rough" and that the name Esau also means "rough." Esau was a rough man who moved to a land that was like him. He was a rough man who liked a rough land.

Verses 9-19 give us more information about the descendants of Esau. Let's see if we can trace them out.

Esau's Sons:

By Adah:

Eliphaz

Teman

Omar

Zepho

Gatam

Kenaz

Amalek (to Eliphaz by Timna)

By Basemath:

Reuel
Nahath
Zerah
Shammah
Mizzah

By Oholibamah:

Jeush
Jalam
Korah

I think that Amalek is highlighted here because his descendants attacked Israel when they were coming out of Egypt. We read about it in Exodus 17:

Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. **9** So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us, and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." **10** And Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. **11** So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. **12** But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. **13** So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. **14** Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." **15** And Moses built an altar, and named it The LORD is My Banner; **16** and he said, "The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation." (Exodus 17:8-16 NASB.)

Later, Moses reminded the people of what Amalek did in Deuteronomy 25:17-19, "Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget." They had carried out an unprovoked attack on Israel, attacking the weak and weary stragglers at the back of the company as they traveled. They were the aggressors and what they had done gave evidence that they did not fear God. Those who oppose the people of God do not have a proper fear of Him, or they would not do so.

Years later God fulfilled this promise and blotted out the nation of Amalek. In fact, it was Saul whom He commanded to do so in 1 Samuel 15. He said, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek *for* what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. **3** 'Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey'" (1 Samuel 15:2-3). Saul did not fully carry out this command, leaving the king and some of the livestock alive, but God did fulfill His promise to destroy this nation. The reason was because they had set themselves against Israel. It is a dangerous thing to set yourself against the people of God. You will find yourself fighting a fight that you are bound to lose.

Genesis 36:20-43

These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan and Shobal and Zibeon

and Anah, 21 and Dishon and Ezer and Dishan. These are the chiefs descended from the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom. 22 And the sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. 23 And these are the sons of Shobal: Alvan and Manahath and Ebal, Shepho and Onam. 24 And these are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah-- he is the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness when he was pasturing the donkeys of his father Zibeon. 25 And these are the children of Anah: Dishon, and Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. 26 And these are the sons of Dishon: Hemdan and Eshban and Ithran and Cheran. 27 These are the sons of Ezer: Bilhan and Zaavan and Akan. 28 These are the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. 29 These are the chiefs descended from the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah, 30 chief Dishon, chief Ezer, chief Dishan. These are the chiefs descended from the Horites, according to their *various* chiefs in the land of Seir.

31 Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the sons of Israel. 32 Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city was Dinhabah. 33 Then Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah became king in his place. 34 Then Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites became king in his place. 35 Then Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the field of Moab, became king in his place; and the name of his city was Avith. 36 Then Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah became king in his place. 37 Then Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth on the *Euphrates* River became king in his place. 38 Then Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor became king in his place. 39 Then Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar became king in his place; and the name of his city was Pau; and his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, daughter of Mezahab.

40 Now these are the names of the chiefs descended from Esau, according to their families *and* their localities, by their names: chief Timna, chief Alvah, chief Jetheth, 41 chief Oholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon, 42 chief Kenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibzar, 43 chief Magdiel, chief Iram. These are the chiefs of Edom (that is, Esau, the father of the Edomites), according to their habitations in the land of their possession.

It seems that everyone descended from Esau became a "chief"! They were prominent men in their tribes. Some of them became kings long before Israel had a king. These were the men who ruled in the land of Edom and who became the Edomites.

Genesis 37:1-11

Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan. 2 These are *the records* of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was *still* a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. 4 And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms. 5 Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. 6 And he said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had; 7 for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf." 8 Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. 9 Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 And he related *it* to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?" 11 And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying *in mind*.

Jacob settled in the land of Canaan where Isaac had lived. At that time, Joseph was still a youngster, just 17 years of age, and his father's favorite. The focus in Genesis now begins to shift from Jacob to Joseph. Joseph's story will be the focus of the rest of Genesis.

Joseph was with some of his brothers pasturing the flock out in the wilderness. He was out with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher. When they came back, Joseph tattled on them. He gave his father a bad report of them. He took on the role of his father's spy among his brothers. He had a closer relationship with Jacob than any of them did, and had his ear like none of the others did. Now, it does not promote peace and harmony and love among brothers if you tattle on them. No doubt they deserved the bad report, but Joseph alienated his brothers by doing this.

Joseph's brothers could all see that their father loved him more than he loved them. His favoritism was not hidden from them. Jacob honored Joseph with a multi-colored tunic that set him apart from his brothers. The brothers all hated Joseph and "could not speak to him on friendly terms." They were adversarial and hostile toward Joseph. They were unable to speak to him kindly because of their hatred for him. When you hate someone you cannot be friendly toward them. You cannot hide your feelings for long. If it is difficult for you to be kind and friendly toward someone it may be because you hate them. Sometimes we deny this, but it could be true. The roots of that hatred may be jealousy or favoritism or a feeling of inferiority. These things must be rooted out of our lives if we are to love as the Lord has commanded.

The hatred of Joseph's brothers increased toward him when he told them his dreams. Both dreams were easy to interpret. In the first, his brothers' 11 sheaves bowed down before his sheaf. In the second, the sun, moon and 11 stars were bowing down to him. According to his dreams, his whole family would bow down before him and he would rule over them. His brothers were incredulous, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" He was, besides Benjamin, the youngest of them. He was still just a kid, and yet he has these dreams that say that he is going to rule over them.

Since we know the story of Joseph, we can see that these dreams were given by God so that Joseph would have a promise to hold on to through his sufferings. They showed him his future, but not his immediate future. They showed him a reality that would take years to fulfill. The dreams were true, however. They revealed the future. He could put his confidence in the God who had given these dreams. When God gives you a "dream," keep it in front of you and pursue it. Don't let go of it regardless of what happens. God will fulfill His purpose for you if you don't give up!

When you have an unbelievable, big dream that God has given you, others will ridicule you and try to discourage you. Since it is not their dream they won't understand. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and ridiculed his dreams. His father rebuked him for his dream and questioned its validity. Jacob asked him if he really thought that they all were going to come bow down before him. The dream was questioned. Did Joseph really believe this was going to happen? It's difficult to hold on to your dreams when the most important people in your life question them. But evidently Joseph did hold on to the dream. He did believe them and trusted God who had given them to him.

Genesis 37:12-28

Then his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing *the flock* in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." And he said to him, "I will go." 14 Then he said to him, "Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. 15 And a man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, "What are you looking for?" 16 And he said, "I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they

are pasturing *the flock*." 17 Then the man said, "They have moved from here; for I heard *them* say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. 18 When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. 19 And they said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer! 20 "Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!" 21 But Reuben heard *this* and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life." 22 Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him"-- that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father.

23 So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; 24 and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it. 25 Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring *them* down to Egypt. 26 And Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 "Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; for he is our brother, our *own* flesh." And his brothers listened *to him*. 28 Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled *him* up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

Jacob did not see the depth of hostility that the 10 brothers felt toward Joseph. If he had seen it, he never would have sent Joseph off to check on them. Jacob was not in tune with what was going on in his family. He should have paid more attention to them. If he had, he might have prevented a lot of this.

Joseph's brothers saw him coming from a distance. They were aware of all that went on around them. They recognized him and plotted against him. Their words were full of venom. "Here comes this dreamer," they said. They decided to kill him, throw him into a pit, and then tell Jacob that a wild beast had devoured him. They would nullify his dreams. This was a true conspiracy. They decided together to kill him, to dispose of him, and to tell the same story about his fate. They worked out all the details. This plot would only work if they all agreed together about the details. For some reason they thought that it was in their interest to eliminate Joseph, but they didn't fully think through the consequences. They didn't think of how it would impact their father. They didn't think of the guilt that they would carry for the rest of their lives. They didn't think of how God would view this act and the fact that He would see it and deal with them. Plots like this have short-term goals with long-term consequences that we will regret our whole lives.

Thankfully, Reuben heard the plot and stepped in and rescued Joseph from death. He was the oldest, and had already brought grief to his father by sleeping with Bilhah. As the oldest, he would be held most responsible if anything happened to Joseph. He also seems to truly care about his father. Evidently he had learned something from his mistakes and saw the guilt they would bear if they killed Joseph. His plan was to restore Joseph to their father. Later, when they appeared before Joseph in Egypt, not knowing it was Joseph, they realized their guilt and were afraid that their guilt regarding Joseph had come back upon them. Reuben then reminded them, "Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood" (Genesis 42:22). He said "I told you so" when they thought they were being held to account for his blood. He was the one who stood up and tried to protect Joseph.

Instead of receiving a warm welcome one would expect from brothers, when Joseph arrived, his brothers stripped off his colorful tunic and threw him into a pit. He must have been flabbergasted! No doubt he was very naïve! He had naively shared

his dreams with his brothers. Now he comes to them expecting to be welcomed, and they take his coat and throw him into a pit! Not only did Jacob fail to see the animosity of the brothers, Joseph did not realize it until this point either. There was a great depth of hatred and jealousy here, and responsibility for it must be laid at the feet of Jacob. He had failed to communicate to his sons that they were all valuable to him. He expressed blatant favoritism toward Joseph and Benjamin, and blatant disregard for the rest of them. It's as if Rachel and her sons were the only family that he really wanted. Yes, the brothers should not have treated Joseph as they did, but the seeds of hatred were sown by their father's favoritism.

As the brothers ate their meal with Joseph down in the pit, they noticed some Ishmaelites passing by on their way to Egypt to trade. An idea occurred to Judah. He pointed out that they would gain no profit by simply killing Joseph and proposed that they should sell him. Additionally, he pointed out that Joseph was their brother and their flesh, implying that maybe they should be gracious for that reason and spare his life. So in selling him there would be two benefits. First, they would gain some income from it, and second, they would demonstrate the depth of their mercy and compassion and brotherly feelings for Joseph by sparing his life. The others agreed that it was a good idea, so they lifted Joseph out of the pit and sold him for 20 silver shekels to the Ishmaelites. Those who plot evil against others are good at spinning their deeds so that, to them, they look good and justifiable. The brothers felt Joseph deserved the treatment they gave him. They felt that they were being gracious by sparing his life. They felt that their world would be better without him around. Beware when you start thinking this way! We are told not to repay evil for evil to anyone (Romans 12:17).

Genesis 37:29-36

Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments. 30 And he returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is not *there*; as for me, where am I to go?" 31 So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat, and dipped the tunic in the blood; 32 and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, "We found this; please examine *it* to see whether it is your son's tunic or not." 33 Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" 34 So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. 35 Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him. 36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard.

Evidently Reuben was not there when they decided to sell Joseph to the Midianites, and when he returned and found that he wasn't there, he was distressed. He was the oldest and would be held most responsible for Joseph. He tore his garments and said to his brothers, "The boy is not there; as for me, where am I to go?" There is no record that the others told him what they had done with Joseph. I don't know if they told him, or just let him draw his own conclusions. His question implies that he could not go back to his father without Joseph, but he didn't know where else he could go. The decision was made that they would make it appear that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. They took Joseph's tunic, dipped it in the blood of a goat, and took it back to their father. All they told him was that they had found the tunic and asked if it was the one that belonged to his son. They would not tell him that they had stripped it off of Joseph and had thrown him into a pit. They would not tell him that they had sold him to a band of Midianite traders for twenty shekels. They would not tell him

that he was headed for Egypt in the custody of the Midianites. They just showed him the tunic and let him draw his own conclusions. Even when they saw his grief, none of them told him the truth. They let him believe that Joseph was dead in order to hide their own evil and guilt.

We can do some very cruel things to others in order to cover up our own guilt. The drive to deny and cover up our own wrongdoing is very strong and is a very twisted aspect of our fallen nature. We should expect that people will lie about their sins. We should expect that they will shift the blame if they are caught red-handed. We tend to become good at this game of covering our tracks and justifying our actions. One of the hardest things for anyone to do is to humble themselves and admit their sin and seek forgiveness, yet this is what God tells us we must do. The best thing would have been if the brothers had not abused Joseph in the first place, of course. But having done it, the next best thing would have been if they had admitted it, sought forgiveness, and then went to recover Joseph. Instead, they made matters worse for themselves and their father.

Jacob examined the tunic and knew it was Joseph's. He was sure that Joseph had been devoured by a wild beast and torn to pieces. His sons had not told him this, but he concluded it on his own. He had no hope that Joseph was still alive. The news his sons brought him was news that Joseph was dead. He did not investigate any further, he did not go out to try to find Joseph's body, he did not question his sons any further. He just assumed the worst.

In his grief Jacob was inconsolable. He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for days and days. Everyone tried to comfort him but he refused their comfort. He wept and said that he would go to the place of the dead mourning for his son. He meant that he would mourn until he died. He would not be turned from mourning. These same sons who had, in effect, told him that Joseph had been eaten by an animal, tried to comfort him, but could not. They carried the guilt of knowing that their deeds and their lies had thrown their father into a period of deep mourning and depression that would last for years.

There comes a time when mourning has gone on for too long and needs to come to an end. It is hard to say when that point comes, but it does come. Sometimes mourning extends into a thing that causes people to be selfish and neglectful of people and responsibilities. There is a time when we need to say, "Enough! It is time to move on with your life. You can't change what has happened by continuing to mourn." That sounds harsh, but sometimes it needs to be said for the good of the one in mourning, and for the good of their family and those who depend on them. David was rebuked by Joab for mourning for his son Absalom after Absalom had tried to overthrow him and had been killed in the attempt (2 Samuel 18:32 – 19:7). His mourning was not appropriate in the situation, despite the fact that Absalom was his son. As Joab said, his mourning said that he loved those who hated him and hated those who love him. There is a time when mourning needs to be cut short.

Thus Joseph came to Egypt and was sold by the Midianites to Potiphar, who was the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard. Potiphar needed more help in his household and he decided to pick up Joseph when he had the opportunity.

Genesis 38

And it came about at that time, that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. 2 And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose

name was Shua; and he took her and went in to her. 3 So she conceived and bore a son and he named him Er. 4 Then she conceived again and bore a son and named him Onan. 5 And she bore still another son and named him Shelah; and it was at Chezib that she bore him.

6 Now Judah took a wife for Er his first-born, and her name was Tamar. 7 But Er, Judah's first-born, was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD took his life. 8 Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." 9 And Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so it came about that when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground, in order not to give offspring to his brother. 10 But what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD; so He took his life also. 11 Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"; for he thought, "*I am afraid* that he too may die like his brothers." So Tamar went and lived in her father's house.

12 Now after a considerable time Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and when the time of mourning was ended, Judah went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13 And it was told to Tamar, "Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." 14 So she removed her widow's garments and covered *herself* with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife. 15 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, for she had covered her face. 16 So he turned aside to her by the road, and said, "Here now, let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" 17 He said, therefore, "I will send you a kid from the flock." She said, moreover, "Will you give a pledge until you send *it*?" 18 And he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" And she said, "Your seal and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand." So he gave *them* to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. 19 Then she arose and departed, and removed her veil and put on her widow's garments. 20 When Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. 21 And he asked the men of her place, saying, "Where is the temple prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?" But they said, "There has been no temple prostitute here." 22 So he returned to Judah, and said, "I did not find her; and furthermore, the men of the place said, 'There has been no temple prostitute here.'" 23 Then Judah said, "Let her keep them, lest we become a laughingstock. After all, I sent this kid, but you did not find her." 24 Now it was about three months later that Judah was informed, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she is also with child by harlotry." Then Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!" 25 It was while she was being brought out that she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "I am with child by the man to whom these things belong." And she said, "Please examine and see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?" 26 And Judah recognized *them*, and said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not have relations with her again. 27 And it came about at the time she was giving birth, that behold, there were twins in her womb. 28 Moreover, it took place while she was giving birth, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet *thread* on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." 29 But it came about as he drew back his hand, that behold, his brother came out. Then she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he was named Perez. 30 And afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand; and he was named Zerah.

The focus shifts from Joseph in this one chapter to Judah, and shows us a man and a family that had been corrupted and had sunk to a low level. It is a very brief summary of the development of Judah's family. Judah was a son of Leah and was the one who had suggested that the brothers should sell Joseph instead of killing him. He left his brothers and set out on his own. He came to Hirah the Adullamite who became his friend. He was attracted to a Canaanite woman, the daughter of Shua, and took her and had sex with her. We must assume that he married her, but there is no mention of it. It sounds like men in this area and at this time simply took women they were attracted to and had sex with them. He saw her, took her, and went in to her.

Judah had three sons by his wife, Er, Onan and Shelah. When Er grew up, Judah got him a wife named Tamar. Before Er had any sons of his own, the Lord took his life because he was evil. Imagine having this said of you that you were "evil in the sight of the Lord"! We are all evil and we all fall short of God's glory, but Er was

exceptionally so and God just struck him down. We know nothing else about Er. We don't know how this evil manifested itself in his life, in his words and behavior. Sometimes God does this. Er is not the only man who has been struck down by the Lord. We've seen already that He wiped out mankind at the flood and later Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. He killed those who rebelled against Him in the wilderness when Israel was coming out from Egypt. He took the lives of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 because they had lied to the Holy Spirit. We are told that God struck down Herod in Acts 12:23 because he did not give glory to God, but exalted himself. Paul tells us that if we partake of the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner we risk being disciplined by the Lord and may even lose our lives (1 Cor. 11:28-32). Our lives are in His hands, and if He must, He will take us out of this world.

Since Er died childless, it was the duty of Onan as his brother to take Tamar as his wife and have a son who would be the heir of Er. Judah told Onan to do so, but he knew the child would not be his, so he "wasted his seed on the ground, in order not to give offspring to his brother." He willingly went to have sex with Tamar, but withdrew and spilled his sperm on the ground. Some have called masturbation the "sin of Onan" or "Onanism," but the sin of Onan was his unwillingness to raise a son for his brother. The passage makes it clear that what displeased the Lord was Onan's refusal to give offspring to his brother. He obeyed his father in having sex with Tamar, but disobeyed in not giving offspring to his brother. The Lord took his life also.

Judah told Tamar to go back and live with her father as a widow until his third son Shelah grew up. But he was afraid to give him to her also lest he die. It seems he thought that maybe she was the reason that God was taking the lives of his sons, that perhaps there was a curse associated with Tamar or something. But we are told that God took the lives of Er and Onan because they were evil, not because Tamar was evil. Anyway, Judah wanted to protect Shelah from the same fate as his brothers, so he withheld him from Tamar.

A considerable amount of time passed (vs. 12) and Shelah grew up and Judah's wife died and Tamar knew that Judah had no intention of giving her to Shelah as his wife. Tamar decided that the only way she was going to have children was if she pretended to be a prostitute and became pregnant by Judah himself. She knew that if she did this she could trick him into having sex with her. She knew that he was a lustful man and that he would pursue her. It makes me wonder if he had a pattern of pursuing different relationships with different women. We are not told, but Tamar was confident her plan would work, and it did. His seal, cord and staff which she took from him in pledge saved her life later on when he found out that she had "played the harlot." Judah was angry and ordered that she be brought out and burned as a harlot when he learned she was pregnant. Amazing that he thought nothing of using the services of a harlot, but when he thought his daughter-in-law was one, he insisted that she die! Too often we have such a terrible double-standard. It is nothing for a man to use the services of a prostitute, but to be a prostitute is a terrible thing! In reality one is just as bad as the other. In fact, if men didn't want prostitutes there would be no prostitutes. The supply is there because the demand is there.

When Judah ordered that Tamar be burned as a harlot, she told him that the father of her child was the man who owned the signet ring, cords and staff that she produced. She proved that Judah himself was the father of her children. He owed her a son because his sons had died, and she needed an heir. Shelah was supposed to become her husband, but she saw that Judah was not going to give her to him, so she

went to him.

Judah has a bit of nobility in him. He did not deny that the things she produced belonged to him. He admitted his culpability and even said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." In effect, he said that he was more to blame than she was. He accepted his responsibility and admitted his error. This takes humility and it is noteworthy. Judah has made progress.

Tamar gave birth to twins – Perez and Zerah. At first the midwife thought that Zerah was going to come out first, but instead Perez was firstborn, then Zerah. Perez means "a break" or "a breach." He was named this because of the words of the midwife, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" Zerah means "a rising of light."

Genesis 39:1-6

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. 2 And the LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. 3 Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and *how* the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight, and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. 5 And it came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD'S blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. 6 So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him *there* he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

Joseph was successful because the Lord was with him. He was not successful because of his talent or good looks or intelligence, though he probably had all of those things. He succeeded because the Lord was with him and blessed him. When the Lord's presence and favor are with you, you will succeed in whatever you do, because He will make it happen.

The word here for "successful" means "to push forward"²¹ and is often translated "to prosper." It is used many times in the Old Testament including Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:3. Joshua 1:8 says, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success." Psalm 1:1-3 says, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers." Note the role of scripture meditation in both passages. Meditating on God's word leads to obedience to God's word which leads to blessing. Joseph must have been a man who was consciously devoted to God and communicated with Him and sought to obey Him.

Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph and that the Lord was causing all that he did to prosper. This statement in verse 3 makes me wonder how Potiphar could see this. How could he see that the Lord was with Joseph? Had Joseph told him that he was a believer in the Lord and that the Lord was with Him? Did Joseph have a great attitude and was he a hard worker? Could he get things done that others couldn't accomplish? Was he a good leader who could coordinate others and motivate them to get things done? Probably all of these things were true. Our faith in the Lord and His

²¹ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

presence in our lives should make us very different from others around us. We should have a better attitude and be harder workers. We should have a joyful spirit even when we're doing menial or boring tasks.

When Joseph did something, God made it prosper. God made his projects succeed. Joseph was not a man who had failed investments or businesses. His livestock didn't get sick and die. His building projects didn't collapse. His crops didn't fail, but bore plenty of fruit. Whenever Joseph was in charge of a project, it succeeded. No wonder Potiphar put him in charge of everything in his household!

Because the Lord was with Joseph and made him successful, he found favor with Potiphar and he made Joseph his right-hand man. He became Potiphar's personal assistant, second only to Potiphar himself in the household. Potiphar put him in charge of everything in his household. All the other servants were subject to Joseph. All the household tasks were under his authority. Joseph managed all his affairs and his finances and property and belongings. Because Joseph was blessed by God, Potiphar also was blessed. The Lord blessed his house and everything he owned because of Joseph. God's blessings spill over to others. Just as Laban was blessed because Jacob was being blessed by God, now Potiphar is being blessed because of Joseph. When you associate with people who are being blessed, you will be blessed. If God is blessing you, others around you will be blessed as well. God always intends that His blessings should be shared. If we try to keep His blessing just to ourselves, we won't find much of it coming our way.

Potiphar found rest from concern and worry because of Joseph. Verse 6 says, "with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate." Potiphar no longer had to check up on things and manage things and oversee everything himself. He left it all to Joseph, knowing that all would be well. He could go do his job with confidence that everything at home was well managed. The man whom God is blessing gives peace and rest to others. He is a man they can trust and will not need to monitor and supervise.

Genesis 39:6b-23

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. 7 And it came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me *here*, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. 9 "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" 10 And it came about as she spoke to Joseph day after day, that he did not listen to her to lie beside her, *or* be with her. 11 Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. 12 And she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. 13 When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled outside, 14 she called to the men of her household, and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. 15 "And it came about when he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled, and went outside." 16 So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; 18 and it happened as I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled outside." 19 Now it came about when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," that his anger burned. 20 So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail.

21 But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. 22 And the chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the

jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*. 23 The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

For a while, Joseph prospered in the house of Potiphar, but once again he fell victim to the wickedness of others. This time it was Potiphar's wife who victimized him.

Potiphar's wife found Joseph attractive and wanted him. Lust is not just a male thing, but women can be consumed by it as well. We must not think that only men are lustful. Women can be attracted by a man's appearance as well. Joseph was good looking, and Potiphar's wife "looked with desire" at him. Being attracted to someone is no crime, but if we act on the attraction, it can be the beginning of adultery. Potiphar's wife acted on her attraction to Joseph, looked at him lustfully, and then pursued him. This is where we cross the line, when we act on that attraction.

Mrs. Potiphar approached Joseph in a brazen manner. She bluntly said, "Lie with me." She issued a command and was probably used to the household servants following her orders. She was, after all, the boss's wife, and the servants did not want to displease her. She thought that Joseph would do as she commanded, but he refused. He would not do as she commanded. Sometimes temptation comes at us full-force in a brazen manner. Potiphar's wife did not try to be subtle. She didn't start flirting with Joseph and try to slowly build an intimate relationship. She wanted to jump right into bed with him immediately. This type of temptation may be easier to resist than the other, because we aren't emotionally involved. In a situation where a couple has built a relationship over weeks or months, there are stronger feelings involved.

When Joseph responded to Mrs. Potiphar, he pointed out that his master had entrusted everything to him. He pointed to his position of authority and responsibility and to the fact that Potiphar trusted him to the extent that he did not concern himself with anything that was under Joseph's charge. It would be a betrayal of the trust of Potiphar if he had sex with his wife. It would also be irresponsible of him to do this thing. He would betray his own position if he were to give in to her.

Joseph pointed out as well that the only thing withheld from him in the household was Mrs. Potiphar, because she was his wife. Joseph was the greatest man in the household and held a great position of authority and privilege. But he was not her husband. She was not his and he was not hers. It would be a "great evil" and a sin against God if he were to have sex with her. Joseph was a man who lived in light of the presence of the Lord. He knew that it was not just Potiphar whom he would betray, but God Himself as well if he gave in to Mrs. Potiphar. This is an important aspect of avoiding temptation and sin, to remind yourself that you live in the presence of God at all times, and that He watches your ways.

The temptation Joseph faced was relentless. The woman "spoke to Joseph day after day." She just would not give up and would not take "no" for an answer. She continually pursued him. He continued to turn a deaf ear to her. He would not listen to her, did not consent to her and avoided her. He did everything he could to avoid the temptation, but working in the household sometimes necessitated that he cross paths with her. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:18, "Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." Paul's prescription for dealing with immorality was that we should run from it, and this is exactly what Joseph did. Solomon told his son not to go anywhere near an adulteress (Proverbs 5:8). We cannot flirt with immorality, it is too dangerous. We must run from it

when we see it coming.

Mrs. Potiphar went from verbal pursuit to physical pursuit. Joseph one day went into the house and none of the other men was there. I presume it was just he and Mrs. Potiphar in the house. Possibly she engineered the whole thing. She grabbed him by his clothing and insisted that he have sex with her, but he pulled away and fled, leaving his clothing behind. He literally ran from her. He didn't argue with her or fight with her, he just fled.

In what happened next we see that she had no love for Joseph, only lustful desire. If she loved him she would not have treated him so shabbily. She became angry with him and accused him falsely of trying to rape her. She had his garment as evidence and used it to tell the household and her husband that he had come in while everyone was gone and tried to rape her. The interesting thing here is that there is a note of accusation toward her husband in what she says. In verse 14 she said to her household, "See, he has brought a Hebrew to us to make sport of us." In verse 17 she said to her husband, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to make sport of me." She wanted everyone to think that her husband's purpose in bringing Joseph in was to "make sport" of them. In telling the household, she put pressure on her husband to clear his own name by putting Joseph in prison. Potiphar was virtually forced to put Joseph into prison.

Potiphar's anger burned. The natural assumption is that he was angry with Joseph, but it is possible that he knew the nature of his wife and was angry that she had put him into this position. Either way, he put Joseph into jail where the prisoners of the king were confined.

Even in jail, Joseph prospered. He found favor with the jailer and was put in charge of the whole jail! This was again because the Lord was with him and was gracious to him and gave him favor with the jailer. In effect, Joseph took over the jailer's job. He became responsible for everything that was done in the jail. The jailer did not need to supervise anything that Joseph did because the Lord made him prosper.

Genesis 40

Then it came about after these things the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. 2 And Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. 3 So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the *same* place where Joseph was imprisoned. 4 And the captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time. 5 Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his *own* dream *and* each dream with its *own* interpretation. 6 When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected. 7 And he asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" 8 Then they said to him, "We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *it* to me, please." 9 So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream, behold, *there was* a vine in front of me; 10 and on the vine *were* three branches. And as it was budding, its blossoms came out, *and* its clusters produced ripe grapes. 11 "Now Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh's hand." 12 Then Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days; 13 within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you will put Pharaoh's cup into his hand according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer. 14 "Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. 15 "For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon."

16 When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, "I also saw in my dream, and behold, *there were* three baskets of white bread on my head; 17 and in the top basket *there were* some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head." 18 Then Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; 19 within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh off you." 20 Thus it came about 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 cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. 21 And he restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand; 22 but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. 23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Joseph was joined in the jail by the chief cupbearer and chief baker. They had somehow offended Pharaoh and were thrown into jail. Joseph was put in charge of them and took care of them, and they were there for some time. The Lord was putting things together for Joseph, though he could not see how this was happening at the time.

Both the cupbearer and the baker had dreams on the same night. These dreams were not just normal dreams that they quickly forgot, but were significant dreams they each knew had some important meaning. The trouble was, they did not know how to interpret them. They were depressed because they did not see any way that they could find someone who could interpret the dreams for them. Joseph could see that they were depressed, so he asked them what was wrong and they revealed the problem. Joseph said, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please." Only God can properly interpret dreams that He has given, and Joseph had a relationship with God. He was the one who could obtain for them the interpretation they sought.

It is a fact that God sometimes communicates through dreams. Sometimes the meaning is plain, like the dreams that Joseph had which indicated that he would rule over his brothers and parents. Sometimes the dreams need to be interpreted to be understood, and God must reveal the interpretation. Dreams play an important part in the book of Genesis and indeed throughout the Bible. We have seen how God warned Abimelech in a dream (Gen. 20:3-7). God spoke to Jacob in dreams on a couple of occasions (Gen. 28:12-15, Gen. 31:10-13). God warned Laban in a dream not to harm Jacob (Gen. 31:24). We have recently looked at Joseph's dreams in Genesis 37. Here we have the dreams of the baker and cupbearer, and in the next chapter we will examine the dreams of Pharaoh. In dreams God often issues warnings, reveals the future as we see in these illustrations, or communicates His instructions to His servants. Dreams are an important tool of communication, but we must not think that this happens all the time. Dreams from God are, I think, very rare, and are issued on His timetable for His purposes. We must not go around looking for dreams from God. He will give them if He needs to and they will have a powerful impression on us.

The cupbearer related his dream to Joseph. He saw a grape vine with three branches that blossomed and produced grapes. He took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and gave it to him. Immediately Joseph knew the interpretation. God revealed it to him then and there. The three branches represented three days. In three days Pharaoh would restore the cupbearer to his office. Interpretations belong to God and Joseph belonged to God. When you have a close relationship with the Lord you have understanding and perspective that those around you lack. His Spirit leads you and you see things from His perspective. Paul said, "For

to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:10-16.) Joseph could interpret the dream because he was in communion with God, and God gave him the interpretation.

Joseph was so confident that this would take place that he asked the cupbearer to remember him when he was restored and get him out of the jail. He said that he was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews and that he had done nothing in Egypt to deserve being thrown into prison. He had been wrongly sent to Egypt and wrongly put into prison. He had never been tried and found guilty of any crime. He had been victimized by his brothers, by the Midianite traders, by Potiphar's wife and by Potiphar. When he saw a chance to do something to have himself released, he took advantage of it and asked the cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh.

The baker was eager to hear the interpretation of his dream when he heard the favorable interpretation of the cupbearer's dream. He thought that he would get a favorable interpretation as well. Unfortunately, his dream indicated that he would be beheaded and hung on a tree and that the birds would eat his flesh. The three baskets again represented three days. The text tells us that Joseph gave the baker the interpretation rather bluntly and straightforwardly. There is no indication that he tried to sugar-coat it or soften the blow. Joseph was an honest man. He gave the man the true interpretation of his dream even though it meant telling him he was going to die. Sometimes difficult truths need to be spoken plainly and directly. If someone is going to die of cancer, we don't really do them any favors by lying to them and telling them that they will recover. Sometimes the truth needs to be spoken directly with gentleness.

As Joseph had said, so it occurred. The third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he restored the cupbearer to his service and hanged the baker. Joseph had gotten it right because the interpretations had come from God Himself. You don't go wrong when your guidance comes from God.

The cupbearer forgot Joseph. He forgot to mention Joseph to Pharaoh after he was restored. It was not yet time for Joseph to be released from prison. God had another plan in mind, and Joseph had to wait.

Genesis 41:1-13

Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile. 2 And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. 3 Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the *other* cows on the bank of the Nile. 4 And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke. 5 And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. 6 Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. 7 And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, *it was* a dream. 8 Now it came about in the morning that

his spirit was troubled, so 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 to Pharaoh. 9 Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, "I would make mention today of my *own* offenses. 10 "Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, *both* me and the chief baker. 11 "And we had a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his *own* dream. 12 "Now a Hebrew youth *was* with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related *them* to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his *own* dream. 13 "And it came about that just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him."

It was at the end of two full years that this happened. From the time that the cupbearer was restored to the time that Pharaoh had his dreams was two years! Joseph had to wait for two years before the cupbearer remembered him! God could have caused this to happen sooner, but chose to make Joseph wait. God seldom does what we want when we want Him to do it. He often makes us wait for the fulfillment of what He has promised. Joseph languished, and in languishing learned to trust God even when it seemed like nothing good would ever happen. God had given him a dream that he needed to hang on to despite his circumstances. God would fulfill the dream in His time.

Pharaoh's dreams were vivid and troubling, and he wanted to know the interpretation of them. He called all his wise men and magicians together and related the dreams to them, but none of them could interpret them. It was time for Joseph to be released and to be promoted from the lowest position in Egypt to the highest. God kept the magicians and wise men from understanding the dreams. He made sure that they were completely befuddled about them. These dreams had come from Him and those who did not know Him would not be able to understand them.

Finally, the cupbearer remembered Joseph. He recalled that when he was in prison there was a young Hebrew man who had interpreted his dream and the dream of the baker and that both dreams had been fulfilled just as he had said. The cupbearer had the courage to tell Pharaoh of what had happened. He admitted his own "offenses." He had erred in failing to remember Joseph and to mention him to Pharaoh earlier, but now he told him the story.

Genesis 41:14-36

Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh. 15 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." 16 Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." 17 So Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, "In my dream, behold, I was standing on the bank of the Nile; 18 and behold, seven cows, fat and sleek came up out of the Nile; and they grazed in the marsh grass. 19 "And lo, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such as I had never seen for ugliness in all the land of Egypt; 20 and the lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows. 21 "Yet when they had devoured them, it could not be detected that they had devoured them; for they were just as ugly as before. Then I awoke. 22 "I saw also in my dream, and behold, seven ears, full and good, came up on a single stalk; 23 and lo, seven ears, withered, thin, *and* scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them; 24 and the thin ears swallowed the seven good ears. Then I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me."

25 Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one *and the same*; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do. 26 "The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one *and the same*. 27 "And the seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind shall be seven years of famine. 28 "It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do. 29

"Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; 30 and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will ravage the land. 31 "So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it *will be* very severe. 32 "Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, *it means* that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about. 33 "And now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 "Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth *of the produce* of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. 35 "Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard *it*. 36 "And let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish during the famine."

Pharaoh sent his servants to retrieve Joseph from the prison, and they hastily cleaned him up, had him shave, and put on the right kind of clothing. You don't just appear before Pharaoh looking scruffy and unshaven. When it was time for Joseph to take his place beside Pharaoh, it happened quickly. He had to be ready.

Pharaoh placed the problem before Joseph. He said that he had had a dream but no one could interpret it for him. He had heard that Joseph could interpret dreams. The cupbearer had told him that Joseph was an interpreter of dreams. Joseph's response is important to note. He said, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." Joseph was saying that the ability to interpret dreams was not in him. He did not have some special insight or special gift that others did not have. He was not some sort of psychic or magician. Dream interpretation was not his vocation. He simply knew the God who gave and interpreted dreams, and he pointed to Him. He said that any interpretation would come from God and not from himself. Joseph did not have the answer, but God did and Joseph knew this God. We must learn to do what Joseph did. God is the one who knows the unknown and does the undoable. We are not healers, but He is. We are not miracle workers, but He is. We must not claim that it is "in us" to do anything good, but it is in God.

Pharaoh related his dreams to Joseph and instantly God gave Joseph the interpretation. Joseph did not have to go away to pray and meditate. Immediately he knew the interpretation of the dreams. He was instantly in fellowship with God.

Joseph said that the dreams were the same dream and had the same interpretation. The cows and ears of grain represented years. There would be seven years of great abundance in Egypt followed by seven years of severe famine. The years of famine would swallow up the seven years of abundance. God had revealed to Pharaoh what He was about to do. Before He made it happen, God showed Pharaoh that it would occur. God had given Pharaoh two dreams in order to show that it was a certainty that it would happen, and that it would happen quickly. When God repeats something, we had better pay attention, because it is firmly established in His plan and it will come to pass.

After interpreting the dream, Joseph kept going and gave Pharaoh some recommendations about how to deal with the situation. He not only informed Pharaoh of the interpretation of the dream, but he also advised Pharaoh. He advised Pharaoh to appoint a man over Egypt who would be discerning and wise to prepare for the time of famine. He recommended appointing overseers who would enforce a 20% tax on all the produce of the land during the seven years of abundance. Over seven years this would enable them to store up 140% of one year's crops. This would give them a reserve that would meet their needs during the famine. It was a plan to save the lives

of the people of Egypt and surrounding nations. No doubt the farmers would grumble about such a heavy tax on their crops, but it was necessary in order to save the nation.

When God lets us know what is coming in the future, He intends that we should do something about it. He wants us to prepare ourselves. This is why He gives us His prophetic word about the future. We are to know what is coming so that we will be prepared, and so that we will live in the light of His promises during the difficult times He has warned us about.

Genesis 41:37-45

Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. 38 Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?" 39 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. 40 "You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you." 41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See I have set you over all the land of Egypt." 42 Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen, and put the gold necklace around his neck. 43 And he had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44 Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "*Though* I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." 45 Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, as his wife. And Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh was impressed along with all his servants. Joseph's proposal was good and right to him. He saw that Joseph had a "divine spirit" in him. Joseph had recommended that Pharaoh appoint a wise and discerning man to handle this task, and Pharaoh saw that there was no one who fit that qualification better than Joseph himself. Joseph was appointed as the number 2 man in Egypt. Again, it was because God was with Joseph that he excelled. God's Spirit was in Joseph and God communicated with Joseph, and Pharaoh and his servants could see that this was true. He was discerning and wise because God was with him.

Joseph was given absolute power over all of Egypt and everyone in Egypt except for Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh directed that everyone would do homage to the commands of Joseph. He was given Pharaoh's signet ring and royal clothing and a gold necklace. He was given Pharaoh's second chariot. Everywhere he went people were commanded to bow the knee to him and recognize his authority. I don't know if anyone has ever ascended from prison to power so quickly. In a few hours Joseph went from having nothing, stuck in a prison with no hope of release, to being the number two man in all of Egypt! With most men this would probably be a dangerous thing to do, but they were safe with Joseph because he was submitted to God. Most men would probably use their newfound power to punish their enemies, but there is no record that Joseph did this. There is no record that he punished Potiphar or his wife. He did not gather some troops to go wipe out his brothers. He did not abuse his position. You can trust a man who is humbly submitted to God.

Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name, Zaphenath-paneah. Smith's Bible Dictionary says, "The rabbins interpreted Zaphnath-paaneah as Hebrew, in the sense *revealer of a secret*. As the name must have been Egyptian, it has been explained from the Coptic as meaning *the preserver of the age*."²² Either meaning could be applied to Joseph.

²²William Smith; revised and edited by F.N. and M.A. Peloubet, *Smith's Bible dictionary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997.

He had revealed the secrets of Pharaoh's dreams and in doing so set the stage to save the lives of the Egyptians and surrounding nations. Pharaoh named him what he was. He was the one who had saved them all from the horrible famine.

Pharaoh also gave Joseph a wife, Asenath the daughter of the Potiphera the priest of On. Joseph now found himself virtual ruler of a pagan nation with a pagan wife and pagan Father-in-law. He had quickly gone from the bottom to the top of the nation and Pharaoh had given him everything. He now would have to continue to learn how to live and lead among people who did not know his God.

Genesis 41:46-52

Now Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. 47 And during the seven years of plenty the land brought forth abundantly. 48 So he gathered all the food of *these* seven years which occurred in the land of Egypt, and placed the food in the cities; he placed in every city the food from its own surrounding fields. 49 Thus Joseph stored up grain in great abundance like the sand of the sea, until he stopped measuring *it*, for it was beyond measure. 50 Now before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore to him. 51 And Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, "For," *he said*, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." 52 And he named the second Ephraim, "For," *he said*, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

When Joseph had his dreams he was around 17 years old (Genesis 37:2-5). Here we find that he was 30 years old when Pharaoh gave set him over all of Egypt. Thirteen years had gone by since the dream was given and another 9 years would pass before the dream was fulfilled (Gen. 45:6). Joseph had to wait about 22 years for his dream to be fulfilled by God. God fulfills His promises, but He is not usually very quick about it, at least by our standard of quickness. He wants us to wait and trust and not give up.

As God had revealed, the land brought forth an abundance during the seven good years, and Joseph did an efficient job of gathering up the crops and storing them. He gathered the food into storehouses near when the crops were grown. He gathered up so much, they could not keep measuring it. They did not know how much they had because it was so abundant they couldn't keep a tally. God was faithful to His promise of abundance. Joseph acted by faith on the interpretation of the dreams. He believed what God had revealed and did what he needed to do to preserve the lives of the Egyptians and the surrounding nations. It seems elementary, but when God reveals that you need to do something, you then must act by faith on that word. If you do nothing, you are disobedient and will be unprepared for the future.

I imagine that Joseph received some criticism during the seven abundant years. Some people probably did not believe that it was necessary to save so much grain. They probably did not believe that there would be a famine and thought it was ridiculous to pile up so much food in reserve. I imagine that some made fun of Joseph. But like Noah, he went ahead and did what needed to be done, and later, during the famine, his detractors would see the wisdom of what he had done and would be thankful for it. The point is that we must move ahead with God's program despite the opposition and criticism. We must not let the naysayers get the best of us. Joseph's saving program was not pointless or wasteful, but it was essential. By the way, this says something about saving. We must have a purpose for our savings. We must not save just because it makes us feel good. Saving must serve a practical purpose or it is

just hoarding.

During the seven years of abundance, Joseph and his wife Asenath had two sons. The first-born he named Manasseh, which means “causing to forget.” Joseph explained that God had made him forget all of his trouble and his father's household. Through His graciousness and goodness to him, God had blotted out the bad memories. His days of being abused by his brothers, being a slave in Potiphar's house and being a prisoner were over, and now he was the ruler of all Egypt! God can cause us to forget the bad days by giving us good days. Joseph no longer thought much about the trouble he had faced, nor did he even think much of his family. He had even “forgotten” them! At this point, of course, he doesn't fully see what God is planning to do to reunite him with his family. Joseph had found peace in his new role.

His second son he named Ephraim, meaning “double fruit.” He commented that this was because God had made him fruitful in the land of his affliction. God had brought him through affliction to exaltation and glory. He had to be humbled before being exalted. This is how it works in the kingdom of God. The one who exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:12). The healing of the past and the fruitfulness of the present were both due to what God had done for Joseph. He wants to do both for us as well. He wants to heal our past hurts and wounds and make us fruitful in the present, even if we are in a place that we never intended to be.

Genesis 41:53-57

When the seven years of plenty which had been in the land of Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said, then there was famine in all the lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵ So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, you shall do." ⁵⁶ When the famine was *spread* over all the face of the earth, then Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians; and the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷ And *the people of* all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth.

The seven years of abundance came to an end and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said, and just as God had indicated. When you have an abundance it is wise to prepare for a time of need. Some are given an abundance so that they can help those who are in need. When Paul talked about the offering he was collecting for the believers in Jerusalem he said, “For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality-- at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality; as it is written, 'HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK.'" (2 Corinthians 8:13-15.) God supplied an abundance to the Corinthians so that they could help the believers in Jerusalem in their time of need.

Though there was famine in all the lands, there was bread in Egypt because of the steps that Joseph had taken. The people of Egypt cried out to Pharaoh, and all he had to do was point them to Joseph. Joseph would know what to do and Joseph would take care of them. Just like Potiphar and the Jailer, Pharaoh did not have to worry about anything when Joseph was in charge. God continued to make him prosper and succeed.

Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain and food to the Egyptians. As

people of other lands heard that there was grain in Egypt, they came to buy as well. Joseph not only saved the Egyptians, but people of other nations also. Joseph had physical bread to preserve the lives of thousands, but the church has the Bread of Life. The church is like the storehouses of Egypt in a time of famine. People around the world are starving for the word of God and for the truth of the gospel. We must "open the storehouses" and distribute that Bread!

Genesis 42:1-17

Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why are you staring at one another?" 2 And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy *some* for us from that place, so that we may live and not die." 3 Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "I am afraid that harm may befall him." 5 So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan *also*.

6 Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with *their* faces to the ground. 7 When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, "Where have you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." 8 But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him. 9 And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, "You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land." 10 Then they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. 11 "We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies." 12 Yet he said to them, "No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!" 13 But they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers *in all*, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no more." 14 And Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you, you are spies; 15 by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! 16 "Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." 17 So he put them all together in prison for three days.

The famine spread as far as Canaan, and impacted Jacob and his family. They had heard that there was grain available in Egypt, so Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt for food. He would not send Benjamin, however, because he feared that something might happen to him. Benjamin was now the apple of his eye, the only link left to his favorite wife. No doubt Benjamin was over-protected and not allowed to take any risks. He probably faced hostility similar to that which Joseph faced from his half-brothers because of his favored position. I imagine though that the brothers, having seen the grief they had brought upon their father because of what they had done to Joseph, would not have tried to do away with Benjamin. Being overly protected can be a stifling thing. Parents must be careful that they don't allow their fears and worries of possible harm to override common sense. We cannot protect our children from every conceivable danger. In fact, there are times when we must let them go to face risky situations so they might mature. For example, when our kids turn 16, they can get their driver's licenses. Yes, there are all sorts of dangers associated with driving, but if we refuse to allow them to take the risks associated with learning to drive and with driving, then they will have difficulty functioning in our society. Be careful that you don't become unreasonable with your children because of your fears.

Jacob was not so fearful for his other ten sons as he was for Benjamin, so he sent them to Egypt to buy grain. In fact, he sounded a little harsh and sarcastic with them when he asked, "Why are you staring at one another?"

In verses 6-9 we read of the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams as his brothers come

to Egypt and bow down before him. Joseph was the one to whom everyone came to buy grain during the famine, so his brothers had to come to him. He recognized them, but they did not recognize him, and he disguised his true identity. He did not yet want to reveal himself to them, because he wanted to test them to see if there had been any change in their attitude or behavior. Posing as an Egyptian, he was wearing Egyptian clothing, probably had his head shaved as they did, spoke Egyptian rather than Hebrew, etc. The brothers had no clue that this was Joseph. They bowed down to him not knowing that they were doing what his dream had indicated they would do so many years before. God was faithful to fulfill the vision he had given Joseph.

Joseph treated them harshly and accused them of being spies, of spying out the undefended parts of Egypt. No doubt this was a danger especially during this time of famine, that men of other nations might want to invade Egypt and take its food for themselves and their nations. Joseph and the officials of Egypt had to be on their guard against this danger.

The brothers denied that they were spies. They said that they were honest men who had just come to Egypt to buy food. They explained that they were all brothers, sons of one man. They told him that they had been 12 brothers and that the youngest was at home with his father and one was no more. They told Joseph that they considered him dead. As far as they were concerned, Joseph was dead, although they did not know for sure what had become of him. Joseph continued to insist that they were spies and said that he was going to test the truthfulness of their story. He would send one of them back to get their youngest brother and bring him down to Egypt to prove their story. Meanwhile, the rest of them would be held in prison. He then locked them all up for three days.

It seems that there was a lack of due process in Egypt. People like Pharaoh and Potiphar and Joseph who held power could imprison people at a whim, without any kind of trial. We saw this with Joseph, with the baker and cupbearer, and now we see it with Joseph's brothers. If they were irritated with someone or suspected them of doing evil, they could lock them up and throw away the key. It's a good thing that our leaders today do not have this kind of power!

Genesis 42:18-24

Now Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God: 19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for *the rest of you*, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, 20 and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die." And they did so. 21 Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us." 22 And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood." 23 They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. 24 And he turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

The challenge that Joseph put before his brothers was this: "Are you really honest men?" That was the question. He challenged their truthfulness. He said that they could prove their honesty by going back to Canaan and bringing their brother back with them. One of them would remain behind in the prison while the rest of them went back home. If they did this, their words would be verified and he would spare their lives. He told them that he feared God and that is why he was going to be gracious to them and give them this chance. He could have had them executed as spies, but he

chose to give them the chance to prove themselves.

The brothers saw this as a day of reckoning for the blood of Joseph. They interpreted what was happening as a repayment of their guilt for selling him into slavery. They admitted their guilt. They admitted that they had seen his distress when they threw him into the pit and when they sold him to the Ishmaelites. He had pleaded with them, but they had refused to listen. We get more insight into what had happened that day. Joseph had not gone quietly into slavery, but had wept and pleaded with them not to do it. For all these years they had carried this guilt with them, knowing what they had done to their own brother. Now they saw that God was not going to let them off the hook, but was going to hold them accountable. This is exactly what these men needed to see and to face. They could not bury this any longer, but would now have to deal with it. It was a healthy thing for them, but they did not know it.

Reuben could not resist saying, "I told you so!" To his credit, he is the only one who did not go along with their plot and tried to rescue Joseph. But they did not listen to him either. He added to their sense of guilt and remorse by pointing this out to them. He had tried to warn them and to discourage them from abusing Joseph, but they would not listen.

We discover in verse 23 that Joseph had been speaking to them through an interpreter. He had been speaking Egyptian, and they had been speaking Hebrew, so the brothers did not know that he understood what they were saying to each other. Joseph was thoroughly Egyptianized by this time. He looked like an Egyptian, spoke like an Egyptian and acted like an Egyptian. His brothers could not tell that he wasn't an Egyptian. When they said these things to each other, Joseph overheard them and their words touched him deeply. He remembered what they had done to him and saw some evidence of a change of heart about what they had done, and he turned away and wept. This was the whole point of what he was doing to them. But it wasn't yet time to reveal himself to them. He had to find out if Benjamin was alright and if they harbored the same hatred for him.

When Joseph recovered, he returned to his brother and took Simeon and bound him. Simeon would be the one who would stay behind in Egypt while the others returned home to retrieve Benjamin. Simeon was the second oldest of the brothers, the second son born to Leah. Simeon and Levi were the two brothers who had slaughtered Hamor and Shechem and the men of their city.

Genesis 42:25-28

Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. And thus it was done for them. 26 So they loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed from there. 27 And as one *of them* opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money; and behold, it was in the mouth of his sack. 28 Then he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack." And their hearts sank, and they *turned* trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

Here was another test of their honesty. Joseph had their money put back into the bags with their grain. Would they return the money when they came back with Benjamin? Would they admit that there had been some mistake? One of the brothers discovered his money in his sack of grain when he opened it to give some fodder to his donkey. When they heard about this, their hearts all sank and they wondered among themselves. They trembled with fear. This was not good news, that their money had been returned. Now they would be accused of theft as well as spying! They said,

“What is this that God has done to us?” They could see that God was doing something, but they didn't know what He was up to. They didn't know what His intent was. At least it reveals a spiritual perspective on the situation. God would reveal His intent in His time. Later, they would see clearly what was happening, but now they were puzzled and fearful.

God's intentions in what He does to us and for us are always good. They are for the good of His kingdom and for our good. We may not be able to understand what He is doing, but in the future we will see it. We will look back and say, “Aha! So that is what He was doing!” And we will see the wisdom and goodness in it.

Genesis 42:29-38

When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, ³⁰ "The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with us, and took us for spies of the country. ³¹ "But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are not spies. ³² 'We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan.' ³³ "And the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me and take *grain* for the famine of your households, and go. ³⁴ 'But bring your youngest brother to me that I may know that you are not spies, but honest men. I will give your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'"

³⁵ Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks, that behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. ³⁶ And their father Jacob said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me." ³⁷ Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him *back* to you; put him in my care, and I will return him to you." ³⁸ But Jacob said, "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow."

The brothers reported to Jacob all that had happened. They explained why Simeon had not returned with them and how the man who was “the lord of the land” had taken them for spies. They told him that to retrieve Simeon they would have to take Benjamin down with them to prove to the man that they were honest men and not spies. If they did this, then Simeon would be released and they would be allowed to trade in the land.

As they opened and emptied their sacks of grain, each of the brothers discovered their bundle of money that had been returned to them. Jacob saw this as well, and they were all dismayed. What they had told him was bad, and now what he saw made things worse. What they didn't know was that they were in the gracious hands of God and of Joseph. What looked evil to them would work out for their good.

Jacob's words are very bitter. He accused the brothers of taking Joseph and Simeon from him and of wanting to take Benjamin from him as well. He said, “All these things are against me.” Everything looked black, bleak and hopeless to him. He was depressed and could not see any good in anything. This is the misery of depression. Nothing looks good, nothing feels good. You see no hope of anything but believe that things will only get worse. You must realize when you are depressed that your thinking and your perspective are distorted. You are not seeing things as they are, but are looking at things from a distorted perspective.

Reuben again took the lead and stood up as the one who would insure Benjamin's wellbeing. He even said that Jacob could put his two sons to death if he did not return Benjamin safely from Egypt. He promised that he would take care of him and

would return him to Jacob. Jacob would not hear of it. He said that Benjamin would not go. He said, "...his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow." He still has his one favorite and is determined to protect him. His other sons meant little to him, but Benjamin was all-important. He had already written off Simeon ("Simeon is no more") and had been convinced that Joseph was dead. He would not allow the risk of sending Benjamin to Egypt in order to retrieve Simeon. He could bear the thought of losing Simeon, but not of losing Benjamin. Jacob was still a very selfish man, and his favoritism continued to dictate his course and demoralize his family.

Genesis 43:1-14

Now the famine was severe in the land. 2 So it came about when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, "Go back, buy us a little food." 3 Judah spoke to him, however, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' 4 "If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. 5 "But if you do 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.'" 6 Then Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had *another* brother?" 7 But they said, "The man questioned particularly about us and our relatives, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you *another* brother?' So we answered his questions. Could we possibly know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'" 8 And Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones. 9 "I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him *back* to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame before you forever. 10 "For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice." 11 Then their father Israel said to them, "If *it must be* so, then do this: take some of the best products of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man as a present, a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. 12 "And take double *the* money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was a mistake. 13 "Take your brother also, and arise, return to the man; 14 and may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man, that he may release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

The famine continued and they ate all of the grain that they had bought in Egypt. They needed to return to buy more, so Jacob told them to do so. Judah pointed out that they could not do so without taking Benjamin with them. He said they would not go unless Benjamin went with them because the lord of the land had said that they would not see his face if they came back without Benjamin. He had given them a "solemn warning" and they were afraid of him. They were more afraid of facing him without Benjamin than they were of facing the famine without Egyptian grain! Joseph had really intimidated them!

Jacob argued with them. He asked them why they even let on that they had another brother. In doing so they had "treated him badly." They pointed out that the man had asked about their family. They had no idea he would require them to bring their brother down. They just answered his questions somewhat honestly. They had not told him about what they had done to their brother Joseph, of course, but they had told him the rest.

Judah told Jacob to send Benjamin with him, and that he would be surety for him. Jacob could hold him responsible if he didn't bring Benjamin back. Recall that Judah was the one who proposed that they should sell Joseph instead of killing him so that they might make a profit on him (Genesis 37:26-27). Judah was also the subject of chapter 38, where the lives of his sons Er and Onan were taken by the Lord because they were evil, and Judah refused to give his son Shelah to Tamar. Now Judah is

showing a change of heart. He will protect Benjamin. He will not take the opportunity of going to Egypt to get rid of him, but will take personal responsibility for his wellbeing. It appears that he has learned from his mistakes. In losing two of his own sons he felt what his father felt about Joseph. He learned how it felt to lose a son. He experienced the same grief his father felt.

Judah pointed out to his father that they had delayed the trip for too long. By that time they could have made two trips to Egypt. Jacob had waited until the grain was exhausted and the need was urgent because of his reluctance to send Benjamin.

Finally, Jacob was convinced that he had to send Benjamin with them. He was stuck and had no other options. He told the brothers to take a gift of some of their best products – balm, honey, aromatic gum, myrrh, pistachios and almonds – as a gift for the lord of the land. He told them to take twice as much money to return the money that had been returned to their grain sacks. He told them to take Benjamin with them and return to the man. All of these things would show the man that they were honest men and not spies. He blessed them and wished them the blessings of God Almighty. He said, “And may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man, that he may release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” If Jacob had known who “the man” was, he would have realized that he had nothing to worry about. He and his family were in good hands, the hands of Joseph and of God.

Genesis 43:15-34

So the men took this present, and they took double *the* money in their hand, and Benjamin; then they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.

16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, "Bring the men into the house, and slay *an animal* and make ready; for the men are to dine with me at noon." 17 So the man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house. 18 Now the men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph's house; and they said, "*It is* because of the money that was returned in our sacks the first time that we are being brought in, that he may seek occasion against us and fall upon us, and take us for slaves with our donkeys." 19 So they came near to Joseph's house steward, and spoke to him at the entrance of the house, 20 and said, "Oh, my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food, 21 and it came about when we came to the lodging place, that we opened our sacks, and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full. So we have brought it back in our hand. 22 "We have also brought down other money in our hand to buy food; we do not know who put our money in our sacks." 23 And he said, "Be at ease, 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. 24 Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys fodder. 25 So they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon; for they had heard that they were to eat a meal there.

26 When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which was in their hand and bowed to the ground before him. 27 Then he asked them about their welfare, and said, "Is your old father well, of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" 28 And they said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." And they bowed down in homage. 29 As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, he said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "May God be gracious to you, my son." 30 And Joseph hurried *out* for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought *a place* to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. 31 Then he washed his face, and came out; and he controlled himself and said, "Serve the meal." 32 So they served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians, who ate with him, by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians. 33 Now they were seated before him, the first-born according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked at one another in astonishment. 34 And he took portions to them from his own table; but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

Joseph's brothers could not understand why he would have them come to his house to eat lunch with him. They speculated that it was because of the money that had been returned and that he was planning to capture them and take them as slaves. They went to his house steward and told him exactly what had happened the first time they came down, how they had found their money in their sacks, and how they had brought it back, along with other money to pay for the grain that they were buying this time. They wanted him to know that they were not stealing the grain or refusing to pay for it.

The steward told them to be at ease. He told them not to worry. He had received their money. He explained that their God had given them treasure in their sacks. We see a glimpse here of Joseph's influence on the Egyptians, at least on those who were closest to him. This man had come to believe in the Lord and to see that the God of Joseph was the true God. Joseph had probably told this man his story. He probably knew all about Joseph's dreams and how he interpreted the dreams of the baker and cupbearer and Pharaoh. He knew Joseph's plan to deal with his brothers. Joseph is a great example to us of how one godly man can influence a godless and pagan culture. Joseph was not conformed to the world of the Egyptians, but had a small part in transforming some of those in it. Yes, he dressed like an Egyptian, spoke like an Egyptian and ate like an Egyptian, but he did not worship like an Egyptian. He honored the Lord and the Lord honored him.

Simeon was restored to the brothers and they were brought into Joseph's house. They were given water to wash their feet and their donkeys were fed. They got the present ready to give to Joseph when he came home at noon. Again they bowed down to the ground before Joseph when he came home and gave their present to him. He asked them how they were doing and if their father was still alive. He asked if the young man with them was their youngest brother, and blessed him with wish that God might be gracious to him. On seeing his brother Benjamin, Joseph was overcome with emotion, but could not let them see it. He excused himself and went to another room to weep and compose himself. It had been so long since he had seen him, and he must have been reminded even more at that point of his father and mother. But he still had one more test for these men, to see if they would take care of Benjamin or if they would be pleased to leave him behind in Egypt.

Evidently the Egyptians had a superior attitude toward those who were from other nations, and would not eat with people of other nations; at least we are told that it was "loathsome" to them to eat with Hebrews. So the Egyptians ate separately from Joseph's brothers, and he ate by himself. Kind of an odd arrangement since they were his guests. It appears that Joseph conformed himself to this custom as well as the others.

Joseph astonished the brothers again by having them seated according to their birth order, from oldest to youngest. They did not understand how he could know this. He gave them food from his own table, but gave Benjamin five times more than anyone else. He showed favoritism again to Benjamin. I think he was being deliberate about this in order to see if the old jealousy and animosity was still there among the brothers. It was part of setting them up for what came next.

Genesis 44:1-13

Then he commanded his house steward, 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. 2 "And put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph had told *him*. 3 As soon as it was light, the men were sent away, they with their donkeys. 4 They had *just* gone out of the city, *and* were not far off, when Joseph said to his house steward, "Up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? 5 'Is not this the one from which my lord drinks, and which he indeed uses for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.'" 6 So he overtook them and spoke these words to them. 7 And they said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing. 8 "Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks we have brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? 9 "With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." 10 So he said, "Now let it also be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and *the rest of you shall be innocent.*" 11 Then they hurried, each man lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. 12 And he searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. 13 Then they tore their clothes, and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city.

This was Joseph's final test for his brothers. What would they do if he gave them the opportunity to rid themselves of Benjamin? Would they abandon him in Egypt or would they protect him? Once again he returned their money to their sacks and then he had his special silver cup planted in Benjamin's sack. He then played out this charade to make it appear to the brothers that Benjamin had stolen the cup. When the steward caught up to them and accused them, they were vehement in their denials. After all, they had returned the money that had been returned to them. They had brought twice as much money as they had needed. They had proven that they were honest men. How could they or would they steal from the Egyptian lord? Then they made a powerful commitment. They said, "With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." They were so confident of their innocence they suggested that the guilty party should die and the rest of them should become Joseph's slaves. The steward accepted what they said, but modified the penalty. He said that only the guilty one would become a slave, and the rest of them would go free. It would be unfair to penalize all of them for the crime of one.

The search was made, and the last one searched was Benjamin, the youngest. It was in his sack that the cup was found. Benjamin appeared to be guilty of stealing the special silver cup of the lord of Egypt! The brothers all tore their clothes, loaded their donkeys and returned to the city. They were grieved and distressed. Now it appeared that they would not be able to return to their father with Benjamin. They had guaranteed that he would come back, but now he had stolen the silver cup of the lord of Egypt! Just when it seemed that things were working out well, everything fell apart. They had retrieved Simeon, they had bought more grain, they had even eaten with the lord of Egypt, but now there was a complete reversal. Now Benjamin would be a slave, and when they returned to their father, he would die of grief. It was the blackest moment of the whole experience for them.

Genesis 44:14-17

When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there, and they fell to the ground before him. 15 And Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?" 16 So Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found." 17 But he said, "Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."

It is interesting here that the group of brothers is now referred to as “Judah and his brothers.” Judah has risen to the forefront as their leader. Later on, the kings of Israel will come from Judah.

They fell to the ground again before Joseph, and he confronted them. In essence, he asked them how they thought they could get away with taking his silver cup. Didn't they know that he could practice divination? Didn't they know that he would know they had done this thing? I don't believe that Joseph actually practiced divination, as this is a thing that God prohibits. I think this was another aspect of Joseph pretending to be an Egyptian official.

Judah spoke up and said that they could not justify themselves. They could not prove that they were innocent. They had no defense. God had uncovered their iniquity, He had exposed their guilt, and they could say nothing. He was referring to their guilt with regard to what they had done to Joseph. He said that all of them would become his slaves. They had forfeited their freedom. When you have no defense, say so. When you are caught, admit it. This is what God wants us to do. The proper response when you are caught in a sin is to confess it. Proverbs 28:13 says, “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.”

Joseph replied that he was not the sort of man who would force all of them into slavery because of the actions of one. That would not be just. Only the one guilty of stealing his cup would be held as his slave. The rest of them were free to go back in peace to their father. This is his final test of his brothers. Would they abandon Benjamin? Were they jealous of him? Did they hate him enough to leave him in Egypt? Had their attitude changed over the years? This is what Joseph needed to know. This is why he was putting them through all of this agony.

Genesis 44:18-34

Then Judah approached him, and said, "Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh. 19 "My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' 20 "And we said to my lord, 'We have an old father and a little child of *his* old age. Now his brother is dead, so he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him.' 21 "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.' 22 "But we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' 23 "You said to your servants, however, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.' 24 "Thus it came about when we went up to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. 25 "And our father said, 'Go back, buy us a little food.' 26 "But we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' 27 "And your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; 28 and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn in pieces," and I have not seen him since. 29 'And if you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.' 30 "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, 31 it will come about when he sees that the lad is not *with us*, that he will die. Thus your servants will bring the gray hair of your servant our father down to Sheol in sorrow. 32 "For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him *back* to you, then let me bear the blame before my father forever.' 33 "Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. 34 "For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest I see the evil that would overtake my father?"

This plea from Judah is the clincher. His speech shows that there had been a

change of heart. He recounted to Joseph all that had happened, reminding him that he was the one who insisted that they bring their youngest brother down to Egypt. He pointed out how important the young man was to their father and how his life was "bound up in the lad's life" and that he would die if Benjamin did not return. He revealed how hard it was to convince their father to allow Benjamin to come on the trip. He told Joseph that he had become surety for Benjamin and had told his father that he would bear the blame before him forever if he did not bring Benjamin back. Finally, Judah asked Joseph to allow him to take Benjamin's place as his slave and to allow Benjamin to return with his brothers. He did not want to return without Benjamin to see the evil that would come upon his father as a result. He would rather stay a slave in Egypt than return without Benjamin. This is the same man who had come up with the idea of selling Joseph into slavery!

Having seen the impact of the loss of Joseph on their father, having become fathers themselves, these men had had a change of heart. They had truly repented. They no longer wanted to get rid of the favorite son. They no longer hated him, but were willing to lay down their own lives and forfeit their own freedom for him. They loved him for the sake of their father. This is how brothers treat one another. This is how they are supposed to behave. They should watch out for one another and take care of one another. Instead of taking the opportunity to rid themselves of Benjamin, they were now going to do whatever they could to make sure that he returned with them.

Genesis 45:1-15

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. 3 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 "And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 "For the famine *has been* in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. 7 "And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. 8 "Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 "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 delay. 10 "And you shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. 11 "There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine *to come*, lest you and your household and all that you have be impoverished.'" 12 "And behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you. 13 "Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here." 14 Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept; and Benjamin wept on his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.

Finally we reach the climax of this story and Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. After hearing Judah's speech he knew that they would not abandon Benjamin. He knew that there had been a change of heart, and he was deeply moved. He could control himself no longer and He wept. He ordered all the Egyptians with him to leave him alone with his brothers. He wept so loudly that his servants heard it, his neighbors heard it, and Pharaoh's household heard it.

Alone with his brothers, Joseph spoke to them for the first time in their own language and said, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" It was like he had torn off a mask and revealed his true identity to them. No longer was he a severe Egyptian official, but now he was their long-lost brother! Suddenly here was the man they had sold into slavery so many years before, and he was the ruler of all Egypt! His brothers were "dismayed at his presence." The word for "dismayed" means "to tremble inwardly"²³. They had been fearful of the Egyptian lord, but now to find out that this lord was their brother whom they had thought about killing and had sold into slavery made them even more fearful! What would he do to them now? How would he pay them back for all the evil they had done to him? It was not good news to them at this initial point to discover that this man was Joseph!

Joseph could see that his brothers were taken aback by this and were stunned. His revelation came as a complete shock and they couldn't speak. He could see that he needed to reassure them, so he invited them to come closer. He told them again that he was Joseph, whom they had sold into Egypt. He told them not to be angry with themselves because they had done this, because God had a different plan. He had come to see that God had sent him into Egypt, using the evil deed of his brothers to bring about a good result. God had sent him to Egypt to preserve life. God wanted to bring the nation of Israel into Egypt to preserve them, protect them, and grow them into a nation. He explained to them that there had been two years of famine, and that there would be five more years. God had sent him to Egypt to preserve them, to keep them alive, and to deliver them from poverty and starvation. Joseph had come to see that it was not his brothers who had sent him to Egypt, but it was God. God had been with him and had blessed him and had made him a father to Pharaoh, lord of his household and ruler over all of Egypt. Joseph was no longer bitter and angry toward his brothers because he could see the plan of God.

When we suffer because of the mistreatment of others, we need to ask God to help us see His purpose. Ultimate good often comes out of these sufferings. Let us recall that Romans 8:28 tells us, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." When I lost my job at a camera shop in 1980, I thought it was a disaster as a young student barely making it on a meager income. But it was God's way of moving me into the radio ministry in which I am still involved 24 years later! God had equipped me for it, and it was a perfect fit for me. Looking back I can see God's hand in my misfortune, and that He had a plan for something better for me.

We should probably not move any further in this story without reflecting on what Joseph had done to his brothers. He had tricked them and deceived them. He had put them through an agonizing test of their truthfulness and integrity. He had lied to them and misrepresented himself to them. He had framed them for a crime they didn't commit and falsely accused them of being spies. He had unjustly imprisoned Simeon. We must ask whether all of this was right, and whether it was justified. Why hadn't he told them the truth when they first came to him and he recognized them? Many of us as Christians believe that lying and deceit is always wrong regardless of the circumstances, that we must always tell the truth and never use deception. But there is no hint in the scriptures that Joseph was wrong in doing what he did. There is no indication that God disciplined him for the way that he treated his brothers.

²³ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

First, we must note that Joseph had a good reason for treating his brothers this way. He did not know if he could trust them. They had hated him and had been eager to rid themselves of him. Did they have the same attitude toward Benjamin? When they first came down he did not know if Benjamin and his father were still alive. He did not know if they had done to Benjamin what they had done to him, or even worse. Even when he revealed himself to them his first question was, "Is my father still alive?" He was still wondering if they had really told him the truth. So he treated them this way to learn the truth and to see if they were trustworthy.

Second, he did these things to protect Benjamin. It looks like he put Benjamin in danger, but actually he was protecting him. The brothers had told him that they had a younger brother who was at home with their father. By threatening to execute them as spies, holding Simeon and requiring them to bring Benjamin down, Joseph ensured that they would bring Benjamin down to Egypt and keep him safe on the way. He made sure that Benjamin was indispensable to them until they got to Egypt. If they wanted to save their own lives, they would have to protect Benjamin.

Third, Joseph wanted to bring them to the point of repentance and of regret for what they had done to him. He knew how they would interpret the misfortunes that he imposed upon them. He knew that they would think that God was bringing them to account for what they had done to Joseph, and indeed He was. God had put Joseph in a position where he could do this to his brothers. God had given him the dream that told him that one day they would bow before him. He had had many years to meditate on what he would do when the dream was fulfilled. When they confessed their guilt in 42:21, Joseph was deeply moved and had to turn away and weep. They had been convicted of their sin and Joseph could see that they regretted it. Thus, it was for their own good that Joseph did these things to to them.

Fourth, Joseph wanted to see what they would do if he gave them the opportunity to get rid of Benjamin and leave him in Egypt as a slave. He wanted to see if they would treat Benjamin the same way they had treated him. The brothers passed all of these tests. Even Judah, who wanted to profit from the sale of Joseph, was the one who offered himself up for Benjamin.

I conclude that Joseph's deceit was justified, because he was doing it for a higher purpose. Most of the time when we lie and deceive we do it for self-serving reasons. Most of the time we are trying to cover up our own evil or trying to manipulate someone to do something we want them to do. But Joseph's reasons for his deceit were good and noble.

Another example of one who lied for a good purpose is Rahab in Joshua 2. She hid the Israelite spies who came into Jericho on the roof of her house. When the king sent men to her house to bring the men to him, she told them that they had come to her, but left when it was time to shut the gate and that they should pursue them. Her lie saved their lives, and she was rewarded for it later. Her life and the lives of her family were spared. Of all the people of Jericho, they were the only ones who survived. In fact, she is mentioned in the great passage about people of faith in Hebrews 11:31.

We must be very careful about taking this principle too far. We have not been given a license to use lies and deceit as a matter of course in our lives. In fact, there are probably very few circumstances in our lives, if any at all, where deceit is appropriate and justifiable.

Joseph told his brothers to go up to his father and convey a message for him, telling him about Joseph and how he was the lord of all Egypt. They were to tell him to

come down to Egypt without delay and live near him in the land of Goshen with all of his family and flocks and herds. He promised to provide for Jacob there in Egypt. He told him that he needed to do this because there would be five more years of famine, and they would be impoverished if they stayed where they were. It is only because God put Joseph in this place of authority in Egypt that they were able to do this and the nation would be preserved. It was God's way of keeping the families of these 12 brothers together to make one nation of them, instead of 12 warring tribes.

Joseph pointed out to them that they were eyewitnesses that it was he who was speaking to them in their own language. This is how they could know for sure that he really was Joseph. It was not through "divination" that he knew so much about them, but it was because he was Joseph. They had been in his faithful hands all along, and he would not harm them.

He urged them to go tell his father all about his splendor in Egypt and of all they had seen, and then hurry to bring him down to Egypt. He has delayed this invitation for a long time and has disciplined himself in order to make sure his brothers have come to a change of heart, and now he is anxious to have his father and family come join him. It can't happen soon enough for him.

After saying these things to his brothers there was a physical demonstration of joy and love. He embraced Benjamin first and wept with him, then he kissed and wept with all of his other brothers as well. He had forgiven them and was glad to see them. He welcomed them. There is nothing like a sincere embrace and kiss to tell you that all is well in a relationship and that the person cares for you. Then we are told that they talked together. I imagine the brothers had lots of questions for him, and he probably told them his whole story. For his part, he probably found out all about their families and what had happened at home through the years. There was lots of catching up that needed to be done!

Genesis 45:16-28

Now when the news was heard in Pharaoh's house that Joseph's brothers had come, it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. 17 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go to the land of Canaan, 18 and take your father and your households and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you shall eat the fat of the land.' 19 "Now you are ordered, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come. 20 'And do not concern yourselves with your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'" 21 Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. 22 To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred *pieces of* silver and five changes of garments. 23 And to his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and sustenance for his father on the journey. 24 So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the journey." 25 Then they went up from Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. 26 And they told him, saying, "Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." But he was stunned, for he did not believe them. 27 When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28 Then Israel said, "It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

It pleased Pharaoh and his servants that Joseph's brothers had come. They had been blessed because of Joseph. He had saved their lives and their nation, and they were pleased to welcome more of his sort of people to Egypt. If it was Joseph's family, they were welcome in Egypt; in fact they would receive the best of the land.

Pharaoh issued orders. He told Joseph to have his brothers take their donkeys and to take wagons as well from Egypt to transport their father and their families to Egypt. He told them not to worry about their goods, because they would have the best of the land of Egypt. Joseph carried out Pharaoh's orders. Wagons were given to the brothers to take back to Canaan. Joseph gave them some new clothes, and gave Benjamin 300 pieces of silver and five changes of clothing. Benjamin is still the favored little brother. Twenty donkeys were sent, ten with the best things of Egypt and ten with grain and bread to meet their needs along the way there and back. I get the impression that it was far more than was really needed for the journey.

At first, when his sons told him that Joseph was alive and was ruler of Egypt, Jacob did not believe them. It was something that was too good to be true to him. He had for so long believed that Joseph was dead that the news that he was alive was completely unbelievable to him. It is similar to the reaction of the disciples when Jesus first appeared to them after His resurrection. Luke 24:41 says that they "could not believe it for joy." The brothers continued to talk about Joseph and all that he had said, and Jacob could see the donkeys and the wagons and all the goods that Joseph had sent, and he was finally convinced. He could not deny the evidence before his eyes and the united testimony of his sons. His spirit revived and he believed them. He came alive when he believed this news and his hope and joy was restored. For years he had been depressed and inconsolable from the loss of Joseph, but now he was revived. He said that he would go see Joseph before he died. This is what happens to us when we believe in the good news of Jesus Christ. When we are finally convinced that He really did die for us and that he really did rise from the dead, and that through faith in Him we are forgiven and come into a relationship with God, then we are revived. We are made alive and given new life and new hope.

Genesis 46:1-7

So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. 2 And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." 3 And He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. 4 "I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes." 5 Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob and their little ones and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. 6 And they took their livestock and their property, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and came to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him: 7 his sons and his grandsons with him, his daughters and his granddaughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt.

Israel went as far as Beersheba and paused there to offer sacrifices to the Lord. At Beersheba Abraham had called on the name of the Lord (Gen. 21:32). The Lord appeared to Isaac at Beersheba, and Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord (Gen. 26:23-25). To Israel this was a special place, a holy place, the place where the Lord had spoken to his father. He may have used the same altar his father had built to offer his sacrifices.

Israel may have been somewhat apprehensive and fearful about going down to Egypt. He may have feared what would happen to them in Egypt, that they might be subjugated by the Egyptians or that they might be swallowed up into Egyptian culture and lose their identity as a nation themselves. God gave Israel visions in the night there at Beersheba and told him not to be afraid to go to Egypt. He promised that in Egypt He would make them into a great nation. They would not lose their

distinctiveness, but would rather find it there. They would not be destroyed, but would prosper there. God was sending them to Egypt to make them a nation. He further promised to go with them and to bring them up out of Egypt again. He promised that Joseph would close his eyes when he died. The Lord wanted Israel to know that He was in the middle of this thing, that all of this was His will and design. To Israel, this move to Egypt seemed to come as a surprise, but God had been preparing for it for years. Sometimes God may surprise us with something that makes us take a big step or a big move. If He is in it, He has already laid the groundwork. We don't need to be afraid if He goes with us. We also must not be so comfortable and inflexible that He can't move us like this.

When God calls us to make a big move, He promises His presence. He does not promise that there will not be any trouble or turbulence along the way, but He promises to be with us and to see us through it. In Isaiah 43:2 the Lord says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you." He does not say "if you pass through the waters," but "when." These things will happen to us. We will pass through the waters and rivers. We will walk through the fire. But there is always the promise of His presence and protection in the midst of these things.

Genesis 46:8-27

Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, Jacob and his sons, who went to Egypt: Reuben, Jacob's first-born. 9 And the sons of Reuben: Hanoch and Pallu and Hezron and Carmi. 10 And the sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman. 11 And the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 12 And the sons of Judah: Er and Onan and Shelah and Perez and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan). And the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. 13 And the sons of Issachar: Tola and Puvvah and Iob and Shimron. 14 And the sons of Zebulun: Sered and Elon and Jahleel. 15 These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, with his daughter Dinah; all his sons and his daughters *numbered* thirty-three. 16 And the sons of Gad: Ziphion and Haggi, Shuni and Ezbon, Eri and Arodi and Areli. 17 And the sons of Asher: Imnah and Ishvah and Ishvi and Beriah and their sister Serah. And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. 18 These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah; and she bore to Jacob these sixteen persons. 19 The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 20 Now to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara, priest of On, bore to him. 21 And the sons of Benjamin: Bela and Becher and Ashbel, Gera and Naaman, Ehi and Rosh, Muppim and Huppim and Ard. 22 These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob; *there were* fourteen persons in all. 23 And the sons of Dan: Hushim. 24 And the sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel and Guni and Jezer and Shillem. 25 These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Rachel, and she bore these to Jacob; *there were* seven persons in all. 26 All the persons belonging to Jacob, who came to Egypt, his direct descendants, not including the wives of Jacob's sons, *were* sixty-six persons in all, 27 and the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, *were* seventy.

When they all came to Egypt, the total number of people who belonged to Jacob there numbered 70, not counting the wives of his sons, except, I presume, the wife of Joseph. She appears to be included among the 70, if I have counted correctly. From one man with four wives we end up with quite a huge family! One thing that stands out in this list is that though they kept referring to Benjamin as a "lad," and a "little child," he has ten children listed here! Now, perhaps some of these were born in Egypt and they are listed because it is meant to include all of the sons of Jacob's sons, whether they were alive when the journey to Egypt was made or whether they were born later.

Nonetheless, Benjamin was a grown man and probably a father of at least some of these boys when they went to Egypt.

Genesis 46:28-34

Now he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out *the way* before him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. 29 And Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time. 30 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive." 31 And Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who *were* in the land of Canaan, have come to me; 32 and the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.' 33 "And it shall come about when Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' 34 that you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' that you may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians."

Judah has become the leader among the brothers. He was sent ahead to Joseph so that he could direct them to the land of Goshen, which is in northern Egypt. Judah became the tribe of Israel from which the kings of Israel came later on. When Jacob blessed his sons and prophesied about them before his death he said to Judah, "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you." (Genesis 49:8.) Even Jesus Himself is called "the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah" in Revelation 5:5. It is from the descendants of Judah that the Messiah was born.

Joseph jumped in his chariot and went to Goshen to meet his father. There was a big emotional reunion and they wept and embraced for a long time. It had been years since they had last seen each other, and Jacob had thought that Joseph was dead. This must have been a very sweet reunion for both of them! Jacob said that he was ready to die now that he had seen Joseph again and knew that he was alive. His life was now complete. He was happy again. The greatest grief of his life had been overturned and he felt joy again.

Joseph addressed the whole family in order to brief them about what he was going to do and what they were to do. Joseph was an Egyptian now and knew the ways of the Egyptians. In order to protect them and their distinctiveness as a family and as a nation, Joseph wanted them to stay in Goshen and wanted to ensure that the Egyptians would actually despise them so that they would not corrupt them or desire to intermarry with them. Since shepherds were "loathsome" to the Egyptians (verse 34), Joseph wanted to make sure that Pharaoh and the Egyptians understood clearly that his family was a family of shepherds. He wanted them to understand that these people had been shepherds and keepers of livestock for generations. In this way, he would ensure that they could stay in the land of Goshen and remain distinct from the Egyptians. They would be able to preserve their culture and their faith without having to conform to Egyptian culture and religion.

Genesis 47:1-6

Then Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, and said, "My father and my brothers and their flocks and their herds and all that they have, have come out of the land of Canaan; and behold, they are in the land of Goshen." 2 And he took five men from among his brothers, and presented them to Pharaoh. 3 Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" So they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, both we and our fathers." 4 And they said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in the land,

for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, therefore, please let your servants live in the land of Goshen." 5 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6 "The land of Egypt is at your disposal; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land, let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know any capable men among them, then put them in charge of my livestock."

We don't know which five of Joseph's brothers he took and presented to Pharaoh, but they did as he told them. They told Pharaoh that they were shepherds. The difficulty was that the pasture for the flocks had failed in Canaan because of the famine, so they had come to stay in Egypt. They had come "to sojourn in the land." The word "sojourn" means to turn aside from a road and stay somewhere as a guest. It means to stop in a place temporarily. They did not mean to stay in Egypt permanently, just to stay there for a while. Little did they know at that point how long Israel would be there! Nevertheless it was not God's intention that they should be there permanently. A time would come when they would go back to Canaan.

The brothers asked Pharaoh to allow them to live in the land of Goshen. Pharaoh had already said this to Joseph before they came down, that they should be settled in Goshen, but they still made a formal request. They could not make any demands or claims, they could simply request that they might be allowed to live in Egypt. They moved there and stayed there by the permission of Pharaoh, and Pharaoh was pleased to have them because of Joseph.

Pharaoh responded positively and ordered Joseph to settle his family in Goshen in the best of the land. He told Joseph that if any of his brothers were capable men, they should be put in charge of the livestock of Pharaoh. Pharaoh not only made a place for them, but he also offered them employment. They could settle in the land and be useful there as well. They could be a blessing and not just a burden to Egypt.

Genesis 47:7-12

Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8 And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years have you lived?" 9 So Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning." 10 And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence. 11 So Joseph settled 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 ordered. 12 And Joseph provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to their little ones.

Joseph brought his father Jacob for a private audience with Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Jacob was grateful for Pharaoh's welcome to him and his family. He wished God's blessings for Pharaoh and for Egypt.

Pharaoh just had one question for Jacob, "How many years have you lived?" He could see that Jacob was a very old man and he was curious. Jacob responded that he was 130 years old. He said that his years had been "few and unpleasant." That is how he summed up his life to that point. I guess that 130 years of age was still not considered to be a really long life, at least among the Hebrews! Jacob looked back on his life and pronounced it "unpleasant." The word Jacob used for "unpleasant" comes from a Hebrew root word meaning "to spoil (literally, by breaking to pieces); figuratively, to make (or be) good for nothing, i.e. bad (physically, socially or morally)."²⁴ What a

²⁴ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

terrible evaluation! Jacob was a negative man who, as he looked back, could only see a spoiled, broken life. But he had known God! He had been protected by God! He had been richly blessed and had inherited the blessings of Abraham and Isaac! He had allowed hardships and grief to sour him and embitter him. We need a positive focus rather than a negative one. We need thankfulness rather than bitterness.

Once again, as he was leaving, Jacob blessed Pharaoh. He was settled in Rameses and Joseph provided them with food. Pharaoh welcomed them as well as Joseph. Joseph opened the door for his family. He became their mediator and advocate before Pharaoh. Pharaoh was gracious to Jacob and his family because of Joseph. In this sense, Joseph is a type of Christ, who is our mediator and advocate before the Father.

Genesis 47:13-26

Now there was no food in all the land, because the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. 14 And Joseph gathered 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. 15 And when the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us food, for why should we die in your presence? For *our* money is gone." 16 Then Joseph said, "Give up your livestock, and I will give you *food* for your livestock, since *your* money is gone." 17 So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses and the flocks and the herds and the donkeys; and he fed them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year. 18 And when that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent, and the cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left for my lord except our bodies and our lands. 19 "Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we and our land will be slaves to Pharaoh. So give us seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate." 20 So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for every Egyptian sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. Thus the land became Pharaoh's. 21 And as for the people, he removed them to the cities from one end of Egypt's border to the other. 22 Only the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment which Pharaoh gave them. Therefore, they did not sell their land. 23 Then Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have today bought you and your land for Pharaoh; now, *here* is seed for you, and you may sow the land. 24 "And at the harvest you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own for seed of the field and for your food and for those of your households and as food for your little ones." 25 So they said, "You have saved our lives! Let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's slaves." 26 And Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt *valid* to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh's.

There was no food in Egypt and Canaan because of the famine, and the people spent all their money during the famine to buy food from Joseph, yet they still had to come to him for grain. All their money was now in the house of Pharaoh. They appealed to him and said, "Give us food, for why should we die in your presence? For our money is gone." They were destitute. They still had livestock, however, and so Joseph traded food for their livestock. The only thing left for them to trade the next year was their own bodies and their land. They offered themselves as slaves to Pharaoh in exchange for seed and food. All the money, livestock, land and people of Egypt became the property of Pharaoh! Egypt became a socialist state because of the famine. People will do just about anything if they are starving. The people of Egypt gave up everything to keep from starving. This was not a bad thing in their case because they were in the gracious hands of Joseph, and he would take care of them.

Since the farms and fields were not producing any food during the famine, Joseph moved all the people into the cities. There it would be easier to distribute food

to them and to take care of them. Since they now belonged to Pharaoh, he could do whatever he wanted with them. Their land was his, their animals were his, and they were his. Until the famine came to an end, they all lived in the cities.

Only one class of people were exempt from selling their property – the priests. They were supported by Pharaoh. They lived on tax money and did not have to rely on their own income. Though they were pagan priests, Joseph respected their protected position in the nation. As a foreigner in Egypt, he had to tolerate the institutions of that nation.

Joseph had done it. He had saved the lives of the Egyptians and of his own family. God accomplished His purpose of moving Israel to Egypt. The famine had not been senseless and without purpose. God did what He had determined to do through the famine. Because of Joseph Israel found a favored position with Pharaoh and with the Egyptians. When the famine was over, Joseph gave the people seed and ordered them to sow the land. He established a law that one-fifth of all the produce of the land should be given to Pharaoh and four-fifths could be used by the people to feed themselves and their families. The people were happy with this arrangement and were happy to be the slaves of Pharaoh because Joseph had saved their lives. One-fifth of one's income is a pretty hefty tax (20%), but they realized that they owed their lives to Joseph and to Pharaoh, and so were happy to pay it.

As Moses wrote this over 400 years after it happened, he could say that the statute that originated with Joseph was still observed in Egypt, that Pharaoh should receive 20% of the produce of the land. This law that Joseph had passed was still in force over 400 years later. Joseph had a lasting impact on the nation of Egypt.

Genesis 47:27-31

Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous. 28 And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years. 29 When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt, 30 but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said." 31 And he said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed *in worship* at the head of the bed.

Israel became a nation in Egypt. They became fruitful and very numerous. They acquired property there and became landowners in Egypt. This is what God had intended.

Jacob lived for 17 years in Egypt until he died at the age of 147. But at heart Jacob was not an Egyptian and didn't feel like Egypt was home to him. The graves of his fathers were not in Egypt. He had not lived out his life in Egypt. Canaan was his home. He was very concerned that he would be buried in Egypt after his death, and he didn't want this. He wanted to be buried with his father in the place that he had lived out most of his life. He made Joseph swear that he would take him up to Canaan and bury him in the burial place of Abraham and Isaac. When Joseph swore to do this, Jacob relaxed and worshipped the Lord. This was his one last anxiety. This man who had acted in fear so much of his life now has his last fear set aside. He will not be laid to rest in Egypt, but will sleep physically with his fathers in Canaan.

It is interesting that Jacob made this request as an inferior to a superior. He said "If I have found favor in your sight." Of course he was favored! He was Joseph's father

whom he loved very much! Joseph's number one concern had been for his father. There was no question that Jacob had found favor with Joseph! But Jacob had respect for Joseph's position as ruler of Egypt. Joseph had the authority and power and resources to grant his request.

Jacob asked Joseph to deal with him "in kindness and faithfulness." If he would be a kind and faithful son, he would not bury him in Egypt. This would be the one last kindness that Joseph would offer to his father.

Genesis 48:1-7

Now it came about after these things that Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is sick." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him. 2 When it was told to Jacob, "Behold, your son Joseph has come to you," Israel collected his strength and sat up in the bed. 3 Then Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, 4 and He said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.' 5 "And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. 6 "But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance. 7 "Now as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan on the journey, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."

When Jacob was on his deathbed Joseph was informed and came to visit him, bringing along with him Manasseh and Ephraim. It is at these times that men speak of the things that are most important to them, and Jacob is no exception. He spoke with Joseph of the covenant that God had affirmed to him when he was in Canaan. When God appeared to him, He blessed him and promised that he would become "fruitful and numerous" and "a company of peoples." The Lord also promised that he would give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants "for an everlasting possession." God's promise involved both the people and the place. God would make them a great nation and God would give them the land. As we look back, we see that God has done this and that He has been faithful to this promise. The land of Canaan is given to Israel as an everlasting possession. This nation will not be wiped out nor will their land be taken from them for all time because God is faithful to His promises. Those who are trying to destroy Israel will never be able to succeed.

Jacob then said to Joseph that Ephraim and Manasseh would be considered his sons. They would be considered his sons as much as Reuben and Simeon were his sons. This is why the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh would later be called "half-tribes." The tribe was not called the tribe of Joseph, but the half-tribe of Ephraim and the half-tribe of Manasseh. We must wonder why Jacob did this, and I think he explains it in his statement in verse 5. It is because Ephraim and Manasseh were born in Egypt before Jacob came to Egypt. Their mother was an Egyptian, the daughter of an Egyptian priest. Jacob wanted Joseph to know that he accepted these boys as His own, and he wanted to make sure that these two sons of Joseph were accepted as part of his family as much as anyone else who had been born to him, and were not ostracized because they were "Egyptians." He therefore recognized them as his own sons so that they and everyone else would know that they were to be included in the nation and the covenant and the promises. They would be heads of tribes in Israel as were Reuben and Simeon.

Any sons or daughters born to Joseph after Ephraim and Manasseh would be

considered to belong to Joseph, but they would be part of the tribe of Ephraim or Manasseh. They would not be tribe leaders themselves.

When he mentioned the death of Rachel, Jacob did not mention the circumstances of her death. He did not mention the birth of Benjamin.

Genesis 48:8-22

When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" 9 And Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." So he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." 10 Now the eyes of Israel were so dim from age *that* he could not see. Then Joseph brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. 11 And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face, and behold, God has let me see your children as well." 12 Then Joseph took them from his knees, and bowed with his face to the ground. 13 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them close to him. 14 But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the first-born. 15 And he blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, 16 The angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; And may my name live on in them, And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." 17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the first-born. Place your right hand on his head." 19 But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people and he also shall be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations." 20 And he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel shall pronounce blessing, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!'" Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. 21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. 22 "And I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

It sounds as if Jacob had not met Ephraim and Manasseh before this moment, or perhaps his vision was so bad that he couldn't recognize them, and so he asked who they were. Joseph told him that they were the sons God had given him, and Jacob asked him to bring them close so that he might bless them. He embraced and kissed them and then expressed his great delight in seeing them. He had thought that he would never see Joseph again, and now he had the opportunity to see his sons as well. God had been gracious to him and exceeded his expectations. God loves to exceed our expectations in what He does.

Manasseh was the firstborn, and Ephraim was the younger, so Joseph put Manasseh at Jacob's right hand and Ephraim at his left. But Jacob was now a prophet and he knew that Ephraim would be greater than Manasseh, even though he was younger. So Jacob crossed his hands and put his right hand on Ephraim's head, and his left on Manasseh's. This displeased Joseph, but Jacob explained that he knew what he was doing. He explained that Ephraim would be greater than Manasseh.

When he blessed the boys he was blessing Joseph (verse 15). In blessing Ephraim and Manasseh he was blessing Joseph and picturing his future. This is what he wanted for Joseph. He expressed first who God was to him. He was the God who had been the God of Abraham and Isaac, the God of his fathers. The Lord was the God who had called and chosen Abraham and passed the blessing of the covenant on to Isaac and not to Ishmael. The Lord was the God who had been his shepherd. God had led him along and had watched over him. God was the one who had redeemed

him from all evil. God had protected him and provided for him. He had protected Jacob from the wrath of Esau. He had protected Jacob from the wickedness and selfishness of Laban and his sons. He had protected Jacob from the people all around him, especially after Simeon and Levi had wiped out the men of the city of Hamor and Shechem. Most recently God had delivered him from the famine in Canaan and had provided for him in Egypt. Jacob looked back and saw all of this, and now needed to communicate these things to Ephraim and Manasseh. He wanted this God to be their God as well, and indeed He would be.

Jacob asked that the Lord might bless the boys, and that Israel's name might live on in them, as well as the names of Abraham and Isaac. He asked that they might grow into a multitude. He wanted the Lord to make them into mighty nations, not just individuals or small families or little communities, but huge multitudes of people. This would be the evidence of God's blessing. If this were fulfilled it would mean that God had taken care of them, had protected them and kept them healthy, had provided wives for them, had given them healthy children and so on. All of these desires are bundled up in this blessing and implied by it.

Jacob capped his blessing of the boys by saying, "By you Israel shall pronounce blessing, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!'" They and their tribes would become the model of God's blessing in Israel, the picture of what happens when God blesses a family. People would say, "Wow, look at how God has blessed Ephraim and Manasseh! May God bless you like that!"

Jacob knew that he was about to die, and he told Joseph. But he reassured him that God would be with him and would bring them back to the land of their fathers. He knew the promise that God had spoken to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-14, "And *God* said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions.'" He knew that their stay in Egypt was not permanent. They would not be absorbed into the nation of Egypt, but would remain a distinct nation themselves and God would restore them to Canaan.

Jacob promised Joseph that he would be given "one portion more" than his brothers. The other eleven tribes would get one portion each in the land, but Joseph would get two. We can read of the fulfillment of this prophetic promise in Joshua 17:14-18:

Then the sons of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, "Why have you given me only one lot and one portion for an inheritance, since I am a numerous people whom the LORD has thus far blessed?" 15 And Joshua said to them, "If you are a numerous people, go up to the forest and clear a place for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the Rephaim, since the hill country of Ephraim is too narrow for you." 16 And the sons of Joseph said, "The hill country is not enough for us, and all the Canaanites who live in the valley land have chariots of iron, both those who are in Beth-shean and its towns, and those who are in the valley of Jezreel." 17 And Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh, saying, "You are a numerous people and have great power; you shall not have one lot *only*, 18 but the hill country shall be yours. For though it is a forest, you shall clear it, and to its farthest borders it shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, even though they have chariots of iron *and* though they are strong."

Joshua fulfilled the promise of Jacob to Joseph by giving Ephraim and Manasseh two portions in the land. They had been blessed and were very numerous and very powerful. They were treated as two tribes rather than one because they were so

numerous. The Lord fulfills His promises. The vision that he had given to Jacob for the future of Joseph's sons was fulfilled. They were blessed and they did receive a double portion in the land.

Genesis 49:1-27

Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what shall befall you in the days to come.

2 "Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob;
And listen to Israel your father.

3 "Reuben, you are my first-born;
My might and the beginning of my strength,
Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.

4 "Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence,
Because you went up to your father's bed;
Then you defiled *it*-- he went up to my couch.

5 "Simeon and Levi are brothers;
Their swords are implements of violence.

6 "Let my soul not enter into their council;
Let not my glory be united with their assembly;
Because in their anger they slew men,
And in their self-will they lamed oxen.

7 "Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;
And their wrath, for it is cruel.

I will disperse them in Jacob,
And scatter them in Israel.

8 "Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father's sons shall bow down to you.

9 "Judah is a lion's whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He couches, he lies down as a lion,
And as a lion, who dares rouse him up?

10 "The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples.

11 "He ties *his* foal to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine;
He washes his garments in wine,
And his robes in the blood of grapes.

12 "His eyes are dull from wine,
And his teeth white from milk.

13 "Zebulun shall dwell at the seashore;
And he *shall be* a haven for ships,
And his flank *shall be* toward Sidon.

14 "Issachar is a strong donkey,
Lying down between the sheepfolds.

15 "When he saw that a resting place was good
And that the land was pleasant,
He bowed his shoulder to bear *burdens*,
And became a slave at forced labor.

16 "Dan shall judge his people,
As one of the tribes of Israel.

17 "Dan shall be a serpent in the way,
A horned snake in the path,
That bites the horse's heels,
So that his rider falls backward.

18 "For Thy salvation I wait, O LORD.

19 "As for Gad, raiders shall raid him,
But he shall raid *at* their heels.

20 "As for Asher, his food shall be rich,
And he shall yield royal dainties.

21 "Naphtali is a doe let loose,
He gives beautiful words.

22 "Joseph is a fruitful bough,
A fruitful bough by a spring;
Its branches run over a wall.

23 "The archers bitterly attacked him,
And shot *at him* and harassed him;

24 But his bow remained firm,
And his arms were agile,
From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob
(From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),

25 From the God of your father who helps you,
And by the Almighty who blesses you
With blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

26 "The blessings of your father
Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors
Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills;
May they be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.

27 "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
In the morning he devours the prey,
And in the evening he divides the spoil."

Having blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob summoned his other 11 sons so that he might tell them about their future. He was going to tell them what would befall them in days to come. He urged them to listen. This was a very important time. He was about to die, and he had a parting word for each of his sons. He spoke to them in order of their birth.

He spoke first to Reuben, his first-born son by Leah. Reuben was the beginning of his strength and might. A man's strength was in his sons, and the more he had, the stronger he was. He said that Reuben was "preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power." The word for preeminent means "an overhanging, an excess, superiority."²⁵ Reuben excelled in dignity and power. These were his outstanding character traits. He was a leader among his brothers, as a firstborn should be. But there was a big problem with Reuben; he was "uncontrolled as water" and because of this he would not be given

²⁵ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

preeminence among his brothers. He would not be the leading tribe in Israel. This uncontrolled character was seen in that he “went up” to his father's bed and defiled it. He had had sex with Bilhah, as recorded in Genesis 35:22, “And it came about while Israel was dwelling in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard of it.” Reuben did not have the self-control required of a leader. He was lustful and impulsive, and therefore could not have the lead position.

Jacob had not forgotten Reuben's sin, and it must have been painful for both of them to revisit the subject. Reuben lost the position that should have been his as firstborn because of his sin. This one act of immorality had long-term consequences for Reuben and his tribe. The same has been true for many who have fallen into sexual sin.

Jacob addressed Simeon and Levi together as a team. Simeon was second born to Leah, and Levi was third, before Rachel bore any children. Simeon and Levi were the team that went into the city and Hamor and Shechem and killed all the men because Shechem had raped their sister (Genesis 34:25-26). In his words to them, this is all that Jacob recalled. They were violent men, driven by anger, wrath and self-will. He cursed their anger and wrath, because their anger was fierce and their wrath was cruel. Twice here Jacob says “Let not.” First, he says “Let not my soul enter into their council.” He exhorts himself not to take their advice and follow their lead. It is a warning to them and to their brothers not to take this pattern of life. A violent course is a dangerous course and can only end in grief for those who follow it. Do not take the advice of people who are angry and violent. Second, he says, “Let not my glory be united with their assembly.” I think what he means is simply that he should not join with them, assemble with them, in doing what they are doing. The NIV says, “Let me not join their assembly.” Proverbs 3:31-32 says, “Do not envy a man of violence, And do not choose any of his ways. For the crooked man is an abomination to the LORD; But He is intimate with the upright.” Violence should never be our first course in solving a problem unless someone forces us into it by their own violence against us. Violence should be a last resort, a defensive measure, but certainly not a pattern of life.

Jacob addressed Judah next. Judah would be praised by his brothers, and they would bow down to him. He would have victory over his enemies. His tribe would be the ruling tribe in Israel. Judah was like a lion who devours his prey and then lies down to rest, and no one dares to disturb him. Judah was powerful and dangerous. He was a leader among his brothers. Jacob prophesied that the ruling scepter would not depart from Judah until Shiloh would come. Who is this “Shiloh”? The word means “tranquil” (Strong's Hebrew Dictionary) or “peaceable”. Smith's Bible Dictionary says this:

Supposing that the translation is correct, the meaning of the word is *peaceable* or *pacific*, and the allusion is either to Solomon, whose name has a similar signification, or to the expected Messiah, who in Isa. 9:6 is expressly called the Prince of Peace. [MESSIAH.] Other interpretations, however, of the passage are given, one of which makes it refer to the city of this name. [See the following article.] It might be translated, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, till he shall go to Shiloh.” In this case the allusion would be to the primacy of Judah in war, Judges 1:1–2; 20:18; Num. 2:3; 10:14, which was to continue until the promised land was conquered and the ark of the covenant was solemnly deposited at Shiloh.²⁶

The second interpretation mentioned above seems unlikely to me, since the passage says “to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” Shiloh is a reference to an

²⁶William Smith; revised and edited by F.N. and M.A. Peloubet, *Smith's Bible dictionary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997.

individual who would rule over all the peoples. He would not simply be the ruler of Israel, but all people would submit to him. There is little doubt in my mind that this is a reference to the Messiah. J. Vernon McGee comments:

This is one of the more remarkable prophecies in all the Word of God. Already we have been told that there will be a seed of the woman. That was the first prophecy of Christ: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). The "seed" of the woman is the One who will do the bruising of the serpent's head. He will be the One to get the victory. This first prophecy was in Genesis; then that Seed was confirmed to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Now it is confirmed to Judah—out of Judah's line He is coming. Also, the word *shiloh* means "rest and tranquility." Christ is the One who will bring rest. Remember that when the Lord Jesus walked here on earth, He turned from those who had rejected Him, and He said to the populace, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will rest you" (Matt. 11:28). That is Shiloh—Shiloh had come.

Not only is Christ Shiloh, but also He is the One who will hold the sceptre. The sceptre of this universe will be held in nail-pierced hands. In the last part of verse 24 of this chapter we read that from God will come the *Shepherd*, the *Stone* of Israel. So this Shiloh is also a shepherd and a stone. When we get to Numbers 24:17 we will find that a Star is prophesied. Think of all that the coming of Christ means. He is the *Seed* promised to the woman and to the patriarchs. He is the *Shiloh* who brings rest. He is the *King* who holds the sceptre. He is the *Shepherd* who gave His life, and He is the Chief *Shepherd* who is coming someday. He is the *Stone* that the builders disallowed but who is now become the headstone of the corner. He is the *Star*, the bright and morning Star for His church. This is the line that went from Adam to Seth (after Abel was murdered). From Seth it went through Noah to Shem and to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and now to Judah. Friend, don't miss this wonderful fact that God is moving according to a pattern and a program here. This is very important for us to see.²⁷

Then also Jacob paints a picture of the fruitfulness of Judah in verses 11 and 12. Judah will tie his donkey's colt to a vine in his vineyard. He have such an abundance that he will wash his garments in wine. There could be an allusion here in some way to Jesus, who rode into Jerusalem on a "donkey's colt" and who himself is the "vine" (John 15). It is difficult to see a clear connection, though.

Zebulun only gets one brief line. He would live by the seashore and be a haven for ships.

For Issachar Jacob has good news and bad news. Issachar is a strong donkey, a strong beast of burden, and will have a good resting place and a pleasant land. However, he would be forced to labor as a slave in this good land. He would bear heavy burdens.

Dan would be a judge. He is like a serpent in the road that bites the horses on their heels so that their riders fall off backward. For some reason here in verse 18 Jacob inserts the words, "For Thy salvation I wait, O Lord." Maybe the mention of a snake reminded him of God's promise of one who would crush the head of the serpent. He was looking for and anticipating the fulfillment of that promise.

Gad would be raided, but would raid the raiders. He would pay back those who took advantage of him. The raiders would not get away with their evildoing.

Asher would produce rich food and "royal dainties". He would be successful in agriculture and would produce delicacies fit for a king.

Naphtali was like a doe set free. He would produce beautiful words. When one is set free, he can do this, he can produce beautiful words, beautiful songs, poetry,

²⁷J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible commentary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1981 by J. Vernon McGee.

books and sermons. The good words come from the good experience of being freed by God.

Jacob depicted Joseph as a fruitful bough by a spring, whose branches run over a wall. His fruitfulness extended beyond his own territory to bless others. He was a blessing not only to his family, but also to a foreign nation, to the nation of Egypt. He had saved their lives and they owed him a great debt of gratitude.

Joseph had also been attacked bitterly, shot at and harassed. He had been abused by his own brothers, by Potiphar's wife and Potiphar, and forgotten by Pharaoh's cupbearer. But he had endured. He had survived and his "bow remained firm, and his arms were agile." His firmness and agility was from the Mighty One of Jacob. He survived and endured because God was blessing him. The God of his father had watched over him and taken care of him. Jacob wishes that those blessings might continue.

From the Mighty One of Jacob comes "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel." The New Testament applies both of these titles to Jesus. In John 10 Jesus points out that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. In a number of places Jesus is called a stone or a rock (Romans 9:32-33, 1 Corinthians 10:4, Ephesians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:4-8). Despite all of his fears and failures, Jacob is now a great prophet. The Lord has taught him to trust Him. The Lord had proven Himself to Jacob, and Jacob utters another prophecy concerning Christ.

Jacob concluded his words to his sons by speaking of his youngest, Benjamin. Benjamin was like a ravenous wolf, devouring the prey in the morning and dividing the spoil at night. Wolves work together in packs, hunting together and sharing their prey with one another. Benjamin would be hungry for prey and conquest, but would be organized about it and work in cooperation.

Genesis 49:28-33

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him. 29 Then he charged them and said to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site. 31 "There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah-- 32 the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth." 33 When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Jacob's last act in life was to bless his sons with the "blessing appropriate to him." He blessed them as was appropriate for each individual. General blessings are fine, but each individual has an appropriate blessing for themselves. After blessing them he charged them with one last command, and that was that he was to be buried with his fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah were buried. This was still the only piece of land that they owned in Canaan. Once he was "gathered to his people" spiritually, he wanted to be gathered to his people physically and buried with them in the land God had promised to them.

When he had finished saying all he needed to say, He laid down in bed and died and was "gathered to his people." This same expression had been used of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, and would later be used to describe the deaths of Aaron and Moses

as well. After they died, they went on to be with their fathers. They continued to exist in fellowship with those who had preceded them. Jesus pointed out that when God says that He is the "God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" that He is proving the truth of the resurrection. He explained, "He is not the God of the dead but of the living." (Matthew 22:32.)

Genesis 50:1-14

Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him and kissed him. 2 And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. 3 Now forty days were required for it, for such is the period required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

4 And when the days of mourning for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your sight, please speak to Pharaoh, saying, 5 'My father made me swear, saying, "Behold, I am about to die; 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; then I will return.'" 6 And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear." 7 So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8 and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father's household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen. 9 There also went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company. 10 When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed seven days mourning for his father. 11 Now when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians." Therefore it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan. 12 And thus his sons did for him as he had charged them; 13 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 had bought along with the field for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. 14 And after he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

When Jacob died, Joseph and his sons mourned, but also all of Egypt mourned. For seventy days the whole nation mourned the death of Jacob, the father of Joseph. He and his family had become a blessing to them, and the whole nation felt his loss. Joseph had the physicians embalm Jacob, a process which took 40 days. I presume this means that Jacob was given the same treatment given to Pharaohs and other high officials when they died, and he was mummified. I don't think he had this done because he had adopted Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife, but because they needed to transport the body to Canaan and it would be quite a while before they could bury him. They needed to preserve the body and halt the decay so that they could delay the burial for a while.

Being a servant of Pharaoh, Joseph had to get his permission before he could leave to take his father's body to Canaan for burial. He told him that he had an obligation to his father to do this, as he had sworn to him that he would do so. He asked that he might be allowed to go up and bury his father and promised to return. Pharaoh granted his request and sent him on his way. Joseph is a great example of a man who knew his place before God and before his employer. He was able to submit both to God and to Pharaoh without any apparent conflicts. Pharaoh knew that Joseph was a man of such integrity that he would do what he said he would do. He knew he could have complete confidence in Joseph. There was no reluctance to grant his request, nor did he have all sorts of questions about how this was going to be carried out. He knew that Joseph could and would take care of everything.

Lots of people went up to Canaan with Joseph and his brothers and their

families. All the servants of Pharaoh went with them along with the elders from Pharaoh's household and the elders of the land of Egypt. The leaders of Egypt except for Pharaoh himself went up with Joseph to bury Jacob. They were all guarded by chariots and horsemen. Such a large company of the leadership of Egypt could not go on such a trip without a military escort. No one dared attack them along the way because of the strength of the force sent with them. We see again the esteem in which Joseph and his family was held. The Egyptians loved Joseph and Jacob as well. Joseph's sorrow was their sorrow, and his grief was their grief.

They stopped at the threshing floor of Atad where they lamented and mourned for seven days for Jacob. Moses comments that this place was "beyond the Jordan," and we must remember that he was writing this from East of the Jordan and he means that this place was on the west side. The Canaanites were impressed with the great company of Egyptians and the great mourning that they observed there and renamed the place Abel-mizraim, which means "meadow of Egypt." Smith's Bible Dictionary says this about the place:

A'BEL-MIZRA'IM (*meadow of Egypt*), the name given by the Canaanites to the floor of Atad, at which Joseph, his brothers and the Egyptians made their mourning for Jacob. Gen. 50:11. It was beyond (on the east of) Jordan. (Schaff and others say it was on the west bank, for the writer was on the east of Jordan. It was near Jericho, or perhaps Hebron.)²⁸

Joseph and his brothers carried out Jacob's wishes and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah. Joseph kept his word to his father. They then all returned to Egypt, their new home. They could not stay in Canaan. It was not yet time for them all to return.

Genesis 50:15-21

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph should bear a grudge against us and pay us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" 16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying, 17 'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? 20 "And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. 21 "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph's brothers feared that Joseph was just waiting until their father died before he took vengeance upon them. They thought that perhaps he had spared their lives just for the sake of their father and would take revenge once he was gone. Their guilt led to fear of reprisal. When you treat others poorly and abuse them, you will face fear yourself. You will see danger where there is no danger. These brothers admitted that they had done great wrong to Joseph and that they deserved to be paid back in full for all they had done to him. What if this was his plan? What if they would now face his wrath? They were not confident of his good will toward him and his forgiveness.

To protect themselves, they concocted this story about Jacob charging them to

²⁸William Smith; revised and edited by F.N. and M.A. Peloubet, *Smith's Bible dictionary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997.

request Joseph's forgiveness of them on his behalf. Surely if Jacob had said this, he would have said it himself to Joseph. We still don't know how much Jacob knew about what the brothers had done to Joseph. Maybe he had known the whole story after moving to Egypt, and maybe he didn't. The brothers felt they needed to invoke the weight of their father's authority to insure that Joseph would forgive them and would not take vengeance on them. They knew Joseph loved their father, but they weren't sure he loved them.

It grieved Joseph that his brothers would fear him so. He wept because they asked his forgiveness and he wept because they thought that he would have taken vengeance on them. He was a tender-hearted man. He had already forgiven them and had no intention of paying them back. Nevertheless it was right of them to finally and formally admit that they had sinned against him and to ask his forgiveness. They bowed before him and presented themselves as his servants.

Joseph set aside their fears. When someone has harmed you and sinned against you and is filled with guilt and fear over how you are going to respond, you hold them in the palm of your hand. You can choose to crush them and punish them and make them feel more miserable, or you can forgive them and comfort them. Joseph chose the latter course.

Joseph reminded them that he was not in God's place. He had learned that it was not they who sent him off to Egypt, but it was God. He used a thing that they had meant for evil and turned it to something good. God had sent Joseph to Egypt to preserve the lives of many people. God did not cause the jealousy and resentment and bitterness between Joseph and his brothers, but He saw it and used it to put Joseph right where He wanted him. The Lord can and does use evil circumstances to bring about good results. Our task is to trust Him in the midst of being victimized by the evil of others. In time we will see His purpose if we don't lose heart and fail to trust Him.

Joseph commanded them not to be afraid and promised that he would care for them and for their children. He would provide for them. They would lack for nothing because Joseph would take care of them.

Genesis 50:22-26

Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. 23 And Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees. 24 And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." 26 So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Egypt was now the home of Joseph and his brothers, the sons of Israel. They stayed there, and Joseph lived to be 110 years of age. He lived to see his great-great grandsons on Ephraim's side and great-grandsons on Manasseh's side. Just before he died, he told his brothers (probably the descendants of his brothers) that God would take care of them and would bring them up out of Egypt to the land that He had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was God who had taken care of all of them. He used Joseph, to be sure, but even without Joseph around, God would still take care of them. This tells us that even when a great leader on whom we depend passes away, God is still there. He is the one we must ultimately trust. Human leaders and providers will come and go, but God remains. He does not change or pass away.

Joseph made the sons of Israel swear that they would bring his bones up from Egypt and back to the land God had promised them when they left Egypt. He did not want his remains left in Egypt for all time, but wanted them returned to his native land, the land that God had said would be theirs. Moses made a point of fulfilling this vow to Joseph. Exodus 13:19 says, "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, 'God shall surely take care of you; and you shall carry my bones from here with you.'" Later, after they entered the land of promise, Joshua buried the bones of Joseph. Joshua 24:32 says, "Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of Joseph's sons."

Joseph died at 110 years of age, was embalmed, probably mummified, and laid in a coffin in Egypt. With the end of the life of Joseph, the book of Genesis ends. The nation of Israel has gotten a good beginning and in Egypt will grow into the great nation that God had promised they would become.