Notes on

Genesis

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Introduction

TITLE

Each book of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament, called "The Pentateuch" since about A.D. 160, and called "The Torah" ["instruction" or "teachings"] by the Jews), originally received its title in the Hebrew Bible—the Jews call the Hebrew Bible the Tanakh—from the first word or words in the book. There are three divisions in the Hebrew Bible: The Law (Torah), The Prophets (Nevi'im), and The Writings (Kethuvim; cf. Luke 24:44).[1] The Torah was originally one book, but the translators of the Septuagint (Greek) version (ca. 250 B.C.) divided it into the five books that we have.[2] The Jews regarded the stories in the Torah as divine instruction for them, as well as the commandments and sermons, since they too teach theology and ethics. "Torah" is often understood as "law," and this is one of its meanings in the Bible (e.g., Exod. 12:49; et al.). The word "Pentateuch" comes from the Greek words *penta*, meaning "five," and *teuchoi*, which was a case for carrying papyrus scrolls, and in later usage, the scrolls themselves.

The English title "Genesis" has come to us from the Latin Vulgate translation (*Liber Genesis*) made by the early church father Jerome (ca. A.D. 390). The Latin title came from the Septuagint translation.[3] "Genesis" is a transliteration of the Greek word *geneseos*, the Greek word that translates the Hebrew *toledot*. This Hebrew word is the key word in identifying the structure of Genesis, and the English translators have usually

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[1]See Appendix 1 at the end of these notes for a table showing four canons of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Jewish, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox. See also Floyd V. Filson, *Which Books Belong in the Bible?* pp. 73-100. See Randall Price, *Searching for the Original Bible*, pp. 36-42, for a concise explanation of the origin and development of the whole Old Testament.

[2]The name "Septuagint" comes from the Latin for 70, because of the legend that 72 translators produced it, six elders from each of the 12 tribes of Israel.

[3]"Vulgate" means the language of the common people.

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rendered it "account" or "generations" or "history" or "records" (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2).[1]

DATE

The events recorded date back to the creation of the world.

Many Christians believe that the earth is millions of years old. They usually base this belief on the statements of scientists and they understand Scripture in the light of these statements. Likewise many Christians believe that the human race began hundreds of thousands of years ago for the same reason.

Many evangelical Christians believe that the earth is not much older than 10,000 years. They base this on the genealogies in Scripture (Gen. 5; 10; 11; et al.), which they understand to be "open" (i.e., not complete).[2] Evangelicals usually hold to a more recent date for man's creation—more recent than the millions of years that evolutionists postulate—for the same reason.

> "The history of man on the earth may easily be more than the supposed six thousand years and with no violence to the testimony of the Sacred Text."[3]

Another group of evangelicals believes that these genealogies are either "closed" (i.e., complete) or very close to complete. This leads them to date the creation of the world and man about 6,000 years ago. I shall discuss the question of how we should interpret the genealogies in the exposition of the chapters where they occur.

Many interpreters have placed the date of composition of Genesis much later than Moses' lifetime. Some of them do this because Genesis contains some names that became common designations of people and places after Moses' time (e.g., the Philistines, Dan, et al.). I shall discuss these peculiarities in the exposition to follow as we come to them. See also the section below: "Writer." If one accepts Mosaic authorship, as

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[1]See Jason S. Derouchie, "The Blessing-Commission, The Promised Offspring, and The Toledot Structure of Genesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:2 (June 2013):219-47; Jared M. August, "The *Toledot* Structure of Genesis: Hope of Promise," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174:695 (July-September 2017):267-82.

[2]E.g., Andrew E. Steinmann, "Gaps in the Genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174:694 (April-June 2017):141-58.

[3]Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:137.

most conservative evangelicals do, the date of composition of Genesis must be within Moses' lifetime (ca. 1525-1405 B.C.).

In Old Testament studies, some writers describe the "before Christ" (B.C.) period as "B.C.E." This stands for "before the common era." These writers also refer to the A.D. (Lat. *anno domini*, "year of our Lord") period as "C.E.," the "common era."

Genesis was perhaps originally intended to encourage the Israelites to trust in their faithful, omnipotent God as they anticipated entrance into the Promised Land from Kadesh Barnea or from the Plains of Moab.[1] Moses may have written it earlier to prepare them for the Exodus.[2] But this seems less likely to me. Another guess is that Moses wrote it during the 38 years of the Israelites' wilderness wanderings.[3] No one knows for sure.

WRITER

The authorship of the Pentateuch has been the subject of great controversy among professing Christians since Spinoza promoted "higher criticism" of the Bible in the 17th century. The "documentary hypothesis," which grew out of his work, is that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, as most scholars in Judaism and the church until that day believed. Instead, it was the product of several writers who lived much later than Moses. A redactor (editor) or redactors combined these several documents into the books that we have now. These documents (J, E, D, P, and others) represent: a Yahwistic (**J**ehovistic) tradition (supposedly dating from the ninth century B.C.), an **E**lohistic tradition (eighth century B.C.), a **D**euteronomic tradition (seventh century B.C.), a **P**riestly tradition (fifth century B.C.), etc. The subject of Old Testament Introduction deals with these matters.[4] One reliable scholar summed up the present state of this controversy as follows:

> "… the documentary hypothesis is shaky at best and before long may have to be given up entirely by the scholarly world."[5]

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[1]Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 30. See Walther Zimmerli, "Abraham," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 6 (1978):49-60.

[2]E.g., Kenneth Kitchen, "The Old Testament in its Context: 1 From the Origins to the Eve of the Exodus," *Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin* 59 (1971):9.

[3]H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 1:8.

[4]See especially Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 42-51. Or see Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, pp. 81-104. For a more extensive discussion see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 3-82.

[5]Kitchen, p. 78.

The evidence that Moses wrote the Pentateuch seems conclusive if one believes that Jesus Christ spoke the truth when He attributed the authorship to Moses (Matt. 19:8; Mark 7:10; Luke 16:29-31; 20:37; 24:27; John 7:19, 22; cf. Acts 15:1). Jesus Christ did not specifically say that Moses wrote Genesis, but in His day the Jews regarded the Pentateuch (Torah) as a whole unit.[1] They recognized Moses as the author of all five books.[2] Consequently they would have understood what Jesus said about any of the five books of Moses as an endorsement of the Mosaic authorship of them all.[3]

> "The view that the Torah is the divine word mediated by Moses was the standard view through the Renaissance."[4]

> "Just west of Abydos in southern Egypt, the Wadi el-Hol site yielded an alphabetic inscription carved on the underface of a ledge. Palaeographically it resembled a text found at Serabit al-Khadem in the Sinai Peninsula from 1600 B.C., which until 1993 was the earliest alphabet ever found. But the Wadi Hol example is at least two hundred years older, dating from the time Jacob and his sons lived in Egypt. The argument that Moses could not have written the Torah in alphabetic form that early (ca. 1400 B.C.) thus has no basis."[5]

How did Moses receive the information that He wrote about in Genesis? He may have done so in either of two ways: Perhaps Adam and Eve told the creation story to their descendants and they passed it on to succeeding generations orally and/or in written form (i.e., tradition). Moses' mother may have told him these stories as a child. If so, God guarded the true account of what happened before Moses' lifetime and kept it from

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[1]See Jon D. Levenson, "Genesis," in*The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1.

[2]See, for example, the testimony of Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish-Christian writer, to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, in *Against Apion*, 1:8.

[3]Oswald T. Allis' *The Five Books of Moses* is a classic rebuttal of the denial that Moses wrote all five books. No one has discredited it, though many liberal scholars have ignored it. More recently, Kenneth Kitchen's series of six articles, "The Old Testament in its Context" in *Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin* (1971-72), especially the sixth article, refuted "the fashionable myth" (p. 9) of the evolution of Israel's religion as proposed by Julius Wellhausen and his followers. Another excellent rebuttal by a Jewish scholar, Umberto Cassuto, is his *The Documentary Hypothesis*. For a review of other subsequent approaches scholars have pursued in the study of Genesis (i.e., the form-critical, tradition-historical, and rhetorical-critical), see Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, pp. 27-35; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1—17*, pp. 11-38; Herbert M. Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch*, pp. 71-78.

[4]*The Jewish Study Bible*, s.v. "Torah," by Jon D. Levenson, p. 3.

[5]Eugene Merrill, "The Veracity of the Word: A Summary of Major Archaeological Finds," *Kindred Spirit* 34:3 (Winter 2010):13.

error. The other ancient Near Eastern accounts were perversions of what really happened.[1] Another possibility is that God revealed this information directly to Moses.[2]

The New Testament writers quoted or alluded to Genesis over 60 times in 17 books. They believed that it contained an accurate account of humankind's early experiences.

SCOPE

The events recorded in Genesis stretch historically from Creation to Joseph's death, a period of at least 2,300 years. The first part of the book (ch. 1—11) is not as easy to date precisely as the second part (ch. 12—50). The history of the patriarchs recorded in this second main division of the text covers a period of about 300 years.

The scope of the book progressively and consistently narrows. That is, only a few selected events are recorded in the first 11 chapters with intervening gaps of unspecified time. But with chapter 12 many more events are recorded in much more detail with much shorter gaps in time.[3] Genesis begins with the creation of the cosmos and ends with the death of one man: Joseph.

PURPOSE

The selection of content included in Genesis points to the purpose of the divine author: to reveal the history of and basic principles involved in God's relationship with people.

Genesis provides the historical basis for the rest of the Pentateuch and the Bible. Chapters 1 through 11 give historical background essential to understanding God's covenant relationship with humankind, and chapters 12 through 50 record the Abrahamic Covenant and its initial outworking. The Abrahamic Covenant continues to be the basic arrangement by which God brings blessing to humanity throughout the Pentateuch and the rest of the Bible.

> "The real theme of the Pentateuch is the selection of Israel from the nations and its consecration to the service of God and His Laws in a

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[1]See John D. Davis, *Genesis and Semitic Tradition*, pp. 1-22. The term "ancient Near East" refers primarily to the region in the Middle East that today comprises the countries of Egypt, Sudan, Israel, Palestinian Territories, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.

[2]For an extended discussion of Mosaic authorship, see G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment*, pp. 205-68.

[3]See the chart "Chronology of Genesis," in John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, p. 29.

> divinely appointed land. The central event in the development of this theme is the divine covenant with Abraham and its … promise to make his offspring into the people of God and to give them the land of Canaan as an everlasting inheritance."[1]
>
> "… the book may also be said to be the story of God's free grace in establishing Israel for Himself as His people."[2]

Genesis provides an indispensable prologue to the drama that unfolds in Exodus and the rest of the Pentateuch. The first 11 chapters constitute a prologue to this prologue.

> "Two opposite progressions appear in this prologue [chs. 1—11]: (a) God's orderly Creation with its climax in His blessing of man, and (b) the totally disintegrating work of sin with its two greatest curses being the Flood and the dispersion at Babel.[3] The first progression demonstrates God's plan to bring about perfect order from the beginning in spite of what the reader may know of man's experience. The second progression demonstrates the great need of God's intervention to provide the solution for the corrupt human race."[4]

The practical purpose of Genesis is to encourage the reader to trust and obey God. Originally the purpose was to encourage the Israelites to trust and obey God. Regardless of when Moses may have written Genesis, this was his obvious purpose, as is clear from what he wrote. He wanted to prepare the Israelites for the future by reminding them of the past—to learn from their history. This is its function for us today as well. As we read the text we should continually ask ourselves: What did this mean to the original readers? That is what God intended it to mean to us today, not whatever else we may think it means. This is one of the cardinal rules of interpreting any piece of literature, including the Bible. Once we have learned what the writer intended the original readers to understand, by what he wrote and by how he wrote it—this is interpretation—then we can go on to apply what he wrote to ourselves—this is application.

One of Moses' main points in Genesis was that the same God who created Israel had created the universe. His word was the key instrument in creating both entities. As He had brought order, fullness, and rest to the material world, so He would do the same for

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[1]Moses H. Segal, *The Pentateuch: Its Composition and Its Authorship and Other Biblical Studies*, p. 23. Cf. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Genesis*, pp. 2-3.

[2]Leupold, 1:9.

[3]Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 13.

[4]Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 21.

His chosen people. He is the sovereign of the universe, its ultimate authority. Therefore people should trust and obey Him.

THEOLOGY

The real hero of Genesis is the LORD God, and its stories deal with the origin and life of the believing community that He created under His sovereign authority.[1]

> "What gives the Old Testament its force and unity is the affirmation of the sovereignty of God. God is the basis of all things and all that exists only exists by his will."[2]
>
> "The subject matter of the theology in Genesis is certainly God's work in establishing Israel as the means of blessing the families of the earth. This book forms the introduction to the Pentateuch's main theme of the founding of the theocracy, that is, the rule of God over all Creation. It presents the origins behind the founding of the theocracy: the promised blessing that Abraham's descendants would be in the land.
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> "Exodus presents the redemption of the seed out of bondage and the granting of a covenant to them. Leviticus is the manual of ordinances enabling the holy God to dwell among His people by making them holy. Numbers records the military arrangement and census of the tribes in the wilderness, and shows how God preserves His promised blessings from internal and external threats. Deuteronomy presents the renewal of the covenant.
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> "In the unfolding of this grand program of God, Genesis introduces the reader to the nature of God as the sovereign Lord over the universe who will move heaven and earth to establish His will. He seeks to bless mankind, but does not tolerate disobedience and unbelief. Throughout this revelation the reader learns that 'without faith it is impossible to please God' (Heb. 11:6)."[3]

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[1]In these notes I capitalize LORD when referring to Yahweh (the name that God used for Himself, and the Israelites used of Him, in His covenant relationship with them) as do many English translations of the Bible.
[2]Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 37.
[3]Ross, "Genesis," p. 26.

> "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."[1]

STRUCTURE

The structure of Genesis is very clear. The phrase "the generations of" (AV, ESV, *toledot* in Hebrew, from *yalad* meaning "to bear, to generate") occurs ten times (really eleven times since 36:9 repeats 36:1), and in each case it introduces a new section of the book.[2] The Jews regarded "ten" as a symbolic number of completeness.[3]

> "The person named is not necessarily the main character but is the beginning point of the section that also closes with his death."[4]

The first part of Genesis is introductory, or a prologue, and sets the scene for what follows in the book. An outline of Genesis based on this structure is as follows:

1. Introduction 1:1—2:3
2. The generations of heaven and earth 2:4—4:26
3. The generations of Adam 5:1—6:8
4. The generations of Noah 6:9—9:29
5. The generations of the sons of Noah 10:1—11:9
6. The generations of Shem 11:10-26
7. The generations of Terah 11:27—25:11
8. The generations of Ishmael 25:12-18
9. The generations of Isaac 25:19—35:29
10. The generations of Esau 36:1-43

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[1]A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 9. For further discussion of the theology of the Pentateuch, see Wolf, pp. 23-40.

[2]For an extended discussion of the structure of Genesis based on the occurrences of *toledot*, see Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1—11:26*, pp. 25-41; Ross, "Genesis," pp. 22-26. AV refers to *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version* of 1611, 1952 reprint, and ESV refers to *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* of 2001.

[3]Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 137.

[4]Longman and Dillard, p. 53.

11. The generations of Jacob 37:1—50:26

As noted above, Moses' movement was from the general to the specific throughout the book:

Part I (chs. 1-11): at least 2,000 years

Part II (chs. 12-50): about 300 years

Total: at least 2,300 years[1]

OUTLINE

A full expository (explanatory) outline designed to highlight the relative emphases of the book follows. I shall follow this outline in these notes as I seek to unpack the message of the book. I am translating *toledot* in this outline as "what became of."

I. Primeval events 1:1—11:26

A. The story of creation 1:1—2:3

1. An initial statement of creation 1:1
2. Conditions at the time of creation 1:2
3. The six days of creation 1:3-31
4. The seventh day 2:1-3

B. What became of the creation 2:4—4:26

1. The Garden of Eden 2:4—3:24
2. The murder of Abel 4:1-16
3. The spread of civilization and sin 4:17-26

C. What became of Adam 5:1—6:8

1. The effects of the curse on humanity ch. 5
2. God's sorrow over man's wickedness 6:1-8

D. What became of Noah 6:9—9:29

1. The Flood 6:9—8:22
2. The Noahic Covenant 9:1-17
3. The curse on Canaan 9:18-29

[1]More comments about the dating of events will follow in these notes.

E. What became of Noah's sons 10:1—11:9

1. The table of nations ch. 10
2. The dispersion at Babel 11:1-9

F. What became of Shem 11:10-26

II. Patriarchal narratives 11:27—50:26

A. What became of Terah 11:27—25:11

1. Terah and Abram's obedience 11:27—12:9
2. Abram in Egypt 12:10-20
3. Abram's separation from Lot ch. 13
4. Abram's military victory ch. 14
5. The Abrahamic covenant ch. 15
6. The birth of Ishmael ch. 16
7. The sign of circumcision ch. 17
8. Yahweh's visit to Abraham 18:1-15
9. Abraham's intercession for Lot 18:16-33
10. The destruction of Sodom ch. 19
11. Abraham’s sojourn at Gerar ch. 20
12. The birth of Isaac 21:1-21
13. Abimelech's treaty with Abraham 21:22-34
14. The sacrifice of Isaac 22:1-19
15. The descendants of Nahor 22:20-24
16. The purchase of Sarah's tomb ch. 23
17. The choice of a bride for Isaac ch. 24
18. Abraham's death 25:1-11

B. What became of Ishmael 25:12-18

C. What became of Isaac 25:19—35:29

1. Isaac's twin sons 25:19-26
2. The sale of the birthright 25:27-34
3. Isaac and Abimelech 26:1-11
4. Isaac's wells 26:12-33
5. Jacob's deception for Isaac's blessing 26:34—28:9
6. Jacob's vision at Bethel 28:10-22
7. Jacob's marriages and Laban's deception 29:1-30
8. Jacob's mishandling of God's blessings 29:31—30:24
9. Jacob's new contract with Laban 30:25-43

10. Jacob's flight from Haran ch. 31
11. Jacob's attempt to appease Esau 32:1-21
12. Jacob at the Jabbok 32:22-32
13. Jacob's meeting with Esau and his return to Canaan ch. 33
14. The rape of Dinah and the revenge of Simeon and Levi ch. 34
15. Jacob's return to Bethel and succeeding events ch. 35

D. What became of Esau 36:1—37:1

E. What became of Jacob 37:2—50:26

1. God's choice of Joseph 37:2-11
2. The sale of Joseph into Egypt 37:12-36
3. Judah and Tamar ch. 38
4. Joseph in Potiphar's house ch. 39
5. The prisoners' dreams and Joseph's interpretations ch. 40
6. Pharaoh's dreams and Joseph's interpretation ch. 41
7. Joseph's brothers' first journey into Egypt ch. 42
8. Joseph's brothers' second journey into Egypt ch. 43
9. Joseph's last test and its results ch. 44
10. Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers 45:1-15
11. Israel's move to Egypt 45:16-46:30
12. Joseph's wise leadership 46:31—47:27
13. Jacob's worship in Egypt 47:28—48:22
14. Jacob's blessing of his sons 49:1-28
15. Deaths and a promise yet to be fulfilled 49:29—50:26[1]

MESSAGE

What is the Bible all about? I would state the answer to that question as follows: God desires to glorify Himself by blessing humankind.

A young boy burst into the living room and announced to his father, "I know what the Bible means!" His father smiled and replied, "What do you mean, you 'know' what the Bible means?" His son replied, "I do know!" "Okay," said the father, "Tell me what the

[1]John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *Genesis-Numbers*, vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 6-14, has given helpful insights into the purpose and literary form of the Pentateuch, which he based on its structure. See Casper J. Labuschagne, "The Pattern of the Divine Speech Formulas in the Pentateuch: The Key to Its Literary Structure," *Vetus Testamentum* 23:3 (July 1982):268-96, for a different approach to determining the structure of Genesis through Numbers.

Bible means." "It's easy, Daddy. It stands for 'Basic Information Before Leaving Earth.'" That is exactly what the Bible is.

G. Campbell Morgan summarized the whole Bible by saying that the Old Testament is a revelation of human need, and the New Testament is a revelation of the divine supply that meets that need. He also believed that within the Pentateuch we hear the sigh for a priest, in the historical books we hear a cry for a king, and in the poetical and prophetical books we find the quest for a prophet.[1]

The message of the Pentateuch can be stated this way: People can experience God's blessing by trusting Him (believing His Word) and by obeying Him (following His initiative).

I believe Genesis is in the Bible primarily to teach us the following lesson: People can enjoy a personal relationship with God, and thereby realize their own fulfillment as human beings, only through trust in God and obedience to God. This is what I would call the message statement of the book. Genesis reveals that God is faithful to His promises and powerful enough to bring them to fulfillment.

Genesis reveals that God originally intended people to have an immediate (nothing between) relationship with their Creator. Evidences for this are, first, that God made man in His own image (1:26-27). Second, He regarded man as His son (1:28-30). Third, He made man as a special creation (2:7). Fourth, He made man with special care (2:7). And fifth, He consistently demonstrated concern for man's welfare (3:9). (Here "man" refers specifically to Adam, but Adam as the head of humanity.)

God's immediate relationship with Adam was broken by the Fall (ch. 3). In the Fall, man did two things: First, he failed to trust God's goodness with his mind. And, second, he rebelled against God's authority with his will (3:6).

God then took the initiative to re-establish the relationship with man that He had created man to enjoy. He provided atonement for man's sin until He would finally remove it. This temporary covering came through the sacrificial system. Animal sacrifices covered peoples' sins adequately, but not completely. A final sacrifice had to be made that would remove people's sins permanently. God accepted sacrifices for sin before Calvary like a merchant accepts a credit card in payment for goods or services. A final payment still had to be made, and Christ's death was that final payment.

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[1]G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, p. 25.

Throughout Genesis we see that people in general consistently failed to trust and obey God (e.g., in Noah's day, at Babel, and throughout the patriarchal period).

Genesis also records what God has done to encourage people to trust and obey Him. It is only by living by these two principles, trust and obedience, that people can enjoy a relationship with God and realize all that God created them to experience.

On the one hand, Genesis reveals much about the person and work of God. This revelation helps us to trust and obey Him. It is through His personal revelations to the main characters in Genesis that God revealed Himself initially (e.g., Adam and Eve, Noah, and the patriarchs).

On the other hand, Genesis reveals much about the nature of man. Not only did God reveal the perversity and depravity of fallen man, but He also identified many positive examples of faith and obedience in the lives of the godly.

In Genesis we learn that faith in God is absolutely essential if we are to have fellowship with Him and realize our potential as human beings.

Faith is the law of life. If one lives by faith, he flourishes, but if he does not, he fails. The four patriarchs are primarily examples of what faith is and how it manifests itself. In each of their lives we learn something new about faith.

Abraham's faith demonstrates *unquestioning obedience*. When God told him to do something, he almost always did it. This is the most basic characteristic of faith. That is one reason Abraham has been called "the father of the faithful." God revealed Himself nine times to Abraham (12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15; 17:1-21; 18; 21:12-13; 22:1-2; 22:15-18), and each time Abraham's response was unquestioning obedience.

Isaac's faith helps us see the quality of *passive acceptance* that characterizes true faith in God. This was his response to God's two revelations to him (26:2-5, 24). Sometimes Isaac was too passive.

Jacob's story is one of conflict with God until he came to realize his own limitations. Then he trusted God. We can see his faith in his *acknowledged dependence* on God. God's seven revelations to him eventually led him to this place (28:12-15; 31:3, 11-13; 32:24-29; 35:1, 9-12; 46:2-4). Most believers today can identify with Jacob most easily because we too struggle with wanting to live independent of God.

Joseph's life teaches us what God can do with a person who trusts Him consistently in the face of adversity. The outstanding characteristic of Joseph's life was his *faithful loyalty* to God. He believed God's two revelations to him in dreams (37:5-7, 9), even though God's will did not seem to be working out as he thought it would. Patient faith

and its reward shine through the story of Joseph. The Lord Jesus supremely illustrates this quality of faith, though He also illustrates the others perfectly as well.

Faith, the key concept in Genesis, means trusting that what God has prescribed is indeed best for me, and demonstrating that trust by waiting for God to provide what He has promised. A "person of faith" is one who commits to acting on this basis—even though he or she may not see how God's way is best.

The Pentateuch is all about God, man, and our mutual relationship. The key concept in Genesis is faith.[1]

Morgan introduced his comments on Genesis with the following admission:

> "How many people have read the Book of Genesis? I do not mean study it. I have been studying it for sixty years and I do not know it yet. Its heights and depths are beyond me and that is the glory of the Bible. It may exhaust you, but you can never exhaust it."[2]

May all the readers of these notes follow Morgan's admirable example of repeatedly studying and learning from this great book.

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[1]See idem, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:1:13-26.

[2]Idem, *The Unfolding …,* p. 25.

Exposition

I. PRIMEVAL EVENTS 1:1—11:26

Chapters 1 through 11 provide an introduction to the Book of Genesis, to the Pentateuch, and to the whole Bible.

> "Although the *story* of the Bible begins in Genesis 12, that is not where *the Bible* begins. It begins with what we now recognize as a prologue, a preparatory statement, so that we may be informed and equipped to understand the story that follows."[1]
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> "What we find in chaps. 1—11 is the divine initiation of blessing, which is compromised by human sin followed by gracious preservation of the promise: blessing – sin - grace."[2]
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> "His [Moses'] theological perspective can be summarized in two points. First, the author intends to draw a line connecting the God of the Fathers and the God of the Sinai covenant [the Mosaic Covenant] with the God who created the world. Second, the author intends to show that the call of the patriarchs and the Sinai covenant have as their ultimate goal the reestablishment of God's original purpose in Creation."[3]
>
> "Evidently an interest in the way in which the world and humankind came into existence and in the history of the earliest times was characteristic of the ancient civilized world. At any rate, various 'origin stories' or 'creation myths' about the activities of a variety of creator-gods are still extant in what remains of the literatures of ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia. But the combination of such accounts with narratives about more recent times testifies to an additional motivation. The aim of such works was to give their readers—or to strengthen—a sense of national or ethnic *identity*, particularly at a time when there was for some reason a degree of uncertainty or hesitation about this."[4]

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[1]Charles C. Cochrane, *The Gospel According to Genesis*, p. 4.

[2]Mathews, p. 60.

[3]Sailhamer, p. 19. Cf. Mathews, p. 77.

[4]Whybray, p. 36.

> "The placing of Gen. 1—11 as a prologue to the main body of the work also afforded the opportunity to express certain distinctively Israelite articles of faith which it would have been more difficult to introduce into the later narratives, particularly with regard to the doctrine of God."[1]

> "Gen 1—11 as we read it is a commentary, often highly critical, on ideas current in the ancient world about the natural and supernatural world. Both individual stories as well as the final completed work seem to be a polemic [attack] against many of the commonly received notions about the gods and man. But the clear polemical thrust of Gen 1—11 must not obscure the fact that at certain points biblical and extrabiblical thought are in clear agreement. Indeed Genesis and the ancient Near East probably have more in common with each other than either has with modern secular thought."[2]

W. H. Griffith Thomas summed up the contents of the first 11 chapters of Genesis memorably as: creation, corruption, deluge, deliverance, and dispersal.[3]

Some scholars understand the stories in Genesis 1 through 11 to be parables, as the following quotation explains:

> "For reasons of clarity and simplicity, the present writer prefers the word *parable* [when describing the stories in Genesis 1—11]. We are already familiar with this word from Jesus' frequent use of parables as a method of teaching his disciples and the people of his time. Surely no one would accuse Jesus of being false because he told the story of the Good Samaritan or the parable of the Prodigal Son."[4]

I do not believe the stories in Genesis 1 through 11 are parables. Parables are invented stories that picture something that could or might have happened but probably did not really happen (e.g., the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son). There seems to be too much evidence that the Creation, Fall, and Flood actually happened to conclude that the

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[1]Ibid., pp. 36-37. See Livingston, pp. 85-101, for information about the religious myths of the ancient Near East, and pp. 137-86 for a comparison of the first 11 chapters of Genesis with other ancient Near Eastern literature. See also Gordon H. Johnston, "Genesis 1 and Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:658 (April-June 2008):178-94; Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation.*

[2]Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. xlvii.

[3]W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Through the Pentateuch Chapter by Chapter*, pp. 14-15.

[4]Cochrane, p. 15.

record that Moses wrote about them, in these chapters, describe things that did not really occur as described. If this is so, then probably the other incidents in these chapters are not parables either. Clearly the genealogies in chapters 5, 10, and 11 record the names of real people; they have not been made up simply to teach a lesson. I believe that the material in chapters 1 through 11 was revealed by God to Moses, directly and/or indirectly (from other sources), and that Moses recorded it as historical narrative as the Holy Spirit guided him (cf. Exod. 20:9-11; 31:17; Ps. 8; 104; Matt. 19:4-6; 2 Pet. 3:5; Heb. 4:4).[1]

A. THE STORY OF CREATION 1:1—2:3

God created the entire universe, and then formed and filled it, in six "days." He brought order and fullness for humankind to enjoy and to rule over. He then blessed and set apart the seventh day as a memorial of His creative work.[2] The God of Israel, the deliverer of His chosen people, is the Creator of all that exists.

> "The creation account [in Genesis 1—2] is theocentric, not creature centered. Its purpose is to glorify the Creator by magnifying him through the majesty of the created order. The passage is doxological [in praise of God] as well as didactic [instructive], hymnic [worshipful] as well as history. 'God' is the *grammatical* subject of the first sentence (1:1) and continues as the *thematic* subject throughout the account."[3]

> "The book of Genesis—and thus the Bible itself—opens with an account of creation that is extraordinary for its austerity. Other ancient Near Eastern evocations [accounts that bring to memory] of God's (or the gods') world-ordering activity, including many in the Bible itself (e.g., Ps. 104), provide high drama and graphic description of the events and their protagonists (even the LORD). Gen. 1.1-2.3, however, is utterly devoid of sensory detail. This eerie abstractness, combined with the highly schematic [simplified] and formulaic [repetitious] structure of the narrative, conveys a sense of the awe-inspiring majesty and inviolable

[1]See "Is Genesis History?" DVD produced by Compass Cinema, 2017.

[2]Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, has influenced this and subsequent introductory and concluding summaries of the major sections of the text, though I have not always footnoted his views in these summaries.

[3]Mathews, p. 113.

> [never to be dishonored] sovereignty of God on whom the narrative is unswervingly focused."[1]
>
> "… Gen 1:1—2:4a is clearly recognizable as a unit of historical narrative. It has an introduction (1:1), a body (1:2—2:3) and a conclusion (2:4a)."[2]
>
> "The account of God's creation of the world establishes two key points that apply throughout this book and throughout the Bible. The first is that God was uniquely involved in the origin of the earth and the sky. They do not exist by themselves and are not the result of impersonal forces or other spiritual beings. The second is that because the world is God's creation, it reveals him and is subject to his will."[3]

Historical narrative is one of several types or kinds (French *genre*) of biblical literature. Other genres include genealogy, poetry, law, epistolary, and apocalyptic.

> "Genre is of crucial importance, since the reader's identification of a text's genre directs his or her reading strategy …"[4]
>
> "For the most part, its [the Old Testament's] contents may be described under two rubrics: stories and poems."[5]
>
> "It has frequently been recognized that the final shaping of the canonical Pentateuch [the Pentateuch as we now have it in our Bibles] involves the sorting and placement of material consisting of at least four literary types: narrative, poetry, law, and genealogy."[6]

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[1]Levenson, p. 10.

[2]John H. Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes: Genesis 1:1—2:4a," *Trinity Journal* 5 NS (Spring 1984):74. This article outlines some principles to use in finding the writer's intent and purpose in selecting the events he chose to record in historical narratives. It provides an excellent introduction to the interpretation of historical narrative.

[3]Barnabé Assohoto and Samuel M. Ngewa, "Genesis," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, p. 10.

[4]Longman and Dillard, p. 29. See ibid., pp. 29-31, for clarification of genre.

[5]Ibid., p. 25.

[6]John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *Genesis-Leviticus*, vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, revised ed., p. 34. See J. Daniel Hayes, "An Evangelical Approach to Old Testament Narrative Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:661 (January-March 2009):3-18; and Steven D. Mathewson, "Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming Old Testament Narratives," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:616 (October-December 1997):410-35, for help in interpreting and preaching narrative portions of the Old Testament. See Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, pp. 217-19, for a list of genres in the Bible with characteristics and biblical examples of each; and Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, pp. 126-35, for a fuller discussion of biblical genres.

> "The prose narratives of the Old Testament are multifunctional. Most intend to impart historically accurate information while leading the reader to a deeper theological understanding of the nature of God and his relationship with his people."[1]

1. An initial statement of creation 1:1

> "The purpose of the statement is threefold: to identify the Creator, to explain the origin of the world, and to tie the work of God in the past to the work of God in the future."[2]

This "beginning" (v. 1) is the beginning of the creation of the cosmos (physical universe), not the beginning of all things.[3] This appears to be clear from the context. Genesis has been called "the book of beginnings" because it records the beginning of so many things.[4] Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe it as "the book of foundations."

> "Contrary to ancient Near Eastern mythologies, in which the earth had no beginning, and in contrast to Greek philosophical thought, in which the existence of the world from eternity is a basic presupposition, the Genesis cosmology fixes by the use of the phrase 'in the beginning' (*bere'sit*) an absolute beginning for creation."[5]

The Hebrew word translated "God" (*'elohim*) is a plural noun. The plurality simply adds intensification to the name "El," as does the personal pronoun "us" in verse 26. Hebrew is the only ancient Semitic language that intensifies nouns and pronouns by making them plurals.[6] The writers of Scripture used *'elohim* as a title of honor. Though it is a plural in form, it is singular in meaning when referring to the true God. This name represents the Creator's transcendent relationship to His creation; He is completely separate from and independent of nature. Some have called this the plural of majesty or

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[1]Longman and Dillard, p. 34.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 50.

[3]Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

[4]See Fruchtenbaum, p. 10, for a list of 82 first things mentioned in Genesis with references.

[5]Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, "The Unique Cosmology of Genesis 1 against Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian Parallels," in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, pp. 10-11. See also Richard M. Davidson, "The Genesis Account of Origins," in ibid., pp. 61-69.

[6]See Livingston, pp. 53-63, for a discussion of the languages of the ancient Near East.

"excellency."[1] Others call it a potential plural.[2] It emphasizes the fact that the God referred to is the fullness of deity, the only true God.

> "The Hebrew word translated 'God' ('elohim) may be used as a plural noun and be translated 'gods.' But when this word is used of true God, then it is not a plural but is an intensified noun, exhausting the meaning of the underlying root ('alah) which means 'to be powerful.' He 'us' [is majestic and great in plurality]. When used of God, this is not really a plural (despite the common translation); it is a similar intensification of the pronoun which describes God."[3]

> "He goes too far who sees in this plural a direct and explicit reference to the Holy Trinity. … he who would claim that the term can have no connection with the truth of the Holy Trinity goes too far."[4]

Theologian A. H. Strong defined God as "the infinitely perfect Spirit in whom all things have their source, support, and end."[5]

The Hebrew verb *bara'* ("create") refers only to the living God as its subject in the Bible. God alone is the Creator; no one else shares in the activity of truly creating (*bara'*ing).[6] Other Hebrew words are used to describe the creative activities of human beings.

"The heavens and the earth" refer to the universe as we know it (i.e., the sky above with all that is in it, and the earth below). There is no single word in Hebrew for "universe." "Heavens and earth" is a figure of speech (a merism) for totality; God created everything. (A merism uses two extremes to represent the whole.) The English translators often rendered the Hebrew word *'eres* ("earth") as "land." By translating it this way here, we can see that Moses wanted his readers to realize that God created—and therefore owned—all land (cf. 12:7 and all subsequent references to the Promised Land; Ps. 24:1).[7]

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[1]Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 86.

[2]Leupold, 1:43.

[3]Email from Ronald B. Allen, August 31, 2006.

[4]Leupold, 1:43.

[5]A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 52.

[6]See Ronald B. Allen, *The Majesty of Man*, pp. 181-84, for a study of *bara'*.

[7]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 19.

> "The sublime ideas expressed in this first verse of the Bible set the tone for the entire Genesis cosmology."[1]

This verse is important because it contradicts six popular philosophies:

1. Atheism: God does exist.
2. Pantheism: God is distinct from His creation.
3. Polytheism: "Created" is singular in the text. An obvious difference between the biblical account of creation and those of other ancient Near Eastern cultures is that the biblical account is monotheistic.[2]
4. Radical materialism (matter is eternal): Matter had a supernatural origin (emphasis on origin).
5. Naturalism (evolutionism): Creation took place when Someone outside nature intervened (emphasis on process).
6. Fatalism: A personal God freely chose to create.[3]

God created the universe from nothing (Latin *ex nihilo*). While the text does not state this fact *per se*, the reader can deduce it from the following evidence: The phrase "in the beginning" implies it, as do the Hebrew word for "create" (*bara'*) and the expression "formless and desolate" (v. 2). New Testament passages also support this conclusion (e.g., John 1:3; Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3).[4]

The emphasis in verse 1 is on the origin of the universe. God created it.[5] He alone is eternal, and everything else owes its origin and existence to Him.[6]

There are three major views concerning the relationship of 1:1 to the rest of the creation account.

1. Verse 1 describes God's *original creation* of the universe. Then God began fashioning the earth, and it became fully formed, as we now know it, in verse 2

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[1]Hasel and Hasel, p. 13.

[2]See John D. Currid, "Genesis," in *The ESV Archaeology Study Bible*, p. 15.

[3]See also Baxter, 1:34.

[4]See Jack Cottrell, "The Doctrine of Creation from Nothing," *The Seminary Review* 29:4 (December 1983):157-75; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:14:20.

[5]Walter C. Kaiser Jr.'s article, "The Literary Form of Genesis 1—11," in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, pp. 48-65, is of great value in understanding and responding to the major critical attacks on Genesis 1—11.

[6]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 20. See Tozer, pp. 71-74, for a discussion of God's omnipotence.

or verse 3. This "double-creation" view may or may not involve a gap in time between verses 1 and 2.[1] Some advocates of this view believe that the original creation became chaotic as a result of divine judgment.[2] More information on this theory follows in my comments on 1:2.

2. Verse 1 describes *part of what God did on the first day* of creation (1:1-5). It is a general statement followed by specific details.[3] *The New Jewish Publication Society* translation (NJPS) renders verses 1 through 3 as follows: "When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light."[4]

3. Verse 1 describes, in very general, introductory terms, the same creation activity that God did *on all six days* of creation (1:2-31). It is a topic sentence, or summary, that introduces the whole creation account that follows.[5] I prefer this view for reasons to be explained.

2. Conditions at the time of creation 1:2

Verse 2 probably describes what we now call "the earth" in its pre-formed—like a lump of clay—existence, before God gave it form and filled it.[6] Here "earth" refers to the whole planet, though the same English word also refers to the earth and the heavens (when combined with "heavens," v. 1), and to dry land (v. 10).

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[1]Advocates of this view include C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 1:46; G. H. Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages and Their Connection with Modern Spiritualism and Theosophy*, pp. 33-77; Thomas Chalmers, *Posthumous Works of the Rev. Thomas Chalmers,* 1:1-2; Arthur Custance, *Without Form and Void,* pp. 1-8; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:556; L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 151; Albertus Pieters, *Notes on Genesis*, p. 18; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 1:13; Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 19.

[2]E.g., Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible*, 1:1:16-17; G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 11; William R. Newell, *Studies in the Pentateuch*, p. 38; J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 1:35, 45-50; Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 3:2:23-24.

[3]Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*, 1:9-10; Leupold, 1:42; Kidner, p. 44; Wenham, p. 11; J. J. Davis, pp. 46-47; Jeremy D. Lyon, "Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62:2 (June 2019):269-85.

[4]Levenson, p. 10.

[5]Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 49; George Bush, *Notes on Genesis*, p. 26; Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, p. 14; Bruce K. Waltke, *Creation and Chaos*; idem, *Genesis,* p. 58; Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 105; Hamilton, pp. 103-8; Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 10.

[6]von Rad, pp. 551.

In this verse we learn that the earth was "a formless and desolate emptiness" (a hendiadys meaning unorganized, unproductive, and uninhabited), before God graciously prepared it for human habitation (cf. Isa. 45:18; Jer. 4:23-27). (A hendiadys is a figure of speech in which the writer expresses a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and," rather than by using an adjective and a substantive.) Various English translations have rendered this expression "formless and void," "formless and empty," and "without shape and empty."

> "… no clear biblical text testifies to the origins of chaos [the formless and desolate condition] or of the Serpent [3:1], nor to the reason for their existence."[1]

> "The Hebrew word [for "darkness"] simply means “darkness,” but in the Bible it has come to symbolize what opposes God, such as judgment (Exod 10:21), death (Ps 88:13), oppression (Isa 9:1), the wicked (1 Sam 2:9) and in general, sin. In Isa 45:7 it parallels “evil.” It is a fitting cover for the primeval waste, but it prepares the reader for the fact that God is about to reveal himself through his works."[2]

"Deep" (Heb. *tehom*) describes the water-covered planet. In the Old Testament, *tehom* refers to the ocean(s), which the ancient world regarded as symbolic of chaos and evil, which needed overcoming and which Yahweh overcame. However its use in the Pentateuch helps us understand the writer's intent in using this term here.

> "The thirty-five usages of *tehom* and its derivative forms in the Old Testament reveal that it is generally 'a poetic term for a large body of water'."[3]

> "… he [Moses] calls the global ocean (the 'deep') in 1:2 a 'desert.' This is not apparent in the English translation 'formless,' but the NASB notes it in the margin as a 'wasteland.' Moses uses this term (Deut 32:10) to describe the desert wasteland where Israel wandered for forty years. Why call an ocean a desert? What better way to teach the people that the God who will lead them out of the *wilderness* and give them the promised *land* is the same God who once prepared the *land* for them by dividing

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[1]Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 181.

[2]*The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 ed., note on verse 2.

[3]Hasel and Hasel, p. 17. Their quotation is from Mary K. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery*, p. 86.

> the *waters* and producing the 'dry land'? The God of the Pentateuch is One who leads his people from the wasteland to the promised land."[1]

Some scholars believe that references to "the Spirit" of God in the Old Testament indicate the *power* or *influence* of God, not the Third Person of the Trinity. Some conservative scholars believe that, even though the Spirit has always been the Third Person of the Trinity, people living during the Old Testament period did not associate the Spirit with God Himself. They supposedly thought of the Spirit as a power or influence of God. But there are several indications in the Old Testament that some informed Israelites identified "the Spirit" as God (cf. Gen. 1:2; 2 Kings 2:9; Ps. 104:30; Ezek. 3:12-14; 11:1; Zech. 4:6).[2] Alexander Hislop has shown that many of the ancient religions believed in a three-in-one god.[3]

On the basis of comparison with Deuteronomy 32:11 and the Aqhat Epic (a Canaanite myth), W. F. Albright believed that "hovering over" would better read "soaring," like an eagle.[4] Moses pictured the Holy Spirit as a wind—the words are identical in Hebrew—moving over the unorganized creation. As God did His work of creating by means of His Spirit, so also we believers in Jesus Christ are to do our work by His Spirit (Zech. 4:6; Rom. 8; Eph. 5:18).

"Waters" is also capable of being interpreted the same way as "deep." It probably refers to what covered the earth, but it also implies chaos.

> "Hitherto all is static, lifeless, immobile. Motion, which is the essential element in change, originates with God's dynamic presence."[5]

> "We should not be averse [opposed] to holding that the foundation for all physical laws operative in the world now was held by this preparatory activity."[6]

Verse 2 seems to me to describe conditions that existed *before* God created the earth. Whereas verse 1 summarizes the entire creation of the universe, verse 2 pictures its pre-creation condition. Verses 3 through 31 explain the process of creation by which God formed what was formless and filled what was void.

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[1]Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes …," pp. 80-81.

[2]See Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, and idem, *The Prophets of Israel,* pp. 85-87.

[3]Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, pp. 12-19.

[4]W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p. 235.

[5]Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 7.

[6]Leupold, 1:50.

There are two basic theories of the creation process that have grown out of interpretations of verse 2:

THE GAP THEORY

Statement: The *classic* statement of this theory—there have been variations of it—contains the following elements:

1. There is an indefinite time gap—hence the name of the theory—between 1:1 and 1:2.
2. Verse 1 reveals the creation of a perfect heaven and earth very different from what we see around us now.
3. A pre-adamic race of humans inhabited this original creation.
4. Lucifer (unfallen Satan), whose "headquarters" was in the Garden of Eden, ruled over this race of people.
5. When Lucifer rebelled—many advocates see this in Isaiah 14 and/or Ezekiel 28—sin entered the world.
6. Part of God's judgment of this rebellion was the destruction of the earth with a flood (in Noah's day) followed by a global ice age, which accounts for the fossils.[1]

History: This is a very old theory that certain early Jewish writers and some church fathers held. Thomas Chalmers promoted it in 1814.[2] Chalmers' purpose was to harmonize Scripture with science.[3] Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* first appeared in 1859, but Chalmers published his theory earlier, in 1814. Franz Delitzsch supported it in 1899.[4] G. H. Pember's book *Earth's Ancient Ages,* published in 1884, gave further impetus to this view. Many Christian geologists favored the view because they saw in it "an easy explanation for the fossil strata."[5] Harry Rimmer supported it,[6] as did J. N.

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[1]For a creationist explanation of the ice ages, see Ken Ham, Andrew Snelling, and Carl Wieland, *The Answers Book*, pp. 12-13, 77-87; John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, *The Genesis Flood*, pp. 292-303. For a discussion of how Genesis 1 can be reconciled with the immense periods of time suggested by fossil strata, see Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 58-65.

[2]See Chalmers, 1:1.

[3]See Randy Moore, Mark Decker, and Sehoya Cotner, *Chronology of the Evolution-Creationism Controversy*, p. 52.

[4]Franz Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology*, p. 74-76.

[5]Whitcomb and Morris, p. 93. See pp. 89-115, for a history of attempts to harmonize uniformitarianism (in contrast to catastrophism) and the Flood.

[6]Harry Rimmer, *Modern Science and the Genesis Record*, pp. 25-29.

Darby,[1] Arno Gaebelein,[2] and Arthur W. Pink.[3] Lewis Sperry Chafer held it,[4] but he did not emphasize it. Arthur Custance is one writer who has defended it fairly recently.[5]

Arguments for and responses to this view:

1. The first word in verse 2 (Heb. *waw*, "and") is a conjunction that indicates consecutive occurrences. (This verbal form, by the way, is the basic characteristic of narrative in the Hebrew Bible.[6]) *Waw* introduces something that happened *after* what precedes. **Response.** The verb tense and word order in this sentence do not permit this use of this conjunction (vv. 1-2). Rather here, as is normal, the conjunction indicates a break in the consecutive order of events and introduces a circumstantial (independent) clause (v. 2) that describes something in a preceding clause (v. 1). This is a *waw* disjunctive, not a *waw* consecutive. A better translation of the *waw* would be "now," as some English translations have it (e.g., the NIV, the TNIV, and the HCSB)[7]. In short, the Hebrew grammar does not support a chronological gap between verses 1 and 2.

2. The verb (*hayata*, "was") can and should read "became." The translators have rendered it this way in many other places in the Old Testament. **Response.** This is a legitimate translation, but "became" is not always the best translation (cf. Jonah 3:3; Zech. 3:3). Here the translation should be "was."

3. The chaos (*tohu wa bohu*, "a formless and desolate emptiness") describes an evil condition (cf. Isa. 24:1; 45:18; Jer. 4:23). **Response.** This is usually the case, but not always (cf. Deut. 32:10; Job 6:18; 12:24; 26:7; Ps. 107:40). It is not so here.

4. "Darkness" is a symbol of evil in Scripture (cf. 1 John 1:5; et al.). This supports the badness of the condition that resulted from Satan's rebellion. **Response.** This is true in some cases but not always (cf. Ps. 104:19-24). Furthermore, "evening," with its darkness, was part of the days that God declared "good."

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[1]J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 1:22.

[2]Gaebelein, 1:1:16-17.

[3]Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis*, pp. 10-11.

[4]Chafer, 6:67.

[5]Arthur Custance, *Without Form and Void*, 1970. See also Baxter, 1:34-36; William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 1:474; Fruchtenbaum, p. 26.

[6]Longman and Dillard, p. 54.

[7]The NIV is *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. My references to the NIV in these notes are to the 1984 edition, unless otherwise indicated. The TNIV is *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version* of 2005, and the HCSB is *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible* version of 2003.

5. The two primary words for "create" (*bara'* and *asah,* used respectively in 1:1 and 1:25) refer to two different kinds of creativity. *Bara'* usually refers to *primary* creative activity. Since Moses used *bara'* in 1:1, this was the *original* creation—and not just a general description of the process that follows (in 1:3-5 or 1:3-31). If 1:1 were a general description, he would have used *asah*, since some of what God created in the six days He formed out of previously existing material (e.g., man and woman). **Response.** These two words are not so distinct. For example, Moses used *bara'* of the creation of man out of previously existing material (1:27), and he used *asah* of the whole creation as the primary creative activity of God (Exod. 20:11). Furthermore, he used *bara'* of the creation of some animals (1:21) and *asah* of the creation of other animals (1:25). The real difference between these two words is that Moses used *bara'* only of divine activity, and he used *asah* of both divine and human activities.[1] Thus *bara'* and *asah* are very close together in meaning. We should not distinguish them on the basis of *bara'* describing primary creative activity and *asah* referring to the reforming of previously existing material.

6. Adam was to "replenish" the earth (1:28, AV), implying a previous race. **Response.** The Hebrew word used means "fill," not "refill." Many modern English translations so render it.

Summary: Though many evangelicals still hold the gap theory, few Hebrew scholars do, because the Hebrew grammar does not favor a chronologically sequential reading of verses 1 and 2. Rather, verse 2 in some way clarifies verse 1.[2]

THE NO-GAP THEORY

The crux of the verse 2 interpretive problem lies in the identification of the chaos (*tohu wa bohu*, "a formless and desolate emptiness") mentioned in this verse. There have been three primary views concerning this condition:

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[1]See Thomas J. Finley, "Dimensions of the Hebrew Word for 'Create' (*bara*)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:592 (October-December 1991):409-23.

[2]For a good explanation of the gap theory, as well as the atheistic evolution, theistic evolution, progressive creation, and fiat creation views, see James M. Boice, *Genesis*, 1:37-68. See also Henry M. Morris, "The Gap Theory," *Creation Ex Nihilo* 10:1 (December 1987-February 1988):35-37; Ham, et al., pp. 16, 157-75; Davidson, pp. 87-102.

1. The chaos was a condition that resulted *after* God judged the earth that He had originally created good.[1]

Explanation: Verse 1 refers to God's *original* creation of the universe. Verse 2 is a reference to the form that He gave it thereafter. Verse 3 refers to the beginning of the process of reforming the judged earth into the form in which we know it.

Vocabulary: We should translate the first word in the verse (*waw*) "and" or "then" (not preferable grammatically) and the verb (*hayeta*) "became" (possible but not preferable). We should interpret the chaos (*tohu wa bohu*) as an evil condition (not necessarily so).

Sequence: This interpretation permits, but does not require, a gap in time between verses 1 and 2.

2. The chaos was the condition that characterized the earth *when* God created it good.[2]

Explanation: Verse 1 states the creation of the universe as we know it, and it is a general statement of creation. Verse 2 describes the earth at the time of its creation. Verse 3 describes God bringing order out of chaos, which continued through the six creative days.

Vocabulary: We should translate *waw* "now" (better) and h*ayeta* "was" (also better). We should also take *tohu wa bohu* to mean either unformed or evil.

Sequence: This interpretation involves no gap in time between verses 1 and 2.

3. The chaos existed *before* God began creating the earth good.[3]

Explanation: We should take verse 1 the same as in view 2. Verse 2 describes conditions as they existed before creation. We should also take verse 3 the same as in view 2.

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[1]Advocates include Chalmers 1:1-2; Keil and Delitzsch, 1:49; Pember, pp. 33-77; C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, footnotes on Gen. 1:1 and 2; Custance, pp. 1-8.

[2]Advocates include Luther, 1:9-10; Leupold, p. 46; Young, p. 13; J. J. Davis, p. 47; Ross, *Creation and …,* pp. 106-7; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 29; Mark F. Rooker, "Genesis 1:1-3: Creation or Re-Creation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:595 (July-September 1992):316-23; and 596 (October-December 1992):411-27; Targum Neofiti. The Targums are expanded translations of the Old Testament made during the Babylonian captivity in the Aramaic language. See Gary Anderson, "The Interpretation of Genesis l:1 in the Targums," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52:1 (January 1990):23.

[3]Advocate include Bush, p. 27; Waltke, *Creation and …*; idem, *Genesis*, pp. 59-60; Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 106; Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 24; idem, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 54.

Vocabulary: Advocates translate and interpret the key Hebrew words the same as in view 2.

Sequence: This interpretation involves no gap in time between verses 1 and 2.

> "… the disjuncture at v 2 is employed by the author to focus his creation account upon the *land*."[1]

The more popular theory among evangelicals now is the no-gap theory in either one of the last two forms described above. Let me restate these last two views:

1. **View 2 above: God created the earth in a formless and void state. He then proceeded to give it form and to fill it.**

> "We would affirm that the first verse serves as a broad comprehensive statement of the fact of creation. Verse two describes the earth as it came from the hands of the Creator and as it existed at the time when God commanded the light to shine forth. The first recorded step in the process of fashioning the earth into the form in which it now appears was God's remarkable utterance, 'Let there be light' [verse 3]."[2]

Problem: It seems unusual that God would create the earth formless and then form it. It seems more likely and consistent with His activity in verses 3 through 31 that He would create it fully formed.[3]

Answer: The whole process of creation in verses 3 through 31 is a movement from a more primitive to a more advanced stage of existence. I prefer this view.

2. **View 3 above: Before God created the earth there was nothing where it now exists, and verse 2 describes that nothingness.**[4]

Problem: Some terms in verse 2 ("darkness," "surface," "deep," "waters") imply that something existed at this time, suggesting some creative activity before verse 3.

Answers: Verse 1 may be part of the first day of creation. Moses may have used these terms to describe—in terms that we can begin to understand (i.e., figurative terms)—a condition that is entirely foreign and incomprehensible to us.

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[1]Idem, "Exegetical Notes …," p. 77.

[2]Young, p. 14. See also Berkhof, pp. 158-59.

[3]Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament,* p. 30.

[4]Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 59-60.

3. The six days of creation 1:3-31

Explaining the bringing of cosmic order out of chaos involved clearly separating the various elements of the universe. God divided light and darkness, waters and dry land, the world above from the world below. Likewise people should observe and maintain other divisions in the universe, such as things that God has separated in the moral realm.[1]

In the first three "days" God made the uninhabitable earth productive, and in the last three "days" He filled the uninhabited earth with life. The process of creation, as Moses described it, typically follows this pattern for each day of creation: announcement, commandment, separation, report, naming, evaluation, and chronological framework.[2]

One writer believed in six literal 24-hour days of creation and sought to harmonize them with an old age earth model, allowing a long period of time (possibly billions of years) between verses 2 and 3.[3] But this explanation does violence to the Hebrew text.[4]

The first day 1:3-5

1:3 This verse begins with an astounding revelation. The world came into being by God's spoken word (cf. Ps. 33:9; Heb. 11:3). Each of the six creative days began with God speaking.

> "The phrases 'the Lord said', 'the Lord spake', 'the word of the Lord came', are actually used 3,808 times in the Old Testament."[5]

This is a powerful testimony to the authority of the spoken word of God and the written Word of God: Scripture.

> "The goal of divine action is to maintain and to create life; to achieve this aim Yahweh chiefly avails himself of two means which we encounter in varying intensities in all the

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[1]See Mathews, p. 124.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 56.

[3]Gorman Gray, *The Age of the Universe: What Are the Biblical Limits?*

[4]For a critique of Gray's book, see Douglas C. Bozzung, "An Evaluation of the Biosphere Model of Genesis 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:648 (October-December 2005):406-23.

[5]D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authority*, p. 50.

> realms of his manifestation: the Spirit [v. 2] and the Word."[1]
>
> "The creation of light on the first day by word of mouth (Gen. 1:3-5) is without parallel in Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythology."[2]

God's ten pronouncements in this chapter anticipate His ten commandments at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 20:2-17). All but one of Jesus Christ's miracles occurred immediately after He spoke. (The exception occurs in Mark 8:25 when He laid His hands on a blind man.) Jesus Christ, the Word of God, was God's agent in creation; He was the Creator (John 1:3). The theme of God's word (spoken, written, or incarnate) continues throughout the Bible. His word is consistently powerful, as here. *Fiat* (the Latin word for "Let there be") *creation* means creation that came into being by God's word.

> "The idea of creation by the word preserves first of all the most radical essential distinction between Creator and creature. Creation cannot be even remotely considered an emanation from God; it is not somehow an overflow or reflection of his being, i.e., of his divine nature, but is rather a product of his personal will."[3]
>
> "This creative word is different from any human word; it is not 'empty' (Gen. 32:47 [*sic* 37:24]; Isa. 55:11), but powerful and of the highest creative potency. In the second place, therefore, this conception contains the knowledge that the world wholly belongs to God; it is the creation of his will, and he is its Lord."[4]

The "light" might not have been sunlight (cf. v. 14). One view is that perhaps this light came from a source fixed at a distance from the earth,

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[1]Jacob, p. 121.

[2]Hasel and Hasel, p. 23.

[3]von Rad, pp. 51-52.

[4]Ibid., p. 52.

such as the *shekinah*, the light that manifests and represents God's glory (cf. Rev. 22:5).[1]

> "The eternal city will enjoy endless light without the help of the sun or moon (Rev. 22:5), so why couldn't there be light at the beginning of time before the luminaries were made?"[2]

A second view is that perhaps God created the sun on the first day, but it's light became visible on the fourth day.[3]

> "The week thus begins with the sunrise in v. 3, 'and there was light.'"[4]

A third view is that God created the sun, moon, and stars on the first day and assigned them their specific functions on the fourth day (cf. vv. 14-18).[5]

> "The Oriental … did not think of light and darkness exclusively in connection with the heavenly bodies (Job 38:19-20)."[6]

Another principal theme of the Bible appears in this verse: God is the One who brings light into darkness. Here He produced physical light, but later He sent His Son to be the Light of the World (John 8:12). In the future there will be no darkness at all (Rev. 21:23).[7]

1:4 "Darkness" was not a creation, like light, but rather the absence of light (cf. v. 2). As previously noted, "darkness" (Heb. *hosek*) in Scripture often connotes evil (cf. Exod. 10:21-23; 1 Sam. 2:9; Job 3:4, 5; Ps. 35:6; Joel 2:2).

The Hebrew word translated "good" (*tob*) refers more to purpose and harmony (i.e., in keeping with God's will) than to aesthetic beauty.[8] Moses presented God as wise, knowing what was good for man, and as

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[1]Hamilton, p. 121.

[2]Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Pentateuch*, p. 16

[3]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 26.

[4]Ibid., "Genesis," revised ed., p. 56.

[5]See Ibid., "Genesis," pp. 33-34.

[6]von Rad, p. 50.

[7]*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 4; Waltke; *An Old …,* p. 213..

[8]von Rad, p. 52.

loving, providing good things for him. This not only reveals aspects of the Creator's character, but it also prepares the reader for the tragedy of the Fall (ch. 3).

1:5 God named things—"called" them such and such—in addition to creating them. Having a name equals having existence, as people in biblical times thought, and the act of giving a name meant the exercise of a sovereign right (cf. 41:45; 2 Kings 24:17; Dan. 1:7). In this chapter, naming or blessing follows some act of creation seven times. The Israelites regarded the number "seven" as connoting a complete, divine act, as will become clearer later in the Pentateuch.

The terms "day," "night," "evening," and "morning" imply the beginning of the earth's rotation on the first day.[1] The use of the Hebrew word *'ehad* ("one" [first] day; cf. "second day," "third day," etc.) as an ordinal number also supports this view.[2] The Jews reckoned the beginning of a day with the evening (the setting of the sun) rather than the morning (the rising of the sun). It is probable, therefore, that by "evening" Moses meant "beginning," and that by "morning" he meant "ending."

> "A few years ago in England some Christians became excited about the Big Bang theory, thinking that it favored Christianity. But they really missed the point—either the point of Scripture or the Big Bang theory or both. The simple fact is that what is given in Genesis 1:1 has no relationship to the Big Bang theory—because from the scriptural viewpoint, the primal creation goes back beyond the basic material or energy. We have a new thing created by God out of nothing [Lat. *ex nihilo*] by fiat [formal decree], and this is the distinction."[3]

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[1]Leupold, 1:56, 69. See my further comments on the length of the creative days at 2:3.

[2]See Andrew E. Steinmann, "'*Ehad* as an Ordinal Number and the Meaning of Genesis 1:5," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45:4 (December 2002):577-84. Ordinal numbers express order (e.g., first, second, third, etc.) whereas cardinal numbers are used in counting (e.g., one, two, three, etc.).

[3]Frances A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Time and Space*, pp. 28-29.

> Nevertheless, though it is not the same, "The Big Bang theory sounds very much like the story that the Old Testament has been telling a long time."[1]

From the beginning God made divisions. He later divided the clean from the unclean, the holy from the unholy, the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, and Israel from the nations. This shows His sovereignty (ultimate authority). And it shows that He intended that some things should remain separate and distinct from other things. This is important to note since some radicals advocate that we should do away with all distinctions under the banner of "equality."[2]

The second day 1:6-8

1:6 The "expanse" (Heb. *raqia'*) refers to the heavens above the earth (lit. "something stretched out"; i.e., the sky, comprising the atmosphere, the solar system, and the universe beyond). Some English translators have rendered this Hebrew word "firmament" (AV, from the Latin *firmamentum*), or "vault" (TNIV). God placed the sun, moon, and stars in it (vv. 16-17). The ancients grouped the stars and planets together, referring to the former as fixed stars and the latter as wandering stars (cf. Jude 13).

1:7 God "separated the waters" so that some of them remained on the earth in a liquid state, and some remained above the earth as moisture in the atmosphere, probably as clouds—but not as a celestial ocean of solid water above the earth.[3] Before God made this division there may have been a dense fog over the whole surface of the earth.[4]

1:8 "Heaven" or "sky" is the same as the "expanse." Moses used "heaven" here as a general term to describe everything above the earth from man's viewpoint (v. 8).

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[1]Lance Morrow, *Time* (Feb. 5, 1979), p. 149.

[2]See Erwin W. Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced*.

[3]See Randall W. Younker and Richard M. Davidson, "The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew (*raqia'*)," in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, p. 53.

[4]Leupold, 1:59. See my comments on the "canopy theory" at 2:4-6.

The third day 1:9-13

1:9 "The waters below the heavens" (Heb. *yammim*) probably refers broadly to all bodies of water, not just oceans. Gathering them into one place does not mean that all the bodies of water were one huge ocean necessarily, but that God separated the bodies of water on the earth from the dry land on the earth.

> "… what we call geologic formations took place in titanic and gigantic measure at a vastly accelerated pace in a truly miraculous creative work as astounding as the rest."[1]

1:10 The separation of water from the land, so that man could enjoy the land, prepares us for the stories of the Flood (chs. 6—9) and the Red Sea crossing (Exod. 14—15). God later used the waters as His instrument to judge those who opposed His will. The "waters" were an obstacle to man's enjoying the land, so God removed them from the land. Even though the Hebrew word *'eres* ("earth") appears in both this verse and verse 1, it does not refer to the same thing in both cases. In verse 1 it refers to the entire planet, but in this verse it refers to dry land in contrast to oceans or seas.[2]

"Good" (Heb. *tob*) indicates beauty as well as purpose and order. Here it is not good as opposed to evil, since evil was then unknown, but good in the sense of pleasing to God.[3] It was only when the land was ready for man that God called it good. This shows God's loving concern for human beings. The land was good for people. A good God provided a good land for good people.

1:11 Moses described the "plants yielding seed, and fruit trees … bearing fruit according to their kind with seed in them." Perhaps he did so because these are the plants that provide food and shelter for man. He created others, of course, but Moses may have been stressing God's care for humans. Another possibility is that "plants" and "trees" encompass all "vegetation."

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[1]Ibid., 1:64.

[2]See Archer, *Encyclopedia of* …, pp. 65-66.

[3]Cochrane, p. 28.

Since God created "plants yielding seed" the original creation evidently had the appearance of age.[1] He created trees with rings and Adam as an adult.[2] The presence of "seed" also shows that God intended the vegetation to reproduce.

1:12-13 "Kind" (Heb. *min*) is not a biologically exact term. It indicates that God created several different families of plants as separate acts of creation (cf. vv. 21, 24-25; 6:20; 7:14; Lev. 11:14-29; Deut. 14:13-18). All plants, therefore, did not evolve from one. Creationists generally affirm microevolution (the development of different varieties of plants and animals through crossbreeding), but deny macroevolution (the development of all plants from one plant, animals from plants, and humans from animals).[3]

> "With the conclusion of the third day yet another color is added to God's cosmos. To the basic white and black of day and night has been added the blue of sky and sea. Now the canvas is adorned with green. The golden-yellow sun and the reddish human being will complete this rainbow of colors."[4]

Note that on the first and second days God did one creative work each day: He created light and the firmament. On the third day He did two works: He created the land and vegetation. Similarly, on the fourth and fifth days, God did one work each day: He created the lights and their functions on the fourth day, and the birds and fish on the fifth day. Then on the sixth day He again did two works: He created the land animals and man.[5] On the first three days He gave form to what was formless, and on the last three days He filled what was empty (cf. v. 1). On the first three days He created motionless objects, and on the last three days He created objects that move or appear to move.

> "Both vegetation and humanity, symbolizing the fertility of life, were considered pinnacles of creation in the ancient Near East. The first triad [of days] ends climactically with the creation of vegetation; the second, the creation of humanity."[6]

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[1]See Pieters, pp. 23-24.

[2]See Whitcomb and Morris, pp. 232-39.

[3]See Pieters, pp. 52-54, for quotations from 10 scientists who reject human evolution.

[4]Hamilton, p. 126.

[5]Ibid., p. 125.

[6]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 36.

The fourth day 1:14-19

1:14-15

> "… the Hebrew text reads, 'And God said, "Let the lights in the expanse of the sky be for separating…."' In other words, in v. 14 God's command assumes that the lights are *already* in the expanse, and in response to his command the lights are given a purpose, namely, 'to separate the day from the night' and 'to mark the seasons and days and years.'"[1]
>
> "The term 'signs' has been given special attention by the author elsewhere in the Pentateuch. For example, the so-called 'plagues' of Egypt are, in fact, called 'signs' by the author of the Pentateuch (e.g., Deut 29:2-3). The meaning given this term in the Exod account … is that the acts of God in the bringing of disorder upon the Egyptians were 'signs' that God was more powerful and majestic than the Egyptians' gods. This sense of the term 'signs' fits well in Gen 1:14. The author says that not only are the sun and moon to give light upon the land but they are to be visual reminders of the power and majesty of God. They are 'signs' of who the God of the covenant is. The [*sic* They] are 'telling of the glory of God,' as the psalmist puts it (Ps 19:1). Not only does the term 'signs' serve as a reminder of the greatness and glory of God for the author of the Pentateuch, 'signs' are also a frequent reminder in the Pentateuch of his grace and mercy (Gen 4, 9, 17)."[2]

Moses did not mean that these signs were the signs of the zodiac or astrological signs.

> "The narrative stresses their function as servants, subordinate to the interests of the earth … This differs significantly from the superstitious belief within pagan religion that the earth's destiny is dictated by the course of the stars."[3]

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 65.

[2]Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes …," p. 79.

[3]Mathews, p. 154.

> "Here is a stern warning for our times for any who would seek the stars in charting their lives."[1]

The Hebrew word translated "seasons" appears elsewhere in the Pentateuch. It means "appointments," but the translators have also rendered it "feasts" in Leviticus.

> "They [the sun and moon] were not mere lights or reminders of God's glory, they were, as well, calendars for the celebration of the covenant. The world is made for the [Mosaic] covenant. Already at creation, the land was being prepared for the covenant."[2]

1:16 Why did Moses use the terms "greater" and "lesser light(s)" to describe the sun and moon? He probably did so, not just because of their relative size, but because these Hebrew words, which are very similar in other Semitic languages, are also the names of pagan gods.[3] He wanted the Israelites to appreciate the fact that their God had created the entities their pagan neighbors worshipped as gods.

> "… the biblical creation story gives the stars only the barest mention, as though the writer shrugged and said, 'And, oh, yes. He also made the stars.'"[4]

1:17 The writer's perspective throughout is earth-oriented. He used phenomenological language (of appearance) that is very common in the Old Testament. Even modern scientific textbooks use such language without fear of being criticized as unscientific—when they refer to "sunrise," "sunset," etc. Moses and the other biblical writers did not believe that the earth was at the center of the universe and that the sun revolved around the earth.

> "Where has the interpretation arisen that the Bible presents [such] a geocentric picture? This arose in the post-New Testament times when leading theologians

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[1]Ibid., p. 155.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 80.

[3]Hamilton, p.127. See G. Hasel, "The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974):81-102.

[4]*The Nelson …,* p. 5.

> adopted the Ptolemaic cosmology of the second century AD and interpreted the Bible on the basis of this nonbiblical cosmology."[1]

1:18-19 Probably God created light on the first day (v. 3), but then on the fourth day the sun, moon, and stars appeared distinctly for the first time.[2] Another view is that, since God did not create the sun and moon until the fourth day, we should understand the "days" of creation as longer than 24-hour days.[3] Still another view is that God created the sun, moon, and stars on the first day, but they did not become bearers of light (luminaries) until the fourth day.[4]

> "This, the fourth day, is the only day on which no divine word subsequent to the fulfillment is added. On days 1-3 this divine word names the created objects (vv 5, 8, 10); on days 5-6 the creatures are blessed (vv 22, 28). The omission may be just elegant stylistic variation, or it may be a deliberate attempt to avoid naming 'sun' and 'moon' with their connotations of deity."[5]

To summarize, the luminaries (lights, objects that shine) served four purposes.

1. They distinguished day from night.
2. They provided signs.
3. They distinguished the seasons.
4. They illuminated the earth.

Creationists have proposed several solutions to the problem of how light from stars, that are millions of light-years away, could get to Adam if the universe was only days old. These explanations are too involved to discuss here, but I have included some sources for further study in the following footnote.[6] I think the best explanation is the

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[1]Hasel and Hasel, pp. 14-15.

[2]Pieters, p. 40; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 93; McGee, 1:15.

[3]Kyle M. Yates, "Genesis," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 3. Cf. Young, p. 104.

[4]Leupold, 1:71.

[5]Wenham, p. 23.

[6]D. Russell Humphreys, *Starlight and Time*, discussed five creationist models. See also Ham, et al., pp. 18, 187-95; and "'Distant Starlight' Not a Problem for a Young Universe" DVD featuring Dr. Jason Lisle.

appearance of age. As God created humans, plants, and animals fully formed, so He created the light from distant stars already visible on the earth.

The fifth day 1:20-23

1:20 On the fifth day God created living creature to live in the water and birds to fly above the earth.

1:21 The "great sea creatures" (Heb. *tauninim*) were large fish, whales, squid, and all large creatures living in the water (cf. Ps. 104:25-26). The pagans worshipped these, but they are under God's authority. The Old Testament writers adopted pagan imagery, but not pagan theology. The selection of these large creatures for mention may also have been for the purpose of balance: to show that God made all creatures, great and small.[1] Again, He created various "kinds" of these creatures (cf. vv. 11-12). These creatures too He evaluated as "good" (cf. vv. 10, 12, 18).

1:22-23 Interestingly this first mention of God's blessing ("God blessed them") refers to fish and birds! These creatures also had the capability to reproduce themselves (cf. v. 12). Birds and fish rule their respective realms by multiplying.[2]

> "The blessing of God is one of the great unifying themes of Genesis. God blesses animals (1:22), mankind (1:28), the Sabbath (2:3), Adam (5:2), Noah (9:1), and frequently the patriarchs (12:2-3; 17:16, 20, etc.). God's blessing is most obviously visible in the gift of children, as this is often coupled with 'being fruitful and multiplying.' But all aspects of life can express this blessing: crops, family, and nation (Deut 28:1-14). Where modern man talks of success, OT man talked of blessing."[3]

Note that Moses wrote that God created both marine animals and birds on the same "day." Evolution claims that birds evolved from reptiles, and that this process took millions of years.

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 67.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 63.

[3]Wenham, p. 24.

The sixth day 1:24-31

1:24-25 "Creature[s]" translates the Hebrew word *nephesh*, which is usually translated "soul" (e.g., 2:7). This Hebrew word, and the English "soul," imply conscious life, in contrast to plants that have unconscious life. So in the sense of having conscious life, animals as well as people have souls. "Livestock" refers to domesticated animals (that man could tame), and "animals" refers to wild animals.

These verses help us answer the age-old question: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? The chicken.

What happened to the dinosaurs? Conservative Bible interpreters generally believe they existed, having been created along with the other animals, but that they became extinct, either before the Flood or after it. One opinion is as follows:

> "Before the Flood, dinosaurs and man lived together on our planet. Extinction of the great marine reptiles, along with the majority of all other types of sea creature, would have been caused by the violent upheavals of the Flood, many being buried and preserved as fossils."[1]

1:26 "Us" is probably a plural of intensification (or potentiality or majesty; see my comment on verse 1 above), though some regard it as a plural of self-deliberation (cf. 11:7; Ps. 2:3).[2] Others believe that God was addressing His heavenly court (cf. Isa. 6:8).[3] However "us" does not include the angels, since God made man in His image alone, not also in the image of angels. "Us" gives us another hint—and it is only a hint at this point—that God is a triune being (cf. v. 1, "Elohim"). As Scripture unfolds it becomes clear that God is indeed a triune being. God the Father may have been addressing the other two members of the Trinity. (This is an anthropomorphism: a description of God in human terms, in this case doing something that humans do.[4]) However we should not use this verse

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[1]Ham, et al., p. 10. See also pp. 21-39; Whitcomb and Morris, pp. 279-81.

[2]E.g., Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, p. 145.

[3]*The NET2 Bible* note on 1:26; Levenson, p. 12; Tremper Longman III, "Genesis," in*The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, p. 84.

[4]For helpful comments about anthropomorphisms, as well as divine soliloquies, see Roderick MacKenzie,"The Divine Soliloquies in Genesis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22:1 (1955):277-86.

as a formal proof of the Trinity, since this reference by itself does not prove that one God exists in three persons.[1]

> "Although the Christian Trinity cannot be derived solely from the use of the plural, a plurality within the unity of the Godhead may be derived from the passage."[2]

The theological controversy in Moses' day was not between trinitarianism and unitarianism but between one self-existent, sovereign, good God—and many limited, capricious, often wicked gods.[3]

Some feminists have restricted the use of "man" (v. 26; AV and some other translations) to males, but this is not the primary meaning of the English word. Its primary meaning is "human being" or "human race," according to the standard Oxford dictionaries. Likewise "mankind" normally means "the human race" or "humanity," unless it is in contrast to "womankind." The Hebrew word *adam* also has a broad range of meanings, from "the human race" to "Adam." Consequently I have used these English words, trusting that the reader will interpret them in harmony with their customary meanings.

What does being made in the image of God involve? We can learn this from the context. God created all the plants and animals with the capacity to reproduce "after their (or its) kind" (vv. 11, 12 [twice], 21, 24 [twice], 25 [twice]). Oak trees bring forth little oak trees, dogs reproduce little dogs, etc. Likewise, a personal God created persons.[4]

But man was also made to rule "over all the earth" (the plants and animals, v. 28). So God not only created mankind (male and female, v. 27) with the ability to "be fruitful and multiply" (v. 28), but He created human beings so that they could also carry out His desires. Thus the image of God involves the capacity to interact with God in order to serve as His representative ruler on earth.[5]

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[1]See Ross, *Creation and …*, p. 112; Wenham, pp. 27-28; Oswald T. Allis, *God Spake by Moses*, p. 13.

[2]Mathews, p. 163. Cf. Calvin, 1:13:24.

[3]Hamilton, p. 133. See Tozer, pp. 32-38, on God's attribute of self-existence.

[4]Cochrane, p. 27.

[5]See Waltke, *An Old …,* pp. 215-21.

> "*Morally responsible personality* is what is meant by 'the image of God.' … Personality involves three things: self-consciousness, reasoning power, and moral sense. In other words, any being that can say to himself: 'I am, I ought, I will,' is made in the image of God."[1]

Parents not only produce a child physically, but they normally desire that their child will carry out their desires. The child bears the image or likeness of the parent both in how he or she looks and in how he or she behaves, that is, in his or her obedience to the will of the parent. Children who follow in their parents' footsteps by their obedience really reflect the image of their parents. Just so, Adam and Eve were created to represent God by carrying out His desires and will and so reveal His image.

> "Image and likeness, means an image which is like. The simple declaration of the Scripture is that man at his creation was like God."[2]

"Image" and "likeness" are essentially synonymous terms.[3] Both indicate personality, moral, and spiritual qualities that God and man share (i.e., self-consciousness, God-consciousness, freedom, responsibility, speech, moral discernment, etc.) These distinguish humans from the animals, which have no God-consciousness even though they have conscious life. Some writers have called the image of God man's "spiritual personality."[4] In another sense man *is* the image of God (e.g., he rules and creates as God does, under God's authority, thus reflecting God).[5] The Fall obscured but did not obliterate the image of God in man (cf. 9:6).[6]

> "What is the image of God in man? The traditional view is that God's image is certain moral, ethical, and intellectual

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[1]Pieters, p. 47. See also *The Theological Wordbook*, s.v. "Image of God," by John A. Witmer, pp. 177-79.

[2]Hodge, 2:96.

[3]See Calvin, 1:15:3.

[4]E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 1:63. See Wenham, pp. 27-28; Charles L. Feinberg, "The Image of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:515 (July-September 1972):235-246, esp. p. 237; Boice, 1:77-79; Mathews, pp. 164-72.

[5]See Longman, p. 84; James Jordan, "Rebellion, Tyranny, and Dominion in the Book of Genesis," *Christianity and Civilization* 3 (Summer 1983):38-80. See also Merrill, "A Theology …," pp. 14-16.

[6]See Calvin, 1:15:4; Jacob, pp. 166-72; and John F. Kilner, "Humanity in God's Image: Is the Image Really Damaged?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53:3 (September 2010):601-17.

> abilities. A more recent view, based on Hebrew grammar and the knowledge of the ancient Middle East, interprets the phrase as meaning 'Let us make man *as* our image' (the Hebrew preposition in this phrase can be translated *as*). In ancient times an emperor might command statues of himself to be placed in remote parts of his empire. These symbols would declare that these areas were under his power and reign. So God placed humankind as living symbols of Himself on earth to represent His reign. This interpretation fits well with the command that follows—to reign over all that God has made."[1]

Does the image of God in man include man's body?

> "Most theologians have recognized that that [*sic*] we cannot interpret it [i.e., the phrase 'the image of God'] literally—that is, that man's physical being is in the image of God. Such an interpretation should be rejected for at least four reasons. In the first place, we are told elsewhere that God is a spirit (John 4:24; Isa. 31:3) and that he is ubiquitous [present everywhere] (1 Kgs. 8:27). In the second place, a literal interpretation would leave us with all sorts of bizarre questions. If man's physical being is in the image of God we would immediately wonder what, if any organs, God possesses. Does he have sexual organs, and if so, which? Does he have the form of a man, or of a woman, or both? The very absurdity that God is a sexual being renders this interpretation highly unlikely. Thirdly, it seems unlikely that man's dignity above the rest of the animals (Gen. 9:5 f.; Jas. 3:7-9) is due to his slight physiological differences from them. Is it credible that animals may be killed but that man may not be killed because his stature is slightly different? Finally, a literal interpretation seems not only contradictory to the rest of Scripture, and unlikely, but also inappropriate, Gardener aptly observed: 'But our anatomy and physiology is demanded by our terrestrial habitat, and quite

[1]*The Nelson …,* p. 5. See also Robert A. Pyne, *Humanity and Sin*, pp. 51-70.

inappropriate to the one who inhabits eternity.' For these reasons, theologians have concluded that the statement in Genesis 1:26-28 must be metaphorical of man's spiritual or immaterial nature."[1]

"… although God's glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of his image is in the soul."[2]

"People are created *as* (not *in*) the image of God so that they can have dominion over all things as God's surrogates (1:26-28; see also Ps. 8)."[3]

"First, God's deliberation [in v. 26] shows that he has decided to create man differently from any of the other creatures—in his image and likeness. God and man share a *likeness* that is not shared by other creatures. This apparently means that a relationship of close fellowship can exist between God and man that is unlike the relationship of God with the rest of his creation. What more important fact about God and man would be necessary if the covenant at Sinai were, in fact, to be a real relationship? Remove this and the covenant is unthinkable.[4]

"Secondly, in Gen 1, man, the image bearer, is the object of God's blessing. According to the account of creation in Gen 1, the chief purpose of God in creating man is to bless him. The impact of this point on the remainder of the Pentateuch and the author's view of Sinai is clear: through

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[1]Bruce K. Waltke, "Reflections from the Old Testament on Abortion," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19:1 (Winter 1976):8. His quotation is from R. F. R. Gardener, *Abortion: The Personal Dilemma*. See also Waltke's helpful discussion of image and likeness in *Genesis*, p. 65-66. For the view that the image of God includes the body, see Jonathan F. Henry, "Man in God's Image: What Does it Mean?" *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 12:37 (December 2008):5-24.

[2]Calvin, 1:15:3. See also 1:15:4.

[3]Eugene H. Merrill, in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 7.

[4]Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes …," p. 80.

> Abraham, Israel and the covenant this blessing is to be restored to all mankind."[1]

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

> "Whatever true scientific endeavor has produced comes under this broad charter which the Creator has given to man."[2]

1:27 "Man" refers to mankind, not Adam individually. "Them" indicates this generic significance. God "created" (cf. v. 1) mankind male and female; they did not evolve from a lower form of life (cf. Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6). Adam and Eve were not androgynous (two individuals joined physically like Siamese twins), or each of them a hermaphrodite (one individual possessing both male and female sexual organs). There is no basis for these bizarre ideas in the text. God formed Eve from Adam's rib (2:21), not from half of his body or from his genitals.

> "The image is found in the type of relationship that was designed to exist between male and female human beings, a relationship where the characteristics of each sex are valued and used to form a oneness in their identity and purpose. When God created human beings as male and female he formed them to exhibit a oneness in their relationship that would resemble the relationship of God and his heavenly court."[3]

> "By ruling as one, male and female fulfill the purpose of God for which they were created. United as one humanity, male and female are one with God and his heavenly court. And it is this unity between male and female, and between humanity and God, that is destroyed in the Fall described in Genesis 3."[4]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Leupold, 1:92.

[3]Henry F. Lazenby, "The Image of God: Masculine, Feminine, or Neuter?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:1 (March 1987):67.

[4]Ibid., p. 66.

As a husband and wife demonstrate oneness in their marriage, they reflect the unity of the Godhead. Oneness involves being in agreement with God's will and purposes. Oneness is essential for an orchestra, an athletic team, and a construction crew, as well as a family, to achieve a common purpose. Oneness in marriage is essential if husband and wife are to fulfill God's purposes for humankind. (Generally speaking, women feel a marriage is working if they talk about it, but men feel it is working if they do not talk about it.)

God created mankind male and female as an expression of His own plurality: "Let *us* make mankind" (v. 26). God's plurality anticipated man's plurality. The human relationship between man and woman thus reflects God's own relationship with Himself.[1]

This verse may be the first poem in the Bible. If so, the shift from prose to poetry may emphasize human beings as God's image bearers, the shift in genre indicating the importance of what is being said. There is some disagreement among Old Testament scholars regarding what distinguishes biblical poetry from biblical prose, so the genre of this verse is debatable.[2]

1:28 Note that God's blessing of man finds expression in terms of posterity that connotes the ideas of seed and life, two prominent themes as Genesis and the whole Bible unfold.[3] God's blessing enables humanity to fulfill its twofold destiny: to procreate (in spite of death), and to rule (in spite of enemies). Blessing denotes all that fosters human fertility and assists in achieving dominion.[4]

Interpreters have generally recognized the commands to "be fruitful and multiply" as commands to Adam and Eve (and later to Noah, 9:1) as the heads of the human race, not simply as individuals. That is, most interpreters believe that God has not charged every human being with begetting children. This seems clear from the fact that God has made many men and women incapable of reproducing.[5] Consequently one

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[1]See Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 38.

[2]See Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, pp. 9-54, for a discussion of biblical poetry.

[3]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 38.

[4]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 67.

[5]For a good book on childlessness, see Vicky Love, *Childless Is Not Less*.

should not appeal to this command as support for the view that God wants all people to bear as many children as they possibly can. This verse is a "cultural mandate," not an individual mandate. It was to Adam and Eve as heads of the human race that God gave this command, not simply to them as individuals.

> "This command, like others in Scripture, carries with it an implicit promise that God will enable man to fulfill it."[1]

Sexual union is God's ordained method of implementing His command to multiply descendants. Consequently sex is essentially good. When God gave this command Adam and Eve were in an unfallen condition. Therefore the descendants they would produce would have been godly. It is particularly a godly seed that God has charged the human race to raise up. Likewise He commanded Noah and his wife, who were both righteous, to be fruitful (9:1).

God did not make men or women emotionally, spiritually, or physically capable of raising children without a marriage partner. Consequently single parents struggle. As children observe both godly parents modeling a harmonious marriage, they learn to appreciate their own sexual identity, the roles of husband and wife, and unconditional love. Unconditional love is necessary for a harmonious marriage.

"Subdue" and "rule," the second aspect of this mandate, imply a degree of sovereignty and control that God delegated to mankind over nature.[2] This constitutes God's "Magna Carta" for all true scientific and material progress (cf. v. 26).[3] God commanded Adam and Eve to acquire knowledge so they could master their environment, to bring all its elements into the service of the human race.[4]

> "The dominion which man enjoyed in the Garden of Eden was a direct consequence of the image of God in him."[5]

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[1]Wenham, p. 33.

[2]See Eric Sauer, *King of the Earth*. Cf. Heb. 2:8-9.

[3]See J. Kirby Anderson, *Moral Dilemmas*, ch. 14: "Technology."

[4]See *Africa Bible Commentary*, s.v. "Christians and the Environment," by George Kinoti, p. 618.

[5]J. J. Davis, p. 81.

> "Why this need to subjugate the earth? There are at least four possibilities: (1) Sin would ruin the earth, and people would have to expend great effort to live there (see 3:17-19). (2) Satan would defy the will of God and make all good efforts difficult. (3) The earth left to itself would not remain good. Instead, God planned that people would need to manage and control it. (4) The beauty of the earth was only in the garden that God planted (see 2:8); the rest of the earth would be hostile. Whatever the case, subdue does not mean 'destroy' or 'ruin.' It does mean to 'act as managers who have the authority to run everything as God planned.' This command applies equally to male and female."[1]

This verse explains that God's purpose in creating human beings was that they should rule over the animal world, indeed, over all the rest of His creation. When Adam and Eve fell (3:6), they took themselves out from under God's authority and put themselves under Satan's authority. Today Satan is the authority under whom Adam and Eve's descendants live—until they come under God's authority. Nevertheless, God promised to raise up a descendant of the woman (Eve) who would conquer Satan and thereby enable humankind to fulfill the commission to rule under God's authority (3:15). In time, this Seed proved to be Jesus Christ, who will one day return to earth to subdue His enemies and rule over the creation, thus fulfilling this commission. This is really the story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.[2]

For a married couple, oneness in marriage is necessary in order to manage God's creation effectively.

> "Our Christian proclamation of hope has antecedents in the theological soil of three divine programmatic expectations first heard in Genesis: (1) God will bless the human family with procreation and dominion (1:26-28); (2) he will achieve victory over mankind's enemy (3:15); and

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[1]*The Nelson …,* p. 6.

[2]See Charles Baylis, "The Biblical Story," at www.thebiblicalstory.org.

> (3) he will bring about both through the offspring of Abraham (12:1-3)—namely, the one man Jesus Christ."[1]

We have in this verse the three essential elements of a divine dispensation (stewardship, household management): a divine revelation of God's will for human conduct, consequent human responsibility, and a period of time during which God tests people as to their obedience to this responsibility. A "dispensation" is a period of time during which God tests man in relation to his obedience to a specific revelation of God's will. The historical "dispensations" constitute a progressive, connected revelation of God's dealings with humankind. God gave some of them to the whole human race, and He gave some to a part of it (e.g., Israel). Dispensations are not separate ways of salvation; in every dispensation, man is saved by God's grace, because of the work of Jesus Christ. Before the Cross, people were saved in prospect of Christ's sacrifice—as on credit so to speak—by believing a revelation given to them by God. After the Cross, people are saved in retrospect of Christ's sacrifice, by believing the revelation that He satisfied God's just demands against sinners (1 John 2:2).

> "The dispensational study of the Bible consists in the identification of certain well-defined time-periods which are divinely indicated, together with the revealed purpose of God relative to each."[2]

Whereas specific human responsibilities change as divine revelation unfolds, and dispensation succeeds dispensation, people have a continuing responsibility to live in the light of previous revelation. For example, even though the dispensation of the Mosaic Law has ended (Rom. 10:4), Christians are nevertheless helped to discharge their responsibilities to God by being aware of what God required of the Israelites under the Mosaic Law (cf. Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The purpose of each dispensation has been to place people under a specific rule of conduct, *not as a condition for salvation*, but to demonstrate that people always fail to live up to God's standards and so need to accept the salvation that God extends to them as a gift. I believe that seven dispensations are distinguishable in Scripture, which are: (1) Innocence

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[1]Mathews, p. 22.

[2]Chafer, 1:xi.

(Gen. 1:28); (2) Conscience (Gen. 3:7); (3) Human Government (Gen. 8:15); (4) Promise (Gen. 12:1); (5) Law (Exod. 19:1); (6) Church (Acts 2:1); and (7) Kingdom (Rev. 20:4).[1]

This verse marks the first dispensation: Innocence. God created man innocent, placed him in a perfect environment, subjected him to a simple test, and warned him of the consequences of disobedience. Adam did not have to sin, but he chose to do so. The serpent deceived Eve (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3), but Adam sinned deliberately (cf. 1 Tim. 2:14). This dispensation ended when God judged Adam and Eve guilty and expelled them from the Garden of Eden (3:24). We do not know how long after their creation our first parents fell.

Whereas many people incorrectly identify John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) as the founder of dispensationalism, historian Ernest Sandeen has shown that "the term should not be used as a shibboleth with which to distinguish Darbyites from other millenarians."[2]

> "The system of dispensations is not primary in Darby's thought; and, furthermore, it is shared by many of Darby's opponents and by literally scores of others, some of whom were not millenarians at all."[3]

1:29-30 God gave man authority and responsibility to regulate nature and to advance civilization. Nature was to serve man, not vice versa. This does not give man the right to abuse nature however.[4] Neither does it justify giving animals and plants the "rights" of human beings.

> "Man is the climax of creation, and instead of man providing the gods with food [as was common in the

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[1]See Elmer Towns, "God's Overall Earthly Plan," in *The Gathering Storm*, pp. 340-48; *The Theological Wordbook*, s.v. "Dispensation," by John F. Walvoord, pp. 99-100; Lewis S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, ch. XVIII: "The Dispensations," pp. 96-102. See also Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, pp. 513-26, for a good explanation of dispensational theology; Stanley D. Toussaint, "A Biblical Defense of Dispensationalism," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 81-91; Elliott E. Johnson, "Hermeneutics and Dispensationalism," in ibid., pp. 239-55; Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference! A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology*.

[2]Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 86.

[3]Ibid., p. 68.

[4]See Gina Hens-Piazza, "A Theology of Ecology: God's Image and the Natural World," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13:4 (October 1983):107-110.

> ancient world], God provided the plants as food for man (1:29)."[1]

Verse 29 suggests that man was originally a vegetarian. After the Flood, God told Noah that he could eat animals (9:3). Some believe that the animals may also have been herbivorous at first (v. 30).[2] Alternatively, some animals may have been carnivorous from the beginning. In this case, the death of some animals may have occurred before the Fall. Death was a judgment on humankind after the Fall, but it may have been part of what God called "good" before the Fall. It is argued that death is a result of moral evil.[3] But animals are incapable of moral evil. Perhaps nothing God created died before the Fall. The question of whether death existed before the Fall or not is one that the Bible does not give a definitive answer to.

1:31 This verse records the end of the sixth "day" of creation, and it summarizes the account of creation just given in chapter 1. Note that everything that God had made was "very good." This is in harmony with all of God's actions; He always and only does what is very good, because He is a good God.

> "Some people ask, 'How can God be good when there is so much evil and suffering in the world?' The answer is that God made a perfect world and man messed it up!"[4]

Verses 27 through 31 are a general account of human creation. The more detailed account of the creation of Adam and Eve follows in 2:4 through 25. These two accounts do not necessarily reflect a two-document composition (two separate versions that differ) of the creation story, but they illustrate the writer's purpose. In chapter 1 he wanted to emphasize the creation of humankind in the larger context of the cosmic creation. The name *elohim* (lit. the strong one, translated "God") occurs over 30 times in this chapter, emphasizing that it was the powerful God who created everything. "Good" appears seven times in this chapter (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), highlighting the goodness of God in blessing His creation—especially mankind.

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[1]Wenham, p. xlix.

[2]See Ham, et al., pp. 29-30.

[3]See Pieters, pp. 59-61, for this view.

[4]Stephen J. Bramer, "Suffering in the Pentateuch," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 91.

There are three major viewpoints regarding the origin of man as recorded in 1:26 through 31; 2:7; and 2:21 through 25.

1. Evolution (both Darwinian and neo-Darwinian) asserts that all living organisms developed from a single, simple cell through a process that took millions of years. This first cell resulted from the accumulation of chemical and protein elements that came together because of unknown change factors over a long period of time. This view contradicts Scripture, and it is not scientifically demonstrable.[1]

> "… Mr. Darwin's theory is incapable of proof. From the nature of the case, what concerns the origin of things cannot be known except by a supernatural revelation. … Science as soon as she gets past the actual and the extant, is in the region of speculation, and is merged into philosophy, and is subject to all its hallucinations."[2]

> "The assumptions of historical continuity and scientific naturalism are no more susceptible of genuine scientific *proof* than are Biblical catastrophism and supernaturalism."[3]

2. Theistic evolution attempts to blend Scripture and scientific theories. It holds that God ordered and directed the evolutionary process. This view fails to explain specific statements in the text of Scripture adequately, and it accommodates the text to scientific theory. The major problem with this view is that it is not completely true to either science or Scripture but is inconsistent.[4]

> "In fact, theistic evolution is a contradiction in terms. It is just as destructive of faith in the Biblical doctrine of creation as naturalistic evolution is; and by calling in the creative activity of God time and again it also nullifies the evolutionary hypothesis."[5]

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[1]See John C. Hutchison, "Darwin's Evolutionary Theory and 19th-Century Natural Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):334-54; Ángel M. Rodriguez, "Biblical Creationism and Ancient Near Eastern Evolutionary Ideas," in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, pp. 293-328.

[2]Hodge, 2:22.

[3]Whitcomb and Morris, p. xxi. See also Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Answers to Tough Questions*, ch. 10: "The Question of Evolution," pp. 119-41, for a general discussion of evolution.

[4]Representative evangelicals who hold this view include Pieters, p. 64; Kidner, p. 48; Waltke, *An Old …*, p. 202; Edward J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*.

[5]Berkhof, pp. 140. See also pp. 162-63; Whitcomb and Morris, pp. 441-43; David H. Lane, "Special Creation or Evolution: No Middle Ground," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):11-31; idem,

3. Special creation asserts that God produced the universe and all life forms through a series of supernatural acts. Some special creationists believe He did this in a relatively brief period of time. Others, such as progressive creationists, believe the creation process took thousands of years. This view gives primacy to the text of Scripture and interprets it more literally, historically, and grammatically.[1]

Progressive creationism is another view, but it is not as common as the three view described above. It teaches that God created the universe in several acts of creation that time periods of indefinite duration separated. The process of evolution was at work within these eras and accounts for the development of phyla, species, etc.[2] The following quotation distinguishes theistic evolution from progressive creationism:

> "I do not believe in theistic evolution. Theistic evolution means simply that God guided the evolutionary process so that it is not to be explained on a purely naturalistic basis. It assumes that all living things, including man, are biologically descended from a common ancestor. By contrast with theistic evolution, Scripture indicates that God made different basic kinds of beings and that all existing plants and animals are not descended from a common ancestor."[3]

"Theological Problems with Theistic Evolution," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:602 (April-June 1994):155-74; Archer, *Encyclopedia of …*, pp. 55-58; for refutations of this view.

[1]Representatives include Bush, pp. 26-27; J. J. Davis, p. 40; Schaeffer, pp. 27-28; Young, p. 11. See Warren H. Johns, "Strategies for Origins," *Ministry* (May 1981), pp. 26-28, for good brief explanations of the evolutionary theories and eight creationist theories of origins. David L. Willis, "Creation and/or Evolution," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 29:2 (June 1977):68-72, set forth criticisms of both creationism and evolutionism. Every Christian who accepts evolution should read Charles C. Ryrie, "The Bible and Evolution," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:493 (January-March 1967):66-78; and Kenneth A. Ham, *The Lie: Evolution*, which shows how important it is for Christians to accept a literal Genesis. See also idem, *Genesis and the Decay of the Nations*, for an explanation of what happened historically to cause people to begin to doubt the Book of Genesis. Idem, *Creation Evangelism for the New Millennium*, relates creationism to evangelism. H. Enoch, *Evolution or Creation*, weighed the so-called evidences for the theory of evolution in several areas of science. See also Henry M. Morris, *Evolution and the Modern Christian*; Wayne Frair and P. William Davis, *The Case for Creation*; Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Evolution*; Jobe Martin, *The Evolution of a Creationist*.

[2]See Hugh N. Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy*. For a critique of the claims in this book, see Mark Van Bebber and Paul S. Taylor, *Creation and Time: A Report on the Progressive Creationist Book by Hugh Ross*.

[3]Russell L. Mixter, "A Letter to President Edman, March 26, 1962," *Bulletin of Wheaton College* (May 1962), p. 5. See also Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture,* pp. 271-72*;* Pattle P. I.

I do not believe that Scripture supports progressive creationism, as these notes will explain.

4. The seventh day 2:1-3

> "2:1-3 echoes 1:1 by introducing the same phrases but in reverse order: 'he created,' 'God,' 'heavens and earth' reappear as 'heavens and earth' (2:1) 'God' (2:2), 'created' (2:3). This chiastic pattern brings the section to a neat close which is reinforced by the inclusion 'God created' linking 1:1 and 2:3."[1]

The mood of the narrative also returns to what it was in 1:1 and 2. Silence and calm prevail again.[2]

2:1 This verse is a concluding summary of God's creative work on the six days of creation. One English translation rendered the Hebrew word *tsb's* "lights" (NASB 2020 ed.). Other translations have "host" or "hosts" (AV, NASB 1971 ed., ESV, NKJV, RSV).[3] Still others have translated it "array" (NIV), "multitude" (NRSV), "throng" (NEB), and "everything in them" (HCSB, NET2).[4] This Hebrew word usually refers to the stars in the Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 4:19) more often than to the angels (e.g., 1 Kings 22:19). So "their heavenly lights" probably refers to the sun, moon, and stars here.

2:2 "Seventh" comes from a Hebrew root meaning "to be full, completed, entirely made up."[5] "Rested" (Heb. *shabat*) means ceased or desisted from activity (cf. Exod. 40:33). There is no implication that God felt fatigued by His creative activity and needed to rest. He simply stopped creating because He had finished His work (cf. Isa. 40:28-29).

Pun, "A Theology of Progressive Creationism," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 39:1 (March 1987):9-19); W. I. LaSor, "Biblical Creationism," *Asbury Theological Journal* 42:2 (1987):7-20.

[1]Wenham, p. 5. A chiasmus is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form, in order to stress the unity of the material, and often to stress its central element or elements.

[2]Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, p. 9.

[3]NKJV refers to *The Holy Bible: New King James Version* of 1982, RSV refers to *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version* of 1952; and NRSV refer to *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* of 1989.

[4]NET2 refers to *The NET (New English Translation) Bible* version of 2019, and NEB is *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*.

[5]Bush, p. 46.

> "The eternal God did not rest, as one weary, but as one well-pleased."[1]
>
> "Unquestionably, the number *seven* marks in Scripture the sacred measurement of time."[2]

Some other ancient Near Eastern civilizations regarded the seventh day as especially significant, but not the same as Israel's Sabbath day.[3] The origin of this mutual regard probably traces back to God's resting on the seventh day of creation.

2:3 God "blessed" the seventh day of inactivity in that He set it apart as different from the other days of creation. It was a memorial of His creative work. God was satisfied with the work that He had done (cf. 1:31). Note the unique threefold repetition of "seventh day" in verses 2 and 3, which highlights its special significance.

> "… according to one Babylonian tradition, the seventh, fourteenth, nineteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of each month were regarded as unlucky: Genesis, however, declares the seventh day of every week to be holy, a day of rest consecrated to God (2:1-3)."[4]

Note that God did not command Adam to abstain from work on the Sabbath. This came later with the Mosaic Law. However Scripture does teach the importance of periodic rest (cf. Exod. 20:8-10; 23:10-12; Lev. 25:2, 4; Deut. 15:1-18; Heb. 4:1-11; et al.). Part of bearing the likeness of God involves resting as He did after completing His work.[5]

> "In the first six days space is subdued; on the seventh, time is sanctified. This day is blessed to refresh the earth. It summons humanity to imitate the pattern of labor and rest of the King and so to confess God's lordship and their

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[1]Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 5. See also Cochrane, pp. 28-29.

[2]Edersheim, p. 195. See his "Chapter X: Festive Cycles and Arrangement of the Calendar," pp. 195-207.

[3]See J. D. Davis, pp. 23-35.

[4]Wenham, pp. xlix-l.

[5]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 39.

> [people's] consecration to him. On this day they cease to subdue the earth."[1]

The writers of Scripture used the Sabbath to anticipate the hope of Messianic redemption throughout the Old Testament. In the creation account the Sabbath points forward to the time when God will bring …

> "… a perfect and complete cosmos out of chaos. The weekly rest-experience of the Sabbath [under the Mosaic Law] served to epitomize the future peace and rest of the Messianic age."[2]

> "The seventh day of the week, the Jewish Sabbath, symbolized the old creation and the covenant of law; first you work, then you rest. The first day of the week, the Lord's day, symbolizes the New Creation and the Covenant of Grace: first you believe in Christ and find rest, and then you work (Eph. 2:8-10)."[3]

The sabbatical and jubilee years in ancient Judaism also pointed to the liberation that Messiah would provide for His people.[4]

The structure of 1:1 through 2:3 bears the marks of literary artistry, as does the structure of the rest of Genesis.

> "The correspondence of the first paragraph, 1:1-2, with 2:1-3 is underlined by the number of Hebrew words in both being multiples of 7. 1:1 consists of 7 words, 1:2 of 14 (7 x 2) words, 2:1-3 of 35 (7 x 5) words. The number seven dominates this opening chapter in a strange way, not only in the number of words in a particular section but in the number of times a specific word or phrase recurs. For example, 'God' is mentioned 35 [7 x 5] times, 'earth' 21 [7 x 3] times, 'heaven/firmament' 21 [7 x 3]

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 67.

[2]Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Sabbatical Typologies of Messianic Redemption," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17:2 (December 1986):155, 165.

[3]Wiersbe, p. 21. See Chafer, *Major Bible …*, ch. XXXVII: "The Sabbath," pp. 218-23.

[4]See John F. Alexander, "Sabbath Rest," *The Other Side* 146 (November 1983): 8-9; Gerhard Hasel, "The Sabbath in the Pentateuch," in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, pp. 21-43.

> times, while the phrases 'and it was so' and 'God saw that it was good' occur 7 times."[1]

These characteristics of repeating important words or phrases in multiples of seven, and using them to bracket sections of the narrative, continue throughout Genesis, though not consistently. They help the reader of the Hebrew text identify distinct sections of the text as such.

How long were the seven days of creation? This is a problem because the inspired writers used "day" (Heb. *yom*) in various ways in the Old Testament.[2]

> "The simple fact is that *day* in Hebrew (just as in English) is used in three separate senses: to mean (1) twenty-four hours, (2) the period of light during the twenty-four hours, and (3) an indeterminate period of time. Therefore, we must leave open the exact length of time indicated by *day* in Genesis."[3]

Moses used "day" these three ways in Genesis 1 and 2: (1) a 12-hour period of daylight (1:5, 14, 16, 18), (2) a 24-hour day (1:14), and (3) the entire seven-day period of creation (2:4). A few scholars have argued that the sequence of days is not chronologically ordered at all.[4] They believe that Moses numbered the days on the basis of content rather than sequence in time. This view has not enjoyed wide acceptance. Other scholars believe that there are some portions of the text that are not in chronological order.[5] There are four major views as to the length of the days of creation.

1. **The literal 24-hour day theory**. The normal conclusion one would most likely draw from the terminology in the text (e.g., evening, morning, day, night, etc.) is that God created the world in six 24-hour days.[6] This view is most consistent with the principles of literal, historical, and grammatical interpretation. The fact that the number of days corresponds to the number of weekdays also favors this view. Furthermore, whenever "day" (*yom*) occurs with a numeral in the Old Testament, as here, it refers to a 24-hour period. Some advocates cite Exodus

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[1]Wenham, p. 6.

[2]See Cochrane, pp. 21-24.

[3]Schaeffer, p. 57.

[4]E.g., D. A. Sterchi, "Does Genesis 1 Provide a Chronological Sequence?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:4 (December 1996):529-36; M. Throntveit, "Are the Events in the Genesis Account Set Forth in Chronological Order? No," in *The Genesis Debate*, pp. 36-55.

[5]E.g., Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 75-78; H. Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p. 78.

[6]See Baxter, 1:45-50; Free, pp. 19-21; Berkhof, pp. 153-55.

20:11 as support also.[1] The main problem with this view is that the activity of some days (e.g., the sixth) seems to some to require more than 24 hours.[2]

2. **The day-age (or geologic day) theory**. This view interprets the terminology less literally. Advocates argue that the events recorded seem to require more than 24-hour days (e.g., v. 12). They also point out that solar days may not have begun until the fourth day. Some advocates of this theory are theistic evolutionists. Others are progressive creationists. Progressive creationists generally seek to correlate the geologic ages with the six days of creation. Not all advocates of this view link the long creative days with the geologic ages.[3] The main problem with the day-age theory is that it interprets terms figuratively that seem to have obvious literal meaning.

3. **The literal days with intervening ages theory**. This view regards each day as a time of completion of creative activity only. It is an attempt to take the "morning and evening" references seriously but still allow the time that seems necessary within the days (e.g., v. 12). It is a combination of the two preceding views. However it strains the text. Also, Moses could have described this method of creation more clearly than he did if long ages interspersed the six days. Few scholars have adopted this view.

4. **The revelatory day theory**. The least literal interpretation holds that God revealed, rather than accomplished, creation in six days. A major problem with this view is Exodus 20:11, where Moses says that God "made," not "revealed," His creation in six days. A variation of this view understands the days as "structures of a literary framework designed to illustrate the orderly nature of God's creation and to enable the covenant people to mime the Creator."[4]

Presuppositions are extremely important in this controversy. If one believes that scientific "facts" are true, he or she may try to make the Bible fit these. On the other hand, if one believes in an inerrant Bible, he or she will give priority to statements in the text. If one believes both are true, he or she will soon learn that both cannot be true. For example, the text says that God created the trees before marine life (1:11, 20), but most evolutionists believe that trees developed after marine life. Also, the Bible implies that

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[1]E.g., McGee, 1:12-14. See Ham, et al., pp. 13-14, 89-101.

[2]See Ross, *Creation and …*, p. 109.

[3]E.g., Pieters, pp. 31-33; Shedd, 1:477-78, 483.

[4]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 61. See Appendix 2 at the end of these notes for a summary of five popular views of Creation.

marine life and birds came into existence about the same time (1:20), but evolutionists hold that they evolved millions of years apart.[1] No theory explains the conflict between biblical statements and scientific claims adequately. In the end, one really is forced to ask: Do I put more confidence in what God says or in what scientists say?[2] One's presuppositions will also affect whether he or she interprets more or less literally.

> "One cannot help being concerned about the drift of some evangelical scholars to subject the interpretation of Genesis 1 to modern scientific opinions. There is a dangerous tendency to interpret the first chapter of Genesis, not by strict and accurate exegesis, but in a manner so as to satisfy the 'scientific mind.'"[3]

Belief in the inerrancy of Scripture does not do away with the problem of the age of the earth however. Several evangelical scholars who are competent scientists and affirm inerrancy believe the proper interpretation of Scripture results in an old earth model of creation.[4] Other equally qualified inerrantists see a young earth model in the Bible.[5]

One writer gave biographical information about Archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656), whose chronology appeared first in the 1701 edition of the AV and later in the margin of the original *Scofield Reference Bible*. He also gave an explanation of how Ussher arrived at his dates and a table listing the dates of the more important events in Old Testament history contained in Ussher's chronology.[6]

> "Clearly a difference between these positions at this precise point of the relationship between science and Scripture is clear and unmistakable. The old-earth view is built on the position that an old universe and an old earth is an established factual base. Thus the Bible at the true meaning

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[1]See John Klotz, *Modern Science in the Christian Life*, pp. 111-12.

[2]See Duane T. Gish, "Evolution—A Philosophy, Not a Science," *Good News Broadcaster* (March 1984), pp. 34-37.

[3]J. Marcellus Kik, in the editor's preface to Young's *Studies in ….*

[4]E.g., Davis Young, *Creation and the Flood* and *Christianity and the Age of the Earth*; Robert Newman and Herman Eckelmann Jr., *Genesis One and the Origin of the Earth*; and Daniel Wonderly, *God's Time-Records in Ancient Sediments*; Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time*.

[5]E.g., Calvin, 1:14:1; and 3:21:4; John Klotz, *Genes, Genesis, and Evolution*; Robert Kofahl and Kelly Segraves, *The Creation Explanation*; Henry Morris, *Science, Scripture and the Young Earth*; John Whitcomb, *The Early Earth*; John D. Morris, *The Young Earth*; Davidson, pp. 69-87, 102-104; Free, p. 18.

[6]James Barr, "Why the World was Created in 4004 B.C.: Archbishop Ussher and Biblical Chronology," *Bulletin of John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67:2 (Spring 1985):575-608. See also Harrison, *Introduction to …,* pp. 147-98, on ancient Near Eastern chronology; and Fruchtenbaum, p. 624, for a chronology of Genesis.

> level *must* be interpreted to show that it is not out of harmony with this *fact*. The young-earth model is based on the position that the *scientific data* used to establish the concept of an old earth can be interpreted differently and that, strictly speaking, there is no need to defend an old earth. Thus the Bible is approached without this *a priori* [theoretical, supposed, inferred] demand for an old earth, and the differences are markedly clear, in this writer's opinion."[1]

Evangelicals who believe in a young earth (usually less than 10,000 years old) normally do so because they believe that the biblical genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 are complete or very nearly complete. Some of the other genealogies in Scripture are clearly incomplete, which opens the door to the possibility that these genealogies in Genesis may also be incomplete.[2]

Where did the names we use for the days of the week come from? The days of the week originally received their names in honor of seven pagan gods, whom the ancients associated with the five major planets plus the sun and moon. The names of Germanic (Teutonic) gods replaced those of some Roman gods as time passed. The early church, following Jewish custom, numbered the days of the week to avoid using the names of pagan gods (e.g., Luke 24:1; Acts 20:7).[3]

Weekday	**Teutonic god**	**Roman god/planet**
Sunday		Sun
Monday		Moon
Tuesday	Tiw	Mars
Wednesday	Woden	Mercury
Thursday	Thor	Jupiter (Jove)

[1]Frederic Howe, "The Age of the Earth: An Appraisal of Some Current Evangelical Positions, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):121. Both parts 1 and 2 of this fine article are very helpful. On the importance of having the correct concept of origins, see Ralph E. Ancil, "Is Creation More Than a Biological Model of Origins?" *Creation Social Science and Humanities Review* 5:2 (Winter 1982):3-13. See also Ernest Lucas, "Miracles and natural laws," *Christian ARENA* (September 1985):7-10.

[2]See Hodge, 2:40-41. Further explanation will follow in my discussion of chapters 5 and 11.

[3]See David Malcolm, "The Seven-Day Cycle," *Creation Ex Nihilo* 9:2 (March 1987):32-35; Charles S. Braden, *The World's Religions*, pp. 71-73.

Friday	Frigg	Venus
Saturday		Saturn

> "Though historical and scientific questions may be uppermost in our minds as we approach the text, it is doubtful whether they were in the writer's mind, and we should therefore be cautious about looking for answers to questions he was not concerned with. Genesis is primarily about God's character and his purposes for sinful mankind. Let us beware of allowing our interests to divert us from the central thrust of the book so that we miss what the LORD, our creator and redeemer, is saying to us."[1]

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

> "This passage is significant also in the lives of Christians. Above and beyond asserting the fact of creation in much the same way it did for Israel, the passage provides an important theological lesson. The believer enters into a life of Sabbath rest from works and embarks on a life of holiness in that rest. We learn from the creation account (1) that God is a redeeming God who changes darkness to light, death to life, and chaos to blessing; (2) that God is absolutely sovereign over all life and all pagan ideas that would contend for our allegiance; and (3) that God works by His powerful Word—to create, to redeem, and to sanctify. Obedience to His powerful Word, either the written Word, or the living Word, our Savior, will transform believers into His glorious image."[3]

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[1]Wenham, p. liii.

[2]See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 62-65, for discussion of the Old Babylonian account of creation: *Enuma elish*.

[3]Ross, *Creation and …*, pp. 114-15.

B. WHAT BECAME OF THE CREATION 2:4—4:26

Genesis 2:4 through 4:26 tells us what became of ("the account of," 2:4) the creation that God described in 1:1 through 2:3. Genesis 2:4 through 25 retells the creation of man and woman as preparation for the account of the Fall in chapter 3. Moses gave us the broad outline of creation in 1:1 through 2:3 and then filled in details having to do with the creation of human beings in the rest of chapter 2 (cf. Ps. 104; Prov. 8). He then described what happened to the creation by recording significant events in the Garden of Eden, the murder of Abel, and the family of Cain.

> "The section begins with a description of the creation of Adam and Eve and traces their sin, God's curse on sin, and the expansion of sin in their descendants. No longer at rest, mankind experienced flight and fear, making his way in the world, surviving, and developing civilization. As if in answer to the blessings of Creation, this passage supplies a threefold cursing (of Satan [3:14], of the ground because of man [3:17], and of Cain [4:11]). Yet in this deteriorating life there is a token of grace (4:15) and a ray of hope (man began to call on Yahweh [4:26])."[1]

1. The Garden of Eden 2:4—3:24

This story has seven scenes that a change in actors, situations, or activities identifies.[2] Moses constructed this section of Genesis in a chiastic (palistrophic, crossing) structure to focus attention on the central scene: the Fall. The preceding scenes lead up to the Fall, and the following scenes describe its consequences.[3]

A Scene 1 (narrative): God is the sole actor, and man is passive (2:4-17).

B Scene 2 (narrative): God is the main actor, man plays a minor role, the woman and the animals are passive (2:18-25).

C Scene 3 (dialogue): The snake and the woman converse (3:1-5).

D Scene 4 (narrative): The man and the woman are primary (3:6-8).

C' Scene 5 (dialogue): God converses with the man and the woman (3:9-13).

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[1]Idem, "Genesis," p. 24. Paragraph division omitted.

[2]For a different narrative analysis, see Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 80-81.

[3]Wenham, p. 50.

B' Scene 6 (narrative): God is the main actor, man plays a minor role, the woman and the serpent are passive (3:14-21).

A' Scene 7 (narrative): God is the sole actor, and man is passive (3:22-24).

The story of what took place in the Garden of Eden (ch. 3) begins with a second, more detailed account of the creation of humankind that Moses gave as an introduction to the Fall and its consequences (ch. 2).

> "More light is shed on the relationship between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 by a consideration of a literary structure that occurs throughout the entire book of Genesis: First, less important things are dealt with rapidly, and then the things more important to the central theme of the Bible are returned to and developed more fully."[1]

Note the following contrasts between the accounts of man's creation.

	1:1—2:3	**2:4-25**
Name of God	Elohim (Strong One)	Yahweh (Covenant-keeping One)
Purpose	Facts of Creation	God's relationship with human creatures
Emphasis	The world generally	Humankind specifically

Moses identified "Yahweh," the God who called Abraham (12:1) and who delivered Israel from Egypt (Exod. 3:15), with "Elohim," the God who created the cosmos.[2] The name "Jehovah," which appears in some English translations, comes from combining the vowels of the Hebrew *adonay* ("Lord") with the consonants of the Hebrew *Yahweh* (i.e., YHWH).

> "In Genesis 1 *'elohim* (God) refers to God's transcendence over the world, while in Genesis 2—3 *yhwh* (LORD) speaks of God's immanence with his elect. When the narrator combines the two names, he makes a bold assertion that the Creation God is the Lord of Israel's history. Just as God ordered creation, he orders history. All is under God's sovereign control, guaranteeing that Israel's history will end in triumph, not in tragedy."[3]

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[1]Schaeffer, pp. 40-41.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 20.

[3]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 34.

The creation of man 2:4-17

The differences between 1:1 through 2:3 and 2:4 through 25 have led many literary critics of the Bible to insist that two different writers composed these sections. But the similarities between these sections argue for a common writer.[1]

Critics who hold to the documentary hypothesis believe that passages in Genesis (and elsewhere) that contain the name "Elohim" derive from one source document (E), and passages where "Jehovah" or Yahweh appear come from a different source document (J). A better explanation is that the speaker in the passage, or the writer of the passage (Moses), chose each of these names of God deliberately to emphasize a particular characteristic of God that that name connotes. In the case of "Elohim," that characteristic is His power as Creator, and in the case of "Jehovah" or Yahweh, it is His covenant relationship with people.[2]

2:4 Having related the creation of the universe as we know it, God next inspired Moses to explain for his readers what became of it. Sin entered it and devastated it.

> "The destiny of the human creation is to live in God's world, with God's other creatures, *on God's terms*."[3]

The Hebrew word *toledot* occurs first in 2:4, where it introduces the next section of the book. This Hebrew word often reads "generations," "histories," "descendants," or, as here (in the NASB and NIV), "account" (cf. 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). The word summarizes what follows in the section and introduces what became of something, in this case the universe, or, more often, someone. The person mentioned after *toledot* is not usually the central figure in the section but the person who originated what follows. The *toledot* statements contribute the major structural and conceptual framework for the whole Book of Genesis.[4]

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[1]See William H. Shea, "Literary Structural Parallels between Genesis 1 and 2," *Origins* 16:2(1989):49-68; Archer, *Encyclopedia of* …, pp. 66-69.

[2]In his *Exposition of Genesis* Leupold often pointed this out where these names of God appear throughout Genesis.

[3]W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 40.

[4]Cf. Martin Woudstra, "The *Toledot* of the Book of Genesis and Their Redemptive-Historical Significance," *Calvin Theological Journal* 5:2 (1970):188-89.

> "… the material within each *tol'dot* is a microcosm of the development of the Book of Genesis itself, with the motifs of blessing and cursing playing a dominant role. Within each of the first several *tol'dot* is a deterioration to cursing until 12:1-12, where the message moves to the promise of blessing. From this point on there is a constant striving for the place of blessing, but still with each successive narrative there is deterioration, for Isaac and Jacob did not measure up to Abraham. Consequently at the end of Genesis the family is not in the land of blessing but in Egypt."[1]

A new name for God appears in this verse. "God" is again Elohim, but "LORD" (Yahweh, Jehovah) translates the proper name of God that elsewhere highlights the Almighty's covenant relationship with His people. The "God" of chapter 1 and the "LORD God" of chapter 2 are the same Person.

2:5-6 These verses describe global conditions before *man's* creation in terms that stress God's gracious preparation of the world for him. They are a flashback to conditions before 1:26. Moses chose terms that contrast with conditions that existed after the Fall.[2] "Shrub[s]" were evidently not edible, whereas "plant[s]" were. Thus Moses distinguished two types of land: arable and non-arable.[3]

Moses' reference to "rain" (v. 5) anticipates the story of the Flood (chs. 6—9). The absence of "rain" and the presence of the "mist" (v. 6) have led some writers to put forward a "canopy theory."[4] According to this theory, a canopy of water vapor covered the earth initially and watered it. It reduced the destructive rays of the sun so that antediluvian (pre-Flood) man lived much longer, and it distributed heat more evenly over the surface of the earth. Such a water canopy covers Venus. This canopy

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[1]Ross, "Genesis," p. 24.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 40.

[3]Wenham, p. 58.

[4]Whitcomb and Morris; pp. 240-41, 255-58, 399, 404-5; Jody Dillow, *The Waters Above*.

supposedly broke up when God sent the Flood (7:11). This is another of those theories that are impossible to prove or disprove conclusively.[1]

> "This idea still has its defenders today [2015], although its exegetical foundation is rejected by most evangelical scholars and its science is rejected by both evangelical and secular scientists. Nevertheless, liberal scholars have been delighted to receive support from the more fundamentalist vapor-canopy theorists for their assertion of the ancient Hebrews' naïve views of the cosmos."[2]

Another explanation is that mists rose from the earth, condensed and fell like rain, and so watered the earth.[3]

I believe Genesis 1:1 through 2:3 is the big picture of creation, and the rest of chapter 2 retells the creation of man. Chapter 2 verses 4 and 5 set the stage for what follows by explaining what agricultural land was like before man started farming it. Verse 5 explains the original order of plant life, which did not yet grow as a result of rain ("no plant of the field had yet sprouted"). Initially plants grew from the mist that arose from the ground (v. 6). In other words, verses 5 and 6 apparently give the chronological sequence of mist—plants—man, and the comment about rain was added because that is how plants grow now.

2:7 "Formed" (Heb. *yasar*) means to shape or mold and implies that God deliberately did this with tender loving care. It describes the work of an artist elsewhere (cf. Job 10:8-9). However, one should not conclude that God literally formed the first man with God's hands, since God does not have hands. He is a spirit being. This is one of numerous anthropomorphisms in the Bible that describe God and His activities as though God were a human being. The point being emphasized is that God created the first man with loving care—like a potter forms a vessel on his wheel.

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[1]For a critique of this view, see Thomas Key, "Does the Canopy Theory Hold Water?" See also Stanley Rice, "Botanical and Ecological Objections to a Preflood Water Canopy," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 37:4 (December 1985):223-29.

[2]Younker and Davidson, p. 45.

[3]Leupold, 1:114.

"Dust" (Heb. *haadama*) reflects man's lowly origin. Even though he was made in God's image, man was a creature like other creatures that God had made. This rules out the view that man descended from the gods, which was popular in the ancient Near East and was foundational in Egyptian cosmology.[1] In the Creation, God raised man out of the dust to reign.[2] However, in the Fall, man returned to the dust by his own work (3:19).[3] By "dust" Moses probably meant "earth": existing material.

> "Practically the universal belief of antiquity in regard to man's origin was that he was made of earth. It could not be otherwise, for the truth was evident to him that had eyes to see. Man's body moulders [decays] to dust after death. Plainly it is made of earth. The tales which would tell the story of man's creation differ, indeed, but the difference between the accounts which assume the intervention of a creator lies in the method of divine procedure."[4]

The "breath of life" (Heb. *nesama*) was God's breath that gave the first man life, spiritual understanding (Job 32:8), and a functioning conscience (Prov. 20:27). It probably also imparted moral, intellectual, relational, and spiritual capacities.[5] The first man's life-breath came from God's breath or spirit.[6] The same Hebrew word, *nephesh,* means both "breath" and "spirit," and sometimes refers to the Holy "Spirit" (cf. 1:2). God's "breath" may be a synonym for His word (cf. Ps. 33:6).[7]

The point is that God imparted life to the first man. Man's uniqueness consisted in his having been made in God's image. Again, one must avoid

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 41.

[2]See W. Brueggemann, "From Dust to Kingship," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972):1-18. See also John M. Soden, "From the Dust: Creating Adam in Historical Context," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:685 (January-March 2015):45-66, for defense of a figurative understanding of the historical Adam's creation; and Brian N. Peterson, "Egyptian Influence on the Creation Language in Genesis 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174:695 (July-September 2017):283-300.

[3]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 41.

[4]J. D. Davis, p. 36.

[5]*The Nelson …,* p. 7.

[6]See Mathews, pp. 197-99.

[7]See Ellis R. Brotzman, "Man and the Meaning of *Nephesh* [Soul]," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:580 (October-December 1988):400-9.

the conclusion that God literally blew breath into the man's nostrils from God's mouth, since God does not have a mouth and lungs. Man, therefore, is a combination of dust and divinity.[1]

> "Not this breath itself but the manner of its impartation indicates man's dignity."[2]

This verse is the basis for the belief that man consists of two parts: a body and a soul—one corporeal (physical) and the other spiritual. This is the doctrine of human dichotomy. Those who hold this view of man usually subsume all of the spiritual and immaterial aspects of humanity under the soul (e.g., the human spirit, the metaphorical heart, the will, the mind, etc.).[3] Whereas 1 Thessalonians 5:23 describes people as having a "spirit and soul and body," it is generally recognized that the spirit and the soul are spiritual and the body is physical.

2:8 Another indication of God's love and grace is that He placed the first man in a garden that He had prepared for him. The God who was powerful enough to create the cosmos with a word (ch. 1) was also a good and loving God.

2:9 The trees in the garden were beautiful ("pleasing to the sight") and edible ("good for food")—an orchard for man to enjoy (v. 9). The "tree of life" appears to have been a means, with its fruit, whereby God sustained Adam's and Eve's lives. Again, God's desire to bless man comes through. "The knowledge of good and evil" (cf. v. 17) probably refers to man's ability to decide for himself what is best for him and what is not (i.e., wisdom).[4] "Good and evil" may be a merism for all the things that protect and destroy life. It may mean total knowledge.[5] These were evidently real trees, since the garden was a real garden, and Adam and Eve were real people (Luke 3:38; Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45; 1 Tim. 2:13-14; Jude 14).

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[1]For defense of the historicity of Adam and Eve, see Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 80, n. 2.

[2]Leupold, 1:116.

[3]See Hodge, 2:42-51, for defense of this view.

[4]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 86. For some other views, see Hamilton, pp. 164-66; Wenham, pp. 63-64.

[5]Jacob, p. 284. A merism is a figure of speech in which two contrasting or opposite parts are substituted in place of the whole.

The one tree God associated with life, and the other tree He associated with the knowledge of good and evil.[1]

2:10-14 The modern equivalent of the "Pishon" River (v. 11) is unknown for certain. Commentators have suggested that it was the Indus, the Ganges,[2] a river of Arabia, or a river of Mesopotamia. The "land of Havilah" seems to have been in southwestern Arabia (cf. 25:18). The "Gihon" (v. 13) may be the pre-Flood Nile, since Cush (the region surrounding the river) in the Old Testament usually describes "an African kingdom located along the Nile River to the south of Egypt in the region that is now part of the country of Sudan" (cf. 10:6-8; Num. 12:1; 2 Sam. 18:19-33; 2 Kings 19:9; 2 Chron. 14:9-15; Isa. 37:9; Jer. 13:23; 38—39).[3] However some interpreters believe that this site was in the land of the Cassites, east of Mesopotamia.[4] Perhaps these rivers are unidentifiable with certainty today because of the great geographical changes that the Flood produced.[5] The "Tigris" and "Euphrates" are now in the area formerly called "Babylonia" (modern Iraq). Some believe that the Garden of Eden was in Mesopotamia.[6] Others believe that it was at either the northern or southern extremes of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.[7]

2:15 "Eden" (meaning "delight," "pleasure," or perhaps "place of abundant waters") therefore appears to have been located in the general area of the Promised Land (cf. Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35; Joel 2:3; Zech. 14:8; Rev. 22:1-2). The "Garden of [sometimes rendered "in"] Eden" seems to have been in the eastern part of Eden, perhaps in Mesopotamia.[8]

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[1]For comments about the tree of life in ancient civilizations, see J. E. Jennings, "Ancient Near Eastern Religion and Biblical Interpretation," in *Interpreting the Word of God*, pp. 18-19.

[2]Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 1:1:3. Josephus' writings reflect certain traditional Jewish opinions in his day (first century A.D.) and are not always consistent with Scripture.

[3]See *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, s.v. "The Cushites," by J. Daniel Hays, pp. 32-36. See also idem., "The Cushites: A Black Nation in Ancient History," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611 (July-September 1996):270-80; and idem, "The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October-December 1996):396-409.

[4]E.g., Ross, "Genesis," p. 31.

[5]Leupold, 1:124.

[6]E.g., Fruchtenbaum, p. 74.

[7]Currid, p. 17.

[8]Free, p. 30; Archer, *Encyclopedia of …*, pp. 69-70.

The Hebrew word translated "placed," in verse 8 (*wayyasem*), is not the same one rendered "put" in verse 15 (*wayyannihehu*). The former term is the normal one for putting something somewhere. The latter one connotes rest and safety (cf. 19:16; Deut. 3:20; 12:10; 25:19), as well as dedication in God's presence (cf. Exod. 16:33-34; Lev. 16:23; Num. 17:4; Deut. 26:4, 10). God specifically placed man in "the garden," where he could be safe and rest, and where he could have fellowship with God (cf. 3:8). Mankind's primary responsibility there was actually to worship and obey God, though not explicitly stated, rather than to merely "cultivate" and "tend" the garden (v. 15).[1] In other words, the first man served—and thereby worshipped God—by tending the garden.[2] Work is essentially a good gift from God, not a punishment for sin.

> "It is not enough to have been blessed with land. We must maintain that land and control all that could destroy it. Thus we need to stop destructive processes like soil erosion and deforestation and must not use chemicals that are harmful to the soil."[3]

Similarities between the descriptions of the garden and the tabernacle are also instructive (cf. Exod. 25-27). Both places reflected the glory of God's presence in their beautiful surroundings (cf. Hag. 2:7-8; Rev. 21:18).[4]

> "The Garden of Eden is a temple-garden, represented later in the tabernacle. Cherubim protect its sanctity (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 26:1; 2 Chron. 3:7) so that sin and death are excluded (Gen. 3:23; Rev. 21:8)."[5]

This rather extensive description of conditions in and the location of the Garden of Eden sets the stage for Adam's and Eve's expulsion from it in 3:24. It probably also encouraged the Israelites to anticipate the Promised Land.

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 45.

[2]See Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*; Anderson, ch. 15: "Ecology and the Environment."

[3]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 14.

[4]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 43.

[5]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 85.

> "It can hardly be a coincidence that these rivers, along with the 'River of Egypt,' again play a role in marking boundaries of the land promised to Abraham (Ge 15:18)."[1]

2:16-17 God gave the first man great freedom of choice. Note that He graciously gave him broad permission before one narrow restriction. God only forbade eating from one of all the trees.

"The knowledge of good and evil" may be a merism, a figure of speech in which polar opposites denote a totality (cf. "heaven and earth," 1:1).[2] If so, God was prohibiting Adam and Eve from obtaining total knowledge.

God's command also implies that He alone knows what is good and not good for man. The first man would die because of disobedience, not because of the fruit of the tree.[3] (Someone posted on their church marquee: "Forbidden fruits create many jams.")

> "Adam was denied the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to test his obedience and prove that he was willingly under God's command. The very name of the tree shows the sole purpose of the precept was to keep him content with his lot and to prevent him from becoming puffed up with wicked lust. But the promise by which he was bidden to hope for eternal life so long as he ate from the tree of life, and, conversely, the terrible threat of death once he tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, served to prove and exercise his faith."[4]

> "That famous tree symbolizes the ability to discern good (i.e., what advances life) and evil (i.e., what hinders life). Such knowledge belongs to God alone because, as Agur inferentially argues in Prov. 30:1-6, one must know comprehensively in order to speak absolutely about what is good and bad."[5]

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 99.

[2]Levenson, p. 14.

[3]For a discussion of what God had in mind in the two trees, see Keil and Delitzsch, 1:84-86.

[4]Calvin, 2:1:4. See also Pieters, p. 81.

[5]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 46.

> "On the whole it seems probable that we should understand 'death' to mean a spiritual state, but a state aptly symbolized by physical death. When man sinned he passed into a new state, one dominated by, and at the same time symbolized by death. It is likely that spiritual death and physical death are not being thought of as separate, so that the one involves the other."[1]
>
> "O, if Adam had only believed God about sin and death! O, if he had only stopped his ears against the father of lies! O, if he could only have foretasted guilt and remorse and agony of conscience as he was led up to the tree! O, if he could only at that fatal moment have foreseen that coming garden where the Son of God Himself lay among the dark olive-trees recoiling from sin and death in a sweat of blood! O, if he could only have seen spread out before him all the death-beds of all his children on the earth, and all the beds of their second death in hell! O Adam and Eve in Eden, and still under the tree of temptation, look before it is too late; look on through the endless ages at the unutterable woes that you are working!"[2]

The Hebrew construction emphasizes the certainty of death, however it is defined. Why did Adam and Eve not die immediately? Because the phrase "on the day" (v. 17) in Hebrew is an idiom meaning "for certain" (cf. Exod. 10:28; 1 Kings 2:37, 42).

> "Did God fail to carry out His promise? Certainly not! But the death that overtook the guilty pair that day was spiritual only; physical death did not come until centuries later (Gen. 5:5)."[3]
>
> "Before Adam and Eve fell into sin, God made a proposition to them that some have regarded as a covenant, as stated in Genesis 1:26-31 and 2:16-17. God gave Adam authority over the creatures of the world,

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[1]Leon Morris, *The Wages of Sin*, p. 10.

[2]Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, 1:18.

[3]Archer, *Encyclopedia of …*, p. 72.

> commanded him to be fruitful, and gave him permission to eat from every green plant. The only restriction was that Adam and Eve not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if they did so they would surely die (2:16-17). Basically, the covenant was conditional, requiring obedience; but it also declared God's purpose to elevate humanity to a place of authority and prominence, ultimately fulfilled by Christ."[1]

The covenant in 2:16 and 17, along with 1:28-30, has been called the Edenic Covenant. A covenant is a divine pronouncement by which God establishes a relationship involving responsibility. The relationship may involve Himself and an individual (e.g., Adam in the Edenic Covenant; Gen. 2:16-17), or Himself and humankind in general (e.g., humanity in the Noahic Covenant; Gen. 9:9-17). It may involve Himself and a nation (e.g., Israel in the Mosaic Covenant; Exod. 19:3-8), or Himself and a human family (e.g., David's family in the Davidic Covenant; 2 Sam. 7:12-17). A covenant of one type may overlap in time another covenant or other covenants of a different type or different types. For example, the Noahic Covenant overlaps the Mosaic Covenant, and the Davidic Covenant overlaps the Mosaic and New Covenants.

The biblical covenants normally involved unconditional promises in which God obligated Himself to accomplish certain purposes despite human failure, though they may contain conditional elements. An exception is the Mosaic Covenant, in which the fulfillment of the promises contained in the covenant depended on Israel's obedience. The Edenic Covenant was also different, in that God promised death for failure to obey His command to abstain from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.[2]

The three universal covenants, which affect the whole human race, are the Edenic, Adamic, and Noahic Covenants. All the subsequent covenants affect Israel primarily, though they all affect the rest of humanity secondarily. There are seven major biblical covenants, and they all help us understand how God is working out His purposes with humankind. These

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[1]John F. Walvoord, "The New Covenant," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 187-88.

[2]See Jacques B. Doukhan, "'When Death Was Not Yet': The Testimony of Biblical Creation," in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, pp. 329-42.

are: the Edenic (Gen. 2:16), the Adamic (Gen. 3:15), the Noahic (Gen. 9:16), the Abrahamic (Gen. 12:2), the Mosaic (Exod. 19:5), the Davidic (2 Sam. 7:16), and the New (Heb. 8:8). Some scholars believe that there is an eighth covenant: the Palestinian (Deut. 30:3), while others regard this verse as a restatement of the land promise given to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant.

> "On the plane of human relationships, the truth almost always points to a covenant between two partners who are on an unequal footing; it is the stronger who proposes the *berit* [covenant]."[1]

The Edenic Covenant required five things from man. He was: (1) to propagate the human race (1:28b), (2) to subdue the earth for human habitation (1:28c), (3) to exercise dominion over the animal creation (1:28d), (4) to care for and enjoy the Garden of Eden and its fruits (2:15), and (5) to abstain from eating from one tree in the garden (2:17).

> "From Genesis to revelation the Bible makes it clear that no one was ever saved by his own good works but only by faith in the promises of God. Only in Eden was salvation put on the basis of obedience, with the accompanying warning of death for transgression of God's command …"[2]

Verse 17 also contains the first prophecy in the Bible. Note that what God predicted was fulfilled literally and in detail. This suggests that His other predictions should be interpreted the same way, unless there is reason in the context to understand it otherwise.

> "One of my books, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990), traces one thousand scriptural passages on prophecy, some of them single verses and some of them entire chapters. The book shows that half of these prophecies have already been fulfilled literally, an astounding proof that prophecy is accurate even when dealing with distant future events."[3]

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[1]Jacob, p. 210.

[2]Archer, *Encyclopedia of* …, p. 70.

[3]John F. Walvoord, *End Times*, p. viii.

The creation of woman 2:18-25

2:18 The first man's creation was not complete, because he lacked a "helper" who corresponded to him. This deficiency led God to pronounce his condition "not good," that is, not in accordance with God's will for him. This provision of a companion follows the pattern of the triune God's own relationships in which He is surrounded by His heavenly court (cf. Ezek. 1; Rev. 4—5). Man should normally live in community, even as God does. God not only evaluated the first man's condition, He also improved it.

> "In Judaism, from the very moment of origins of the Jewish people, marriage was considered to be the ideal state."[1]

God's provision of a wife for the first man is a concrete example of God knowing what is good for man.[2] Companionship replaced isolation. For companionship to be satisfying, however, there must be oneness in the marriage (cf. 1:26-27). Self-centered living destroys oneness and companionship.

The term "helper" (Heb. *ezer*) does not mean "servant" and does not denote subordination. The Hebrew word is used elsewhere to describe God as Israel's helper (Deut. 33:29; Ps. 33:20; 89:18; cf. Ps. 70:5; 115:9). Jesus Christ used the Greek equivalent word (*paraclete*) to describe the Holy Spirit, who would help believers following the Lord's ascension (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). "Ally" may be a better translation in this context.

> "The word *help* suggests that the man has governmental priority, but both sexes are mutually dependent on each other. The man is created first, with the woman to help the man, not vice versa (see also 1 Tim. 2:13); however, this does not mean ontological [essential] superiority or inferiority. The word *helper*, used for God sixteen of the nineteen times it appears in the Old Testament, signifies the woman's essential contribution, not inadequacy."[3]

"Suitable to him" or "corresponding to him" means "equal and adequate." What was true of the first man (cf. v. 7) was also true of the

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[1]Blu Greenberg, "Marriage in the Jewish Tradition," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22:1 (Winter 1985):3.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 46.

[3]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 88.

first woman. They both had the same nature. She was comparable to him, in contrast to the rest of the animal creation.

> "Since Adam and Eve were a spiritual unity, living in integrity without sin, there was no need for instruction here on headship."[1]

This verse is not saying that it is "not good" for all men to remain single but that they should marry. This verse is often misquoted in modern marriage ceremonies to make this point. Some men are better off single than married. Paul explained that the single state is perfectly acceptable to God (1 Cor. 7). This verse is saying that God regarded His creation of Adam ('the man" in view, not just any man) as "not good" until He provided a suitable helper for him. The point is that the creation of humankind required both a male and a female to make it "good" in God's sight.

The ancient Near Eastern texts contain no account of the creation of woman. Moses, however, devoted six verses to her formation compared to only one for man (2:7). This indicates God's concern for women.

2:19-20 These verses do not mean that the first man named every individual animal. He apparently gave names to the different kinds God brought before him. This exercise demonstrated his authority over the animals and the dissimilarity between humans and animals. As God had named things (ch. 1), now the first man demonstrated his right, as God's viceregent (under-ruler), to name the animals ("whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name"). He became aware of his own need for a companion as he named the animals.

The name "Adam" (v. 20) comes from the Hebrew word for "earth" (*adamah*). "Adam" means "one that is red," like the earth.[2] Likewise the names of the animals probably expressed something characteristic of each animal. Names of humans in Old Testament times usually reflected the nature of the persons who bore them. This indicates that the first man must have had great intelligence and wisdom to be able to identify

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[1]Ross, "Genesis," p. 31.

[2]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:1:2.

and label the various types of animals according to their characteristics or natures.

Man is not like the other animals. Adam could find no suitable partner who was comparable to him among them (v. 20). So God graciously provided for his need by creating Eve.

The events of this sixth "day" of creation (cf. 1:24-31) have led some interpreters to conclude that Adam could not have done all that he is reported to have done in one 24-hour period.[1] Nevertheless, he could have named all the animals very quickly if they were all in the Garden of Eden.

2:21-22 More than once, when God initiated a new relationship for someone, He first put that person into a "deep sleep" (cf. 15:12; 28:11). He evidently did so to assure the recipient that his own works had no part in his receiving it.[2] It was totally a gift of God's grace.

> "… the woman was *made of a rib out of the side of Adam*; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."[3]
>
> "Similarly, it was observed [by the Rabbis], that God had not formed woman out of the head, lest she should become proud; nor out of the eye, lest she should lust; nor out of the ear, lest she should be curious; nor out of the mouth, lest she should be talkative; nor out of the heart, lest she should be jealous; nor out of the hand, lest she should be covetous; nor out of the foot, lest she be a busybody; but out of the rib, which was always covered. Modesty was, therefore, a prime quality."[4]
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> "Just as the rib is found at the side of the man and is attached to him, even so the good wife, the rib of her

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[1]E.g., Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, p. 75.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 46.

[3]Matthew Henry, p. 7.

[4]Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, p. 146.

> husband, stands at his side to be his helper-counterpart, and her soul is bound up with him."[1]
>
> "Adam was put to sleep and his side opened that he might have a wife, but Jesus died on a cross and His blood shed that He might have a bride, the church (John 19:33-37)."[2]

God "fashioned" Eve (v. 22) to be a suitable companion for Adam. Then He presented her to him as a gift ("brought her to the man").

> "That woman was taken from man no more implies the inferiority of woman to man than the taking of man from the ground (*'adam* from *'adamah*) implies the inferiority of man to the ground."[3]
>
> "… the whole account of woman's creation has a poetic flavor: it is certainly mistaken to read it as an account of a clinical operation or as an attempt to explain some feature of man's anatomy. Rather, it brilliantly depicts the relation of man and wife. Here the ideal of marriage as it was understood in ancient Israel is being portrayed, a relationship characterized by harmony and intimacy between the partners."[4]

2:23 The Hebrew word translated "woman" (Heb. *ishah*) sounds similar to the Hebrew word translated "man" (*ish*). This similarity reflects the close union between the two. Moses identified Adam by his relation to the ground, but Adam identified his wife in relation to himself.[5]

> "… name-giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of sovereignty, of command."[6]

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[1]Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I: From Adam to Noah*, p. 134.

[2]Wiersbe, p. 24.

[3]Merrill, "A Theology …," p. 19.

[4]Wenham, p. 69.

[5]See C. Jeff Foster, "The Name Ritual: A Mark of Significance," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 64:4 (December 2021):703-28.

[6]von Rad, p. 83. George W. Ramsey, "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50:1 (January 1988):24-35, disputed this view.

> "Gen. 2 is unique among the creation myths of the whole of the Ancient Near East in its appreciation of the meaning of woman, i.e., that human existence is a partnership of man and woman."[1]
>
> "Though they are equal in nature, that man names woman (cf. 3:20) indicates that she is expected to be subordinate to him, an important presupposition of the ensuing narrative (3:17)."[2]

When Adam discovered that God had provided him with a partner like himself, not like one of the other animals, he rejoiced greatly. He received his mate as God's good gift to him because he trusted in God's wisdom, goodness, and integrity. Adam was now "beside himself"! (Pardon the pun.)

Following Adam's example, it is essential for every husband and wife to thankfully receive the mate that God has given him or her as His best provision for them. To do so we must know and trust God's goodness. Our mate's differences are good things that God "brings to us" (as part of the whole "package") that He will use as tools to shape us into the people He wants us to be. Failure to accept one's mate as a good gift from a loving God leads to many problems in marriage, and it frustrates God's purpose and plan for marriage. It expresses rejection of God and His provision for one's life. It also demonstrates unbelief, disobedience, and displeasure with God's character. Your mate needs your unconditional acceptance.

Sanford Yoder considered this verse to be the first of 26 poems in the Pentateuch.[3] He believed that the only book of the Pentateuch that does not contain some poetry is Leviticus.

2:24 This verse clarifies God's purpose in marriage. It may be a parenthetical observation by the writer (cf. 10:9; 26:33; 32:32). It involves leaving parents and cleaving (being "joined") to one's spouse.[4]

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[1]Westermann, p. 232.

[2]Wenham, p. 70.

[3]Sanford C. Yoder, *Poetry of the Old Testament*, pp. 29-54.

[4]See Mathews, pp. 222-24. See *Africa Bible Commentary*, s.v. "New Family Relationships," by Soro Soungalo, p. 12, for some traditional African views of family relationships.

> "In Gen 2:24, 'for this cause' did not refer to God's making the first human beings 'male and female,' but to God's making Eve out of Adam's rib. The reason for a man's leaving his father and mother, cleaving to his wife, and becoming one flesh with her was not sexual, then. It had to do with Eve's origin in Adam: since woman came from man, man should unite himself with woman to recapture their original unity."[1]

Note that God gave the command to "leave" and "be joined" (or "cleave" AV, NASB 1971 ed., "be united" NIV, cf. NEB, "hold fast" ESV, "bond[s]" HCSB) to the man, not the woman, indicating that the man should take the leadership in marriage.

> "… Israelite marriage was usually patrilocal, that is, the man continued to live in or near his parents' home. It was the wife who left home to join her husband."[2]

"Leaving" and "be[ing] joined" probably means both psychological and physical separation and union, under normal conditions. A newly married couple is wise to establish relative independence from both sets of parents emotionally, physically, financially, and in other ways. The couple also needs to solidify their commitment to one another. The vows in marriage ceremonies express this commitment. Marriage is a covenant between two people to remain committed to one another.

"Be[ing] joined" resembles weaving two threads into one new piece of cloth. The Hebrew word suggests the ideas of passion and permanence. In marriage a man's priorities must change. Before, they were primarily to his parents, but now, they should be primarily to his wife. Moses was probably correcting those cultures that gave parental bonds priority over marital bonds.[3]

Marriage also involves physical consummation that unites two individuals as "one flesh" in a physical union that symbolizes that they become

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[1]Robert H. Gundry, *Mark*, pp. 531-32. See Charles A. Clough, "Responding to Government's Declaration that 'Marriage' Is Merely a Social Construct: A Proposal to Reform the Wedding Service in Bible-Believing Churches," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 18:53 (Spring 2014):7-46.

[2]Wenham, p. 70.

[3]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 90.

intimately related to each other—that they are a unit[1] "One flesh" is not the same as marriage (1 Cor. 6:16). For a marriage to exist, there must also be a commitment to "leave" parents and "be joined" to one's spouse *from then on*. The bond of marriage (spouse with spouse) even takes precedence over the bond of procreation (parent with child).

In the Old Testament there are many examples of polygamy.[2] According to this verse, polygamy is a perversion of God's intention for marriage. His intent was that one man should be joined in marriage to one woman for as long as they lived. Jesus and Paul later affirmed this view of marriage (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-10; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph.5:31).

> "Promiscuity is thus a degradation of God's intentions in creating human beings male and female. It is interesting that although polygamy is amply attested in the Tanakh, v. 24 may suggest that the ideal, Edenic condition is monogamy (see also Mal. 2.14-16; Prov. 5.15-23)."[3]

> "God condemns all sexual relationships that involve anything other than one man and one woman (Rom. 1:27; 1 Tim. 1:8-10)."[4]

2:25 The "naked" condition of Adam and Eve does not just describe their unclothed physical appearance. It also expressed the physical and psychological oneness and transparency that existed in their relationship. Physically they were "naked"; they shared their bodies with each other freely. Psychologically they were "not ashamed"; they hid nothing from each other. They were at ease with one another, without any fear of exploitation for evil.

> "Shame can be described as the feeling that something you are doing is bad."[5]

Transparency should increase with trust, commitment, and friendship. It involves communicating what we know, think, feel, and are—with the

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[1]Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2:334.

[2]See *Africa Bible Commentary*, s.v. "The Bible and Polygamy," by Isabel Apawo Phiri, pp. 429-30.

[3]Levenson, p. 14.

[4]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 14.

[5]Alan D. Wolfelt, *Understanding Your Grief*, p. 17.

> person or persons we choose. We should not be transparent with everyone, however, but only with people who commit themselves to us. A transparent person is an open and vulnerable person.
>
> This is a hinge (*janus*) verse; it looks backward into chapter 2 and forward into chapter 3.[1] The similarity of the Hebrew words for "naked" (*'arom*) and "crafty" (3:1, *'arum*) points to a wordplay. The word here for nakedness means unclothed, whereas the one in 3:7 (*'erom*), and elsewhere, describes those under God's judgment (cf. Deut. 28:48; Ezek. 16:39; 23:29).[2]

To summarize, verses 18 through 25 teach us much about marriage:

1. God instituted it.
2. God intended it to be monogamous (not monotonous). One woman completed Adam.
3. God intended it to be heterosexual. This passage does not support the idea that same-sex marriage was in God's plan when He instituted marriage.[3]
4. It involves both a physical and a spiritual union.
5. The husband was to be the head of the wife. God created Adam before Eve, and He created Eve for Adam (cf. 1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:13).
6. A woman can be a complete person without bearing children. A wife's primary function in marriage is to complete her husband, not to bear children.
7. Normally a couple, following the lead of their representatives, Adam and Eve, should "be fruitful and multiply" (1:28). God did not specify how early in the marriage and to what extent. He left this up to the couple. Couples may choose when and how many children they plan to have, though God may sovereignly overrule their plans.

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[1]Janus was a Roman god depicted as having two faces on his head, one looking backward and the other looking forward.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 49.

[3]See Brian N. Peterson, "Does Genesis 2 Support Same-Sex Marriage? An Evangelical Response," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60:4 (December 2017):681-96.

The Family Ministry organization has summarized these purposes as five. Marriage should: mirror God's image, multiply a godly heritage, manage God's realm, mutually complete one another, and model Christ's relationship to the church.[1]

The Bible writers made use of the creation account in many different ways, and we too can use it in these ways for our own personal benefit. These purposes include: glorifying the God of creation, stimulating praise and worship, and fortifying faith in God's promises. They also include: learning about God's attributes, expressing wonder at man's position in God's universe, dispelling fear, and exalting the Lord Jesus.[2]

However a main point of this unit (2:4-25) seems clearly to be that God made human beings "male and female," with a spiritual capacity, and mutually dependent. He did so in order that they might serve and obey Him, and so enjoy His creation. Even today, serving and obeying God is man's greatest privilege, and we find help to do this in the marriage relationship.

As with Adam and Eve, God later placed Israel in a place of blessing. The nation could enjoy His blessing by being obedient and trusting, with the assistance He had provided for them in marriage.

> "Two primary themes dominate the Creation account [1:1—2:25]: the land and the blessing."[3]

The theme of descendants (seed) is also present, though perhaps not as prominent (1:28).

The temptation of Eve 3:1-5

As in chapters 1 and 2, the word of the LORD is very important in chapter 3. Here we learn that Adam and Eve doubted God's integrity when He spoke to them. This pericope (section of text) also has something to teach about the acquisition of wisdom. Chapter 2 anticipated God's gift of the Promised Land to the original readers, and chapter 3 anticipates their exile from it.[4]

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[1]*Family Life Conference*, p. 45.

[2]Ted S. Rendall, "Using the Creation Account for Maximum Spiritual Profit," *Prairie Overcomer* 60:8 (September 1987):3-5, 22.

[3]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, pp. 81-82. Cf. 12:1-3, 7.

[4]Idem, "Genesis," pp. 48-49.

Claus Westermann observed that chapters 1 through 11 (really 3 through 11, I think) "are in fact dominated by the crime/punishment motif which shapes the narrative."[1]

We cannot read this chapter without wondering if the events described really happened as presented, or if this is an allegory or pictorial description merely designed to teach some truth. The rest of Scripture regards these things as having actually happened (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3; 2 Tim. 2:13). Thus we conclude that we should take this chapter literally.[2]

3:1 Who was the tempter? Among evangelicals there are two major views regarding the identity of "the serpent."

1. **Arguments for it being a literal snake:**
    a. Moses called it an "animal of the field" (v. 1).
    b. It possessed a natural characteristic of serpents: subtlety.
    c. Though snakes normally do not speak, Satan could have spoken through a snake. A spirit being spoke through Balaam's donkey (Num. 22:21-30), and spirit beings spoke through demoniacs in Jesus' day.
    d. God judged a snake in this case (v. 14).[3]
2. **Arguments for it being Satan himself described here as a snake:**
    a. God called Satan a "serpent" elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Rev. 20:2).
    b. Satan can and does speak, as recorded elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Job 1).
    c. What the serpent said here is in character for Satan, who is called "the father of lies" (John 8:44).

Another less popular view is that the serpent was not a reptile, like serpents today, but a beautiful creature that Satan used to deceive Eve.[4]

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[1]Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers*, p. 55.

[2]See Leupold, 1:140; Hodge, 2:123-24.

[3]See Jacqueline Tabick, "The Snake in the Grass: The Problems of Interpreting a Symbol in the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic Writings," *Religion* 16 (April 1986):155-67, who traced the symbolic use of the snake as a servant of God, a symbol of rebellion against God, and a creature independent of God.

[4]Gaebelein, 1:1:23.

Probably the tempter was actually Satan, who in this event possessed and controlled a literal snake.[1] Satan came to Eve disguised, unexpected, and using a subordinate, as he still does today.

God made Adam and Eve to rule over the plants and animals (1:28), but Satan was able to make them subject to an animal. Ever since, man has not been able to effectively control his environment. Jesus Christ will reverse this when He, the "second man" (cf. Rom. 5:18-19), comes back to the earth to rule and reign.

The pattern of temptation observable here is one that Satan has used often—and still uses (cf. the temptations of Achan, David, and Jesus Christ).

Satan's first step was to plant a seed of doubt in Eve's mind concerning God's good character and His purpose to bless her (vv. 1-3).

> "What God actually said was clear; but now Satan, the liberal theologian, will make it unclear so that it becomes a matter of debate."[2]

The key phrase is "from any." Satan focused Eve's attention on God's one prohibition. He suggested that God did not really want what was best for Adam and Eve but was withholding something from them that was essentially good. Satan implied that God's line of protection was actually a line that He drew because He was selfish. Satan still tempts women (and men) to believe that God's role for them is primarily for His benefit rather than for their welfare.[3]

The Hebrew word translated "cunning" or "shrewdest" (NJPS), or "crafty" (ESV, Heb. *'arum*) does not imply "wicked" as much as "wise." Eve's sin also was not so much an act of great wickedness as it was an act of great folly. She already had all the good that she needed, but she wanted more. She wanted to glorify herself, not God.

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[1]See Robert P. Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons*, pp. 77-78.

[2]Fruchtenbaum, p. 88.

[3]*Family Life* …, p. 99.

3:2-3 Perhaps Eve was vulnerable to the serpent's suggestion to doubt God's goodness because she distorted the word of God. She seems to have added to God's words "or touch it" (v. 3).

> "In her reply to [the serpent's] question, she perverted and misquoted *three times* the divine law to which she and Adam were subject: (1) She disparaged her privileges by misquoting the terms of the Divine *permission* as to the other trees. (2) She overstated the restrictions by misquoting the Divine *prohibition*. (3) She underrated her obligations by misquoting the Divine *penalty*."[1]

God reveals His character through His word—His spoken word, as well as His written Word and His incarnate Word. When we do not remember His Word precisely, a distorted concept of God is often the result. This may have led Eve to doubt God's goodness.

However, if Eve lied about what God had said, that would have been the first sin. God gave the command to "the man" Adam (2:16-17). Perhaps Eve repeated God's words accurately if those words were given to Adam previously but not recorded in the text.[2] Or perhaps Eve paraphrased God's command.[3] In either case she was emphasizing the strictness of God's prohibition, which makes her disobedience all the more blameworthy.

The serpent's claim directly contradicted the main point of chapters 1 and 2, namely, that God would provide what is good for humankind.

> "It is because 'Yahweh Elohim' expresses so strongly the basic OT convictions about God's being both creator and Israel's covenant partner that the serpent and the woman avoid the term in their discussion. The god they are talking about is malevolent, secretive, and concerned to restrict man: his character is so different from that of Yahweh

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[1]W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, p. 48.

[2]Fruchtenbaum, p. 89.

[3]Levenson, p. 14.

> Elohim that the narrative pointedly avoids the name in the dialogue of 3:1-5."[1]

One natural tendency that we have, when we do not understand or recall God's Word precisely, is to make it more restrictive than He does. This may be what Eve did. This is a form of legalism. Legalism is the belief that keeping laws is what God wants from people above all else. But legalism also involves making up laws that God has not imposed.

3:4-5 The second step in Satan's temptation was to deny God's word. In denying it, he imputed motives to God that were not consistent with God's character. God's true motive was the welfare of Adam and Eve, but the serpent implied it that was God's welfare at their expense.

This added suggestion seemed consistent with what the serpent had already implied about God's motives in verse 1. Having possibly entertained a doubt concerning God's word, Eve was ready to accept a denial of His word.

What the serpent said about Adam and Eve being "like God [or gods, divine beings, Heb. *'elohim*]" (v. 5) was a half-truth. Ironically, Eve was already "like God," having been made in His image (1:26). She also knew what was "good." She did become like God, or a divine being, in that she obtained a greater knowledge of good "and evil" by eating of the tree. However, she became less like God because she was no longer innocent of sin. Her relationship with God suffered. She also became like God in that she became the center of her world and assumed the authority to do what she pleased. Though she remained like God, she could no longer enjoy unhindered fellowship with God (3:24).

We, like Eve, are sometimes tempted to explore evil for our own gratification. We pursue the evil behavior of sinners, various forms of evil, and the sensations that come along with evil. We know what is good, but we also want to satisfy our curiosity about evil. In doing this we reenact Eve's sin—sin so serious that it plunged the human race into its present fallen condition. Paul wanted his Roman readers "to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil" (Rom. 16:19). Sometimes ignorance is a good thing, specifically ignorance of various forms of evil.

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[1]Wenham, p. 57.

The first doctrines that Satan denied in Scripture was that sin results in death and that God will not punish sin (cf. John 8:44). These are still the truths that Satan tries the hardest to get people to disbelieve.

The Fall 3:6-8

This group of verses records that the relationship that God had established with man, which is the focus of the creation story, was broken. We can gain great insight into human nature from this story. Adam's and Eve's behavior as recorded here has been repeated by every one of their descendants.

> "It is hardly too much to say that this chapter is the pivot of the Bible … With the exception of the fact of Creation, we have here the record of the most important and far-reaching event in the world's history—the entrance of sin."[1]

> "… Genesis does not explain the origins of evil; rather, the biblical account, if anything, says where evil does *not* have its source. Evil was not inherent in man nor can it be said that sin was the consequence of divine entrapment. The tempter stands outside the human pair and stands opposed to God's word."[2]

3:6 Having succumbed to temptation, Eve disobeyed God's will. Whereas the serpent initiated the first two steps in Eve's temptation, he let Eve's natural desires (her flesh) carry her into his trap. Instead of listening to the serpent, Eve should have spoken to it what God had said (His prohibition), as Jesus did when He was tempted (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). God commissioned man to "subdue" the earth, including the animal world (1:28), but instead man allowed it to subdue him, by listening to and heeding the serpent.

All three avenues of fleshly temptation are present in verse 6:

1. Eve saw that the tree was "good for food" (the lust of the flesh: the desire to *do* something contrary to God's will, i.e., eat the tasty fruit).

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 46.

[2]Mathews, p. 226.

2. It was "delightful to look at" (the lust of the eyes: the desire to *have* something apart from God's will, i.e., possess the attractive fruit).

3. It was "desirable for obtaining wisdom" (the pride of life: the desire to *be* something apart from God's will, i.e., as wise as God, or gods). It was the illegitimate quest for forbidden wisdom that led Eve to disobey God.[1]

   "Our first parents, who knew so much, did not know this—that they knew enough."[2]

Eve saw, coveted, and took and ate the fruit—Moses did not tell us what kind of fruit it was—(cf. Josh. 7:21; 2 Sam. 11:2-4). We see, then covet, then act.

> "We have already noted how the scenes themselves are arranged in a concentric palistrophic pattern (ABCDCBA). Within this central scene, the same device is used; the midpoint 'and he ate' employs the key verb of this tale—'eat.' On either side we have the woman's hopes of eating, 'good to eat,' 'delight to the eyes,' 'giving insight,' balanced by its effects, 'eyes opened,' 'knowing they were nude,' 'hiding in the trees.' These contrasts are deliberately drawn."[3]

> "The proposition that an adult can gaze at anything is ludicrous and naive, for gazing is too often followed by desiring and sinning."[4]

In view of Jesus' statement that a lustful look is as sinful as an overt act of sin (Matt. 5:27-28), did Eve commit the first sin when she desired the forbidden fruit? Temptations are not sins until we respond by giving in to them. Eve yielded to temptation when she ate the fruit. Until she did that, she was only experiencing temptation (desire). God created man in His image to reflect His desires as well as to rule over His creation. So when

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 51.

[2]Matthew Henry, p. 9.

[3]Wenham, p. 75.

[4]J. J. Davis, p. 90. Cf. 9:20-27.

we yield to desires (temptations) that are contrary to God's desires, we are sinning.

> "Here is the essence of covetousness. It is the attitude that says I need something I do not now have in order to be happy."[1]

> "What Adam and Eve sought from the tree of knowledge was not philosophical or scientific knowledge desired by the Greeks, but practical knowledge that would give them blessing and fulfillment."[2]

> "The problem was not the fruit on the tree; it was the pair on the ground!"[3]

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

> "The root of sin should be understood. The foundation of all sin lies in man's desire of self-assertion and his determination to be independent of God. Adam and Eve chafed under the restriction laid upon them by the command of God, and it was in opposition to this that they asserted themselves, and thereby fell. Man does not like to be dependent upon another, and subject to commands upon another, and subject to commands from without. He desires to go his own way, to be his own master; and as a consequence he sins, and becomes 'lord of himself, that heritage of woe.'"[4]

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[1]Hamilton, p. 190.

[2]K. Armstrong, *In the Beginning*, p. 27.

[3]McGee, 5:508.

[4]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 49. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 103.

> "The basic position of man in rebellion against God is that man is at the centre of the universe, that he is autonomous—here lies his rebellion."[1]
>
> "Since the day that Adam took the fruit of the tree of knowledge, man has been engaged in deciding what is good and what is evil."[2]

God has always asked people to believe and trust His promise that His will for us will result in our blessing. But Satan has always urged us to have experiences that will result in even greater blessings. He says: Try it; you'll like it! But God says: Trust me, and you'll live. Satan's appeal to get us to experience something, just to assure ourselves of its goodness, directly contradicts God's will for us. It is the way of sight rather than the way of faith.

Adam chose to obey his wife rather than God (cf. 3:17).

> "… Adam would never have dared oppose God's authority unless he had disbelieved in God's Word."[3]
>
> "In this integrity [i.e., in his unfallen state] man by free will had the power, if he so willed, to attain eternal life. Yet his choice of good and evil was free, and not that alone, but the highest rectitude was in his mind and will, and all the organic parts were rightly composed to obedience, until in destroying himself he corrupted his own blessings."[4]
>
> "Now we need bear only this in mind: man was far different at the first creation from his whole posterity, who, deriving their origin from him in his corrupted state, have contracted from him a hereditary taint. For, the individual parts of his soul were formed to uprightness, the soundness of his mind stood firm, and his will was free to choose the good. But the reason he [God] did not sustain

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[1]Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason*, p. 42.

[2]Watchman Nee, *Sit. Walk. Stand*, p. 17.

[3]Calvin, 2:1:4.

[4]Ibid., 1:15:8.

> man by the virtue of perseverance [i.e., keep him from sinning] lies hidden in his plan "[1]

Some commentators have interpreted eating the forbidden fruit as a euphemism for having sexual intercourse.[2] They say that the original sin was a sexual sin. However, the text makes such an interpretation impossible. Eve sinned first (v. 6), she sinned alone (v. 6), and besides, God had previously approved sex (1:28).

3:7 The separation (spiritual death) that sin produces in man's relationship with God stands out clearly in verses 7 ad 8. Adam and Eve's "new knowledge," that the serpent promised would make them as God, actually taught them that they were no longer even like each other. They were ashamed of their nakedness and "sewed fig leaves together" in order to hide their differences from each other.[3] Perhaps they chose fig leaves because they are large and strong.

> "Adam and Eve's nakedness (2:25) does not idealize nudity but shows why human beings must wear clothes. With the Fall came a tragic loss of innocence (together with resulting shame). When people's minds are enlightened by the gospel, they understand their moral frailty and practice customs of dress that shield them against sexual temptation."[4]

This verse marks the beginning of the second dispensation, the dispensation of Conscience (or moral responsibility). Adam and Eve had failed in their responsibility under the dispensation of Innocence; they were now sinners. They had rebelled against a specific command of God (2:16-17), and this rebellion marked a transition from theoretical to experiential knowledge of good and evil. Their new responsibility now became to do all known good, to abstain from all known evil, and to approach God through blood sacrifice, which anticipated the sacrifice of Christ. As a period of testing for humanity, the dispensation of Conscience ended with the Flood. However people continued to be morally

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[1]Ibid.

[2]E.g., E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 26.

[3]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 52.

[4]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 103.

responsible to God as He added further revelations of Himself and His will in succeeding ages (cf. Acts 14:14-16; Rom. 2:15; 2 Cor. 4:2).

3:8 The "cool" of the day is literally the "wind" of the day. God came to Adam and Eve in this wind. He came in a wind earlier in Creation (1:2) and later to Job (Job 38:1), Israel (Exod. 20:18-21; cf. Deut. 5:25), and Elijah (1 Kings 19:11).

> "Jeffrey Niehaus has proposed a different translation of the verse, as follows: 'Then the man and his wife heard the thunder of Yahweh God as he was going back and forth in the garden in the wind of the storm and they hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden.'"[1]
>
> "Though unlikely to be adopted by published Bibles anytime soon and not seen by all scholars as proving the presence of a storm theophany in the passage, Niehaus's translation of Genesis 3:8 remains the correct one. The verse is about God's appearance in the wind of a storm, not the cool of the day."[2]
>
> "A more complete transformation could not be imagined. The trust of innocence is replaced by the fear of guilt. The trees that God created for man to look at (2:9) are now his hiding place to prevent God seeing him."[3]

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

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[1]Douglas K. Stuart, "'The Cool of the Day' (Gen. 3:8) and 'the Way He Should Go' (Prov. 22:6)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:683 (July-September 2014):259. His quotation is from Jeffrey Niehaus, "In the Wind of the Storm: Another Look at Genesis III 8," *Vetus Testamentum* 44 (1994):263-67.

[2]Ibid., p. 263.

[3]Wenham, p. 76.

Three kinds of death appear in Scripture: physical—separation of the body and soul (the material and immaterial parts of the person), spiritual—separation of the person and God, and eternal—permanent separation of the person and God.

The Apostle Paul wrote that Eve was "deceived" (1 Tim. 2:14). This does not mean that women are by nature more easily subject to deception than men.

> "There is nothing in Scripture to suggest that the woman was inferior to the man in any way or more susceptible to temptation than he was."[1]

> "The tempter addresses himself to the woman, probably not because she is more open to temptation and prone to sin, for that is hardly the conception of the Old Testament elsewhere. The reason may have lain in this, that the woman had not personally received the prohibition from God, as Adam had."[2]

Eve may have received God's command through Adam. Perhaps Satan appealed to Eve because she was not only under God's authority—but also under her husband's authority—and, therefore, more inclined to think that God was withholding something from her.

> "It is interesting to observe that when this sin is referred to throughout Scripture, it is not referred to as the sin of Eve—but rather as the sin of Adam! The phrase in verse 6, 'with her,' seems to suggest that Adam was at Eve's side when she was tempted by Satan. As God's theocratic administrator, and as the appointed head of the family, it was Adam's responsibility to safeguard Eve and to assure that she remained in submission to the command of God. But Adam failed in his God-given responsibility and permitted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit."[3]

Adam, however, "was not deceived" (1 Tim. 2:14). He sinned with his eyes wide open (v. 6b). Eve's sin was a sin of initiative, whereas Adam's sin was one of acquiescence.[4] Too much aggressiveness in a woman, and too much passivity in a man, still are tendencies of the respective sexes. Death "passed unto all men" (Rom. 5:12) when Adam sinned—

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[1]Susan Foh, *Women and the Word of God*, p. 63.

[2]Gerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 45.

[3]Pentecost, p. 37.

[4]Hamilton, p. 191.

because Adam, not Eve, was the head of the human race under God's administration (cf. 3:18-23).[1]

The timeless lesson of these verses is that victory over the temptation to violate God's good will depends on a thorough knowledge of God's Word and an unwavering confidence in God's goodness. As Israel faced temptations to depart from God's revealed will, from the pagans she encountered, this record of the Fall would have provided an encouragement to remain faithful, as it does for us today. Often these temptations attract because they promise superior blessing and fulfillment—even divinity. Therefore knowing God's Word is extremely important (cf. Deut. 6:5-9, 13-25; Ps. 119:9-16). Satan tempted Jesus similar to the way that he tempted Eve. But Jesus overcame victoriously by accurately using the Word of God to remain faithful to the will of God. True wisdom comes by obeying, not disobeying, God's Word.

God's confrontation of the sinners 3:9-13

This section of verses begins to relate the effects of the Fall. We now see the God who acted as Creator and Benefactor in chapters 1 and 2, acting as Judge (cf. 1:3-4). He first questioned the offenders in order to obtain a confession, then announced new conditions for life, and finally provided for the sinners graciously. God's grace is His divine favor, forgiveness, and righteousness freely granted. The sinners' responsibility was to confess their sins and to accept and trust in God's provision for them (cf. 1 John 1:9). Unfortunately they did not confess their sins but blamed others for them.

> "Note, Though [*sic* though] God knows all our sins, yet he will know them from us, and requires from us an ingenuous [childlike] confession of them; not that he may be informed, but that we may be humbled."[2]

Note also that God took the initiative in seeking out the sinners in order to re-establish a relationship with them. Evidence of God's love is His unwillingness to abandon those He loved, even when they failed to do His will. His approach was tender as well as gracious (vv. 9, 11, 13). He asked Adam and Eve: "Where are you?" (v. 9), not because He did not know, but because He wanted them to know that He was concerned for them.

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[1]See Jimmy A. Milliken, "The Origin of Death," *Mid-American Theological Journal* 7:2 (Winter 1983):17-22.

[2]Matthew Henry, p. 10. See also Archer, *Encyclopedia of* …, pp. 75.

> "In … spite of the apparent similarity in expression to pagan religions the anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament reveal all the more remarkably a sharply contrasting concept of deity."[1]

> "It's unfortunate that some people have made an issue over what pronouns we should use when referring to God. The Bible consistently uses 'he,' but not because the male gender is more godlike. God is spirit, and spirit beings (including angels) have no gender. For some reason, people who object to God being called 'he' don't object when Satan is called 'he'; yet Satan is also a spirit creature who is sexless."[2]

The fact that Adam viewed God's good gift to him (Eve) as the source of his trouble, shows how far he fell (v. 12). He virtually accused God of causing him to fall, by giving him what he now regarded as a bad gift. Contrast David's proper response to his sin in 2 Samuel 12:13.

The text records several effects of the Fall on Adam and Eve.

1. They felt guilt and shame (v. 7).
2. They tried to change these conditions by their own efforts (v. 7).
3. They fled from God's presence out of fear of Him (vv. 8, 10).
4. They tried to blame their sin on another rather than confessing their personal responsibility (vv. 12, 13).

The judgment of the guilty 3:14-21

As the result of man's disobedience to God, the creation suffered a curse and began to deteriorate. Evolution teaches that man is improving his condition through self-effort. The Bible teaches that man is destroying his condition through sin. Having been thrice blessed by God (1:22, 28; 2:3), the creation now experienced a triple curse (3:14, 17; 4:11).

> "In the Bible, to curse means to invoke God's judgment on someone, usually for some particular offense."[3]

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[1]Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Anthropomorphism in Ancient Religions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:497 (January-March 1968):29.

[2]Wiersbe, p. 67.

[3]Wenham, p. 78.

Nevertheless, God also began the process of restoration. Verses 14 through 19 reveal the terms of the second major biblical covenant, the Adamic Covenant. Here God specified the conditions under which fallen man was to live (until God lifts His curse on creation; cf. Rom. 8:21). The elements of this covenant can be summarized as follows: God cursed the serpent (v. 14), but promised a Redeemer (v. 15). He changed the status of the woman in two respects: she would experience sorrow and pain in motherhood, and continuing headship by the man (v. 16). God also changed Adam and Eve's light workload, in Eden, to burdensome labor and inevitable sorrow, resulting from His curse on the earth (vv. 17-19). Finally, He promised certain physical death for Adam and all his descendants (v. 19).

Effects on the serpent 3:14-15

God's judgment on each trespasser (the snake, the woman, and the man) involved both a life function and a relationship.[1] In each case, the punishment corresponded to the nature of the crime.

> "Curses are uttered against the serpent and the ground, but not against the man and woman, implying that the blessing has not been utterly lost. It is not until human murder, a transgression against the *imago Dei* [image of God], that a person (Cain) receives the divine curse "[2]

1. The snake had been "cunning" (3:1; Heb. *'arum*), but now it was "cursed" (Heb. *'arur*). It had to move on its belly (v. 14). Some commentators assumed from this that the snake had legs before God cursed it.[3] Others take this curse figuratively as a reference to the resultant despised condition of the snake (cf. Lev. 11:42).[4] Josephus wrote that God also deprived the serpent of speech at this time.[5] But there is no biblical support for this conclusion.

2. The serpent would eat dust (v. 14). Since snakes do not literally feed on dust, many interpreters take this statement figuratively. Eating dust is an expression used in other ancient Near Eastern writings to describe the lowest of all forms of life. In the Bible it also describes humiliation and total defeat (cf. Ps. 44:25; 72:9; Isa. 25:12; 49:23; 65:25; Mic. 7:17).[6] Another explanation is that this is the

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[1]J. T. Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b—3:24: A Synchronic Approach," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977):168.

[2]Mathews, p. 243.

[3]E.g., Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:1:4.

[4]E.g., J. D. Davis, pp. 76-77; Leupold, 1:162; Kidner, p. 70; Mathews, p. 244.

[5]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:1:4.

[6]See W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 2:332.

language of appearance: snakes appear to eat dust now, since they glide along the ground on their bellies.

God revealed later through Isaiah that serpents will eat dust during the Millennium (the thousand-year earthly reign of Christ, Isa. 65:25). Presently snakes eat plants and animals. Perhaps God will yet fulfill this part of what He predicted here in Genesis, concerning snakes, in the millennial kingdom. This is a literal interpretation. If this is correct, then perhaps we should also take the former part of the curse literally as well, namely, that snakes did not travel on their bellies before the Fall. Alternatively, Isaiah may have meant that serpents will be harmless (defeated, no longer a threat) after God lifts the curse on creation in the Millennium. I prefer this interpretation.

Was it fair of God to curse the serpent, since it was, presumably, the instrument that Satan used to tempt Eve? Leupold cited similar situations (6:7; 7:21; Josh. 7:24) and quoted Chrysostom as follows:

> "God destroys the instrument that brought His creature to fall 'just as a loving father, when punishing the murderer of his son, might snap in two the sword or dagger with which the murder had been committed.'"[1]

3. There would be antagonism (enmity) between the serpent and human beings (v. 15a). This obviously exists between snakes and people, but God's intention in this verse seems to include the person behind the snake (Satan) as well as, and even more than, the snake itself.

> "… the seed of the serpent refers to natural humanity whom he has led into rebellion against God. Humanity is now divided into two communities: the elect, who love God, and the reprobate, who love self (John 8:31-32, 44; 1 John 3:8). Each of the characters of Genesis will be either of the seed of the woman that reproduces her spiritual propensity, or of the seed of the Serpent that reproduces his unbelief."[2]

4. Mankind (through Christ) would eventually destroy the serpent, though the serpent would wound mankind (including Christ; v. 15b). This is a prophecy of the

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[1]Leupold, 1:163.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 93-94. Cf. p. 46.

victory of the ultimate "Seed" of the woman (Messiah) over Satan (cf. Rev. 19:1-5; Gal. 3:16, 19; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8).[1]

> "The comparative importance of predictive prophecy as related to other aspects of Bible truth is indicated by the fact that at least one-fifth of the Bible was, at the time it was written, an anticipation of the future."[2]

> "The bruising of the head suggests that the serpent's wound will be fatal; the bruising of the heel is a warning that even the victor will not come away unscathed."[3]

Most interpreters have recognized this verse as the first biblical promise and prophecy of the provision of salvation from sin (the protoevangelium or "first gospel").[4] The rest of the book, in fact the whole Old Testament, proceeds to point ahead to that Seed: Jesus Christ.[5]

> "The snake, for the author, is representative of someone or something else. The snake is represented by his 'seed.' When that 'seed' is crushed, the head of the snake is crushed. Consequently more is at stake in this brief passage than the reader is at first aware of. A program is set forth. A plot is established that will take the author far beyond this or that snake and his 'seed.' It is what the snake and His [*sic* his] 'seed' represent that lies at the center of the author's focus. With that 'one' lies the 'enmity' that must be crushed."[6]

> "The text in context provides an outline that is correct and clear in pattern but not complete in all details. Numerous questions are

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[1]See John Sailhamer, "The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:1 (March 2001):5-23; Steven C. Ger, "The Jewish Longing for the Messiah," in *The Gathering Storm*, pp. 72-93; Jonathan Cheek, "Recent Developments in the Interpretation of the Seed of the Woman in Genesis 3:15," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 64:2 (June 2021):215-36.

[2]Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:xxxii.

[3]Cochrane, p. 44.

[4]See John C. Jeske, "The Gospel Adam and Eve Heard: Genesis 3:15" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 81:3 (Summer 1984):182-84; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:518 (April-June 1973):135-50.

[5]See Max I. Reich, *The Messianic Hope of Israel*, for a study of the messianic prophecies in the Old Testament.

[6]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 55. See also Mathews, pp. 246-48.

> left unanswered. When Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, the details of the climax were filled in and specified, but the text does not demand to be reinterpreted. Nor does it demand interpretation in a way not suggested in context."[1]
>
> "The patriarchs, and the ancient world in general, were perfectly acquainted with the grand primeval promise of Eden, and they knew right well that the bruising of the heel of the promised seed implied his death, and that the curse could be removed from the world only by the death of the grand Deliverer. … There is hardly a people or kindred on earth in whose mythology it is not shadowed forth."[2]

Some interpreters have believed that this is the first prediction of the virgin birth of Messiah, since it is specifically the seed of "the woman" and not the man that would crush the serpent.[3] I believe that this language allows for a virgin birth but does not necessarily predict it.[4]

God cursed all animals and the whole creation because of the Fall (Rom. 8:20), but He made the snake the most despicable of all the animals for its role in the Fall.

> "The snake is a natural symbol of sin. It comes spontaneously to the mind; for sin, like the serpent, is a monster of hideous mien which creeps in by stealth and infuses poison by its bite."[5]
>
> "Words possess power. God's words of blessing and of curse are most powerful. They determine our lives."[6]

J. Barton Payne took this cursing of the serpent as an indication that the fall of Satan occurred almost simultaneously with the fall of Adam and Eve.[7] This view has not found

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[1]Elliott E. Johnson, "Premillennialism Introduced: Hermeneutics," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, p. 22. See also Darrell L. Bock, "Interpreting the Bible—How Texts Speak to Us," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 81; Wenham, pp. 80-81; Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, pp. 129-45.

[2]Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, pp. 59, 60.

[3]See Charles L. Feinberg, *Is the Virgin Birth in the Old Testament?* pp. 32-33; Enns, p. 218.

[4]See also John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, p 57.

[5]J. D. Davis, p. 73.

[6]Pamela J. Scalise, "The Significance of Curses and Blessings," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):59.

[7]J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 294.

much acceptance. Most interpreters believe that Satan was created before or at the same time as the cosmos was created.[1]

Effects on women 3:16

1. Eve would experience increased "pain" in bearing children. There may have been some pain in the process of bearing children even before the Fall, but Eve and her daughters would experience increased pain. This view assumes that there was pain before the Fall. Or God may have meant that He would "greatly multiply" the pain in contrast to just making childbearing painful. The HCSB has "I will intensify your labor pains, and you will bear children in anguish." Women's joy in bearing children would be diminished because of the pain involved in it.[2] "Pain and childbirth" (a more literal translation than "pain in childbirth") is probably another hendiadys in the Hebrew text, meaning "painful childbirth" (cf. 1:2; 4:12; 9:2; Ps. 9:2).

   The text does not say that God promised more conception as well as more pain, as the NKJV translation "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception" implies.[3]

2. Women's desire would be for their husbands. There have been several different interpretations of what the woman's "desire" would be.

   a. The phrase "your desire will be for your husband" means that a woman's desire would be subject to her husband's desire.

      > "Her desire, whatever it may be, will not be her own. She cannot do what she wishes, for her husband rules over her like a despot and whatever she wishes is subject to his will."[4]

   b. The woman will have a great longing for, yearning for, and psychological dependence on her husband.

      > "This yearning is morbid. It is not merely sexual yearning. It includes the attraction that woman experiences for man which she cannot root from her nature. Independent

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[1]See my discussion of the creation of Satan in my notes on Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.

[2]Cf. *The Nelson …,* p. 11.

[3]Cf. Schaeffer, *Genesis in …,* p. 93.

[4]Edward J. Young, *Genesis 3*, p. 127. Cf. John Calvin, *Genesis*, p. 172.

> feminists may seek to banish it, but it persists in cropping out."[1]

c. The woman will desire to dominate the relationship with her husband. The ESV translation is: "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband." This view rests on the parallel Hebrew construction in 4:7. This view seems best to me.

> "The 'curse' here describes the beginning of the battle of the sexes. After the Fall, the husband no longer rules easily; he must fight for his headship. The woman's desire is to control her husband (to usurp his divinely appointed headship), and he must master her, if he can. Sin had corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband. And so the rule of love founded in paradise is replaced by struggle, tyranny, domination, and manipulation."[2]

> "This is the first reference to the primacy of the man. There could have been no question of primacy while the man and woman lived together in complete harmony and obedience to the word of God. Rule is necessary only where disorder has set in—in this case as a consequence of their disobedience."[3]

d. The woman would continue to desire to have sexual relations with her husband even though, after the Fall, she experienced much pain in childbearing.

> "… the woman's desire for the man and his rule over her are not the punishment but the conditions in which the woman will suffer punishment. It may be concluded that,

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[1]Leupold, 1:172. Cf. Gini Andrews, *Your Half of the Apple*, p. 51; Janson C. Condren, "Toward a Purge of the Battle of the Sexes and 'Return' for the Original Meaning of Genesis 3:16b," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60:2 (June 2017):227-45.

[2]Foh, p. 69. See also her article, "What is the Woman's Desire?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 37:3 (Spring 1975):376-383; Mathews, p. 251; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 94; Pyne, p. 156.

[3]Cochrane, p. 45.

> in spite of the Fall, the woman will have a longing for intimacy with man involving more than sexual intimacy.[1]

This view takes this statement of God as a blessing rather than a curse.

Effects on humanity generally 3:17-19

In view of Adam's sin, we might have expected God to curse him, but, graciously, God cursed the ground for his sake.[2]

1. Adam would have to work hard ("hard labor," "painful labor" NKJV, "struggle" CEV) to obtain a living from "the ground" (vv. 17-18).[3] Adam already had received the privilege of enjoying the garden (2:15), but this had not required "painful toil" (NIV).

> "As for the man, his punishment consists in the hardship and skimpiness of his livelihood, which he now must seek for himself. The woman's punishment struck at the deepest root of her being as wife and mother, the man's strikes at the innermost nerve of his life: his work, his activity, and provision for sustenance."[4]
>
> "If Adam had not sinned, he had not sweated."[5]
>
> "These punishments represent retaliatory justice. Adam and Eve sinned by eating; they would suffer in order to eat. She manipulated her husband; she would be mastered by her husband. The serpent destroyed the human race; he will be destroyed."[6]
>
> "In drawing a contrast between the condition of the land before and after the Fall, the author shows that the present condition of the land was not the way it was intended to be. Rather, the state of the land was the result of human rebellion. In so doing, the author has paved the way for a central motif in the structure of biblical eschatology [study of the end times], the hope of a 'new

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[1]Irving Busenitz, "Woman's Desire for Man: Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered," *Grace Theological Journal* 7:2 (Fall 1986):203, 206-8. Cf. Song of Sol. 7:10.

[2]Newell, p. 10.

[3]CEV refers to *The Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version*.

[4]von Rad, pp. 93-94.

[5]Matthew Henry, p. 11.

[6]Ross, "Genesis," p. 33.

> heaven and a new earth' (cf. Isa 65:17: [*sic* ;] Ro 8:22-24; Rev 21:1)."[1]

2. People would "return to dust" when they died (v. 19). Rather than living forever, experiencing physical immortality, people would now die physically and experience physical mortality (cf. Rom. 5:12-14).

> "Genesis 3:19 does not attribute the cause of death to the original composition of the human body, so that man would ultimately have died anyway, but states merely one of the consequences of death: Since the human body was formed from the dust of the earth, it shall, upon death, be resolved to earth again."[2]

Verse 18 shows the reversal of the land's condition before and after the Fall. Verse 19 shows the same for mankind's condition.

> "Adam and Eve failed … to observe the restrictions of the Edenic covenant [1:26-31; 2:16-17]. Innocence was lost and conscience was born."[3]
>
> "Having failed under the Edenic covenant, human beings were then faced with the provisions of the Adamic covenant [3:14-19]. That covenant was unconditional in the sense that Adam and Eve's descendants would be unable by human effort to escape the consequences of sin."[4]
>
> "A ray of light is provided, however, in the Adamic covenant because God promised that a redeemer would come [3:15]. This is the introduction of the great theme of grace and redemption found in the Scriptures."[5]
>
> "Unless tempered by the grace of God and changed by subsequent promises, people continue to the present time to labor under the provisions of the Adamic covenant."[6]
>
> "How admirably the satisfaction our Lord Jesus made by his death and sufferings answered to the sentence here passed upon our first parents. (1) Did travailing pains come in with sin? We read of *the travail of Christ's soul* (Isa. liii. 11). (2) Did subjection come in with sin? Christ was made

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 109.

[2]Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, p. 143.

[3]Walvoord, "The New …," p. 188.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

> under the law, Gal. iv. 4. (3) Did the curse come in with sin? Christ was made a curse for us, died a cursed death, Gal. iii. 13. (4) Did thorns come in with sin? He was crowned with thorns for us. (5) Did sweat come in with sin? He for us did sweat as it were great drops of blood. (6) Did sorrow come in with sin? He was a man of sorrows, his soul was, in his agony, exceedingly sorrowful. (7) Did death come in with sin? He became obedient unto death. Thus is the plaster [bandage] as wide as the wound. Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!"[1]

Additional effects on Adam and Eve 3:20-21

Adam and Eve accepted their judgment from God and did not rebel against it. We see this in Adam naming his wife "Eve," which name is related to the Hebrew verb translated "to live." "Eve" means "the mother of all the living." This is a personal name that defines her destiny (v. 20). Adam believed that life would continue in spite of God's curse. This was an act of faith and an expression of hope. Adam believed God's promise that Eve would bear children (v. 16).

> "This may well be at once the most astounding, the most profound, and the most exuberant thing the man ever did."[2]

Adam's wife's first name, "Woman" (2:23), looked back on her origin, whereas her second name, "Eve," anticipated her destiny. "Eve" is related to the Hebrew verb that means "to live."

> "How astonishing the grace which at this moment gave promise of a Saviour and conferred on her who had the disgrace of introducing sin the future honor of introducing that Deliverer (I Tim. 2:15)."[3]

1. Note that before God sent Adam and Eve out into a new environment, He provided them with "garments of skin" (v. 21) that were adequate for their needs (cf. Rom. 3:21-26). Their own provision of fig leaves (v. 7) was not adequate. He did for them what they could not do for themselves. This is another indication of God's loving care and grace for people.

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[1]Matthew Henry, p. 11.

[2]Cocheran, p. 46.

[3]Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 20. The Talmud is the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend comprising the Mishnah and the Gemara.

> "The Jewish ethical tradition finds in this unmerited kindness a paradigm [model] for human behavior as well. 'Great are acts of kindness,' a Talmudic rabbi remarks, 'for the Torah begins with an act of kindness and ends with an act of kindness'—it begins with God's clothing the naked and ends with His burying the dead (Moses) (Deut. 34.6) …"[1]
>
> "Clothing is now Divinely commanded; though despised by pagan idolaters and modern worldlings."[2]

Though I would not say this was a divine command, God's provision of clothing certainly suggests that God intended Adam and Eve to wear clothing.

> "… he [Adam] had to learn that sin could be covered not by a bunch of leaves snatched from a bush as he passed by and that would grow again next year, but only by pain and blood."[3]

Gleason Archer thought it reasonable to assume that when God provided animal skins for Adam and Eve to wear that He also instructed them about the significance of the atoning blood of the substitute sacrifice. He also believed that they passed this understanding on to Cain and Abel.[4] There is no way to prove or disprove this theory.

2. Furthermore, God prevented Adam and Eve from living perpetually in their fallen state (vv. 22-24).[5] Thus physical death was a blessing as well as a curse.

Expulsion from the garden 3:22-24

Verse 22 shows that man's happiness (good) does not consist in his being *like* God as much as it depends on his being *with* God (cf. Ps. 16:11).[6] "Like one of Us" probably means like heavenly beings (God and the angels; cf. 1:26).[7] This clause does not imply the existence of more than one God.[8]

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[1]Levenson, p. 16.

[2]Newell, p. 43. Bold type omitted.

[3]Marcus Dods, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 25.

[4]Archer, *Encyclopedia of* …, pp. 75-76.

[5]On other effects of the Fall, see Whitcomb and Morris, pp. 454-73.

[6]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 59.

[7]Wenham, p. 85; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 95.

[8]See Archer, *Encyclopedia of* …, pp. 74-75.

> "He [God] turned him [man] out, from the garden to the common. … But man was only sent to till the ground out of which he was taken. He was sent to a place of toil, not to a place of torment. He was sent to the ground, not to the grave—to the workhouse, not to the dungeon, not to the prison-house—to hold the plough not to drag the chain."[1]

"Cherubim" (v. 24) are represented in the Old Testament as surrounding and symbolizing God's presence. They are equivalent to God's bodyguards, standing guards, or sentries. Ancient oriental iconography (visual images and symbols used in a work of art) pictured them as human-headed winged lions guarding holy places.[2] Moses pictured them here blocking access to the tree of life with a "flaming sword." Evidently eating of "the tree of life" would have caused Adam and Eve to stop aging (cf. Rev. 22:2). Sculptures of cherubim guarded the ark of the covenant later, just as real cherubim earlier guarded the tree of life in the garden. The laws contained in the ark were a source of life for the Israelites. The golden lampstand in the tabernacle represented a tree of life and the presence of God.[3]

As people moved east from the Garden of Eden, they settled in Shinar and built Babel (Gr. Babylon, 11:2). When Lot departed from Abram, he moved east to Sodom (13:11). When Abram returned in victory from the battle against the eastern kings (led by King Chedolaomer), he came back to the Promised Land and the city of Salem ("Peace," 14:17-20). Thus God's presence continued to reside in the Garden (Promised Land?) in a localized sense, and movement to the east from there typically involved departing from Him.

> "No matter how hard people try to do away with male dominion, agonizing labor, painful childbearing, and death, these evils will continue because sin is present. They are the fruits of sin."[4]

Rebellion against God results in suffering and death, but confession secures His gracious protective care. This section of Genesis (ch. 3) explains why human beings toil and agonize all their lives and finally die. Sin is responsible, and only the removal of sin will end this condition. This pericope presents God as a Savior as well as a Judge. Moses

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[1]Matthew Henry, p. 12.

[2]See James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, pp. 159-60, plates 456, 458. See also the discussion of cherubim in J. D. Davis, pp. 78-84.

[3]Wenham, p. 86.

[4]Ross, "Genesis," p. 33.

introduced God's required way for covering sin, namely, the death of an innocent substitute. Consequently there is hope in the midst of tragedy.[1]

> "The chapter simply does not support the concept that one finds fulfillment and bliss in liberating oneself from subordination to God's word, his permissions and his denials. Man is not suddenly metamorphosed from a puppet to a free and independent thinker. In fact, he never was an automaton. If man had lacked the ability to choose, the prohibition from God not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil would have been superfluous. One is not told to abstain from something unless he has the capacity not to abstain."[2]

Thus Genesis 3 introduces us to the fact of human freedom, as well as reminding us of divine sovereignty.[3]

Why did God permit the serpent to tempt Adam and Eve?

> "Character must be developed, and it can only be developed in the presence of temptation."[4]
>
> "Sin, … according [to] the Scriptures, is permitted, that the justice of God may be known in its punishment, and his grace in its forgiveness."[5]
>
> "Take away the first three chapters of Genesis, and you cannot maintain a true Christian position nor give Christianity's answers [to the big questions that people are asking today]."[6]

2. The murder of Abel 4:1-16

Chapter 4 shows the spread of sin from Adam's family to the larger society that his descendants produced. Cain became the first murderer and Abel the first martyr. Chapter 3 records the root of sin, and chapter 4 the fruit of sin. Not only did sin affect

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[1]See M. Stephen Davis, "Stories of the Fall in the Ancient Near East," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):37-40. On the larger issue of sin's origin, see William K. Harrison, "The Origin of Sin," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:517 (January-March 1973):58-61.

[2]Hamilton, p. 211.

[3]See Sidney Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 (July-September 2004):259-73.

[4]McGee, 1:23.

[5]Hodge, 1:435.

[6]Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, p. 104.

everyone, but people became increasingly more wicked as time passed. Human self-assertion leads to violence. Verses 1 through 16 show that the Fall affected Adam and Eve's children as well as themselves. Verses 17 through 26 trace what became of Cain and Seth and their descendants. Note that the chapter begins and ends with the subject of worship.

God had warned Adam and Eve about sin. Even so, Cain murdered his brother—the beginning of sibling rivalry—because God accepted Abel's offering but not his own. Sibling rivalry plagued each of the godly families in Genesis. Cain denied responsibility for his sin and objected to the severity of God's punishment. God graciously provided protection for Cain in response to his complaint.

There are structural and conceptual parallels between this pericope and the previous one (2:4—3:24).[1]

A Scene 1 (narrative): Cain and Abel are active, and Yahweh is passive (vv. 2b-5).

B Scene 2 (dialogue): Yahweh questions Cain (vv. 6-7).

C Scene 3 (dialogue and narrative): Cain and Abel are alone (v. 8).

B' Scene 4 (dialogue): Yahweh confronts Cain (vv. 9-14).

A' Scene 5 (narrative): Yahweh is active, and Cain is passive (vv. 15-16).

Both stories, this one and 2:4 through 3:24, conclude with the sinners leaving God's presence and going to live east of Eden (3:24; 4:16).

> "Cain's sin, jealousy of his brother, is the replica of Adam's—jealousy of Yahweh's privilege."[2]
>
> "… though the writer of Genesis wants to highlight the parallels between the two stories, he does not regard the murder of Abel simply as a rerun of the fall. There is development: sin is more firmly entrenched and humanity is further alienated from God."[3]

4:1 The name "Cain" sounds like the Hebrew word translated "I have acquired" and means "possession" or "acquisition," a sign of his own

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[1]Wenham, p. 99.

[2]Jacob, p. 284.

[3]Wenham, p. 100.

primary proneness. His name is related to a Hebrew word meaning "craftsman" or "metalworker."

Was Eve thanking God for helping her bear a son (Cain)?[1] Or was she boasting that she had created a man (Cain) as God had created a man (Adam, v. 1)?[2] The former alternative seems preferable to me (cf. v. 25).

4:2 "Abel," from the Hebrew *hebel*, means "breath," "vapor," "exhalation," or "what ascends." As things turned out, his life was short, like a vapor. Perhaps his parents gave him this name after his death, in view of the comparative shortness of his life. Another possibility is that "human existence marred by sin had impressed man with the emptiness of it all."[3] "Abel" also means "meadow" elsewhere in the Old Testament.

> "Nearly all Bible names were significant, and were conferred with reference to some circumstance connected with the birth of the child."[4]
>
> "Since animal husbandry did not provide meat for humans at this time, Abel's profession of shepherding would have been to provide milk, skins, and wool."[5]
>
> "Shepherding and farming are the first two occupations mentioned in the Bible, and since they compete for the same land, throughout history there has frequently been tension between the two."[6]

4:3-5 Why did God have "regard" for Abel's offering and not Cain's (v. 4)? It was because Abel had "faith" (Heb. 11:4). What did Abel believe that Cain did not? The Bible does not say specifically. The answer may lie in one or more of the following explanations.[7]

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[1]Mathews, p. 265; Wenham, pp. 101-2.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, pp. 111-12; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 96.

[3]Leupold, 1:192.

[4]Thomson, 1:179.

[5]Currid, p. 19.

[6]Longman, "Genesis," p. 87.

[7]See Jack P. Lewis, "The Offering of Abel (Gen 4:4): A History of Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:4 (December 1994):481-96.

1. Some commentators believed Abel's attitude reveals his faith. Cain's improper attitude toward God is evident in verse 5.[1]

2. Others say Abel's faith is evident in his bringing the best ("fat portions") of his flock (v. 4; cf. Lev. 3:16), whereas Moses did not describe Cain's offering as his best (v. 3).

> "He [the writer] characterizes Abel's offerings from the flocks as 'from the firstborn' and 'from their fat.' By offering the firstborn Abel signified that he recognized God as the Author and Owner of Life. In common with the rest of the ancient Near East, the Hebrews believed that the deity, or lord of the manor, was entitled to the *first share* of all produce. The *first*fruits of plants and the *first*born of animals and man were his."[2]
>
> "Abel's offering conformed with this theology; Cain's did not. In such a laconic story the interpreter may not ignore that whereas Abel's gift is qualified by 'firstborn,' the parallel 'firstfruits' does not modify Cain's."[3]
>
> "Abel also offered the 'fat' which in the so-called 'P' [Priestly] material belonged to the Lord and was burned symbolically by the priests. This tastiest and best burning part of the offering represented the best. Abel's sacrifice, the interlocutor aims to say, passed the test with flying colors. Cain's sacrifice, however, lacks a parallel to 'fat.'"[4]

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[1]Davis, *Paradise to …*, p. 99; Pentecost, p. 41; Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 97; Brian N. Peterson, "Cain's Struggle: A Proposed Reason for the Rejection of Cain's Sacrifice," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 177:706 (April-June 2020):154-71.

[2]Bruce K. Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48:2 (Fall 1986):368.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid. Cf. idem, *Genesis*, p. 97; Keil and Delitzsch, 1:110; and Hamilton, p. 223.

> "Every unprejudiced reader of the Bible must feel that sacrifices constitute the centre of the Old Testament."[1]

3. Possibly Cain's bad attitude (he "became very angry and his face was gloomy") resulted in his not offering the best to God. In other words, both options 1 and 2 could be correct.[2] I prefer this explanation. Evidently the sin that led Cain to murder his brother was envy.[3]

> "Abel went out of his way to please God (which meant he had faith in God, Heb. 11:6), whereas Cain was simply discharging a duty."[4]
>
> "We think the absence of 'firstfruits' for Cain in juxtaposition with Seth's [*sic* Abel's] 'firstborn' would not have been lost on the Mosaic audience."[5]
>
> "Both giver and gift were under the scrutiny of God. Cain's offering did not measure up because he retained the best of his produce for himself."[6]
>
> "The issue was not just between what the two sons brought to the Lord; there was also a significant difference in their hearts. … True worship happens only when both heart and action are right before God. … As for Cain, it seems things were even worse: he was wrong in both his heart and his actions. Abel, on the other hand, had both heart and actions that were pleasurable to God."[7]

4. Many believe that Abel realized the need for the death of a living substitute to atone for his sins, but Cain did not. If Abel

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[1]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 106.

[2]Archer, *Encyclopedia of* …, p. 76.

[3]See Whyte, 1:28-33.

[4]Ross, "Genesis," p. 34.

[5]Mathews, p. 268.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ronald B. Allen, *The Wonder of Worship*, pp. 84, 85. Paragraph divisions omitted.

understood this, he may have learned it by divine revelation that Scripture did not record explicitly.[1] Perhaps Cain and Abel learned that an animal sacrifice satisfied God, whereas a vegetable sacrifice did not, from the fact that the fig leaves that Adam and Eve used to cover their nakedness were not satisfactory, but an animal skin was (3:7, 21). Adam and Eve provided the fig leaves, but God provided the animal skins. Thus the contrast in the case of Cain and Abel may also have been between what man provides (works) and what God provides (grace).

> "Faith always presupposes a Divine revelation to which it is the response "[2]
>
> "The general requisites of all sacrifices [in the Old Testament] were—that they should be brought of such things, in such place and manner, and through such mediatorial agency, as God had appointed."[3]

"Whatever the cause of God's rejection of Cain's offering, the narrative itself focuses our attention on Cain's response. It is there that the narrative seeks to make its point."[4]

God graciously questioned Cain, as He had Adam and Eve (v. 6; cf. 3:9, 11), to elicit Cain's admission of sin *with a view toward repentance*, not simply to scold him. Had Cain corrected his attitude and repented, he would not have proceeded to kill his brother. God gave him the opportunity and the encouragement to "do well" (v. 7). Adam reluctantly admitted his guilt, but Cain tried to cover it up by lying. Cain was "much more hardened than were the first human pair."[5] "Sin is lurking at the door" (v. 7) probably means that the power and tragic consequences of sin could master the person who opens the door to it (cf. 3:16).

> "The consequences of his reaction to God's correction are more far-reaching than the initial sin itself, for if he pursues

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 34; Jamieson, et al., p. 21.

[2]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 55.

[3]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 109.

[4]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 112.

[5]von Rad, p. 106.

> sin's anger, it will result in sin's mastery over him. This is his decision. It is possible for Cain to recover from sin quickly if he chooses the right thing."[1]

The Apostle John revealed the reason that Cain killed Abel in 1 John 3:12: "… his own works were evil and his brother's righteous." Abel's attitude of faith in God resulted in righteous works that produced guilt in unrighteous Cain. This is pattern of cause and effect that has continued forever. The seriousness of Cain's sin is clear from God's repeated references to Abel as Cain's "brother" (vv. 9, 10, 11). Jesus spoke of Cain's murder of Abel as a historical fact (Matt. 23:35). This was the first case of religious persecution.

> "If you want to find out Cain's condition of heart you will find it after the service which he pretended to render; you know a man best out of church "[2]

Later, under the Mosaic Law, the fact that a killing took place in a field, out of the range of help, was to be taken as proof of premeditation (cf. Deut. 22:25-27).

> "Cain and his unrighteous offspring served as a reminder to Israel that its destiny was measured in the scales of ethical behavior."[3]

4:6-8 Violence by Cain followed disobedience by Adam and Eve. Violence in a culture often reflects and results from rebellion against God and self-assertion.

4:9-10 As in chapter 3, God came investigating the sin with questions.[4] In the case of Adam and Eve, the result was God cursing the ground and people generally, but here the result is His cursing Cain, another evidence that wickedness was worsening.

> "As always, God does not ask ("Where is Abel your brother?") in order to secure information. The question is

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[1]Mathews, p. 270.

[2]Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible*, 1:147.

[3]Mathews, p. 269.

[4]See P. A. Riemann, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" *Interpretation* 24 (1970):482-91.

> pedagogic, in order to remind Cain that God knows where Abel is."[1]

Cain's response to God's judgment was self-pity because of his punishment, rather than repentance for his crime and an expression of remorse over the extent of his iniquity.[2] No one would be his "keeper" (cf. "Am I my brother's keeper?" v. 9).

4:11-14 Note also that human immorality again impacted earth's ecology (v. 12; cf. 3:17).

Cain's punishment consisted of his being banished from God's presence ("I will be hidden from Your face," v. 14) and unable to enjoy his family's company and the peacefulness of a settled agrarian life ("I will be a wanderer and a drifter on the earth," v. 14; cf. vv. 11-12). He would have to wander from place to place seeking food, rather than living a sedentary life. This punishment was appropriate and just, since he had alienated himself from his brother and God by his horrible crime.

> "Cain is not being condemned to a Bedouin-like existence; the terminology is too extreme to describe such a life-style. Rather it seems likely that the curse on Cain reflects the expulsion from the family that was the fate in tribal societies of those who murdered close relatives. 'To be driven away from the land' (cf. v. 14) is to have all relationships, particularly with the family, broken. Moreover, it is to have one's relationship with the LORD broken."[3]

> "Nomadism according to the Sumerian flood story is a plight from which the gods rescued man; according to the Bible a nomadic existence was a judgment imposed on the first murderer. This contrast fits in with the overall optimism of Mesopotamia which believes in human progress over against the biblical picture of the inexorable advance of sin. It would seem likely that the other human

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[1]Leupold, 1:204.

[2]See Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 98; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 114. See ibid., "Genesis," revised ed., pp. 100-101, for the view that Cain was repentant.

[3]Wenham, p. 108.

> achievements listed here—farming, metalwork, and music—are also seen by Genesis as somehow under the shadow of Cain's sin."[1]

Cain's sin resulted in his being "driven" out (v. 14; cf. 3:23). Note again that sin results in broken relationships and alienation, and alienation from God leads to fear of other people ("whoever finds me will kill me," v. 14; cf. Job 15:20-25). The population had apparently increased by this time, since Cain feared retaliation by any number of other people (cf. 5:4-5).

4:15 God in grace allowed Cain and his family to continue to live under His care, but apparently without salvation.

The commentators have interpreted Cain's "mark" in a variety of ways. One view is that it was partial paralysis, based on the meaning of the word used to translate the Hebrew word in the Septuagint. An old Jewish interpretation understood it to be the word "Yahweh," and another viewed it as a long horn growing out of the middle of Cain's forehead. Some medieval paintings represent Cain with a horn on his head following this view. Another idea is that it was some other identifying mark on Cain's body, in view of parallels with other marks that identify and protect their bearers in Scripture (cf. Ezek. 9:4; Rev. 7:3; 13:16-18; 14:1).[2]

Still other interpreters believe that the mark was a verification of God's promise to Cain. This view rests on the usual meaning of the Hebrew word translated "sign" in the Old Testament (cf. Judg. 6:36-40; 2 Kings 2:9-12; et al.), which the Hebrew construction supports here.[3]

> "The parallels with texts relating to the cities of refuge … suggest that Cain's 'sign' may have been the safety he found in the building of a city. His city was a sign of his divine protection from anyone 'who found him.'"[4]

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[1]Ibid., pp. 98-99. For a discussion of the people-groups mentioned in the Pentateuch, see Livingston, pp. 19-41.

[2]von Rad, p. 107; Mathews, p. 278; Wenham, p. 109; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 99.

[3]See Bush, p. 104; Leupold, 1:211.

[4]Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 102.

The text does not identify the mark, but it was some identifiable indication that God gave Cain to assure him that he would not die (cf. 21:13, 18; 27:37; 45:7, 9; 46:3 with 21:14; 44:21). Whatever it was, Cain's mark served to protect him, as well as to remind him and others of his punishment by God.

4:16 "Nod" (lit. "homelessness") is a wordplay on the Hebrew term for "vagabond" or "wandering." So the very name of the place where Cain "settled" and lived also reminded him of his sentence.

> "Throughout the book of Genesis this direction [i.e., east] often reflects movement away from the Promised Land and from the Lord (11:2; 13:11)."[1]
>
> "The point is more theological than geographical; to be apart from the presence of the Lord is to be a vagabond in a 'vagabond-land.'"[2]
>
> "The ungodly here are portrayed as living on in the world (with a protective mark of grace) without being saved. Their sense of guilt was eased by their cultural development and their geographical expansion."[3]

Cain was a man who did not care to please God. Because he did not, God did not bless ("had no regard") for Cain (v. 5), as He did ("had regard for") Abel (v. 4), who was righteous—a man of faith. Cain's anger and jealousy over Abel's blessing brought disaster on himself. God has preserved his example in order to help us avoid it. Those who worship God must have as their goal *to* please Him rather than letting envy and hatred ruin their lives (cf. Col. 1:10).

> "One of the greatest lessons of this narrative is that God is concerned with sins committed by one man against another."[4]

3. The spread of civilization and sin 4:17-26

Cain prospered even though he rebelled against God. This is another indication of God's grace. Cain's descendants took the lead in building cities, developing music, advancing

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[1]Currid, p. 19.

[2]*The Nelson …,* p. 12.

[3]Ross, "Genesis," p. 33.

[4]Pieters, p. 104.

agriculture, creating weapons, and spreading civilization. However the descendants of Seth made an even more important advance: worshipping God.

The descendants of Cain 4:17-24

> "By virtue of being Cain's descendants, the people named in the genealogy all inherit his curse. Thus the Cainite genealogy becomes part of the Yahwist's account of man's increasing sin."[1]

> "Here begins the first extended genealogy in Genesis. Ancient peoples constructed and used genealogies differently than people do today. Studying biblical genealogies in the light of ancient Near Eastern genealogies show that although they are not completely disconnected from actual history, they are constructed primarily for theological purposes. For instance, here the author wants to point out that civilization (making of cities, technology, music) has a suspect origin in the line of Cain."[2]

4:17 Cain's "wife" (v. 17) was evidently one of his sisters or nieces, since Adam continued to father "other sons and daughters" besides Cain, Abel, and Seth (5:4).[3] God did not prohibit marrying siblings and close relatives until the Mosaic Law.

> "As long as it pleased God to let the human race descend from one pair, it must be conceded that for a time marriage between brothers and sisters was a necessity."[4]

> "Because harmful mutations so greatly outnumber any supposed helpful ones, it's considered unwise nowadays (and illegal in many states) to marry someone too closely related to you. Why? Because you greatly increase the odds that bad genes will show up. By the way, you also increase the odds of bringing out really excellent trait combinations. But did you ever hear anybody say, 'Don't marry your first cousin or you'll have a genius for a child?' They don't usually say that, because the odds of something

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[1]R. R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, p. 155.

[2]Longman, "Genesis," p. 87.

[3]See Archer, *Encyclopedia of* …, p. 77.

[4]Leupold, 1:399.

> bad happening are far, far, far, far, far greater. That would not have been a problem, by the way, shortly after creation (no problem for Cain and his wife, for example). Until mutations had a chance to accumulate in the human population, no such risk of bad combinations existed."[1]

The "city" that Cain built must not have been very large, though reference to it suggests that the population at this time was increasing rapidly. It was probably no more than a few structures.

> "Pre-flood genealogies were present in ancient Near Eastern literature, especially in Mesopotamia. For example, the Sumerian King List records a listing of the kings who ruled before the time of the 'Great Deluge.' One of the principal tasks of these rulers was to found cities."[2]

4:18-22 "Lamech" (v. 19) was the first bigamist. He deliberately subverted God's will that marriage should consist of only one man and one woman (2:24). "Bigamy" (being married to two spouses at the same time) was common in the ancient Near East, but it was never God's desire (cf. Matt. 19:4-5). God permitted it, however, as He did many other customs of which He disapproved (e.g., divorce, marrying concubines, polygamy, etc.). That is, He allowed people who practiced them to continue to live.

> "To be sure, no rebuke from God is directed at Lamech for his violation of the marital arrangement. It is simply recorded. But that is the case with most OT illustrations of polygamy. Abraham is not condemned for cohabiting with Sarah and Hagar, nor is Jacob for marrying simultaneously Leah and Rachel. In fact, however, nearly every polygamous household [*sic* household] in the OT suffers most unpleasant and shattering experiences precisely because of this ad hoc [formed] relationship. The domestic struggles that ensue are devastating."[3]

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[1]Gary Parker, *Creation: Facts of Life*, p. 98. Paragraph division omitted. This is an excellent book that deals with the evidence of creation, Darwin and biologic change, and the fossil evidence. See also Ham, et al., pp. 17, 177-85.

[2]Currid, p. 19.

[3]Hamilton, p. 238. Cf. Deut. 21:15-17.

> "Cain's family is a microcosm: its pattern of technical prowess and moral failure is that of humanity."[1]

God *shows* the destructive consequences of sin (cf. 2:24) more often than He *states* them in the Old Testament. Polygamy is one form of sin.

> Polygamy is "… the symptom of an unbalanced view of marriage, which regards it as an institution in which the wife's ultimate *raison d'etre* [reason for being] is the production of children. [This was the attitude in the ancient world, but there are, of course, additional reasons why people practice polygamy.] Where God had created the woman first and foremost for partnership, society made her in effect a means to an end, even if a noble end, and wrote its view into its marriage contracts."[2]

This is the first occurrence of polygamy (having more than one wife at the same time) in Genesis. We shall find several cases of it throughout the Old Testament. People practiced it widely in the ancient Near East, but it was contrary to the will of God (2:24). Besides indulging the flesh, polygamy was an attempt to ensure the survival of the family by providing male successors.[3] The presence of polygamy in Lamech's generation shows how sin escalated in the marriage relationship following the Fall.

The reference to forging (lit. "sharpening"; also forming, shaping) "iron" implements (v. 22) appears anachronistic [out of place] since, as far as we know, the smelting of iron was not common until the Iron Age—in the second millennium B.C. Perhaps this is a reference to the cold forging of meteoric iron, which was common earlier.[4] Later workers with iron could look back on Lamech as the father of metallurgy.

4:23-24 We could paraphrase the vengeance or retaliation idea in Lamech's mind, as expressed in these verses, more clearly as follows: If I am threatened again, I will retaliate again, much more forcefully than God retaliated

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[1]Kidner, p. 78.

[2]Ibid., p. 36.

[3]For a good, brief introduction to polygamy, see M. Stephen Davis, "Polygamy in the Ancient World," *Biblical Illustrator* 14:1 (Fall 1987):34-36.

[4]*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Mining and Metals," by A. Stuart, pp. 823-25. See also Mathews, p. 287; Hamilton, p. 239.

agaainst Cain. God threatened His retaliation and vengeance against anyone who retaliated against Cain for being a murderer: "whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him seven times as much" (v. 15). Lamech may have been claiming that he had killed in self-defense. Nevertheless, he was boasting, and he shows himself thereby to be more vengeful in his self-defensive threat than even God Himself (cf. "Vengeance is Mine, and retribution," Deut. 32:35). Jesus taught His disciples to forgive and not take revenge (Matt. 18:22), even as He did (cf. 1 Pet. 2:21-24).

The seven generations from Adam through Cain and Seth, ungodly Lamech (vv. 19-24) and godly Enoch (5:24), stand in sharp contrast to each other. The former man (Lamech) inflicts death, and the latter (Enoch) does not die. Some scholars have called Lamech's poem the "Song of the Sword." Lamech thought himself invincible with his newly acquired, state of the art, weapons.

> "Both Cain's antediluvian lineage and the postdiluvian Babel cautioned later Israel that cities founded upon arrogance resulted in violence and ultimately destruction."[1]

The family of Seth 4:25-26

4:25 This verse recalls verse 1 of this chapter, and it signals the conclusion of this section of narrative. Seth's name, from the Hebrew verb translated "granted," and meaning "substitute" or "to set" or "to place," expresses Eve's faith that God would continue to provide seed (descendants) despite death.[2] Seth was set or "appointed" to "take up the work and mission of Abel."[3] Simplicity of life and devotion to God characterized the Sethites, generally speaking. The Cainites, in contrast, became more aggressive and determined to find happiness and fulfillment in their lives apart from God (cf. Luke 16:8).

4:26 Many commentators regarded this verse as the first reference to prayer as we know it in the Bible. Prayer is basic to man's relationship with God, which is a major theme in Genesis. However the phrase "call upon the

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[1]Mathews, pp. 282-83.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 101.

[3]Yates, p. 11.

> name of the LORD," in the Pentateuch, usually refers to proclamation (preaching) rather than prayer.[1] Here it probably refers to the beginning of public worship of Yahweh.[2]

> "Gen 4 concludes the story of mankind that was cut off in the flood, a tale that opened with Gen 2:4, 'This is the history.' With the aid of a genealogy from Adam to Lamek [*sic* Lamech], the seventh generation, it traces the development of technology and arts on the one hand and the growth of violence on the other. Only in the last two verses introducing the descendants of Seth do we have glimmers of hope, for from him, as chap. 5 will describe, descended Noah, the survivor of the flood, and it was in Enosh's day that the public worship of God was reintroduced."[3]

Chapter 4 also teaches that it is important for the righteous to preserve the knowledge of God when they live in an ungodly society. The Israelites needed this encouragement as they anticipated entering the Promised Land, as we do today. Jesus taught His disciples the same lesson (Matt. 5:14-15).

C. WHAT BECAME OF ADAM 5:1—6:8

The story of creation (1:1—2:3) is an introduction to Genesis. The first *toledot* section (2:4—4:26) explains what became of the creation. In this second *toledot* section (5:1—6:8) we learn what happened to Adam. The primary purpose of this section appears to be to link the generations of Adam and Noah. After the Fall (ch. 3) the cursed human race continued to multiply and grow worse (ch. 4), and human beings continued to die. Yet the record of Enoch gives hope.

> "Genealogies in this book of genealogies serve several purposes, depending in part on the nature of the genealogy. *Broad* genealogies present only the first generation of descendants (e.g., "the sons of Leah … the sons of Rachel …" in Gen. 35:23-26; cf. 6:9-10; 25:13-15). *Deep* genealogies list sequential descendants, in this book usually numbering from two to ten. (There are ten generations from Adam through Seth to Noah. In the eleventh generation the genealogy becomes segmented.) *Linear* genealogies display only depth (e.g., "Cain … gave birth to Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad …" 4:17-18; cf. 5:1-31; 11:10-26; 36:31-39, 40).

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[1]Ross, *Creation and* …, p. 169.

[2]Pieters, p. 107.

[3]Wenham, p. 116.

> *Segmented* genealogies display both depth and breadth (e.g., "This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth. … The sons of Japheth: Gomer … The sons of Gomer …" 10:1-29; cf. 11:27-29; 19:36-38; 25:19-26; 36:1-5, 10-30; 46:8-25). The distinctions of broad, deep, linear, and segmented genealogies help explain the various functions of genealogies."[1]
>
> "Genesis begins the process of identifying the seed that will rule the earth (Gen. 1:26-28) and crush the Serpent (3:15). Book 2 [5:1—6:8] traces that lineage from Adam to Noah, even as the matching ten-generation genealogy of Book 5 [11:10-26] traces it from Shem to Abraham. Book 2 concludes with the progressive and rapid hardening of sin and the inability of the godly seed of the woman on its own to reverse it. Sin, like the Serpent, is too strong for them. Clearly, both God's judgment and deliverance are needed."[2]

1. The effects of the curse on humanity ch. 5

There are at least four purposes for the inclusion of this genealogy, which contains 10 paragraphs (vv. 1-5, 6-8, 9-11, 12-14, 15-17, 18-20, 21-24, 25-27, 28-31, and 32) and covers over 1,500 years of human history.

1. It shows the development of the human race from Adam to Noah, and it bridges the gap in time between these two major individuals. One writer argued that the ages of these patriarchs were inflated to glorify them.[3] I think not, as this would seemingly undermine the trustworthiness of Scripture.

   > "The genealogies [in chapters 5 and 11] are exclusionist in function, indicating by linear descent the one through whom the promissory blessing will be channeled."[4]

   How was it possible for people to live so long at this time in history?

   > "At the time Adam and Eve were created, they were in an ideal environment for the preservation of human life. The Garden of

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 105. See also David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, pp. 249-50; M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, pp. 77-82.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 109.

[3]R. K. Harrison, "From Adam to Noah: A Reconsideration of the Antediluvian Patriarchs' Ages," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:2 (June 1994):161-68.

[4]Mathews, p. 298.

> Eden was ideally suited to maintaining their health and vigor unimpaired. Even after they were expelled from Eden, it would seem that conditions for longevity were still far more favorable than they later became after the Flood; and there may well have been a virtual absence of disease. When these conditions gradually changed for the worse, particularly after the terrible judgment of the Flood, the life expectancy of man became progressively shorter. By Moses' time a lifetime of seventy years was considered normal, and those who lived on to eighty or beyond were generally beset with discomforts and weaknesses of various sorts, until they finally passed off the scene (see Ps. 9:10 …)."[1]

2. "Although by our standards the pre-flood people lived long lives, one of the purposes of this genealogy was to be a polemic against Mesopotamian mythology, in which people lived for tens of thousands of years. Babylonian texts record the lives of ten kings who were demigods and lived exceptionally long lives in pre-flood times. The Sumerian King List names eight kings prior to the flood who lived a total of 241,000 years. The OT criticizes such myths; humans lived long lives before the flood, but they were not demigods who lived for an exaggerated amount of time."[2]

3. This genealogy also demonstrates the truthfulness of God's (spoken) word when He said that people would die as a result of sin (cf. 2:17). Note the recurrence of the phrase "and he died" (vv. 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, and 31).

4. This genealogy contrasts the progress of the godly line of Seth, culminating in Enoch (lit. Dedicated One) who walked with God, and experienced "translation" (i.e., instant transformation and transport into heaven, without dying; 5:6-24; cf. 3:8; 6:8), with the development of the ungodly line of Cain. Cain's branch of the human race culminated in Lamech, who was a brutal bigamist (4:16-24).

> "The author's return to the theme of God's 'blessing' man (cf. v. 2) is also a part of his overall scheme to cast God's purposes for man in terms that will recall a father's care for his children. Throughout the remainder of the Book of Genesis, a recurring theme is that of

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[1]Archer, *Encyclopedia of* …, p. 77.

[2]Currid, p. 21.

> the father's blessing his children (9:26-27; 27:27; 48:15; 49:1-28). In keeping with such a theme, the author shows at each crucial turning point in the narrative that God himself renewed his blessing to the next generation of sons (1:28; 5:2; 9:1; 12:3; 24:11). Seen as a whole, the picture that emerges is that of a loving father insuring the future well-being of his children through the provision of an inherited blessing. In this way the author has laid a theological foundation for the rest of Scripture. God's original plan of blessing for all humanity, though thwarted by human folly, will nevertheless be restored through the seed of the woman (3:15), the seed of Abraham (12:3), and the 'Lion of the tribe of Judah' (49:8-12; cf. Rev 5:5-13). It is on this same foundation that the apostle Paul built his view of Jesus as the one through whom God has 'blessed us' (Eph 1:3) and 'adopted us as his sons' (v. 5) so that 'we have obtained an inheritance' (v. 11, KJV) from the one we may call '*Abba*, Father' (Rom 8:15)."[1]

Enoch's walking with God (v. 22) may have been the inspiration for this sign that appeared on a church marquee: "Exercise daily. Walk with God."

Some commentators have seen evidence in the text that this genealogy is not complete:[2]

1. The word "father" can just as accurately be translated "ancestor" (v. 3, et al.). It does not require a literal father-son sequence.[3] Likewise "fathered" or "begat" (AV) can mean eventually begat, not necessarily immediately begat.

2. The fact that Lamech, the sixth name in Cain's list (4:16-24), corresponds to Enoch, the sixth name in Seth's list (5:6-24), is suggestive: It indicates that God wanted to point out the contrast between the generations of these two sons of Adam. One was ungodly and the other godly. This purpose seems to some writers to be more dominant than that God wanted simply to preserve a complete record of all the generations between Adam and Noah. Lamech and Enoch were each the seventh generation, as recorded in this list, from Adam (cf.

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 70-71.

[2]E.g., Allis, *The Five …,* pp. 295-98; Mathews, p. 305; Andrew E. Steinmann, "Genesis Genealogies and Messianic Promise," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 176:703 (July-September 2019):343-59; Lloyd T. Anderson, *The Hidden Beauty of Hebrew Genealogies*.

[3]See Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible In Its World*, p. 33.

> Jude 14). Matthew 1:1 through 17 contains a similar genealogy, in which 14 men from each of three historical periods appear, and it is not complete (cf. Matt. 1:8 with 1 Chron. 3:11-12).[1]

3. The writer did not list Noah's sons in the order of their birth (cf. 5:32 and 9:24).

4. The genealogy in chapter 11 is probably not complete.[2]

But the careful recording of the age of each man, when he fathered the next man in the list, strongly suggests to some that this list is complete.[3] Furthermore, the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1:1 through 4 and Luke 3:36 through 38 are identical to the one in Genesis 5. This fact is used to support the theory that there are probably no missing generations in chapter 5's genealogy.[4]

> "The genealogy of Seth in Genesis 5 is thus intended to take up [continue] the creation story which had reached its first climax in the creation, as we would now read it, of Adam. The elemental orderliness of the genealogy continues the order begun at creation; indeed, it reaffirms that order after the threatened slide back into chaos narrated in the intervening chapters. But the genealogy does more; it imparts movement to creation. The Genesis 1 creation story is essentially static. When God rests on the seventh day, all phyla of creation are in their proper order and the earth is at rest. There is little suggestion of movement or further development, no story to be traced. The sole dynamic elements lie in God's command to newly created humanity to 'be fruitful and multiply' and 'subdue the earth.' The genealogies document the fruitfulness of humanity and thus become the expression of the fulfillment of God's mandate, providing movement away from the steady state of creation but at the same time

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[1]Cf. Thomas, *Through the …,* p. 35.

[2]See my comments on 11:12. For defense of the view that the Scriptures do not fix and were not intended to fix the dates of any events before the time of Abraham, see W. H. Green, "Primeval Chronology," in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 13-28; B. B. Warfield, "On the Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race," *Princeton Theological Review* 9:1 (January 1911):1-25.

[3]See Leupold, 1:241; Jeremy Sexton, "Evangelicalism's Search for Chronological Gaps in Genesis 5 and 11: A Historical, Hermeneutical, and Linguistic Critique," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61:1 (March 2018):5-25; J. Paul Tanner, "Old Testament Chronology and Its Implications for the Creation and Flood Accounts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:65 (January-March 2015):24-44. Appendix 3 at the end of these notes: Chronology of Genesis 5 & 11, shows a closed genealogy.

[4]See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:120-27. Wenham, pp. 130-34, wrote an excursus on the ages of the antediluvians that is one of the best discussions of this issue that I have found. McGee gave a chart showing which of the patriarchs were contemporary with each other on 1:35.

> preserving its orderliness. Creation's order advanced through the genealogy."[1]
>
> "Connection of the genealogy to creation also exerts a reciprocal influence on our understanding of this and subsequent genealogies. The genealogies represent the continuation of creation's fundamental order through time. As a result, they assume theological significance. The organic and orderly succession of generations is not an expression of thematically empty biological necessity but of God's initial creative activity. Birth awakens not neutral destiny but enrollment in the continuing order of creation ordained by God. The genealogies become bearers of the creation theme and, by their elemental, organic nature, its fit expression."[2]

Assuming closed (or "tight") genealogies in chapters 5 and 11, J. Paul Tanner calculated the Creation as having occurred about 4200 B.C., and the Flood about 2550 B.C.[3] Archbishop James Ussher (A.D. 1581-1656) believed that the creation of Adam took place in 4004 B.C.[4] Lloyd Anderson believed that these genealogies are open, and he calculated the date of the Flood at about 4000 B.C.[5] Eusebius, the fourth-century AD church historian, wrote that the time from the origin of man to the death of Moses was "nearly three thousand years."[6]

Even though the death motif (theme) is strong in this chapter, there is even more emphasis on God's grace. We see this in the references to life, fertility (sons and daughters), Enoch's translation, and other blessings. The enjoyment of God's blessings depends on walking with God. "Walk" is a biblical figure for fellowship and obedience that results in divine blessing (cf. 1 Sam. 15:25; Eph. 4:1; 1 John 1:7).

> "Enoch is pictured as one who did not suffer the fate of Adam ('you shall surely die') because, unlike the others, he 'walked with God.' The sense of the author is clear. Enoch is an example of one who found life amid the curse of death. In Enoch the author is able to show that the

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[1]Robert B. Robinson, "Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (October 1986):600-601.

[2]Ibid., p. 601. See also Gavin Ortlund, "Image of Adam, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57:4 (December 2014):673-88.

[3]Tanner, p. 44.

[4]See Pieters, p. 111.

[5]L. Anderson, p. 6.

[6]Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, 3:10:97.

> pronouncement of death is not the last word that need be said about a person's life. One can find life if one 'walks with God.'"[1]
>
> "'Walked with God' is metaphorical and indicates that Enoch had a lifestyle characterized by his devotion to God. The sense of 'walk' (*halak*) in its verbal stem indicates a communion or intimacy with God."[2]
>
> "The double repetition of the phrase 'walked with God' indicates Enoch was outstanding in this pious family."[3]
>
> "Those whose conversation in the world is truly holy shall find their removal out of it truly happy."[4]

Repetition usually reinforces and emphasizes in Scripture. The central lesson of this section of Genesis appears to be that the godly can experience victory over the effects of the curse by walking with God.[5] God will snatch some away of the godly (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:17), like Enoch, but most have to endure physical death, though not spiritual death.

> "The finality of death caused by sin, and so powerfully demonstrated in the genealogy of Genesis, is in fact not so final. Man was not born to die; he was born to live, and that life comes by walking with God. Walking with God is the key to the chains of the curse."[6]
>
> "Within the time-scale of Genesis, this chapter covers the longest period in world history."[7]

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch …*, p. 118. Paragraph division omitted. Cf. 3:8; 6:9; 15:6; 17:1; 24:40; 48:15; Deut. 30:15-16; Mic. 6:8; Mal. 2:6. See also Timothy J. Cole, "Enoch, a Man Who Walked with God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:591 (July-September 1991):288-97.

[2]Mathews, p. 313. Cf. 3:8; 6:9.

[3]Wenham, p. 127.

[4]Matthew Henry, p. 16.

[5]For additional study of the genealogies, see Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, pp. 36-39; Schaeffer, *Genesis in …,* pp. 122-124; *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Chronology," pp. 162-75; *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Antediluvian Patriarchs," by G. F. Wright, 1:139-43; James L. Hayward and Donald E. Casebolt, "The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11: a statistical study," *Origins* 9:2 (1982):75-81; Frederick Cryer, "The Interrelationships of Gen. 5, 32; 11, 10-11 and the Chronology of the Flood," *Biblica* 66:2 (1985):241-61; and Barr, pp. 584-85; L. Anderson.

[6]Cole, p. 294.

[7]Wenham, p. 145.

As the story of Cain and Abel (4:3-24) interrupted the genealogy of Adam in 4:1 and 2, and 25 and 26, so the story of the Flood (6:1—9:27) interrupts the genealogy of Noah in 5:32, and 9:28 and 29.

2. God's sorrow over man's wickedness 6:1-8

As wickedness increased on the earth God determined to destroy the human race—with the exception of those few people to whom He extended grace.

> "Stories of a great flood sent in primeval times by gods to destroy mankind followed by some form of new creation are so common to so many peoples in different parts of the world, between whom no kind of historical contact seems possible, that the notion seems almost to be a universal feature of the human imagination."[1]

There were two major reasons for the flood: the sins of the sons of God (vv. 1-4), and the sins of humankind in general (vv. 5-8).

The sins of the sons of God 6:1-4

6:1-2 There are three major views about the identity of "the sons of God":

1. They were fallen angels (demons, "divine beings" [NJPS]) who married women.[2] Arguments in favor of this view follow, with responses:
    a. The term "sons of God," as it occurs here in Hebrew, refers only to angels in the Old Testament (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; et al.). Response: Angels do not reproduce (Matt. 22:30). Also, "sons of God" is a strange title for evil angels.
    b. 2 Peter 2:4 and 5 and Jude 6 and 7 appear to identify angels with this incident. Response: There are no other

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[1]Whybray, p. 45. Josephus cited Berosus, a Chaldean historian, as one such writer, in *Against Apion*, 1:19. See Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 132, for references to several extrabiblical stories of the Flood.

[2]*The Book of Enoch* (a second century B.C. pseudepigraphal book); Philo; Josephus; Justin Martyr; Tertullian; Cyprian; Ambrose; Pember, pp. 206-8; Clarence Larkin, *The Spirit World,* p. 23; Gaebelein, 1:1:29-30; von Rad, p. 114; Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*; C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil*; M. R. DeHaan, *508 Answers to Bible Questions*; Boice, 1:245-48; R. S. Hendel, "When the Sons of God Cavorted with the Daughters of Men," *Bible Review* 3:2 (Summer 1987):8-13, 37; Yates, p. 12; Merrill, "A Theology …," p. 23; idem, in *The Old …,* p. 14; Wenham, pp. 140, 146; *The Nelson …,* p. 15; Newell, p. 58; Lightner, pp. 94-98; Fruchtenbaum, p. 136-45; Longman, "Genesis," p. 88.

references to angels in the context here in Genesis. These New Testament passages probably refer to the fall of Satan.

c. If God could impregnate Mary, spirit beings may be able to do the same thing to human women. Response: Spirit beings cannot do everything that God can do.

2. They were godly Sethites who married ungodly women.[1] I prefer this view. Arguments in favor of this view follow, with responses:

a. The Old Testament often refers to the godly as "God's sons" (e.g., Exod. 4:22; Deut. 32:5; Ps. 73:15; 80:17; Hos. 1:10). Response: This would have to be an exception to the use of "sons of God" as a normal reference to angels in the Old Testament.

b. Moses had already established the concept of a godly line and an ungodly line in Genesis (4:16—5:32). Response: This does not mean that godly Sethites are in view here necessarily.

c. Sonship of humans based on election is common in the Old Testament. Response: These "sons of God" could be elect angels who fell.

d. Warnings against marriages between believers and unbelievers are common in the Pentateuch and throughout Scripture, and this seems to be in view here. Response: The warning seems to be against more abnormal forms of intermarriage than just marriage between believers and unbelievers.

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[1]Matthew Henry, p. 16; Jamieson, et al., p. 22; Morgan, *An Exposition …,* p. 13; Leupold, 1:250; Davis, *Genesis and …,* pp. 1-1-6; Free, p. 40; Thomas, *Through the …,* p. 36; Payne, p. 206; Wiersbe, p. 42; René Pache, *The Future Life*, pp. 109-10; Enns, p. 46; Archer, *Encyclopedia of …*, pp. 79-80; Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 21.

3. They were ungodly dynastic rulers who married women.[1] That is, they were upper class men who married lower class women. Fallen angels (demons) may have indwelt, or at least controlled, these men.[2] Arguments in favor of this view, and responses, follow:

    a. Ancient Near Eastern literature often called kings "sons of gods" (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14). Response: This is not the usual meaning of "sons of God" in the Old Testament.

    b. The Old Testament refers to administrators (e.g., judges) as "gods." Response: Scripture never regards them as descendants or sons of deities, as pagan ancient Near Eastern literature does.

    c. This story is similar to Babylonian antediluvian stories. Response: Similarity does not require identical meaning. Nor does it require that the Babylonian explanation gave rise to the biblical explanation. Rather the reverse seems to be true.[3]

Scholars have debated this passage heatedly. One writer expressed his frustration as follows:

> "What does he [Moses] mean? I do not know, and I do not believe anyone knows. So far as I am concerned, this passage is unintelligible."[4]

Context is very important in any interpretive problem, and I believe it argues for view 2 in this case.[5] If so, the purpose of this segment of the text appears to be to document the degradation of even the godly, thus justifying the Flood. Evidently the godly were selecting their wives on the basis of who looked best to them, believers and unbelievers alike, rather than choosing godly wives. In other words, the godly had adopted the

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[1]Merediith G. Klein, "Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4," *Westminster Theological Journal* 24 (1962):187-204; John Skinner, *Genesis*; Kitchen, "The Old …," p. 4. See also Watson E. Mills, "Sons of God: The Roman View," *Biblical Illustrator* (Fall 1983):37-39.

[2]Ross, "Genesis," p. 36; Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 116-17.

[3]See Robert T. Boyd, *A Pictorial Guide to Biblical Archaeology*, pp. 65-79.

[4]Pieters, p. 116.

[5]See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:131-34; Wolf, p. 99. Many conservative interpreters hold this view.

values of the world and were behaving like unbelievers. This breakdown of godliness existed in the realm of the most fundamental human institution: marriage (cf. Matt. 24:37-38; Luke 17:26-27).

Some people who believe that the angelic conflict (the conflict between good and bad spirit beings) is a major theme of Scripture have emphasized this passage. I do not believe that the angelic conflict is a major theme of Scripture. I believe the angels are important primarily because of their function as God's messengers sent forth to minister to (help) people (Heb. 1:14).

6:3 The "120 years" are evidently the number of years of grace that God decided to give humankind to repent before the Flood.[1] They probably do not indicate a reduction in the normal human lifespan to 120 years, though people who lived before the Flood lived longer than those who lived after it.[2]

> "The judgment is that God will not endlessly and forever permit his life-giving spirit to enliven those who disorder his world. The breath of life (Gen. 2:7; Ps. 104:29-30) remains his to give and to recall."[3]
>
> "The attempt by man to become more than he is results in his becoming less."[4]

6:4 The "Nephilim" were on the earth both before and after the marriages of the sons of God with the daughters of mankind. They were literally "fallen ones" or "tyrants." They have been described as mighty men who were of old, men of renown. That is, they were powerful individuals. The men that Moses sent to spy out the land later described the "people of great stature" in Canaan as Nephilim. But this was not just because of their height but also because of their powerful appearance (cf. Num.13:31-33).

> "The translation 'giants' (A.V.) is most unfortunate. It originated with the Septuagint (*gigantes*). It does not

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[1]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:136; Leupold, 1:256.

[2]von Rad, p. 114. Mathews, p. 335; Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, p. 376; Wenham, pp. 142, 146-47, defended the shortening of life view.

[3]Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 72.

[4]L. Eslinger, "A Contextual Identification of the *bene ha'elohim* and *benoth ha'adam* in Genesis 6:1-4," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 13 (1979):72.

> follow from Num. 13:33, even if there the 'attackers' should also happen to have been giants."[1]

The sins of humanity generally 6:5-8

The second reason for the Flood, beside the sins of the "sons of God," was the sinfulness of humanity generally.

6:5 Men's and women's actions were very wicked, and their thoughts and affections ("every intent of the thoughts of their hearts," their mind-set, attitudes, and motives) were completely ("continually") "evil" by this time (cf. vv. 11-12; Rom. 1:18-32).

> "Near the turn of the 19th century F. W. Farrar wrote a book entitled *Seekers After God*. The book was a popular seller and was in considerable demand. A certain western bookseller had a number of requests for the volume but had no copies available. He sent a telegram to the dealers in New York requesting them to ship him a number of the books. After awhile [*sic*] a telegram came back which read, 'No seekers after God in New York. Try Philadelphia.'"[2]

6:6 God was "sorry" that He had made humankind, because people generally did not want a relationship with Him. They insisted on living life independently of God, and consequently they were destroying themselves in sin. God experienced "heart-piercing sorrow"[3] over what His special creation had become. This is an anthropopathism: Moses was describing the LORD as having human emotions (cf. 9:15, 16).

> "God is no robot. We know him as a personal, living God, not a static principle, who while having transcendent purposes to be sure also engages intimately with his creation. Our God is incomparably affected by, even pained by, the sinner's rebellion. Acknowledging the passibility (emotions) of God does not diminish the immutability [unchangeableness] of his promissory purposes. Rather, his feelings and actions toward men, such as judgment or

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[1]Leupold, 1:259.

[2]D. Edmond Hiebert, *Working with God: Scriptural Studies in Intercession*, pp. 100-101.

[3]Yates, p. 12.

> forgiveness, are always inherently consistent with his essential person and just and gracious resolve (Jas 1:17)."[1]
>
> "God repented that he had made man; but we never find him repenting that he redeemed man."[2]

6:7 This verse is another important early promise and prophecy. God proceeded to fulfill it literally. His destruction of all the animals in the Flood was not because they were sinful. It was an inevitable consequence of His judgment on all humankind.

6:8 Noah was the one exception to the universal godlessness. The name "Noah" may mean "grieved" (the Hebrew *niphal* form) or "rest" or "comfort" (the *piel* form). "Favor" equals grace. This is the first occurrence of the Hebrew word translated "grace" or "favor" in the Old Testament, though we have seen many examples of God's grace thus far. There is a wordplay in the Hebrew text (an anagram). The same consonants of Noah's name (*nh*) in the reverse order mean "grace" (*hn*).

All of God's people can identify with Noah: they have all been recipients of God's grace. It is only by God's grace that we can escape His judgment on the wicked.

> "Genesis is flatly contradicting the humanistic optimism of Mesopotamia: humanity's situation in its [Genesis's] view is hopeless without divine mercy."[3]

This section, together with the next, shows that pagan idolatry and immorality pain God and incur His judgment, and that man can only escape by His provision of salvation.

D. WHAT BECAME OF NOAH 6:9—9:29

The LORD destroyed the corrupt, violent human race, and He deluged its world. But He also used righteous Noah to preserve life and to establish a new world after the Flood.

> "Noah's experience presents decisively the author's assertion that the Lord judges human sin but provides a means for perpetuating the creation blessing (1:26-28) and the salvation hope for an elect seed (3:15). The recurring theme of blessing, threatened by sin but preserved

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[1]Mathews, p. 344.

[2]Matthew Henry, p. 17.

[3]Wenham, p. xlviii.

> by divine mercy, is found in the two narratives that make up the Noah *toledot*: the flood story (6:9—9:17) and the account of the patriarch's drunkenness (9:20-27). The former is worldwide in scope, and the latter is its microcosm. A genealogical note binds the two (9:18-19), and another concludes it (9:28-29)."[1]
>
> "Also Noah's *toledot* contributes to the broader concerns of early Genesis by preparing the reader for the postdiluvian world. This 'new world' is the setting for understanding the perpetuation of the 'blessing' by the patriarchs (11:27—50:26), which is the main deliberation of Genesis."[2]

Noah is a very important person in biblical history. In addition to 34 occurrences of his name in Genesis, there are 13 more in 8 other books of the Bible (1 Chron. 1:4; Isa. 54:9 [twice]; Ezek. 14:14, 20; Matt. 24:37, 38; Luke 3:36; 17:26, 27; Heb. 11:7; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5).

1. The Flood 6:9—8:22

The chiastic (palistrophic, crossing) structure of this section shows that Moses intended to emphasize God's grace to Noah, which occupies the central part of the story.

> "One mark of the coherence of the flood narrative is to be found in its literary structure. The tale is cast in the form of an extended palistrophe, that is a structure that turns back on itself. In a palistrophe the first item matches the final item, the second item matches the penultimate [next to last] item, and so on. The second half of the story is thus a mirror image of the first. This kind of literary structure has been discovered in other parts of Genesis, but nowhere else is it developed on such a large scale. This may be partly due to the fact that a flood narrative is peculiarly suited to this literary form."[3]
>
> "Particularly striking are the references to days (lines H, I, L, O). (Only the references to days form part of the palistrophe; the 40 days *and nights* [vii 4, 12] and the dates do not.) The periods of time form a symmetrical

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[1]Mathews, pp. 349-50.

[2]Ibid, p. 350.

[3]Gordon J. Wenham, "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 28:3 (1978):337.

> pattern, 7, 7, 40, 150, 150, 40, 7, 7. The turning point of the narrative is found in viii:1 'God remembered Noah.'"[1]
>
> "What then is the function of the palistrophe? Firstly, it gives literary expression to the character of the flood event. The rise and fall of the waters is mirrored in the rise and fall of the key words in its description. Secondly, it draws attention to the real turning point in the saga: viii 1, 'And God remembered Noah.' From that moment the waters start to decline and the earth to dry out. It was God's intervention that was decisive in saving Noah, and the literary structure highlights this fact."[2]

The following diagram illustrates this palistrophe (chiasm) more simply:[3]

Introduction: Noah's righteousness and Noah's sons (6:9-10).

A God resolves to destroy the corrupt race (6:11-13).

B Noah builds an ark according to God's instructions (6:14-22).

C The LORD commands the remnant to enter the ark (7:1-9).

D The flood begins (7:10-16).

E The flood prevails 150 days and the water covers the mountains (7:17-24).

F God remembers Noah (8:1a).

E' The flood recedes 150 days and the mountains are visible (8:1b-5).

D' The earth dries (8:6-14).

C' God commands the remnant to leave the ark (8:15-19).

B' Noah builds an altar (8:20).

A' The LORD resolves not to destroy humankind (8:21-22).

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid., pp. 339-40. See also idem, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 155-58. See the chart of the chronology of the Flood in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 39.

[3]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 191. See also the charts in Mathews, p. 354; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 125.

Conditions and events before the Flood 6:9—7:9

6:9-10 This is the first time the important words translated "righteous" and "blameless" appear in the Bible.

> "The same explanation for Enoch's rescue from death ('he walked with God') is made the basis for Noah's rescue from death in the Flood: 'he walked with God' (6:9). Thus in the story of Noah and the Flood, the author is able to repeat the lesson of Enoch: life comes through 'walking with God.'"[1]

> "Most people know that Noah built an ark. What they may not know is that he also built a godly character and a godly family."[2]

> "Noah is depicted as Adam *redivivus* (revived). He is the sole survivor and successor to Adam; both 'walk' with God; both are the recipients of the promissory blessing; both are caretakers of the lower creatures; both father three sons; both are workers of the soil; both sin through the fruit of a tree; and both father a wicked son who is under a curse."[3]

6:11-12 Notice again that "the earth" (i.e., the atmosphere, dry land, bodies of water, all plant and animal life) had to suffer because of human sin (cf. 3:17-19; 4:12; Rom. 8:20-21).

> "The two words, 'corrupt' and 'violence,' give us respectively the character and expression of the sin, the cause and the effect. The corruption has led to violence, for badness always leads to cruelty in one form or another. A life that is wrong with God necessarily becomes wrong with its fellows."[4]

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 119.

[2]Wiersbe, p. 45.

[3]Mathews, p. 351, cf. p. 359. See Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 127-30; and Warren Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis*, pp. 9-15, for striking parallels between Adam and Noah and between the pre-flood and post-flood worlds.

[4]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 71.

We already had an illustration of this corruption in verse 2. God had created the earth and pronounced it "good" (1:31). But now it was "corrupt" and "filled with violence" (vv. 11-13).

6:13

> "Whereas God has blessed the human family with the power of procreation to fill the earth (1:28; 9:1), these culprits have 'filled the earth' by procreating 'violence' (cf. v. 13; Ezek 8:17; 28:16)."[1]

> "There come times in the events of this world when God's gracious dealings with men are definitely terminated. Such times come only when grace has been offered in richest measure. But when the end is resolved upon, there is no recall. Such a case is marked by the 'end' that God here determines."[2]

6:14-16 Noah received detailed instructions that he was to follow in building the ark. Much later Moses received detailed instructions that he was to follow in building the tabernacle.

> "God must be obeyed in all his instructions if his people expect to enjoy the fruit of life and blessing (e.g., Deut 26:16-19; 28:1-14)."[3]

Both men followed their respective instructions and received praise (v. 22; Exod. 39:42-43; Lev. 8:36; Num. 27:22; Deut. 34:9). Both men inaugurated a new epoch. In this respect, Moses was another Noah.

> "The word translated *ark* occurs only in the flood story of Genesis and in the account of Moses' mother's effort to save her baby by putting him in the Nile in Exod. 2.3, 5 (where the term is rendered 'basket'). Noah foreshadows Moses, even as Moses, removed from the water foreshadows the people Israel, whom he leads to safety through the death-dealing sea that drowns their oppressors (Exod. chs 14-15)."[4]

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[1]Mathews, p. 359.

[2]Leupold, 1:268-69.

[3]Mathews, p. 363.

[4]Levenson, pp. 19-20.

The ark was about 450 feet long (1 1/2 American football fields), 75 feet wide (7 standard parking spaces), and 45 feet high (a typical four-story building). It had three decks and over 100,000 square feet of deck space. There were over 1 million cubic feet of space in it. This is a volume capacity of approximately 860 railroad boxcars. It had a floating capacity (its buoyancy, the total weight that it could float) of almost 14,000 gross tons.[1]

The ark probably looked more like a rectangular box than a typical ship. After all, its purpose was to stay afloat, not to transport its contents from one destination to another. This design used space very efficiently. The ark would have been very stable in the water. Modern ocean-going tankers and aircraft carriers have a similar scale of dimensions. The type of wood ("gopher," v. 14) out of which Noah made the ark is unknown. The Hebrew word occurs only here in the Old Testament and is transliterated "gopher" into English.

> "Covered *inside and out with pitch* (v. 14) to protect its passengers from the cataclysm, the ark symbolizes the tender mercies and protective grace with which God envelops the righteous even in the harshest circumstances."[2]

Evidently an opening ("window," v. 16) ran completely around the ark one cubit in height below the roof, though the meaning of the Hebrew words here is uncertain.

6:17 God made two promises to Noah. First, He would bring a flood of water upon the earth that would destroy all animal and human life ("in which there is the breath of life." "Everything" that was "on the earth" would "perish." This certainly sound like the Flood would be universal rather than local.

6:18a Second, God promised to establish a covenant with Noah. This is the first occurrence of the important word "covenant" (Heb. *berith*) in the Old Testament (v. 18). The making of and the details of this covenant follow in

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[1]See "Noah's Flood: Washing Away Millions of Years" DVD featuring Dr. Terry Mortenson.

[2]Levenson, p. 20.

9:9 through 17. There were two basic kinds of covenants in the ancient Near East.[1]

1. The *parity* covenant was one that equals (peers) made, for example: Abraham and Abimelech (21:22-32), Isaac and Abimelech (26:26-33), and Jacob and Laban (31:44-54).

2. The *suzerainty* covenant was one that a superior (e.g., a king) made with an inferior (e.g., a vassal, subject). Examples of this type of covenant are the Noahic Covenant (Gen. 9:1-17), the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15:18-21), and the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 19—Num. 10).

   "The Noahic covenant is closer to the royal grant known from the ancient Near East where a deity bestows a benefit or gift upon a king. It has its closest parallels to the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Gen 15; 17; 2 Sam 7), which are promissory charters made by God with the individuals and their offspring, characteristically forever. Unlike the Mosaic covenant, in the royal grant form of covenant God alone is under compulsion by oath to uphold his promise to the favored party."[2]

6:18b-20 Noah and his wife plus his sons and their wives—eight individuals in all—were to enter the ark. Noah was also to bring into the ark two of every "kind" of animal ("every living thing of all flesh"), a male and a female of each kind (cf. 1:21, 24-25) to keep them alive. Even birds and small crawling creatures were to be included.

6:21 Noah was also to stock the ark with food for his family and the animals.

> "The problem of providing food for so many creatures for somewhat more than a year is simplified by the very proper consideration that beasts are very shrewd about adapting their food supply to their needs. When they have no physical exercise, like brooding hens, they cut down promptly on the amount of food consumed. Likewise during the time of hibernating. A kind of winter sleep may

[1]Livingston, pp. 153-54.

[2]Mathews, p. 368.

> providentially have taken possession of all inmates of the ark, materially cutting down their needs and reducing them to a very small minimum."[1]

6:22 We can see Noah's faith (Heb. 11:7) in his complete obedience to God ("Noah did these things; according to everything that God had commanded him"; cf. 7:5, 9, 16; 8:16-18)—even though he faced many obstacles. In his obedience to God he was similar to Abraham (cf. 12:4; 22:3).

> "Once again we are reminded of the importance of the relationship of the head of a family has with God, for his or her conduct can result in an overflow of blessings or curses to the rest of the family."[2]

"The author's purpose in drawing out the list of specifications for the ark in chapter 6, as with the details of the building of the tabernacle, is not that readers might be able to see what the ark or the tabernacle looked like, but rather that readers might appreciate the meticulous care with which these godly and exemplary individuals went about their tasks of obedience to God's will. They obeyed God with 'all their hearts.'"[3]

"What a splendid figure this man makes, a picture of solitary goodness! He was the one saint of that day. It *is* possible, therefore, to be good even though we have to stand alone. It is possible to be right with God even amidst surrounding iniquity. God is the same today as He was to Noah, and if only we are willing to fulfill the conditions we too shall walk with God and please Him."[4]

"God here makes Noah a great blessing to the world, and herein makes him an eminent type of the Messiah. 1. God made him a preacher to the men of that generation. 2. God made him a saviour to the inferior creatures, to keep the several kinds of them from perishing and being lost in the deluge, *v*. 19-21. (1) He was to provide shelter for them, that they might not be drowned. (2) He was to provide sustenance for them, that they might not be starved, *v*. 21. Herein also he was a type of Christ, to

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[1]Leupold, 1:278.

[2]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 22.

[3]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 125.

[4]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 74.

whom it is owing that the world stands, by whom all things consist, and who preserves mankind from being totally cut off and ruined by sin. Noah saved those whom he was to rule, so does Christ, Heb. v. 9."[1]

"A type is a divinely purposed anticipation which illustrates its antitype [something that is represented by the type]."[2]

7:1 God, in His grace, invited Noah to enter the ark with his family (v. 1; cf. 8:15). God took the initiative, as He later did in calling Abram (cf. 12:1). This is the first occurrence of the offer "Come" (v. 1, NET2, AV, NKJV) in the Bible.[3] This invitation continues throughout Scripture, the last offer being in Revelation 22:17. God extends the invitation to people, He urges them to take advantage of the perfect provision He has made for their preservation, and He offers it in a time of impending judgment and gloom.

> "It is not that Noah's works of righteousness gains [*sic* gain] him salvation, for none is cited. Rather, his upright character is noted to condemn his generation, which merits death."[4]
>
> "Sinful men do not *deserve* to live on God's earth. This is the basic message of the Genesis Flood."[5]

7:2-3 This command does not contradict what God had said in 6:19 and 20. There He specified that Noah was to take two of every kind of animal into the ark. Here He enlarged that number to include seven pairs of ritually clean animals.

God did not reveal the basis for His distinction between "clean" and "not clean" animals here. Israel's pagan neighbors also observed clean and unclean distinctions between animals, though these distinctions varied from country to country. In the Mosaic Law, God further distinguished between acceptable and unacceptable foods—for the Israelites. Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul taught that now, in the Church Age, these

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[1]Matthew Henry, p. 18. See *The Theological Wordbook*, s.v. "Types," by Donald K. Campbell, pp. 363-65.

[2]Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:xxx. See Baxter, 1:53-62; and Zuck, pp. 169-84; for discussions of typology. Gaebelein's commentary is full of typology.

[3]Other translations have "Go" (NIV, TNIV, ESV) and "Enter" (NASB, HCSB).

[4]Mathews, p. 371.

[5]John C. Whitcomb, *Esther: The Triumph of God's Sovereignty*, p. 21.

distinctions no longer need affect people as far as our relationship with God goes (Mark 7:15, 18-19; cf. Acts 10:15; 11:9; Rom. 14:14).

7:4 God gave the instructions in this section of the Flood narrative (7:1-4) seven days before the rain began (cf. v. 10).

> "According to the scriptural use of numbers forty regularly describes a period of trial terminating in the victory of good and the overthrow of evil; see Num. 14:33; Exod. 24:18; I Kings 19:8; Jonah 3:4; Matt. 4:2; Acts 1:3."[1]

7:5 Again Moses drew attention to Noah's complete obedience to what God had told him to do (cf. v. 22). Obviously this was a point that Moses wanted his readers to be sure to get.

7:6-9 How did God cause all the animals to come to the ark (vv. 8-9)? Perhaps all varieties of animals were in the immediate neighborhood of the ark, or perhaps they came from far away while the ark was being built. Moses did not explain this.

> "… there is absolutely no way of telling [from the Bible] how the various continents were formed and shaped in days of old and whether they were more intimately connected with one another prior to the Flood and immediately thereafter."[2]

The Flood proper 7:10-24

There are two views among evangelicals as to the extent of the Flood:

1. The Flood was *universal*, in that it covered the entire earth. Here is a summary of the evidence that supports this view:[3]
    a. The purpose of the Flood (6:5-7, 11-13).
    b. The need for an ark (6:14).
    c. The size of the ark (6:15-16).

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[1]Leupold, 1:291.

[2]Ibid., 1:303.

[3]See also Whitcomb and Morris, pp. 1-35; Fruchtenbaum, pp. 164-65.

d. The universal terms used in the story (6:17-21; 7:19, 21-23). Context must determine whether universal terms are truly universal or limited (see Luke 2:1 and Matt. 28:19-20 for examples of universal terms that are limited).

e. The amount of water involved (7:11, 20; 8:2).

f. The duration of the Flood: 371 days (7:11; 8:14).

g. The testimony of the psalmist (Ps. 104:5-9).

h. The testimony of Peter (2 Pet. 3:3-7).

i. The faithfulness of God (8:21).

This view has been the most popular with conservative interpreters throughout history.

> "By and large, the tradition of the Christian church is that the context requires a universal flood, and many Christian scholars have maintained this position knowing well the geological difficulties it raises."[1]
>
> "Water seeks its own level, so if 'all the high mountains' were covered (7:19), the whole earth was under water to that extent. Moreover, the insistence on the use of 'all' ('all mountains,' 7:19; 'all flesh,' 7:21; 'all in whose nostrils,' 7:22; 'all that was on the dry land,' 7:22; and so forth) can lead to no other view than a universal deluge, modern scientific opinion notwithstanding."[2]
>
> "The language is not consistent with the theory of a partial deluge."[3]
>
> "On the one hand the distribution of the saga (among Indians, Persians, Africans, Melanesians, and Australians, among the Eskimos, the Kamchatkans, Indians of the Americas, etc.), on the other hand its remarkable uniformity (flood caused by rain),

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[1]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 124. See Leupold, 1:273, 301-6; Free, p. 42; Whitcomb and Morris, pp. 1-2; Boice, 1:278-88; Ariel A. Roth, "Evidences for a worldwide flood," *Ministry* (May 1984), pp. 12-14; Donald Patten, "The Biblical Flood: A Geographical Perspective," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:509 (January-March 1971):36-49; Wiersbe, pp. 46-47; Wolf, pp. 101-6; Archer, *Encyclopedia of …*, pp. 82-84.

[2]Merrill, in *The Old …,* p. 15.

[3]Jamieson, et al., p. 22.

> require the assumption of an actual cosmic experience and a primitive recollection which, to be sure, is often clouded and in part often brought to new life and revised only later by local floods."[1]

2. The flood was *local*, and covered only part of the earth.[2] It was, in the words of J. Vernon McGee, "sort of a big swimming pool."[3] (McGee believed in a universal flood.[4]) The evidence is as follows:

   a. The main arguments rest on modern geology and the improbability of a universal flood in view of consequential global changes.

   b. Advocates take the universal statements in the text as limited to the area where Moses said the Flood took place.

   c. Some advocates believe that Moses described the Flood as an observer would have seen these events. An observer would have seen no mountains that were not covered with water.[5]

   This view has gained wide acceptance ever since the modern science of geology has called into question the believability of the text.[6]

   > "The principle concern of those advocating a local flood is to escape the geological implications of a universal flood."[7]

   > "Since the distorted concept of special creation used by the originator of the geologic column was never truly Creationistic, and organic evolution has long since become the conceptual basis for time-equivalence of index fossils, modern Creationists can justifiably point out that organic evolution *is* the basis for the geological column."[8]

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[1]von Rad, p. 124. See also pp. 128-30.

[2]See, for example, Ramm, pp. 305-43; Baxter, 1:41-42; Morgan, *An Exposition …,* p 14.

[3]McGee, 1:42.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Pieters, pp. 118-19.

[6]See Whitcomb and Morris, pp. 36-88, for refutation of the local flood view.

[7]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 124. See Ramm, pp. 229-40; and Kidner; who advocated a local flood.

[8]John R. Woodmorappe, "A Diluviological Treatise on the Stratigraphic Separation of Fossils," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* (December 1983):135.

Basically this controversy, like that involving the Creation account, involves presuppositions about the credibility of Scripture or science, and the possibility of supernatural occurrences. The scientific community seems to be more open to catastrophism of some kind than it used to be.[1]

> "We believe that most of the difficulties associated with the Biblical record of the Flood are basically religious, rather than scientific. The concept of such a universal judgment on man's sin and rebellion, warning as it does of another greater judgment yet to come, is profoundly offensive to the intellectual and moral pride of modern man and so he would circumvent it if at all possible."[2]

The non-biblical stories of the Flood are undoubtedly perversions of the true account that God preserved in Scripture.[3] God may have revealed the true account directly to Moses, or He may have preserved a true oral or written account that Moses used as his source of this information. Moses may have written the Genesis account, under divine inspiration, to correct the Mesopotamian versions (the maximalist view), or both the biblical and Mesopotamian accounts may go back to a common tradition (the minimalist view).[4]

Some interpreters have understood the opening of the "floodgates of the sky" (v. 11) as a breaking up of a water vapor canopy that, some theorize, covered the earth before the Flood. Advocates of this "canopy theory" believe that it may account for longevity before the Flood.[5] Other less probable explanations of the longevity of the antediluvians are (1) that "years" really means "lunar months," or (2) that the "years" refer not to the age of individuals but to the age of a family, tribe, or dynasty.[6]

> "The water for Noah's Flood came from the release of great underground sources of water (the fountains of the great deep which continued

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[1]See Henry Morris, "Biblical Catastrophism and Modern Science," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:498 (April-June 1968):107-15. An interesting article on some ancient non-biblical accounts of the Flood is Jack P. Lewis, "Noah and the Flood in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Tradition," *Biblical Archaeologist* 47:4 (December 1984):224-39. See also J. Randall O'Brien, "Flood Stories of the Ancient Near East," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):60-65; and *The ESV Archaeology Study Bible*, s.v. "Ancient Near Eastern Flood Accounts," p. 22.

[2]Whitcomb and Morris, p. xxii. See also pp. 439-41.

[3]See Finegan, pp. 27-36, for discussion of these.

[4]For a chart that compares the biblical account of the Flood with four other ancient Near Eastern accounts of it, see Appendix 4 at the end of these notes.

[5]See my comments on 2:5-6 for discussion of the canopy theory.

[6]See Pieters, p. 109, for advocates of these views.

> pouring forth for 150 days), and from the collapse of the waters above (presumably a vast water vapor blanket or canopy above the atmosphere), giving the 40 days and nights of rain. Psalm 104 indicates that after the Flood, the mountains were upthrust to their present positions, with associated deepening of the ocean basins, which now hold the waters of the Flood."[1]
>
> "These waters would not have been enough to cover today's highest mountains. Genesis indicates no rain or rainbows before the Flood, which is consistent with the absence of high mountains that are important to the triggering of rainfall. Also, the absence of large temperature differences between poles and equator under such a greenhouse blanket of water vapor would mean an absence of the vast winds which are also necessary (now, but not before the Flood) for the rainfall cycle. Genesis describes how the earth before the Flood was watered by mists and/or springs and geysers."[2]

A diagonal strip of marine limestone, which is the remains of the ancient Tethys Sea, that mountain climbers refer to as the Yellow Band, is located beneath Mt. Everest's just over 29,000-foot summit, between about 25,000 and 27,000 feet. This is evidence that water did indeed cover "all the high mountains everywhere" (v. 19). However, Mt. Everest may not have been as high before the Flood as it is now. Another less likely possibility, I think, is that the few mountains that are higher than Mt. Ararat, the present altitude of which is just under 17,000 feet, were unknown in Noah's day and in Moses' day (cf. v. 19).[3] The Flood may have, and probably did, create major changes in the topography of the entire earth.

> "… the effects caused by the waters of the great deep (1:2), as they surged about on the earth in process of formation, together with the effects brought about by this great Flood, seem to us an entirely adequate explanation for geological formations of every kind, as they are now to be observed."[4]
>
> "We have shown earlier that the flood narrative points ahead to Moses and the escape of the Hebrews through the Red Sea. This is evidenced

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[1]Ham, et al., p. 15.

[2]Ibid. Cf. also pp. 117-29 for further discussion.

[3]Leupold, 1:302.

[4]Ibid.,1:296.

> again by the term 'dry land' (*haraba*) in our passage (v. 22) rather than the customary 'dry ground' (*yabasa*). This infrequent term occurs eight times, only once more in the Pentateuch at Exod 14:21, where it describes the transformation of the sea into 'dry land' by a 'strong east wind.' This exodus parallel is confirmed by 8:1b, which speaks of God's sending a 'wind' upon the waters. Later Israel identified itself with Noah and the tiny group of survivors who escaped the wicked by the awesome deeds of God."[1]

Critical scholars have believed that verse 24 contradicts verse 12 and so assigns them to the supposed J and P documents respectively.[2] But verse 12 gives the number of days that it rained, and verse 24 gives the number of days that the water covered the earth.

The Lord Jesus affirmed the historicity of "the days of Noah" when He likened them to the end days (Matt. 24:37; Luke 17:26, 27). Peter also used the story of Noah as an illustration of what will happen in the end days (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5; 3:5, 6).

My wife and I took a tour of the Fossil Rim Wildlife Center near Glen Rose, Texas. We discovered early in our tour that our guide was a Christian, and she discovered that we were Christians. At one point in the tour, she explained that the geological formations nearby were the result of millions of years of evolution. She then, surprisingly, turned off the motor of the jeep in which we were riding, and confessed that she didn't really believe what she had just told us. She asked us what we believed. I told her that I believe that the fossil record, and geological stratification, harmonize with the Bible if one believes two things: (1) that God created things with the appearance of age, and (2) that God sent a universal flood that covered the whole earth.

The aftermath of the Flood ch. 8

8:1-3 When Moses wrote that "God remembered" someone (v. 1), in this case Noah, he meant that God extended mercy to him or her by delivering that person from death or destruction (here; cf. 19:29) or from barrenness (30:22).[3] God's rescue of Noah foreshadows His deliverance of Israel in the Exodus (cf. 8:13-14 and Exod. 2:24; 14:21).[4]

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[1]Mathews, pp. 381-82.

[2]See Levenson, p. 20.

[3]Hamilton, p. 299.

[4]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 127; idem, "Genesis," p. 89.

> "The statement that *God remembered Noah* is the turning point of the whole flood narrative, marking the triumph of mercy over judgment."[1]

8:4-5

> "'Ararat,' known as ancient Urartu in Assyrian records, was an extensive territory and bordered the northern Mesopotamian region. It reached its political zenith in the ninth to sixth centuries B.C. Urartu surrounded Lake Van with boundaries taking in southeast Turkey, southern Russia, and northwest Iran. Among the mountains of modern Armenia is the impressive peak known today as Mount Ararat, some seventeen thousand feet in elevation, which the Turks call Byk Ari Da. 'Mount Ararat' as a geographical designation comes from later tradition. During the eleventh to twelfth centuries A.D., it became the traditional site known as the place of Noah's landing. Verse 4, however, does not specify a peak and refers generally to its location as the 'mountains of Ararat.' The search for the ark's artifacts has been both a medieval and a modern occupation; but to the skeptic such evidence is not convincing, and to the believer, while not irrelevant, it is not necessary to faith."[2]

Modern Mt. Ararat lies near the intersection of Turkey, Armenia, and Iran, near the center of the ancient world. From this general region Noah's descendants spread out over the earth.[3]

8:6-9

> "The raven in seeking food settles upon every carcass it sees, whereas the dove will only settle on what is dry and clean."[4]

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[1]Levenson, p. 21.

[2]Mathews, pp. 385-86.

[3]For a history of the evidence that Noah's ark is still on Mt. Ararat, see Boice, 1:263-65. See also Tim LaHaye and John Morris, *The Ark on Mt. Ararat*, or Violet Cummings, *Has Anybody Really Seen Noah's Ark?* Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:3:5; 20:2:2.

[4]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:149.

The dove (v. 8), which is a light-colored, clean animal (Lev. 1:14; 12:6; et al.), in contrast to dark-colored, unclean animals (Lev. 11:15; Deut. 14:14), returns to its home when it finds no place to land.

8:10-12 "The olive tree will put out leaves even under water."[1]

8:13-14 "The six hundred and first year" refers to the years that Noah lived (cf. 7:6).

8:15-17 There are many interesting thematic parallels between God calling Noah out of the ark, and God later calling Abraham out of Ur (cf. 8:15 and 12:1; 8:16 and 12:1; 8:18 and 12:4; 8:20 and 12:7; 9:1 and 12:2; 9:9 and 12:7).

> "Both Noah and Abraham represent new beginnings in the course of events recorded in Genesis. Both are marked by God's promise of blessing and his gift of the covenant."[2]

8:18-19 These verses may seem like needless repetition to the modern reader, but they underline Noah's obedience to God's words, which Moses stressed in the entire Flood narrative.

8:20-21 Noah's "altar" is the first altar mentioned in the Bible. His "burnt offerings" were for worship. Some of the burnt offerings in the Mosaic cultus (system of worship) were for the same purpose. Specifically, a burnt offering made atonement and expressed the offerer's complete personal devotion to God (cf. Lev. 1; Rom. 12:1-2). As the head of the new humanity, Noah, with his sacrifice, represented all humankind.

> "To sacrifice seems as 'natural' to man as to pray; the one indicates what he feels about himself, the other what he feels about God. The one means a felt need of propitiation [a felt need to satisfy God]; the other a felt sense of dependence."[3]

Nevertheless, human nature had not improved. Compare verse 21 with 6:5.

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[1]Ibid. See Fruchtenbaum, p. 170, for a table of the chronology of the Flood.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 91.

[3]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 107.

8:22 God's promise in this verse guarantees a certain degree of reliability in earth's climate system.

> "There are good theological and scientific reasons to think Earth's climate is stable and global warming alarmism is unwarranted. Climate alarmism is distracting people—both Christians and non-Christians—from much weightier issues."[1]

> "Biblical religion explained that the seasonal cycle was the consequence of Yahweh's pronouncement and, moreover, evidence of a divine dominion that transcends the elements of the earth. There is no place for Mother-earth in biblical ideology. Earth owes *its* powers (not her powers!) to the divine command."[2]

God will again judge the wicked catastrophically, and begin a new era of existence with faithful believers: at the Second Coming of Christ and the following Millennium.

2. The Noahic Covenant 9:1-17

Following the Flood, God established human life anew on the earth, showing His high regard for it. He promised to bless humanity with faithfulness, and He prohibited murder. He also promised—with a sign (the rainbow)—that He would not destroy His creation again "by the waters of a flood" (v. 11). Later God make a covenant with Israel after bring the Israelites through other waters of judgment (i.e., the Red Sea).

> "The Noahic covenant's common allusions to 1:1—2:3 show that Noah is the second Adam who heads the new family of humanity, indicating that the blessing continues through the progeny of the Sethite line. Also 8:20—9:17 possesses lexical and thematic connections with the ratification of the Sinai covenant by Moses and the elders (Exod 24:4-18)."[3]

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[1]Jake Hebert, *The Climate Change Conflict*, p. 44.

[2]Mathews, p. 397.

[3]Ibid., p. 398. See also Kenneth Mulzac, "Genesis 9:1-7: Its Theological Connections with the Creation Motif," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12:1 (Spring 2001):65-77.

9:1-3 At this new beginning of the human family God again commanded Noah and his sons to "fill the earth" with their descendants (v. 1; cf. 1:28; 9:7).[1] As with Adam, He also gave them dominion over the animals and permission to eat any animal or "moving thing" (v. 3) for food, with only one prohibition: the animal's blood (cf. 1:26, 28-29; 2:16-17). The phrases "The fear of you" and "the terror of you" express the same idea (v. 2). Evidently at this point animals began to have a greater fear of human beings than they had previously (cf. 1:28). The exceeding sinfulness of mankind that resulted in the Flood did not wipe out God's original commands regarding human reproduction and dominion.

God gave Noah permission to eat animals (v. 3). Until now evidently people had eaten only plants (cf. 1:29). Now humanity received the power of life and death over the animal kingdom ("I have given everything to you").

> "God did not expressly prohibit the eating of meat in the initial stipulation at creation, but by inference 9:3's provision for flesh is used as a dividing mark between the antediluvian and postdiluvian periods. Whether or not early man could eat meat by permission from the beginning, now it is stated formally in the Noahic covenant."[2]

Until the Mosaic Law, God made no distinction between clean and unclean animals with regard to human consumption. Under the Mosaic Law, the Israelites could not eat certain foods. Under the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), we may again eat any foods (Rom. 14:14; 1 Tim. 4:3). These changes illustrate the fact that God has changed some of the rules, for human conduct at various strategic times in history. These changes are significant features that help us identify the various dispensations (economies) by which God has ruled historically.[3]

9:4 God did, however, prohibit the eating of animal "blood" in order to instill respect for the sacredness of life, since blood is a symbol of life, and it is

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[1]See Bernhard W. Anderson, "Creation and Ecology," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 4:1 (January 1983):14-30; Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 155-56.

[2]Mathews, p. 401.

[3]See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 22-64; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 23-59.

the life-giving fluid (cf. Lev. 3:17; 7:2-27; 19:26; Deut. 12:1-24; 1 Sam. 14:32-34; Acts 15:20, 29).

> "Drinking blood as a ritual was well known in antiquity; this command was partly a polemic to set Israel apart from her neighbors."[1]

> "The implication [of New Testament references to eating blood] seems very clear that we are still to respect the sanctity of the blood, since God has appointed it to be a symbol of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore it is not to be consumed by any believer who wishes to be obedient to Scripture."[2]

During my years of seminary teaching I had the privilege of ministering to many students from Africa. Some of them asked me about this prohibition against eating blood, because in their tribal cultures eating solidified blood was practiced. Since Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19), and Paul taught that all foods are acceptable for the Christian (Rom. 14:20; 1 Cor. 8:8; cf. Acts 10:13), I told them that I thought eating blood was all right, unless it was part of a pagan ceremony. In that case participation would probably imply approval of the paganism (cf. 1 Cor. 10:14-33).

God not only reasserted the cultural mandate to reproduce, and subdue the earth, and modified the food law, but He also reasserted the sanctity of human life (cf. ch. 4).

9:5-7 The reason for capital punishment for murder (v. 6) is that God made man in His own image. This is one reason, therefore, that murder is so serious. A person extinguishes a revelation of God—which God takes very personally (cf. Abel's blood "crying out to Me [God] from the ground," 4:10)—when he or she murders someone.[3] Years later the writing

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[1]Currid, p. 24.

[2]Archer, *Encyclopedia of* …, p. 86.

[3]See Elmer L. Gray, "Capital Punishment in the Ancient Near East," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):65-67; Charles C. Ryrie, "The Doctrine of Capital Punishment," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:515 (July-September 1972):211-17; Marshall Shelley, "The Death Penalty: Two Sides of a Growing Issue," *Christianity Today* (March 2, 1984), pp. 14-17; James A. Stahr, "The Death Penalty," *Interest* (March 1984), pp. 2-3; Duane C. Caylor, "Capital Punishment, a different Christian perspective," *Reformed Journal* 36:7 (July 1986):10-12;

prophets announced that God would judge certain foreign nations because they shed human blood without divine authorization (e.g., Amos 1:3, 11, 13; 2:1). God has never countermanded this command, so it is still in force. Before the Flood, the lack of capital punishment led to bloody vendettas (cf. 4:23-24).

The Mosaic Law prescribed the death penalty for several other crimes, in addition to murder (Exod. 21:12; Num. 35:16-31): working on the sabbath (Exod. 35:2), cursing father or mother (Lev. 20:9), adultery (Lev. 20:10), incest (Lev. 20:11-12), sodomy (Lev. 20:13, 15-16), false prophesying (Deut. 13:1-10), Idolatry (Deut. 17:2-7), incorrigible juvenile delinquency (Deut. 21:18-21), rape (Deut. 22:25), keeping an ox that had killed a human being (Exod. 21:29), kidnapping (Exod. 21:16), and intrusion of an alien into a sacred place or office (Num. 1:51; 3:10, 38; 17:7). These punishments ended with the end of the Mosaic Law, but the punishment for murder continued, since it antedated the Mosaic Law.[1]

> "This command laid the foundation for all civil government."[2]
>
> "The human government and the governors that existed previously—as in the city which Cain established (4:17), or in the case of the mighty men (6:4)—existed solely on human authority. Now, however, divine authority was conferred on human government to exercise oversight over those who lived under its jurisdiction."[3]
>
> "I sometimes feel that often the hue and cry against capital punishment today does not so much rest upon humanitarian interest or even an interest in justice, but rather in a failure to understand that man is unique. The simple fact is that Genesis 9:6 is a sociological statement: The reason that the punishment for murder can be so severe is that man, being created in the image of God, has

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Bruce W. Ballard, "The Death Penalty: God's Timeless Standard for the Nations?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:3 (September 2000):471-87; Hamilton, p. 315; Mathews, pp. 403-6.

[1]See Ryrie, *Biblical Answers …,* pp. 23-34.

[2]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:153. See Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 157-58.

[3]Pentecost, p. 46.

> a particular value—not just a theoretical value at some time before the Fall, but such a value yet today."[1]
>
> "… the establishment of the divine sovereign right over human life is expressed apodictically [beyond dispute] and unconditionally. It is absolutely inviolable and, moreover, not for man's sake because of some law of humanity, or 'reverence for life,' but because man is God's possession and was created in God's image."[2]

Often, today, people who believe in capital punishment argue for it on the basis of passages that commanded the Israelites to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, etc. (Exod. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21; cf. Num. 35:33). However that was Mosaic legislation, and Christ ended the Law when He died on the cross (cf. Rom. 10:4; et al.). A better basis for capital punishment is this Noahic legislation.

> "… capital punishment is divinely ordained. For the proper safeguarding of the human race this basic ordinance is laid down. When lawgivers attempt to tamper with this regulation, they are trying to be wiser than the Divine Lawgiver and overthrow the pillars of safety that He Himself provided for the welfare of mankind."[3]

Sometimes those who argue against capital punishment, today, appeal to Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I say to you, do not show opposition against an evil person" (Matt. 5:38-39). Jesus was not cancelling God's command to execute murderers when He said this, but was teaching self-restraint and non-retaliation in interpersonal conflicts, as is clear from the context.

Others sometimes appeal to Jesus' words to the woman taken in adultery: "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on do not sin any longer" (John 8:11). They believe that Jesus was refusing to recommend the death penalty for a person who had committed a capital offense under Israel's law, because He disapproved of capital punishment. Besides

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[1]Schaeffer, *Genesis in …,* pp. 50-51.

[2]von Rad, p. 132.

[3]Leupold, 1:334.

the fact that the inspiration of this passage is highly disputed, Jesus, as the Judge of all mankind, had every right to waive or postpone this woman's judgment.

Jesus, on the other hand also said, in the Sermon on the Mount, "For in the way you judge [deal with people], you will be judged [dealt with], and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you" (Matt. 7:2). And, "all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

The Apostle Paul also taught Christians to submit to the government: that "bear[s] the sword" and is "an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil" (Rom. 13:4). These statements affirm judgment "in kind" for offenders.

The fact that there have been and still are injustices in a legal system does not justify doing away with capital punishment. Rather, the system needs to be corrected so that innocent people are not put to death and guilty people are.[1]

These verses introduce the third dispensation, the dispensation of Human Government. When Noah and his family stepped out of the ark to begin life on earth anew, God laid down new rules for humanity, including a new test. Previously no one had the right to take another human life (cf. 4:10-11, 14-15, 23-24). Now, though man's direct moral responsibility to God continued, God delegated to man certain areas of His authority, including capital punishment (the death penalty for a crime). Man was now to express his obedience to God, not only by obeying God directly, but also by obeying the human authorities that God would set over him, namely, human governors (cf. Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-2).

God now specified that human beings were to practice capital punishment in order to safeguard the sanctity of human life. Human life is a gift from God that people should not dispose of except as God directs. Restraint on man in the preceding dispensation was internal (6:3), God's Spirit working through individual moral responsibility. But now a new external restraint was added: the influence and power of civil government. According to this legislation the most important function of human government is the protection of human life.

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[1]See Anderson, ch. 7: "Capital Punishment," for further discussion.

Unfortunately mankind failed to rule his fellow man righteously. Civil leaders have abused their function as God's viceregents, by ruling for themselves rather than for God. Examples are the failures at Babel (11:9), in Israel's theocracy (2 Chron. 36:15-21), and in "the times of the Gentiles" (Dan. 2:31-45). The glorious reign of Jesus Christ over the earth will supersede man's rule, eventually. The dispensation of Human Government ended, as a specific test of human obedience, when God called Abraham to be His instrument of blessing to the whole world (12:2). Nevertheless mankind's responsibility to govern himself did not end then, but will continue until Christ sets up His kingdom on the earth. Then He will govern.

9:8-11 The Noahic Covenant was a suzerainty treaty that God made with humankind through Noah.[1] In it He promised to "never again" destroy all flesh with "the waters of a flood" (v. 11).

> "A peculiar difficulty arises in v. 10 for those who hold that the Flood was partial and not universal. They must support the strange supposition that God made a covenant with those creatures only which went forth from the ark. Others that never entered the ark must do without the benefits of such a covenant."[2]

9:12-17 The sign that God appointed to remind people of this promise, and to guarantee its veracity, was the rainbow (v. 12-15; cf. 6:12). There may have been rainbows before this pronouncement, but now God attached significance to the rainbow.

> "It is not impossible that with the Flood came altered atmospheric and cloud conditions, for geologic evidence points to an earlier age when a climate uniformly tropical prevailed also in the artic region."[3]

In later years God gave other signs in connection with other covenants: physical circumcision with the Abrahamic Covenant, Sabbath observance with the Mosaic Covenant, and the Lord's Supper with the New Covenant.

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[1]See note on 6:18.

[2]Leupold, 1:338.

[3]Ibid., 1:340.

> "Shining upon a dark ground … it [the rainbow] represents the victory of the light of love over the fiery darkness of wrath. Originating from the effect of the sun upon a dark cloud, it typifies the willingness of the heavenly to penetrate the earthly. Stretched between heaven and earth, it is as a bond of peace between both, and, spanning the horizon, it points to the all-embracing universality of the Divine mercy."[1]
>
> "The rainbow arcs like a battle bow hung against the clouds. (The Hebrew word for rainbow, *qeset*, is also the word for a battle bow.) … The bow is now 'put away,' hung in place by the clouds, suggesting that the 'battle,' the storm, is over. Thus the rainbow speaks of peace."[2]
>
> "A bow bespeaks terror, but this bow has neither string nor arrow, and a bow alone will do little execution. It is a bow, but it is directed upwards, not towards the earth; for the seals of the covenant were intended to comfort, not to terrify."[3]
>
> "God could certainly turn the bow of judgment upon us, because we've broken His law and deserve judgment. But He has turned the bow toward heaven and taken the punishment for us Himself!"[4]

This covenant would remain for "all future generations" (v. 12). People have no responsibility to guarantee the perpetuity of this covenant; God will do all that He promised (v. 9). Observe the recurrence of "I," "Myself," and "My" in these verses. God was making His promise—to all living creatures for all time going forward—very personal. Note that He said that the rainbow would remind Him of His promise; it was primarily a reminder to God and secondarily to human beings. Finally, this covenant is unconditional (v. 9), universal (v. 11), and everlasting (v. 12).[5]

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[1]Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, 1:289-90.

[2]Ross, "Genesis," p. 40. Paragraph division omitted,

[3]Matthew Henry, p. 23.

[4]Wiersbe, p. 55. Italics omitted.

[5]See Thomas, *Genesis*, pp. 89-93.

> "None of the regulations that follow is temporary or ever to be abrogated as long as the present world era continues."[1]
>
> "What distinguishes the Noahic [Covenant] from the patriarchal one and for that matter all others recounted in the Old Testament is its truly universal perspective. It is God's commitment to the whole of humanity and all terrestrial creation—including the surviving animal population."[2]
>
> "The covenant with Noah [6:18; 9:9-16] is entirely unconditional rather than a conditional covenant, as in the Edenic situation. The certainty of the fulfillment of the covenant with Noah rested entirely with God and not with Noah. As this point is somewhat obscured in current discussion on the covenants of Scripture, it is important to distinguish covenants that are conditional from those that are unconditional. Conditional covenants depend on the recipients meeting the conditions imposed by God. Unconditional covenants declare that God's purpose will be fulfilled regardless of an individual's response. The fact that the covenant is one-sided—from God to humankind—does not mean that there is no response on the part of humankind. But the point is that the response is anticipated and does not leave the fulfillment of the covenant in doubt."[3]

The elements of the Noahic Covenant are the following: (1) God held man responsible for protecting the sanctity of human life by orderly governmental rule, even specifying the use of capital punishment to accomplish this (9:5-6; cf. Rom. 13:1-7). (2) God promised not to judge humanity again with a universal flood of water (8:21; 9:11-16), and He confirmed the established order of nature (8:22; 9:2). (3) God permitted people to eat animal flesh, evidently for the first time (9:3-4). (4) God announced that Canaan's descendants would be servants to their

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[1]Leupold, 1:327.

[2]Mathews, p. 62.

[3]Walvoord, "The New …," pp. 188-89.

brethren (9:25-26), Shem's descendants would enjoy a special relationship to the LORD (9:26-27), and Japheth's descendants would become enlarged races (9:27).

"… the author is intentionally drawing out the similarities between God's covenant with Noah and the covenant at Sinai. Why? The answer that best fits with the author's purposes is that he wants to show that God's covenant at Sinai is not a new act of God. The covenant is rather a return to God's original promises. Once again at Sinai, as he had done in the past, God is at work restoring his fellowship with man and bringing man back to himself. The covenant with Noah plays an important role in the author's development of God's restoration of blessing. It lies midway between God's original blessing of all mankind (1:28) and God's promise to bless 'all peoples on the earth' through Abraham (12:1-3)."[1]

3. The curse on Canaan 9:18-29

This pericope presents the characteristics of the three branches of the human family that proceeded from Noah. Moses stressed the themes of blessing and cursing. God "cursed" Canaan with slavery ("A servant of servants he shall be to his brothers," v. 25), because Ham (Canaan's father) showed disrespect of Noah. The LORD blessed Shem and Japheth, because they showed regard for their father's vulnerable condition ("Shem and Japheth … covered the nakedness of their father," v. 23).

"The world seems all set for a new start. The slate has been wiped clean, and we hope that the mistakes of the antediluvians will not be repeated. But no sooner is the blessing pronounced and the eternal covenant confirmed than man lapses again."[2]

9:18-19 These verses introduce what follows.

9:20-24 Evidently Noah became so "drunk" that he took off all his clothes; he "uncovered himself inside his tent" (v. 21). There is no explicit indication that Ham disrobed his father or committed some homosexual act.[3] However, because the expression "saw the nakedness" (v. 22) is sometimes used of sexual intercourse, it is possible that some form of

[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 93.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 206.

[3]See Mathews, pp. 417, 419.

sexual immorality was involved.[1] One explanation is that Ham's sin was that he failed to cover his father's nakedness.[2]

> "His sin was not that he saw his father naked, but that he did not act to protect his father from shame, and in fact exposd him to the ridicule of others. … God commands us to honour our parents (Exod 20:12) and that means that we will hide their nakedness. This nakedness may be the result of moral weakness or from material poverty or from the physical weakness of illness or old age. Whatever form it takes, we are to act to maintian our parents' dignity."[3]

Perhaps Ham failed to respect his father's godliness.[4] Shem's and Japheth's act of covering their father's nakedness was similar to God's act of covering Adam and Eve's nakedness (3:20); it was a godly thing to do.

Noah's shame was not that he drank some "wine" (v. 20), but that he drank to excess and thereby lost his self-control, which resulted in his vulnerability (cf. Eph. 5:18). Certainly this incident should warn the reader of the potential harm of drunkenness, both for the drinker and for his or her family.

> "Whatever the actual nature of his [Noah's] conduct might have been [in becoming drunk and uncovering himself in his tent], the author presents his deed as one of disgrace and shame ('nakedness,' as in Ge 3), and he seems intent on depicting the scene in such a way as to establish parallels between Noah's disgrace (he took of the fruit of his orchard and became naked) and that of Adam and Eve (who took of the fruit of the Garden and saw that they were naked)."[5]

Ham's response to seeing Noah's nakedness (v. 22) represents an early step in the abandonment of morality after the Flood. Ham dishonored Noah, not by seeing him naked, but by his apparent amusement or

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[1]Wolf, pp. 106-7.

[2]Nicholas Odhiambo, "The Nature of Ham's Sin," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:678 (April-June 2013):154-65.

[3]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 25. Paragraph divisions omitted.

[4]Leupold, 1:346.

[5]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 120. See also Mathews, p. 418.

delight in his father's condition (cf. Gen. 19:26; Exod. 33:20; Judg. 13:22; 1 Sam. 6:19). He probably should have covered Noah up himself, rather than drawing his brothers' attention to his father's nakedness and thereby magnifying it.

> "It is difficult for someone living in the modern world to understand the modesty and discretion of privacy called for in ancient morality. Nakedness in the OT was from the beginning a thing of shame for fallen man [3:7] … the state of nakedness was both undignified and vulnerable. To see someone uncovered was to bring dishonor and to gain advantage for potential exploitation."[1]

> "The sons of Noah are here shown to belong to two groups of humankind, those who like Adam and Eve hide the shame of their nakedness and those who like Ham, or rather the Canaanites, have no sense of their shame before God. The one group, the line of Shem, will be blessed (9:26); but the other, the Canaanites (not the Hamites), can only be cursed (9:25)."[2]

> "Shem, the father of Abraham, is the paradigm of later Israel; and Ham of their archenemies, Egypt and Canaan (10:6). Lying behind this is the ancient concept of corporate personality. Because of this unity of father-son, the character of the father is anticipated in the deeds of the sons. Hebrew theology recognized that due to parental influence future generations usually committed the same acts as their fathers whether for ill or good. In this case the curse is directed at Ham's son as Ham's just deserts for the disrespect he had toward his own father, Noah."[3]

Ham's action may have also involved an attempt to take the leadership of the family from Noah.[4] Shem and Japheth's act of covering their father's

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[1]Allen P. Ross, "The Curse of Canaan," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:547 (July-September 1980):230.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 130.

[3]Mathews, p. 421.

[4]See Jordan, pp. 47-52.

nakedness, however, imitated God, who covered Adam and Eve's nakedness in the garden (3:21).

Brian Peterson discussed 17 instances of sexual aggression in Genesis, apart from polygamy, that resulted from the Fall. Six of these were men against women, three men against men, three women against women, and five women against men. Ham's sin against Noah is the first on his list.[1]

9:25-27 This oracle (divine pronouncement) is the first one in which Moses recorded a human uttering a curse. It is a prophecy from God announcing divine judgment on Ham's descendants. As explained above, Noah saw, with prophetic insight, that Ham's son Canaan would repeat and further his father's sin. Noah, as a prophet, announced the future of this particular man's descendants (cf. Gen. 49; Deut. 33; et al.).

> "For his breach of the family, his [Ham's] own family would falter."[2]

The Canaanites became infamous for their shameless depravity in sexual matters.[3] When Joshua invaded their land, he proved to be God's instrument of punishment for the Canaanites. Moses' mention of Noah's curse on Canaan would have encouraged his original Israelite readers by reminding them that the people who occupied the land that they were about to enter were cursed. Likewise, his mention of Noah's blessing of Shem, the ancestor of Abram and the Israelites, would have encouraged them (v. 26).

There is no basis for the popular notion that this oracle doomed the Hamites, who settled mainly in Africa, to a position of inferiority or slavery among the other peoples of the world. "Canaan," and only his branch of the family, are the subject of this prophecy, not Ham and all his descendants. The curse on Canaan was a prophecy of what God would do to Canaan's branch of the human family, because the sinful attitude and act of Ham would eventually come to full flower in his son Canaan. Noah,

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[1]See Brian N. Peterson, "Male and Female Sexual Exploitation in Light of the Book of Genesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62:4 (December 2019):693-703.

[2]Kidner, p. 104.

[3]See Charles Pfeiffer, *Ras Shamra and the Bible*.

as a prophet, looked down the corridors of time, with God's revelation, and saw what would happen.

> "There are no grounds in our passage for an ethnic reading of the 'curse' as some have done, supposing that some peoples are inferior to others. Here Genesis looks only to the social and religious life of Israel's ancient rival Canaan, whose immorality defiled their land and threatened Israel's religious fidelity (cf. Lev 18:28; Josh 23). It was not an issue of ethnicity but of the wicked practices that characterized Canaanite culture."[1]

The Canaanites are now extinct.

> "With the defeat of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar in 572 B.C. the Canaanites/Phoenicians ceased to be of importance in biblical history."[2]

> "In dealing with the Canaanites and their religious ideas we must never forget that Canaanites and Phoenicians were one people, so far as language and cultural tradition went."[3]

The prophecy about Japheth living in the tents of Shem (v. 27) may have been fulfilled when Alexander the Great defeated the Persians and took control of Canaan.[4]

9:28-29 These verses conclude this story, as verses 18 and 19 introduced it.

The general lesson of this passage (vv. 18-29) is that God blesses those who behave righteously, but He curses those who abandon moral restraint. In view of what studies on the effects of viewing pornography have taught us, it should be no surprise that the root of the depraved Canaanite culture was looking at someone's nakedness. We need

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[1]Mathews, p. 423. See also Charles C. Ryrie, *You Mean the Bible Teaches That …*, p. 60; Thomas Figart, *A Biblical Perspective on the Race Problem*, p. 55; and O. Palmer Robertson, "Current Critical Questions Concerning the 'Curse of Ham' (Gen 9:20-27)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:2 (June 1998):177-88.

[2]*The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Canaan, Canaanite," by A. K. Helmbold, 1:297. See also *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Canaan, Canaanites," by Kenneth A. Kitchen, pp. 183-86; and *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Canaan, Canaanites," by Merrill F. Unger, pp. 170-73.

[3]W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel,* p. 68.

[4]See Archer, *Encyclopedia of …*, p. 87.

to be very careful about gazing at nudity. It can lead to an addiction that results in complete corruption and finally ends in divine judgment.

> "Instructively, the first three heroes of faith listed in Hebrews are from Genesis 4—6: Abel, Enoch, and Noah. All believed God, but their destinies were significantly different. Abel believed God and died. Enoch believed God and did not die. Noah believed God, and everyone else died in the Flood; eventually he died a natural death at the good old age of 950 years. We cannot dictate where faith will lead. The human tendency is to see only Enoch as the example of faith, but Abel is also given as our example. What all three have in common is that they walked by faith and pleased God. That faith is an example to us."[1]

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

There are many similarities between the Creation story and the Flood story.[2]

	The First Beginning: Adam and Eve	**The Second Beginning: Noah and His Family**
God's Action	God created Adam and Eve from the dust (2:7).	God saved Noah and his family from destruction (7:23).
God's Provision	God planted the Garden and gave Adam and Eve plants to eat (1:29-31; 2:8).	God saved animal species along with Noah and gave Noah and his family animals for food (6:17-22).
God's Blessing	Be fruitful and multiply; have dominion over all living things (1:28).	Be fruitful and multiply; all living things will be filled with fear and dread of you (9:1, 2).

[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 155.

[2]The following chart is adapted from *The Nelson …,* p. 18.

God's Covenant	[You have great freedom, but if you disobey Me you will die (2:17).]	Never again will God destroy the earth with a flood; He will always provide the annual seasons (8:21, 22; 9:11).
God's Prohibition	Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:16).	Do not shed the blood of any person (without divine authorization; 9:5, 6).
God's Warning	Those who eat of this tree will die (2:17).	Of those who shed blood God will demand a reckoning (9:5).
God's Evaluation	It is very good (1:31).	Humanity's heart is evil (8:21).

E. WHAT BECAME OF NOAH'S SONS 10:1—11:9

This section gives, in some detail, the distribution of Noah's descendants over the earth after the Flood (cf. 9:18-19). Part of God's plan to bring blessing to humankind involved dividing the human race by languages, territories, and nations.

This fourth *toledot* section (10:1—11:9) brings the inspired record of primeval (earliest) events to a climax and provides a transition to the patriarchal narratives. All the nations of the world, in their various lands, with their different languages, descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Of special interest to the original Israelite readers were the Canaanites and the other ancient Near Eastern powers.

> "From this section we learn that the 'blessing' is for all peoples because all nations have their source in the one man, Noah, whom God favored. Moreover, the disunity among Noah's offspring that resulted from the tower event [11:1-9] did not prevent the blessing God had envisioned for humanity."[1]

> "The Tower of Babel incident (11:1-9), though following the table in the present literary arrangement, actually precedes chronologically the dispersal of the nations. This interspersal of narrative (11:1-9) separates the two genealogies of Shem (10:21-31; 11:10-26), paving the way for the particular linkage between the Terah (Abraham) clan and the Shemite lineage (11:27). The story of the tower also looks ahead by anticipating

[1]Mathews, p. 427.

> the role that Abram (12:1-3) will play in restoring the blessing to the dispersed nations."[1]

1. The table of nations ch. 10

This table reinforces the fact that Yahweh created all peoples (cf. Deut. 32:8; Amos 9:7; Acts 17:26). Like the genealogy in chapter 5, this one traces 10 main entities, and the last one named in each case had three sons.[2]

This chapter contains one of the oldest, if not the oldest, ethnological table in the literature of the ancient world. It reveals a remarkable understanding of the ethnic and linguistic situation following the Flood. Almost all the names in this chapter have been found in archaeological discoveries in the last two centuries. Many of them appear in subsequent books of the Old Testament.

> "… the names in chapter 10 are presented in a dissimilar manner: the context may be that of an individual (e.g., Nimrod), a city (e.g., Asshur), a people (e.g., Jebusites) or a nation (e.g., Elam). A failure to appreciate this mixed arrangement of Genesis 10 has led, we believe, to numerous unwarranted conclusions. For example, it should not be assumed that all the descendants of any one of Noah's sons lived in the same locality, spoke the same language, or even belonged to a particular race."[3]

> "The table of nations is a 'horizontal' genealogy rather than a 'vertical' one (those in chaps. 5 and 11 are vertical). Its purpose is not primarily to trace ancestry; instead it shows political, geographical, and ethnic affiliations among tribes for various reasons, most notable being holy war. Tribes shown to be 'kin' would be in league together. Thus this table aligns the predominant tribes in and around the land promised to Israel. These names include founders of tribes, clans, cities, and territories."[4]

In contrast to the genealogy in chapter 5, this one lists no ages. It contains place and group names, which are spoken of as the antecedents of other places or groups, as well as the names of individuals. God built nations from families. Thus it is quite clearly a

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[1]Ibid., p. 428.

[2]See Fruchtenbaum, p. 193, for a table that lists the individuals named in relation to one another.

[3]Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*, p. 76. Paragraph division omitted. See pages 76-79 for discussion of each name in chapter 10. See also *Wenham, Genesis 1—15, pp. 216-32;* or *The NET2 Bible* notes on these verses.

[4]Ross, "Genesis," p. 42.

selective list, not comprehensive. The writer's choice of material shows that he had a particular interest in presenting Israel's neighbors. Israel would deal with, displace, or subjugate many of these peoples, as well as the Canaanites (ch. 9). They all had a common origin.

10:1 Evidently 70 nations descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth: 26 from Shem, 30 from Ham, and 14 from Japheth (cf. Deut. 32:8). Seventy became a traditional round number for a large group of descendants.[1] Jacob's family also comprised 70 people (46:27), which may indicate that Moses viewed Israel as a microcosm of humanity, as he presented it here. God set the microcosm (Israel) apart to bless the macrocosm (all of humanity).

10:2-5 Japheth's descendants settled north, east, and west of Ararat.[2] Their distance from the land of Israel probably explains the brief treatment that they received in this list, compared with that of the Hamites and Shemites. The "coastlands" (v. 5) are the inland areas and the northern Mediterranean coastlands on the present European shore, from Turkey to Spain. The dispersion of the nations "according to … language" (v. 5) took place after Babel (ch. 11) all along these coasts, as well as elsewhere.

> "The Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian dialects constitute the older East Semitic branch of this family, while Hebrew, Aramaic, Phoenician, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic are included in the West Semitic."[3]

> "*Ashkenaz* [v. 3] refers to the Scythians, who occupied the area to the north of the Black Sea (cf. Jer. 51.27). In the Middle Ages, Jews reused the term to refer to Germany and, later, to the Jewish communities of central and northeastern Europe."[4]

10:6-20 Ham's family moved east, south, and southwest into Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Africa. Canaan's descendants (vv. 15-21) did not migrate as far

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 213.

[2]For helpful diagrams and maps showing the generational relationships of the descendants of Japheth, Ham, and Shem respectively, see Mathews, pp. 440, 444, and 459; Currid, p. 26; and Levenson, p. 25.

[3]Finegan, p. 46.

[4]Levenson, p. 24.

south, but settled in Palestine.[1] ("Palestine" [land of the "Philistines," who settled in "Philistia"] is a later name for the land of Canaan.[2]) The length of these Hamite Canaanite lists indicates the importance of these people and places in Israel's later history. Note the absence of the common sevens in the structuring in Canaan's genealogy, suggesting chaos.[3]

It is possible that Sargon of Agade, whom many secular historians regard as the first ruler of Babylon, may be the "Nimrod" (meaning "We Shall Rebel") of verses 8 through 10.[4] Many people in ancient times had more than one name. His description as "a mighty one" (v. 8, Heb. *gibbor*) means a "tyrant" or "despot." He evidently was "a mighty hunter" (v. 9) of men, not just beasts.[5] Reference to him probably foreshadows 11:1 through 9, which describes what took place in Babylon. The Greeks connected the constellation Orion with Nimrod.[6] A counterpart to Nimrod is the hero of the Babylonian flood tale: Gilgamesh.[7] The ''land of Shinar" (v. 10) is another name for Mesopotamia, the region between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

> "The influx of the Amorites in Canaan is disputed. It does not necessarily follow that the original Amorites, attributed to Hamite descent in Genesis 10, were a Semitic people since the term 'Amorite' in ancient Near Eastern documents does not serve as a definitive source for designating ethnicity. Moreover, linguistic evidence does not always assure true ethnic derivation."[8]

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[1]For explanation of the locations the individuals, cities, tribes, and nations cited in this table, see Allen P. Ross, "The Table of Nations in Genesis 10—Its Content," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:549 (January-March 1981):23-31.

[2]See Finegan, p. 135.

[3]Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 164-65.

[4]See Finegan, pp. 46-48; Oliver R. Blosser, "Was Nimrod-Sargon of Agade, the First King of Babylon?" *It's About Time* (June 1987), pp. 10-13; Douglas Petrovich, "Identifying Nimrod of Genesis 10 with Sargon of Akkad by Exegetical and Archaeological Means," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:2 (June 2013):273-305.

[5]Leupold, 1:367.

[6]See Hislop, pp. 13, 57.

[7]See Davis, *Genesis and …*, pp. 135-39.

[8]Mathews, p. 456. See also *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Amorites," by A. R. Millard, pp. 31-32.

10:21-31 Shem's posterity settled mainly to the northeast and southeast of the Canaanites. This branch of the human family is also important in the Genesis record of Israel's history.

"Eber" (v. 21) is probably the origin of the name "Hebrew," a racial term by which the Israelites' neighbors referred to them.[1] "Israel" is a national term. Later these names were used as synonyms.[2]

> "According to Gen. x. 22, Shem had five sons, Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram, whose descendants peopled and gave name to the following countries:—The descendants of Elam occupied the country called Elymais, between the Lower Tigris and the mountains of Iran; of Asshur, Assyria, lying to the north—the hilly country between the Tigris and the mountain range of Iran; of Arphaxad, the country of *Arrapachitis* on the Upper Tigris, on the eastern banks of that river, where the highlands of Armenia begin to descend. Lud, the father of the Lydians, is the representative of the Semites who went westward to Asia Minor; and Aram of the Semites who spread along the middle course of the Euphrates to the Tigris in the east, and to Syria in the west."[3]

> "When the two lines of Shem are compared (10:21-31; 11:10-26), there is a striking divergence at the point of Eber's descendants, Peleg and Joktan [v. 25]. In chap. 10 Peleg is dropped altogether after his mention, while the nonelect line of Joktan is detailed. It is left to the second lineage in chap. 11 to trace out Peleg's role as ancestral father of Abraham "[4]

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[1]See Matthew Akers, "What's in a Name? An Examination of the Usage of the Term 'Hebrew' in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55:4 (December 2012):685-96.

[2]Yates, p. 15.

[3]C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, p. 75.

[4]Mathews, p. 459.

> Some creationists believe that the division of the earth in Peleg's day (v. 25) refers to continental drift, but many creationists do not hold this view.[1]

> "This Table of Nations, then, traces affiliation of tribes to show relationships, based on some original physical connections. It is clear that the writer is emphasizing the development of these nations that were of primary importance to Israel (*yalad* sections) within the overall structure of the Table (*b'ne* arrangement)."[2]

> "In general, the descendants of Ham settled in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean coast, the descendants of Shem in Mesopotamia and Arabia, and the descendants of Japheth in Europe and the greater area of Asia Minor."[3]

> "The three geographical arcs of the branches intersect at the center—that is, Canaan, Israel's future homeland."[4]

This chapter of Genesis reveals that it was God's plan to bless the human race by dividing the family of man as a result of language, location, and leadership differences. God formerly blessed the earth by dividing the light from the darkness, the earth from the heavens, and the land from the seas (ch. 1).

> "By correlating the number of nations [in ch. 10, i.e., 70] with the number of the seed of Abraham [in 46:27, i.e., 70], he [the writer] holds Abraham's 'seed' before the reader as a new humanity and Abraham himself as a kind of second Adam, the 'father of many nations' (Ge 17:5)."[5]

> "… his intention is not to give an exhaustive list but rather a representative list, one which, for him, is obtained in the number seven."[6]

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[1]For a creationist discussion of the subject of continental drift, see Ham, et al., pp. 11-12, 41-63; David M. Fouts, "Peleg in Gen 10:25," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:1 (March 1998):17-21.

[2]Allen P. Ross, "The Table of Nations in Genesis 10—Its Structure," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:548 (October-December 1980):350. Paragraph division omitted. See also Eugene H. Merrill, "The Peoples of the Old Testament according to Genesis 10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:613 (January-March 1997):3-22.

[3]Currid, p. 26.

[4]Mathews, p. 433. See Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, map 15.

[5]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 131.

[6]Ibid., p. 132.

> "The table's figure of 'seventy' for the world's nations is alluded to by Jesus in the sending forth of the seventy disciples, as recounted by Luke (10:1-16). Here the evangelist emphasizes the mission of the church in its worldwide evangelistic endeavors."[1]

2. The dispersion at Babel 11:1-9

This pericope is a flashback that explains the division of the earth in Peleg's time ("in his days the earth was divided," 10:25). The main emphasis in this section is not the building of the tower of Babel, but the dispersion of the people. We can see this in the literary structure of the passage.[2]

A All the earth had one language (v. 1)

B there (v. 2)

C one to another (v. 3)

D Come, let's make bricks (v. 3)

E Let's make for ourselves (v. 4)

F a city and a tower

G And the LORD came down to see (v. 5; cf. 8:1)

F' the city and the tower (v. 5)

E' that the humans built (v. 5)

D' Come, let's confuse (v. 7)

C' everyone the language of his neighbor (v. 7)

B' from there (v. 8)

A' (confused) the language of the whole earth (v. 9)

When the people of the world, united by a common language, attempted to preserve their unity, and to make a name for themselves by building a tower that would reach into heaven—hoping to achieve God-like power and authority—Yahweh frustrated their

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[1]Mathews, p. 437. See also Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part II. From Noah to Abraham*, pp. 175-80.

[2]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 235. Cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, p. 22; Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 234-38; Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 176-77.

plan and scattered everyone over the face of the whole earth by frustrating their ability to communicate in the language that bound them together.

> "The tower of Babel story is the last great judgment that befell mankind in primeval times. Its place and function in Gen 1—11 may be compared to the fall in Gen 3 and the sons of God episode in Gen 6:1-4, both of which triggered divine judgments of great and enduring consequence."[1]

This story explains to God's people how God scattered the nations and why. Sending judgment upon them for trying to establish a world order in opposition to divine rule (human government run amuck), God struck the thing that bound people together, namely, their common language. Chronologically the Babel incident preceded the dispersal that Moses described with genealogies in chapter 10.

> "By placing the Tower of Babel incident just prior to the patriarchal stories, the biblical writer is suggesting, in the first place, that post-Flood humanity is as iniquitous as pre-Flood humanity. Rather than sending something as devastating as a flood to annihilate mankind, however, God now places his hope in a covenant with Abraham as a powerful solution to humanity's sinfulness. Thus problem (ch. 11) and solution (ch. 12) are brought into immediate juxtaposition, and the forcefulness of this structural move would have been lost had ch. 10 intervened between the two."[2]

> "As it is presently situated in the text, the account of the founding of Babylon falls at the end of the list of fourteen names from the line of Joktan (10:26-29). At the end of the list of the ten names of Peleg's line, however, is the account of the call of Abraham (11:27—12:10). So two great lines of the descendants of Shem divide in the two sons of Eber (10:25). One ends in Babylon, the other in the Promised Land."[3]

> "By placing the narrative between two genealogies of 'Shem,' the author establishes a relationship between the central point of the narrative—'Let us make a name ['Shem'] for ourselves' 911:4)—and the central point of the patriarchal narratives—'and God said, "I will make your name ["Shem"] great"' (12:2a). Thus the genealogies of 'Shem' provide a

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 242.

[2]Hamilton, pp. 347-48. See J. Sasson, "The 'Tower of Babel' As a Clue to the Redactional Structuring of the Primeval History [Gen 1—11:9]," in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon*, pp. 218-19.

[3]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 134.

> narrative link between the story of the fall of Babylon (11:1-9) and the account of the call of Abraham (12:1-3)."[1]

One writer argued for the identification of the tower of Babel incident with the demise and dispersion of the last great Sumerian dynasty centered at Ur.[2]

> "Although no record of the attempted building of the tower at Babel and the confusion of tongues has been found in cuneiform literature [as of 1894], a tradition of such an event was current outside of Israel, and was ascribed by the transmitters of it to Babylonia."[3]

11:1-2 Some of the Hamites migrated "east" (v. 2, specifically southeast) to the plain of Shinar (cf. 10:10). This was in the Mesopotamian basin (modern Iraq). (Some translations have them going *from* the east (e.g., ESV, NKJV, HCSV), but the Hebrew text reads literally "and he was as to move them to east and they found …").

> "The Hebrews used the name Shinar, originally a region in northern Mesopotamia, to designate the whole region of Mesopotamia."[4]

> "In light of such intentional uses of the notion of 'eastward' within the Genesis narratives, we can see that here too the author intentionally draws the story of the founding of Babylon into the larger scheme at work throughout the book. It is a scheme that contrasts God's way of blessing (e.g., Eden and the Promised Land) with man's own attempt to find the 'good.' In the Genesis narratives, when man goes 'east,' he leaves the land of blessing (Eden and the Promised Land) and goes to a land where the greatest of his hopes will turn to ruin (Babylon and Sodom).[5]

> "Following the Ararat departure, the people migrated southeast to the lower Euphrates valley. Genesis 1—11

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[1]Idem, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 25.

[2]Paul T. Penley, "A Historical Reading of Genesis 11:1-9: The Sumerian Demise and Dispersion under the Ur III Dynasty," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:4 (December 2007):693-714.

[3]Davis, *Genesis and …,* pp. 142-43.

[4]Yates, p. 15.

[5]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 104.

> then has come full circle from 'Eden' to 'Babel,' both remembered for the expulsion of their residents."[1]

11:3-4 The motivation for building "a city" (cf. 4:17, Cain's "city") with its "tower" was to make the builders "a name" (v. 4; i.e., to establish world domination, authority, and power in God's place; cf. Ps. 14:1). Ironically, history has not preserved the name of a single one of Babel's builders.[2] Later God would make a "name" for Abram (12:2-3).[3] The object of this endeavor was evidently to establish a center by which the builders might maintain their unity, achieve God-like authority, and gain world domination, with a one-world government.

> "A defensive wall is the hallmark of a city (see 4:17). Cities in the ancient Near East were not designed to be lived in but were intended for religious and public purposes."[4]

God desired unity for humankind, but one that He created, not one founded on a social state.[5] The builders wanted to "empower" themselves. Both motive and object were ungodly. God had instructed man to "fill the earth" (1:28), to spread over the whole planet.

The builders of the "tower" seem to have intended that it serve as a memorial or landmark, among other things. It was probably a ziggurat used for religious purposes.

> "Mesopotamian religion claimed that their cities were of divine parentage. A symbol of this obsession with divinity among the Mesopotamians was the ziggurat (Akk. *ziqqurratu*) that was erected as early as the third millennium B.C. The ziggurat was a step-ladder edifice, made up of mud bricks, whose bottom was square or rectangular. The precise meaning of the structure is unknown, though it is widely agreed that it formed a

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[1]Mathews, p. 467.

[2]Matthew Henry, p. 25.

[3]See Seth D. Postell, "Reading Genesis, Seeing Moses: Narrative Analogies with Moses in the Book of Genesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65:3 (September 2022):437-55, for comparisons of the major characters and some events in Genesis and those in Exodus through Deuteronomy.

[4]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 179.

[5]Mathews, p. 473.

stairway between the gods and earth (cf. Gen 28:12). At the foot of the ziggurat as well as the pinnacle was a temple area serving as a habitation for the god. Ziggurats may have been considered an earthly imitation of the heavenly residence of the gods."[1]

"A small pavement of rough limestone blocks at Uruk [also known as Erech and Warka, on the Euphrates River about midway between the ruins of Babylon and the Persian Gulf] is the oldest stone construction in Mesopotamia, and here, too, is found the first ziggurat. The Assyrian-Babylonian word *ziqquratu* comes from the verb *zaqaru* meaning 'to be high, or raised up,' and hence signifies the top of a mountain, or a staged tower. Such a tower provided a sort of artificial mountain in the flat Mesopotamian plain as a high place for a god whose shrine stood on its summit. From its first appearance here at Uruk, it was ever afterward the most characteristic feature of temple architecture in Mesopotamia, and the locations of more than two dozen such structures are known today."[2]

"Mud-brick with asphaltic tar [v. 3], rather than stone and mortar, were the regular building materials of ancient Mesopotamia."[3]

"The ziggurat which stood at Babylon in the days of Hammurabi and was known as Etemenanki, 'the House of the Terrace-platform of Heaven and Earth,' became more famous [than the ziggurat at Ur] and was remembered in biblical tradition as the Tower of Babel, but the zuiggurat [*sic* ziggurat] at Ur is today the best preserved of all monuments of this type and therefore the best fitted to give a vivid impression of their character (Fig. 19)."[4]

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[1]Ibid., pp. 470-71. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 179.

[2]Finegan, p. 23.

[3]Longman, "Genesis," p. 92.

[4]Finegan, p. 50.

Verse 4 identifies two basic errors of humankind: (1) the determination to get to God by one's own works rather than admitting that this is impossible and trusting in God to make entrance into His presence possible—in short, salvation by works ("let's build … [to] reach into heaven"), and (2) the determination to glorify self rather than God ("let's make a name for ourselves"). These errors have marked humankind throughout history.

11:5-6 The builders undoubtedly expected to ascend to heaven to meet God. Instead, God descended to earth to meet them ("The LORD came down to see the city and the tower"), another anthropomorphism, here referring to God's omniscience (total knowledge). If God had allowed this project to continue, the results would have been even worse, and more serious, than they were at this time. The sin of the builders was their refusal to obey God-given directives.

> "Depraved humanity are united in their spiritual endeavor to find, through technology, existential meaning apart from God and the means to transgress its boundaries. Unless God intervenes and divides them by confounding their speech, nothing can stop human beings in their overweening pride and their desire for autonomy."[1]

The construction of cities by itself was not sinful. God chose Jerusalem for His people, and He will create the New Jerusalem for believers to inhabit. It is the pride and security that people place in their cities—and their arrogant independence from Himself, the Most High God—that God disapproves of.

> "Human beings must neve forget that they are mortal (6:3) and that God is the Creator, whose position they should not try to usurp. God's words in 11:6 have great relevance to the whole issue of cloning. While he encourages us to advance our knowledge of the world he has created, we must not impinge on his prerogatives."[2]

The movement of humanity in our day is again, or still, to unite and so achieve security and independence apart from God. This will culminate,

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 182.

[2]Assohoto and Ngewa, p 27.

the Book of Revelation reveals, in a one-world government under the leadership of Antichrist. The present breaking down of racial, linguistic, and geo-political distinctions is evidence of this movement. From the human viewpoint this unity seems good, but from the divine perspective it is further evidence of rebellion against God. He will judge it one day, when Jesus Christ returns to the earth to terminate Antichrist and to rule for 1,000 years (Rev. 19:11—20:6).

11:7 God's soliloquy ("Come, let Us go down ") in this verse mimics the language of the tower builders in verse 4 ("Come, let's build"; cf. 1:26). The confusion of language probably involved more than just the introduction of new words, since the original single language produced the thousands that we have today.

> "If language is the audible expression of emotions, conceptions, and thoughts of the mind, the cause of the confusion or division of the one human language into different national dialects might be sought in an effect produced upon the human mind, by which the original unity of emotion, conception, thought, and will was broken up. This inward unity had no doubt been already disturbed by sin, but the disturbance had not yet amounted to a perfect breach."[1]

Some scholars believe that this judgment resulted in ethnic and racial distinctions in humankind eventually. They believe that the Table of Nations in chapter 10 may also imply this.[2]

11:8 The resultant confusion led to a scattering of the people "over the face of all the earth" (cf. v. 9). God did not allow human rebellion to reach the level that it did before the Flood. He forced people to do what they refused to do voluntarily, namely, scatter over the face of the earth. This is the third great judgment on sinful humanity in this first major section of Genesis (chs. 1—11), the first two being Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden, and the second being the Flood.

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[1]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:174-75.

[2]See Merrill, "The Peoples …," p. 22.

> "They [the rebellious builders] deserved death, but are only banished or transported; for the patience of God is very great towards a provoking world."[1]

Some interpreters take the confusion of languages to have been a local phenomenon only. One writer believed that lightning struck the tower of Babel, and the confusion of speech that followed resulted from a scrambling of the electrical circuits in the brains of those struck.[2] This is an interesting idea but impossible to prove or disprove. Most interpreters, however, regard this event as the source of the major language groups in the world today.

> "It should be observed that the change of speech is not asserted to have been sudden, though it may have been; much less is it asserted that all differences observable in languages the world over, or even those characteristic differences which distinguish the great families of language, owe their origin to the confusion at Babel. The event at Babel must not be minimized, neither must it be exaggerated."[3]

11:9 "Babel" sounds like the Hebrew word for "confuse" (*balal*), and it means "the gate of gods" in Akkadian.

> "… Gen 11:1-9, the tower of Babel story, is a satire on the claims of Babylon to be the center of civilization and its temple tower the gate of heaven (E[numa]E[lish] 6:50-80): Babel does not mean gate of God, but 'confusion' and 'folly.' Far from its temple's top reaching up to heaven, it is so low that God has to descend from heaven just to see it! (11:4-9)."[4]

This was the original "Babylon" (the Greek form of the name "Babel"), that forever afterward was the city most characterized in the Bible by rebellion against God's authority, and the desire to earn salvation by works, idolatry, and self-assertion. It stands as a symbol of organized rebellion against God elsewhere in Scripture, and God will

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[1]Matthew Henry, p. 25.

[2]James E. Strickling, "The Tower of Babel and the Confusion of Tongues," *Kronos* (Fall 1982), pp. 53-62.

[3]Davis, *Genesis and …*, p. 149.

[4]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. xlviii-xlix.

eventually destroy it (Rev. 17 and 18). The spirit of Babel is strong throughout the world today.[1]

> "Man certainly did not expect his project to take such a turn. He did not anticipate that the name he wanted to make for himself would refer to a place of noncommunication."[2]

The story of Babel is important for several reasons:

1. It explains the beginning of, and the reason for, the various languages of humankind.

2. It probably explains the origin of the "races" within humankind.

> "The separate language groups no longer could inter-marry freely with the rest of mankind. As in-breeding and lack of access to the larger pool of genes occurred, ethnic characteristics developed. Furthermore, each local environment tended to favor selection of certain traits, and eliminate the others. Ethnic characteristics, such as skin color, arose from loss of genetic variability, not from origin of new genes through mutation as suggested by evolution."[3]
>
> "The concept of race is an evolutionary idea (Acts 17:26). All humans possess the same color, just different amounts of it. We all descended from Noah and Adam."[4]
>
> "The Bible doesn't tell us what skin color our first parents had, but, from a design point of view, the 'middle [color]' makes a great beginning. Starting with medium-skinned parents (**AaBb**), it would take only one generation to produce all the variation we see in human skin color today. In fact, this is the normal situation in India today. Some Indians are as dark as the darkest Africans, and some—perhaps a brother or sister in the same family—as light as the lightest Europeans. I once knew a family from India that

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[1]See Everett H. Peterson, "Prehistory and the Tower of Babel," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 19:2 (September 1982):87-90.

[2]J. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, p. 18.

[3]A quotation for a plaque explaining an exhibit at the Institute for Creation Research Museum, Santee, Calif., which I observed on May 21, 1997.

[4]Ibid.

included members with every major skin color you could see anywhere in the world."[1]

"But now notice what happens if human groups were isolated after creation. If those with very dark skins (**AABB**) migrate into the same areas and/or marry only those with very dark skins, then all their children will have very dark skins. (**AABB** is the only possible combination of **AB** egg and sperm cells, which are the only types that can be produced by **AABB** parents.) Similarly, parents with very light skins (**aabb**) can have only very light-skinned children, since they don't have any **A** or **B** genes to pass on. Even certain medium-skinned parents (**AAbb or aaBB**) can get 'locked-in' to having only medium-skinned children, like the Orientals, Polynesians, and some of my ancestors, the Native Americans."[2]

"Where people with different skin colors get together again (as they do in the West Indies, for example), you find the full range of variation again—nothing less, but nothing more either, than what we started with. Clearly, all this is *variation within kind*."[3]

"What happened as the descendants of medium-skinned parents produced a variety of descendants? Evolution? Not at all. Except for albinism (the mutational loss of skin color), the human gene pool is no bigger and no different now than the gene pool present at creation. As people multiplied, the genetic variability *built right into* the first created human beings came to visible expression. The darkest Nigerian and the lightest Norwegian, the tallest Watusi and the shortest Pygmy, the highest soprano and the lowest bass could have been present right from the beginning in two quite average-looking people. Great variation in size, color, form, function, etc., would also be present in the two created ancestors of all the other kinds (plants and animals) as well."[4]

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[1]G. Parker, pp. 111.

[2]Ibid., pp. 111, 113.

[3]Ibid., p. 113.

[4]Ibid., pp. 113-114.

> "Evolutionists *assume* that all life started from one or a few chemically evolved life forms with an extremely small gene pool. For evolutionists, enlargement of the gene pool by selection of random mutations is a slow, tedious process that burdens each type with a 'genetic load' of harmful mutations and evolutionary leftovers. Creationists *assume* each created kind began with a large gene pool, designed to multiply and fill the earth with all its tremendous ecologic and geographic variety. (See Genesis, chapter 1.)"[1]
>
> "Many thinkers labor under the illusion that evolution is an empirical science when in fact it is a philosophy."[2]
>
> "We can never have too big a conception of God, and the more scientific knowledge (in whatever field) advances, the greater becomes our idea of His vast and complicated wisdom."[3]

3. The Babel story demonstrates the inclination of fallen man to rebel against God, and to try to provide for his needs in his own way, rather than by trusting and obeying God.

4. It also illustrates that rebellion against God results in: (1) broken fellowship between God and man, and (2) failure to realize God's intention for man in His creation, namely, that he rule the earth effectively.

5. Additionally, it provides the historical background for what follows in Genesis, since Abraham, the great patriarch and father of the Hebrews, came from Mesopotamia.

> "Irony is seen in the beginning and the ending of this passage. The group at Babel began as the whole earth (11:1), but now they were spread over the whole earth (11:9). By this time the lesson is clarified: God's purpose

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[1]Ibid., p. 114. See also Ham, et al., pp. 15-16, 131-55. And see ibid., pp. 19, 197-207, for discussion of how animals could have reached remote parts of the earth.

[2]Norman L. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:1 (March 1999):7.

[3]J. B. Philips, *Your God Is Too Small*, p. 115.

will be accomplished in spite of the arrogance and defiance of man's own purposes. He brings down the proud, but exalts the faithful."[1]

"The significance of this little story is great. It explains to God's people how the nations were scattered abroad. Yet the import goes much deeper. The fact that it was Babylon, the beginning of kingdoms under Nimrod from Cush, adds a rather ominous warning: Great nations cannot defy God and long survive. The new nation of Israel need only survey the many nations around her to perceive that God disperses and curses the rebellious, bringing utter confusion and antagonism among them. If Israel would obey and submit to God's will, then she would be the source of blessing to the world."[2]

"Unfortunately, Israel also raised her head in pride and refused to obey the Lord God. Thus she too was scattered across the face of the earth."[3]

F. WHAT BECAME OF SHEM 11:10-26

"The function of this genealogy is not so much to connect Abraham with the preceding events, as the previous genealogies have done, but to provide the reader with the necessary background for understanding the events in the life of Abraham. The list includes eight names. All the individuals named are relevant for understanding the events of the following narrative except 'Iscah' (v. 29). The inclusion of this otherwise insignificant name in the list suggests that the author is seeking to achieve a specific number of names. Thus far in the Book of Genesis, the author has followed a pattern of listing ten names between important individuals in the narrative. In this short list only eight names are given, hence if we are expecting ten names, the number of individuals in this list appears to be short by two names. By listing only eight names, the author leaves the reader uncertain who the ninth and, more importantly, the tenth name will be. It is only as the narrative unfolds that the ninth and

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[1]Allen P. Ross, "The Dispersion of the Nations in Genesis 11:1-9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:550 (April-June 1981):133.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid. See also Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 103-4.

> tenth names are shown to be the two sons of Abraham, 'Ishmael' (16:15) and 'Isaac' (21:3)."[1]
>
> "The Babel account (11:1-9) is not the end of early Genesis. If it were, the story would conclude on the sad note of human failure. But as with earlier events in Genesis 1—11, God's grace once again supersedes human sin, insuring the continued possibilities of the promissory blessings (1:28; 9:1). The scaffolding of human pride would be dismantled by the erection of the Shemite line that culminates in obedient Abraham, who likewise is found in the region of Shinar. Abraham would prove to be the nations' deliverance."[2]
>
> "Without the blessing of God the situation of humanity is without hope: that seems to be the chief thrust of the opening chapters of Genesis."[3]

In contrast to the genealogy in chapter 5, this one emphasizes life and expansion rather than death, even though longevity was declining.[4] This genealogy starts with Noah's son Shem, whom God blessed, and it concludes with Abram, whom God purposed to bless. This is the line of Israel's ancestors. It is a "vertical" list, of the type used in the ancient Near East to document legitimate claims to thrones or inheritances.[5] This genealogy, like the one in chapter 5, appears to be complete. But since other biblical genealogies have gaps in their lists, we may be suspicious that this one may have gaps as well.[6] Note that the pattern Moses followed in this list is: X lived so many years and begat Y, and X lived so many more years and begat other children. This is the same pattern we find in chapter 5, except that there, the final notation is: X lived a total of so many years and died. The purpose of this genealogy in chapter 11 is to connect Abram to Noah, and to give background information essential for understanding the story of Abram that follows.[7]

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[1]Ibid., p. 109.

[2]Mathews, p. 487.

[3]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. li.

[4]For short histories of the pre-patriarchal period of ancient Near Eastern history, see John Bright, *A History of Israel*, pp. 17-37; Siegfried Schwantes, *A Short History of the Ancient Near East*.

[5]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 249.

[6]See Whitcomb and Morris, pp. 474-89, for discussion of Genesis 11 and the date of the Flood. They did not believe that this genealogy is complete.

[7]Mathews, p. 488, included a helpful chart of 20 generations from Adam to Abram.

> "… the author's aim is to show that God's promise concerning the seed of the woman cannot be thwarted by the confusion and scattering of the nations at Babylon."[1]
>
> "If the message of Genesis is essentially one of redemption, Gen 3—11 explains why man needs salvation and what he needs to be saved from. Chaps. 1—2, in describing the original state of the world, also describe the goal of redemption, to which ultimately the world and humanity will return when the patriarchal promises are completely fulfilled."[2]
>
> "An extensive statistical analysis of the life-spans of the patriarchs, as given in Genesis Chapter 5 and 11, shows that statistically the life-span can be considered constant before the Flood, while after the Flood the data can be fitted by an asymptotic exponential decay curve. Also, it is concluded that as for the life-spans reported in Genesis Chapter 11, the data in the Masoretic text are the authentic ones; those in the Septuagint have been tampered with. Moreover, it is statistically unlikely that there are gaps in the genealogies in Genesis Chapter 11."[3]

The genealogies in Genesis 11:10 through 26 and 1 Chronicles 1:17 through 27 are identical, but the one in Luke 3:34 through 36 inserts the name "Cainan" between Arpachshad and Shelah. The inclusion of "Cainan" may indicate that Luke used the Septuagint to compose his genealogy, since this name appears in this Greek translation, but not in the Masoretic genealogies. "Cainan" appears elsewhere in Luke's list as Adam's great-grandson (Luke 3:37-38), so this may be a scribal error.[4]

Adam, Noah, and Abram all fathered three named sons, linking them as "saviors" of humanity. In Abram's case, these sons (descendants) were Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

The genealogy of Shem (11:10-26), in this pericope, prefaces the story of Abram (11:27—25:11). This structure serves as a prototype (first example) for the narrative that follows in Genesis. Similarly, the genealogy of Ishmael (25:12-18) introduces the story of

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 136.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. lii.

[3]William L. Seaver, "A Statistical Analysis of the Genesis Life-Spans," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 20:2 (September 1983):80. "The Masoretic Text" is the authoritative Hebrew and Aramaic text of the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible (the Tanakh).

[4]See M. S. Mills, "A Comparison of the Genesis and Lukan Genealogies (The Case for Cainan)" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978).

Jacob and Esau (25:19—35:29), and the genealogy of Esau (36:1-43) introduces the story of Joseph (37:2—50:26).

> "With 11:26 the scene has finally been set for the patriarchal history to unfold. The opening chapters of Genesis have provided us the fundamental insights for interpreting these chapters properly. Gen 1 revealed the character of God and the nature of the world man finds himself in. Gen 2 and 3 portrayed the relationship between man and woman, and the effects man's disobedience has had on man-woman and divine-human relations. Chap. 5 sketched the long years that passed before the crisis of the great flood (chaps. 6—9), which almost destroyed all humanity for its sinfulness. The table of the nations (chap. 10) started the process of Israel's geographical and political self-definition with respect to the other nations in the world, but Gen 11:1-9 reminded us that the nations were in confusion and that mankind's proudest achievements were but folly in God's sight and under his judgment."[1]

> "However, according to 11:10-26, just five generations after Peleg, whose lifetime according to 10:25 saw the confusion of languages at Babel, Abram arrives. As 12:3 will declare, it is through him that all the families of the earth will be blessed. Man is not without hope. The brevity of this genealogy is a reminder that God's grace constantly exceeds his wrath. He may punish to the third or fourth generation but he shows mercy to thousands (Deut 5:9; 7:9)."[2]

> "Four key concepts presented in Genesis 1 through 11 are crucial for comprehending the rest of the Bible. First, the God who entered the lives of Abram and Sarai is the same God who created the entire universe. He is the only true and living God—Yahweh, the Creator and the Savior of the world. Second, all people have rebelled against God, their benevolent Creator, and His good will for them. Humanity has inherited a state of sinfulness from Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden. Third, God judges and will judge the actions of all people. God, by sending the Flood, made it clear to Noah and to everyone that human wickedness is entirely unacceptable. God cannot let evil reign free in His creation. Fourth, sin continues to plague all of humanity—even after the Flood.

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 253.

[2]Idem., pp. 253-54.

> Although the Flood did not wash away sin, God, as the second half of Genesis (chs. 12—50) reveals, has a plan to save humanity from its own evil deeds."[1]

The chronological framework for the patriarchal stories (Abraham through Joseph) rests on two important texts:

1. 1 Kings 6:1 states that the Exodus took place 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon's reign (i.e., 967 B.C.). This makes the date of the Exodus close to, if not exactly, 1446 B.C.

2. Exodus 12:40 records that "the sons of Israel had lived in Egypt" 430 years before the Exodus, or from about 1876 B.C. This is the probable date when Jacob's family moved to Egypt (ch. 46).

From these two texts we can calculate other dates in the patriarchal period.

The historicity of the patriarchs continues to be a matter of scholarly debate.[2] The problem is the lack of explicit reference to the patriarchs in nonbiblical literature and in archaeology ("the scientific study of the material remains of the past"[3]). Scholars who reject the biblical testimony as unauthentic have been labeled "minimalists," and those who believe that the Hebrew Bible credibly supplements nonbiblical material are known as "maximalists." I am one of the latter, believing that the biblical records reliably testify to historical individuals and events recorded in this section of Genesis.[4] One liberal scholar made the following admission:

> "It is not because scholars of to-day begin with more conservative presuppositions than their predecessors that they have a much greater respect for the patriarchal stories than was formerly common, but because the evidence warrants it."[5]

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[1]*The Nelson …,* pp. 1-2.

[2]For a helpful survey of the recent history of scholarly opinion regarding the historical reliability of the patriarchal narratives, see Kenneth L. Barker, "The Antiquity and Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, pp. 131-39; Emil C. Wcela, "The Abraham Stories, History and Faith," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 10 (October 1970):176-81; Nahum M. Sarna, "Abraham in History," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 3 (December 1977):5-9.

[3]Finegan, p. 3.

[4]For a good discussion of the historicity of the patriarchs and the authenticity of the patriarchal accounts, see Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 24-55; or Wolf, pp. 113-17.

[5]H. H. Rowley, "Recent Discovery and the Patriarchal Age," in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, p. 318.

"It is beyond question that traditional and conservative views of biblical history, especially of the patriarchal period, will continue to be favored by whatever results accrue from ongoing Ebla research."[1]

PATRIARCHAL CHRONOLOGICAL DATA[2]

2296 B.C.	Birth of Terah	Gen. 11:24
2166	Birth of Abram[3]	Gen. 11:27
2091	Abram's departure from Haran	Gen. 12:4
2081	Abram's marriage to Hagar	Gen. 16:3
2080	Birth of Ishmael	Gen. 16:16
2067	Reaffirmation of covenant	Gen. 17:1
2067-66	Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah	Gen. 19:24
2066	Birth of Isaac	Gen. 21:2-3; cf. 21:5
2029	Death of Sarah	Gen. 23:2
2026	Marriage of Isaac	Gen. 25:20
2006	Birth of Jacob and Esau	Gen. 25:26
1991	Death of Abram	Gen. 25:7
1966	Marriage of Esau	Gen. 26:34
1943	Death of Ishmael	Gen. 25:17
1930	Jacob's journey to Haran	Gen. 28:2
1923	Jacob's marriages	Gen. 29:23, 28; 30:4, 9
1918	Birth of Judah	Gen. 29:35

[1]Eugene H. Merrill, "Ebla and Biblical Historical Inerrancy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:550 (October-December 1983):318. Ebla was one of the earliest kingdoms in Syria. See also Peter C. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament*, pp. 93-98; Giovanni Pettinato, "The Royal Archives of Tell Mardikh-Ebla," *Biblical Archaeologist* 39 (May 1976):44-52; Currid, p. 28.

[2]From Eugene H. Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:547 (July-September 1980):248.

[3]See Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, pp. 30-38.

1916	End of Jacob's 14 year labor for his wives	Gen. 29:30
1916	Birth of Joseph	Gen. 30:23
1910	End of Jacob's stay with Laban	Gen. 31:41
1910	Jacob's arrival at Shechem	Gen. 33:18
1902	Rape of Dinah	Gen. 34:1-2
1900	Marriage of Judah	Gen. 38:1-2
1899	Selling of Joseph	Gen. 37:2, 28
1888	Joseph imprisoned	Gen. 39:20; cf. 41:1
1886	Joseph released	Gen. 41:1, 46
1886	Death of Isaac	Gen. 35:28
1879	Beginning of famine	Gen. 41:54
1878	Brothers' first visit to Egypt	Gen. 42:1-3
1877	Judah's incest with Tamar	Gen. 38:18
1877	Brothers' second visit to Egypt	Gen. 43:1, 15; 45:6, 11
1876	Jacob's descent to Egypt	Gen. 46:6; cf. 47:9
1859	Death of Jacob	Gen. 47:28
1806	Death of Joseph	Gen. 50:22

II. PATRIARCHAL NARRATIVES 11:27—50:26

One of the significant changes in the emphasis that occurs at this point in Genesis, is from cursing, in the primeval record, to blessing, in the patriarchal narratives. The Abrahamic Covenant is most important in this respect. How Abram's family gained and provided these blessings unfolds. Israel could, and we can, identify with their experiences.

> "Chapters 1—11 are set in Babylonia; chs. 12—36 are set in Palestine; chs. 37—50 are set in Egypt. (The same kind of tripartite geographical focus emerges from Exodus: 1:1—12:36, in Egypt; 12:37—18:27, to Sinai; 19:1—40:38, at Sinai.) In other words, each part of the Mediterranean world is highlighted in some part of Genesis. The crucial center section of

> Genesis (chs. 12—36) is bracketed geographically by two sections of the Near Eastern world with whose history that of Israel would be constantly interlocked."[1]
>
> "In chs. 1—11 we read of individuals who had land, but are either losing it or being expelled from it. In chs. 12—50 the emphasis is on individuals who do not have land, but are on the way toward it. One group is losing; another group is expecting."[2]
>
> "Genesis is moving us progressively from generation (chs. 1—2), to degeneration (chs. 3—11), to regeneration (chs. 12—50)."[3]

Chapters 1 through 11 present a structural pattern that continues in the rest of the Pentateuch.

> "The importance of Genesis 1—11 for the rest of the Pentateuch can be seen in the fact that its narrative structure provides a pattern by which the author often shapes subsequent pentateuchal narratives. Thus the order and arrangement of the Creation accounts in Genesis 1—2 exhibit the same pattern as the description of the building of the tabernacle (Ex 25—31); the tabernacle is portrayed as a return to the Garden of Eden. The instructions given to Noah for building the ark foreshadow those given to Moses for building the tabernacle. Furthermore, one can demonstrate that whole sections of laws in the Pentateuch have been grouped and arranged in patterns that parallel the narrative structure of Genesis 1—11."[4]
>
> "The ancient oriental background to Gen 1—11 shows it to be concerned with rather different issues from those that tend to preoccupy modern readers. It is affirming the unity of God in the face of polytheism, his justice rather than his caprice, his power as opposed to his impotence, his concern for mankind rather than his exploitation. And whereas Mesopotamia clung to the wisdom of primeval man, Genesis records his sinful disobedience. Because as Christians we tend to assume these points in our theology, we often fail to recognize the striking originality of

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[1]Hamilton, p. 10.

[2]Ibid., p. 11.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 39.

> the message of Gen 1—11 and concentrate on subsidiary points that may well be of less moment."[1]

Some notable changes take place in the second part of Genesis, though both parts begin with a creation initiated by the spoken word of God (1:1; 12:1). Instead of the genealogies being prominent and the stories secondary, as in chapters 1 through 11, the reverse becomes true now. God retreats further into the background of the events recorded than was the case earlier, and there is more emphasis on the personalities of the patriarchs. The promises to the patriarchs form the central theme of this section, specifically those concerning descendants, land, and divine blessing. There also seems to be increasing depth in the moral awareness of the patriarchs as generation follows generation from Abram to Joseph.[2]

> "Archaeology demonstrates that the narratives of the Hebrew fathers [the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph] correspond perfectly to the Middle Bronze Age cultural setting [i.e., 2200-1550 B.C.], not to any other time period."[3]

A. WHAT BECAME OF TERAH 11:27—25:11

This is the sixth and central—and consequently the most important—of the 11 *toledot* sections in Genesis.

A major theme of the Pentateuch is the beginning of the fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs. The promises in Genesis 12:1 through 3 and 7 are the fountainhead from which the rest of the Pentateuch flows.[4] Walter Kaiser labeled the three things that God promised Abram as "an heir, a heritage, and an inheritance."[5] David Clines called them "posterity, relationship with God, and land."[6] J. Dwight Pentecost and Robert L. Saucy referred to them as "seed, blessing, and land."[7]

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. l.

[2]Ibid., p. 258. See also Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 25.

[3]Currid, p. 13.

[4]See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 169.

[5]Kaiser, *Toward an …*, pp. 35, 84-99.

[6]David Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, pp. 29, 45-60.

[7]J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 72; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 42.

God progressively revealed more information about each of these promises. He gave more information about the land promise in 13:15, 17; 15:7 and 8, 18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3 and 4 (plural "lands"); 28:4, 13; 35:12; 48:4; and 50:24.

Repetition of the seed promise occurs in 13:15 and 16; 15:5; 17:2, 5 and 10, 13, 16, 19 and 20; 18:18; 21:12; 22:17 and 18; 26:3 and 4, 24; 28:13 and 14; 32:12; 35:11 and 12; 46:3; and 48:4 and 16.

> "A line of successive representative sons of the patriarchs who were regarded as one with the whole group they represented matched the seminal idea already advocated in Genesis 3:15. Furthermore, in the concept of 'seed' were the two aspects of the seed as a future *benefit* and the seed as the present *beneficiaries* of God's temporal and spiritual gifts. Consequently, 'seed' was always a collective singular noun; never did it appear as a plural noun (e.g., as in 'sons'). Thereby the 'seed' was marked as a unit, yet with a flexibility of reference: now to the one person, now to the many descendants of that family. This interchange of reference with its implied corporate solidarity was more than a cultural phenomena [*sic* phenomenon] or an accident of careless editing; it was part and parcel of its doctrinal intention."[1]

The promise of universal blessing recurs in 18:18; 22:18 (to Abraham); 26:4 (to Isaac); and 28:14 (to Jacob). God reiterated His purpose with additional detail to Abraham in 13:14 through 17; 17:1 through 21; and 22:15 through 18; to Isaac in 26:3 through 5, 24; and to Jacob in 28:13 through 15; and 35:9 through 12 (cf. 46:1-4).

> "While this promissory triad of blessing, seed, and land is the thematic cord binding the Book of Genesis, we find that the counterthemes of fratricide, violence, uncreation, and expulsion are the literary-theological foil for the promissory blessing."[2]

Genesis 12 through 50 focuses on the promise of posterity (an heir, seed), though the other promises receive much attention as well. Exodus and Leviticus deal more with the promise of worldwide influence (relationship with God, heritage, blessing), and Numbers and Deuteronomy emphasize the promise of real estate (land, inheritance, and rest).

In order to provide these blessings God had to overcome many obstacles. Each obstacle provided an opportunity for each patriarch to grow stronger in faith, and each one

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[1]Kaiser, *Toward an …,* pp. 88-89.

[2]Mathews*, Genesis 1—11:26,* p. 59.

tested his faith (cf. James 1:2-4). Each episode in the Abraham narrative reveals something important about God's power and faithfulness. It should also teach the reader something about responding to God's promises in the midst of various difficulties. This is the plot of the Abraham narrative.

In chapters 12 through 25 the problems of possessing the land and obtaining an heir dominate the story of Abram's life. How will Abram obtain the Promised Land? Who will be Abram's promised heir? How will Abram become the promised blessing of humanity? These are the great questions that the thoughtful reader continually asks as he or she reads the story of Abram—in view of God's promises in 12:1 through 3. At least one of these questions is central in every incident in Abram's life that God has chosen to record in Genesis. These questions form the unifying theme of the Abram narrative.[1]

One writer called the form in which Moses revealed Abram's story an "obstacle story":

> "Few literary techniques have enjoyed so universal and perennial a vogue as the obstacle story. It is found in ancient and modern literature from the Gilgamesh epic and the Odyssey to the Perils of Pauline and the latest novel. Its character is episodal in that it is not self-contained but finds its *raison d'etre* in its relation to the larger story or narrative of which it is a part. Its purpose is to arouse suspense and sustain interest by recounting episodes which threaten or retard the fulfillment of what the reader either suspects or hopes or knows to be the ending of the story."[2]

Twelve crises arise as the story of Abram's life unfolds. Each of these must be overcome—and is overcome, by God—who eventually does provide Abram's descendants. Each of these problems constituted a challenge to Abram's faith. Is God faithful and powerful enough to provide what He promised? In the end we can see that He is.

Each problem that Abram encountered is typical of problems that every believer has to deal with in seeking to live by faith in God's promises. Consequently each episode in Abram's life teaches us something about God's power and faithfulness, and it should enable us to live by faith more consistently. Moses originally recorded these lessons for

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[1]See Larry Helyer, "The Separation of Abram and Lot: Its Significance in the Patriarchal Narratives," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 26 (June 1983):77-88; *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. Supplement* vol., "Promises to the Patriarchs," by Claus Westermann, pp. 690-93; Dixon Sutherland, "The Organization of the Abraham Promise Narrative," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95:3 (1983):337-43; Whybray, p. 55; and Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 262.

[2]Peter E. Ellis, *The Yahwist, the Bible's First Theologian*, p. 136.

Israel's benefit, so that the Israelites would imitate Abram's faith. Abram was not without his faults, and his failings prove as instructive as his successes, as is true of all biblical characters.

The following were the 12 obstacles that Abraham encountered in his faith journey:

1. Sarai was barren and incapable of producing an heir (11:30).
2. Abram had to leave the Promised Land, which God had told him he would inherit (12:10).
3. Abram's life was in danger in Egypt (12:11-20).
4. Abram's nephew Lot (his heir?) separated from Abram over a land dispute (ch. 13).
5. Abram entered a war and could have died (14:1-16).
6. Abram's life was in danger from retaliation in the Promised Land (15:1).
7. God ruled Eliezer out as Abram's heir (15:2-3).
8. Hagar, pregnant with Abram's son (his heir?), departed (16:6).
9. Abimelech threatened Sarai's reputation and child (his heir?) in Gerar (ch. 20).
10. Abram had two heirs (21:9-21).
11. God commanded Abram to kill his heir (ch. 22).
12. Abram could not find a proper wife for his heir (24:5).

> "… the narrator has skillfully woven this material together in such a way as to involve the reader/listener in a drama of increasing tension between, on the one hand, the promise of Yahweh that Abram would have an heir and, indeed, would become the father of many nations, and, on the other, the threat to the fulfillment of this promise by a series of crises."[1]

1. Terah and Abram's obedience 11:27—12:9

All that Moses wrote in this pericope (11:27—12:9) deals with Abram and his future in the Promised Land. Abram obeyed the LORD's command to relocate to a land that God

[1]Helyer, p. 80. See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 90, for a diagram of the chiastic structure of the Abraham narrative.

would give to him and his descendants with the promise that he would become a blessing to the rest of the world. Abram's example of obedience is a model for all believers to forsake all else in order to obtain the promised blessings of God and to serve Him by becoming a blessing to others.

> "Within the book of Genesis no section is more significant than 11:27—12:9."[1]

Abram's background 11:27-32

11:27-28 Abram evidently grew up in the city of "Ur of the Chaldeans." A few scholars believe that the "Ur" in view was located just east of Haran, near the top of the Fertile Crescent (cf. 24:4, 7, 10).[2] However, most hold that it was the Ur in southern Mesopotamia. Since the Chaldeans later lived in southern Mesopotamia, this seems to be the correct site.

> Ur was an "ancient city of the early Sumerian kingdom, located about 125 miles from the present mouth of the Euphrates, 100 miles southeast of Babylon, 830 miles from Damascus, and 550 miles from Haran. It was the capital of Sumer."[3]
>
> "Ur is well known as an important center in the land of Sumer; it reached its zenith under the kings of the third dynasty of Ur, who around 2060-1950 B.C. revived for the last time the ancient cultural traditions of the Sumerians. [Abram was probably born about 2166 B.C.] The names of several of Abram's relatives are also the names of known cities: *Terah Nahor Serug Haran* and Laban the *Aramean*, Jacob's father-in-law, was from the city *Haran* in Paddan-*aram*. All these are places around the river Balih in northern Mesopotamia. Haran and Nahor are often mentioned in the Mari documents of the eighteenth

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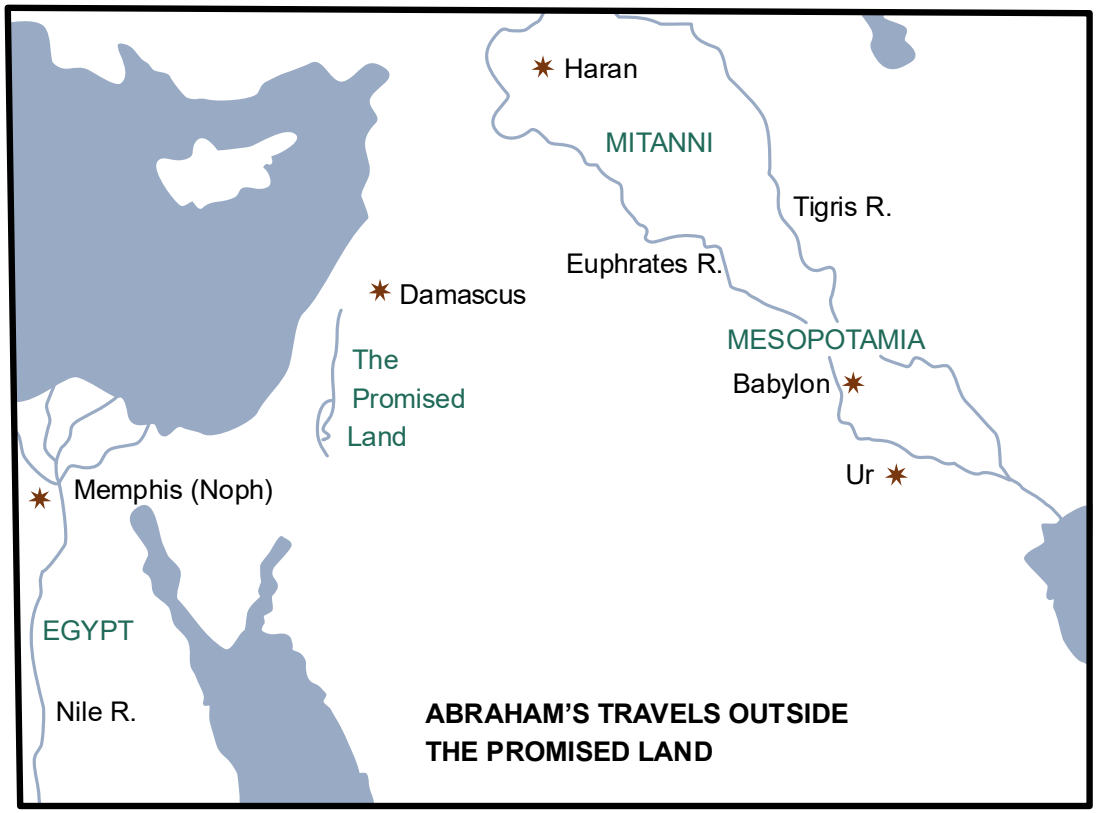
[1]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 281.

[2]E.g., Beitzel, pp. 80-81. Cf. Finegan, pp. 70-71. The Fertile Crescent is a crescent-shaped region that includes the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, modern-day Iraq to the northeast, and the northern region of modern Kuwait to the southeast.

[3]Yates, p. 16.

century B.C., and cities named Tell-terah and Serug are known from later Assyrian sources."[1]



"In the ruins of Ur at about this time [ca. 2070-2060 B.C.] there are some twenty houses per acre. Assuming six to ten persons per house, there were 120 to 200 people per acre, the average figure of 160 being exactly the same as the population density of modern Damascus [in 1959]. Ur covered 150 acres, and it may therefore be estimated that the population was approximately 24,000 inhabitants."[2]

"If Abraham did come from Mesopotamia sometime in the early second millennium B.C., it is necessary to revise the picture sometimes painted of him as a primitive nomad accustomed only to open spaces of the desert, and to

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[1]*The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, p. 28. See also Finegan, pp. 56-57, 67-68, 200-201; Wood, *A Survey …*, pp. 39-43. Mari was an ancient city in what is now Syria where ancient documents have been found.

[2]Finegan, p. 52.

> recognize that at least to some extent he must have been the heir of a complex and age-old civilization."[1]

A later writer may have added the reference to "the Chaldeans" in verse 28, since the Chaldeans did not enter Babylonia until about 1,000 B.C.[2] Another possibility is that there were some people knowns as Chaldeans who lived in this region when Moses wrote Genesis.

Abram's family members were polytheists (Josh. 24:2).

> "Several of Abram's relations have names that suggest adherence to lunar worship (cf. Sarah, Milcah, Laban), a cult that was prominent in Ur and Harran [*sic* Haran]."[3]

11:29 Abram married his half-sister, Sarai, which was not contrary to God's will at this early time in history (cf. Lev. 18:9; 20:17; Deut. 27:22). Indeed, the marriage of brothers to sisters was a necessity for a time, since the human race descended from one pair of individuals (cf. 4:17). Endogamy is the practice of marrying within a family group.

11:30 Abram's wife was barren. This fact will play a major role in Abram's story.

> "We find that in Abraham's society a husband could rather easily divorce his wife—but not if the marriage had produced children. This last insight, in light of Sarah's barrenness, adds another dimension to our appreciation of Abraham's faithfulness."[4]

11:31 God first called Abram to leave his home when the patriarch still lived in Ur (12:1-3; cf. 15:7; Neh. 9:7; Acts 7:2). Abram left a cultured community in Ur, not to better his life materially, but to obey God. Canaan at this time was what could be called "uncivilized."

> "Likely the son [Abram] persuaded the father [Terah] to accompany him, and the father, then, according to

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[1]Ibid., p. 73.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 272; Mathews, *11:27—50:26*, p. 100.

[3]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 252. Cf. Josh. 24:2. See also Livingston, pp. 103-34, for a survey of religious practices in the ancient Near East.

[4]Alfred J. Hoerth, "Archaeology and the Christian Mind," in *Interpreting the Word of God*, p. 42.

patriarchal propriety, became the official leader of the party."[1]

"It appears that Terah, for his own reasons, decided to move from Ur to Canaan. He began the journey with several members of his family. However, they went to Haran, where Terah died. This was the first step of the journey of Abram and Sarai to the land of promise."[2]

"By recounting Abraham's call from 'Ur of the Chaldeans,' the author aims to cast the patriarch as one who came out of Babylon."[3]

"The movement between Ur and Haran becomes easy to understand when we recall that Ur was the greatest commercial capital that the world had yet seen …"[4]

"Numerous texts from archaeological research show that travel of this kind was not uncommon for the time."[5]

"The Kultepe texts from the nineteenth century BC mention Haran as a crossroads for trade and an important commercial center."[6]

"There was no serious language barrier anywhere in the Fertile Crescent [in the time of the patriarchs], since West Semitic was understood everywhere and the related Accadian of Babylonia was the *lingua franca*, the tongue of diplomacy and business. Moreover, political and cultural ties between Egypt and Palestine continued to be close, and Egyptian was understood in all important Palestinian

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[1]Wood, *A Survey …,* p. 43.

[2]*The Nelson …,* p. 25.

[3]Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 148.

[4]W. F. Albright, "Abram the Hebrew: A New Archaeological Interpretation," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 163 (October 1961):44. See *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, map 25.

[5]Wood, *A Survey …,* p. 29.

[6]Currid, p. 30.

> centres, while West Semitic was spoken in many parts of northern Egypt."[1]

God's call was pure grace; there is no evidence in this text, or elsewhere in Scripture, that God chose Abram because he merited special favor. God was continuing to form a family of faithful followers for Himself. He called Abram to leave an urban center in trust and obedience. Abram's exodus from his homeland, and Israel's Exodus from Egypt, were two key events in the formation of national Israel.

> "Election is one of the central realities of the Old Testament; even though it is less frequently mentioned than the covenant it is however the initial act by which Yahweh comes into relation with his people and the permanent reality which assures the constancy of that bond. Every intervention by God in history is an election: either when he chooses a place in which to make more especial manifestation of his presence, or when he chooses a people to carry out his intention, or when he chooses a man to be his representative or his messenger, the Old Testament God is the one who has universal sovereignty at his disposal, and shows it by the free use that he makes of it."[2]

Abram's family stayed in Haran for some time, possibly because Terah was very old and in poor health. Another explanation follows:

> "It [Haran] was known as a center for the worship of the moon, which is significant because Terah's name means 'moon,' and he was known as a pagan (Josh. 24:2)."[3]

> "The difference between Terah and Abraham was one thing only: a response of faith to God's call."[4]

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[1]Albright, *The Archaeology …,* pp. 204-5.

[2]Jacob, p. 201.

[3]Longman*,* "Genesis," p. 93.

[4]George Van Pelt Campbell, "Refusing God's Blessing: An Exposition of Genesis 11:27-32," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:659 (July-September 2008):282.

"It is thus that a father can muffle his son's call, impede his progress in the work of God, or, by his caution and unbelief, hold back the outworking of a divine plan in his son's life. Terah seems, as we peer back through history, to have been a man not without vision, not lacking a desire to abandon an inadequate life, or a corrupt environment, but for lack of bravery or conviction, to have fallen short of the best, and held his family back with him."[1]

"Like Nuzi, Haran was also part of the Hurrian Mitanni Empire whilst the Hurrians were at the height of their power, so that the tablets discovered at Nuzi would also reflect the way of life in Haran. In this manner, scholars have ascertained from a careful study of the Nuzi tablets that they are very helpful in explaining many of the Biblical episodes relating to the Patriarchs, which had hitherto been somewhat puzzling."[2]

"Although the Bible indicates that Abram eventually left Haran (Genesis 12:4), the Patriarchs nevertheless kept in close contact with that city. Abram sent his servant back to Aram-naharaim, the region in which Haran was situated, in order to find a wife for his son Isaac (Genesis 24:2-10). Isaac later told his younger son Jacob to flee to his uncle Laban in Haran, in order to escape the wrath of his brother Esau, whom he had tricked out of his birthright blessing (Genesis 27:43). Jacob indeed fled to Haran, subsequently marrying there his cousins Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29:1-30).[3]

"The influence of Hurrian society on the Patriarchs was undoubtedly very strong, not only because of the origins of Abram in Mesopotamia, but also because all the Patriarchs maintained contact with the area. This is borne out by the fact that many of the incidents in the Biblical narratives relating to the Patriarchs in reality reflect Hurrian social

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[1]E. M. Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook of Bible Characters*, p. 20.

[2]Stuart West, "The Nuzi Tablets," *Bible and Spade* 10:3-4 (Summer-Autumn 1981):66.

[3]Ibid.

> and legal customs, and prove beyond reasonable doubt that the Patriarchal way of life had its roots in Hurrian society."[1]

Archaeologists have dated the Nuzi tablets four or five hundred years after the patriarchs, but they reflect customs that had been prevalent for centuries.[2] We should be careful not to overemphasize the influence of Hurrian civilization, however.[3]

> "In this period (the first part of the Middle Bronze Age [ca. 2000-1750 B.C.]) Palestine was receiving an infusion of population as semi-nomadic groups infiltrated the land …. That these newcomers were 'Amorites,' of the same Northwest-Semitic stock as those whom we have met in Mesopotamia, can scarcely be doubted. Their names, so far as these are known, point unanimously in that direction. Their mode of life is splendidly illustrated by the Tale of Sinuhe, but especially by the stories of Genesis—for it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the migration of Israel's ancestors was a part of this very movement. These people brought to Palestine no fundamental ethnic change, for they were of the same general Northwest-Semitic stock as were the Canaanites."[4]

11:32 After the patriarch Terah died, being 205 years old, Abram continued his trek toward Canaan in obedience to God's call.

MAJOR HISTORICAL PERIODS OF THE PROMISED LAND[5]

Stone (Neolithic) Age	to ca. 4000 B.C .(?)
Copper (Chalcolithic) Age	ca. 4000-3150 B.C. (?)

[1]Ibid. See also Albright, *The Archaeology …,* p. 184; Harrison, *Introduction to …,* pp. 106-111.

[2]See Finegan, p. 65-67; M. J. Selman, "The Social Environment of the Patriarchs," *Tyndale Bulletin* 27 (1976):114-36.

[3]Ephraim Speiser did this in his commentary on Genesis.

[4]Bright, pp. 48-49. Paragraph division omitted. See also Finegan, pp. 139-50.

[5]See also the "Chronological Table" in *Archaeology*, Israel Pocket Library series, 2 pages before p. 1; and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land*, pp. 1-7 for descriptions of the major periods.

Early Bronze Age I	3150-2850 B.C.
Early Bronze Age II	2850-2650 B.C.
Early Bronze Age III	2650-2350 B.C.
Early Bronze Age IV	2350-2200 B.C.
Middle Bronze Age I	2200-2000 B.C.
Middle Bronze Age IIA	2000-1750 B.C.
Middle Bronze Age IIB	1750-1630 B.C.
Middle Bronze Age IIC	1630-1550 B.C.
Late Bronze Age I	1550-1400 B.C.
Late Bronze Age IIA	1400-1300 B.C.
Late Bronze Age IIB	1300-1200 B.C.
Iron Age I	1200-1000 B.C.
Iron Age II	1000-586 B.C.
Babylonian/Persian Period	586-332 B.C.
Hellenistic Period I (Ptolemaic and Seleucid)	332-152 B.C.
Hellenistic Period II (Hasmonean)	152-37 B.C.
Roman Period I (Herodian)	37 B.C.-A.D. 70
Roman Period II	A.D. 70-180
Roman Period III	A.D. 180-324
Byzantine Period (Christian)	A.D. 324-640
Arab Period (Moslem)	A.D. 640-1099
Crusader Period (Christian)	A.D. 1099-1291
Mameluke Period (Moslem)	A.D. 1291-1517
Turkish Period (Moslem)	A.D. 1517-1917
British Mandate Period (Christian)	A.D. 1917-1948
State of Israel Period (Jewish)	A.D. 1948-today

God's promises and Abram's initial response 12:1-9

> "These verses are of fundamental importance for the theology of Genesis, for they serve to bind together the primeval history and the later patriarchal history and look beyond it to the subsequent history of the nation."[1]

> "Whereas chapters 1—11 generally portray man's rebellion, chapters 12—50 detail God's bringing man into a place of blessing."[2]

> "… this is the central passage of the Book of Genesis."[3]

God's revelation to Abram in these verses explains why his family left Ur (11:31).

> "… by placing the call of Abraham after the dispersion of the nations at Babylon (11:1-9), the author intends to picture Abraham's call as God's gift of salvation in the midst of judgment."[4]

> "The primeval history thus explains the significance of the patriarchal story: though apparently of little consequence in the world of their day, the patriarchs are in fact men through whom the world will be redeemed. The God who revealed himself to them was no mere tribal deity but the creator of the whole universe."[5]

William Newell condensed God's revelations of Himself to Abram as follows:

> "*The progressive revelation* of God to Abraham (Revised Version best): (a) As the LORD (Jehovah, His name as in covenant with His people), 12:1, 8; 13:4, 18. (b) God Most High (El Elyon, Creator—God Over and Owning All), 14:18-22. (c) Shield and Exceeding Great Reward, 15:1. (d) The Almighty God (El Shaddai), 17:1. (e) The Righteous Judge, 18:25. (f) The Everlasting God, 21:33. (g) The God of Providence (Jehovah Jireh), 22:14."[6]

The fourth dispensation, the dispensation of Promise, extended from Abram's call to the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19—24). Man's stewardship rested on God's

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 274.

[2]Ross, "Genesis," p. 25.

[3]Ibid., p. 47.

[4]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 139.

[5]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. li-lii.

[6]Newell, p. 74.

promises to Abram, which appear first in 12:1 through 3, but receive confirmation and enlargement in: 13:14 through 17; 15:1 through 7; 17:1 through 8, 15-19; 22:16 through 18; 26:2 through 5, 24; 28:13 through 15; 31:13; and 35:9 through 12. Individual blessing depended on individual obedience (12:1; 22:18; 26:5).

God unconditionally promised blessing through Abram's descendants to the nation of Israel (12:2; 15:18-21; 17:7-8), to the church through Christ (Gal. 3:16, 28-29), and to the Gentile nations (12:3). Individuals (e.g., Pharaoh, 12:17; Abimelech, 20:3, 17) and nations (e.g., Egypt, chs. 47—50; Exod. 1—15) that proved favorable toward Abram's seed would experience divine blessing, but those that proved hostile would experience divine cursing (12:3; cf. Matt. 25:31-46).

Christians are called upon to trust God as Abram did, and so enter into the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant—which covenant inaugurated the dispensation of Promise (Rom. 4:11, 16, 23-25; Gal. 3:6-9). God's promises to Abram and his descendants did not end with the giving of the Mosaic Law (Gal. 3:17; cf. Exod. 32:13; 33:1-3; Lev. 23:10; 25:2; 26:6; Deut. 6:1-23; 8:1-18; Josh. 1:2, 11; 24:13; Acts 7:17; Rom. 9:4). However, as a test of Israel's stewardship of divine truth, the dispensation of promise was superseded, not annulled, by the dispensation of Law (Exod. 19:3-8). As the Apostle Paul put it, the Mosaic Law "was added [to the promises given to Abram] on account of the violations [of God's holiness], having been ordered through angels at the hand of a mediator [Moses], until the Seed would come to whom the promise had been made [i.e. Christ]" (Gal. 3:19).

God's word 12:1-3

12:1 This section begins with a *waw* disjunctive in the Hebrew text, translated "Now" in several English translations. It introduces an independent circumstantial clause (cf. 1:2). Probably the revelation in view happened in Ur. The NIV, TNIV, AV, and NKJV capture this with the translation "The Lord had said to Abram." So the beginning of chapter 12 flashes back to something that happened in Ur, even though chapter 11 ends with Abram in Haran.

Stephen's statement in Acts 7:2 supports this interpretation. Stephen quoted the Septuagint translation of this verse in Acts 7:2 and 3: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and He said to him, 'Go from your country and your relatives, and come to the land which I will show you.'"

> "The name Yahweh, translated as LORD, is not explained until Ex. 3:14, 15. But the readers of Genesis needed to know that the one who spoke to Abram is the same Yahweh who later would form the nation of Israel and who had created all things (2:4) [and had called the Israelites out of Egypt to a new land]."[1]
>
> "Throughout the entire story one must always remember that to leave home and to break ancestral bonds was to expect of ancient men almost the impossible."[2]

The focus of God's command was that Abram should uproot himself and follow His leading. God called him to leave three things, which were progressively more difficult: his "country," his family ("relatives"), and his "father's house." His country was his home region, his family was his clan, and his father's house was his branch of his clan. In Abram's world such a move was unheard of. These are the very things that give people a sense of security.[3]

> "Only the poverty-stricken or the defeated would wander; only the landless and the fugitive would move about and leave their ancestral homes."[4]
>
> "It has been well remarked that the very essence of the history of Israel is in the words, 'Get thee out!' [AV]"[5]
>
> "One detail we do need to note here is the conditional element in the covenant program with Abram. It was not until after the death of his father (Gen. 11:32) that Abram began to realize anything of the promise God had given to him, for only after his father's death did God take him into the land (12:4) and there reaffirm the original promise to him (12:7)."[6]

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[1]*The Nelson …,* p. 25.

[2]von Rad, p. 161.

[3]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 29.

[4]*The Nelson …,* p. 25.

[5]William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, p. 246.

[6]Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom …,* p. 60.

> "It is important, therefore, to observe the relationship of obedience to this covenant program. Whether or not God would institute a covenant program with Abram depended on Abram's act of obedience in leaving the land. Once this act was accomplished, however, and Abram did obey God, God instituted an irrevocable, *unconditional* program."[1]
>
> "… in what sense is the Abrahamic covenant unconditional? The point here, which has often been misunderstood, is that *while the fulfillment of any particular generation of Israel depended on obedience to God, the ultimate possession of the land is promised unconditionally to Israel even though she does not deserve it*. Scripture prophesies that a godly remnant of Israel will be the ultimate possessors of the land at the second coming (Ezek. 20:33-38)."[2]

Since God does not normally speak audibly to people today, how can we know that God is leading us to make a move? Charles Swindoll offered these possibilities:

> "God may be moving you to change if you have been experiencing any of these things: An increasing uneasiness with your current situation. … A heightening curiosity regarding a new challenge. … A decreasing attachment to creature comforts and tangible securities. … A growing desire to obey God at all costs, even when you can't explain it. … An inability to turn the thought off. …"[3]

12:2-3 Abram had only a promise from God, which was also a prophecy. We see Abram's faith in his willingness to obey God based solely on the confidence that God would perform what He had promised (Heb. 11:8). This divine promise, along with the promise in verse 7, was the seed or heart of the Abrahamic Covenant, which God made shortly thereafter

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[1]Ibid. See also Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Evidence from Genesis," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, p. 54.

[2]Walvoord, "The New …," p. 191.

[3]Charles R. Swindoll, *The Swindoll Study Bible*, p. 23. I have omitted his explanations between his points and his italics.

with Abram (ch. 15). The promise at this point included few details; it was only a general promise of descendants (v. 2) and influence (vv. 2-3).

The Hebrew text says, "be a blessing" (v. 2), not "you shall be a blessing" (v. 2). This was a command as well as a prediction ("I will bless you," v. 2). Not only would God bless Abram, but he would become a blessing to "all the families of the earth" (v. 3). God would make his life more rich and powerful, and he would enrich the lives of others.

> "The missionary mandate of the church does not begin with John 3:16 or Matthew 28:18-20. It begins with God's covenant with Abraham. We are blessed that we might be a blessing."[1]

There are seven elements in this promise—seven—suggesting fullness and completeness (cf. 2:2-3): (1) God promised to create "a great nation" through Abram. (2) God promised to "bless" Abram. (3) Abram's "name" would live on after his lifetime ("I will make your name great"). (4) Abram was (commanded) to "be a blessing" to others. (5) God would "bless those who bless[ed]" Abram. (6) And God would "curse those who curs[ed]" Abram. (7) "All the families of the earth [would] be blessed" through Abram and his descendants. Or, as the NJPS translates it: "all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you."

> "The promises that this glorious God gave to Abram fall into three categories (Gen. 12:2-3). First there were *personal* promises given to Abram. God said, 'I will bless you; I will make your name great.' Then there were *national* promises given to this childless man. 'I will make you into a great nation.' And finally there were *universal* promises that were to come through Abram. 'You will be a blessing and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"[2]

> "Five times in vv 2-3 Abraham is said to be 'blessed' or a 'blessing' to others. This harks back to the first great blessing of mankind at creation (1:28) and its renewal after

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[1]Wiersbe, p. 69. Italics omitted.

[2]Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom …,* pp. 51-52. See Z. Weisman, "National Consciousness in the Patriarchal Promises," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31 (February 1985):55-73.

> the flood (9:1). Moreover, Abraham is to become 'a great nation,' comparable presumably to the seventy nations listed in Gen 10. His name will also be 'great,' whereas the men of Babel who tried to make themselves 'a name' were frustrated (11:4-9)."[1]

Three components of blessing include: prosperity (13:2, 5; 14:22-23; 24:35; 26:12-13; 30:43; 32:3-21), potency or fertility (1:28; 13:16; 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 28:3, 14; 35:11) and victory (1:22; cf. 22:17).

The Hebrew words translated "curse" in verse 3 are significant. The Hebrew word *qll* in "the one who curses you" really means "disdains," but the Hebrew word *'rr* in "I will curse" means "curse." Even just disdain for Abraham would provoke God's judgment.

> "Why is there suffering in the world? One answer is that some people and nations have chosen not to bless Abraham and his descendants."[2]

God's ultimate purpose was to bless "all the families of the earth" through Abram and his seed.[3] Abram's call and obedient response form a foundation for all that follows concerning him, his immediate descendants, and his later descendants. When God called Abram, He took a new approach to blessing the human race. These verses constitute a programmatic statement: a statement that lays out God's program concerning the future.

> "Any promise God gives must be appropriated by faith."[4]
>
> "The remarkable thing about Abraham was his deep, unwavering faith."[5]

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 282.

[2]Bramer, p. 92.

[3]William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 65, explained how the Hebrew construction of verses 1-3 makes this evident. See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 72-80, for proof that the theme of the patriarchal narratives is blessing. He listed as major motifs (recurring key words or ideas) in these stories: sibling rivalry, deception, and alienation/separation.

[4]Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom …,* pp. 51-52.

[5]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 168.

The amillennial interpretation of this promise is that it "does not pertain today to unbelieving, ethnic 'Israel' (see Rom. 9:6-8; Gal. 3:15) but to Jesus Christ and his church (see 12:7; 13:16 and my comments on these verses; Gal. 3:16, 26-29; 6:16)."[1] This interpretation applies the promise to the *spiritual* seed of Abraham (Christians), but not to the *physical* seed (Jews). But there is no reason for accepting this more unnatural explanation. Abraham understood the promise as applying to his physical descendants, and later revelation encourages us to understand it this way too. This prophecy has been partially fulfilled, and it will be entirely fulfilled, literally.[2]

God repeated His promise to Abraham five times in Genesis: 12:2 and 3, 13:14 through 17; 15:1 through 21; 17:1 through 22; and 22:15 through 18.

The following table lists all of God's revelations to the four patriarchs in Genesis 12 through 50. Whenever God spoke to them what He said was significant.

REVELATIONS TO THE PATRIARCHS

Abraham	**Isaac**	**Jacob**	**Joseph**
Gen. 12:1-3	Gen. 26:2-5	Gen. 28:12-15	Gen. 37:5-7
Gen. 12:7	Gen. 26:24	Gen. 31:3	Gen. 37:9
Gen. 13:14-17		Gen. 31:11-13	
Gen. 15		Gen. 32:24-29	
Gen. 17:1-21		Gen. 35:1	
Gen. 18		Gen. 35:9-12	
Gen. 21:12-13		Gen. 46:2-4	
Gen. 22:1-2			

[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 206.

[2]Amillennialists believe that God's promises to Abram will not all be fulfilled to the Jews, because of their disobedience, but will be fulfilled to Christians.

Gen. 22:15-18

Abram's response 12:4-9

12:4 Since Lot voluntarily chose to accompany Abram, he probably believed the promises as well (cf. Ruth and Naomi). Abram's call had been to separate from his pagan relatives, so I do not think that he was being disobedient by allowing Lot to accompany him.[1] Not only Lot, but Sarai and "the people which they had acquired in Haran" went with Abram (v. 5).

Probably Abram viewed Lot as his heir, since he had no children (cf. 11:27-32; 12:4-5; 13:1-2).

> "Since Mesopotamian law-codes allowed for the adoption of an heir in the case of childlessness, this becomes an attractive hypothesis with respect to Lot."[2]

Abram lived 75 years with his father, then 25 years without his father or a son, and then 75 more years with his son Isaac.

12:5-6 Abram probably traveled south from Haran on the Great Trunk Road that connected Mesopotamia and Egypt. This road passed through Haran and descended south through Damascus and Hazor in Canaan. West of the Sea of Cinnereth (Galilee) the Central Ridge Route branched off and passed through Shechem, Bethel, Jerusalem, Hebron, and Beersheba, finally ending in Egypt.[3]

Abram's first settlement was in Shechem, which was about 40 miles north of Salem (later called Jerusalem).

> "… towns on the main caravan route southwestward from the Euphrates which figure significantly in the Abram stories, are Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and Gerar."[4]

Shechem became sacred to the Israelites because it was there that God revealed Himself to Abram, for the first time, in the Promised Land. This

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[1]See Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 207.

[2]Helyer, p. 82.

[3]See *The ESV Archaeology Study Bible*, s.v. "Main Routes of Ancient Palestine," p. 31.

[4]Albright, "Abram the …," p. 47.

was God's second major revelation to Abram, the first being while Abram was in Ur. At Shechem Jacob later bought land, set up his home, and buried his idols in an act of rededication to Yahweh, after returning from his sojourn in Paddan-aram (33:18-20; 35:4). Here too the Israelites assembled twice when they had taken possession of Canaan under Joshua's leadership, in order to commemorate God's faithfulness in giving them the land that He had promised their forefathers (Josh. 8; 24). Shechem was near the geographic center of Canaan (cf. Josh. 20:7). It lay in the heart of the land that God now promised Abram.[1] "Moreh" (v. 6) means "teacher," so "the oak of Moreh" may have been a pagan site for oracles (supposed divine revelations).

> "Here Abraham began symbolically taking possession of the land that would one day be the territory of the Great Teacher and His instruction."[2]

The reference to the Canaanites' presence in the land prepares the reader for incidents of conflict with these native inhabitants that followed in Israel's history (cf. 10:15-19). It also denotes a barrier to the fulfillment of God's promise to give Abram and his heirs the land (v. 7). Abram could not take possession of the Promised Land immediately, because the Canaanites occupied it.

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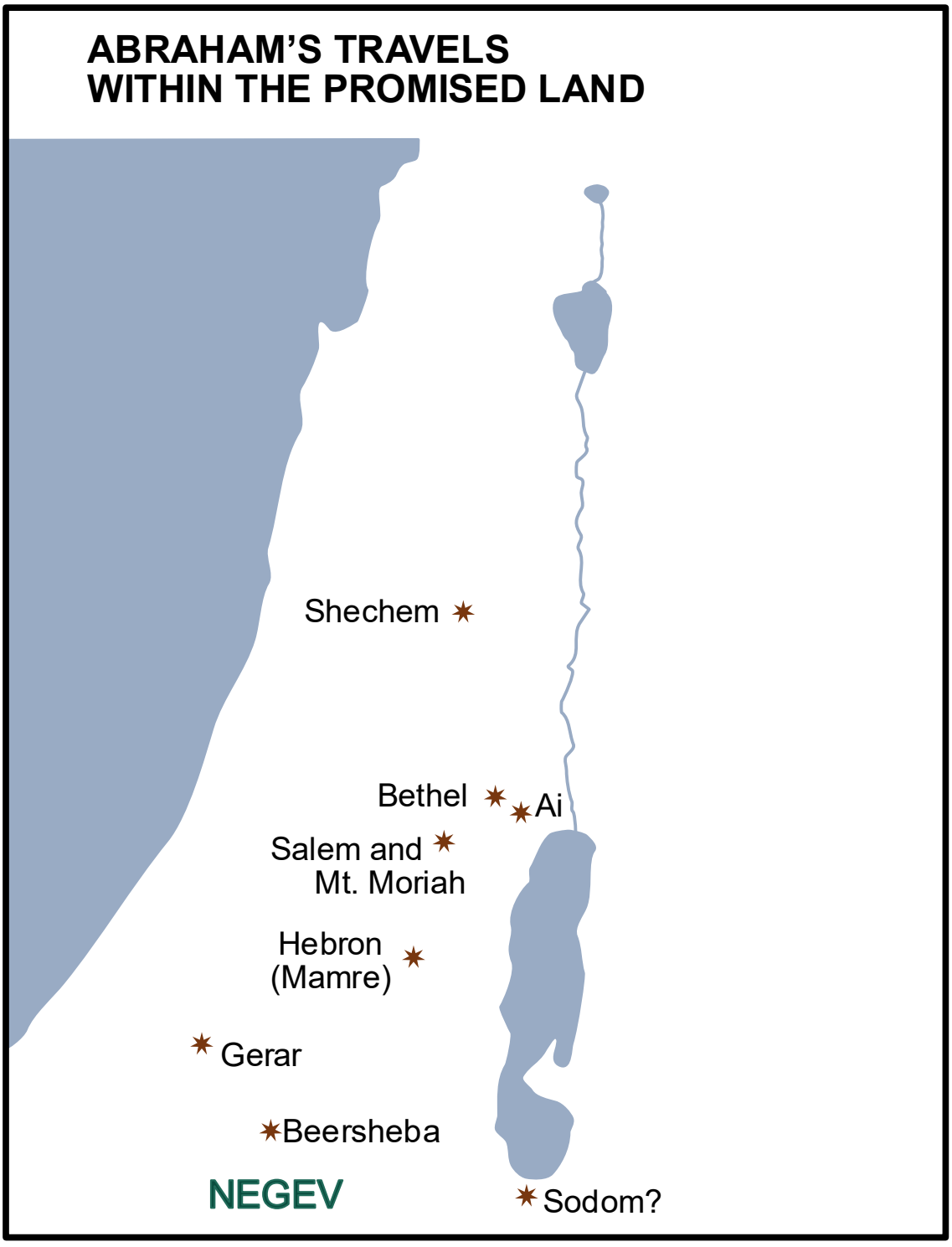
[1]See Finegan, pp. 183-84.

[2]*The Nelson …,* p. 26.



12:7 In response to God's promise to give Abram the land where he stood ("this land"), the patriarch "built an altar" and worshipped Yahweh. This was Abram's characteristic response to God's grace. Abram's altars were

more permanent structures than his tents. He continued living as a pilgrim and stranger in a land that he did not yet possess (Heb. 11:9-10).

> "They [the Jews] have never really occupied the land God gave to them. At the zenith of their power, they occupied 30,000 square miles, but that is not all that God gave them. Actually, He gave them 300,000 square miles. They have a long way to go, but they will have to get it on God's terms and in God's appointed time."[1]

Critics of the historicity of the patriarchal narratives have tried to prove that the religion of the patriarchs differed greatly from Mosaic orthodoxy—and even Christian norms. While there were some differences, there is no solid evidence that the patriarchs worshipped a different God than subsequent Israelites worshipped.[2] Of course, the Israelites also worshipped idols.

> "If anything becomes more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity, then it is an idol."[3]

12:8 Abram proceeded south and encamped ("pitched his tent") between Bethel and Ai (lit. "Ruin," probably "et Tell"[4]). This site is about 10 miles north of Salem (Jerusalem). Again Abram "built an altar" to worship Yahweh, and "called upon the name of the LORD" in worship (cf. 4:26).

12:9 Abram next continued south "toward the Negev" (lit. "dry land," a transliteration of the Hebrew word for "south"). He may have done this because of a shortage of food for his grazing animals (v. 10). This is the most common reason that nomads move from place to place.

Many years later, in Moses' day, the nation of Israel shared the same call that God had extended to Abram. She was to leave her place of residence, Egypt, and go to a Promised Land to worship and serve God there with the promise of blessing. This

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[1]McGee, 1:57.

[2]For a fuller discussion of the religion of the patriarchs, see Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 55-71.

[3]Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, p. xxi.

[4]Peter Briggs, "Testing the Factuality of the Conquest of Ai Narrative in the Book of Joshua," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, Col., Nov. 15, 2001.

required faith. Believers today have a similar calling. Believers who walk by faith will forsake much to become part of God's program to bless the world.

> "Departure from securities is the only way out of barrenness."[1]

2. Abram in Egypt 12:10-20

How was God going to fulfill His promises to Abram? The second challenge to Abram's faith—the first being Sarai's barrenness (11:30)—arose because of a famine in Canaan. Abram chose to live temporarily in the Nile Valley in Egypt until the famine ended.

> "As we learn later from the Joseph story (Gen. 37—50), as well as from ancient documents such as the Egyptian Papyrus Anastasi VI and ancient paintings on Egyptian tombs, it was not unusual for Semitic people like Abraham to seek refuge in Egypt during times of crisis such as a famine."[2]

In this incident Abram misrepresented Sarai because he feared for his life ("they will kill me," v. 12).[3] By doing so he jeopardized his blessing, because he lost his wife temporarily to Pharaoh ("the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house," v. 15). But Yahweh intervened to deliver Abram and Sarai from Egypt.

> "God knows what kind of faith we have, but *we* don't know; and the only way to advance in the 'school of faith' is to take examinations. Like Abraham, as you progress in the 'school of faith,' you will face three special tests: *circumstances* (Gen. 12:10), *people* (12:11-13:4), and *things* (13:5-18)."[4]

> "The account of Abraham's 'sojourn' in Egypt bears the stamp of having been intentionally shaped to parallel the later account of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Gen 41—Exod 12). Both passages have a similar message as well. Thus, here, at the beginning of the narratives dealing with Abraham and his seed, we find an anticipation of the events that will occur at the end. Behind the pattern stands a faithful, loving

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[1]Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 118.

[2]Longman, "Genesis," p. 94.

[3]See Robert R. Gonzalez Jr., *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in Genesis with Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives*.

[4]Wiersbe, p. 71. Paragraph division omitted.

God. What he has done with Abraham, he will do for his people today and tomorrow."[1]

12:10 Though Bible students debate the point, I believe that Abram rushed ahead of God by going to Egypt without a divine revelation that he should do so.[2] God blessed Abram in Egypt, ironically mainly because of Sarai, in spite of Abram's lack of faith, and then returned him to the Promised Land. Nevertheless, what Abram acquired in Egypt (great wealth and servants, probably including Hagar) proved to be problems later. Another severe famine even later encouraged Jacob and his family to sojourn in Egypt (47:4), but God gave Jacob permission to go (46:2-4). It was evidently fear rather than faith that made Abram leave the Promised Land.

> "Throughout Gen. 12—50 Egypt is a symbol of safety and provision for the patriarchs and their families. If anything, Egypt is the oppressed in Genesis. Note that it is Sarai who 'dealt harshly' with her Egyptian maidservant, forcing her 'to flee' (16:6). Later she urges her husband to 'cast out' this Egyptian."[3]

12:11-13 Some commentators have concluded that in dealing with Sarai as he did, Abram was relying on a custom of the land from which he had come (i.e., Babylonia) to protect him. They suggest that this custom was evidently unknown in Egypt. Because he failed to perceive this, Abram got into trouble.

> "The thrice repeated story [involving Abraham in 12:10-20 and 20:1-18, and Isaac in 26:6-12] has been the subject of much discussion by commentators through the ages, but only with the discoveries at Nuzi has it become clear that Abraham and Isaac were not involved in any trickery, but were endeavoring to protect their respective wives from molestation by invoking the Hurrian custom or law of wife-sistership. According to the Nuzi tablets a woman having

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 116-17. See also Levenson, p. 30.

[2]See Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 213; McGee, 1:59; Wiersbe, pp. 72-73; Blaiklock, pp. 20-21. For the view that Abram did not do wrong in going to Egypt, see Kidner, pp. 115-16.

[3]Hamilton, p. 386. See Peter D. Miscall, *The Workings of Old Testament Narrative*, pp. 42-45.

> the status of wife-sister rather than that of just an ordinary wife, enjoyed superior privileges and was better protected. The status was a purely legal one, a wife-sister being quite distinct from the physical relationship usually understood by the word 'sister.' In order to create the status of wife-sistership two documents were prepared—one for marriage and the other for sistership. Thus, we find a Nuzi tablet, according to which a person by the name of Akkuleni, son of Akiya, contracted with one Hurazzi, son of Eggaya, to give to Hurazzi in marriage his sister Beltakkadummi. Another tablet records that the same Akkuleni sold his sister Beltakkadummi as sister to the same Hurazzi. If such a marriage was violated, the punishment was much more severe than in the case of a straightforward ordinary marriage. It would appear that the actions of Abraham and Isaac reflect this custom."[1]

In the Hurrian culture from which Abram came (in Haran), people evidently viewed the husband/wife-sister relationship as even more sacred than the husband/wife relationship. According to this view, when Abram went to Egypt, he assumed that the Egyptians also regarded the husband/wife-sister relationship as more sacred than the husband/wife relationship. Therefore he presented Sarai as his wife-sister, and expected that the Egyptians would not interfere with his relationship with Sarai.[2] However, proponents of this view assume the husband/wife-sister relationship was foreign to Pharaoh, who took Sarai because he believed that she was just Abram's physical sister. When Pharaoh discovered that Sarai was also Abram's wife, he returned Sarai to Abram, because Pharaoh regarded the husband/wife relationship as sacred. He was angry with Abram, because in Pharaoh's eyes, Abram had misrepresented his relationship with Sarai.

Those who hold this view see this incident as an example of failure to adjust to a foreign culture and failure to trust God. They usually

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[1]West, p. 67. See also Speiser, pp. 91-92.

[2]See Matthew Newkirk, "Pimps or Protectors? A Reexamination of the Wife-Sister Deceptions," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 64:1 (March 2021):45-57.

understand Abram's motivation as having been confidence in a cultural custom from his past, rather than faith in God.[1]

Most interpreters have concluded that Abram, on the other hand, was being rather dishonest about his relationship with Sarai, and was telling a half-truth to save his own life (cf. 20:12). Evidently it was possible for brothers to fend off suitors of their sisters with promises of marriage—without eventually giving them away (cf. 24:55; 34:13-17). Archaeologists have discovered "a papyrus document which tells that Pharaoh had a beautiful woman brought to his court and caused her husband to be murdered."[2]

> "When you find yourself scheming in order to escape problems with people, beware; worse trouble is coming!"[3]

How would God fulfill His promises if Abram died now? The fact that Abram's life was in danger was the third challenge to his faith in God's promises. Abram's fears were understandable.

12:14-16 Pharaoh did take Sarai into his harem. Pharaoh not only took Sarai into his harem, but he also "treated Abram well for her sake" (v. 16) and gave him many animals as well as male and female servants.

The Pharaoh (lit. "Great House") that Abram dealt with in Egypt was probably Inyotef II (2117-2069 B.C.). He was a ruler of the eleventh dynasty, Middle Kingdom period. His capital was in Memphis, which was very near modern Cairo.

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[1]For refutation of this view, see C. J. Mullo Weir, "The Alleged Hurrian Wife-Sister Motif in Genesis," *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 2:22 (1967-68):14-25; David Freedman, "A New Approach to the Nuzi Sistership Contract," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 2:2 (1970):80; Samuel Greengus, "Sisterhood Adoption at Nuzi and the 'Wife-Sister' in Genesis," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975):5-31; "The Patriarchs' Wives as Sisters—Is the Anchor Bible Wrong?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 1:3 (September 1975):22-24, 26; Selman, pp. 119-23; Kitchen, *The Bible …*, p. 70. For information on three social classes of Babylonian women 200 years after Abraham, see J. M. Diakonoff, "Women in Old Babylonia Not Under Patriarchal Authority," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 29:3 (October 1984):225-38.

[2]Free, p. 55.

[3]Wiersbe, p. 72.

IDENTIFICATIONS OF SIGNIFICANT PHARAOHS IN THE GENESIS PERIOD[1]

PREHISTORY (to ca. 3100 B.C.)

EARLY DYNASTIES (dynasties 1-2; ca. 3100-2686 B.C.)

Menes (first Pharaoh) He united upper and lower Egypt.

OLD KINGDOM (dynasties 3-6; ca. 2686-2181 B.C.) Capital: Memphis (the Greek name); Noph (the Egyptian name). A period of absolute power. The age of pyramid building. (Archaeologists have identified almost 80 pyramids.)

Djoser (Zoser; 2nd Pharaoh of 3rd dynasty) Zoser built the first stepped pyramid (south of Cairo).

Cheops (Khufu; 2nd Pharaoh of 4th dynasty) Khufu built the Great (largest) Pyramid at Gizeh (near Cairo).

Chephren (Khafre; 4th Pharaoh of 4th dynasty) Khafre built the still capped pyramid near the Sphinx (near Cairo).

FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD (dynasties 7-10; ca. 2181-2040 B.C.) Capital: Thebes (Greek name): No (Egyptian name)

MIDDLE KINGDOM (dynasties 11-14; ca. 2033-1603 B.C.) Capital: Memphis/ Noph. A period of culture and civilization.

Inyotef II (2117-2069 B.C.; 3rd Pharaoh of 11th dynasty) He entertained Abram (Gen. 12:15).

Ammenemes II (1929-1895 B.C.; 3rd Pharaoh of 12th dynasty) He ruled when Joseph arrived in Egypt (Gen. 37:36).

Sesostris II (1897-1878 B.C.; 4th Pharaoh of 12th dynasty) He had his dreams interpreted by Joseph and exalted Joseph (Gen. 40:2; 41:1, 14-45).

Sesostris III (1878-1843 B.C.; 5th Pharaoh of 12th dynasty) He ruled when Jacob entered Egypt and received a blessing from Jacob (Gen. 46:31; 47:10).

[1]Based on the *Cambridge Ancient History*. All identifications are probable. See also Finegan, ch. 2: "The Panorama of Egypt."

Ammenemes III (1842-1797 B.C.; 6th Pharaoh of 12th dynasty) He ruled when Joseph died (Gen. 50:26).

The first reference to camels in Scripture occurs in verse 16. For many years, scholars believed that the ancients did not domesticate camels until much later than the patriarchal period. They believed that references to camels in Genesis indicated historical inaccuracies. But the archaeological evidence for the early domestication of camels has proven these critics wrong.[1] The Hebrew word translated "camel" does not distinguish whether these were one- or two-humped camels.

> "They represented great wealth; to have a camel in this period was like having an expensive limousine."[2]

12:17-20 In spite of Abram's weak faith, God intervened supernaturally and struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because he had taken Sarai. Somehow Pharaoh connected his troubles with Sarai. He summoned Abram into his presence and demanded why Abram had misrepresented his relationship to his wife. Pharaoh returned Sarai to Abram and sent them away—definitely away from his presence and probably away from the land of Egypt (cf. 13:1). So God, using Pharaoh, reunited Abram with Sarai and returned them to the Promised Land, albeit by deportation.[3]

Abram's fear for his physical safety in a strange land led him to take an initiative that was not God's will. He should have told the truth and continued to trust God. Yet even in his disobedience and lack of faith, God blessed Abram (v. 16) and preserved him (v. 20), because of His promises (12:1-3).

> "One cannot miss the deliberate parallelism between this sojourn of Abram in Egypt and the later event in the life of the nation in bondage in Egypt. The motifs are remarkably similar: the famine in the land (12:10; 47:13), the descent to Egypt to sojourn (12:10; 47:27), the attempt to kill

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[1]See John J. Davis, "The Camel in Biblical Narratives," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, pp. 141-52; and *The ESV Archaeology Study Bible*, s.v. "Domestication of the Camel," p. 160.

[2]*The Nelson …,* p. 28.

[3]For a helpful though not entirely accurate study, from my viewpoint, which compares the three incidents in which the patriarchs claimed their wives were their sisters in Genesis 12, 20, and 26, see Robert Polzin, "'The Ancestress of Israel in Danger' in Danger," *Semeia* 3 (1975):81-98. See also Mathews' good explanation of the wife-sister episodes in Genesis, in *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 124-26.

> the males but save the females (12:12; Ex. 1:22), the plagues on Egypt (Gen. 12:17; Ex. 7:14—11:10), the spoiling of Egypt (Gen. 12:16; Ex. 12:35-36), the deliverance (Gen. 12:19; Ex. 15), and the ascent to the Negev (Gen. 13:1; Num. 13:17, 22). The great deliverance out of bondage that Israel experienced was thus already accomplished in her ancestor, and probably was a source of comfort and encouragement to them."[1]

We sometimes feel tempted to fear for our welfare, especially in a foreign environment. This fear sometimes leads us to seize the initiative and disobey God, rather than trusting Him. But we can count on God to fulfill His promises to us, in spite of threatening circumstances. We should therefore remain faithful and honest.

> "In times of testing, the important question is not, '*How* can I get out of this?' but, '*What* can I get out of this?' (See James 1:1-12). God is at work to build your faith."[2]

> "The integrity and honesty of a child of God are among his most potent weapons in spreading the gospel."[3]

God will protect His plan, even when His people complicate it with deception. Consequently believers should not try to deliver themselves from threatening situations by deceptive schemes but should continue to trust and obey God.

> "Here Abram's failure in the face of hostility, like Israel's sinfulness in the wilderness, is surely recorded as a warning for later generations (cf. 1 Cor 10:11) and as an illustration of the invincibility of the divine promises (cf. Rom 11:29)."[4]

This is the first of many fulfillments of God's promise to bless those who blessed Abram, and to curse those who cursed him (12:3).

SYNOPTIC CHRONOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST[5]				
Dates	**Periods**	**Ancient Near East**	**Canaan**	**Scripture**

[1]Ross, "Genesis," p. 49. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 217.

[2]Wiersbe, p. 72.

[3]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 178.

[4]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 292.

[5]See Livingston, pp. 14-17, for discussion of the archaeological ages in the ancient Near East.

3150-2200 B.C.	*Early Bronze Age* (Early Canaanite)	Egypt: Old Kingdom (pyramid builders). Mesopotamia: Sumer and Akkad.	No written records until the Ebla tablets. Excavations show rich and powerful city-states.	Genesis 5—11
2200-1500 B.C.	*Middle Bronze Age* (Middle Canaanite)	Egypt: Middle Kingdom. Amorites (Hyksos) control Egypt and Canaan.	Amorites and Hebrew patriarchs in Canaan and Egypt	Genesis 12—50
1500-1200 B.C.	*Late Bronze Age* (Late Canaanite)	Egypt expels the Amorites and controls Canaan.	Egyptians, Canaanites (El Amarna Age). Conquest by Joshua. Early Judges, Philistines, Midianites, Ammonites, Moabites, etc.	Exodus—Judges
1200-930 B.C.	*Iron Age I* (Israelite I)	Egyptian influence weakening. Syrian and Assyrian influence not yet developed.	Later Judges, Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon.	Judges—1 Kings
930-586 B.C.	*Iron Age II* (Israelite II)	Egypt weak, but Shishak attacks Canaan after Solomon's death. Syria (Aram) develops into serious rival for Israel.	Divided Kingdom	1 Kings—2 Kings

3. Abram's separation from Lot ch. 13

Chapters 13 through 19 have been called "the Lot narratives."[1]

This chapter records how Abram, though challenged by a major conflict with Lot, due to strife between their herdsmen, magnanimously gave his nephew a choice of whichever portion of the Promised Land he wanted. Lot took an area that was very fertile, though inhabited by wicked people. In return, God blessed Abram with a reaffirmation of His promise.

[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 160.

This was the fourth crisis that Abram faced. Lot was Abram's nephew and so the most likely relative to succeed childless Abram. When Lot separated from Abram over a land dispute it must have seemed like Abram was losing his heir. If he lost his heir, how could God fulfill His promises?

13:1 Abram returned from Egypt to the Negev (the southern region of Canaan). Though Lot is not mentioned as being in Egypt with Abram and Sarai, we now learn that he was.

> "Of special interest is that in Genesis 12:10—13:4 Lot occupies the same position as that of the 'mixed multitude' (Ex 12:38) in the narrative of Genesis 41—Exodus 12. In other words the author apparently wants to draw the reader's attention to the identification of Lot with the 'mixed multitude.' It is as if Lot is seen in these narratives as the prefiguration of the 'mixed multitude' that comes out of Egypt with the Israelites."[1]

13:2 Abram by this time had become "very rich" (v. 2; cf. 12:16).

> "He was very *heavy*, so the Hebrew word signifies; for *riches are a burden*. There is a burden of care in getting them, fear in keeping them, temptation in using them, guilt in abusing them, sorrow in losing them, and a burden to account, at last, to be given up concerning them."[2]

13:3-4 Abram and his entourage (companions) proceeded north and settled down near his former location between Bethel and Ai. There he proceeded to worship the LORD (cf. 4:25; 12:8). Note the mention of his altar there. The altar that he had previous built was still standing, and Abram's return to it hints at his return to fellowship with God.

Note also Lot's similarity to Esau in that both men chose what pleased them (v. 10; cf. 25:29-34).

13:5-7 Lot also had "flocks, herds, and tents" (v. 5). When it became clear that there was not enough pasture to sustain all the flocks of both Abram and Lot ("the land could not support both of them … for their possessions

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 38.

[2]Matthew Henry, p. 27.

were so great," v. 6), fighting broke out between the herdsmen of Lot and Abram.

> "Riches are often an occasion of strife and contention."[1]

Moses' mention of the Canaanites and Perizzites living in the land gives context to the situation in which Abram and Lot lived at this time. These were descendants of Ham who, we learned earlier, were cursed by God (9:25).

> "… the Tale of Sinuhe of the twentieth century [B.C.] depicts persons like Abraham moving freely about in the Canaanite region with large flocks and herds in a semi-nomadic type of existence."[2]

13:8-9 Abram gave his nephew the choice of where he wanted to settle. This was a magnanimous gesture on Abram's part. If he was older than Lot, which seems probable, it shows even greater graciousness. Furthermore, God had called Abram into the Promised Land and promised it to him, not Lot.

In offering Lot either the "left" or the "right" Abram was evidently suggesting that he and Lot partition the Promised Land into two halves; he would take one half and his nephew the other (cf. 22:3-10). Important to our appreciation of Abram's offer is knowledge of the fact that the Hebrews, as well as other ancient peoples, were eastern-oriented (as contrasted with being northern-oriented, as we are). Abram and Lot were probably looking east when Abram made his suggestion.

13:10 Thus "Lot raised his eyes and saw all the vicinity of the Jordan," which was to the east of where they stood. Perhaps they were standing on Mt. Asor, the highest point in that part of Canaan and only a short walk from both Bethel and Ai.[3] So when Abram offered Lot what was on his left, he was referring to northern Canaan, including the area around Shechem (cf. 12:6; 33:18—34:31; 37:12-17), going as far south as Bethel and Ai. The other choice was what was on their right: southern Canaan, including Hebron and the Negev (cf. 13:6, 9; 13:1, 18; 20:1; et al.). Both men had previously lived in both regions.

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[1]Ibid., p. 28.

[2]Wood, *A Survey …*, p. 29.

[3]See *Student Map Manual*, map 1-13.

> "The narrator's comparison of his [Lot's] portion to *the garden of the LORD*, a place of disobedience and curse, and to Egypt, a place of exile and oppression, suggests the short-sightedness of Lot's choice …"[1]

Moses' description of the Jordan Valley as being similar to Egypt should also have warned the Israelite readers of Genesis against desiring to return to Egypt (cf. Exod. 16:3; Num. 11:5; 14:2-3).

13:11 Lot, however, chose neither of the options that Abram had offered: north ("left") or south ("right"). Instead he decided to move "east" into the Jordan Valley (v. 11). Earlier we read that Adam, Eve, and Cain traveled east after they sinned (3:24; 4:16), and that the people of Babel went east and rebelled against God (11:2). Thus Lot's move east makes us a bit uneasy (cf. 12:3), as does Moses' reference to Sodom and Gomorrah being nearby (vv. 10, 12). Was this a bad choice? As things turned out, it was.

At that time the Jordan River was the eastern border of Canaan, and the border continued going south from the southeastern end of the Salt Sea (what we now call the Dead Sea) and southwest toward Kadesh (lit. "cultic shrine") Barnea (10:19). It then proceeded to the Great Sea (which we call the Mediterranean Sea) along the Wadi el Arish ("Brook of Egypt"; cf. Num. 34:1-12; Josh. 15:1-12).

13:12 The text contrasts "the land of Canaan" where Abram settled, with "the cities of the vicinity of the Jordan," where Lot settled. The place Lot chose to settle was on the eastern frontier, along the edges of the border of the Promised Land (v. 11).

The location of Sodom is still uncertain. There are three primary possibilities: northeast of the Dead Sea,[2] southeast of the Dead Sea, or under the southeastern portion of the Dead Sea. The second option seems most probable.

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[1]Levenson, p. 30.

[2]See Steven Collins, "Where Is Sodom? The Case for Tall el-Hammam," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 39:2 (March/April 2013):32-41, 70.

> "… this choice by Lot made rather final the rupture between him and Abram."[1]

Lot's choice erected another hurdle for Abram's faith in the promises of God, and it precipitated another crisis in the "obstacle story" of how God would fulfill His promises to Abram: Lot chose the Jordan Valley.

> "Due to the combination of water (emerging from underground springs fed by the limestone hills farther west [of Jericho]), soil (deposited on the plain from the same hills) and climate (warm and sunny during most of the year), the region is known for all types of agricultural products, especially dates and balsam (used in ancient ointments). … It is not surprising that Lot, who with Abraham had lived for a short time in the lush Nile Valley of Egypt [chose as he did] … His choice appears to have been made from the mountains northeast of Bethel, with a view of the Jericho oasis or the Plains of Moab."[2]

13:13 Lot's choice seems to have been influenced, to some extent, by a desire to ally himself with the native inhabitants (cf. 13:7, 12; 19:1-26), as well as by the natural fruitfulness of the Jordan Valley.

> "In any given situation, what you are determines what you see, and what you see determines what you do."[3]

> "The eyes see what the heart loves."[4]

> "The close parallels between the two [cities, i.e., Babylon and Sodom] which are created in the narrative of chapter 13 suggest that the author intends both cities to tell the same story. As in the case of parallels and repetitions throughout the book, the double account of God's destruction of the 'city in the east' is intended to drive

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[1]Harold Stigers, *Commentary on Genesis*, p. 146.

[2]James Monson, *The Land Between*, pp. 163-64.

[3]Haddon Robinson, *Leadership* 3:1 (Winter 1982):104.

[4]Wiersbe, p. 74. Italics omitted.

> home the point that God's judgment of the wicked is certain and imminent (cf. 41:32)."[1]

13:14-16 Abram was now without an heir. However Yahweh appeared to him at this crucial time and reconfirmed the promise of land that, He said, He would give to Abram's offspring.

Abram "raised his eyes" (v. 10) too (v. 14), but he saw the whole land—as far as he could see in every direction ("northward and southward and eastward and westward"). God repeated His promise to give him and his descendants all the land he saw. This promise was more specific than God's previous promises regarding the seed and the land (12:2, 7). This was God's third revelation to Abram. It contained three specifics:

1. Abram's heir would be his own seed (offspring; vv. 15-16). Lot was his nephew, the son of Haran, Abram's brother (11:27).
2. God would give the land to Abram and his descendants forever (v. 15). Interpreters who believe that the Jews permanently forfeited the land by rejecting their Messiah sometimes translate "forever" (Heb. *'adh 'olam*) "a long time."[2]
3. Abram's descendants would be innumerable (v. 16).

The figure of "dust" (v. 16) suggests physical seed (cf. 2:7), and is hyperbole (overstatement not meant to be taken literally). The meaning is that Abram's descendants would be as innumerable as the dust. The "stars" figure, given later (15:5), suggests heavenly or spiritual seed (cf. 1:14-16), in addition to physical seed, and is also hyperbole.

13:17 God's encouragement to walk through the land implied that Abram should claim the promise by treading the land under his feet. In the ancient Near East victorious armies claimed defeated territory by marching through it and literally treading it under their feet.

> "The divine promise of land and other blessings (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-8) is in the form of a covenant known technically in ancient Near Eastern studies as a

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 144.

[2]E.g., Leupold, 1:441.

> 'covenant of grant.' It was made at the initiative of the granter and often with no preconditions or qualifications."[1]

13:18 Abram later relocated his encampment near Hebron, where he built another altar and worshipped again (cf. 12:7; 13:4). Hebron is the highest town in the Promised Land, with an elevation of about 3,000 feet. Its site is strategic, lying midway between Jerusalem and Beersheba, about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem.

Sailhamer saw Lot as a prefiguration of the rabble that came out of Egypt with the Israelites.[2] Many of the commentators have seen two types of believers in Abram and Lot. One commits himself completely to trusting and obeying God, though not without occasional lapses in his faith. The other wants both what God and what the world can give. These correspond to a spiritual and a carnal believer, or a single-minded and a double-minded believer (James 1:8; 4:8). When Abram gave Lot the choice of where he wanted to live, Abram was giving up any claim to temporal advantages, and he was trusting God to bless him as God had promised He would. This step of faith led to greater blessing by God (vv. 14-17). Abram's response to this fresh revelation, again, was worship ("he built an altar to the LORD," v. 18).

People who truly believe God's promises of provision can be generous with their possessions, as Abram was.

4. Abram's military victory ch. 14

Sometime later a powerful coalition of kings from Mesopotamia invaded Canaan and, in the process, took Lot captive. Abram retaliated with a surprise attack at night and recovered Lot and the possessions those kings had taken. Upon his return to his home, Abram received a blessing from Melchizedek, the king of Salem, and he received an offer of reward by the king of Sodom: Bera. Abram declined to accept the reward, because he did not want people to conclude that Bera, rather than Yahweh, had blessed him. Abram's acknowledgment that victory and possessions come from God alone enabled him to avoid the danger of accepting gifts from the wicked, and to wait for God to provide what He had promised. In this chapter we see a much different Abram from the coward who endangered his wife in Egypt (ch. 12).

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[1]Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 36, n. 39.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 37.

Abram's war with four kings 14:1-16

The significance of this literary unit is that it describes two more challenges to God's faithfulness and Abram's faith. So far Abram had to contend with several barriers to God fulfilling His promises to him. His wife was barren, he had to leave the land, his life was in danger, and his anticipated heir showed no interest in the Promised Land. Now he became involved in a war and consequently became the target of retaliation by four powerful kings.

14:1-2 The four kings mentioned in verse 1 resided in the eastern part of the Fertile Crescent.

> "Their identity is difficult to pin down precisely, but some things are certain. Shinar is Mesopotamia, specifically Babylon (see comments on Gen. 10:8). Elam is the name of an ancient nation-state that was located in what is today southwestern Iran, and *goyim* (Goiim) is a Hebrew term that means 'nation,' often used for non-Semites (here perhaps the Hittites or the Umman-manda). Chedorlaomer is an authentic-sounding EIamite royal name. Ellasar is the most difficult place to identify, but may be a reference to the city-state Larsa in southern Mesopotamia. In spite of great effort the identity of these specific kings has not been determined, although such a coalition was most likely to have occurred before the Old Babylonian period (so before the eighteenth century BC), which was around the time the Bible places Abraham."[1]

These four kings sought to dominate the land of Canaan by subjugating five kings who lived there. They probably wanted to keep the trade routes between Mesopotamia and Egypt open and under their control. It is interesting that people living around Babylon initiated this first "war" mentioned in the Bible (v. 2).

> "Inscriptions found in recent years have shown that the names of the Mesopotamian kings may in some cases be identified with names of persons already known from the

[1]Longman, "Genesis," p. 95.

> [archaeological] discoveries, and that, in any case, they fit into the pattern of Babylonian names."[1]

14:3-7 This war was the result of the five kings who lived in and around the Promised Land rebelling against Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam, whom they had served for 12 years. Scholars have debated the identity of the "Rephaim" (v. 5; cf. 15:20; literally "ghosts" or "spirits of the dead"), whom Chedorlaomer and his coalition of kings defeated. Some believe they were gods, others that they were the deified dead, and still others the promoters of fertility.[2] Most likely they were one of the early tribal groups that inhabited Canaan when Abram entered the land. They appear to have been very powerful, and apparently some of their neighbors regarded them as super-human, before and/or after their heyday.[3] The four Mesopotamian kings subjugated the rulers of a large area in the southwest Fertile Crescent.

14:8-10 The scene of the battle of the nine kings was the Valley of Siddim (vv. 3, 8). This valley probably lay in the southern part of the modern Dead Sea, south of the Lissan Peninsula. The Old Testament calls this body of water the "Salt Sea," because its average 32 percent saline content is about ten times more than the oceans' 3 percent average. Josephus referred to it as Lake Asphaltitis.[4] Apparently the "tar pits" (v. 10) that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fell into contained asphalt. "The hill country" to which the survivors fled probably refers to the higher ground that surrounded the Salt Sea.

14:11-12 The Mesopotamian kings took "all the possessions" of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, including "their food supply," as booty and departed for home. They also took some of the people who lived in these towns, including Lot.

14:13 One of the survivors of the battle came and told Abram what had happened and that Lot had been taken prisoner.

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[1]Free, p. 57.

[2]Conrad L'Heureux, "The Ugaritic and Biblical Rephaim," *Harvard Theological Review* 67 (1974):265-74.

[3]See *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Rephaim," by T. C. Mitchell, pp. 1084-85.

[4]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 9:1:2. See his description of it in *The Wars of the Jews,* 4:8:4. See also Thomson, 1:336-37.

Some scholars have suggested that Abram's designation as "the Hebrew" (v. 13) marked him as a resident alien, rather than a semi-nomad. As such he would have taken steps to take possession of the land God had promised him.[1] He could have been both a resident alien and a semi-nomad.[2] Albright argued that he was a "donkeyman, donkey driver, caravaneer."[3]

> "In the eighteenth century B.C. the ass was the chief beast of burden."[4]

However, most conservative interpreters have concluded that Abram was a semi-nomadic shepherd.[5] The term "Hebrew," occurring here for the first time in the Bible, is primarily an ethnic designation in the Old Testament.[6] Usually people other than Hebrews used this term to describe Abram's ethnic group. "Hebrew" comes from the name "Eber" (cf. 10:21), and is related to a verb meaning "cross over" or "pass through." Abram "crossed over" or "passed through" from another place in order to obey the LORD's command.[7]

Abram was living by "the oaks of Mamre" at this time, which were in the vicinity of Hebron (13:18). "Mamre," Eshcol," and "Aner" were brothers with whom Abram had an alliance.

14:14 The fact that Abram could muster 318 "trained men" who had been "born in his house" shows the great wealth and influence that he possessed at this time. God was already blessing him greatly. Abram led his small army in pursuit of the Mesopotamian kings all the way north to Dan.

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[1]See Donald J. Wiseman, "Abraham in History and Tradition. Part I: Abraham the Hebrew," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:534 (April-June 1977):123-30.

[2]See Yochanan Muffs, "Abraham the Noble Warrior: Patriarchal Politics and Laws of War in Ancient Israel," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1982):81-107.

[3]Albright, "Abram the …," p. 34.

[4]Idem, *The Archaeology …,* p. 206.

[5]E.g., Kitchen, *The Bible …*, p. 57. Cf. 46:32, 34; 47:3.

[6]Hamilton, p. 405. See Finegan, pp. 68-70, for discussion of the Habiru people, and Kathleen Kenyon, *The Bible and Recent Archaeology*, pp. 19, 31.

[7]*The Nelson …,* p. 30.

> "The appearance of the later name 'Dan' is a post-Mosaic updating of the place name for later readers."[1]

Another explanation is that the Dan referred to here was Dan-jaan (2 Sam. 24:6, and possibly Deut. 34:1) in Gilead.[2] In either case, Abram and his "trained men" travelled quite a way north in order to recover Lot.

14:15-16 Abram had some ability as a military strategist, as is clear from how he routed the Mesopotamians. Not content to simply defeat them, he pursued them "as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus," as they fled back home. He brought back to their home territory the people who had been captured and their possessions, including Lot and his possessions.

Abram could have lost his possessions and his life by getting involved in war with the Mesopotamian kings. He definitely set himself up as a target for retaliation. Almost everyone in the ancient Near East practiced retaliation, and it is still a major factor in the continuing political turmoil that characterizes the Middle East to this day.[3] People did not forgive and forget. They harbored resentment for acts committed against their ancestors or themselves for generations, and they took revenge when they thought they could succeed.

Why was Abram willing to take such risks? He probably believed that he could win. His love for Lot may have been the primary factor. His attitude was not: "He's made his own bed; let him lie in it." Perhaps Abram hoped that Lot had learned his lesson, living like a stranger in Sodom, and that he would return to him. Unfortunately Lot had not learned his lesson but returned to Sodom soon after his release as a prisoner of war. Undoubtedly Abram also went to war because he had confidence in God's promises to him (12:2-3, 7).

> "We have here a prelude of the future assault of the worldly power upon the kingdom of God established in Canaan; and the importance of this event to sacred history consists in the fact, that the kings of the valley of Jordan and the surrounding country submitted to the worldly power, whilst Abram, on the contrary, with his home-born servants, smote the conquerors and rescued their booty,—a prophetic sign that in the conflict

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[1]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 147.

[2]Wood, *A Survey …,* p. 53; Leupold, 1:459.

[3]"The ancient Near East" is a term that applies to the whole eastern Mediterranean world in ancient times. "The Middle East" is a term that refers to the area where Africa, Europe, and Asia meet in modern times.

> with the power of the world the seed of Abram would not only not be subdued, but would be able to rescue from destruction those who appealed to it for aid."[1]

The situation that Abram faced, taking his 318 men and going into battle against an alliance of four armies, was similar to the one Gideon faced in leading 300 men against 135,000 Midianites (Judg. 7:6; 8:10). The lesson of both passages is the same: God is able to give a trusting and obedient minority victory over ungodly forces that are overwhelmingly superior in numbers.

Abram's meeting with two kings 14:17-24

This section records an important decision that Abram had to make after he returned victoriously from his battle with the Mesopotamian kings.

14:17 The "valley of Shaveh" was near the city that later became Jerusalem (the "Salem" of verse 18). It may have been the Kidron (or "Black") Valley, immediately east of the city, or some other valley not far away.[2]

> "It has been suggested that this meeting took place at En-rogel, a spring that was southeast of ancient Jerusalem at the intersection of the Kidron and Hinnom Valleys."[3]

14:18 "Melchizedek" was probably a title rather than a proper name. The word means "King of Righteousness" or "My King is Righteous" (cf. "Adonizedek," "Lord of Righteousness," (Josh. 10:1, 3). However theophoric names (names bearing the name of a god) were common in the ancient Near East. So his name may have meant "My King is Sedeq" or "Milku is Righteous," *Sedeq* and *Milku* presumably being the names of gods.[4] The names of both the kings of Sodom ("Bera") and Gomorrah ("Birsha," v. 2) are compounds of a Hebrew word translated "evil" (cf. 13:13).

> "The Rabbis have a curious conceit about the origin of the name Jerusalem, which is commonly taken to mean, 'the foundation,' 'the abode,' or 'the inheritance of peace.' They make it a compound of *Jireh* and *Shalem*, and say

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[1]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:202.

[2]See ibid., 1:462.

[3]Currid, p. 35.

[4]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 316.

> that Abraham called it 'Jehovah-Jireh,' while Shem had named it *Shalem*, but that God combined the two into Jireh-Shalem, Jerushalaim, or Jerusalem. (*Ber[akot]. R[abbah].*)"[1]

Bread and wine were the royal food and drink of the day. Many writers have commented on their typical significance, though there is no basis for connecting them directly with the elements used in the Lord's Supper. Many ancient Near Easterners used bread and wine in making covenants.[2] Melchizedek, the first priest mentioned in the Bible, evidently gave a royal banquet in Abram's honor. In view of their characters and geographical proximity, Abram and Melchizedek may have been friends before this meeting. Melchizedek may have been Abram's king to whom the patriarch was expected to discharge an obligation.[3]

The "God" whom Melchizedek worshipped as a priest was the true God, known to him as "El Elyon," meaning "God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth" (i.e., the Creator). This title reveals the sovereign power of God over the nations. Both Melchizedek and Abram regarded Abram's recent victory in battle as due to the blessing of El Elyon (cf. v. 22). This shows that both of them worshipped the true, living God.

14:19-20 Melchizedek "blessed" Abram, and so set himself up for God's blessing (cf. 12:3). He also blessed (praised) God for handing Abram's enemies over to him. Melchizedek believed that the Most High God controlled the affairs of people: that He is sovereign.

People commonly practiced tithing as an act of worship in the ancient Near East at this time (cf. 28:22).[4] It was also a common tax. This is still true in some modern countries. For example, in England part of every person's taxes goes to maintain the Church of England. Some residents regard this part of their tax as their contribution to the church or their tithe. However, since Melchizedek gave Abram a priestly blessing, it is likely that Abram reciprocated by giving Melchizedek a gift with priestly

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[1]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 25.

[2]Donald J. Wiseman, "Abraham in History and Tradition. Part II: Abraham the Prince," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:535 (July-September 1977):236.

[3]Loren Fisher, "Abraham and His Priest-King," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962):268.

[4]See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:207.

connotations.[1] In some cases, people gave tithes to those whom they regarded as superiors, as a sign of their respect.[2] "Everything" probably refers to all that Abram took in the battle rather than all that was in his possession (cf. vv. 23-24; Heb. 7:4).

14:21-24 Abram identified El Elyon with Yahweh (v. 22). His willingness to take no spoil from the battle for himself demonstrates Abram's desire that God would receive all the glory for his prosperous victory. He also appears not to have wanted to be indebted to the king of Sodom. This man may have, by his command to Abram (v. 21), been setting him up for demands later on (cf. 23:15).

> "The gifts of the ungodly are often attached to deadly strings."[3]

Normally the patriarchs believed that God would give them what He had promised without their having to take it from others.[4] Abram was content with what God had given him (cf. Phil. 4:11).[5]

> "… just as in the previous episode where Abram allowed Lot the pick of the land, so here he allows the surly king of Sodom more than his due."[6]

> "Christians are really so rich in their own inheritance that it ill becomes them to crave the possessions of others."[7]

Here (v. 24) we learn that Abram's allies: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre (v. 13), had also participated in the battle along with Abram's servants (v. 14).

This event is significant because it demonstrates Abram's trust in God to provide what He had promised, which God soon rewarded with another revelation and a promise (15:1).

> "Even without the explicit warning that 'he who disdains you I shall curse,' the narrative suggests that it is dangerous to despise those through

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 316.

[2]A. Noordtzij, *Leviticus*, p. 279.

[3]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 182.

[4]See note on 48:22.

[5]See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 120-22, for an excursus on the patriarchs' wealth.

[6]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 318.

[7]Bush, 1:237.

> whom God works. It is the demonstration of divine support for Abram [however] that is the clearest thrust of this story."[1]
>
> "Within Genesis … Melchizedek is primarily an example of a non-Jew who recognizes God's hand at work in Israel … They are those who have discovered that in Abram all the families of the earth find blessing."[2]

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews expounded the typical significance of Melchizedek, and the events of this incident, in Hebrews 7 (cf. Ps. 110:4). A "type" is a divinely intended illustration given beforehand of something else like it that follows: the antitype.[3]

The confidence that God will preserve and provide for His own, just as He promised, should encourage believers to decline worldly benefits and wait for God's blessings.

> "We see in chapter 14 who has the real power, Lot the man who compromised with the world, or Abraham the man who lived in separation from it. You know they tell us, 'If you want to have power and influence with the world, you must live according to it, and, in a sense, be *of* it. If you want to win card players, you must learn to play cards,' etc."[4]

5. The Abrahamic Covenant ch. 15

Abram virtually asked God to strengthen his faith (14:23-24). In response, Yahweh promised to give the patriarch innumerable descendants. This led Abram to request some further assurance that God would indeed do what He promised: "What will You give me, since I am childless?" (v. 2). God graciously obliged him by formalizing the promises in a covenant. In the giving of the covenant God also symbolically let Abram know that enslavement would precede the fulfillment of the promise.

From chapters 12 through 14 issues involving God's promise to Abram concerning land have predominated. From chapter 15 on tensions arising from the promise of descendants become central in the narrative.

Abram was legitimately concerned about God's provision of the Promised Land, as well as his need for an heir. He had declined the gifts of the king of Sodom, and he had placed

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 321. Paragraph division omitted.

[2]Ibid., p. 322.

[3]See Paul L. Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, pp. 166-74. And see Gerald R. McDermott, "Typology in Creation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 175:697 (January-March 2018):5-16, for an argument for extensive typology.

[4]Newell, p. 79.

himself in danger of retaliation from four powerful Mesopotamian kings. God had proved Himself to be Abram's "shield" (v. 1; defender) in the battle just passed. Now He promised to be the same in the future, and to give Abram a "great reward." This was God's fourth revelation to Abram in Genesis.

> "Gen 15 not only stands at the center of the external structure of the Abraham narratives, but also is regarded in the history of exegesis right down to the present as the very heart of the Abraham story."[1]

> "Scene 5 [ch. 15] consists of two divine encounters (15:1-6 and 7-21) involving dialogue between the Lord and Abraham and powerful images symbolizing God's presence and promises. The first occurs at night (15:5) as a vision (15:1) and pertains to the promised seed. The second occurs at sundown (15:12), partially in a deep sleep (15:12), and pertains to the promised land."[2]

Moses' declaration that "Abram believed the LORD " (v. 6) links the two sections.

15:1

> "'The word of the LORD came.' This is a phrase typically introducing revelation to a prophet, e.g., 1 Sam 15:10; Hos 1:1; but in Genesis it is found only here and in v 4 of this chapter. Abraham is actually called a prophet in 20:7. It prepares the way for the prophecy of the Egyptian bondage in vv 13-16."[3]

Only in 15:1, and 22:1 and 11, did God address Abram directly. Visions were one of the three primary methods of divine revelation in the Old Testament, along with dreams and direct communications (cf. Num. 12:6-8).

In view of the possibility that the powerful Mesopotamian kings (ch. 14) might take revenge, it was natural for Abram to fear.

> "By his bold intervention and rescue of Lot, Abram exposes himself to the endemic plague of that region—wars of

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[1]Westermann, *Genesis 12—36*, p. 230. See Showers, ch. 6: "The Abrahamic Covenant," pp. 55-68, and ch. 7: "The Effects of the Abrahamic Covenant Upon Israel," pp. 69-76; and Pentecost, *Things to …*, pp. 65-94, for a thorough discussion of the Abrahamic Covenant.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 238.

[3]Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 32

> retaliation.[1] This fear of retaliation is the primary reason for the divine oracle of 15.1 which could be translated: 'Stop being afraid, Abram. I am a shield for you, your very great reward.' Yahweh's providential care for Abram is to be seen as preventing the Mesopotamian coalition from returning and settling the score."[2]

The promise of "reward" (Heb. *shakar*), coming just after Abram's battle with the kings, resembles a royal grant to an officer for faithful military service.[3] God would compensate Abram for conducting this military campaign, even though he had passed up a reward from the king of Sodom. The compensation in view consisted of land and descendants (cf. Ps. 127:3).

This interpretation, that Abram feared retaliation, looks back to the preceding chapter (ch. 14). Another view looks forward to what follows in this chapter: the promise of numerous descendants for Abram. Advocates of this second view see Abram's fear as fear of remaining childless (cf. v. 2), not fear of retaliation.[4] Perhaps he feared both things. "After these things" seems to me to separate the events of chapters 14 and 15, and that may support the second view.

In response to Abram's fear, God promised that He Himself would be Abram's perfectly adequate safeguard and the only reward that he would need.

15:2-3 Abram used a new title for God, calling Him "Master (Adonai) Yahweh" (translated "Lord God," meaning "Sovereign Master"). Abram had willingly placed himself under the sovereign authority and leadership of the Strong One, the Most High God.

> "… under Hurrian law a man's heir would be either his natural-born son—a direct heir—or, in the absence of any natural-born son, an indirect heir, who was an outsider adopted for the purpose. In the latter case, the adopted

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[1]"See Sarna, [*Understanding Genesis*, pp.] 116, 121, 122."

[2]Helyer, p. 83.

[3]M. G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, p. 216.

[4]E.g., Leupold, 1:472; Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 169.

> heir was required to attend to the physical needs of his 'parents' during their lifetime."[1]
>
> "A childless couple adopts a son, sometimes a slave, to serve them in their lifetime and bury and mourn them when they die. In return for this service they designate the adopted son as the heir presumptive. Should a natural son be born to the couple after such action, this son becomes the chief heir, demoting the adopted son to the penultimate position."[2]

Abram assumed that since he was old and childless, and since Lot had not returned to him, the heir that God had promised him would be his chief servant, Eliezer (v. 2; cf. Prov. 17:2). The wordplay between the Hebrew words *mesheq* ("heir") and *dammesek* ("Damascus") suggests the incongruity that Abram's presumed heir (Eliezer) would apparently be an alien (cf. Jer. 49:1).

15:4 God assured Abram that the descendants that He had promised would come through a natural-born son, not an adopted heir ("one who will come from your own body"; cf. 12:7; 13:15-16). The repetition of "the word of the LORD came" (cf. v. 1) stresses the divine origin of this promise.

15:5 To the promise of "descendants as innumerable as the dust" (possibly implying physical descendants from the land, cf. 13:16), God added another promise: that Abram's seed would be as countless as "the stars." This is perhaps a promise of Abram's spiritual descendants (all believers after Abram), those who would have faith in God as he did. Abram may not have seen this distinction, since he would have more naturally taken the promise as a reference to physical descendants.

15:6 Moses did not reveal exactly what Abram "believed" (confidently trusted, relied upon), for which God "credited it to him as righteousness." In Hebrew, the preformative conjunction *waw*, with the imperfect tense verb following, indicates consecutive action, and it best translates as

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[1]West, pp. 68-69. See also Currid, p. 35; Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 116, 121-22; Anthony Phillips, "Some Aspects of Family Law in Pre-Exilic Israel," *Vetus Testamentum* 23:3 (1973):360; Kitchen, *The Bible …*, p. 70.

[2]Hamilton, p. 420. See also Cyrus H. Gordon, "Biblical Customs and the Nuzu Tablets," *Biblical Archaeologist* 3:1 (February 1940):2-3; Wood, *A Survey …,* p. 28.

"Then." When *waw* occurs with the perfect tense verb following, as we have here, with a *hiphil* perfect, it indicates disjunctive action, and could read, "Now Abram had believed" (cf. 1:2). Many English translations avoid the problem and read simply "And" or "Abram believed."

Clearly God justified Abram (declared him righteous) because of Abram's faith. Abram's normal response to God's words to him was to believe them. Abram had trusted the Person of God previously (cf. Heb. 11:8), but he evidently had not realized that God would give him an heir from his own body (v. 4). Now he accepted this promise of God also (cf. Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23). The Hebrew word translated "believed" literally means "leaned fully."[1] Thus "trusting" is a good synonym for "believing."

One writer suggested that Abram believed the "counting" promises of 13:16 and 15:4 and 5, regarding numerous descendants, and the result was that the LORD "counted" his faith as righteousness.[2] The Apostle Paul expounded verse 15 in Romans 4 and there wrote that the promise that Abram believed was "that he would be heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). That is, Abram believed that through his yet to be born son, Abram would bless the whole world.

> "In the middle of this chapter occurs what is perhaps the most important verse in the entire Bible: Genesis 15:6. In it, the doctrine of justification by faith is set forth for the first time. This is the first verse in the Bible explicitly to speak of (1) 'faith,' (2) 'righteousness,' and (3) 'justification.'"[3]

It is also the first reference to the word "believe."

> "Religious conversion appears first in recorded history in the Hebrew Bible."[4]

Trust in God's promise is what results in "justification" in any era. The promises of God (the content of faith) vary, but the object of faith does

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[1]Merrill, in *The Old …,* p. 20.

[2]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 167.

[3]Boice, 2:98.

[4]Albright, *Archaeology and …,* p. 24.

not. It is always God.[1] Technically, Abram trusted in a Person and believed His promise. To "justify" someone means to *declare* that person righteous, not to *make* him or her righteous in his or her conduct (cf. Deut. 25:1). "Justification" expresses a legal verdict.

> "We are not saved by making promises to God; we are saved by believing God's promises to us. How you respond to God's promises determines what God will do in your life."[2]

Covenant theologians believe that the *object* of saving faith in both Testaments is the same: Jesus Christ.[3] But there does not seem to be enough specific revelation about Jesus Christ early in the Old Testament to justify such a conclusion (cf. Rom. 4:13).

Today, some preachers warn us about "easy believism," a term that they use for the teaching that faith alone is all that is necessary for salvation. But Genesis 15:6 presents faith as the only thing that resulted in Abram's justification. It sounds very much as though Abram simply gave mental assent to what God told him. Even though it is possible for a person simply to acknowledge certain facts as true (to give mental assent to them), *saving* faith goes beyond that and rests one's hope for the future on them (trusts them)—without adding anything else (cf. Heb. 11:1).

> "*He'emin*, Hifil of *'aman*, 'to confirm' and 'support,' means 'trust,' 'believe,' implying *fiducia* [the Latin word for "trust"] rather than *assensus* [or *ascensus*, the Latin word for "assent"]."[4]

Moses probably recorded Abram's faith here because it was foundational for making the Abrahamic Covenant. God made this covenant with a man who believed Him.

James 2:21 suggests that Abram was justified when he offered Isaac (ch. 22). James meant that Abram's work of willingly offering Isaac justified

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[1]See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 110-31; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 105-22.

[2]Wiersbe, p. 69.

[3]See the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, in *Creeds of Christendom*, edited by Philip Schaff, 3:7:3; Calvin, *Institutes of …,* 2:6:4; and Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Is It the Case that Christ is the Same Object of Faith in the Old Testament?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55:2(June 2012):291-98.

[4]Leupold, 1:476.

him (declared or showed him to be righteous). That is, his work demonstrated his righteous condition. In Genesis 15 *God* declared Abram righteous (in his standing before God), but in Genesis 22, *Abram's works* declared (testified, showed to others) that he was righteous.

> "In the sacrifice of Isaac was shown the full meaning of the word (Gen. 15:6) spoken 30 years before in commendation of Abraham's belief in the promise of a child. It was the willing surrender of the child of promise, 'accounting that God was able to raise him up from the dead,' which fully proved his faith."[1]

> "*Righteousness* is not an ideal, absolute norm which is above men, but rather a term of relationship. Thus, a man is called righteous who conducts himself properly with reference to an existing communal relationship, who, therefore, does justice to the claims which this communal relationship makes on him. This communal relationship can be human. But the passages where righteousness refers, as it does here, to the relationship of communion between man and God are more important."[2]

15:7 In order to make sure that Abram knew who was making these promises, Yahweh identified Himself as the same God who had faithfully led Abram out of Ur and into the land that God had promised to give him. He had been faithful to His promises so far, so Abram could trust Him for these additional promises.

> "Ancient Near Eastern covenant documents of the second millennium BC often opened with a statement of self-identification by the suzerain, or superior party, of the treaty."[3]

15:8 Abram requested a sign, a supernatural verification that God would indeed fulfill the land promise ("… how may I know that I will possess it?"). His request shows that he was taking God's promises seriously. Though Abram was in the land, he had not yet taken possession of it. He

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[1]Joseph Mayor, *The Epistle of Saint James*, p. 104. Cf. Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, pp. 28-31.

[2]von Rad, p. 185.

[3]Currid, p. 36.

was still a semi-nomadic foreigner in it. Abram's concern at this point seems to have been the promise of land more than the promise of descendants.

> "Requests for signs were not unusual in Old Testament times. They were not so much to discover God's will as to confirm it."[1]

15:9-10 God responded by giving Abram a sign and making a covenant with him.

> "Only after he had been counted righteous by his faith could Abraham enter into God's covenant."[2]

> "This type of covenant is called a covenant of grant, which is a reward for past loyalty, and does not involve any obligations upon the grantee [cf. 2 Sam. 7:8-16; Ps. 89:20-37]."[3]

> "Four rites are mentioned [in the Old Testament] as parts of the covenant making event. They are the setting of a stone or a group of stones, the taking of an oath, the sacrifice of animals, and/or a communal meal."[4]

The sacrifice of animals in covenant-making normally involved two parties. They divided an animal into two equal parts, joining hands, and walked between the two parts (cf. Jer. 34:18-19). On this occasion, however, God alone passed between the parts, indicating that Abram had no obligations to fulfill in order to receive the covenant promises (v. 17). The animals used were standard types of sacrificial animals.

> "The use of five different kinds of sacrificial animals on this occasion underlines the solemnity of the occasion."[5]

> "We suggest that the animal cutting in Gen. 15:9-10, 17 is designated a 'covenant ratification sacrifice' … The killing and sectioning of the animals by Abram is the sacrificial

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[1]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 186.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 152.

[3]Levenson, p. 33.

[4]Livingston, p. 157.

[5]Gordon J. Wenham, "The Symbolism of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15: A Response to G. F. Hasel, *JSOT* 19 (1981):61-78," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 22 (1981):135.

> *preparatio* [preparation] for the subsequent divine *ratificatio* [ratification] of the covenant by Yahweh who in passing between the pieces {v. 17] irrevocably pledges the fulfillment of his covenant promise to the patriarch. The initiative of Yahweh remains in the foreground both in the instruction for the 'covenant ratification sacrifice' (Gen. 15:9-10) and in the act of *b^{e}rit* [covenant] ratification itself (v. 17).[1]
>
> "Gen. 15:7-21 contains covenant-making in which Yahweh binds himself in promise to Abram in the passing through the animals in the act of covenant ratification. Abram had prepared the animals for this ratification act through the 'covenant ratification sacrifice' which involved both killing and sectioning of the victims. Certain basic features of this covenant ratification rite are most closely paralleled only in aspects of the function of animal rites of the extant early second millennium treaty texts."[2]

To ratify (in the quotation above) means to give formal consent to either a treaty, a contract, or an agreement, making it officially valid.

> "By passing through the parts, God is taking on a self-curse: 'If I break my promise, may I become like these animals [cf. Jer. 34:17-22].'"[3]

God gave these instructions to Abram in direct communication. Abram was not yet asleep (v. 12) nor was he having a vision. It is impossible to tell whether Abram heard God speaking audibly from heaven, in his head, or whether God had appeared to him in the form of a man (cf. 18:16-17; Dan. 3:24-25; et al.). In view of what follows, I think probably Abram heard God speaking to him audibly from heaven or in his head.

15:11 Why did Moses include this verse? Possible he intended the reader to understand that what he had just described really took place. It would have been natural for birds of prey to attack these sacrificed animals and

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[1]Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Meaning of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19 (1981):70.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Longman, "Genesis," p. 97.

for Abram to drive them away. But another interpretation has been offered:

> "The birds of prey are unclean (Lev. 11:13-19; Deut. 14:12-18) and represent foreign nations (Ezek. 17:3, 7; Zech. 5:9), most probably Egypt. Thus Abram driving off the birds of prey from the dismembered pieces portrays him defending his descendants from the attacks of foreign nations. Genesis itself tells of a number of attacks by foreigners against the children of Abraham (e.g. chs. 26, 34) and it already looks forward to the sojourn in Egypt (chs. 37—50 [cf. Exod. 1:11-12]). But in what sense can Abraham's actions be said to protect his offspring? Genesis 22:16-18; 26:5 suggest it was Abraham's faithful obedience to the covenant that guaranteed the blessing of his descendants. Exodus 2:24 and Deuteronomy 9:5 also ground the exodus in the divine promises made to the patriarchs. The bird scene therefore portrays the security of Israel as the consequence of Abraham's piety."[1]

15:12 Apparently Abram then fell into the same type of "deep sleep" that God brought on Adam when He took Adam's rib to make Eve (cf. 2:21). Abram's "terror" reflects his reaction to the "torch" that passed between the parts and to the revelation of the character and holy presence of God that the flame represented (cf. v. 17).

15:13-14 Moses gave more detail regarding the history of the promised descendants here than he had revealed previously (cf. vv. 14, 16). The "four hundred years" of enslavement were evidently from 1845 B.C. to 1446 B.C., the date of the Exodus.

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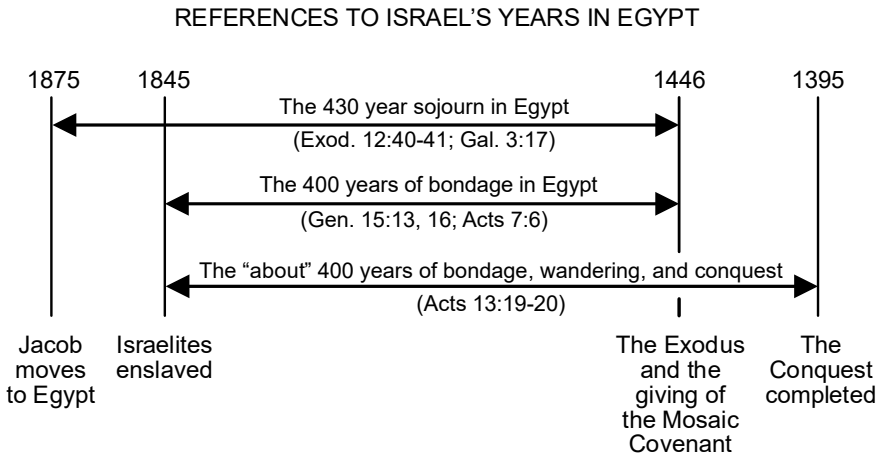
[1]Wenham, "The Symbolism …," p. 135.



This promise, read by the early readers of Genesis after the Exodus, would have encouraged them greatly (cf. Exod. 12:40-42). They experienced the fulfillment of this promise. That generation did indeed come out from Egypt with "many possessions," also promised here, having "plundered" the Egyptians (cf. Exod. 12:31-36).

15:15 The ancients conceived of death as a time when they would rejoin their departed ancestors ("you shall go to your fathers"; cf. 2 Sam. 12:23). This was more than just joining their ancestors in their graves. It was confidence that they would live together with them.[1] There was evidently little understanding of what lay beyond the grave in Abram's day.[2]

15:16 The Hebrew word translated "generation" generally refers to an average person's lifetime, which at that time in history was about 100 years.[3] This seems a better explanation than that four literal generations are in view. The writer mentioned four literal generations in Exodus 6:16 through 20 and Numbers 26:58 and 59, but there are quite evidently gaps in those genealogies.[4] "The Amorite" serves as a synecdoche for the ten Canaanite nations listed in verses 19 and 20. (A "synecdoche" is a figure of speech in

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[1]Leupold, 1:485-86.

[2]For a synopsis of Israel's view of life after death, see Bernhard Lang, "Afterlife: Ancient Israel's Changing Vision of the World Beyond," *Bible Review* 4:1 (February 1988):12-23.

[3]See W. F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*, p. 9; and *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, s.v., "*dor*," by Robert D. Culver, 1:186-87.

[4]See Kitchen, *Ancient Orient …*, p. 54.

which one part of a whole represents the whole, as here, or the whole represents a part.)

> "The Amorites, we may suppose, became the most numerous, powerful, and corrupt of all the race, for they are frequently made to represent the whole [cf. 1 Kings 21:26]."[1]

15:17 The "smoking oven" and "flaming torch" were evidently one entity. This was an intensely bright, hot flame symbolizing God in His holiness. The bright, hot, burning flame is a good symbol of God in that it is pure, purges in judgment, and provides light and warmth.

> "This act is a promise that God will be with Abraham's descendants (e.g. 26:3, 24; 28:15; 31:3; 46:4, etc.). Indeed the description of the theophany as a furnace of smoke and 'a torch of fire' invites comparison with the pillar of cloud and fire that was a feature of the wilderness wanderings, and especially with the smoke, fire and torches (Exod. 19:18; 20:18) that marked the law-giving at Sinai. These were visible tokens of God's presence with his people, that he was walking among them and that they were his people (Lev. 26:12)."[2]

> "In this episode then Abram's experience in a sense foreshadows that of his descendants. He sees them under attack from foreign powers but protected and enjoying the immediate presence of God. Elsewhere in the Abraham cycle, his life prefigures episodes in the history of Israel. Famine drove him to settle in Egypt (12:10; cf. chs. 42—46). He escaped after God had plagued Pharaoh (12:17; cf. Exod. 7—12), enriched by his stay in Egypt (13:2; cf. Exod. 12:35-38) and journeyed by stages (13:3; cf. Exod. 17:1; etc.) back to Canaan. In Genesis 22 Abraham goes on a three-day journey to a mountain, offers a sacrifice in place of his only son, God appears to him and reaffirms his promises. Sinai is of course a three-day journey from Egypt

[1]Thomson, 1:240-41.

[2]Wenham, "The Symbolism …," p. 136.

> (Exod. 8:27), where Israel's first-born sons had been passed over (Exod. 12). There too sacrifice was offered, God appeared and reaffirmed his promises (Exod. 19—24)."[1]
>
> "Finally, it may be observed, the interpretation of Gen. 15:9-11, 17, that I am proposing on the basis of other ritual texts in the Pentateuch is congruent with verses 13-16, which explain that Abraham's descendants would be oppressed for 400 years in Egypt before they come out with great possessions. Whether these verses are a later addition to the narrative as is generally held, or integral to it as van Seters asserts, they do confirm that at a very early stage in the history of the tradition this rite was interpreted as a dramatic representation of the divine promises to Abraham. It is not a dramatized curse that would come into play should the covenant be broken, but a solemn and visual reaffirmation of the covenant that is essentially a promise …"[2]

Another writer argued that this verse does not picture a covenant-making ritual for a unilateral, wholly unconditional covenant (cf. 17:1-2, 9-14; 18:18-19; 22:16, 18; 26:5). He believed that the covenant is unconditional, but it did not become unconditional until chapter 22.[3]

15:18 This was the formal so-called "cutting" of the Abrahamic Covenant. God now formalized His earlier promises (12:1-3, 7) into a suzerainty treaty, similar to a royal land grant, since Abram now understood and believed what God had promised. God as King bound Himself to do something for His servant Abram. The fulfillment of the covenant did not depend on Abram's obedience. It rested entirely on God's faithfulness.[4]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Gordon H. Johnston, "Torch and Brazier Passing between the Pieces (Gen 15:17): Does It Really Symbolize an Unconditional Covenant?" and "God's Covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15: A Contingently-Unconditional Royal Grant?" papers presented at the 56th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, Tex., November 18, 2004.

[4]Westermann, "Promises to …," p. 690.

"Note that the conditional promise of Gen. 12:1-3 becomes an unconditional covenant in Gen. 15:18. God declared His unconditional covenant with Abraham after declaring him righteous because of his belief (15:6)."[1]

"… it is fitting that in many respects the account should foreshadow the making of the covenant at Sinai. The opening statement in 15:7: 'I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Ur of the Chaldeans,' is virtually identical to the opening statement of the Sinai covenant in Exodus 20:2: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.' The expression 'Ur of the Chaldeans' refers back to Genesis 11:28, 31 and grounds the present covenant in a past act of divine salvation from 'Babylon,' just as Exodus 20:2 grounds the Sinai covenant in an act of divine salvation from Egypt. The coming of God's presence in the awesome fire and darkness of Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18; 20:18; Dt 4:11) appears to be intentionally reflected in Abraham's pyrotechnic vision (Ge 15:12, 17). In the Lord's words to Abraham (15:13-16) the connection between Abraham's covenant and the Sinai covenant is explicitly made by means of the reference to the four hundred years of bondage of Abraham's seed and their subsequent 'exodus' ('and after this they will go out,' v. 14). Such considerations lead to the conclusion that the author intends to draw the reader's attention to the events at Sinai in his depiction of the covenant with Abraham."[2]

"If we ask why the author has sought to bring the picture of Sinai here, the answer lies in the purpose of the book. It is part of the overall strategy of the book to show that what God did at Sinai was part of a larger plan which had already been put into action with the patriarchs. Thus, the exodus and the Sinai covenant serve as reminders not only of God's power and grace but also of God's faithfulness.

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[1]*The Nelson …,* p. 1885.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 152.

> What he sets out to accomplish with his people, he will carry through to the end."[1]

Moses revealed the general geographical borders of the Promised Land here for the first time. Some scholars interpret the "river of Egypt" as the Nile River.

> "The argument is usually based on the fact that the Hebrew word *nahar* is consistently restricted to large rivers. However, the Hebrew is more frequently *nahal* (= Arabic *wady*) instead of the *nahar* of Genesis 15:18 which may have been influenced by the second *nahar* in the text.[2] In the Akkadian texts of Sargon II (716 B.C.) it appears as *nahal musar*."[3]

God later specified the Wadi El 'Arish, "the geographical boundary between Canaan and Egypt,"[4] as the exact border (Num. 34:5; Josh. 15:4, 47). That seems to be the "river" in view here too.

> "… if it [the river of Egypt] was the Nile, the Jews were already in the Promised Land before they ever left Egypt."[5]

The Euphrates River has never yet been Israel's border.[6] These borders appear to coincide roughly with those of the Garden of Eden (cf. 2:10-14). Thus the Garden of Eden may have occupied the same general area as the Promised Land.

Some amillennialists take these boundaries as an ideal expressing great blessing, and they believe that God never intended that Abram's seed

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[1]Ibid.

[2]"J. Simons, *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament*, p. 96, sec. 272."

[3]"James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 286; also Esarhaddon's *Arzi(ni)* or Arsa = Arish (?), (ibid., p. 290). See Bruce K. Waltke, 'River of Egypt,' *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible,* 5:121; and J. Dwight Pentecost, *Prophecy for Today*, p. 65. An interesting case for the Nile is made by H. Bar-Deroma in 'The River of Egypt (*Nahal Mizraim*),' *Palestinian Exploration Quarterly* 92 (1960):37-56." Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:552 (October-December 1981):311.

[4]Charles Pfeiffer and Howard Vos, *Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands*, p. 88.

[5]Fruchtenbaum, p. 268.

[6]Cf. Edersheim, *Sketches of …*, p. 8.

should extend this far geographically.[1] But such a conclusion is subjective, and it finds no support in the text.[2] Others take this promise as referring to heaven. Still other amillennialists take it literally but believe that it was conditional and will never be fulfilled because of Israel's disobedience.[3]

15:19-21 Moses named ten of the native tribes that were then inhabiting the Promised Land. The longest of the 27 lists of pre-Israelite nations that inhabited the Promised Land names 12 entities (10:15-18a; 1 Chron. 1:13-18). Sometimes as few as two receive mention. Most of these lists identify six.[4]

The Kenites (lit. "smiths," v. 19) were copper-workers who lived among the Midianites to the southeast of the Gulf of Aqabah.[5] The Kenizzites (v. 19) lived in the extreme south of the Promised Land.[6] The Kadmonites (v. 19) evidently lived near the headwaters of the Jordan River near Mount Hermon.[7]

The Hittites mentioned here (v. 20) lived near Hebron (23:10). They are probably not the same Hittites that lived in Anatolia (Asia Minor, modern western Turkey; cf. 10:15).[8] The Perizzites (v. 20) apparently lived in villages (Heb. *peraza*) scattered among the other Canaanites.[9] The Rephaim (v. 20) were people of a legendary stature who lived among the other Canaanites and were also known by other names, such as Emim (Deut. 2:11) and Zamzummim (Deut. 2:20-21).[10]

The Amorites (v. 21) lived mainly in the hill country, on both sides of the Jordan River.[11] "Canaanites" (v. 21) is both a general name for all these tribes (a synecdoche) and, as used here, the name of one of them. The

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[1]E.g., Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 245.

[2]See Mal Couch, "When God *Restores* the Kingdom to Israel," in *The Gathering Storm*, pp. 258-76.

[3]See John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy*, ch. 4: "The Promise of the Land to Israel," pp. 63-79.

[4]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 177.

[5]*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Kenites," by J. A. Motyer, pp. 688-89.

[6]Ibid., s.v. "Kenizzites," by J. P. U. Lilley, p. 689.

[7]Thomson, 1:242.

[8]See Finegan, pp. 198-200; Archer, *Encyclopedia of …*, pp. 96-98.

[9]*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Perizzites," by J. P. U. Lilley, p. 968.

[10]Ibid., s.v. "Rephaim," by T. C. Mitchell, pp. 1084-85.

[11]Ibid., s.v. "Amorites," by A. R. Millard, pp. 31-32.

> tribal Canaanites lived mainly in the western part of Canaan.[1] Little is known of the Girgashites (v. 21), though they were descendants of the patriarch Canaan (Gen. 10:16; 1 Chron. 1:14) and were a part of the mixed population of the Promised Land. The Jebusites (v. 21) lived mainly in the hills around Jerusalem (Num. 13:29; Josh. 11:3; 15:8; 18:16).[2]

God repeated the promises of this covenant frequently in Genesis (17:1-22; 18:1-15; 22:15-18; 26:23-24; 35:9-15; cf. 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17).

The Abrahamic Covenant is basic to the premillennial system of theology.

> "How one understands the nature and function of this covenant will largely determine one's overall theology and most particularly his eschatology [study of the end times]."[3]

This covenant has not yet been fulfilled exactly as God promised it would be.[4] Since God is faithful to His Word, I believe He will fulfill these promises in the future. Consequently there must be a future for Israel as a nation (cf. Rom. 11). Amillennialists interpret this covenant in a less literal way. Most of them believe, for example, that the land promise was fulfilled during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 8:65) and again during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25).[5] The crucial issue is interpretation. If God fulfilled the seed and blessings promises literally—and He did—should we not expect that He will also fulfill the land promises literally as well?[6]

The Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenants are outgrowths of the Abrahamic Covenant. Each of these expands one major promise of the Abrahamic Covenant: the land, seed, and blessing promises respectively.

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[1]Ibid., s.v. "Canaan, Canaanites," by Kenneth A. Kitchen, pp. 183-86.

[2]Ibid., s.v. "Jebusites," by D. J. Wiseman, pp. 601-2.

[3]Eugene H. Merrill, "The Covenant with Abraham," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 12:36 (August 2008):5.

[4]See also Levenson, p. 33.

[5]E.g., Leupold, 1:490.

[6]See Jeffrey Townsend, "Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:568 (October-December 1985):320-37; Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Covenant with Abraham and Its Historical Setting," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:507 (July-September 1970):241-56; Daniel C. Lane, "The Meaning and Use of the Old Testament Term for 'Covenant' (*berit*): with Some Implications for Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Toronto, Canada, November 20, 2002.

God's people can rely on His promises, even if they have to experience suffering and death before they see the promises fulfilled.

6. The birth of Ishmael ch. 16

Now that God had given Abram the covenant, the writer proceeded to show how He would fulfill the promises in it. This is the reason for the selection of material that follows. So far in the story of Abram, Moses stressed the plans and purposes of God, culminating in the making of the covenant. Now we learn how Abram and his seed would realize these plans and purposes. This involves a revelation of God's ways and man's responsibilities.[1]

Sarai and Abram schemed to obtain the heir that God had promised to give them by resorting to a culturally acceptable custom of their day, but which involved a failure to trust God. This fleshly act created serious complications for Abram and his household that included Hagar fleeing into the wilderness. Nevertheless God proved faithful to His promises and responded to Hagar's cries for help. He provided for her needs, and He promised her many descendants, through Ishmael, since he was Abram's son.

> "The account of Sarah's plan to have a son has not only been connected with the list of nations in chapter 15, but also appears to have been intentionally shaped with reference to the account of the Fall in Genesis 3. Each of the main verbs (*wayyiqtol* forms) and key expressions in 16:2-3 finds a parallel in Genesis 3."[2]

Alluding to the Fall, which the above quotation points out, implies the writer's disapproval of what Sarai did (cf. 3:17). Moses continued to focus increasing attention on the problem of an heir. Sarai had borne Abram no children (v. 1). She therefore concocted a plan to obtain an heir from his "own body" (15:4). It looked as if everything would work out well until a conflict developed between Sarai and Hagar (v. 4). This conflict grew into a major crisis when Hagar fled the family encampment pregnant with Abram's unborn child (v. 6). Yahweh intervened again to resolve the crisis (v. 7). He instructed Hagar to return to Sarai (v. 9). Thus Hagar bore Ishmael in Abram's house, but later God revealed that he would not be the promised heir.

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[1]See Darby, 1:54-55.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 153. See this page for a chart of the parallels.

Sarai and Hagar 16:1-6

16:1-2 Using a woman other than one's wife was a culturally approved method—apart from adoption—of providing an heir in the case of a childless marriage.[1] The Code of Hammurabi, which influenced life in the ancient Near East at this time, gave the Babylonians permission to do what Sarai suggested.[2] This is a practice that is still acceptable in some parts of Africa today.[3] Hagar was Sarai's personal servant ("slave woman"). Abram also had at least one personal servant (24:2).

> "It was a serious matter for a man to be childless in the ancient world, for it left him without an heir. But it was even more calamitous for a woman: to have a great brood of children was the mark of success as a wife; to have none was ignominious failure. So throughout the ancient East polygamy was resorted to as a means of obviating [removing] childlessness. But wealthier wives preferred the practice of surrogate motherhood, whereby they allowed their husbands to 'go in to' their maids, a euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. 6:4; 30:3; 38:8, 9; 39:14). The mistress could then feel that her maid's child was her own and exert some control over it in a way that she could not if her husband simply took a second wife."[4]

Did Sarai mean that she would obtain children through Hagar by adopting them as her own, or by becoming fertile herself as a result of Hagar's childbearing? Most interpreters have taken the first position, but some have preferred the second.[5] The basis of the second view is the not-infrequent phenomenon of a woman, who has had trouble conceiving, becoming pregnant after she has adopted a child.

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[1]Speiser, p. 130; T. Frymer-Kensky, "Patriarchal Family Relationships and Near Eastern Law," *Biblical Archaeologist* 44 (1981):209-14.

[2]See Free, pp. 59-60. See also Currid, p. 36.

[3]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 34.

[4]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 7. See also Wood, *A Survey …,* p. 28.

[5]E.g., Samson Kardimon, "Adoption As a Remedy For Infertility in the Period of the Patriarchs," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 3:2 (April 1958):123-26. See John Van Seters, "The Problem of Childlessness in Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968):401-8.

People in Abram's culture regarded a concubine as a "secondary wife" with some, but not all, of the rights and privileges of the primary wife.[1] In effect, Hagar became Abram's concubine.

> "… one Nuzi tablet reads: 'Kelim-ninu has been given in marriage to Shennima. If Kelim-ninu does not bear children, Kelim-ninu shall acquire a woman of the land of Lulu (i.e., a slave girl) as wife for Shennima.'"[2]

Not only was using a concubine an option, but in Hurrian culture, husbands sometimes required that if their wife could not bear children, it was then her duty to provide a concubine for him.[3]

> "… any child of the bond-slave would necessarily belong to the mistress, not the mother."[4]

This custom helps to explain why Abram was so willing to be part of Sarai's plan, which seems very unusual to us in the West. Abram agreed to his wife's faithless suggestion, just as Adam had followed Eve's lead. Abram's passivity contrasts with his earlier valiant action to save Lot from his captors (ch. 14).

16:3 This incident happened ten years after Abram had entered Canaan. To their credit, Abram and Sarai did not resort to this practice to obtain an heir for some time.

16:4 When Hagar conceived she began to feel superior to Sarai.

> "Given the high estimation of motherhood in biblical culture, the status of Sarai and Hagar now reverses."[5]

When Sarai gave Hagar to Abram, Hagar became his "property"; she was no longer Sarai's personal maid but his concubine. Hagar proceeded to despise Sarai, because she (Hagar) had been elevated to the status of Abram's (secondary) wife and because Sarai could not bear children. This

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[1]Bush, 1:258.

[2]West, p. 69.

[3]Livingston, p. 152. Cf. Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):245; Longman, "Genesis," p. 97.

[4]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 147. Cf. J. Cheryl Exum, "The Mothers of Israel: The Patriarchal Narrative from a Feminist Perspective," *Bible Review* 2:1 (Spring 1986):64.

[5]Levenson, p. 33. Cf. Prov. 30:23.

led Sarai to complain to Abram about Hagar's behavior. This in turn led Abram to give Hagar back to Sarai as her "property;" she was no longer his concubine (v. 6).[1]

16:5 Like Eve, Sarai also blamed someone else for the results of her act, namely, Abram ("May the wrong done me be upon you! … May the LORD judge between you and me," v. 5). "If mama ain't happy, nobody's happy!"

> "Of course, it is also possible that now that Hagar was pregnant with his child, Abram gave her a status above that of a servant and Sarai felt threatened."[2]

16:6 In order to settle Sarai down Abram returned Hagar to Sarai as her "slave woman." Or perhaps he reminded Sarai that Hagar was her "slave woman." But this did not work. Sarah abused Hagar to the point that Hager finally left the family encampment.

Though using a woman other than one's wife to bear one's children was a custom of the day, it was never God's desire (2:24; Matt. 19:4-5). Abram and Sarai here repeated the failure of Adam and Eve, namely, doubting God's word. This episode ended in total disaster for everyone involved. Hagar lost her home, Sarai lost her maid, Abram lost his concubine and his wife's maid, and he eventually lost his child by Hagar.[3]

> "A thousand volumes written against polygamy would not lead to a clearer fuller conviction of the evils of that practice than the story under review."[4]

Sarai tried to control the will of God by seizing the initiative from God (cf. 3:17). She and Abram chose fleshly means of obtaining the promised heir, rather than waiting for God in faith (cf. 25:21).[5] They let their culture guide them rather than God.

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[1]von Rad, p. 192. See also Currid, p. 36.

[2]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 35.

[3]See Charles R. Swindoll, *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*, ch. 8: "Mistakes: Inevitable Marks of Imperfection," pp. 105-16.

[4]Bush, 1:259. See also Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 339.

[5]See George Van Pelt Campbell, "Rushing Ahead of God: An Exposition of Genesis 16:1-16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:651 (July-September 2006):276-91.

> "It's a shame that she [Sarai] hadn't comprehended the fact that her infertility could be used by the Lord to put her in a place of dependence on Him so that fruit could be born in her life."[1]

The Angel of the LORD and Hagar 16:7-14

16:7-8 This is the first of 48 references to "the angel of the LORD" in the Old Testament. In some places "the angel of the LORD" is deity, and in other places he appears to be an angelic messenger from the LORD. Here He seems to be the LORD (cf. v. 13).

> "He is God himself in human form. … The figure of the angel of the Lord has conspicuous Christological qualities."[2]

The "angel" appeared to Hagar in "the wilderness" while she was on her way to Egypt. "Shur" was the desert east of Egypt (cf. 20:1; 25:18) "between Kadesh and Bered" (v. 14).

> "In Hebrew the word means 'wall,' perhaps referring to the Egyptian frontier wall or fortifications in the region of Shur. Its purpose was to keep eastern invaders out of Egypt."[3]

Another possibility is that the wall was a limestone ridge near Gebel Halal and Gebel Maghara.[4]

Hagar had stopped at a spring of water where the "angel" met her. The "angel" appeared as a man and conversed with Hagar.

16:9-12 The "angel" first instructed Hagar to return to Sarai and submit to her authority. Then he promised to "greatly multiply" her descendants so that they would be "too many to count." He then announced that the child that she carried in her body would be a son whom she was to name Ishmael ("God hears"). God's blessing of Ishmael was an answer to his mother's prayers. However Ishmael would be an unusual man.

> "The prophetic description of Ishmael as a 'wild ass of a man' (RSV, NRSV) is rather intriguing. The animal referred

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[1]Don Anderson, *Abraham: Delay Is Not Denial*, p. 93.

[2]von Rad, pp. 193, 194.

[3]Currid, p. 37.

[4]Longman, "Genesis," p. 97.

> to is the wild and untamable onager, which roams the desert at will. This figure of speech depicts very accurately the freedom-loving Bedouin moving across vast stretches of land."[1]
>
> "We should say, he will carry a chip on his shoulder and have his finger on the trigger."[2]

This prophecy was not an insult or a curse. Ishmael would enjoy the freedom that his mother sought.

16:13-14 The LORD named Ishmael, and Hagar "named" the LORD "You are a God who sees me." These two names constitute a major revelation of God: He hears and He sees. This may be the only instance in Scripture of a human being conferring a name on God.

Evidently Hagar understood the "angel" to be the LORD, and she was amazed that, having seen Him, she was still alive. The NJPS translated Hagar's meaning: "Have I not gone on seeing after He saw me?" So she named this place "Beer-lahai-roi" ("the well of the living One who sees me").

Abram and Sarai's presumptuous and manipulative "solution" proved to be a source of much difficulty for everyone involved (cf. Abram's error in going to Egypt, 12:11-13). God, however, graciously took care of and blessed Ishmael even though he was the fruit of Abram's presumption. This was another occasion when Abram did not trust God as he should have (cf. 12:10-20).

> "Both Hagar and Mary [the mother of Jesus] stand as examples of women who obediently accepted God's word and thereby brought blessing to descendants too many to count."[3]

The Apostle Paul used this story as an allegory (Gal. 4:24: "This is speaking allegorically"). An "allegory" today means a story without factual basis. Paul did not deny the factuality of Genesis 16, but he used this story as the basis for a comparison. Perhaps "illustration" or "comparison" would be better words to use to describe Paul's use of this story. He used Hagar to represent the Mosaic Covenant, and Ishmael as its fruit (a slave). He used

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[1]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 189. Cf. Jer. 2:24; Hos. 8:9.

[2]Leupold, 1:505.

[3]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 13.

Sarai to represent the Abrahamic Covenant, and Isaac as its fruit (a free son). Children of the flesh, like Ishmael, persecute children of the promise, like Isaac (Gal. 4:29).

There is much irony in this story: Barren Sarai lived in a fertile land, whereas fertile Hagar ended up living in a barren land. Furthermore the Egyptians, to whom the persecuted Hagar fled for freedom, later enslaved the persecutor, represented by Sarai's descendants.

Resorting to fleshly means, rather than waiting for God to provide what He has promised, always creates problems. This story also shows that human failure does not frustrate God's plans ultimately.

> "If we have made mistakes which have led us into sin, the primary condition of restoration is complete submission to the will of God, whatever that may involve."[1]

When in great or in any kind of distress, people should always pray, because God is aware of their needs, and He will fulfill His promises to them.

The birth of Ishmael 16:15-16

When Ishmael was finally born, Abram named him as God had directed (v. 11). Ishmael was born 12 years after God had first promised that Abram would have descendants (12:2, 7). At that time Abram was "eighty-six years old." Now it appeared that Ishmael would be the promised heir, but God had someone else in mind for Abram.

7. The sign of circumcision ch. 17

The LORD confirmed His covenant with Abram 13 years after Ishmael's birth by reiterating the promises of descendants and land, and by commanding Abram to circumcise all the males in his household. Circumcision thereby became the physical demonstration (sign) of the obedient faith of Abram and his descendants. There is archaeological evidence from tombs and mummies that the Egyptians practiced circumcision at this time.[2]

There are three types of signs in the Old Testament. Some signs were proofs that convinced observers of something (e.g., the Egyptian plagues). Others were certain acts that resembled an announced situation (e.g., acted prophecies). Still others were reminders of something (e.g., the rainbow, circumcision).

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 149.

[2]See Free, p. 60.

God further encouraged Abram's faith by changing his name to Abraham, and Sarai's to Sarah. This was an added confirmation that God would indeed give them innumerable seed (descendants) as He had promised.

> "The change was significant, as it placed emphasis not upon the importance of the man, but upon the purpose of God through him."[1]

> "This chapter is a watershed in the Abraham story. The promises to him have been unfolded bit by bit, gradually building up and becoming more detailed and precise, until here they are repeated and filled out in a glorious crescendo in a long and elaborate divine speech. From this point in Genesis, divine speeches become rarer and little new content is added to the promises, but the fulfillment of these promises becomes more visible."[2]

There are, in fact, five divine speeches in this section: verses 1b and 2, 4 through 8, 9 through 14, 15 and 16, and 19 through 21. The third speech comprises the center of the chiastic structure of this chapter, which may also be read as two parallel panels, namely, 1 through 14 and 15 through 27.

> "The chapter is more of a theological treatise than the typical Abraham story "[3]

Abram undoubtedly assumed that Ishmael would be the promised heir—until God told him that Sarai would bear his heir "herself" ("a son *by her*," emphasis added, v. 16). That revelation is the most important feature of this chapter. God gave the name changes and circumcision both to confirm the covenant promise of an heir and to strengthen Abram's faith.

17:1 Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael (16:16), God spoke to Abram again (the fifth revelation). God called Himself by a new name: *El Shaddai* (the "God Almighty"). This was appropriate in view of the thing that God proceeded to reveal to Abram that He would do. It would require supernatural power.

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[1]Morgan, *An Exposition …,* p. 19.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 16.

[3]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 199.

> "The concept of walking before a deity was used in Mesopotamian texts to reflect one's loyalty to a ruler."[1]

"Blameless" does not mean sinless, but "with integrity," or "wholeness of relationship" (with God; cf. 6:9). God requires such a life of those who would enjoy His promised blessings.

17:2 The references to the "covenant" in this chapter have caused some confusion. The Abrahamic Covenant (ch. 15) is in view (vv. 4, 7, 11, 19, 21), but also the outward sign of that covenant, which was the Covenant of Circumcision (vv. 2, 9, 10, 13, 14; cf. Acts 7:8). Thus Moses used the word "covenant" with two different references here, though throughout, the Abrahamic Covenant is in view.[2] Visualizing the Covenant of Circumcision as a smaller circle within the larger circle of the Abrahamic Covenant will help us understand the relationship of these two covenants to one another. Whereas the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were unconditional, the Covenant of Circumcision depended on Abram's obedience (vv. 1-2). God would bless Abram as Abram obeyed God by circumcising his household. This blessing would be in the form of multiplying Abram's descendants "exceedingly," even more than God had already promised. The rite of circumcision was to be a continuing sign of the Abrahamic Covenant to all of Abram's descendants.

> "Circumcision was the visible sign of the invisible intimacy between God and his people."[3]
>
> Circumcision was a rite of passage in which the circumcised person

17:3 Abram's response to this great promise was to prostrate himself on the ground as a sign of his great gratitude and wholehearted submission to God Almighty.

17:4-5 God also gave Abram and Sarai the added assurance that they would have a multitude of descendants by changing their names.

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[1]Currid, p. 37.

[2]For refutation of the view that God made more than one covenant with Abraham, see Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "God's Covenant with Abraham," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:2 (June 2013):249-71.

[3]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 35.

> "In the ancient Near East, the change of one's name reflected a change in status, role, or function."[1]

God changed the name "Abram" ("High" or "Exalted Father") to "Abraham" ("Father of a Multitude"). And He changed the name "Sarai" ("My Princess" [perhaps a reference to her noble descent]) to "Sarah" ("Royal Princess" [from whom kings would come; cf. v. 16]). Abraham's name emphasized the innumerable number of his seed, and Sarah's evidently stressed the royal nature of their family line (vv. 6, 16, 20; cf. 12:2).

17:6

> "The choice of the word *be fruitful* in verse 6 and *multiply* in verse 2 seems intended to recall the blessing of all humankind in 1:29 [*sic* 1:28]: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land,' and its reiteration in 9:1: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land.' Thus the covenant with Abraham was the means through which God's original blessing would again be channeled to all humankind."[2]

17:7

Circumcision was "an everlasting covenant" because it was designed to mark the eternal salvation of the person who believed God as Abraham did, not because God wanted people to practice it for all of human history.[3] God, for instance, has not commanded circumcision of the flesh for Christians (cf. Gal. 5:6; 6:15).

> "Initiation rites are formal ceremonial rites of passage that mark an individual's moves from one state of life to another, one society to another or one status to another. Different forms of initiation rites are performed by different kinds of groups and communities."[4]

Some Christians in the reformed traditions of Protestantism regard baptism as what God requires of us today in place of circumcision. They practice infant baptism believing that this rite brings the infant into the "covenant community" (i.e., the church) and under God's care in a special

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[1]Currid, p. 37. See also my comment on 1:4.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 157.

[3]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 203.

[4]*Africa Bible Commentary*, s.v. "Initiation Rites," by Judith A. Milasi, p. 101.

sense. Some believe baptism saves the infant. Others believe it only makes the infant a recipient of special grace.

The Bible is quite clear, however, that water baptism is a rite that believers should practice after they trust Christ as their Savior as a testimony to their faith. Undoubtedly there are some parallels between circumcision and baptism. Nevertheless, God did not intend baptism to replace circumcision. God did command circumcision of the Israelites in the Mosaic Law, but He has not commanded circumcision of Christians. Christians do not live under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 4:10-13; 6:14-15; 7:1-4; 10:4).

17:8 God also repeated His promise that the land of Canaan would be the possession of Abraham and his descendants "as an everlasting possession." He also promised to remain Israel's God forever. That is, He promised never to abandon them as His chosen people.

In recent years wars have been fought over who has the right to claim ownership of the ancient land of Canaan. The Palestinians base their claim on the fact that for centuries they occupied this territory, until the United Nations gave it to the Jews. The Israelis claim ownership on the basis of these promises that God gave to Abraham and his descendants, as well as the United Nations' decision in 1948. God told the Israelites that they could occupy the Promised Land as long as they were obedient to the Mosaic Covenant. If they were disobedient, He would drive them out of the land. But He also promised to bring them back into it when they as a whole returned to faith in Him. The Old Testament prophets predicted that this will happen in the future. It has not happened yet.

17:9-13 God wanted Abraham to circumcise all of his male servants, including slaves that he had bought from a foreigner, as well as his children and grandchildren (vv. 12-13). The reason for this was that the Abrahamic Covenant would affect all who had a relationship with Abraham. Consequently they needed to bear the sign of that covenant.

Only males underwent circumcision; females did not. In the patriarchal society of the ancient Near East, people considered that a girl or woman shared the circumcised condition of her father, if she was single, or her husband, if she was married.

> "Female circumcision cannot be justified from the Bible."[1]

Circumcision was a fitting symbol of belief in God's promises to Abraham for several reasons:[2]

1. It would have been a frequent reminder to every circumcised male of God's promises involving seed (descendants), since circumcision was a medical procedure on the penis.

   > "Since the promises center on descendants, it is appropriate that the sign of this covenant is associated with the male reproductive organ."[3]

2. It involved the cutting off of flesh. The circumcised male was one who repudiated "the flesh" (i.e., the simply physical and natural aspects of life) in favor of trust in Yahweh and His spiritual promises. Thus the "flesh" was involved in circumcision both literally and figuratively.

3. It resulted in greater cleanliness of life and freedom from the effects of sin (i.e., disease and eventually death). Literal circumcision is still performed today for hygienic reasons.

   > "Research indicates that other Middle Eastern cultures practiced circumcision. However, the Hebrews were unique in that they practiced infant circumcision, which, though medically risky if not properly performed, is less physically and psychologically traumatic than circumcisions performed at an older age."[4]

Designating the eighth day after birth as the day of circumcision (v. 12) is one of the most amazing specifications in the Bible, from a medical standpoint. Why the eighth day?

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[1]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 36. See also *Africa Bible Commentary*, s.v. "Female Genital Mutilation," by Mbura Murlithi, p. 37.

[2]See also Archer, *Encyclopedia of …*, pp. 93-94.

[3]Longman, "Genesis," p. 98.

[4]Jay D. Fawver and R. Larry Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September 1990):277. See also von Rad, p. 201; Davis, *Paradise to …*, p. 192; Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 23-24; J. Sasson, "Circumcision in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966):473-76; Kidner, p. 174.

> "At birth, a baby has nutrients, antibodies, and other substances from his mother's blood, including her blood-clotting factors, one of them being prothrombin. Prothrombin is dependent on vitamin K for its production. Vitamin K is produced by intestinal bacteria, which are not present in a newborn baby. After birth prothrombin decreases so that by the third day it is only 30 percent of normal. Circumcision on the third day could result in a devastating hemorrhage.
>
> "The intestinal bacteria finally start their task of manufacturing vitamin K, and the prothrombin subsequently begins to climb. On day eight, it actually overshoots to 110 percent of normal, leveling off to 100 percent on day nine and remaining there for the rest of a person's healthy life. Therefore the eighth day was the safest of all days for circumcision to be performed. On that one day, a person's clotting factor is at 110 percent, the highest ever, and that is the day God prescribed for the surgical process of circumcision.
>
> "Today vitamin K (Aqua Mephyton) is routinely administered to newborns shortly after their delivery, and this eliminates the clotting problem. However, before the days of vitamin K injections, a 1953 pediatrics textbook recommended that the best day to circumcise a newborn was the eighth day of life."[1]

Another writer saw the eighth day as symbolic of completing a cycle of time corresponding to the Creation.[2]

17:14 The person who refused circumcision was "cut off from his people," because, by refusing it, he was repudiating God's promises to Abraham ("he has broken My covenant").

> "This expression ["cut off from his people"] undoubtedly involves a wordplay on *cut*. He that is not himself cut (i.e.,

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[1]L. Holt Jr. and R. McIntosh, *Holt Pediatrics*, pp. 125-26.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 261.

> circumcised) will be cut off (i.e., ostracized). Here is the choice: be cut or be cut off."[1]

There are two main views as to the meaning of being "cut off from his people." Some scholars hold that it means excommunication from the covenant community (in this case Abraham's family) and its benefits.[2] A corollary to this view is that it refers to the eventual total extinction of one's line.[3] But there is also later evidence in Scripture that points to execution as the meaning—sometimes by the Israelites, but usually by God, in the form of premature death.[4] The threat of being "cut off" hung over the Israelite offender, like the threat of contracting a terminal disease that might end one's life at any time does today.

The person who refused to participate in circumcision demonstrated his lack of faith in God by his refusal. Thus he broke the Covenant of Circumcision.

17:15-16 God informed Abraham that He had big plans for Sarai as well as for him. He would bless her by giving her a son, after a lifetime of being childless, and the descendants that would come from this son would become nations. Furthermore, kings would come from her. In order to memorialize these promises God also changed Sarai's name to Sarah, meaning "princess."

> "*Sarai* signifies *my princess*, as if her honour were confined to one family only. *Sarah* signifies *a princess*—namely, of multitudes [i.e., a royal princess]."[5]

17:17 Abraham's laughter probably expressed his amazement, and it was probably a joyful response to God's promise.[6] Sarah's laughter (18:15) seems to have arisen from a spirit of unbelief. God did not criticize

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[1]Hamilton, p. 473.

[2]J. Morganstern, "The Book of the Covenant, Part III—The Huqqim," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 8-9 (1931-32):1-150; Anthony Phillips, *Ancient Israel's Criminal Law*, pp. 28-32.

[3]Baruch J. Schwartz, "Leviticus," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 210.

[4]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:224; Hamilton, p. 474; M. Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961):195-201; M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, pp. 241-43; W. Horbury, "Extirpation and excommunication," *Vetus Testamentum* 35 (1985):16-18, 31-34; and Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 25.

[5]Matthew Henry, p. 34.

[6]Yates, p. 23. See Raymond L. Cox, "What Made Abraham Laugh?" *Eternity* (November 1975), pp. 19-20.

Abraham for laughing (in delight), but He did rebuke Sarah when she laughed (in doubt).

17:18 However Abraham seems to have preferred that Ishmael would be his heir, being his firstborn son, rather than the boy that Sarah would bear. His longing request seems to be that Ishmael would become a son worthy to carry on leadership of the family and be the honored channel of divine blessing.

17:19 God's plan was that Isaac, not Ishmael, would be the person through whom He would fulfill His promises to Abraham. God repeated His promise that Sarah would bear Abraham a son in order to remove any doubt that Abraham might have had that this miracle would indeed take place. Isaac's name meant "he laughs," which would have been a constant reminder to his parents that his birth had been a laughable thing, in view of their advanced ages.

17:20 God honored Abraham's request that God would bless Ishmael (v. 18). He too would be fruitful, father 12 princes, and become a great nation. The Arabs trace their ancestry back to Ishmael.

17:21-22 But God would fulfill what He had promised in His covenant with Abraham through Isaac, not Ishmael. He also promised that Sarah would give birth to Isaac "at this season next year." Then God departed from Abraham.

17:23-27 On the very same day that God had said these things to him, Abraham circumcises every male in his extensive household, including Ishmael. As head of the household in this patriarchal society Abraham's faith in God would have been accepted by everyone in his household. Again we see Abraham responding in obedience to God's commands immediately.

The writer's use of the phrase the "very same day" (vv. 23, 26) points to a momentous day, one of the most important days in human history (cf. Noah's entry into the ark, 7:13; and the Exodus, Exod. 12:17, 41, 51).

Fruchtenbaum concluded that God requires all Jews, including Messianic (Christian) Jews, to circumcise their children even today:

> "Because the Mosaic Law has been rendered inoperative with the Messiah's death, there is no basis for circumcising Jews or Gentiles under the Mosaic Covenant. However, the

> point of the Abrahamic Covenant is that it is a continuous covenant throughout the rest of human history. As long as human history continues on this planet, Jews are required to circumcise their sons on the eighth day; Jewish believers in the Messiah are not exempt from this particular ruling."[1]

This fifth revelation from God advanced God's promises in seven particulars:

1. Part of God's blessing would depend on Abraham's maintaining the Covenant of Circumcision, though the Abrahamic Covenant as a whole did not depend on this (vv. 1-2).
2. Many nations would come from Abraham (vv. 4-6).
3. The Abrahamic Covenant would be "everlasting" (vv. 7-8).
4. God would be the God of Abraham's descendants in a special relationship (vv. 7-8).
5. This is also the first time God identified the Promised Land as "Canaan" by name (v. 8).
6. Sarah herself would give birth to the promised heir (v. 16).
7. Sarah would give birth in 12 months (v. 21)

> "Abraham's experiences should teach us that natural law [barrenness] is no barrier to the purposes and plans for [*sic* of] God."[2]

> "Thus Abraham and Noah are presented as examples of those who have lived in obedience to the covenant and are thus 'blameless' before God, because both obeyed God 'as he commanded them' (17:23; cf. 6:22; 7:5, 9, 16)."[3]

8. Yahweh's visit to Abraham 18:1-15

Chapters 18 and 19 constitute one integrated story, but we shall consider this episode in the Abraham narrative section by section. Like the Flood story, it has a chiastic structure, this time focusing on the announcement of the destruction of Sodom (19:12-13).[4] Again

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[1]Fruchtenbaum, pp. 290-91.

[2]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 193.

[3]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 160.

[4]See Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 41, for a diagram of the chiasm.

there is a mass destruction, with only one man and his family escaping. Both stories end with the father's intoxication, and shameful treatment of the father by his children, that have consequences for future generations.[1]

> "Chs 18 and 19 display a chiastic structure (ABB'A'): 18.1-15 is the annunciation of Isaac's conception (A); 18.16-33 is the announcement of Sodom's destruction (B); 19.1-29 report the destruction of Sodom (B'); and 19.30-38 report Moab's and Ammon's conception (A'). In the process, Abraham emerges again as a heroic figure, one who deeply reveres God yet politely demands justice from Him. Lot is once again (as in ch 13) a foil for Abraham—self-interested, passive, and, finally, victimized."[2]

We can perceive the LORD's gracious initiative, that He extended toward Abraham, in His visit, namely, to eat and commune with the patriarch under the tree outside his tent. This was an evidence of intimate fellowship in Abraham's culture. On the basis of that close relationship, God guaranteed the soon arrival of the promised heir (cf. 17:21). In response to Sarah's laugh of unbelief, the LORD declared that nothing would be too difficult for Him.

This chapter and the next may seem at first reading to be extraneous (irrelevant) to the purpose of the Abraham narrative, which is to demonstrate God's faithfulness to His promises to the patriarch. But they are not. Chapter 18 contributes the following:

1. It records another "promised heir" revelation in which God repeated exactly when the heir would appear (vv. 10, 14; cf. 17:21). With this revelation God strengthened Abraham's, and especially Sarah's, faith.

2. It fortifies Moses' emphasis on God's supernatural power at work to fulfill His divine promises, in spite of apparently impossible circumstances (vv. 9-15).

3. As a literary device, this chapter provides an interlude in the story line, and it heightens suspense by prolonging the climax. We anticipate the arrival of the heir with mounting interest.

4. It presents Abraham as an intercessor, one of the roles of the prophets, of whom Abraham was one of the first (cf. 20:7).

5. It records God's announcement of judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 16-33), which follows in chapter 19.

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[1]See ibid., pp. 43-44; and Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 212-13; for more parallels.

[2]Levenson, p. 36.

> "The noon encounter in this chapter and the night scene at Sodom in the next are in every sense a contrast of light and darkness. The former, quietly intimate and full of promise, is crowned by the intercession in which Abraham's faith and love show a new breadth of concern. The second scene is all confusion and ruin, moral and physical, ending in a loveless squalor which is even uglier than the great overthrow of the cities."[1]
>
> "There is also a blatant contrast between how Abraham hosted his visitors (ch. 18) and how the Sodomites hosted the same delegation (ch. 19)."[2]

18:1 Abraham was living near Hebron at this time ("the oaks of Mamre"; cf. 13:18; 14:13).

18:2 The three "men" were "the LORD" (the Angel of Yahweh, vv. 13, 17, 20, 33), and "two angels" (19:1; cf. 18:22) who later visited Lot. If Abraham had previously met the Angel of the LORD, it seems likely that he would have recognized Him at once (cf. 17:1, 22). If he had not, Abraham definitely became aware of who this Angel was during this encounter (cf. v. 25).

> "It is safe to assume that every visible manifestation of God in bodily form in the Old Testament is to be identified with the Lord Jesus Christ."[3]
>
> "It appears that in Old Testament times God came in the *form* of a man, while in the incarnation He actually *became* man."[4]

18:3-8 Abraham's hospitality reflects oriental custom as practiced in his day and, in some respects, even as it is practiced today in the Middle East.[5] Abraham was behaving more wisely than he realized, since he did not yet know that his guests were heaven-sent visitors (v. 8).

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[1]Kidner, p. 131.

[2]Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18—50*, p. 5.

[3]Walvoord, *Jesus Christ …*, p. 54.

[4]J. Oswald Sanders, *The Incomparable Christ*, p. 23.

[5]See Thomson, 2:161-62.

18:9 "Where is your wife Sarah?" recalls God's earlier questions about Adam (3:9) and Abel (4:9).

18:10-11 The Angel assured Abraham that He would revisit him at the same time the following year, and He repeated the divine promise that at that time Sarah would have a son (cf. 17:21). Apparently this was the first time that Sarah heard this promise directly from the LORD.

18:12 Sarah's laugh "to herself," which the LORD nevertheless heard, sprang from a spirit of unbelief, due to long disappointment, as is clear from the LORD's response to it ("Is anything too difficult for the LORD?" v. 14). Abraham's laugh (17:17) did not draw such a response. Sarah's words "am I to have pleasure" probably refer to her pleasure in bearing a son and being a mother after so many years of being childless.

18:13 The fact that the LORD knew that Sarah had laughed "to herself" (v. 12), and knew her thoughts, demonstrated His omniscience to Abraham and Sarah. This would have strengthened their faith in what He told them.

18:14 The LORD's rhetorical question, one of the great statements of Scripture, reminded the elderly couple of His supernatural power, and it fortified their faith further (cf. Jer. 32:17, 27). He repeated again, a third time, His promise of a son for Abraham and Sarah (cf. 17:21. 18:10).

18:15 Sarah evidently denied that she had laughed either from fear of the LORD's power or from fear of offending Him. Again God built confidence in His word. If the LORD could read Sarah's thoughts, could He not also open her womb?

Believers should never doubt God's promises, because nothing is impossible for Him.

9. Abraham's intercession for Lot 18:16-33

After God reviewed the reasons for sharing His plans for the destruction of Sodom with Abraham, He told the patriarch that He was about to investigate the wicked condition of that city. This news moved Abraham to ask God to deal justly with the righteous people there.

> "In this section, God treats Abraham as a prophet (cf. 20.7, where he is the first person so designated in Tanakh), disclosing His plans to him (vv. 17-22); cf. Amos 3.7), and Abraham, like one of the prophets of Israel,

eloquently demands justice from God (vv. 23-25; cf. Jer. 12.1-4) and pleads for mercy (Gen. 18.26-32; cf. Amos 7.1-6)."[1]

"A rhetorical question in each section—'Is anything too demanding for Yahweh?' [v. 14]; 'Shall not he who judges all the earth give right judgment?" [v. 25]—sounds the major motif of each unit [vv. 1-15 and vv. 16-33]. In both units it is some kind of noise that provokes Yahweh—Sarah's laugh and Sodom's groans."[2]

18:16 Sodom was east of Hebron, where Abraham was living at this time.

18:17-19 These verses record a soliloquy (an act of speaking one's thoughts aloud regardless of any hearers) that the LORD spoke to Himself (cf. 1:26). Probably Abraham did not hear these words. God must have revealed them to Moses directly.

God chose to reveal His intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah to Abraham. He did so because of His plans for Abraham. Notice that God said that He had "chosen him" (v. 19). God's choice to bless Abraham was His initiative; He did not choose Abraham because of anything special about him.

God evidently chose to reveal His plans for Sodom and Gomorrah because He wanted to challenge Abraham to act wisely and nobly for justice. "Righteousness and justice" (v. 19) may be a hendiadys meaning "genuine righteousness" (cf. Mic. 3:1; 4:8). In other words, God shared His plans with Abraham in order to test Abraham's faith. Would Abraham respond by saying: So what? Who cares? Or would he exhibit compassion for those under God's judgment and so demonstrate truly righteous behavior?

18:20-21 Like Abel's blood "cried out" for God to punish his murderer (4:10), so the "exceedingly grave" wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah cried out to God for punishment. "I will go down now and see" (v. 21) is another anthropomorphism, this one emphasizing God's justice (cf. Ps. 113:4-6). God always thoroughly investigates a situation before passing judgment and sending calamity, because He is just.[3]

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[1]Levenson, p. 37.

[2]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, pp. 16-17.

[3]See Tozer, pp. 92-95, for discussion of the justice of God as one of His attributes.

> "In this section [vv. 1-21] we have an illustration of fellowship with God and some of its essential features. Fellowship is the crowning purpose of God's revelation (1 John i: 3). There is nothing higher than this, for man's life finds its complete fulfillment in union and communion with God. Notice the following elements:—
>
> "1. *Sacred Intimacy*. …
>
> "2. *Genuine Humility*. …
>
> "3. *Special Revelation*.—Fellowship with God is always associated with the knowledge of His will. Servants do not know their master's purposes, but friends and intimates do. …
>
> "4. *Unique Association*.—The man who is in fellowship with God does not merely know the Divine will, but becomes associated with God in the carrying out of that will. …"[1]

> "The Lord would not arbitrarily destroy them [the people of Sodom]. As a fair and just judge, He would examine the evidence and then reward their deeds appropriately. The anthropomorphic language veils the ontological [having to do with the nature of His being] reality of God's omniscience, but the Lord seems to have been more concerned in this context with revealing Himself as a fair judge, emphasizing the importance of human responsibility and inviting Abraham to assume the role of an intercessor."[2]

18:22 "The men" refers to two of the angels who had visited Abraham, and "the LORD" refers to the third "man" (cf. vv. 1-2). Now the two angels headed for Sodom, but Abraham remained where he was with the LORD.

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, pp. 161-62.

[2]Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Anatomy of an Anthropomorphism: Does God Discover Facts?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:653 (January-March 2007):9.

18:23 This is the first time that Scripture records a man initiating a conversation with God. Abraham prayed—he spoke and interceded directly to God—for all the people of Sodom, not just Lot. His question was "Will You sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

18:24-32

> "Notice that Abraham's demand is not that the guilty be punished and the innocent spared, but rather that the Lord *forgive* [the entire city] *for the sake of the innocent … who are in it*."[1]

Abraham's intercession raises several questions in the minds of thoughtful Bible students. Did Abraham succeed in his intercession, since, in the end, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? Some interpreters believe he did not succeed, because he quit too soon:

> "… Abraham ceased asking before God ceased giving."[2]

This conclusion assumes that Abraham's primary purpose was to get God to demonstrate mercy and to spare the cities for the sake of their few righteous inhabitants (v. 24). While this idea was obviously in Abraham's mind, his primary purpose seems rather to have been to secure justice (i.e., deliverance) for the righteous minority in their wicked city (vv. 23, 24). Secondarily he wanted God to spare the city. This interpretation finds support in Abraham's appeal to the justice of God rather than to His mercy (v. 25). This appeal was the basis of his intercession. Abraham was jealous for the reputation of Yahweh among his neighbors. If this was indeed his primary purpose, Abraham succeeded in obtaining justice for the righteous in Sodom.

A second question arises from Abraham's method of interceding. Is his haggling with God an example that we should follow? Evidently Abraham was not trying to wear God down by pressuring Him. Instead he was seeking clarification from God as to the extent of His mercy. He wanted to find out just how merciful God would be in judging Sodom.

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[1]Levenson, p. 37.

[2]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 116. See also Chris Wright, "Intercession or Irritation?" *Third Way* 29 (February 1983):18-19.

> "This entire scene appears to be a form of ancient Near Eastern bartering that is carried on even today."[1]

Why did Abraham stop with 10 righteous people (v. 32)? Perhaps he had learned that the LORD would be merciful regardless of the number.[2] Perhaps he thought there would be at least 10 righteous people in Sodom. If so, he underestimated the wickedness of the Sodomites, and, perhaps, he overestimated "righteous" Lot's influence over his neighbors (cf. 2 Pet. 2:7).

Will God spare a city or nation today because of the Christians—who are righteous by God's grace—in it? This passage is helpful in answering this question, because in it we can see that the presence of a godly minority does play a role in influencing God's judgment. It may not prevent judgment, but it is a factor that God takes into account as He evaluates cities and nations. A godly minority can delay judgment by promoting godliness.

> "Here begins the docrine [*sic* doctrine] of the Remnant, the 'salt of the earth,' which from then till now has preserved corrupt societies from final disintegration."[3]

A godly minority may not prevent God's judgment if "sin is exceedingly grave" (v. 20). God does not always choose to remove the righteous from the wicked before He judges the wicked, as He did in Lot's case. Nevertheless, "the Judge of all the earth" (v. 25) does "deal justly." We can see this when we take the long view of life: People alive now have yet to receive their final judgment from the divine Judge (cf. Rom. 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 3:9, 15).

Abraham's shameless, bold persistence with God illustrates what Jesus had in mind when he taught the importance of these qualities in prayer (e.g., Luke 11:5-10; 18:1-8). Three-fold repetition is common in Scripture, but Abraham's doubling of it—six-fold—gives his request even more solemnity and weight.

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[1]Currid, p. 39.

[2]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 230.

[3]Blaiklock, p. 29.

18:33 At the end of their conversation Yahweh departed from Abraham, and Abraham returned to his encampment by the oaks of Mamre near Hebron (cf. v. 1; 13:18).

This chapter illustrates a progression in Abraham's relationship with God, which is normal for those who have a trusting relationship with Him.

1. God revealed Himself to Abraham (v. 1).
2. Abraham welcomed God's revelation (vv. 2-3).
3. Fellowship resulted (vv. 4-8). They ate together.
4. This fellowship led to further revelation and greater understanding of God's will (vv. 9-22).
5. Having learned of God's purpose to judge the sinners, Abraham's response was to intercede for those under God's judgment (vv. 23-32). One of the evidences of Abraham's righteousness is that he loved his neighbors (the righteous in Sodom).

> "It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to pray effectively for lost souls if one is not convinced that lostness will ultimately result in literal, eternal punishment."[1]

The outstanding lesson of this section is, most likely, that since God is a righteous Judge, He will not destroy the righteous with the wicked.[2]

10. The destruction of Sodom ch. 19

> Chapters 18 and 19 "paint a vivid contrast between the respective patriarchal ancestors, Abraham and Lot, with an obvious moralistic intent (i.e., a demonstration that human initiatives—Lot's choice—always lead to catastrophe)."[3]
>
> "In the development of the story two of the themes in counterpoint with Abraham and the Promise—the theme of Lot, the righteous man without the pilgrim spirit, and of Sodom, the standing example of worldly

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[1]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 199.

[2]See Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Abraham and the Righteous of Sodom," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1982):119-32; T. J. Mafico, "The Crucial Question Concerning the Justice of God," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 42 (March 1983):11-16.

[3]Helyer, p. 84.

> promise, insecurity (chapter 14) and decay—are now heard out to their conclusion. By a master-stroke of narrative, Abraham, who will outlive all such time-servers, is shown standing at his place of intercession (27), a silent witness of the catastrophe he has striven to avert. It is a superb study of the two aspects of judgment: the cataclysmic, as the cities disappear in brimstone and fire, and the gradual, as Lot and his family reach the last stages of disintegration, breaking up in the very hands of their rescuers."[1]

19:1 The traditional site of Sodom is near the south bay of the Dead Sea. Many scholars still support this location.[2]

Lot was "sitting at the gate of Sodom" when "the two angels" (cf. 18:22) found him. Sitting in the gate of a town was the equivalent of having an official position at city hall (2 Sam. 15:2-6; 1 Kings 22:10; Amos 5:10, 12, 15).[3] This was an indication that Lot had been recognized as a leader in Sodom (cf. v. 9).

> "Archaeological excavations show that the gates of Palestinian cities often had stone benches or seats as a built-in part of the structure, so that people might sit there and wait for their friends, or engage in conversation with those whom they had agreed to meet at the gate."[4]

19:2-3 As Abraham had done, Lot extended hospitality to his visitors (cf. 18:3-8). Note that Lot lived in a house, which implies a permanent residence, whereas Abraham lived in a tent, which reflects his nomadic type of existence (18:1-2, 6)

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[1]Kidner, pp. 133-34.

[2]E.g., David Howard Jr., "Sodom and Gomorrah Revisited," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27:4 (December 1984):385-400. On the location of Sodom and Gomorrah, see "Cities of the Dead Sea Plain," *Buried History* 18:3 (September 1982), pp. 35-48; R. Thomas Schaub and Walter E. Rast, "Preliminary Report of the 1981 Expedition to the Dead Sea Plain, Jordan," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 254 (Spring 1984):35-60.

[3]See *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "City," by J. A. Thompson and J. N. Birdsall, p. 236.

[4]Free, pp. 61-62.

> "Lot's move from a tent pitched near Sodom (13:12, 13) to a permanent residence in the city showed his willingness to exist with unbridled wickedness."[1]

19:4-5 The men of Sodom apparently wanted to have homosexual relations with Lot's visitors.[2] The Mosaic Law later regarded all homosexual behavior as a capital offense (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; cf. Rom. 1:26-27).[3]

> "Their desire for sex with the men does not necessarily mean that they are homosexual. In the ancient Near East the act of men forcing themselves on other men was thought to be a sign of power that shames those who are forcibly violated."[4]

The Sodomites' lack of hospitality contrasts with Abraham's hospitality (18:1-8), and it reflects their depraved moral state.

> "With the growing prominence of the homosexual movement, it is now being said that the sin was not homosexuality but inhospitality and gang rape.[5]
>
> "The claim goes that when Lot received the two angels (who appeared as men and were strangers to the residents of Sodom), he angered the locals because no one had examined their credentials. So when the locals demanded to 'know' them (v. 5), they only wanted to get acquainted with them. Lot, however, was bound to be hospitable to the strangers and to protect his guests, so he offered to sacrifice his daughters to the crowd. And had not the angels blinded the men of the city, then gang rape would

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[1]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 200.

[2]See Brian N. Peterson, "The Sin of Sodom Revisited: Reading Genesis 19 in Light of Torah," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Societ*y 59:1 (March 2016):17-31; Glenn R. Kreider and Thomas M. Mitchell, "Kindness and Repentance: Romans 2:4 and Ministry to People with Same-Sex Attraction," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173:689 (January-March 2016):57-79.

[3]For a refutation of denials of this view, see P. Michael Ukleja, "Homosexuality and the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:559 (July-September 1983):259-66. On the modern resurgence of homosexuality and its connection with ancient religious paganism, see Peter Jones, "Androgyny: The Pagan Sexual Ideal," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:3 (September 2000):443-69.

[4]Longman, "Genesis," p. 98.

[5]Ryrie, *Biblical Answers …,* pp. 144-45.

> have occurred. But, the argument concludes, homosexual relations were never the intent of the men of Sodom. This view gained initial prominence in 1955 and has been restated often."[1]
>
> "Exegetically, the word *know* can mean 'get acquainted with.' But it also means 'to have intercourse with' and is used with that meaning about nineteen times in Genesis. But statistics do not decide the matter. What decides it is the use in verse 8, where it obviously means that Lot's daughters had not had intercourse with a man. It certainly cannot mean they had never been acquainted with a man. If intercourse is the clear meaning in verse 8, then the same verb in verse 5 evidently has the same meaning (though in relation to homosexual relations in that verse). The men of Sodom lusted after the two men (angels), desiring homosexual relations with them."[2]

19:6-8 Hospitality was more important than sexual morality to Lot (cf. Judg. 19:23-25). Compromise with sinners tends to distort values. Lot considered his duty to his guests (hospitality) of greater importance than his duty to his children (protection). Lot offered his daughters to these men, but Abraham later offered his son to the LORD (ch. 22).

> "When a man took in a stranger, he was bound to protect him, even at the expense of the host's life."[3]

19:9-10 Archaeologists have found evidence that, at this time, it was not uncommon for houses to have very strong walls and heavy stone doors.[4] This may explain, in part, why the men of Sodom could not enter Lot's dwelling.

19:11 The moral blindness of the Sodomites led to their spiritual blindness, and even to physical blindness (cf. 2 Kings 6:18).

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 201. See Desmond Alexander, "Lot's Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104:2 (June 1985):289-91.

[4]Free, p. 62.

> "Apparently there was no attempt made in the city of Sodom to have a church for this crowd and to tell them that they were all right in spite of the fact that they practiced this thing."[1]

19:12-14 God had told Noah to bring his wife, his sons, and their wives into the ark for protection (7:1, 7). Noah did so, and they were saved. The two "men" (angels) told Lot to gather his family and to be ready to escape Sodom for their protection. But his sons-in-law, who were presumably Sodomites, laughed at his warning, and they were destroyed.

It is not clear whether Lot's two daughters (v. 15) were married at this time or if they were engaged to be married. The Hebrew participle allows either interpretation.[2] Another option is that the sons-in-law were married to two other of Lot's daughters who perished with their husbands in the conflagration.

19:15-17 The angels' compassion, and Yahweh's compassion behind it, stands out in these verses. The angels had to physically pull Lot and his family out of the city. The sons-in-law did not accompany them (cf. v. 31).

> "In order to show that the rescue of Lot was in response to the prayer of Abraham, the narrative reads so that the words of the messengers ["swept away," vv. 15, 17] recall explicitly the words of Abraham's prayer in behalf of the righteous in the previous chapter ["sweep away," 18:23]."[3]

> "This is the whole point of the story. God could have destroyed the city of Sodom with no word to Lot or Abraham (18:17). But because of God's mercy, His angels grabbed Lot and his family and brought them forcefully to safety."[4]

Once out of Sodom, Lot's family still had to flee farther away. The angels told Lot to escape to the mountains to avoid being swept away in the judgment of Sodom.

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[1]McGee, 1:81.

19:15-[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p 57.

[3]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 170.

[4]*The Nelson …,* p. 40.

19:18-20 Lot was grateful for the angels' compassion, but he did not want to go to the mountains. He claimed that disaster would overtake him there and he would die. As things turned out, it would have been better for Lot to die in the mountains then than what happened to him when he fled there later (vv. 30-38). Lot pled with the angels to let him go to the nearby town of Zoar. Lot still favored urban dwelling, in spite of the moral corruption that he had encountered there, as opposed to life in the country.

19:21-22 One of the angels granted Lot's request and promised not to destroy Zoar on Lot's account, nor would he judge Sodom until Lot was safely in Zoar. "Zoar" (v. 22) means "insignificant" (in size at least).

19:23-25 It was daybreak when Lot finally reached Zoar. Then Yahweh sent "fire and brimstone" from heaven down of Sodom and Gomorrah—the cities, all the inhabitants of the cities, all the surrounding area, and what grew on the ground in that vicinity.[1]

> "As the Creator and righteous judge, God alone has the right to end the life of his creatures."[2]

All that Lot had gained by living in Sodom burned up like "wood, hay, and stubble" (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15).

> "He lost everythin: his home, his wealth, his wife, and the respect of his daughters, whose behaviour must have covered him with shame."[3]

Josephus wrote that God sent a thunderbolt to set the city on fire (v. 24).[4]

> "It is possible that God did see fit miraculously to time an earthquake at this precise moment, which could have released great quantities of gas, mixed sulphur with various salts found in abundance, and measurably increased the flow of asphalt seepage. Lightning could

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[1]For a discussion of illeisms in the Old Testament (the use of third-person self-references, such as "He [God] overthrew," v. 25), see Andrew S. Malone, "God the Illeist: Third-Person Self-References and Trinitarian Hints in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:3 (September 2009):499-518.

[2]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 39.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:11:4.

> have ignited all, and the entire country been consumed as indicated. The Bible is clear that God does use natural means to accomplish His purpose when and to the extent that they are available. He may have done so here."[1]
>
> "The heaven's rain cannot be explained solely as a natural phenomenon, such as earthquake; it was exceptional, never again repeated, providing the parade illustration of the fiery eschatological judgment against the wicked (e.g., 2 Pet 2:6-9). The twin calamities of Noah and Lot illustrate Jesus' teaching on the suddenness of the coming of the Son of Man (Luke 17:26-30)."[2]

The Apostle Peter cited Lot as an example of the LORD's deliverance of the godly from the very trials that He uses to punish the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:6-10).

19:26 Probably the burning sodium sulfate ("brimstone and fire") that was raining down was what covered Lot's wife and which turned her into a "pillar of salt."[3] Evidently she had lingered behind Lot and had not yet reached Zoar, as he had, when the falling brimstone fell on her. The fact that she "looked back" toward Sodom, as well as the fact that she was trailing behind Lot, shows that she was reluctant to leave Sodom.

> "… something tragic occurs in us when we fan the flames of an old lust and linger over the pleasurable scenes of a lifestyle that was ruining us. If, by the grace of God, He leads you out of a lifestyle of wrong, you will only hinder your recovery by looking back in longing. There's something about a second glance—about lingering over a selective memory—that makes us weak against the pull of what we left behind."[4]

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[1]Wood, *A Survey …,* p. 56.

[2]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 241.

[3]Kidner, p. 135; Fruchtenbaum, p. 309. See Deborah Aufenson-Vance, "Lot's Wife Remembers," *Adventist Review* 163:8 (Feb. 20, 1986), p. 5.

[4]Swindoll, *The Swindoll …*, p. 36.

The Apostle John called believers to not love the world, or the things in the world—because they will pass away (1 John 2:15-17). Jesus warned those living just before His return to "remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32).

19:27-29 As in the Flood story, the writer focused the reader's attention on the response of individuals to the judgment rather than on the destruction itself. Here those individuals are Lot's wife and Abraham. Later they will be Lot and his daughters (vv. 30-38).

The picture of Abraham, in verses 27 and 28, standing on a high place, and looking down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, is similar to that of Moses, interceding for Israel in the battle with the Amalekites (Exod. 17:11-12).[1] Lot's "prayer request" of the two angels, concerning Zoar (vv. 18-20), contrasts sharply with Abraham's prayer for Sodom (18:23-32).

> "The substitution of Abraham for Lot in this sentence ["God remembered Abraham," v. 29; cf. 8:1] makes an important theological point. Lot was not saved on his own merits but through Abraham's intercession."[2]

Abraham rescued Lot twice: from the Mesopotamian kings (14:16) and from Sodom.

19:30- Previously Lot could not find room enough for himself and his livestock in the whole land (13:4-5), so he moved to Sodom. When he could not stay in Sodom, he did not want to go to the mountains because he thought he would die there (v. 19), so he fled to Zoar. He apparently discovered that living in Zoar was worse than living in the mountains, so he moved to one of the mountains and lived in a cave. Now he was confined to a hole in a hill where he hardly had room to turn around. Instead of being surrounded by a growing family, servants, and herdsmen, he was alone with his two daughters and afraid.

> "There are lives recorded in the Bible which have well been called beacons. There are men like Balaam, Saul, and Solomon, who started well, with every possible advantage, and then closed their careers in failure and disaster. Such a life was that of Lot, the nephew of Abraham. … There is

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 173.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 59.

> scarcely a life recorded in Scripture which is fuller of serious and solemn instructions for every believer."[1]

19:31-38 This story is so clear that it requires little clarification by me, though the commentators have made some helpful comments:

> "The impact of the unit focuses more directly on a characterization of the father. The one who offered his daughters for the sexual gratification of his wicked neighbors now becomes the object of his daughters' incestuous relationship … To be seduced by one's own daughters into an incestuous relationship with pregnancy following is bad enough. Not to know that the seduction had occurred is worse. To fall prey to the whole plot a second time is worse than ever."[2]
>
> "In tragic irony, a drunk Lot carried out the very act which he himself had suggested to the men of Sodom (19:8)—he lay with his own daughters.[3]
>
> "Throughout the ancient Near East, incest between father and daughter was regarded as wrong, and OT law punishes more remote forms of incest with death (Lev 20:12). The fact that his daughters had to make him drunk shows that they were consciously flouting normal conventions. Because of his readers' moral assumptions, the narrator did not feel it necessary to excoriate [criticize severely] Lot's daughters' behavior. The facts spoke for themselves."[4]
>
> "Lot was able to take his daughters out of Sodom, but he was not able to take … Sodom out of his daughters."[5]
>
> "The account is remarkably similar to the story of the last days of Noah after his rescue from the Flood (9:20-27).

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 171. Paragraph division omitted.

[2]George W. Coats, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, p. 147.

[3]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 174.

[4]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 61-62.

[5]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 206.

> There, as here, the patriarch became drunk with wine and uncovered himself in the presence of his children. In both narratives, the act had grave consequences. Thus at the close of the two great narratives of divine judgment, the Flood and the destruction of Sodom, those who were saved from God's wrath subsequently fell into a form of sin reminiscent of those who died in the judgment. This is a common theme in the prophetic literature (e.g., Isa 56—66; Mal 1)."[1]

Moses evidently included this account of Lot's incest for at least three reasons:

1. This story explains the origin of the Moabite and Ammonite nations, which played major roles in the later history of Israel as her habitual enemies. "Moab" sounds like the Hebrew words translated "from the father," and "Ammon" means "son of my kin."

   > "His [Lot's] legacy, Moab and Ammon (37f.), was destined to provide the worst carnal seduction in the history of Israel (that of Baal-Peor, Nu. 25) and the cruelest religious perversion (that of Molech, Lv. 18:21)."[2]

2. This story also illuminates the degrading effect that living in Sodom had on Lot's daughters. The writer censured Lot's daughters by not naming them (cf. Ruth 4:1). Lot's older daughter was so desperate to marry that she exaggerated the effects of the recent catastrophe in order to—at least according to her way of thinking—"keep our family [line] alive through our father" (v. 32).

   > "The story of Lot and his family should provide a sobering reminder that all of our decisions are significant, even that of where we live. Our moral environment significantly influences our lives. For this and many other reasons the

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 174.

[2]Kidner, p. 136. See also Henry O. Thompson, "The Biblical Ammonites," *Bible and Spade* 11:1 (Winter 1982):1-14.

New Testament constantly implores the believer to fellowship with those of like precious faith."[1]

3. This story also shows how God's mercy triumphs over His judgment. A descendant of Moab was Ruth, who was an ancestress of David and Messiah. And a descendant of Ammon was Naamah, the wife of King Solomon and the mother of his successor King Rehoboam.

From 2 Peter 2:6 through 9 we know that Lot was a "righteous" man, though from the record of him in Genesis we might doubt that. He chose to live as, what the New Testament calls, a "fleshly" (NASB, HCSB) or "carnal" (AV, NKJV) or "worldly" (NIV, TNIV) believer (1 Cor. 3:3). First, he "raised his eyes and saw all the vicinity of the Jordan" (13:10). Then, he "chose for himself all the vicinity of the Jordan" (13:11). Then, he "settled in the cities of the vicinity of the Jordan and moved his tents as far as Sodom" (13:12). Then, he sat "at the gate of Sodom" and acted as one of its judges (19:1, 9). Then, "he hesitated"—as Sodom's destruction loomed (19:16). Finally, he ended up committing incest with his daughters in a cave (19:30-38). How far it is possible for a believer to depart from God's will when he or she keeps making selfish decisions!

A major revelation of this chapter is that it is foolish for a believer to become attached to the things of this world. They will corrupt him or her, and God may destroy these things swiftly and suddenly.

> "There is many a man today who may be a saved man, but due to his life style or where he lives, he loses his family, his influence, and his testimony."[2]

11. Abraham's sojourn at Gerar ch. 20

Chapters 20 and 21 place Abraham in Philistine territory. Abraham had not yet obtained the Promised Land but still had to live as a sojourner in a land not his own. In between the incidents involving Abimelech in these chapters, the writer has inserted the record of Isaac's birth, giving hope that the promises of God would yet be fulfilled.

> "The stories about the jeopardy of the ancestress in pagan kings' harems form an inner frame around the Abraham cycle before the transition to the next cycle in 22:20—25:11. After Abraham's initial call to the

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[1]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 207.

[2]McGee, 1:80.

> Promised Land to become a great nation, he immediately jeopardizes Sarah in Pharaoh's harem. Now, immediately before the birth of the promised seed, he jeopardizes the matriarch in Abimelech's harem."[1]

The writer composed chapter 20 as another chiasm, with the focal point being Abimelech's announcement to his servants (v. 8). Two dialogues constitute the main parts of the story: the one between God and Abimelech (vv. 3-7), and the one between Abimelech and Abraham (vv. 9-13).

> "The focus of the narrative of chapters 20 and 21 is on the relationship between Abraham and the nations. Abraham's role is that of a prophetic intercessor, as in the promise 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (12:3). He prayed for the Philistines (20:7), and God healed them (v. 17). In the narrative Abimelech plays the role of a 'righteous Gentile' with whom Abraham could live in peace and blessing. There is, then, an implied contrast in the narratives between chapters 19 (Lot, the one who pictures the mixed multitude) and 20 (Abimelech, the righteous sojourner)."[2]

This chapter records the ninth crisis in the story of God providing an heir for Abraham.

> "Apparently, shortly after the announcement of a birth one year hence, Sarah is again taken into another man's harem. The reader is to infer that if there is an heir, he is in danger of being reckoned as Abimelech's not Abraham's. But Yahweh intervenes once again and preserves Sarah (20.6b) and restores her to Abraham."[3]

> "… the episode is chiefly one of suspense: on the brink of Isaac's birth-story here is the very Promise put in jeopardy, traded away for personal safety. If it is ever to be fulfilled, it will owe very little to man. Morally as well as physically, it will clearly have to be achieved by the grace of God."[4]

> "What is the relationship of this incident to the similar one described in Genesis 12:10-20? Some suggest that both these accounts refer to the same incident, arguing that the story was passed along in two different forms in the oral tradition before being written down. But such an

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 284.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 161.

[3]Helyer, p. 84.

[4]Kidner, p. 137.

> interpretation ignores the role of the Holy Spirit, who guarded God's word from error. It also ignores the clear differences between the two incidents. One took place in Egypt, the other in Gerar. One involved Pharaoh, the other Abimelech. In one, Abraham was fleeing from famine; in the other he was moving freely, without any external compulsion. All that they have in common is that both involve Abraham saying that Sarah is his sister and both involve a ruler. Abraham's behavior is the one consistent factor."[1]

20:1 From the oaks of Mamre near Hebron, Abraham moved south toward the Negev and settled temporarily there. Nothing of special importance apparently happened to Abraham and Sarah there, since Moses passed over their time there without comment. Then they moved north near Gerar, which was under Philistine control. Its exact location is debatable. Abraham, naturally, moved frequently since he had to find pasture for his flocks and herds. He lived a semi-nomadic life.

20:2 Abraham again misrepresented his relationship with Sarah by calling her his "sister" (cf. 12:13). This was misrepresentation because, though Sarah was indeed Abraham's half-sister (v. 12), she was also his wife. By presenting her as his sister Abraham was implying that she was not his wife.

> "Abraham stopped asking 'What is right?' and began asking 'What is safe?' and this led to his downfall."[2]

> "Abraham isn't the only one returning to the same sin again and again. Look back in your own life at the past few days or weeks. You and I return to the same patterns of sin. We bring the same things before the Lord again and again, don't we? It is easy to say, 'Abraham, you should have known better!' It is more difficult, however, to learn these basic lessons ourselves."[3]

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[1]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 40.

[2]Wiersbe, p. 97.

[3]Swindoll, *The Swindoll …*, p. 37.

"Abimelech" was a title rather than a proper name (cf. 26:1; Judg. 8:31; 2 Sam. 11:21; Ps. 34 title). It meant "royal father" or "the king is my father."[1]

Abimelech took Sarah into his harem as a consequence of Abraham's deception. Although some women are still attractive at 90 years old, Abimelech's motivation for taking Sarah may have involved the desire to make a treaty with Abraham through marriage.[2]

20:3 Nevertheless, God intervened to preserve Sarah's purity. He warned Abimelech in a dream about Sarah's real relationship to Abraham. Dreams were one of the primary means by which God revealed Himself to individuals in Old Testament times, along with visions and personal encounters (cf. 15:1; Num. 12:6-8).

20:4-5 Abimelech "had not come near" Sarah (had not had sex with her). Adultery commonly drew the death penalty in the ancient Near East, which the Mosaic Code later specified (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Other ancient Near Eastern texts refer to adultery as a "great sin" and a "great crime," reflecting the seriousness of this offense in the eyes of society.[3]

Abimelech addressed Yahweh as "Lord." Evidently Abimelech recognized that the Person talking to him in his dream was someone in authority over him. He appealed to God not to kill his "nation" because. what Abimelech had done. he had done innocently.

> "In king Abimelech we meet with a totally different character from that of Pharaoh [ch. 12]. We see in him a heathen imbued with a moral consciousness of right, and open to receive divine revelation, of which there is not the slightest trace in the king of Egypt."[4]

20:6 Abimelech claimed to head a "blameless" (lit. "righteous") nation (v. 4), so we would expect God to be gracious, since Abraham had prayed that the LORD would not destroy the righteous with the wicked (18:23-32), and

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 70. For an explanation of Abraham's behavior here, see my notes on 12:10-20. D. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis*, p. 30, noted several parallels between the three similar events in 12:10-20; 20:1-18; and 26:1, 7-17.

[2]Leupold, 2:583.

[3]See *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Adultery," by E. A. Goodfriend, 1:82-86.

[4]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:242.

God had done just that. God was indeed gracious with Abimelech and his people (v. 6; cf. v. 17). Contrast God's dealings with the unrighteous in Sodom.

God also explained that He had kept Abimelech from sinning against Him by not letting him "touch" Sarah (cf. v. 2).

20:7 God instructed Abimelech to restore Sarah to her husband and to ask Abraham the "prophet" to intercede with God ("pray") for him. If Abimelech did not return Sarah to Abraham, God promised, Abimelech and all his people would certainly die.

Moses identified Abraham as a "prophet." This is the first explicit reference to a prophet in the Old Testament. Prophets received direct revelations from God, spoke to others for God, and praised God (1 Chron. 25:1). Here the role of the prophet includes that of intercessor, as it does elsewhere in Scripture.

> "The term indicates more a relationship to God than an ability to speak for Him. Abraham's relationship to God was the basis for God's command that Sarah be restored to her husband."[1]

Fear for his safety evidently led Abraham to act as he did this second time, even though his previous deception in Egypt had been unsuccessful. Even the repeated promises of God did not drive out the fear of potential danger from Abraham's heart. God used a king with "integrity" (v. 5) to rebuke the righteous prophet—who had just recently boldly pleaded for Sodom—when Abraham's faith failed.

20:8 All of Abimelech's servants were "greatly frightened" when they learned what God had revealed to Abimelech.

> "Like the sailors and the king of Nineveh in the book of Jonah (1:16; 3:6-9), the Philistines responded quickly and decisively to God's warning. Like Jonah, however, Abraham in this narrative was a reluctant prophet."[2]

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[1]*The Nelson …,* p. 42.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 175.

20:9-13 When Abimelech confronted Abraham with what he had done, and the serious consequences that his misrepresentation could have brought on these Philistines, Abraham explained his reasons for acting as he did.

> "In the ancient Near Est, this phrase ["a great sin," v. 9] was used as legal terminology for adultery."[1]

Abraham had assumed, wrongly, that there was no fear of God in Abimelech's people. And what he had said about Sarah being his sister was half true: she was his half-sister as well as being his wife. Everywhere that Abraham and Sarah went he had represented himself as Sarah's brother rather than as her husband.

20:14-16 This explanation evidently satisfied Abimelech, since he proceeded to give Abraham "sheep and oxen and male and female servants," freedom to settle in his land, and "a thousand pieces of silver." These gifts were designed to make it clear to everyone that Abimelech had forgiven Abraham for what he had done.

So God blessed Abraham in spite of his deception, as He had done when Abraham was in Egypt (12:16). This is another indication of God's grace. Not only did God preserve Sarah's purity in Gerar, but he blessed Abraham further. This incident should not lead the reader to take a lax view of sin but to see that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20).

20:17-18 Abraham showed his forgiveness of Abimelech's treatment of Sarah by praying for him. God had shut up all the wombs of the women in Abimelech's household, but Abraham's prayers resulted in God lifting this judgment.

This incident shows and contrasts God's faithfulness to Abraham and Abraham's unfaithfulness to God (cf. 2 Tim. 2:13). God's chosen ones cannot destroy His ultimate plans for them by failing. Abraham learned that Yahweh will maintain His covenant and fulfill His promises in spite of the continuing failures of His chosen ones.

Righteous Abimelech in this chapter, who was not a part of Abraham's family, contrasts with Lot who, in the previous chapter, behaved like a pagan, even though he was a part of Abraham's family.

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[1]Currid, p. 41. See also Longman, "Genesis," p. 99.

God requires His people to maintain purity in marriage, and to look to Him to provide what He has promised.

12. The birth of Isaac 21:1-21

God proved faithful to His promise—to give Abraham a son from Sarah—by providing Isaac. Abraham and Sarah responded to the fulfillment of this promise with praise and obedience. Ishmael, however, became a threat to Abraham's heir, Isaac, and consequently Abraham sent Ishmael away, into the wilderness, where God continued to provide for him and his mother, as He had promised He would do (16:10).

God's provision and Abraham's and Sarah's response 21:1-8

The emphasis in this brief section is on God's faithfulness and power, both in keeping His promise, and in miraculously providing an heir through Sarah, in spite of Abraham's and Sarah's old age (v. 2; cf. 17:16; 18:14).

21:1-2 Note the repetition: "as He had promised," and "of which God had spoken." The tension of anticipating the birth of Abraham's heir finally subsides—but only temporarily.

God "visited" Sarah (AV, NKJV, ESV, RSV), "came to" her (HCSB), "took note" of her (NASB), "was gracious" to her (NIV, TNIV), and "showed favor" to her (NEB, v. 1). The Hebrew word used here is a common metaphor that describes God's intervention in nature and human affairs. It also appears when God intervened to save the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (50:24-25; Exod. 4:31), and when He ended a famine (Ruth 1:6). It also occurs when He caused Hannah to conceive (1 Sam. 2:21), and when He brought the Jewish exiles home from the Babylonian Captivity (Jer. 29:10). Thus this word's presence here highlights the major significance of Isaac's birth.

McGee listed nine similarities between the birth of Isaac and the birth of Jesus: (1) They had both been promised. (2) With both births there was a long interval between the promise and the fulfillment. (3) The announcements of the births seemed incredulous and impossible to Sarah and to Mary. (4) Both Isaac and Jesus were named before their births. (5) Both births occurred at God's appointed time. (6) Both births were miraculous. (7) Both sons were a particular joy of their fathers. (8) Both sons were obedient to their fathers, even unto death. (9) The

miraculous birth of Isaac is a picture of the resurrection of Christ.[1] Also, both births resulted in their mothers' rejoicing in God's goodness to them.

21:3-7 Isaac's name ("Laughter") was appropriate for two reasons:

1. Isaac would be a source of joy to his parents as the fulfillment of God's promised seed (v. 6).
2. Both Abraham and Sarah had "laughed"—in delight and disbelief respectively—when told that God had chosen to bless them by giving them a son so late in life (v. 7; cf. 17:17; 18:12).[2]

Abraham's obedience, in naming his son "Isaac" (17:19) and circumcising him on the eighth day (cf. 17:12), was an expression of worship.

> "Abraham's life divides into seven periods of 25 years each: three of them in Mesopotamia (12.4), one in Canaan without the promised son (21.5), and three in Canaan after Isaac's birth (25.7). The period of his life in which Abraham lived with the promise unfulfilled, though the shortest, is the pivotal and central one and occupies the most space in the narrative."[3]

21:8 Weaning would normally have occurred at age two or three (cf. 1 Sam. 1:22-24; Hos. 1:8; 2 Macc. 7:27-28).

The expulsion of Ishmael and Hagar 21:9-14

All was not well in Abraham's household, even though God had provided the promised heir. Ishmael was a potential rival to Isaac's inheritance. This section records another crisis in the story of Abraham's heir. This was the second time that Sarah treated Hagar harshly and drove her from Abraham's compound (cf. 16:6). Now that Abraham had a son by his wife, Sarah did not want Ishmael to share Isaac's inheritance.

21:9 The Hebrew word translated "mocking" or "playing" (NJPS) comes from the same root as Isaac's name, and means "laughing." However this

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[1]McGee, 1:88.

[2]On the alternate reading of verses 6-7 as "God has made a joke of me laugh at me …," see Isaac Rabinowitz, "Sarah's Wish (Gen. XXI 6-7)," *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (July 1979):362-63. This reading has not won support from most commentators.

[3]Levenson, p. 41.

participle is in the intensive form in Hebrew here, indicating that Ishmael was not simply "laughing" but cruelly ridiculing Isaac (cf. Gal. 4:29, "persecuted" him). There is a wordplay on Isaac's name here; Ishmael was "Isaacing." He was taking Isaac's place. Ishmael showed contempt for Isaac, like Hagar had despised Sarai (16:4).

21:10

> "Sarah's omission of the names of the two individuals who have aroused her jealousy [in v. 10] indicates the depth of her contempt."[1]

> "According to ancient Near Eastern law, Ishmael had a legal right of inheritance. The Code of Hammurabi, laws 170-171, stated that a son of a handmaid had a legal claim on his father's property. This was perhaps why Sarah drove Hagar and Ishmael out of the camp."[2]

21:11 Abraham understandably felt distressed by this situation, since he loved both Ishmael and Isaac, and he would, presumably, never see Ismael again (cf. 17:18).

> "… Abraham's insight into the deeper issues of the case was in this instance blurred by the very strong affection he felt for Ishmael."[3]

21:12-13 God appeared to Abraham again (the seventh revelation) to assure him that Sarah's desire—that Abraham's descendants would be named through Isaac, not Ishmael—was in harmony with His will (cf. 17:19-21). God also promised to make a nation out of Ishmael's descendants, since he was also Abraham's son.

> "The key to Sarah's demand lies in a clause in the laws of Lipit-Ishtar where it is stipulated that the father may grant freedom to the slave woman and the children she has borne him, in which case they forfeit their share of the paternal property."[4]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Currid, p. 41.

[3]Leupold, 2:602.

[4]Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 147.

The laws of Lipit-Ishtar were laws that governed life in Mesopotamia that pre-dated the Mosaic Law.

21:14 The birth of Isaac seems to have produced a much stronger faith in Abraham. Note Abraham's immediate response, from then on, to God's instructions to him (cf. 22:3).

Abraham made provision for the temporary needs of Hagar and Ishmael by giving them bread and water for their journey. Hagar seems to have wanted to return to Egypt, since she headed south and "wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba," which was on the northern edge of the Negev.

Some interpreters believe that God encouraged Abraham to just send Hagar away, namely, to separate her from himself and Sarah. Others believe that God encouraged him to divorce Hagar.

> "The Hebrew word used here (*shalah*) implies that this was a divorce (cf. Deut. 22:19, 29; 24:1, 3; Jer. 3:1; Mal. 2:16)."[1]

> "But how could God ask Abraham to do evil if divorce is always a sin? The answer must be that divorce in this case is either not a sin or else is the lesser of two evils."[2]

For other instances where God apparently commanded divorce, see Deuteronomy 21:10 through 14 and Ezra 9 and 10. Since God makes the rules, He alone can also alter them according to His sovereign will. Whether Abraham and Hager divorced or separated, the result was the same: They no longer had contact with each other, as far as we know.

> "… even in that culture it was reprehensible to send Ishmael away. When a surrogate wife had borne a son to one's husband, that mother and child could not be dismissed even if the first wife subsequently gave birth to a son. This partly explains Abraham's reluctance to do what Sarah demanded (v. 11)."[3]

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[1]Longman, "Genesis," p. 100.

[2]Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:4 (December 1997):535.

[3]*The Nelson …,* p. 43. See also Wood, *A Survey …,* p. 28.

The focus of this revelation in verses 9 through 14 is a clarification of God's purposes for each of the two sons. God would bless Abraham through Ishmael as well as through Isaac.

> "As Cain suffered both banishment from the divine and protection by the divine, so Ishmael is both loser and winner, cut off from what should be his but promised a significant lineage."[1]

God's care of Ishmael and Hagar 21:15-21

Waltke pointed out six parallels between Hagar's and Ishmael's trek, and Abraham's and Isaac's (ch. 22).[2]

The concluding description of Ishmael's experiences (vv. 15-21) provides essential information that is necessary to understand and appreciate later references to him and his descendants: "I will make a great nation of him" (v. 18), and "he lived in the wilderness of Paran" (v. 21). The exact location of the wilderness of Paran is debatable. Some believe that it was "a desert plateau in the heart of the Sinai Peninsula."[3] Others place it "south of Beer-sheba, not too far north of the Sinai Peninsula."[4]

Ishmael became the father of 12 sons (25:13-16), as Jacob also did. From Ishmael's sons came the Arab nations, that have ever since been the chief antagonists of the Israelites. The term "Arab" (someone from Arabia) came into use for the first time in the ninth century B.C.[5] Hagar chose a wife for her son from her homeland: Egypt (v. 21).

> "In this respect she does not display the wisdom used by Abraham in choosing, as he did, a god-fearing wife for his son."[6]

> "The picture of Ishmael as the rejected son is complete: he is the son of a slave woman, married to an Egyptian, lives outside normal social bounds, and is remembered for his hostilities."[7]

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[1]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 81.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 292.

[3]Currid, p. 42.

[4]Longman, "Genesis," p. 100.

[5]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 156.

[6]Leupold, 2:609.

[7]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 274.

God not only makes promises, but He also makes provision. His provision of what He has promised results in great joy, and should lead to separation from whatever might hinder His program of blessing. (See Paul's use of this account in Galatians 4:21 through 31.)

13. Abimelech's treaty with Abraham 21:22-34

The writer may have included this incident in the text partially because it records the testimony of a Gentile king to God's faithfulness (v. 22), but also to record Abraham's strong testimony to God's faithfulness (vv. 32-33). Furthermore it sets the stage for Isaac's dealings with Abimelech in chapter 26.

> "This scene occurs at the same time as the events of Scene 6 [21:1-21] but focuses on different characters and tensions. This second conflict with Abimelech creates a bracket around the Isaac birth narrative. Whereas the first conflict, Scene 5 (20:1-18), concerned jeopardy of the seed, the second conflict, Scene 7 (21:22-34), concerns jeopardy of the land (i.e., well rights)."[1]

21:22-24 God's blessing of Abraham resulted in his material prosperity, among other things. In response to Abimelech's initiative, Abraham agreed to make a covenant, or treaty of peaceful coexistence, with him. This treaty enabled Abraham to live, serve, and worship God freely, without worry or threat from his neighbors, in the Promised Land.

Since Abraham had become a powerful individual in the land, as a result of God's blessing, King Abimelech initiated a bilateral treaty with him for his own protection. This was evidently the same "Abimelech" whom Abraham had dealt with previously (ch. 20).

"Phicol" (v. 22) seems to have been a title rather than a proper name, probably of Anatolian origin.[2] Anatolia is the ancient name for what is now the western part of modern Turkey.

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 298.

[2]See Thomson, 2:352. On the origin of Phicol, Abimelech's army commander, see J. D. Ray, "Two Etymologies: Ziklag and Phicol," *Vetus Testamentum* 36:3 (July 1986):358-59; Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 91-92. Cf. 26:26.

21:25-32 Wells were extremely important in the life of semi-nomads like Abraham (v. 25).[1] Abraham especially, being a wealthy owner of large flocks and herds, needed much water for his animals.

Abraham and Abimelech made a parity covenant (i.e., between equals, vv. 31-32). This is the first of several parity covenants in Genesis (cf. 26:28; 31:43-45). This covenant treaty was a remarkable admission of Abraham's standing and blessing by God, and an expression of Abimelech's confidence in the future existence of the patriarch's family.

> "It was customary in ancient Near Eastern covenant making for the parties to exchange gifts (see 1 Kings 15:19). The gifts served as a witness to confirm the treaty."[2]

"Beersheba" (v. 31; cf. v. 14) was one of the more important sites throughout Old Testament times, meaning "Oath of Seven" or "Oath Well." It became Abraham's possession with the payment of "seven ewe lambs" (v. 28; cf. 26:33).[3]

Critics of the historicity of the patriarchal narratives have pointed out that references of "the land of the Philistines" in Genesis (vv. 32, 34; cf. 26:1) are evidence that the Bible contains errors. These critics believe that the Philistines did not enter Canaan until about 1200 B.C., whereas Abraham evidently lived about 800 years earlier. They base this assumption on the lack of archaeological evidence of Philistine occupation. But this is an argument from silence. Perhaps one day archaeological evidence will be discovered that validates the presence of Philistines in Canaan in Abraham's day.[4]

One explanation of this reference to Philistines is that the Philistines of Genesis were peaceful, and those of Judges and later were warlike. Perhaps the same name describes an earlier but entirely different race of people. They may have resembled the later 13th-century Philistines, who also emigrated from the Aegean area into Canaan.[5] Or perhaps the

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[1]See Clark Youngblood, "Wells," *Biblical Illustrator* (Fall 1986), pp. 41-49.

[2]Currid, p. 42. Bold font omitted.

[3]See William G. Dever, "Beersheba," *Biblical Illustrator* (Spring 1983), pp. 56-62.

[4]See Free, pp. 65-66.

[5]Kitchen, *Ancient Orient …*, p. 80; Edward E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament*, pp. 94-95.

Philistines of 2000 B.C. were Minoan and thus peaceful, whereas those of 1200 were Mycenean and thus warlike.[1] Other explanations follow:

> "I hold that the Philistines came from the neighboring coast of Africa, perhaps from Lower Egypt, though Josephus seems to place Caphtor, their ancient home, higher up the valley of the Nile."[2]

> "I suggest that the Philistines of Genesis represent the first wave of Sea Peoples from the Aegean, and that the later Philistines represent the last wave (cf. 1200 B.C.)."[3]

Another explanation is that a later writer or editor used the name "the land of the Philistines" that was common later in Israel's history (cf. the use of "Dan" in 14:14).

> "Biblical historical data are accurate to an extent far surpassing the ideas of any modern critical students, who have consistently tended to err on the side of hypercriticism."[4]

21:33-34 By planting a tree, Abraham indicated his determination to stay in that region. Tamarisk trees were long-lived and evergreen.[5] This tree was an appropriate symbol of the enduring grace of the faithful God, whom Abraham now recognized as "the Everlasting God" (*El Olam*).

> "The Hebrew word *'olam* is often translated with 'eternal,' 'eternity,' but it does not contain the conception of timelessness or otherworldly time but rather of time which extends forward and backward without end."[6]

Abraham now owned the first, small part—like a first installment—of the land God had promised him.

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[1]Barker, p. 134. See also Vassos Karageorghis, "Exploring Philistine Origins on the Island of Cyprus," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10:2 (March-April 1984):16-28.

[2]Thomson, 2:288.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 94. See also Archer, *Encyclopedia of …*, pp. 94-96.

[4]Albright, *The Archaeology …,* p 229.

[5]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 282.

[6]von Rad, p. 237.

> "By granting Abraham rights to a well, Abimelek [*sic*] had made it possible for Abraham to live there permanently and had acknowledged his legal right at least to water. In other words, after so many delays the promises of land and descendants at last seem on their way to fulfillment."[1]

> "The reader is forced to ask why the author constantly draws attention to the fact that Abraham was dwelling with the Philistines during this time [cf. vv. 32, 34]. The purpose of such reminders may be to portray Abraham as one who had yet to experience the complete fulfillment of God's promises."[2]

In contrast to Abraham's earlier fear of Abimelech (ch. 20), we now see him boldly standing up to this powerful king. His changed attitude evidently resulted from God's grace in blessing the patriarch as He had promised.

Peaceful interpersonal relationships with those who acknowledge God enable the believer to proclaim his or her faith freely (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-4).

14. The sacrifice of Isaac 22:1-19

In obedience to God's command, Abraham took his promised heir to the land of Moriah to sacrifice him to the LORD. Because Abraham was willing to slay his "only begotten son," God graciously restrained him from killing Isaac and promised to bless him further for his obedience. Abraham memorialized the place by calling it: "The LORD Will Provide."

> "At the age of 75, Abraham enrolled in the 'School of Faith.' Now he was over 100, and he was still having soul-stretching experiences. We are never too old to face new challenges, fight new battles, and learn new truths. When we stop learning, we stop growing; and when we stop growing, we stop living."[3]

Warren Wiersbe reviewed the tests that Abraham underwent: the *family* test, when he had to leave his loved ones and step out to a new land; the *famine* test, when he went down into Egypt; the *fellowship* test, when Lot separated from him; the *fight* test, when he defeated the Mesopotamian kings; the *fortune* test, when he said no to Sodom's wealth; the *fatherhood* test, when Sarah got impatient with God; and the *farewell* test,

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 94.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 177.

[3]Wiersbe, p. 103.

when Ishmael left him.[1] We might call the sacrifice of Isaac Abraham's *filial* test, because it tested his love for God and Isaac.

God called on Abraham to make five great sacrifices: his native country, his extended family, his nephew Lot, his son Ishmael, and his son Isaac. Each sacrifice involved something naturally dear to Abraham, but each sacrifice resulted in greater blessings from God. Previously God had called Abraham to cut himself off from his past (12:1; 21:14); now He called him to cut himself off from his future.

This story also demonstrates the strong confidence that Abraham had in God at this time. "He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19). This is why Abraham was willing to slay Isaac. Evidently Abraham concluded that, if God could enable him and Sarah to bear a son so late in life, God could raise Isaac from the dead (cf. Rom. 4:19-21).

Jewish tradition refers to this chapter as the Akedah, from the Hebrew word *wayya'aqod*, translated "bound," in verse 9.[2]

> "With this chapter we reach the climax of the faith life of Abraham—the supreme test and the supreme victory."[3]
>
> "The seventh crisis [I believe it is the eleventh] comes at a point in the narrative when we least expect it and is without question the greatest crisis of all. After all obstacles have seemingly been surmounted and all potential rivals eliminated, God now asks for Abraham's only son whom he loves. The gracious intervention of God and the reaffirmation of the basic promise of 12.1-3 in 22.15-18 would seem to conclude the Abraham cycle at the moment when faith triumphs over the greatest obstacle of all, death."[4]
>
> "Our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible."[5]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 300-306.

[3]Leupold, 2:616. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 99, 112. Wenham also noted parallels between chapters 21 and 22 on pp. 99-100.

[4]Helyer, pp. 84-85.

[5]Wiersbe, p. 104.

22:1-2 This incident took place some time after the events recorded in the chapters immediately preceding this one, evidently several years later.

God's revelation to Abraham (His eighth recorded in Scripture) came to test Abraham's faith (i.e., to prove its character and strength; cf. James 2:21-23).

> "Life is a succession of tests, for character is only possible through discipline."[1]

The Hebrew text says that "the God" tested Abraham (v. 1). The presence of the definite article before "God" underlines the fact that it was the true God, genuine Deity, who made this request, not a false god or a demon (cf. 41:32). The true God was testing Abraham's love for Himself, and not simply his faith (v. 2). Such testing (Heb. *nsh*) shows what someone is really like, and it usually involves difficulty or hardship (cf. Exod. 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2, 16; 13:3; Judg. 2:22; 3:1, 4; 1 Kings 10:1; Job 1—2; Dan. 1:12, 14; Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13).

> "This scene presents the radical nature of true faith: tremendous demands and incredible blessings."[2]
>
> "The … best approach to the passage is that God commanded an actual human sacrifice and Abraham intended to obey Him fully."[3]
>
> "'How could God demand a human sacrifice, when He is on principle unalterably opposed to such a practice?' The answer must be given as follows: What God actually wanted Abraham to give was the *spiritual* sacrifice of his son. … But then the problem arises, Why did God ask for the spiritual sacrifice in the form of a material sacrifice? … God asked for one thing only: the spiritual surrender, the giving back to Him of this great gift which He had granted to Abraham."[4]

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 195.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 301.

[3]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 217.

[4]Leupold, 2:617.

The "land of Moriah" (v. 2; lit. "Where the LORD Provides" or "Where the LORD Appears") was the mountainous country around Jerusalem. This area was located about 45 miles north of Beersheba, which would have been a two-day or a three-day journey for Abraham and Isaac. During this time Abraham would have had many temptations and opportunities to turn back. "Moriah" may have been the name the Israelites gave this area after this event. On these mountains, God's angel later appeared to David, who built an altar to the LORD (2 Sam. 24:16-25). Here also, Solomon built his temple (2 Chron. 3:1), and Jesus Christ died. A mountain was a suitable place for Abraham to meet God (cf. v. 14).[1]

Verses 1 and 2 refer to a second time that God called Abraham, which parallels the first call in 12:1 through 3, in which He told Abraham to leave his home to go to another place.

> "The repetition of these motifs forms an inclusio in the narrative structure of the Abrahamic narrative, pointing out the complete cycle in the patriarch's experience. The allusion to the former call would also have prompted obedience to the present one, in many ways a more difficult journey in God's direction."[2]

The LORD was not asking Abraham to make any greater sacrifices to Him, the true God, than his pagan neighbors were willing to make to their false gods. Canaanite religion involved child sacrifice, but we do not know for sure that the Canaanites practiced it as early as Abraham's time.[3]

> "The demand [to sacrifice Isaac] was indeed only made to prove that Abraham was not behind the heathen in the self-denying surrender of his dearest to his God, and that when the demand had been complied with in spirit, the external fulfillment might be rejected."[4]

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[1]See Appendix 5 at the end of these notes for an article about Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

[2]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 394. Cf. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p, 283. In biblical studies, inclusio is a literary device similar to a refrain. It is also known as bracketing or an envelope structure, and consists of the repetition of material at the beginning and end of a section of text.

[3]See *Everyday Life in Bible Times*, p. 91; *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Canaan, Canaanite," by K. A. Kitchen, pp. 183-86.

[4]Delitzsch, 2:91.

> "If anyone puts a child in the place of the true God, it creates an idolatrous love that will smother the child and strangle the relationship."[1]

22:3-4 Matthew Henry suggested several questions that Abraham must have asked himself as he and Isaac made their trek northward: Am I not going to disobey God's command against murder (9:6)? How can I do this to my own son? Why did God not explain His reason for commanding me to do this? How will God fulfill His promises to me if I kill Isaac? If I do this, how can I ever look Sarah in the face again? Will this action not cause the pagan people of the land to disrespect the LORD?[2]

22:5-7 Abraham may have told his servants to stay behind so they would not try to restrain him from killing Isaac. The three verbs that Abraham used in verse 5 are all intensive in Hebrew (cf. 12:2): "We *are determined* to go," "We *are determined* to worship," and "We *are determined* to return." The words used to describe Isaac in this chapter, as well as what Moses said of him, indicate that he was probably a young man at this time (v. 6). Josephus, reflecting the belief of the Jews of his day, wrote that he was 25 years old.[3]

> "There are indications to suggest that the meaning of *Abba* in Mark 14:36 is to be found in the light of its whole context and Genesis 22. Jesus' final trial in Gethsemane appears to be modelled on the supreme trial of Abraham and Isaac. Despite his horror and anguish before the prospect of an imminent sacrificial death, Isaac calls to Abraham his *Abba* and, as a faithful son, obeys the voice of God speaking through his father. Parallel to this, Jesus says *Abba* to God in the same way that Isaac does to Abraham. In this context, *Abba* has the meaning of 'father' in the sense of a relationship to a devoted and obedient son. In Jesus' supreme hour of trial, it is his trust and obedience to God as *Abba* that carries him through, even to the cross. This meaning of *Abba* may prompt further study of the significance of *son* in other NT texts to discover whether

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[1]Keller, p. 7. See also pp. 4-21 for insightful comments on this incident in Abraham's life.

[2]Matthew Henry, p. 40.

[3]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:13:2.

> the obediential aspect may be more prominent than has been suspected. The father-son relationship in Genesis 22 may be a far-reaching New Testament model of that between Jesus and God."[1]

Josephus recorded a supposed conversation between Abraham and Isaac at this point, in which Abraham explained to his son what he was about to do and why, and in which Isaac verbalized his willingness to die.[2]

The NJPS translated "fire" (v. 7) as "firestone." This suggests that Abraham and Isaac did not carry fire with them but a stone that they used to strike in order to make a fire.

22:8 Abraham referred to the sacrifice he would offer, supposedly Isaac—but in reality God's substitute for Isaac—as "the lamb." This statement, of course, proved prophetic of Jesus Christ as well (John 1:29). Abraham spoke better than he knew.

22:9-10 Isaac demonstrated his own faith clearly in this incident. He must have known what his father intended to do to him, yet he submitted willingly.

> "If Abraham displays faith that obeys, then Isaac displays faith that cooperates. If Isaac was strong and big enough to carry wood for a sacrifice, maybe he was strong and big enough to resist or subdue his father."[3]

The possibility of Isaac resisting may have been the reason why Abraham bound him on the altar.

> "The sacrifice was already accomplished in his [Abraham's] heart, and he had fully satisfied the requirements of God."[4]

> "The test, instead of breaking him, brings him to the summit of his lifelong walk with God."[5]

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[1]Joseph A. Grassi, "*Abba*, Father (Mark 14:36): Another Approach," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50:3 (September 1982):455.

[2]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:13:3-4.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 110.

[4]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:250.

[5]Kidner, pp. 142-43. See Donald Campbell, "Passing the Test," *Kindred Spirit* 9:2 (Summer 1985):9-10.

> "The temptation does not aim to uncover the evil in a saint of God but rather to make apparent what good God has wrought in this faithful believer."[1]

22:11-12 God had previously told Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice (v. 2), but now He told him *not* to sacrifice him. Sometimes, even today, we may proceed on a course of action believing that God has called us to it. Yet afterward, we may become equally convinced that He wants us to do the very opposite. We should not necessarily conclude that we were wrong in the first case. God may be testing our faith, as He did Abraham's.

Also, the LORD acknowledged Abraham's faith ("I know that you fear God"; cf. 18:21; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3).

> "… where the phrases 'fear of God' and 'fearing God' occur in the Old Testament [cf. v. 12], they refer not to a particular form of strong emotions but rather to their consequences, i.e., to obedience (Gen. 20.11; 42.18; II Kings 4.1; Isa. 11.2; Prov. 1.7; Job 1.1, 8). It would be more correct to interpret the phrase 'fear of God' simply as a term for obedience to the divine commands."[2]

> "In the Tanakh, the 'fear of God' denotes an active obedience to the divine will."[3]

22:13-14 Abraham's sacrifice of the ram, like Noah's sacrifice after he left the ark (8:18—9:17), expressed thanks and devotion to God—and anticipated His benevolence toward future generations. A "burnt offering" was most appropriate, because it symbolized complete surrender to God (cf. Lev. 1). This is the first explicit mention in the Bible of the substitutionary sacrifice of one life for another.

> "The author makes an editorial comment that appears to refer to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem [in v. 14]. In other words, he was connecting the sacrifice of the ram in

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[1]Leupold, 2:617.

[2]von Rad, pp. 241-42.

[3]Levenson, p. 43.

> Abraham's time to the later Hebrew sacrificial system that took place on the Temple Mount."[1]

As a result of this incident, Abraham gained a greater appreciation of God as the One who will provide or "look out for" him (*Yahweh-jireh*, lit. "The LORD Sees").

> "… the whole issue in this narrative has consistently turned on the question, not whether Yahweh would 'appear' but whether He would 'provide.'"[2]

> "… the main point of Genesis 22:9-14 is not the doctrine of the Atonement. It is portraying an obedient servant worshipping God in faith at great cost, and in the end receiving God's provision."[3]

22:15-18 The LORD appeared again ("The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven," the ninth revelation) at the end of his test. God "swore" *by Himself* to confirm His promises to Abraham. God so swore ("By Myself I have sworn") only this one time in His dealings with the patriarchs. Moses referred to this oath later in Israel's history (24:7; 26:3; 50:24; Exod. 13:5, 11; 33:1; et al.; cf. Heb. 6:13-14).

For the first and last time in Genesis, the LORD swore an oath in His own name guaranteeing His promise (cf. Heb. 6:13-14). God thus reinforced, reemphasized, and extended the promise that He had given formerly (12:1-3), because Abraham trusted and obeyed Him (vv. 16, 18). "Greatly bless" and "greatly multiply" (v. 17) translate a Hebrew idiom in which the verb is doubled to stress the certainty of the action.

> "Here again God promised Abraham that he would become the recipient of the [Abrahamic] covenant blessings. The covenant was not based on obedience, nor was the perpetuity of the covenant based on obedience—but rather the reception of covenant blessings was

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[1]Currid, p. 43.

[2]Leupold, 2:632.

[3]Ross, "Genesis," p. 65.

conditioned on obedience. Remember, an unconditional covenant may have conditional blessings."[1]

"The story reaches its climax when Abraham demonstrated his loyalty (22:12, 15-18) by obeying God's command (cf. 26:5). God then elevated the patriarch to the status of a favored vassal who now possessed a ratified promise, comparable to the royal grants attested in the ancient Near East. God contextualized His self-revelation to Abraham (and to the readers of the narrative) within the relational, metaphorical framework of a covenant lord. Thus one should not be surprised to hear Him speak in ways that reflect the relational role He assumed within this metaphorical framework."[2]

"The Abrahamic Covenant contained a total of fourteen specific provisions. First, Abraham is to become the father of a great nation, and that nation is Israel (12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:1-2, 7; 22:17). Second, God promises land, the land of Canaan (12:1, 7; 13:14, 15, 17; 15:7-12, 17-21; 17:8). Third, Abraham will be blessed (12:2; 15:6; 22:15-17). Fourth, Abraham's name will be great (12:2). Fifth, Abraham will be a blessing to others (12:2). Sixth, those who bless Abraham will be blessed (12:3). Seventh, those who curse Abraham will be cursed (12:3). Eighth, in Abraham all will be blessed, which is the promise of Gentile blessing (12:3; 22:18). Ninth, Sarah will have a son, implied in (15:1-4) and clearly stated in (17:16-21). Tenth, the Egyptian bondage is foretold (15:13-15). Eleventh, other nations were to come from Abraham, such as the Arab tribes and nations (17:3-4, 6). Twelfth, his name was to be changed from Abram, meaning 'exalted father,' to Abraham, meaning 'the father of a multitude' (17:5). Thirteenth, Sarai's name, meaning 'my princess,' was changed to Sarah, 'the princess' (17:15). Fourteenth, the token of the covenant would be circumcision to be

[1]Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom …,* pp. 66-67.

[2]Chisholm, "Anatomy of …," p. 13.

> performed on the eighth day to distinguish Jewish circumcision from all others, and that would serve as a sign of Jewishness (17:9-14)."[1]

Abraham's "seed" refers not only to Isaac but also to Messiah (cf. Gal. 3:16). It is important to consider the context of any reference to the seed of Abraham in Scripture, in order to interpret correctly which seed is in view.

The Four Seeds of Abraham in Scripture
NATURAL SEED All physical descendants of Abraham Genesis 12:1-3, 7; et al.
NATURAL-SPIRITUAL SEED Believing physical descendants of Abraham Romans 9:6, 8; Galatians 6:16
SPIRITUAL SEED Believing non-physical descendants of Abraham Galatians 3:6-9, 29
ULTIMATE SEED Jesus Christ Galatians 3:16

22:19 Having passed his test, Abraham then returned to the well that he had purchased at Beersheba and lived there.

[1]Fruchtenbaum, pp. 339-40.

One writer suggested that 22:15 through 18 really "… describes the establishment of the covenant of circumcision first mentioned in Genesis 17."[1] But the lack of reference to circumcision in the immediate context makes this interpretation weak.

Moses probably preserved the details of this story because this test involved the future of God's promised seed, Isaac, and, therefore, the faithfulness of God. He probably did so also because this incident illustrates God's feelings in giving His Son as the Lamb of God (cf. John 1:29; 3:16). Other themes in this chapter include testing and obedience, the relationship between God and man, and the relationship between father and son.[2]

Every time Abraham made a sacrifice for God, the LORD responded by giving Abraham more.

1. Abraham left his homeland, and God gave him a new one.
2. Abraham left his extended family, and God gave him a much larger family.
3. Abraham offered the best of the land to Lot, and God gave him more land.
4. Abraham gave up the King of Sodom's reward, and God gave Abraham more wealth.
5. Abraham gave up Ishmael, and God made Ishmael the father of a multitude of Abraham's posterity.
6. Abraham was willing to give up Isaac, and God allowed Isaac to live, and, through him, gave Abraham numerous descendants.

In each case God gave Abraham a deeper relationship with Himself, as well as more material prosperity. Note the closeness of this fellowship in Abraham's response to God's revelations: "Here I am" (vv. 1, 11).

God has not promised Christians great physical blessings (cf. 2 Tim. 3:2), but whenever we make a sacrifice for Him, He at least gives us a deeper relationship with Himself (cf. John 15:14). For this reason we should not fear making any personal sacrifice for God.

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[1]T. Desmond Alexander, "Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (February 1983):17.

[2]John Lawlor developed these other themes in "The Test of Abraham: Genesis 22:11-19," *Grace Theological Journal* 1:1 (Spring 1980):19-35. See also Abraham Kuruvilla, "The *Aqedah* (Genesis 22): What is the Author *Doing* with What He is *Saying*? *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55:3 (September 2012):489-508.

Note too that what God called Abraham to give back to Him, each time, was something that He had provided, or would provide, for Abraham supernaturally—in faithfulness to His promise. Sometimes God tests our faith by asking us to give back to Him what He has supernaturally and faithfully provided, not just what He has provided through regular channels.

This test of Abraham's faith is the climax of his personal history. It is the last major incident in the record of his life.

> "… God does not demand a literal human sacrifice from His worshippers, but the spiritual sacrifice of an unconditional denial of the natural life, even to submission to death itself."[1]

The faithful believer will surrender to God whatever He may ask, all the while trusting in God's promise of provision and blessing.

> "Faith does not demand explanations; faith rests on promises."[2]

15. The descendants of Nahor 22:20-24

The testing of Abraham's faith was complete with the sacrifice of Isaac. The divine Author of Genesis (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16) therefore brought the history of his life to a close, and He began to set the scene for related events in Isaac's life.

This section signals a change in the direction of the narrative. It moves from Abraham to the next generation, and its genealogical connections with the East. The record of Nahor's 12 sons prepares the way for the story of Isaac's marriage. It also shows that Rebekah (meaning "Heifer," "Soft," or "Supple") was the daughter of Bethuel's wife (v. 23), not the daughter of Bethuel's concubine (v. 24). Isaac's marriage was very important, because Isaac was the heir of the promises (ch. 24). His wife would produce the next generation of the promised "seed."

Only a few of the individuals named as descendants of Abraham's brother Nahor appear elsewhere in Scripture. The most important individuals were Rebekah and her father Bethuel. This is a "segmented" genealogy, designed to establish family relationships—not a "linear" genealogy, which identifies the final descendant as the legitimate successor of the first (cf. Ruth 4:18-22).

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[1]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:252.

[2]Wiersbe, p. 104.

16. The purchase of Sarah's tomb ch. 23

> "After the climactic episode of the 'Akedah, all Abraham's actions are in the nature of putting his affairs in order. In ch. 23, he acquires a burial plot for Sarah. In the next chapter, he arranges for a wife for Isaac, and in ch. 25, he decrees the distribution of his assets and passes away."[1]

Abraham's purchase of a burial site in the Promised Land demonstrated his intention to remain in Canaan, rather than go back to his native homeland. Since he was "a stranger and a foreign resident" in Canaan (v. 4), his friends and relatives probably expected him to bury Sarah back in their home area, namely, Mesopotamia.

The two major events contained in this chapter continue Moses' emphasis on God's faithfulness. They do so by recording the death of Abraham's wife, the mother of his heir, and by showing the beginning of the fulfillment of the land promise that God had given Abraham.

23:1 Sarah is the only woman whose age at death ("127 years" old) the Scriptures record. She is also the only woman whose name God changed (17:15). This notation of her age illustrates her importance. Isaac was 37 years old when his mother died. Abraham died at the age of 175 (25:8), 38 years after Sarah.

23:2 Abraham and Sarah had moved back near Hebron after having lived at Beersheba for some time (cf. 22:19). "Kiriath-arba" means "Town of Four" (cf. Josh. 14:15). It was another, perhaps older, name for Hebron.

> "It should be stressed here that the world of the patriarchs was that of a developed and organized society and not what is usually regarded as a simple pastoral-bedouin existence. Throughout Genesis 12-50 there are connections to Mesopotamia and to Egypt as well as negotiations with local political centers (Shechem, Salem and Hebron) as well as Gerar in the Western Negev on a branch of the Coastal Highway."[2]

> "Much of the theological relevance of the patriarchs is based upon the fact that there were other more attractive

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[1]Levenson, p. 44. The 'Akedah (lit. binding) is the Jewish term for the story of Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac in 22:1-19.

[2]Monson, p. 153.

> lifestyles available to these early Biblical figures. The option they chose gave them few of the advantages they could have enjoyed elsewhere, especially in Mesopotamia where their family was established. In light of this fact and the great promises made to Abraham during his lifetime, his remark to the leaders of Hebron after the death of his wife, Sarah, takes on new meaning."[1]

Abraham mourned and wept for his wife.

> "Tears are a tribute due to our deceased friends. When the body is sown, it must be watered."[2]

23:3-4 These "sons of Heth" (Hethites) were native residents of Canaan, probably not members of the mighty Hittite Empire that later flourished north of the Promised Land, in modern Turkey and Syria—ancient Anatolia.[3] There is some textual and pottery indication of Hittite presence in Canaan at this time.[4] But this may connect to the Canaanite nation called "Hittite" (cf. 10:15; 15:20).

Typically ancient Near Easterners buried family members in their native land.[5] Abraham's desire to bury Sarah in the Promised Land shows that he had turned his back on Mesopotamia forever. Canaan was his adopted homeland.

> "The great safeguard against overmuch sorrow is work."[6]

23:5-6 God had made Abraham a powerful person, which his neighbors acknowledged.[7]

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[1]Ibid., pp. 153-54. See also Thomson, 1:456.

[2]Matthew Henry, p. 41. For helpful guidelines for grieving over the death of someone dear to you, see Swindoll, *The Swindoll …*, p. 43.

[3]See Bryant G. Wood, "Hittites and Hethites: A Proposed Solution to an Etymological Conundrum," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:2 (June 2011):239-50; von Rad, p. 247.

[4]See Currid, pp. 43-44.

[5]Ross, "Genesis," p. 66.

[6]Thomas, *Through the …,* p. 50.

[7]On Abraham as a "mighty prince" (lit. "prince of God"), see Wiseman, "Abraham Part II: Abraham the Prince," pp. 228-37.

> "Abraham has put himself at the bottom of the social ladder, and they put him at the top."[1]
>
> "Their warm and generous reply apparently gave Abraham all he wanted, but permission to bury Sarah was only part of what he had requested. He had asked for a burial plot, not simply for the use of one of their graves. Despite the warmth of their reply, the Hittites, by omitting any mention of this point, probably indicate their reluctance to transfer land to Abraham, for then he would no longer be a landless sojourner."[2]

23:7-9 Abraham offered to buy "the cave of Machpelah" that was located at the end of a field that Ephron the Hittite owned. He offered to pay Ephron the full price of the cave, and he wanted this to be a public transaction, evidently to avoid any future claim by Ephron on the property.

23:10-11 This transaction took place at the gate of Hebron. So there would have been many witnesses to it, including "the sons of Heth." At first Ephron offered to give Abraham not only the cave but the whole field free of charge. Everyone present at the gate heard Ephron's words.

23:12-13 Abraham bowed before the people of the land out of respect. Then he explained that he wanted to buy the field (as well as the cave). Apparently Ephron wanted to make the purchase of the field and the cave a package deal. Abraham undoubtedly knew that, if he received the field and the cave from Ephron as a gift, Ephron could come back in the future and make a claim on it. Abraham wanted it to be perfectly clear that he owned the field and the cave.

23:14-15 Ephron still wanted to appear generous, but he shrewdly mentioned the value of the land. If Abraham really wanted to buy the field and the cave it would cost him "four hundred shekels of silver." Coins were not minted until the eighth century B.C., so Abraham would have paid for his land with weighed pieces of silver.[3]

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[1]E. F. Roop, *Genesis*, p. 154.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 127.

[3]*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Money," by A. F. Walls, p. 836.

Why did Ephron want to sell Abraham the entire field in which the cave lay, rather than just the cave, as Abraham requested? The law specified that when a landowner sold only part of his property to someone else, the original owner had to continue to pay all taxes on the land and remained obligated to the state for military service. However, if he sold the entire tract, the new owner became responsible (cf. 1 Chron. 21:24).[1] Consequently Ephron held out for the entire tract of land, knowing that Abraham needed to make his purchase quickly, so he could bury Sarah without delay.[2]

Abraham's willingness to pay what appears to have been an unusually large price for the land further demonstrates his faith. An average field cost four shekels per acre, and garden land cost 40 shekels per acre.[3] Abraham was willing to pay 400 shekels. Of course, the text does not give the size of the field. And there is some question as to the value of 400 shekels in Old Testament times. The NASB footnote says it was worth "about 12.5 lb.," the table of weights and measures in the NIV makes it worth 62.5 pounds, and Hamilton rated it at "more than a hundred pounds."

> "The piece of property was no bargain for Abraham; *400 shekels* would be more than a hundred pounds of silver. David paid only one-eighth that amount—50 shekels of silver—for the purchase of the temple site from Araunah (2 Sam. 24:24)."[4]

Ephron's responses to Abraham's requests sound very generous, but he was probably asking an exorbitant price, to serve as a starting point for bargaining.[5] Ephron's objective may have been to get a present (favor; gratuity; exchange gift) from Abraham, for having given him the field and cave, that would compensate for the value of the land. Such a gift was

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[1]See Wood, *A Survey …,* p. 62; Cyrus H. Gordon, "Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 17 (1958):29; Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Patriarchal Age*, pp. 115-16.

[2]Barker, p. 134.

[3]Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventy-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 1:356.

[4]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 135. Cf. Jer. 32:9.

[5]Leupold, 2:650.

customary. On the other hand, he may have wanted to prevent Abraham from offering to pay him less than his asking price.[1]

23:16 Abraham so wanted this burial site that he paid Ephron his full initial asking price for the field and the cave.

> "Did the patriarchs who forsook everything for the sake of the promises go unrewarded? No, answers our narrative. In death they were heirs and no longer 'strangers.' A very small part of the Promised Land—the grave—belonged to them; therefore they did not have to rest in 'Hittite earth' or in the grave of a Hittite (cf. v. 6), which Israel would have considered a hardship difficult to bear."[2]

> "At a time when the children of Israel were on their way to take possession of the land, Moses did well to remind them how in faith their forefathers had secured at least 'a grave which was his own property,' and thus to arouse in them the desire to finish the work of taking into full possession what had so long ago been promised to them."[3]

23:17-18 Apparently "Machpelah" (lit. "double cave," or "split cave") was the name of a region that "faced Mamre," "that is, Hebron" (v. 19). The field and cave that Abraham purchased were evidently within this region. Abraham's purchase of the cave "in" Machpelah indicates his continuing faith in God's promise to give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants. Similarly, Jeremiah purchased property in the Promised Land, on the eve of the Babylonian Captivity, in order to express his belief that God would eventually bring the Israelites back there (cf. Jer. 32:6-15). One does not usually bury his family in a place unless he considers it his home and plans to be there a long time.

Acts 7:16 says that Abraham purchased a tomb from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. Perhaps Abraham purchased two burial sites, one in Shechem and one in Hebron.[4] But Genesis 33:19 says that *Jacob* purchased a piece

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[1]See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:255-56; G. C. Aalders, *Genesis*, 2:58-59.

[2]von Rad, p. 250.

[3]Leupold, 2:653.

[4]Ibid., 2:654.

of land from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. The Acts statement may be a case of attributing to an ancestor what one of his descendants did (cf. Heb. 7:9-10). In the ancient Near East people regarded an ancestor as in one sense participating in the actions of his descendants (cf. 9:25; 25:23; Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:11-13).

23:19-20 The writer noted twice that Hebron was within "the land of Canaan" (vv. 2, 19), and he stressed repeatedly that the negotiations for the land were official (vv. 10, 13, 16, 18).[1] There was no doubt that this part of the land now justly belonged to Abraham and his heirs.

> "This verse [v. 20] is a conclusion to vv. 2-19. It seems strange appearing after v. 19—which would have been a reasonable note on which to conclude. Its placement here points out that the crucial element in this chapter is not Sarah's death, but Abraham's acquisition of land from outsiders. As such, it is a harbinger of things to come."[2]

> "The very fact that Abraham buried Sarah in the land of Canaan is proof of his unwavering faith. Knowing that his descendants would have to endure four hundred years of bitter bondage in a foreign country (15:13), he looked beyond that to the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises."[3]

Isaac and Jacob, as well as Abraham, used this burial site. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah were all buried there. Rachel's Tomb, on the other hand, was near Bethlehem (lit. "House of Bread," i.e., "Granary"; cf. 35:9; 48:7).

The time of death should be the time when the godly proclaim their faith most loudly in view of their hope in God's promises.

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[1]See Fruchtenbaum, pp. 348-49, for explanation of how this purchase was in keeping with the Hittite Law Code.

[2]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 136.

[3]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 223.

17. The choice of a bride for Isaac ch. 24

Abraham's servant, who was evidently Eliezer (cf. 15:2), returned to Paddan-aram charged with the duty of finding a suitable bride for Isaac. He faithfully and resolutely fulfilled his task, relying on God's faithfulness to prosper his journey, and God's providence to guide him. God directed him to Rebekah.

The length of this story, and the amount of detail included, suggest that this incident played an important part in the fulfillment of the divine Author's purpose. This is the longest chapter in Genesis.[1] The details show how God provided a wife and seed-bearer for Isaac and thereby remained faithful to His promises to Abraham. God's working providentially through the natural course of events to accomplish His purposes clarifies His ways with humankind.

> "The key idea in the passage is in the word *hesed*, 'loyal love' or 'loyalty to the covenant'—from both God's perspective and man's."[2]
>
> "This … narrative is the most pleasant and charming of all the patriarchal stories."[3]

The structure of the four sections (1-9, 10-28, 29-61, 62-67) is again palistrophic (chiastic). The first and fourth sections take place in Canaan, and the second and third sections record events in Paddan-aram.

Abraham's plan to secure a wife for Isaac 24:1-9

24:1 By this time Abraham was a very old man. Moses noted that God had blessed him "in every way" (cf. 12:2).

24:2-4 Abraham charged his oldest and most trusted servant to select a wife for his heir Isaac from among his relatives in the country where Abraham had once lived. The "thigh" may be a euphemism for the genitals (cf. 46:26; Exod. 1:5).[4] The ancients considered the "thigh" to be the source of posterity and the seat of power (cf. 47:29).

> "By putting his hand under Abraham's thigh, the servant was touching his genitals and thus giving the oath a special

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[1]See Brian A. Bompiani, "Is Genesis 24 a Problem for Source Criticism?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:656 (October-December 2007):403-15, for defense of the unity of this chapter.

[2]Ross, "Genesis," p. 67.

[3]von Rad, p. 253. Cf. 15:18-20.

[4]Ibid., p. 254; cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 327.

> solemnity. In the ancient Orient, solemn oaths could be taken holding some sacred object in one's hand, as it is still customary to take an oath on the Bible before giving evidence in court. Since the OT particularly associates God with life (see the symbolism of the sacrificial law) and Abraham had been circumcised as a mark of the covenant, placing his hand under Abraham's thigh made an intimate association with some fundamental religious ideas. An oath by the seat of procreation is particularly apt in this instance, when it concerns the finding of a wife for Isaac."[1]
>
> "Putting a hand under another's thigh was a solemn way of signifying that if the oath were violated, the children, yet unborn, would avenge the act of disloyalty."[2]
>
> "That act would be significantly symbolic in this instance, for success of the mission would make possible propagation of posterity and fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant."[3]

Abraham's insistence on a non-Canaanite wife for Isaac did not demonstrate racial preference as much as religious preference. Marriage to an influential Canaanite would have given Isaac land and powerful social connections, but Abraham's values lay elsewhere. The Canaanites worshipped Baal and Asherah (cf. 15:16; Deut. 7:3), but Abraham's extended family in Paddan-aram (cf. 48:7) evidently worshipped the true God (cf. vv. 31, 50; 11:27—12:4; Josh. 24:2).

> "Isaac was not regarded as a merely pious candidate for matrimony, but as the heir of the promise, who must therefore be kept from any alliance with the race whose possessions were to come to his descendants, and which

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 141.

[2]Yates, p. 28.

[3]Howard F. Vos, *Genesis*, p. 90. See R. David Freedman, "'Put Your Hand Under My Thigh'—The Patriarchal Oath," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 2:2 (June 1976):3-4, 42.

> was ripening for the judgment to be executed by those descendants."[1]

24:5 The servant wisely anticipated that the woman he chose would not want to move to Canaan. So he asked Abraham if he could then take Isaac back to Paddan-aram instead.

24:6-8 Abraham's last recorded words reflect his continuing faith in God's promises to him, as well as his concern for Isaac's future. "He will send His angel ahead of you" (v. 7) means that God would direct the servant and prepare the way for his arrival in Paddan-aram.

It is interesting that the name of Abraham's servant never appears in this story. Some expositors have noted the parallel between this fact and the fact that the Holy Spirit, who does the same thing for Jesus Christ that Abraham's servant did for Abraham, does not have an individual name as well. He is simply referred to throughout Scripture as God's "Spirit."

24:9 So the servant swore to Abraham that he would carry out his assignment as ordered.

God's provision of a wife for Isaac 24:10-28

24:10 Camels were relatively rare at this time in Canaan, so the fact that Abraham owned many of them reflects his great wealth (cf. Job 1:3).[2]

Paddan-aram lay within Mesopotamia. It was the region between and surrounding the Tigris and Chaboras Rivers. Paddan-aram did not extend all the way to the Tigris River.[3] "The city of Nahor" was evidently either Haran or a town close to Haran (cf. 11:31-32).

24:11

> "In the East, where wells are scarce, and water indispensable, the existence of a well or fountain determines the site of the village. The people build near it, but prefer to have it outside the 'city,' to avoid the noise, dust, and confusion always occurring at it, and especially if the place is on the public highway. About great cities men

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[1]E. W. Hengstenberg, *Dissertations on the Genuineness of the Pentateuch*, 1:350. Cf. Esau's Canaanite wives, and Ishmael's Egyptian wife.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 142-43, 146.

[3]Leupold, 2:663.

> often carry water, both on donkeys and on their own backs, but in the country, among the unsophisticated natives, *women only* go to the well or the fountain; and often, when traveling, have I seen long files of them going and returning with their pitchers, 'at the time when women go out to draw water.'"[1]
>
> "The well itself must be imagined as a large, deep hole in the earth with steps leading down to the water (spring water); above is a watering trough."[2]

The above comment seems to be based on the fact that some wells discovered in Canaan were of this design, such as the well at Gibeon. However it is possible that this well was a typical small-mouthed well (cf. 29:3; John 4:6-12).

24:12-14 This is the first recorded instance of prayer for specific guidance in Scripture. Notice that the servant did nothing but pray; he took no other initiative but left the situation entirely in God's hands to control. Since camels could drink 25 gallons of water, the servant's sign (v. 14) showed his discernment. It tested Rebekah's kindness, hospitality, industry, and willingness to help a stranger.

> "Those who are single and longing for a spouse should follow his example. Rather than rushing into a hasty choice, we should call on the Lord to lead us to the right person."[3]

24:15-16 Rebekah's name means "Ensnaring Beauty," and Moses commented on her beauty. She was Isaac's second cousin. Her grandfather was Abraham's brother.

> "Even the statement as to the manner of carrying her pitcher, or rather jar, is exact—*on her shoulder* [v. 15]. The Egyptian and the negro carry on the head, the Syrian on the shoulder or the hip."[4]

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[1]Thomson, 2:404-5.

[2]von Rad, p. 257.

[3]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 44.

[4]Thomson, 2:405.

24:17-21 Not only was Rebekah friendly to Abraham's servant, but she went out of her way to provide water for his 10 camels as well as for him. She seemed to be the answer to the servant's prayer (vv. 12-14).

24:22-25 In response to Rebekah's kindness the servant gave her a gold ring and two bracelets. The servant wanted to know whose daughter Rebekah was and if there was room in his home for him to stay overnight. Rebekah assured him that he would be welcome to stay with her family overnight.

24:26-28 Sensing that God had answered his prayer, the servant worshipped Yahweh. He had apparently provided a wife for Isaac and had led the servant to Abraham's family. Rebekah, for her part, ran back home and reported this incident to her family.

The arrangements for Rebekah's departure 24:29-61

24:29-31 Rebekah's brother Laban gave the servant as warm a welcome as Rebekah had given him. Laban recognized the servant as a person who had been "blessed of the LORD" (v. 31). Here was a family that recognized that Yahweh was the source of blessing, as Abraham did. Evidently Laban could tell from the presents that the servant had given Rebekah, and from his camel caravan, that his master was rich.

24:32-48 Extending hospitality, including a shared meal, was a sign of mutual respect and commitment, as noted previously (18:3-8). The servant would not eat until he had related how God had led him, which he proceeded to do.

> "Another striking feature of this story is that after introducing the new characters of Laban and his household, the writer allows the servant again to retell the narrative (vv. 34-39). But as with most repetitions in biblical narrative, the retelling is not a mere repeating. It is rather a reassertion of the central points of the first narrative. As we overhear the servant recount more details, we see that the miracle of God's provision was even more grand than that suggested in the narrative itself."[1]

[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 177.

> "The following detailed speech, which tells the reader nothing new, can be considered long only by Western standards. The ancients had a quite different feeling. To be able to speak worthily in decisive situations was considered a sign of special cultivation and training."[1]

Repeating an event confirmed its truthfulness in Scripture usage (cf. 41:32).

24:49 The servant concluded his speech with a request. Would the family "deal kindly and truthfully" (lit. show kindness and truth) with Abraham by giving Rebekah to Isaac in marriage, or should the servant look elsewhere for a wife? Showing "truth" to Abraham evidently meant dealing with him in a fair manner. Later Laban did not deal with Jacob in a fair manner (31:7, 41).

24:50-51 Rebekah's brother and father recognized that this whole affair had been Yahweh's doing, so they agreed to give Rebekah to become Isaac's wife.

> "Although the Lord elects both Abraham and Rebekah, his mode of revelation to them is strikingly different. To Abraham he speaks (12:7) in visions and auditions, to Rebekah he communicates through answered prayer and providential acts (24:27, 48, 50)."[2]

24:52-54a This answer to prayer led the servant to worship the LORD. He also presented Rebekah, Laban, and Rebekah's mother with valuable gifts. Why not her father? I do not know. Then all the participants enjoyed their meal and went to bed. In the morning the servant was ready to head for home.

24:54b-58 Naturally Rebekah's family wanted her to stay at home a little longer before heading off to Canaan. But she agreed to depart with Abraham's servant immediately. He was eager to return to Abraham and to complete his successful mission.

Jacob later found it very difficult to get away from this family, because they would not let him and Rachel and Leah depart (30:25-28; 31:17-23). Thus the fact that Rebekah's family let her go immediately is another

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[1]von Rad, p. 258.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 326.

evidence that God was working in this entire episode to bring His will to pass.

W. M. Thomson described marriage negotiation customs as they existed for millennia in this part of the world as follows:

> "The parents, or the elder brother if there are no parents, make the bargain, and the poor bride has nothing to do but to submit."[1]

It must have been customary in Hurrian society, however, to consult the bride before completing the marriage plans, or perhaps this family was exceptional. Note that Laban, Rebekah's brother, was the principal negotiator who represented the family—rather than Bethuel, her father, or her mother (vv. 53, 55; cf. 34:11-17; 42:1-3)—though Bethuel was involved (v. 50). Perhaps Bethuel was simply too old, infirm, or was under his wife's control, as Rebekah later "organized" Isaac.[2]

> "Here is a reminder for parents and guardians that when it come to the matter of marriage, the wishes of the future wife or husband are of first importance. … Parents should listen very carefully to their children when arrangeing marriages, and allow them to say 'yes' or 'no' and assume responsibility for all the consequences."[3]

24:59-61 The description of the family farewell also hints at Laban's leadership ("they sent away their sister").[4] Their blessing of Rebekah (v. 60) was fulfilled in time. Rebekah demonstrated her faith in Abraham's God in her decisively choosing to leave her family in order to marry Isaac (cf. the similar choices of Abram and Ruth; Ruth 1:16).

Isaac's and Rebekah's meeting and marriage 24:62-67

24:62-63 Beer-lahai-roi, the place where Isaac lived and meditated, was a place where God had previously answered prayer (cf. 16:14). This suggests that Isaac may have been praying for God's will to be done in the choice of his

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[1]Thomson, 1:451.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 149.

[3]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 46. Paragraph division omitted.

[4]See West, pp. 67-68; Speiser, pp. 184-85.

wife. Clearly Isaac was a man who prayed about important things (cf. 25:21).

24:64-65 Rebekah dismounted out of respect for her intended husband (cf. Josh. 15:18; 1 Sam. 25:23). Her self-veiling hinted at her soon becoming his bride, since it was customary to veil the bride in a marriage ceremony. Normally Israelite women did not wear veils, but unmarried women wore vails in front of men (cf. 12:14; 38:14).[1]

24:66-67 "The final remarks again show that God's guidance in the mundane areas of life is good for those who put their trust in him. When Isaac took Rebekah as his wife, he loved her and was comforted with her after the death of his mother. In other words, Rebekah had taken the place of Sarah in the line of the descendants of Abraham."[2]

The significance of this long story in the larger context of special revelation is fourfold at least:

1. Primarily it demonstrates God's faithfulness to His promise to provide descendants for Abraham and, therefore, His trustworthiness. Along with this is the assurance that, even though Abraham was soon to die, God would fulfill His promises in the future.

2. It reveals that God guides people who are sincerely seeking His will so that they discover it.

3. It illustrates God's later selection of a "bride," that He chose out of the world for His Son, through the Holy Spirit's agency—as revealed and taught in the New Testament—namely, the church.

4. It provides a good model, in the servant, of one who responded properly to the work of God. Abraham's servant prayed before he acted, praised when God answered his prayers, and believed that God controls all the affairs of life.

   "There are two themes, one more central, one more auxiliary, which are highlighted by the example story [in Genesis 24]: the faithful, prudent and selfless steward acting on behalf of his master as messenger, and the

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[1]Currid, p. 47.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 178.

> good wife as a gift from the LORD, the theme underlying much of the steward's action."[1]

18. Abraham's death 25:1-11

Before Abraham died he made sure that God's covenantal blessing would be Isaac's by sending his other sons away. After he died God confirmed his decision by blessing Isaac.

> "It is only said of Isaac among Abraham's children that "God [*'elohim*] blessed" him (v. 11; cf. 24:1, 35); this language is used rarely in Scripture, appearing in creation narratives (1:22, 28; 2:3; 9:1)."[2]

Abraham's sons by Keturah 25:1-6

25:1-4 Keturah (lit. "Enveloped in Fragrant Smoke") was apparently Abraham's concubine (v. 6; 1 Chron. 1:32). Jewish tradition identified Keturah as Hagar.[3] It is not possible to prove that Abraham married Keturah, and that she bore him six sons after Sarah's death, though this was probably the case.[4] He may have married her earlier in his life, while Sarah was alive. Most English translations read, "Abraham took another wife," or the equivalent, and only a few read, "Abraham had taken another wife" (e.g., TNIV, NET2).

> "There is little basis in the Hebrew text for the translation, 'Abraham had taken a wife' (NIV mg.), as though Keturah had been a wife or 'concubine' of Abraham in his younger days at the same time he was married to Sarah."[5]

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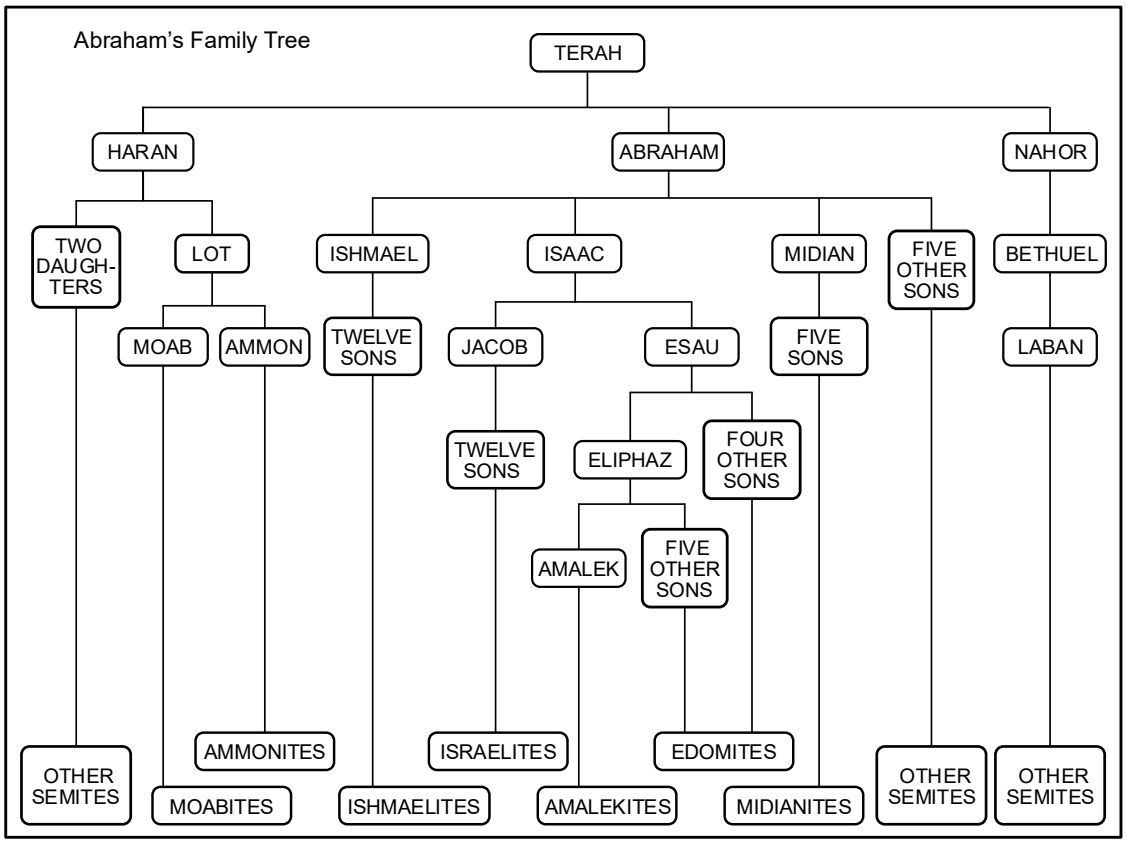
[1]Wolfgang M. W. Roth, "The Wooing of Rebekah: A Tradition-Critical Study of Genesis 24," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34 (1972):181.

[2]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 348-49.

[3]*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*; *Targum Neofiti I* (margin); *Genesis Rabbah* 61:4.

[4]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:15:1. See Archer, *Encyclopedia of …*, p. 98.

[5]Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 221.



The information revealed in these verses may appear, at this point in the narrative, simply to introduce the Midianites, who come into prominence later in Genesis. They were a group of tribes that inhabited the deserts around the Israelites. Probably Moses also included this data, because this passage confirms God's faithfulness in giving Abraham many descendants, though Isaac and his branch of the family would be the recipients of God's special blessings.

> "It is related of this Ophren [translated "Epher," v. 4], that he made war against Libya, and took it; and that his grandchildren, when they inhabited it, called it (from his name) Africa; and indeed Alexander Polyhistor gives his attestation to what I here say "[1]

25:5-6 "The land of the East" to which Abraham sent his sons, other than Ishmael and Isaac, was evidently Arabia. God's promise that "through

[1]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:15:1.

Isaac your descendants shall be named" (21:12) undoubtedly led Abraham to act as he did.

> "In this case the sending away of the sons is to make Isaac's position more secure."[1]

In this section and the following two (vv. 7-11 and 12-18), those characters who play minor roles in the drama take their curtain calls, making way for the chief actors who follow.

Abraham's death and Isaac's blessing 25:7-11

25:7 Isaac would have been 75 years old, and Jacob 15, when Abraham died (v. 7; cf. 21:5; 25:26).[2] Abraham lived 100 years in the Promised Land (cf. 12:4).

25:8-10

> "It is one thing to live a long life. It is another thing to live a long life that is also a happy life. This obituary notice about Abraham draws attention to the fact that Abraham died not only at an elderly age but in a frame of mind filled with inner *shalom* and satisfaction. That is the thrust of the phrase *full of days* or 'contented.'"[3]

The phrase "gathered to his people" implies reunion in Sheol, the place of departed spirits, with ancestors who had died previously. It presupposes continued personal existence after physical death (cf. 15:15; Heb. 11:13). Abraham was buried in "the cave of Machpelah" near Mamre, the old site that later became a part of Hebron (v. 9).

25:11 God's dealings now focus on Isaac, who then lived near Hagar's well at Beer-lahai-roi (lit. "The Well of the One Who Lives and Who Sees Me"; cf. 16:14; 24:62). Archaeologists have yet to find this site. It was evidently somewhere south of Beersheba in the Negev.

> "The patriarch Isaac presents but a pale appearance as he stands planted between two stately and so impressive

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[1]Loren Fisher, "An Amarna Age Prodigal," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 3:2 (April 1958):119.

[2]See the chart "Patriarchal Chronological Data" earlier in these notes.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 167.

> personages as his father Abraham on the one hand, and his son Jacob on the other hand."[1]

God's servants should do all in their power to ensure the continuation of God's program to bless from one generation to the next.

B. WHAT BECAME OF ISHMAEL 25:12-18

> "The last four *toledot* sections of the Book of Genesis follow a definite pattern: the lines in each generation that are not chosen lines are traced before the narrative returns to the chosen line."[2]

This section records God's faithfulness to His promises to make Ishmael a great nation and to give him many descendants (16:10; 21:18). This is another of the 10 family histories (*toledots*) that Genesis records.[3] There is probably an intentional parallel with the 10 nations mentioned in the Table of Nations (ch. 10), suggesting that God would bless all the families of the earth through other special families.

These verses show that God fulfilled His promises regarding Ishmael (16:10-12; 17:20). Ishmael, like Nahor and Jacob, fathered 12 sons. Moses drew Ishmael's personal history to a conclusion before he moved on to concentrate on his brother Isaac.

> "As with other lists of names throughout Genesis, the number twelve appears to be a deliberate attempt to set these individuals off as founders of a new and separate people"[4]

The Ishmaelites lived in Arabia. Josephus described Arabia as laying to the southeast of Canaan and extending from the Euphrates River to the Red Sea.[5] Probably the Ishmaelites were once a confederation of tribes like the Israelites.

> "The names of the twelve princes descending from Ishmael are applied not only to tribal divisions but also to geographical localities (cf. v. 16)."[6]

Ishmael died at 137 years of age, having lived 48 years after Abraham's death. The writer probably included the fact that Ishmael lived "in defiance of all his relatives" (v. 18) in

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[1]Whyte, 1:93.

[2]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 429.

[3]See the outline in the introduction to these notes.

[4]Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 223.

[5]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:12:4.

[6]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 231.

order to show the fulfillment of God's prediction to Hagar (cf. 16:12). The Bedouin-like Ishmaelites later had many conflicts with their more settled Israelite relatives.

God is faithful to His promises to bless whom He has promised to bless.

C. WHAT BECAME OF ISAAC 25:19—35:29

A new *toledot* begins with 25:19. Its theme has been called "the acquisition of the blessing and its development and protection by the Lord."[1]

Moses set up the whole Jacob narrative in a chiastic structure that emphasizes the fulfillment of the promise of the seed and the seed's prosperity.

"A Oracle sought; Rebekah struggles in childbirth; *bekorah* birthright; birth; themes of strife, deception, fertility (25:19-34).

B Interlude: strife; deception; *berakah* blessing; covenant with foreigner (26).

C Deception; *berakah* stolen; fear of Esau; flight from land (27:1-28:9).

D Encounter (<*paga'*) with the divine at sacred site near border; *berakah* (28:10-22).

E Internal cycle opens: arrival; Laban at border; deception; wages; Rachel barren; Leah fertile (29:1-30:21).

F Rachel fertile; Jacob increases the herds (30:22-43).

E' Internal cycle closes: departure; Laban at border; deception; wages (31).

D' Encounters (<*paga'*) with divine beings at sacred sites near border; *berakah* (32).

C' Deception planned; fear of Esau; *berakah* gift returned; return to land (33).

B' Interlude: strife; deception; covenant with foreigner (34).

A' Oracle fulfilled; Rachel struggles in childbirth; *berakah*; death resolutions (35:1-22)."[2]

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[1]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 433.

[2]Ibid., p. 85. Cf. Fishbane, p. 42; Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 169; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 352.

The Flood story also has a palistrophic structure, and both stories have a similar statement at the middle (turning point): "God remembered Noah" (8:1) and "God remembered Rachel" (30:22). This emphasizes that God controls events and saves His chosen people.

> "… the author of Genesis has deliberately split the Jacob-Joseph story into two parts by putting the family history of Esau 36:1—37:1 in the middle. This allows him to alternate the genealogies of the non-elect lines of Ishmael (25:12-18) and Esau (36:1—37:1) with the fuller family histories of the chosen lines of Terah (Abraham) (11:27—25:11), Isaac (Jacob) (25:19—35:29), and Jacob (Joseph) (37:2—50:26) to produce a total of five patriarchal family histories. This matches the five family histories of pre-patriarchal times "[1]

1. Isaac's twin sons 25:19-26

Verses 19 through 34 introduce the whole Jacob and Esau saga.

In the first pericope (25:19-26) we have the record of God answering Isaac's prayers by making Rebekah fertile. This was another evidence of God's grace and blessing. He gave her two sons, Esau and Jacob, and foretold that, from them, two nations would come, with the elder serving the younger.

The emphasis of this section is on the divine oracle (v. 23), as is clear from its chiastic structure:

"A Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah (20).

B Rebekah was barren; prayer for children was answered (21a).

C His wife Rebekah conceived (21b). The children struggled together within her (22a).

D Rebekah asks for an oracle (22b)

D' Yahweh grants her an oracle (23)

C' Her days to be delivered were fulfilled (24a). And behold, there were twins in her womb (24b).

B' Jacob and Esau are contrasted in birth and appearance (25-26a).

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 168.

A' Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah bore the twins (26b)."[1]

The question of an heir continues to be primary in this section: "Who will be *Isaac's* heir through whom God will fulfill His promises?"

25:19-20 "Paddan-aram" means "The Flat (Land) of Aram." Aram was the area near Haran. People from this region became known as Arameans, and later the Greeks called them Syrians. Bethuel was a semi-nomadic herdsman, like Abraham, and he probably lived in the open fields at least part of the year.

25:21 Rebekah was unable to have children for 20 years after she married Isaac (vv. 21, 26). God closed her womb for that time, so that the chosen family would recognize her children as the fruit of His grace, rather than simply the fruit of nature. Isaac was apparently the only monogamous patriarch among the first three: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is the first reference to a patriarch interceding for another single individual, though compare 18:22 through 33.

25:22-23 Rebekah's pregnancy was very painful ("the children struggled together within her"), and she wondered why ("Why am I in this condition?"). She expressed a similar thought when her sons had grown up (27:46).

God's choice of the younger over the elder "was contrary to ancient Near Eastern custom, but the elective purposes of God transcend custom."[2] The divine oracle announcing this choice summarizes the careers of Jacob and Esau, and it is similar to 12:1 through 3 in that both statements are programmatic. All of Jacob's subsequent scheming to obtain the birthright and the blessing was unnecessary, because God had already promised that he would become the dominant nation.

Scripture does not give the reason that God chose Jacob over Esau. What we do know is that His choice did not rest on the superior merit of Jacob, but on the sovereign prerogative of Yahweh (Rom. 9:10-13). In ancient Near Eastern culture the firstborn normally became his father's heir. So in designating Jacob as Isaac's heir, God sovereignly overruled natural custom by supernatural revelation.

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[1]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 436. Cf. Michael Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19—35:22)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1975):15-38.

[2]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 232.

The responses of the members of Isaac's family to this revelation demonstrated their faith, or lack of it. However the main point of the narrative is to trace God's faithfulness and power in bringing to pass what He had promised. Jacob's reactions to his election over Esau were quite different from Isaac's reactions to God's choice of him as Abraham's heir, as this section begins to illustrate ("the children struggled together within her").

> "The revelation of the Divine will concerning the two brothers (ver. 23) was evidently no secret. It is clear that both Esau and Jacob knew of it. This fact is in some respects the key to the true interpretation of this incident [i.e., vv. 29-34]."[1]

25:24-26 "Red" (v. 25; Heb. *'admoni*) is a wordplay with "Edomites," Esau's descendants. "Esau" means "Hairy One" (Heb. *sa'ar*). This Hebrew word is similar to "Seir," which was later the name of the Edomites' probably wooded homeland. Hairiness seems to have been a mark of incivility in the ancient world, indicative of an animal-like nature.[2] "Jacob" means "El Will Protect."[3] The Hebrew word *ya'aqob* ("Jacob") is similar to *'aqeb* ("heel"). From Jacob's grasping Esau's heel at birth came the nickname "heel-holder" (i.e., one who outwits by trickery) "just as in wrestling an attempt may be made to throw the opponent by grasping the heel."[4]

A lesson to be learned from this pericope is that those who owe their existence to God's creation and election should acknowledge His hand at work in the affairs of their lives.

2. The sale of the birthright 25:27-34

25:27 Abraham died when the twins were 15 years old (25:7), so they grew up knowing their grandfather, and they undoubtedly heard his stories of God's promises to their family. Esau became a "skillful hunter, a man of the field," but Jacob "was a civilized man, living in tents." These twins could not have been more different from each other.

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 230.

[2]Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, p. 288. See also Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 356.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 178.

[4]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:268.

> "… they became the personification of the two different ways of life which would have been typical for Palestine at this period of history: that of hunter and nomad (Esau) and that of shepherd and semi-nomad (Jacob). Esau is described as a 'skilled hunter,' 'a man of the outdoors;' Jacob, on the other hand, is portrayed as 'a simple man,' one 'remaining in his tents,' that is, a man of stable life in contrast to the rootless life of the nomad."[1]
>
> "The two characters are utter opposites, as the two nations will eventually be."[2]
>
> "This fellow Esau was a cunning hunter, the outdoor boy, the athletic type. He is the one we would call the all-American boy today. He went in for sports. He went in for everything that was physical, but he had no understanding or capacity or desire for spiritual things. He was only interested in that which was physical. He represents the flesh."[3]
>
> "Jacob was a plain man. I think that you can make of that anything you want to. He lived indoors. He was a mama's boy and was tied to her apron strings. You will notice that he did what she told him to do."[4]

The Hebrew word *tam*, translated "civilized" or "quiet" (NRSV, ESV, HCSB), "plain" (AV, NIV), "mild" (NKJV), or "content" (TNIV), probably means domesticated, a "homebody."[5] Translators have rendered this Hebrew word "perfect" and "blameless" elsewhere (Job 1:1, 8; 8:20; Ps. 37:37; Prov. 29:10). It may imply a quiet, self-contained, detached person, complete in himself.[6] The NET2 Bible translators translated it "even-tempered," and the NEB has "Jacob led a settled life."

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[1]Donald B. Sharp, "In Defense of Rebecca," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 10:4 (October 1980):165.

[2]Kidner, p. 152.

[3]McGee, 1:106.

[4]Ibid. See also Whyte, 1:99-101.

[5]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 181. Cf. Nichol, 1:369; Carl D. Evans, "The Patriarch Jacob—An 'Innocent Man,'" *Bible Review* 2:1 (Spring 1985):32-37.

[6]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 177.

25:28 "When one parent is partial to one child and the other parent is partial to the other child, you have trouble. That is exactly what took place here."[1]

> "Families today can end up with similar divisions. It is important that parents do not simply favour the child who meets their own needs."[2]

> "Descriptions of Jacob's early life in the Scriptures paint an interpersonal portrait of a highly narcissistic individual who grew up in a family of origin ripe for producing such pathology."[3]

Adam failed in eating, Noah in drinking, and Isaac in tasting. Isaac became a gourmand: one who enjoys eating and often eats too much.

> "A marriage made in heaven (see 24:1-67) can end in dysfunction when a spouse gives priority to taste in the mouth over a voice in the heart (see 26:35)."[4]

25:29-30 The Hebrew word translated "stew" literally means "lentils." Esau wanted to "gulp it down" (Heb. *la'at*), and he called the stew "red stuff." It was from this incident that Esau got his name, probably his nickname.

> "The hunter, in contrast to the shepherd with his much more economic and careful way of life, often does not have enough to eat. If he takes no prey, he goes hungry."[5]

25:31-34 The way that Jacob stated his demand for Esau's birthright suggests that he had long premeditated his act, and he ruthlessly exploited his brother's weakness. His insistence that Esau "swear" to him (v. 33) strengthens this impression. Jacob's lack of compassion and hospitality contrasts with that of Abraham (18:1-8), Lot (19:1-8), and Laban's family (24:18, 31). It was right that Jacob valued the birthright, but it was wrong that he obtained it the way he did. Explicit moral commentary is rare in

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[1]McGee, 1:106-7.

[2]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 47.

[3]Vance L. Shepperson, "Jacob's Journey: From Narcissism Toward Wholeness," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12:3 (1984):180.

[4]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 363.

[5]von Rad, p. 266.

the Bible, so the writer's inclusion of it here marks something about Esau that he did not want the reader to miss: "Esau despised his birthright".

> "The cunning hunter fell into a better hunter's trap,
> becoming prey to his own appetite."[1]

The "birthright" was the privilege of being chief of the tribe and head of the family (27:29). In Isaac's family, it entitled the bearer to the blessing of Yahweh's promises (27:4, 27-29), which included the possession of Canaan and covenant fellowship with God (28:4). It also included a double portion of the family inheritance (Deut. 21:17), and the privilege of being the priest (spiritual leader) of the family.[2]

Judah, Joseph, and Levi later received the privileges of the birthright. Judah obtained leadership among the tribes (possession of Canaan and covenant fellowship), eventually through David and Messiah. Joseph received the double portion through his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Levi became the priestly tribe. In the New Testament we learn that Christ is the Firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Heb. 12:23). He is the great Birthright-Bearer.

> "It is quite apparent from the Nuzi tablets that instances of the transference of birthright, such as occurred in the Patriarchal narratives, were not uncommon in Hurrian society. One example concerns a certain Zirteshup, whose father disowned him but later restored his status. Another instance of the transference of birthright from the Nuzi tablets is the exchange by one Kurpazah of his birthright in consideration for three sheep given to him by Tupkitilla, his brother. In the light of this example, Esau's willingness to exchange his birthright for Jacob's mess of pottage (Gen. 25:29-34) is perhaps more understandable."[3]

The writer showed that the natures of the two sons were very different: they were not identical twins, obviously. Esau cared only for physical and material things, whereas

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[1]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 449.

[2]See Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 185; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, pp. 41-42, 53; I. Mendelsohn, "On the Preferential Status of the Eldest Son," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 156 (December 1959):38-40.

[3]West, p. 71.

Jacob valued the spiritual. Esau gave priority to the immediate satisfaction of his sensual desires, but Jacob was willing to wait for something better that God had promised for the future (cf. Heb. 12:16).

> "The frivolity with which he [Esau] sold his birthright rendered him unfit to be the heir and possessor of the promised grace."[1]
>
> "From one human perspective, Esau, who functions as a foil to Jacob, is much more likeable than Jacob. From the divine viewpoint, however, he is rejected because he rejects his right to inherit the divinely given vision of his fathers."[2]

Even though Esau was a cunning hunter, he placed little value on his privilege as the firstborn son. He was willing to trade it to his cunning brother for a meal of "red stuff," a fitting description of his own nature.[3] Though Jacob later deceived Esau regarding his blessing, there was no deception involved in this sale of the birthright. Esau knew precisely what he was doing when he gave it up.

The structure of the narrative again identifies the writer's emphasis, this time Esau's disdain for his birthright (v. 32):

"A Jacob was boiling pottage (29a).

B Esau came in from the field; he was tired (29b).

C *wayyo'mer 'esaw*: Let me eat some of that red pottage …, I am so tired! (30)

D *wayyo'mer ya'aqob*: First sell me your *bkrh* (31).

E *wayyo'mer 'esaw*: I depart; I die! Of what use is a *bkrh* to me? (32).

D' *wayyo'mer ya'aqob*: Swear to me first. So he swore to him and sold his *bkrh* to Jacob (33).

C' Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; he ate and he drank (34aa).

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[1]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:269.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 352.

[3]See Richard D. Patterson, "The Old Testament Use of an Archetype: The Trickster," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:3 (September 1999):385-94, for a helpful discussion of instances of trickery in the Old Testament.

B' He rose and went his way (34ab).

A' Thus Esau despised his birthright (34b)."[1]

There are two important instances of firstborn sons relinquishing the rights of primogeniture in Genesis: Esau and Reuben. Esau considered his birthright of so little value that he sold all his rights as firstborn to Jacob just to realize an immediate physical gratification. Reuben forfeited his birthright through sexual promiscuity (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4). In Esau's case, his entire birthright went to Jacob. In Reuben's case, his birthright went to three of his brothers: Judah obtained the regal right, Levi eventually received the priestly right, and the blessing of the double portion went to Joseph—who realized it through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.[2]

In reading this pericope, some have concluded that God chose Jacob over Esau because He foresaw that Jacob would value the promises and the birthright, whereas Esau would not. This is not correct. Jacob valued the spiritual because God gave him the grace to do so. In the previous generation, Isaac was the recipient of God's grace, while Lot and Ishmael were not. Abraham was a recipient, too, whereas his brothers were not.

In this incident, Jacob manifested spiritual perception. Some writers have suggested that he was impatient and took fleshly initiative like his grandfather (cf. 12:10-20; 16; 20). Note, however, that Moses blamed Esau, not Jacob, in this event (v. 34).

> "At the beginning he [Jacob] really did rather well as far as the world would measure him. But there came a day when God sent this man off to college, and Uncle Laban was the president of the college. It was known as the college of hard knocks, and Jacob was going to learn a few things in the college of hard knocks. But here he is still operating on the principle that he is clever enough to get what is coming to him."[3]

> "How often do we put the question to ourselves, 'What is my mess of pottage?' It is important to verbalize the question. We are in constant danger of being tempted to give up something very precious in order to indulge a sudden strong desire. The desire may involve greedy eating and drinking, lusting after money or material things, letting loose our anger in abandonment of reason, succumbing to depression without check, cursing God in despair or disappointment without even thinking of the

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[1]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 446.

[2]See Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, pp. 138-40.

[3]McGee, 1:108.

> trap Satan set for Job and is setting for us, giving in to a sweeping sexual desire without waiting for the right framework. The mess of pottage that is dangerous to you and to me is any temptation to gratify the 'feelings' of the immediate moment in a way that shows we 'despise' the promises of the living God for our future."[1]

God has given Christians special promises as well (e.g., His presence, promises, strength, provisions, fruitfulness, glorification, rewards). How might we "despise" these? By living primarily for the present rather than for the future.

This section is a warning that profane (secular, lit. "outside the temple," meaning "removed from the sacred") people, who live to satisfy their fleshly appetites, will lose the more valuable things of lasting spiritual worth. Christians who live for the present will not lose their eternal salvation, but they will lose some of their eternal reward (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15).

3. Isaac and Abimelech 26:1-11

God prevented Isaac from leaving the Promised Land (which included Gerar, where some Philistines lived), and at this time renewed the Abrahamic Covenant with him. Soon afterward, the LORD protected Rebekah when Isaac lied to Abimelech about his relationship with her.

> "In the short span of one chapter, the writer shows how the whole of the life of Isaac was a rehearsal of that which happened to Abraham. Thus the lesson that is conveyed is that God's faithfulness in the past can be counted on in the present and the future. What he has done for the fathers, he will also do for the sons."[2]

Whereas the events of Isaac's life repeated those of Abraham's on several occasions, God dealt with Isaac differently, and in harmony with his individual character. The many parallels between this chapter and the story of Abraham (esp. chs. 12—14, as compared with chs. 20—21) show that the writer wanted the reader to compare and contrast the two men.[3]

> "The figure of even a great man may be dwarfed by comparison with that of a distinguished father or of a famous son. Thus the character of Isaac is

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[1]Edith Schaeffer, "What Is My Mess of Pottage?" *Christianity Today* (March 14, 1975), p. 50.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 185.

[3]See Garrett, p. 136, or Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 366, for several striking parallels.

> overshadowed by the majesty of Abraham and the dramatic interest of Jacob. There was a third factor which diminished the importance of Isaac; he was the husband of a clever and masterful wife. No matter how exciting the scene in which he may appear, he is always assigned to a minor part. At least, by contrast with these other actors, his role in life was prosaic, uneventful, obscure."[1]
>
> "The chapter before us is full of illustrations of how difficulties should and should not be met."[2]
>
> "This is a chapter that teaches patience."[3]
>
> "All this was the calm persistence of faith."[4]

26:1-4 Isaac was evidently considering going to Egypt to escape the famine in Canaan. He was in Gerar, living close to Abimelech, "king of the Philistines" (vv. 8-9), when God spoke to him. This was God's first recorded revelation to Isaac (cf. 25:23). Therefore, it appears that Isaac may have previously moved north from Beer-lahai-roi. Of course, constant relocating was common for the nomadic patriarchs, and these places were not far from one another.

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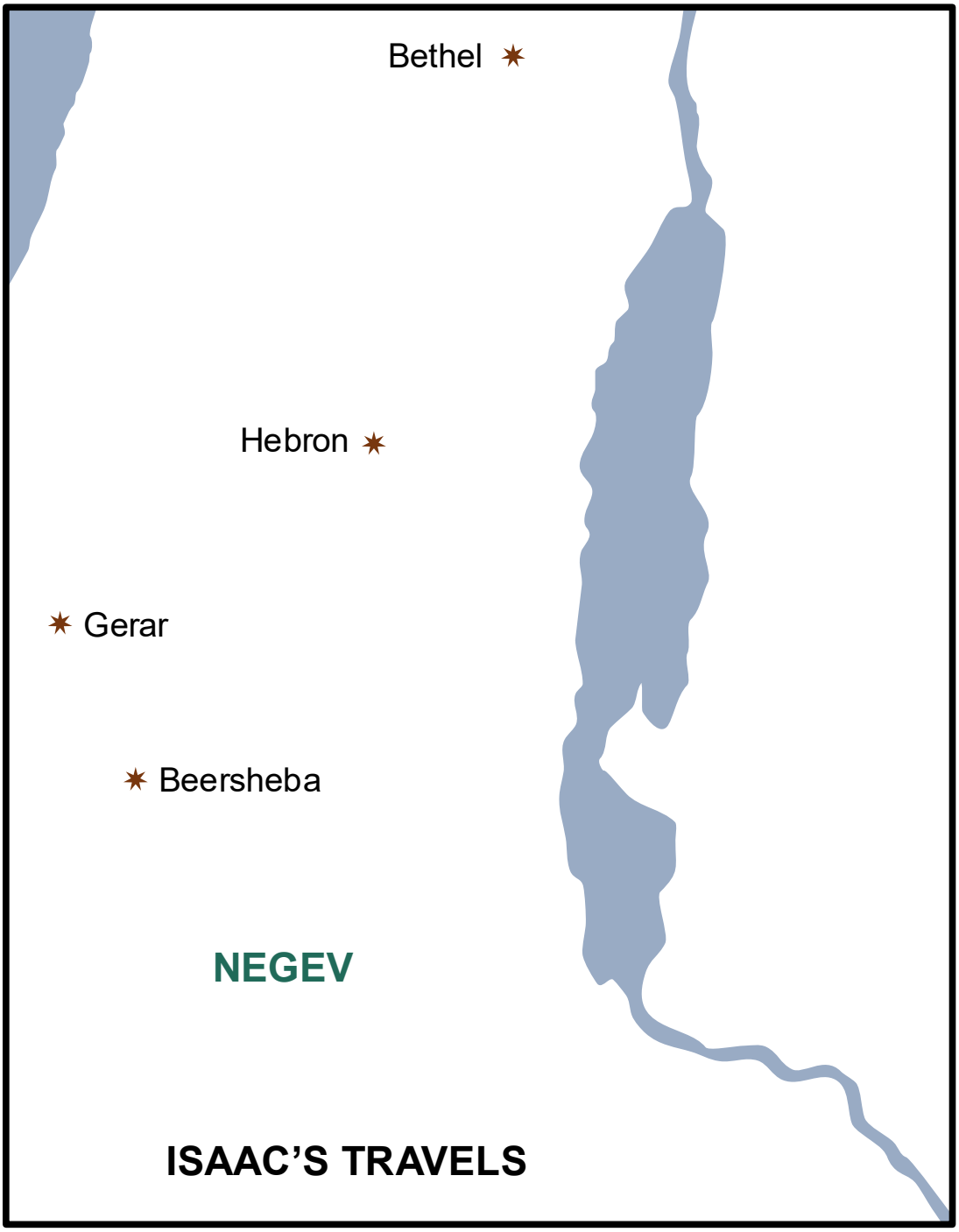
[1]Charles R. Erdman, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 86.

[2]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 238.

[3]McGee, 1:108.

[4]Morgan, *An Exposition …,* p. 23.



The first major migration of the Philistines into Canaan took place hundreds of years later, in the 12th century B.C. However there were some Philistines, perhaps an unrelated ethnic group, already in Canaan in

Abraham's and Isaac's time. This is clear from this reference and others in Genesis. (See the notes in the section 21:22 through 34.)

Another famine in the land of Canaan (cf. 12:10) created a crisis for Isaac. God's will for Isaac to remain in the land was definite, and He communicated it clearly to the patriarch (v. 2). Perhaps God wanted Isaac to stay in the land so he would learn that God would "be with [him] and bless [him]" (v. 3). God reiterated His promise given earlier to Abraham—now to Isaac—in order to give Isaac a promise to believe and the encouragement to obey Him. Promises of protection are also prominent in the Jacob story (cf. 26:24; 28:15, 20; 31:3, 5, 42; 32:10).

The promise, specifically, was that God would protect ("be with") and "bless" Isaac, "multiply" his "descendants," and "give" them "all these lands" (i.e., the lands held by the various Canaanite tribes, vv. 3-4).

> "Palestinians today claim they should possess the land, saying that God promised this to Ishmael. This claim is without scriptural support, but it is found in the Koran, on which Palestinian Muslims base their faith. The Koran, however, was written some six hundred years after Christ, in contrast to the Book of Genesis, which was written fifteen hundred years before Christ. There is no ancient evidence anywhere that God promised the land to Ishmael. The entire Old Testament contradicts this Palestinian claim. The covenant of the land is confirmed in Psalm 105:8-11 in unmistakable terms. … The promises of the land were given to the descendants of Jacob alone, not to the other children of Abraham."[1]

26:5 One reason for God's blessing of Isaac was Abraham's obedience to God (v. 5; cf. 22:18). Isaac became the spiritual beneficiary of a godly parent, but he had the opportunity to increase God's blessing on him, through his own obedience to God (cf. John 15:14).

> "The Abrahamic blessing will pass to Isaac. Everything included in that blessing will now belong to the son, and in turn will be passed on to his sons. But there is a

[1]Walvoord, *End Times*, p. 78.

> contingency involved: if they are to enjoy the full blessings, they will have to obey the word of the LORD. And so obedience is enjoined here with the example of how well Abraham obeyed."[1]

The quotation above should not be understood to mean that God's *promises* made to Abraham, and now Jacob, were conditioned on their obedience, as some claim. These promises were prophecies of what God would do regardless of the patriarchs' obedience or disobedience. *Full blessing* for them, however, depended on their obedience.

This verse reads as though Abraham kept the actual "commandments," "statutes," and "laws" of the Mosaic Covenant—before they were even in existence. This verse was the basis upon which the Jews of Jesus' day believed that Abraham kept the whole Law of Moses before it was given.[2] It also may seem to contradict 15:6, which says that God justified Abraham because of his faith.

> "Ultimately, we should attempt to find the meaning of this verse in the larger strategy and purpose of the Pentateuch. Did the author of the Pentateuch intend to depict Abraham as a model of faith or as a model of obedience to the law? Curiously enough, the overwhelming majority of biblical scholars have read this passage as if the verse intended to show Abraham's life as an example of obedience to the law …"[3]

> "It appears reasonable to conclude that the importance of Gen 26:5 lies in what it tells us about the meaning of the deuteronomic terms it uses. It is as if the author of the Pentateuch has seized on the Abrahamic narratives as a way to explain his concept of 'keeping the law.' The author uses the life of Abraham, *not Moses*, to illustrate that one *can* fulfill the righteous requirement of the law. In choosing

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[1]*The NET2 Bible* note on 26:3.

[2]C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 86. Cf. *Kiddushin* 4:14. (*Kiddushun* is the last tractate of the third order of the *Mishnah Nashim*.)

[3]John H. Sailhamer, "The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (Fall 1991):253.

> Abraham and not Moses, the author shows that 'keeping the law' means 'believing in God,' just as Abraham believed God and was counted righteous (Gen 15:6). In effect the author of the Pentateuch says, 'Be like Abraham. Live a life of faith and it can be said that you are keeping the law.'"[1]
>
> "Israel would immediately see Torah (Law) terminology in the record of Abraham, and would be prompted to keep the Law."[2]

26:6-11 For an explanation of this strange incident, see the notes on chapter 20. When endangered, Isaac, like Abraham, resorted to a "situation ethic" in which the end justifies the means. Isaac did not tell the truth, because Rebekah was not really his "sister," but his cousin. Abraham's claim was only a half truth, since Sarai actually was Abraham's sister—his half-sister. "Like father, like son." Isaac and Rebekah must have been childless at this time, because otherwise any of their children would have exposed their deception.

A period of between 70 and 97 years had elapsed between Abraham's sojourn in Gerar and Isaac's. "Abimelech" could have been the same man in both cases, since lifespans of 150 years were not unknown at that time. But he may not have been. Certainly in both cases "Abimelech" demonstrated pious conduct. In the first case, however, Abimelech took Sarah into his harem, but in the second, Abimelech wanted to protect Rebekah from the people of Gerar. Since "Abimelech" may be a title rather than a personal name (cf. 1 Sam. 21:10-15; Ps. 34's superscription), this could have been a different ruler than the one that Abraham dealt with.

4. Isaac's wells 26:12-33

26:12-14 Verses 12 through 17 show God's faithfulness in blessing Isaac as He had promised (cf. v. 3; 24:1; 25:11). Isaac planted crops (or "sowed seed," NRSV, HCSB; cf. NASB, AV, ESV, NKJV) in that land and the same year reaped a "hundredfold" (v. 12, NIV, TNIV"). This was a result of Yahweh's

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[1]Ibid., p. 254. Cf. John 6:29.

[2]Ross, "Genesis," p. 71.

blessing (v. 12). Isaac became richer and richer (v. 13). In addition to a large harvest, Isaac had large flocks of sheep and large herds of livestock. As a semi-nomad, Isaac practiced farming as well as ranching (v. 14). His neighbor Philistines envied him for his wealth.

26:15 Evidently the Philistines attempted to control Isaac's growing wealth by filling the wells that Abraham's servants had dug with dirt. This would have made it harder for Isaac to provide water for his animals. They wanted Isaac to move away from them.

> "… to stop up wells was the most pernicious and destructive species of vengeance, the surest way to convert a flourishing country into a frightful wilderness."[1]

26:16-17 Abimelech testified to Isaac's power ("you are too powerful for us," v. 16), which was another testimony to God's faithfulness to His promise to bless Isaac (v. 3). Isaac did indeed move farther from Gerar and settled in the nearby "Valley of Gerar" (v. 17).

26:18-22 Isaac reopened ("dug again") the wells that Abraham had dug, which the native inhabitants had later filled with dirt. Isaac also dug three new wells, which were named "Esek" ("argument"), "Sitnah" ("accusation"), and "Rehoboth" ("broad places"). God's provision of water for Isaac was another indication of His blessing on this patriarch.

This incident furthermore reveals the peaceful character of Isaac, who did not battle his neighbors for the wells, even though he was stronger than they were (v. 16). His actions expressed his trust in Yahweh.[2]

> "Isaac is a pacifist in the best sense of the word. Power is safe in his hands. He shows no inclination to abuse it."[3]

Isaac's decision to sojourn in the town of Gerar (vv. 1, 6), and then the Valley of Gerar (v. 17), seems to have been unwise, but was not sinful. Though he sinned in misrepresenting his relationship to Rebekah out of fear (v. 7), his choice to live in Philistine territory was not sinful. It did, however, open him to temptation and trials that he probably would have

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[1]Thomson, 2:351.

[2]See note on 48:22.

[3]Leupold, 2:725-26. "Peacemaker" might be a better word than "pacifist."

avoided if he had stayed away from Gerar. God had not told him to go to Gerar, only to "stay in the land" (v. 2). ").

26:23-25 Isaac returned to Beersheba, where Abraham had lived occasionally. On the very night he arrived God appeared to him there (his second revelation), calming his fears and repeating the promises that He had given previously (vv. 2-5). Isaac's response was to build an altar, worship Yahweh, and settle down ("pitched his tent," v. 25) there. God's promise to bless Isaac "for the sake of My servant Abraham" (v. 24) means because of the promises that God had made to Abraham, not because of Abraham's merit or obedience.[1]

Settlers could only continue to live in an area where there was a working, water-yielding well. Wells were vital to the life of herdsmen, who, because of their flocks, had to move about. While there was probably at least one well at Beersheba already, Isaac dug another for his own use, or perhaps because he needed more water for his great flocks and herds and large household (family and servants). His ability to dig wells indicates both his wealth and his intention to establish permanent residence in the land. In contrast with Abraham, Isaac "was called not so much to pioneer as to consolidate."[2]

These verses seem to confirm the fact that Isaac's decision to move out of Philistine territory pleased God.

26:26-29 Abimelech paid an official visit to Isaac at Beersheba, with his advisor and the commander of his army, and again testified to God's blessing of Isaac and gave God glory (vv. 28, 29). He was afraid the Isaac might attack him, so he proposed making a treaty.

26:30-33 Isaac and Abimelech then made a parity covenant (treaty) of mutual non-aggression. They sealed it by eating a meal together, "a feast" that Isaac made for his treaty partners. Eating together was often a sacred rite in the ancient Near East that sealed an agreement (cf. 27:3, 4; 31:46, 54). This covenant was similar to the older one made between Abimelech and Abraham (21:31). The exchange of oaths, and Isaac's official renaming of the town "Beersheba," also strengthened this agreement. They also dug a

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[1]von Rad, p. 272.

[2]Kidner, p. 154.

new well that they named "Shibah" (perhaps meaning "oath," v. 33; cf. 21:31).

> "… this account of Isaac's dealings with the Philistines portrays Isaac as very much walking in his father's footsteps. He receives similar promises, faces similar tests, fails similarly, but eventually triumphs in like fashion. Indeed, in certain respects he is given more in the promises and achieves more. He is promised 'all these lands [v. 4],' and by the end of the story he is securely settled in Beersheba and has a treaty with the Philistines in which they acknowledge his superiority."[1]

God's people must maintain confident trust in God's promises of His presence and provision, in spite of the envy and hostility of unbelievers that His blessing sometimes provokes.

5. Jacob's deception for Isaac's blessing 26:34—28:9

Reacting to Isaac's disobedient plan to bless Esau, Jacob and Rebekah stole Isaac's blessing by deception. Esau became so angry with Jacob over his trickery that Jacob had to flee for his life.

Two reports of Esau's marriages (26:34-35 and 28:6-9) frame the major account in 27:1 through 28:5, providing a prologue and an epilogue. Esau's marriages are significant because Rebekah used them productively, namely, as the incentive to persuade Isaac to send Jacob away to get a wife (27:4b), and because they were the reason Isaac did so (28:1).

The main account centers on Isaac giving his blessing.

"A Isaac and the son of the *brkh/bkrh* (=Esau) (27:1-5).

B Rebekah sends Jacob on the stage (27:6-17).

C Jacob appears before Isaac and receives blessing (27:18-29).

C' Esau appears before Isaac and receives antiblessing (27:30-40).

B' Rebekah sends Jacob from the stage (27:41-45).

A' Isaac and the son of *brkh/bkrh* (=Jacob!) (27:46—28:5)."[2]

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 196.

[2]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 474. Cf. Fokkelman, p. 101.

Esau's marriages 26:34-35

We can identify three purposes for this brief section:

1. Moses explained and justified the reason for Jacob's later departure for Paddan-aram (27:46—28:2).
2. Moses identified the ancestors of the Edomites, who later played a major role in Israel's history.
3. Moses revealed Esau's carnal character again, which proved him unworthy of being the blessed heir of Isaac. Whereas godly Abraham was careful that Isaac marry a non-Canaanite, Esau had no such concern.

Esau showed no interest in the special calling of his family but instead sought to establish himself as a great man in the world by marrying Canaanite women (cf. 11:4). These women were evidently the daughters of Canaanite lords.[1] They were probably members of the Hittite tribe that lived in Canaan, rather than members of the mighty Hittite Empire in the North (cf. 15:20; 27:46). The Canaanites were, of course, under God's curse (9:25-27). Contrast Esau's method of securing wives with Abraham's plan to identify God's choice of a wife for Isaac.

> "These preliminary notices [in verses 34 and 35] put into perspective the cunning deed of Jacob and Rebekah. They demonstrate that Esau was not fit to inherit the blessing."[2]

Isaac's blessing 27:1—28:5

Here we have the third round of Jacob's battle with Esau. The first was at birth (25:21-28) and the second was over the family birthright (25:29-34). In all three incidents Jacob manipulated his brother—unnecessarily, in view of God's promise (25:23).

> "This chapter [27] offers one of the most singular instances of God's overruling providence controlling the affairs of sinful men and so disposing of them that the interests of God's kingdom are safeguarded. Usually the guilt of Jacob is overemphasized, and Esau is regarded as

[1]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:18:4. See K. Luke, "Esau's Marriage," *Indian Theological Studies* 25:2 (June 1988):171-90; Archer, *Encyclopedia of …*, pp. 99-101.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 189.

> relatively or entirely the innocent party in the transaction. This traditional view requires modification and correction."[1]
>
> "This chapter portrays an entire family attempting to carry out their responsibilities by their physical senses, without faith.[2]
>
> "All the natural senses play a conspicuous part—especially the sense of taste in which Isaac prided himself, but which gave him the wrong answer. Reliance on one's senses for spiritual discernment not only proves fallible, but often fouls up life unduly. Most importantly, however, the story is about deception."[3]

An oral blessing was as legally binding as a written will in the ancient Near East.[4] It finalized, and perhaps altered, the terms of the birthright.[5] In the case of Abraham's family, the blessing was a prophecy regarding through whom and how God would continue to bless. When Jacob blessed his sons (49:1-28), each son received part of his blessing.

> "As in modern society, inheritance under Nuzi law was effected by testamentary disposition, although the [Nuzi] tablets indicate that such a testament was often made orally. One of the tablets tells of a lawsuit between brothers concerning the possession of their late father's slave girl, Sululi-Ishtar. The youngest of three brothers, Tarmiya, was defending his elder brothers' claim to Sululi-Ishtar and the tablet sets out his testimony: 'My father, Huya, was sick and lay on a couch; then my father seized my hand and spoke thus to me. "My other sons, being older, have acquired a wife; so I give herewith Sululi-Ishtar as your wife."' In the end result the Court found in favour of Tarmiya, upholding his father's oral testamentary disposition."[6]
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> "It also appears from another Nuzi tablet that even an oral testament commenced with an opening introductory statement such as: 'Now that I am grown old .' which was the legal phraseology to indicate that what

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[1]Leupold, 2:735.

[2]Ross, "Genesis, p. 72.

[3]Ibid., p. 73. Paragraph division omitted.

[4]See Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 239.

[5]See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 418-19, for clarification of the difference between a birthright and a blessing.

[6]West, p. 71.

was to follow constituted a testamentary disposition. In similar manner, Isaac indicated to his elder son Esau that he wished to bestow upon him his testamentary blessing: 'Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death' (Genesis 27:2)."[1]

27:1-4 Abraham's life ended with happiness, success, and a strong character. In contrast, physical and spiritual decay marked Isaac's old age.[2]

> "In this the infirmity of his [Isaac's] flesh is evident. At the same time, it was not merely because of his partiality for Esau, but unquestionably on account of the natural rights of the firstborn, that he wished to impart the blessing to him, just as the desire to do this before his death arose from the consciousness of his patriarchal call."[3]
>
> "It seems psychologically most probable that Isaac purposely forgot what God had determined; and at the same time by clever little sophistries he led himself to believe that if he bestowed the blessing on Esau, the divine word uttered long before would not be crossed. He that knows the duplicity and treachery of the human heart will not find it difficult to understand how a man will circumvent a word of God, no matter how clear it be, if his heat is really set on what is at variance with that word."[4]
>
> "… Isaac's sensuality is more powerful than his theology."[5]
>
> "Old Isaac, with his eyes so dim that he could not see, is the father of all those men who make their god their belly, who think too much and too often of what they shall eat and what they shall drink, who value their friends by the table they keep, and who are never so happy as when they are sitting over their venison and their wine."[6]

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[1]Ibid. See also Ephraim Speiser, "'I Know Not the Day of My Death,'" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 74 (1955):252-56.

[2]Meir Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 350.

[3]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:274.

[4]Leupold, 2:736.

[5]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 206.

[6]Whyte, 1:98-99.

> "We should make it our prayer to end well. To know how to grow old is a task for wisdom, the most difficult chapter in the book of living."[1]

27:5-10 It seems consistent with the character of Rebekah, as presented elsewhere in Genesis, to interpret her actions here as predictable, but not commendable. She was a woman who made quick decisions (cf. 24:58). Her motivation for what she did seems to have been a sincere desire to make sure that Isaac's blessing went to the divinely chosen, more responsible of her sons (cf. 25:23). While her motive seems to have been good, her method evidenced lack of faith in God.[2] In this she reminds us of Sarai, who tried to obtain what God had promised illegitimately (16:1-3).

> "She prompts her son to lie and to deceive, and the vast irony of the situation is that they secure corruptly, and at infinite cost in suffering, what they would have won in any case, had they waited for God's time, and the outworking of God's plan."[3]

27:11-17 > "Jacob is clearly less concerned with the rightness, the morality, of his mother's suggestion than he is with what happens to him if his disguise is discovered and his impersonation revealed."[4]

> "Rebekah must have had rare culinary gifts to presume to make a mess of kid's meat taste like game."[5]

People used the black, silk-like hair of the camel-goat of the East ("young goats," v. 16) as a substitute for human hair as late as the Roman period.[6] Rebekah tried to "pull the wool" over Isaac's eyes.

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[1]Blaiklock, p. 38. See Bruce K. Waltke, "Reflections on Retirement from the Life of Isaac," *Crux* 32 (December 1996):4-14.

[2]See Sharp, pp. 164-68.

[3]Blaiklock, p. 37.

[4]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 216.

[5]Leupold, 2:741.

[6]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:275, n. 1.

27:18-26 The reference to Isaac's blessing in verse 23 is proleptic (anticipatory). It refers to the blessing in verses 27 through 29, not some other blessing that preceded that one.

27:27-29 Isaac uttered his blessing in poetic language, and God's Spirit doubtless inspired it, since it proved to be prophetic (cf. 49:1-27; Deut. 33; et al.). It was a divine oracle: a word from God.

The blessing involved material prosperity, leadership among the nations, including the nations that would descend from Esau, the cursing of Jacob's enemies, and the blessing of his friends and allies (cf. 12:3). Or, as some writers have put it: satisfaction, provision, promotion and protection.[1]

> "Since the intention to give the blessing to Esau the firstborn did not spring from proper feelings toward Jehovah and His promises, the blessing itself, as the use of the word *Elohim* instead of Jehovah or *El Shaddai* (cf. xxviii. 3) clearly shows, could not rise to the full height of the divine blessings of salvation, but referred chiefly to the relation in which the two brothers and their descendants would stand to one another, the theme with which Isaac's soul was entirely filled. It was only the painful discovery that, in blessing against his will, he had been compelled to follow the saving counsel of God, which awakened in him the consciousness of his patriarchal vocation, and gave him the spiritual power to impart the 'blessing of Abraham' to the son whom he had kept back, but whom Jehovah had chosen, when he was about to send him away to Haran (xxviii. 3, 4)."[2]

Isaac's mention of Esau's "brothers" (plural) and his "mother's sons" (plural, v. 29) is the only indication that Isaac and Rebekah had other sons beside Jacob and Esau, if this reference is to be taken literally. Alternatively, Isaac may have been referring to Esau's kinfolk.

27:30-38 Isaac evidently knew that he had been resisting God's will and finally accepted defeat submissively ("Yes, and he shall be blessed," v. 33).

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[1]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 51.

[2]Ibid., 1:276-77.

Besides, in that culture a paternal blessing, such as the one Isaac had uttered, was irrevocable.

> "A discovered court record [from Nuzi] contains the blessing of a father for his sons which the court held binding. This explains Isaac's refusal of Esau's entreaty to change the blessing given to Jacob even though deceit had been involved."[1]

> "By showing that the blessing was irrevocable, even by the father who gave the blessing, the writer underscores an important feature of the blessing—its fulfillment is out of human hands."[2]

Perhaps Isaac did not withdraw the blessing he had given Jacob because he realized that God had overruled his carnal preference for Esau.

> "The blessing is not magical, but has behind it the weight of patriarchal authority. Once announced, it could not be taken back or reversed."[3]

Esau's response: "he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry" (v. 34), prefigures the response of all who live for the flesh when they eventually discover their fate.

27:39-40 Isaac's prophecy to Esau was no true "blessing." In fact, it resembled more of a "curse." At best he introduced a disturbing element into the blessing that he had given Jacob ("You will break his [Jacob's] yoke from your neck," v. 40), because Jacob had used deception to obtain it.

> "Esau will have to endure hardships, danger, and slavery. These are the opposites of the blessings pronounced on Jacob …"[4]

The mountains of Edom (Esau's "dwelling") are some of the most desolate and barren of any on earth today. They stand to the southeast of

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[1]Wood, *A Survey …,* pp. 28-29. See also A. C. Thiselton, "The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS25:2 (October 1972):294.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 191.

[3]Longman, "Genesis," p. 105.

[4]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 52. Formatting changed.

the Dead Sea. Esau's descendants would subsist by hunting people, just as Esau had subsisted by hunting game (v. 40a).

The Edomites served, revolted from, and were conquered by the Israelites repeatedly during their history. This is apparently what Isaac predicted in verse 40b. Saul defeated the Edomites after they enjoyed a long period of independence (1 Sam. 14:47). Then David made them his vassals (2 Sam. 8:14). They tried to revolt under Solomon but were unsuccessful (1 Kings 9:14 ff.). The Edomites were subject to Judah until King Joram's reign when they rebelled successfully (2 Kings 8:20-22; 2 Chron. 28:17). In Amaziah's reign Judah again subjugated them (2 Kings 14:7). They finally achieved permanent freedom from Judah during Ahaz's reign (2 Kings 16:6).

Hundreds of years later, John Hyrcanus conquered Edom, about 129 B.C., forced the Edomites to submit to circumcision, and incorporated them into the Jewish nation. Later, through Antipater and Herod, the Edomites established the Idumean dynasty over Judah, which lasted until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The writing prophets sometimes used "the Edomites" as the epitome of Israel's enemies.

27:41-45 Rebekah feared the loss of both of her sons as a result of her plot (v. 45). Esau might have killed Jacob, and Esau then might have fled, or an avenger of Jacob's blood might have slain him (cf. 9:6). Rebekah's deceit secured the blessing for Jacob, but it resulted in his having to flee from his home. Rebekah hoped that Jacob's stay with her brother Laban in Haran would only last "a few days"—until Esau's anger subsided. Then she planned to send for him and he would return to her. But this never happened. Jacob ended up staying with Laban 20 years. As far as Genesis records, Rebekah never saw him again.

> "… she greatly underestimated the range of the mischief she had caused."[1]

27:46 Rebekah used her dislike for Esau's Canaanite wives as an excuse to gain Isaac's permission for Jacob to go to Paddan-aram. As previously noted, Paddan-aram was the area around Haran.[2] Evidently Rebekah had kept

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[1]von Rad, p. 279.

[2]See the map "Abraham's Travels Outside the Promised Land" under my comments on 11:27-32 for its location.

Esau's hatred for Jacob from his aged father because she believed Isaac was near death (v. 41).

> "… her broaching the subject of Jacob's marriage was a masterstroke: it played equally on Isaac's self-interest and his principles. The prospect of a third Hittite daughter-in-law and a distracted wife would have unmanned even an Abraham."[1]

> "Rebekah's manipulative language to spare Jacob again displays the poverty of Isaac and Rebekah's relationship. As demonstrated by the previous deception, Isaac and Rebekah do not seem able to communicate honestly with one another on important spiritual matters."[2]

28:1-2 Isaac evidently realized, by now, that his desire to give the blessing to Esau was not God's will. So, having given it to Jacob (27:27-29), he blessed him further.[3] He also instructed Jacob to go to Paddan-aram to seek a wife from the daughters of Laban, Rebekah's brother, in Paddan-aram. He did not want Jacob to marry a Canaanite woman, as Esau had done.

28:3-4 Jacob also gave Jacob a benediction. His prayer-wish was that "God Almighty" (*El Shaddai*; cf. 17:1) would bless Jacob, give him a multitude of descendants, and give him and his descendants "the blessing of Abraham" (cf. 12:2), namely, that they would possess the land that God had promised to Abraham.

28:5 Then Isaac sent Jacob off to Paddan-aram.

This whole story is another remarkable demonstration of God's ability to use the sins of men and women to accomplish His purposes, and, at the same time, punish the sinners for their sins.

> "What man intends for evil God utilizes for good."[4]

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[1]Kidner, p. 157.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 382.

[3]Concerning Isaac's desire that Jacob marry someone from outside the Promised Land, see the note at 24:3-4.

[4]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 238. Cf. Rom. 8:28.

Many years later, the aged Jacob blessed Joseph's younger son Ephraim instead of his older brother Manasseh (48:14-19). He certainly must have remembered then how he had deceived his father Isaac to get his blessing. Joseph's approach to Jacob on that occasion was honorable by contrast, and his life was free of the consequences of deceit. This was not true of Jacob's life.

Jacob reaped what he sowed (Gal. 6:7). Laban later deceived him, and later still, his own sons (in the case of the sale of Joseph) did so—even more cruelly than he deceived Isaac.[1]

This great story of Jacob's deception teaches that, when God's people know His will, they should not resort to deceptive, manipulative schemes to attain spiritual success, but should pursue God's will righteously. Every member of Isaac's family behaved in a self-centered and unprincipled manner, yet God graciously overcame their sins. This reminds us that His mercy is the ultimate ground of salvation (cf. Rom. 5:20).

Esau's additional marriages 28:6-9

Esau sought to obtain his parents' approval by marrying one of Abraham's descendants (a granddaughter, who was Ishmael's daughter "Mahalath"). The patriarch's wives were key to God's promises concerning descendants. "Mahalath" ("Dance," v. 9) is evidently another name for, and the same woman as, Basemath, Ishmael's daughter (36:2).

> However, "he [Esau] failed to consider that Ishmael had been separated from the house of Abraham and family of promise by the appointment of God; so that it only furnished another proof that he had no thought of the religious interests of the chosen family and was unfit to be the recipient of divine revelation."[2]
>
> "Growing up in a household where it was well known why Abraham had taken pains to secure a non-Canaanite wife for Isaac, Esau never seems to have understood why this was done. The entire spiritual heritage and all spiritual traditions had not as yet begun to mean anything to Esau."[3]

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[1]For some helpful insights into Jacob's character, see R. Paul Stevens, "Family Feud," *His* 42:3 (December 1981):18-20.

[2]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:281.

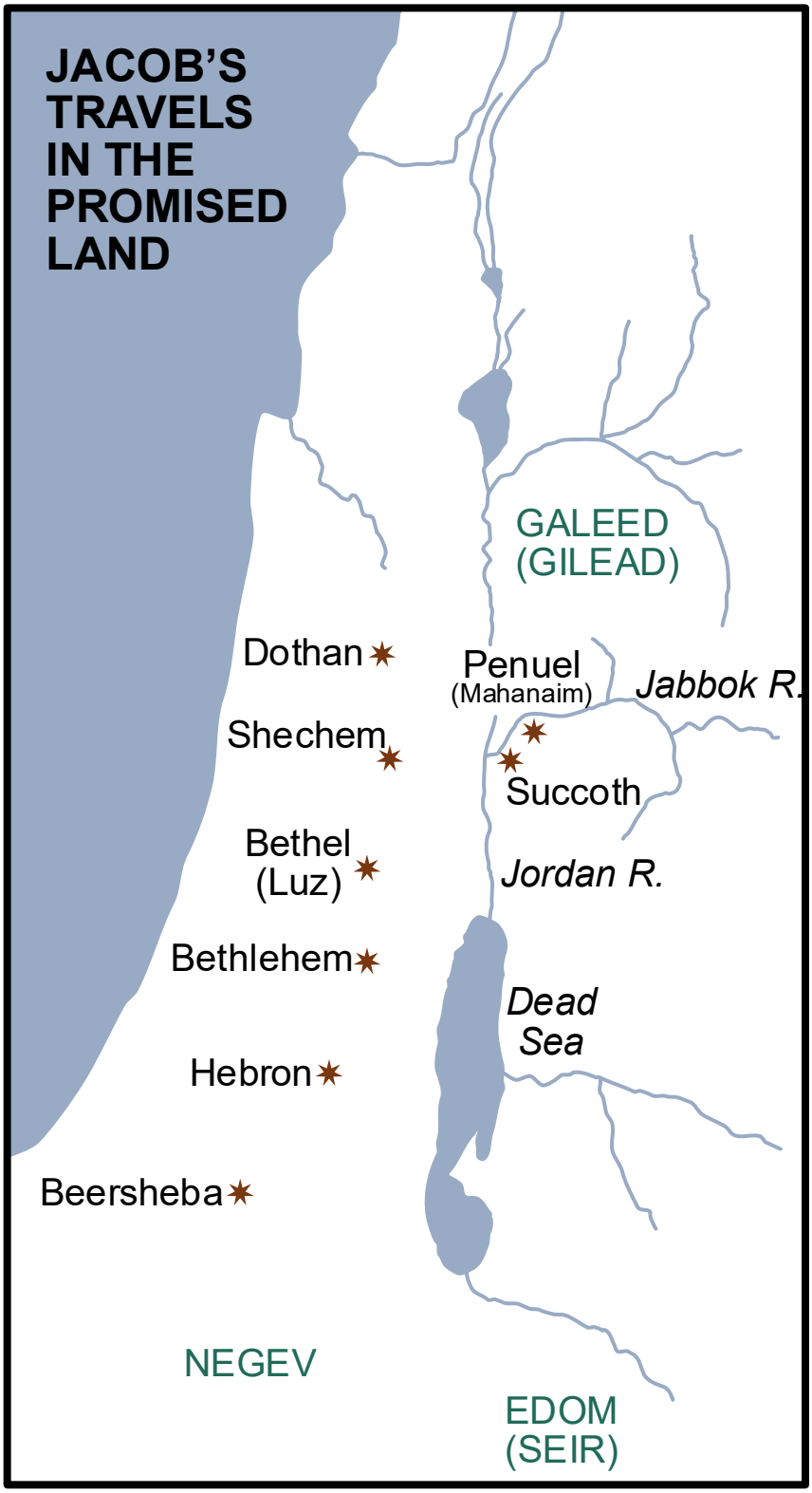
[3]Leupold, 2:769.

6. Jacob's vision at Bethel 28:10-22

> "From a 'stone pillow' to a 'stone pillar,' this account tells how Jacob's lodging place at Bethel became the most celebrated place of worship among the patriarchal narratives."[1]

Yahweh appeared at the top of an angel-filled stairway, restating the promise made to Abraham, and adding more promises of blessing and protection for Jacob. Upon waking, Jacob acknowledged God's presence, memorialized the place with a monument stone and a name (Bethel), and vowed to worship the LORD there if He did indeed bless and protect him.

[1]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 442.



"The two most significant events in the life of Jacob were nocturnal theophanies. The first was this dream at Bethel when he was fleeing from

> the land of Canaan, which ironically was his by virtue of the blessing. The other was his fight at Peniel when he was attempting to return to the land. Each divine encounter was a life-changing event."[1]

Bethel is mentioned more than any other city but Jerusalem in the Old Testament. This indicates its importance in biblical history.

28:10-11 As Jacob made his way north from Beersheba toward Haran, he stopped for the night at a place that he later named "Bethel" (v. 19). Moses' mention of the stone that Jacob used for his pillow prepares the reader for what he wrote about this stone later (v. 18).

28:12-14 The "ladder" (Heb. *sullam*) that Jacob saw in his dream evidently resembled a broad stairway or ramp. Some interpreters take it as an allusion to a ziggurat.[2] Others believe it refers to the slope or ascent of the mountain of Bethel.[3] The NIV, TNIV, HCSB, and NET2 translators rendered this Hebrew word "stairway."

> "The ladder was a visible symbol of the real and uninterrupted fellowship between God in heaven and His people upon earth. The angels upon it carry up the wants of men to God, and bring down the assistance and protection of God to men. The ladder stood there upon the earth, just where Jacob was lying in solitude, poor, helpless, and forsaken by men. Above in heaven stood Jehovah, and explained in words the symbol which he saw. Proclaiming Himself to Jacob as the God of his fathers, He not only confirmed to him all the promises of the fathers in their fullest extent, but promised him protection on his journey and a safe return to his home (vers. 13-15). But as the fulfillment of this promise to Jacob was still far off, God added the firm assurance, 'I will not leave thee till I have done (carried out) what I have told thee.' [v. 15]"[4]

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[1]Allen P. Ross, "Jacob's Visions: The Founding of Bethel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:567 (July-September 1985):226.

[2]See the comments on 11:3-4 above.

[3]See C. Houtman, "What Did Jacob See In His Dream At Bethel?" *Vetus Testamentum* 27:3 (July 1977):337-51.

[4]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:281-82.

Other visions of God's heavenly throne-room appear in 1 Kings 22:19 through 22; Job 1:6 through 8; 2:1 through 3; Isa. 6; Ezek. 1; Zech. 1:10; 6:5; Rev. 4 and 5; and elsewhere. This was God's first revelation to Jacob, and it came in a dream (cf. John 1:51). Other passages contain promises (prophecies) of the land (12:7; 13:14-16; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7), but this one (vv. 13-14) is closest in terminology to the one in chapter 13, which also features a Bethel setting.

28:15 Jacob was the second person in the Bible to hear the assurance "I am with you." Isaac was the first (cf. 26:3, 24). This was a promise that God later repeated to Moses (Exod. 3:12), Joshua (Josh. 1:5), Gideon (Judg. 6:16), regarding Immanuel (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23), and to all Christians (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

28:16-17 Perhaps God's revelation surprised Jacob because he was preparing to leave the Promised Land. Jacob may have felt that God would abandon him, since he was leaving the land that God had promised his forefathers. But the main cause of Jacob's fear was that God had appeared to him.

> "The term 'fear' [v. 17, "afraid"] is used in the Bible to describe a mixture of terror and adoration, a worshipful fear (cf. Exod. 19:16)."[1]

"Bethel" (lit. "house of God," v. 17) means "the place where God dwells." To Jacob, this was "the gate of heaven," the place where Jacob entered heaven (in his dream).

> "As Abraham's vision anticipated narratives from the latter part of the Pentateuch, so Jacob's vision anticipated the events which were to come in the next several chapters."[2]

28:18-19 Jacob set up the stone on which he had rested his head to serve as a memorial of this revelation and God's promise (v. 18). The ancients commonly set up standing stones to mark important places and events, many of which remain to this day. Pouring oil on the stone constituted an act of consecration (cf. Lev. 8:10-12). He also gave the site, which was previously known as Luz, the name "Bethel." But Jacob did not build an altar in response to God's revelation, as his forefathers had done.

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[1]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 491.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 193.

28:20-22 Jacob also made a vow (a solemn promise to God). He promised to make Yahweh his God "if" the LORD would be with him, protect him on his journey, provide for his needs, and bring him back to his father's house in safety. He also promised to make the stone on which he had slept into "God's house." This probably means that it would become a place of worship (cf. vv. 20-21; 31:13; 35:1-3, 7). Jacob also promised to give Yahweh a tenth of all that the LORD gave him.[1]

This sounds like Jacob made a conditional vow—conditioned on God's faithfulness. He swore that Yahweh would be his God *if* God proved faithful to him. This is how most of the English translations of Jacob's vow read.

However, the Hebrew word translated "if" (v. 20) can also be translated "since." If "since" is the correct translation, this was not a crass bargain, as it appears to have been—though the record of Jacob's life shows that he typically was keen on negotiating deals. In this case Jacob was promising that he would fulfill his vow *when* God did these things for him, not *if* He would do them. His vow then could be understood as a response to God's promises to him (v. 15).[2] I prefer the former, conditional vow, interpretation.

Jacob was apparently a believer in Yahweh already, but his commitment to God at this time appears to have been somewhat selfish and conditional. He had not yet fully surrendered and dedicated himself to God.

> "The assurance of God's presence should bring about in every believer the same response of worship and confidence it prompted in Jacob. This is the message from the beginning: God by grace visits His people and promises them protection and provision so that they might be a blessing to others. They in turn were to respond in faith, fearing Him, worshiping Him, offering to Him, vowing to Him, and making memorials for future worshipers at such places."[3]

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[1]On tithing, see my note on 14:20.

[2]von Rad, p. 286; Leupold, 2:780.

[3]Ross, "Genesis," p. 75.

Jacob's relationship with Yahweh was quite different from what Abraham's or Isaac's relationship to Him had been. God tested Abraham, but Jacob tested God. God told Abraham to leave his country before he entered into blessing, but Jacob imposed conditions on God before he vowed to bless God.[1] Jacob was willing to accept God's promises, but he did not commit himself to God until God proved Himself faithful to him personally. God blessed Jacob because of His election of him, and because of Abraham's and Isaac's faith, more than because of Jacob's faith, at this time.

Many believers bargain with God as Jacob apparently did here. They agree to worship Him on their terms, rather than because God has proven Himself faithful in the past. God often accommodates such weak faith, but the fact that He does so does not commend the practice of bargaining with God.

The personal revelation of God's presence and promised blessings inspires genuine worship. This worship is the appropriate response to such revelation.

7. Jacob's marriages and Laban's deception 29:1-30

The long account of Jacob's relationship with Laban (chs. 29—31) is the centerpiece of the Jacob story (chs. 25—35). It is a story within a story, and it too has a chiastic structure. At its center is the account of the birth of Jacob's sons, who became the forefathers of the tribes of Israel (29:31-35).

Jacob met Rachel at a community well, and watered her flock of sheep, in spite of opposition against doing so. Jacob's love for Rachel (in the sense that he strongly preferred and desired her for marriage) led him to serve Laban for seven years to obtain her as his wife. But Laban deceived Jacob into marrying Leah, his firstborn daughter, so Jacob had to work an extra seven years for Rachel.

> "In Laban Jacob met his match and his means of discipline."[2]
>
> "Jacob is now in the greatest of all schools, that of experience, and there are many lessons to learn. These three chapters (xxix-xxxi.) cover forty years [*sic*, probably twenty years] of his life, and are the record of a large part of his training."[3]

29:1 Jacob left Bethel and proceeded northeast toward Haran. Some of the references to "the east" in Genesis so far have negative connotations (cf.

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[1]J. H. Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary*, pp. 573-74.

[2]Kidner, p. 159.

[3]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 269. Cf. Exod. 2:16-21.

3:24; 4:16; 11:2; 16:12; 25:6). So the reader may wonder if something bad is going to happen soon.

> "More than any other book in the OT, Genesis emphasizes the east (see 3:24; 4:16; 10:30; 11:2; 13:11; 25:6 [and 29:1]) as a direction of some significance."[1]

Jacob traveled about 450 miles from Beersheba to Haran. Notice the absence of prayer for divine guidance to the woman of God's choosing, which dominates the story of Abraham's servant's visit to the same area for the same purpose (ch. 22). Also, Jacob traveled alone and apparently on foot, whereas Abraham's servant came with a well-laden camel caravan.

29:2-3 The first significant event that happened to Jacob when he reached Haran was that he saw a well with some sheep gathered around it. Moses filled the reader in on what normally happened at the well.

29:4-8

> "True to his character, Jacob proceeds arrogantly, questioning the shepherds' carefree behavior (v. 7). For all the criticism one might level at Jacob's conduct, he was no slacker in his labor ethic (31:6, 38-41)."[2]

Nahor was actually the grandfather of Laban, not his father (v. 5; cf. 22:20-23). This is one indication that "son" in the Old Testament does not always refer to the next in line in a family, but it sometimes refers to a later descendant.

The well was probably a cistern that had a mouth with a large circumference (v. 8). A very large stone, that normally required several men to remove it, evidently covered it. After they moved the stone, water could be drawn for the flocks to drink. The male shepherds may have been unauthorized to roll the stone away because the well belonged to Laban. Their inability may have been legal rather than physical.[3]

> "Their unwillingness is likely the result of an agreement of the type that was common for water rights in the ancient Near Eastern world among different shepherds to assure

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[1]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 252.

[2]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 462.

[3]Bush, 2:116-17.

> equal distribution of water from the well. Jacob probably would not have been bound by such an agreement."[1]

29:9-12 This is one of the few places in Scripture that we read of a man kissing a woman. Jacob apparently acted solely on the basis of Rachel's physical attractiveness (cf. v. 17). Her name means "Ewe Lamb." Jacob wept—perhaps for joy and relief—but he did not worship God (cf. 24:26). He had ended his journey, was now in the right place, and had met the right person—he thought.

> "When Abraham's servant had discovered Rebekah's identity, he worshiped the Lord (24:24, 26), but here Jacob flexed his muscle, proving his capacity to serve Laban's house."[2]

> "This scene [29:1-14] is chiefly about God's providence versus Jacob's prayerlessness "[3]

29:13-14 Laban, Rebekah's brother, extended warm hospitality to Jacob, his sister's son. The suggestion of some interpreters that Laban adopted Jacob as his son is questionable.[4] There is not adequate information in the text to support it.

29:15-20 Evidently during the first month that Jacob stayed with Laban (v. 14) Jacob did some work for Laban. At the end of the month Laban offered to pay Jacob for his help and asked Jacob how he would like to be paid. Jacob then offered to work for Laban for seven years if Laban would give him Rachel as his wife. Laban agreed to the bargain, and Jacob served him for seven years.

> "In the ancient Near East the groom and his family would pay the bride's family a sum as a bride-price. Jacob brought no wealth with him, so he works off his debt to Laban's family in this way."[5]

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[1]Longman, "Genesis," p. 106.

[2]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 463.

[3]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 402.

[4]See John Van Seters, "Jacob's Marriages and Ancient Near East Customs: A Reexamination," *Harvard Theological Review* 62:4 (October 1969):377-95.

[5]Longman, "Genesis," p. 106.

Moses described Leah's eyes as "weak," meaning dull (NEB) and lacking in luster ("didn't sparkle" CEV), rather than bright (v. 17). Fiery eyes were, and still are, considered the height of beauty among Near Eastern people.[1] The Hebrew word translated "weak" (NASB, NIV, TNIV, ESV) can also mean "delicate" (NKJV, HCSB) or "lovely" (NRSV) or "tender (AV). Evidently Leah had unusual eyes. Her name means "Wild Cow."

Moses described Rachel, on the other hand, as "beautiful in figure and appearance." It was her physical appearance that attracted Jacob. Evidence will follow that Leah was the more "spiritual" of the two sisters; that is, she valued unseen things more than seen things.

> "Regarding marriage generally, the Nuzi tablets provided that if a man worked over a period of time for the father of a girl whom he wished to marry, then he would have the right to take the girl as his wife."[2]
>
> "*Seven years* was a handsome offer: Jacob was clearly not risking a refusal—a fact which Laban would not fail to note and exploit, as Jacob had exploited Esau's eagerness (25:32)."[3]

Casual laborers received between one-half and one shekel a month in old Babylonia.[4] Jacob gave seven years of wages for Rachel's hand in marriage. Later, we learn that Laban changed Jacob's wages several times (31:7), so it is impossible to know just how much Jacob paid Laban for Rachel.

The chiastic structure of verses 20 through 30 focuses attention on the complication caused by deception:

"A Jacob's payment for his wife (20)

B Consummation of the marriage to Leah by deception (21-24)

C Jacob's accusation against Laban (25)

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[1]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:285; von Rad, p. 291.

[2]West, p. 70.

[3]Kidner, p. 160.

[4]G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, eds. and trans., *The Babylonian Laws*, 1:470-71.

C' Laban's defense (26)

B' Consummation of the marriage to Rachel by negotiation (27-30a)

A' Jacob's payment for his wife (30b)."[1]

29:21-27 Laban and Leah deceived Jacob, as Jacob and Rebekah had deceived Isaac.

Perhaps Jacob's eating and drinking at the feast had clouded his mind (v. 22). The darkness of his tent at night, additionally, may have made it hard for him to see.[2] Furthermore, in that culture a bride customarily entered her husband's presence "veiled."[3] Gerhard von Rad wrote "heavily veiled," and Aalders "completely veiled."[4]

One year an Indian student of mine told me that his father did not see his mother's face for three days after their wedding. It is still customary among some Indians for the bride to remain veiled before and after the consummation of the marriage.[5]

Jacob had deceived Isaac by taking advantage of his inability to see due to poor eyesight (27:36). Similarly Laban deceived Jacob by taking advantage of his inability to see in the dark tent (29:25). Earlier Jacob had deceptively pretended to be the older brother (ch. 27), and now Laban tricked him by replacing the younger with the older sister. Jacob had pretended to be the older brother, and now Leah pretended to be the younger sister. Isaac had thought that Jacob was Esau, and now Jacob was made to think that Leah was Rachel. Laban was just as deceitful as Jacob.

> "This was about one of the meanest pranks ever played on a man."[6]

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[1]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 498.

[2]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 1:19:6-7.

[3]S. R. Driver, *Genesis*, p. 271.

[4]von Rad, p. 291; Aalders, p. 115.

[5]See also J. A. Diamond, "The Deception of Jacob: A New Perspective on an Ancient Solution to the Problem," *Vetus Testamentum* 34:2 (April 1984):211-13.

[6]Leupold, 2:795.

> "For despicability Laban takes the prize in the Old Testament."[1]

Laban should have told Jacob of this custom, of giving the older daughter in marriage before the younger, earlier, if indeed it was a custom, which seems questionable.

> "Having acquired his older brother's birthright for a bowl of lentils, He [Jacob] now proves unable to acquire the woman he loves even with seven years of harsh labor (31.38-41)."[2]

It was customary for the bride's father to give her a large present when she got married: a dowry. In the ancient world, the gift normally consisted of clothing, furniture, and money, and it served as security for the wife in case her husband died or divorced her. Some dowries were exceptionally valuable, such as slave-girls (24:61; 29:29) or a city (1 Kings 9:16). Laban was being generous, giving away two of his servants (vv. 24, 29).[3]

29:28-30 The bridal "week" was the week of feasting that followed a marriage (cf. Judg. 14:12, 17). Jacob received Rachel seven days after he had consummated his marriage to Leah. (Josephus incorrectly wrote that after the second seven years Jacob took Rachel as his wife.[4]) As mentioned above, the Hebrew name "Rachel" means "Ewe," and "Leah" means "Cow." Ironically, Laban treated his own daughters like cattle and sheep, and used them for bargaining and trading. "Zilpah" (v. 24) means "Small Nose," and "Bilhah" (v. 29) means "Carefree."

Notice that Jacob was behaving like his parents, who each favored one son above the other, by favoring one of his wives above the other. In both cases serious family problems followed. The Mosaic Law later prohibited marrying two sisters at the same time (Lev. 18:18). Bigamy and polygamy were never God's will (2:24).[5]

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[1]Ibid., 2:798.

[2]Levenson, p. 56.

[3]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 236. Cf. West, p. 70.

[4]Josephus, *Antiquities of …*, 1:1:7.

[5]See Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 249.

> "Jacob had planned to take Rachel as his wife, but God intended him to have Leah."[1]

God remains faithful to His promises to bless His people, but in the process He may discipline them for their previous unresolved sins, and He often does so in kind (i.e., with talionic judgment; cf. Prov. 3:12; Gal. 6:7; Heb. 12:5-6).[2]

> "Jacob was getting what he deserved. In this light the seven extra years that Jacob had to serve Laban appear as a repayment for his treatment of Esau. By calling such situations to the attention of the reader, the writer begins to draw an important lesson from these narratives. Jacob's deceptive schemes for obtaining the blessing did not meet with divine approval. Through Jacob's plans God's will had been accomplished; but the writer is intent on pointing out, as well, that the schemes and tricks were not of God's design."[3]

8. Jacob's mishandling of God's blessing 29:31—30:24

God formed Jacob's family, the ancestors of the tribes of Israel, as He had promised Jacob at Bethel (cf. 28:14). Unfortunately Jacob and his wives lived in envy and friction over how God chose to bless them. The real issue of the two sisters' struggle, in this pericope, is the same as that of the brothers', Esau's and Jacob's, struggle: Who will take the lead and be first, and who will have to serve? When people refuse to let God control, they take control themselves.

> "Jacob had planned to take Rachel as his wife, but God intended him to have Leah. Thus in two major reversals in Jacob's life, we can begin to see the writer's theme taking shape. Jacob sought to marry Rachel, but Laban tricked him. Then Jacob sought to build a family through Rachel, but she was barren; and God opened Leah's womb."[4]

This record of Jacob's children, the center of the Jacob story structurally, is important for at least three reasons:

1. It shows God's faithfulness in providing descendants as He had promised.

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 195.

[2]For a fascinating narration of this story in expanded form, see Thomas Mann, "Jacob Takes a Bride," *Bible Review* (Spring 1986):53-59, which is an excerpt from Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers*.

[3]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 199.

[4]Ibid., p. 200.

> "Now the account centers on the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to be with Jacob and to bless him [28:15]."[1]

2. It gives the origins and circumstances surrounding the births of the tribal heads of Israel.

> "The *theme* of the Pentateuch is not difficult to discern. It is the story of the birth and adolescence of a nation."[2]

3. It explains the roots of much of the tribal rivalry that follows in Israel's history.

The section culminates with the birth of Joseph (30:24), which proved to be the cue for Jacob to return home (30:25).

29:31-35 Moses recorded the births of Leah's first four sons: "Reuben" ("Looked At"), "Simeon" ("Heard"), "Levi" ("Attached"), and "Judah" ("Praise"). When the clause "the LORD saw" occurs (v. 31), His acting decisively, often for the weak and oppressed, follows soon (cf. 6:5; 7:1; 18:21; 31:12; Exod. 2:25; 4:31).[3] Leah gave Yahweh glory for the birth of at least three of her first four sons.

30:1-4 Rachel's reactions to her barrenness were anger and despair, and Jacob's responses were anger and defensiveness. Both Sarah and Rachel resorted to a custom that was acceptable in their culture, though contrary to God's will, in order to secure an heir for their husbands (cf. 16:1-2). Isaac had prayed that God would open Rebekah's womb, and had waited (25:21).

> "Ancient Near Eastern evidence suggests that placing a child on one's knees [v. 3] represents acknowledgment of that child as one's own."[4]

> "It was common in the ancient Near East to provide a new wife if the first wife was barren. In the Nuzi texts, for instance, the majority of texts on marriage deal with childlessness and provisions for a new wife."[5]

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[1]Leupold, 2:800.

[2]Whybray, p. 9.

[3]See Keller, ch. 2: "Love Is Not All You Need," pp. 22-47, for insightful comments on Jacob's, Rachel's, and Leah's idolization of love.

[4]Levenson, p. 57. Cf. 50:23.

[5]Currid, p. 53.

The conflict between Rachel and Leah focuses on love and motherhood (cf. 1 Sam. 1). Rachel had Jacob's love, but she could not become a mother. Conversely, Leah was the mother of Jacob's children, but she could not win his love.[1]

> "It seems that Jacob's love for Rachel savored too much of infatuation growing out of purely physical attraction."[2]

30:5-8 Rachel named her first son by Bilhah "Dan" ("Judge"). She named the second son "Naphtali" ("Wrestler"). Both names were connected with Rachel's experiences with God and Leah, respectively.

> "The terms *wife* and *concubine* are used more loosely in the patriarchal period. Three women in the patriarchal period are called both *wife* and *concubine*: Hagar (Gen. 16:3; 25:6 indirectly), Keturah (25:1; cf. 25:6; 1 Chron. 1:32), and Bilhah (Gen. 30:4; 35:22). Each of these concubines is an auxiliary wife to the patriarch, not a slave, but subordinate to the wife who is her mistress. After the patriarchal period, the term *wife* is never used as a synonym for concubine."[3]

30:9-13 Zilpah, Leah's maid, bore Jacob two sons: "Gad" ("Good Fortune") and "Asher" ("Happy"). These names reflected Leah's joy at providing Jacob with more sons, through Zilpah.

> "Zilpah, though never called a concubine (cf. 30:9), has the same social position as Bilhah (cf. 37:2)."[4]

30:14-16 The mandrake, a member of the potato and tomato family, is a plant that bears bluish flowers in winter and yellowish plum-size fruit in summer. The fruit has a strong, pleasant fragrance, and it was thought to help

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[1]See Samuel Dresner, "Rachel and Leah: Sibling Tragedy or the Triumph of Piety and Compassion?" *Bible Review* 6:2 (April 1990):25.

[2]Leupold, 2:801.

[3]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 411.

[4]Ibid.

barren women conceive. Some Arabs still use it as an aphrodisiac, and call it "devil's apple" (cf. Song of Sol. 7:13).[1]

> "Just as Jacob had purchased the birthright for a pot of stew (25:29-34), so also Leah purchased the right to more children by Jacob with the mandrakes of her son Reuben (30:14-16)."[2]

> "'Sleep' (*skb*) [v. 15] as a euphemism for sex, is never used for loving marital intercourse in this book, only for illicit or forced sex: Lot's daughters with Lot (19:32-35); the Philistines with Rebekah (26:10); Shechem with Dinah (34:2, 7); Reuben with Bilhah (35:22); Potiphar's wife with Joseph (39:7, 10, 12, 14)."[3]

30:17-21 > "The outcome was ironical, the mandrakes doing nothing for Rachel, while Leah gained another son by parting with them."[4]

> "It is often said that 'men use love to get sex, women use sex to get love.'"[5]

Leah received her other children, "Issachar" ("Reward"), "Zebulun" ("Acknowledge"), and Dinah, only because "God listened to Leah" (v. 17), not because of some magic supposedly connected with the mandrakes. Dinah's name is related to the Hebrew word that means "judgment." She was evidently the only daughter of Jacob (cf. 46:15).

30:22-24 God eventually granted Rachel a son, "Joseph" ("My He [God] Add"). He was born at the end of Jacob's fourteenth year in Laban's service.

> "The provision of a maidservant for the bride by the bride's father [v. 24] is found in the Nuzi tablets of the mid-second millennium BC. There it was part of the wedding

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[1]von Rad, p. 295. See H. Moldenke and A. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible*, pp. 137-39; M. Zoary, *Plants of the Bible*, pp. 188-89.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 201.

[3]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 413.

[4]Kidner, p. 162.

[5]Keller, p. 40.

> arrangement to demonstrate that the marriage was legally binding."[1]

The jealousy, bickering, superstition, and weak faith demonstrated by Jacob and his wives stand out in this section. God's gift of children was gracious; He gave them in spite of, rather than because of, the behavior of the parents. Another indication of God's grace. Rachel acknowledged this finally (vv. 23-24), as did Jacob. The use of the names Elohim ("God," the mighty One) and Yahweh (LORD," the covenant keeping One), in each story, reflects the attitudes toward God of the various characters, and it shows their relationships with Him.

> "On the human plane the story demonstrates the craving of human beings for love and recognition, and the price of thwarting it; on the divine level it shows once again the grace of God choosing difficult and unpromising material."[2]

> "Jacob's partiality and his general handling of his family led to strife and mother groupings that were to affect the history of Israel for centuries thereafter."[3]

Believers should not envy and strive, which leads to bitter conflicts, but should obey God—trusting Him to dispense His blessings wisely, justly, and compassionately.

The actions of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah in this chapter, and those of Abraham and Sarah in chapter 16, raise questions about surrogate parenting:

Today, husbands and wives who cannot have children naturally, sometimes choose to secure the services of a third person who can provide a needed reproductive function and thereby enable them to have children. For example, if the wife cannot carry a baby in her womb for a full term pregnancy, some doctors recommend that the couple use the services of another woman. If acceptable to the couple, a physician will implant the couple's fertilized egg in her womb that she agrees to "rent" for the nine-month gestation period. Another example is the securing of sperm from a donor (artificial insemination), if the husband is sterile. There are many ways in which childless couples can now become parents with this kind of help from a third, and sometimes a fourth, party. These situations are somewhat similar to what we find in Genesis 16 and 30. The

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[1]Currid, pp. 52-53.

[2]Kidner, p. 161.

[3]H. Vos, p. 113.

common tie is that, in all these cases, someone other than the husband and wife is essential to facilitate the conception of the child.

I do not believe that adoption is similar to surrogate parenting, because in adoption a husband and wife simply agree to assume the responsibility of raising someone else's child as their own—a child who has already been or will be born naturally. They do not require a third party for the conception of the child, as in surrogate parenting.

9. Jacob's new contract with Laban 30:25-43

Jacob and Laban ("White") made an agreement, which both men felt they could manipulate to their own advantage. But God sovereignly overruled to bless Jacob, as He had promised, in spite of Laban's selfishness and Jacob's deviousness (cf. Job 5:13; Ps. 7:15; 1 Cor. 3:19).

As the previous pericope shows how Yahweh provided descendants (seed) for Jacob, as He had promised, this one demonstrates how He made Jacob wealthy (blessing).

30:25-28 After Joseph was born, Jacob asked Laban's permission to return to Canaan. Laban's permission was evidently necessary since Jacob had been his employee.

> "The underlying assumption seems to be that Jacob had accepted the status of an indentured servant. Thus, he could not leave without his master's permission, and his wives and children would belong to the master (Exod. 21.2-4; cf. Gen. 31.43). The verb translated *Give me leave* serves as the standard term for manumission in the story of the exodus (e.g., Exod. 4.23)."[1]

> "Throughout the ancient Near East, as is clear in the Nuzi documents …, children born in servitude belonged to the master and not the servant (see Ex. 21:4)."[2]

Jacob wanted to part with Laban on good terms. But Laban did not want Jacob to leave. He had learned "by divination" that Yahweh had blessed him (Laban) because of Jacob. Evidently Laban did not have a very close relationship with Yahweh, since he relied on divination, rather than trust

[1]Levenson, pp. 57-58.

[2]Currid, p. 54.

in the LORD, for guidance. Laban wanted Jacob to stay so much that he even let him name his own wages for his future service.

30:29-30 Jacob reminded Laban of how Yahweh had blessed him since he (Jacob) had worked for him. This sounds like the beginning of a negotiation for higher wages. Evidently all the flocks belonged to Laban, and few if any at this time belonged to Jacob.

30:31-33 Laban then repeated his offer to Jacob to name his wages. Jacob proposed that Laban would give him all the speckled or spotted sheep, which were normally white, and goats, which were normally black, that were in his flock, and that would be born, as his wages. These were supposedly regarded as inferior animals to the others. In this way Laban could easily identify all the animals that belonged to him and those that belonged to Jacob, and he would have no reason to charge Jacob with stealing his animals.

30:34-36 Laban agreed to Jacob's proposal and separated the two kinds of animals into two groups. He also separated the two flocks by a distance of three days' journey. Laban's sons oversaw one flock,, and Jacob oversaw the other flock.

30:37-42 Then Jacob proceeded to do what he thought would result in his flock bearing additional speckled or spotted or black sheep and goats.

> "By crossing the heterozygotes among themselves, Jacob would produce, according to the laws of heredity, twenty-five percent spotted sheep. Thus he multiplies his flock. Jacob has displayed ingenuity; he has not practiced deception. … Jacob's knowledge of zoology is far from primitive. But perhaps such knowledge has been given him by God, just as his son's capacity to interpret dreams was a gift from God."[1]

Another explanation is that Jacob did not really understand the laws of heredity, but that he just did what he thought would work, and God blessed him. Jacob was seemingly relying on a popular superstition, namely, that certain experiences of the mother during pregnancy

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[1]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 284. Paragraph division omitted. Cf. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 212; and Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 257.

influenced the condition of her offspring. Apparently Jacob was mistakenly counting on this custom to ensure fertility among his flocks:

> "All marking of the offspring such as that which Jacob thought he was accomplishing in Laban's flocks, is completely impossible. In the placenta and umbilical cord, which constitutes the only connection between the mother and the fetus, there are *no nerves*. Thus, absolutely no mechanism exists whereby the mother can mark her offspring in the way that Jacob thought he was accomplishing the marking."[1]

Whether Jacob was very smart or very superstitious, the success of Jacob's plan was due to the grace of God ultimately (cf. 31:10-12).

> "As with many of the tricks which Jacob attempts in these narratives, God blessed Jacob in spite of them, not because of or through them."[2]

The herdsmen evidently believed that the stronger members of the flock mated in the summer, and the weaker ones mated in the fall.[3]

30:43 God blessed Jacob and made him "exceedingly prosperous." He acquired more servants, camels, and donkeys, as well as "large flocks" of sheep and goats. Jacob's ownership of camels proves that he was very rich, since these animals were rare and costly in Jacob's day.[4] God blessed Jacob in spite of his actions, not because of them.

God allowed Jacob to become wealthy through his own toil. God probably would have done even more for Jacob than he did for himself if Jacob had placed himself under God's authority. That is what God usually does. But at this stage in his life Jacob was relying on himself more than on God.

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[1]Frank L. Marsh, *Studies in Creationism*, pp. 368-69. Cf. Fruchtenbaum, pp. 434-35.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 196. Cf. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 502.

[3]See Martha A. Morrison, "The Jacob and Laban Narrative in Light of Near Eastern Sources," *Biblical Archaeologist* 46:3 (Summer 1983):155-64, which contains many helpful explanations of herding practices, contracts involving herding, marriage customs, and the significance of household gods.

[4]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 503.

Many Christians prosper materially for the same reason Jacob did: they work hard and smart. But material prosperity is not necessarily a reward for godliness. Jacob made his own fortune, but the text says that God made Abraham rich (24:35).

A lesson of this section is that people who experience God's material blessing need to acknowledge that it comes from Him, rather than from their own abilities.

10. Jacob's flight from Haran ch. 31

In this chapter Jacob was motivated to return to Canaan, due to Laban's hostility, Leah's and Rachel's encouragement, and Yahweh's direction. When Laban overtook Jacob in Gilead, Jacob not only defended his own actions of leaving with his share of the livestock without giving notice, but he also accused Laban of deceit. This silenced Laban and led him to request a peace treaty with Jacob.

Jacob's departure for Canaan 31:1-21

God had been faithful in blessing Jacob, as He had promised Abraham and Isaac. Moses recorded the testimony to that fact in this section. Jacob acknowledged that God was responsible for his prosperity. God's goodness, and His command to return to the Promised Land, as well as Laban's growing hostility, motivated Jacob to leave Paddan-aram.

31:1-3 The increasing antagonism of Laban's sons ("Jacob has taken away all that was our father's") encouraged Jacob to obey God's command to return to the Promised Land. The LORD also promised that He would be with Jacob.

Verse 3 and 28:15 form bookends around the story of Jacob in Paddan-aram, and they remind us that God had been watching over Jacob during his entire sojourn (cf. Ps. 121:8).

31:4-13 Jacob then called Rachel and Leah and explained why he felt it necessary to leave Paddan-aram and return to Canaan. He gave them several reasons: First, Laban's attitude toward Jacob had become hostile rather than friendly. Nevertheless, "the God of my [his] father" had been with Jacob, that is, He had protected him (v. 5). Second, Laban had cheated Jacob and had changed his wages 10 times in spite of the fact that Jacob had served Laban with all his strength. Nevertheless, God had not allowed Laban to do Jacob harm (vv. 6-7). Jacob then explained how Laban had cheated him (vv. 8-10).

> "Whatever wealth Abraham may have forfeited upon leaving the family unit of Terah in Haran comes to his heirs in this most unimaginable way."[1]

Third, the angel of God had spoken to Jacob in a dream, assuring him that He knew what Laban had done to him, and He had commanded Jacob to return to Canaan (vv. 11-13).

It is unclear, from what Jacob reported to his wives, exactly when the angel of God appeared to him in the dream (v. 11). This may have occurred before or at the same time as the revelation referred to earlier in this passage (v. 3). It seems likely, however, that this was the same revelation, and was God's second one to Jacob.

In this revelation Jacob learned that God had been responsible for his becoming richer (v. 12). Jacob credited God with this and with his own survival (vv. 5, 7). This is the first time in the narrative that Jacob emerges as a man of public faith. He finally takes the leadership in his home, and his wives, for the first time, follow his lead.

> "The true character of Laban is clearly seen from the fact that his daughters entirely sided with Jacob against their own father . They too had experienced their father's selfishness and greed, and were ready to approve of their husband's project and to go with him."[2]

31:14-16 Rachel and Leah shared the same feelings about Laban that Jacob had. Laban had treated them as badly as he had treated Jacob. Laban had evidently taken back some of the dowry that he had given Rachel and Leah when they married Jacob.[3] So they encouraged Jacob to do whatever God had told him to do.

> "This is another case of the 'Ruth effect,' where the foreign wife commits herself and future to the God of her adopted family."[4]

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[1]Ibid., p. 517.

[2]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 285.

[3]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 273.

[4]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 510.

31:17-21 Jacob then assembled all his possessions and left Paddan-aram for Canaan. He did this secretly. Laban was busy sheering his flock and did not know that Jacob was leaving.

> "Rachel's theft of her father's idols [*teraphim*] reflects the Hurrian custom of keeping household gods. Nevertheless, the real significance of what she did, and perhaps the reason for the theft, lies in the fact that according to the Nuzi tablets he who possessed the household gods was the legitimate heir."[1]

> "One of the purposes of these idols was to obtain oracles (Ezek. 21:21). It may be that Rachel stole them to prevent Laban from using them to divine Jacob's route of escape."[2]

Evidently Rachel wanted Jacob to remain Laban's heir, even though sons had been born to Laban after Jacob arrived in Haran, presumably (cf. v. 1).

Other writers, however, dispute this significance of the household gods at this time, as well as Rachel's motivation:

> "The supposed role of the *teraphim* or 'household gods' (Gen. 31:19, 30-35) as constituting the title-deeds to inheritances seems also to be fallacious; Rachel simply took them for her own protection and blessing."[3]

These gods were usually small figurines two to three inches long, sometimes carried on the body as charms, many of which archaeologists have discovered in Canaan. They may have represented departed ancestors or gods that their makers venerated.[4] Rachel may also have hoped that these "gods" would make her a fruitful mother.[5] Apparently

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[1]West, p. 70. See also Wood, *A Survey …,* p. 28; Free, p. 71.

[2]Currid, p. 55.

[3]Kitchen, *The Bible …,* p. 70. Cf. Barker, p. 135.

[4]See Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 273; K. Van der Toorn, "The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990):203-22.

[5]See M. Greenberg, "Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962):247; Harry A. Hoffner Jr., "The Linguistic Origins of Teraphim," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 1967):230-38; Gerhard Mehlman, "Genesis 31:19-39: An Interpretation," *Journal of Reform Judaism* 29:3 (Summer 1982):33-36; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 518-19.

Laban's family worshipped false gods as well as the true God (cf. Josh. 24:1-3).

> "It is curious that Rachel, and not Leah should have almost always turned out to be Jacob's greatest hindrance in life."[1]

The writer identified Jacob's deception as such (i.e., "Jacob deceived Laban," tricked him) when he fled from Paddan-aram (v. 20).

> Perhaps "Laban's nationality is mentioned [in verses 20 and 24] because the Syrians [earlier called Arameans] were known from of old as the trickiest people; here one of this people in a kind of just retribution meets one trickier than himself."[2]

Laban's confrontation with Jacob 31:22-55

God had promised to be with Jacob and to return him safely to Canaan (v. 3; cf. 28:15). We see God doing this, in spite of Laban's opposition, in this section.

> "It was only by divine prospering and protection (24) that Jacob brought anything, even his life, back from exile."[3]

31:22-24 When Laban learned that Jacob and all that he possessed had departed, Laban pursued him. On the seventh day he caught up with him in the hill country later called "Gilead." But God appeared to Laban in a dream and told him not to do anything to Jacob: good (commending Jacob, because, after all, Jacob had deceived Laban) or bad (condemning Jacob, because Laban's treatment of Jacob had been unfair).

> "Each of the three patriarchs had to be ingloriously extricated from some adventure."[4]

God revealed Himself to people other than the patriarchs in those days (Laban, vv. 24, 29; cf. Abimelech in 20:3). Many scholars believe that Job also lived in the patriarchal period.

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 285.

[2]Leupold, 2:841.

[3]Kidner, p. 165.

[4]Ibid.

> "Despite this very stern divine warning, the following diatribe is one of the fiercest and longest in Genesis."[1]

31:25-30 First, Laban accused Jacob of deceiving him by stealing away secretly without giving Laban the opportunity to say goodbye to his daughters with a joyous celebration (vv. 26-28). Of course Jacob had departed secretly for the reasons explained above (vv. 4-13). Second, Laban explained that the only reason he had not done Jacob "harm" was that God had restrained him (v. 29).

> "The behavior of Laban is true to life, and every expression is familiar to my ear 'as household words.' Laban says: The God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad [v. 29]. Now we should think that Laban was uttering his own condemnation, and it appears strange that Jacob did not retort upon him by asking, Why, then, have you followed me? You have disobeyed the command of God, according to your own admission. Jacob, however, knew very well that such a plea would avail nothing. Laban believed that he fulfilled the intent of the divine command merely by refraining to injure Jacob, and so the latter understood it. The terms of the order were most comprehensive and stringent; but the real intention was to forbid violence, and this sort of construction must be applied to Oriental language in a thousand cases, or we shall push simple narratives into absurdities, and make men, and even the God of Truth, contradict himself."[2]

Third, Laban accused Jacob of stealing his "gods" (v. 30).

31:31-32 Jacob explained that he had departed secretly because he feared that Laban would take Rachel and Leah from him by force. He invited Laban to take anything that he found among his possessions that belonged to Laban. As for the "gods" that Laban claimed had been stolen, Jacob promised that if anyone in his household would be found with them, that person would die.

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 274.

[2]Thomson, 2:23.

> "Capital punishment for stealing was rarely imposed in the ancient Near East. This threat demonstrates how seriously Jacob took the matter."[1]

31:33-35 Since Rachel had "stolen" Laban's "gods" (vv. 19, 32) she hid them—successfully—while Laban searched for them among Jacob's possessions. Rachel too, as well as Jacob and Laban, was deceitful.

> "Jacob and Rachel are again two of a kind. This time both almost bring ruin on the family by their risk taking: she by her rash theft, he by his rash vow ([v. 32] cf. his sons' rash vow in 44:6-12)."[2]

The *teraphim* were already "nothing gods," but they became unclean and suffered humiliation when Rachel, who claimed to be unclean, sat on them while menstruating (vv. 34-35; cf. Lev. 15:20).

> "… it is still very common for Arabs to hide stolen property under the padding of their saddles. I have known many such thefts of modern teraphim (pictures and images), and by women too. And why not? It is surely not absurd to steal the god whose aid you invoke to assist you to steal other things."[3]

> "… whereas Laban is fiercely devoted to his *gods*, it is God who has stripped him of his wealth and given it to his daughters (v. 16)."[4]

31:36-41 "Then Jacob became angry" and proceeded to argue his innocence and explain his actions to Laban.

Under traditional ancient Near Eastern law, a shepherd was not held responsible for losses to his master's flocks due to attacking wild beasts and, in some cases, thieves.[5] Yet Jacob had borne these losses. Laban had

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[1]Currid, p. 55.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 430.

[3]Thomson, 2:24-25.

[4]Levenson, p. 60.

[5]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 277.

not only cheated Jacob, but he demanded compensation from Jacob for dead animals that Jacob was not personally responsible for (v. 39).

> "God has corked the bottle of his [Laban's] aggressiveness [with Jacob's comments]."[1]

The NJPS interpreted "ten times" (v. 41) as a round number and translated it "time and time again." The Hebrew is literally "ten times."

31:42 Jacob concluded his defense by giving the God of his grandfather Abraham, whom he also described as "the fear" of Isaac (the God whom Isaac feared, i.e., worshipped), credit for preserving and prospering him. He said that God had seen him through all the 20 years that he had been with Laban and had "rendered judgment" in favor of him by restraining Laban (vv. 24, 27).

Note the similarity between Jacob's escape from Laban and his descendants' escape from Egypt in the Exodus.

Jacob believed that he was innocent until proved guilty, but Laban felt he was guilty until proved innocent. Jacob's words in this verse summarize his whole life in Paddan-aram. Addressing the issue of Jacob and Laban using lies to achieve their ends, Assohoto and Ngewa wrote the following:

> "These persons cannot be our examples in all areas, for they were still toddlers in their knowledge of God. They had never been given the Ten Commandments (Exod 20), nor had they heard the Sermon on the Mountain (Matt 5—7). Thus we, who have a far fuller revelation of God's will through Jesus Christ, need to respond to the bad behavior of people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Rachel as we would respond to toddlers who do something that we, as adults, know is wrong. We do not hold a toddler responsible in the same way we would an adult, not do we think that their behavior is a model for us to imitate. Rather, we acknowledge that what the child had done is wrong, and then we allow them to experience grace from us as we continue to train them in right and wrong. The

[1]Fokkelman, p. 166.

> end never justified the means. But God's grace works in imperfect people."[1]

31:43 Laban's frustration comes out in this verse. True, everything that Jacob possessed had been Laban's, but Laban had given his daughters to Jacob, and Jacob had worked for and been paid the flocks that he now owned. Laban had no legitimate claim on any of these things.

31:44-54 Jacob and Laban then made a parity covenant (peace treaty), at Laban's request. They set up a "memorial stone" (Heb. *misbah*, a so-called "standing stone") to mark the spot, gathered stones in a "heap," and ate a meal together as part of the rite involved in establishing a covenant (vv. 44-48). They may have erected the "heap" of stones (Heb. *gal*, cairn, v. 46) both as a table for the meal and as a memorial of the event. Standing stones (stone pillars) sometimes marked supposed dwelling places of the gods (cf. 28:17-18), and cairns (stone heaps) often marked graves (cf. Josh. 7:26; 8:29; 2 Sam. 18:17).

"Galeed" ("witness heap," v. 47) is the name from which "Gilead" came. Gilead became a common name for this mountainous area east of the Jordan River, between the Sea of Galilee (*Cinnereth*, Hebrew for "lyre" denoting the shape of the lake) and the Dead (Salt) Sea (cf. vv. 21, 23, 25). "Jegar-sahadutha" means "witness heap" in Aramaic.

The so-called "Mizpah [lit. "watchtower" or "outlook point"] blessing" was not really a promise between friends, but a warning between antagonists who did not trust each other (v. 49). Laban and Jacob called on God to keep each other true to the terms of the covenant that they had just made: "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other." They could not check on each other themselves.

> "This covenant also might be called a nonaggression pact."[2]

> "It is impossible to avoid noticing the curious misconception of the term 'mizpah' which characterizes its use today. As used for a motto on rings, Christmas cards,

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[1]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 60.

[2]H. Vos, p. 122.

> and even as the title of an organization, it is interpreted to mean union, trust, fellowship; while its original meaning was that of separation, distrust, and warning. Two men, neither of whom trusted the other, said in effect: 'I cannot trust you out of my sight. The Lord must be the watchman between us if we and our goods are to be kept safe from each other.'"[1]

Laban swore by the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor—Abraham and Nahor were brothers—and the God of their father (Terah; v. 53). Abraham was Jacob's ancestor, and Nahor was Laban's ancestor. Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac, (the God whom his father Isaac feared; v. 54, cf. v. 42). Perhaps Jacob described God as he did in order to highlight the difference between himself and Laban; they each had their own designation of God.

Apparently the sacrifice that Jacob offered and the meal associated with it were the concluding part of the covenant-making ritual (v. 54).

31:55 The next morning Laban said his goodbyes and departed for his home.

This chapter teaches that those who are obediently following God's call and are experiencing His blessing can be confident that He will protect them.

11. Jacob's attempt to appease Esau 32:1-21

Chapters 32 and 33 can be viewed as one episode in the life of Jacob. They describe his return to the Promised Land, including his meeting with Esau. There are thematic parallels between these chapters and chapter 31 that should become clear as the exposition advances.

In spite of the vision of God's angelic assisting messengers, Jacob divided his people into two groups, as a precaution, when he heard that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. In addition to praying for God's deliverance, he sought to pacify Esau's anger with an expensive gift.

Jacob had been able to handle his problems himself "by hook or by crook" until now. At this point in his experience, God brought him to the end of his natural resources.

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 287.

> "As Jacob is at the precipice of receiving the promise of Canaan, he is not yet morally ready to carry out the blessing. Jacob must possess his own faith, obtaining the blessing through personal encounter, not by heredity alone."[1]

> "The events of this chapter are couched between two accounts of Jacob's encounter with angels (vv. 1, 25). The effect of these two brief pictures of Jacob's meeting with angels on his return to the land is to align the present narrative with the similar picture of the Promised Land in the early chapters of Genesis. The land was guarded on its borders by angels. The same picture was suggested early in the Book of Genesis when Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden and 'cherubim' were positioned on the east of the garden to guard the way to the tree of life. It can hardly be accidental that as Jacob returned from the east, he was met by angels at the border of the Promised Land. This brief notice may also be intended to alert the reader to the meaning of Jacob's later wrestling with the 'man' at Peniel (vv. 25-30). The fact that Jacob had met with angels here suggests that the man at the end of the chapter is also an angel."[2]

32:1-2 These "angels" (messengers) must have resembled the angels that Jacob had seen at Bethel (28:12), since he recognized them as angels. This was not a dream or a vision that Jacob had (cf. 31:11) but an encounter with angels (cf. 18:22; 19:1). They joined his own company of travelers for Jacob's protection (cf. Ps. 34:7). This is the reason for the name "Mahanaim" (i.e., "double host" or "double camp").[3] Jacob probably saw the camp of angels ("God's camp") as a source of comfort to his own camp as he prepared to enter the Promised Land. The text does not say how many angels were present, but apparently there were quite a few. "This is God's camp" (v. 2) recalls Jacob's statement at Bethel: "This is … the house of God" (28:17).

> "Although outside the land of promise, he was not outside the hand of promise."[4]

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[1]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 537.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 208.

[3]Thomas, *Through the …,* p. 58.

[4]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 547.

32:3-5 Why did Jacob initiate contact with "Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom"? Jacob wanted to "find favor" in Esau's sight.

> "He knows that there can be no peace and quiet until his relations with Esau are assured and put on a proper footing. Not until that matter was settled could Jacob feel certain of his future."[1]

32:6-8 Jacob's servants returned from the land of Seir with terrifying news. Esau was coming to meet Jacob with 400 men. Esau may have had a large army because he had needed to build one in order to subjugate the Horite (Hurrian) population of Seir, which he took over. His soldiers probably included his own servants plus the Canaanite and Ishmaelite relations of his wives.

Jacob's reaction to Esau's apparently hostile advance to meet him was to try to protect himself. This was Jacob's standard response to trouble: he relied on what appeared to be wise to him. Jacob's plan does not seem to me to reflect lack of trust in God as much as carefulness and personal responsibility. Faith does not mean trusting God to work for us in spite of our irresponsibility; that is presumption. Faith means trusting God to work for us when we have acted responsibly, believing that without His help we will fail.

32:9-12 This time Jacob knew that self-preservation would not be enough. So he called on God for help. We need to be right with God before we can be right with our brothers (and sisters).

Jacob's prayer (his first recorded prayer) reflects his deeply felt need for God's help and his own humility. One writer likened its form to the penitential psalms.[2] He reminded God of His past dealings with Jacob's forefathers and with himself (v. 9; cf. 31:3). He confessed his personal unworthiness and lack of any claim upon God's favor (v. 10). By calling himself "your servant," Jacob was making himself ready to serve God. He requested divine deliverance and acknowledged his own fear (v. 11). Finally, he claimed God's promise of a continuing line of descendants (v. 12; cf. 28:14). This is an excellent model prayer.

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 293. Cf. Matt. 5:23-25a.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 443.

> "It contains adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication (all the elements summed up in the mnemonic ACTS)."[1]

> "He [Jacob] should not be sharply criticized for taking precautionary measures first and praying afterward. Many a man in the face of extreme danger has lost his sense of proportion. Besides, there are emergencies that call for action first and prayer afterward."[2]

32:13-21 Though he prayed and hoped for God's help, Jacob did not fail to do all that he himself could do to appease Esau. He offered his magnanimous gifts diplomatically in order to pacify his offended brother.

> "In the Levant, it was common for someone of lower status to present tribute to one of a higher rank."[3]

Jacob was a planner and schemer, and, consequently, he struggled. He planned to take Esau's birthright and blessing, and he planned to get rich off of Laban. Now he schemed to pacify Esau. Some interpreters have seen this as evidence that Jacob was not trusting God.[4]

> "As the narrative unfolds, however, it was not Jacob's plan that succeeded but his prayer. When he met with Esau, he found that Esau had had a change of heart. Running to meet Jacob, Esau embraced and kissed him and wept (33:4). All of Jacob's plans and schemes had come to naught. In spite of them all, God had prepared Jacob's way."[5]

Jacob's ability to give Esau 520 animals (vv. 14-15) proves that God had made him enormously wealthy.

> "Jacob's behavioral response was classically narcissistic."[6]

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[1]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 62. A mnemonic is a device that assists in remembering something.

[2]Leupold, 2:866.

[3]Currid, p. 59. The Levant is an area on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea usually considered to encompass the modern lands of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria.

[4]E.g., McGee, 1:132.

[5]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 209.

[6]Shepperson, p. 183.

In view of God's many promises of protection, believers can pray with confidence for His deliverance, and they do not need to give away His provisions to appease their enemies.

12. Jacob at the Jabbok 32:22-32

> "Hebrew narrative style often includes a summary statement of the whole passage followed by a more detailed report of the event. Here v. 22 is the summary statement, while v. 23 begins the detailed account."[1]

32:22-23 The site of this incident was probably just a few miles east of the Jordan Valley. The Jabbok River joins the Jordan River about midway (north-to-south) between the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee) and the Salt (Dead) Sea.[2]

> "In Hebrew the river's name was *yabboq*, perhaps a wordplay with Jacob's name (*yaaqob*) and the verb 'wrestled' (*yeabeq*)."[3]

32:24-25 It was when Jacob was "alone," after having done everything he could to secure his own safety, that God came to him. An unidentified "man" assaulted ("wrestled with") Jacob, and he had to fight for his life. Though not explicitly stated, this "man" appears to have been the angel of the LORD: the pre-incarnate Christ (cf. vv. 28, 30; cf. Hos. 12:3-4). Note that God took the initiative in wrestling with Jacob, not vice versa.

> "Jacob was not looking for another fight. He has Uncle Laban in back of him and Brother Esau ahead of him, and the last time he saw both of them they were breathing out threatenings against him. This man Jacob is not in a position to take on someone else. Therefore, the 'man' took the initiative; He was the aggressor."[4]

God was bringing Jacob to the end of himself. He was leading him to a settled conviction that God was superior to him, and that he must submit to God's leadership in his life (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). This event was the climax

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[1]*The NET2 Bible* note on 32:22.

[2]On the location and significance of the Jabbok River, see Bryant G. Wood, "Journey Down the Jabbok," *Bible and Spade* (Spring 1978):57-64.

[3]Longman, "Genesis," p. 108.

[4]McGee, 1:135.

of Jacob's spiritual development and similar to Abraham's experience of offering Isaac on Moriah.[1]

> "The great encounter with God came when Jacob knew himself to be exposed to a situation wholly beyond him."[2]

This was not a vision or a dream, but a real event. The injury to Jacob's hip joint proves this. It was God's third revelation to Jacob.

32:26 Jacob's refusal to release "the man" indicates the sincerity of his felt need for God's help (cf. John 15:5). Again Jacob demonstrated his strong desire for blessing, as he had done previously when he obtained Esau's birthright and blessing.

> "Jacob completed, by his wrestling with God, what he had already been engaged in even from his mother's womb, viz. his striving for the birthright; in other words, for the possession of the covenant promise and the covenant blessing … To save him from the hand of his brother, it was necessary that God should first meet him as an enemy, and show him that his real opponent was God Himself, and that he must first of all overcome Him before he could hope to overcome his brother. And Jacob overcame God; not with the power of the flesh however, with which he had hitherto wrestled for God against man (God convinced him of that by touching his hip, so that it was put out of joint), but by the power of faith and prayer, reaching by firm hold of God even to the point of being blessed, by which he proved himself to be a true wrestler of God, who fought with God and with men, i.e., who by his wrestling with God overcame men as well."[3]

32:27 By asking Jacob "What is your name?" "the man" was forcing Jacob to acknowledge his nature. By giving his name to "the man" Jacob ("Heel-holder") was admitting that he was a cheat.

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[1]Leupold, 2:872-73.

[2]Kidner, p. 168.

[3]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:305-6.

> "The acknowledgment of the old name, and its unfortunate suitability [Jacob], paves the way for the new name [Israel, v. 28]."[1]

32:28 With his wrestling with God Jacob began a new stage in his life; he was a new man because he now began to relate to God in a way that was new for him. As a sign of this, God gave him a new name that indicated his new relationship to God. "Israel" means "God's Warrior." Hereafter Jacob behaved either carnally or spiritually. Note which of his names Moses used, in each event, from here on: When Jacob behaved like the "old Jacob," Moses referred to him as "Jacob," but when he behaved like the new "Israel" ("God's Warrior"), Moses referred to him as "Israel."

> "… the name Israel denoted a spiritual state determined by faith; and in Jacob's life the natural state, determined by flesh and blood, still continued to stand side by side with this. Jacob's new name was transmitted to his descendants, however, who were called Israel as the covenant nation. For as the blessing of their forefather's conflict came down to them as a spiritual inheritance, so did they also enter upon the duty of preserving this inheritance by continuing in a similar conflict."[2]

"Elohim" ("Strong One") occurs here in order to bring out the contrast between God and His creature. Jacob "prevailed" in the sense of obtaining his request, by acknowledging his dependence and cleaving to God as his Deliverer. He had prevailed "with men" in that he had held his own in his conflict with the man who wrestled with him, as well as with Laban and Esau.

> "The transformation pertains to the way in which Jacob prevails. Heretofore he prevailed over people by trickery. Now he prevails with God, and so with humans, by his words, not by the physical gifts conferred on him at birth or acquired through human effort."[3]

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[1]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 333.

[2]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:307.

[3]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 446.

I do not believe that Jacob was spiritually regenerated ("saved," or "born again") at this time. There have been many evidences in the preceding chapters that he already had saving faith in God. But this was the time that Jacob yielded to God as his Master and submitted to His lordship (cf. Rom. 12:1).

32:29 Jacob asked "the man" what His name was.

> "One wonders if 'Why is it that you inquire about my name?' is another way of asking, 'Jacob, don't you realize who I am?'"[1]

Another view is that God withheld His name in order to heighten Jacob's awe at this great moment in his life, and to impress the significance of the event on Jacob all the more. The "man" also blessed Jacob there. Grace upon grace.

32:30 Jacob believed that he had seen God "face to face." Of course, what he meant was that he had seen the angel of the LORD, since no one has seen God without some physical manifestation of God, since God is a spirit being (cf. John 1:18; 4:24). The ancients believed that anyone who saw God face to face would die (cf. 16:13; Exod. 33:20; Judg. 13:21-22). Jacob was probably grateful that the Angel had not dealt with him more severely, as he deserved.

"Peniel" sounds more like "face of God" in Hebrew than the more common "Penuel," which means the same thing. Perhaps Peniel was an older form of the place name and Penuel a newer form. Penuel seems to have been more common (cf. Judg. 8:8). Or perhaps these names describe two places located closely together, though this seems less likely.

32:31 The result of this spiritual crisis in Jacob's life was obvious to all who observed him from then on. It literally resulted in a change in his walk—both physically and spiritually.[2]

> "From this time on, Jacob is not seen again scheming or deceiving."[3]

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[1]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 336.

[2]See Harry Foster, "Walking with a Limp," *Toward the Mark* (September-October 1982):97-100.

[3]Wood, *A Survey …,* p. 73.

> "When God touched the strongest sinew of Jacob, the wrestler, it shriveled, and with it Jacob's persistent self-confidence."[1]

32:32 Moses added that this experience is the basis upon which the Israelites did not eat the "tendon of the hip" of animals—out of respect for what God did to Jacob on this occasion.

> "There is no problem in adopting a practice in honour of an ancestor, as the Jews did with Jacob. It becomes a problem only when that practice becomes part of worship. Thus there is nothing wrong with having a totem [a natural object or animal that is believed by a particular society to have spiritual significance and that is adopted by it as an emblem] and abstaining from eating a particular animal. But when that animal becomes elevated to the level of something to bow to, the practice becomes a problem."[2]

Every Christian does not need to have the type of drastic experience that Jacob had, though some do. Abraham and Isaac did not. God has told us that we can do nothing without Him (John 15:5), and that we should believe and trust Him. It is only when we do not believe and trust Him that He must teach us this hard lesson. Sometimes He has to bring us very low in order to do it. Every Christian should yield himself or herself to the Lordship of God (Christ; Rom. 6:13, 19; 12:1-2).

> "If only the swimmer yields to the water, the water keeps him up; but if he continues to struggle, the result is disastrous. Let us learn to trust, just as we learn to float."[3]

To become strong in faith, the believer must forsake self-sufficiency.

> "The narrative is presented in a deliberately enigmatic manner to channel the reader's imagination in certain directions."[4]

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[1]Allen P. Ross, "Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:568 (October-December 1985):350.

[2]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 62.

[3]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 298.

[4]Stephen Geller, "The Struggle at the Jabbok: The Uses of Enigma in a Biblical Narrative," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 14 (1982):39. See also Edward M. Curtis, "Structure, Style and Context as a

13. Jacob's meeting with Esau and his return to Canaan ch. 33

Jacob's meeting with Esau 33:1-17

Jacob was ready to sacrifice part of his family, expecting Esau to attack him, and he approached his brother as though Esau was his "lord." In contrast, Esau welcomed Jacob magnanimously, received his gift reluctantly, and offered to host him in Seir hospitably. Jacob declined Esau's offer and traveled instead to Succoth, four miles west of Peniel, where he settled next.

> "As Jacob had won God's blessing by capitulating [yielding] to Him, so now he was to win reconciliation to Esau by capitulating to him ..."[1]

33:1-2 Jacob arranged his family in a marching order that would preserve those who were most precious to him, in case his brother proved to be violently hostile.

> "There is nothing generous in the whole matter; nothing like saying, 'These are all my children; I can not [*sic*] choose between them; come life, come death, it shall come upon us all together.' Far, far from this noble spirit. He [Jacob] in effect says, 'You handmaids and our children go first; if any are to be killed, let it be you. And Leah, go you and your sons next.'" This story needs two remarks to set certain matters in their proper light. The *first* is, that Jacob, in this affair, is no more than a type of every Arab emeer [emir] in the country, and, indeed, of nearly every Oriental household. Such favoritism is, and always has been, the prevailing custom of the East. He therefore did nothing but what the laws and domestic regulations of his day and generation sanctioned. The *second* remark is, that we have in this conduct of the father an explanation of the intense hatred to Joseph "[2]
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> "This kind of ranking according to favoritism no doubt fed the jealousy over Joseph that later becomes an important

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Key to Interpreting Jacob's Encounter at Peniel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:2 (June 1987):129-37.

[1]H. Vos, p. 125.

[2]Thomson, 2:25-26.

> element in the narrative. It must have been painful to the family to see that they were expendable."[1]

33:3 Jacob was obviously fearful and felt weak as he anticipated meeting his brother. But the fact that he led his family to meet Esau shows the new "Israel" overcoming the fear that had formerly dominated the old "Jacob." Bowing "down to the ground seven times" demonstrated Jacob's great respect for Esau.

> "Seven was a number of completion or totality, and to bow seven times would be to show utter respect and subordination."[2]

> "Sevenfold prostration appears in the Amarna Letters (14th c. BCE) as a gesture of homage to one's suzerain."[3]

33:4-9 Esau's behavior, when meeting Jacob, was typical of how people conducted themselves when happily reuniting in his day (v. 4).[4] Jacob gave God the glory for giving him his family; he confessed that his family was a gift from God (v. 5). This attitude is evidence of a basic change in Jacob's approach to life. Whereas he had previously been scheming and secretive, now he was honest and forthright about his intentions. Jacob's gift to Esau recalls Abram's gift to Melchizedek (14:20).

33:10 Jacob's insistence on giving presents to Esau may have been an attempt to give back to Esau the blessing that should have been his in the first place, in order to undo his sins of earlier years.[5]

> "Now that they are reunited, Esau desires a fraternal relationship, but Jacob is unable to move beyond a formal relationship."[6]

> "Only the restraining intervention of God kept Laban from retaliation against Jacob (31:24, 29). Esau is apparently in

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[1]*The NET2 Bible* note on 33:2.

[2]Longman, "Genesis," p. 109.

[3]Levenson, p. 63. See *The ESV Archaeology Study Bible*, s.v. "Amarna Letters," p. 58.

[4]For some interesting insights into eastern behavior, as reflected in verse 4, see Imad Shehadeh, "Contrasts between Eastern and Western Cultures," *Exegesis and Exposition* 2:1 (Summer 1987):3-12.

[5]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 298-99.

[6]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 345.

> no need of a similar divine check. His own good nature acts as a check on him. Since his rage and hate of ch. 27, Esau himself has undergone his own transformation. No longer is he controlled by vile passions."[1]

"I see your face as one sees the face of God" means: I see in your face, as expressive of your whole attitude toward me, the friendliness of God; I see this friendliness demonstrated in His making you friendly toward me (cf. 1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam. 14:17). Jacob had seen God's gracious "face," and had been spared at Peniel, and he now saw Esau's gracious "face," and was spared again.

> Jacob's "language shows that he saw the two encounters with his Lord and his brother, as two levels of a single event: cf. 10b with 32:30."[2]

33:11 Previously, Jacob had taken Esau's blessing, but now he gave Esau a blessing: his gift.

33:12-14 Jacob's reasons for declining Esau's offer of an escort evidently did not spring from fear—or perhaps from fear alone. He gave a legitimate explanation of why it would be better for him to travel separately: the needs of his children and animals.

> "This, by the way, proves that Jacob's flight was late in the autumn, when alone the flocks are in this condition. The same is implied in his immediately building booths at Succoth for their protection during the winter [v. 17]."[3]

Jacob's reference to visiting Esau "at Seir" (v. 14) does not mean that Jacob planned to go directly to Seir, where he did not go, as far as the text records. He might have been deceiving his brother again. Perhaps Jacob meant that he would visit his brother in Seir in the future.[4] Scripture does not record whether Jacob ever made such a trip.

33:15-17 Jacob may have been counting on God's protection and therefore felt no need for Esau's men to accompany him. Alternatively, Jacob may have

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Kidner, p. 171. Cf. von Rad, pp. 327-28.

[3]Thomson, 1:304.

[4]Leupold, 2:892.

mistrusted Esau, having been both deceptive and deceived himself.[1] Still another view is that Jacob was returning to the Promised Land on God's orders, and that did not include going to Seir.[2]

> "This is only the second—and it is the last—conversation between Esau and Jacob mentioned in Genesis. On the first occasion (25:29-34) Esau failed to perceive Jacob's capacity for exploitation. On the second occasion he fails to perceive Jacob's hesitancy and lack of excitement about going to Seir. In both cases, Jacob succeeds in deceiving Esau."[3]

That same day Esau headed back to Seir, but Jacob and his family settled down at "Succoth" ("Booths"), east of the Jordan River (v. 17). Evidently he lived there for some time, since he built a house and huts for his livestock.

This incident illustrates the truth of Proverbs 16:7: "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

> "At almost every point in this story, Esau emerges as the more appealing, more humane, and more virtuous of the two brothers."[4]

What were Jacob's motivation and his relationship to God when he met Esau? This question arises often in the study of this chapter. The answer is not obvious. Some commentators have felt that Jacob completely backslid and returned to his former lifestyle of self-reliance and deceit.[5] Most interpreters attribute good motives to Jacob.[6]

I believe the truth probably lies somewhere between these extremes. It seems to me that Jacob's experience at Peniel had a life-changing impact on him. Jacob seems to be referring to it in 33:10: "I see your face as one sees the face of God." Nevertheless, Jacob's former lifestyle had become so ingrained—Jacob was over 90 years old at this time—that he could have easily slipped back into his former habits. I believe we have a clue to this in the frequent use of his name "Jacob" in the text from now on, rather than

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[1]von Rad, p. 328.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 299.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 348.

[4]Ibid., p. 347.

[5]E.g., Thomas, *Genesis*, pp. 309-16.

[6]E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 1:307-11; Aalders, pp. 148-53.

"Israel." In short, Jacob seems to have had a genuine experience of coming to grips with himself and yielding his life to God at Peniel. But from then on his motives and attitudes vacillated. At times he trusted God as he should have, but at others, several others, he failed to trust God.

The divine Author's main concern in this section was not Jacob's motivation however. He could have clarified that for us. Rather it seems to have been the faithfulness of God in sparing Jacob's life and returning him to the Promised Land—as He had promised (28:13-15). The Jacob narrative also contains evidence that God was faithful to bless others through Abraham's descendants (12:3), including Laban (cf. 30:27) and Esau (cf. 33:11).

Jacob's settlement at Shechem 33:18-20

33:18 After an unspecified length of time, Jacob crossed the Jordan River with his family and moved from Trans-Jordan (the part of the land of Canaan that lay east of the Jordan River) into Cis-Jordan (the part of Canaan that lay west of the Jordan River). He chose the vicinity of "Shechem" ("Peaceful") as his home.

33:19 By purchasing land there Jacob showed that he regarded Canaan as his permanent home and the home of his children and future descendants. The Israelites eventually buried Joseph at Shechem (Josh. 24:32). Shechem was only about a mile from the Sychar of Jesus' day (cf. John 4:5, 12).

33:20 God had granted Jacob's request by bringing him safely back into the Promised Land (cf. 28:20-21). As he had vowed to do, Jacob then worshipped the God of his father as "his God" ("he erected there an altar"). He called Yahweh "El-Elohe-Israel" meaning "The Mighty God Is The God of Israel." Jacob, in naming the altar, used his own new name, "Israel" (32:28). This was Jacob's first altar, which he built to worship God, just as Abraham had done at Shechem when he had first entered Canaan (12:6-7). The altar would have served the double purpose of providing a table for Jacob's sacrifice and serving as a memorial for his descendants in the years to come.

A major lesson of this chapter is that those who have received God's grace may trust in God's promise of protection when they seek reconciliation with others.

14. The rape of Dinah and the revenge of Simeon and Levi ch. 34

After Shechem the Canaanite raped Dinah, Simeon and Levi plotted and took revenge by deceiving the Shechemites into getting circumcised as the condition for Dinah's marriage. Then, to get their full revenge, they murdered the disabled men of the city.

> "The name of the Lord isn't mentioned once in this chapter, and the wisdom of the Lord is surely absent as well.[1]
>
> "Once again, as in the birth of his sons (29:31—30:24), Jacob's household is dysfunctional because of his passivity. His sons are rash and unbridled, and he is passive. No one in this story escapes censure."[2]

Contrast Jacob's great distress, upon hearing that Joseph had apparently been killed (37:34-35), with his lack of response upon hearing that Dinah had been raped. He favored Rachel's children terribly.

> "The story is a tangled skein of good and evil, as are all the patriarchal narratives."[3]

Dinah must have been a teenager at this time. Keil and Delitzsch calculated from other references in Genesis that she was between 13 and 15, Davis wrote that she was 15 or 16, and Leupold believed that she was 14 or 15.[4]

34:1 It would have been natural for Dinah, living in a family with only brothers as her siblings, to want some female companionship.

34:2-7 The Hebrew word translated "raped" is somewhat ambiguous. Whereas most English translations have "raped," the word used refers to improper sexual relations and could mean "seduced."[5]

Here is another instance of a man seeing a woman and taking her for himself, like the "sons of God" took "the daughters of mankind" (cf. 6:2).

> "This occurrence serves to illustrate the low standard of morals prevalent among the Canaanites. Any unattended female could be raped, and in the transactions that ensue

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[1]Wiersbe, p. 135.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 458.

[3]Ross, "Genesis," p. 83.

[4]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:311; Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 256; Leupold, 2:897.

[5]See Levenson, p. 64.

> neither father nor son feel the need of apologizing for or excusing what had been committed."[1]

Moses used the name "Israel" here for the first time as a reference to God's chosen people (v. 7). The family of Jacob had a special relationship to God by divine calling, reflected in the name "Israel" ("Prince with God"). Therefore Shechem's act was an especially "disgraceful thing," having been committed against a member of the family with the unique calling in the world (cf. Deut. 22:21; Josh. 7:15; Judg. 20:10; 2 Sam. 13:12; et al.).

> "What had happened to Dinah was considered by Jacob's family to be of the same nature as what later was known as 'a disgraceful thing in Israel' [i.e., rape]."[2]

34:8-12 Hamor appealed to Jacob's family on behalf of his son. Shechem evidently genuinely loved Dinah and wanted to marry her. But Hamor's proposal would have resulted in the Israelites intermarrying with the cursed Canaanites (cf. 9:25). This arrangement would have guaranteed the possession of land in Canaan for Jacob's family, but it would not have come to them as a gift from God, since the Israelites would be going against God's will by intermarrying with the Canaanites.

34:13-17 As was customary in their culture, Jacob's sons took an active part in approving their sister's marriage (v. 13; cf. 24:50).[3] They were correct in opposing the end in view: the mixing of the chosen seed with the seed of the Canaanites. Yet they were wrong in adopting the means that they chose to achieve their end. In their deception they show themselves to be "chips off the old block": Jacob. The Hivites negotiated in good faith, but the Jacobites renegotiated treacherously (vv.13-17; cf. Prov. 3:29; Amos 1:9).

> "… Jacob's sons are guilty of treating the sign of the covenant [circumcision] lightly and of dishonoring it."[4]

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[1]Leupold, 2:898.

[2]Aalders, p. 156.

[3]Thomson, 1:451.

[4]Leupold, 2:904.

> "Marriage was always preceded by betrothal, in which the bridegroom's family paid a *mhd* 'marriage present' to the bride's family (1 Sam 18:25). In cases of premarital intercourse, this still had to be paid to legitimize the union, and the girl's father was allowed to fix the size of the marriage present (Exod 22:15-16 [16-17]; limited by Deut 22:29 to a maximum of fifty shekels). Here it seems likely that Shechem is offering both a 'marriage present' to Jacob and 'a gift' to Dinah."[1]

34:18-24 We can explain the agreement of "the people of their city," including both "Hamor" (meaning "donkey," a valued and respected animal) and "Shechem" (v. 18), to undergo circumcision. Other nations besides Jacob's family practiced this rite at this time in history as an act of consecration.[2] Jacob was not suggesting that these men convert from one religion to another.[3] Normally circumcision was practiced on young adults, rather than on infants, though God told Abraham to circumcise the infants born in his family (17:12-14).

> It [circumcision] was "sometimes an initiation into marriageable status."[4]

Another reference to Jacob's great wealth appears in this story (v. 23). This is another testimony to God's faithfulness to His promises to bless Abraham's descendants.

34:25-29 Dinah, Simeon, and Levi were the children of Jacob and Leah, the "unloved wife." Simeon and Levi doubtless felt closer to Dinah, being full brothers and sister, than some of their half-brothers did. But Reuben, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun were also Leah's children, and thus Dinah's full brothers. The fact that only Simeon and Levi reacted as they did against the men of Shechem suggests that they responded with excessive recklessness (cf. 49:5-7).[5] Perhaps Jacob's indifference to Dinah's plight,

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 312-13.

[2]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:313-14.

[3]J. Milgrom, "Religious Conversion and the Revolt Model for the Formation of Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982):173.

[4]Kidner, p. 174.

[5]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 590.

evidenced by his lack of action, encouraged the violent overreaction of her brothers.[1]

While Simeon and Levi took the lead in this atrocity, all of Jacob's sons evidently participated with them in the looting of the city (v. 27; cf. vv. 28-29). This was only the first of several notorious incidents that took place at Shechem that the Bible records (cf. Judg. 9:30-49; Jer. 41:4-8; Hos. 6:9).

34:30-31 Jacob's distress arose because of two facts. His sons had committed murder and robbery, and his family had now broken a covenant—a very serious act in their society.

> "His [Jacob's] censure is more a peevish complaint."[2]
>
> "It is ironic to hear Jacob venting his disgust over Simeon's and Levi's failure to honor their word, especially in terms of its potential consequence for Jacob, for he had done exactly that on more than one occasion."[3]
>
> "Jacob's complaint to Simeon and Levi was utterly unworthy of a man of faith. It breathed the spirit of selfish fear from first to last."[4]

Deception had proceeded to murder and then to looting.

> "The crafty character of Jacob degenerated into malicious cunning in Simeon and Levi; and jealousy for the exalted vocation of their family, into actual sin."[5]
>
> "Of course, fear is natural in such a situation, but the reasons Jacob gives for damning his sons betray him. He does not condemn them for the massacre, for abusing the rite of circumcision, or even for breach of contract. Rather, he protests that the consequences of their action have made him unpopular. Nor does he seem worried by his

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 308-10.

[2]von Rad, p. 334.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 371.

[4]Morgan, *An Exposition …,* p. 27.

[5]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:315.

> daughter's rape or the prospect of intermarriage with the Canaanites. He is only concerned for his own skin."[1]

It is interesting that Simeon and Levi, when responding to Jacob, referred to Dinah as "our sister" (v. 31), rather than as "your daughter," which would have been more appropriate. This implies that, since Jacob had not showed enough concern for Dinah, her blood-brothers felt compelled to act in her defense. This is an early indication that Jacob's family was already dysfunctional and crumbling, which becomes obvious when Joseph's brothers turn on him, sell him as a slave, and lie to their father (37:12-36).

As a result of this sin, Jacob later passed over Simeon and Levi when he gave his final blessing to his sons (49:5-7). He favored Judah instead.

The significance of this chapter is fourfold at least:

1. It explains why Jacob passed over Simeon and Levi for special blessing just before he died.
2. It shows the importance of keeping the chosen seed separate from the Canaanites.[2]

> "The law [of Moses] said that Israel was not to intermarry with the Canaanites or make treaties with them but was to destroy them because they posed such a threat. This passage provides part of the rationale for such laws, for it describes how immoral Canaanites defiled Israel by sexual contact and attempted to marry for the purpose of swallowing up Israel."[3]

Noah's curse on Canaan and his seed had warned the rest of humanity that bad things would happen to people who mixed with the Canaanites (cf. 9:25-27).

> "People who live on the borderland between church and world are like those who lived in the old days on the borders between England and Scotland—they are never safe."[4]

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 316. Cf. 19:8.

[2]See Calum M. Carmichael, "Forbidden Mixtures," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:4 (1982):394-415.

[3]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 569.

[4]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 325.

3. It gives a reason for the sanctification of Jacob's household that follows (35:2-4).

4. It demonstrates the sovereign control of God.

> "While the story in this chapter operates at a level of family honor and the brothers' concern for their ravaged sister, the story nevertheless also carries along the theme that runs so clearly through the Jacob narratives, namely, that God works through and often in spite of the limited self-serving plans of human beings. The writer's purpose is not to approve these human plans and schemes but to show how God, in his sovereign grace, could still achieve his purpose through them."[1]

> "What message does such a sordid episode have in the Jacob-Joseph narratives? At this point forward, Genesis turns its attention to Jacob's sons, the progenitors of Israel's twelve tribes. After the tension of the Jacob-Esau struggle was alleviated in chap. 33's account of the twin's pacification, the author sets out to demonstrate the seedy character of Jacob's descendants, raising the specter that the promises are again in peril."[2]

Abraham had dealt honorably with the Hittites (ch. 23), and Isaac had behaved peacefully with the Philistines (2612-33). But now Jacob's sons became the aggressors in a conflict with the Hivites. Simeon and Levi's unrepentant treachery stands in stark contrast to Esau and Jacob's recent moral transformations. In contrast to the Isaac incident in chapter 27 (Jacob's deception of Isaac), this chapter contains no prayer, no divine revelation, no promised blessing, and no explicit mention of God.[3]

> "Jacob's move to Shechem set the stage for a series of setbacks. What should have been a period of blessing for Jacob and his family in the land of promise (31:3, 13) turned into one misfortune after another."[4]

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 200; and idem, "Genesis," p. 214.

[2]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 576-77.

[3]Ibid., p. 578.

[4]Brian N. Peterson, "'Jacob's Trouble': The Shechem Fiasco and the Breaking of Covenant in Genesis 34," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 176:703 (July-September 2019):285.

Young zealots, such as Simeon and Levi, can sometimes bring reproach on God through their misguided zeal. This can happen when spiritual leaders such as Jacob are indifferent to pagan defilement, and fail to act decisively against it.[1]

> "… this story shows Jacob's old nature reasserting itself, a man whose moral principles are weak, who is fearful of standing up for right when it may cost him dearly, who doubts God's power to protect, and who allows hatred to divide him from his children just as it had divided him from his brother."[2]

Many believers bring the wrath of unbelievers on themselves and on other believers by their ungodly behavior, as Jacob, Simeon, and Levi did.[3]

15. Jacob's return to Bethel and succeeding events ch. 35

After God reminded Jacob of his previous commitment to Him (28:20-22), the patriarch returned to Bethel in order to worship Yahweh, bringing closure to the past. There the LORD reconfirmed the promises to him, and completed his family with the birth of Benjamin. However, Jacob also experienced three deaths, and rebellion against himself by Reuben. The deaths of Deborah, Rachel, and Isaac signal the end of an era.

Jacob's renewed consecration to Yahweh 35:1-8

About 10 years had passed since Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, but he had not yet returned to Bethel to fulfill his vow there (28:20-22). He probably should have gone there immediately after making peace with Esau, rather than settling near Shechem. His negligence evidently was due in part to the continuing presence of the idols that Rachel—and probably others—had brought from Haran. Perhaps their allegiance to these gods had restrained Jacob's total commitment to Yahweh (cf. 1 Kings 11:3-4).

35:1 Elohim appeared to Jacob (the fourth time), and commanded him now to fulfill his vow (v. 1). This revelation encouraged Jacob to stop procrastinating. This is the first and only time that God commanded a patriarch to build an altar. This command constituted a test of Jacob's

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[1]For an interesting summary of post-biblical rabbinic traditions concerning the characters and events in this chapter, see Jeffrey K. Salkin, "Dinah, The Torah's Forgotten Woman," *Judaism* 35:3 (Summer 1986):284-89.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 318.

[3]For another discussion of this chapter, see Elizabeth H. P. Backfish, "Household Dynamics in Ancient Israel: Genesis 34 as a Case Study," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 179:714 (April-June 2022):163-79.

obedience, similar to Abraham's test when God instructed him to offer up "a burnt offering" on Mt. Moriah (22:2).

35:2-4 In preparation for his trip to Bethel, Jacob purged his household of idolatry—by literally burying Rachel's idols, along with all the other objects associated with the worship of these gods. He also purified them from the defilement of the blood his family had shed in Shechem (ch. 34).

> "They [Jacob and his family] also need to change their clothes, a ritual that symbolizes the transition into the realm of the holy since they are coming into the presence of God in Bethel."[1]

> "It is significant that Jacob called God the one 'who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone' (v. 3). That epithet [nickname] serves as a fitting summary of the picture of God that has emerged from the Jacob narratives. Jacob was in constant distress; yet in each instance God remained faithful to his promise and delivered him."[2]

The "oak" referred to here (v. 4) seems to have been "the oak of Moreh" (lit. "teacher"), where God had appeared to Abraham shortly after he had entered the land (12:6).

> "At the same spot, possibly prompted by Jacob's example, Joshua was one day to issue a very similar call to Israel (Josh. 24:23ff.)."[3]

> "It is noteworthy that there are certain things in connection with the spiritual life that must be entirely given up and destroyed, for it is impossible to sanctify or consecrate them. They must be buried and left behind, for they cannot possibly be devoted to the service of God. There are things that have to be cut off and cannot be consecrated. Books have to be burned (note xix. 19). Evil

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[1]Longman, "Genesis," p. 110.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 217.

[3]Kidner, p. 175.

> habits have to be broken. Sin must be put away. There are things that are beyond all reclamation."[1]

35:5-7 God blessed Jacob for his commitment, expressed in his burying the idols ("foreign gods") and earrings ("rings which were in their ears")—perhaps taken from the Shechemites—by placing the fear ("a great terror") of Jacob's family in the hearts of the Canaanites, whom they passed on their way to Bethel (cf. Prov. 16:7). Perhaps God used the memory of Simeon and Levi's fierce treatment of the Shechemites to cause the Canaanites to fear Jacob and his family.

> "Throughout his life Jacob has had to contend with his own fears—fear of God (28:17), fear of Laban (31:31), fear of Esau (32:8, 12 [Eng. 7, 11]). Nobody had been in fear of him. Angry, yes; fearful, no."[2]

Jacob faithfully fulfilled his vow to God at Luz, which he renamed "Bethel" ("House of God," v. 15). He named the place of his altar "El-Bethel" ("God of Bethel"), in memory of God's first revelation to him there. This has been called the first spiritual "revival" recorded in the Bible.

35:8 Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (cf. 24:59), must have been an important member of Jacob's household to merit this notice of her death by the writer. She may have left Beersheba with Jacob, or she may have joined him later, after the death of Rebekah. The reference to Deborah is probably a way of reminding the reader of Rebekah, and of alluding to Rebekah's death in a veiled manner.[3] This may have been appropriate in view of Rebekah's deception of Isaac (ch. 27).[4]

Yahweh's reconfirmation of the covenant 35:9-15

God then appeared again to Jacob at Bethel (the fifth revelation), after Jacob had fulfilled his vow to God and built an altar there. This revelation came 30 years after the first one to Jacob at Bethel. In this case, God appeared in visible (bodily) form ("God went up from him in the place," v. 13). In the former instance, Jacob had seen a vision.

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, pp. 331,

[2]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 377.

[3]Gary A. Rendsburg, "Notes on Genesis XXXV," *Vetus Testamentum* 34:3 (July 1984):361-65.

[4]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 473.

35:9-12 God now confirmed Jacob's name change (cf. 32:28). This new name, "Israel," was a pledge from God that He would do what He now promised Jacob: to give him numerous descendants and the whole land of Canaan.[1] Here God summed up all the long-range promises that He had made to Jacob at various times in his life.

> "The purpose of the second renaming is to erase the original negative connotation and to give the name Israel a more neutral or even positive connotation—the connotation it is to have for the remainder of the Torah. It does so by removing the notion of struggle associated with the wordplay in 23:28 and letting it stand in a positive light "[2]

God's use of His name "God Almighty" (*El Shaddai*) is significant in view of what God promised Jacob. It would take an omnipotent God to fulfill these promises (cf. 17:1-2). God expanded the former promises, and added to the significance of the name "Israel" (vv. 10-11; cf. 28:4, 13-15; 31:3, 13; 32:12, 28).

35:13-15 After God had departed from him, Jacob solemnized this occasion by setting up a second "memorial stone," which perpetuated the memory of God's faithfulness for the benefit of Jacob's descendants (cf. 28:18). He not only set the stone apart as special (consecrated it) by pouring oil on it, as he had done 30 years earlier, but he also made an a drink offering to God there, and he renamed the place "Bethel." The drink offering probably consisted of pouring some wine on the stone.[3] It constituted a personal sacrifice to God.

> "This was an act of dedication and worship throughout the ancient Near East."[4]

> "Bethel occupies something of the same focal place in Jacob's career that the birth of Isaac occupied for

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[1]See Chee-Chiew Lee, "[*Goim*] in Genesis 35:11 and the Abrahamic Promise of Blessings for the Nations," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:3 (September 2009):467-82.

[2]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch …*, p. 203. Cf. idem, "Genesis," pp. 217-18.

[3]*The Nelson …,* p. 68.

[4]Currid, p. 62.

> Abraham, testing his fluctuating obedience and his hold on the promise, for more than twenty years."[1]

God's blessing of Jacob when his dedication was complete illustrates the LORD's response to those who fully obey Him.

> "The importance of God's words to Jacob in vv. 11-12 cannot be overemphasized. First, God's words 'be fruitful and increase in number' recalled clearly the primeval blessing of Creation (1:28) and hence showed God to be still 'at work' in bringing about the blessing to all mankind through Jacob. Second, for the first time since 17:16 ('kings of peoples will come from her'), the mention is made of royalty ('kings,' v. 11) in the promised line. Third, the promise of the land, first given to Abraham and then to Isaac, was renewed here with Jacob (v. 12). Thus within these brief words several major themes of the book have come together. The primeval blessing of mankind was renewed through the promise of a royal offspring and the gift of the land."[2]

We can enjoy the fellowship with God that He created us to enjoy, only when we commit ourselves wholeheartedly to Him and obey His Word.

> "… if only we yield ourselves wholly and utterly to the hand of God, our lives, whatever the past may have been, shall be monuments, miracles, marvels of the grace of God."[3]

Still, all of Jacob's problems were not behind him.

> "Just as Abraham had two sons and only one was the son of promise, and just as Isaac had two sons and only one was the son of the blessing, so now Jacob, though he has twelve sons, has two wives (Leah and Rachel); and each has a son (Judah and Joseph) that can rightfully contend for the blessing. In the narratives that follow, the writer holds both sons, Joseph and Judah, before the readers as rightful heirs of the promise. As the Jacob narratives have already anticipated, in the end it was Judah, the son of Leah, not Joseph, the son of Rachel, that gained the blessing (49:8-12)."[4]

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[1]Kidner, p. 174.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 218.

[3]Ibid., p. 336.

[4]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 218.

The birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachel 35:16-21

This pericope is important in Genesis because it records the birth of Jacob's twelfth son. The notation of Rachel's death was probably included because it was an event that was vitally connected with Benjamin's birth.

35:16-17 Was Jacob disobedient to God when he left Bethel? God had told him to go to Bethel and "live there" ("dwell" [AV, NKJV, ESV] or "settle [NIV, TNIV, NRSV, HCSB, NEB] or "make your home" there [CEV], v. 1). This may have been a command to live there temporarily, while he fulfilled his vow. On the other hand, God may have wanted Jacob to establish permanent residence, to settle down there. This seems unlikely, however, since Jacob remained a semi-nomad.

35:18 *Ben-oni* means "Son of My Pain." *Oni* in Hebrew can mean either "trouble" or "wealth." In this case it means trouble. For Rachel, Benjamin's birth was a fatally painful experience. However, the birth of Jacob's twelfth son eased his sorrow over Rachel's death. He named his son "Benjamin," meaning "Son of the Right Hand" or "Son of My Good Fortune."[1] This is the only son that Jacob named, which suggests his renewed leadership of the family, at least over Rachel's sons, following his rededication at Bethel. Benjamin was born on land that later became part of his tribe's allotment.

35:19-20 Jacob buried Rachel "on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)." Later Jacob said, "Rachel died … on the journey, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath. I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)" (48:7). This burial site was evidently somewhere between Bethel, and "Ephrath," an older name for "Bethlehem" ("House of Bread," v. 19). Both Bethlehem and nearby Kiriath-jeraim ("City of Forests") became known as "Ephrath" (or Ephratha), because the clan of Ephrath settled in both towns (cf. 1 Chron. 2:50).

First Samuel 10:2 says that Rachel's tomb was "in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah," a site that is presently unknown but was evidently south of Bethel.[2] Jeremiah 31:15 says that Rachel wept for her children near Ramah, which was near the center of the territory of Benjamin, which was also south of Bethel, and north of both Jerusalem and

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[1]See James Muilenberg, "The Birth of Benjamin," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75 (1956):194-201.

[2]Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, pp. 113, 302.

Bethlehem. This is not a reference to where she died or was buried, however. Since the fourth century B.C., another site, still covered with a mausoleum a mile north of Bethlehem, in the territory of Judah, has been venerated as the burial place of Rachel.

The record of Benjamin's birth and Rachel's death demonstrates God's faithfulness in providing descendants. It also gives the origin (etiology) of the tribe of Benjamin, and it shows Rachel's important place in the growth of the chosen family.

The opening section of the Isaac *toledot* (25:19-26) contained the record of two births: Esau's and Jacob's. Its closing section (35:16-29) documented two deaths: Deborah's and Rachel's. Ironically Rachel, who had cried in desperation to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die" (30:1), died giving birth to the child that he gave her.

35:21 "The tower of Eder" (v. 21, *Migdal-eder*) was simply a watchtower that was built to help shepherds protect their flocks from robbers (v. 21; cf. 2 Kings 18:8; 2 Chron. 26:10; 27:4). Since the time of Jerome, the early church father who lived for a time in Bethlehem, tradition has held that this watchtower stood very close to Bethlehem.

The sin of Reuben 35:22a

This incident is important because it explains why Jacob's firstborn son did not inherit the birthright or the blessing that would normally have gone to him. It also brings to a close the *toledot* of Isaac, which began in 25:19.

Reuben may have wanted to prevent Rachel's maid, Bilhah, from succeeding Rachel as his father's favorite wife. He may have resented the fact that Jacob did not honor his mother, Leah.[1] Reuben's act constituted a claim against and challenge to his father, as well as being an immoral act (cf. Deut. 22:30; 2 Sam. 16:21-22; 1 Kings 2:13-25). In the ancient Near East, a man who wanted to assert his superiority over another man might do so by having sexual relations with that man's wife or concubine (cf. 2 Sam. 16:21-22). Ancient Near Easterners regarded this act of physical domination as an evidence of personal superiority.

[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 327.

> "It was a widely adopted practice in the ancient Near East for the firstborn son to inherit his father's concubines (see 2 Sam. 16:22). Reuben may have been asserting himself as the true heir of Jacob."[1]

A concubine was sometimes a slave with whom her owner had sexual relations. She enjoyed some of the privileges of a wife, and people sometimes called her a wife in patriarchal times, but she was not a wife in the full sense of the term.

> "Taking the concubine of one's predecessor was a perverted way of claiming to be the new lord of the bride."[2]

Reuben's act, therefore, demonstrated rebellion against Jacob's authority, as well as unbridled lust. It resulted in his losing his birthright as the firstborn of Jacob's sons. Judah and his descendants later obtained the right to rule as head of the Israelites, and Levi and his descendants eventually received the priestly leadership. The double portion of his father Jacob's inheritance went to Joseph, who realized it through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. 1 Chron. 5:1-2).

> "At an early stage in the narrative Reuben had played some small part in the all too brief restoration to his mother of her conjugal rights (Gen. XXX. 14ff.), but now, at the end of the Jacob narrative, it is by his agency that the supplanter is well and truly supplanted."[3]

As at Shechem, Jacob appears to have reacted passively at this time. Moses wrote that Jacob heard of Reuben's act, but not that he did anything about it.

A summary of Jacob's family 35:22b-26

This paragraph is important because it records the entrance of Jacob into his father's inheritance.

Jacob had left Beersheba with only a staff in his hand. Now he returned with 12 sons, a large household, and very much livestock. The most important aspect of God's blessing was his 12 sons, grouped here with their four mothers, through whom God would proceed to fulfill His promises to the patriarchs.

Benjamin was not born in Paddan-aram, of course, but near Bethlehem (vv. 16-18). Therefore the statement that Jacob's 12 sons were born in Paddan-aram (v. 26) must be

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[1]Currid, p. 62.

[2]Jordan, p. 65.

[3]George G. Nicol, "Genesis XXIX. 32 and XXXV. 22a: Reuben's Reversal," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31:2 (October 1980):538.

understood as a general one, possibly a synecdoche (in which "the sons" is used generally).

The death of Isaac 35:27-29

Jacob presumably visited Isaac in Hebron on various occasions following his return from Paddan-aram. But on this occasion he moved his family to his father's encampment and evidently remained there as Isaac's heir.

With the record of Jacob entering into his father's inheritance, the history of Isaac's life concludes. He died several years later, and was buried in the cave of Machpelah near Hebron (49:29-31). Isaac lived for 12 years after Jacob's relocation to Hebron. He probably shared Jacob's grief over the apparent death of Joseph, but he died shortly before Joseph's promotion in Egypt.[1]

> "The end of the Jacob narratives is marked by the death of his father, Isaac. The purpose of this notice is not simply to record Isaac's death but rather to show the complete fulfillment of God's promise to Jacob (28:21). According to Jacob's vow, he had asked that God watch over him during his sojourn and return him safely to the house of his father. Thus the conclusion of the narrative marks the final fulfillment of these words as Jacob returned to the house of his father, Isaac, before he died."[2]

Chapter 35 teaches us that it is very important that God's people follow through and keep the commitments that they have made concerning participation in His program. When they commit themselves to Him in purity and worship, He commits Himself to blessing them.

D. WHAT BECAME OF ESAU 36:1—37:1

Moses included this relatively short, segmented genealogy in the sacred record to show God's faithfulness in multiplying Abraham's seed, as He had promised. It also provides connections with the descendants of Esau referred to later in the history of Israel.

Esau's three wives and five sons 36:1-8

After the standard title that announces a new *toledot* section in Genesis (v. 1), Moses recorded a brief list of Esau's three wives and five sons that were born to him in Canaan

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[1]See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:320, for a chronology of these events; and Fruchtenbaum, p. 623, for a chronology of the patriarchs.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 220.

of Canaanite wives (vv. 2-5). Then he described Esau's move from Canaan to Seir (vv. 6-8; cf. 13:5-13).

Among his descendants were the Edomites (v. 8) and the Amalekites (v. 12). Lot, Ishmael, and Esau all passed out of the line of promise. This list also includes earlier inhabitants of the area later known as "Edom" (lit. "Red") whom Esau brought under his control.[1]

Different names of Esau's wives appear here as compared with what Moses recorded earlier (cf. 26:34; 28:9). Women often received new names when they married. Also, people added surnames to given names later in life.[2]

Esau married a Hittite (v. 2), a Hivite (v. 2) who was a descendant of a Horite (Hurrian, v. 20), and an Ishmaelite (v. 3). Some commentators connected the Horites with cave dwellers, since the Hebrew word for cave is *hor*.[3]

> "Recent archaeological discoveries have shown that these people were not to be explained as cave-dwellers but are to be identified with an important group in the Near East in Patriarchal times. The homeland of the Horites (Hurrians) was apparently the region south of the Caucasus. From there they swarmed into northern Mesopotamia after 2400 B.C., and in the following years Hurrian names are found to be common in the archaeological records even in southern Mesopotamia."[4]

> "A man's choice in his marriage, more than anything else in this life, makes it manifest what that man is, and where his heart is."[5]

> "It is difficult, if not impossible, to found a God-fearing family without a wife who fears God, for a mother has a tremendous influence on her children."[6]

Esau's sons were born in Canaan and then moved out of the Promised Land to Seir. Jacob's sons, except for Benjamin, were born outside Canaan in Paddan-aram, and later moved into the Promised Land.

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[1]*The NET2 Bible* note on 36:1.

[2]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:321.

[3]E.g., Speiser, p. 283; Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 223.

[4]Free, p. 72.

[5]Whyte, 1:101.

[6]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 66.

Esau's five sons and 10 grandsons 36:9-14

> "That there are two *toledot* headings for Esau makes his treatment in two consecutive sections exceptional in the book. The first section [36:1-8] focuses on family and homeland, and the second [36:9—37:1] centers on his offspring as a developing nation. These two sections are flanked by the major narrative *toledot* sections of Isaac (25:19—35:29) and Jacob (37:2—50:26)."[1]

> "This heading [v. 9], virtually repeating 36:1, betrays what follows as a later insertion into Genesis …"[2]

What follows in this section repeat the names of Esau's five sons and records the names of his 10 grandsons.

The descendants of Kenaz (vv. 11, 15) later affiliated with the tribe of Judah.[3] The descendants of Amalek (v. 12) separated from the other Edomites and became an independent people early in their history.[4] A group of them settled in what later became southern Judah, as far as Kadesh and the border of Egypt (14:7; Num. 13:29; 14:43, 45). Another branch of the tribe settled in the hill country of Ephraim that was in central Canaan (Judg. 12:15). The largest group of Amalekites lived in Arabia to the southeast of Canaan and Edom. They united on occasion with their neighbors: the Midianites (Judg. 6:3; 7:12) and the Ammonites (Judg. 3:13). Saul defeated the Amalekites (1 Sam. 14:48; 15:2), as David did after him (1 Sam. 27:8; 30:1; 2 Sam 8:12). Some Simeonites finally exterminated them during Hezekiah's reign (1 Chron. 4:42-43).

Chiefs descended from Esau 36:15-19

This list is almost identical to the one in verses 10 through 14. It may represent the line of political rulers that descended from Esau.[5]

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[1]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 632.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 337.

[3]J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, pp. 391-92.

[4]See the chart illustrating their family relationship among my comments on 25:1-6.

[5]Wilson, p. 179.

Chiefs of the Horites 36:20-30

This is a list of the Horite chiefs and their clans that the Edomites defeated. The Edomites took possession of the Horites' territory (cf. Deut. 12:2), but they also intermarried with some of the Horites.[1]

> "What Israelites did to Canaanites, Esauites did to Horites. Thus Gen. 36 is moving backward from the conquerors (vv. 9-19) to the conquered (vv. 20-30)."[2]

Kings of Edom 36:31-39

Some scholars believe that this is a list of the kings who ruled over Edom during its earliest history—before Moses (cf. Num. 20:14). Moses could have written "before any king reigned over the sons of Israel" (v. 31) since he knew that kings would eventually arise in Israel, because God had promised them (17:6, 16; 35:11). Other writers believe that these kings ruled before the Israelites first had kings—before King Saul—in order to show that the Edomites were also a powerful people with kings, even before there were kings in Israel.[3] Either of these two views could be true.

The presence of kings in Edom is further proof of God's blessing on Esau, one of Abraham's descendants. This list of Edomite kings demonstrates the partial fulfillment of God's promises that kings would come from Abraham's loins.

> "We may suppose it was a great trial to the faith of God's Israel to hear of the pomp and power of the kings of Edom, while they were bond-slaves in Egypt [assuming that Moses wrote Genesis before the Exodus]; but those that look for great things from God must be content to wait for them; God's time is the best time."[4]

> "What is most interesting about the king list is that it reflects an elective kingship rather than a dynastic one."[5]

> "These 'kings' may have indeed been charismatic individuals who, like the judges, assumed their office without regard to heredity."[6]

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[1]See Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 338.

[2]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 397.

[3]See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 656.

[4]Matthew Henry, p. 57.

[5]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 400.

[6]Ibid.

A final list of Edomite chiefs 36:40-43

This appears to be a summary list of the chiefs descended from Esau.

> "It has been suggested that this is a list of the administrative districts of Edom, since some of the names are place names."[1]
>
> "It might seem unusual that such detail concerning the descendants of Esau be included, but the relationship between Esau and Jacob, and then between the nations of Edom and Israel, is a theme of the entire Old Testament."[2]

Esau's brother 37:1

> "Verse 1 [of chapter 37] belongs structurally to the preceding narrative as a conclusion to the Jacob story. It shows Jacob back in the Land of Promise but still dwelling there as a sojourner like his father before him. The writer's point is to show that the promises of God had not yet been completely fulfilled and that Jacob, as his fathers before him, was still awaiting the fulfillment."[3]
>
> "Theologically, the whole narrative cycle of Jacob and Esau [chs. 25—36] is determined by the concept of blessing. The object of the rivalry between the brothers is a blessing. Even the interlude of Jacob and Laban deals with this blessing (the consequences of the blessing in the fertility of Jacob's flock, the effect of the blessing beyond the individual receiving it); the central section of this interlude, which deals with the birth and naming of Jacob's children, is concerned with the blessing of children."[4]

Perhaps the major lesson of this genealogy is that secular greatness develops faster than spiritual greatness. Consequently the godly must wait patiently for the fulfillment of God's promises.

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 340.

[2]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 259. For archaeological discoveries relating to the Edomites, see Itzhaq Beit-Arieh, "New Light on the Edomites," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 14:2 (March-April 1988):28-41.

[3]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 225. Cf. Heb. 11:39.

[4]Westermann, *The Promises* …, p. 91.

E. WHAT BECAME OF JACOB 37:2—50:26

Jacob and his family were living near Hebron when Joseph's brothers sold him, and he may have continued living there until he moved to Egypt ("the land where his father had lived," 37:1; cf. 35:27).

Here begins the tenth and last *toledot* in Genesis. Jacob remains a major character throughout Genesis. Moses recorded his death in chapter 49. Nevertheless Joseph replaces him as the focus of the writer's attention at this point.[1] These chapters are not entirely about Joseph however. The writer showed interest in all the sons of Jacob, and among them, especially Judah.[2]

> "The emphasis now shifts from Jacob's personal struggles to receive the blessing promised to Abraham and Isaac, to the events in Jacob's life that lead up to the formation of Israel as a nation."[3]

> "In structure, the Joseph story is quite different from the preceding material centering on Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Whereas the latter takes the form, predominantly, of small, self-contained passages, the story of Joseph resembles a coherent novella [short novel], with a subtle and well-crafted plot. Its theology, too, is different. Whereas the patriarchal narrative is replete with appearances of God or His messengers, and oracles from them, Joseph never sees or hears God or His messengers (the only direct revelation in these chs comes to Jacob, in 46.1-4. Rather, God works here in a hidden way, secretly guiding the course of human events, even bringing good out of human evil (50.20). Lastly, whereas the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob take place in Canaan and Mesopotamia, the novella of Joseph and his brothers takes place mostly in Egypt. The events that result in the return to the promised land will begin only after Joseph's death."[4]

The story of Joseph also links the history of the patriarchs with their settlement in Egypt.

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[1]For some enriching insights into the similarities between the stories of Jacob and Joseph, see Peter Miscall, "The Jacob and Joseph Stories As Analogies," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 6 (February 1978):28-40.

[2]See Bryan Smith, "The Central Role of Judah in Genesis 37—50," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:646 (April-June 2005):158-74.

[3]Aalders, 2:179.

[4]Levenson, p. 69.

> "The Joseph story develops the theme of the Pentateuch by showing the gradual fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham in 12:1-3. In particular, it shows how God blesses the nations through the descendants of Abraham [cf. 50:20]."[1]

> "The theme of the Joseph narrative concerns God's hidden and decisive power which works in and through but also against human forms of power. A 'soft' word for that reality is *providence*. A harder word for the same reality is *predestination*. Either way God is working out his purpose through and in spite of Egypt, through and in spite of Joseph and his brothers."[2]

> "The story of Joseph and his brothers encourages us to recognize the sovereignty of God in the affairs of life and to trust His promises no matter how dark the day may be."[3]

Richard Patterson concluded that the genre of the Joseph story in chapters 37 through 50 is a "court narrative." He provided many observations on the narrative features of the story.[4]

> "The Joseph story, though different in style from that of the patriarchs, continues the theme of the patriarchal narratives—God overcomes obstacles to the fulfillment of the promise."[5]

W. F. Albright commented on the Joseph narrative from a literary point of view:

> "Nothing in the ancient Near East can equal the dramatic portrayal of Joseph's career—Jacob's grief, Joseph's purity and generosity, the shame and remorse of his brethren."[6]

Herbert Wolf's observation was theological:

> "Rarely has God's providence been so evident in such an extended passage."[7]

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 344.

[2]Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 293.

[3]Wiersbe, pp. 158-59.

[4]Richard D. Patterson, "Joseph in Pharaoh's Court," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:654 (April-June 2007):148-64.

[5]Longman and Dillard, p. 60.

[6]Albright, *Archaeology and …,* p. 23.

[7]Wolf, p. 121.

The books of Ruth and Esther also emphasize divine providence. But human responsibility is as much a revelation of this section as divine sovereignty.

William Newell and A. C. Gaebelein stressed the typological significance of Joseph's story:

> "'The sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow them' [1 Pet. 1:11] is the theme which his story so wondrously sets forth."[1]

> "The Holy Spirit has devoted more space to the life of Joseph than He devoted to Abraham. The reason for this must be sought in the fact that the story of Joseph foreshadows the story of Christ."[2]

This section of Genesis is quite long because it illustrates so fully and beautifully, in narrative form, the whole process of divine redemption that the rest of Scripture unpacks.

1. God's choice of Joseph 37:2-11

Joseph faithfully served his father, even bringing back a bad report of his brothers' behavior to him, for which Jacob expressed his love by giving Joseph preferential treatment. However, his brothers envied and hated him. God, through a dream, confirmed His choice of Joseph as leader of his family—an event that annoyed and perplexed Jacob and infuriated Joseph's brothers.

37:2 Here begins the *toledot* of Jacob. Though Joseph is the main character in this section of Genesis, it is the story of what happened to Jacob.

The description of 17-year-old Joseph "pasturing the flock with his brothers" prefigures Joseph's later shepherding role in relation to his brothers, after they became dependent on him. David also tended sheep in preparation for his role as a leader of people.

Joseph was tending his father's flock with his brothers, "the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah." Why Moses did not also mention the sons of Leah remains a mystery. Perhaps they had other responsibilities at this time. Reuben and Judah, who play important roles in a later incident (vv. 12-36), were sons of Leah.

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[1]Newell, p. 95. See pp. 95-97 for 18 parallels between Joseph and Christ.

[2]Gaebelein, 1:1:76.

Joseph's "bad report" implies that the brothers were participating in serious wicked behavior. This is not hard to believe, in view of their former treatment of the Shechemites, and their later treatment of Joseph and Jacob.

37:3 The use of the name "Israel" suggests that Jacob's special love for Joseph had a divine origin and was part of God's plan for the chosen family. However, Jacob's favoritism of Joseph over his other sons was wrong, and it fueled the brothers' hatred of Joseph. Favoritism had a long history in Jacob's family (Isaac's preference for Esau, Rebekah's for Jacob, and Jacob's preference for Rachel). In every case it created major problems.

"Son of his old age" means "wise son," or "son of wisdom." Joseph was "old" (mature) for his years; he had the wisdom of age in his youth. Joseph was born when Jacob was 91 years old, but he was not Jacob's youngest son. One of Joseph's brothers was younger than he, namely, Benjamin.

The "multicolored tunic" was probably also a long robe. The sons of nobles wore long robes with long sleeves and ornamentation, like Joseph's, as did Tamar, King David's daughter (2 Sam. 13:18).

> "It was a mark of distinction that carried its own meaning, for it implied that exemption from labor which was the peculiar privilege of the heir or prince of the Eastern clan."[1]

During a visit to Lebanon, I observed a gentleman with a very long fingernail on his fifth finger. I later learned that it identified him as a man who did not have to work with his hands, which would have been impossible with such a long fingernail. This is similar to what Joseph's "tunic" said about his status, though, of course, Joseph did do manual labor.

37:4 Such a garment as Joseph wore identified the possessor of the family birthright. This sign of Jacob's love for Joseph constantly irritated the jealous brothers. Sibling rivalry continues to mark Genesis—from Cain

[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 356.

and Abel, to Jacob and Esau, to Joseph and his brothers. Leah "was hated," and her sons "hated" (cf. 29:31, 33).

> "The end of the verse [v. 4] can be translated more literally as, 'they could not (even) say "Shalom" to him.'"[1]

> "Jacob's partiality for Rachel and for her two sons doomed his family to the same strife he had experienced in his father's household."[2]

> "The story of Jacob features rocks; that of Joseph features robes (37:3, 23; 39:12; 41:14). These palpable objects symbolize something of the characters' social and/or spiritual situations."[3]

37:5-11 Joseph's dreams were revelations from God (cf. 40:8; 41:16, 25, 28). Joseph, his brothers, and his father did not grasp their significance fully until God brought them to pass. Joseph regarded his dreams as important, however, and therefore did not hesitate to make them known to his family.

> "Joseph was more of a prophet than a politician, else he would have kept this to himself, when he could not but know that his brethren did already hate him and that this would but the more exasperate them."[4]

> "This is the first dream in the Bible in which God does not speak (cf. 20:3; 28:12-15; 31:11, 24). It forms a transition in the dominant means of God's revelation from theophany in Genesis 1—11, to dreams and visions in Genesis 12—35, and now to providence in Genesis 36—50. These three stages resemble the three parts of TaNaK (i.e., the OT). In the *Torah* ('Law'), God speaks to Moses in theophany; in the *Nebiim* ('Prophets'), he speaks in dreams and visions;

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[1]Levenson, p. 69.

[2]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p, 689.

[3]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 499.

[4]Matthew Henry, p. 58.

> and in the *Ketubim* ('Writings'), he works mostly through providence."[1]

In the first dream (v. 7), God revealed that Joseph's brothers would come to him for bread (food), symbolized by the sheaves of grain. Note the agricultural motif in both the dream and its fulfillment. His brothers did not fail to see Joseph's position of superiority over them (v. 8), and they resented, still more, humiliation from him.

In the second dream (v. 9), which was even grander than the first, Joseph was himself supreme over the whole house of Israel, symbolized by the sun and moon and eleven stars. The repetition of the main point of the dream confirmed that what God predicted would certainly happen (cf. 41:32). (Repetition in biblical narratives is a literary device that usually emphasizes certainty.) Jacob took note of these revelations, but he resented the possibility that his son might be in a position of authority over him (vv. 10-11). Many people today, also, are offended by God's election of some to special prominence and usefulness, especially close family members.

Some interpreters of this incident have concluded that Joseph should not have shared his dreams with his family, and others have believed that he should have. Whether he should or should not have done so, he did it.

> "Joseph is depicted as morally good but immature and bratty. His tattling, boasting, and robe parading inflames his brother's hatred against him."[2]

> "God's future agent and mouthpiece in Egypt could hardly make a worse impression on his first appearance: spoiled brat, talebearer, braggart."[3]

Textual references cannot establish whether Joseph at this time realized that his dreams were divine prophecies or not. People often regarded

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 500.

[2]Ibid., p. 498.

[3]Sternberg, p. 98.

dreams as divine revelations in the ancient East.[1] If Joseph did so, the fact that he related them boldly to his family may indicate his faith.[2]

> "More than likely, the dream, and its recounting, is to be understood as an unsuspecting prophecy uttered by Joseph. God has a plan for his life, a destiny in his future, and Joseph spontaneously shares the enthusiasm that revelation spawns."[3]

> "A vision was for the ancients so important and obligatory that a demand to keep it tactfully to oneself would not have occurred to them."[4]

God chooses faithful, righteous individuals for positions of leadership, but those chosen may experience the jealous hatred of their brethren. Note the repetition of the key word "hated" in this section (vv. 4, 5, 8).

> "Divine sovereignty is not a rigid detailed blueprint that manipulates and straitjackets human behavior."[5]

2. The sale of Joseph into Egypt 37:12-36

Joseph's brothers met his second recorded visit to them with great hostility. They plotted to kill him, and thereby render his dreams impossible to fulfill. For practical reasons, they decided to sell him, and to deceive Jacob into thinking that a wild beast had killed him. In spite of their plan, however, God kept Joseph alive and safe in Egypt. Ironically, by selling Joseph into Egypt, his brothers actualized the dreams they sought to invalidate. The focus of this pericope is deceit, which is a recurring feature of the Jacob and Joseph narratives.

37:12-17 It was not uncommon for shepherds to lead their flocks many miles from home in search of pasture. Shechem was about 60 miles north of Hebron, where Jacob lived. Jacob owned land there (33:19). Dothan was 17 miles farther north.

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[1]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 600.

[2]Cf. Erdman, p. 113.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 410.

[4]von Rad, pp. 351-52.

[5]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 692.

It may seem strange that Joseph's brothers would return to Shechem after their family had become "repulsive" in the eyes of the people who lived there (cf. 34:30). Perhaps the "great terror" of Jacob's family still rested on the locals (cf. 35:5). Or perhaps Joseph's brothers were bold men who did not fear courting danger.[1] Or perhaps, since they were shepherds pasturing their flocks in the fields, they had very little contact with the people who lived in and around Shechem.

37:18-20 The extreme measures that Joseph's brothers considered, in order to silence him, have led some commentators to conclude that it was not just personal hatred springing from jealousy that motivated them (cf. Cain, 4:9). They may have actually wanted to alter the will of God as revealed in Joseph's dreams as well.

> "The brothers' hate is therefore a rebellion against the matter contained in the dreams, against the divine power itself, standing behind them, who had given the dreams. The expression usually translated by 'the dreamer' [v. 19] means much more than our English word, namely, the one empowered to prophetic dreams …"[2]

37:21-24 Reuben, as the firstborn, looked after his father's interests, and, knowing what sorrow Joseph's death would bring to Jacob, sought to spare Joseph's life and release him from the pit later. Perhaps Reuben wanted to get back in the good graces of his father (cf. 35:22). Joseph's place of confinement was evidently a dry well or cistern (cf. 40:15).

> "Cisterns were large holes in the earth, formed like bottles, to store the winter rain for the summer; and one could put a man in them quite easily (cf. Jer. 38.6)."[3]

> "That dreadful pit in Dothan was the beginning of Joseph's salvation."[4]

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[1]Leupold, 2:961.

[2]von Rad, p. 353.

[3]Ibid., p. 354. See also Currid, p. 65.

[4]Whyte, 1:120.

> "The clothing and unclothing of Joseph mark pivotal moments in the course of the narrative (cf. 37.3; 39.15-18; 41.14, 42)."[1]

37:25 Dothan stood on a caravan route that ran from Damascus to Egypt.[2] The next time the brothers would eat a meal in Joseph's presence, he would be sitting at the head of the head table (43:32-34).

37:26-27 Judah, like Reuben, did not relish killing Joseph. Yet he was not willing to let him go free either. Probably Judah dreaded the prospect of Joseph receiving the rights of the firstborn. His suggestion that the brothers sell Joseph implies that he knew slave trading was common in Egypt. The price agreed on for Joseph, 20 shekels of silver, was the same price that God later specified, under the Mosaic Law, that Israelites should pay for a slave between the ages of five and 20 years old (Lev. 27:5). These prices were evidently standard in the ancient Near East at this time. Shepherds employed by others earned about eight shekels a year.[3]

> "Favorable circumstances are not always the will of God."[4]

> "If Joseph steps onto the pages of sacred history as a bratty do-gooder, Judah enters as a slave trader who has turned his back on Abraham's God-given vision. He is callous toward his father and cynical about the covenant family."[5]

The significance of the action of Joseph's brothers was greater than may appear at first.

> "They had not only sold their brother, but in their brother they had cast out a member of the seed promised and given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from the fellowship of the chosen family, and sinned against the God of salvation and His promises."[6]

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[1]Levenson, p. 70.

[2]See Ammon Ben-Tor, "The Trade Relations of Palestine in the Early Bronze Age," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 29:1 (February 1986):1-27.

[3]von Rad, p. 356.

[4]Thomas, *Through the …,* p. 62.

[5]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 508.

[6]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:332.

37:28 Moses referred to the traders that bought Joseph as both "Ishmaelites" (vv. 25, 27, 28) and "Midianites" (v. 28). Probably the caravan contained a mixture of both of these groups of Abraham's descendants, who made their living as nomadic merchants (cf. 39:1; Judg. 8:24). Residents of this area sometimes used these names interchangeably. "Ishmaelite" is the more generic term for a Bedouin nomad. It became a general designation for desert tribes. "Midianite" is the more specific ethnic term.[1] Alternatively, "Ishmaelites" may designate a league of tribes, with the "Midianites" constituting just one tribe in it (cf. 25:13-17).[2] Rather than being agents of death, the traders proved to be God's instruments of deliverance.

> "This ["twenty shekels of silver"] was a common price for a male between 2 and 20 years of age in the first half of the second millennium BC. In laws 116, 214, and 252 of the Code of Hammurabi, this was the value of a slave."[3]

37:29-30 Reuben was absent during the sale of Joseph. When he returned and found Joseph missing, he felt great distress ("he tore his garments," v. 29; cf. Jer. 31:15). Jacob would have held Reuben responsible for Joseph's safety, since Reuben was the oldest of the brothers. Joseph's brothers tried to cover one sin with another.

> "The message accompanying the cloak [v. 32] has a certain blunt brutality about it. They did not try to soften the blow."[4]

37:31-32 Jacob had deceived his father with the *skin* of a goat (27:16). Now his sons were deceiving him with the *blood* of a goat (v. 31).

37:33-34 Had Jacob believed more strongly in God's revelations through Joseph's dreams, he might not have jumped to the conclusion that Joseph was dead, and his sorrow might not have been as great (cf. 2 Sam. 18:33). Jacob's fears were groundless, but he did not realize this because he

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[1]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 423.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 355.

[3]Currid, p. 65.

[4]Leupold, 2:973.

chose, in this instance, to live by sight rather than by faith. Note that Moses referred to him as "Jacob" here, not "Israel."

37:35 "The first hint of the concept of future life [in Scripture] is found in the words of Jacob, speaking of Joseph, whom he thought to be dead: 'I will go down to Sheol to my son mourning' (Gen. 37:35)."[1]

The translation in the quotation above ("I will go down to Sheol to my son mourning"), which some English translations have, can be understood to mean that Jacob's son was mourning in his grave. The translation "I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son" (NASB, cf. NET2) is clearer.

37:36 The Pharaoh referred to was probably Ammenemes II (1929-1895 B.C.), and the capital of Egypt during this period (the twelfth dynasty) was Memphis. This was where Joseph was taken. Potiphar, as Pharaoh's bodyguard captain, would have been in charge of the king's executioners, who carried out the capital sentences ordered by Pharaoh. The name "Potiphar" is a shortened form of "Potiphera" (41:45), meaning "He Whom Ra [the sun-god] Has Given." The meaning of the Hebrew word *saris*, translated "captain" changed in meaning in the first millennium B.C. to "eunuch."[2] Josephus called Potiphar Pharaoh's chief cook, which may or may not be correct.[3]

This chapter is the first of many, in the record of Joseph's experiences, that demonstrates God's ability to cause the "wrath of mankind" to "praise" Him (Ps. 76:10). He can make even bad situations work for the accomplishment of His purposes and for the blessing of His elect (Rom. 8:28).

> "Envy is the root of almost every sin against our brethren. And whenever it is harbored, there is an end of all peace, rest, and satisfaction. Envy is 'the rottenness of the bones' (Prov. xiv. 30), and no one can stand against it (Prov. xxvii. 4). 'Where envying is, there is confusion and every evil work' (James iii. 16)."[4]

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[1]Merrill C. Tenney, *The Reality of the Resurrection*, p. 25.

[2]Kitchen, *Ancient Orient …*, pp. 115-66.

[3]Josephus, *Antiquities of …*, 2:4:1 and 2:5:4. See Magen Broshi, "The Credibility of Josephus," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1982):379-384.

[4]Thomas, *Genesis*, pp. 361-62.

> "The Genesis account presents Joseph as a very unusual young man, possessed of a strong and sterling character, of a high morality and fidelity to God and his superiors. He was also characterized by gentleness in human relations. Remarkably, Joseph's spiritual and moral strength does not appear to be based on or related to God's periodic and direct revelations, as was true of Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. [This is debatable.] Presumably then Jacob must have put a lot of character building truth into the young man's life at an early time. It does not appear that he could have obtained such information from any other source. If this is the case, Jacob did a much better job with Joseph than with his other sons."[1]

> "They [Joseph's older brothers] had been brought up under the influence of the old Jacob, while Joseph had been the companion of the changed Jacob or 'Israel.'"[2]

Joseph's motives are not completely clear in the text. Consequently, students of his life have made judgments about his character that are both positive and negative. Most have concluded that he was one of the greatest men in history.[3] A few have contested this view and believed that he was selfish and manipulative.[4] I believe the textual evidence favors the former view primarily, though some of Joseph's early actions may have been unwise, at best, and arrogant at worst.

An important lesson of this chapter is that people who serve faithfully, as unto the LORD, often experience severe persecution, but God will preserve them so that they can fulfill their God-given destiny.

3. Judah and Tamar ch. 38

This chapter at first seems out of place, since it interrupts the story of Joseph. But we must remember that this is the *toledot* of Jacob. This is the story of what happened to him and his whole family, not just Joseph. The central problem with which the chapter deals is childlessness. The events of the chapter must span at least 20 years, a long period probably during which Joseph was lost to his family (cf. 37:2; 41:46-47; 45:6).

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[1]H. Vos, p. 134.

[2]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 355.

[3]See Thomas Mann's 1,600-page *Joseph and His Brothers*.

[4]E.g., Maurice Samuel, *Certain People of the Book*; idem, "Joseph—The Brilliant Failure," *Bible Review* 2:1 (Spring 1986):38-51, 68.

> "Joseph was seventeen when he was sold and thirty years old when he was elevated to the throne, which gives us thirteen years. When you add the seven years of plenty and the two years of famine, you have twenty-two years before Joseph was reconciled to his brothers. That's plenty of time for Judah to marry, beget three sons, bury two sons and a wife, and get involved with Tamar. If his marriage had occurred before Joseph's exile, you have even more time available."[1]

Leah's oldest sons were bad men. In chapter 34 we saw Simeon and Levi massacring the inhabitants of Shechem. In chapter 35 we saw Reuben defiling his father's bed. And now in chapter 38 we see Judah having relations with a supposed prostitute and trying to cover it up. Judah has been called a prodigal son of Jacob.[2]

Judah tried unsuccessfully to ensure the levirate (brother-in-law) rights of his daughter-in-law Tamar (whose name means "Palm"). As a last resort to obtain her legally rightful child, Tamar deceived Judah into having sexual intercourse with her by masquerading as a prostitute. She thereby fulfilled her right to become the mother of Judah's children. She gave birth to twins, the younger of which displaced his older brother in an unusual birth.

> "The following sketch from the life of Judah is intended to point out the origin of the three leading families of the future princely tribe in Israel [Shelah, Perez, and Zerah] and at the same time to show in what danger the sons of Jacob would have been of forgetting the sacred vocation of their race, through marriages with Canaanitish women, and of perishing in the sin of Canaan, if the mercy of God had not interposed, and by leading Joseph into Egypt prepared the way for the removal of the whole house of Jacob into that land, and thus protected the family, just as it was expanding into a nation, from the corrupting influence of the manners and customs of Canaan."[3]

This chapter records the compromise of the Israelites, specifically Judah, with two Canaanites—Shua and Tamar—resulting in the confusion of seed: the chosen people mixing with the condemned. Like Esau, Judah chose a wife from the women of the land, even one of the accursed Canaanites (cf. 24:3-4; 27:46—28:2). This shocking and shameful story is perhaps the basis for the prohibition against mixing various kinds of

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[1]Wiersbe, p. 145.

[2]See David Wyrtzen, *Unexpected Grace*, pp. 45-54.

[3]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:338-39.

seed, yoking two different kinds of animals together, weaving two kinds of thread into cloth, and so forth, in the Mosaic Law.[1]

> "One gets the distinct impression that ever since the Dinah incident (ch. 34) Jacob has less and less control over the behavior of his family."[2]

38:1-5 Judah visited his friend Hirah who lived in or near the town of Adullam, which was not far from Hebron (cf. Josh. 15:35; 1 Sam. 22:1). On this visit he met and eventually married a Canaanite woman who was the daughter of a man named Shua. Moses did not give the woman's name, which, in the Old Testament, is sometimes an indication of disrespect. This woman bore Judah three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. "Chezib" is evidently the name of the town where they lived.

38:6-8 Judah arranged for his son Er to marry a woman named "Tamar." But Er was wicked and died prematurely. Then Judah instructed his second son, Onan, to marry Tamar and to "raise up a child for your brother."

Levirate marriage (the marriage of a man to his deceased brother's wife to provide his brother with an heir) was a common custom in the ancient Near East at this time. It was common also in Asia, Africa, and other areas, but it evidently originated in Mesopotamia.[3] The Mosaic Law did not abolish it but restricted it in Israel in order to preserve the sanctity of marriage (cf. Deut. 25:5-10).

38:9 Onan's refusal to give Tamar a child not only demonstrated a lack of love for his deceased brother. It also revealed Onan's selfish heart that wanted for himself what would legally have gone to his elder brother's heir. If Tamar had borne Onan a son, that child would have been the perpetuator of Er's name, legacy, family line, and inheritance. Onan thereby would have fulfilled his "duty" to "raise up a child" for his brother (cf. Ruth 4:5, 21-22).

> "The enormity of Onan's sin is in its studied outrage against the family, against his brother's widow and against his own body. The standard English versions fail to make

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[1]Cf. Carmichael, pp. 394-415.

[2]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 433.

[3]de Vaux, pp. 37-38. See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 705-10, for an excursus on levirate marriage.

> clear that this was his persistent practice. *When* (9) should be translated 'whenever.'"[1]

38:10 God judged Onan's sin severely, because descendants were important in His plans for the Israelite patriarchs—not because he practiced birth control. God leaves the choice of how many children we have, and when, up to us, though He sovereignly controls this, of course. Onan was frustrating the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by refusing to give Tamar a child (cf. 11:4). This is the first story that explicitly states that God put someone—actually two people—to death ("took his life" [twice], vv. 7, 10).

The Israelites typically viewed incidents with the ultimate cause in view, namely, God—rather than with the immediate cause in view, namely, the instrument or instruments that God used to accomplish His will. Thus the statement that "the LORD took his life" means that ultimately God was responsible for his untimely death. It does not mean that God supernaturally intervened to execute him directly. God may have used other means to bring about his death.

38:11 Judah sinned against Tamar by forcing her to live as a widow. This was because he wrongly blamed Tamar for the deaths of his sons (cf. v. 26) rather than blaming his sons. But Tamar had every right to children by virtue of her lawful marriages. Moreover, as a member of the chosen family, Judah should have made certain that she had another legitimate opportunity to bear children.

Judah comes across at the beginning of this incident, again, as a hard and callous man. He had previously suggested selling Joseph into slavery, in order to make money off of him, and deceiving Jacob—despite Reuben's protests (37:26-27, 29-30). Now the writer portrayed him as showing no grief over the tragic deaths of his sons—in contrast to Jacob, who mourned inconsolably over Joseph's apparent death (37:34-35). Judah also ordered the burning of his daughter-in-law (38:24)!

38:12 After "a considerable time" Judah's Canaanite wife died. After Judah had finished mourning for his wife, he and his friend Hirah went to Timnah, a neighboring town, to sheer their sheep.

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[1]Kidner, p. 188.

38:13-15 When Tamar learned that Judah was going to Timnah she dressed up as a prostitute and sat along the roadside so that Judah would see her as he passed.

38:16-19 Judah propositioned Tamar, not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, and had sex with her. But Tamar was wise enough to obtain Judah's seal, cord, and staff so that she could obtain, if necessary, the goat that he promised her as payment for having sex with her.

> "The signet ["seal"] was a cylinder seal bearing an impression to identify the owner, often used to seal documents in antiquity. In the ancient Near East, seals were perforated and then suspended by a cord around one's neck. The staff was a symbol of authority in the ancient Near East and an important object for identifying it owner."[1]

Then Tamar departed, presumably went home, and resumed her normal role as a grieving widow.

When Judah deceived Jacob (37:31-32), a goat and an item of clothing featured in the trick. Here, ironically, a goat and an item of clothing play a part in Tamar's deception of Judah. Tamar's strategy for obtaining her right to a husband was not commendable. She played the role of a common prostitute (Heb. *zona*). Judah's Canaanite friend described her as a "temple prostitute" later (v. 21, Heb. *qedesa*, lit. "holy woman," i.e., a woman used in the worship of pagan religion), but he probably said this to elevate her social status in the eyes of the other men he was addressing.

Though ancient Near Eastern society condemned adultery, it permitted prostitution.[2]

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[1]Currid, p. 66. See also Longman, "Genesis," p. 114.

[2]See the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Prostitution (OT)," by E. A. Goodfriend and Edward Lipinski, 5:505-10; "Cult Prostitution in Ancient Israel," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 40:1 (January/February 2014):46-56, 70.

> "The influence of Hittite law may be reflected in Tamar's action, for it held that, when no brother-in-law existed to fulfill the levirate duty, the father-in-law was responsible."[1]

By wearing a veil, Tamar hid her identity from Judah, but at the same time presented herself as a betrothed (to Shelah) woman, since engaged women wore veils (cf. 24:65; 29:21-25). However, the fact that she sought to obtain seed by Judah shows her legitimate desire for children, at least. It may also reveal her desire to enter into the Abrahamic promises—by bearing children for Judah and his sons. Jacob's family experienced deception again.

> "Tamar qualifies as a heroine in the story, for she risked everything for her right to be the mother in the family of Judah and to protect the family."[2]

> "Although Tamar's actions in this regard may seem strange to us, there is evidence that among ancient Assyrian and Hittite peoples, part of the custom was that the levirate responsibility could pass to the father of the widow's husband if there were no brothers to fulfill it. Thus Tamar was only trying to acquire that to which she had a legal right."[3]

Moses did not clarify Tamar's motivation. Whether or not she understood and believed the promises to the patriarchs regarding their sacred vocation, she did become an ancestress of the Messiah (Ruth 4:18-22; Matt. 1:3, 16).

> "Just as in chapter 20 where the seed of Abraham was protected by the 'righteous' (*saddiq*, 20:4; NIV, 'innocent') Abimelech (cf. also 26:9-11), it is the woman Tamar, not Judah the patriarch, who is ultimately responsible for the survival of the descendants of the house of Judah."[4]

38:20-23 Judah's attempts to find Tamar and pay her proved futile.

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[1]Wood, *A Survey …,* p. 76. See also Cyrus H. Gordon, *The Ancient Near East*, p. 136.

[2]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 612.

[3]Aalders, 2:194.

[4]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 232.

> "In the ancient Orient, it was customary in many places for married women to give themselves to strangers because of some oath. Such sacrifices of chastity in the service of the goddess of love, Astarte, were, of course, different from ordinary prostitution even though they were repulsive to Israel. They were strictly forbidden by law, and the teachers of wisdom warned urgently against this immoral custom, which was apparently at times fashionable even in Israel (Deut. 23.17; Num. 30.6; Hos. 4.33 ff; Prove. 7.1-27 …)"[1]

Tamar seems to have been presenting herself as following this practice of "sacred" prostitution, since Judah referred to her as "the temple prostitute" (v. 21).

> "Temple prostitution was a common Canaanite practice. Male and female prostitutes were attached to central shrines, plying their trade to enhance fertility in the land."[2]

38:24-26 Judah's initial response to his discovery of Tamar's pregnancy was: "Bring her out and have her burned!" (v. 24).

> "Note, It is a common thing for men to be severe against those very sins in others in which yet they allow themselves; and so, in judging others, they condemn themselves, Rom. ii. 1; xiv. 22."[3]

When Judah was publicly identified as responsible for Tamar's pregnancy, his response seems to have been genuine repentance (v. 26). He confessed his wrong and repented, by ceasing from further sexual relations with Tamar, his daughter-in-law. It is evidently because his repentance was genuine that Jacob did not exclude him from receiving a special blessing, as he would later exclude Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Because Judah humbled himself, God raised him up to be the chief of the house of Israel. And God blessed the children that he fathered—even though they were a result of his sin. Compare God's blessing of Solomon

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[1]von Rad, p. 359.

[2]Currid, p. 66.

[3]Matthew Henry, p. 59.

despite the fact that he was the fruit of the unlawful union of David and Bathsheba.

> "The scene marks the beginning of Judah's transformation when he declares of Tamar, 'She is righteous, not I' (lit., 38:26)."[1]

> "… in its biographical sketches, character change is what Genesis is all about: Abram becomes Abraham; Jacob becomes Israel. Particularly in Jacob's family we see examples of character change: Reuben, violator of his father's concubine, later shows great concern for both Joseph and his father, while the upstart cocky Joseph becomes the wise statesman who forgives his brothers. Thus, this chapter has a most important role in clarifying the course of the subsequent narrative; without it we should find its development inexplicable."[2]

38:27-30 Tamar bore Judah twin boys. "Perez" (meaning "A Breach" or "One Who Breaks Through") was the firstborn (vv. 27-30). He became the ancestor of David and the Messiah (Ruth 4:18-22; Matt. 1:3, 16). Moses may have included the unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of these twins in order to emphasize God's selection of the son through whom the line of blessing would descend—again (cf. God's choices of Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and Judah over Reuben).

> "He [Judah] and his brothers sold their younger brother into Egypt, thinking they could thwart God's design that the elder brothers would serve the younger Joseph. Yet in Judah's own family, despite his attempts to hinder Tamar's marriage, God's will worked out in a poignant confirmation of the principle that the elder would serve the younger."[3]

A scarlet thread marked the second-born, "Zerah" ("Dawning," i.e., "Red" or "Scarlet," v. 28). It did not indicate the messianic line. That line came

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 506.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 364.

[3]Ross, "Genesis," p. 89. See also *The NET2 Bible* note on 38:29.

through the other son, Perez (cf. Mic. 2:13). The thread is probably just a detail of the story that explains the names given.

> "A key to this story is the remarkable similarity between the births of Perez and Zerah and of Jacob and Esau. Both births involve twins; in both the younger thrusts ahead of the elder and displaces him; and in both the one who is naturally expected to get the birthright, but loses it, is associated with red: red stew in the case of Esau and a red string in the case of Zerah."[1]

The only mothers in the Bible who bore twins were Rebekah and Tamar.

> "As the Jacob narrative began with an account of the struggle of the twins Jacob and Esau (25:22), so now the conclusion of the Jacob narrative is marked by a similar struggle of twins. In both cases the struggle resulted in a reversal of the right of the firstborn and the right of the blessing. The brevity and austerity with which the narrative is recounted leaves the impression that the meaning of the passage is self-evident to the reader. Indeed, coming as it does on the heels of a long series of reversals in which the younger gains the upper hand on the elder, its sense is transparent."[2]

Judah's hedonistic willfulness, in this chapter, contrasts with Joseph's self-control in sexual temptation in the next. Here promiscuous Judah grasps Tamar's seductive offer and enlarges his family. Later chaste Joseph resists Potiphar's wife's seductive offer and ends his career (temporarily) in prison. This chapter also provides an explanation of the origins of the tribe of Judah, helps the reader appreciate the Canaanite threat to Israel's purity, and helps us appreciate Jacob's later willingness to leave Canaan to join Joseph in Egypt.

An important lesson from this chapter is that God corrects those who disregard His plan and pursue lives of self-gratification, often using talionic justice (i.e., punishment exactly the same as the crime) in His discipline.

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 506-7.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 232. For a comparison of the births of Jacob and Esau with those of Perez and Zerah, see K. Luke, "Two Birth Narratives in Genesis," *Indian Theological Studies* 17:2 (June 1980):155-80.

4. Joseph in Potiphar's house ch. 39

Joseph experienced God's blessing as he served faithfully in Potiphar's house (cf. 37:36). His master's wife repeatedly seduced him, but he refused her offers because he did not want to betray Potiphar's trust and sin against God. Joseph continued to enjoy God's abundant blessing even after being imprisoned because of a false charge.

> "Each scene in the record of Joseph's life reveals some distinctive trait of character elicited by means of a crisis."[1]

> "Rhetorically, the Joseph narrative often [doubles and] couples events, especially the double dreams of Joseph (chap. 37), the duo of the baker and butler (ch. 40), and the two dreams of Pharaoh (chap. 41). After the Judah-Tamar incident, chap. 39 provides the second story of a patriarch's temptation by a married woman."[2]

Both of the seductresses were non-Israelites.

39:1-6

> "Joseph arrived in Egypt during the reign of the Twelfth Dynasty [c. 1900-1730 B.C.], arguably the zenith of Egypt's power. Shortly before this era, Upper and Lower Egypt had been unified under one ruler, and now Egyptian influence expanded south and east. The regular flooding of the Nile River provided a relatively stable supply of food and offered some degree of protection from the famines suffered by other lands of the ancient Near East."[3]

The clause "the LORD was with" Joseph occurs four times in this chapter (vv. 2, 3, 21, and 23), and explains the reason for his success. The divine name "LORD," Yahweh, appears eight times in this chapter (vv. 2, 3 [twice], 5 [twice], 21, and 23 [twice]), but only one other time in the Jacob *toledot* (37:2—50:26): in 49:18. God had previously promised to be with Isaac and Jacob (26:3, 24, 28; 28:15, 20; 31:3). "Yahweh" is the name for God used in this story. The covenant-keeping God of the patriarchs was with this son of Jacob far from home.

> "Joseph was sold to an officer of Pharaoh, with whom he might get acquainted with public persons and public

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 369. Cf. James 1:2-4.

[2]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 725.

[3]Currid, p. 67.

> business, and so be fitted for the preferment for which he was designed. What God intends men for he will be sure, some way or other, to qualify them for."[1]

Joseph proved faithful in a little, and therefore the LORD placed him in charge of much ("he [Potiphar] made him [Joseph] overseer in his house, and over all that he owned," v. 5; cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 16:10; 19:11-27). Note that God blessed Potiphar "on account of Joseph" (v. 5; cf. 12:3a). Joseph had a fine physique and a handsome face (v. 6), features that he seems to have inherited from his mother Rachel (cf. 29:17).

> "The whole sequence of 39:2-6 is a particularly apt and clear example of the meaning of blessing in the Old Testament. Assistance and blessing belong together, though they are different. Blessing embraces both people and the rest of creation. The narrator simply presupposes that the blessing can flow over from the one whom Yahweh assists to a foreign people and adherents of a foreign religion precisely because of the one whom Yahweh assists. The power inherent in the blessing is expansive "[2]

39:7-18 Joseph was evidently in his mid-twenties at this time. He was in a "no win" position with Potiphar's wife. As a slave he had to obey her. But as a trustworthy and moral servant of Potiphar he had to refuse her. The typical male clothing in patriarchal times consisted of mid-calf-length shorts and a tunic that resembled a long tee-shirt (cf. 3:21; 37:3).[3]

The sin of Potiphar's wife (v. 7), like the sin of Judah (39:15), began in her eye.

> "We have great need to make a covenant with our eyes (Job xxxi. 1), lest the eye infect the heart."[4]

Joseph regarded obedience to God as his primary responsibility (v. 9), and therefore he chose as he did (cf. Ps. 51:4). Note that Potiphar's wife's

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[1]Matthew Henry, p. 59.

[2]Westermann, *Genesis 36—50*, p. 63.

[3]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 376.

[4]Matthew Henry, p. 60.

invitation was for Joseph to lie "beside" (Heb. *'esel*) her (v. 10; cf. vv. 15, 16, 18; 41:3), not to lie "with" her, the more common phrase that describes sexual intercourse (cf. 34:7; 39:14). Evidently she invited his physical familiarity, which she hoped would lead to intercourse. Joseph, realizing where this first step might lead, wisely set a boundary for himself and refused even to be alone with her (v. 10).[1]

> "The garment that Joseph had to leave in the woman's hands was actually the undergarment, a long shirt tied about the hips. It was not the coatlike [*sic*] cape, which men were not accustomed to wear indoors. This means that Joseph fled completely undressed, at once disgracefully and honorably."[2]
>
> "It is better to lose a good coat than a good conscience."[3]
>
> "This story about Joseph reverses a well-known plot in the patriarchal narratives. Whereas before it was the beautiful wife of the patriarch who was sought by the foreign ruler, now it was Joseph, the handsome patriarch himself who was sought by the wife of the foreign ruler. Whereas in the earlier narratives it was either the Lord (12:17; 20:3) or the moral purity of the foreign ruler (26:10) that rescued the wife rather than the patriarch, here it was Joseph's own moral courage that saved the day. Whereas in the preceding narratives, the focus of the writer had been on God's faithfulness in fulfilling his covenant promises, in the story of Joseph his attention is turned to the human response.[4]
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> "The Joseph narratives are intended then to give balance to the narratives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Together the two sections show both God's faithfulness in spite of

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[1]Mathews, Genesis 11:27—50:26, p. 735.

[2]von Rad, p. 366.

[3]Matthew Henry, p. 60.

[4]Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 234.

> human failure as well as the necessity of an obedient and faithful response."[1]

Success in temptation depends more on character than on circumstances. Character rests on commitment to the will of God. We can see Joseph's character in his loyalty to Potiphar with regard to what his master had entrusted to his care (v. 9). We also see it in his responsibility to God for what belonged to someone else (v. 9). It is further obvious in his responsibility to God respecting his special personal calling (37:5-9; 45:5-9). Additionally we see it in his responsibility to God concerning his sacred vocation as a member of the house of Israel.

> "It is too little observed, and especially by young men who have most need to observe it, that in such temptations it is not only the sensual that needs to be guarded against, but also two much deeper-lying tendencies—the craving for loving recognition, and the desire to respond to the feminine love for admiration and devotion. A large proportion of misery is due to a kind of uncontrolled and mistaken chivalry."[2]

> "But keep in mind that there is no sin in the bait [that tempts]. The sin is in the bite [that tastes]."[3]

This is not saying that Potiphar's wife did not sin when she tempted Joseph—she did—but that Joseph would have sinned only when he yielded to the temptation.

> "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor hell a fury like a woman scorned."[4]

39:19-23 Joseph's punishment was light in view of the charge against him.[5]

> "In ancient Egypt there was no state-sanctioned capital punishment for adultery. This is perhaps why Potiphar sent Joseph to prison. Although imprisonment as punishment is

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[1]Ibid., p. 235.

[2]Dods, p. 344.

[3]Charles R. Swindoll, *Joseph*, p. 29.

[4]William Congreve, quoted in *John Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, p. 324.

[5]Leupold, 2:1001.

> unknown in the law codes of the ancient Near East, including OT law, it is well attested in Egyptian documents, and the present scene reflects that custom."[1]

Joseph's integrity had obviously impressed his master, but Potiphar himself may have also had questions about his wife's chastity (cf. Ps. 105:18). Some interpreters have concluded that Potiphar believed his wife's story (v. 19).[2] Others think he did not:

> "The Hebrew words used for Potiphar's office are literally 'captain of the butchers' or 'captain of the executioners,' indicating that Potiphar holds an office that utilizes violence. The fact that Joseph is not executed for the charge that he raped Potiphar's wife thus suggests that Potiphar probably does not believe his wife's accusation."[3]

Whether Potiphar believed his wife or not, Joseph ended up in prison. Joseph's slavery in Potiphar's house, and later his imprisonment, prefigure the nation of Israel's Egyptian bondage.

Because God was still "with" Joseph (vv. 21, 23; cf. v. 2), and because his character had not changed, Joseph experienced the same kind of favor at the hand of the prison warden that he had received from Potiphar. The LORD honored Joseph ("made whatever he did prosper," v. 23) as one who had honored Him (1 Sam. 2:30). It is easier to depart from God's will when we are alone, and when there is not much hope for the immediate future.

> "Yokes borne in youth have at least three results; they prove personal integrity, they promote spiritual maturity, and they prepare for fuller opportunity. In nature and in human life the best things are not the easiest but the hardest to obtain."[4]

"How nobly Joseph comported himself amidst all these trials and hardships! He might have sulked and become embittered; but instead of

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[1]Currid, p. 69.

[2]Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 2:4:5.

[3]Longman*,* "Genesis," p. 114.

[4]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 375.

> this his spirit was unconquerable by reason of its trust in God. He steadfastly refused to be unfaithful to his God, whatever might be the consequences. In duty he was loyal, in temptation he was strong, and in prison he was faithful. When this spirit actuates our life, difficulties become means of grace and stepping-stones to higher things. On the other hand, if difficulties are met in a fretful, murmuring, complaining, disheartened spirit, not only do we lose the blessings that would otherwise come through them, but our spiritual life suffers untold injury, and we are weakened for the next encounter of temptation whenever it comes. There is scarcely anything in the Christian life which reveals more thoroughly what our Christianity is worth than the way we meet difficulties by the use of the grace of God."[1]
>
> "The lesson here is that it does not matter where we serve the Lord. We may serve in a high position or in a low one. God can bless us in either position."[2]

This chapter reveals that dedication to God's calling enables His servants to resist temptation.[3] I am assuming, with many other interpreters of this chapter, that Joseph remembered his dreams (37:5-11) and believed that God had a future for him.

5. The prisoners' dreams and Joseph's interpretations ch. 40

This chapter contain the second of three pairs of dreams that proved to be pivotal events in Joseph's life, the first being his own dreams in 37:5-11, and the third being Pharaoh's dreams in 41:1-32.

When Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker had disturbing dreams in prison Joseph accurately foretold their meanings—the cupbearer's restoration and the baker's execution—but Joseph remained in prison because the cupbearer forgot him.

40:1-4 "The cupbearer" and "the baker" were responsible for Pharaoh's drink and food. Nehemiah, much later, occupied a similar position to this cupbearer in the Persian court (cf. Neh. 1:11—2:8). The cupbearer was the ruler's "right hand man."

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[1]Ibid., pp. 375-76. Cf. James 1.

[2]Assohoto and Ngewa, p. 69.

[3]See Doug Mennen, "How the Wise Man Overcomes Temptation," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988):90.

> "In the ancient Near East, this was an official governmental position as a close advisor to the king (see Neh. 1:11). Often it denoted the duties of a governor or prime minister."[1]

It seems likely that both of Pharaoh's servants were in prison because someone had tried to poison Pharaoh, or so it seemed, and Pharaoh could not determine which of the two men was responsible. Their offences may have involved no more than the casual lighting of a fly in his cup or a little sand in his bread.[2]

> "When it is said that they 'offended' [v. 1] their lord, the verb used, *hate'u* implies actual guilt on the part of each, for literally it means, 'they sinned.'"[3]

The place of confinement was a state prison: a round, wall-enclosed building that was probably attached to Potiphar's house, as was customary in Egypt (vv. 3, 7). These prisoners would have been dealt with much more harshly if their offences had warranted it. The "warden of the prison" (39:21-23) was evidently in charge of the prison. Potiphar was "the captain of the bodyguard" (v. 3; 39:1). The warden gave Joseph the job of taking care of Pharaoh's two important prisoners (v. 4). Obviously the warden trusted Joseph and gave him some responsibility for these accused servants of Pharaoh—like some prisoners now have certain privileges and responsibilities for other prisoners in their facilities.

> "Genuine loyalty to God will always express itself in absolute faithfulness in every-day duty."[4]

40:5-8 The Egyptians and the Babylonians regarded dreams as very significant predictions.[5]

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[1]Currid, p. 69.

[2]See Matthew Henry, p. 60.

[3]Leupold, 2:1005.

[4]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 380.

[5]Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 218-19.

> "There were men who had learned the technique of interpreting dreams, and there was a considerable literature on the subject."[1]

The dreams of the cupbearer and baker were revelations from God. Realizing that God had given him the ability to interpret these divine revelations, Joseph invited the two prisoners to relate their dreams to him. He was careful, however, to give God the glory for his interpretative gift (v. 8; cf. 41:16, 25, 28, 39). Daniel also had this ability, and likewise gave God the credit (cf. Dan. 2:28).

> "Typically, these dream messages were determined by researching the content of the dreams in written commentaries, the Dream Books. Joseph, on the other hand, believed that God would give him the interpretation of dreams without the need to consult the commentaries ..."[2]

> "Joseph means to say that the interpretation of dreams is not a human art but a *charisma* [gift] which God can grant."[3]

40:9-15 The cupbearer and the baker told their dreams to Joseph, and Joseph gave them the interpretations. After three days, Pharaoh would "lift up" the cupbearer's head (v. 13) and restore him to his former position.

> "This expression goes back ultimately to an actual custom in an audience: the petitioner stands or kneels with bowed head while the one on the throne takes him under the chin and raises his head (cf. II Kings 25.27; etc.)."[4]

Joseph asked the baker to remember him when Pharaoh restored him to his former position (vv. 14-15).

40:16-19 Pharaoh would also "lift up" the baker's head (v. 19), but he would do so in a different sense. The baker would not simply suffer execution, but his corpse would then be impaled and publicly exposed. (Josephus called this

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[1]von Rad, p. 371.

[2]Longman, "Genesis," p. 115.

[3]von Rad, p. 371.

[4]Ibid., p. 372.

"crucifixion," impaling being an early form of crucifixion.[1]) The Egyptians did this to prevent one's spirit from resting in the afterlife.[2]

> "The Egyptians didn't use the gallows; they beheaded the victim and then impaled his body on a stake ("tree")."[3]
>
> "This ["the birds will eat the flesh off you"] would have been a horrible punishment considering the ancient Egyptians' view that the preservation of the body was critical for attaining the afterlife. They emphasized this through embalming and other methods of preservation."[4]
>
> "In ancient Egyptian dream omens, there were normally four characteristics: (1) the dreamer sees himself doing something; (2) the dreams are oracular (they predict the future); (3) the dreams are allegorical; and (4) wordplays and puns are frequently used. All four of these elements are evident in the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker."[5]

40:20-23 Things turned out just as Joseph had predicted, but the baker forgot Joseph and did not mention him to Pharaoh. He must have done so deliberately, since he could hardly have forgotten the man who had played such a significant role in his life.

The significance of this chapter lies in Joseph's God-given ability to interpret dreams. This gift, and Joseph's use of it on this occasion, prepared the way for Pharaoh's calling for Joseph, two years later, to interpret his two dreams and exalting him to high office in the government (ch. 41).

> "Trials may be viewed from two standpoints, and it will make all the difference to our spiritual life and peace which of these two points of view we take. From the human side Joseph's suffering was due to injustice on the part of Potiphar, and ingratitude on the part of the butler. From the Divine side these years were permitted for the purpose of

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[1]Josephus, *Antiquities of …,* 2:5:3 and 4. See *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Crucifixion," by D. H. Wheaton, pp. 281-82.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 384.

[3]Wiersbe, p. 148.

[4]Currid, p. 70.

[5]Ibid., p. 69.

> training and preparing Joseph for the great work that lay before him. If we look only at the human side of trial we shall become discouraged, and it [*sic*] may be irritated and angered, but as we turn to look at it from the Divine side we shall see God in everything and all things working together for our good."[1]

An important lesson from this chapter is that those who faithfully use the abilities that God has given them, even in discouraging circumstances, demonstrate unwavering faith in God's promises to them.

6. Pharaoh's dreams and Joseph's interpretations ch. 41

Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's two dreams clearly and accurately. This led to God elevating Joseph in the government, and demonstrating His sovereign control over economic life in Egypt, as He prepared to preserve Israel and Egypt through the coming famine.

Like Joseph's two dreams (37:5-11), Pharaoh's two dreams meant the same thing and dealt with the triumph of the weak over the strong. And like the two dreams of the cupbearer and the baker (40:9-22), Pharaoh's two dreams deal with good fortune and ill, in that order.[2]

41:1-8 These verses record the two dreams that Pharaoh had two years after the two dreams that his cupbearer and baker had.

> The "soothsayer priests" (v. 8) were "men of the priestly caste, who occupied themselves with the sacred arts and sciences of the Egyptians, the hieroglyphic writings, astrology, the interpretation of dreams, the foretelling of events, magic, and conjuring, and who were regarded as the possessors of secret arts (*vid*. Ex. vii. 11) and the *wise men* of the nation."[3]

Divination tries to understand the future, and magic seeks to control it. God prevented the Egyptian diviners from comprehending the meaning of

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 389.

[2]Levenson, p. 75.

[3]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:349. See Livingston, pp. 65-80, for information about the scripts of the ancient Near East.

Pharaoh's dreams, even though the clue to their interpretation lay in the religious symbols of Egypt.

> "For the cow was the symbol of Isis, the goddess of the all-sustaining earth, and in the hieroglyphics it represents the earth, agriculture, and food; and the Nile, by its overflowing, was the source of fertility of the land."[1]

However these symbols had multiple meanings to the Egyptians, which probably accounts for the difficulty of interpretation.[2]

41:9-13 Finally Pharaoh's chief cupbearer told the king about his experience with a dream, while he was in prison, and how Joseph had interpreted it, and the baker's dream, accurately.

41:14-24 Pharaoh then called for Joseph and related his dreams to him.

> "The Heb word for *dungeon* (also in 40.15) is the same as that for the 'pit' into which Joseph's brothers threw him in 37.20, 22, 24, 28."[3]

> "For the fourth time, Joseph's clothes are changed (the previous instances are in 37.3, 23; 39.12), this time (like the first) as a sign of elevation."[4]

Joseph carefully gave God (*Elohim*) the glory for his interpretive gift (v. 16).

> "As far as Joseph was concerned, absolute truthfulness in guarding God's honor was far more important than personal advantage."[5]

> "Like Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar, he expressly disclaims all ability of himself to unfold the secret counsels of heaven, or exercise that wisdom for which Pharaoh seems very willing to give him credit. The same humility has been

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[1]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:349.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 391.

[3]Levenson, p. 76.

[4]Ibid. See verse 42 for his fifth and final recorded change of clothes.

[5]Leupold, 2:1025-26.

> in every age a distinguishing ornament of all God's faithful servants."[1]

41:25-32 Joseph then interpreted Pharaoh's dreams for him. Joseph also presented God (*Elohim*) as sovereign over Pharaoh—twice ("God has told to/shown Pharaoh what He is about to do," vv. 25, 28).

> "Joseph's life and his thinking are theocentric."[2]

> "Seven-year famines were a familiar feature of life in the ancient Near East."[3]

Verse 32 is important because from it we learn that, when God repeats something, it is an indication that He definitely intends to do it, or that it is certainly true. This is important to remember as we read through Scripture and find things that are repeated.

> "… the writer has gone out of his way to present the whole narrative in a series of pairs, all fitting within the notion of the emphasis given by means of the repetition: 'The matter is certain and swift' (v. 32). The repetition of the dreams, then, fits this pattern."[4]

> "The intention of prophecies concerning judgments to come, is to excite those threatened with them to take proper measures for averting them."[5]

> "The writer's emphasis on the 'good' and 'evil' represents Joseph's wisdom and discernment as an ability to distinguish between the 'good' (*tob*) and the 'evil' (*ra'*). Such a picture suggests that in the story of Joseph the writer is returning to one of the central themes of the beginning of the book, the knowledge of 'good' (*tob*) and 'evil' (*ra'*). While Joseph is able to discern between 'good and evil,' it is clear from this story that ultimately such knowledge comes only from God (v. 39). Joseph is the

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[1]Bush, 2:277.

[2]Leupold, 2:1029.

[3]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 398.

[4]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 214.

[5]Bush, 2:281. Cf. von Rad, p. 376.

> embodiment of the ideal that true wisdom, the ability to discern between 'good and evil,' comes only from God. Thus the lesson of the early chapters of Genesis is artfully repeated in these last chapters."[1]
>
> "Joseph prefigured the victors Moses and Daniel, the bookends of Israel's period of captivity, whose wisdom prevailed over the Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor 1:18—2:16)."[2]
>
> "Someone once asked Gladstone what is the measure of a great statesman. He said it is the man who knows the direction God is going for the next fifty years. Well, here in Genesis, Pharaoh is told what is going to happen for the next fourteen years."[3]

41:33-37 Then Joseph proceeded to advise Pharaoh on what measures needed to be taken in view of the coming famine.

The Egyptians regarded Pharaoh as a divine manifestation in human form. By accepting Joseph's interpretation of his dreams and his advice, Pharaoh chose to humble himself under Joseph's God. God rewarded this humility by preserving the land of Egypt during the coming famine.

41:38-44 That Pharaoh believed Joseph's interpretation, humbled himself, and then chose to raise a young foreign prisoner to such an elevated position in his government, are truly miraculous occurrences. Pharaoh recognized Joseph as one who had unique supernatural powers (cf. Dan. 5:14). He probably did not identify the "divine spirit" (v. 38) in Joseph as the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. There is no evidence that Pharaoh understood or believed in the God of Israel, much less comprehended His tri-unity. Most likely he thought some unfamiliar or unknown deity had manifested himself through Joseph.

> "It can hardly be accidental that in all of Genesis only Joseph is described as one who is filled with the Spirit of God (41:38)."[4]

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 240.

[2]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 740.

[3]McGee, 1:166.

[4]Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 281.

It was not unknown in Egypt for the Pharaohs to appoint individuals who lacked previous social station or political rank to positions of authority in the government.[1] But this Pharaoh seems to have been unusually humble, generous, and secure.

> "The Hyksos Period, during which Joseph's story unfolds, roughly encompassed the two-hundred-year period from 1750 until 1550 B.C. The Hyksos were Semitic rulers that conquered Egypt, established the 15th dynasty, and are believed to have ruled into the 17th dynasty. Thus the Pharaoh at the time of Joseph was Semitic. This explains how a Semite such as Joseph could rise to the second highest position in Egypt, which had a Hamitic population."[2]

> "At any time the king would—and did—appoint outsiders. In fact, the noteworthy careers, as preserved for us in tomb inscriptions, broke through all departmental limitations. Men of humble origin could rise to the top once their gifts were recognized; and we find that they were called to a succession of posts which would seem to us to have required entirely different preparatory training."[3]

> "Only a man like Joseph, schooled by adversity and sorrow, could meet a sudden elevation like this without pride and self-exaltation."[4]

> "Just as Adam is seen in the Creation account as dependent on God for his knowledge of 'good and evil,' so Joseph also is portrayed here in the same terms. Just as Adam is made God's 'vicegerent' to rule over all the land, so similarly Joseph is portrayed here as the Pharaoh's 'vicegerent' over all his land (vv. 40-43). As Adam was

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[1]See Longman, "Genesis," p. 116.

[2]Fruchtenbaum, p. 536.

[3]Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p. 35. See also Kitchen, *The Bible …,* p. 74; J. K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*, pp. 93-95; Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 395-96; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 533.

[4]Leupold, 2:1033-34.

> made in God's image to rule over all the land, so the king here gave Joseph his 'signet ring' and dressed him in royal garments (v. 42). The picture of Joseph resembles the psalmist's understanding of Genesis 1 when, regarding that passage, he writes, '[You have] crowned him with glory and honor./ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;/ you put everything under his feet' (Ps 8:5-7)."[1]

41:45 To naturalize Joseph, and to give him the necessary social status, Pharaoh gave him an Egyptian name: "Zaphenath-paneah" (cf. Dan. 1:7), which probably means "The God Speaks and Lives." He also gave him an Egyptian wife from an appropriate level of society. Her name, "Asenath," means "Belonging to [the goddess] Neith." Joseph's father-in-law, "Potiphera," whose name means "He Whom Ra (the sun god) Gave," was evidently a high-ranking priest in the celebrated Temple of the Sun in the city of On (Gr. Heliopolis) 10 miles northeast of modern Cairo.

> "The high priest at On held the exalted title 'Greatest of Seers.' Joseph thus marries into the elite of Egyptian nobility."[2]

Joseph's marriage to an Egyptian seems to have been Pharaoh's order, and God permitted it and blessed it. The faithful patriarchs Abraham and Isaac avoided marrying Canaanites, because of God's curse on Canaan (9:25), but marriage to non-Canaanite Gentiles was less serious. Joseph's wife and in-laws did not turn him away from his faith in Yahweh or his high regard for God's promises to his forefathers (cf. Moses, Heb. 11:24-26).

> "Although Joseph married a pagan priest's daughter, he trained his sons to worship the living God. Probably Asenath also became a worshiper of the Lord."[3]

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 242.

[2]Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 288.

[3]*The Nelson …,* p. 80.

> "Just as God provided a wife for Adam in the garden and gave man all the land for his enjoyment, so the king gave a wife to Joseph and put him over all the land (v. 45)."[1]

41:46-49 Joseph began his illustrious career at the age of 30. Interestingly, Jesus was "about 30 years old" when He began His public ministry (Luke 3:23). This is only one of many similarities between Joseph's life and Jesus' life. For seven years, the years of plenty, Joseph stored the excess food in preparation for the coming famine. An allusion to the blessing aspect of the patriarchal promises occurs in the reference to the grain that Joseph had stored up: "in great abundance like the sand of the sea" (v. 49).

41:50-52 During the years of plenty Asenath bore Joseph two sons. The notation of the birth of Joseph's sons is, of course, very significant in view of God's purposes concerning Abraham's descendants. Their names also reveal their father's faith. Joseph acknowledged God's goodness to him in the naming of both his sons: "God has made me forget all my trouble" and "God has made me fruitful." In both names Joseph used the name *Elohim,* which highlights His power. McGee suggested that we could therefore call these boys "Amnesia" and "Ambrosia."[2]

> "If the name of Joseph's first son (Manasseh) focuses on a God who preserves, the name of Joseph's second son (Ephraim) focuses on a God who blesses."[3]

Some readers of Genesis have wondered why Joseph did not inform Jacob of his welfare quickly, since he must have realized that Jacob would have worried about his disappearance. In naming Manasseh, Joseph said that God had enabled him to "forget all my troubles and all of my father's household" (v. 51). Perhaps Joseph did not try to contact Jacob because he thought his father had set him up for what happened to him at Dothan.[4] This seems very unlikely to me, since Jacob's sorrow over Joseph's apparent death seems genuine (37:34-35).

Perhaps Joseph did not try to contact Jacob because, through the remarkable events by which God had exalted him, he came to realize that

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 242.

[2]McGee, 1:168.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 512.

[4]Marc Shapiro, "The Silence of Joseph," *Journal of Reform Judaism* 36:1 (Winter 1989):15-17.

God would fulfill the rest of His promises contained in his dreams.[1] He may have concluded that his best course of action would be to continue to let God take the initiative, since he had done so consistently in his life to that time.[2] Joseph had evidently come to trust God in place of his father. In this sense he had forgotten his father's household as well, not just his troubles there (cf. Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:26). Clearly, Joseph had not literally forgotten his father (cf. 45:9-13).

> "'Forget' does not mean here 'not remember' but rather to have something no longer (cf. Job 39.17; 11:16. See, too, the Arabic proverb, 'Whoever drinks water from the Nile forgets his fatherland if he is a foreigner'). The phrase refers, therefore, more to an objective external fact than to a subjective, psychological process."[3]

One might say that, for Joseph, life in Canaan was a closed chapter of his life.[4]

41:53-57 When the years of plenty ended and the famine years began, there was plenty of food in Egypt thanks to Joseph's plan and God's provision.

> "This [i.e., famine] was a common occurrence in ancient Egypt, as low Nile levels often reduced areas of cultivation and limited agricultural productivity. Examples of local Egyptian officials distributing famine relief are many, such as in the tomb biography of Ankhtyfy."[5]

"The entire face of the earth" (v. 56) probably means the entire known earth of that time. People from far away came to buy food from the Egyptians. This is another indication of God blessing "all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3) through Abraham's descendants.

"The picture of Joseph, then, looks back to Adam; but more, it looks forward to one who was yet to come. It anticipates the coming of the one from the house of Judah to whom the kingdom belongs (cf. 49:10). Thus

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[1]Delitzsch, 2:306; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 535.

[2]Cf. Matthew Henry, p. 62.

[3]von Rad, p. 379.

[4]Cf. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 766.

[5]Currid, p. 72.

> in the final shape of the narrative, the tension between the house of Joseph and the house of Judah, which lies within many of these texts, is resolved by making the life of Joseph into a picture of the one who is to reign from the house of Judah."[1]

Note some comparisons between Joseph and Daniel. Like Joseph, Daniel was a Hebrew slave summoned before a Gentile king to interpret a dream. Like Joseph, Daniel interpreted the king's dreams that the other wise men in the king's court could not decipher. Like Joseph, Daniel enjoyed promotion from the status of slave to high government official, as a reward for rendering faithful service.[2]

> "Joseph was the first example of the successful Jewish statesman and businessman. From Babylon of the post-exilic centuries, on through all history, they have been legion."[3]

This chapter teaches us that God controls the fortunes of nations to protect and provide for His covenant people.

7. Joseph's brothers' first journey into Egypt ch. 42

In this chapter Joseph awakened his brothers' guilty consciences for the things they had done to him and their father, when, after the brothers had come to Egypt for food, he put them in prison as spies. By keeping Simeon hostage while allowing the others to bring Benjamin back, Joseph pricked their consciences even more.

Joseph treated his brothers in the way that he did in order to discover how they felt toward Jacob, and especially his younger brother Benjamin, who had taken Joseph's place as Jacob's favorite son. He also did so in order to see if they had genuinely repented of their sin against himself. He apparently did not act out of revenge, and he was not spiteful. Joseph simply wanted to discover his brothers' hearts.

> "Joseph's tests of his brothers were important in God's plan to channel his blessing through the seed of Abraham. God had planned to bring the family to Egypt so that it might grow into a great nation [15:13]. But because the people who would form that nation had to be faithful, the

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 242. See also idem, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 215.

[2]For other remarkable parallels between Joseph and Daniel, see Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 637; Joshua M. Philpot, "Was Joseph a Type of Daniel? Typological Correspondence in Genesis 37—50 and Daniel 1—6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61:4 (December 2018):681-96.

[3]Blaiklock, p. 53.

> brothers needed to be tested before they could share in the blessing. Joseph's prodding had to be subtle; the brothers had to perceive that God was moving against them so that they would acknowledge their crime against Joseph and demonstrate that they had changed. If they failed the test, God could have started over with Joseph, just as he had said he would with Moses in Exodus 32:10, when his wrath was kindled against Israel."[1]

42:1-5 When food became scarce due to the famine in Canaan, Jacob sent 10 of his sons to Egypt to buy food there. But he kept Benjamin, his favorite, at home with himself.

> "Doubtless there has been but little change in all these matters [of men and donkeys going for grain, v. 3] from that time to this, and the resemblance is often still more exact from the fact that when the crops of this country [Canaan] fail through drouth [drought] or other causes, the people still go down to Egypt to buy corn, as they did in the time of the patriarch. It has also frequently occurred to me, when passing a large company of donkeys on their way to buy food, that we are not to suppose that only the eleven donkeys on which the brethren of Joseph rode composed the whole caravan. One man often leads or drives half a dozen; and, besides, I apprehend that Jacob's sons had many servants along with them. Eleven sacks of grain, such as donkeys would carry, would not sustain a household like his for a week."[2]

42:6-7 When Jacob's sons arrived in Egypt they had to appear before Joseph, who was in charge of the sale of food. Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. Joseph presented himself to them as someone who was hostile to them.

> "The double identification of Joseph as *hassallit* [administrator, "ruler"] and *hammasbir* [dispenser, "the one who sold grain to all the people"] recall Joseph's two earlier dreams, the one in which the sun, moon, and

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[1]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 647.

[2]Thomson, 2:407-8.

> eleven stars bowed before him (his position of authority), and the other in which the brothers' sheaves bowed before his sheaf (his position of provider)."[1]

Twenty-one years after his brothers sold Joseph into slavery, they "bowed down to him with their faces to the ground," in fulfillment of his youthful dreams (v. 6; cf. 37:7).

Would it not have been more loving of Joseph to have revealed himself to his brothers immediately, without putting them through the agony that followed?

> "True reconciliation, however, requires sincere repentance and humble confession of sin, and often it takes time for a person to get to that place."[2]

Joseph was really being more loving toward his brothers, by treating them as he did, than he would have been by revealing himself to them immediately—as will become clear. Furthermore, God was at work through Joseph dealing with their sins.

Ronald Hyman analyzed Joseph's skillful use of questions to uncover his brothers' attitudes and intentions, as well as the key role that questions played in the whole Joseph narrative. There are 30 to 40 of them.[3]

> "The time was when Joseph's brethren were men of high respectability in the land of Canaan [because of their wealth, at least], whilst Joseph himself was a slave or a prisoner in the land of Egypt. Now, by a signal reverse, Joseph was governor over all the land of Egypt, while they appeared before him as humble suppliants, almost craving as an alms those supplies of food for which they were both able and willing to pay the price demanded."[4]

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[1]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 519. Cf. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 163.

[2]Wiersbe, p. 151.

[3]Ronald T. Hyman, "Questions in the Joseph Story: The Effects and Their Implications for Teaching," *Religious Education* (Summer 1984):437-55.

[4]Bush, 2:298.

> People who sell their brothers into slavery are not trustworthy. Therefore Joseph retained power over his brothers until he could trust them.

The chiastic structure of verses 8 through 24 focuses attention on the brothers' imprisonment:

"A Joseph knew his brothers and remembered (8-9a).

B Joseph accused them of being spies, but they explained their situation (9b-13).

C Joseph set out a test whereby they could prove they were honest men (14-16).

D Joseph put them in prison (17).

C' Joseph set out a new test for the brothers to prove they were honest (18-20).

B' The brothers confessed their guilt concerning their brother, and Reuben accused them of their fault (21-22).

A' Joseph understood and wept (23-24)."[1]

42:8-17 Joseph remembered his dreams (v. 9), and the proof of God's faithfulness undoubtedly encouraged his confidence as he proceeded to deal with his brothers. He played the role of a prosecutor before them, charging them with a crime ("you are spies," v. 9) punishable with death in Egypt. Such a serious accusation encouraged his brothers to be as honest as possible, which is what Joseph wanted.

> "In general the Egyptians distrusted Semitic people like the family of Jacob (see comments on Gen. 43:32). Thus it would not be unusual for them to suspect traveling Semites of planning a raid on the stored grain. This fear gave Joseph's accusation some substance, though of course Joseph knew that they were not spies."[2]

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[1]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 649.

[2]Longman*,* "Genesis," pp. 116-17.

A family will rarely risk almost all of its sons in a dangerous spying mission, which probably explains the brothers' statement that they were all sons of one man (v. 11).

Probably Joseph wanted to be sure that his brothers had not killed Benjamin, remembering that they had contemplated, and even worse plotted, killing himself (v. 15).

The three-day imprisonment provided Joseph with time to plan his strategy, and it impressed the brothers with the importance of cooperating with Joseph (v. 17). These three days also gave the brothers a taste of what Joseph had endured for three years. Joseph may have intended that they serve one day's imprisonment for each year he had suffered incarceration because of their hatred.

> "A vindictive Joseph could have dismayed his brothers with worthless sackloads, or tantalized them at his feast as they had tantalized him (37:24, 25); his enigmatic gifts were a kinder and more searching test. Just how well-judged was his policy can be seen in the growth of quite new attitudes in the brothers, as the alternating sun and frost broke them open to God."[1]

42:18-25 Joseph's profession of faith in God (*Elohim*; "I fear God," v. 18) told his brothers that he realized he was under divine authority, and therefore he would be fair with them. His test guaranteed Benjamin's safe passage to Egypt, something that Joseph had every reason to worry about, in view of his brothers' treatment of himself. Earlier, when he saw only 10 brothers—and not Benjamin—he probably wondered if the 10 had already done away with Benjamin.

The brothers saw divine retribution in what had happened to them and admitted their guilt ("Truly we are guilty concerning our brother," v. 21). This is the first acknowledgement of guilt recorded in Genesis (cf. 44:16).[2]

The brothers confessed their guilt—in dealing with Joseph as they had done—in his hearing, not knowing, however, that Joseph understood what they said (v. 23). Joseph wanted to assure himself that they had also

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[1]Kidner, p. 199. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 542.

[2]See Leupold, 2:1053.

borne the fruits of genuine repentance (i.e., taken a different course of action with Benjamin and Jacob). So he did not reveal himself to them at this time ("he turned away from them," v. 24). Joseph's heart had not become hard toward his brothers because of their treatment of him. He did not hate them ("he returned to them and spoke to them," v. 24).

> "There is nothing more striking in the character of Joseph than the utter absence of revengeful feeling, whether it was against his brothers, or against Potiphar, or against the chief butler."[1]

Rather, Joseph's heart remained tender, and his brothers' confession moved him (he "wept," v. 24). Reuben, as the eldest and most responsible son, would have been the logical choice to retain as a hostage. Yet because Joseph had overheard that Reuben had talked his brothers out of killing him (v. 22), Joseph passed him over and selected Simeon, who was the next oldest. Perhaps Joseph also remembered Simeon's cruelty and callousness toward his father (34:25; cf. 49:5-7). According to Jewish tradition, Simeon was the most cruel of all the brothers.[2]

> "Joseph's returning their silver (which was weighed out and used as money for much of the biblical period) deftly symbolizes the movement of the whole chapter: The brothers are getting what they gave!"[3]

42:26-28 Joseph restored his brothers' money to them out of the goodness of his heart. His gracious act would satisfy their needs on their return trip, but it would also cause them to search their souls further as they contemplated the implications of their good fortune. When the brothers first discovered the money in one of their sacks, they regarded what God was doing to them as divine punishment ("What is this that God has done to us?" v. 28). This is the first time in the story that the brothers mentioned God. Their aroused consciences saw God at work behind what they were experiencing (cf. vv. 21-22).

> "'Silver, money' (*keseph*) is mentioned twenty times (42:25—45:22). In the first scene of Act 1 [37:2-36], the

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 407.

[2]Yates, p. 41.

[3]Levenson, p. 79.

> brothers put a total of twenty pieces of silver before a brother (37:28). Now they put their brother over a fortune in silver. As might be expected in an act about family reconciliation [42:1—46:27], other key words are 'brother' (ca. 50x) and 'father' (ca. 40x)."[1]

42:29-34 Each time Jacob's sons had left home, they returned with more money—but minus a brother (chs. 37, 42).[2] Did Jacob think they had sold Simeon?

> "Joseph's brothers soften the news considerably, making it sound like Simeon was a guest of Joseph (Leave one of your brothers with me) instead of being bound in prison. They do not mention the threat of death and do not at this time speak of the money in the one sack."[3]

42:35-36 The money in the sacks widened the breach between Jacob and his sons, but drew the brothers closer together. Jacob despaired, not only because he distrusted his sons and the Egyptian ruler, but because he had forgotten the promises of God. He therefore concluded that, "… all these things are against me" (v. 36). In reality, God was causing all those things to work together for good for Jacob (cf. 45:5-7; Rom. 8:28). He would soon realize God's blessing.

> "A great portion of our present trouble arises from our not knowing the whole truth."[4]

> "Few things are more difficult or troubling to see than a bitter old person—wrapped in a blanket of anger, spewing forth profanity, poring over albums of wrongs done, and feeding on the dregs of would-be memories."[5]

42:37-38 Reuben's offer of his two sons seems pathetically weak (v. 37; cf. 37:18-30). He claimed willingness to suffer in Jacob's place. But would he really turn over his own sons before his brother? And how would killing Reuben's sons console Jacob? It is no wonder that Jacob declined

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 541-42.

[2]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 535.

[3]*The NET2 Bible* note on 42:34.

[4]Bush, 2:309.

[5]Swindoll, *Joseph*, p. 206.

Reuben's offer (v. 38). This is the second time that Reuben failed to convince his family (cf. 37:18-30).

> "This was a thoughtless and unwarrantable condition—one that he [Reuben] never seriously expected his father would accept. It was designed only to give assurance of the greatest care being taken of Benjamin."[1]

Throughout this chapter we can observe the attitude of Joseph's brothers changing. Faced with a personal crisis, they acknowledged their guilt. They regarded their suffering as righteous divine punishment, and they began to place Jacob's interests above their own. However, their repentance was not yet complete. They had to prove their contrition before reconciliation was possible.[2]

> "The motives and actions of Joseph and his family members are not patterns to be copied or avoided. The author's goal is to show that God's designs for Israel's fathers are working toward the end of redeeming the household of faith."[3]

When believers have unresolved guilt in their hearts, God often convicts their consciences to discover if they are spiritually sensitive enough to participate in His program.

> "St. Anne of Austria, a sixteenth-century saint, once wrote, 'God does not pay at the end of every day, but at the end, He pays.'"[4]

8. Joseph's brothers' second journey into Egypt ch. 43

Chapters 43 through 45 are a unit describing what happened when Joseph's brothers returned to Egypt. Like chapter 42, which this section echoes, it consists of seven scenes arranged palistrophically, with the central scene being the arrest of Joseph's brothers (44:1-13).

A Jacob sends his sons to Egypt (43:1-14).

B Arrival in Egypt; the steward and the brothers (43:15-25)

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[1]Jamieson, et al., p. 48.

[2]See Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 550, for further development of the "severe mercies" that God used to heal Jacob's fractured family.

[3]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 768.

[4]Swindoll, *Joseph*, p. 97.

C Lunch with Joseph (43:26-34)

D The brothers arrested (44:1-13)

C' Joseph's self-disclosure (44:14—45:15)

B' Departure from Egypt; Pharaoh and the brothers (45:16-24)

A' Jacob receives his sons' report (45:25-28).[1]

When the brothers returned to Canaan from Egypt they had to persuade Jacob to let Benjamin accompany them on their next trip to buy more food, which they did—but with considerable difficulty. When they went back to Egypt and tried to return the money that they had found in their sacks, Joseph received them graciously and dealt with them peacefully. He also showered Benjamin with lavish favoritism that was designed to test his brothers for jealousy.

43:1-10 Judah evidently took the lead and spoke for his brothers because Jacob had already refused Reuben (42:37-38), Simeon was in Egypt, and Levi had previously forfeited his father's confidence (ch. 34). As Reuben had done (42:37), Judah offered to be accountable to Jacob, but in contrast to Reuben, Judah took personal responsibility for Benjamin's safety (v. 9; cf. 37:17-18; John 15:13). From this point on, Judah becomes the leader of Jacob's sons (cf. 49:8-10; Matt. 1:2, 17; Luke 3:23, 33).

43:11-15 Facing a crisis like his meeting with Esau (chs. 32—33), Jacob again prepared a lavish present to appease "the man" (v. 14): Joseph (cf. Prov. 18:16). However, Moses called Jacob "Israel" here (v. 11), which may indicate that Jacob was not relying on the flesh here but was relying on Yahweh.

> "Jacob has no guarantee El Shaddai will do anything. His *if I am to be bereaved, bereaved I shall be* is the same construction as Esther's 'if I perish, I perish' (Est. 4:16) "[2]

Rebekah also had complained when she thought she might lose both Jacob and Esau (27:45).

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 418-19.

[2]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 545. See also S. B. Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes, and Structure*, pp. 123-42, for linguistic and thematic parallels between the Esther story and the Joseph story.

> "The 'and Benjamin' [v. 15] hangs like the resigned sigh of a father trapped between the need to live and the possibility of a life made utterly empty through another loss."[1]

43:16-22 Joseph's brothers felt very vulnerable, being invited to Joseph's house for dinner. They feared Joseph since the money in their sacks suggested that they were guilty of theft. So they appealed to Joseph's steward as their mediator. He assured them of Joseph's good will toward them. This incident illustrates how guilty sinners crave a mediator who will defend them before a just God, and how Jesus acts as an advocate for them before the Father (cf. 1 John 2:1).

43:23-25 A better translation of, "Your money was in my possession" (v. 23), is, "Your money had come to me." In modern parlance: "Don't worry; the money was returned to me." Evidently Joseph had covered the loss by paying for his brothers' food himself.

43:26-31 Again the brothers fulfilled God's prophecy in Joseph's dreams by bowing before Joseph (vv. 26, 28; cf. 37:5-9). Benjamin was about 16 years younger than Joseph, so he would have been about 23 at this time (v. 29).[2] Joseph was 39 (41:46; 45:6).

> "… according to the prevailing custom of the East, the very fact that they had been invited to Joseph's table was in itself an encouraging circumstance. Though the Orientals are for the most part a revengeful people, yet if you eat with them, you are thenceforward sure of having their protection. Even should you have done them the greatest injury, yet you need be under no apprehension from their resentment."[3]

43:32-34 The caste system in Egypt required that Joseph, as a member of the upper class, eat at a table separate from his Egyptian companions. The Hebrews sat at a third table, since they were foreigners (v. 32). The Hebrews and other foreigners ate animals that the Egyptians regarded as sacred.[4] The Egyptians also followed strict rules for the ceremonial cleansing of their

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[1]W. L. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study*, p. 45.

[2]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:361; Merrill, *Kingdom of …,* p. 31.

[3]Bush, 2:316.

[4]Cf. Herodotus, *The Histories*, 2:18, 41.

food before they ate it. This made the Hebrews "an abomination" (v. 32) to the Egyptians.[1] The Egyptians also shaved off all their body hair (cf. 41:14), so the hairiness of the Hebrews may have been another reason for the Egyptians' distaste.[2] This segregation later allowed the Israelites to develop into a numerous, distinct nation within the borders of Egypt (cf. 46:34).

Joseph now hosted a meal for his brothers, who, years before, had callously sat down to eat while he languished in a pit (cf. 37:25).[3] Joseph gave the highest honor to Benjamin as his distinguished guest, by giving him larger and better servings of food than the other brothers received ("five times as much," v. 34). Special honorees frequently received double portions, but a fivefold portion was the sign of highest privilege. With this favor Joseph sought not only to honor Benjamin, but also to test his other brothers' feelings toward Benjamin. He wanted to see if they would hate Benjamin as they had hated him, his father's former favorite. Evidently they passed this test.

> "Coming forth from this crucible, the formerly callous brothers emerge a bonded family, shining with integrity and love toward one another"[4]

"Those who would participate in God's program must be willing to take responsibility for their actions, make restitution when they are culpable, and accept their lot gratefully and without jealousy."[5]

9. Joseph's last test and its results ch. 44

Joseph next tested his brothers' loyalty to Benjamin by framing Benjamin and charging him with stealing Joseph's cup. These events prompted the brothers to acknowledge that God was punishing them for their treatment of Joseph many years earlier. Judah's plea for Benjamin voiced the genuineness of the brothers' loyalty to Benjamin. It contrasts with their former disloyalty to Joseph.

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[1]See also the note on 46:34.

[2]*The Nelson …,* pp. 79, 84.

[3]Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 302.

[4]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 557.

[5]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 662.

Joseph wanted to discover if his brothers would sell Benjamin as a slave, as they had sold him, and possibly kill Jacob with sorrow. Their only reasonable alternative was to submit to slavery for Benjamin's sake. This discovery seems to have been the object of Joseph's actions as Moses related them in this chapter. As God had tested the genuineness of Abraham's faith (22:1), so Joseph tested the genuineness of his brothers' repentance.

44:1-5 That Joseph actually practiced "divination" (a black art of the dark demonic world, that was later outlawed by God in Deuteronomy 18:10) is not clear from either verse 5 or verse 15. He may have, but this seems inconsistent with his character as a man of faith in Yahweh.[1] It also seems unlikely since Joseph had the gift of interpreting dreams (divine revelations) from God. He was a prophet who could reveal the future. If anyone needed to resort to divination—in this case hydromancy (discerning the future from liquids)—it would not have been Joseph.

Some interpreters, however, believe that Joseph's claim was just part of his ruse.[2] The first statement, made by Joseph's servant, may have been a lie (v. 5). The second statement, made by Joseph, did not claim to actually "practice divination" (v. 15). Joseph said that such a person as he could do it. Leon Wood believed that Joseph meant that he had information not available to ordinary people.[3]

The Hebrew verb in both verses 5 and 15 is *nahash* ("to whisper," "mumble formulations," "prophesy"), not *qasam*, the word normally translated "to divine."[4] These references to divination seem intended to impress Joseph's brothers with the value of the cup that had disappeared. The Hebrew word translated "cup" here, *gabia'*, refers to an extremely valuable and special chalice or goblet, not to a common drinking cup, a *kos*. The brothers inferred, rightly or wrongly, that Joseph used it to give him extraordinary insight.

44:6-9 The brothers' promise ("With whomever of your servants it [the cup] is found, he shall die, and we also shall be my lord's slaves," v. 9) was not only rash but foolish, since the contents of their sacks had surprised them

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[1]See Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., p. 303.

[2]E.g., Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 559; and Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 799.

[3]Wood, *The Prophets …*, p. 33.

[4]Ibid., p. 32.

previously. Years earlier Laban had searched through Jacob's possessions for his *teraphim* that remained hidden in Rachel's tent. Jacob had then rashly pronounced a death sentence—which would presumably have been carried out on Rachel, who was hiding the idols—on the guilty person (cf. 31:23, 25, 32-33, 35). Now the Egyptians searched for Joseph's cup of divination and found it, ironically, in Benjamin's sack—Rachel's son's sack! Death and slavery were also the punishments that the brothers planned to inflict on Joseph earlier (37:18-28).

44:10-13 Joseph's steward did not hold the brothers to their promise to become slaves, but simply stated that the supposed guilty person would become a slave (v. 10). Joseph had set his brothers up with a perfect excuse to abandon Benjamin—and free themselves from slavery!

There is plenty of evidence in the text that Joseph's brothers had truly repented and changed their attitudes. They were no longer greedy, jealous, or disloyal. This put them in a position to enjoy the blessings of their "sovereign" (Joseph), and to become channels of blessing to others. Their "sovereign" (lord) was Joseph, on the human level, but Joseph was also God's representative, serving their Sovereign in heaven: God. Note how the brothers acted together now, rather than fighting among themselves, as they had done previously.

Tearing one's clothing was a sign of great personal distress in the ancient Near East (v. 13; cf. 37:29). Here it expressed the brothers' sincere agony, first, at the prospect of having to turn Benjamin over to the Egyptians, and second, having to return to Jacob only to break his heart. They tore their clothes in anguish, as Jacob had done when he received news of Joseph's apparent death (37:34). The brothers did not suspect that they were the victims of deception, any more than Jacob did when his sons gave him Joseph's bloody coat.[1]

> "That all the brothers suffered such distress is a telling sign of the new sense of unity they had developed. They had already been informed that the innocent will be released (v. 10). Moreover, that they all return to Egypt underscores their commitment to Benjamin. The brothers are of one accord without any grumbling or dissent. They were guilty

[1]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 564.

> [previously] but did not show remorse; now they are innocent and demonstrate deepest agony."[1]

44:14-17 Judah acted as the spokesman for the brothers, because he had promised Jacob that he would take responsibility for Benjamin's safety (v. 16; cf. 43:8-9). Judah regarded this turn of events as divine condemnation for the brothers' treatment of Joseph and Jacob years earlier ("God has found out the guilt of your servants," v. 16).[2] Actually it was divine discipline that God designed in order to produce repentance. Later in Israel's history, as recorded in the Book of Judges, God again used discipline to produce repentance in the Israelites. Judah did not try to get rid of the privileged son this time, as he had done previously with Joseph. Instead, he volunteered to share Benjamin's fate—at great personal sacrifice.

Joseph allowed Judah and the other brothers to depart and return home, but without Benjamin (v. 17). But Judah's refusal to do so demonstrated the sincerity of the brothers' repentance.

44:18-34 Judah now gave all the facts to Joseph. He did not try to hide or excuse the brothers' guilt. This is the longest speech in Genesis. Key words are "servant" (10 times), "my lord" (7 times), and "father" (13 times).

> "This is one of the manliest, most straightforward speeches ever delivered by any man. For depth of feeling and sincerity of purpose it stands unexcelled. What makes it most remarkable, however, is the fact that it comes from the lips of one who once upon a time was so calloused that he cared nothing about the grief he had caused his father."[3]

> "No orator ever pronounced a more moving oration."[4]

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[1]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 800.

[2]See D. Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law*, pp. 248-55; Sternberg, p. 306.

[3]Leupold, 2:1086.

[4]Bush, 2:329.

> "Sir Walter Scott called this plea 'the most complete pattern of genuine natural eloquence extant in any language.'"[1]

> "I would give very much to be able to pray before our Lord God as well as Judah prays here before Joseph. For this is a perfect pattern of prayer, yes, of the true feeling which should be in a prayer."[2]

> "Both Judah's speech and Abraham's [in 18:23-32] exhibit a delicate balance of deference and assertion, and both succeed in moving the addressee from judgment to mercy."[3]

The brothers had changed; they now truly loved their father and Benjamin. Note Judah's appeal to Jacob's old age and Benjamin's youth (v. 20), descriptions designed to stress each one's vulnerability and so elicit Joseph's pity.

Jacob had not changed completely, in that he still doted on his youngest son (v. 29).

> "There are Christians today who reveal a very wonderful faith in God at the time when death comes to a loved one. Others actually collapse when this happens. I don't care how much you love a member of your family, friend, if you both are children of God, you know you are going to see each other again someday. The one walking by faith is not going to collapse at a time like that. Therefore, we can recognize that Jacob has not yet arrived. Although he is growing in grace, he still does not have a complete trust in God."[4]

Judah manifested concern for Jacob as well as Benjamin (v. 31). Rather than hating their father for favoring Joseph and then Benjamin, the brothers were now striving for Jacob's welfare. The supreme proof of

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[1]Yates, p. 42.

[2]Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, 7:368.

[3]Levenson, pp. 82-83.

[4]McGee, 1:178.

Judah's repentance, and the moral high point of his career, was his willingness to trade places with Benjamin and remain in Egypt as a slave (v. 33; cf. John 15:13). This is the first instance of altruistic human substitution in Scripture (cf. 19:8; 22:13).

> "A spiritual metamorphosis for the better has certainly taken place in Judah. He who once callously engineered the selling of Joseph to strangers out of envy and anger is now willing to become Joseph's slave so that the rest of his brothers, and especially Benjamin, may be freed and allowed to return to Canaan to rejoin their father."[1]

> "Jacob will crown Judah with kingship [49:10] because he demonstrates that he has become fit to rule according to God's ideal of kingship that the king serves the people, not vice versa. Judah is transformed from one who sells his brother as a slave to one who is willing to be the slave for his brother. With that offer he exemplifies Israel's ideal kingship."[2]

> "Judah's faithful adherence to Benjamin, now in his distress, was recompensed long after by the constant adherence of the tribe of Benjamin to the tribe of Judah, when all the other ten tribes deserted it. … How fitly does the apostle, when he is discoursing of the mediation of Christ, observe, that *our Lord sprang out of Judah* (Heb. vii. 14); for, like his father Judah, he not only *made intercession for the transgressors*, but he became a surety for them."[3]

Paul Twiss noted that this speech mirrors Joseph's test of his brothers.[4]

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[1]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 570.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 567.

[3]Matthew Henry, p. 64.

[4]Paul Twiss, "An Overlooked Aspect of Judah's Speech in Genesis 44:18-34," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65:3 (September 2022):457-71.

We should learn from this chapter that God teaches His people to be loyal to one another by convicting them of previous disloyalty in order to get them to love one another unselfishly. Such self-sacrificing love is essential for the leaders of God's people.

10. Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers 45:1-15

Joseph emotionally revealed his identity to his brothers when he could no longer hold back his feelings. Joseph assured his brothers of God's sovereign control of his life. He then directed them to bring Jacob to Egypt. Then he warmly demonstrated his love for his brothers. This chapter contains one of the most dramatic recognition scenes in all literature.

45:1-3 Judah so impressed Joseph with the sincerity of his repentance, and the tenderness of his affection, that Joseph broke down completely. He wept tears of joy uncontrollably (v. 2; cf. 2 Sam. 13:9).

> "The simple statement, 'I am Joseph,' must have come like a thunderclap out of a clear sky on these unsuspecting men."[1]

45:4-13 Joseph then explained his perspective on his brothers' treatment of him. He had discerned and accepted God's providential control of the events of his life. He interpreted the events that had led to the present state of things as he had interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. Four times Joseph stated that God, not his brothers, was behind what had happened (vv. 5, 7, 8, 9).

> "This statement is the theological heart of the account of Jacob's line (see 50:19-21; Acts 7:9-10). God directs the maze of human guilt to achieve his good and set purposes (Acts 2:23; 4:28). Such faith establishes the redemptive kingdom of God."[2]

> "It is divine sovereignty that undergirds the optimism of Genesis. 'God sent me to *preserve life*,' says Joseph."[3]

> "Then, why was Joseph so great? He was great because of his faith in God, which manifested itself in a magnanimous

[1]Leupold, 2:1091.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 563.

[3]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 433.

> attitude toward others and his magnificent attitude toward difficulties. A strong faith leads to a good attitude."[1]
>
> "Happy is the man whose eye is open to see the hand of God in every-day events, for to him life always possesses a wonderful and true joy and glory."[2]

Part of God's purpose was to use Joseph to preserve the house of Israel through the famine (v. 7).

> "In using terms like *remnant* and *survivors*, Joseph is employing words that elsewhere in the OT are freighted with theological significance. It may well be that in the deliverance of his brothers and his father Joseph perceives that far more is at stake than the mere physical survival of twelve human beings. What really survives is the plan of redemption announced first to his great grandfather."[3]

Joseph called God "*Ha Elohim*," the powerful God, the God of their fathers (v. 8). Joseph was "a father to Pharaoh," in that he was his adviser, like a father might be an adviser to his son (v. 8; cf. Prov. 1:8).

> "The theme of divine providential care is put into words by Joseph himself (45:7-8; 50:20), summing up the whole patriarchal story."[4]

An appreciation for God's sovereign control produced in Joseph a character marked by graciousness, forgiveness, and acceptance. No one can force a person who trusts in God out of God's will. I have known people who became bitter because they lost a good job, or a close family member, or a prized possession. But these events are all part of God's sovereign plan to bring blessing to these people, and through them to others. Even having suffered abuse in the past, as Joseph did, is no excuse for holding grudges and being bitter.

Joseph had evidently been planning for his father's family to move down to Egypt—if or when his brothers would prove that their attitude had

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[1]Swindoll, *Joseph*, p. 135.

[2]Thomas, *Genesis*, pp. 379-80.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 576.

[4]Whybray, p. 5.

changed (v. 10). "Goshen" (a Semitic rather than an Egyptian name) was the most fertile part of Egypt (cf. v. 18). It lay in the delta region northeast of the Egyptian capital: Memphis. Joseph made provision for the blessing of his father's family ("I will provide for you") so that they would not be "impoverished," since there were still five more years of famine to come (v. 11).

45:14-15 Joseph then embraced Benjamin, and all his other brothers, to express his love to them and to confirm his forgiveness of them. The writer highlighted the genuine reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers by recording that they "talked with him" (v. 15). Much earlier they could not speak to him because they hated him (37:4). But now, after a threefold expression of Joseph's goodwill toward his siblings (weeping, explaining, and embracing), the shocked and fearful brothers gained the courage to speak. They now recognized Joseph as the same person whom they had so cruelly abused, and who was now able to crush them if he chose to do so.

Outstanding in this reconciliation story is the way in which Joseph's perception of God's ways made him gracious, forgiving, and accepting—rather than bitter and vindictive. He saw the loving hand of his God behind the cruelty of his brothers. He had accepted all that had come to him as the will of God, and, therefore, he experienced the blessing of God. Reconciliation is possible when there is forgiveness, and forgiveness is possible when there is recognition of God's sovereignty.

> "Some have questioned the morality of Yosef's actions, seeing that the aged Yaakov might well have died while the test was progressing, without ever finding out that Yosef had survived. But that is not the point of the story. What it is trying to teach (among other things) is a lesson about crime and repentance. Only by recreating something of the original situation—the brothers are again in control of the life and death of a son of Rachel—can Yosef be sure that they have changed. Once the brothers pass the test, life and covenant can then continue."[1]

> "Genesis declares that children raised in dysfunctional families are not locked by fate into living dysfunctional lives."[2]

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[1]E. Fox, *In the Beginning*, p. 202.

[2]Wyrtzen, p. 25.

Though the Bible never identifies Joseph as a type of Christ, many analogies are apparent and significant: Both had unusual births in answer to prayer. Both were special objects of their father's love. Both were set apart from their brethren. Both were sent by their fathers to their brethren. Both obeyed their fathers. In both cases their brethren ridiculed and hated them without just cause, and sold them for a few pieces of silver (Joseph for 20 and Jesus for 30). Their brethren rejected their superior claims, sought to prevent their exaltation, conspired to kill them, and turned them over to Gentiles. Both disappeared from their brethren for a time (Joseph in Egypt and Jesus in heaven). Both were tempted and overcame their temptations. Both began their saving work at or near the age of 30. Both were unjustly condemned by Gentile rulers (Potiphar and Pilate). Both found favor with Gentile overseers (Joseph's jailer and the centurion at Jesus' crucifixion). Both suffered with two malefactors, one of which received life and the other death. Joseph asked the blessed prisoner to remember him, and Jesus told the blessed thief that He would remember Him. Both became a savior and a blessing to their brethren, to strangers, to the Gentiles, and to the whole world—in spite of their brethren's hatred and rejection. Both received a bride (Asenath and the church). The brethren of both received judgment for their treachery. Both forgave their persecutors. Joseph reconciled with his brethren and exalted them, and so will Christ. Jacob rejoiced over the fact that Joseph, whom he long regarded as dead, was alive, and returned to him. Likewise the Israelites will rejoice and return to Jesus when He finally appears at His second coming.[1]

There is also a general correspondence between Joseph's dealings with his brothers and Jesus' dealings with the Jews: When the brothers came to Egypt the first time, Joseph's identity was hidden from them. When Jesus came at His first advent most of the Jews did not recognize Him for who He was. During the time between the brothers' visits they continued to be ignorant of Joseph's true identity. During the present age, between Jesus' first and second advents, most of the Jews are still ignorant of His true identity. This time was a period of suffering for the brothers (and Jacob) that culminated in great suffering (running out of food). This time will be a period of suffering for the Jews (worldwide dispersion and persecution) that will culminate in great suffering for them (the Great Tribulation). When the brothers made their second visit to Egypt, they were still ignorant of who Joseph was until Judah voiced their repentance. This resulted in Joseph identifying himself to his brothers. However, in the future Jesus' true identity will become known to the Jews when He returns to the earth at His second advent, and then

[1]See Leupold, 2:951; Baxter, 1:60-62; McGee, 1:150, 160-61, and 168-69.

they will repent (Zech. 12:10). In both cases great blessing followed or will follow—for the brothers, and for all the Jews.

11. Israel's move to Egypt 45:16—46:30

Joseph's brothers returned to Jacob with news of Joseph's survival and prosperity. Israel (Jacob) then moved to Egypt in response to Joseph's invitation and God's encouragement. The survival of Jacob's family in Egypt through the famine recalls the survival of Noah's family in the ark through the Flood.

Israel's decision to move to Egypt 45:16-28

45:16-20 Pharaoh's invitation was so exceptionally generous because Pharaoh held Joseph in such high regard. This is another excellent example of true hospitality: giving the best that one has to a starving and needy family. Pharaoh's invitation was only an invitation, not a command. Pharaoh commanded Joseph to take wagons for Jacob's family to use in coming to Egypt, but Pharaoh had no authority to command Jacob to move into Egypt. Jacob was free to accept or reject this offer. If Jacob chose to accept it, he would be free to return to Canaan whenever he chose. The fact that Jacob's family later could not leave Egypt, after they had settled there, was due to a new Pharaoh's new policies concerning the Israelites as residents of Egypt. It was not due to the action of this Pharaoh (Sesostris III).

> "… when Pharaoh restates Joseph's offer and 'twice' gives the brothers the 'good' (vv. 18, 20) of the land of Egypt, it is hard not to see in the purpose of this narrative a conscious allusion to the 'good' (1:31) land given to Adam in Genesis 1. The picture of Joseph is a picture of restoration—not just the restoration of the good fortune of Jacob, but, as a picture, the restoration of the blessing that was promised through the seed of Jacob. This picture is also a blueprint for the hope that lies for the people of Israel at the end of the Pentateuch. They are to go into the land and enjoy it as God's good gift (e.g., Dt 30:5)."[1]

[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 223.

45:21-23 Joseph obediently provided wagons for Jacob's household. He also gave his brothers provisions for their journey back to Canaan and extra clothing. But to Benjamin, his full brother, he gave money and more clothes. For Jacob he sent some of the best things of Egypt and ample provisions that would sustain him until he reached Egypt.

45:24-28 Joseph's admonition to his brothers not to "quarrel" (NASB, ESV, NRSV, NIV, TNIV, NEB), "fall out" (AV), or "argue" (HCSB, CEV) on their journey (v. 24) is a bit unclear. Probably he meant not to become involved in arguing and accusations over the past (cf. Prov. 29:9). Since Joseph had forgiven them, they should forgive one another (cf. Matt. 18:21-35). However the usual meaning of the Hebrew word translated "quarrel" is "fear" or "tremble" (e.g.. Exod. 15:14). Another English version has rendered this Hebrew word "become troubled" (NKJV). So part of Joseph's meaning may have been that they should not be afraid of robbers as they returned to Canaan, or fearful of returning to Egypt in the future.[1]

> "I think it is safe to say that we are to trust one another, but we are never to trust one another's nature."[2]

Jacob had suffered as a victim of his sons' deception and malice. But he had also suffered because of his own failure to cling to the promises that God had given to his forefathers, to himself, and to Joseph in his dreams. Jacob always had difficulty believing without seeing. Nevertheless, when he believed that Joseph was alive and ruling over Egypt, his spirit revived, and he returned to a position of trust in God. For this reason Moses called him "Israel" again in the text (v. 28). Often, in Genesis, a final comment by a chief actor in the drama anticipates the next scene, as is true here.

> "Both Abraham and Jacob figuratively receive their sons back from the dead. Both sons prefigure the death and resurrection of Christ, but Joseph even more so. Both are not only alive but rulers over all (cf. Acts 2:32-34; Phil. 2:6-11). Jacob's response on hearing the incredibly good news prefigures the response of the disciples when the women tell them that Christ is alive, having been raised from the dead. They too greet the news at first with stunned

[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 430.

[2]Swindoll, *Joseph*, p. 156.

> disbelief and finally with unspeakable joy when it is proved with many infallible proofs (cf. Luke 24:9-49; John 21:1-9, 24-25; Acts 1:3). Their faith, like Jacob's, revives them, reorients their lives, and makes them pilgrims venturing from land plagued by famine to the best land imaginable."[1]
>
> "A fugitive is fleeing from home; a vagabond has no home; a stranger is away from home; *but a pilgrim is heading home*."[2]
>
> "In the central place of every heart there is a recording chamber; so long as it receives messages of beauty, hope, cheer, and courage, so long are you young. When the wires are all down and your heart is covered with the snows of pessimism and the ice of cynicism, then, and then only are you grown old."[3]

God's encouragement to move 46:1-4

The structure of chapters 46 and 47 is also chiastic:[4]

A God appears to Jacob (46:1-4)

B Jacob journeys to Egypt (46:5-27)

C Joseph meets Jacob (46:28-34)

D Joseph's brothers meet Pharaoh (47:1-6)

C' Jacob meets Pharaoh (47:7-10)

B' Joseph cares for his family and Egypt (47:11-26)

A' Jacob prepares to die (47:27-31)

46:1-4 Beersheba lay near the southern border of Canaan. Jacob and his caravan stopped there to offer sacrifices to Yahweh. Earlier, Abraham had planted a tamarisk tree there, and called on the name of the LORD (21:33). Isaac had also built an altar there and called on the LORD, after God had

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 578.

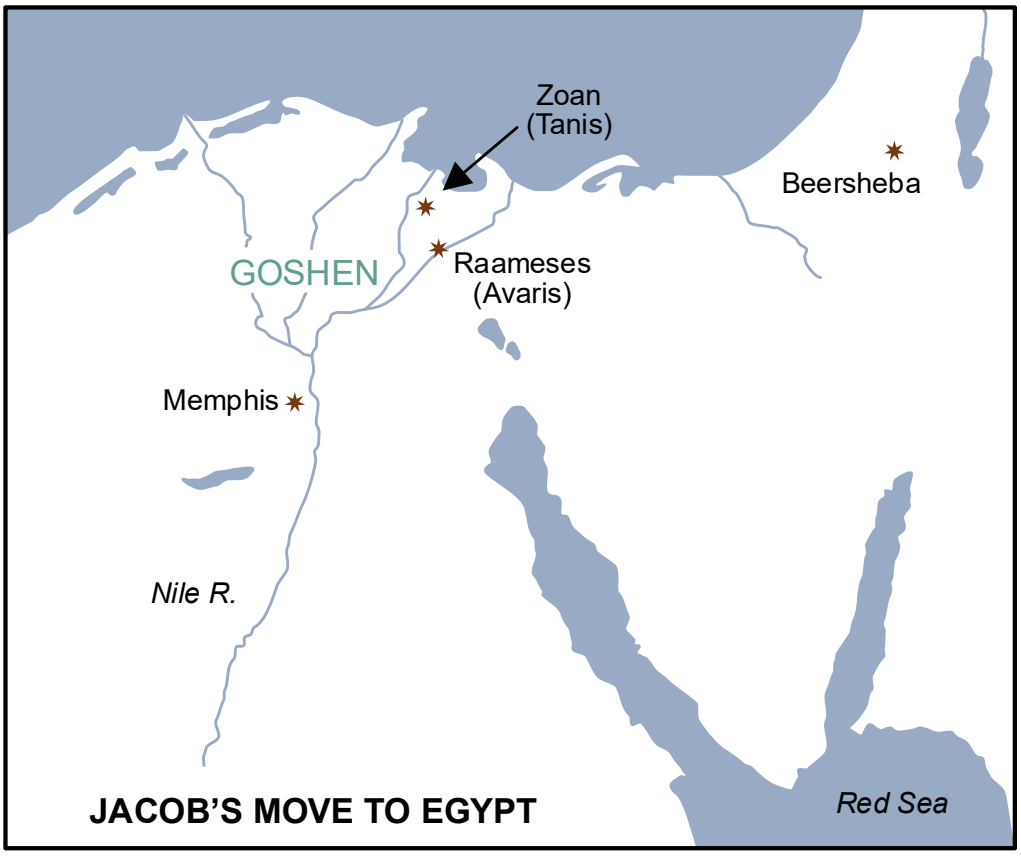
[2]Wiersbe, p. 119.

[3]General Douglas MacArthur, quoted in *Quote Unquote*, p. 15.

[4]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 439.

appeared to him (26:24-25). It was perhaps on this very altar that Jacob now presented his sacrifices.

Jacob must have had mixed feelings as he looked forward to seeing Joseph again. At the same time, he realized that he was leaving the land promised to his family by God. This move was as momentous for Jacob as Abram's journey had been from Ur (12:1-3), Jacob's flight to Paddan-aram (28:1-22), or his return to Canaan (31:3-54)—all of which God encouraged with visions.



Jacob—Moses called him Israel here—was probably aware of the prophecy that Abraham's descendants would experience slavery in a foreign land for 400 years (15:13). Consequently, he must have found it even more difficult to cross into Egypt (vv. 2-4). God revealed Himself to Jacob here (the sixth time) in order to assure him that this move was in harmony with His will for him and his family. This is one of four "Do not be afraid" consolations that God gave in Genesis (v. 3; cf. 15:1; 21:17; 26:24).

God promised to make Jacob's family "a great nation" in Egypt (cf. 12:2; 15:13-14; 17:6, 20; 18:18; 21:13-8). Because of the Egyptians' disdain for Hebrew shepherds, Jacob's family was not in danger of assimilation into Egyptian life—as they had been in danger of being assimilated into Canaanite life. They also received the best land in Egypt. The Israelites' removal to Egypt was a divine discipline too. Jacob's sons had failed to stay separate from the Canaanites, so God, in keeping with His promise, temporarily removed them from the land that He had promised them. Note the parallels with Esau's migration to Seir (cf. 36:2-8 and 46:8—47:27).

God promised to go with Jacob into Egypt (v. 4). Egypt became the womb that God used to form the nation of Israel.[1] Though Jacob was leaving God's Promised Land, he was not leaving God behind. God further promised to bring Jacob back into the land ("I will also assuredly bring you up again," v. 4). He did this by bringing Jacob's descendants back, 400 years later, and by bringing Jacob himself back for burial in the land (50:1-21). Moreover, God promised that Jacob would not die until he had seen Joseph (cf. 49:29-33). "Joseph will close your eyes" (v. 4) refers to a custom that Jews still practice. The eldest son or closest relative would gently close the eyes of the deceased.[2] God assured Jacob that Joseph would be by his side when he died.

> "Jacob's decidedly dysfunctional family is on the verge of coming together again in genuine community."[3]

Israel's household's move to Egypt 46:5-27

46:5-7 In response to God's instructions and promises, Jacob moved all that he had to Egypt. These verses are a summary. A more detailed description of Jacob's family follows.

46:8-27 This section contains a list of the individuals in Jacob's family when they moved to Egypt. Simeon and Judah had married Canaanite women (vv. 10, 12; cf. 38:2). As in chapter 31, when Jacob left Paddan-aram, this move was also difficult for Jacob. Moses recorded a total of 70 persons (v. 27; cf. Exod. 1:5). The 66 referred to in verse 26 excluded Jacob, Joseph,

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 574.

[2]Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 313.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 593.

Ephraim, and Manasseh; or perhaps Er and Onan (v. 12) and Ephraim and Manasseh. This number also excluded the wives of Jacob's sons (v. 26). Stephen said there were 75, but he must have added Joseph's three grandsons and two great-grandsons (Acts 7:14). These five were born later, as were some or all of Benjamin's 10 sons (v. 21), in all probability.[1]

> In addition to the 70 males "… according to a view which we frequently meet with in the Old Testament, though strange to our modes of thought, [they] came into Egypt *in lumbus patrum* [i.e., in the loins of their father]."[2]
>
> "It [verse 8] means: shortly after the children of Israel had come to Egypt there were to be found those seventy fathers from whom were derived the seventy clans that were the prevailing clans throughout Israel's early history."[3]

This was the humble beginning of the great nation of Israel.

> "It can hardly go without notice that the number of nations in Genesis 10 is also 'seventy.' Just as the 'seventy nations' represent all the descendants of Adam, so now the 'seventy sons' represent all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the children of Israel. Here in narrative form is a demonstration of the theme in Deuteronomy 32:8 that God apportioned the boundaries of the nations (Ge 10) according to the number of the children of Israel. Thus the writer has gone to great lengths to portray the new nation of Israel as a new humanity and Abraham as a second Adam. The blessing that is to come through Abraham and his seed is a restoration of the original blessing of Adam, a blessing which was lost in the Fall."[4]
>
> "But there must have been a very large company belonging to them, of both men-servants, maid-servants, and

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[1]See Sailhamer, "Genesis," revised ed., pp. 309-10, for discussion of the numbers.

[2]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:371.

[3]Leupold, 2:1115.

[4]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* …, p. 225.

> children; and, beyond a doubt, these remained, were incorporated with, and multiplied as rapidly as their masters. May we not in this fact find an explanation of the vast multitude to which this company had grown in so short a time?"[1]

Israel's reunion with Joseph 46:28-30

46:28 Note that Jacob sent Judah ahead to guide him to Goshen. Judah is again the leader of his brothers and Jacob's family.

> "The land of Goshen, where the Hebrews lived, adjoined Avaris—now known to have been sited at Tell el-Dab'a (*not* at Tanis, as so many textbooks wrongly aver)."[2]

The opinion expressed in the quotation above rests on belief in a late date for the Exodus in the thirteenth century B.C., however, and may not be correct.

46:29-30 This reunion recalls Jacob's former meeting with Esau (32:3). In both situations, after a long period of separation, Jacob sent a party ahead to meet his relative.

Jacob had said that the loss of his sons would bring him to his grave in mourning (37:35; 42:38). Joseph's "resurrection" had enabled his father to die in peace. Similarly, the resurrection of a "Greater Joseph" (Jesus) has allowed many to face death with courage and hope (cf. Acts 7:55, 59-60; Phil. 1:21-26; 1 Pet. 1:3).

Believers should respond to divine providence by making their decisions in response to the initiative of His wise leaders. They should do so with confidence in His promises, dependent on His continuing guidance and provision. "Providence" is God's guidance and care that He exercises through circumstances.

12. Joseph's wise leadership 46:31—47:27

As a result of Joseph presenting his family members to Pharaoh, they received the best of Egypt's land. Jacob blessed Pharaoh in return for his goodness. In the years that followed, Joseph bought almost all of Egypt for Pharaoh, saved the Egyptians' lives, and

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[1]Thomson, 2:409.

[2]Kitchen, *The Bible …,* p. 76.

furthered Israel's prosperity and blessing. Through Joseph all the nations surrounding Egypt also received blessing (cf. 12:3).

God's provision of land and food for Israel 46:31—47:12

A major purpose of this section is to show how God sustained and blessed Jacob's family in Egypt during the remaining five years of the famine (cf. vv. 12-13). Another is to demonstrate how He partially fulfilled His promises to the patriarchs: to make them a blessing to the whole world (47:15-25), as well as fruitful and numerous (47: 27).

46:31-34 Egyptians loathed shepherds, because agriculture was the basis of Egyptian society, and the Nile River and its delta, where Goshen was, sustained agricultural life (v. 34). The Egyptian farmers organized their fields carefully and controlled them relatively easily and neatly, but without large herds of livestock. The comparative difficulty of controlling large herds of sheep, goats, and cows led the Egyptians to think of those who cared for these animals as crude and barbaric.[1] Probably, too, the more "civilized" Egyptians distrusted any nomadic peoples.[2] This resulted in the Israelites living in separate territory from the Egyptians, where they increased in numbers, and developed a distinct national identity and vocation, as God had promised.

> "The Egyptians generally seemed to detest 'the Asiatics,' the term they used for the various Semitic groups (including the Hebrews) that lived to the east and northeast of them. This was related to the fact that the Egyptians had an advanced and wealthy urban society, while the Semites typically lived as nomads. This attitude is well illustrated by the Egyptian wisdom book known as the Instruction of Merikare, a Middle Kingdom (ca. 2133-1786 BC) document in which the main speaker warns the reader to beware 'the hated Asiatic.'"[3]
>
> "Rameses III is said to have employed 3,264 men, mostly foreigners, to take care of his herds."[4]

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[1]See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:374-75, and my note on 43:32.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 445.

[3]Longman, "Genesis," p. 117.

[4]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 446.

Joseph encouraged his family to be completely honest with Pharaoh. Dishonesty had long plagued Jacob's family, but now Joseph led them out of this destructive behavior.

47:1-6 When Joseph presented five of his brothers to Pharaoh, they followed Joseph's advice and identified themselves as shepherds. They also requested permission to live in the land of Goshen. Pharaoh, undoubtedly out of great respect for Joseph, allowed his family to settle in "the best of the land" (v. 6), namely, the land of Goshen. Pharaoh also gave Joseph permission to place "any capable men" among his brothers over Pharaoh's livestock.

47:7-10 Jacob's blessing of Pharaoh (vv. 7, 10) is unusual, since it implies that, in one sense (i.e., as one of God's elect), Jacob was superior to Pharaoh. "… the lesser person is blessed by the greater" (Heb. 7:7). Pharaoh was a man of immense worldly power and influence. Jacob became a blessing to a Gentile world ruler and so fulfilled God's promise of becoming a blessing—partially. This event also foreshadowed the future, complete fulfillment of Israel's worldwide blessing of the nations (cf. Ps. 2).

> "The least and most faltering of God's children has the superiority in the presence of the most elevated men of the world."[1]

Jacob in this scene described his life as "my living abroad" (v. 9) primarily because he had not come into final possession of the Promised Land. He had, of course, also lived in widely separated places during his lifetime: Paddan-aram, Canaan, and now Egypt. His years were fewer than his fathers: 130 compared with Abraham's 175, and Isaac's 180. This comparison, plus Jacob's statement that "few and unpleasant have been the years of my life," testifies to the fact that neither Abraham nor Isaac had experienced the difficulties and distresses that Jacob had during his lifetime.

> "These words [in v. 9] appear to be the author's attempt at a deliberate contrast to the later promise that one who honors his father and mother should 'live long and do well upon the land' (Dt 5:15 [*sic* 16]). Jacob, who deceived his

[1]Darby, 1:78.

> father and thereby gained the blessing, must not only die outside the Promised Land but also, we learn here, his years were few and difficult. From his own words, then, we can see a final recompense for Jacob's actions earlier in the book."[1]
>
> "When we first encountered Jacob he was struggling inside his mother's womb with his twin brother. As we come to the end of Jacob's life, he is struggling for his life in a famine-devastated Canaan. In between these first and last moments of struggle have been many trying experiences for Jacob. His life has had more sorrow than joy."[2]
>
> "To watch Jacob is to see a man who alternated between faith and fear."[3]
>
> "Frankly, my feeling is that Jacob has arrived. What an opportunity he has to boast, but he doesn't take advantage of it. Someone else might have thought, *Pharaoh is a great ruler, but I want him to know that I was a pretty big man up yonder in the land of Canaan!* But Jacob doesn't brag—he is just a sinner, saved by the grace of God."[4]

47:11-12 The text describes the area where Jacob's family settled as "the land of Rameses" here, rather than Goshen (v. 11).

The use of the name "Rameses" here and elsewhere (Exod. 1:11; 12:37; Num. 33:3, 5) has become a kind of "red herring" for many interpreters. It has led them to conclude that these events occurred after one of the Pharaohs named Rameses lived. Rameses I reigned about 1347-1320 B.C. However the biblical chronological references (1 Kings 6:1; Exod. 12:40; et al.) point to a date for Israel's move to Egypt near 1876 B.C. How can we account for the use of the name "Rameses" here then?

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[1]Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch …*, p. 227.

[2]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 612.

[3]Morgan, *An Exposition …,* p. 32.

[4]McGee, 1:185.

It is possible that the name "Rameses" (also spelled "Raamses" and "Raameses") was in use when Jacob entered Egypt, even though extra-biblical references have not confirmed this.[1] "Raamses" simply means "Ra [the sun god] has created it."[2] A second possibility is that Rameses may have been the name of this district later, in Moses' day, when he wrote Genesis. Moses might have used the more modern name when writing Genesis, rather than an older one that was in use in Jacob's day. A third possibility is that Rameses was the district name even later in history (e.g., after Pharaoh Rameses). A later scribe may have substituted "Rameses" for an older name that was in use when Moses wrote or when Jacob entered Egypt.[3]

> "How different is Jacob's descent to Egypt from his grandfather's (ch. 12)! Both seek out the safety of Egypt because of famine. To save himself Abraham engages in deceit. To save his family Jacob engages in blessing. The Pharaoh at Abraham's visit was only too happy to see Abraham return to his own country. The Pharaoh at Jacob's visit insists that Jacob stay and settle on some choice land. Abraham retreats from Egypt. For Jacob Egypt is his new home. Abraham leaves Egypt alive (and happy to be so!). Jacob will leave Egypt dead."[4]

God's provision of land and food for Pharaoh 47:13-27

This section demonstrates the fulfillment of Jacob's blessing on Pharaoh (46:31—47:6 and 47:7-10). Joseph was able to save Egypt and its neighbors from a very severe famine, and to alleviate the desperate plight of the Egyptians. Joseph fulfilled God's promises to bless his family through himself (promised in his dreams), and to bless the whole world through Abraham's descendants (12:3). Pharaoh received money from Egypt and Canaan (vv. 13-14), livestock (vv. 15-17), land and slaves (vv. 18-21, 23, 25), and 20 percent of future harvests (vv. 23-26). Such a tax was not out of line with what was common in that day in the ancient Near East. Twenty percent was actually a small

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[1]Merrill, *Kingdom of …,* pp. 70-71; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *A History of Israel*, pp. 74-75.

[2]*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Raamses," by C. R. Conder, 4:2520.

[3]See Leupold, 2:1131.

[4]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 613.

tax at that time, since the average was 33 and a third percent.[1] God blessed this Pharaoh because he had blessed the Israelites with the best of Egypt. Later, in Moses' time, God cursed a different Pharaoh, because he dealt harshly with the Israelites.

> "This entire situation informs the meaning of Exodus 1:8-11, which states that a new king came to power who did not know Joseph. Consequently—and ironically—that king began to enslave the Israelites to work in his projects. Had he remembered Joseph, he would have realized how loyal and faithful Israel could be in their sojourn in the land. Because this Pharaoh treated Israel well, they flourished, and he became powerful and wealthy; but because that new king treated Israel harshly, he would have none of the blessing of God, nor would he be able to hinder the prosperity of the people of God. From the beginning to the end of the Egyptian sojourn, prosperity and growth came from God's blessing. Those who acknowledged it shared in it."[2]

47:13-19

> "It was axiomatic in the ancient world that one paid one's way so long as one had anything to part with—including, in the last resort, one's liberty."[3]
>
> "Both Egyptian and Mesopotamian slavery differentiated generally between formerly free people who became debt slaves and foreigners (usually war captives) who were bought and sold as chattel [property other than real estate]. Mesopotamian laws and contracts indicate that creditors obtained the service of the debt slave until the debt was covered, but chattel slaves belonged to their owners without much chance of release. Although we cannot know from Genesis, there is reason to believe that the voluntary submission of the people assumes that the enslavement was not permanent (cp. the law established by Joseph, 47:26)."[4]

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 591; Thomas, *Genesis*, pp. 451-52; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 851, 860; Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 322; 1 Maccabees 10:29. See Brian Alexander McKenzie, "Jacob's Blessing of Pharaoh: An Interpretation of Gen. 46:31—47:26," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (Fall 1983):386-99.

[2]Ross, *Creation and …,* p. 687. Cf. 12:3.

[3]Kidner, p. 211.

[4]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 851.

> "The idea of slavery is not attractive to the modern mind, but in the ancient world it was the primary way of dealing with the poor and destitute. If the people became slaves of Pharaoh, it was Pharaoh's responsibility to feed them and care for them. It was the best way for them to survive the famine."[1]

This is the first mention of "horses" in the Bible, the primary beast of burden and military machine at that time (v. 17). Egypt was an important source of horses in Solomon's day (cf. 1 Kings 10:28-29).

The reference to the Egyptian's exchanging "flocks" and "herds" for food (v. 17) may seem to contradict the fact that "every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians" (46:34). Even though many Egyptian were farmers, there had to have been many Egyptians who kept flocks of sheep and herds of cows. Probably the earlier statement about shepherds is a reference to the lower caste of Egyptians, whom most Egyptians looked down upon.

47:20-26 Early Greek writers, as well as monument evidence, seem to confirm Joseph's political reforms and redistribution of land in Egypt.[2]

> "This tax burden [20 percent, v. 24] was not excessive according to ancient Near Eastern standards."[3]

In a very real sense Joseph became a "savior" of the Gentiles ("So they [the Egyptians] said [to Joseph], 'You have saved our lives!'" v. 25) as well as a "savior" of the Jews.[4]

> "We might also add that the exception made to temple lands (vv. 22, 26) shows that Joseph's action was not a crass land grab without regard for Egyptian tradition and society's welfare."[5]

> "The tables have indeed turned. The man who was brought to Egypt as a slave now reduces the Egyptians to

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[1]*The NET2 Bible* note on 47:19.

[2]See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:379; *Cambridge Ancient History*, 1:306-310.

[3]Currid, p. 79.

[4]See Frankfort, pp. 36-43.

[5]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 852.

> slavery, all the while, however, saving their lives just as he saved the lives of his own family."[1]

47:27 "Israel" prospered under Joseph's administration, in contrast to Egypt. Here "Israel" quite clearly refers to the family of Jacob. The Israelites "acquired property in it [Egypt] and were fruitful and became very numerous." The fulfillment of God's promise to increase the seed of the patriarchs was advancing quickly.

This chapter illustrates the fact that a wise leader knows that prosperity comes only from God, so he makes decisions in harmony with what God has revealed about how He has promised to bless.

> "Adversity is sometimes hard upon a man, but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity."[2]

13. Jacob's worship in Egypt 47:28—48:22

Jacob demonstrated his faith in God's promises by demanding that his sons bury him in the Promised Land. He also showed that he had learned that God will bless those He chooses to bless, by his blessing the younger Ephraim over the older Manasseh.

Jacob's request to be buried in Canaan 47:28-31

Jacob lived his last 17 years in the care of Joseph, who, ironically, had spent the first 17 years of his life in Jacob's care (37:2). As Jacob's death seemed to be approaching, he called for Joseph and made him promise to bury him in the Promised Land ("with my fathers"), rather than in Egypt (cf. 24:2-3). As the father of such an important person as Joseph, Jacob could have had a very fine burial in Egypt. His request demonstrated his preference for the promise of God rather than the acclaim of the world (cf. Moses, Heb. 11:24-25).

As mentioned previously, placing the hand under a person's thigh was part of a ritual connected with making a solemn promise (cf. 24:2-3). Israel "bowed in worship at the head of the bed." He evidently thanked Yahweh in prayer for granting his wish to be buried in Canaan. Here is another reference to Jacob bowing in Joseph's presence, in fulfillment of Joseph's dream (cf. 37:9-10). Jacob may have been too weak to bow down on the ground, which was a more common posture in worship (cf. 48:12; 1 Kings 1:47).

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[1]Levenson, p. 87.

[2]Thomas Carlyle, quoted in *John Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, p. 474.

> "Jacob, in life too often the cunning schemer who trusted his own wiliness to achieve his ends, now in the face of death shows that his ultimate hope is the promise of God."[1]

> "Jacob's desire was that his funeral would be a clear witness that he was not an idol-worshiping Egyptian but a believer in the true and living God. When you stop to think that your funeral and burial are the last public testimonies you will ever give, it makes you want to plan carefully. Making your last will and testament is important, but don't neglect your last witness and testimony."[2]

Jacob's adoption of Joseph's sons 48:1-11

The events recorded in the last three chapters of Genesis deal with the last days of Jacob and Joseph. In these last chapters there are many other references to earlier episodes in the book.

> "This constant harking back to earlier episodes and promises is totally in place in a book whose theme is the fulfillment of promises, a book that regularly uses analogy between episodes as a narrative technique. And at the close of a book it is particularly [*sic*] appropriate to exploit these cross-linkages to the full. It reinforces the sense of completeness and suggests that the story has reached a natural stopping point."[3]

> "It is appropriate that the end of Genesis should draw to a close with repeated references to the thematic word of the book (*b-r-k*, 'to bless')."[4]

This very important section explains how Ephraim and Manasseh came to have equal standing with Joseph's brothers, and why Joseph did not become the head of a tribe. Manasseh would have been between 20 and 26 years old at this time (41:50; 47:28). Ephraim, of course, was younger than Manasseh. Thus we have another etiology (an explanation of origins).

48:1-7 It was as "Israel," the "Prince with God," that Jacob performed the official and significant act of blessing and adopting Ephraim and Manasseh as his own sons (vv. 2, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 20, 21; cf. 30:3; Heb. 11:21). His action

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[1]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 452.

[2]Wiersbe, p. 164.

[3]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 461.

[4]Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 863.

was in harmony with God's will and purpose for the chosen family, and it involved the patriarchal promises to which he referred (cf. 35:10-12).

> "Jacob may be losing his health, but he is not losing his memory. He can recall the incident of many years earlier when God appeared to him at Luz [Bethel] (35:9-15). He repeats the promises of God about fertility, multiplication, that his seed will be an assembly of nations, and finally the promise of land. The only essential element of that theophany he does not repeat is the name change from Jacob to Israel. In this way, Jacob minimizes his role and maximizes God's role in that event."[1]

By adopting Joseph's first two sons as his own, and giving them equal standing with Joseph's brothers, Jacob was bestowing on Joseph the double portion of the family birthright (v. 5; cf. v. 22; 1 Chron. 5:1-2). He was also, in effect, elevating Joseph to the level of himself. Joseph was the first son of Jacob's intended first wife: Rachel. Jacob's reference to Rachel (v. 7) shows that she, as the mother of Joseph, was in his mind in this act. It honored her. The other sons of Joseph, who were born after Manasseh and Ephraim, were to receive their own inheritances, though there is no record in Scripture that Joseph had other sons. It is possible that Jacob intended Ephraim and Manasseh to replace Reuben and Simeon (v. 5), who had both earned their father's censure (cf. 34:30; 35:22; 49:3-7; 1 Chron. 5:1).[2]

> "Verse 7 has long puzzled biblical interpreters. Why the mention of Rachel at this point in the narrative, and why the mention of her burial site? If we relate the verse to what precedes, then the mention of Rachel here could be prompted by the fact that just as she had borne Jacob 'two sons' (44:27, Joseph and Benjamin) at a time when he was about to enter (48:7) the land, so also Joseph gave Jacob 'two sons' (v. 5) just at the time when he was about to enter Egypt."[3]

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[1]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 628.

[2]Levenson, p. 88.

[3]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 271.

48:8-11 Jacob's eyes were failing in his old age (v. 10), so he may not have recognized Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. 27:1). But it seems more likely that by asking "Who are these?" (v. 8), Jacob was identifying the beneficiaries as part of the legal ritual of adoption and/or blessing (cf. 27:18). The eyesight of both Isaac and Jacob failed in their old age.

> "There is a slight touch of irony here: Jacob had secured Isaac's blessing by guile and deceit, while Joseph is securing the blessing for his sons by honesty and forthrightness."[1]

Jacob gave God the credit that he was able to see Joseph's sons ("God has let me see your children as well," v. 11). He had come to acknowledge God's providential working and His grace in his life, as he realized how faithful God had been to him in spite of his unfaithfulness.

Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh 48:12-20

48:12-14 Ephraim and Manasseh had been standing very close to Jacob, between his knees, so that he could see and touch them (v. 12). Ancient Near Eastern adoption rituals included placing the adopted child on the knees of the adopting parent, to symbolize the adopter giving birth to the child in place of the birth mother.[2] Now Joseph took his sons back to where he had been standing, a few feet away, in front of his father. He then bowed before Jacob.

> "Joseph may be the second most powerful man in Egypt, but he never loses his respect for his father, and he never ceases to be gracious toward him."[3]

Arranging Manasseh and Ephraim in the normal order for Jacob's blessing, by their age with Manasseh to Jacob's right, Joseph then brought them forward again, within arm's reach of Jacob (v. 13).

This is the first of many scriptural instances of the laying on of hands (v. 14). With this act, a person symbolically transferred a spiritual power or gift to another. This rite was part of the ceremony of dedicating a person

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[1]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 294.

[2]See I. Mendelsohn, "A Ugaritic Parallel to the Adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh," *Israel Exploration Journal* (1959):180-83.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 635.

or group to an office (Num. 27:18, 23; Deut. 34:9; Matt. 19:13; Acts 6:6; 8:17; etc.), offering sacrifices, and the healings that Jesus Christ and the apostles performed. In this case Jacob symbolically transferred a blessing from himself to Joseph's sons. Once uttered, blessings were irreversible (cf. 27:33; Num. 23:20; Rom. 11:29).

48:15-20 Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh also carried prophetic significance and force (vv. 19-20). Under the inspiration of God, Jacob deliberately gave Ephraim the privileged "firstborn blessing," and predicted his preeminence. This was the fourth consecutive generation of Abraham's descendants in which the normal pattern of the firstborn assuming prominence over the second born was reversed: Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben, and Ephraim over Manasseh. We can see this blessing in the process of its fulfillment during the Judges Period of Israel's history when the tribe of Ephraim had grown larger and more influential than the tribe of Manasseh. The combined tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh increased from 72,700, in the second year after the Exodus (Num. 1:32-35), to 85,200, forty years later (Num. 26:28-37). By contrast, the tribes of Reuben and Simeon decreased from 105,800 to 65,930 during the same period.

The Ephraimites took the lead among the ten northern tribes, after the split between the northern and southern tribes. They flourished to the extent that the Jews later used the names "Ephraim" and "Israel" interchangeably—to describe the northern confederacy. The Ephraimites even occasionally demonstrated an attitude of superiority among the tribes, that we can trace back to this blessing (e.g., Judg. 12:1; et al.).

The Hebrew phrase translated "a multitude of nations" (v. 19) appears only here in the Old Testament, and probably means "a company of peoples," namely, "numerous." The reference to "Israel" in verse 20 applies to the nation in the future—from Jacob's viewpoint.

Jacob's announcement of Joseph's birthright 48:21-22

Jacob, called "Israel" here, the Prince with God, firmly believed God's promise to bring his descendants back into the Promised Land (cf. 46:4). Israel's prophetic promise to Joseph (v. 22) is a play on words. The word for "portion" means "ridge" or "shoulder (of land)," and it is the same as "Shechem." Shechem lay in Manasseh's tribal territory. The Israelites later distributed the land among the tribes (Josh. 24:1), and they buried Joseph

at Shechem (Josh. 24:32). Jacob regarded the land that he had purchased there (33:18-20) as a pledge, or down payment, of his descendants' future possession of the whole land. In Jesus' day, people spoke of Shechem (near Sychar) as what Jacob had given to Joseph (John 4:5).

Jacob spoke as though he had taken Shechem from the Amorites by force ("with my sword and my bow"; v. 22). Probably Jacob viewed Simeon's and Levi's slaughter of the Shechemites as his own taking of the city (34:27-29).[1] Another view is that Moses used the perfect tense in Hebrew, translated past tense in English ("took"), prophetically. In this usage, which is common in the Old Testament, the writer spoke of the future as past. The idea was that, since God predicted them by divine inspiration, events yet future are so certain of fulfillment that one could speak of them as already past. Here the thought is that Israel (Jacob) would take Canaan from the Amorites, the most powerful of the Canaanite tribes, not personally, but through his descendants (cf. 15:16).[2] Other scholars have suggested still another explanation:

> "It is not impossible that the property which Jacob owned at Shechem was taken away by the Amorites after he left the region (cf. 35:4, 5) and that he eventually returned and repossessed it by force of arms?"[3]

Apparently Jacob gave Joseph the town of Shechem, which he regarded as a down payment of all that God would give his descendants as they battled the Canaanites in the future.

> "For Joseph it was an honour that his father entrusted him with his funeral in Palestine (47.30f.). In 48.21f., the implication in family law is finally drawn: Joseph, instead of Reuben, receives the double heritage as a sign of his primogeniture (48.22a). Just as the son is commanded to bury the father in Palestine, so it is in Palestine that the priority of Joseph within the family takes effect. These two scenes thus enclose a detailed blessing for Joseph and his sons, so filling out the promise of his superiority in Palestine (48.22a)."[4]

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 601.

[2]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:385.

[3]Davis, *Paradise to …,* p. 294. Cf. H. Vos, p. 165; Aalders, 2:267; Leupold, 2:1158; Bush, 2:384; Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 464.

[4]Horst Seebass, "The Joseph Story, Genesis 48 and the Canonical Process," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (June 1986):30.

Believers whom God has shepherded for a lifetime, like Jacob, can see God's purposes and plans for the future more clearly than others can, even though the maturing process may have been difficult for them.[1]

14. Jacob's blessing of his sons 49:1-28

Having blessed Pharaoh (47:7-10) and Ephraim and Manasseh (48:15-20), Jacob next blessed all 12 of his sons and foretold what would become of each of them and their descendants. He disqualified Reuben, Simeon, and Levi from leadership, and gave that blessing to Judah. This chapter is the last one in Genesis that gives the destinies of the family members of Abraham's chosen line. It contains blessings, curses, warnings, judgments, and promises, all of which are prominent throughout Genesis.

> "These chapters [Gen. 11—49], then, take the story from the first mention of Abram in 11:26 to the first mention of Israel as a people, a people blessed by God with a special blessing."[2]

The writer of Genesis called this section Jacob's blessing (v. 28). Isaac had prophetically outlined the future of his two sons' families (ch. 27). Earlier Noah had prophesied the future of Canaan's descendants (9:25-27). Likewise Jacob, by divine inspiration, foretold major characteristics of each of the twelve tribes that would issue from his twelve sons (v. 1). Each blessing contains at least one of these elements: (1) a synopsis of the son's personality, (2) a hint as to his potential, and (3) a prophecy of his future.

> "Jacob predicted how things would turn out for each of his sons and their descendants, should they continue to display the character they had displayed thus far."[3]

This is the first long poem in the Bible.

> "This chapter, in that it is poetry, seems to be intended to be a high point of the *toledot ya'aqob* [what became of Jacob] (i.e., chaps. 37—50), if not the whole book of Genesis."[4]

These blessings rested on God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Each son learned how his branch of the family would benefit from, and be a channel of, blessing

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[1]See William J. McIlwain Jr., "My Ways Are Not Your Ways," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988):92-100.

[2]Whybray, p. 4.

[3]Joel D. Heck, "A History of Interpretation of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:585 (January-March l990):20. See also Stigers, p. 325.

[4]R. E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence*, p. 23.

relative to the patriarchal promises. The natural character of each son, and the consequences of that character, would have their outcome in the future of the Israelites. The choices, and consequently the characters of the patriarchs, affected their descendants for generations to come, as is usually true.

> "The Spirit of God revealed to the dying patriarch Israel the future history of his seed, so that he discovered in the character of his sons the future development of the tribes proceeding from them, and with prophetic clearness assigned to each of them its position and importance in the nation into which they were to expand in the promised inheritance."[1]

> "It is fitting that the Book of Genesis, which opened with the creative power of the divine word, closes with the notion of the effective power of the inspired predictive word of the patriarch."[2]

Jacob assumed, in his blessing, that his family would increase and possess the land of Canaan. This optimism reveals his faith.

> "God gave His people this prophecy to bear them through the dismal barrenness of their experiences and to show them that He planned all the future. For Jacob's family, the future lay beyond the bondage of Egypt in the land of promise. But the enjoyment of the blessings of that hope would depend on the participants' faithfulness. So from the solemnity of his deathbed Jacob evaluated his sons one by one, and carried his evaluation forward to the future tribes."[3]

The scope of Jacob's prophecy extends into the Millennial Age: the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ on the earth (cf. Rev. 20). God did not fulfill these prophecies completely during the lifetime of Jacob's sons. Neither did He do so during Israel's occupation of the Promised Land. And He has not done so since then. The final, complete fulfillment awaits the future.

> "Jacob's last words to his sons have become the occasion for a final statement of the book's major theme: God's plan to restore the lost blessing [lost in the Fall] through the offspring of Abraham.[4]

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[1]Keil and Delitzsch, 1:387.

[2]Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 331.

[3]Ross, "Genesis," p. 98.

[4]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 274.

> "By framing Jacob's last words between v. 1 and v. 28, the writer shows where his interests lie. Jacob's words look to the future—'in days to come'—and draw on the past, viz., God's blessing of mankind. It is within that context we are to read and understand Jacob's words in this chapter."[1]

49:1-4 **Reuben.** As the firstborn, Reuben could have anticipated preeminence among his brothers, leadership of the tribes, priesthood (spiritual leadership) within the nation, and the double portion of the birthright (twice as much blessing). However he forfeited these privileges, preferring rather to give free reign to his lust (35:22; cf. Esau). The leadership of the tribes therefore went to Judah, the priesthood to Levi, eventually (cf. Exod. 32:25-29; Num. 3:12-13), and the double portion of blessing to Joseph. Joseph was the firstborn of the favored Rachel, whereas Reuben was Leah's firstborn. Joseph's priority was not due solely to Jacob's preference, however, but to the will of God as revealed in Joseph's dreams.

> "About no other tribe do we know so little as about *Reuben*. … The tribe produced no significant man, no judge, no king, no prophet …."[2]

No priest came from Reuben, either. Hesitancy and uncertainty marked the Reubenites in the time of Israel's judges (Judg. 5:15-16).

> "This forfeiture is fulfilled historically in later times when the Reubenites living in Transjordan are integrated into the tribe of Gad. From this first oracle the teaching is clear that the behavior of one individual affects the destiny of his descendants."[3]

49:5-7 **Simeon and Levi.** These two were brothers not only by blood but also in disposition. They were violent, angry, self-willed men (cf. 34:25-31). Because of their wickedness they would have no independent tribal territory, but their descendants would live scattered among the other tribes.

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[1]Ibid., p. 275.

[2]von Rad, p. 423.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 647. Paragraph division omitted.

By the second census, taken just before the Israelites entered Canaan, the Simeonites had become the smallest tribe (Num. 26:14). Moses later passed over the Simeonites in his blessing of the Israelites (Deut. 33).[1] This tribe received only a few cities within the tribal allotment of Judah, rather than a separate geographical territory (Josh. 19:1-9). The Simeonites eventually lost their tribal identity and lived among the other tribes, especially in Judah's territory (cf. 1 Chron. 4:27, 38-43).

The Levites received no separate land grant, but Joshua gave them several cities, in which they lived among the other tribes (Josh. 21:1-42). The Levites, however, received a special blessing at Mt. Sinai, by siding with Moses when the other Israelites turned against Moses (Exod. 32:26-28; Num. 3:5-13; 18:6-32). This resulted in their becoming the tribe of priests in Israel.

Even though these first three tribes suffered punishment for their sins, Jacob's prophecies about them were still a blessing. They retained a place in the chosen family, and they enjoyed the benefits of the patriarchal promises as Jacob's heirs.

> "By demoting Reuben for his turbulence and uncontrolled sex drive, Jacob saves Israel from reckless leadership. Likewise, by cursing the cruelty of Simeon and Levi, he restricts their cruel rashness from dominating."[2]

49:8-12 **Judah.** Judah possessed a lion-like nature. As such, he became the leader of the other tribes (43:3-10; Judg. 1:1-2; 3:9; 20:18; etc.). Through him came David, and then came the Messiah: "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5). Judah led the other tribes, both in the march through the wilderness (Num. 2:1-3) and in the monarchy. Judah's leadership was not consistently preeminent in the history of Israel however. At times other tribal leaders led the nation—as in the Judges Period. But with the coming of David, who was from the tribe of Judah, all of the following legitimate kings of Israel were from Judah.

A "scepter" (v. 10) was and is the symbol of royal command and the right to rule. Judah was to exercise leadership among the tribes "until Shiloh

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[1]See Archer, *Encyclopedia of* …, pp. 103-7, for a harmonization of the blessings in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33.

[2]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 603.

[came]," at which time Shiloh would extend Israel's rule to worldwide dominion.

"Shiloh" (lit. "Bearer of Rest," "Peacemaker," or "Pacifier") from the Hebrew word *salah*, meaning "to rest") has been believed by some to be a proper name.[1] According to this view, the word "Shiloh" refers, here, not to the city in Canaan of that name, but to a person who would arise in the tribe of Judah and bring peace to the world, namely, Messiah (cf. 3:15; Num. 24:17).[2] Some English translations simply transliterate the Hebrew word and read "Shiloh" (NASB, AV, NKJV).[3] Others translate "Shiloh" as "until tribute comes to him" (NRSV, ESV, cf. NEB) or "until he comes to whom it [the ruler's staff] belongs" (NIV, NET2) or "until he to whom it [the ruler's staff] belongs shall come" (TNIV) or "So that tribute shall come to him" (NJPS) or "until he whose right it [the ruler's staff] is comes" (HCSB; cf. Ezek. 21:27).[4]

> "Whichever of these interpretations is adopted … all at least agree that this line is predicting the rise of the Davidic monarchy and the establishment of the Israelite empire, if not the coming of a greater David. And if the primary reference is to David, traditional Jewish and Christian exegetes would agree that like other Davidic promises it has a greater fulfillment in the Messiah."[5]

> "V. 10 has traditionally been viewed as a messianic prophecy in both the Jewish and Christian traditions, though this is not its likely original meaning [i.e., David]."[6]

Because Reuben, Simeon, and Levi had disqualified themselves, Judah received the leadership of the tribes and the blessing that normally went

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[1]Talmud *Sanhedrin* 98b, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, and one of the Dead Sea Scrolls. See S. H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation*, p. 9; Millar Burrows, *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 401. The Targums are ancient Aramaic paraphrases or interpretations of the Hebrew Bible.

[2]See Rydelnik, pp. 47-52.

[3]See Eugene H. Merrill, "Rashi, Nicholas de Lyra, and Christian Exegesis," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1975):74-75.

[4]See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 892-97, for an extended discussion of the interpretive possibilities.

[5]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 478.

[6]Levenson, p. 90.

to the firstborn. This was how the leadership of the tribes and the messianic line fell to Judah. Jacob evidently forgave Judah's earlier sins, because he repented and later sacrificed himself for Jacob's well-being.

Everything after the word "until" (v. 10), in Judah's blessing, describes millennial kingdom conditions: "And to him ["Shiloh"] shall be the obedience of the peoples." Messiah will then reign over the peoples of the world, and they will obey Him. Neither David nor any other Judahite king reigned over all "the peoples."

> "No Judean would tie his ass to a vine [v. 11], for it would be eaten up, of course. Anyone who can be so careless and who can wash his garments in wine, lives in paradisiacal abundance."[1]

> "The sense of the imagery is that wine, the symbol of prosperity and blessing, will be so plentiful that even the choicest vines will be put to such everyday use as tethering the animals of burden and vintage wine will be as commonplace as wash water. Verse 12 returns to the picture of the king of Judah. His eyes are darker than wine and his teeth whiter than milk. He is a picture of strength and power."[2]

This prophecy is the first of many that follow in the Old Testament that associate bumper crops with the golden age of future blessing.[3] It is also, of course, a significant messianic prophecy that was and will be fulfilled literally by Jesus Christ.

49:13-17 These verses contain Jacob's shorter blessings on his other sons, except Joseph and Benjamin, whose blessings follow these.

> "True to the poetic qualities of the text, the images of the destiny of the remaining sons are, in most cases, based on

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[1]von Rad, p. 425.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 277.

[3]See Gary E. Schnittjer, "The Blessing of Judah as Generative Expectation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 177:705 (January-March 2020):15-39.

> a wordplay of the son's name. The central theme uniting each image is that of prosperity."[1]

Zebulun (v. 13) later obtained territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. This was a thriving commercial area. It is possible that Zebulun and Issachar shared some territory (cf. Deut. 33:18-19), so Zebulun could have bordered the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps the men of Zebulun worked for the Phoenicians in their maritime trade and prospered as a result (cf. Deut. 33:19).[2] Another explanation follows:

> "*In the time of Jac*ob, and at the distance of Egypt, Zidon was the representative of all Phoenicia. She was, in fact, the mother of that people, and was so spoken of by Homer several hundred years after the death of Jacob. Homer does not speak of Achzib, or Acre, or Dor, but only of Zidon, when he has occasion to mention this country. But Phoenicia, or *Sidonia* if you please, extended south of Acre, and Zebulon [Zebulun] bordered on the sea for a considerable distance along that part of the coast; Jacob therefore spoke according to the received geography of his time, but with prophetic brevity mentioned only the parent city. When, however, Joshua, several hundred years later, came to divide the country between the tribes, it became necessary to specify the subordinate places, and no doubt some of the cities south of Sidon had by that time risen to importance, and might well give name to the coast in their vicinity; at all events, Joshua was obliged to mention them in defining the limits of the tribes. Hence, though Zebulon touched the sea far south of the city of Sidon, yet 'his haven of ships' was actually a part of the general coast of Sidonia when Jacob gave forth his prophecy. Nor is it at all improbable that the *territory* of Sidon did originally extend southward to where Zebulon had his border at the sea, thus meeting the very letter of the promise."[3]

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 277.

[2]Yates, p. 46.

[3]Thomson, 1:485.

The territory of Zebulun will extend to the Mediterranean Sea in the Millennium, when its borders will reach as far as Sidon on the Mediterranean coast ("he shall be a harbor for ships," v.13; cf. Ezek. 48:1-8, 23-27). An important caravan route that connected Mesopotamia and Egypt passed through this territory.

Issachar (vv. 14-15) would prefer an agricultural way of life and what it produced, rather than political supremacy among the tribes. Lower Galilee, including the Valley of Jezreel, which Issachar obtained, was a pleasant and productive farming area.[1]

> "… the tribe of Issachar would submit to the Canaanite invader, who would fasten the yoke upon them. Instead of fighting, the men of this tribe would submissively allow themselves to become slaves of the peoples of the land. They would prefer shame and slavery to courageous action."[2]

Dan (vv. 16-17) would judge Israel. This prophecy came to reality, partially, during Samson's judgeship. Dan's victories benefited all Israel. Yet this tribe led Israel into idolatry (Judg. 18), and was therefore similar to "a serpent" (v. 17; cf. 3:1).

> "… Dan would be exceedingly dangerous to his foes. In later times members of the tribe of Dan fulfilled these words with remarkable accuracy. After a time in their original territory, the Danites moved to the north and occupied the northernmost point in Israel."[3]

49:18 Jacob asked Yahweh to deliver his descendants in the future ("For Your salvation I wait, O LORD," v. 18).

> "Jacob's heartfelt aside in 18 is enigmatic: it could arise from a father's prayer, like Abraham's for Ishmael (17:18), or possibly from the sudden memory of his own treachery,

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[1]See Joel D. Heck, "Issachar: Slave or Freeman? [Gen. 49:14-15]," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29:4 (December 1986):385-96.

[2]Yates, p. 46.

[3]Ibid.

> long renounced, called up by the acts and the words (heel[s], 17, 19) associated with his own name."[1]
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> "Repeatedly Jacob has spoken of self-help on the part of the tribes: of Judah the lion, or Issachar the strong-boned ass, of Dan the deadly serpent. Yet Jacob would not be misunderstood. Not from that source does he expect true salvation. Even when men help themselves, only then are they truly delivered if God helps them."[2]

49:19-21 Jacob resumed his blessing.

Gad (v. 19) would, like Dan, also be effective in battle ("he will attack at their heels"). Even though Gad would be exposed to the raids of marauding enemies, he would not be slow in defending himself and striking back.

Asher (v. 20) would enjoy very fruitful soil, namely, the lowlands of the Carmel (lit. "vineyard") range, north along the Mediterranean coast. This area contained some of the most fertile land in Canaan.

Naphtali (v. 21) evidently would enjoy the admiration and appreciation of the other tribes in a special way (cf. Deborah and Barak's victory and Deborah's song, Judg. 4 and 5). Jacob could have meant, on the other hand, that Naphtali would exchange his freedom for a more sedentary, domesticated lifestyle in the land ("a doe let loose"), or that he would accommodate ("utters beautiful words," i.e., speak flattery) to the Canaanites.[3]

49:22-26 **Joseph**'s blessing was especially abundant. The two tribes that bore his sons' names, Ephraim and Manasseh, would see the fulfillment of this blessing, even though, during his lifetime, Joseph had faced much opposition ("The archers provoked him, and shot at him and were hostile toward him," v. 22). Judah received the leadership of the tribes, but Joseph obtained the double portion of the birthright (cf. 1 Chron. 5:2).

Jacob's names for God in this blessing are noteworthy: "the Mighty One of Jacob" (cf. Isa. 1:24; et al.), "the Shepherd" (48:15), and "the Stone of

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[1]Kidner, p. 220.

[2]Leupold, 2:1189-90.

[3]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 483.

Israel" (v. 24; cf. Deut. 32:4, 18, et al.), "the God of your father," and "the Almighty (v. 25)."[1]

> "Blessing is one of the key words of Genesis occurring some eighty-eight times in the book. Here in two verses [25 and 26], like the finale of a fireworks display, the root occurs six times (verb 1x, noun 5x) making a brilliant climax to the last words of Jacob. The God-given blessings of the future will far outshine those already experienced."[2]

49:27 **Benjamin** produced many warriors in Israel's history (e.g., Ehud, Saul, Jonathan, et al.) and demonstrated a warlike character among the tribes (Judg. 5:14; 20:16; 1 Chron. 8:40; ch. 12; 2 Chron. 14:8; 17:17; et al.). Jacob predicted that Benjamin would be consistently successful in his encounters with his foes—"morning" and "evening" being a synecdoche for "always."

Judah (v. 9), Issachar (v. 14), Naphtali (v. 21), Joseph (v. 22), and Benjamin (v. 27) are all described as animals. It would have been natural for a nomadic herdsman such as Jacob to see parallels between his various sons and animals.

49:28 In his 12 sons, Jacob blessed all the future tribes of Israel.[3] This is only the second mention of "the twelve tribes" in the Bible, the previous reference being in verse 16, where we read "the tribes of Israel."

> "Within Jacob's words to each of the sons (after Judah), the theme of blessing has been evident in two primary images. First, the reverse side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of the victorious warrior. The defeat of the enemy is the prelude to the messianic peace. Second, the positive side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of great prosperity and abundance. Behind such imagery of peace and prosperity lies the picture of the Garden of Eden—the Paradise lost. The focus of Jacob's words has been the promise that when the one comes to whom the

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[1]See *The Nelson …,* pp. 93-94.

[2]Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 486.

[3]See Darby, 1:80-82, for further observations concerning the fulfillment of these prophecies.

> kingship truly belongs, there will once again be the peace and prosperity that God intended all to have in the Garden of Eden."[1]

Sailhamer also proposed that this poetic section plays a significant role in the larger structure of the Pentateuch:

> "At three macrostructural junctures in the Pentateuch, the author has spliced a major poetic discourse onto the end of a large unit of narrative (Ge 49; Nu 24; Dt 31). A close look at the material lying between and connecting the narrative and poetic sections reveals the presence of a homogeneous composition stratum. It is most noticeably marked by the recurrence of the same terminology and narrative motifs. In each of the three segments, the central narrative figure (Jacob, Balaam, Moses) calls an audience together (imperative: Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:28) and proclaims (cohortative: Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:28) what will happen (Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:29) in 'the end of days' (Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:29)."[2]
>
> "In sum, the apparent overall strategy of the author in these three segments suggests that one of the central concerns lying behind the final shape of the Pentateuch is an attempt to uncover an inherent relationship between the past and the future. That which happened to God's people in the past portends of future events. To say it another way, the past is seen as a lesson for the future."[3]
>
> "The narrative texts of past events are presented as pointers to future events. Past events foreshadow the future. It is not hard to see that such a hermeneutic [method of interpretation] leads to a form of narrative typology. We should, then, look for signs of such a typology in the composition of the smaller units of narrative in the Pentateuch as well as in the arrangement of the legal material."[4]

A believer's works during this life, in the context of lasting spiritual fruit for the Lord, significantly determine the extent of divine blessing that he or she and their descendants will receive in the future. This is a truth that the New Testament teaches as

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[1]Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 278-79.

[2]Idem, *The Pentateuch …,* p. 36.

[3]Ibid., p. 37.

[4]Ibid.

well (cf. Matt. 10:41-42; 1 Cor. 3:8, 14; 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 10:35; 2 John 8; Rev. 11:18; 22:12).

15. Deaths and a promise yet to be fulfilled 49:29—50:26

Joseph received permission from Pharaoh to bury Jacob in Canaan, as Jacob had requested. Joseph then assured his brothers of his favor, in spite of how they had treated him, and testified that God would fulfill His promises.

Plans to bury Jacob in Canaan 49:29—50:14

49:29-33 Jacob again expressed his faith in God's promises that Canaan would be the Israelites' homeland by requesting burial in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Hebron (cf. 47:29-32; 48:21-22). Had Jacob still been thinking in the flesh, as he had earlier in his life, he probably would have asked to be buried with his favored wife Rachel.

> "This scene concludes Jacob's finest hour. On his deathbed—a scene extending from 47:28 to 49:32—Jacob has assumed total and dynamic leadership of the family. Even Joseph bows down to him."[1]

Jacob died peacefully, and was gathered to his people (i.e., reunited with his ancestors, implying life after death, in *Sheol*, the "Place of Departed Spirits"; cf. 25:8). Jacob was 147 when he died (47:28).

50:1-3 Joseph evidently had Jacob's body preserved as a mummy ("Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father," v. 2).[2] The Egyptians mourned for Jacob 70 days, just two days less than they normally mourned the death of a Pharaoh.[3]

50:4-6 Pharaoh's permission regarding the burial of Jacob also shows his great regard for Joseph and Jacob.

50:7-11 Jacob's elaborate funeral was probably due both to the high regard in which the Egyptians held him as Joseph's father, and to the Egyptians'

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[1]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 617.

[2]See Davis, *Paradise to …,* pp. 302-3; H. Vos, p. 169; Leupold, 2:1205-6, or Longman, "Genesis," p. 119 for how the Egyptians prepared mummies.

[3]von Rad, p. 430; Ross, "Genesis," p. 100.

love of showy funeral ceremonies.[1] This is the grandest state funeral recorded in the Bible. It is entirely appropriate since Jacob's story spans more than half of Genesis. Abel-mizraim (v. 11) means "the meadow (or mourning) of Egypt."

> "The Canaanites were so impressed with the party of mourners that they named the place for them."[2]

> "This grand funeral procession and this exaltation of Jacob as a king by the Egyptians foreshadows Israel's exodus from the world and gives a foretaste of the time when the nations hail a son of Jacob as King."[3]

It is not clear why the procession approached Hebron by way of Transjordan. But this itinerary foreshadows the route that the Israelites took after they escaped from Egypt and entered Canaan from Transjordan (Num. 33:1-49; Josh. 3).

> "As God had promised (46.4), Jacob, in short, is given his own personal exodus."[4]

> "When we return to our own houses from burying the bodies of our relations, we say, 'We have left them behind'; but, if their souls have gone to our heavenly Father's house, we may say with more reason, 'They have left us behind.'"[5]

50:12-14 The record of Jacob's burial in the land is important to the purposes of Genesis. God had promised the land to Abraham, and had already given the patriarchs small portions of it. The faith of these men, that God would fulfill His promises, and do for their descendants all that He had promised, is obvious in that they viewed Canaan as their homeland. They were counting on the future faithfulness of God, who had proved Himself faithful to them personally during their lifetimes.

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[1]See E. W. Hengstenberg, *Egypt and the Books of Moses*, pp. 70-71.

[2]*The Nelson …,* p. 95.

[3]Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 618.

[4]Levenson, p. 93.

[5]Matthew Henry, p. 70.

> "There was no Old Testament saint of them all who, first and last, saw more of the favour and forgiveness of God than Jacob."[1]

Peace in the family of Jacob 50:15-21

50:15-18 Jacob's death raised fears in the hearts of Joseph's brothers. They claimed that Jacob had left a message urging Joseph to forgive them. It is impossible for us to know if they were telling the truth or not. The brothers feared because of their uneasy consciences, rather than because of Joseph's behavior (cf. v. 19).

50:19-21 Joseph's response to his fearful brothers reveals his attitudes toward God and them (cf. 27:41). He humbled himself under God's authority. Joseph regarded God as sovereign over him, and the One who had providentially guided all the events of his life. He knew that God's purposes for him, his family, and all people were good (cf. chs. 1—2). Consequently he behaved with tender compassion toward his brothers. Joseph proved to be his "brothers' keeper" (cf. 4:9). Genesis opened with a couple, Adam and Eve, trying to become "like God." It closes with a man, Joseph, denying that he is "in God's place."[2]

> "Perhaps the best parallel to Gen. 50:20 is the case of Judas Iscariot in the NT. He is both evil and important (much as there are others who are good and important). In lifting up his heel against his friend, Judas is marked as the archetypal traitor. He is additionally a figure of sinister importance in the working out of the divine will. Judas is to Jesus what Joseph's brothers were to Joseph."[3]

> "The sequence of deceptions that causes this family so much suffering finally comes to an end when Joseph chooses not to take revenge on his brothers."[4]

> "Each sentence of his threefold reply is a pinnacle of Old Testament (and New Testament) faith. To leave all the

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[1]Whyte, 1:111.

[2]E. I. Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis*, p. 156.

[3]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 707.

[4]Richard Elliott Friedman, "Deception for Deception," *Bible Review* 2:1 (Spring 1986):30.

> righting of one's wrongs to God (19; cf. Rom. 12:19; 1 Thes. 5:15; 1 Pet. 4:19); to see His providence in man's malice (20; cf. on 45:5); and to repay evil not only with forgiveness but also with practical affection (21; cf. Luke 6:27ff.), are attitudes which anticipate the adjective 'Christian' and even 'Christlike.'"[1]
>
> "Behind all the events and human plans recounted in the story of Joseph lies the unchanging plan of God. It is the same plan introduced from the very beginning of the book where God looks out at what he has just created for man and sees that 'it is good' (*tob*, 1:4-31). Through his dealings with the patriarchs and Joseph, God had continued to bring about his good plan. He had remained faithful to his purposes, and it is the point of this narrative to show that his people can continue to trust him and to believe that 'in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose' (Rom 8:28)."[2]

The death of Joseph 50:22-26

Joseph lived to see God's blessing on his children's children. He died 54 years after Jacob's death, when he was 110 years old.[3] Some Egyptian texts refer to 110 as the ideal lifespan.[4] Abraham had lived to be 175, Isaac 180, and Jacob 147.

Joseph probably could have been given a burial in a pyramid, or had some other grand burial in Egypt. Like Moses, Joseph chose the promises of God over the privileges of the world. He is a model for all believers, Israelites in the past and present Christians alike. He wanted his family to embalm him and place his body in a coffin in Egypt. Later descendants would bury his bones in the Promised Land near Shechem. They would do so in the parcel of land his father Jacob had bought and given to him, perhaps near Abraham's oak (48:22; cf. Josh. 24:32).

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[1]Kidner, p. 224.

[2]Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 283. See also Paul Twiss, "Learning God's Redemptive Good: Reading Genesis 50:15-21 as a Last Delay," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 66:3 (September 2023):405-19.

[3]See Hugh C. White, "The Joseph Story: A Narrative that 'Consumes' Its Content," *Semeia* 31 (1985):49-69.

[4]Hamilton, *The Book … Chapters 18—50*, p. 709.

This expression of Joseph's faith, in God's promises to his forefathers, provides a fitting climax for the Book of Genesis and the formative period of Israel's history: "God will assuredly 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," (v. 24). Verse 24 contains the first reference to the three patriarchs together.

> "The outstanding feature of Joseph's life was faithful loyalty to God under all circumstances."[1]

> "The story of Joseph illustrates patient faith and its reward. It ends the book of Genesis and brings its theme to a literary climax. But the story of Joseph shows us that the road to victory, dominion, mastery, and judicial authority, is through service, the humble service of a slave. Through service and suffering, God purges and destroys indwelling sin in the believer (not completely, but sufficiently), builds character in him, and fits him for the mastery of the world."[2]

> "The Book of Genesis, like the Old Testament in microcosm, ends by pointing beyond its own story. … Joseph's dying words epitomized the hope in which the Old Testament, and indeed the New (cf. Rev. 22:20), would fall into expectant silence: *God will surely visit you*."[3]

An important lesson that this last chapter of Genesis teaches is that believers who trust that the LORD will fulfill His promises to bless in His own inscrutable ways will demonstrate their faith in the way they die.

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[1]Thomas, *Genesis*, p. 379.

[2]Jordan, pp. 67-68.

[3]Kidner, p. 224.

Conclusion

Out of the many great revelations of the person of God in Genesis, probably the most outstanding attributes are His power and faithfulness. Almost every section of the book demonstrates the fact that God is absolutely trustworthy. People can rely on His word (spoken and written) with confidence. All the major characters in Genesis came to acknowledge the faithfulness of God. Even Jacob, who was perhaps the most skeptical, came to a firm trust in God as God guided him through his stormy life.

The major revelation about man in Genesis is his creation "in the image of God" (1:27). As the bearer of God's image, man has a relationship with his Creator as well as with his fellow creatures. The "image of God" in man consists of his spiritual qualities that distinguish him from other created beings. The Fall obscured, but did not obliterate, this image. It also damaged, but did not destroy, man's relationship with God.

The key revelation in Genesis concerning the relationship that God and people have, is that God initiated it, and people can enjoy it when they respond to God in trust and obedience. People can and must have faith in God in order to enjoy the relationship with God that He created them to experience. As men and women trust God they experience God's blessing, and they become instruments through whom God works to bring blessing to others.

How can Christians motivate others to trust and obey God as we minister to them? We can do so the same way that Moses motivated the Israelites with his emphases in Genesis: He demonstrated and illustrated God's strength (or power) and trustworthiness. God is powerful enough to do anything (see especially chs. 1—11), and He is faithful to fulfill His promises (see especially chs. 12—50). We need to point these things out in Scripture, in history, and in our own experiences. This is what builds strong faith. In order to trust and obey someone, we must believe that he or she is strong enough to do what is needed, and faithful to his or her word. We must also believe that they have our best interests at heart, which Genesis also demonstrates is true of God throughout its 50 chapters.

Appendix 1

The Canons of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

JUDAISM	PROTESTANTISM	ROMAN CATHOLICISM	EASTERN ORTHODOXY
Hebrew Bible (Tanak)	Old Testament	Old Testament	Old Testament
Torah	**Pentateuch**	**Pentateuch**	**Pentateuch**
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
Prophets (Neviim)	**Historical Books**	**Historical Books**	**Historical Books**
Former Prophets	Joshua	Joshua	Joshua
Joshua	Judges	Judges	Judges
Judges	Ruth	Ruth	Ruth
1 & 2 Samuel	1 & 2 Samuel	1 & 2 Samuel	1 & 2 Samuel
1 & 2 Kings	1 & 2 Kings	1 & 2 Kings	1 & 2 Kings
Latter Prophets	1 & 2 Chronicles	1 & 2 Chronicles	1 & 2 Chronicles
Isaiah	Ezra	Ezra	Ezra
Jeremiah	Nehemiah	Nehemiah	1 Esdras
Ezekiel	Esther	Tobit	2 Esdras
The Twelve		Judith	Nehemiah
Hosea		Esther	Tobit
Joel		1 Maccabees	Judith
Amos		2 Maccabees	Esther
Obadiah			1 Maccabees
Jonah			2 Maccabees
Micah			3 Maccabees
Nahum			
Habakkuk			
Zephaniah			
Haggai			
Zechariah			
Malachi			
(continued below)	*(continued below)*	*(continued below)*	*(continued below)*

JUDAISM	PROTESTANTISM	ROMAN CATHOLICISM	EASTERN ORTHODOXY
Hebrew Bible (Tanak)	Old Testament	Old Testament	Old Testament
(continued)	*(continued)*	*(continued)*	*(continued)*
Writings (Ketuvim)	**Poetical Books**	**Poetical Books**	**Poetical Books**
Psalms	Job	Job	Job
Proverbs	Psalms	Psalms	Psalms
Job	Proverbs	Proverbs	Psalm 151
Five Scrolls	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Prayer of Manasseh
Song of Solomon	Song of Solomon	Song of Solomon	Proverbs
Ruth		Wisdom of Solomon	Ecclesiastes
Lamentations		Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)	Song of Solomon
Ecclesiastes			Wisdom of Solomon
Esther			Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
Daniel	**Prophets**	**Prophets**	**Prophets**
Ezra-Nehemiah	Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah
1 & 2 Chronicles	Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Jeremiah
	Lamentations	Lamentations	Lamentations
	Ezekiel	Baruch	Baruch
	Daniel	Ezekiel	Letter of Jeremiah
	Hosea	Daniel	Ezekiel
	Joel	Additions to Daniel	Daniel
	Amos	Hosea	Additions to Daniel
	Obadiah	Joel	Hosea
	Jonah	Amos	Joel
	Micah	Obadiah	Amos
	Nahum	Jonah	Obadiah
	Habakkuk	Micah	Jonah
	Zephaniah	Nahum	Micah
	Haggai	Habakkuk	Nahum
	Zechariah	Zephaniah	Habakkuk
	Malachi	Haggai	Zephaniah
		Zechariah	Haggai
		Malachi	Zechariah
			Malachi
			(4 Maccabees)

Appendix 2

Five Views of Creation[1]

Atheistic Evolution

Statement of the view

Everything in the universe has come into existence, and has evolved into its present form, as a result of natural processes unaided by any supernatural power.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It appears to explain the origin of everything.
2. It offers a single explanation for everything that exists: It evolved.
3. It offers the only real alternative to creation by God.
4. It eliminates God and exalts man.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. It cannot explain the origin of matter. Answer: Matter is eternal.
2. It cannot explain the complexity of matter. Answer: Billions of years of evolution are responsible for the complexity of matter.
3. It cannot explain the emergence of life. Answer: Primordial life evolved from bio-polymers that evolved from inorganic compounds.
4. It cannot explain the appearance of God-consciousness in man. Answer: This too was the product of evolution.

Evaluation of the view

1. It rests on a hypothesis that cannot be proven to be true; it is essentially a faith position.
2. Its support rests on little historical evidence (only the fossil record), which has many gaps in it and is open to different interpretations.
3. It relies on mutations as a mechanism for change. However, mutations have not produced new species.

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[1]This material is a condensation of James M. Boice, *Genesis*, 1:37-68, with additions by myself.

4. It is extremely improbable statistically.

5. It repudiates special revelation concerning creation.

Modern advocates of the view

Almost all non-Christian scientists, and many Christian scientists, hold this view.

Theistic Evolution

Statement of the view

Everything in the universe has come into existence, and has evolved into its present form, as a result of natural processes guided by the God of the Bible.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It unites truth known by special revelation with truth known by general revelation in nature, and truth discovered by science.

2. God seems to work according to this pattern in history, interrupting and intervening in the course of events only rarely.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. It presupposes the truth of evolution, which scientists have not been able to validate beyond doubt. Answer: Evolution is a fact or at least an accepted theory.

2. God has intervened in history many more times than the theistic evolutionist posits. Answer: In the early history of the universe He intervened less frequently.

3. Divine intervention in the evolutionary process is contradictory to the basic theory of evolutionary progress. Answer: The evolutionary process does not rule out divine intervention.

4. This method of creation does not do justice to the biblical record of creation. Answer: We should interpret the biblical record non-literally when it conflicts with evolution.

Evaluation of the view

1. It cannot do justice to both the tenets of evolution and the teaching of Scripture.

2. It is ultimately destructive of biblical religion.

Modern advocates of the view

Some scientists and theologians, who have respect for but a weaker view of Scripture, hold this view; for example, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*.

Progressive Creation

Statement of the view

God created the world directly and deliberately, without leaving anything to chance, but He did it over long periods of time that correspond roughly to the geologic ages.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It provides a reasonable harmony between the Genesis record and the facts of science.
2. The translation of "day" as "age" is an exegetically legitimate one.
3. It is a tentative conclusion and acknowledges that not all the scientific evidence has been discovered, and that our understanding of the text may change as biblical scholarship progresses.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. There are discrepancies between the fossil record—and the order in which Genesis records what God created—of plants, fish, and animals. Answer: Science may be wrong at this point, or Genesis may have omitted the earliest forms of life.
2. Taking the six days of creation as "ages" is unusual exegetically. Answer: This interpretation is possible and best here.
3. "Evenings" and "mornings" suggest 24-hour periods. Answer: The sun did not appear until the fourth day.
4. Death entered the world before the Fall. Answer: It took on its horror at the Fall but existed before that event.

Evaluation of the view

This view takes the biblical text quite seriously, but adopts some unusual interpretations of it in order to harmonize it with scientific data.

Modern advocates of the view

Many evangelicals who have been strongly influenced by science hold this view, including Davis A. Young, *Creation and the Flood*. James Boice, Bernard Ramm, Robert Newman, Herman Eckelmann, and Hugh Ross also held this view.

Six-Day Creationism

Statement of the view

Genesis 1 describes one creative process that took place in six consecutive 24-hour periods of time, not more than 6,000 to 15,000 years ago.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It regards biblical teaching as determinative.
2. It rests on a strong exegetical base.
3. It results from the most literal (normal) meaning of the text.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. Data from various scientific disciplines (i.e., astronomy, radioactive dating, carbon deposits, etc.) indicate that the earth is about 5 billion years old, and the universe is about 15 to 20 billion years old. Answer: God created the cosmos (universe) with the appearance of age.

> "The Carbon 14 dating method has been developed by Willard F. Libby and J. R. Arnold at the Institute for Nuclear Studies of the University of Chicago. It depends upon the fact that in their exchange with the atmosphere, in the life process, all living things take in Carbon 14, which is an unstable or radioactive form of carbon with an atomic weight of 14. Upon the death of a living thing, this radiocarbon begins a long process of decay at a known rate. An ounce of it, for example, is reduced by disintegration to a half ounce in 5,500 years, this half is diminished to a quarter ounce in the next 5,500 years, and so on. Having determined experimentally the proportion of Carbon 14 in living matter, and knowing its 'half-life' as just indicated, it is possible to ascertain the age of an ancient organic sample by the amount of Carbon 14 (measured by a radiation counter) it contains. With present

> techniques, the effective range of the method is about 20,000 years, with a year error in dating samples of 5 to 10 per cent."[1]

2. A universal flood cannot fully explain the geologic strata. Answer: It can explain most if not all of it, and the remainder may have been a result of creation.

3. Creation with the appearance of age casts doubt on the credibility of God. Answer: Since God evidently created Adam, plants, and animals with the appearance of age, He may have created other things with the appearance of age too.

4. There is no reason why God would have created things with the appearance of age. Answer: He did so for His own glory, though we may not yet fully understand why.

Evaluation of the view

This view rests on the best exegesis of the biblical text, though it contradicts the explanations of several branches of science.

Modern advocates of the view

Many conservative evangelicals hold this view, for example, Robert E. Kofahl and Kelly L. Seagraves, *The Creation Explanation*.

The Gap Theory

Statement of the view

Between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, there was a long, indeterminate period of time, in which we can locate the destruction of an "original world" and the unfolding of the geological ages.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It rests on an exegetical, biblical base.

2. It is consistent with the structure of the creation account itself.

3. It is possible to translate the Hebrew verb translated "to be" in verse 2 as "become."

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[1]Finegan, p. 13, n. 4. For a critique of the carbon-14 dating method, see Whitcomb and Morris, pp. 374-78; Ham, et al., pp. 12, 65-75; George Howe, "Carbon-14 and Other Radioactive Dating Methods"; Glenn R. Morton, "The Carbon Problem," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 20:4 (March 1984):212-19.

4. "Formless and void" in verse 2 may be a clue to God's pre-Adamic judgment on the earth.

5. It provides a setting for the fall of Satan.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. It is an unnatural explanation, since the text implies only an original creation in Genesis 1:2 and following (cf. Exod. 20:11). Answer: This is a superficial conclusion.

2. The exegetical data that supports this view is far from certain. Answer: These interpretations are possible.

3. This theory does not really settle the problems posed by geology. Answer: The universal flood may have produced some of the geological phenomena.

Evaluation of the view

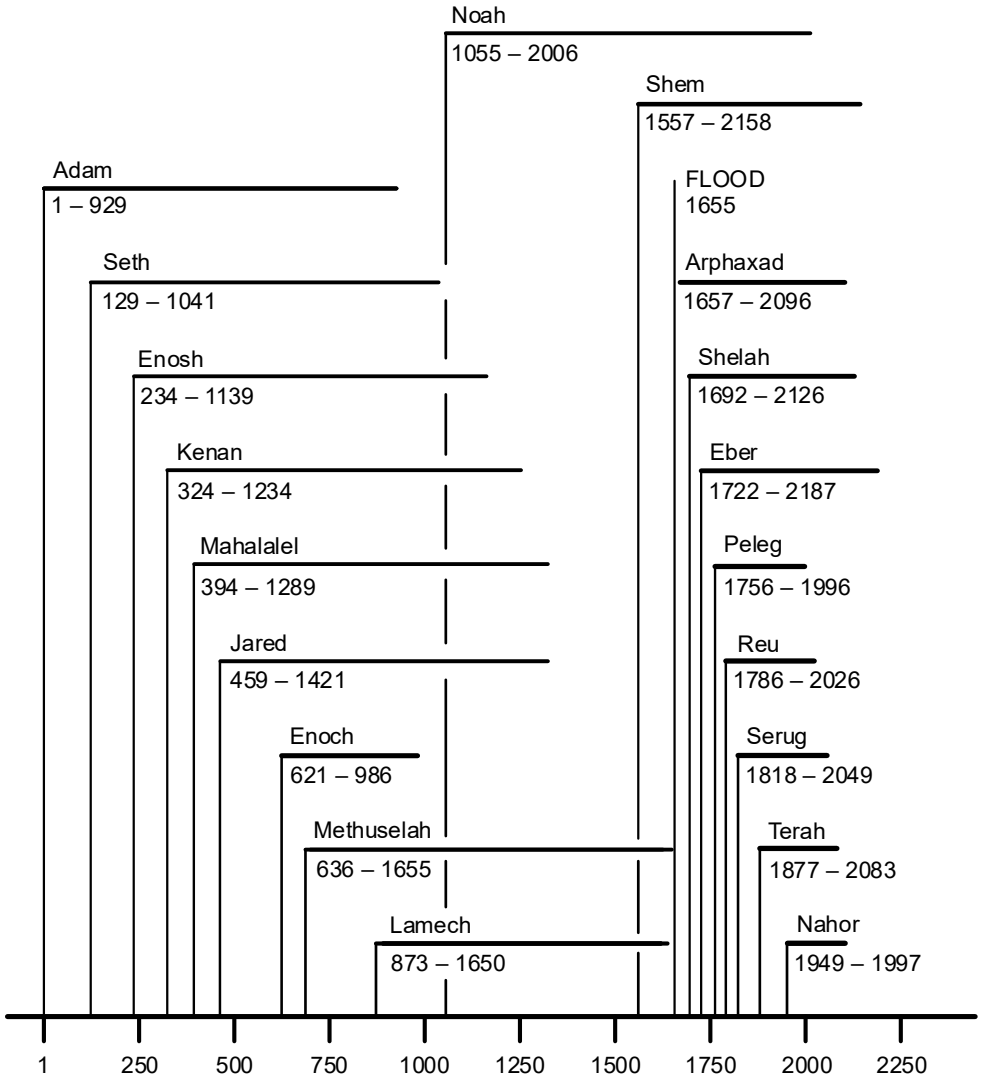
While this view grows out of a high view of Scripture, several of the interpretations required for it rely on faulty exegesis.

Modern advocates of the view

Many conservative evangelicals, including Arthur Pink, C. I. Scofield, C. S. Lewis, M. R. DeHaan, and D. G. Barnhouse, held this view. See also Arthur C. Custance, *Without Form and Void*.

Appendix 3

Chronology of Genesis 5 and 11



Appendix 4

Comparison of Flood Stories[1]

	Biblical	Berossus (Greek)	Atrahasis (Akkadian)	Gilgamesh (Akkadian)	Sumerian
Date of account	Earliest possible: 15th century B.C.	ca. 275 B.C.	16th century (copy of earlier work)	ca. 1500 B.C. (copies, not the original)[2]	19th century B.C. (copy, not the original)
Author of Flood	Yahweh		Enlil	Council of gods	Assembly of gods
Intercessor	Yahweh	Kronos	Ea	Ea	Enki (probably)
Reason for Flood	Wicked-ness of mankind, violence, corruption		The clamor, uproar of man disturbs Enlil's sleep.	No reason given at first. In the end, the "sin of man" is implied as the cause.	None is given.
Hero	Noah (rest)	Xisouthros (Greek for Ziusudra)	Atrahasis (all wise)	Utnapishtim (finder of life)	Ziusudra (he saw life)
Intended for whom	All mankind		All mankind	City of Shurippak particularly but all mankind	All mankind
Reason hero spared	Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. A righteous				Ziusudra was "humbly obedient," reverent; one who seeks

[1]From O'Brien, pp. 62-63. See also Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 159-66; Davis, *Genesis and …*, pp. 110-34; and Kerry L. Hawkins, "The Theology of the Flood," *Seminary Review* 34:2 (December 1988):69-88.

[2]Albright, *Archaeology and …,* p. 19, dated the original to about 2000 B.C.

	man. Blameless. Walked with God.				revelation by dreams and incantations.
Means of escape	Ark	Boat	Large ship	Ship	Huge boat
Description	Detailed: 3 stories, 1 door, 1 window at least		(Text destroyed)	Detailed: 6 stories, 1 door, 1 window at least	
Occupants	Noah, wife, 3 sons, their wives, 7 pairs of all clean animals (male and female), 1 pair of all unclean animals (male and female)	Xisouthros, his family, others, all species of animals	Atrahasis, his wife and family relations, craftsmen, grain, possessions, food, beasts and creatures of the field	Utnapishtim and all his family and kin, craftsmen, beasts and wild creatures of the field	
Duration of storm	40 days and nights		7 days and nights	6 days and nights	7 days and nights
Landing place	Mountains of Ararat	Mountains of Armenia	(Text missing)	Mt. Nisir (Mt. of Salvation)	
Birds released	Raven, dove, dove, dove	Birds	(Text missing)	Dove, swallow, raven	
Sacrifice	Hero offers. "The LORD smelled the pleasing odor."	Hero offers	(Text missing)	Hero offers. "The gods smelled the sweet savor."	Hero offers, and bows to Utu, Anu, Enlil.
Blessing	God blesses Noah and charges him to	Hero disappears but his voice		Enlil blesses Utnapishtim. The hero and his wife then	Ziusudra is granted "life as a god" and "breath

	populate earth.	instructs others.		become as gods.	eternal." He is called "preserver of the seed of mankind."

Appendix 5
Jerusalem's Temple Mount[1]

It occupies only 140 dunams (35 acres), yet this trapezoid-shaped walled area, hovering over the Old City of Jerusalem, is seldom out of the news. The Mount has been the site of frequent conflicts.

What is so important about the Temple Mount that it arouses such raging passions among Jew and Moslem alike? In Hebrew it is known as Har HaBayet (Mountain of the House) and in Arabic, Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary). Within the area of the Temple Mount there are about 100 structures from various periods—great works of art and craftsmanship including open-domed Moslem prayer spots, arched porticos, Moslem religious schools, minarets, and fountains.

Here also is the magnificent Dome of the Rock, the central structure, which was begun by the Ummayyad Caliph, Abd-al-Malik in 684 C.E., and completed in 1033. With the bloody conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, the Dome of the Rock was converted into a church and only re-converted into a mosque after Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem in 1187. With its 45,000 ornamental tiles and 8 graceful arches at the top of the steps leading to the mosque, some observers consider it to be one of the most beautiful buildings in the world.

The Temple Mount has a very special status and enormous importance to Jews because it was the site of the Temple which stood at its center. Jerusalem, the Holy City, is regarded as the equivalent of the "camp of Israel" that surrounded the sanctuary in the wilderness; and the Temple Mount represents "the camp of the Divine Presence" (Sif. Naso 1:Zev 116b).

Its most sacred section was the Holy of Holies. Only the highest priest was allowed to enter it, and then only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, for the service Isaiah (2:3) tells us that [*sic*] "it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it … For out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

For Moslems, the Temple Mount also has great sanctity. They have three mosques to which special holiness is attached: the Ka'ba in Mecca, the Mosque of Muhammad in

[1]Reprinted from *From Mt. Zion* 3:4 (1983):2.

Medina, and the Temple Mount, their third holiest site in Islam. The adoration of the site is based on the first verse of Sura 17 of the Koran, which describes the prophet's Night Journey. They believe that when Muhammad was sleeping near the Ka'ba, the angel Gabriel brought him to a winged creature. Together they rose to heaven and met Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Some Moslems believe that Muhammad made the journey while awake and actually traversed the ground of the Temple Mount.

Because of the special nature of the Temple Mount, it will continue to inflame passions—according to religious Jews until such time as the Messiah comes. Then, according to Jewish belief, He will reign over the restored kingdom of Israel to which all Jews of the Exile will return. It is believed that the foundation of the Messiah's throne will be justice and He will be charismatically endowed to dispense justice both to Israel and its neighboring nations.

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