

# **Commentary on the Book of Genesis Bible Study Notes and Comments**

**by David E. Pratte**



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*Commentary on the Book of Genesis:  
Bible Study Notes and Comments*

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**“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord”  
– 1 Corinthians 1:31**

# Comments on the Book of Genesis

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Notes to the reader: To save space and for other reasons, I have chosen not to include the Bible text in these notes (please use your Bible to follow along). When I do quote a Scripture, I generally quote the New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated. You can find study questions to accompany these notes at [www.gospelway.com/classbooks](http://www.gospelway.com/classbooks). The abbreviation “**b/c/v**” means “book, chapter, and verse.” Also, when I ask the reader to refer to a map, please consult the maps at the back of your Bible or in a Bible dictionary.

# Genesis 1

## Introduction to the Book of Genesis

### ***Name and theme***

“Genesis” means origin or beginning. The book is the account of the beginning of the earth, mankind, and God’s dealings with man. It is the earliest history we have of the earth and of God’s relationships to men. As such, it is foundational to our understanding of many major Bible themes. Many events cited elsewhere in Scripture are first mentioned and described in detail in the book of Genesis and would be very hard to understand without Genesis.

Morris (p. 18f) offers a list things the beginning of which are recorded in Genesis, including the following: The universe, life, man, marriage, evil, language, civilization, nations, religion, and the promises to Abraham regarding his descendants (Israel).

### ***Author***

#### **Evidence for Moses as author**

Genesis is part of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. The Bible often speaks of the “law” as written by Moses. None of these passages refers directly to Genesis, however Genesis is clearly included in the law and is the beginning installment in the story that continues in the following books. See Exodus 17:14; 24:4,7; 34:27; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 31:9,22,24; Joshua 8:31,32; Judges 3:4; Mark 10:4,5; John 5:46,47 (cf. Joshua 1:8; 8:34; 22:9; 23:6; 14:2; Daniel 9:12,13; Mark 12:19; John 1:45).

The only people who deny Mosaic authorship are liberals who undermine the authority and inspiration of the book, especially those who do not accept the teaching of the book regarding creation, the world-wide flood, etc.

#### **Evidence that writing existed in Moses’ day**

Some have denied Moses could have written the Pentateuch because writing had not been invented in Moses’ day (1450 BC). Such a view flatly denies the inspiration of Scripture, since the Bible repeatedly states that Moses did write various books of the Pentateuch. However, archeology has now conclusively proved that writing was known long before Moses’ day.

Specifically, Waldron explains that 100,000 clay tablets were found at Nuzi and dated at 1700-2000 BC, more than 250 years before Moses.

Halley's handbook (pp 48-55) lists many examples of ancient writings, discovered by archaeologists, that dates to Moses' day and before, some of it dating even back to Abraham's time! (See archaeological notes on Genesis 12.) Here are a few quotations:

Ras Shamra (Ugarit), North of Sidon, near Antioch ... [a] French Expedition (1929-) found a Temple Library ... with vast quantities of tablets ... in 8 languages ... and an alphabet of 27 letters far earlier than any previously known, many of them dating from the middle of second millennium B.C.

...

Thus, it is certain that writing was in common use in Palestine, Sinai, Syria, and Phoenicia, for centuries before the days of Moses. Dr. W. F. Albright, leading authority on Palestinian archaeology, says, "Only a very ignorant person can now suggest that writing (in many forms) was not known in Palestine and the immediately surrounding regions during the entire second millennium B.C." (pp 54,55)

Remember that Moses lived in the middle of the second millennium BC!

### **The Documentary Hypothesis**

The Documentary Hypothesis or Graf-Wellhausen Theory states that different parts of the Pentateuch (not just Genesis but the Pentateuch) must have originally been written by different uninspired authors, whose writings may have been collected by some editors (called redactors) long after Moses died. This view is said to be necessary to explain supposed contradictions and different writing styles found in different sections of the books. But such a theory proves nothing. Many writers use different styles at different times for different purposes. Such an approach could just as easily be used to "prove" that modern books were written by more than one author despite the fact we know each one was written by just one author.

Of course, it is possible that Moses was aware of other sources for some of his information (oral traditions), even as Luke and others did (Luke 1:1-4). However, this must never be used (as defenders of the Documentary Hypothesis do) to cast doubt on the inspiration of the Pentateuch or to argue that Moses is not the fundamental human author. Using sources no more proves Moses did not write the Pentateuch than it would prove that Luke did not write the book of Luke or that modern writers did not write their books just because they cite or refer to sources.

For excellent evidence against the Documentary Hypothesis see Coffman's introduction. Here is a summary of the evidence:

\* Writers who seriously defend this view invariably are liberal theologians. Coffman argues that one can search the writings of those who defend the Documentary Hypothesis and never find a single statement that affirms the Bible to be the inspired word of God.

\* There is no historical evidence that the manuscripts allegedly used as sources ever really existed. None of them have ever been found nor do any other ancient manuscripts refer to them. Those who defend the theory confidently affirm their existence, but only because it fits their theory. They did not find the manuscripts and then deduce the theory, nor have they ever found the manuscripts even after concocting the theory.

\* One of the main arguments for the hypothesis is that different sections use different names for God. However, Coffman demonstrates at great length that many sections use the various names interchangeably even in close proximity, and that various names are often used in sections that are supposedly characterized by use of a different name.

\* Those who defend the hypothesis disagree widely regarding what authors allegedly wrote what sections, they often admit that the authors for some sections are difficult or impossible to identify, and they even admit that there are sections for which the evidence contradicts their theory. Coffman documents such instances at great length.

\* More important, the theory denies that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, in flat contradiction to direct statements of Scripture that he did write it (see list above). Such a view effectively denies the inspiration of most of the Bible, including the teachings of Jesus.

\* And above all, the theory becomes a justification for denying the inspired infallibility of the Pentateuch. When men don't believe some statement of Scripture (especially the miracles), they just dismiss it as a mistake or legend/myth, etc. The effect leads to denial of the inspiration of all Scripture. See Matthew 15:3,4; 22:29-32; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Exodus 24:3-7; 34:27; Deuteronomy 31:9,22,24; 18:18-22; Judges 3:4; Joshua 22:9; 14:2; Daniel 9:11-13.

The Bible states that Moses wrote the books of the law and gives no other view. To argue otherwise is to simply deny Scripture. Why bother to claim to be a Bible believer when you deny its teaching? Note John 5:46,47 – Jesus asked how people could believe His words if they were unwilling to believe what Moses wrote!

See Coffman's introduction for his detailed discussion.

### ***Genesis as history***

The only proper approach to Genesis is to view it as divinely inspired history. Its accounts should be viewed as history, accurate and literal just like all other Biblical history, including Acts, Matthew, etc. It is not legend or myth, nor is it symbolic (except for occasional symbols that are understood by the same means as any other occasional symbol in a book of history). For many topics it discusses, it is the

**only** accurate written history, since it gives the account of the only One (God) who was present and has given a written eyewitness account.

Efforts to view the book as mere legend, especially chap. 1-11, are vain. Consider the following evidence that Genesis should be recognized as history, not myth, legend, or a book of symbols.

**(1) Other books of the Bible, including statements from Jesus, treat Genesis (specifically the first 11 chaps) as inspired, historical fact.**

We will note many examples as we study. Morris (p. 21) states:

“There are at least 165 passages in Genesis that are either directly quoted or clearly referred to in the New Testament. Many of these are alluded to more than once, so that there are at least two hundred quotations or allusions to Genesis in the New Testament ... there exist over one hundred quotations or direct references to Genesis 1-11 in the New Testament. Furthermore, every one of these eleven chapters is alluded to somewhere in the New Testament, and every one of the New Testament authors refers somewhere in his writings to Genesis 1-11. On at least six different occasions, Jesus Christ Himself quoted from or referred to something or someone in one of these chapters, including specific reference to each of the first seven chapters.”

We will see that Adam, Abel, Noah, and Abraham and other Genesis characters are named in other books of the Bible and treated as real characters just as surely as later characters of both the Old Testament and New Testament.

**(2) Genesis has been repeatedly confirmed by archeology and other proofs but has never been proved wrong by any historical, geographical, or scientific proof.**

Genesis conflicts with human opinion such as evolution, but never does it conflict with any proved fact. Much of the book has been confirmed but never disproved by science and archeology. We will cite many examples as we proceed through the book.

**(3) People generally can distinguish whether a writing is intended to be history or myth.**

Coffman observes that no known society has ever generally accepted as history any writing that was in fact not history but myth. Societies have myths, but they are able to distinguish them from that which professes to be history. We have Paul Bunyan and Mother Goose, but we don't confuse them with real historical characters or events such as



Christopher Columbus or the Revolutionary War. What is presented as history may be mistaken or even demonstrably false (such as the Book of Mormon), but people can still recognize that it **claims** to be history, not myth. Genesis throughout portrays itself as history.

**(4) One identifying characteristic of that which purports to be history is the use of genealogies.**

History deals with people and places by name as well as with real events. But inclusion of genealogies clearly defines a work as professing to be history because genealogies have no purpose whatever except history. The book of Genesis manifestly contains several genealogies, including several lengthy ones in chap. 1-11 (see chap. 5,10,11).

**(5) Genesis 12-50 is generally accepted to be history. Yet, there is no evidence in Scripture to identify chap. 1-11 as being different in nature.**

The book manifestly tells a continuous story from beginning to end. To accept three fourths of the book as history but one fourth as non-history makes the whole book nonsense. It is either history or not. What evidence in the book itself or in other Scripture would identify Genesis or any major portion of Genesis to be myth, legend, or symbol?

The only real reason why anyone would believe the book to be myth or legend is that they are biased by personal beliefs or by arguments from **outside** the Bible. In short, for various reasons they do not want to believe Genesis to be history. This conclusion results from wishful thinking, not from the content of Genesis or other Scripture itself.

**(6) Viewing Genesis as myth or legend leads to confusion throughout the rest of Scripture.**

Genesis is foundational to the theme and purpose of Scripture. Much of the rest of the Bible depends upon Genesis as historic fact. Denial of Genesis as historic inevitably results in denial of numerous other major Biblical truths. We will document many of these as we proceed.

When we compromise the Bible statements about our origin, we invariably end up being confused about our purpose in life and our destiny. Humanistic evolution, for example, denies the creation and says we came by evolutionary forces (chance). The logical consequence would be that there is no real purpose for life, and there is no life after death. We can understand our purpose and goal only when we understand our origin.

So, to deny the accuracy of Genesis, to deny its inspiration, or to treat it as legend, is to reject the whole Bible and thoroughly undermine all other Bible writings. If we respect the Bible, we must treat Genesis as accurate history like other Bible writers did. If we do not so

treat it, then we are rejecting the whole of the Bible, not just a few chapters in one book.

In short, viewing Genesis as a conglomeration of legendary accounts leads logically to infidelity and atheism. And many who start that road end up at that destination, regardless of their original intent. Those who have not yet reached the destination simply have not accepted the consequences of their position ... yet.

### **Outline of Genesis**

The following outline is suggested by the Waldrons with modification:

- I. Creation and the Flood (and related events) – chap. 1-11
  - A. Creation and the first people (chap. 1-5)
    - 1. Creation of the universe (chap. 1,2)
    - 2. First sin (chap. 3)
    - 3. Cain and Abel (chap. 4)
    - 4. Generations of Adam (chap. 5)
  - B. The Flood (chap. 6-9)
  - C. The descendants of Noah (chap. 10,11)
    - 1. Generation of the sons of Noah (Table of Nations - chap. 10)
    - 2. Tower of Babel (11:1-9)
    - 3. Generation of Shem (11:10-32)
- II. The Patriarchs – chap. 12-50
  - A. Abraham – 12:1-25:18
  - B. Isaac – 25:19-28:9
  - C. Jacob – 28:10-36:43; chap. 38
  - D. Joseph – chap. 37,39-50

### **Sources frequently cited in these notes:**

*Archaeology and Bible History*, Joseph P. Free (11<sup>th</sup> edition, 1972); Scripture Press Publications, Wheaton, IL

*Commentary on Genesis*, James Burton Coffman

“Genesis and the Law” – notes from class taught by Clinton Hamilton

*The Genesis Record*, Henry Morris

*Halley's Bible Handbook*, Henry H. Halley, (24<sup>th</sup> edition, 1965); Zondervan's Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI

*In the Beginning*, Bob and Sandra Waldron

# **Section 1: Creation, the Flood, and Related Events – chap. 1-11**

## **I. Creation and the First People – Chap. 1-5**

### **1:1-2:3 - The Overview of Creation**

#### ***1:1-5 - The First Day***

##### **Creation of heavens and earth**

The first verse of the first book of the Bible begins with one of the most fundamental facts known to man. Throughout time, men have desired to know their origin. Young people “drop out” of society to try to find out “who they are.” Older people go to psychiatrists. Philosophers and scientists spend multiplied hours and millions of dollars investigating where we came from. The Bible answers the question in its first verse with one of the simplest affirmations imaginable. God made all things in nature. Note some things we can learn.

##### **“In the beginning”**

There was a beginning (cf. John 1:1). The Bible says that God existed eternally in the past. Time as we know it began when the earth began. When Jesus returns, the earth and time will be destroyed and we will again enter eternity. But there was a beginning to the earth and time.

When was the beginning? Evolutionists tell us it was billions of years ago, but we will see that evolution is false and its methods faulty. While the Bible itself does not answer the question with mathematic precision, yet it defines the beginning quite closely. By studying Bible genealogies men have concluded that creation occurred about 4000 BC, but there are problems in those methods. See Morris pp 42-45 for a good study. His conclusion, which appears as valid as any, is that the creation occurred 6000-10,000 years ago. In any case, it must be in the thousands of years, not millions.

##### **“God”**

From its first sentence onward, the Bible affirms the existence of God. The Bible is the story of God’s work, His will, and His revelation to man. It is totally fitting that the story begins with God. God is described in this book as the eternal, all-wise, all-powerful, infinitely righteous, merciful, and loving Creator and Ruler of the universe.

Some of His characteristics can be observed even in this account of creation, especially His wisdom and power.

Yet, while God is properly spoken of in the singular, He may also be spoken of in the plural. This verse refers to God as ELOHIM (Heb.), which is a plural. Yet the verb is singular. This terminology occurs elsewhere too. So, God is both singular and plural at the same time. This is not explained here, but as we continue to study we learn that we worship one Godhead consisting of three separate and distinct individuals, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In fact, all three Beings in God were present on this occasion. The Son was the active force in creation (John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:15), but the Father was also present (John 1:1), and so was the Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:2; cf. Job 26:13). Cf. vv 26,27 where God is again presented as being both plural and singular. There is only one true God, but that God consists of three individuals united in all aspects of their character and work.

This concept can best be understood by comparing it to the plural gods of idolatry. Idolatry has many gods having different character, different authority, different will and goals, often conflicting and even warring with one another. Some have authority in one part of the world or one area of life, others have authority in other areas, etc. They are plural gods, not just in the sense of plural beings, but in the sense of plural natures and wills, etc. The true God is three distinct individuals, but all united perfectly in will, character, authority over created things, etc., so that there is never difference or conflict of any kind. Hence, one united God, yet three Beings. We speak of God as “Him” or “He” referring to the united whole, yet often three Beings are involved. While this may at times seem confusing that singular terms are used to refer to plural beings, remember that the Bible often does it, including in this very first verse.

### **“Created”**

The word here is used only for the work of God bringing into existence that which had no previous existence (not just the reforming or making of that which already existed in a different form).

The Bible repeatedly affirms, not just here but elsewhere, that the world is the result of Divine creation. To deny this does not deny just Gen. 1 but the fundamental essence of the whole Scriptures. Further, the Bible uses creation as evidence of God’s existence, wisdom, power, etc. (Rom. 1:20; etc.). To deny creation is to deny a major fundamental reason for believing in God. (See Exodus 20:11; Psalm 33:6-9; 102:25; 89:11; 90:2; 104:5-9,24-28; 19:1; 24:1,2; 95:5; 146:6; 136:5-9; 8:3,6-8; 148:5; Isaiah 42:5; 45:18; 40:26; Jeremiah 10:12; 27:5; John 1:1-3; Acts 14:15; 17:24; Hebrews 1:10; 11:3; 2 Peter 3:5; 2 Corinthians 4:6.)

The only alternative to creation is evolution — the belief that somehow millions of years ago life began by natural causes from non-

living matter, and gradually over millions of years ago that original life form gradually changed till from it came all present-day kinds of plants and animals including man. As we proceed, we will notice numerous ways that this view contradicts the Bible and science.

Creation and evolution are essentially the only two choices regarding origin. Something must be eternal for where something exists, it must have come from something. Something exists now, so something must always have existed. Either matter is eternal and all life evolved gradually from it, or else an all-wise Being is eternal and formed all other life.

Some, who take a middle position called “theistic evolution,” would claim that living things all evolved from an original thing, but that God directed the process. But we emphasize that evolution – theistic or atheistic – inherently and repeatedly contradicts fundamental Bible teachings. We will observe this on numerous points as we proceed. And evolution - theistic or atheistic - also contradicts true science. Furthermore, theistic evolution is nothing but a compromise which is the first step toward rejection of Bible miracles, then the whole Bible story. Those who accept the view may choose to remain inconsistent, but the fact remains that they are inconsistent. Consistency will compel them to reject more and more Bible teachings, and most of them reject at least some other Bible teachings.

### **“Heavens”**

“Heaven” is used in 3 ways in the Bible: (1) Earth’s atmosphere, where birds fly (Gen. 1:20; Hos. 4:3; Prov. 23:5); (2) Outer space where the sun, moon, and stars are, perhaps including the atmosphere (Gen. 1:14-17; 22:17; Josh. 10:13); (3) the eternal, spiritual dwelling place of God and angels (1 Kings 8:27,30; Psa. 11:4; Matt. 5:16; 6:9; 1 Pet 1:12; cf. 2 Cor. 12:2,4). Here it cannot have the last meaning. Nor can it refer to the atmosphere as we now know it nor to the heavenly bodies as we now know them, since they were not formed till the second and fourth days. I conclude that the term “heavens” must here refer to all the matter above the earth which at this point remained unorganized, just as the earth itself existed but was not yet organized (v2). Later in the creation process, the heavens were organized into the atmosphere and the heavenly bodies, just as earth itself was later organized into a form such as we now know it. Here God had simply made the matter from which the rest was eventually formed.

### **“Earth”**

This refers to the matter or material stuff from which that which is now earth was eventually constituted. At this point it was unformed and void (v2).

## **Errors disproved in v1**

Morris (p. 38) points out that, in this very first verse, the Bible denies numerous fundamental errors of human thinking:

- (1) It denies atheism, for it claims God exists.
- (2) It denies pantheism (the belief that God is in everything and everything is a part of God) for it shows that God is the Maker, distinct from that which He made.
- (3) It denies polytheism for it shows one God who made all things.
- (4) It denies humanism for it shows that God, not man, is the highest intelligence and power in the universe.
- (5) It denies evolution for it says God created all things.
- (6) It denies materialism for it says God is eternal and matter had a beginning when it was created.

## **Heavens and earth were created on the first day**

I conclude that verses 1,2 are included in the events of the first day. This seems to me to clearly fit the pattern of the chapter. The chapter is divided into sections by days, each section ending with “the evening and the morning were the \_\_\_\_ day.” I see no reason, Scripturally or otherwise, to view the first day differently. If so, then vv 1-5 constitute the record of what God did on the first day.

However, the main reason for this view is that God’s word expressly says this is so in Exodus 20:11: “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them...” This truth is expressly repeated in Exodus 31:17.

So, God’s word expressly states that the heavens and earth were made in the six days of creation. It follows that v1 is part of the events of the first day. So on the first day God brought heaven and earth into existence, then God created light, etc.

## **Archaeological evidence regarding original monotheism**

The Bible teaches that, from the beginning, people believed in one true God, then polytheism developed as men digressed from the original God. However, liberals often claim that originally men believed in many gods and then gradually evolved to a higher belief in one God. While no doubt many will continue to hold the liberal view, there is evidence to confirm that monotheism was the original concept of God.

Halley’s Handbook (p62) says:

Dr. Stephen Langdon, of Oxford University, has found that the earliest Babylonian inscriptions suggest that man’s first religion was a belief in One God, and from that there was a rapid decline into Polytheism and Idolatry. (See ... “Field Museum-Oxford University Expedition to Kish,” by Henry Field, Leaflet 28)

Sir Flinders Petrie said that the Original religion of Egypt was Monotheistic.

Sayce announced (1898) that he had discovered on three separate tablets in the British Museum, of the time of Hammurabi, the words “Jahwe (Jehovah) is God.”

Leading anthropologists have recently announced that among all primitive races there was a belief in One Supreme God.

### **Matter existed without form; the Spirit hovered over the waters.**

At this point God had only brought into existence the basic elements to be used in forming the universe. But what existed had no useful or meaningful shape (without form), and contained nothing (void – it was uninhabited, no life yet existed).

The surface of earth is described simply as the “deep” and “waters” - apparently a solution or liquid form of matter in no useful form. Furthermore, there was apparently no existing energy, for there was darkness. All our energy comes physically from light. At this time there was no light. Darkness is the absence of light.

Yet the Holy Spirit was present hovering over the waters. He was alive and involved in the events (see on v1), though after this we are told little of what He did.

### **Gap Theory**

Some people, in an attempt to “harmonize” the Bible with the age of the earth claimed by evolutionary “scientists,” theorize that a “gap” of unknown duration may have occurred between v1 and v2 or between v2 and v3. Some speculate that perhaps another creation with other life forms even existed and was destroyed during this gap period, presumably because the result did not suit God’s will.

Some arguments have been made for this view based on Bible phrases, but none of them are convincing. The view exists primarily as a means to try to harmonize the Bible account with “scientific” theories about the age of fossils and rocks. Morris (pp. 46-49) shows that there is nothing to be gained and much to be lost by such views. In truth, there is no Biblical reason to accept the view, nor does it satisfy the theories of “science.” We are better off both Biblically and scientifically to reject such views. And when we begin to accept the false theories of science about the ages of geology, etc., we are likely to further compromise Bible teaching.

However, as shown on our notes on v1 above, the Bible expressly includes the creation of the heavens and the earth in the six days of creation. It follows that there can be no time gap between v2 and v3.

The events of v1 occur on the first day. God's word says so in Exodus 20:11 and 31:17. Those who believe in God's word will accept what it says.

### **Creation of light**

"Then God said" — All the days of creation begin with God's word working. This is the only means stated that He used. He spoke and all obeyed and came into being (Hebrews 11:3; Psalms 33:6-9). God is supreme and His will must be obeyed even by lifeless, inanimate matter.

God's first creation on the unformed earth was light. Light is energy from which all our other energy forms come. To have life as we know it, energy is required. So God began by making the energy — light.

What God created was "good." This is said repeatedly regarding nearly every day, and is stated in summary regarding the whole creation (v31). God is perfect and makes no mistakes. Anytime man criticizes nature he is either criticizing the all-wise God who made all things very good or else he is observing that which is part of the curse later brought on nature when man sinned (Gen. 3).

God separated light from darkness. They are different in essence, for darkness is the absence of light. They are separate and cannot be the same. Light removes darkness. This physical truth is the symbol of many spiritual truths regarding right and wrong (1 John 1:3-7; etc.). Darkness did not cease to exist, but it was distinct from light.

God named His creations. Light was called "day" and darkness called "night." The evening and morning were the first day. In this verse it appears that "evening" and "morning" refer to the darkness and light God had just made.

The sun, moon, and stars were not created till the fourth day. Then they were assigned the duty of giving light on earth, ruling the night and the day. However, at that point light itself had already been created on the first day. So light existed before the heavenly bodies that later were assigned control of the light.

How could light exist and cause day and night before the heavenly bodies were created? We are not told, therefore I do not know. But then, I don't understand how God did anything He did in creation. How did He make the light to begin with and then all the other works of creation? The God who can make light and can make the sun, moon, and stars, etc., can surely make light to exist and to shine in the day but not at night for three days till He made the heavenly bodies.

(Suppose God had done it the other way around. Suppose He had made the sun, moon, etc., then He created light and assigned them the task of ruling the light, etc. Then we would ask how the sun could be the sun if it did not give light! No matter how God did it, we would have unanswered questions because we are not God and do not understand how He does His miraculous works!)



## **1:6-8 - The Second Day**

### **Creation of the firmament**

“Firmament” means expanse, something which is spread out. This firmament was called “heaven.” “Firmament” and “heaven” are very similar in their usage. Like the word “heaven” (see notes on v1), “firmament” can refer to the earth’s atmosphere (Gen. 1:20), outer space where the heavenly bodies are (Gen. 1:14,17), and firmament is pictured as being present in the dwelling place of God (Ezek. 1:22).

But the heaven was already created in v1, which probably referred to outer space. So vv 6-8 probably refer to the atmosphere. This would be essential to the existence of life, but would not have existed in v1.

What are the waters under the firmament compared to those above it? The waters below would have been the water on the surface of the earth (v2), which was formed into the seas on the third day (vv 9ff).

But what were the waters above the firmament? It could refer to the clouds. They are in the firmament, but could be thought of as being above them. However, there is no Bible proof that there were clouds or rain until the flood (see 2:5 and notes on ch. 6). (Note that, of course, there could have been clouds from creation even if there was no rain till the flood.)

Alternatively, some say that, before the flood, there was a canopy of water vapor covering the entire atmosphere. This would have protected the earth from harmful rays of the sun, and provided a greenhouse effect that would have kept the temperature all over the earth more constant than it is now. This would have made a better environment for life, perhaps explaining the great ages men lived before the flood. When the flood occurred, God destroyed this upper canopy, causing it to fall on earth as rain. This also allowed more harmful sun-rays to reach the surface of the earth, leading to shorter lifespans following the flood. Also, from the time of the flood onward the earth was watered by clouds that produced rain. This would explain the existence of the rainbow for the first time after the flood. This theory involves some unproved speculation, perhaps, but it does fit the Bible accounts better than most other explanations. (See Morris, p59ff).

Note again that what God created was done by the power of His word. He spoke and it was done.

## **1:9-13 - The Third Day**

### **Formation of dry land and plants**

The third day involved the formation of the dry land, in contrast to the seas, and plants to live on that land. Again this was done by the power of God’s word, and again what was done was declared by God to be good.

The seas resulted from the water on the earth's surface being gathered together into one place. So there are seas (plural) but all are "gathered together" in one place (in contrast to the earth). The only reasonable explanation for the language is exactly what we see today: there are several seas that are distinguishable, but all share one continuous bed so there is one "sea level" (this refers to the seas, not necessarily to bodies of waters such as rivers or lakes). Likely, the location and exact boundaries of these seas, may have been greatly changed by the flood and perhaps other events since creation. Nevertheless, exactly as Genesis 1 states, the seas are gathered together into one continuous seabed, but how did Moses know this when he wrote? The only reasonable explanation is inspiration.

Then God spoke into existence the many kinds of plants that live on the earth. These included grass, herb, and fruit tree.

### **After their kind**

All the plants God made reproduce after their kind because they have seed in themselves. This agrees with what we see in nature today, but conflicts with evolution. Evolution would say that, given enough time, the kinds of living things would develop into different kinds, so that all the present kinds came from one original kind. But the Bible says the living things reproduce after their own kind. There is great diversity or variation within each kind, allowing for adaptation to environment, yet each kind remains the same kind.

This reproduction after the same kind, which we continue to observe today, occurs because of the power of seed. Scientists have now discovered that each kind of living thing has its own seed, and that seed has genes and chromosomes that determine the kind of plant that will develop from the seed. These genes and chromosomes came, in turn, from the parent plants. There is some variation within the genes and chromosomes of each kind of plant, allowing diversity and adaptation to environment. But still each seed produces the same kind of living thing from which it came, just as Genesis says.

This doctrine is taught, not just in Genesis 1, but also elsewhere throughout the Bible, and is used as the basis for fundamental, critical doctrines.

Matthew 7:15-20 — You can recognize a false teacher, even in disguise, by the principle that things reproduce after their kind. False teaching produces false practices like thistles produce more thistles. Good teaching cannot produce evil practices and vice versa. But evolution contradicts the Lord's teaching because if, given enough time, thistles could produce grapes, then given enough time, maybe false teaching could lead to salvation and true teaching could lead to error. There would be no way to know what teachings lead to salvation and what do not.

Galatians 6:7,8 — Don't be deceived, God is not mocked. We reap what we sow. Sow to the flesh and reap corruption; sow to the Spirit and reap eternal life (cf. 5:16-26). But if evolution were true, then maybe sowing long enough could lead us to reap something different, so living in sin long enough might still lead eternal life. Or maybe if we live faithfully long enough we could still be lost! Evolution – theistic or atheistic - **mocks God**, and those who believe it are **deceived**. [Cf. James 3:12.]

1 Peter 1:23-25 — The word of God is compared to seed which causes us to be born again as children of God, in comparison to physical seeds which reproduce plants. But if plants reproduce different kinds given enough time, then perhaps after enough time had past, obeying the gospel would not make us children of God but children of the devil or something else.

These and other passages demonstrate that God's word throughout teaches the same as Gen. 1: living things reproduce after their kind. To deny the principle is to deny the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus Himself. Denying the principle denies the very basis on which God will determine who will or will not receive eternal life. Hence, whether atheistic or theistic, evolution contradicts the Bible throughout. It cannot be reconciled with truth.

### Creation with maturity (“apparent age”)

The account describes the plants as having seed in themselves from the very beginning. They were created mature on the very first day of their creation, as was later done with the animals, Adam and Eve, etc. They are described as being capable of propagating from the first day of their existence. This is miraculous, of course. Normally a plant or animal takes weeks, months, or years to mature to the point it can reproduce.

The point here, however, is that, if a person were to observe these full-grown plants one day after they had been made and if he were to assume that they had grown to maturity gradually as modern plants do, he would have concluded them to be weeks, months, or years old. Yet in fact they would have been only one day old. This is called “creation with apparent age.”

God plainly tells us here what He did, so there is nothing deceitful about this. He created everything to do its job from the day they were created. Since they were made by miracle, there was no reason why He should make them immature. He could make them mature as easily as He could make them immature. And by making them mature, He formed a functioning, operational earth. After the six days of creation, all was set in motion to function properly on an ongoing basis, just like it can function today. Had things been made immature, the earth would have taken years to reach the point of mature function. Who would have cared for the immature animals as they grew, etc.? By

making them mature, God made it possible for them to care for themselves, to reproduce and to care for their offspring, from the very beginning.

The same principle would apply to all that God made. Everything was capable of functioning from the very beginning. So things that, by today's laws, would have taken years to develop, were made already functioning. This explains one reason why people today misjudge the age of the universe. If we assume that all things were originally immature, as evolutionists assume, and that all things proceed by the same processes as exist today, then we will inevitably judge nature to be much older than it really is. But the Bible describes a mature creation which, judged by today's processes, might have been appeared, as soon as it had been created, to be years, centuries, or even many millennia old (depending on what assumptions were used). [Cf. Morris, p63]

(Note that this same truth would apply to the formation of dry land. If we assume that the mountains arose from gradual processes such as we observe today, the formation of mountains would have taken millennia. But the Bible says that, what may appear to have taken millions of years by modern processes, really occurred in one day by God's miracles of creation.)

(Coffman on 2:5 argues that God first created seed, not full-grown plants, which seed could have remained dormant for thousands of years before sprouting. Such a view is nonsense in light of what the passage says. The Scripture says: "the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the third day." So, the earth produced grass, herbs, and trees on the third day, and those plants had seed in themselves. God did not just make seeds on the third day; He made plants that had seed in them.)

Some object to this concept saying, as answered above, that it is deceitful or misleading. But what alternative did God have in creation that would avoid this issue? If he made the plants, animals, and people immature, if people insisted on explaining them by processes of today, they would assume they came by process of natural **reproduction** from parents. So, they would reason that it would be deceitful to say God created them directly when they look like the modern products of reproduction. In short, if we insist on forcing current processes on Divine creation, we effectively eliminate creation as a possible explanation at all! The fact is that creation is a miracle and does not fit current processes – that is the whole point! It was the means by which God miraculously set the universe in motion and established current processes. By the very nature of a miracle, it cannot be explained by current processes. To insist that every appearance be explained by current processes is to assume away (without proof) the very possibility of cre-

ation. God is not required to answer to man's rules. He told us in plain language what He did. When people deny His statements and then accuse Him of dishonesty, they are guilty of falsifying the evidence and prove themselves to be the ones who are dishonest.

### **The origin of life**

Here we read of the first living creatures. They were created by the eternal, living God (cf. Acts 17:24-28). Evolution, in contrast, says that life began by accident in a primeval swamp. Then from that life came all the present kinds of living things.

One of the most firmly established laws of science is the Law of Biogenesis, which says that life comes only from living things. There is no evidence that dead, non-living matter can spontaneously generate life. Biology texts, even in public schools, go to great lengths to explain the experiments of Redi and Pasteur that proved that living things are the offspring of other living things. No living things, not even microscopic one-celled creatures, can begin spontaneously from dead matter. The Bible agrees with this scientific fact, for it says that life came from the eternally living Creator (cf. Acts 14:15).

However, evolution contradicts the scientific evidence, since it demands that dead matter must have sometime come to life, and from that original life came all present living things. Biology texts will attempt to explain how scientists have been experimenting with the kind of environment they believe existed millions of years ago to see if life could have been generated then. So far, even with the efforts of intelligent scientists involved, they have done no better than to form some basic chemicals that are found in life. They have not even been able to form a true protein molecule, let alone a cell, let alone cause it to live.

How can evolution be true when it conflicts, not only with the Bible, but also with one of the most basic laws known to science?

### ***1:14-19 - The Fourth Day***

#### **Creation of sun, moon, and stars**

On the fourth day, God created the heavenly bodies, the sun (the greater light to rule the day), the moon (the lesser light to rule the night), and the stars. These were set in the firmament — not in the atmosphere but beyond that in space.

These bodies serve several purposes. (1) They give light on earth, divide the light from darkness, and rule over day and night. The light had already been created and divided from the darkness on day one. But now God established the natural forces by which the light would be generated and controlled on a continuing basis through the future. How the light had been generated before was not stated (see notes on day one). But from now on it would be generated and controlled by the heavenly lights.

(2) They serve as signs for seasons, days, and years. The position of the heavenly bodies has always determined how we measure time. The rotation of the earth in relation to the heavenly bodies determines the days, the sun ruling the day and the moon ruling the night. The revolution of the earth about the sun determines the years. And the angle of the earth's axis combined with its revolution about the sun determines the seasons. Not all this has been understood by people throughout the years, but it has all functioned properly, and the location of heavenly bodies in the sky has always been used to determine these measures of time.

The account does not say how the heavenly bodies were formed. It is possible (as discussed on day one) that the material from which they were made had existed in the "heavens" that were created on day one, but was formless and void like the earth. God may then have put them into their ultimate form and assigned them their duties here on day four.

Again, God saw that what He had made was good.

### ***1:20-23 - The Fifth Day***

#### **Creation of water animals and birds**

On the second day, God had created the firmament and used it to divide the waters above it from the waters below it. On the fifth day, God created living things to dwell in the firmament and the waters under the firmament — birds, fish, and sea creatures.

Note that there was great abundance from the first day these were created. It was not a gradual process in which there was one kind at first, then after a while a few kinds, and then after many millions of years there were many kinds, all developed from the original kind. From the beginning of their existence there were many kinds.

Also note that all reproduced "after their kind" (see notes on the third day). As it was with the plants, so with the fish and birds. Their heredity had been determined and they always form the same kind of offspring as the parents were. Once again, evolution cannot fit the account.

Also, note again that they were able to multiply from the very beginning, and were instructed to do so, as the plants were (see notes on the third day). They were apparently created mature, as the man and woman clearly would be. They did not need weeks or months to mature and then multiply. They were created capable of functioning from their formation. Hence, they would have appeared to be many years old, by the normal process of nature, on the very day they were brought into existence by miracle.

God's observation of His creation again assured Him it was good.

Consider the correspondence in days. On the first day God made light, and on the fourth day He made heavenly bodies to disperse the

light. On the second day He made firmament and separated it from the waters. On the fifth day He made birds and fish to fill the firmament and waters. Now we will see the correspondence continue. On the third day He made dry land, and on the sixth day He will make life to dwell on the dry land.

### **1:24-31 - The Sixth Day**

#### **Creation of land animals**

On the sixth day God first made the animals to dwell on dry land — living creatures, cattle, creeping things and beasts of the earth. “Creeping things” may include reptiles, but could also include insects.

Again, everything reproduced after its own kind. The account has already shown that this was true of the plants, fish, and birds; here we are told that it was also true of the land animals. (See notes on the third day.) Again, this thoroughly and necessarily contradicts evolution in all its forms.

And again all was declared by God to be good.

#### **Creation of man**

Finally, on the sixth day, God came to the crowning creation, the greatest and most dominate of His creatures. He made man, male and female.

Here God is referred to as “us” and “our” (v26) and then “His” and “He” (v27; cf. 3:22). This cannot refer to the angels for the man and woman were made in God’s image, not the image of angels. The “us” and “our” (v26) must refer to God (v27). Hence, God is both singular and plural — three in one. Here is further evidence of the plural individuals in the singular God (see notes on v1). Other passages in which the individual beings in God appear to be conversing are Psalm 2:7; 110:1; 45:7; Isaiah 48:16; as well as the many New Testament references to the Father and Son, etc.

Note that Jesus quoted v27 in Matthew 19:4, thereby proving His acceptance of this account as historic, factual revelation from God.

**For further discussion of the number of individuals in the Godhead, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

The term “man” (vv 26,27) clearly includes both male and female (v27). Hence, by Divine decree, woman wears the name of man. “Man” can refer to the male or to the human race including both male and female. It is so used throughout Scripture, the feminists notwithstanding. See Gen. 5:1,2.

#### **Image of God**

Unlike the animals, man is created in the image or likeness of God. This is what makes Him superior to animals. This concept is both challenging and amazing. (Note that Adam, in the image of God, in

turn had a son in **his** image — Gen. 5:1-5 — so all people are in God’s image). Other Scriptures confirm that man is in the image of God:

James 3:9,10 — Men should not be cursed because they are made in the likeness of God. But if man is not really in God’s image, would it be all right to curse them? [Gen. 9:6]

1 Corinthians 11:7 — Man is the image and glory of God.

Psalms 8:4-8 — God placed man over all creation, including all animals (quoted in Heb. 2:6-8).

These verses show that Gen. 1 is not to be taken as myth. What it says about the nature of man is intended to be taken as historical truth, and is so treated throughout the Bible.

The “image of God” does not seem likely to refer to man’s physical nature, since God is spirit (John 4:24), and a spirit does not have flesh and blood (Luke 24:39). What is involved in the “image of God”? It appears that man is similar to God (though not on His level) and unlike animals in the following ways:

1. Man has rational intelligence. He has ability to reason, invent, communicate, etc., in ways far beyond animals (see below). His ability in this regard allows him to communicate with God and understand God’s will for him.

2. Man has a will, and a power to choose. He is a free moral agent. He is able, without absolute controls (as a robot), to choose between alternatives and determine which course he will pursue. He is therefore accountable before God to make the choices and pursue the goals that God instructs him to.

3. Man has emotions. He can experience joy, love, anger, hatred, sorrow, and many other feelings. The Bible also attributes such feelings to God.

4. Man has a conscience. He is able, not only to distinguish right from wrong, but also to have an inherent sense of guilt when he has done wrong and a sense of approval when he has done right.

5. Man has a spirit nature which has the opportunity to be with God in eternity. Cf. John 4:24 to Ecc. 3:21; 12:7; etc.

The image of God may involve more than this, but it surely includes all this.

### **Evolution and the image of God**

Simple observation shows that man is far different from the animals we are said to have evolved from.

**Only man has rational intelligence.** What animal uses abstract symbols (letters and numbers) to speak, write, or do mathematical and scientific calculations? What animal invents new tools and machines, trains animals, uses fire, or records wisdom to pass on to future generations?



Among animals, there are many shades of intelligence. If man evolved from animals, why are there no animals with shades of intelligence right up to ours, instead of so vast a gulf?

**Only man creates new beauty to appreciate** in the form of music, art, poetry, humor, etc.

**Only man has a conscience and sense of religious values.** What animal by nature feels a sense of guilt or seeks to find and worship the cause of its existence?

Here is another major contradiction between the Bible and evolution. If man evolved from animals, how do we explain these vast differences? If we develop new characteristics according to “survival of the fittest,” how does appreciation of art, etc., make us more fit to survive? But the Bible easily explains all these differences. These are characteristics man shares in common, not with the animals, but with God in whose image we were made.

Regarding the existence of an original man and woman, see notes on Gen. 2:23.

Regarding the dominion of man over animals see further on v28. But at this point we note that it clearly shows man is distinct from animals and not classed as simply an animal or one who is slightly evolved above them.

### **Dominion of man over other creatures**

The man and woman were told, as God had decreed regarding the fish, birds, and animals, that they were to multiply and fill the earth. Note that this shows they were mature on the day of their creation. They were able to understand instruction and communication from God (see more in chap. 2). They could be held responsible for understanding. And they were able to procreate. Clearly, they were physically mature on the very day they were created, but had we looked at them and judged them by the natural process of maturity, we would have judged them to be decades old. Hence, note again the concept of creation with apparent age (see notes on the third day).

Man was told to subdue the earth and have dominion over the animals, etc. This demonstrates that man is in charge of the earth and the living things on it, and that we were authorized from the beginning to use the earth for our benefit. This authorizes the use of science and technology to investigate how the earth functions and to harness it for our good.

Some argue at times as though we should oppose things that are “not natural”: “If God had meant for us to ..., He would have given us ...” This argument is made selectively (according to the personal opinions of whoever makes the argument), but has been applied to many things such as going to the moon, birth control, eating certain foods, etc. But if we must be totally “natural,” then we can disturb nothing in nature. Yet consider many things we all accept as proper,

though they do not strictly occur by nature but require us to use and modify events of nature: flying in an airplane, living in a house, wearing clothes, driving a car, wearing glasses, eating from a plate with fork and spoon, taking medications and doing surgical operations, flying in airplanes, riding in boats, writing on paper, wearing jewelry, etc. These and thousands of other activities are not strictly the course of nature but involve us in deliberately modifying the course of nature for our benefit. Many of these are specifically mentioned by way of condoning them in other Scriptures. The others are based on modern technology but simply amount to use of nature for our good.

If we are not authorized to fly to the moon, use birth control, etc., because they are “not natural,” then neither are we authorized to do any of these other acts. In particular, if we are authorized to use technology to postpone the end of life (by using medical treatments, surgery, etc.), why can we not likewise use technology to postpone the beginning of life (contraceptives)? We may as well argue against medical and technological treatments to prolong life (some people do!) as to argue against medical and technological treatments to postpone the beginning of life. If we understand why any of these “unnatural” acts are authorized, then we understand why all are authorized. They are all examples of subduing the earth, using it for our good.

Note then that we also have a stewardship regarding the earth (cf. Psa. 8:6-8). If the earth is a blessing from God, which He owns, yet which has been put under our charge, then that by definition is a stewardship. We are accountable, not just to enjoy the earth, but to use it wisely and care for it. We should benefit from it but also care for it so as to leave it useful for our children and future generations.

This is the proper Biblical view of such issues as environmentalism, animal rights, etc. No animal has nature greater than or equal to man, nor do they have rights as men do. We were created to dominate and use them for our purposes – God says so. This is a “right” granted us by God, not granted to animals, plants, earth, etc. Later passages will show that this mandate includes using them for clothing, food, etc.

Likewise, we are in control of all aspects of the earth we were placed upon. Note that the earth too is to be subdued for our purpose. Earth is not a goddess to be worshiped or served by man. Earth is a creature given us by God to use to meet our needs and accomplish His purposes. It is subject to us, not vice versa. We have a stewardship. We must submit to God’s plan for the use of the earth, plants, and animals, but we are in control to use them for our good. We should not cause suffering or trouble for people in order to benefit other creatures.

### **Plants given for food**

At this point, Adam and the animals apparently ate only plants, fruit from trees, etc. God made provision for man’s needs in every way. This will be discussed more fully in chap. 2. Genesis 9:1ff gives the first

mention of man eating meat. It is mentioned many places following that and is clearly authorized in the New Testament (Acts 10; Mark 7:19; 1 Tim. 4:1-3). The fact that meat eating was apparently not practiced from creation does not in any way change the clear authority later granted to practice it.

**For further discussion of animal rights, eating meat, etc., see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

The creation account ends as God decrees that everything He had made was very good. Note the emphasis. Till now nearly every day's work had been declared "good." Now it is **all** reviewed and declared to be "very good." This includes the relationship of man and wife which has already been created (more detail regarding this will be given in chap. 2).

If man finds anything in nature that appears to be not good, then one of two things is true. Either is really is good but we just don't understand it. Or else it was not present at the creation but has been added later as a result of sin entering the world and man's perversion of God's original plan. So let us take care what we criticize in nature lest we be criticizing our Creator.

### **Design must come from a designer.**

The Bible says that everything in nature was made by God and all that was made was very good. If, as evolutionists and others claim, there is no God, we ask how this complex order came to exist in nature.

Design must come from a designer. Intelligent beings have an inherent ability to recognize the work of another intelligent being. When an intelligent being designs something to accomplish some purpose, that thing bears the marks of intelligence: it is intelligible. Other intelligent beings can study how it works, etc. Even if we have never met the maker, we know he must exist and we can appreciate the degree of his intelligence.

If a thing appeals to your intelligence — it "makes sense" as a logical, reasonable way to accomplish some purpose — you know instinctively that it originated as the effort of some intelligent being. It did not "just happen" by blind chance. This is true of anything you can name even if you have never met the maker personally: a car, house, bridge, etc.

But the universe bears countless marks of being designed by an intelligent Being:

*Cameras* are designed by intelligent beings. But no camera can match the overall performance of the *human eye*. Where did your eyes come from?

*Computers* are made by intelligent beings. But the *human brain* can surpass computers in many ways. Where did your brain come from?

*Factories* are made by intelligent beings to manufacture a product. But who made the *human reproductive system*?

“For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God” (Hebrews 3:4). When you consider all the organs of the human body, then all the other plants and animals, the heavenly bodies, and all the complex laws of nature, is it reasonable to argue that all this came without intelligent planning?

Science is founded on the conviction that the universe is *intelligible* — it is so orderly and systematic that the human intelligence is able to grasp much about its working. Doesn't this, of itself, prove that an intelligent Being invented it? And doesn't the fact that much of its working is beyond our ability to understand and to duplicate, prove that the intelligent Being who made it is far superior to us?

Every effect must have an adequate cause! Evolution says that life began by *blind chance*, and that random mutations (more blind chance) have been the root cause of all advanced life forms. The Bible, however, says that there is an all-wise, all-powerful living God who intentionally planned and created the universe and all the life forms in it. This is the only sensible and adequate explanation. See Rom. 1:20 and Psalm 19:1.

### **Length of the Days**

What is the significance of “day” (Hebrew YOM) as used here in the Genesis account of creation: first day, second day, etc.? Some say they are long ages or that there are long ages between the days of creation, mainly to harmonize with “scientific” claims that the earth is billions of years old. Again, this is an unscriptural compromise that, as with the gap theory, will almost certainly lead its defenders into even further compromises.

The issue is important because the days are an integral part of the doctrine of creation, which in turn is a fundamental proof of God and the Bible. To weaken the doctrine about the days of creation is to weaken the doctrine of creation itself. And to weaken the doctrine of creation is to undermine or weaken faith in God and the Bible as God's word.

Creation was a miracle. One way some people attempt to weaken the force of Bible miracles is to claim that they took much longer than the Bible describes. A miracle of healing, for example, could have a natural explanation if it took months or years to occur; but miraculous healings happened suddenly so we can know they were impossible by natural law so must have been supernatural works of God. Likewise, arguing for long ages in creation would make natural explanations, such as evolution, appear more plausible. This would undermine the Bible truth of creation in six days as evidence for God and the Bible.

Note that each of the seven “days” must all possess the same definition since God itemizes them one after the other. Each consists of “evening and morning,” each is counted, etc.

Here are reasons for viewing each “day” as the 24-hour period we think of as a natural day:

(1) Some say “a day is as a thousand years with God” to justify their view of long periods in Gen. 1. But days of 1000 years would still not harmonize with the claims of “science.” That would require days of nearly a billion years each, and there is absolutely no verse that uses the word “day” for periods that long!

(2) The Bible does rarely use the word for day to include: a period of indefinite duration (Isa. 2:12-22), a long time or time itself (Gen. 4:3), or an inconclusive length of time (Gen. 2:4; cf. Deut. 10:10). [Cf. Psa. 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8; Gen. 19:37f; 26:33; Jer. 46:10.]

However, these are not the normal meanings of the word. In the nearly 2000 verses that use YOM, it is translated “age” or “time” in only about 70 instances. Study of context shows that, in about 95% of cases, YOM refers either to the literal 24-hour day or to the period of daylight (in contrast to night). So, “day” is clearly the normal meaning, and the “days” of creation are highly unlikely to be long periods. In a historical context, the normal use should be accepted unless there is reason in the context to accept another view. And remember that we have already demonstrated that true Bible believers must accept Genesis as history.

(3) Two passages say God created all things in six “days”: Exodus 20:11; 31:17. The **plural** “days” is used to refer to periods longer than literal days only in prophecy, which is often symbolic. Overall, “days” occurs almost 600 times in Bible history, doctrine, and poetry. In every case, “days” is literal, never a long period of time. In particular, Moses uses “days” 191 times. All are literal; none refer to long ages. This is strong evidence that the “days” of creation are not long ages in Exodus 20 & 31.

(4) Three passages refer to days of creation using a **cardinal** number: Exodus 20:11; 31:17; Genesis 1:5. A “cardinal” number simply indicates how many items are being described (“one,” “two,” “three,” etc.). This contrasts to an “ordinal” number, which also indicates the order of the items (“first,” “second,” “third,” etc.). [Some versions translate Genesis 1:5 as an ordinal number (“first day”), but the original text has a cardinal number (“one day” – see ASV, NASB, NKJV footnote; etc.).]

Moses uses “day” with a cardinal number over 100 times. Always it refers to literal days, never to longer periods! A total of at least 235 verses of Bible history or doctrine contain “day” with a cardinal number. Every one of them refers to literal days. (“Days” with a cardinal number refer to periods longer than literal days only in **prophecy**. As

already observed, this proves nothing about how the word is used in historical or doctrinal contexts.)

Furthermore, whenever a cardinal number of days describes an **event** (such as creation in “six days”), the days are always **consecutive, sequential** days.

(5) Ten passages refer to **creation** using “day” with an **ordinal** number: Genesis 1:8,13,19,23,31; 2:2,3; Exodus 20:11; 31:17; Hebrews 4:4. In all, Moses uses “day” with an ordinal number well over 100 times. It always mean literal days, never longer periods! All ten references to creation days are in contexts of Bible history or doctrine. But in such contexts “day” with an ordinal always refers to literal days, never longer periods (over 190 instances).

There is only one verse in the whole Bible where “day” with an ordinal number might be longer than a literal day. **One!** And that verse is **prophecy**, not history or doctrine, so again it proves nothing about historical or doctrinal contexts. Furthermore, when “day” is used with an ordinal number, the days are always **consecutive**, without exception. So, “day” with an ordinal number not only proves creation days are literal days, it also proves no long ages occurred **between** the days.

(6) In thirteen Bible contexts, “day” with an ordinal number refers to **two or more days in sequence**, describing a “first day,” “second day,” etc., like in Genesis 1. **Every one of these cases describes consecutive literal 24-hour days!** See Genesis 1:8-2:3; Exodus 14:9,10; Numbers 6:9,10; Numbers 7:12-78; Numbers 28:16,17; Numbers 29:17-35; Joshua 6:14,15; Judges 19:5-8; Judges 20:22-30; Esther 9:17; Esther 9:18; Esther 9:21; Ezekiel 45:21-25.

Of special interest are long sequences of days with ordinal numbers (longer than just two days). There are four of these: Genesis 1&2; Numbers 7:12-78; Numbers 29:12-35; Judges 20:22-30. These sequences unquestionably all describe consecutive literal 24-hour days. No one would ever consider otherwise. Surely Genesis 1&2 must carry this same meaning.

(7) Two passages state that God made everything **“in six days”**: Exodus 20:11; 31:17. In the Bible the expression “in X days” always means **literal consecutive, sequential** days. The entire point is **to state the limits of a literal time span within which an event or task was completed**. This proves, not just that creation days were literal days, but also that no long ages occurred **between** the days.

Here is a list of all Bible passages using an expression such as “in X days”: Exodus 20:11; Exodus 31:17; 2 Chronicles 29:17; Nehemiah 6:15; Matthew 26:61; Matthew 27:40; Mark 15:29; John 2:19; John 2:20; Acts 20:6.

Note that several of these verses state that Jesus arose “in three days” after His death. We may as well argue that Jesus may have been

in the tomb for three long periods of many millions of years as to claim that creation occurred in six long periods.

(8) The “days” of creation are defined in all six cases to consist of **“evening and morning.”** This implies the days consisted of a dark period and light period as in a 24-hour day. Moses used “evening” and “morning” together 20 times. Every time refers to literal days, never to longer periods! Further, wherever they are found together in Bible history, law, or poetry, they describe literal days, never longer periods. In all the Old Testament, only twice might this expression refer to periods longer than a literal day. And those cases are **prophecy**, so they prove nothing about the words in historical or doctrinal contexts.

(9) **Genesis 1:5** - Here darkness was called “night” and was separated from the light, which is called “day.” Day/light and night/darkness are so closely associated with evening and morning that they appear to define the terms and thereby define a day!

“The first day” has a cardinal number, not an ordinal number: “And there was evening and there was morning, one day” (ASV). So the very first day defined the creation “days” to consist of “evening and morning,” the darkness and the light. Since each day consisted of evening and morning, it follows that each creation day was a literal 24-hour day, not a long period.

If the “evenings” consisted of millions of years of darkness, how could life have survived?

(10) **Genesis 1:14-19** - On the fourth day the heavenly bodies were designated to measure time. They divided day from night and ruled over the light and the darkness. They were signs of seasons, days, and years. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

Again darkness and daylight appear to describe “evening and morning,” a literal 24-hour day. Furthermore, the heavenly bodies measure the “days.” Surely these are 24-hour days, since they are distinguished from “years.” It follows that the fourth “day” is the kind of “day” that those heavenly bodies measure (if the fourth “day” was hundreds of millions of years long, then how long were the years and the seasons?). But if the fourth day was a literal day, remember that all six days are the same.

(11) The last day of creation was **the seventh day** on which God rested (Gen. 2:2,3). This later became the basis of the Sabbath command (Exodus 20:9-11; 31:17; Heb. 4:4).

Note: God made everything in “six days” and then rested the “seventh day,” so He hallowed the Sabbath “day” – Exodus 20:11. But Israel was similarly commanded to work “six days” then rest on the “seventh day” – vv 9,10. So the “seventh day” on which Israel was to rest must mean the same as the “seventh day” on which God rested. Likewise, the “six days” Israel was to work must mean the same as the “six

days” God worked. “Day” must mean the same throughout. Therefore, the days of creation were literal days.

Note the parallel in the “seventh-day” passages:

\* What God blessed and sanctified was the **seventh day** on which He **rested** – Gen. 2:3.

\* But what God blessed and hallowed was the **Sabbath day** – Ex 20:11.

\* So the Sabbath day was the seventh day, the day on which God rested. But the Sabbath day was a literal 24-hour day. So, the seventh day on which God rested at creation was a literal day!

So, the last day of creation week was a literal day, and surely this means the six days of work were also literal days!

(Note that Coffman and others argue that the Sabbath day has continued for thousands of years, so the “days” of creation could mean thousands of years. The above argument disproves such a view.)

(12) Nature involves **highly integrated interdependence** that would have made life impossible if the days were millions of years long. Plants were made the 3rd day, but no animals till the 5th and 6th days. How could plants survive millions of years without animals?

Specifically, many plants cannot reproduce without animals. Many need bees and other insects to pollinate them. The Yucca plant must have the Yucca moth to fertilize it. How could plants have existed millions of years without animals?

(13) ***There is no way evolution can be harmonized with the Bible or with science even if we take the view the days were long periods.*** There are many other major objections to evolution from the Bible account, as we will see. There is no reason, scientifically or Biblically, to try to harmonize the Bible with evolution. Why take a view of the Bible that contradicts its apparent meaning in order to satisfy an unproved, man-made theory with which the Bible can never harmonize anyway?

To deny that the “days” of Gen. 1 are natural days, is to undermine the historical accuracy of Genesis and therefore of the whole Bible. Unless there is something in the **Bible** itself that compels us to believe otherwise, we should not compromise with human theories. To do so is to begin the long road to religious liberalism and ultimate rejection of the authority of Scripture.

**For documentation and further discussion of the above information about the days of creation, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**



# Genesis 2

## (Overview of Creation - cont.)

### **2:1-3 - The seventh day**

#### **God finished the work of creation.**

God had observed all He had made and declared it to be very good (1:31). Now we are told it was ***all finished***. The world is no longer being created, nor is God creating new things to live on the earth. All was created at the beginning, and then God “ended” or ceased creating because all was finished.

This (together with the account of sin in chap. 3) appears to harmonize with the second law of thermodynamics which states that, in every expenditure of energy, some is irretrievably lost. It is not destroyed, but becomes unavailable for future use. Another way of stating it is that the randomness of the universe (entropy) is always increasing. This can be interpreted to mean that the universe is gradually running down, becoming more and more disorderly and random. Hence, the universe was originally set in order, but has been in a state of gradual decay since then. This contrasts with evolution which says that the process of forming new kinds of living things continued on and on for millions of years. Logically it must still be going on today, if evolution is true.

(Note that the process of “running down” would have begun after the occurrence of sin – until then all would have been sustained. Nevertheless, there has been no new building up or creating since the six days ended. The point is that the Bible record of creation and the Fall agrees with science. Evolution does not.)

#### **The seventh-day rest**

God rested on the seventh day. Obviously He was not too tired to go on, but His work was complete so He ended or ceased His labors. God believes in resting at times. God believes in labor, but He does not expect people to be laboring constantly with no let up. He rested and He allows His people to rest (cf. Mark 6:31). He has an ultimate rest for His faithful servants (Hebrews 4).

This does not mean frequent idleness is our purpose on earth. God worked for six days before He rested for one day. Clearly there should be significantly more work than rest (the ratio is not bound, but the idea surely is). God has always commanded men to work. But when He had worked long enough, He then rested.

This does not mean that God did nothing on the seventh day. He did not cease all activity. Jesus explained this at length in John 5, showing that God continued working on the seventh day. He rested, not from all work, but from specific work – the work of creation: God “rested from all His work which God had created and made.” Had he done nothing at all, the whole universe would have ceased to exist. However, He continued the work of sustaining what He had made.

Note that this is necessarily the basis of our seven-day week. Every other measure of time that men use has some basis in the movements of heavenly bodies (day, month, year, etc.). But the week has no reason whatever for existing on the basis of any movement of heavenly bodies. It exists only and entirely because of the day of creation and God’s later decrees of the significance of the seventh day of the week under the Old Testament and the first day of the week in the New Testament.

We also learn here that God does not continue repeating activity that has accomplished His purpose. Many people argue that God must do today various things they see He has done in the past (such as miraculous healings, direct revelation, binding Old Testament laws, etc.). However, the pattern begun at creation and continued throughout Bible history is that God’s works have a purpose. Many of them – including many miracles – had a specific purpose, then they ceased when that purpose was accomplished. To continue doing a job that no longer needs done is foolish. The fact He ceased the work of creation when it was complete demonstrates that God ceases work that has accomplished its purpose.

### **The length of the seventh day**

Coffman and others argue that the seventh day on which God rested has continued to last from that time till now, since God still is not creating things in nature. So, it is argued that the seventh day lasted many thousands of years, and likewise the first six days may have lasted many thousands of years.

Even if this were true, it would be no real comfort to evolutionists, since they need days of billions of years, not just thousands of years. However, we have already proved at length that the six days of creation were literal days (see the notes on Genesis 1). Specifically, we have shown from Exodus 20:9-11 and 31:13-17 that the “day” God hallowed (as recorded in 2:3) was a literal 24-hour day – the seventh day. But the passage clearly states that was the day on which God rested. It is folly to argue that the seventh day on which God rested is many thousands of years long when God Himself plainly stated elsewhere that it was a literal day.

The meaning, therefore, must be that the seventh day was emphasized as the day that God **stopped** working on creation. Note v2 – it was the day on which God “ended” His work. The “ending” or ceasing of work is the point. Presumably, He spent the day resting in the sense

of observing and enjoying the fruit of His labor before He moved on to other projects. But there is no intent to define the length of the day in terms of the fact that no more work of creation was done even later—that is irrelevant and is not the point. As already discussed, the reason no more work of creation was done later was because there was none to do – the work was done – not because the day of “rest” was intended to last longer than a day.

Suppose we are told that a man worked for several days remodeling a room in his house, then he rested for a day from his remodeling work because the job was done. Should we argue that the “day” on which he rested continued for years because he never went back to continue more remodeling on the room? Of course not. The point is that he rested from that particular job on that day, then afterward he went on to other work. The reason he did not return to remodeling the room was because the job was done and needed no more work – not because he was still “resting.”

So, God worked throughout the six days of creation, then He ceased or “ended” His work on the seventh day because creation was finished. He rested for a day, then went on to other work. He did not return to the work of creation because no more needed to be done. This in turn became a pattern to men that we also need rest, and later was the basis of the seventh-day Sabbath.

### **The Sabbath for all men for all time?**

God hallowed the seventh day because He had rested on that day. Some say that, because God rested after creation, He has bound on all men from that time on that they must rest on the seventh day of the week. Hence, it is still sinful to work on the seventh day.

It is true that the verse says God blessed and sanctified the seventh day. But does that prove that He bound the Sabbath on all people for all time? Where does the Bible say that the commands revealed in the book of Genesis are still binding? In fact, there are many commands we know are no longer binding, yet they were first given in Genesis. This includes animal sacrifices (Gen. 4:4; 8:20; etc.), circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14), and unclean animals (Gen. 7:2).

Further, there is no real proof that God bound the Sabbath on men from creation. There is no passage mentioning Noah, Abraham, Jacob, or any of the patriarchs keeping the Sabbath. Ezek. 20:10-12 says God gave Israel the Sabbath as a sign between Him and them when He led them out of Egypt, and Deut. 5:15 says it was a memorial of that event (cf. Neh. 9:13,14; Ex. 31:13-17). How could it be a sign between Him and one nation if everyone since creation had the same sign? And how could it be a memorial of an event before that event occurred? (Note that the word “then” in v3 is found in the NKJV, but not in the ASV or KJV. So, the verse specifies, not time significance, but logical signific-

ance. I.e., it is telling us the reason why God hallowed the day, not the time when He did so.)

Gen. 2:3 says only that God Himself rested on the seventh day, then it says that is **why** He blessed and sanctified it. But Genesis 2 does not tell **when** God began to require **men** to rest on the Sabbath, nor **who** was required to keep it. Remember, Moses wrote this account many years after Israel left Egypt and had been given the Sabbath. He mentions the Sabbath in connection with the Creation so men would see the purpose of it, not necessarily to tell when people began to keep it. Similar language is found in Gen. 3:20 and Matt. 10:4.

## **2:4-25 - A Restatement of the Creation of Man and Woman**

Chapter 1 gave an overall summary statement of the days of creation and what was created on each day. Now chapter 2 gives a flashback with more detail especially about the creation of man, the greatest of God's creatures. This is not a contradiction but simply a method often used even today by historians and other storytellers. The teller states the overall story, then gives more details about a particular part of the story (or vice versa).

It is foolish to attempt, as some do, to argue that this chapter contradicts chapter 1 or was added by uninspired men. The fact is that Jesus quoted both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 in Matthew 19:4-6 and cited them as the basis for His teaching about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In so doing, He put His stamp of approval on both of these chapters. We will later see other inspired writers who quote from Genesis 2 as historic fact. It follows that the two chapters are both inspired of God and should be believed and accepted as historic fact. Rather than rejecting any of it because we find it hard to understand, we must trust it as truth and seek to understand it.

### ***2:4-6 - Creation of the plants watered by a mist***

The flashback initially goes back to the time there was not even any plants in the earth. It explains conditions then as being such that there was no man to till the ground to grow the plants, and that there was not even any rain, but the ground was watered by a mist that went up from the earth. The plants were created, according to chap. 1, on the third day of creation. There is no record of rain till the flood in Gen. 6-8, though we are not told exactly when rain first began.

The Waldrons suggest that, rather than a recounting here of the creation of plants on day 3, this section is describing conditions in the specific location where God intended to place the Garden of Eden. There were no plants in that particular place yet, because the man had not yet been created to care for the garden. So, God made the garden, then made the man, etc.

It is interesting that the NKJV here uses the word "history" for this record. Other translations use "generations" (KJV, ASV, ESV) or

“account” (NASB, NIV). In subsequent uses the NKJV translates this word “genealogy,” but as pointed out earlier, a genealogy emphasizes events as history. So, such terms add to the undeniable proofs that this record is presented as fact and reality, not myth or legend or symbolism.

Coffman points out that the term for “history” or “generations” is used ten times in Genesis to introduce a new section of the book. He points out that, every time the term is used, the section that follows describes, not so much with the **beginning** of the subject mentioned (the “history of the heavens and the earth” in this case), but rather subsequent events after the subject mentioned already existed. So, this section tells about things that happened after heavens and the earth had been created (as per 1:1).

Some have argued that the use of the term “day” in v4 must refer to the whole period of creation, so “day” in chap. 1 need not be a literal 24-hour period. I urge the reader to restudy our proofs in chap. 1. We have never denied that “day” can occasionally be a time period, even in historical accounts. But the use is rare. And much more important in 1:1-2:3 is the overwhelming evidence based on the use of the plural “days,” especially combination with other terms, such as numbers, etc. Every such variation or term, added to the word “day,” shows that the word is intended to be literal as used in chap. 1.

### ***2:7 - Additional information about the creation of man (cf. 1:26ff)***

Man was made of the dust of the ground. It is a proved scientific fact that all the elements that make up our bodies are the same elements found in the earth. This may not be obvious by observation and we may wonder that it would be stated so clearly in the Scriptures, because our bodies surely do not look the same as rocks, dirt, etc. It is, however, clear that our bodies decay and go back to the ground. And people might have reasoned that we eat the plants that came from the ground, though they do not look much like the ground. In any case, the Bible is inspired by God and it is correct here as always.

Having formed man, God gave him breath to live and caused him to become a living soul. So, man was in the image of God (see notes on 1:26ff). This again conflicts with evolution. Evolution says man evolved from lower animals. The Bible says God made man from the dust of the earth. And if man came from the lower animals, he would already have the breath of life for they surely have it. He would not have been formed and then had the breath of life breathed into him. The Bible picture is a direct miraculous creation, not a formation from previous animals. There is simply no way the Bible can be harmonized with evolution, Theistic or atheistic. Evolution is wrong and the Bible is right. Efforts to harmonize them are useless and foolish.

As discussed earlier, Adam was created mature. If someone could see him on the very day he had been created, one would conclude that he was several decades old, based on the assumption that he was born by natural procreation. This illustrates the principle of creation with apparent age, as discussed on chap. 1. Again, this is not deceitful, since God tells us exactly what He did. Rather, God created man mature so that he could function as God intended, caring for the garden, reproducing, etc.

### **2:8,9 - Creation of the Garden of Eden**

Next we are told of the place where man first lived. God formed a garden or park where man could live. It was located in Eden. Since man was later driven out of this garden, we do not know its location (except that it was “eastward” and later we are told some rivers in it.)

“Eden” means “delight” (*Zondervan’s Pictorial Bible Dictionary*). The description shows that it was beautiful. This in turn shows that God appreciates beauty and wants us to learn to appreciate it too. Eden is called a “garden” in 2:15; 3:23,24; Ezekiel 36:35; and Joel 2:3 (see also Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 28:13; 31:9; 16,18.)

God provided man’s nourishment by causing trees to grow that were beautiful to look at and that provided good food. (This does not mean trees in general were created after Adam’s creation in v7. Trees were created on the third day. God may have prepared the Garden of Eden on the third day, preparing for man’s creation. Or perhaps He created trees on the third day, then later He placed some of these trees or caused them to grow in the garden where Adam would be.)

Included among these trees were the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We will learn more about the tree of knowledge of good and evil in 2:16f and in chap. 3.

The tree of life apparently is a tree that those who ate of it would never die (3:22). It is now said to be in heaven (Rev. 2:7; 22:2,14), though of course the description of heaven is symbolic whereas this account in Genesis is apparently a literal tree like the other trees.

Note how God had provided for the well-being of man. He gave man every advantage, including a place to live where all his needs were met. There was no sorrow, death, hunger, nor thirst (rivers were present as v10ff show). Apparently, there was no pain, sickness, or suffering of any kind; these are associated with death (which had not yet begun) and we are told they will not be in the paradise conditions of heaven.

Surely this shows the goodness and love of God. It also shows that God is not to blame for the problems and troubles in the world. Suffering and trouble came because man chose to rebel against God’s will. Finally, this shows that there was no excuse for man’s sin. It could never be viewed as something man had a right to do. The only ones to properly blame are the people and Satan.

## ***2:10-14 - The rivers of Eden***

Eden also had a river to water the garden. This river parted and became the source of four rivers. It is not clear why we are told this information, but it is nevertheless provided. One thing it does accomplish is to show that the author intended to be historically and geographically accurate. There is no apparent reason for giving this information except that, as a historian, he is recording facts of the situation Adam found himself in. The author did not mean for us to take this as legend.

The first river is Pishon which flowed around the area of Havilah where there was good gold and also other valuable stones. This tells us little today because the area of Havilah is unknown.

The second is Gihon which flowed around Cush. Cush is often the same as Ethiopia. There is no river now from Ethiopia that could flow anywhere near the Tigris or Euphrates. However, it must be remembered that time changes the course of rivers, and especially the flood of Noah would have significantly changed the course of rivers. And of course, Cush might refer to some area other than Ethiopia. The Waldrons say Cush may have been near the Black Sea. In any case, the Pishon and Gihon are unknown to us today and might not even exist.

The third river is Hiddekel (same as the Tigris — see footnote and Dan. 10:4), which goes east of Assyria, and the fourth is Euphrates. Today and for centuries men have known the Tigris and Euphrates. It is possible, of course, that what we call the Tigris and Euphrates today are not the same as these. And it is possible that their beds have changed location or even that Assyria is not the same as the Assyria of later Bible references.

The description leads us to believe that the Garden of Eden was somewhere in the area later called Mesopotamia. But the exact location is unknown.

## ***2:15 - God gave Adam the responsibility of tending and keeping the garden.***

Adam's responsibilities in the garden are not described in detail. We know that it was not until after sin entered the world that there were hindrances to the growth of crops (3:17ff). In any case, there was work to be done to care for the garden.

Note that these events took place during the creation, therefore work must be part of what God instituted during the creation. The Bible teaches a work ethic throughout. But the point to be observed here is that work is not a part of the fall of man, nor is it a consequence of sin. It existed from man's creation, and everything God made was very good. The consequence of sin was that work is frustrating and must be done at the cost of hardship and overcoming opposition. But



work itself was ordained for man before the fall. Therefore, work is not inherently bad for man but rather good.

### ***2:16,17 - The tree of knowledge of good and evil***

Having provided all these good things for man, God had the right to expect man to serve Him obediently. To test man's willingness to be faithful and loving to God, God gave one simple restriction: The man was not to eat of a certain tree, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We have no idea of the exact nature of the fruit of this tree, nor is there any reason to believe any such tree still exists. The tradition that it was an apple tree is totally without foundation.

The man faced no compelling reason whatever that would lead him to sin. His conditions were perfect and there was nothing lacking that he needed. God had been good to him. Yet He gave man a test to prove his faithfulness.

Note that man from the beginning had the power to choose right or wrong. God has created man with a free moral agency: a power to choose right or wrong. All men from that time on have had the same free moral agency, the same power to choose (Josh. 24:15; Mark 16:15,16; etc.). We are now born into a world having far more temptation and evil influences around us than surrounded Adam. Nevertheless, as we face each moral decision, we too can choose to do right or choose to not do right. There is no such thing as an irresistible compulsion to sin (1 Cor. 10:13).

Evidently God created man in such a way that he would not be a robot regarding moral decisions. God apparently wanted a creature that would serve God because he chose to serve God out of love and good will, not out of compulsion. In order to achieve this, God had to give man a real choice. Man had to be created capable to choose good or capable to choose evil. In so creating man, God ran the risk of man choosing to do evil, but this was the only way to have a creature that truly served God out of choice. Some people question why God created man capable of doing evil, since such terrible consequences resulted. But those same people like having the power to choose: people today exalt almost beyond reason the value of having choices. No one likes to be a robot completely controlled by others. But the only way to create man with a real power to choose was to make evil a real possibility.

Then God explained to man the consequence of choosing to disobey: he would surely die. Death has always been the wage of sin (Rom. 6:23; Ezek. 18:20; James 1:15; Deut. 30:15,19,20). It is true that man dies physically because Adam committed sin (Gen. 3:17ff; 1 Cor. 15:20ff). But the death that occurred on the day man sinned was a spiritual death, a severing of the fellowship or close relationship between God and man. This is death in the sense of alienation between man and God, like physical death is separation of man's body from his spirit (James 2:26). Cf. 1 Tim. 5:6; Eph. 2:1-18; Isa. 59:1,2.



God is a loving God but also a just and righteous God. He cannot have fellowship with sin. He must punish it. People who view God as being spineless and unwilling to punish sin, have misunderstood the Bible from start to finish. God does love man as proved here by His provision for man. But God also must insist on righteousness, and this requires that sin be punished. Yet, God warns man first and gives him opportunity to do right. If man sins anyway, then he must be punished.

Note: Some claim that, since man did not die physically on the very day that he sinned, God must have changed His mind about punishing man. But that denies the faithfulness of God to His promises. God said man would “surely die” in the day that he ate. Can we trust God to keep His promises or not? Besides, other passages confirm that death did come as a result of sin.

Others say the “day” in which man died must mean a long period, since Adam died hundreds of years later. Some even claim the “day” referred to the seventh “day” on which God rested, which will last till the end of the earth. But we already showed that the seventh day was a literal day (see on vv 1-3). And if the seventh “day” lasts till the end of the earth, then Adam died relatively early in that day. It seems to mean little to say that Adam would die “in the day that he ate”; why include a time element at all if it simply meant he would die sometime in the history of the earth?

Others say Adam simply began to die on the day that he ate. But the verse says he would **die** in the day he ate, not that he would **begin** to die. The most reasonable explanation is the one given: Adam did die spiritually the very day he ate, but he also eventually died physically.

## **2:18-25 - The creation of woman**

### **The man needed a suitable companion.**

Gen. 1:31 tells us that, at the end of creation, everything was “very good.” However, in this more specific retelling of the creation of man, God had not yet reached the end of the creation, for there was still something that was “not good.” It was not good for the man to be alone.

Man by nature needs companionship. It may be that some men can, especially under unusual circumstances, survive adequately alone, yet in general this is not the best arrangement. God knew this and determined to meet man’s need.

He made a “helper comparable to him.” The KJV says a “help meet for him.” But the word is not “helpmeet.” There is no such word as “helpmeet” in any Bible translation. The word “helpmeet” is fundamentally meaningless. The text says woman is a help “**meet for him.**” This is the old English usage of “meet,” meaning suitable, fitting, or answering adequately to the need. So, the woman is stated by God to be

the answer that fulfills man, providing what is missing or inadequate in man.

Woman is a “helper,” an assistant, associate. Note that the Bible teaches clearly that woman was created to meet a need for man (1 Cor. 11:9). For this and other reasons, she is his “helper,” a subordinate. He is the leader, she is the follower (1 Tim. 2:11-13). Woman was not created, and is not suited by nature, to be a leader of men. Such a position would be unsuited to her nature and unnatural for the purpose for which she was created. After the fall, this role of serving as man’s helper became much more difficult. Yet, the Bible throughout places woman in the role of a follower, not a leader of her husband. See Genesis 3:16; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:12-14; 3:4,12; Titus 2:4,5; 1 Peter 3:1-7.

This does not mean that woman is less important or less useful or valuable than man. The Bible throughout shows that the role of serving others is of greater value than possession of authority – see Matthew 20:25-28. In fact, man’s authority gives him responsibility to use his leadership role to serve God and others, not primarily as an honor designed to exalt him. So, the point of this context is, not to degrade woman, but to emphasize her importance and how needed she is. Without her, man is incomplete, inadequate. She fills a need nothing else can fill. Without her, circumstances for man were “not good.” With her, God’s creation is “very good.” She was the final act of God’s creation. She was absolutely essential in His creation or His purpose would not have been fulfilled. She is a glory to her husband and a glory to God’s creation.

### **Adam named the animals.**

This passage does not mean that the animals were formed after Adam had been made. The birds had been made on the fifth day, and Gen. 1 shows that the man and woman were made after the land animals had been made. But all this was in the past tense from the point of view of the one recording these events, so it is simply listed in the past tense. Then after Adam had been formed the animals came before him to be named.

Note the degree of Adam’s intelligence and maturity. He was able to communicate and reason on the very day of his creation (Eve had not yet been made and she too was made on the sixth day of creation.) Hence, the first man was as completely adequate and intelligent as all mankind has ever been. And he was mature, not immature, on the day of creation (as discussed previously). There is no evolution here, but creation with apparent age.

Note also that the animals were made of the “ground,” as was said regarding man (v7). This also agrees with science. The elements of which animals consist are those that come from the ground. If they

were made from the ground, this appears to contradict the idea that the animals developed from one another.

This context again shows Adam's dominance over the animals. He was in charge of naming them. They did not name him nor one another.

Nevertheless, the animals were not suitable as helpers, so eventually woman was created. (The purpose of bringing them before Adam was, not so God could determine whether or not a suitable companion existed, but so Adam could realize that the animals would not meet his needs.) We may rightly ask, if evolution is true, why would not an animal have been a good companion for Adam? Had he evolved from lower animals, he would have been only minutely different from the one(s) he evolved from. Why would their companionship be inadequate? This can only be explained on the grounds that, as the Bible says, he is unlike the animals drastically.

In what ways was Adam so unlike the animals that they could not meet his needs for companionship? In all the ways that the Bible distinguishes people from animals (1:26-28). (1) He was in the image of God, but they were not. Man has intelligence, emotions, conscience, and a spirit nature, none of which he shares in common with animals. (2) He has dominion over the animals. They are on a separate level, so much so that even companionship is inadequate. (3) He could not reproduce with the animals. Only after woman was created did God tell them to reproduce. Animals can reproduce with others of their kind, but not with people.

In all these ways, the animals were incomparable to the man and hence not adequate as companions. The woman, however, was like man in all these ways and hence an adequate companion. And again, none of this makes a bit of sense if Adam evolved from the animals. If evolution were true, the animals he evolved from should have been close enough to meet his needs in a companion.

Note that since the animals are not comparable companions and man was told to reproduce with the woman, not with the animals, it follows that bestiality is contrary to nature and contrary to God's intent.

It also follows that the fundamental concepts of the "Animal Rights" movement are contrary to God's intent and plan. Animals are not humans, and are not even close to the level of humans but are below us by a major gap. We have the dominion over them and are to subdue and use them for our purposes (1:26-28). Hence, animals have no "rights" in the sense that men have rights.

As stewards of God's creation, men should care for animals and show them kindness rather than cruelly causing unnecessary pain. But eating animals was later ordained expressly by God, as was using their fur for our clothing, and compelling them to do labor for us. Our

dominion over animals would justify using them for any other reasonable purpose that benefits mankind.

### God created woman from man's rib.

The manner of woman's creation is here described. She was formed from a rib taken from the side of man, after God had caused the man to sleep.

This story is the crowning blow that proves evolution, theistic or otherwise, to be hopelessly incompatible with the Bible account. There is no way anyone can take this as history and still believe woman evolved from a lower animal. We must either accept the Bible and reject evolution, or else accept evolution and reject the Bible. There can be no compromise or harmonizing them.

Note that God here used sleep as the means to perform this "operation" on Adam. Only many hundreds of years later did our modern civilization discover this means of avoiding pain during operations.

### An original man and woman

Evolution says people developed gradually from lower animals over millions of years; if so, you could not say who was the first man and woman. To harmonize this with the Bible, some must take references to Adam and Eve as symbols, legends, etc.

However, Genesis affirms there was a first man, made from dust, and a first woman made from the man's rib — 2:7,21-23; 3:19. Man was named Adam (2:17,21, etc.), and woman was named Eve (3:20). They had children the same as other historical characters did, lived a certain number of years and then died, etc. Adam is listed in a genealogy as a man like the others, but he is the **first** man. What could be more historical than a genealogy? (5:1-5ff).

Likewise, other passages confirm the Genesis account:

1 Chronicles 1:1; Luke 3:38 — Genealogies begin with Adam and name many generations including Abraham, David, even Jesus. Were these other men all myths too? If not, how can Adam be a myth? But Adam was the first man in the genealogies.

Matthew 19:4-6 — From the **beginning** God made **male** and **female**. These **two** become one in marriage (one man and one woman). Jesus confirmed the Genesis account of creation of one original man and one original woman. [Mk. 10:6-8]

1 Corinthians 15:22,45,47 — Adam is the first man (cf. to Jesus). He is called by name. He became a living soul. All die as a consequence of what he did. [1 Cor. 11:8,9]

1 Timothy 2:13 — All the basic facts Genesis states about Adam and Eve are here confirmed. Both are named. Man was created first, then woman. [Jude 14; 2 Cor. 11:3]

To deny the historical accuracy of the Genesis accounts of Adam and Eve is to deny the accuracy of many major parts of Scripture, in-

cluding the teaching of Jesus Himself. Yet the account hopelessly contradicts evolution. We must accept the Bible and deny evolution or accept evolution and deny the Bible. There is no middle ground and no point in undermining any Bible teaching in an effort to find a compromise.

### **Adam affirmed his unique tie to the woman.**

It appears that God chose to take the woman from the side of man (rather than from the ground as had been done with Adam) so as to show the connection and the similarity in nature between the two. Unlike the animals, which were so different from the man that they were not adequate companions, the woman was bone of bones and flesh of flesh with Adam. She was an adequate companion because of her similarities in all the ways that animals were different (see above).

Similar language is used in Eph. 5:28-30 where the relationship of husband and wife is compared to that of Jesus and the church. We are told there that the husband should love, cherish, and nourish his wife as he does his own body. We are said to be part of Jesus' body as the woman here is said to be part of the man's body, and then Gen. 2:24 is quoted. Hence, it is fair to conclude that this statement in Gen. 2:23 is intended to show the close companionship of the man to the woman and the duty of man to provide for, love, and cherish the woman whom God provided for him.

In particular, it follows that she should not be treated like an animal. The animals were not adequate companions, so the woman was especially created to be a companion for the man. If she is not in the class with animals, she should not be treated like one. Instead, she is also in the image of God and should be treated with honor and understanding (1 Pet. 3:7).

Woman was intended by God to be a creature of beauty and delight to the man, a blessing to him. Imagine Adam's excitement when he first saw her, after finding all the animals to be a disappointment. His joyful reaction on seeing her shows that he understood her purpose and the adequacy with which she would meet his need. She is a true companion who should be valued and honored far above any earthly treasure (Mal. 2:14; Pro. 18:2; 19:14; 2:17; 31:10-31). The Bible has always expressed the relationship between a man and his wife, including the sexual union, as being beautiful and upright. It was created for good. It is nothing to be ashamed of, belittled, or ridiculed but rather enjoyed within Scriptural marriage (Heb. 13:4; Prov. 5:15-20; 1 Cor. 7:2-5).

Note that, because the woman was taken from man, she wears his name. "Man" is part of her name "woman" (Heb. ISH and ISSHAH); the Bible says this was the case because she was taken out of man (Gen. 1:26,27; 5:2). She was created to be his companion and helper. Let her not be ashamed of her role, but value and fulfill it. Let her not

try to change God's purpose. Let her not be ashamed to wear the name of man, such as the modern feminist foolishness of calling herself "Womyn" to avoid the association with man.

However, though woman partakes of human nature even as man does, still she was created different from the man. God did not create two men to be companions for one another, nor did He create two women, but rather a woman and a man. He was created first and she to be his helper. Physically he is created to cause conception, but she to bear the child and nourish it after birth. Male and Female created He them (Gen. 1:27).

Man and woman should appreciate their similarities, yet maintain their God-determined differences. Let them not seek to deny, belittle, or destroy the differences. There is beauty in the differences as much as in the similarities. Men and women are divinely ordained to be different in work, purpose, appearance, clothing, hair length, leadership, sexual role, and the bearing and nurturing of children. Let us not compromise with those who would attempt to deny or change these differences.

### **The institution of marriage.**

Here is another fundamental first in the book of Genesis: the creation of marriage. Marriage was clearly ordained of God. Since He created it, it is part of His wise plan and provision for man. It is part of that which is "very good" (1:31). Marriage is not the result of natural evolution, it is not a mere social institution invented by humanity, nor was it invented by males for the purpose of enslaving women. This passage is quoted with approval in Eph. 5:31 and by Jesus Himself in Matt. 19:3-9. Marriage was ordained of God for the good of men, women, and children. He is the supreme Source of power and wisdom in the universe. Those who would undermine, destroy, or change the Divine plan for the institution are in direct conflict with the Creator of the Universe!

Since God created marriage, His will must guide it. His way is best in the home as surely as it is in the church. In fact the marriage relationship is paralleled to that of Jesus and the church in Eph. 5:22-31. We have no more right to change God's plan for the home than we do to change His plan for the church. Those who seek a happy and blessed home life must consult God's word first and foremost, and must never follow any guidance that conflicts with Divine teaching. Marriage counselors, government institutions, social workers, psychologists, educators, and human "authorities" of all kinds must be rejected and abandoned if they teach differently from God's word for the home.

Note that the marriage instruction, as stated here, was designed to apply to all Adam's descendants throughout all time. This is clear from the passage itself, since it says a man should leave his parents; but this could not refer to Adam, since he had no parents. The application of

this passage by Jesus in Matthew 19 and by Paul in Ephesians 5 confirms that these principles do apply throughout all time, including in the New Testament age. (Jesus stated later that God did allow some exceptions during the Mosaic Age, but those exceptions have been abolished in the New Testament.)

Marriage is a union between man and woman which is intended to last throughout life. They must “cleave” to one another (KJV) or be “joined” to one another. The bond should not to be broken except by death (Rom. 7:2,3). The man and woman are bound as long as both live, and if either takes another companion while their first spouse lives, it is adultery. If both spouses follow God’s word, one is free to remarry only if the other dies.

Furthermore, even divorce cannot break this bond in God’s eyes, unless one spouse obtains the divorce because the other one committed fornication. Divorce for any other reason is forbidden, since man must not separate what God has joined. If one divorces for another cause and then remarries, the marriage is adultery; and whoever marries the person who was put away also commits adultery. This is what Jesus Himself taught on the basis of this passage in Genesis (see Matt. 19:3-9; cf. Matt. 5:31,32; 1 Cor. 7:10,11).

This passage clearly teaches that marriage, as ordained by God, involves one man joined to one woman. This rules out homosexuality and bestiality: God joins a man and his wife, not two men nor two women nor a human and an animal. It rules out adultery and fornication, since the man is to be joined to his wife, not to another man’s wife nor to a woman who is not his wife. It rules out polygamy and divorce, since the man is joined to his wife (singular) and the **two** become one. There is no room for three or for any other besides the original two (except as provided above).

We also learn here that marriage begins a new family relationship. The man should leave his parents. He has been part of their family, but he leaves that relationship and enters a new one. He cleaves to his wife. Both man and woman must “cut the apron strings.” The husband then becomes head of this new family (Eph. 5:22ff; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1-7). Neither the wife’s parents nor the husband’s parents have authority in this new family (though their advice may be considered and even valued). The man must consider first the needs and wishes of his wife and rule for her good, not subject to the headship of either of their parents any longer.

So from creation, according to Gen. 1:26-28 and 2:18-24, the purposes which marriage were intended to accomplish are love and companionship, procreation, and fulfillment of the sexual desire (1 Cor. 7:2-5). Let it always fulfill those purposes, subject to the will of God and His service.

Finally, we are told the man and the woman were naked and were not ashamed. Of course, there was no reason they should be ashamed at this point. However, after they came into the knowledge of sin they became ashamed as revealed later.

### ***A summary of the contradictions between evolution and the Genesis account of the origin of man.***

The following points prove conclusively that evolution can never be harmonized with the Bible. Details regarding most of these points have already been (or will be) discussed in these notes.

\* Evolution says the universe came into existence by natural processes. The Bible says God created all and was specifically involved in each step of the creative process.

\* Evolution says the universe as we know it took billions of years to evolve. The Bible says all was organized in six days (literal days, as described previously).

\* Evolution says the first life form began from non-living matter by accident. The Bible says life came from the living God.

\* Evolution says all current kinds of living things came from previous different kinds, all the way back to one (or a few) original life form(s). The Bible says God created all basic kinds of living things at the beginning and that each reproduces after its kind.

\* Evolution says man is just an advanced animal. The Bible says man is in the image of God, unique from the animals, and above them by a great gap.

\* Evolution says man evolved from previously existing animals. The Bible says God formed man from the dust of the ground and directly instilled life into him.

\* Evolution says woman evolved from previously existing animals. The Bible says God formed woman from the side of the man.

\* Evolutionary belief in the gradual development of new kinds of life would make it impossible to determine who was the first man and woman. The Bible clearly identifies Adam and Eve as the first man and woman, having no earthly ancestors (man or animal).

\* The Bible describes the first man and woman and their children as being capable of speech, capable of understanding and obeying instructions, able to reason and explain their reasoning, possessing a conscience and a sense of guilt, etc. If evolution were true, these qualities should have gradually developed, beginning with cave men. But the Bible says the first man and woman were fully developed like people today.

\* Evolution says man is wholly material like the animals from which he evolved. This implies that man, like the animals, has no life after death. The Bible says man will continue to exist in eternity.

\* Evolution says that death was occurring throughout man's development and was a necessary part of the process. The Bible says there



was no death (surely not among men) until after people were fully developed and committed sin.

\* Evolution implies new kinds of living things are (or could be) still developing. The Bible says creation ceased after 6 days.

\* Evolution says man is the pinnacle of evolution, but may still be evolving. The Bible says man is fallen from his original exalted state.

\* Evolution implies there is no real purpose in life, but life just exists as a result of a series of accidents in nature. The Bible says man was deliberately and purposefully created by God to serve Him and receive His blessings.

\* Evolution implies man is the greatest being in existence and so must follow his own wisdom in deciding right from wrong. The Bible says man is subject to this Creator and is unable to determine right from wrong adequately. Man must depend on His all-wise Creator to reveal the standard of morality.

\* Evolution says, as man continues to evolve, he will develop for himself new ways to solve his own problems. The Bible says man is inadequate to solve his own problems, but must turn to a Savior, Jesus Christ, receive His forgiveness and follow His will.

# Genesis 3

## Chap 3 - The Fall and Its Consequences

### ***3:1 - The serpent questioned Eve about God's command.***

A serpent is a snake, but it is clear that Satan was using the serpent as an agent to accomplish his purposes (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:3; Revelation 12:9; 20:2; note John 8:44). The serpent was a cunning, subtle, crafty animal, but he came under the influence of Satan. (We are not told how Satan was able to influence the serpent or how or when the serpent became "crafty." Presumably the serpent was part of God's original creation, in which case it had been created very good like all of God's creation. Somehow Satan was able to influence it for evil even before people had sinned.)

Some have tried to justify the serpent's actions here as innocent, harmless, well intentioned, or even beneficial. Yet, Scripture repeatedly presents it as deceitful and evil (cf. vv 13-15; 1 Timothy 2:14; 2 Corinthians 11:3). Apparently, the serpent was one of Satan's agents.

From the very beginning, Satan has sought to work through agents to do his "dirty work." He uses teachers who appear as sheep but are ravaging wolves (Matt. 7:15). Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, and His ministers transform themselves into ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Satan knows that, to have success, he must deceive as he did Eve here. He cannot present his evil and its consequences in their true light else people will not follow his will. He must therefore counterfeit and disguise. He must appear to be other than he is, and his purpose must appear other than what it is. One way to achieve this is to work through agents. This is why we must always put teachers and teachings to the test and make sure we know the truth of God's word (Matt. 7:15- 24; 1 John 4:1,6; Acts 17:11).

It seems strange that an animal was allowed to talk to Eve. Balaam's donkey spoke to him, but that was a miracle performed by God (Num. 22:28). Demons have been known to inhabit and overpower the bodies of animals in other cases (Luke 8:33). Yet, we are not told how this serpent was enabled to speak. And we wonder why Eve conversed with the serpent with no indication this was unusual. Perhaps she did wonder, but in her innocence and inexperience, and with the conversation taking the turn it did, she simply did not express her wonder or it is not recorded. Note that Balaam also spoke to his donkey when it spoke to him.

The serpent began his attack by questioning God. He did not at first openly attack God's will, as he later did. But first he tried to get a sense of what Eve knew and thought, in a way that subtly questioned God's conduct.

How long it was after creation till these events occurred we are not told.

***3:2,3 - Eve explained that they were forbidden to eat of the tree in the midst of the garden.***

Not that Eve clearly knew God's will. She could not excuse her sin on grounds of ignorance. God cannot be blamed for having never made clear His will. She clearly knew what God said. Had she been ignorant, Satan may have used a different approach. But since she knew, he had to convince her it was not a good rule, so she would disobey it even knowing what God had said.

It is interesting that she said they could not touch the fruit. Gen. 2:16f had not said this. Perhaps God had said this is a fuller statement to them, but it simply is not recorded. In any case, though some criticize her for having said this, yet it is surely best not to play with sin. If an act is sinful, just leave it alone.

***3:4 - The serpent plainly claimed that sin would not lead to death.***

Satan here flatly contradicted God's statement and denied the consequence of sin. He boldly declared God was wrong and the act would not lead to death. Remember, Satan was a liar from the beginning (John 8:44). Deceit is one of his favorite techniques (2 Cor. 11:3; Rom. 12:9).

One of his standard forms of deceit is to deny the consequences of sin. He makes it appear that disobeying God will not lead to the consequences that God's word says it will. Many sins are said in the Bible to be deceitful: drinking alcohol (Prov. 20:1), riches (Matt. 13:22), and sin in general (Heb. 3:12,13).

Yet, sin always leads to harmful consequences, if not in this life, then in eternity (Eph. 5:3-7; Gal. 6:7-9). This cannot be avoided. In this case, Satan said sin would not lead to death, but it did.

People throughout all ages have fallen to sin in the same way, somehow thinking they could avoid the consequences. They drink or take drugs thinking they will not suffer the consequences, but they end up as alcoholics or addicts. They commit fornication thinking they will not get caught, will not get VD, will not conceive outside wedlock, etc. They steal thinking no one will know. They lie thinking they will get away with it. Often they are exposed and suffer even in this life, but if not they will surely be exposed at the judgment.

The serpent's statement denies the wisdom of God. It implies that God is not wise or knowledgeable enough to really know what effect sin

will have. God said it, but Satan knows better. He has a better idea than God does.

Such thinking may not always be directly stated as in this case, but it is commonly involved in sin, especially when an act is something people want to do anyway. Satan tempts us to think we have a better way, we can improve what God said or change it, and it will work out fine. People always have an excuse why they think they will not suffer the consequences of disobedience, despite what God's word says.

Yet, no one is as wise as God, and no one can give rules as wise as His. He is infinitely wise. We are limited in knowledge and so is Satan. This is why God forbids us from following any laws or rules that differ from His. We must simply do what He says and not change the rules in any way, for to change them is to imply human wisdom can improve on divine wisdom (Prov. 3:5,6; Isa. 55:8,9; Matt. 15:9; 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5; etc.).

And note that Satan was the first one to deny the consequences that God said would follow from sin. In short, he was the first to teach once saved, always saved.

### ***3:5 - Satan said that eating the fruit would make men wise like God.***

Next Satan boldly impugned the goodness of God. He implied that really God knew there was nothing wrong with eating the fruit, but that He was jealous of His position. God knows (Satan implied) that, if people can learn good and evil, they can rise to God's level. So to protect His position, God told them not to eat.

Satan here uses the technique of confusing good and evil. God said it was evil to eat the fruit, but Satan said it was not evil. This is another of Satan's common tricks. He makes God look evil instead of good (Isa. 5:20).

Today homosexuality is called an alternate lifestyle, fornication is called a trial marriage, and murder is called preventing an unwanted pregnancy. And the people who oppose such are said to be unloving, insecure, self-righteous bigots. Multitudes of other examples can be given in which good is called evil and evil good.

Satan's trick also involved implying that God's rule was not best for man: somehow God was holding man back from enjoying the full blessings and benefits that man could have. God's rules are self-serving and benefit Him to our detriment, so if we just do what we choose to do instead of what He says to do, we will actually be better off. The truth again is the opposite, as this temptation proves. In the end, we are better off to do God's will, and following Satan always leads to tragic consequences and slavery to evil.

Satan here also appealed to the common desire of men to "be as gods." Men never seem to be satisfied with their exalted position. No matter how richly they are blessed, they want more. It is not enough

that God made us the highest of his earthly creatures, having dominion over all the earth and animals. We want something higher. The child wants the position of the parent. The wife wants the authority of the husband. Men want the authority of whoever rules over him. And the ultimate position, that men often covet, is that of God Himself.

We are not satisfied to think that anyone is wiser, more powerful, or better than we are. If they are, we must drag them down or exalt ourselves above them. This is done in multitudes of ways as people deny God is creator, or say that He has not spoken in the Bible so we can make our own rules because we are the highest intelligence. Some claim that Divine wisdom is already within us, so we can search and find truth in our own hearts by meditation, etc. It has always appealed to man to take to ourselves the prerogatives of God.

Note also that, as the father of lies, Satan here demonstrates the use of the half truth. What he says in a sense is true. When they ate the fruit, the man and woman did come to have a degree of knowledge of good and evil which they had not previously had (though it is not clear exactly how this happened). But even then they did not have as much wisdom as God. And even more important, there was no joy, blessing, or benefit to them in that knowledge.

So today, people often use half-truths by telling something that is technically accurate, but they leave out the rest of the information that, if provided, would lead to a different conclusion. This is a form of deceit and Satan is the master of it.

### ***3:6 - Eve and Adam ate the forbidden fruit.***

The woman saw three things about the fruit that she desired: (1) it would be good food (taste good), (2) it looked good, and (3) it would make her wise. These three avenues of temptation have been used by Satan ever since and are described elsewhere. 1 John 2:15-17 describes them as lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. In Matthew 4:1-10 Satan tempted Jesus using these same three basic avenues.

So today, Satan's trick is to offer us false benefits if we will do what God has forbidden. There is pleasure in sin, and we desire the pleasure to our eyes, flesh, or pride — Heb. 11:25; 2 Thess. 2:9-12; Matt. 13:22. This leads to accumulating wealth and possessions, fornication, partying, gambling, etc., all for such motives as these.

But, the woman ate and gave to Adam and he ate. They soon found that the benefits were not what they expected, as the story will show. The benefits of sin are false benefits because they do not ultimately satisfy — they are not what they pretend to be (Matt. 13:22; Ecc. 5:10). They seem nice, but we just want more and more. Or the pleasure that does exist does not last. It is soon and easily lost (Heb. 11:25; 1 John 2:17; Luke 12:19).

Note that the woman was deceived, but Adam was not (1 Tim. 2:14). This does not mean he did better than she did. He did wrong ap-

parently knowing it was wrong. She was deceived, but was not excused. And in addition to committing sin herself, she also induced him to sin. Neither was innocent, and each in his/her own way did worse than the other. He did wrong because he heeded his wife – v17. Men often do wrong to please a woman. But both the man and the woman were guilty so God punished both.

The fact the woman was deceived, yet led the man into error, however, does show that woman was not intended to be the leader or decision maker for the marriage. God later used this as an additional reason why she must be subject to her husband (v16; 1 Tim. 2:14).

Some people may view this story as a legend or fable. Yet other Scriptures confirm it, treating it as a historical event: 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14; Rom. 5:12; John 8:44. Again, we cannot reject the Genesis account without rejecting the Bible as a whole.

### **Archaeological evidence regarding the temptation**

Halley's Handbook describes two ancient seals that almost surely are describing the temptation story.

The "Temptation" Seal ... found among ancient Babylonian tablets, now in the British Museum, seems definitely to refer to the Garden of Eden story. In the center is a Tree; on the right, a Man, on the left, a Woman, plucking Fruit; behind the Woman, a Serpent, standing erect, as if whispering to her.

The "Adam and Eve" Seal ... found, 1932, by Dr. E. A. Speiser, of the University Museum of Pennsylvania ... 12 miles north of Nineveh. He dated the Seal at about 3500 B.C., and called it "strongly suggestive of the Adam and Eve story"; a naked man and a naked woman, walking as if utterly down-cast and broken-hearted, followed by a serpent .... (p. 68; this is confirmed by Free, p. 34)

Note that, if this date is close to correct, and if we have no significant gaps in the genealogies, this seal would have been made in Adam's lifetime!

These do not prove the Bible account to be inspired, of course, but they do verify that traditions existed independent of the Bible long before Moses' time that agree with the Bible account.

### **3:7 - They realized their nakedness and tried to cover it with fig leaves.**

Having eaten the fruit of the tree, they knew they were naked. Exactly how this knowledge came from eating the fruit we are not told. In any case, this is what happened, and they found that the knowledge they received was not pleasant as they had thought it would be. They

expected a desirable wisdom (v6) that would make them like God (v5). Instead, the knowledge they received made them feel guilty. Sure enough, Satan's benefits were false benefits.

From the time of the first sin, throughout the Bible, nakedness outside of Scriptural marriage has been considered abominable (2 Sam. 11:2-4; Ex. 32:25; Rev. 3:18). Adam and Eve attempted to cover themselves with fig leaves sewn together. The clothes they made for themselves were called "coverings" (NKJV, NIV), "aprons" (KJV, ASV), "loin coverings" (NASB), or "loincloths" (ESV). This gives us some idea of what they covered, but it was not adequate as following events show.

### ***3:8-10 - Adam and Eve tried to hide when God came.***

It was apparently common for God to come and have personal communication with Adam and Eve. We are not told in what form God came to speak to them, but it would make sense to take some visible form (God the Son later came to earth in the form of a man). God evidently wanted companionship with the people He had made.

However, the man and his wife heard God coming and, instead of going to meet Him as would be expected and as had been their apparent past practice, they hid among the trees. God asked where they were. Of course, He did not ask for the sake of His information. He knew even before they answered. It was a rhetorical question designed to make them think about their conduct and ultimately to admit their guilt.

So God knew what man had done, yet He came to speak to the man anyway. This shows His willingness to forgive. He had from eternity a plan to deal with sin should man choose to disobey. He could justly have slain Adam and Eve at that point and ended the human race. But His love and mercy provided a plan to save those who are willing to turn from sin and serve Him in faith. He came to speak to the people to begin enacting His plan.

Adam said he hid himself because he knew he was naked so he was afraid. Sin creates guilt which leads to fear of God. When we sin, sin alienates us from God. This is a break in spiritual fellowship, which is spiritual death. (Isa. 59:1,2; Eph. 2:11ff; 1 Tim. 5:6). This is most likely the sense in which death came "in the day" that they ate the fruit, as God had said they would die. The physical death came many years later.

Adam tried to hide from God, but it didn't work. Hiding from God has never been successful because He knows all things, including where we are and all we have done (Jonah 1:3ff; Ecc. 12:13,14; Psa. 139:1-12). Yet people still think that, by doing evil in the dark or by keeping people from finding out or by lying about the deed, they can escape suffering for it. It may work sometimes with men, but never with God.

Then note that the man and woman were “naked” even though they had put on their fig-leaf coverings. It is possible to be “naked” even though we have some covering on. Nakedness in the Bible is not necessarily nudity. Many people today wear swim suits and other clothing that they think covers their nakedness, yet what Adam and Eve wore could not possibly have covered less than what many people today deliberately wear in public. Adam and Eve were still naked and so are many people today even when they claim to be clothed.

Further, it is possible to be clothed and yet be so inadequately clothed that we ought to be ashamed, and will be ashamed before God. We ought to so dress that we would not be ashamed to stand before God Himself in our clothing. We will see that God later clothed them adequately (see on v21).

***3:11-13 - God led them to admit their sin, yet they shifted the blame.***

Adam’s answer, of course, revealed that he had eaten of the forbidden tree, since that would be the only way he could have such a sense of guilt. They had been naked before but felt no guilt. Now they felt guilt, so God asked if they had eaten of the tree.

What follows is a classic example of blame shifting. Each admitted he had done the act that was forbidden, but each blamed others to escape the force of personal guilt. Adam said the woman gave the fruit to him, and he even implied God must bear some of the guilt because He had given the woman to Adam. Eve said she ate because the serpent deceived her. But none of them humbly repented and asked forgiveness.

Now what each one said was technically true. The question is: did such excuses justify them in their conduct? Did they stand free from guilt because of such excuses? No, and neither do people today stand justified by the many excuses we offer.

In particular, it does no good to point fingers at others who were involved in our sin. If we have done wrong, incriminating others will not excuse us. People seem to never learn this. Like little kids, we still try to blame others for having “started it” or for having tempted us. We blame our parents for the way they brought us up, or we blame society for our environment. Or we say “the devil made me do it.” Or we may even indirectly blame God as Adam did. We say, “It’s my nature. God made me this way, so I can’t help it.” Homosexuals and others try this one. Criminals blame the police for the way they gathered the evidence.

But we will see that, instead of justifying them, God punished them all. If others have done wrong too, they deserve to be punished. But that does not mean we get to avoid punishment. If we did wrong, we get punished no matter how many others did wrong too.



In particular, it is wrong to tempt others to sin. The serpent did wrong and would be punished despite the fact he never ate the fruit. But it is wrong to tempt others to sin, and for this the serpent deserved blame (1 Timothy 4:12; Matthew 5:13-16; 18:6,7; Titus 2:7,8; 1 Peter 2:11,12; 2 Corinthians 6:3; 8:20,21; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:23-33).

Furthermore, the fact others have deceived us will not excuse us. We are responsible before God to know His will well enough to avoid being misled. We will not escape by saying that someone tempted us but we were ignorant. Ignorance is no excuse; we must still repent (Acts 17:30). Those who mislead us are in error, but so are we if we follow them (Matt. 15:14).

The way many people try to excuse themselves, ***no one could ever be blamed for sin***. The person who tempts others thinks he should not be punished because he did not actually do the wrong thing himself. The person who did the wrong thinks he should not be punished because somebody else encouraged him to do it. So, who is there that deserves to be punished? No one! But it will not work with God.

### ***3:14,15 - The curse upon the serpent and Satan***

As a consequence of the sin, God pronounced punishments in the form of curses upon each of those involved in the sin: the serpent, the woman, and the man. Note that these are brief summary statements and are enlarged upon by later Bible teaching. Much of what we read here is best understood in light of later Bible teaching.

First, God pronounced a curse upon the serpent. It was cursed among animals and required to go on his belly and eat dust (not as food, but eat things on and from the dust). Cf. Isa. 65:25; Micah 7:17. Later God pronounced a curse upon the whole earth (v17), the effect of which is felt by all animals. But the serpent received an even greater curse.

Probably snakes do not consciously understand the significance of the way they have to live. It is unclear how much responsibility or choice it ever had in how the Devil used it anyway. Nevertheless, God's curse on the serpent serves as a lesson to people in that every time we see a serpent we are reminded of sin and its consequences. Coffman compares this to God's later curse upon the ground or to Jesus' curse upon the fig tree. Like the ground and the tree, the serpent probably does not understand the consequences. But the result does serve as a lesson to men and to Satan.

The one who was ultimately responsible for the serpent's act was the Devil. His punishment is described in v15, which takes the form of God's first major prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ. God said there would be enmity between the serpent and the woman, between the seed or offspring of the serpent and that of the woman. This has a literal fulfillment in that people (seed of women) generally have a special aversion toward snakes beyond any aversion normally felt toward

other animals. Men can tolerate nearly all animals, some we deliberately domesticate as farm animals and work animals, some we consider beautiful, and some are even raised as pets. But snakes are generally hated, feared, or at least disliked. The person who really likes snakes is rare and is generally viewed as strange. Do men say, “Here, snakey, snakey,” like “Here, kitty, kitty?” Do they build snake feeders to attract snakes like bird feeders to attract birds?

However, the main application of the enmity God described is spiritual. It is a conflict between Jesus, who was born of woman (her seed), and the devil. God said the serpent would bruise the heel of the seed of woman, but he would bruise the serpent’s head. This is a parable or figure of speech (as is often the case with prophecy) describing a man stomping a snake on the head. The result might do minor harm to the heel of the man, but would deal a deathblow to the head of the snake.

Note that the seed of the woman is spoken of as “He.” God here prophesied a specific person: Jesus. By the virgin birth, Christ was born as the seed of woman, but not of man (cf. Galatians 4:4). Satan’s forces would wound Jesus by causing His death on the cross. But this would turn out to be minor compared to what happened to the Devil. Jesus would arise and completely overpower Satan and death, which was the power of Satan as the consequence of sin (see Hebrews 2:9,14; Isaiah 53:5; 1 Cor. 15:22; in Rom. 16:20 this is used also as a symbol of our victory over Satan).

So, this passage serves as a highly symbolic description of the ultimate conflict between Satan and God that, in its earthly manifestations, began when Satan led Eve to sin. This conflict will last until the forces of righteousness are ultimately victorious, but Satan and his forces are condemned to hell.

As such, the verse becomes the first prediction that God had a plan to deal with the sin problem. Almost as soon as man committed the sin, God predicted the solution to sin. This was part of God’s eternal plan for how He would respond, should man choose to commit sin (Acts 2:23). So this book of beginnings here describes, not just the beginning of sin, but the beginning of God’s plan for dealing with sin. This introduces the theme of the Bible. Similar predictions will be found repeatedly through the Old Testament till finally Jesus will come to offer the sacrifice that truly can solve our sin problem.

Coffman points out the following major truths encompassed in this one statement:

- 1) The future suffering of mankind
- 2) Jesus’ incarnation
- 3) The Virgin Birth
- 4) The crucifixion
- 5) The defeat of Satan

- 6) The defeat of evil
- 7) Man's hope for salvation from sin

### **3:16 - Punishment of woman**

Next God stated the punishment of the woman. First, she would experience multiplied pain in childbirth. The curse was not that she would bear children; she had been told from creation to bear children (1:28). The curse was that childbirth would be associated with great pain. Scripture often speaks of the pangs and travail women experience in childbirth as an example of great suffering (John 16:21; cf. 1 Tim. 2:15). All women from that time throughout history experience this consequence of sin whenever they give birth.

In addition, woman's desire would be to her husband and he would rule over her. This did not originate man's leadership role over women, just as the curse did not originate childbirth. Genesis 2:18 said that, from creation, woman was made to be a helper (assistant) suitable to meet man's needs. Her role from creation is that of helper, not leader. Eve, however, had taken the lead in a major spiritual decision. In doing so, she led herself and her husband into sin. As a result, her punishment included that subjection to her husband would become far more difficult.

Before her sin, she had been a helper; but in that sinless world, submission to her husband would have been easy. Now with sin in the world, submitting to a husband became a very difficult problem for women. Yet, women still desire to have a husband, and if they do they must submit. This truth is taught throughout Scripture.

1 Timothy 2:12-15 gives both Gen. 2:18 and 3:16 as reasons why women must be in subjection.

Ephesians 5:22-24,33 adds that the wife should submit to her husband as the church submits to Jesus. The husband is the head of the wife just as Jesus is Head of the church. This applies "in everything" (v24), not just in certain areas or in "the major decisions." [Cf. Col. 3:18; 1 Cor. 11:3,9.]

Titus 2:4,5 — Young women should be taught to be workers at home and to submit to their own husbands. This is required of women just as surely as is love for the husband. When wives fail in this, the word of God is blasphemed.

1 Peter 3:1-6 — Wives should be subject to their husbands just as Sarah was obedient to Abraham. This is true even when the husband himself is not obeying God's word. Misconduct by the husband does not excuse the wife from her duty to be in subjection, just like misconduct by the wife does not excuse the husband from his duty to love his wife (cf. Rom. 12:17-21). [1 Tim. 3:11,12]

Nothing here justifies a husband in making his wife's subjection more difficult by ruling selfishly or harshly. As with woman's pain in childbirth and man's hardship in providing family income, a woman

will often have difficulty submitting to even a good husband. But compassion in Christ teaches us to ease the suffering caused in all these areas in whatever ways we can. So, husbands should use their authority with love and care for the wife's well being, not with cruelty, selfishness, and harshness (Eph. 5:22-31; 1 Pet. 3:7).

### **3:17-19 - Punishment of man**

Next God pronounced the curse on man. Note that first God stated a curse on the ground for man's sake. God punished man by cursing the ground so it would not produce for man as before. So, the whole world is under a curse because of man's sin (Gen. 5:29; Heb. 1:10-12; Rom. 8:20- 22).

Specifically, this meant that man would have difficulty getting the ground to grow food. It would produce thorns and thistles, so man could grow food only by toil and sweat. As in the punishments already described, this did not mean that man here began to grow food from the ground. Since the beginning, man had been responsible to keep the trees and till the ground (2:5,15), but now there would be hindrances and obstacles. Apparently, the curse brought changes in processes of nature – thorns and thistles, etc. Of course, later history shows that not all men are required to be farmers. Many worked in other occupations with God's approval. But no matter what occupation a man chooses, the curse placed on the earth will always lead to frustrations.

#### **Distinctions in roles**

These punishments clearly state different roles for man and woman. The punishment of woman involved pain in childbearing and hardship in subjection to her husband. The punishment of man involved hard work in providing food. The woman has a domestic role, working in her home for the good of her family. The man's role involves taking an occupation whereby he provides necessities for himself and his family – a role that often takes him away from home and family for long hours in the day.

As with all these curses, these are summary concepts that become enlarged in later Bible teaching. The Bible often teaches that providing income and necessities for the family is the husband's duty as commanded by God (1 Tim. 5:8; Eph. 5:28-31 cf. 2 Thess. 3:12; 1 Thess. 4:10-12). Many Bible examples show men employed away from the home in such occupations as shepherd, carpenter, physician, fisherman, merchant, farmer, sailor, preacher, tent maker, etc. Women however are taught to be homemakers, focusing on caring for their husbands and children: 1 Tim. 5:14; Titus 2:5; Psalm. 113:9; Proverbs 31:27; 7:11,12. Blurring and ignoring these God-given distinctions often results in further hardships and consequences for mankind.

## Death as a consequence of sin

God also stated that man would die physically as a result of sin. Man had been formed from the dust and would return to the dust (cf. Psa. 104:29; Ecc. 12:7). As we have already discussed, man died spiritually at the very time he sinned, being alienated from God. Here God said that man would die physically as well. Later he was cut off from the tree of life so he could not live forever (vv 22-24). This explains the existence of all disease, suffering, pain, and accidents. All these are the means that ultimately lead to death, so all began as a result of the curse of sin.

Note that this consequence of death passes on to all people who have lived from Adam and Eve on (1 Cor. 15:21,22). It follows that all the punishments, as stated here to Adam and Eve, actually apply throughout all time to all people who have lived since then. This does not mean we are born guilty of sin, but we do bear the consequences of sin in this life. It is therefore valid to use this passage as a statement of how things are in God's plan for us today. These punishments state eternal principles that were not done away when God removed the Old Testament laws.

Although God here stated these terrible consequences of sin, Jesus came to overcome sin, in fulfillment of the promise of v15. He died so our sins can be forgiven spiritually. He was raised as proof we will be raised when He returns (1 Cor. 15:20-26). As a result, we can receive an eternal reward in heaven where we will experience none of these problems brought on by the curse of sin (Rev. 21:4; 22:3).

Note that God here explains the beginning of suffering and hardship. God brought severe consequences on men for their sin. These problems did not exist from creation; everything then was very good as man lived in a paradise garden. God never wanted man to suffer as we do now. He warned the first people how they could avoid such problems. Suffering exists because people listened to Satan and disobeyed God. So, God should not be blamed for the existence of pain, hardship, and death. The Bible often places the ultimate blame for the existence of these problems squarely on Satan, not on God. God is the Giver of life. He originally blessed men with all that was good. When this was lost because of sin, God immediately promised a solution by which the consequences of sin can be overcome.

Then note that this curse on earth and people contradicts evolution. Evolution says that living beings have gradually advanced and improved over the years from lower animals. It follows that man is now at his highest point, and some say we will continue to evolve to still greater heights. Hence, man is better now than he ever has been. However, the Bible says man was originally created in a state that was "very good," but because of sin has fallen to an accursed state, not as good as originally.

### **3:20 - Eve as the mother of all living**

For the first time the record states the name that was given the woman. Adam named her “Eve” (meaning living or life) because she is the mother of all the living. This clearly teaches that she was the first woman and that all other people have descended from her.

To say that all people have descended from one particular woman also appears to contradict evolution. If evolution were true, women would have gradually evolved from lower animals. Many animals would have been involved in this gradual process of development, so how could any one particular woman be considered the mother of all human beings? Cf. Acts 17:26.

### **3:21 - The importance of clothing**

Earlier we observed that the man and woman were naked and were ashamed. They made coverings of fig leaves, but were still naked and ashamed (3:1-10). Here we are told that God solved this problem by making them tunics from animal skins.

Note that the fact God made these of animal skins shows proof positive that man is authorized to slay animals for their skins. Later revelation will show many other ways people are authorized to use animals in fulfillment of God’s dominion mandate stated in 1:26-28.

This passage shows that God intends for people to wear clothing to cover or conceal the body. Clothing may also serve the purpose of protecting us from the elements. But from a moral standpoint, the purpose of clothing is to conceal the body from people of the opposite sex (other than our Scriptural spouse). This is explained further by later Bible teaching.

Proverbs 7:10 — A woman who seeks to seduce a man is described as wearing the attire of a harlot. This shows that it is possible for a person to so dress as to suggest sexual immorality and arouse the sexual desires of someone of the opposite sex.

Proverbs 5:18-20 — A man should be satisfied with his own wife’s body in the marriage relationship that God says is pure and undefiled (Heb. 13:4). This shows that God wants a man and his wife to reserve for marriage, not just the sexual union itself, but also other intimacies of seeing and touching one another. Since for each woman there is only **one** man who may properly desire her, God has forbidden her to allow other men to see or touch her intimately. And likewise, the man should keep his body only for his wife. So, God commands us to wear clothing to cover ourselves, so that we do not tempt other people to have such desires. [Lev. 20:17; Isa. 20:4; 47:2,3]

2 Samuel 11:2-4 — David **saw** a woman bathing. She was not his wife, but the fact he saw her led him to want her and eventually commit adultery with her. This illustrates the power of desire that can be aroused in a man when a woman does not properly cover herself.

Job 31:1 — I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman? Job knew it was wrong to **look** lustfully at a woman (other than his wife). So, he had determined in his heart he would not allow his eyes to do so.

1 Peter 3:2-6 — Old Testament women, including Sarah, demonstrated the chastity with which women should adorn themselves. What was adequate covering then, is apparently adequate covering today.

Revelation 3:18 — Though this passage is figurative, it likewise shows that nakedness is a shame. And to avoid the shame of nakedness, one should be clothed like God clothed Adam and Eve.

### **God made “tunics” for people to wear.**

In order to adequately cover Adam and Eve, God made “tunics” (“coats” — KJV; Heb. KETHONETH). Note that from the beginning God has ordained that people who are not wearing enough should put more on! Consider further:

Exodus 20:26; 28:39,40 — God did not want the priests to expose themselves before the people, so He also prescribed that they should wear “tunics.” This is the same thing God made for Adam and Eve. [Cf. Judges 3:16; 2 Sam. 10:4]

John 19:23 — The men who crucified Jesus cast lots for His “tunic” (“coat” — KJV; Gk. CHITON). This is the Greek equivalent to the tunics God gave Adam and Eve. [cf. Rev. 1:13]

Acts 9:39 — Dorcas, approved of God for her good works, also made “tunics” (CHITON) for widows.

Interestingly, this garment is still worn by common people in that area of the world. There is little doubt about what it is because the same thing has been worn and called by the same name for thousands of years. What is it?

Gesenius’ lexicon — “a tunic ... coming down to the knees, rarely to the ancles”

Young’s concordance definition — “a tunic, long coat” (cf. Wilson’s)

Zondervan’s dictionary — It was a “shirt-like garment which was the most frequently worn garment in the home and on the street. ... [It] extended down to the ankles when worn as a dress coat... Hard-working men ... wore them more abbreviated — sometimes even to their knees” — p. 225.

*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* — “It resembled the Roman ‘tunic,’ corresponding most nearly to our ‘long shirt,’ reaching below the knees always, and, in case it was designed for dress occasions, reaching almost to the ground.”

When making sure people were adequately covered, this is what God prescribed. We can know what it was because people there still wear it. (The point is not the style of the garment but rather how it covered the body to avoid nakedness and shame.)

For other material about proper covering of the body study also Titus 2:5 (“chaste”); 2 Cor. 11:2; Luke 8:27,35; 1 Tim. 2:9,10. Note Matt. 5:27,28; Prov. 6:25; Phil. 4:8; Mark 7:20-23; Rom. 13:13,14; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Pet. 4:1-4 — “lascivious” or “licentious” = anything that causes or tends to arouse sexual excitement, desire, or lust between people not married to one another.

### ***3:22-24 - Adam and Eve sent from Eden***

If man had been allowed to stay in the garden, he could have continued to eat of the tree of life (see 2:9). If so, he would not have died but would have lived forever. This would contradict the punishment God had decreed. So to enforce the curse of death, God drove man from the garden. Again, the record says that the man must till the ground that God had cursed.

God then placed cherubim (a type of angel – Exodus 25:17-20; Ezekiel 1:4-28; Isaiah 6) with a flaming sword at the east of the garden to prevent man from accessing the tree of life. The location of Eden and the tree of life is, of course, unknown. Presumably, the tree of life has been removed from earth to heaven, since Revelation says it is there. But from Genesis 3 onward, no man has had access to the tree of life on earth. This means all men must die. We will, however, once again have access to the tree of life in heaven, as described in the book of Revelation. The necessary implication is that in heaven we will live forever.

Note once again, as in 1:26,27, that God speaks referring to God as “us.” God is both singular (one God) but plural (several individuals) – see notes on 1:26,27.

The record then proceeds to describe both the consequences of sin in the lives of the descendants of Adam and Eve and the development of God’s plan to provide men with salvation from sin.



# Genesis 4

## 4:1-15 - Cain and Abel

### ***4:1,2 - Adam and Eve's sons Cain and Abel***

Adam knew his wife. "Knew" is the old English term for sexual relations. This is clear since it resulted in conception. Adam and Eve were obeying God's command to reproduce and fill the earth (1:28). How long this was after the sin of chap. 3 is not stated.

Eve named the first son "Cain," meaning "to get," because she had gotten a man. She viewed him as a blessing from the Lord. So, we ought to view our children as blessings, not as burdens and drudgery. The second son was named Abel.

Abel was a shepherd, caring for sheep. Cain was a farmer, tilling the ground. The subsequent record shows that Abel was a righteous man, so it follows that God's statement to Adam in 3:17-19 was not intended to mean tilling the ground was the only acceptable form of occupation.

Note that the children of the first man and woman demonstrate division of labor and systematic civilized conduct. These were intelligent people who, from the very beginning, demonstrated characteristics of civilization that evolutionists claim came only very gradually through many generations. We will see many other indications of this.

The Bible elsewhere, including the New Testament, confirms the existence of Cain and Abel, treating them like real, historic characters. Once again we have proof that the record of Genesis, from the very outset, is historic fact. To deny it is to deny all of Scripture. See Matthew 23:35; Hebrews 11:4; 12:24; 1 John 3:12; Jude 11.

### ***4:3-5 - Abel sacrificed acceptably to God, but Cain's sacrifice was not accepted.***

The event here recorded occurred "in the process of time." Nothing tells us how long it was after the sin in the Garden of Eden. Nothing tells us how old these sons were. People in that day lived many hundreds of years. Surely these men were mature adults. V2 described them as having occupations, and then v3 implies that some period of time had passed following that.

Cain and Abel both brought offerings to God. There are many things about this story that are not recorded. We must remember that, at this time, people had no written record of God's law to follow. He spoke personally to people, as recorded in vv 6,9. This was typical in this period that we call the "Patriarchal Age." Moses wrote the written record, which we are reading, many years later. So, God obviously told

the people much that is not recorded for us, since there is no reason why we need to know it.

For example, we are nowhere told when or how God told them to offer sacrifices at all. Yet it is obvious that He had told them else they would not have known to do it. And people in later generations continued to offer them. It is obvious that God had revealed His will regarding the practice, even though it is not recorded. In revealing it, God obviously gave some requirements that Abel obeyed but Cain disregarded.

Offerings were a form of worship to God. Many sacrifices in particular were a form of propitiation or atonement for sin. Later instructions show that, when a person sinned, he should offer an animal, shedding its blood as a sacrifice. The wages of sin is death, but the animal's death was accepted rather than the sinner himself dying for his sin. So, a sacrifice for sin required the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22; Lev. 17:11). These sacrifices were also shadows or symbols representing the sacrifice of Jesus. They could not really forgive, but just satisfied God's requirements temporarily until Jesus came and gave the sacrifice that truly satisfied (Heb. 10:1-18). For all these reasons, sacrifices for sin required shedding of animal blood. (Other sacrifices were given for other purposes, but these too usually involved killing an animal. Sacrifices for sin always required it.)

### **Worship matters to God.**

Cain's sacrifice was of the fruit of the ground he had raised, but Abel's was one of the best sheep of his flock (fat, firstborn). God accepted Abel's, but not Cain's. We are not told exactly why God did not accept Cain's. If it were a sacrifice for sin, the information above would explain it. Or perhaps the error was in Cain's attitude. In any case, Cain and Abel knew what God expected, and Abel obeyed but Cain did not.

Hebrews 11:4 — By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. Romans 10:17 says faith comes by hearing God's word. So, Abel did what God had said, but Cain did not.

Other verses confirm that Abel was righteous and even a prophet (Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:50,51). And other verses confirm that Cain did evil. 1 John 3:12 says that he murdered his brother because his brother was righteous but Cain's works were evil. And the account here shows that God spoke to Cain and implied that he did not do well (v7). God does not condemn people for things that they had no way of knowing. So, while the record does not tell us exactly what Cain did wrong, he surely knew what God wanted but simply disobeyed.

We learn from this that God does care about the manner in which we worship Him (John 4:23,24). Many people think that, as long as we worship God, it does not matter how. Cain worshiped God, even the

true God, yet God did not accept His worship. Likewise today many people, who attempt to worship the true God, will find out that He does not accept their worship any more than He accepted Cain's (Matt. 7:21-23; Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19).

When he realized God was displeased, Cain was angry and it showed in his countenance. Anger and displeasure often shows in our face (Isaiah 3:9). Instead of repenting, Cain became angry when rebuked. This is typical of many people. When they do wrong and are rebuked for it, instead of feeling remorse, they become angry and blame the people who rebuked them. This attitude followed through in Cain's subsequent conduct.

#### ***4:6,7 - God confronted Cain for his wrong conduct and attitude.***

God instructs us today to confront sinners, and here He practiced it. When Adam and Eve sinned, He confronted them. Here when the second sin occurred, He again confronted the sinner. By His example and His commands God shows that sin should be rebuked. See Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4.

God explained that the reason Cain's worship was not accepted is that he had not "done well." If he wanted to be accepted, there was a simple solution: do what is right. The problem was caused by his own failure to do as instructed. The solution was to repent and do right. This is the same today. When our conduct is shown to be sinful, the solution is not to become angry at the rules, at God, or at the person who pointed out our error. The solution is to correct our conduct. (Cf. Jer. 3:11-13; Micah 7:18f; Acts 8:22; 2 Cor. 7:10).

This statement, made after the sin of Adam and Eve, demonstrates (in contradiction to the doctrine of Total Inherited Depravity) that people do have the power to choose to do right or to do evil (Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21; Proverbs 4:23; 1 Corinthians 10:13). However, if we will not repent and do right, sin lies at the door; it wants to take us over, but we can rule over it. This seems to mean that, though Cain had already done wrong, ahead of him lay a still deeper and more grievous error that would completely swallow him up. Like a lion (1 Pet. 5:8), sin waits to consume us. This is what it wants to do. But we can overcome it by turning from it and correcting our lives. (Coffman offers the alternative explanation that "sin" can mean a sin offering. The point is that an animal was easily available to be offered as a sin offering, so there was an available solution to Cain's sin. This view, however, does not seem to me to explain the last part of the verse that says Cain should rule over it.)

Cain was ultimately lost, not so much because he sinned to begin with, as because he would not humble himself to repent when God re-

buked him. Like Cain, when they are rebuked for sin, many people become hardened. Examples in Scripture are King Saul (1 Sam. 15:22,23), Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 18:17; 19:1,2), and Judas (Matt. 27:3-10).

On the other hand, many people have committed terrible sins, yet have repented and been forgiven. Examples in Scripture are David (2 Sam. 12:1-14), Peter (Matt. 26:69-75), the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), and Paul (1 Tim. 1:15-17). All of these people committed sins as bad as those of Cain and other folks who were rejected. The difference was that these people did not let sin rule in their lives, but they took control and ruled over it.

When an instance of sin creeps into our lives, as with Cain, this is a problem. But if we recognize the error, we can rule over it. We can control our conduct, refuse to sin, repent, correct our lives, and keep sin out of our lives (Job 11:14,15; Rom. 6:12-18). But if we do not do so, especially after seeing our sin and being rebuked for it, then sin will take the opportunity to completely take over our spiritual well-being.

#### ***4:8 - Cain then killed Abel.***

Cain talked with Abel; and one day, when they were in the field, he killed Abel. Jesus refers to Abel as the first righteous person and prophet to be slain by evil people (Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:50,51). 1 John 3:12 says Cain was of the evil one and slew his brother because Abel was righteous but Cain was wicked. Such conduct is so obviously terrible that all societies condemn murder. Yet the passage makes clear that this case was especially evil since it was his own "brother" whom Cain slew. See how quickly the consequences of Adam's sin spread even with his own children!

This illustrates the origin and cause of religious persecution. When people do wrong, they can either repent and correct their conduct as God had warned Cain to do, or they can harden their hearts. This latter reaction often leads to persecution, because the sinner resents people whose conduct reminds them of their sin. It is a form of jealousy.

People resent excellence in many areas of life because it makes them feel inferior. Especially in matters of right and wrong, sinners often resent those who do right because it shows there is no excuse for their own sin. If everyone did wrong, they could justify themselves saying "I'm as good as everyone else." But when someone else does right, then it becomes obvious that the sinner too could do right. The examples and teaching of righteous people rebuke their conduct. If the sinner won't change, he feels he must get rid of that which reminds him of his sin. He can do this by trying to lead the good person into sin, or by getting rid of the person.

This same attitude led to the harassment, threats, and physical violence done to many people of God throughout history, not just Abel

but also Elijah, John the Baptist, Stephen, the apostles, and especially Jesus (Matt. 27:18). 2 Timothy 3:12 says we should expect the same to happen to us in some form. Note John 7:7; 15:18-21.

#### **4:9,10 - God confronted Cain for killing Abel.**

As God had warned in v8, Cain had indeed gone much deeper in sin. He did not rule over sin, so sin consumed him. God then confronted him for this, asking where Abel was. This was not asked for information. God knew where Abel was (v10). But it was a question asked to give Cain a chance to confess, as God had done with Adam (3:9ff).

Cain, however, refused to confess. Instead, he bluntly lied to God to hide his sin. This attempt at covering up proves that he knew he was wrong. Adam tried to avoid punishment by hiding from God. Cain tried it by lying about his conduct. Neither method availed. Lying denials are common today to attempt to cover sin. It may work with people, but never with God. He knows all things (Prov. 28:13).

#### **“Am I my brother’s keeper?”**

By this question, Cain showed both disrespect for God and lack of concern for Abel. It disrespected God in that it implied God had no right to ask him where Abel was. It showed lack of concern for Abel because it implied he had no reason to care about the circumstances and problems of others. True, we are not “keepers” of others in the sense of having the primary responsibility to know their whereabouts and affairs at all times. But we should love and help them. We should know their problems and be willing to assist them. We should surely not harm them. This lack of love and concern is what led to the murder in the first place (Matt. 22:37-39; 1 John 3:12-18; 1 Cor. 13:4-7; Rom. 13:8-10).

#### **Murder demanded punishment.**

God said that Abel’s blood cried to him, not literally, but God knew Abel was dead and knew Cain had killed him. It was a call in that the crime demanded justice. God knows and sees all we do, and our sins call out to Him for punishment (Num. 35:33; Heb. 12:24). God’s character will not allow Him to ignore such calls. Abel’s blood spoke a message to God and likewise speaks a message to all men since that time – Hebrews 11:4.

#### **The progression of sin in Cain’s life**

In v7 God had warned that, unless Cain ruled over sin and did well, sin would capture him like a lion waiting at the door. This is exactly what happened. Note the progression:

Vv 3-5 — Religious sin: offering an unauthorized sacrifice

Vv 5,6 — Responding to God’s rebuke with anger, instead of sorrow and repentance

V8 — Persecution of the one who did right, even to the point of murder

V9 — Lying to cover up his sin, even a direct lie in direct response to God

V9 — Denial of responsibility for other people: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Sin likewise progressed in the lives of many Bible characters such as King Saul. Note also Romans 1. We must take care to root sin out of our lives lest it grow and become more and more deeply rooted.

#### ***4:11,12 - God decreed Cain’s punishment***

Cain had spilled Abel’s blood on the ground, so God said the ground would now not produce for Cain. Farming had been Cain’s livelihood (v2). His punishment would be that he would no longer be able to farm, but would be a wanderer and vagabond on the earth.

God’s punishments are appropriate to the crime. This is a lesson for us as parents. If a person deserves punishment because they did wrong using some object, person, or event, it is appropriate to use in the punishment that which they used in the sin.

#### ***4:13,14 - Cain objected to the punishment***

This should not be surprising. Nearly all evildoers object to their punishment and try to lighten it. No matter what we have done, we always think people are too hard on us when we receive the just rewards of our deeds. Cain seems to have become less rebellious, but still did not want to accept the consequences of his deed.

In particular, he expressed fear that people would recognize him for what he had done and would kill him. Strange he did not think of this earlier. If he viewed killing as such a reprehensible act, why had he killed Abel? If he did not want to accept the consequence of his deed, he should not have done it. It is interesting how consistently a sinner does not want people to do to him the very thing that he has done to others. He has a strong sense of “justice” when he thinks people may hurt him, but has no such scruples against hurting others!

#### ***4:15 - God set a mark on Cain***

God responded to Cain’s pleading by being kinder to him than he had been to Abel. He placed a mark on Cain so people would know not to kill him. He then decreed that anyone who killed Cain would receive seven times the same in vengeance on himself.

Many have speculated regarding what this mark was on Cain. Some say it was black skin passed on to black people today. This is frankly impossible. All Cain’s descendants died in the flood; only Noah and his descendants survived. So no one living on earth today could possibly have inherited anything from Cain, neither a black skin nor any other such sign.

In fact, there is no indication whatever what the sign was. Nor is there any reason to believe it would be passed on to his descendants. Cain was the one who sinned and he was the one marked by God. Why think the mark would pass on to his descendants? They had done no evil.

Note the downward progression of man deeper and deeper into rebellion against God. Adam and Eve in the first generation had eaten the forbidden fruit. Now their son had disobeyed God's law of worship, killed his brother, and directly lied to God. What terrible consequences sin brings into the world, and what sadness to observe the tragedy we bring, not only into our own lives when we sin, but also into the lives of others by our example and the influence of sin. Never believe the lie that our sins hurt no one but ourselves.

### **4:16-24 - A History of Cain's Lineage**

#### ***4:16,17 – Cain's subsequent life***

Departing from the land where he and Abel had lived, Cain moved to Nod, a land east of Eden. There he and his wife had a son whom he named Enoch. He also built a city that he also named Enoch. Note that Joseph P. Free cites archaeological evidence of the existence of towns and villages as early as 4000 BC (pp. 37,38).

#### **Observations about population growth**

The fact that Cain, the son of Adam, built a city tells us much about the increase in population in the early history of mankind. If a city was built in the lifetime of a son of the very first man, it follows that population grew rapidly and was quickly civilized (in contrast to the views of evolutionists).

God had commanded Adam and Eve to reproduce and fill the earth (1:28). Men in that time, before the flood, lived to great ages (see chapter 5). Adam, for example, lived to be 930 years old before he died (5:5), and most of his descendants before the flood lived about 900 years. If we assume there are no gaps in the genealogies, this means Adam would have been alive during the lifetime of Noah's father Lamech, 8 generations later! This greatly multiplied the number of people living on earth because, at any one time, many generations were still living.

Further, men were capable of having many children; large families were common. Noah was having children at age 500 (5:32). All men in chap. 5 are recorded as having "sons and daughters." In such long lifetimes with long periods of fertility, many children could be born.

Using conservative estimates, Morris estimates (p. 143) that, by the time Cain died, there could easily have been 120,000 people on the earth: certainly enough for there to be cities. By the time of Noah the population of the earth could have exceeded seven billion – more than



on earth today! Do not think of Cain, Adam, and other such people as walking around on a bare, lonesome, uninhabited earth.

### **Where did Cain get his wife?**

Ultimately, this question makes absolutely no difference whatever in the scheme of the Bible, except that some people seek to satisfy curiosity and skeptics enjoy seeking difficulties in the Bible. But there is no difficulty. The above information demonstrates that Cain could have chosen from among many women. With people living such long lives, a man could easily marry a woman 50 or even 100 years younger than himself. Comparing their lifespans of 900 years to lifespans today of 90 years, marrying a woman 50-100 years younger then would be no different by comparison than marrying a woman 5 or 10 years younger today.

So, Cain may have had plenty of women to choose from. However, among Adam's sons and daughters (5:5), some would have had to marry a brother or a sister to get the process of reproduction going. Perhaps Cain married a sister. If not, he could have married a niece, etc. At that point there would have been no laws against such close intermarriage (cf. Gen. 20:12). God had commanded reproduction, and such intermarriage would be needed to obey the command. Nothing indicates that intermarriage among close relatives was forbidden until years later, and the reason it was later forbidden was the danger of genetic problems. That would have been no problem, however, in the early history of man when long lifespans prove there were few mutant genes to cause genetic problems.

Remember that we do not know how old Cain was when he killed Abel or when he married. We do not know how many brothers or sisters he had, though we know he did have sisters (5:5). Although the Bible records the birth of these other sons and daughters of Adam after it records the marriage of Cain, that does not prove that all these people were born afterward. (Seth was evidently born after the death of Abel – v25. This implies the other sons of Adam were also born after Abel's death, but that tells nothing about when the daughters were born. And even other sons could have been born during the intervening time between the death of Abel and Cain's marriage.) History often uses flashbacks, giving details of a series of related events and then going back to tell about other events in other places or circumstances. In particular, Genesis 5 tells about Adam and Eve's other sons and daughters in an extended genealogy. A genealogy is not intended to describe when these people lived or were born in relation to other events recorded elsewhere.

### ***4:18 - A summary of the genealogy of Cain***

Cain's descendants were Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methushael, Lamech. Lamech's sons, according to the following verses, were Jabal,



Jubal, and Tubal Cain, and Lamech's daughter was Naamah. We are then told some details about Lamech and his three sons.

Some people question the similarity of some names in Cain's genealogy compared to that of Seth in chap. 5: Enoch, Lamech, and some others are similar. Some use this to question the accuracy of the records, but why? Many people in the Bible had similar or identical names. The Bible names several Simons, Sauls, Josephs, Johns, Judases, etc., and we have so many Marys we can hardly count them. People often tend to use names that are common in their family history to honor or remember certain people, even when those names are somewhat unusual. Several people in just a few generations of our family have similar names, including Edward, David, Joyce, Esther, Isaac, etc. My father's family had a number of men with the name Welton. Why be surprised when such things happen in Bible genealogies?

#### ***4:19-22 - Some details about Lamech***

Lamech is the first man recorded as having a plurality of wives, Adah and Zillah. This clearly violated God's intent according to Gen. 2:18-24. Other men later practiced polygamy, and apparently God tolerated it without counting the men as sinners, just as Jesus later explained that God tolerated divorce though it violated His original plan for marriage (Matt. 19:3-9). No such practices are acceptable under the New Testament.

Lamech's three sons are each significant in their accomplishments. Jabal began the practice of itinerant nomads, who traveled about the country in tents caring for livestock. It appears that this is the kind of lifestyle later adopted by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Jubal began the practice of playing musical instruments, both wind instruments (flute) and stringed instruments (harp). This demonstrates that, from early times, men had skill in invention, musical talents, and a love for the beauty of music.

Tubal Cain instructed craftsmen in the use of bronze and iron. This is fascinating because it demonstrates the early involvement of men in the shaping and use of metals. This included relatively advanced metals, since bronze is a mixture of two other metals. The ability to use metals was, of course, a major factor in the advancement of civilization.

Note the evidence of intelligence and civilized advancements of mankind in these early generations. Evolution teaches that for thousands or even millions of years, men lived in caves, got food by hunting animals with clubs, dragged their women around by the hair, etc. Instead, in just the first eight generations of history we have all the following developments important to human civilization but unknown to animals: building of cities, division of labor with specialized occupations, farming, animal husbandry, use of fire, building of tents to dwell in, appreciation of music, invention and construction of musical in-

struments, and craftsmen skilled in making metal articles. All this implies relatively high intelligence and civilization.

### **Archaeological evidence of ancient use of instruments and metal work**

Joseph P. Free, in *Archaeology and Bible History*, cites the following evidence for the early existence of musical instruments and metal work:

Most of the very recent books on the history of music devote a large share of their beginning chapters to the evidence of early music found in the excavations, such as the harps and lyres discovered at Ur of the Chaldees and the string and wind instruments pictured on the Egyptian monuments.

...

At a site in Mesopotamia about fifty miles northeast of Baghdad ... Henri Frankfort of the Oriental Institute ... found evidence of an iron blade from the level of 2700 B.C. A small steel ax from Ur and other very early objects of iron have also been found." ... Archaeological discoveries give evidence of definite use of copper as far back as the period 4000-3000 B.C. In summary, the excavations indicate some knowledge of metal in early times, as implied in the Biblical record ... (pp 38,39)

### **4:23,24 - Lamech's vengeance**

Lamech also appears to have been a braggart and even a bully. He was vengeful and proud of it. Whereas God said anyone who killed Cain would endure vengeance sevenfold (v15), Lamech took upon himself the privilege of taking vengeance 77-fold on anyone who even harmed him. He killed a man (or perhaps more) just for hurting or wounding him.

The account does not explain why this information about Lamech is recorded, but it demonstrates to us how men continued to depart from God's plan. Lamech invented many practices that oppose God's will: polygamy, vengefulness, and presumptuously adding to God's statements. The continued decline of man would eventually lead to severe consequences in chap. 6.

### **4:25,26 - Adam had another son named Seth**

This chapter began with the record of Adam and Eve's sons Cain and Abel. Abel died at the hand of Cain, and Cain and his descendants turned to evil. The last part of the chapter leaves the genealogy of Cain to tell about Seth, another son of Adam. Seth was evidently born after Cain killed Abel: he was given a name that means "appointed," because

God appointed a seed instead of Abel who had been killed. Seth's son in turn was called Enosh.

This does not necessarily mean that no daughters had been born in the family between Abel and Seth. Other sons and daughters were born sometime (5:4). Seth is evidently emphasized because he was the one through whom the genealogy would be traced to Noah, as in chap. 5.

Daughters were generally not named in genealogies, though there are exceptions. We do not know when the daughters of Adam and Eve were born, in relation to the males. Throughout the Bible, the birth of a male was significant and was emphasized in genealogies, because males inherited the family possessions and authority, etc. In fact, the birth of women is rarely mentioned in Genesis. Seth was especially important because all people since that time have descended from him. No descendants of Abel, Cain, or any of Adam's other sons have survived (except perhaps as they may have intermarried into Seth's line so as to be ancestors of Noah).

In that time, men began to call upon the name of God. It is difficult to know what this specifically means. Calling upon the Lord, elsewhere in Scripture, simply means to do whatever God requires in order to receive some blessing. This could be prayer or public worship, or it could be doing some specified act. We today call upon the name of the Lord to wash away our sins by being baptized (Acts 22:16). God's word must reveal what action men must do to receive a specified blessing. Perhaps the reference here is to public worship in some assembled form. In any case, the point is that some men had respect for God.

# Genesis 5

## 5:1-13 - Genealogy from Adam to Noah

This is the first of several major genealogies in the Bible (though note 4:18). Genealogies were important to people in that day especially because many blessings were determined by inheritance, such as land, privilege of the firstborn, and sometimes office (such as kings, priests, etc.). Further, we will see God Himself make certain promises to descendants of certain people. To demonstrate a right to receive these benefits, one had to be able to demonstrate lineage. Spiritually, these are not so important today because God's blessings are now determined entirely by our service to Him, not by physical lineage (Titus 3:9).

Genealogies also serve important historical purposes in helping identify order of events in relationship to one another, etc. They also give us some concept of how far apart events were chronologically. There are, however, difficulties in genealogies that make it difficult to be sure how precisely they were intended to be taken. (It sometimes appears that men were included when they were "sons" in the sense of descendants, but not immediate descendants. In other cases a woman might be the heir because there were no male heirs; but women are almost never listed, so the woman's husband would be named.) We will generally avoid discussing issues regarding these difficulties.

One other important value of genealogies, however, is to show that these are truly historical accounts. A genealogy such as this one, for example, includes names, ages, relationships, etc. Surely, this shows that the record was meant to be taken historically. This is not myth, fiction, or legend. It is fact. Adam is listed as a real man, the first man, just as historical as any other man in the list. Likewise for Noah. We may not always be sure about some details in the genealogies, but surely they do show us that these are historical accounts.

### ***5:1,2 - Adam was created in the likeness of God***

The record here repeats that man was created by God, in the likeness of God, male and female (cf. Gen. 1:26,27).

Further, both the male and female were called "man" ("Adam" or "mankind"). They both wore the same name, the name of man. Man did not wear the woman's name, nor did woman wear a distinct name unrelated to that of man. Both man and woman wore the name of "man." This was decreed by God since the creation, and is generally recognized in every language (cf. 2:23).

Feminists show their folly when they attempt to change this and object to women being included in the term "man," or women referred

to in the generic pronoun “he,” or women taking the name of their husband at marriage. Their attempts to find separate terms for women, or at least gender neutral terms, are misdirected. Their root problem is that they are ashamed of the position for which God created woman. She was created to be a helper to the man, not his master nor even independent from him. She is equally valuable and important as man, yet she was created to be a helper, dependent on the man. The terms God uses show this tie. He is God. Let the feminists rage.

### ***5:3 - Adam lived 130 years and then begot his son Seth***

Note that Seth is listed in this genealogy as Adam’s son, but we know for a fact he was not the first son; he came after Cain and Abel. How old Adam was when Cain and Abel were born we are not told. However, it is clear that Seth is listed because the intent of the genealogy is to show the lineage of Noah and hence the lineage of those who survived the flood and are the ancestors of those we read of throughout the rest of the Bible.

Genealogies often include those who inherit certain blessings or the right to certain positions, not necessarily the first child born, let alone all the children born. In this case, the determining factor is the ancestry of Noah. It is therefore likely that men in the list may have had other children born before the son who is listed. It is possible that there might have been daughters born before the sons listed, since only sons are listed in the genealogies. Or there might have been sons born before the sons who are listed, but these earlier sons may not be listed because they were not reckoned in the genealogy of Noah. This would also be true of Adam. It is possible that some of his daughters were born before Seth.

### ***Adam’s son was in Adam’s likeness, after his image.***

Man was in God’s image (v1) and Adam’s son was in Adam’s image. Hence, the son was in the image of God too. Clearly, the implication is that this principle followed from Adam to his son, then to his son, etc. In short, this is how we are all in the image of God — by virtue of being born the descendants of men. Other passages confirm that all men are in the image of God. How could this happen except by process of human conception as stated in this passage?

This also proves beyond question that men reproduce “after their own kind” just as surely as plants and animals do (Gen. 1:11,24-27). Contrary to evolution, the offspring of a plant is the same kind of plant and the offspring of an animal is the same kind of animal. Now we see the same is true of people. The offspring of a human is another human individual — in the father’s likeness.

Note further that this happens because of the process of begetting or conception. Adam ***begot*** a son in his likeness, etc. The plant reproduces after its kind because of the power in the seed (Gen. 1:11,12).

Likewise, the animals reproduce after their kind because of the “seed” — i.e., the male and female reproductive cells determine the inheritance. The same is true of people. The offspring of human reproduction is another human. It can never be an animal or another kind of organism other than a human. It must always be human.

Further, the implication is that, since all the above is true, it must be human from the moment of begetting on. It is not sub-human or non-human until it is born (or some other point in development) and then it becomes human later. It is in the image of its father, and hence human, because it was begotten that way. The power of the conception is what determines this, so it is true from conception on.

A further logical consequence is that our obligations toward what is begotten, whether before birth or afterward, are the same as our obligations to any other human child. We must care and provide for the child that is begotten, love and protect it, and surely not kill it. The child is housed in a unique place so that much of this happens naturally; nevertheless, it is our responsibility. Mothers should avoid activities, drugs, etc., that are known to harm the unborn baby, just as after birth they would avoid what harms the baby. And surely to deliberately kill it is murder whether it has or has not been born (cf. Gen. 9:1-6).

### ***5:4.5 - Adam had other children***

We are here told how long Adam lived after he begot Seth. We are told also that he begot sons and daughters. This of course was the fulfillment of God’s command to populate the earth (1:18). Considering the great ages to which men lived, and considering they were able to have children at great ages, it is likely the men in the list had numerous sons and daughters (see notes on chap. 4).

The language might appear to mean that all other sons and daughters of Adam came after Seth was born — i.e., Seth was the first, and all others were after him. But we have already seen that Adam had two other sons before Seth. Further, the same kind of language is used for every man in the genealogy. Did not one of them ever have a daughter before they had the son? Did the first son they had always survive, and did it just happen that the first son figured in Noah’s genealogy, rather than a subsequent son? It appears that the language simply tells how long each man lived after the begetting of the named son, and further that the man had other sons and daughters. We are simply not told whether there were sons and daughters begotten before the named son.

V5 records the ultimate fulfillment of the curse of Gen. 3:19. God had decreed Adam would die, and so would his descendants. This is fulfilled in Adam as recorded here, and it was fulfilled in his descendants as recorded throughout the rest of the chapter and throughout history since. Tragic indeed was Satan’s lie to Eve that she would not surely die!

It is interesting to observe that, if there are no unstated factors to consider, Adam would have lived till after the birth of Lamech, the father of Noah.

### **Men lived to great ages.**

Note the great age attained by Adam and most men in this genealogy. Man was away from the tree of life and therefore doomed to die because of the curse. Yet, it appears that the earth at this time, so relatively close to creation, was still far more capable of sustaining life than it is today. God's original creation was designed to sustain life for great lengths of time. The curse for sin would result in death, but apparently at first still allowed great longevity. Apparently, the earth and the nature of men were also capable of producing far larger men and animals than today. It is likely animals also lived to great ages. We have evidence of huge reptiles (dinosaurs) and other huge animals, including giant men. The earth appears to have been more vital, more capable of sustaining life for long times and great sizes.

While the curse brought death, there were also later changes that further reduced lifespans and perhaps also affected the sizes of men and animals. Apparently, the flood brought great changes, for it appears that lifespans decreased afterward. Some claim there was a vapor canopy around the atmosphere which was the water above the firmament in Gen. 1. This canopy provided much of the water that fell as rain in the flood. That canopy may have protected people from radiation and other harmful affects. Its disappearance at the flood, coupled with other changes in the atmosphere and the earth at that time, may explain the changes in lifespans. In any case, it is clear that there have been changes.

Halley's Handbook includes this note: "Besides the Babylonians: Persians, Egyptians, Hindoos, Greeks, and others had traditions of the great longevity of the earth's earliest inhabitants. Where could such traditions come from, except from the fact the first men did actually live long?" (p. 72)

### ***5:6-20 - Other descendants of Seth***

These verses just enumerate the names in the genealogies. There is little of special interest to discuss regarding these men. The names from Adam to Noah are as follows: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah.

### ***5:21-24 - Enoch walked with God***

Enoch is the next son for which the record notes something of special interest. Walking with God appears to be an expression for the close fellowship this righteous man had with God – He pleased God (cf. vv 21,24 to 6:9. See also 17:1; 24:40; 48:15; and 1 John 1:7). Jude 14,15 implies Enoch was a prophet.

He was not because God took him. Note that, unlike all others in this genealogy, it does not say Enoch died. Hebrews 11:5 explains that God translated Enoch, so that Enoch did not die, because he was pleasing to God. A similar thing happened to Elijah (2 Kings 2:10,11).

We are told very little about this man, yet he must have been a very great man before God indeed, for God to have so honored him as He did Elijah, that he should be taken straight to heaven without undergoing death. And note that this too is not legend or myth. It is history recorded in a genealogy and confirmed by Hebrews 11:5.

### ***5:25-27 - The great age of Methuselah***

Methuselah lived the longest of any man recorded in this genealogy or anywhere in history: 969 years. He was the grandfather of Noah. Some have calculated that, if no significant information is missing from the genealogy, the numbers indicate Methuselah died the same year the flood began (see the Waldrons' notes).

### ***5:28-31 - Lamech was the father of Noah***

Lamech named his son Noah, meaning comfort or rest. The reason he gave for this choice of names was that Noah would give comfort regarding their work, which was difficult because of the curse God put on the ground. In what way Noah would provide such comfort is not stated. However, it is clear that, in other ways Noah provided much great comfort for not only his parents but many others. It was he through whom the human race survived the flood.

### ***5:32 - Noah had three sons***

Noah's three sons are named: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. This is our introduction then to the man who, in subsequent chapters, becomes the main character in one of the most important events of history.



# Genesis 6

## II. The Flood — Chap. 6-9

### The Flood Was a Historical Event.

Chapters 6-8 describe one of the most important events in Bible history. Many people view it as merely a myth or legend, because it does not seem possible or reasonable in their human wisdom. However, like creation and many other events in the early chapters of Genesis, the flood is presented here as simple historic fact. There is nothing whatever in the account itself to indicate that it is legend, myth, or symbolic.

Furthermore, other accounts throughout the Bible refer to the flood as a real event and to Noah as a real character. Here are some of the evidences that this record should be accepted as history:

#### ***Dates***

Genesis 7:11; 8:4,13,14 — We are told exactly how old Noah was when the flood began, when the ark rested on Ararat, and when his family left the ark.

History is about ***time*** — dates and the events that occurred on those dates. To give dates is to clearly imply actual history.

#### ***Genealogies***

Noah is mentioned repeatedly in Genealogies.

Genesis 5:28-32; 10:1,32 — Genealogies including Noah and his sons are given immediately before the account of the flood and immediately afterward! They are necessarily included, because all subsequent people descended from them!

1 Chronicles 1:4; Luke 3:36 — Noah and his sons are in the genealogies along with Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, and Jesus. If Noah was a myth, why should we believe any of these other Bible people were historical characters?

Genealogies necessarily mean the record is intended to be historical fact. Nothing is more historical than a genealogy. If this is not meant to be historical fact, there is no point whatever in giving genealogy.

#### ***Ezekiel 14:14,20***

Ezekiel lists Noah along with Daniel and Job. He says that a land can become so wicked that God would not spare it even if those men all lived there. But those righteous men would themselves be saved.

Noah is here confirmed to be a real historical character, just like Job and Daniel. And his righteousness is also confirmed.

[Isaiah 54:19]

### **Hebrews 11:7**

Noah is listed with other Old Testament men and women of faith: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, etc. Specifically, he is said to have prepared an ark to save his family. Noah is just as historical as the other people in the chapter, and the story of the flood is just as real as the other events in the chapter.

The purpose of the account is to show the importance of obedient faith. But if the writer was mistaken in thinking these stories really occurred, then how can we be sure we need faith to be saved? Bible history and doctrine go hand in hand. To deny one is to deny the other. And this is discussing faith — one of the most basic doctrines in Scripture!

[2 Pet. 2:5]

### **Matthew 24:37-39**

The coming of Jesus is compared to the suddenness in which people were slain by the flood in Noah's day. Jesus Himself confirms the story of Noah and the flood as historical fact.

And whereas people today claim God could never punish men by such a flood, Jesus flatly affirms that God did so. Furthermore, He claims this is totally in harmony with God's character. And finally, He uses the flood to convince us He Himself will come again and will punish evil men.

Again, doctrine and history are inseparable. If Noah's flood is a myth, how do we know God will punish wickedness?

### **2 Peter 3:3-7**

Some people in that day, like people today, denied that God would destroy the world and punish evil men. Peter responds by reminding us that the earth will be destroyed by fire just as surely as it was destroyed by flood in Noah' day.

If the flood of Noah never really occurred, how can we know Jesus will come, the earth will perish in fire, and evil men will be punished? Peter's whole point would become nonsense. Again, doctrine and history are inseparable.

### **1 Peter 3:20,21**

The story of Noah is not just about the punishment of the wicked. It is also about the salvation of the righteous. So, Peter reminds us that, in Noah's day, people were saved by the flood. So, baptism now saves us through the resurrection of Jesus.

But if Noah's flood was a myth, is our salvation from sin by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ also a myth? Is the necessity of

baptism also a myth? Inspired men inseparably link history and doctrine.

The Scriptures repeatedly confirm the people and the events surrounding the flood. If none of this is historically accurate, then the Bible is so full of error that it would be nonsense for the writers to claim to be historically accurate or to be inspired by an infallible God.

But the writers did claim to be guided by God and to be writing historical fact. The very nature of what they themselves said will not allow us to claim that they wrote mere legends or that historical accuracy did not matter to them. The Genesis account of the flood must be viewed as historic truth.

### ***6:1,2 - The sons of God made foolish marriage choices***

People multiplied on the earth as God had commanded (1:28). However, sin had also entered the earth and with the multiplication of men came the multiplication of sin.

The sons of God took wives of the daughters of men because they were beautiful, choosing to please themselves. The only reason for mentioning this fact in this context is that these choices of marriage companions contributed to the evil that is subsequently described. Whom we choose to marry makes a significant difference in our faithfulness to God. Women are not virtuous simply because they are beautiful (Proverbs 31:30), yet the account here describes those who made their choices simply on the basis of outward appearance. The result contributed to the complete corruption of the earth. We need to learn how important our choice of marriage companion can be to the eternal destiny of ourselves and our children.

***The following explanations are offered to explain who the “sons of God” were:***

**The term “sons of God” refers to the descendants of Seth (who were calling on God - 4:26) or to men in general who had dedicated themselves to God’s service.**

“Sons of God” is a common expression in the New Testament and throughout the Bible for people devoted to serving God (John 1:12; Rom. 8:14; Galatians 4:6; 3:26,27; 1 John 3:1-10; etc.). In contrast, the “daughters of men” were descendants of Cain (or just evil women in general) who were living in rebellion against God. This intermarriage led to moral decline because these women corrupted their offspring.

The result was that the “sons of God” and/or their children became corrupted as the chapter proceeds to describe. This may be compared to Solomon, who was dedicated to God’s service but intermarriage with idolatrous women led to his downfall. The same concern is expressed in many passages in the Old Testament (cf. Ezra 10).

Some object to this explanation because they think it does not adequately explain the “giants” (see on v4).

## Some suggest that the sons of God were angels who married human wives.

(A variation of this is that the sons of God were people possessed by demons - fallen angels.)

In my view, such an explanation cannot fit Scripture for the following reasons:

(1) Nowhere does the context mention “angels” or “demons” or any such term. To conclude that such is meant here is speculation or assumption with no substantial evidence of any kind.

(2) While it is true that “sons of God” can refer in rare cases to angels (Job 1:6; etc.), nevertheless such a usage is extremely rare. The expression regularly refers to **people** who serve God.

(3) If angels could reproduce with men (which we will see that they cannot), why would the offspring be people? Why wouldn't they be angels?

(4) Jesus said that angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30). If angels do not marry and reproduce with other angels, why would we conclude that they could marry and reproduce with humans? (Some respond that these angels were no longer “in heaven.” But angels dwell in heaven. They may at times visit earth, but their habitation is in heaven. So, did these angels come to earth to have relations with their human wives, then return to heaven where they cannot marry? This would make their human wives essentially mistresses!)

(5) No passage implies that angels anywhere can reproduce at all, neither with one another nor with humans. The Bible contains numerous references to angels and to demons. What passage anywhere implies that they can reproduce? Jesus' statement that they do not marry implies they cannot reproduce, since that is a primary purpose of marriage.

(6) All God's creatures reproduce after their kind: plants, animals, fish, birds, and people (5:3). People cannot reproduce with plants, animals, fish, or birds. What evidence makes angels an exception, so that people can reproduce with angels – especially, when all Bible evidence indicates that angels cannot reproduce at all?

(7) The necessary conclusion would be that, even before they married human wives, these angels were fallen angels cast out of heaven—i.e., demons or servants of Satan. But where does the Bible refer to demons or fallen angels (or even demon-possessed people) as “sons of God”? Such a view is incredible!

John 8:30-47 - Jesus said that humans who did not believe in Him were sons of Satan; He absolutely denied that they were sons of God.

Acts 18:8-10 – Paul called Elymas a son of the devil because he opposed the gospel.

1 John 3:1-10 – Children of God are contrasted to children of the devil (v10). He who does not practice righteousness is not of God (v10). He who sins is of the devil, for the devil sinned from the beginning (v8).

If God calls sinful humans children of Satan, not sons of God, why would God call fallen angels sons of God? As Coffman said, "... fallen angels, in a million years, would never have been designated by the Holy Spirit as 'the sons of God.'"

(8) When and how were these fallen angels punished? Their offspring would have died in the flood, because all people died. But where does it say that angels died in the flood? Why punish the children of these fallen angels but not punish the angels who caused the problem?

To view these "sons of God" as angels is Biblically incredible.

**The "sons of God" were tyrannical rulers who claimed to be offspring of gods.**

This view is based on the fact that, almost throughout history, some rulers have claimed to rule by "divine right" because they are gods or the offspring ("sons") of gods. Such claims are common in secular history and are confirmed by the Bible. Some of the Caesars were worshiped as gods. Herod in Acts 12 was slain by God because he allowed people to honor him as a god. The serpent's temptation to Eve in the Garden of Eden was that she could be as God. From that time till now people have often sought various honors and powers of Deity (cf. Acts 10:25; 14:8-18). Since the word "son" is often used in the Bible to refer to an adherent or follower of a belief, the meaning could even be that these people claimed to be representatives of deities (not necessarily physical offspring of gods).

This view would fit the passage in that such rulers would surely be evil and would have great influence to corrupt other people as described in Genesis 6. They could take any women they wanted as wives, as kings have often tried to do throughout history. They would willingly practice violence against those who opposed them, as described in context. And they would become a strong influence leading others into corruption and violence. If worship of these rulers was closely related to the practices that are later obvious in pagan worship, they may well have involved drunken feasts and incredibly perverted sexual acts (including prostitution).

While we may not be able to prove that this is the correct meaning of the expression in Genesis 6, people in Moses' day may have been more likely to understand the meaning than we would today.

**6:3 - God decreed 120 years for men to survive**

**This is a clear statement of God's mercy and justice.**

God shows great love, patience, and mercy toward mankind. He postpones punishment because He wants men to repent (2 Pet. 3:9).

Yet He will not postpone indefinitely. He is determined that men will repent and if not, God will punish.

In this case, the earth was so corrupt God said He would not continue striving with people forever. Nevertheless, in His mercy he waited 120 years before destroying them. This appears to be the length of time in which Noah was preparing the ark and “the longsuffering of God waited ... while the ark was being prepared.” Meantime, Noah was preaching to the people to warn them of coming punishment (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5).

“For he is indeed flesh” (“in their going astray they are flesh” — ASV fnt) appears to mean that God classed sin as an act of men in the flesh. Sin had come into the world and become so widespread that it had become the pattern of people.

### **An alternative view: Was God predicting shortened human lifespans?**

Some suppose instead that the meaning here is that, instead of the long lifespans before the flood (chap. 5), men would live on the average 120 years after the flood. They point out, based on the age of Noah (5:32 cf. to 7:6), that it was 100 years till the flood, not 120 years; so it does not fit that God meant to say it would be 120 years till the flood. This view does no particular violence to any Bible truth, yet it does not seem to me to be the meaning.

(1) What would this have to do with the context? While it is true that lifespans shortened after the flood, how does that connect reasonably to the fact God was tired of striving with man (v3) or to the evils of men described in context? Why would God bring this up here? The explanation given above, however, fits quite well as described above.

(2) Does this explanation fit what actually happened after the flood? Genesis 11 describes the lifespans of men after the flood. The succeeding generations lived 600, 438, 433, 464, 239, 237, 230, 148, etc. Even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived 175, 180, and 130 years. Further, the 120 years lifespan does not fit people today, nor even in David’s day when ages generally lived 70 or 80 years. So when did it fit? And if we could determine when it did fit, what would a prediction of that time have to do with the flood?

(3) The difference between God’s prediction of 120 years and the age of Noah when the flood began would easily be explained by overlap between chap. 5 and chap. 6. Note that Noah was 500 years old in 5:32 referring to the birth of his sons. But the birth of his sons is repeated in 6:10 when God spoke to him about the flood. So 6:1-9 is a period of overlap in which Moses’ account stepped back in time. Chap. 5 gives the genealogy from Adam to Noah. Then chap. 6 begins to describe the evil of men that had developed during the generations described in chap. 5.

As a result, God predicted 120 years till the destruction of mankind.

6:9 then begins the instructions to Noah, again repeating the record of his son's birth. The passing of 20 years between 6:3 and 6:10 is quite reasonable.

### **6:4 - There were giants in those days**

Some translations refer to "Nephilim," but others refer to "giants." Some say this means that the giants resulted from the marriages of the sons of God with the daughters of men. They then use this as the basis for the argument that the sons of God were fallen angels (see on v2).

(1) Actually, the language does not really say the giants resulted from these marriages, but only that such people existed during and after the time "**when**" the sons of God were marrying daughters of men.

(2) Why assume it took angels to have large offspring? Again, the Bible contains numerous references to angels and to demons. Where do any of these passages say angels are giants, let alone that they have giants as offspring? Why isn't it just as reasonable that humans could have large offspring? Even if the giants did result from the marriages described, to conclude this refers to angels is still a figment of imagination.

(3) All these giants would have died in the flood. The verse expressly states that there were giants "afterward," after the flood too, as other passages confirm (Num. 13:33; 1 Sam. 17). Did angels marry women after the flood too? (The only possible response would be to claim that some of the righteous people on the ark had inherited some of these angel genes, so they could have giant offspring. But the passage nowhere states or implies such a thing. More speculation. Why not just believe human beings could have giant offspring?)

(3) The Waldrons point out that the word translated "giants" does not necessarily mean physically large. Some "nephilim" were giants in later accounts (mentioned above), but the word just basically means tyrants or oppressors, regardless of size. Such evil men would result as men became increasingly evil, but were not necessarily physically large.

(4) Aside from this passage, every Bible believer who reads about giants in other Bible accounts, would simply conclude that the human gene pool – i.e., natural human heredity – could produce giants. So what is there about this account that compels or even seriously suggests any other view? "Sons of God" not only **can** refer to humans, it almost always **does**. So why not just conclude here too that humans can, under certain conditions, produce offspring that are very large? Especially in the early days of the earth when people lived longer ages implying they had better health than later, perhaps they could also become large.

Once again, the concept of angels marrying and reproducing with humans is totally unfounded speculation. It has no Bible foundation



here or elsewhere. And it conflicts with numerous Bible teachings as listed on v2 above.

### ***6:5 - God observed the great corruption among men***

The record then describes the moral conditions on earth. Wickedness was great, and the intents, thoughts, and imaginations of men's hearts were continually evil. God cares about the condition of the heart. This is especially important because from the heart comes the choices that determine our total conduct. This is why God demands that we keep our hearts pure (Prov. 4:23; 6:18; 24:2; Psa. 14:1-3; Matt. 15:19; 5:8; Phil. 4:8; etc.).

So today evil is still the result of evil hearts. People plan evil, fantasize evil, and are entertained by evil. When hearts are filled with evil thoughts, surely corrupt words and deeds will follow. So our society is corrupt because people enjoy evil thoughts. If we do not correct this, how can our society stand?

### ***6:6 - God was grieved that He had made man***

Having described that man was full of evil, the account describes the effect this had on God. He was grieved and sorry He had made man. Sin grieves God. He hates it and cannot stand it in His people. This ought to be our same attitude toward it.

Other translations say He "repented" that He had made man. But this is not repentance in the sense that man repents for having done wrong. Repent means simply to change ones mind. God never sins, therefore He does not repent in the sense of having done something evil He is sorry for (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29). However, He does change His mind about His conduct toward men, when those men change their conduct toward Him (Jer. 18:7-10; Jonah 3:10).

### ***6:7 - God determined to destroy man***

Here is stated God's verdict about man. He determined that He would destroy man from the face of the earth. But the form of destruction God chose to use in order to do this would also result in destruction to all the beasts, creeping things, and birds. Comparing this to the Gen. 1 account of creation, we see that this includes all the living animals except the fish or water creatures. They of course could survive a flood. But the ones here named are the classes that could not survive a flood.

The fact God said He was sorry He made man indicates the universality of the sin and therefore the universality of the destruction. If men in some regions of earth were still righteous so God could spare them, that would not seem to fit the degree of corruption described, nor does it seem that would lead God to be sorry He had made man.

Scripture elsewhere refers to the flood as evidence that God does indeed punish evil people (2 Pet. 3:3-11; Matt. 24:37-39). Some people think God is too "loving" to punish sinners. Such people need to realize



that God has already proved beyond question His willingness to punish people. He has done it on a number of occasions, of which the flood is one of the more outstanding ones.

Yes, God is loving and patient. But never underestimate His determination or willingness to punish sin. This account proves we must take seriously Bible warnings of judgment and punishment on all who will not obey Him.

### ***6:8,9 - Noah was found upright before God***

Noah had been introduced in the genealogy in chapter 5. Now we are told about his character and his role in this great flood. Noah found grace in God's eyes because he was a just man, perfect in his generations (Hebrews 11:7), and he walked with God (cf. Enoch — 5:22,24).

Despite the fact the world all around him was evil, yet Noah resisted the world and lived an upright life. He was in the definite minority, like faithful servants of God will always be (Matt. 7:13,14). But he refused to go along with the majority in their sins.

Here is a major lesson for us. Just because others sin, this does not justify us in sinning. Those who do evil may surround us on every side. This is a great temptation. But consider all the temptation Noah faced. His family alone was right before God. Yet he did right. We can do the same, and God requires us to do so.

God's people have always been in the minority and have always been required to do right despite how others act (Phil. 2:15,16; Acts 2:40; Rom. 12:2). Do you feel alone in your service to God? Remember Noah. Do you get discouraged in your efforts to save the lost? Noah preached for over one hundred years, but could save only his own family. If you think you have it hard, remember Noah.

### ***6:10-12 - Further description of the evil of society***

Noah's sons are named again (cf. 5:32).

Then we are told again that the earth was corrupt. All flesh had corrupted their way. See how the introduction of sin by Adam and Eve led to such terrible corruption among the whole world. Many think, "It's no one else's business how I live. I can do as I please with my life." But your life affects others. Sin multiplies. Like Noah, we must resist it.

People were not only corrupt but also violent. This also characterizes our society. It is often not safe to walk the streets. How can we expect God to overlook such violence when we see how He viewed the violence in Noah's day?

And note who was responsible for the corruption of man: all flesh had corrupted their way. People are evil because they choose to do evil. They do not inherit total depravity at birth. They are not victims of circumstances. God did not decree them to be lost unconditionally. Men have the power of free will and free moral agency. They can choose to

do good or to do evil. That is why God is just in choosing to punish men when they choose to do evil.

### ***6:13 - God revealed to Noah His plan to destroy all flesh***

The account has thus far partly revealed God's plan to us. Here God began to reveal His plans to Noah. Note He said that the end of **all** flesh was before Him and He would destroy them with the **earth**. This sounds like a global, worldwide cataclysm. We will note, as we proceed, other evidence regarding the scope of the destruction. Was it worldwide, or was it limited to a particular locality?

### ***6:14-16 - God commanded Noah to build an ark***

God then described the means by which Noah would survive this great cataclysm. He was to make an ark. A much smaller ark was also used as the means of saving Moses (Ex. 2:3). This term apparently refers to a box-shaped container (cf. the "ark of the covenant"). The purpose of this ark was to keep afloat in the water. It was not a ship designed to travel anywhere.

The material used was "gopherwood." Today we are not sure what kind of wood this was (some suppose a type of cypress), though obviously Noah understood. We are later told that Noah obeyed God in every command (v22). It follows that the ark was made of gopherwood.

To illustrate the proper concept of obedience, we often teach that Noah would have been disobedient had he made the ark of metal or even of some other kind of wood. When God specified gopherwood, that limited the material to be used. The material used had to fit the meaning of "gopherwood." The same is true of other details of the pattern God gave. Just as Noah could not change the pattern and still please God, so we today must not change the pattern for salvation, worship, the church, etc. Obedience requires doing just what God said without change.

Other instructions included that the ark should have rooms. These were probably like stalls or pens for the various kinds of animals. Also, the ark was to be covered inside and out with pitch. Obviously, this was to make it waterproof.

The measurements are then given in cubits. The exact length of a cubit varied from society to society, but generally it was about 18 inches. This would make the ark about 450' long, 75' wide, and 45' high. Modern ship builders say these dimensions were ideal for the purpose of floating as Noah would need.

To illustrate the size of this ship, the Queen Elizabeth is one of the biggest ocean liners ever built and it was 1031' long. The ark was as big or bigger than most ocean-going vessels until very recent times. And yet it was built by the efforts of Noah and his three sons. There is no evidence they had known about shipbuilding before this time. In fact, the Bible had not previously referred to any kind of boats. However,

the degree of technological skill in that day is indicated by the fact they were able to build such a vessel. It apparently took a long time, perhaps most of the 120 years (v3). During this time, Noah was also preaching to the people, though apparently no one except his family was persuaded to join him. The work required of Noah was a monumental task.

Morris has done some calculations on the volume of space inside this ark. Making very conservative assumptions, he concludes the inside volume would be at least 1,400,000 cubic feet. This is equivalent to 522 modern train livestock cars. 240 sheep can be transported in a livestock car, so the ark would hold 125,000 sheep. He later proves this is adequate to hold all the animals needed (see notes on v19).

The ark had three decks or stories, and a single door in the side. It also had a “window” (“light” — ASV; “roof” — ASV ftnt). Obviously, it is not clear to us what this was, though again Noah would have understood. Presumably it provided ventilation and light for the ark.

Most likely God gave Noah many other specific instructions that are not recorded for us. Enough is given that we can understand somewhat the events that occurred, the size of the task given Noah, and his success in that task.

The description of the ark constitutes another evidence that this was a worldwide flood. Had it been a local flood, there would have been no need for such elaborate provisions. God could simply have told Noah where to travel so he could escape the flood. It is not likely that he would have needed to take any animals, since there would be animals elsewhere that would survive; but if not, then the animals could have migrated to a safe place as surely as they could have migrated to the ark. [Cf. 2 Pet. 3:6]

### ***6:17,18 - God intended to destroy all flesh that breathed, but made a covenant with Noah***

God here explained to Noah the nature of the destruction (though it was surely implied by all that had been said previously). God intended to send a flood that would destroy **all** flesh under **heaven** that had the breath of life. Everything on **earth** would die. Again, this necessarily required a worldwide flood.

However, God had better plans for Noah. He was making a covenant with Him. This is the first reference in the Bible to a covenant, but there are many later examples. A covenant involves serious promises or commitments, usually mutual promises and commitments made between two parties. Noah was required to build the ark as commanded by God (vv 14-22), and God would then spare Noah and his family from the flood (other promises were added later).

This shows that, while God was firm in punishing sin, He still was patient and kind toward those who would do right. Both sides of God’s character are clearly revealed in this story. He must punish evildoers,

but He must also reward and care for those who do right (cf. 1 Pet. 3:20).

And note that God stated exactly what people would be saved in the ark: Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives. Of all the people on earth, only this tiny minority would be saved (cf. Matthew 7:13,14).

### **6:19,20 - God then gave instruction about preservation of animals**

God said that two of each kind of animal should come into the ark, male and female. This would provide for the reproduction of the animals after the flood. Note that the purpose of this is expressly stated: to keep the animals alive. Obviously there was nowhere on earth where they could run to survive, again demonstrating that this was a world-wide flood. (Note that later we are told that a greater number than just two of the clean animals would be saved.)

### **Morris (p.185) calculated the space on the ark required for the animals.**

There would be no fish or water animals; and of course, insects would take little room (they could sit on the walls or ceilings). Birds could rest in the rafters (as could a number of smaller animals for that matter). Of the land animals, not every variety would be needed – just the most basic kinds from which all the other varieties could reproduce. Morris calculates a maximum of 75,000 animals that would need floor space in the ark. If we assume a sheep is an average sized animal (some are bigger, but many are smaller), we already learned there would be room for 125,000 of them. This would leave plenty of room for the people and the food.

Actually, these are very conservative estimates. It is likely that the animals that came were young and immature. There would be no reason to bring full-grown ones, and the young ones would take less room and perhaps be less trouble. Probably God also caused the animals on the ark to hibernate or estivate, as many animals do anyway at other times when they need to preserve food and energy. As a result, far less room and food would be needed.

### **Provisions for the animals**

Note that God told Noah that the animals would “come to” him. He did not need, as some imply, to catch all the animals or lure them to the ark. They came of themselves, somehow motivated by God. Surely some aspects of this event were miraculous. And why not? Great miracles are done elsewhere in Scripture. Nevertheless, God required Noah to do what he could.

References to the animals coming to the ark and provision for food lead us to realize that many other necessary arrangements are not mentioned in the record. We cannot be sure how they were handled,

but we know some provisions must have been made for each animal to receive food and water daily, to eliminate waste products, and to get along with other animals that may have been natural enemies (remember, violence among men led to the flood, so surely animal violence was also well known). Since God somehow trained or otherwise motivated the animals to go to the ark, we can be sure He somehow provided for these other needs. People house train pets to know where to go to obtain food and water, to eliminate in an acceptable place, and to get along with other pets. Likewise, in some way God could work with Noah to “ark-train” these animals where to go on the ark to have their needs met. It seems unreasonable to expect Noah’s family to personally wait on each animal’s needs without expecting the animals to help by some form of cooperation.

### ***6:21,22 - Noah completely obeyed all God’s instructions***

God also required Noah to include food for the people and the animals. All these instructions Noah obeyed completely, just as God had commanded.

In this, Noah gives an example of what our salvation requires. Hebrews 11:7 and 1 Peter 3:20,21 both use him as an example of what we need to do to please God. He was saved by grace (Gen. 6:8) and so are we (Eph. 2:8,9). But he had to have faith in God (Heb. 11:7) and so do we (Eph. 2:8,9; John 3:16; etc.).

No one could seriously doubt that faith was required of Noah. He was given a monstrous job to do. He had to make a huge ark, provide for all these animals. He had to believe that the flood would occur and that it would necessarily mean death for himself and all animals if he did not do as God said. God had predicted something Noah had never seen or heard of before (Heb. 11:7). It is sure he had never seen a worldwide flood, and it is possible he had never seen rain before (cf. notes on Gen. 2:5,6). Obviously, the people that he preached to did not believe Noah’s message. Noah’s family alone believed the ark was needed. Apparently, the job took much of 120 years (Gen. 6:3). Imagine the faith required to build such an ark under these conditions!

But just as surely as faith was a condition of Noah’s salvation, so also was obedience. In fact, the obedience was essential to his faith. His faith required him to obey — he had to build that ark (Heb. 11:7; Gen. 6:22; 7:5,9,16). No matter how much he believed God’s message in his heart, he would have perished had he not done what God said. Had Noah been like many people today, he would have said that he believed, but works are not necessary; so, he would not need to obey. But that is not what the passage says. All references confirm he had to obey. The faith that God rewards is the faith that obeys. And Noah’s example in this regard is used as the example of the kind of faith we need to be forgiven of our sins and receive eternal life (Heb. 10:31; 11:7; cf. 1 Pet. 3:20,21). See Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts

10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6.

Specifically, Noah's salvation involved water and so does ours — 1 Peter 3:20,21. He was saved from the flood, but he was also saved by the flood. The water lifted that ark and became the means both of the destruction of the wicked and the salvation of the obedient. This is a type of baptism in which we are saved by immersion in water. Many deny it, but many also denied the necessity of the ark! The New Testament teaches baptism is necessary to receive forgiveness by Jesus' blood. See Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21.

And note that Noah's salvation required that he come into the ark (v18). Those who remained outside the ark perished. Many today tell us that membership in Jesus' church is not necessary to salvation. Yet, the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus saves those in the church just as surely as God saved those in the ark. Yes, it is Jesus who saves, just as it was God who saved Noah. But to be saved, we must be in the place where God commands us to be. Salvation today is for those in the church. See Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:23,25; Acts 2:47; Colossians 1:12-14; Acts 20:28.

Noah's salvation proves we are saved by a faith that motivates us to do what God says we must do to be saved. We are saved when we obey and not before and not without. Only when we obey do we receive the blessings God's grace made available to us.

# Genesis 7

## The Flood (cont.)

### ***7:1 - God called Noah into the ark***

This chapter continues the story of the flood as God called Noah to enter the ark. Noah had finished the work of preparing it, so God instructed him the time had come to enter. He reminded Noah again that he was being spared because of his righteousness.

No doubt, the actual entering of the ark was a traumatic time for Noah. To be told the flood was coming would have been distressing. But he had been building the ark for perhaps a hundred years or over. But to finally come to the time to enter the ark would be a fearful, memorable experience.

The language here may mean that the time had come for Noah's family to begin the process of entering the ark. The entire process, loading animals and all, would have taken some time.

### ***7:2,3 - The animals were then brought into the ark***

God had said that the animals should be taken by pairs, male and female. Here it is stated, in addition, that the clean animals should be taken by sevens. This is not a contradiction to the instruction in 6:20, but simply additional information not recorded there.

What was the difference between clean and unclean animals? This is the first time the distinction is mentioned. Later Moses defined it distinctly (Lev. 11:1-31). It is not clear that the distinction Noah was to make was the same distinction God made under the Law of Moses, though if it is this would explain why Moses saw no need to explain the matter further here – he knew his readers could gain the information elsewhere in his writing. It appears that clean animals could be used as sacrifices to God (8:20) and could be eaten. A greater number was to be taken because of their greater usefulness. In the New Testament, the distinctions between clean and unclean animals have been removed (Col. 2:16; Acts 10).

Did the instructions mean to take seven unclean animals or seven pair? It is not clear. If just seven were taken, one would be offered as a sacrifice (8:20) and that would leave three pair to reproduce. Since the clean animals were authorized for food immediately after the flood (9:3,4), more of them would be needed for food. (The ESV says seven "pair," but it is not clear why.)

Again, the purpose for taking the animals was to preserve the kinds of animals alive on the earth, which proves again that this was a worldwide flood. No other view can explain why these measures were needed to keep the species alive on earth.

### ***7:4-6 - Time aspects of the flood***

At this point, God warned the flood would begin in just seven more days. Then He told Noah that the rains would fall for 40 days and nights. This is the first recorded statement of how God intended to produce the flood. Remember that there is no indication it had ever rained before (see 2:5,6). But even if it had rained before, it had surely never rained for 40 days and nights.

The flood would destroy all living things from the face of the earth. Again, a worldwide flood is clearly indicated. Anything less would not destroy all life from the earth. And a rain of this magnitude would surely cause more than just a local flood.

Again, Noah did all God told him to do (see on 6:22).

For the first time we are told Noah's age. He was 600 years old when the flood occurred.

It is interesting that God had told Noah to enter the ark (v1), yet it was a week till the rains began. I suspect v1 means that Noah was to begin the work of loading and arranging the ark – a process that could easily take seven days. What a difficult and nerve-wracking week that must have been! Doubtless, unbelievers had ridiculed Noah endlessly as he had preached to them. Then another week passed as they were entering the ark. How could he have avoided doubts? Surely, this is why Hebrews 11 lists him as an example for our faith.

### ***7:7-10 - Noah's faith resulted in the salvation of his family***

Subsequent events occurred just as God had said. Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives all entered the ark. They took the clean and unclean animals as instructed. And seven days later the flood began.

Note that, though Noah had been preaching to the people throughout the time while he was building the ark, yet when it came time to enter, no one but his own family would enter. Only eight people were saved. When you begin to think your efforts to save the lost are unsuccessful and people are unreceptive to truth, remember Noah. Consider how long he worked and how discouraging it must have been to be the only people on earth who really believed God. Think of the temptation to give it up yourself. Yet Noah persevered and he was saved. We can do the same.

On the other hand, Noah did at least save his family. That is more than some people today do, more even than some preachers and other faithful men of history. Noah must have been a good family man and head of his family. He could not have forced those sons and their wives



to enter the ark. They must have come by choice, which must have been a fruit of the teaching and example given by Noah. So, he could rejoice in their choice to stand for what was right.

It is easy for us to get discouraged and think, in an evil society, that it is just impossible to save even our own children. How do we keep them from going along with the world? When all their friends are evil, how can we lead them to do right? Surely, Noah faced the same problem on an even greater scale than we do, yet he got the job done. May we so labor with our children that they too are willing to serve God faithfully by their own choice, regardless of the evil in the world.

### ***7:11,12 - The flood began***

The exact date is given when the flood began: the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the second month of Noah's six hundredth year of life. However, it is unclear what calendar was being used, so we still don't know exactly when it happened. Nevertheless, the information we are given serves as a basis for comparison to determine how long the flood lasted (cf. 8:13,14).

The water did not come just from the rain. It did rain forty days and nights as God had said. But also, the fountains of the deep were broken up. What does this mean? Perhaps there were underground reservoirs, lakes, or rivers of some kind that suddenly began to expel their water to the land. Other theories also exist. Some say earthquakes caused the sea beds to rise, causing water to rush upon the land as from fountains of the deep. In any case, the rain was not the only source of water.

If there had been no rain previously, yet there were rivers, so there had to be some way for the water to move from the seas to the higher levels to start the rivers. Morris theorizes that there was a vast underground network of pools and conduits that circulated water from the seas to the higher levels, perhaps by heating the water inside the earth so it would rise. In any case, there must have been underground sources of some kind that began shooting forth water. This surely involved some miraculous action on God's part that we do not understand.

"The windows of heaven" implies that the water that fell from the sky was not just a shower or even a heavy rain, but a real cloud burst or even worse. Some theorize that there had been a vapor canopy above the atmosphere, which suddenly began to condense and fall to earth, providing much of the water of the flood. If true, this would have been the end of the canopy, explaining why it does not exist today. Such an event would also produce great permanent changes in weather and climate, perhaps explaining the change in ages to which people lived after the flood. Forty days and nights of rain would not be possible under present conditions, especially not over all the earth at once. This almost surely involved some miraculous aspects, though perhaps some

aspects have a natural explanation. In any case, a great volume of water fell.

Morris points out that such an amount of water would cause immense upheavals and major changes in the earth's surface. It would probably be accompanied by volcanic activity. Great deposits of sediment would form as earth and rocks were washed down the mountains. This is probably the best explanation for the many huge beds of fossils in sedimentary rock found in many places of the world. It also explains the existence of the geologic column, explaining it not as the product of millions of years of deposits, but as the result of a major catastrophe lasting only a relatively brief time. Such catastrophes would result in many observed changes in the earth's surface. Water, especially longstanding water under great pressure, can cause immense changes, and those changes would be similar to the effects caused by great aging. This may well explain some of the confusion by modern evolutionists regarding the age of the earth.

Finally, consider how frightening such an awesome experience would have been to Noah and those on the ark. Had they never even seen rain before, such a storm as this was would surely be overwhelming.

### ***7:13-16 - When the people and animals had entered the ark, God shut them in***

V1 had told Noah to enter the ark. The language here sounds like the rain began the same day they entered. But v1 may have instructed them to begin the process of loading the ark (food and other necessities). This may have taken a week. Then on the day that Noah's family and the animals finished the process of entering the ark, that day the rain began.

We are told again that included were every kind of beast, bird, etc. Again, such would be completely unnecessary in a local flood. And note again that the animals went into the ark to Noah – he did not have to go out to round them up (cf. 6:20). These repeated statements may seem repetitious, but they serve to emphasize the great importance of the events.

God shut them in. Apparently, He sealed the door in some way. This put finality on the preparations. Noah had done much, but when the time for the flood actually came, it was God who completed the final act of preparation. And when the door had been shut, none of those who remained outside could be saved. The time of mercy was over. God is longsuffering, but His patience comes to an end. Judgment had begun, and no pleas for mercy could afterward be accepted. Likewise, at the final Day of Judgment, people who have neglected obedience will find it too late to seek mercy.

### ***7:17-20 - The flood waters rose, lifted the ark, and covered all the mountains***

It did rain forty days, causing floodwaters that lifted up the ark. Note how the record uses repetition to emphasize the reality and magnitude of the flood. The waters increased ... the waters prevailed and greatly increased ... the waters prevailed exceedingly ... the waters prevailed. Finally, all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered, covered till the waters were fifteen cubits higher than the highest mountains.

How much clearer description could there be for a worldwide flood? Water flows to the lowest available level. This water came for forty days and remained for a year. If the highest hills were covered this deep, the water would just flow away elsewhere and the hills would never stay covered until the water had flowed everywhere. In short, it is impossible to cover the highest mountains with water and the water remain there a whole year, unless the whole earth is covered.

Many people today doubt or deny the accuracy of the Genesis record. They simply cannot bring themselves to believe that such a worldwide flood ever occurred. And after all, science denies it. Yet in fact, it is the best explanation for many aspects of nature that science observes. And why should we be surprised that people today do not believe it? Such people are just like the people in Noah's day who did not believe that such a flood would happen, and so they perished! People in all ages have doubted and rejected God's word ... and they have paid the consequences. What we today need is exactly what Noah and his family possessed: faith.

### ***7:21-24 - The consequences of the flood are here described***

Once again, see how the record repeatedly emphasizes the destruction. All flesh died that moved on earth, birds, beasts, cattle, creeping things, and every man. All that breathed on dry land died. All living things on the face of the ground were destroyed, man and cattle, creeping thing and birds: they were destroyed. And finally, the record clearly states that the only survivors were Noah and those with him in the ark. Surely, no honest person can deny that these are terms for a worldwide flood.

And again, it is clear that God will punish evildoers. What a terrible destruction, yet man deserved it for his terrible evil. Never doubt God's willingness to punish evil. He had proved it beyond question.

Then the record states that the waters prevailed 150 days. This seems to mean that the water continued covering the earth as described earlier in the chapter for 150 days until the next major change in circumstances began to occur. It was long enough to make sure everyone died. And it was long enough it would have wrought incredible changes on the surface of the earth.

Note that the occurrence of such a flood has at least two consequences for evolution: (1) It provides an adequate alternate explanation for fossil deposits, the geologic column, apparent age of the earth, and many other arguments often used for evolution. (2) It flatly contradicts evolution, for evolution says everything must be explained on the basis of the processes we see currently occurring (uniformitarianism). But nowhere do we see floods of this magnitude occurring today. In fact, the Bible record will soon assure us that such a thing cannot occur again. There appear to be no current forces that could cause such an event. Yet the Bible says it happened.

### **Summary of Evidence that the Flood Was Worldwide**

Many who claim to believe the Bible - even some influential teachers among conservative churches of Christ - doubt or deny that the flood was worldwide. But consider the evidence:

1. The wording throughout uses expressions clearly referring to a worldwide event: whole earth, under the whole heaven, etc. See 6:13,17; 7:3,4,21-23. [6:7; 8:9,21; 9:11,15]

2. All flesh under the whole heaven died, including all that had the breath of life and all men. The only ones that survived were the ones on the ark (6:13,17; 7:4,21-23; 8:21; 9:11,15). How can this be explained except by a worldwide flood? In a local flood, some animals and almost surely some people in other places would survive.

3. The flood involved a steady downpour combined with fountains of the deep breaking up for a period of 40 days, followed by a period of 150 days in which the waters prevailed. A whole year passed before the ground was suitable for human habitation (7:11,12,24; 8:3,5,14). Surely, the result would create more than just a local flood.

4. The water covered all the high hills under the whole heaven. It prevailed over the mountains by 15 cubits (7:19,20) and continued this way for 150 days (7:24). Water naturally flows to the lowest level. It could not cover and remain above the mountains unless the whole surface of the earth was covered.

5. Five months after the flood began, the ark rested on Ararat (7:11; 8:4). But another 2½ months followed before the tops of the mountains were visible (8:5). Forty days after that, a dove sent out could find no place to land, because the water still covered the whole earth (8:6-9). Again, clearly this required a worldwide flood.

6. To build the ark and place the animals on it would be absurd, if this was only a local flood. In a local flood, animals elsewhere and probably people elsewhere would have survived. God could have saved some people and animals to repopulate the earth much more easily by having them migrate to where the flood would not occur. Yet the account clearly says the ark was needed to save the people and animals from passing from the face of the earth. (See 7:3,4,23.) Those who

claim that this is a local flood effectively deny that God is all-wise. They make Him out to be more foolish than the average human!

7. We are later told that all living things on the earth were descended from Noah and the animals on the ark. See 9:1,18,19 (note the genealogy in chap. 10, especially 10:32). If the flood was not worldwide, there would be other people and animals elsewhere to repopulate the earth. [8:17,19]

8. God promised He would never again send such a flood to destroy all flesh from the face of the earth (8:21; 9:11,15). If this was just a local flood, God has repeatedly broken this promise.

9. Peter used the flood as a parallel of the worldwide judgment to occur when Jesus returns (2 Peter 3:3-7). If the flood was not worldwide, then how do we know the whole earth will be destroyed when judgment comes?

To deny that the flood was worldwide is to simply deny the Scriptures. To claim this is a legend is to make a mockery of the story and turn God into an imbecile. If you don't believe the story, please don't claim that you believe in the Bible.

# Genesis 8

## The Flood (cont.)

### *8:1-3 - The waters recede*

Though the water had prevailed 150 days (7:24), Noah's time on the ark was by no means over. The earth was still covered with water, which yet had to recede in order for the earth to be inhabitable by men and animals. So God remembered Noah and the animals on the ark — i.e., He did not forget them but continued to make provision for their need.

He caused the water to recede from the earth. This was done by a wind that passed over the earth. Also the fountains of the earth and windows of heaven were stopped. The rain had stopped after 40 days. This is perhaps a summary statement. Or perhaps it means that they remained stopped and did not start again, but rather allowed the water to recede.

It is not obvious where all the water went. One possibility, advocated by Morris, is that the force of the long-standing water over the surface of the whole earth eventually caused the continents to heave upwards and the sea beds to drop so as to make room in them for all the water. In fact, he argues that it is most likely that the current sea beds were the continents before the flood and the current continents were sea beds before the flood. They in effect reversed roles due to the great amount of water and sediment. This may give additional explanation for the great evidence of fossils of sea animals on today's continents, plus the huge beds of fossils and other evidence of longstanding water on the continents.

Of course, another possibility for what happened to all the water is that God Himself miraculously removed it. The passage does not specify whether the removal of the water was miraculous or natural.

Morris (pp. 204,205,211,212) also gives a scientific explanation for how the flood would explain the existence of the geologic column and the fossil beds. These are often used as major proofs of evolution. However, such huge beds of fossils are not being deposited today, and could not occur under any known currently acting force of nature. Instead, animals today decay and decompose, they do not fossilize in great numbers and huge beds. The very existence of huge fossil beds disproves the fundamental evolutionary theory of uniformitarianism (all history must be explained by the forces we see currently acting

around us), and demonstrates the occurrence of a past catastrophe such as the flood.

The geologic column is not nearly so complete and well defined as modern evolutionary texts want us to believe. It is nowhere found complete in any one place, but is the result of compiling the formations found in various places. And in many places the various levels are found in different orders or even reverse order to what evolution would predict, yet with no apparent reason why it should be so. Morris shows that the various levels, with their increasing complexity of animals, could be explained best by a flood of worldwide proportions, just as the Bible says.

### ***8:4,5 - The ark rested on Mt. Ararat***

The ark finally came to rest on the 17th day of the 7th month. The rain had begun on the 17th day of the 2nd month in Noah's 600th year (7:11). Assuming time was measured the same way in both passages, it was five months from the beginning of the rain until the time the ark rested.

Even yet it was a long time before the ark could be abandoned. The tops of the mountains were not seen until the first day of the tenth month. Again, such expression shows a worldwide flood. The mountaintops remained covered by water for several months. The fact the ark rested on a mountain but the mountaintops were not seen for a long time indicates that the ark rested on top of the highest mountain in the area.

The ark rested on the mountains of Ararat. The language implies that "Ararat" was the name for more than one mountain, perhaps a range or series of mountains. Several sites have been suggested, however there is still today in northeastern Turkey a mountain by this name and there is strong tradition that this is the mountain on which the ark landed. In recent years, several explorers have claimed evidence of the remains of an ancient boat preserved in the glaciers on that mountain. Coffman quotes the Jewish historian Josephus as saying the remains were still there in his day.

Morris points out that computer studies show this mountain to be very close to the geographical center of all modern land masses. Hence, the dispersion of all the men and animals throughout the earth would be most convenient from this mountain.

### ***8:6-9 - Noah sent out birds to check for dry land***

Noah waited forty more days and then opened the window of the ark. He began to send out birds to determine what the land conditions were. Because of the position of the window and perhaps the location of the ark, he may not have been able to see the ground well. But more likely, he wanted to know the conditions at some distance from the ark, not just on the mountaintop where it had landed.

The first bird was a raven. It continued to fly back and forth over the earth until the waters dried up. Apparently, this did not tell Noah what he wanted to know so he sent out another type of bird, this time a dove. The dove could not find anyplace to even rest on the earth because, though the mountaintops were visible, the land was still covered with water and there was no place she could live. She returned to the ark and Noah took her back in.

### ***8:10-12 - Noah sent out the dove again***

Seven days later Noah sent the dove out again. She returned in the evening with a freshly plucked olive leaf in her mouth. This told him that the waters had receded, not completely, but enough that apparently some vegetation had begun to sprout.

He waited another seven days and sent her out again. This time she was apparently able to find a place to live, so she never returned to him again. This showed that the earth was dry enough to be inhabitable, for a bird anyway.

### ***8:13 - Noah removed the covering of the ark***

Noah continued to wait for God to command him to leave the ark (v16). On the first day of the first month of the 601st year of his life, he removed the covering from the ark. Then he could see clearly and see that the ground appeared dry.

This was nearly a year after the rain had begun. Still Noah did not leave the ark because God had not told him to do so. The fact that the ground appeared to be dry was not sufficient reason to leave the ark. Before the people and animals could live on the earth, vegetation would have to grow to provide them with food. The longstanding floodwaters would have left virtually nothing except rotting vegetation. Presumably, seed of plants would have remained to begin to replenish the plants, else God would have told Noah to take seeds on the ark too. But some time would be required for the seeds to grow enough plants for food.

### ***8:14-19 - The people and animals left the ark***

Finally, on the 27th day of the second month God gave the command for Noah and all the people and animals to leave the ark. This was exactly one year and ten days after the rain had begun (cf. 7:11). A whole year they had been in the ark — a whole year for the waters to reshape and change the surface of the earth. If you have ever seen the damage done by a local flood of short duration, you can only begin to imagine the changes made in the earth by a yearlong, worldwide flood higher than the highest mountains.

The animals were to spread out on the earth, reproduce, and cause life on the earth to abound once more. This makes clear that all present kinds of animals on the earth are descended from those on the ark. The express purpose for which they were put on the ark was to preserve life



so it could multiply again on the earth. So, these people and these animals were the ancestors of all living things today. This again necessarily implies a worldwide flood.

The Bible does not specify all the changes that followed the flood, but without doubt the physical changes would have been incredible. Here are some of the changes that are likely to have occurred as a consequence of such a huge, long lasting flood (cf. Morris, pp. 211f):

1) Presumably, the surface of the earth now contained more water than before the flood (unless God had miraculously removed it). The oceans may have been bigger and deeper, and the continents correspondingly smaller. If so, this would affect future weather patterns.

2) If it had not rained before the flood, then storms, rain, snow, hurricanes, and precipitation of all kinds would not have existed before the flood as they do now.

3) The vapor canopy, if one had existed before the flood, would now be gone. This would have allowed greater temperature variations and great winds that would not have existed before.

4) Also, radiation from space, which had been absorbed by the vapor canopy before the flood, would now reach the surface of the earth.

5) It is likely that great quantities of floodwater would have frozen at the North and South polar regions. When the water receded, great glaciers would eventually flow away from the poles, resulting in the ice age for which science has found evidence. It probably lasted a much shorter time than is generally thought, yet it would have caused immense changes in the surface of the earth.

6) Erosion caused by the receding floodwaters would have formed great rivers, lakes, and canyons, such as the Grand Canyon.

7) These and other unknown factors would have contributed to the greatly reduced lifespans of mankind (and presumably the animals) following the flood. It is even possible that earth conditions were so changed that certain life forms were unsuited to the new conditions and so became extinct, including perhaps the large dinosaurs and other life forms for which fossil evidence has been found.

8) Great beds of fossils would have been formed because many animals would have been swept by the flood waters to places where they would form huge burial plots, which in turn would have been covered by layers of mud compressed by great depths of water. This explains the many fossil beds scientists find, as well as the geologic column.

In addition, many other incredible effects would have followed in the earth's climate and physical structure. It is likely that earthquakes, tsunamis, storms, and even volcanoes lasted many years as the earth settled to new conditions. Some suspect that new mountains were formed and others washed away. All these changes would have effects on the earth's surface that defy efforts of modern observers to explain by means of current processes.

### ***8:20 - Noah offered great sacrifices to God***

Having survived the flood, Noah determined to show His gratitude to God by offering animal sacrifices. It is difficult to imagine the awe that would be struck in a man's heart by witnessing such an event and the fearful changes it had wrought. It was only right that Noah give thanks to God for his salvation, just as it is only right that we give thanks for our salvation from sin. Noah's salvation occurred at the cost of a worldwide flood that destroyed all men and animals. Ours occurred at the cost of the life of God's own Divine Son.

Noah offered burnt offerings of every clean animal and every clean bird. Burnt offerings had been mentioned first in Gen. 4, regarding Cain and Abel. This is the second reference to it. Obviously God was pleased by it, as the subsequent events show. Sacrifices from the beginning have reminded men of their sins, their dependence on God, and their need to give up what is of value to them in order to please God. Especially they symbolized the fact that someday Jesus would die as a sacrifice to save us from our sins.

Note that only clean animals could be offered to God. This would leave fewer of them to replenish the earth (had there been only two of each to begin with, they could not have been offered or could not have reproduced). And since man ate clean animals after the flood, a greater number of them were needed to provide food for the people (see on 7:2,3).

### ***8:21,22 - The Lord promised never to cause such destruction again while the earth stands***

Clearly, the Lord was pleased with Noah's sacrifice. The reference to aroma means, not just that the burning animals smelled good, but that all worship, done acceptably, pleases God like a perfume smells good. The point is simply that Noah's offering pleased God.

The Lord then determined never again to pronounce such a curse on the ground despite the evil of men. This is described more fully in 9:11ff. God had slain all people because they were evil even in their imaginations (6:5). He had also pronounced a curse upon the earth after Adam and Eve sinned (3:9ff). Here God determined that He would not again curse earth nor destroy every living thing as He had just done.

Yet God knew that man would be evil from their youth. Does this mean God would just accept the evil and do nothing about it? No. The rest of the Bible repeatedly shows God's opposition to men's evil, and there are many warnings He would yet punish man for sin (2 Pet. 3; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Matt. 25:31-46; etc.). He yet had a plan to provide the great sacrifice that would offer man salvation for all sin.

The point seems to be that, as long as the earth continues to stand, any future punishments would not bring such great destruction as the

flood did. He would allow the world to stand and would not bring further interruptions to its normal course of events. But seedtime and harvest, day and night, cold and heat, summer and winter would continue. The normal seasons and events of earth would not again be disrupted as God had disrupted them. He would allow the world to continue, despite the sins of men, until such time as He determined to end the whole world.

Someday the earth will be destroyed by fire (2 Pet. 3). God had proved that He is willing to punish men. He later referred to the flood as an example demonstrating His willingness to do so. Having proved His point, He determined to allow earth to continue until the final destruction. He may bring curses on people on relatively small scales, but these are not curses that hinder or interrupt the natural seasons of the earth itself.

The result is that God's commitment here becomes a great assurance to us that the world will continue to stand till God determines to destroy it by fire. Man cannot destroy it, though we may do great harm. Seasons and seedtime and harvest will continue as long as the earth itself shall stand.

Yet, surely there are great lessons for us to learn from the flood:

1) God surely does hate evil and will punish evil men. Do not expect you can be guilty and escape.

2) By faith and obedience we can yet please God as Noah did, even though others live in sin.

3) God loves the righteous and will care for them even though He punishes the wicked.

4) God is pleased when we worship and honor Him according to His will.

5) God is still in charge of His world. He who had the power to create the world and everything on it, still has the power to intervene as He chooses. He can and will do with His world and the people on it what He wills to do, regardless of the thoughts or conduct of humans. We are not in charge here but are subject to His ultimate power.

Some claim the expression "imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" teaches the doctrine of total inherited depravity (see Morris). But the passage does not say a person is evil from birth, nor that the evil is inherited from Adam or from any ancestor. It simply affirms the universal truth taught elsewhere that each individual eventually commits sin — it says he is evil, not that he inherits guilt. Further, it says this is true from "youth." Youth throughout the Bible is a general word used for people from early childhood through teenage years and even later. So, nothing here says a person is a sinner at birth, nor does it say guilt is inherited. It simply shows that all of us do eventually become sinners, and this begins relatively early in life.

# Genesis 9

## 9:1-17 - God's Covenant with Noah

The great flood had ended and affairs of men on earth were about to resume. In many ways this time period can be compared to the period immediately following creation. All sin had been removed (though of course many of the consequences remained). It was a new beginning with only eight people and the animals.

God began this new period by announcing some rules for people to live by, some of them intended to correct problems that had preceded the flood. He also gave a great promise regarding future punishment on mankind.

Some teachings and events in this chapter are difficult to understand. It appears to me that we need to remember that Moses wrote this inspired record, not as it was occurring, but after the patriarchal age had been succeeded by the Mosaic age. In other words, Moses wrote about these events to the descendants of the people being written about, but after a new law had been given to those descendants.

So, this was written primarily for the sake of history and the lessons we can learn from that history. It was not written to instruct people in God's laws, as were the Mosaic and Christian writings. Moses wrote to instruct people about God's rules under the Mosaic Law. Likewise, the New Testament writers wrote to tell Christians about God's will for the current age. But Genesis was not written to instruct people about laws God wanted people to live by. By the time Moses wrote it, the laws the patriarchs lived under were no longer in effect.

This seems to me to explain why we may sometimes be confused about what laws the people had, and why the laws are stated with so little explanation. Why explain them in detail when, by the time the explanation was written, people were not living under those laws anyway? It appears to me that, when God spoke to the heads of each household (the patriarchs), He gave them the specific instruction they needed as they needed it. But this was not included in Moses' record because there was no point in it.

As a result, for example, we may be left to wonder exactly what God had told Cain and Abel about their animal sacrifices, or what distinctions Noah was to follow regarding clean and unclean animals. Similarly, it appears to me that much of the information in chapter 9 is an extremely brief overview for historical purposes, but God probably gave more specific instructions to Noah and other patriarchs regarding how to carry these subjects. These specifics are not recorded because,

by the time the record was made, the laws had been superseded by new laws that are explained in Scripture.

### ***9:1 - Noah and his sons were told to reproduce and fill the earth***

The earth had been populated once as God had instructed Adam (1:26ff). But the flood had destroyed those people for their wickedness. God still wanted men on the earth, so He commanded Noah and sons to have children to live on the earth. Note that such a command once again implies that the flood had been worldwide, since Noah's family were at this point the only people available to multiply and fill the earth.

### ***9:2 - Animals would fear and dread people***

Why was this told to Noah? Was this not true before the flood? Several possibilities come to mind, though I am not sure which is correct.

1) It may be that, prior to this, animals were not eaten by men and perhaps were not even eating one another, so they had no fear of man but were useful to man in his work. But from this point on, men would eat meat as well as plants, so the animals had reason to fear the men. This would explain why this statement is made in connection with v3.

2) Or it may be that the people were in danger of being eaten by the animals since, at this point, there were many animals but few people. So, God made the animals to be afraid of the people so they would stay away from the people and not harm them.

3) Or it may be that, in order to come to Noah to enter and live together on the ark, God had given these particular animals a bravery so they had no fear of man; but now that the flood was over God would instill in them a fear of man which Noah was here being informed about.

Some animals, of course, still would be domesticated and have been domesticated by men. Perhaps this is implied by the statement, "they are given into your hand." Surely the instruction to Adam, that the animals would be subject to his dominion, includes the idea of training animals to use them to work for us and serve us. The fear can be overcome by personal relationship with certain specific individual creatures, but even these if they are raised in the wild will have fear for man.

### ***9:3 - God gave animals as well as plants for food for man***

For the first time the Bible mentions that people were allowed to eat animals, just as they had previously been eating herbs. Does this mean men were forbidden to eat meat before this? Or could it be that people had eaten meat before, but God here officially sanctioned a practice that He may have revealed earlier to specific individuals?

If eating meat were not allowed from the beginning, why the change? Some have argued that the change in the circumstances of the

earth as a result of the flood made it necessary or beneficial for man to eat animals, whereas conditions before had made it unnecessary or unwise. Again, the reasons are not revealed.

In any case, it is clear that eating meat was allowed from this point on. Some people actually argue that this passage shows we should not eat meat. They claim that people did not eat meat before this time according to God's original intent. People lived longer before the flood, etc. So it is argued that we should be vegetarians like people were originally and we will live longer and have better conditions on earth like people did then. Some actually imply that people who eat meat are in sin or at least are spiritually immature and inferior.

In recent times, animal rights activists have argued that we should refuse to eat meat because killing the animal is cruel, etc. This idea is largely based on the false belief that we evolved from, and so are closely related to certain animals, so we should not kill them just as we should not kill other people. In fact, some people become far more upset that some animals are killed or may become extinct than they do over the annual murder of millions of unborn babies!

Yet, no one can successfully deny that God here definitely authorized the eating of meat. It is incredible that people take a passage that authorizes meat eating and use it to argue against meat eating! The fact is that eating meat is repeatedly allowed and described with approval from here on throughout the Bible. The Mosaic Law described in great detail the eating of ceremonially clean animals, and the eating of animals sacrificed to God, etc. Abraham killed an animal to feed angels (Gen. 18). Jesus fed people with fish and Himself ate fish (Luke 24:42,43; John 21:9-13; the feeding of the 5000, etc.). God commanded Peter to eat even animals that had been unclean under the Mosaic Law (Acts 10; cf. Mark 7:19). The doctrine that forbids the eating of meat is a doctrine of apostasy (1 Tim. 4:1-3). (See also Luke 15:23.) And remember that, from the fall, God authorized the killing of animals so their skins could be used for clothing (3:21). Why would that be acceptable but killing the animal to eat it would be unacceptable?

If a person chooses to be a vegetarian based on personal opinion or personal health reasons, he is free to do so. No Scripture demands that he eat meat. But he must not make this an issue of spiritual contention and strife with other Christians or put down those who do eat meat as if they are spiritually wrong or inferior (Rom. 14).

This passage states no limitations regarding eating clean vs. unclean animals. Yet Noah had kept more clean animals than unclean ones. Perhaps this distinction had already been revealed so Noah understood that only the clean ones may be eaten, or perhaps that instruction was given in details that are not here recorded. Or perhaps

the clean animals were the only ones allowed to be sacrificed and the rules regarding eating unclean animals were revealed later.

### ***9:4 - Though eating meat was permitted, eating blood was forbidden***

God stated a specific limitation of eating flesh: the blood of the animals was not to be eaten because that was its life. Like the permission to eat flesh, this regulation applies throughout the rest of the Bible. The Law of Moses explained the rule more fully. Blood is so closely associated with life that killing is actually called “shedding blood.” Animals would be killed as sacrifices to fulfill the demand that the wages of sin is death, so blood was especially important in animal sacrifices. For this reason (and perhaps others), God forbade eating blood.

The command meant, not that absolutely no blood from an animal could enter ones mouth, but that blood was not to be deliberately drunk or deliberately used as a food (as by adding it to a dish being cooked). When an animal was killed, the blood was to be drained. Some blood, of course, would remain in the animal. This was not forbidden, but it was not to be deliberately left in. Perhaps the cooking of the meat was also intended to remove some of the blood rather than eating it raw. See Lev. 3:17; 7:26f; 17:10-16; 19:26; Deut. 12:16,23-28; 15:23; 1 Sam. 14:31-34

Acts 15:21,29; 21:25 show that this prohibition against eating blood continues to apply today (see notes there). Other Mosaic regulations were no longer binding, but this was among the ones that continued. Jesus’ blood saves us from our sins. Perhaps this is why we should still eat no blood. In any case, it is forbidden today as it was under the Law of Moses.

### ***9:5-7 - Prohibitions regarding murder***

Having expressly granted permission for men to kill animals for food, God then expressly forbade killing of people. And He stated why He made this distinction. People were created different from the animals from the beginning. People were superior to animals and were in the image of God. Therefore, killing people is wrong. This too has been forbidden in every age. The reason animals may be killed for food and clothing is that they are not in the image of God but were made to serve the needs of man (1:26-28).

God may have emphasized this regulation here because of the violence that characterized people before the flood. Of course, murder had been forbidden all along, as His reaction to Cain’s killing Abel showed — Gen. 4.

Here, however, God went further and decreed the punishment for anyone who would shed man’s blood. Any animal or person that killed a man, his blood should likewise be shed (i.e., he should be killed). (The reference to every man’s brother appears to refer to the “avenger

of blood” principle explained more fully under the Mosaic Law. If a man was slain, his relatives were responsible to find and slay the murderer.)

This passage clearly forbids murder. It equally clearly teaches capital punishment for murderers. This teaching also was clearly taught in the Law of Moses. In fact, under that law people were killed for a host of other crimes in addition to murder. There can be no doubt that God here required people to practice capital punishment. (The issue of mercy for people who are guilty but penitent is not dealt with, yet God Himself made exceptions as in the case of David and Uriah.)

It further appears that this command authorizes the existence of authorities to administer punishment to evildoers. Prior to the flood, we find little evidence of human governments (though we simply may not be told of them). People were independent, every man for himself. The result was evil and violence so gross that God had to deal with it.

God had promised, and would yet more clearly promise, that He would not again make such a flood. He did, however, make provision to deal with evildoers. He gave little detail about governments here, though again He may have given more at other times and places that were not recorded. Governments appear to become more fully established in later history. At that time, God gave the nation of Israel a government of His choosing. The New Testament clearly states that God still authorizes governments to serve the purpose of punishing evildoers to protect the righteous (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13ff). So, human government as a concept, is still authorized by God (though of course men often corrupt it as they do everything else of God’s making).

A remaining question is whether or not the capital punishment for murder is in effect under the New Testament. Everything else in this series of statements by God appears to be part of the New Testament. However, other things in the Patriarchal Age clearly are different from the New Testament, such as animal sacrifices, circumcision, etc. We observe that the reason given for capital punishment is that man was created in the image of God. This is still true, so that would lead us to expect the penalty is still in effect. Also Rom. 13:1-7 says, even under the gospel, that the government does not bear the sword in vain, and a sword is clearly a symbol of death not just pain. Beyond that, we leave the issue for further study in the New Testament itself.

Note that it is clearly invalid to argue that capital punishment is wrong because God has forbidden us to kill people. That is the substance of many people’s argument against it. Yet here, and in many passages forbidding killing people, God clearly required that we should kill the person who kills people! We must let God’s word explain itself. The prohibition against killing people did not prove capital punishment was wrong under the Patriarchal or Mosaic ages. In fact, God’s law against killing was the very reason why capital punishment should



be practiced — to teach people the severity of murder. So, what God condemned is murder, not the judicial exercise of capital punishment on one who is guilty of murder. People must not twist God's decrees against sin to argue against the punishment of sin! Such was never God's intent.

Finally, note that the distinction here made between killing animals and killing people reaffirms that people are distinct in nature from animals. This again demonstrates the contradiction between the Bible and basic concepts of the animal rights movement and evolution.

Verse 7 repeats the instruction of v1 (see notes there).

### ***9:8-10 - God made a covenant with people and animals***

God then revealed a covenant with Noah, his sons, and their descendants. But it is also a covenant with all the animals of the earth. The concept of a covenant was first mentioned in 6:18 (see notes there). This covenant may simply be a continuation and fuller statement of that one. The fact this covenant included Noah's descendants shows that it includes us today.

Noah and his sons and the animals had just been through a terrible experience. Who could imagine such an event as they had witnessed? They had faithfully done God's will, and having escaped the flood by God's grace, they had offered many sacrifices to praise and honor Him. He here reassured them that what they had witnessed would never happen again.

### ***9:11-17 - The rainbow symbolizes God's promise to never again send such a flood***

In 8:21f God had promised that He would never again destroy all flesh or the earth by a flood. This again shows that Noah's flood was worldwide, for many local floods have occurred since. If God was promising never again to allow local floods, He has broken His word repeatedly.

However, He was not promising that He would never again destroy the world and all mankind. On the contrary, He clearly says He will destroy it completely, but it will be by fire, not by flood. In fact, He uses the flood of Noah as evidence that He will destroy the world when the time comes — 2 Pet. 3.

In addition to the promise of 8:21f, God here gave a token or sign of the covenant. It was common in making covenants to give some symbol to remind the participants to honor it. The symbol of this covenant is the rainbow in the cloud. God gave this sign as a token for all those involved in the covenant: Himself, Noah, his sons, their offspring, and the animals, and all flesh on the earth, including all future generations. The fact that rainbows can be seen everywhere on earth also shows that the flood was worldwide: the token of the covenant was

with all flesh on the earth, and the bow can be seen everywhere on earth.

The covenant and its token were given for perpetual generations. It is true that some “perpetual” covenants have ceased, such as God’s covenant made through Moses. However, this covenant has not ceased but applies to all people for all time as shown by the following evidence:

1) God said He would “never again” send such a flood.

2) The promise applied to Noah’s descendants, but all people since the flood are descendants of Noah (in contrast to the covenant of circumcision, for example, that was made just with Abraham’s descendants).

3) The sign of the covenant – the rainbow - still exists and can be seen by all people everywhere. God said that when He sees the rainbow He would remember this covenant.

It is possible that changed atmospheric conditions after the flood produced the rainbow where it was not present before. In any case, God here assigned it this meaning. Men today may call it a myth, but the Bible affirms it by inspiration.

People sometimes cite the teaching that “Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8) and argue this means Jesus could never change anything He has ever practiced. If He gave the seventh-day Sabbath and the Law of Moses, some say it must still be in effect. Others say that if He ever did miracles, they must continue today, etc. But here is an act and a command that God did and then clearly said He will never do again: He destroyed the earth with a flood and required men to build an ark to escape. Then He said He would never do so again. God unquestionably has changed many of His laws and practices. Heb. 13:8 means that God’s character does not change; it has no reference to His laws for men.

## **9:18-29 - Noah’s Drunkenness and the Curse on Canaan**

### ***9:18,19 - The whole earth was populated from Noah’s three sons***

The three sons of Noah are here named once again. The Word of God expressly states that the whole earth was populated from these three sons. This again shows conclusively that the flood described had been worldwide. If it had been only a local flood, the survivors in other parts of the world would have populated some of the world. Also, from this follows a description in chapter 10 of all the peoples of the world and how they descended from these three men.

We are also introduced to Canaan, one of Ham’s sons, who plays a significant role in the story that follows.

Note that this proves conclusively that the event recorded in the remaining part of this chapter occurred a significant time after the

flood. At this time Noah's sons have children, but those children were not on the ark. In fact, 10:6 probably implies that Canaan was the fourth and youngest of Ham's sons.

### ***9:20,21 - Noah commits drunkenness and nakedness***

After the flood Noah was a farmer, a tiller of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He became drunk from the wine of the vineyard and was uncovered in his tent.

This is the first mention of alcoholic beverages in the Bible, and it is surely a shameful, negative event. The Bible does sometimes speak favorably of "wine," but that word is like our word "cider" and can mean either fermented or unfermented - only the context determines. There is no evidence that the favorable references to wine refer to the kind of alcoholic beverages commonly drunk in our society.

However, the Bible does contain numerous warnings against alcoholic drinks. Their history has been long and sad. This first Bible reference to them presents them as a source of shame that brought a curse on a portion of mankind. From that time to this, alcoholic drinks have been the cause of much misery and sorrow, a curse on mankind.

Did Noah sin here? Such conduct would unquestionably be sinful under the New Testament — Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Pet. 5:8,9; 1 Thess. 5:6-8; Prov. 20:1; 23:29-32. Since Noah lived under the Patriarchal Age, some may suggest that different rules prevailed then. If he sinned, we wonder why it is not stated that he sinned, and we wonder why a curse was pronounced on Canaan, but no punishment was mentioned for Noah (but see notes below).

Nevertheless, it seems that Noah did wrong here. He did not flaunt his evil, but he did get drunk and he left himself exposed where others could easily see him (and we do know that nakedness is shameful from the first sin onward). He was seen and consequences resulted to others. The Bible is proved to be objective in that it records the sins and weaknesses of its greatest heroes, as well as their great accomplishments. If Noah did sin here, we can only conclude that he later repented, since the New Testament still upholds him as a man of great faith.

Assuming this was a sin, it is a severe warning to us (1 Cor. 10:12). Noah had resisted the temptations of the flood and the years of preparation. Now that he had achieved success, he let his guard down. Let us realize we are vulnerable to temptation, and perhaps especially so when we have been successful in facing some other hardship or temptation.

Morris points out interesting parallels between Noah and Adam:

- \* Both entered a world that had no sin.
- \* Both were responsible to populate the earth, hence all men are descended from each of these men.
- \* Both committed sin.

\* In both cases, the sin involved partaking of a fruit.

\* Both became naked and both were provided with a covering for their nakedness by someone else.

\* In both cases, their sin brought a curse on their descendants.

### ***9:22,23 - Ham saw Noah's nakedness, but Shem and Japheth covered it***

Noah's error involved others, as sin often does, and soon other people suffered as a result. Ham for some reason saw Noah naked in the tent and told Shem and Japheth. These two, however, did not look at their father but took a garment and, going backward, covered their father so they did not see his nakedness.

Exactly what error was committed here? It is clear from the subsequent verses that wrong was done, but who did it and what was the error?

It appears from a casual reading that Ham was wrong just for seeing his father unclothed, whereas his brothers avoided that error. Nakedness is clearly shameful between unmarried people of the opposite gender. Yet, is it wrong simply to see one of the same sex naked? If so, then Noah was to blame more so than Ham. Noah is the one who was unclothed as a result of his own misconduct. Ham simply happened upon him — if seeing nakedness is all the error there was. So why a curse on Ham's son, but no implication that Noah was wrong?

Some have assumed that Ham had sexual desires for his father. This is possible, but is nowhere mentioned.

Another possibility is that his speech to his brothers was in some way disrespectful to his father. Perhaps he made a joke of it, ridiculed his father, or even rejoiced in his father's sin. In short, he may have slandered or reviled his father.

It is however, clear that Ham did some wrong. If not, why did his brothers make such an extreme effort to act differently from what he did? However, it is not clear exactly what the sin was, and we may need to admit that we do not have enough information to know for sure.

On the other hand, we wonder why the curse was pronounced on Ham's son Canaan instead of directly on Ham. Some say it was because Canaan must have sinned too, though his sin is not directly recorded. It is argued that this is the only sensible explanation for why the curse was pronounced on him instead of on Ham. Also, "youngest son" (v24) allegedly can be translated "grandson" referring to Canaan ("youngest son" does not well apply to Ham either, since there is no indication Ham was Noah's youngest son — no listing of their names would so indicate). So perhaps Canaan committed some of the sins mentioned above or even something worse.

Others say that the curse actually was on Ham, since he was the one that sinned, and only in this way does the prophecy of vv 25-27 constitute a complete prophecy regarding all Noah's descendants.

However, Canaan (we are told) is named because Noah preferred not to mention his son by name he was so ashamed that one of his sons would so act, or perhaps the curse was really on all Ham's children so Canaan was mentioned because he was youngest showing it was to pass on all the children even to the youngest. However, such explanations seem weak.

In truth, all explanations of the story seem uncertain. We simply lack the information necessary to know exactly which of these alternatives (or perhaps some other one) is the real explanation.

We observe, however, that the curse is actually not so much a curse on Canaan (or Ham) as on their descendants. This is a prophecy of the future of the offspring of these men. It is a curse, not in the sense of eternal punishment, but in the sense of a general trend of their future history. It is not unusual for God to predict consequences in this life that come on children for the sins of their fathers, as can be seen often in the lives of the kings of Israel and Judah (consider even Adam's sin). Further, in making such curses God often took into consideration the character of the descendants themselves, who often became sinful like their ancestor. Individuals in the lineage, however, would be eternally saved or lost on the basis of the own conduct; even descendants of Canaan could be saved eternally if they obey God's word.

In short, this "curse" was likely not a punishment on a specific man for a specific deed, but a prophecy of a general trend of life that would characterize many descendants, not just because of their father's deed, but also because of their own general character. If so, then it was not really Canaan personally who was cursed, but his descendants. But that in turn means it was a curse on the descendants of Ham and the descendants of Noah. Hence, all the men involved in the error suffered in the knowledge of the consequences.

### ***9:24-27 - Noah prophesied the future of his descendants***

This is the first of several instances in which a patriarch would pronounce a blessing (or curse) on his descendants. Such pronouncements often involved naming sons one by one and prophesying their future in very broad and often symbolic terms, but the fulfillment referred primarily to the descendants of the men not just to the men themselves. (See notes above). The statements predicted, not eternal destinies, but future history involving the descendants, especially in their role in God's plan.

The predictions often took into consideration some specific event or characteristic of the son named, which was used symbolically of the future of the descendants. The prophecy also involved Divine foreknowledge of future history and of the character of the descendants themselves (cf. Jacob's pronouncing a greater blessing on Joseph's younger son). If the speaker were a prophet, the blessing would take

the nature of an inspired prophecy. The statements were broad and general with many exceptions, and individual could surely be different from the overall trend.

So, what is the meaning of these blessings/curses?

It is said that Canaan would be a servant of servants to his brothers. Coffman points out that the people of Canaan were regularly subject to other foreign powers. Rarely did they themselves dominate others.

Morris, however, holds a completely different view. He says some of Canaan's descendants were dominant powers for a time, namely Phoenicia and the Hittites. So he applies the curse on Canaan to all Ham's descendants, meaning that they would be people who achieved many great material accomplishments that would, in turn, be of great use to other peoples (hence, they would serve their brethren). He names many specific examples of achievements among these people (p. 241).

Nevertheless, it is true that, throughout the Old Testament records, Canaanites are generally described as evil, wicked Baal worshipers who engaged in loathsome idolatrous practices. As a result, God allowed Israel and others to dominate them.

The prophecy regarding Shem stated that Jehovah would be his God. This we are told means that the descendants of Shem, more than others, would serve the true God. Abraham, the nation of Israel, and especially Jesus, all were descendants of Shem.

Japheth would be enlarged (many descendants and widespread?), and would dwell in Shem's tents. Some say this means these descendants would benefit from the spiritual blessings Shemites received.

### ***9:28,29 - Finally we are told of the end of Noah's life***

This great man of God, who yet erred, lived a total of 950 years, including 350 years after the flood.

He is the last man we will read about who lived to such an age. In chap. 10 we will see the ages gradually and consistently reducing till people in Abraham's time often lived over one hundred but never even as long as two hundred years.

# Genesis 10

## III. The Descendants of Noah – Chap. 10,11

### Chap. 10 - The Table of Nations

#### *10:1 - Introductory comments*

This chapter summarizes the descendants of Noah through his three sons. It is not just a genealogy, but also an inspired account of the nations that descended from each.

It is unique and unprecedented in ancient literature. There is nothing else in history to compare to it. Yet its accuracy has been attested by famous scholars and often confirmed by archeology (see Morris, p. 245).

Surely, this establishes the historical nature of the book of Genesis. Why would anyone even attempt such a list of names and data in a legend or fable? Very specific names and places are given, in some cases to several generations.

As mentioned, many points from the chapter have been confirmed by archeology. This is done by various means, one of the most common is by tracing names through various regions. On this basis, various commentators attempt to identify where these various peoples settled on the earth (see Coffman, Morris, and the Waldrons). However, a number of these are uncertain or impossible to determine. I will mention only a few of the more interesting ones.

#### *10:2-5 - The descendants of Japheth*

Japheth's sons were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. It is generally thought that these were the European people and perhaps the people of India and Persia. The Waldrons point out that these people generally settled the furthest away from the people involved in subsequent Bible records, so the Bible gives little information about these people. The account does give some information about the descendants of two of Japheth's sons.

The sons of **Gomer** were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. The Waldrons say we have reasonable confidence that the descendants of Togarmah were the Armenians. Other sons of Gomer are thought to have settled from the Caspian and Black Sea areas to Germany.

The sons of **Javan** were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. Descendants of Tarshish are believed to have settled in southern Spain.

Kittim is a name that often refers to the island of Cyprus. Other descendants of Javan are believed to have settled Greece (note the similarity between the name Javan and Ionian).

Other passages elsewhere give information that may be helpful regarding other sons of Japheth. **Magog, Meshech, and Tubal** are mentioned in Ezekiel 38:1-3; 39:1.

**Madai** was most like the ancestor of the Medes, who much later joined to form the empire of the Medes and Persians.

### ***10:6,7 - The descendants of Ham***

Ham's sons were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.  
Little is known of the descendants of Put.

#### **Ham's son Cush**

Cush's sons were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabtechah; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. Cush had prominence because of his son Nimrod (vv 8ff). But Ethiopia is often called Cush in the Bible. So the descendants of Cush moved, some to Africa, but some to Arabia and Mesopotamia.

#### **Cush's famous descendant was Nimrod.**

We are told a surprising amount about Cush's son Nimrod. He was said to be a mighty hunter before the Lord. And he began several important cities and even nations.

He began Babel and other cities in the area of Shinar or Sumer. This area had prominence in chapter 11. And many great events in history and in the Bible involved this area of Babel, Shinar, etc.

He also built Nineveh (and other cities) the capitol of another great empire Assyria. Hence, this one man was instrumental in the beginning of two civilizations that later became great worldwide empires.

#### **Ham's son Mizraim**

Mizraim's sons were Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, and Casluhim.

Ham's son Mizraim is known as the founder of Egypt.

The account specifically states that the Philistines are descendants of Mizraim through his son Casluhim. The Philistines later played a major role in their relationships with Israel during the days of Saul and David.

#### **Ham's son Canaan,**

Next, the account describes the descendants of Ham's Son Canaan. He had been expressly mentioned in the curse in chap. 9. His descendants lived in the area of Palestine and so had many contacts in later Bible stories involving the Israelites.

Canaan's son **Sidon** was probably the ancestor of the Phoenicians, that city of Sidon being named after their ancestor. **Heth** was the ancestor of the Hittites.



The other descendants named lived in what became known as the land of Canaan. The nations that descended from Canaan and lived in this area are named: The Jebusite, Amorite, Girgashite, Hivite, Arkite, Sinite, Arvadite, Zemarite, and Hamathite.

Their general territory is described and basically refers to the area of Palestine. These nations are later listed as those the Israelites displaced from the land.

Since this is true, there is no basis whatever for believing, as some do, that the Negro or black peoples are the descendants of Canaan on whom the curse of Noah fell in the form of a black skin. This idea has no Biblical merit, especially since the descendants of Canaan lived in the area of Canaan, not in Africa where the black peoples lived.

### ***10:21-32 - The descendants of Shem***

These people become the most prominent in the Bible record in that they are the ones through whom Abraham was eventually born and the Israelites descended. The sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

The sons of **Aram** (Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash) became the ancestors of the Arameans or Syrians who settled northeast of Palestine.

Descendants of **Elam** settled northeast of the Persian Gulf.

**Asshur** would be the father of the Assyrians.

The line through **Arphaxad** became the most prominent line in Bible history since it was the line through Abraham. This line goes as follows: Noah, Shem, Arphaxad, Salah, Eber, Peleg, and Joktan.

Eber's name became the origin of the term Hebrew to refer to his descendants. He had two sons. The son through whom Abraham was born was Peleg. Eber's other son was Joktan, who had many sons who are also listed here. One of his sons was Sheba, who may be an ancestor of the Queen of Sheba who later met Solomon. Also, his son Ophir may have given his name to a place later known for the presence of gold. Joktan's sons are said to have lived from Mesha to Sephar (in the east).

The reference to the division of the earth in Peleg's day has been variously applied. The most likely explanation is that this refers to the division of the earth into languages at the tower of Babel as described in the next chapter. Others think it refers to the continents that had been together but drifted apart. The evidence for this is not in the Bible, however, and even science is unsure about it.

The passage clearly demonstrates that the descendants of Noah repopulated the earth after the flood. This is confirmed by the fact that, despite racial and national differences, all people share common blood types. This once again confirms the flood was worldwide.

# Genesis 11

## 11:1-9 - The Tower of Babel

### ***11:1-4 - The people planned to build a tower to avoid being scattered***

God had commanded the descendants of Noah to repopulate and fill the earth (9:1). However, instead they tried to avoid being scattered so they could achieve their own exaltation (v4).

At this time the people all spoke the same language. This is reasonable, since they were all descendants of one man, Noah. As they journeyed from the east (some translations say they journeyed eastward), they determined to dwell in a plain in the land of Shinar (near where Babylon was later built). Rather than scatter over the face of the earth, they decided to build a city with a great tower. This would be made of bricks that they made by baking them, using asphalt as mortar. They hoped this would make a great name for themselves. Perhaps the idea was that this great tower would become a memorial to them for later generations.

Building a city and a tower of itself may not have been a problem. But they sought to disobey God's command to scatter to fill the earth. In addition, God's later observations indicate He was troubled by their pride of achievement. They thought they could do whatever they wanted to do, if they could just stay together and do great things. Their egotism is expressed in their speech: "let us ... let us ... let us ... lest we."

Many commentators observe that the tower they build sounds like a ziggurat – a tower in a pyramid form with terraces built one upon another becoming smaller as they go up, each level reached by steps from the previous level. Many remains have been found of such towers in various places, most of them thought to be temples of worship. The Waldrons report that remains of this ancient city have been found, including the remains of a great ziggurat, though no one would know if it was the one referred to here.

Interestingly, Babylon (which was built near here) becomes a common symbol throughout the Bible for evil. It would appear that beliefs and doctrines of great evil originated here. Perhaps the current event began a pattern that developed into greater evil as time passed.

### ***11:5,6 - God observed and was troubled by the people's plans***

God came down to see the city and tower. This is obviously accommodative language simply expressing the fact that God observed what

the people did (cf. v7). God always knows whatever people do, but the passage expresses the idea that He exercised His Divine power to know what the men were doing.

He observed that the people all had one language. But what seems to have especially troubled Him was the fact that they could do whatever they proposed to do. By their God-given intelligence, being able to communicate effectively with one another, they could pursue their own plans. The point seems to be that, if they pursued their own agenda of greatness, they would defeat or hinder God's plan for them. Instead of scattering and filling the earth, they would pursue their own plan, not God's plan.

### ***11:7-9 - To defeat their purposes, God confused their language***

God determined to stop these men from their intended plans for personal exaltation. He said He would go down and confuse their language, so they could not understand one another. This would prevent them from working together effectively. This plan was effective, and as a result the people ceased building the city and were scattered over the face of all the earth, as God had instructed. The name of that city became "Babel" (confusion), because their language was confused and they scattered.

Joseph Free quotes an ancient Babylonian writing, discovered by archaeologists, that states: "The building of this temple offended the gods. In a night they threw down what had been built. They scattered them abroad, and made strange their speech." (Free, p. 46). This is written from the viewpoint of Babylonian idol worshipers. Nevertheless, it shows that other people had traditions confirming the main points of the Bible account.

Here we see the origin of languages. Our modern languages have doubtless developed from those original languages, though languages change as time passed. It seems almost certain that this event also led to the development of nations, since most nations are separated from one another on the basis of language. Note how this disproves the theory of evolution that languages evolved gradually over millions of years as people have progressively advanced.

Note that accommodative language is again used as God said He would "go down" to confuse their languages. Of course, He did not have to literally "go" anywhere to achieve His purposes, as other passages show. But He did have to exert His power to effect His purposes on earth. So the language simply means He took steps to change the outcome of what the men intended.

Further, note that God spoke of Himself as plural ("us"), as in 1:26,27; etc. (see notes there). God is both plural and singular.

## 11:10-32 - The Descendants of Shem

### ***11:10-17 - The genealogy from Shem through Peleg***

These verses repeat the descendants of Shem as given in 10:22-29. The difference is that chap. 10 names various other sons in addition to those listed here. However, this genealogy adds information about how long the men lived before and after the birth of the sons named.

The reason for giving details about Shem's genealogy is that this is the ancestry of Abraham. The point is that God's plan for man's salvation, we will see, would develop through the descendants of Abraham. So, God here inspired Moses to record Abraham's genealogy.

Beginning with Noah's son Shem, the genealogy was Shem, Arphaxad, Salah, Eber, then Peleg. Of course, each of these men had other sons and daughters as well, but they are not named here, since they were not in the direct line to Abraham.

Note again that genealogies such as this surely demonstrate that God intended this record to be history. Listing names and ages must mean this is historical data, especially since there is no purpose whatever for naming most of these people except for history. They play no particular role in the Bible accounts except as ancestors for Abraham.

### ***11:18-25 - The genealogy down to Abraham's father Terah***

Beginning with Peleg, the genealogy proceeded as follows: Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, and Terah. Terah was then the father of Abraham (and of Sarah), so more detail is given regarding him in the following verses.

Note also how the ages to which men lived quickly declined after the flood. Whereas men typically lived over 900 years before the flood, yet after the flood they soon were living over 400 years. But by the time of Abraham, men commonly died at age 200 or less. We will see that Abraham's descendants lived even shorter lives. This would surely indicate that something changed as a result of the flood that gradually led to decreasing lifespans.

### ***11:26-28 - Terah's sons***

Terah, the father of Abraham, had three sons: Abram, Nahor, and Haran (other accounts lead us to believe that Abram was not the first-born). Haran had a son named Lot, who is named here because of his importance in the later accounts.

We are also told that Terah's native land was Ur of the Chaldeans, southeast from Babylon (see **map**). The Waldrons report that the remains of Ur are well known and have been extensively excavated. The results show a highly developed civilization with advanced writing, mathematics, religion, etc.

However, Terah's son Haran died in Ur. This would explain why Abram felt such a responsibility for Haran's son Lot. It would appear that he had adopted him or at least felt responsible for the care of this orphan.

### ***11:29,30 - The wives of Terah's sons***

Abram married his sister Sarai. The account does not here give this information, but later the record shows that Sarai was also a daughter of Terah by another wife (20:12). So, Abram was Sarai's half-brother. Such close marriage was permitted in those days before the Law of Moses.

Abram's brother Nahor also married a close relative. His wife, we are told, was Milcah. She and her sister Iscah were daughters of Terah's other son Haran. So Nahor married his niece.

The record then states that Sarai was barren, having no child. This fact is introduced here, and of course becomes extremely important as the history unfolds.

### ***11:31,32 - Terah and Abram moved to Haran***

The record then states that Terah, Abram, and Lot, along with Abram's wife Sarai, all left Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan. However, for some unstated reason, they stopped along the way and lived in Haran. Their Abram's father Terah died at the age of 205. It appears that the fact this city was named Haran is coincidence with the fact that Abram had a brother named Haran (or perhaps Abram's family somehow managed to give the place the name of their dead brother).

There is some confusion in comparing various Bible accounts of this. As recorded here in Genesis, it would appear that Abram had already left Ur with the intent of moving to Canaan (11:31), then God called him to go to Canaan and he left Haran (12:1,4).

However, other accounts show that God called Abram in Ur, but did not tell him where he was to go (Genesis 15:7; 24:7; Acts 7:2-4; cf. Hebrews 11:8). It is possible that God called Abram in Ur and they began the journey, but for some reason stopped in Haran and stayed there till Terah died, then they continued their journey. Perhaps Terah's old age and ill health hindered their journey so they stopped to care for him and he eventually died.

Some argue that Abram actually disobeyed God here. They claim Abram was supposed to leave all his family in Ur, so he should not have taken Terah and Lot. Because he improperly took them, they became a hindrance and burden to him, keeping him from fulfilling God's will as God had planned it. But eventually Terah died and Lot left (chap. 13), so Abram was free then to fulfill God's plan. While this could be possible, no Bible account states that Abram did wrong in any of this. And it hardly harmonizes with the description of Abraham's

faithfulness as described in Hebrews 11:8. Besides, the Bible teaches throughout that God's people should care for elderly parents and for orphans, especially those who are related. Lot and Terah could easily have been viewed as part of Abram's immediate family, so that he was obligated to take them with him.

It appears that the family of Abraham's brother Nahor later was located in Haran in Mesopotamia or Padan Aram. This is where Abraham's servant went to contact Abraham's family to find a wife for Isaac and also where Jacob went to find a wife from his mother's family (24:10; 28:2,5,10; 29:4). No passage tells us when Nahor's family moved to Haran. Did they move with Abram, but then stayed in Haran when Abram went on to Canaan? If so, that might lend evidence to the view that Abram did not leave his kin behind but tried to take them with him. On the other hand, the Waldrons conclude that Nahor's family simply came later after Abram had left Ur with Terah and Lot.

In any case, chap. 11 ends with Abram in Haran.

## Section 2: The Patriarchs – Chap. 12-50

### I. Abraham – 12:1-25:18

## Genesis 12

### Archaeological Notes Pertinent to Abraham

#### *Writing and education in Abraham's time*

Halley's Handbook includes the following notes:

**Hammurabi's Code** ... was one of the most important archaeological discoveries ever made. Hammurabi, king of Babylon, about 2000 B.C. was a contemporary of Abraham ... Here is a book, written on stone, not a copy, but the original autograph book itself, made in Abraham's day, still in existence, bearing testimony, not only to a well-developed system of jurisprudence, but also to the fact that as early as Abraham's time literary skill had reached a remarkably advanced stage.

**Libraries in Abraham's Day** In Ur, Abraham's own city, in Lagash, Nippur, Sippar, indeed in every important city in Babylonia, in connection with schools and temples, there were libraries with thousands of books; Dictionaries, Grammars, Reference Works, Encyclopedias, Official Annals, works on Mathematics, Astronomy, Geography, Religion, and Politics .... (pp 50,51)

#### *The city of Ur*

Halley's Handbook includes the following notes:

...Just prior to the time of Abraham, it was the most magnificent city in all the world; a center of manufacture, farming and shipping, in a land of fabulous fertility and wealth, with caravans going in every direction to distant lands, and ships sailing from the docks of Ur down the Persian Gulf with cargoes of copper and hard stone. Then,

about the time of Abraham, it was eclipsed by Babylon, but remained an important city ... (p. 88)

Joseph Free adds:

As a result of the archaeological excavations conducted at Ur ... (1922-34) by C. Leonard Woolley, a great deal is now known about this city ... An average dwelling measured forty by fifty-two feet ... On the lower floor were located the servants' rooms, the kitchen, the lavatory, the guest chamber, and ... a private chapel ... The second floor housed the family ... The entire house of the average middle-class person had from ten to twenty rooms. (*Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 49).

(See also *Baker's Bible Atlas*, p55.)

## **Chap. 12 - The Call of Abraham**

We were introduced to Abram in chap. 11. Beginning in chap. 12, events involving Abram and his descendants become the primary focus of the Bible. This marked a major development in God's plan for man's salvation.

Before this, God's laws had apparently been for people in general, and from time to time He had dealt with certain receptive individuals. But He had picked no particular group of people - especially no nation - on an ongoing basis to concentrate His efforts. But at this point, He chose the descendants of one man to be a nation with whom He primarily would deal and through whom His efforts on behalf of mankind would be accomplished.

Shortly after Satan through the serpent had led men into sin, God had promised that One would come who would be an enemy defeating the works of Satan (Gen. 3:15). This would be fulfilled by overcoming the power and consequences of sin. Since that promise was made, little has been said in the record about the means of its fulfillment. But God had a plan that He was working for man's salvation, and the call of Abraham was a major step in that plan. So important was Abraham in God's plan that those who afterward would be His true people are referred to as the spiritual descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3:29).

This does not mean God would not offer salvation to others nor deal with others. He did have relationships with others (such as Melchizedek). However, they were not the means through which God worked to bring salvation into the world, so we are told little or nothing about them.



## **12:1-9 - God's promises to Abram**

**God commanded Abram to go to a land He would show him.**

The man through whom God determined to develop His plan was Abram. God's first instruction to Abram was to leave his country, family, and his father's house and go to a land that God would show Him.

Hebrews 11:8-10 says Abram obeyed this command by faith. Great faith would be required by any man to move hundreds of miles away into a land where he knew no one, if the only reason he was doing so was that God told him to do it. But in that day, a move of a few hundred miles would be like a move of thousands of miles today. Travel was slow and difficult. People in different areas had greatly different customs, beliefs, etc.

And above all, Heb. 11 said Abram did not know where he was going. He went to a land where he had to dwell as a stranger in tents. Extreme faith would be required to leave ones family and personal ties and go where you do not even know where you are going and where you would be a total stranger. Abram possessed such faith, and God blessed him for it.

It is clear at this point that Abram was a worshiper of the true God. His family had been idol worshipers (Josh. 24:2). How and when Abram came to know the true God is not stated. Presumably, it had been before this time — it is not likely he would have obeyed had this been the first revelation he had received from God.

In Acts 7:1ff, Stephen said this revelation was given to Abram in Mesopotamia before he left there to go to Haran. Then he left Haran after his father was dead. The passage here in Gen. 12 refers to when he left Haran (v4). Some believe that the command and associated blessings were given twice, first in Mesopotamia and later in Haran. This would not be surprising since we will see God's covenant with Abraham revealed several times to Abram just in the record we have. But the NKJV says God "had said" to Abram to leave his country, etc., as though the command had been given before the events in 12:1ff. That could agree with the fact the command and promises had been made in Ur. On the other hand, v4 says He departed as the Lord had spoken and left from Haran. I am uncertain which occurred, but either case would require great faith.

### **God's promises begin.**

God made a great promise to Abram for his faithfulness. This promise generally concerned his descendants, and it became the fundamental promise from which all following Bible history flowed. It is the skeleton on which God built all subsequent dealings to bring about man's salvation. It is hard to overemphasize this promise.

We will emphasize the specific parts of the promises that are of special importance regarding God's plan as it would be fulfilled in Abram's descendants. These promises consisted of several parts: (1) God would make of Abram (i.e., of his descendants, as we will see) a great nation. (2) In Abram (i.e., his descendant) all families of earth would be blessed.

By following this promise through history, we can determine how it was fulfilled. God repeated it numerous times to Abram, and since it concerned his descendants, he repeated it to them.

The promise concerning a great nation is repeated in Gen. 15:5; 18:18; 22:17,18; 26:4; 32:12; Ex. 32:13; cf. multitude of nations — 17:4-6. As the other passages explain, the promise regarding a great nation means a nation consisting of many people, like the sands of the seashore and the stars of heaven. This was fulfilled in that the nation of Israel did become many people. The multitude of nations refers to the others nations that were descended from Abram through Ishmael, Esau, etc.

The promise included protection for Abram and his descendants in that God would bless anyone who sought their good and punish any who sought their harm. This also came true throughout history. The result of these promises would cause Abram's name to be great and he would be a blessing. This was fulfilled as the other promises were fulfilled. Who today has not heard something about Abraham?

The second part of the promise was that he would be a blessing on all families of earth. This is repeated in 18:18 and 22:18. The New Testament quotes it in Gal. 3:8,16 and Acts 3:25,26, where it is shown that the One who fulfilled this was Jesus and that the blessing was forgiveness of sins through His death. This was the ultimate solution to the problem of sin. The problem was introduced in Eden and the solution was brought by Christ, the descendant of Abram as here promised. This promised salvation came to pass through the descendants of Abram, but the blessing itself (salvation) was to come upon all families or nations. The Jews and even the early Christians misunderstood this, thinking the blessing was just for Jews.

Hence, this promise to Abram became the focal point of Bible history as the working out of this promise was fulfilled through history. The descendants of Abram were traced as they became a great nation and eventually Jesus came to save all.

### **Abram left Haran and came to Shechem.**

Abram obeyed God's command, despite the difficulties involved. He left Haran when he was 75 years old. At this time he had no children (11:30). Yet, God had made great promises to come true through his children. Men at that time could conceive children at such an age, but Abram's wife Sarai was already reaching the upper limit of her

childbearing age. This became a great difficulty to Abram as time passed.

Sarai and Lot went with Abram, as did many servants, etc., in their household. They left Haran (where Terah had died – 11:32). They went to Canaan, as God directed them. At that time, the land was inhabited by the Canaanites, who were descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham whom Noah had cursed.

Abram traveled through this land. He dwelled at various places beginning at Shechem (see **map**) and as far as Moreh where there was a terebinth tree.

### **God promised to give this land to Abram.**

God made a further promise to Abram regarding his descendants – a third part of the oft-repeated promise. He promised to give them the land of Canaan. This promise too was later repeated (see Gen. 13:15,17; 15:7,18; 24:7; 28:4). It was made at a time when Abram owned none of the land (Acts 7:5). Some insist that it has never been fulfilled and must be when Jesus returns. However, the Bible clearly states that it has been fulfilled: Josh. 23:14; 21:43-45; 1 Kings 8:56.

In fact all God's promises to and through Abram's descendants had been fulfilled by the time the New Testament was completed. There is no special promise left for them as a nation, nor is there any special privileged place for them in His plan. They can be saved like all others through the gospel of Jesus, but there will be no special treatment for them in the future or when Jesus returns. All has been fulfilled.

Abram built an altar to God. An altar was a place for offering animal sacrifices to God. This is the first of numerous times we will be told this regarding Abram. Abram worshiped God everywhere he went; and behind him he left visible testimonies to his faith. Remember this was done in the midst of an idolatrous people who knew nothing about God. We also ought to worship God wherever we go regardless of what people around us believe.

### **Abram journeyed further through the land.**

Abram appeared at this time to be somewhat migrant as nomads are, moving about as the needs of his flocks required. Perhaps he was also exploring the land that God had promised to give to his descendants. He moved to a mountain east of Bethel and dwelt between Bethel and Ai (see **map**). Again, he built an altar and called on the Lord.

This area was apparently of special importance in Canaanite idol worship. Their worship consisted of the most abominable forms of self-indulgence and sexual immorality. It took great courage for Abram here to erect an altar to the true God.

He continued traveling going toward the South (Negeb), the region in the area of southern Palestine.

## **12:10-20 - Journey to Egypt and Deceit toward Pharaoh**

### **Abram asked Sarai to deceive the Egyptians.**

Because of famine in Canaan, Abram determined to move to Egypt. Some assume this was a lack of faith on Abram's part. God had said he should move to Canaan, but Abram left. On the other hand, Jacob also received the same promise, and he also moved to Egypt during a famine. God expressly told Jacob to do so, but nothing says he so told Abram. Nevertheless, Jacob's conduct shows that leaving Canaan under exceptional circumstances might not be wrong. Although the record nowhere states that God was displeased by Abram's choice, nevertheless it did lead to problems.

As a result of the move, Abram faced a problem, which he dealt with deceitfully. He knew Sarai was beautiful. This shows that the aging process at that time was slow compared to today. Sarai would have been 65 when they left Haran and even older at this point. Yet she was so beautiful Abram knew other men would desire her. Note that 1 Peter 3:1-6 uses Sarai as an example of godliness in outward appearance as well as in subjection. Yet she was obviously beautiful to others, including men. Bible teaching about women's appearance does not mean they must appear dowdy or unattractive.

Abram asked Sarai to tell the Egyptians she was his sister, because if they knew she was his wife they might kill him to take her from him. The account later reveals that he had a standing agreement with Sarai to say this everywhere they went (20:13). This was a half-truth in that she was his half sister (20:12 — remember at that time the rules against marriage of close kin had not yet been made). Nevertheless, it was a deliberate deceit in that they failed to tell people she was also his wife. The result was a deliberate and obvious intent to mislead people to believe a thing that is not true. This is by definition deceit.

We are reminded that a different law was in effect then compared to today. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how Abram's conduct could be justified. Not only did he practice deceit, he asked his wife to do the same, and she apparently agreed. Surely, he had to realize that a consequence would be that his wife would very likely be taken to be another man's wife. If men might kill him to take her even if she was his wife, surely men might want her if they thought she was free to marry! What man who loved his wife would put her in such a position or be willing to allow her to be so treated? And considering the great promises God had just made regarding Abram's descendants, why would he allow the mother of these promised descendants to be so defiled by other men?

Furthermore, God had promised to care for him, blessing those who blessed him, etc. God had promised to give him descendants who would become a great nation and receive great blessings. If Abram

really trusted God, why would he expect God to let him be killed before God kept these promises? Hadn't God protected Abram in Canaan? Why would He fail to protect him in Egypt? It is hard to see this as anything other than a definite lack of faith in this man who otherwise often showed great faith. Worse yet, Abram repeated this error in Gen. 20. Yet all of us sin. The Bible objectively reveals the bad as well the good in its heroes.

### **Sure enough, the Pharaoh himself took Sarai.**

As should have been expected, the men of Egypt did see that Sarai was beautiful, so much so that they commended her even to the Pharaoh. He took her to his house. V19 shows that he had not yet married her, but the intent was clear. She was about to become part of the king's harem! Surely this shows that she was very beautiful. Abram had indeed a very beautiful wife. A good woman can be beautiful, but true beauty is in character (Prov. 31).

Pharaoh was good to Abram, giving him great possessions for Sarai: sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels, and servants. This appears to be a sort of dowry in exchange for permission to take Sarai as wife. Yet how could Abram have tolerated such a situation! Surely, no amount of possessions could have been worth his beautiful and faithful wife. He may have avoided harm, but it was a bitter price to pay for his deceit.

Archaeological note: Joseph Free (pp. 55,56) observes that this verse says Abram had camels. He states:

The critics ... have set this aside as an error, asserting that camels were not known in Egypt until long after the time of Abraham. The writer's study of archaeological material has, however, revealed a knowledge of the camel in Egypt even before the time of Abraham. Archaeological evidence ... includes statuettes and figurines of camels, plaques ..., rock carvings and drawings, camel bones, a camel skull, and a camel hair rope ... Thus the evidence again shows the authenticity of the record concerning Abraham.

### **God led Pharaoh to realize the truth and to restore Sarai to Abram.**

Though Abram had been dishonorable in this matter, God had made a promise to him and He still intended to keep it. He intervened by bringing plagues on Pharaoh's house because of Sarai. The nature of the plagues is not further described.

How Pharaoh knew the cause of the plagues is not stated but he somehow found out and called Abram to talk to him. He rebuked Abram for not telling him Sarai was Abram's wife but only his sister. He then sent them away.

So, Pharaoh came out as more honorable than Abram. Abram was deceitful in his treatment of Pharaoh and shameful in his treatment of his wife. Pharaoh took her only because he thought she was unmarried, and he returned her when he learned she was not free. Of course, he was also motivated by the fact that his family was also suffering plagues because of her. He rebuked the one who ought to have set the example of uprightness.

Note that the rebuke Abram received may indicate God's disapproval for what Abram did. In any case, it surely should have been an embarrassment to the man of God to be rebuked by one who most likely knew nothing of the true God. So today it is a shame that some Christians must be reminded of their duty by those who do not even claim to be Christians.

The Bible in many places condemns lying and deceit: 1 Peter 2:1,22; 3:10; Matthew 15:18-20; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8,27; 22:14,15; Proverbs 6:16-19; 19:22; Psalm 24:3-5; 40:4; Exodus 20:16; John 8:44; Acts 5:1-9.

The consequences of lying are always serious. Often we suffer in this life, and we surely suffer eternally if we do not repent. When people find us out, our reputation suffers. No one knows when to believe us again. Our influence for good in the world is greatly harmed.

It is interesting to observe that this is just the first in a long history of lies and deceit that characterized Abram's offspring. Abram practiced it on two occasions. His son Isaac and his family did likewise, Isaac's son Jacob and his family did it repeatedly, and Jacob's sons lived in deceit. One wonders how much responsibility Abram must bear for the pattern of deceit that developed in his offspring. Surely we need to learn to avoid this error.

# Genesis 13

## Chap. 13 - Conflict between Abram and Lot's Servants

### ***13:1-4 - Abram returned to Bethel***

Abram left Egypt as requested by the Pharaoh. He took with him his wife, Lot, and all his substance. He was wealthy in animals, silver, and gold. Note that, in that society, wealth was measured in flocks and herds as well as in money.

It is possible for a wealthy man to be pleasing to God. The New Testament, however, teaches that it is very difficult. The Old Testament, more than the New Testament, appears to emphasize material possessions as a blessing God gives to those who are faithful (cf. Job, David, Solomon, etc.). Nevertheless, those who are wealthy can serve God faithfully if they will. In this chapter we will see how Abram's wealth leads to conflict with Lot.

Abram first went to the South, the Negev area. But he continued to journey to the area between Bethel and Ai, where he had been when he first came into the land (12:8 – see *map*). There he returned to the place where he had built an altar, and he worshiped God there. After his deceitful conduct in Egypt, he needed to renew his faith in God; however, this is not specifically mentioned.

### ***13:5-9 - Abram and Lot determine to part company***

Lot was also very wealthy by this time, having also great flocks and herds. As a result, the area was simply unable to sustain the flocks and herds of both wealthy men. Strife had begun between their servants, probably involving conflict over grazing areas and water for the flocks, etc. It became clear that the two men simply could no longer continue to live together. The presence of other people in the area also complicated the problem and perhaps the danger.

Abram reminded Lot they were brethren and should seek peace instead of striving together. He stated the reality that they needed to separate from one another, and he gave Lot the first choice of where he wanted to live. Then Abram would go elsewhere.

Many passages show the importance of Christians being peaceable. This is especially true toward people that we are related to and above all with our brothers and sisters in Christ. However, we ought to seek peace with all people as much as possible. Sometimes peace is not possible because of the attitudes of others. Nevertheless, it ought not to be our attitudes that cause the problems. See Matthew 5:9; James 3:13-18; Romans 12:18; 14:19; Genesis 13:8; Proverbs 20:3; Psalm 133:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Ephesians 4:2-6; Galatians 5:19-21.

In this example, Abram shows one of the fundamental characteristics that is necessary in order to maintain peace: a humble willingness to sacrifice one's own desires and prosperity if necessary to achieve peace. When strife occurs usually someone has been concerned only for his own interests without regard for the needs of other people. In order to have peace, we must be willing to give up we want for the good of the group (cf. Phil. 2:1-8).

Abram illustrated this by giving Lot first choice of the land. By rights, he could have insisted that he have first choice since he was the oldest and Lot was his nephew. In fact, he had apparently cared for Lot after the death of Lot's father. It appears that the reason Lot was wealthy was largely because of what Abram had done for him. Further, Abram could have reasoned that God said the land would be his anyway. Nevertheless, to have peace Abram did not insist on his own self-satisfaction and exaltation. Instead, he gave Lot first choice. It does not speak well for Lot that he accepted the first choice when he should obviously have offered it to Abram. Abram, however, demonstrated a much better character than he had in deceiving the Egyptians.

It must be remembered, however, that we can give in to the wishes of other people to achieve peace only when doing so does not compromise the will of God. Numerous passages show that God's people must always stand up and refuse to compromise or cooperate in that which violates God's will. It is only our personal advantage that we may properly sacrifice for peace, not the exaltation of God's will. See James 3:17,18; Matt. 23; Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11; Acts 5:29; etc.

Also, we observe that, at times, even spiritual brethren must separate from one another in order to have peace. The New Testament rebukes people who insist on practicing sin to the division of the church. However, in Acts 15:36-41 we have a similar example to this in Gen. 13. Brethren differed over what was evidently not a matter of Scriptural right and wrong (at least neither was ever presented as being in the wrong). Yet they disagreed so sharply in their judgment that finally they separated.

If our difference relates simply to personal matters, personal opinions, personal advantage, or personality conflicts, let us seek peace in any Scriptural way we can. If we cannot seem to get along, let us separate but do so peaceably still recognizing one another as brothers as did Abram and Lot.

### ***13:10-13 - Lot chose the area of Sodom and Gomorrah, but Abram lived in Canaan***

Lot made some serious mistakes in this chapter. First, he did not respect his uncle in letting him have the first choice. Second, he made his choice on the wrong basis. He saw the material prosperity of the plain of the Jordan where Sodom and Gomorrah were located. At that time, this was a rich area compared to the garden of the Lord, with



plenty of water. This was, of course, before God had destroyed the area. This was the area Lot chose. Abram went the other way and lived in the land of Canaan. (Coffman and the Waldrons point out that there is a high place near Bethel where one can see much of Canaan, including as far as the Dead Sea.)

The error Lot made was that he considered mainly material prosperity, rather than spiritual prosperity. The men who lived in this area were exceedingly wicked. Physically, the area may have been as wonderful as Lot thought it was. But it became a very seductive influence toward sin for his family. In the end, all Lot's family was destroyed except Lot himself and two daughters - and the two daughters him were obviously very immoral (Gen. 19).

We will consider the fate of Sodom later. But the point here is that Lot should have considered the evil of these cities when he chose where to live. We ought not to allow material advantages to override our spiritual concerns. See Matthew 6:19-33; 16:24-27; Romans 8:5-8; 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8:5; 10:3,4; John 6:27,63; Luke 12:15-21; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Colossians 3:1,2.

Far too often we are lured into sin because of desire for material prosperity and pleasure. We may think we can live under evil influences without committing sin, but evil environments may lead us closer and closer to sin until we or our family are destroyed. First Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom. Later he lived in the city (Gen. 19), then when the city was destroyed, many of his relatives would not leave.

Regarding the fact Lot found the plain of Jordan to be desirable, Joseph Free (p56) states that Nelson Glueck explored the area carefully.

Glueck's explorations ... showed that the area had been 'densely inhabited,' for he discovered more than seventy ancient sites, many of them founded more than five thousand years ago ... Thus the archaeological discoveries have shown that no one who knows the facts can set aside as inaccurate the Biblical record of Lot's choice of the Jordan area.

### ***13:14-18 - God then repeated to Abram the promise given first in chap. 12***

Abram had generously offered for Lot to choose whatever portion of the land he wanted, so Lot was permitted to dwell there for the time being. But God said that eventually all the land would be given to Abram and his descendants forever. He told Abram to look around him in every direction and it would all belong to him and his descendants. Actually, Abram never possessed it personally, though he did live in it. On these promises and their fulfillment, see chap. 12.

Forever is a term meaning age-lasting or for an indefinite period of time. It does not mean throughout eternity. Many people get confused and think that, since Israel was later cast out of the land, the promised was not kept and must still be fulfilled. Many things God told Israel were forever, yet they ceased. This includes the Sabbath, feast days, tabernacle, Levitical priests, animal sacrifices, etc. Furthermore, remaining in the land was conditional, and we will see that Israel repeatedly violated God's conditions.

God again repeated the promise about the number of Abram's descendants. He illustrated it with the dust of the earth. The point was that it would be a number so great no man could count them. How many descendants Abram had at any given time would be very difficult to count, and if you consider all that have ever lived, no human could possibly know.

God said for Abram to walk through the land and observe all that God would give him. Abram then moved near Mamre (perhaps the name of a man — 14:13), later named Hebron (see a **map**). It was also known as Kirjath Arba (23:2). Again, he built an altar to worship God, as was his practice everywhere he dwelt.

#### **Note on historical accuracy**

Archaeology has confirmed many of the geographical aspects of the story of Abraham. Skeptics have claimed there was no such man, or at least that much of what was said about him in Genesis was myth. However, so much has been proved to be true that it is now generally recognized that this portion of the book is historically and geographically accurate. This is amazing when you consider how old the book is.

Morris points out the following places Abraham lived which have been confirmed to have existed. In fact, much is known about the history of these places even in Abraham's day: Ur, Haran, Nahor, Egypt, Shechem, Bethel, Salem, Gerar, Beersheba, and Hebron. Joseph Free adds: "Practically all the towns mentioned in connection with Abraham (such as Shechem, Ai, Bethel) have been excavated, and the findings show that these towns go back to Abraham's time" (p53; see also Halley, p100).

# Genesis 14

## 14:1-16 - War Between the Four Kings and the Five Kings

### *14:1-3 - War began involving the king of Sodom*

V1 names four kings from regions in Mesopotamia. These made war with five kings from the region including Sodom where Lot lived (v2). It appears that, at this time, kings reigned over small regions that we might think of as city-states, rather than large nations. They would form into alliances with neighboring kings for defense purposes.

The four kings included Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations. These regions were near Mesopotamia which was, by the standards of that day, a long distance from Canaan. This group was led, as the rest of the chapter reveals, by Chedorlaomer.

The five kings were Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). The explanation that best fits the context of Genesis is that all these cities were located in the region that is now the south end of the Dead Sea. It is believed that, at this time, this area was beautiful and fertile (which is why Lot chose to live there). However, the destruction, that God later brought on these cities because of their sin, caused the whole area to sink perhaps as by earthquake. As a result, the region was eventually covered by water, except for Zoar which God spared.

All these five city-states were confederates and were located in the Valley of Siddim, which is thought to be the name for the whole region, now underwater, where these cities were located.

### *14:4-7 - Chedorlaomer came attacking cities, intending to punish the five kings who had rebelled*

Apparently, the five cities, including Sodom, had been subject to Chedorlaomer for twelve years, but then they rebelled. Chedorlaomer determined, with his allies, to come and punish the rebels, bringing them back into subjection.

They came toward Sodom and Gomorrah, capturing and destroying all the cities in their path. The cities named here appear to have been on the east side of Jordan, then on the south of the Dead (Salt) Sea, and surrounding Sodom and Gomorrah. Some of the locations are not exactly known. Mt. Seir is south of Canaan where the Edomites (descendants of Esau) later settled. The Amalekites and Amorites were tribes living in the area who later played important roles in the history of Israel.

It appears that the plan was to capture all the peoples surrounding Sodom and her allies, perhaps so there would be no one to join with the five kings in their defense. Then the five cities themselves would be attacked. The strategy was successful.

***14:8-12 - Lot was taken captive when the king of Sodom and his allies were defeated***

The five kings went out to battle against the four kings, fighting in the Valley of Siddim. The area was full of asphalt pits (slime pits – ASV). The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and allies were defeated and fled. The four kings took captives and plunder from the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. They left apparently thinking their victory was complete.

One mistake they made, without realizing its consequences, however, is that they took, among the captives and plunder, Lot the nephew of Abram.

***14:13-16 - Abram and his allies pursued and recaptured the captives***

The reason it was a mistake to take Lot is that it aroused Abram to come to Lot's defense. One of the people who escaped the battle, told Abram, and he went in pursuit. Though Lot had made a foolish choice in living in Sodom, yet he himself was righteous (2 Peter 2:8) and he was still a relative of Abram.

Abram is here called a Hebrew. This is the first use of this word in the Bible. Its origin and meaning are uncertain. Some think it is derived from the name of Eber, a descendant of Shem and ancestor of Abram. Others think it came from the terms used to refer to nomadic peoples. And others think its meaning referred to people from "beyond the river" (the Euphrates). In any case, it came to refer to Abram and his descendants. (See Morris, p. 316.)

At this time, Abram was living near the terebinth trees of Mamre (later called Hebron). Mamre and his brothers Eshcol and Aner were Amorites who were confederates with Abram. It appears from v24 that these men accompanied Abram, presumably with servants, as part of the army Abram took to recapture Lot.

Abram himself had 318 trained servants, born in his house, that he took with him. Presumably, his friends had servants too, so we do not know the exact size of the army Abram took. However, it is clear that Abram was a very wealthy and influential man to have so many servants able to leave and go to battle. Nevertheless, it is possible that he and his army were still outnumbered.

With his army he pursued the departing kings till they came to Dan. It is possible that this was that city that was named Laish at this time and later named Dan (located north of the Sea of Galilee). But the

Waldrons point out that there are some problems with that view. It is possible this was a different city named Dan.

They came upon the enemy, divided their forces, attacked at night, and achieved a total victory. The enemy fled, and Abram's forces pursued them till they had gone even past Damascus to a place called Hobah. Damascus was north and some east of the Sea of Galilee by a significant distance, and later played a major role in Old Testament history. Abram was able to defeat the four kings so completely that he recaptured, not only Lot, but all the goods, people, and spoils the kings had taken.

Perhaps the four kings thought they had been completely victorious and had traveled a long distance from the battle site, so they were not prepared for a counter-attack. In any case, it is clear that the victory was ultimately a blessing from God.

## **14:17-24 - Abram and Melchizedek**

### ***14:17-20 - Melchizedek meets Abram***

When Abram returned, the king of Sodom met him. But he was also met by a man of far greater significance to Bible history than the king of Sodom, and that was Melchizedek.

Melchizedek is here described as king of Salem and priest of God Most High. We are told that He pronounced a blessing on Abram in the name of God Most High, who possesses heaven and earth. Then we are told Abram gave Melchizedek a tithe (tenth) of all.

This is an amazing account because it is such an incredibly brief reference to such an important man. In only two other books in the Bible is this man mentioned, yet there we are told that he was greater than Abram! Truly, he must have been an amazing individual. The facts that he was a priest of God Most High, that Abram paid him a tithe, and that he is cited as a symbol of Jesus all show clearly that other people, besides Abram and his family, worshiped the true God in those days.

Melchizedek is also mentioned in Psalm 110:4, and that verse is quoted several times in Hebrews, where we are told that Jesus Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 7 tells us almost as much as we can learn anywhere else about the man. Note that these other references confirm beyond any doubt that other Bible writers took this account to be history.

### **Both king and priest**

Melchizedek was said to be king of Salem and priest of the Most High God — i.e., the true God, not an idol. His name Melchizedek means, in the original language, “king of righteousness.” He is also called “king of Salem” (likely a reference to Jerusalem), and Salem

means “peace.” Hence, he was both king of righteousness and king of peace.

The interesting point made both in Genesis 14 and in Psalms 110 is that we here have reference to one who was **both king and priest at the same time**. This was entirely unknown and in fact impossible under the Mosaic Law. Yet it was true of Melchizedek and, as Heb. 7:11ff shows, it is true of Jesus. This is one of the most significant points of similarity between Jesus and Melchizedek.

### **Without parents or genealogy**

Hebrews 7:3 states what is probably the most difficult thing to explain about Melchizedek. We are told that he had no parents and no genealogy — no ancestors and perhaps also no offspring. This apparently is similar to the Christ. One could easily be without offspring if he never had children. But how could one be without parents and ancestors?

In fact, this expression cannot be taken literally and physically regarding Jesus, for He did have mother, beginning of days, and end of life, physically. Yet the passage says Melchizedek was “like the Son of God” in the ways described. Clearly, these expressions are not meant to be physical and literal but rather figurative and symbolic. How then should we understand them?

There seem to be only two possible answers. Some have concluded that Melchizedek must have been an angel, or even Jesus, who appeared on earth in the form of a man. Surely, such things did happen in the Old Testament, and could explain what happened here.

The other possibility is that these expressions are intended to describe, not the man’s literal conception and birth, but the **order of the priesthood** of Melchizedek and Jesus, in contrast to the Aaronic priesthood. The parallel emphasized between Jesus and Melchizedek is their priesthood as compared to that of Aaron. That is the subject under discussion in Hebrews 7. Priests under the Mosaic Law had to be able to prove, by genealogy through their mother and father, that they were descendants of Aaron. Neither Melchizedek nor Jesus, however, served as priest because of parents or genealogy. That was simply not the nature of their office. And further, they had no successors in the office.

Milligan’s commentary on Hebrews cites some examples of this kind of language in ancient writings and concludes that this is what is meant here. The person served in the capacity, but he did not inherit his office nor did he bequeath it by inheritance to his children. He simply entered the role, then had no successor. This would be a true and sensible explanation, especially since we know Jesus did have a mother in his earthly birth, yet this was irrelevant to His priesthood. It was not by right of inheritance through her that He became priest. Perhaps the same thing is meant regarding Melchizedek.

It is more difficult, however, to explain that they had “neither beginning of days nor end of life” and they “abide a priest continually” (Heb. 7:3). Regarding earthly life, Jesus had beginning of days and end of life; but in His ultimate existence, He is eternal in time past and time future. He was uncreated and will exist eternally. If this is the meaning, then Melchizedek can only be one of the 3 persons of the Godhead, probably Jesus.

However, some say the passage should not be taken regarding physical, earthly existence (since it cannot apply that way to Jesus anyway), but should be explained like “without father and mother.” The point is not that Melchizedek never experienced these historical events in his life, but that they were irrelevant to the order of his priestly office. Just as he did not get his office from his parents nor did he pass it on to his offspring, so he did not receive his priesthood by virtue of his birth nor did he pass it on to anyone at his death. So, “neither beginning of days nor end of life” refers, not to their physical existence, but to the order of their priesthood.

This latter explanation is probably the actual intended meaning. It surely does not do violence to any Biblical teaching. It does express a valid and important difference between the priesthood of Melchizedek and Jesus as compared to that of Aaron. If, however, the point is that Melchizedek was simply an Old Testament appearance of Jesus, that view also does no violence to any Bible teaching, and we can still learn the same lessons.

In what sense did Melchizedek abide a priest continually? Is he still a priest today? If he were Jesus, this would be explained. On the other hand, we could explain this as not physically true, just at the other points made are not physically true, but again the point is that he had no successors in the order of his priesthood. So far as the Bible record goes, he simply appears as a priest and then we hear no more of his priesthood. So, he simply **is** a priest in the account and that’s that. Historically, he probably died and ceased to serve as priest, but we have no record of it and it is not relevant. The point is that no one else served as priest in His place, and the same will be true of Jesus. Again, all this is true and surely fits the points being made, though one must take the statements in a figurative manner to so conclude.

### **Applications from Melchizedek**

In Heb. 7:4-6 the author draws some conclusions by “necessary inference” about this Melchizedek. The greatness of Melchizedek is indicated by the fact that he blessed Abraham and Abraham paid him tithes. Under the Mosaic Law, Levites received tithes, and all Hebrews agreed this office of priesthood made them greater than other Israelites. (They were greater in office and position, not necessarily in righteousness nor eternal reward, nor importance in history.)



Melchizedek was neither a descendant of Abraham nor related to him in any way, yet Abraham paid tithes to him. Now if the fact the Israelites paid tithes to priests proved those priests were greater than the other Israelites, then the same reasoning would prove Melchizedek was greater than Abraham.

In Heb. 7:7,8 the author continues by showing that Melchizedek blessed Abraham, not the other way around. He points out that everyone knows that one who is greater in office or position blesses one who is lower, not the other way around. This too makes Melchizedek greater than Abraham. He was greater in office, but not necessarily more important in history.

The author also points out the difference between Aaronic priests and Melchizedek priests in that Levitical priests died and had to be replaced. This was not true of Melchizedek or of Christ. Again, this could be meant figuratively referring only to the fact that no successor was ever named (despite the fact Melchizedek would have died). Or, alternatively if Melchizedek actually was Jesus, the same conclusions would apply.

One may wonder why God would bring Melchizedek into the Old Testament account and not give us more details about his background, etc., if he meant to make such a point of him later. But the whole force of the point lies in the fact that we *don't* know anything else about him because nothing else about him is important. His ancestors and descendants don't matter, and his successors did not exist. That is why nothing is told of them. This enables God to make the very point being emphasized in Hebrews 7.

Surely this Melchizedek is an amazing individual, and his appearance in the record is an interesting study.

It is interesting to observe that the Mormon Church today claims to have a Melchizedek priesthood. Do these priests have the qualifications here described? Surely not. It is a priesthood derived, not from divine authority, but from human imagination and presumption.

### ***14:21-24 - Abram refused to take spoils for himself***

Following this, the king of Sodom offered Abram to take the spoils, including the spoils the four kings had taken from Sodom. The king of Sodom seemed content just to have the people back, and let Abram have a reward.

Abram refused, however, because he had promised God he would not take anything, and also because he did not want the people to think it was because of them that Abram was prospering.

He did, however, ask for enough to pay for "expenses" — the provisions for the men who went with him. Also he said his allies should be allowed to take what they wanted. But Abram himself refused any reward or spoils.



Coffman points out that the name for God used in this context is Jehovah, showing that name was used long before Exodus 6:3.

# Genesis 15

## Chap. 15 - God Confirms the Covenant with Abram

### ***15:1 - God assured Abram He would be his shield and reward***

God repeated in this chapter the promises He had previously made to Abram. This began in a vision in which God told Abram not to be afraid because God would be Abram's shield (protection) and exceedingly great reward — i.e. the source or means by which he would be rewarded. The reward seems to include the blessings promised to Abram's descendants.

We are not told exactly why God thought Abram needed assurance at this time. He was still a stranger in a foreign land, and others in that land did not worship the true God. Perhaps he was also fearful of some kind of revenge sought by the kings he had defeated. But the main concern Abram himself raised to God was the fact that he still had no heir through whom the promises could come true. In any case, God assured Abram that He would be the protection Abram needed.

Coffman emphasizes that this is a "vision." A vision was a revelation from God in the form of something a person sees, though it may not physically be present. Often they were highly symbolic. Apparently, this entire chapter is a vision. This understanding is helpful because of the highly symbolic significance of some parts, especially later in the chapter. Genesis is history, but this chapter records the historical fact that God spoke to Abram in a highly figurative vision (cf. the vision of Peter revealed in the highly historic book of Acts, chap. 10).

We should also note that God stated from the very outset of this vision His relationship with Abram and the blessings He intended to give him. It follows that statements later in the chapter about Abram being justified by faith are not saying that Abram became a servant of God by faith only. Abram was already a faithful servant of God before this chapter began, and that relationship had been established on the basis of an obedient faith (see on v6 below).

### ***15:2-4 - Abram expressed concern about his heir***

God's promises were to come true through Abram's descendants, but Abram had no child. This problem becomes the focus of events for a few chapters. How would the promises come true through Abram's descendants when he had no descendants?

Abram mentions one who, at the time, stood to be his heir. That was a servant, Eliezer of Damascus, who was born in Abram's house. It is not clear whether Abram is requesting that God accept Eliezer as

heir and fulfill the promises through him, or whether Abram was just observing the situation and perhaps questioning God since this was the only heir he had. In any case, it is clear that Abram had no heir who was his own flesh and blood child.

God said Eliezer would not be the heir, but Abram would yet have an heir who was his own child, born from his own body. Clearly, God was promising that Abram would yet have a son. However, God did not specify the mother (though it should have been obvious). This becomes a problem in chap. 16.

### ***15:5,6 - God repeated that Abram would have countless descendants, and Abram believed the promise***

God then took Abram outside and showed him the stars of the sky, using this to illustrate how many descendants Abram would have. The point is an uncountable number, like the sand of the sea, an illustration used elsewhere. This repeats the promise made in 12:2 (see other references there).

Abram believed in the Lord and God accounted this to Abram for righteousness. Faith in this instance obviously required trust in that which was unseen. God was making a promise to Abram about a son he did not even have, nor did he have any obvious prospects of having one in his old age. Yet he believed in God. Note that his faith was not in his own ability to achieve what God had said, but in God Himself.

This verse is quoted in the New Testament in Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; and James 2:23. It is used in those places to illustrate how we are justified before God by faith. Some read this passage and the New Testament references to it and conclude that they teach salvation by “faith alone,” meaning that obedience is not necessary to receive God’s favor or blessing of salvation under the gospel. This is a misunderstanding and perversion.

It is true that obedience does not **earn** salvation, but then neither does faith. Nothing could earn God’s blessings. This is the point made in the context Rom. 4:3. Some misunderstand it to be saying no form of obedience is needed to be forgiven by God, since it says he was justified by faith not works. But there are different kinds of works referred to in the New Testament. This passage is referring to meritorious works whereby one makes God a debtor who owes us eternal life because we worked so hard for it (cf. Rom. 4:4). That is the only kind of justification that the Law of Moses could provide; but Paul was denying in Romans 4 that we can be saved by works that earn salvation, since all have sinned and what we earn is eternal death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23).

### **What kind of faith saved Abram?**

The fact is that Abram was not justified by a faith that did not obey. He was already in covenant relationship with God long before

chap. 15. And he had already done a number of acts of obedience to God before Gen. 15:6 says his faith was accounted for righteousness. In particular, he had left his home to travel to the promised land (note v7). This was a great demonstration of faith. But the chapter of faith, Heb. 11, clearly says the obedience was needed for Abram to receive God's blessings (11:8-10). The same is true of all the other examples of faith in Heb. 11.

Hebrews 10:39; 11:6 — God rewards people who diligently seek Him by faith. The stories cited tell of people who received various rewards. But they illustrate the faith we need for “**saving of the soul.**” The faith needed, according to God's inspired examples, is **obedient** faith.

V17 — By faith Abraham **offered** Isaac.

v4 — By faith Abel **offered.**

V7 — By faith Noah **prepared** an ark.

v8 — By faith Abraham **obeyed** to go out.

v30 — By faith, the walls of Jericho fell **after** they were compassed.

These show that obedient faith is what we need to receive the **saving of the soul.**

James 2:23 also quotes Gen. 15:6, but the context there emphasizes that Abram's faith had to be demonstrated by his works of obedience. This illustrates that our faith must also lead us to do what God says in order for us to be saved.

James 2:14-26 — Can one be saved by faith without works? Such a faith is **dead**, like demon's faith. Abraham's act of offering Isaac is cited as an example of acceptable faith: he was justified by works because **faith was working together with works.** He was not justified by “faith alone” nor by works without faith. Both go together. But neither faith nor works **earn** God's reward; they are simply the conditions we must meet to receive God's favor by grace.

Galatians 3:6 also quotes this passage in Gen. 15:6, but the context shows that the faith of the Galatian brethren had led them to be baptized in order to come into Christ (Gal. 3:26,27). Baptism cannot save without faith. But then faith cannot save without baptism. The truth is that it is the power of Jesus' death that saves us. But it saves us only when we have met the conditions He requires. He says we must have faith enough to obey. Abram is an excellent example of such faith.

**Other passages teach that obedience is necessary as an expression of our faith before God will give us the blessing of salvation.**

Romans 6:17,18 — We are made free from sin when we **obey** God's teaching.

1 Peter 1:22,23 — We purify our souls in **obeying** the truth.

Hebrews 5:9 — Jesus is author of eternal salvation to all who **obey** Him.

1 Peter 3:21 — Baptism also now saves us.

Acts 2:38 — We should be baptized for **remission** of sins.

Continued obedience is also needed after baptism because we must **continue** to have faith, and that must continue to be obedient faith.

Revelation 2:4,5 — Christians who have been negligent must be told to repent and do first works.

Revelation 2:10 — We must be faithful unto death to receive the crown of life. [1 Cor. 15:58]

Abram's faith challenges us to realize we must have obedient faith to receive eternal salvation.

### ***15:7-11 - God symbolically renewed the covenant***

In order to reassure Abram that He really did intend to keep this covenant, God reminded Abram that he had brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees. He then repeated to Abram the promise that He would give the land of Canaan as an inheritance. This promise was first recorded in 12:7. See notes there regarding this promise and other passages where it is recorded and fulfilled.

Though Abram had faith in God, yet he wanted reassurance. This is natural and fairly common even among God's greatest servants. God is a God who gives assurance. He does not leave us without proof that He exists or what His will is. He expects us to obey by faith, but He does give us evidence on which to base our faith. God responded to Abram's request by a vision that confirmed the covenant being made.

In those days, apparently covenants were confirmed by such a ceremony as is here described. Two rows of animals would be lined up opposite one another, and the two parties to the covenant would walk between the rows. The ceremony was a sort of solemn confirmation of the covenant. This ceremony, however, was done in a vision, since God could not physically come down to participate in such a ceremony.

In this example, Abram killed the various animals named (a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon), all of which were commonly used in Old Testament animal sacrifices. The parts of the animals were divided into two rows (except the birds were not divided).

For a good while nothing happened except that birds of prey (i.e., vultures or similar birds that feed on carrion) came to eat the dead animals. Abram had to drive them away. Since this is clearly a highly symbolic vision, there must be some symbolism intended here. What is it? Perhaps it represents those problems or forces of evil that would attempt to prevent the fulfillment of the promises God was making to Abram, just like the birds attempted to eat the sacrifices thereby preventing the confirmation of the covenant. Perhaps these problems in-

cluded Abram's own doubts, which he had to drive away like he drove away the birds.

***15:12-16 - God reassured Abram that his descendants would live in a strange land but would return to Canaan.***

Finally, about sundown in the vision Abram went into a deep sleep and great horror and darkness came on him. It sounds like a nightmare, yet I am not sure of the significance of the horror and darkness.

God then repeated his promises regarding Abram's descendants and confirmed it by prophesying some specific details. He said Abram himself would live a long life and die peacefully (v15). This shows that the land here described would be inherited, not personally by Abram, but by his descendants.

But afterward his descendants would be strangers in some other land where they would be afflicted by slavery 400 years. God would then bring judgment on that nation that afflicted them, and in the fourth generation they would leave that land with great possessions and return to the promised land of Canaan. Then he added that "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."

This clearly predicted the Egyptian bondage. Israel was there 430 years (Ex. 12:40). It could be that the 400 years is a rounded number or that it counts only the part of the sojourn in Egypt that was slavery (they were not slaves when they originally went there). God of course brought the ten plagues on Egypt to convince them to let Israel go, and Israel left having despoiled the land. This may be considered the fourth generation in the sense that the patriarchs lived long lives, so that four generations of their day would be about 400 years.

What is the significance of the statement that "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full"? The Amorites included many of the people who lived in Canaan. God later explained to the people of Israel that He gave them Canaan, not because of their own goodness nor even just because of His promise to Abram, but also as a punishment on the people of the land for their wickedness (Lev. 18:24-28).

But God is patient and longsuffering, not willing for any to perish. He gives evil people time to repent, and these people were not yet wicked enough for Him to punish them by giving their land to others. Yet He prophesied and knew that the time would come when they would deserve to be dispelled. When that time came, Israel would be the nation He would use.

***15:17-21 - God renewed the covenant to give the land to Abram's descendants***

Finally, the confirmation of the covenant occurred when the sun had gone down and it was dark. A smoking oven and burning torch – these are said to be symbols of God - passed through the pieces of the animals, symbolizing God's commitment to the covenant. Some point

out that the reason Abraham did not pass between the pieces is that it was an unconditional covenant. God would keep it regardless of what Abraham's descendants did.

God then reaffirmed the land promise, as Abram had requested (cf. vv 7,8). He said He was making a covenant to give them the land. He even identified the extent of their inheritance. It would include the territory from the river of Egypt (probably not the Nile but a lesser river south of Canaan) to the great river Euphrates. We are then told the names of the nations that would be dispossessed. The names of these nations are repeated frequently in later descriptions of the territory to be given to Israel.

This extent of territory was possessed in the days of Solomon, hence confirming that the land promise was fulfilled. It need not be fulfilled when Jesus comes for it has been so already (1 Kings 8:65; cf. Joshua 21:43-45; 23:14).

# Genesis 16

## Chap. 16 - The Birth of Ishmael

### *16:1,2 - Sarai suggested that Abram bear a child by her handmaid*

#### **As time passed, God's promise had not yet been fulfilled.**

God had promised Abram a son from his own body. He had given great promises regarding the future of Abram's descendants, and Abram had believed God's promise (15:4-6). Yet time continued to pass and still no son was born. Abram was now about 85 years old (cf. 16:16) and Sarai ten years younger. Sarai was still barren; and at her age, the likelihood of having children grew less and less.

We do not know exactly why God waited to fulfill His promise. Perhaps He was testing Abram's faith and teaching him patience. Perhaps He wanted the son to be born by a miracle in order to give God glory and show the significance of the son. In any case, God had not yet fulfilled the promise.

Though Abram had faith before, Sarai's faith appeared to be wavering; and under her influence, Abram was led to try to help God's plan along. It is very difficult, even for people of faith, to be patient in waiting for God's time. When we are convinced a certain course of action is good, we want to see it now and not wait. We become concerned that, because it has not happened, it will not happen (2 Peter 3:3,4).

Sometimes under such circumstances, we decide to help God's plan along. This may not always be bad. The Bible clearly teaches us to do what we can to bring about God's will on earth. However, sometimes we do things that do not fit God's instructions, and problems result. Such was the case here.

#### **Sarai had a servant named Hagar, an Egyptian.**

Presumably, Sarai had obtained her while they were in Egypt. Sarai suggested that Abram take Hagar and have a child by her. Apparently, the laws or customs of that society permitted this.

It is clear that Abram took Hagar as a secondary wife (v3). This was known as a concubine. In some cases, a concubine was not even legitimately married to her master. But in other cases, including this one, a concubine was a legal wife, but without the privileges of a primary wife. As in this case, a concubine was often a slave, or had been taken as a wife after being a slave. If a slave had a child, the child too became the property of the slave's master. Hence, any child Hagar had would belong to Abram and Sarai and would, in this case, be Ab-



ram's lawful son. This would be from Abram's bowels as God had promised.

However, it was not what God had said to do, and there is no indication that Abram consulted God in any way to ask if this was God's will.

Further, there is no revelation anywhere to indicate that God wanted His people to have more than one wife. God had intended each man to have only one wife (cf. Gen. 2:24 and see notes there). God later tolerated his servants having plural wives; and it could be that He did not condemn Abram for this of itself, though it was not really what God wanted. Nevertheless, though it was tolerated at times, it was not God's plan and always produced strife and ill will among the people involved. That was the case here.

Note that Abram listened to his wife in this matter. Wives were created to be helpers, but not leaders. Husbands should consider their wives' desires. But the husband must be the head and is ultimately responsible for the decisions. He is obligated to follow what is right and best regardless of what the wife suggests. Adam sinned by listening to his wife. Abram surely made a foolish choice when he listened to Sarai, whether or not it was sinful.

### ***16:3-6 - Strife began immediately when Hagar conceived***

Hagar did conceive and, as should have been expected, the result was strife, jealousy, hatred, and conflict between the wives. The strife began immediately and has continued unabated for generations! Hagar despised her mistress. We are not told exactly why. Perhaps it was because she knew the child would be Sarai's heir and would be treated as Sarai's child. Or perhaps she was proud and arrogant toward Sarai because she could bear Abram a child, which Sarai had been unable to do.

While we must not condone Hagar's bad attitude, we can to some extent sympathize with her. This whole mess does not appear to have been her idea. She may even have opposed it from the beginning. In any case, she was surely placed into a very difficult position as a result of Sarai and Abram's decision.

### ***Sarai said to Abram. "My wrong be upon you."***

This is confusing. It sounds as though she was blaming him for the problem! Why? True, he was the husband and so had the ultimate responsibility. Yet it hardly seems Sarai had the right to blame him since it was all done at her suggestion and with her approval. Perhaps it was just the natural human reaction to blame others for our problems, even when they are basically our own fault.

On the other hand, could it be that she was admitting she had done wrong ("my wrong") and acknowledging that he was suffering the

consequences of her wrong? If so, the statement would amount to more of an apology and would be a far more just view of the matter.

“The Lord judge between me and you.” This is fairly common Old Testament expression and seems to mean that God knows who is right in this matter (cf. Genesis 31:53). It is an appeal to God’s justice to indicate who is right. Perhaps it is also an appeal to the conscience of the other individual to examine what God’s verdict would be. As such, that is a good concept, but it would be strange in this case to hear Sarai say it, since she had initiated the whole mess.

### **Abram said Sarai could deal with Hagar as she saw fit.**

Note a primary wife had great power and priority over the concubine who was still treated as a slave. Sarai was harsh with Hagar, with the result that Hagar fled. This is natural. But see all the problems created by changing God’s plan and not consulting his will? Whether it was sin or not, it was surely unwise and led to severe consequences.

In fact, the strife between Sarai and Hagar was just the beginning of strife. Later there was strife between Ishmael, the son of Hagar, and Isaac who later became Sarai’s son. This resulted in Ishmael’s being sent away and disinherited.

Yet that too was just the beginning, for even greater was the strife that resulted between Ishmael’s descendants and Isaac’s. Ishmael is the father of those today who are Arabs. Isaac was the father of the Jews. There has been strife and war throughout history between them.

And furthermore, the result has been religious strife throughout history. The Jews received the Law of Moses and through them came the New Testament. Many Arabs today are Muslims, who falsely claim that their religion is the true religion of Abraham through Ishmael. The result is religious strife between Muslims and Jews and Christians.

So the strife that began here has been unending and seems unlikely ever to end on this earth. It has spread to thousands of people and lasted for thousands of years. Still today, the media is filled almost every day with news of wars, terrorism, hatred, and religious conflict because of the strife that resulted between the descendants of the two sons Abram eventually conceived.

And it all began because of a foolish choice by Sarai and Abram. One wonders what Abram and Sarai would think if they could see today the end result of their foolish idea. Let us learn to think carefully before we act without Divine authority. The consequences may be far greater than we could ever imagine.

### **16:7-9 - God found Hagar and told her to return**

God apparently also saw that Hagar was to a large extent the victim of Sarai and Abram’s bad decision. In any case, he sent His angel to speak to her and give her promises.

Note: Some believe that the “Angel of the Lord” here refers to Jesus largely because in subsequent appearances he is addressed by the name Jehovah. Whether this is valid or not I am not sure. See later notes.

Hagar was by a spring in the wilderness on the way to Shur. Apparently, she was headed back to Egypt.

The angel found her there and asked her from whence she came and where she was going. She explained she was fleeing from her mistress. The angel told Hagar to return to Sarai and submit to her.

Obviously, this would not be easy for Hagar. She had fled because of conflict with Sarai, and it is even harder to go back into a difficult situation when everybody knows we have already once fled from it. Further, for a slave to flee from a master was a clear violation of law, punishable by severe penalties. Yet Hagar obeyed and returned.

God had plans and blessings for Ishmael as He was about to explain. He wanted Ishmael, apparently, to be raised by Abram.

### ***16:10-12 - God gave Hagar great promises regarding her son***

God’s promises were great and bountiful. He said the child would be a son and she should name him Ishmael. The name means “God hears,” and the name was given because God heard her affliction. This also appears to indicate that God sympathized with Hagar’s problem.

Although Ishmael would not be the son through whom God’s promise to Abram was fulfilled, yet God promised that Hagar’s descendants (through Ishmael) would be multiplied to such a great number they could not be counted. The descendants of Ishmael are the Arabs. They have been a numerous people throughout history and even today are widely multiplied just as God here promised.

Further, God prophesied that Ishmael would be a wild man, with his hand against every man and every man’s hand against him. He would dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

Like the prophecies regarding Noah’s sons (Gen. 9:25-27), this is not just a reference to Ishmael as an individual and perhaps not primarily regarding him. It is true that there was much conflict between Ishmael and Isaac, so that Ishmael was compelled to leave Abram’s family.

But this was primarily a prophecy regarding Ishmael’s descendants. Throughout history, there has been conflict between Arabs and Jews, in whose presence the Arabs have dwelt. And few other people could ever get along for any great period with Arab people. As already mentioned, the Arabs also have continual religious conflict with other peoples. Just listen to the news and you will know that even today Arabs are continually in conflict with Jews and other peoples. Here is another Divine prophecy that we can see the fulfillment for ourselves. (See notes above on vv 3-6).

***16:13,14 - The well where this happened is named because God saw her there***

Hagar was so impressed by God's promise to her that she gave Him a name that means "The God who sees." It is likely that, being an Egyptian, Hagar had little understood the true God before her contact with Him here. She seems amazed that He was aware of her circumstances and cared enough to provide for her and assist her.

She asked, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" The exact meaning is difficult to determine. She is amazed that God saw her affliction. Perhaps she is even more amazed that He appeared and spoke to her.

The well where all this occurred was, as a result, named Beer Lahai Roi, meaning "The well of the Living One who sees me." It is located between Kadesh and Bered. The exact location I am unable to determine.

We too need to realize that God sees us and cares for us even as He did for Hagar. He sees our problems and our triumphs. He cares enough to want to help and provide for us if we will do as He says. He also sees our good deeds and our evil ones, and He will reward us accordingly.

***16:15,16 - Ishmael was born when Abram was 86 years old***

As God promised, the child was born and was a son. Abram named him Ishmael as God had told Hagar. When this occurred, Abram was 86 years old.

# Genesis 17

## Chap. 17 - The Sign of Circumcision

### ***17:1,2 - God appeared to Abram***

Ishmael had been born when Abram was 86 years old (16:16). Here we read about the next recorded communication between God and Abram, which occurred thirteen years later when Abram was 99 (cf. v25). At this time, Sarai would have been 89 (v17). To have children at this age in life would surely have been impossible by natural process. Imagine the frustration of Abram and Sarai as the years passed and still they had no child in fulfillment of God's promise.

Having waited all these years, God finally came again to Abram and repeated the promise, as first given in Gen. 12:2, saying he would multiply Abram exceedingly. Why God waited is not clear unless it was to prove by miracle that the promised son was definitely a special person and perhaps also to teach Abram patience and trust.

God identified Himself as "Almighty God." This name emphasizes the fact that God is all-powerful and can do anything He chooses to do. This is a truth taught throughout the Bible (Matthew 19:26; Genesis 17:1; Mark 14:36; Job 42:2; 26:14; Revelation 19:6; Jeremiah 32:17,20-22). He made the universe and all creatures on earth in six days. How could anything else be impossible for Him?

Note that, by so identifying Himself, God gave assurance that He was able to do what He had promised Abram (cf. 18:14). Surely, by this time there were some doubts in Abram's mind about the promised seed. God was assuring Abram that He is able to do what He has promised.

Then He commanded Abram to walk blamelessly before Him. God still expected obedience from Abram. He had made His promises many times. Yet He expected Abram to maintain a faithful life.

### ***17:3-5 - God changed Abram's name to Abraham***

God repeated His covenant with Abram. As part of that covenant, God said Abram would be a father of many nations. God had already said that His descendants would be a great nation. But here He added that many nations would come from Him.

This was fulfilled in that Israel was not the only great nation that descended from Abram. This nation later divided into two nations, Israel and Judah. But there were others. God had already promised Hagar that the Ishmaelites would be a great nation. They too were descendants of Abram. Also, Isaac's son Esau became a great nation, the Edomites. In addition, Abram had a later wife named Keturah by

whom he had other sons who became heads of nations (24:1-6). Then, in Romans 4:16-18 Paul quotes this promise and appears to include in it the spiritual nation of Israel in the New Testament, consisting of all believers.

In reaffirming this covenant, God changed Abram's name. The name "Abram" means "exalted father" (ASV ftnt). This was an accurate name for Abram. But God, in harmony with His covenant promise, changed the name to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude."

Names matter to God. He had identified Himself by a name that indicated His character (v1). He gave names to many people. He chose the names for many before they were born, including Ishmael and Isaac and many others, not the least of whom was Jesus. In addition, He changed the names of several great Bible characters, including Abram, Sarai, and Jacob.

Some claim, "There is nothing in a name." They argue this to defend unscriptural and denominational names they wear to identify themselves spiritually. If there is nothing in a name, why does God put so much emphasis on them?

### ***17:6-8 - God's covenant included giving the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants***

God continued His promise telling Abraham that he would be exceedingly fruitful to the point that nations and kings would come from him. The nations were described in v4 (see notes there). These nations would be led by kings who would also be descendants of Abraham. This was true in Judah and Israel, and doubtless in the other nations that descended from Abraham.

God again promised that His covenant would pertain to Abraham's descendants, and that His covenant would be established with them just as it was with Abraham. The covenant did not pertain just to him, but also to his descendants to whom the covenant would be repeated.

In particular, it would involve the giving of the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants, though Abraham at this time was still just a stranger in the land. God would be the God of Abraham's descendants. This was a very special relationship God here promised.

### ***An "everlasting" promise***

The covenant, circumcision (v13), and possession of Canaan were all promised to be "everlasting." Some conclude this means eternal, so they argue that God's promise requires Him to let the descendants of Abraham have the land of Canaan eternally. Since they were removed from the land after they lived in it a long time (see notes on Gen. 12:7), premillennial types argue that, when Jesus returns He will give the land back to Israel and will reign over them on earth for 1000 years.

In the first place, such a theory contradicts the very argument being made by the people who claim to believe the theory. If “everlasting” means eternal, then it does not mean 1000 years. 1000 years is not eternal any more than Old Testament history till the coming of Jesus was eternal. If a 1000-year reign would fulfill the promise of having the land “everlasting,” then why doesn’t Old Testament history satisfy the meaning of “everlasting”?

Bible terms do not always mean what they appear on the surface to mean. To understand them, we must study how the Bible uses them (cf. the word “hate” in Luke 14:26, etc.). The Old Testament terms “forever,” “everlasting,” etc., do not necessarily mean they have no end. This should be obvious when we consider eternity after the Judgment. Does anyone seriously believe Jews in heaven will be physically circumcised or that they will dwell in Canaan for a literal eternity? Consider many practices that God said were “forever,” “everlasting,” etc., but which definitely have ceased:

Circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14) — Circumcision was both a covenant and a command given by God to Abraham and his descendants (cf. 21:1-4; Lev. 12:3). Yet circumcision no longer applies (1 Cor. 7:18-20; Gal. 5:1-8; 6:12-16; Acts 15:1-29).

The Levitical priesthood (Ex. 40:15; 29:9,26-28; 28:40-43; Num. 25:13; Deut. 18:5) - Under the covenant made at Mt. Sinai, God commanded only Aaron and his descendants to serve as priests (Num. 3:10; 18:1-7; 16:40). But today Jesus is High Priest, though He was not a descendant of Aaron. This proves there has been a *change in the law* (Heb. 7:11-18; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5,9).

Animal sacrifices (Lev. 16:29-34; 6:19-23; 2 Chron. 2:4; Num. 15:1-6) — Throughout the Old Testament God commanded people to offer animal sacrifices (cf. Gen. 4:1-5; Lev. chap. 1-7). But today Jesus is our perfect sacrifice. Animal sacrifices have ceased to be offered because they are no longer needed (Heb. 10:1-18).

The Sabbath (Ex. 31:13,16,17), Passover and other holy feast days (Ex. 12:14; 13:3-10; Lev. 23:14,21,31,41) - God commanded Israel to keep various holy feast days, but we today should not keep them (Col. 2:14-17; Gal. 4:10,11).

Incense (Ex. 30:8)

Tabernacle worship (Ex. 27:21; 30:8,17-21; Lev. 24:5-9)

ALL God’s commands and ordinances (Psa. 111:7; 119:151,152,160) — Yet all the Old Testament law ceased at the cross — Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.

If these practices could cease, though they were “forever,” etc., why cannot the land promise likewise have ceased?

“Forever,” in these passages refers to that which would last an indefinite period of time — “age lasting.” In regard to the Sabbath, the

context of Ex. 31:13,16 defines this further to mean “throughout Israel’s generations.” This expression was also used for many of the other above practices:

Gen. 17:9,10 — Circumcision

Ex. 12:14; Lev. 23:21,31,41 — Holy feast days

Ex. 29:42; 30:10 — Animal sacrifices

Ex. 30:8 — Incense

Ex. 30:31 — Holy anointing oil

Ex. 31: 13-17 — Sabbath observance

Ex. 40:15; Num. 18:23 — Levitical priests serving in the tabernacle  
[Cf. Num. 15:38; Ex. 30:21; Lev. 7:36; Num. 10:8; 35:29]

All these practices would endure for the same length of time — throughout Israel’s generations. If any of them have ceased, then they must have all ceased since they were all to endure the same length of time. But we have already proved that many of them have ceased, so they must have all ceased.

Further, these all continued as long as Israel’s special relationship to God continued, and all would end when that special relation ended. It ended when the gospel came into effect. There is no more Jew or Gentile in God’s plan (Gal. 3:28). [Cf. Eph. 2:11-18; Acts 10:34,35; 15:7-11; Rom. 10:12; Col. 3:11]

It follows that the “everlasting” promise for Israel to dwell in Canaan also ceased with the other aspects of God’s special relationship ceased. It ceased when the law ceased and that happened at the cross. In AD 70, the Romans defeated Jerusalem and the Jews from that time on have been a scattered people, never gathered as a nation possessing their land as God’s special people. There is no promise such will ever be again.

### ***17:9-14 - Circumcision as the token of the covenant***

Here God gave Abraham a token or sign of the covenant between them. The sign was circumcision in the flesh of the foreskin for every male child. It was to be done at the age of eight days for every male child born in Abraham’s household, and it was done for any male who became part of Abraham’s household by being bought with money. Anyone not circumcised would be cut off from the people because he broke the covenant.

Circumcision is an interesting choice for a sign. Why did God choose this sign? We are not told why. Perhaps the sexual organ was involved in the sign because the promise pertained to physical offspring. Every child produced by the reproduction of Abraham and his offspring would be involved in this covenant.

In the New Testament, circumcision is referred to as a symbol of the removal of sin. As the foreskin was removed physically in the Old Testament, Christians are to remove evil and sinful practices from our lives (Col. 2:11-13). Spiritual uncircumcision refers to those whose



hearts are not attuned to serving God; and it puts one out of covenant relationship with God like physical uncircumcision did with Abraham's descendants (Rom. 2:28,29).

Circumcision was both a covenant and a command given by God to Abraham and his descendants (cf. 21:1-4; Lev. 12:3). It was also "everlasting" and throughout the generations of Abraham's descendants. Nevertheless, the command of circumcision no longer applies (1 Cor. 7:18-20; Gal. 5:1-8; 6:12-16; Acts 15:1-29). As discussed above regarding the everlasting land promise (v7), everlasting meant it lasted through the age of Israel's special position with God. That age ended when Jesus died on the cross (see notes on v7 for detailed discussion).

Note that circumcision was a token of the covenant and promises God made with Abraham. That made circumcision essential for Abraham's descendants to be in covenant relationship with God. However, being circumcised did not in any way guarantee salvation or a favorable status with God. It was a necessary condition but not the only condition. Faithful obedience to other instructions was still needed. So one could be circumcised yet stand condemned before God for other reasons. Later Jews apparently did not realize this. The New Testament shows that some Jews apparently thought being circumcised assured them of God's favor (see Romans 2:25-29).

### ***17:15,16 - Sarai's name changed to Sarah***

As God had changed Abram's name to Abraham, He then changed Sarai's name to "Sarah." I am not sure what "Sarai" meant, but "Sarah" means "princess" (ASV fnt). This is tied with the promise that she would have a son, would be a mother of nations, and kings would come from her. "Princess" is an appropriate name for one from whom kings would be born.

In 15:4 God had told Abram that His promise would be fulfilled through a son born from Abram's body — his physical offspring. Sarah had then encouraged Abraham to have a son by Hagar, leading to the birth of Ishmael — a son born from Abram's body. But that was not what God intended. Here God plainly told Abraham that the son who fulfilled the promise would also be a son of Sarah. And not only would she have a son, but she would be a mother of nations, and kings would be from her. This is the same promise that had been given to Abraham, so the point was clearly that they would have physical offspring through whom God's promises would be kept.

### ***17:17-22 - God assured Abraham of His intent and said to name their son Isaac***

Abraham laughed in response to God's promise. He wondered that a child would be born to him when he was 100 years old and his wife 90 years old. He then asked that Ishmael might live before God — i.e., that God might recognize him and bless him.

God disagreed with Abraham's statement and reaffirmed that Sarah would have a son. The promised son was to be named Isaac (meaning "laughter"). In Gen. 21:6, when the promise was fulfilled, Sarah referred to her laughter in joy for having a child. Perhaps the choice of name by God also memorialized Abraham and Sarah's laughter when God told them of the son in their old age.

Though God said the promises would not be fulfilled through Ishmael, yet He here repeated to Abraham the promise He had given Hagar that Ishmael would be richly blessed. He too would have many descendants and a great nation would come from him. This would include 12 princes.

God then reaffirmed that the covenant with Abraham would be fulfilled through Isaac and that he would be born to Sarah in about a year. That ended the conversation between God and Abraham.

There is some difficulty in understanding the difference between God's response to Abraham here and His response to Sarah's laughter in 18:11ff. God seemed to disagree with Abraham, but there is no firm rebuke as with Sarah. Romans 4:18-21 says that Abraham did not waver through unbelief at God's promise. So, in some sense, his laughter did not express doubt to the extent that Sarah's did.

Some have argued that Abraham's laughter was one of pleasure in God's promise, instead of doubt. Perhaps a better explanation is that he laughed in amazement and wonder, more so than in doubt.

In any case, God definitely said the covenant would not be fulfilled through Ishmael, but Sarah would have a son and the promise would be fulfilled through him. Islam may deny it, but the Bible clearly teaches that God's promises to Abraham came true through Isaac, not through Ishmael.

One further observation: In this day of abortion on demand, modern thinkers would have vigorously opposed the birth of Isaac saying it would be too risky and inconvenient to have a child in old age. Some even discourage it in women in their late thirties or early forties. They say the child is more likely to be handicapped, the mother may suffer more, and it will be an inconvenience, etc.

Doubtless, many such thinkers would have recommended abortion in the case of Isaac. God deliberately planned it this way as a great gift and blessing. And Abraham and Sarah looked on it with great joy. The birth was one of the great events of Bible history. So, we today ought to view birth as a blessing from God, and abortion is murder. Instead of aborting babies, let us abort the opinions and theories of modern abortion defenders!

### ***17:23-27 - Abraham obeyed the command of circumcision***

Abraham was immediately obedient to God's command. The same day he and Ishmael and everyone in his house were circumcised.

This too was somewhat an act of faith. Abraham was 99 years old. Ishmael was 13. If all the men were circumcised, they would have been in considerable pain for several days. There would have been no work done, no one to fight against enemies, etc. Yet Abraham immediately obeyed.

Interestingly, since Ishmael was circumcised at age 13, I am told that Arabs today are circumcised at age 13 since they descended from Ishmael. This is clear disobedience to the command of God, proving that they have no valid claim to the covenant God made with Abraham. God commanded circumcision as a sign of His covenant with Abraham to be done on the eighth day.

# Genesis 18

## Chap. 18 - God Visited Abraham and Predicted the Destruction of Sodom

### ***18:1,2 - Three men came to visit Abraham***

The events of this chapter occurred while Abraham was still living by the terebinth trees of Mamre (cf. 14:13). Abraham was sitting in the door of his tent at the time of the heat of the day. Note that he dwelt in a tent, as nomadic herdsmen of that time (and today) typically did. The event began in the afternoon when the day was at its hottest.

Abraham saw three men standing nearby. He ran to meet them and bowed down to them. The three men are further shown, as the story proceeds, to not be normal men. Two were angels who eventually went on to Sodom and appeared to Lot (19:1). Again it is apparent that, to do the will of God, angels could take on the form of men.

The third “man” is later referred to as “Jehovah” or “the Lord” (vv 13,20,22). Other references have been made to the angel of the Lord in previous events, but here this “man” is clearly called “the Lord.” Obviously again he was a superhuman being who took the form of a man to do a certain task. There are two possibilities, for which I am unable to determine which is correct. (1) Some believe this was just an exalted angel who was called “the Lord” because he was acting as an express representative to express God’s will to Abraham. (2) Others believe it was God Himself (presumably Jesus) in the form of a man.

### ***18:3-8 - Abraham set an example of hospitality***

Abraham demonstrated great hospitality for these men. He brought water to wash their feet, urged them to rest under the tree, and provided them with food.

It should be remembered that the form of hospitality in this specific case was intended to meet the needs of the guests. The guests were traveling in the heat of the day, a time when resting in the shade would be good for them. They were traveling in a hot, dusty region where people generally wore sandals. To refresh them, washing the feet would meet a need. Likewise, there were no McDonald’s or other restaurants easily available. If travelers were to have food, people along the way provided it.

The Bible likewise instructs Christians to be hospitable to others — Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9; Matthew 25:34-36,40; Hebrews 13:1,2; Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:9,10. Such hospitality involves kindness to strangers and also using our homes and possessions to do

good works for those around us. Note also that Abraham's wife Sarah had an important role in this hospitality.

As in the case of Abraham here, hospitality does not primarily refer to having a good time by inviting our friends who will in turn invite us back to their home for a good time. It was done to meet a need of those being assisted. The particular form hospitality takes would depend on the need of the individual at the time and in the society we live in. This may vary from society to society. (Who can seriously believe, for example, that Eskimos in the Arctic Circle in winter must practice hospitality by washing feet with water?) Yet God always expects hospitality.

We will see more about hospitality in chap. 19 when the angels visit Lot. Note in particular that some, practicing hospitality, have entertained angels unaware (Heb. 13:1,2). This reference surely includes the events we are studying here in Genesis.

Abraham's reference to one of the "men" as "my lord" and his bowing down may imply that he had some idea they were not normal men. However, that is not likely at this point. Bowing and the phrase "my lord" were often used, not to refer to God, but as expressions of respect for others, especially important people. However, as the story proceeds God revealed clearly who He was.

Further, note that Abraham fed these "men" butter, milk, and meat from a calf that he killed, as well as cakes made from meal. This contradicts some modern views about what people should eat. Animal Liberation often argues that we should not kill animals to eat meat. Some even say we should not eat butter or drink milk, which also come from animals, because this requires capturing and imprisoning animals for our benefit. Not only did Abraham reject these views, but so did the angels whom he fed, including one of them who was called "Jehovah."

The same principle applies to people today who argue that we should not eat animal meat today, especially "red meat" such as comes from cows. Some likewise claim we should not eat dairy foods, such as butter and milk. Some argue these views on religious grounds, others on health grounds. But Abraham and his three visitors refused to abide by any such views, and remember the visitors were angels including one called "Jehovah." Surely, they would have known if there were religious or general health reasons for rejecting such food. This does not prove that we **must** all eat such food today. People may choose not to eat such things, but they have no Scriptural right to bind such views on others. Some may have some specific health problem that would be complicated by such foods, but no one can effectively argue that such foods are wrong or bad for people in general. See also 1 Timothy 4:1-3; Mark 7:19; Peter's vision in Acts 10, etc.

**For further discussion of Animal Liberation, including a lengthy discussion of meat eating vs. vegetarianism, see our article on that subject in the Religions and Denominations section of our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

***18:9,10 - God repeated the promise that Sarah would have a son***

God had repeatedly promised that Abraham's descendants would receive great blessings, yet Abraham had no descendants. God had promised that He would have a son, and in 17:15-19,21, He had said that the child would be born to Abraham by Sarah his wife (not through a servant such as Hagar, nor any other woman).

Here God asked regarding Sarah and said again that Sarah would have a son. This time Sarah was listening and she herself heard the promise.

The statement of the visitor, along with subsequent developments, prove conclusively that he was not just a man, but was a spokesman for God.

***18:11-15 - Sarah was rebuked as a result of laughing at God's promise***

We are here plainly told that, at this point in her life, Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. She would be ninety years old when the promise came true and the son was born (17:17). People in that day lived longer than today. In fact, Sarah was still so attractive that, in chap. 20 (as in chap. 12 when she was 65) a man other than Abraham wanted to take her for his wife. Yet, she had passed the time of life and she could no longer have children. This proves that, when she did have a child, it was a miracle.

This was no doubt the cause of the concern we have seen expressed by Abraham and Sarah for several chapters. God had repeatedly said they would have a child; but 25 years had passed since the promise was first made, and they not only had no child, but Sarah was unable to have children. Such would try one's patience.

So Sarah, hearing the prediction, laughed to herself in the tent, thinking such an event would be impossible due to the age of herself and of Abraham.

Note that Sarah here spoke of Abraham as "my lord," an expression that is cited in 1 Peter 3:6 as showing her subjection and respect toward Abraham, an example for all godly women today (1 Peter 3:1-6). She spoke and thought respectfully and this led her to act respectfully. Modern liberated women need to consider this carefully.

But God asked why she had laughed. Is anything too hard for God? He then repeated the promise. Sarah denied she had laughed, but God affirmed that she had done so.

Note that nothing is too hard for God (see notes on 17:1ff). If He promised this, He could do it, and we ought never doubt that He can do what He says He will do. See also Matthew 19:26; Mark 14:36; Job 42:2; 26:14; Revelation 19:6; Jeremiah 32:17,20-22.

God seems here to give a fairly stern response to Sarah. Yet Abraham had also laughed, without receiving such a seemingly stern response (17:17ff — see notes there). It could be that the sternness occurred because she laughed largely as a result of skeptical doubt, whereas Abraham's laughter involved more a delighted amazement. Or perhaps God was more stern because she denied what she had done, a direct lie to God.

On the other hand, maybe God approached it as He did as a way of proving to Sarah that He could keep the promise. If He could know what she was doing in secret when she thought no one knew, then nothing is too hard for him. So, He proved His power to cause her to have a son by proving He knew even what she thought.

Nevertheless, Sarah was guilty of lying and denying what she had done. She actually lied to God; she may not have completely understood that he was God, but she knew he was repeating the promise of a child, so he had to have been a messenger from God. So, she ought not to have lied and denied her action. This is a common method people use to cover their sins (cf. Gen. 4:9 when Cain was questioned by God about how he had treated Abel.) We cannot prosper by covering sin, but only by confessing it (Prov. 28:13). Sarah only compounded her error by lying.

On the other hand, Heb. 11:11,12 says that Sarah conceived "by faith." Either she came to believe and have faith after this event, or perhaps the reference is to Abraham's faith. In any case, God blessed them because they were people of faith. Yet it is clear they had doubts at times. We too will have doubts, but we must overcome them by God's word and maintain our faith and obedience to God.

Note that the word for "Lord" in v13 in the original is "Jehovah." So Moses here made clear, in writing the record, that this was God (or a spokesman for God), not just a man.

### ***18:16-19 - God determined to talk further with Abraham***

The men prepared to travel further. They looked toward Sodom (indicating their intended destination), and Abraham went with them a ways.

God determined that He would tell Abraham what their intent and purpose was. Doubtless, this was because Abraham's nephew Lot lived in Sodom, and Abraham would want to discuss God's plan, as he eventually did. However, another and perhaps greater reason was that Abraham and his descendants (and all of us) would need to understand the significance of what was about to happen at Sodom. Had God simply destroyed the cities, others would not learn from their example.

But by explaining this to Abraham, God began the first of many passages that use the impending events as a lesson of His punishment of evil, like the event of Noah and the flood.

Note how God again repeated here the promise first stated in 12:2,3 regarding Abraham's descendants.

Then v19 states quite well the duty of husbands and fathers, which duty God said He knew Abraham would diligently fulfill. Abraham would command his children and his household to obey God and do what is righteous and just. Many other Scriptures show that this is the responsibility of parents, especially fathers (Josh. 24:15; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:19; Psa. 78:4; Prov. 22:6). Far too many households throughout history have neglected to pass on God's true word to following generations. When such failures occur, the mother bear some blame, but ultimately the responsibility falls on the father.

Too often a father leaves the spiritual leadership of the household up to his wife, or he is too busy doing other things, etc. If a man wants his household to follow God's word and wants to pass on his conviction about God to his children, he needs to stand firm at the head of his household, teach the truth, set an example of following truth, and chasten his family to see that they too follow that truth. A godly mother may succeed without a godly husband, but success is far more likely if the husband leads as he should.

Note that, in this case, God connected the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham's willingness to fulfill his duty as a father. This would help succeeding generations to appreciate their need to follow God (though we will see that they often failed, even so).

### ***18:20,21 - God told Abraham about His concern regarding Sodom and Gomorrah***

God then informed Abraham that He was going to Sodom to see if it was as evil as what He had heard (cf. 13:13 and chap. 19). If it was or was not, He would know. Abraham understood this to mean that God would destroy them if they were as evil as He had heard.

Cf. 11:5. The expression here is interesting. Since God knows all things, why does He here imply that He was investigating to find out if this is true?

One possibility is that God has the power to know all things because He has the power to do all things. But that does not mean He automatically knows all things, any more than He does everything He has the power to do. Rather, He must deliberately exercise His power to know. If He chooses not to exercise the power, then He will not know, just as He does not do the things He chooses not to do, even though He has the power to do them. Perhaps this verse simply expresses the fact that God was here exercising this power. When it comes to future events, we know that God sometimes does exercise His power to foreknow them, but perhaps sometimes He does not. How-



ever, we should understand that He always does know everything that we do, as we do it.

Another possibility is that this whole description of the actions of the angels all took place really for the benefit of people – Abraham and all who read the account. Perhaps it was all a teaching method to demonstrate to us how evil Sodom was, that it did deserve to be destroyed, and that we likewise deserve destruction when we sin against God.

### ***18:22-33 - Abraham's intercession for Sodom***

This interesting story reveals much about prayer and God's response to the requests of his people. Abraham made request on behalf of Sodom that, if God found fifty righteous people there, He would spare the city for the sake of the righteous ones. Subsequent requests were repeated till finally God agreed to spare the city for ten righteous people.

Note that by this point there was no doubt in Abraham's mind to whom he was speaking. He even refers to God as "the Judge of all the earth." Indeed, only God is the Judge of all the earth. Only He has the right to destroy all wicked people as God here intended to do.

Abraham's request was in harmony with and based upon God's character. We must not request what contradicts God's character. Instead, Abraham appealed to God's character. God punishes the wicked and cares for the righteous, so Abraham argued that surely He would not kill the good people with the evil ones. This does harmonize with the character of God, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is one of the best examples of it.

Abraham, of course, was concerned for his nephew Lot who lived in Sodom. Abraham hated to think his nephew would be slain because others were wicked. Perhaps Abraham was also motivated by the fact that his military campaign had delivered these very people from destruction in chap. 14. Now here they were all about to be killed, despite his efforts. In any case, the end result of Abraham's request was that God agreed to spare the city if only ten could be found who were righteous.

We also learn here the humility and sense of unworthiness with which we ought to approach God in prayer. Abraham admitted he was but dust and ashes (v27). We ought to approach God humbly, not demanding or presumptuous as if we deserve to make requests or even had the power to command God. It is only because of God's mercy and grace that we are permitted to make humble requests.

This example shows also that righteous people are a blessing to a community. Evil people often resent those who are righteous. The Sodomites were an example — they resented Lot's rebuke of their evil (19:9). So today evil people wish they did not have to put up with the

example and teaching of good people who remind evil people of their sins. This is why good people are often persecuted.

But we need to realize that it is only because of the good people in a community that it is spared from utter destruction. God would destroy the whole world as He did Sodom if it were not for the good people, or at least because He hopes that some people might become good (2 Peter 3:9). Righteous people are the salt that saves the earth from destruction.

We see also in this example that good people are concerned for one another and make request of God on behalf of other good people. This is called intercession. We ought to pray diligently for those who are righteous that God might care for them.

Finally, we see here the power of prayer. This was not a prayer in the usual sense of the word, since Abraham was directly talking with the angel and could immediately hear God's response to his request. Nevertheless, there are useful lessons to be learned. The Bible clearly affirms that God does answer prayer: 1 John 5:14,15; 3:21,22; James 5:16; Matthew 7:7-11; 18:19; 1 Peter 5:7; John 14:13,14; cf. 1 Samuel 1:10-28; 7:5-11; 2 Kings 20:1-7; 2 Chronicles 7:11-14.

God has created His world in such a way that He is able to work through natural law to control events here to accomplish His will. We often do not know how He does this, but faith requires us to believe that He does so. In particular, He always does what harmonizes with His will. But often His will can be influenced by the expressed desires of His faithful servants. So, we need to pray if we seek to influence His will. By prayer we have the blessing of knowing that our influence with God can change the course of history, even as did Abraham's prayer here.

Sadly, we will see in the next chapter, that not even ten righteous people could be found in Sodom. We will then see the result.

# Genesis 19

## Chap. 19 - The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

### *19:1-3 - Lot offered hospitality to the two “men”*

As discussed earlier, Sodom is believed to have been located in the southern area near the Dead Sea. It was formerly believed that, after the destruction of the cities, accompanying earthquakes caused the area to descend so that the sea covered it. However, evidence exists that the remains of the cities have been found southeast of the Dead Sea (see references below).

We are here told that the two “men,” who were with the Lord when He visited Abraham, were really angels who evidently took the form of men. They were sent to investigate the evil in Sodom and, if necessary, bring about its destruction. God had discussed this with Abraham (18:20-33).

Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom when the angels arrived. When he had separated from Abraham, he had pitched his tent toward Sodom (13:12). But by the time of this story, he was living in Sodom and sat at the gates, which generally were a place of business and official decisions (14:12; 19:1). This implies that he was very much a part of the affairs of this evil city. Though still objecting to their evil practices (2 Peter 2:8), he had established deep roots and ties among the people.

Many Christians have imitated this dangerous approach. We know certain practices are evil, but we want to enjoy the benefits of being close companions to people who practice that evil. The result weakens our influence for good, and in many cases we ourselves are led into evil and fall away from God’s service. It does not appear that Lot had been rejected by God, but it seems clear that he had no real influence for good among the people, and in fact he had lost his influence to save even his own family. We need to think seriously about the consequences of our material and social ties in this world (1 Cor. 15:33; etc.)

Lot demonstrated hospitality, even as Abraham had. In fact, he even invited these complete strangers into his home, where he provided them a meal (see notes on hospitality in 18:1ff). This shows that, in that society, if strangers were not invited to stay in the homes of inhabitants, they had to stay in the streets. Travel was relatively rare, inns were rare, so local inhabitants had to provide for travelers or they would have no provisions at all. It is also possible, even probable, that Lot was aware of the danger in this evil city to men who slept in the

public square. Perhaps he was motivated by a desire to protect the men.

It is clear that the needs of those people differed from needs of people today. And while we still need to practice hospitality, we should do it to help people who have needs. We have no obligation to people who can provide for themselves but simply choose to take advantage of others (2 Thess. 3:10). Note that, while Lot was making some serious spiritual errors, nevertheless he had some definite good qualities.

### ***19:4,5 - Homosexual inhabitants sought to abuse Lot's visitors***

Men both young and old from all over the city came and demanded that Lot bring out the men who were visiting with him so they might know them carnally. Despite the efforts of some to deceive us, this carnal knowledge clearly refers to sexual intercourse. Dictionaries list sexual intercourse as an older meaning of the word “know.” The NIV here translates, “so that we can have sex with them.”

Why would Lot accuse the men of wickedness (v7), and why would he offer his daughters to the men, if all they wanted was to get acquainted and visit a while with the strangers? The same word for “know” is used in v8 to say that Lot’s daughters had not “known” men. It elsewhere is used to refer to a man lying with a woman so that she conceives: Num. 31:17,18,35; Gen. 4:1,17,25; Matt. 1:23,25; Luke 1:27,34; etc.

Without question, it was the intent of these men to commit homosexual acts with the strangers. The passage clearly shows that such is sinful. The New Testament confirms that what these men wanted to do was sinful (2 Peter 2:6-8). Many other passages refer to homosexuality as sinful: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:9-11 (“abusers of themselves with mankind” = homosexuals — see newer translations); Romans 1:26-32; Leviticus 18:22,23; 20:13,15,16. Homosexuality also violates God’s command that sexual intercourse occur only in marriage (Gen. 2:18-24; Eph. 5:22-33; Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 7:2-4). Because this sin was so common in Sodom, such sexual perversions later came to be called “sodomy”: Deut. 23:17,18; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7.

Despite modern efforts to justify homosexuality as simply an alternate “lifestyle,” or even a sickness for which the individual is not responsible, the Bible clearly says it is sin. Homosexuals are capable of ceasing the practice of the sin, if they are willing to obey God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Note that the degree of evil in Sodom was so extreme that: (1) the men wanted to commit homosexuality with strangers; (2) they sought to rape or force them against their will; (3) men from all over the city, young and old, not only accepted the act but sought to participate in it; (4) they refused to cease even when Lot rebuked them; (5) they contin-

ued to pursue the evil even after the angels struck them “blind.” This was indeed an incredibly wicked city.

Some have suggested that perhaps the men were especially insistent in this case because the visitors, as angels in the form of men, were very attractive in appearance. Others have pointed out that such homosexuality was common among the inhabitants of Canaan, which contributed to God’s determination to destroy them and give the land to the Israelites.

Because of its evil, Sodom has become a symbol of evil throughout the Bible, and its destruction is a warning to people of all ages: Jer. 23:14; Isa. 3:9; 13:19; Matt. 11:23,24; 2 Peter 2:6-9; Jude 7; Jer. 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11; Zeph. 2:9; Matt. 10:15; Luke 17:28-30. Note that, once again we have abundant confirmation from other Scriptures that these events were real history. When people deny the destruction of these cities or claim this was simply some kind of legend or symbol, they deny the accuracy of Scripture in numerous passages throughout the Bible.

Yet we are led to wonder how far behind our own society is when homosexuals “come out of the closet” and march in the streets demanding moral acceptance by society. And much of our society does so accept them. They seek to use the schools and government funds, first to get people to accept their conduct as morally and socially acceptable, and then to gain special privileges for themselves as an underprivileged unfairly treated minority, and then to get people to encourage and promote their lifestyle. They demand the right to marry and adopt children. How much longer will our society avoid destruction unless such evil is opposed?

### ***19:6,7 - Lot rebuked their sin***

Lot first tried to reason with the men. He went outside, closed the door behind him, and politely asked them to please cease their wickedness. Lot deserves respect for recognizing their conduct as evil and speaking out against it. That is more than many in our society today do, including many who claim to be devout servants of God.

But many people are so steeped in sin that nothing will change them. Instead of just rebuking them, we ought to disassociate ourselves from them (Proverbs 4:23; 6:27; 13:20; 22:3; Matthew 5:8; 6:13; 18:8,9; Romans 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Genesis 39:7-12). Lot appears to have been far too attached to these people in his personal relations. He called them “my brethren.” We will see that he and his family found it very difficult to leave.

We cannot leave the world, but we can make a stand against it. And we can choose where we live and work so as to minimize its harmful influence. Many of us are too wrapped up in organizations and activities that result in close ties to evil people. Some ties can give us opportunity to teach. But there comes a time when it is clear that

people will not be taught, so we must cut off our ties with them. We may even need to change jobs or move from a community for the good of our family. But we can certainly cut off close companionship with those who practice evil, will not change, and even flaunt their evil before us. And we must consider the influence others have, not just on us, but also on our children.

Lot should have limited his relations with these evil people much sooner. Instead, he continued to allow the evil people to influence him and his family. As a result, he lost his family. We may do the same, if we are not careful.

### ***19:8 - Lot offered his daughters to those evil men***

Lot's conduct here is extremely difficult to understand or explain. He offered his two virgin daughters to the evil men that they might do with them as they wish, but leave alone the strangers who had come. Such an incredibly horrible offer seems indefensible.

In what way was this any better than what the men themselves had proposed? That Lot would make such an offer shows how incredibly terrible he viewed the unnatural intercourse of homosexuality: even the gang rape of two women would be less evil! In addition, he appears to view this as a way to protect the visitors who came under his hospitality. One wonders if another motivation was a false belief that abusing a woman is somehow not so bad as abusing a man. Yet, what he suggested would surely be fornication and gang rape, and that with Lot's own daughters!

A similar event is recorded in Judges 19:24, which shows that this kind of thinking seems to have characterized people at that time. Yet in that passage the men of the region did abuse the woman offered to them to the point of killing her. And the result was that the guilty people were punished. So it was understood that their conduct was evil.

Nevertheless, I see no way to justify Lot's conduct. Offering a different evil, instead of the one people propose, is no solution. We ought to oppose any and all wrongs. Fornication and gang rape are evil. We ought never to propose them.

On the other hand, the very fact that Lot's daughters were still virgins, especially living in a city like Sodom, speaks well for Lot as a father. He had managed thus far to maintain proper guidance and influence in their lives.

### ***19:9-11 - The men's persistence required intervention by the angels***

Despite Lot's pleas, the men were so set on evil that they ignored his rebuke and threatened violence and harm even to him. They would have broken down the door to reach the men inside. This showed beyond any remaining doubt how incredibly evil homosexual lusts can be-

come. It also proved that Lot had essentially no influence for good in that evil society.

The men/angels saved Lot by pulling him back in and closing the door. Then they struck the men outside with blindness. This seems to be a strange sort of blindness. The men kept trying to find the door till they wearied themselves in their effort. This is not what we would expect to follow from blindness that caused total blackness. It seems more like they could see but could not see clearly. Cf. 2 Kings 6:18.

It is interesting that the evil Sodomites used the same reasoning to reject Lot's rebuke that people do today. "You're acting like a judge." "You think you have the right to judge us." "Don't you know the Bible says, 'Judge not.'" Such "logic" is used today to discourage opposition to denominational and religious error. Yet, those who make such arguments are using the same "logic" as these evil gang rapist homosexuals.

We have every right to judge conduct to be sinful and to urge people not to participate in it, when the Bible shows that it is sinful. In fact God requires us to do so: John 7:24; Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4.

This does not justify us in attempting to determine people's eternal destinies — that is God's job. Nor does it justify being hateful or self-righteous or contentious in our attitudes and manner. Yet pointing out that people are guilty of sin is exactly what God says we should do, when it is really true.

### ***19:12-14 - The angels proceeded to warn that God would destroy the city***

The angels had come to investigate the evil of the city. The events of the evening had answered the question beyond any shadow of doubt. The fate of the city was doomed. There were not enough righteous people in the city to spare it.

Nevertheless, God still demonstrated his care and goodness for those who were righteous or for whom there was any hope of righteousness. As Abraham said, He would not destroy the righteous with the wicked (18:23-26). However, God has more than one way to deal with problems like this. Abraham had offered only one alternative. God has others. Sometimes we see a valid problem, but we come up with a solution as if it is the only one. Often God has other options that fulfill His requirements.

In this case, God determined to destroy the evil cities, but send the righteous people out first. The angels told Lot to find anybody whom he could and take them out of the city because the Lord had seen how evil the people were.

Lot did try to persuade his sons-in-law to leave, but they thought he was joking and refused to leave. So ingrained in the Sodomite way of life were they that they could not even accept the possibility that God

would destroy the city. Either they thought Lot was joking, or they made it a joke because that's how it seemed to them. This is the way with many today. Their way of life is so attractive to them that they cannot possibly believe that God would punish anyone for it. They laugh when godly people try to warn them.

Observe here the mercy of God. Though He had determined to destroy the city, yet He would at least warn the people who could perhaps be influenced to leave. The men in general had already proved themselves worthy of death. But if there was anyone who might be influenced to consider fleeing, God wanted them warned.

God does not punish the righteous with the wicked, but warns people even today to flee from sin and avoid the punishment that will surely come on the wicked. If they refuse to flee, then they clearly deserve to be punished. Yet God has given them a chance. This is why we today must likewise teach all the lost.

Note that the record says these sons-in-law were married to Lot's daughters. This seems to imply that Lot had a plurality of daughters who were already married, besides the two that were virgins (vv 8,16). (But the ASV footnote says they "were to marry" his daughters. So some think that if a girl was just betrothed, she was counted as married even if the wedding had not yet officially occurred — cf. Mary and Joseph.)

The list of people Lot should take with him, if he could, also implies that he had sons. There is no mention that the sons ever left, yet the implication may be that he had some. Why would angels of God suggest such if no such people existed? If Lot did have sons, they apparently died along with his sons-in-law and the daughters who were married to them (if that is the meaning). Also any children in those families were lost, eventually Lot's wife was lost, and finally his two daughters who left became exceedingly corrupt. Lot really appears to have lost his whole family. And it all began because of his attraction toward prosperity, despite the evil influence it involved him in.

### ***19:15-17 - The angels urged Lot and his family to leave***

When it had become obvious that no one else would heed the warning, the angels said the time for the destruction had come. They insisted that Lot flee and take with him his immediate family, his wife, and two daughters.

But Lot and his family did not want to leave. They lingered. This is somewhat understandable. They would be leaving everything of material value and escaping only with their lives. Likewise, it appears that they were leaving family and loved ones behind to be destroyed. This would be difficult for anyone to do.

But as the story unfolds, it becomes obvious that there was an even deeper problem here, especially with Lot's wife. They were simply too attached to the city, its people, its lifestyle, and their life there.



They were simply not as willing as they ought to have been to make the sacrifice that God required of them. Having made the mistake of becoming so attached to evil people and circumstances, they were unwilling to leave it. It is sometimes hard to admit the depth of our attraction to evil.

Yet, the angels urged them, took them by the hand, led them out of the city, and said to escape to the mountains. They were not to stay in the plains nor look behind them.

The account again states that God did this because of His mercy. While His justice demands that He punish the wicked, God's mercy yet requires that He save the righteous or at least give an opportunity to those who might become righteous.

### ***19:18-23 - Lot pled to be able to flee to Zoar***

But Lot was still hesitant. He could not bring himself to accept the hard life that surely was before them in the mountains. His family had lived in a wealthy, prosperous city. Presumably, they had significant possessions: he had separated from Abraham and moved to Sodom to begin with because of his great wealth. Now they had a house there and relatives. Leaving this was bad enough, but to go live in the mountains seemed dangerous and unbearable. Lot thought evil would overtake him and slay him. All this shows a lack of faith in God, but how different would we have been in his place?

Lot pled for a little city nearby to be spared, so he and his family could flee there instead of to the mountains. Because he referred to it as a little city, it was then named Zoar, meaning little. This shows that other cities in the area would be destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude 7 confirms this. Deuteronomy 29:23 names the cities of Admah and Zeboiim as being destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah.

The angels agreed not to overthrow Zoar. They urged them to hurry and escape there because they could not do as needed until Lot was gone.

Lot arrived in the city when the sun had arisen. What significance there is in the rising of the sun is unclear.

### ***19:24,25 - Then the promised destruction occurred as God had said***

Fire and brimstone (sulfur) rained from the Lord out of the heavens. The cities, plains, produce on the ground, and all inhabitants were destroyed or overthrown.

This could have all been done by supernatural, miraculous means. If so, it would fit the language. On the other hand, there are natural means that might fit the description too. The area is known for tar pits as recorded earlier (14:10). Even today, there is much oil in that general region of the earth. Morris suggests that it is possible that earth-

quakes and volcanoes “overthrew” the area. Gas and oil from the earth could have caused a great conflagration that was spewed in the air and fell on the cities.

In any case, the act was definitely occasioned by the will and power of God. This is confirmed by the fact that the great destruction overthrew all the cities round about, yet spared Zoar. The resulting destruction became, as described earlier, a punishment to the wicked and a warning to us of the punishment before us if we do not obey God.

### **19:26- Punishment of Lot's wife**

Lot's wife is remembered because she violated the angels expressed warnings (v17). She looked back; and as a result, she became a pillar of salt. Luke 17:32,33 urges us to remember Lot's wife. She is an example of those who, because of their attachment to things other than God, will allow themselves to be held in error when they ought to leave it.

Exactly what happened is not given in detail. She looked back. Such language could mean she just glanced back in curiosity. More likely, considering the punishment given and the use made of her by Jesus in Luke 17, she gazed back longingly unwilling to leave, wishing she could return. Some even believe that she “turned” back as if to actually go back.

She became a pillar of salt, but we are not told whether or not it was instantaneous. Perhaps she died or maybe was even caught in the conflagration because she was lingering. Then as time went by her remains may have become part of a pillar of salt. Many mounds and pillars of salt are still known to stand in that area around the Dead or “Salt Sea,” because of the deposits of salt that accumulate there.

The lesson to us is not to become so attached to this world that we let it hinder our doing of God's will. This is how Jesus used the story in Luke 17. Lot had apparently lost several children and here he lost his wife. And all because he had allowed them to become too attached to the world.

Interestingly, archaeology has found evidence of a serious earthquake that occurred about this time in the southern area of the Dead Sea (see ICR's *Acts and Facts*, October, 2010). In addition, an article from the summer, 1999, issue of *Bible and Spade* claims there is convincing evidence that the remains of ancient Sodom and Gomorrah have been found in the southeast area near the Dead Sea.

Halley's Handbook (p99) adds:

...Drs. W. F. Albright and M. G. Kyle ... found, at the south-east corner of the Dead Sea, five Oases ... [and] at a place called Bab-ed-Dra ... remains of a period dating between 2500 B.C. and 2000 B.C.; and evidence that the population ended abruptly about 2000 B.C. This evidence that the re-

gion was densely populated and prosperous indicates that it must have been very fertile, “like the garden of God.” That the population ceased abruptly, and that it has been a region of unmixed desolation ever since, seems to indicate that the district was destroyed by some great cataclysm ...

(See also Free, p63.)

### ***19:27-29 - Abraham observed evidence of the destruction***

Abraham, arising early, was able to observe the evidence of destruction, though he lived some distance away. No doubt he had been very concerned about what would happen ever since God had warned him about it. He saw the smoke of the area going up like furnace smoke. The account never tells us when or if or how he ever learned what happened to Lot. We are only left to imagine what fears may have gone through his mind.

But the account does assure us that God remembered the request Abraham had made and He spared Lot despite the fact there were not enough righteous people to spare he cities. The request Abraham made of God, like many of our prayers, was answered but not in the way he had thought it would be. God proved beyond doubt that he is able to both punish the wicked and spare the righteous.

### ***19:30-38 - Lot's daughters commit fornication with him***

Here is the final episode recorded in the Bible regarding Lot. Having escaped the destruction by going to Zoar, he then changed his mind again and did as the angels originally commanded and went to live in a cave in the mountain. The only reason we are given is that he became afraid to live in the town. Perhaps after he saw how terrible the destruction really was, he was afraid something else might happen there. Or perhaps he now saw the need to leave the wicked people, so he was afraid to live among them. In any case, what God had originally said turned out to be best.

But the final episode in his life is a sad commentary on his history. Both his daughters decided there was no one for them to marry (since so many had been killed). They almost seem to think that everyone on earth was dead except them. Or perhaps because of their circumstances they were convinced no men would ever marry them.

They wanted their father to have seed. This was admirable since it was very important in that day and since all relatives had been killed. Perhaps they even thought this was the only way the family name could be carried. However, they were mistaken and, as always, all would have been much better if they had simply waited on God to solve the problem. It never seemed to occur to them to discuss it with their father, pray about it, or seek God's will. In any case, the course they took was evil and unjustified through and through. As Coffman observed,

they may have escaped from Sodom, but Sodom was still in them. They had lived too long under its evil influence.

These women took matters into their own hands and, like Eve and Sarah, they created major problems. They decided to make Lot drunk and have intercourse with him and raise children for him. The older daughter did so one night and the younger daughter the next night. As a result, both daughters had children by their own father. The fact the daughters made Lot drunk proves conclusively that they knew their conduct was evil, so their father would never agree to it if he were sober.

The older daughter had a son who was named Moab and his descendants became the Moabites. The younger had a son named Ben-Ammi, the father of the Ammonites. These nations settled in the area east of the Dead Sea and became important in Israel's later history. In fact, both of them were steeped in idolatry and contributed to Israel's sins (see Numbers 25; 1 Kings 11:5-8).

The daughters initiated this. But it would never have worked had Lot refused to drink the intoxicating liquor and become drunk. So we see that, with Lot as with Noah, the men who escaped great punishments of God, eventually themselves got in trouble because of alcoholic beverages. It is a sad commentary on Lot that this ends his story. Alcohol has been the downfall of many people.

# Genesis 20

## Chap. 20 - Abraham Deceived Abimelech Regarding Sarah

### *20:1,2 - Abraham again said Sarah was his sister*

Abraham moved to Gerar, between Kadesh and Shur. This is the first time in several chapters that the record says Abraham moved. Gerar is thought to be located in the southwest area of Palestine near the Mediterranean Sea (northwest of Beer-sheeba – see *map*).

As in 12:10-20 when he was in Egypt, Abraham again deceived the people regarding his relationship to Sarah. He said simply that she was his sister, but did not tell them she was also his wife. This will be explained more fully later in the chapter. Nevertheless, this was clearly an act of deceit. (See notes on Gen. 12).

As in Egypt where the Pharaoh took Sarah, here Abimelech king of Gerar took Sarah. Like the names “Caesar,” “Pharaoh,” and “Herod,” “Abimelech” was a title used to refer to the various kings in the area. It was not at this time primarily a personal name.

Some liberal “scholars” have wondered if the event in Egypt is the same as this event, but the story got mixed up so that it was placed in the account twice with different kings. But such speculation is beyond foolish. In the first place, common sense would tell us that a man might do the same thing more than once. But furthermore, before this story is over Abraham himself will tell us that he often used this deception whenever he went someplace new.

This whole story is amazing in several ways. For one thing, Sarah at this point was nearly ninety years old. She was definitely past the age of bearing children (18:11). God had promised she would have a child in a year from that time and she laughed at the idea. It is possible that she was not yet expecting. It is also clear that people lived longer in those days. And perhaps Abimelech himself was an older man. Yet, Sarah must have been an amazingly attractive woman that, even at this stage of her life, a man of such high and honorable position wanted her for a wife.

Some commentators suggest that Abimelech wanted Sarah, not just for herself, but as a way of forming an alliance with Abraham. Abraham was obviously wealthy and powerful. Marrying relatives of great men has always been a means used by powerful men to increase their standing and influence. This may have been part of Abimelech’s motivation. However, Sarah must also have been beautiful still, else why would Abraham even tell the lie? The purpose of the lie was to prevent

evil men from killing him to get Sarah. If she was unattractive and undesirable, there would have been no reason to tell the lie to begin with.

### ***20:3-7 - God warned Abimelech in a dream to restore Sarah to Abraham***

It is hard to believe that Abraham acted honorably in this matter. One would think he would have learned from the earlier experience with Pharaoh. Nevertheless, Abimelech was innocent in the matter. He had taken her with the understanding that she was unmarried.

God spoke to him in a dream and warned Abimelech that Sarah was married. God said Abimelech was as good as a dead man and would die if he did not return her. This did not mean he would die for what he had already done. The account plainly says that Abimelech had not had an intimate relationship with her yet. He responded to God that he had acted uprightly in that both Abraham and Sarah had told him that they were brother and sister. God said that He knew Abimelech had acted with integrity and that God had kept Abimelech from having a relationship with Sarah and so kept him from sinning against God.

Note that the record clearly states that Abimelech did not sin in this matter. If at that point he would restore Sarah to Abraham, he could be spared. If however he proceeded in his determination to have her, then he and all his family would die.

V18 makes clear that a plague of some sort had come on Abimelech's household such that none of the women were having children. No doubt Abimelech knew about this plague, whatever it was. Some have suggested that the plague affected the people in such a way as to hinder men from having sexual relations with the women. Perhaps this was the means God used to keep Abimelech from touching Sarah. And perhaps he would have died from this plague had he not restored Sarah and received Abraham's good favor and prayer. Maybe this is the sense in which God meant he was as a dead man.

God here called Abraham a prophet, and said he would pray for Abimelech. This is the first use of the term "prophet" in the Bible. A prophet is a spokesman for God. Hence, Abraham is here identified as one God used to reveal His will to man.

### ***20:8-10 - Abimelech rebuked Abraham***

On the next morning, Abimelech told his servants what had happened. Their response showed they did not want to suffer the consequences God had warned them of. Abimelech called Abraham and rebuked him. He asked why he had acted as he had, and said plainly that what Abraham had done "ought not to be done."

He said Abraham had brought a great sin on Abimelech and his kingdom. V6 showed that actually they had not committed a sin ac-

ording to God's view. The point seems to be that Abraham had put them in a position of committing sin, tempting him, etc.

Note that Abraham was definitely rebuked by Abimelech as surely as he had been by Pharaoh. He was clearly told that what he had done should not have been done. Abraham had deceived Abimelech and had surely tempted him to sin.

It is amazing that Abraham had actually repeated such shameful conduct. It was bad enough once. To have repeated it is flabbergasting. In chap. 12, Abraham may have been a new servant of God lacking understanding. Doubtless, many people around him would not think he was wrong, since they did not serve God anyway. But by this time in his life, it seems to me that he should have known better. One wonders why we have no evidence that God Himself rebuked Abraham and why He allowed Abraham to profit by the event as subsequent circumstances show.

### ***20:11-13 - Abraham rationalized his conduct***

Here we are told Abraham's explanation. He said he did not believe the people there feared God, and they would kill him so they could have his wife. He further explained that she really was his half sister, the daughter of his father but not of his mother. So he had an agreement with her everywhere they went she was to say she was his sister.

It is, of course, possible that some evil people somewhere might have killed Abraham to take Sarah. We do not know what would have happened here or elsewhere had the lie not been told. Abimelech never denied Abraham's statement. So, it is possible that the people were in general not serving God as they should. However, none of this would justify Abraham's conduct toward them. His treatment of these people was abominable, and he should have had faith in God to protect him to keep His promises. He did not need to resort to lies and trickery.

Abraham's explanation indicates that the decision to act in this way had been made early in Abraham's service to God. However, again, one would think they would have learned better. His statement was a half-truth (she really was his sister), but it was still a deception since she was also his wife. This illustrates the evil of lies in the form of half-truths.

Also, one wonders if this means they told the same lie other times besides the two we have recorded. Maybe this fact affects the story. Maybe they had told this lie numerous times and maybe it had often worked and we just are not told of those times. Maybe the events related here were the means God used to convince Abraham to cease this evil he had been involved in for many years.

In any case, Abraham's explanation hardly seems justification for putting his wife in the position of adultery. Even if Pharaoh and Abimelech did not know she was married, **she** knew she was and **Ab-**

**raham** knew she was. She was about to go into a marriage relationship with other men knowing she was already married. And all this was done at her husband's request.

Anyway you look at it, Abraham comes out of this smelling like a skunk! The people of the land, whom he said did not serve God, appear far more honorable than he did, and they end up rebuking him for his wrongdoing!

### ***20:14-16 - Abimelech restored Sarah to Abraham***

Abimelech gave flocks of animals to Abraham and restored Sarah to him. He said they could live anywhere they chose in the land. We are then told that he rebuked Sarah, telling her he had given Abraham 1000 pieces of silver for Sarah (some think this is not in addition to the flocks but is an evaluation of the worth of the flocks given). He said this was to vindicate Sarah in the eyes of everyone. This appears to be a peace offering and an indication that he had not violated her but was giving her up publicly.

The record says this was a rebuke to her. She surely needed to be rebuked and so did Abraham. Perhaps we should take this as also being God's rebuke.

Yet it is still confusing that God allowed Abraham to take this reward and profit by his wrong deed. Some have suggested that he took them to avoid further antagonizing Abimelech. When he had defeated the kings that took Sodom captive, he had refused to accept wealth. He was not a selfish man as shown in the choice he gave Lot regarding where to live. Perhaps his acceptance of the wealth in this case was actually an indication of humility and desire for peace.

### ***20:17,18 - The women of Abimelech's household were healed***

The story concludes by telling us that Abraham prayed for the people and they were able again to have children. They had not had children since Abimelech took Sarah, because God closed the wombs of the women. It is likely that the affliction that God had caused, whatever it was, had actually prevented the men from having relations with the women. This would have been the means God used to prevent Abimelech from having relations with Sarah.

If nothing else we learn from this story that Abraham was not a perfect man as was our Savior Jesus Christ. Great a man as he may have been, he had his failures. After this, we read of no further failures. Perhaps this event helped mold his faith and strength.



# Genesis 21

## Chap. 21 - The Birth of Isaac and the Rejection of Ishmael

### *21:1-7 - The birth of Isaac*

#### **Sarah's conception**

After many years of waiting, after several attempts to invent their own ways to fulfill God's promise, and after God's promise had become a physical impossibility, finally Abraham and Sarah received the fulfillment. God had said Abraham would have a child by Sarah his wife (17:19,21; 18:9-15). Many great promises would be fulfilled through this son. Finally, Sarah conceived at the time and in the way God said it would happen.

Why did God make them wait so long? The answer is not stated. Perhaps it was to test or to develop their faith. Perhaps it was to make some parallels to the birth of Jesus as mentioned below. But the most prominent reason is probably simply to show the importance of the child. By bringing him into the world miraculously, God showed how important he was and thereby proved that he was the son through whom God intended to do great works for the good of mankind and for the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham.

There are several important similarities between Isaac and Jesus. So many in fact that God almost surely did it deliberately. Both had been foretold and promised ahead of time. Both would be the means by which blessings would come to others. Both were offered as sacrifices by their fathers. And both were given special wives (cf. Genesis 24 and Ephesians 5:23-29).

And here we see that Isaac, like Jesus, was born by a miracle. Isaac was born when it was impossible for his mother to conceive and give birth (18:9-15). Jesus was conceived in the womb of a virgin who had never had sexual relations with a man (Matt. 1:18-25). The parallel is noticeable. Clearly, God intended to show the world, in both cases, that these were not ordinary men. There was something special in God's plan for each of them. (Consider also the birth of John the Baptist in the old age of Elisabeth and Zacharias — Luke 1:5-25ff).

Note also that God does keep His word. He is faithful to His promises. If God did not keep His word, we would be miserable people indeed. But we have great cause for rejoicing in the knowledge that He does as He says He will do. Instead of trying to change His promises or do things ourselves in ways He has not authorized, we should learn to simply trust Him to do what He says He will do.

## **Isaac's birth and circumcision**

God had told Abraham and Sarah that the child should be named Isaac — 17:19,21. In obedience, Abraham gave this name to his son. So at this point God had determined the names of Abraham, Sarah, and their son Isaac.

Abraham also circumcised Isaac on the eighth day as commanded in Gen. 17:9-14. Note that the eighth day was the proper age for circumcision. It is surely erroneous for Muslims to circumcise at age 13 while still claiming to follow the religion of Abraham.

When Isaac was born, Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90, as God had said (17:17). This was clearly miraculous in that 18:9-15 definitely says Sarah was beyond the age of child bearing. Nevertheless, when Sarah later died, Abraham remarried and had a number of other sons (25:1ff). So, either these sons also were born miraculously (which would make Isaac's birth less special), or more likely Abraham himself was not beyond childbearing even for many years.

### **Sarah expressed her joy regarding the birth of Isaac.**

She said God had made her laugh and all who hear would laugh with her. This is an obvious reference to the meaning of Isaac's name, which is laughter. People often chose for their children names that had significance regarding the circumstance of the child's birth or his character or even served as a prediction of his future. In this case, God had chosen the name, yet it had special significance for Sarah.

Sarah's laughter here was surely the laughter of rejoicing, for she said that all who heard would laugh with her. She also rejoiced in amazement that she would give children suck having borne Abraham a child in his old age. However, laughter also was an appropriate name for Isaac in that both Abraham and Sarah had laughed when God first told them together they would have a son in their old age — 17:17; 18:9-15 (see notes there).

Notice Sarah's joy at having a child. This was obviously a special child born under special circumstances. But in that day women generally rejoiced to have a child and grieved if they were barren. Note 17:15,16; 18:12 and other passages regarding barrenness. Many other Scriptures show that having children is a blessing from God: 1 Tim. 5:14; Tit. 2:4,5; Psa. 113:9; 127:3-5; 128:1-4.

Yet today many women have come to view childbirth as degrading. Some don't want the inconvenience and expense of children. Others are too involved in careers or outside activities. Some just don't know how to care for children and feel uncomfortable doing it. Older women, far younger than Sarah was, are often discouraged from childbearing or even encouraged to have abortions to avoid birth defects. The result of such thinking is that children are not appreciated. Many are aborted, abused, or neglected.

Sarah was an example to all married women in that she wanted a child, rejoiced to receive one, and counted it a blessing to be a mother. May modern women learn from her example!

### ***21:8-21 - Hagar and Ishmael sent away***

#### **Sarah sought to send Ishmael away for scoffing at Isaac.**

Sarah's joy in the birth of her son was short-lived. An unpleasant rivalry soon developed between Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael had been Abraham's only son, though by a concubine. Now there was another son, a rival. And what was worse he was a son by the true wife of Abraham and the son of promise through whom many great promises would come true. It is not uncommon for teenage boys to feel rivalry or resentment toward small children in the family. No doubt this was worse than usual due to the circumstances.

Isaac was weaned, we don't know at what age, but babies in those days were generally breastfed longer than children are today. Abraham made a great feast to celebrate. There was much cause for celebration, but not from Ishmael's viewpoint. Sarah saw him scoffing, mocking Isaac. Details are not stated, but some kind of teasing and rivalry was involved. Whatever it was, it was surely unpleasant and wrong, since Paul later used this incident to illustrate the Jews' persecution of Christians (Galatians 4:29,30). Isaac may have been too young to understand, and probably did not intend to provoke Ishmael. But Sarah saw and resented Ishmael's conduct.

Ishmael's own character no doubt contributed to this. God had predicted he would be a sort of loner or rebel. His hand would be against every man (16:12). Here we see a sample of his character.

Sarah's recommended solution was to get rid of Ishmael. She had been the one who encouraged Abraham to have a son by Hagar, but this had led to conflict. Hagar had even fled till God told her to return. Now the promised son had been born and the situation had changed. Now Sarah no longer wanted Hagar and Ishmael around. Her own son Isaac would inherit the family honor and blessings. She did not want Isaac to suffer abuse or competition from Ishmael. She doubtless believed – and rightly so – that the strife between Isaac and Ishmael would only grow worse. She did not want that for her family or for her son, and God soon expressed agreement with her. Yet, she was just reaping according to what she had sown for having advised Abraham to have a son by Hagar.

Once again we see the folly and danger of polygamy. God evidently tolerated it in that day, but it was never His plan for the family. It always resulted in rivalry, jealousy, and strife. This is just one of many examples we will see in the families of Abraham and his descendants.

## **Abraham hesitated to send Ishmael away, but God confirmed the decision.**

The situation deeply troubled Abraham. There was conflict between his sons. And Ishmael was truly Abraham's son, albeit by a concubine. Abraham had at one time hoped God's promises would come true through him. Obviously, he loved Ishmael and was pained to consider sending him away. He doubtless also loved Hagar, for God spoke about Abraham's concern for both Ishmael and Hagar. This shows Abraham's loving and caring nature.

Yet, God said to do as Sarah said and send Ishmael away, because God's promises would come true through Isaac. His descendants would be Abraham's true seed and heirs. Nevertheless, God demonstrated his care and kindness by promising to care for Ishmael even after Abraham sent him away (cf. 21:18; 16:10; 17:20; 25:12-18). He even said he would make his descendants a nation, which was fulfilled in the Ishmaelites who are ancestors of many Arabs today.

The only explanation God gave was that Isaac should be Abraham's seed. The same course of action was taken for all the sons subsequently born to Abraham by Keturah, who was his wife after Sarah died – 25:1-6. It appears that God knew, if Ishmael stayed, the conflict would get worse between Isaac and Ishmael. Maybe it would become a serious conflict over the family name, possession, and honor after Abraham died. Such conflicts were common then and now. It appears that God intended to resolve such issues forever by having Abraham take definite action early in Isaac's life so there would never be any doubt where things stood.

This passage is cited in Galatians 4:21-31, where Hagar and Ishmael on the one hand are contrasted to Sarah and Isaac on the other hand in the form of an allegory. The allegory is based, not on physical ancestry, but on spiritual bondage vs. spiritual freedom.

The Law of Moses given at Mt. Sinai is compared to Hagar and Ishmael, and the gospel is compared to Sarah and Isaac. Obviously there is no physical connection. But the point made is that Hagar and Ishmael were bondservants like the Law of Moses enslaved people to sin (see Gal. 3-5). Sarah and Isaac, however, were true family members of Abraham and therefore not slaves but free, and were the ones who received the blessings of God's promise. This is like the gospel that makes us truly free from sin (cf. John 8:31,32) and gives us God's full blessings as spiritual descendants of Abraham.

Because the law made slaves, Paul by inspiration said it should be cast out (like Hagar and Ishmael) and those who adhered to it would not inherit the promises. The gospel was God's means to make men free and saved from sin, and those who adhere to it are the ones to receive God's blessings (like Sarah and Isaac).

The Waldrons point out that sending Ishmael and Hagar away would violate customs of that day that forbade a man to disinherit that son of a slave-wife. This may have contributed to Abraham's concern, though he clearly did care for Hagar and Ishmael. Coffman cites a legal tradition that the son of a slave woman could be disinherited in exchange for setting the slave and her son free. This is the option that was chosen here. In any case, God's law must prevail, and He said to send Ishmael away.

This passage makes abundantly clear that God intended Isaac, not Ishmael, to be Abraham's true heir. He obviously meant there to be no doubt regarding His intent that His promises would come true through Isaac. And God followed this same pattern with all of Abraham's other sons. In light of such clear teaching, it is amazing that Islam still claims that God intended for Ishmael, not Isaac, to be Abraham's true heir! The only way to hold such a view is to deny the inspiration of the passage, which of course is what Muslims do! They say such passages are not inspired but were added later to change God's will. This accuses Jews and Christians of deliberately falsifying Scriptures – an incredibly serious charge in light of clear Bible prohibitions against such conduct (Revelation 22:18,29; Galatians 1:8,9; etc.). And remember that Jesus confirmed repeatedly the Old Testament as the Jews had it, including the writings of Moses; so the Muslim claim makes Jesus a false teacher. The New Testament in Galatians 4 likewise confirms the rejection of Ishmael, so the Muslim claim makes the New Testament a perversion. The charge that Jews and Christians changed their own Scriptures is totally without evidence, since no ancient texts of Scripture confirm it.

**For further discussion of Islam and their view of Scripture, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

### **Being sent away, Hagar feared death.**

So Abraham sent the son and his mother away as God had said. He gave them some provisions. Morris points out that there were other settlements nearby that they could have reached. But they apparently became lost or for some other reason wandered in the wilderness till their provisions ran out.

The situation became so bad that Hagar was convinced they were going to die. She left Ishmael under a bush of some kind, and went away so she would not have to watch him die. Then she wept.

Note that, at this time Ishmael must have been at least 15-17 years old. He was 13 when circumcised and Abraham was then 99 (17:24,25). It was about a year later, when Abraham was 100, that Isaac was born (21:5). Then it was after Isaac was weaned (another year or more later?) that Ishmael was sent away (vv 8ff). This shows that Ishmael at this time was not a babe in his mother's arms, as some translations al-

most seem to imply. He had surely been old enough to mock Isaac (v8). Keil points out that the word here translated “boy” means, not a little child, but a lad or young man (see Coffman).

The Waldrons point out that Hagar’s grief, and perhaps even her becoming lost, was also the result of great sorrow and discouragement over her circumstances. Though she had been a slave, yet she had been the mother of a great man’s only heir. She had doubtless lived in sheltered and wealthy circumstances with great hope for the future. Now her son had been disinherited, and she and her son had been sent away with no apparent hope for the future. They were in the wilderness not knowing how they would survive or where to turn. Finally, they became lost and the provisions ran out. Surely, she had reason to grieve, and we can sympathize with her. After all, none of this was her idea at any point throughout.

### **God called to Hagar and provided for her and her son.**

God had promised Abraham that He would take care of Ishmael if Abraham sent him away. God heard the voice of the lad (he too had apparently spoken his fears, perhaps crying or even praying). An angel called to Hagar and assured her she need not fear. He reminded her of God’s promise to make a great nation from Ishmael’s descendants (see above).

Then He enabled her to find a well with water to provide for Ishmael’s needs. Apparently, she had not seen this well, either because of her upset or because it was somehow hidden. When God helped her, she found it.

The instruction to lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, again cannot mean carry and hold him like a little baby, since he was in his upper teens (see above). It must mean more to the effect of helping and supporting him. Perhaps she would hold his head up to give him a drink. Or perhaps she would embrace and support him. Or perhaps some other idea is intended.

### **Ishmael grew up in the wilderness and married a wife from Egypt.**

God took care of Ishmael, as He had promised. He lived in the wilderness of Paran (located south of Canaan between Canaan and Mt. Sinai — see map). He became an archer. His mother found a wife for him from Egypt (where she was from).

Little more is told of Ishmael, but later genealogy shows that God fulfilled His promise regarding Ishmael’s descendants. They did indeed become a great nation — 25:12-18.

## **21:22-34 - Covenant between Abraham and Abimelech**

### **Abimelech requested a covenant.**

Abimelech is no doubt the same king of Gerar with whom Abraham had dealt deceitfully in chap. 20 (see 20:2). He came with the commander of his army Phicol to ask a treaty or covenant with Abraham.

He saw that God richly blessed Abraham, so he thought it wise to have peace between them. He asked mutual oaths that they and their posterity would deal honestly and fairly with one another. Abimelech had treated Abraham kindly, so he here appealed to Abraham for assurance this would continue and be mutual. Abraham agreed.

This whole event demonstrates the greatness of Abraham. Had Abraham been poor and insignificant, no king would see need to make a treaty with him. The very fact that Abimelech sought such a relationship demonstrates that he recognized Abraham to be a man of great wealth and influence. If they were to live close to one another, they needed peace instead of war.

### **Abraham raised the issue of a disputed well.**

Before the agreement was completed, Abraham brought up a matter that needed to be resolved between them. Some of Abimelech's servants had seized a well that Abraham had dug. Abimelech claimed that he had no knowledge whatever of this.

Conflict over wells was apparently a rather common thing in this area. Water was, of course, vital to those who had flocks and herds. Access to wells could literally be a matter of life or death for flocks and for those who made their living from their flocks. Despite the covenant made here, Isaac later had conflict with Abimelech (perhaps a descendant of this Abimelech) over wells — 26:15,18,20-22.

Halley's Handbook says, "The self-same wells are still there." Coffman quotes a scholar who likewise claims this well still exists and is still in use. Whether or not that is true, his information illustrates the importance of wells in this area. The well is said to be 12½ feet in diameter and of great depth made of high-quality masonry. Another well nearby is five feet in diameter and cut through 16 feet of solid rock; the water level is 38 feet below ground level. Surely, such wells would require serious effort to dig, especially in those days. This shows the great importance of water in those days and the great value of wells. No wonder they became a focus of strife.

To seal the covenant Abraham set aside seven ewe lambs that he gave to Abimelech as a symbol of the understanding that this well was his and he had dug it.

They made the covenant and mutually swore. The place was named Beersheba. It is halfway between the Mediterranean and the

southern part of the Dead Sea (see *map*). It later became the southern boundary of Israel (“Dan to Beersheba”).

Note how this event illustrates the concept of a covenant and the symbolic sealing of a covenant.

Abraham planted a tree there and called on God. He lived in the area of these Philistine people for a long time.



# Genesis 22

## Chap. 22 - The Sacrifice of Isaac

### **22:1,2 - The command to sacrifice Isaac**

God here tested Abraham. He does not tempt us (James 1:13), but He has at times tested people. Tempting implies intent to lead someone to sin. But God made this test hoping that Abraham would pass (as a teacher in school testing his pupils). God's reaction when Abraham passed this test shows His intent (vv 12,15-18).

The location of the land of Moriah is uncertain. Many people believe it is the same location as where the temple was later built in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Chronicles 3:1). This would have symbolic significance. But this was in Jerusalem, and if Melchizedek was the king of Jerusalem then this area would have been occupied. This does not seem to fit the description. Other places have been suggested.

We find it hard to conceive how difficult it would be for Abraham to obey this command. Hebrews 11:17-19 says he obeyed by faith, and surely immeasurable faith would be needed to obey a command such as this. Many people would have tried to find an excuse to not obey. There could have been a number of objections offered, such as the following:

- \* God here told Abraham to kill a **human** as a sacrifice. God had asked for animal sacrifices before, but never humans. The idea of killing any innocent human would be repulsive to God's people.

- \* God told Abraham to kill his own **son** "whom you love" (v2). Hard as it would be to kill anyone, it would surely be hard to kill one's son. The love God teaches us to have for children would make this almost impossible.

- \* God said to kill his **only** son, by his true wife (v2). If a man had a dozen sons, it would be hard to give up one. Isaac was Abraham's only son by Sarah his wife. (Ishmael was a son by a handmaid, but had been sent away).

- \* God said to kill the promised son of his **old age**. Abraham and Sarah had waited years for God to fulfill a special promise to give this son in their old age (Genesis 18:9-14; 21:1-5). Finally, God answered the promise and sent the son when it seemed impossible to even have a child. Now God said to kill the son He had given!

- \* God said to kill the son **through whom God's promises** to Abraham were to be fulfilled — Hebrews 11:17,18. God had repeatedly told Abraham that great blessings would come to his descendants. Abraham waited years, but had no descendants. Finally, Ishmael was

born, but God said the promise would not be through him. When it seemed all hope was gone, Isaac was born, and now God said to kill him. How could God's promises be fulfilled through Isaac's descendants if Abraham killed him? [Gen. 12:2,3; 15:4-6; 17:18,19.]

All this would surely seem that God was contradicting Himself. "It just doesn't make sense!" In Abraham's place, we would have had a million excuses to not obey. But **faith** led Abraham to obey anyway.

We must also consider how difficult this would be for Sarah. It would be as hard for her as for Abraham. It is possible that Abraham never told her; but he had to know that, if he killed Isaac, she would be terribly distraught with him. He must surely have considered how she would react.

Yet despite all these difficulties, Abraham obeyed. Would we have had the faith to do so? Heb. 11 uses this event as a lesson to us to teach us the meaning of the kind of faith we need to be saved. There are many lessons here for us.

It is also interesting to consider the parallel between this event and the death of Jesus. We have learned that Isaac was symbolic of Jesus in several ways. Here is another of those ways: Isaac's father offered him as a sacrifice just as Jesus' Father offered Him. It is hard to believe this is coincidence. One wonders, in fact, if God did not give Abraham this test for one reason because of its symbolic significance.

If we can sympathize with the difficulty Abraham faced in offering his son, surely we should have some concept of how hard it was for God to send Jesus to earth and allow him to be slain by evil men. Isaac was not dying for any wrong he had done, nor did Jesus.

### ***22:3 - Abraham obeyed promptly and diligently***

He did not procrastinate, make excuses, or delay like most of us would. Some say, "I believe in God and know what to do to obey, but I'm not ready. There are things I want to do first or circumstances are not right yet. But I plan to obey someday, when I'm older, when circumstances are better..."

But Abraham began immediately. He arose "early in the morning." As soon as he knew God's will, he proceeded to obey: no postponement, delay, or excuses. Yet this was an extremely difficult and unpleasant task. We should imitate this faith. Note 2 Corinthians 6:2; Acts 24:25; Psalms 119:60.

Furthermore, Abraham was diligent in worship. He arose early and prepared well. He saddled the donkey, got Isaac, and cut the wood (v3). He had fire and a knife (v6). Then he went to the appointed place, which required three days travel, to offer the worship God commanded (vv 3-9). All this to do a very hard, unpleasant task.

Do we have this faith? Do we prepare well, arise early, and travel to the appointed time and place of worship? Can we be counted on to come, or do we make excuses because the distance is too great or other

excuse? Can we be counted on to arise early enough to be present on time, or are we habitually late? Do we come prepared with Bible class lesson studied, songs prepared if we are to lead, lesson thoroughly studied if we are to teach class, thoughts organized if we will officiate at the table?

And Abraham was diligent in worship, even when that worship was extremely painful to offer. But we have many conveniences he did not have. We don't ride donkeys but drive comfortable cars. We don't travel three days, but just a few minutes or hours. Some say, "I don't get anything out of it — it's such a burden." Was it easy for Abraham?

What really determines how diligently we worship? It is not how far the travel, or how difficult the task, nor any other such problem. The real issue is: How deep is our faith? We need to accept the challenge of having faith like Abraham's to lead us to obey promptly and diligently, even when the task is difficult.

### ***22:4,5 - Abraham and Isaac left to go up on the mountain***

At first Abraham's promise that he and Isaac would come back to the servants may almost seem deceitful, because he would know that Isaac was not coming back. But actually, it is more likely that the statement shows the depth of his faith. Hebrews 11:19 says he believed that God would even raise Isaac from the dead if Abraham killed him. In that case, Isaac would come back with him.

Instead of making excuses or even giving in to apparent difficulties of God's command, Abraham looked for ways that God could work out what seemed to be an impossible situation. This is the kind of faith we need.

Note the term "worship" as used here. Some words translated "worship" can refer to a general concept of service to God. So some have reasoned that anything we do in obedience to God's word constitutes worship. This may be true in a general sense. But as with many Bible words, there is also a specific sense in which we "worship" God. We worship in the sense of praise or honor to God by doing specific acts He has commanded which have little or no meaning except as acts intended to honor or praise Him.

### ***22:6-8 - Isaac asked about the lamb for the sacrifice***

Abraham took Isaac and all the necessary provisions, then the two of them began to climb to the appointed place. Isaac then asked a reasonable and obvious question. They had everything they needed for a sacrifice. It was obvious they intended to offer a sacrifice. But they had no lamb or other animal to offer. Isaac knew something strange was happening, so he asked about it. Abraham answered that God would provide a lamb to offer.

Again, this may appear to be less than truthful. But actually, it was the exact truth, and even more than Abraham realized. First, it was

true that the lamb was provided by God, in that God had given Isaac to Abraham. If God asked for him back, what right did Abraham have to refuse?

And remember that Abraham was convinced that, no matter what happened, Isaac would end up alive, even if a resurrection was needed. So, while the event may be frightening and temporarily painful for Isaac, in the end all would be well.

Actually, God provided the sacrifice without Isaac needing to die, as it turned out. But Abraham's statement, while not worrying Isaac overly, spoke the exact truth of what happened.

Note how Abraham addressed Isaac as "my son," surely meant to be a term of endearment. He knew full well that it was his beloved son that would be the sacrifice to be offered.

### **22:9,10 - Abraham prepared the altar and the sacrifice: his son**

Abraham was fully determined to exactly obey God's command. He avoided no difficulty and wasted no time. They came to the appointed place, Abraham built the altar and prepared the wood. Then he bound Isaac, put him on the altar, and raised the knife to kill Isaac.

Note that Abraham's faith led to complete obedience. He kept nothing back. Whatever God said, he would do, even to the sacrifice of his only son of promise.

Many people today deny the necessity of obedience to salvation. Some teach salvation by "faith alone" — if you believe God exists and Jesus died and arose to forgive you, and if you trust Him to forgive you, He will! There is nothing to **do** to receive forgiveness, especially not baptism.

Then they say, once you are a child of God, nothing you can do or fail to do, will cause your soul to be eternally lost. Disobedience or obedience are irrelevant to whether or not you become saved or stay saved.

### **Abraham's example shows we need obedient faith to receive God's reward.**

Hebrews 11:17-19 — By faith Abraham **offered** Isaac — **action** was required. He did not say, "Lord, I believe in you. Surely I don't need to **do** anything to receive your reward." Nor, "Lord I already have believed and am your servant. Surely I don't need to **do** anything to stay in your favor."

Vv 16-18 say God rewarded Abraham **because** he **did** this thing, "because you have **obeyed** My voice." God rewards people when they have faith enough to **obey**, not before and not without obedience.

To receive eternal life, we too must have obedient faith. Hebrews 10:39; 11:6 — God rewards people who diligently seek Him by faith. The stories cited in Heb. 11 tell of people who received various rewards.

But they illustrate the faith we need for “*saving of the soul.*” The faith needed, according to God’s inspired examples, is **obedient** faith: v4 — Abel **offered**; V7 — Noah **prepared** an ark; v8 — Abraham **obeyed** to go out; v30 — the walls of Jericho fell **after** they were compassed.

James 2:14-26 — Can one be saved by faith without works? Such a faith is **dead**, like demon’s faith. Abraham’s act of offering Isaac is here again used as an example of acceptable faith — he was justified by works because **faith was working together with works**. He was not justified by “faith alone” nor by works without faith. Both go together. But neither faith nor works **earn** God’s reward; they are simply the conditions we must meet to receive God’s favor by grace.

Abraham’s faith challenges us to realize we must obey to receive forgiveness and eternal salvation. Many other passages teach the same: Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6.

Continued obedience is also needed after baptism because we must **continue** to have faith, and that must continue to be obedient faith: Revelation 2:4,5; 2:10; 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Observe also the faith and obedience demonstrated by Isaac. We do not know how old he was at this time. He must have been quite strong to carry the wood of the offering (v6). He was also able to reason to understand the significance of the items they carried but the absence of the sacrifice. He may have been a teenager or even older than that. Doubtless, he could have stopped an old man like Abraham from killing him. If he did not know before, he surely knew when Abraham started tying him up, that he was the sacrifice. Yet, there is no indication he made any effort to resist or even spoke out to stop what was being done. If nothing else, he could have tried to run away, but there is no indication he did so.

Truly in many ways this is parallel to the death of Jesus on the cross.

### **22:11,12 - God stopped Abraham’s hand**

Abraham shows that serving God requires us to be willing to sacrifice. God blessed Abraham because he had not withheld his **only son** from God (cf. v16). Here was the purpose of the test. God did not want Isaac dead. He stopped the sacrifice when Abraham had proved that God was more important to him than his son was. It was an issue of **priorities**.

The question of priorities is often demonstrated by what we are willing to **sacrifice** (give up). When people are forced to make a choice between two things, the choice they make shows what is most important.

God faced Abraham with a choice: give up (sacrifice) his son, or give up faithfulness to God. Which was more important: son or God. To refuse to sacrifice Isaac was to say Isaac was more important to him than God. To sacrifice Isaac was to say God was more important than Isaac. True faith requires us to pay whatever price is needed to put God first. Abraham passed the test because he had the faith. Do we?

Matthew 10:34-37 — Jesus must be more important to us than **family**. Would we be willing to give up our relationship with spouse, parents, children, rather than do something displeasing to God? Abraham proved his faith by sacrificing his son. Do we have the faith to refuse to please our loved ones in order to please God?

Matthew 19:29 — We must be willing to give up father or mother, wife or children, etc., to be Jesus' disciples. We often face this choice, but not on the same scale Abraham did. If our family wants us to do something Christians should not do or wants us to dress as Christians should not dress, or if relatives want us to stay home from worship to visit with them, we face a choice. What we are willing to give up shows where our priorities are and what is most important to us. See also such passages as Luke 14:33; Matthew 6:33; 16:24; 2 Timothy 3:4.

Abraham shows that our faith determines our priorities, and our priorities determine our sacrifices. Our choices seem so petty compared to Abraham's. Consider what a major sacrifice he made and how small our sacrifices are by comparison. Surely his faith would teach us to get our priorities right and make the right choices.

Note that God said "now I know..." Couldn't He have known otherwise? It is possible that He did know and this was just an expression showing that Abraham had now demonstrated his devotion openly for all to see. However, passages like this seem to confirm the idea that, although God **can** know anything or everything from the future, yet He limits the exercise of that power and often chooses to wait for events to unfold to discover what people will do.

In any case, God's statement shows beyond doubt that Abraham's conduct was necessary for God to be willing to bless Him. Abraham's faith had to show itself in obedience, just as ours must do for God to be willing to forgive our sins and save us eternally.

### ***22:13,14 God provided a substitute for Isaac***

Indeed God did provide the sacrifice, just as Abraham had said in v8. But it was not provided in the form that Abraham had expected. God provided a ram caught in a thicket. This is what Abraham killed and offered instead of Isaac.

Abraham therefore named the place after the Lord as provider. God is likewise our provider and we need to appreciate Him and His provision for us.

### ***22:15-19 - The promise to Abraham repeated***

The angel of God then repeated the promise that had been made to Abraham when he left his homeland to journey to Canaan (see notes on Gen. 12). This is reaffirmed on the basis of Abraham's obedience and his willingness to sacrifice his son to God.

Note that, in this promise, God swore an oath, swearing by Himself. Hebrews 6:13-18 refers to this showing that God swore by Himself because He had nothing higher or greater to swear by. This shows how immutable was God's determination to keep this promise to Abraham. Not only did He promise — and God always keeps His promises — but He also made an oath confirming the promise.

Also, note again the clear statement that Abraham's obedience was a necessary condition for God to grant him this blessing. "Because you have **done** this thing..." The fact Abraham did what God had commanded was essential to receive the blessing God had promised. No amount of gainsaying can counteract this clear truth.

Following this test and his amazing commitment to God, Abraham returned to live at Beersheba.

### ***22:20-24 - News regarding Abraham's relatives***

Abraham then heard some news regarding his brother Nahor. Nahor had apparently remained in Mesopotamia. Their other brother Haran had died (see 11:26-32).

Nahor had twelve sons by his wife Milcah and his concubine. Hence, Terah's sons Nahor and Abraham both produced many offspring.

We are not specifically told why this information is included. However, one item in this genealogy becomes of great importance. The genealogy mentions only sons with one exception. Nahor's son Bethuel had a daughter named Rebekah. She eventually became Isaac's wife (see chap. 24). This is apparently the reason for giving the information.

Note that Abraham's son married Abraham's brother's granddaughter. Rebekah was a full generation behind Isaac. However, it must be remembered that Isaac was not born till Abraham was 100 years old, so that surely explains why he would marry a woman from another generation.



# Genesis 23

## Chap. 23 - The Death and Burial of Sarah

### **23:1,2 - The death of Sarah**

Following Abraham's trial regarding the sacrifice of Isaac, the next recorded event is the death of Sarah. God's promise through her had been fulfilled. She had given birth to the promised son. No doubt, she raised him well and was very close to him, for he missed her greatly after she died, even though he was a fully-grown man (24:67).

Sarah died at age 127. (She is the only woman in the Bible whose age is stated at the time of her death, though this is commonly done for men.) At that time, Abraham would have been 137 and Isaac would have been 37 (21:5; 17:17). She died in Kirjath Arba, which we are told (probably by Moses who wrote the account many years later) was also named Hebron (see *map*). They had evidently moved since the time of the sacrifice of Isaac when they lived in Beersheeba (22:19).

Abraham mourned and wept for her. Any man, who had enjoyed such a long and happy marriage as Abraham had with Sarah, would rightly mourn her passing. The Bible does not condemn grief at the time of death. Even Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus, and He knew He was going to raise him from the dead (John 11:33-35). Death is always presented in the Bible as an enemy, being a curse as a consequence of sin (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:26).

But this was no ordinary woman. Without question, she is one of the greatest women in the Bible. She was the wife of one of the greatest men in the Bible. She had left her homeland with her husband and wandered in a strange land, because God had told Abraham to go.

One of the greatest promises God ever made was fulfilled through her giving birth to Isaac. This birth was miraculous, coming at a time in her life when childbirth was physically impossible. Hebrews 11:11 specifically praises her faith. It was her responsibility then to bring up the one through whom God's promises would be fulfilled. One of the greatest services women can do is to bear and raise godly children. Sarah is a great example for women today. Yet many women belittle and even ridicule the value of childbirth and raising children.

Sarah was known for her beauty. Yet, she is expressly mentioned in the New Testament as an example of a godly woman who submitted to her husband and put godly character above outward beauty (1 Pet. 3:1-6).

She was not perfect. But she grew in faith and is known throughout the Bible for her importance in God's plan. Let godly women imit-



ate her good qualities. Truly, it was right for Abraham to mourn the passing of such a woman. Let godly men learn to likewise appreciate godly women and praise them for the work they do. Cf. Prov. 31:1-31.

### ***23:3,4 - Abraham sought a burial place for Sarah***

The time of grief must end and life must go on. So, Abraham arose from mourning. Sarah was the first of Abraham's family to die in Canaan. Till this time he needed no burial place. He went to the sons of Heth (Hittites — v10; cf. 10:15; 26:34; 27:46) to purchase a burial place because he was a stranger in the land and had no place to use for a grave.

This story is both interesting and sad. God had promised Abraham the land. In time, the whole territory would belong to his descendants. Yet at this time he did not own enough property to bury his wife in.

Clearly, he had lived a nomadic life, traveling to wherever he thought he could best provide for his herds. He was obviously very wealthy and powerful, yet for all that he did not own any of the land God had promised him.

(Note: Acts 7:16 refers to a burial place purchased by Abraham near Shechem. Yet that appears to be a different place from this one. Had Stephen's statement been inaccurate, his enemies would have quickly refuted him. See notes in Morris, p. 389f; cf. Coffman.)

As far as the record goes, the only property Abraham himself ever owned were burial places for his dead (cf. Acts 7:5).

### ***23:5-9 - Arranging the sale of the property begins***

The sons of Heth were willing to honor Abraham's request. They said he was a mighty prince among them. He was rich and powerful and they knew it. They were willing to give him the choicest of their burial places. It appears that at first they were willing to simply allow him to use one of their burial places, but he wanted to buy one instead.

So Abraham specified the property. It was the cave of Machpelah in a field owned by Ephron, son of Zohar. Abraham offered to buy the field at its full value. He needed a burial place, but he was not poor and was not asking for charity. He would pay what was required.

The place was a cave. Apparently, cave burials were common. Jesus was buried in a cave even many centuries later.

This event illustrates the customs of that day regarding exchange of property or possessions. Speech was very respectful. Abraham bowed to them. Each spoke honorably one to the other. Some of this could, of course, have been formality. Nevertheless, it is clear that customs regarding buying and selling of property did exist. This was a civilized society. Such transactions were well known.

### ***23:10-16 - The transaction completed***

Ephron was consulted in the presence of other men at the gate of the city. Note that such business transactions and other legal matters

were often settled at the city gates, similarly to the town square in the early history of our country.

Ephron offered to give the field and the cave to Abraham. This appears to have been an offer to give the land without price. It may have been a formality, knowing the offer would not be accepted; or it may have been sincere as a gesture of friendliness to so powerful a man.

In any case, Abraham respectfully said he would buy the land. As in his dealings with the king of Sodom, he refused to do anything that would lead the inhabitants to resent him or think his wealth had been obtained by taking unfair advantage of them.

Ephron said the field was worth 400 shekels of silver, and Abraham paid the price, currency of the merchants. Note that there was commonly accepted currency in that day (though it may have been just a weight of silver). And witnesses were present to testify to the transaction. Some commentators say this was an exorbitant price. Ephron may have expected Abraham to barter with him, as was commonly done. But Abraham simply paid the price, thereby emphasizing that the people had not made him wealthy.

### ***23:17-20 - The field and its cave became a burial place for Abraham's family***

The field was near Mamre, which was the same as Hebron (v19). Abraham had lived there before (14:13). It was a place he was familiar with and here he chose to bury Sarah.

Apparently, a careful deed was made in which Abraham purchased the field, the cave, and the trees that were within the boundaries of the field. All this was done in the presence of witnesses at the gate of the city. This all appears to be in full harmony with the customs of the day.

There Abraham buried Sarah. This place became an important burial place in the history of the descendants of Abraham (see 49:29-31). Other people later buried in this cave were: Abraham himself (25:9), Isaac (35:27,29), Rebekah (49:29-31), Leah (49:29-31), and Jacob (50:13).

# Genesis 24

## Chap. 24 - Abraham Sought a Wife for Isaac

### *24:1-4 - Abraham appointed his servant to find a wife for Isaac*

As Abraham advanced in years, he knew he needed to make sure his son Isaac married the proper woman. Isaac was 40 when he married (25:20), so Abraham must have been nearly 140 when the events of this chapter occurred. Though he lived a number of years afterward (he died at 175 — 25:7), yet he had no way to know how much longer he would live.

It was important for Isaac to marry so the promises could come true through his descendants. Yet he was nearly 40 years old and had no wife. Abraham determined it was time to take action.

He called the oldest servant, the one who had charge of all Abraham's possessions (cf. v10). Since so much time had passed, it seems doubtful that this servant was Eliezer, mentioned in 15:32. A man of Abraham's wealth and possessions would need servants to help care for all he had. In such cases, it was common to have a steward who would be responsible for running the daily affairs of all the household and possessions. This freed the master to do other work, such as supervising and checking up on all his possessions and even beginning new ventures. It also left him some time to spend with his family instead of constantly doing routine daily activities. (Joseph later became such a steward for Potiphar — Gen. 39).

A servant in this position must be very trustworthy. Abraham trusted this one so much he gave him the duty of finding a wife for Isaac. The servant must not take a wife from among the Canaanites, but go back to Abraham's people and find a wife from them. He made the servant place his hand under Abraham's thigh and swear. This was apparently to them a very serious form of oath (cf. 47:29). He also swore by the true God.

The Canaanites were extremely corrupt, which was why God would eventually cast them out of the land and let Abraham's descendants take the land. None of them would be a suitable companion for Isaac. But Abraham had heard from his family and knew they had numerous descendants (22:20-24). Among them might be some who would believe in the true God. In any case, they would surely be better people than these Canaanites. So, Abraham required the servant to find a wife for Isaac from among those of his family.

We should take a lesson from Abraham's concern that his son find a proper marriage companion. This was especially important in Isaac's case, since he was a son of promise, a very special son who would receive great promises and through whom God's people would be preserved. If they were to maintain God's favor, it was important for Isaac to have a good wife.

Yet all Christians should want their children to marry companions that would help them serve God. We go to great lengths to see that our children are well educated and maintain good health. How much more important should it be to see that they marry the proper companion? We should not be satisfied to let our children marry people who are simply close by and convenient. Are these people going to help our children be faithful to God and raise godly children? If not, we must discourage our children from marrying them. We should be willing to go to great lengths, if necessary, to find proper companions.

In that society, parents were more involved in their children's selection of spouses than today. Isaac was willing to allow his father to make the entire arrangements. Sometimes the children themselves, however, did make the choice (cf. Jacob with Rachel).

Parents have greater experience and therefore greater wisdom than children. This is one of the most important decisions in a young person's life. Yet, too often today we leave the decision up to young people who are totally unaccustomed to making major decisions and totally unprepared to know what to look for. Modern American dating is a system filled with dangers for young people. When godly parents love their children and want what is best for them, their children ought to listen with great respect to their parents' guidance, especially in major decisions such as choice of a marriage companion.

This story also shows the great value of a godly woman. Abraham had been married to a godly woman, and he knew how important it was for Isaac to have the same blessing. A worthy wife is the greatest blessing a man can have in this life (other than his relationship with God) — Prov. 31:10-31. The choice should be made with great care.

Marriage is a lifetime commitment. Too many do not see the seriousness of the commitment and so do not choose with proper care. As a result, marriages are often unhappy and uncommitted, resulting in divorce and broken homes. Children are left broken in spirit and without proper guidance, and souls are lost eternally. Surely, we should imitate Abraham's concern for his son's marriage.

Coffman goes to great lengths to emphasize that the marriage between Rebekah and Isaac is a type or symbol of the relationship between Jesus and the church. I know of no passage that makes any such point, though of course it could still be true.

### ***24:5-9 - The servant clarified the task***

The servant, receiving such a serious charge, naturally wanted to make sure he understood his duty. He asked what he should do if he found a young woman but she would not come back with him to marry Isaac. Should he bring Isaac to the girl?

This was a natural question. He was being asked to travel many miles away, find a woman none of them even knew, and get her consent to travel hundreds of miles and many days to a strange land where she had never been to marry a man she had never met. The likelihood of her refusing such an arrangement was significant. It might be much easier if Isaac could go so he and the young woman could meet one another. Both could have greater assurance and could attract one another.

But Abraham absolutely forbade bringing Isaac to the land from which he came. He cited God's promise that the land of Canaan would belong to Abraham's descendants. Abraham had left his father's house to come to this land, so he surely did not want his son to go back. Perhaps he was afraid the young woman and her family would persuade Isaac to stay with them instead of sending their daughter to go with Isaac. In any case, Abraham would not allow it.

Abraham's faith is manifest again in that he was convinced God would provide a wife for Isaac. He knew God had called him to leave his father's house to come to Canaan. He knew God had made great promises regarding Isaac's descendants. He had seen God's power to provide a son. He no longer doubted God's provisions. He was confident God would now send an angel and provide the wife that was needed.

Here again is a great lesson regarding choice of a marriage companion. We should have faith that God will provide what is needed. Do not settle for an unsuitable companion. If we are having trouble finding a good companion, do not compromise the standards of God's word. Instead, pray to God, trust Him, and wait for Him to provide.

However, Abraham also knew God did not always work the way people thought He might. So he assured the servant that, if the young woman he found would not come, the servant would be free from the vow.

The servant then swore the oath and began his preparations.

### ***24:10,11 - The servant journeyed to the city of Nahor***

As instructed, the servant prepared for the journey to the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia. The exact location is unknown, but it was in the vicinity of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Mesopotamia). This would be a very long journey and would need adequate provisions. In addition, the servant took many gifts for the girl and for her family. (The Waldrons point out that the "city of Nahor" does not mean the

city was named “Nahor,” but only that it was the city where Nahor had lived. Nahor, of course, had been Abraham’s brother.)

His job would be very difficult, and he wanted to do all he could to assure success. This meant taking much substance with him. He needed ten camels. This was easy for him to arrange since he had control of all of Abraham’s property. (Note that he did not undertake this long and important journey alone. Having considerable substance to convey such a long distance, he had other men with him — vv 32,54,59).

He arrived outside the city at the well. He came at evening when women go to draw water, and he made his camels kneel down.

### ***24:12-14 - A test for Isaac’s future bride***

No doubt, the servant had meditated for many hours, before and during the journey, planning exactly what strategy he would use to find the right girl to marry Isaac. Yet he knew, as we ought to know, that plans of men are worthless if they do not harmonize with God’s will. So, he began by asking God’s blessing on his effort, both for his own sake and for Abraham’s sake.

He then revealed his plan for identifying the proper girl, and asked God to bless his plan as a sign to him what girl God had chosen. He intended to ask the young women who came to draw water to give him a drink. The girl who also offered to water His camels would be the one to marry Isaac.

Now this plan would succeed only if God blessed it. Nevertheless, we can see some wisdom in the plan. In the first place, as the passage says, the young women were responsible to draw water for their families from the community well, so the well was a great place to meet young women! Furthermore, drawing water was a difficult task. There was no faucet at the kitchen sink! The girls would carry jars to the well, fill them, and carry them home. Water is heavy, and the work would not be easy.

A girl who would willingly go beyond her duty and dip water for a man and all his camels, must necessarily be a willing, diligent worker. Camels drink a lot of water, and there were ten of them (the Waldrons say each camel could typically drink five gallons). The girl would have to go to the well, fill her jar, and bring it up to the animals repeatedly till the job was done (vv 16,20). A girl who would do this would definitely not be lazy. Further, she must be hospitable and kind to others since she would be doing this for a complete stranger. The servant knew Isaac needed a special woman, and his test was intended to at least determine if a girl was considerate of others and a hard worker.

It is important to understand that this was an age of direct revelation from God, and that Isaac was a son of special promise from God to Abraham. For that reason, the servant had every right to believe that God would give him special guidance in his errand (cf. v50). God also

has promised to answer prayer for us, in that He will give what is best. However, He has nowhere promised to give us signs as direct answers to our prayers to guide us to know what His specific will is in such details of life as whom we ought to marry. Some have been misled into thinking that God works in our lives in answering prayer in exactly the same way as in this case. Such is not true, but that should not discourage us from praying. We should pray for what we believe is best and then ask God to do what He knows is best. He will work matters out for our good, but not by giving us a sign to guide us.

***24:15,16 - Rebekah arrived at the well even as the servant prayed***

God's answer to the servant's prayer was immediate, so much so that the girl arrived before he finished his prayer! God had determined to grant the servant's request in a way that no one could doubt. God had made Abraham and Sarah wait for many years before He fulfilled His promise to give them a son. But when that son needed a wife, God responded to the request before it was even completely made! God has different purposes for the way He acts, and no doubt He saw that an immediate response was needed in this case.

God knew that the request Abraham had made of the servant was a hard one. The chance of finding the right kind of girl was slim. The chance that the girl, if found, would be willing to go hundreds of miles away to marry a man she had never met, was even slimmer (see notes above). God needed signs that would convince, not just the servant, but the girl and her family, that she was God's own choice for Isaac's wife (cf. v50).

The girl who came was the very Rebekah that Abraham had heard about when he received news from his family (22:20ff). She was the daughter of Bethuel, who was in turn the son of Nahor by his wife Milcah. So, she was the granddaughter of Abraham's brother. This might normally have made her much younger than Isaac, but in this case her age would have been about right since Isaac had been born when Abraham was so old.

The servant's test would help him determine if the girl was hospitable and hard working. But Rebekah was more than those, she was also beautiful. She was also, of course, a virgin who had never had sexual relations with a man.

Here is an important lesson regarding moral purity for all young people. Rebekah saved her sexual pleasures for her husband within marriage. This is exactly how God says it should be (Heb. 13:4). Yet far too many do not learn the lesson.

This whole story is a beautiful love story, showing the beauty of marriage and the importance of finding a good marriage companion. In addition, it shows the need to pray for God's blessings on our efforts

to find a marriage companion. But here we also learn the importance of maintaining virtue before marriage.

### ***24:17-20 - Rebekah fulfilled the sign***

The sign the servant had requested was immediately fulfilled as he asked Rebekah for a drink from her pitcher, as he had planned. She let down her pitcher to give him a drink, but then said she would draw for his camels until they had drunk their fill. And this is what she did.

This was the exact fulfillment the servant had requested. It was plainly the sign from God as previously described.

### ***24:21-25 - The servant asked Rebekah who she was***

The servant knew, of course, that he had a difficult task to perform. He wondered at Rebekah and was amazed that she did exactly as he had asked. Yet, he remained quiet because there was much yet to be determined before it was clear that the Lord had granted what he sought. Was she really of the right family, and would she be willing to go to marry Isaac?

He began by giving her gifts of gold, a ring for her nose and bracelets for her arms. This was a very generous gift, no doubt of far greater value than the service she had rendered him. But he knew the girl was about to be asked to do a very difficult thing, and he wanted all the favor he could get.

He also used every advantage he had that would work in his favor. One was that Abraham (and therefore Isaac) was wealthy. This had probably been told to his relatives, just as he had heard about their well being. While people should not marry for wealth, yet a woman needs a sense of security when she is asked to leave her home and travel many miles to marry someone she has never met. And her family would be concerned for her well being. The generous gifts the servant gave would serve to offer her security, to confirm that his master was wealthy, and to make Rebekah and her family more favorably inclined to his request.

But the servant did not yet even know the girl's name or family, so he asked. To his amazement he was told that she was the granddaughter of his master's own brother. God had led him directly to the very family and in fact to a beautiful, diligent, and very eligible daughter in the family he was seeking.

He also asked if there was room and provisions at her father's house for him to spend the night there. As has been discussed in Gen. 18 and 19, travelers commonly stayed with people along the route. But in this case, it was obvious the man was well able to pay for whatever he needed. Rebekah said her father had plenty of room and provisions (though she had not yet asked her father's permission, which she soon proceeded to do).



### **24:26,27 - The servant gave thanks to God**

The servant did what we sometimes forget to do. He had asked God for a specific blessing on his mission. God was obviously blessing him toward his goal. So, he stopped immediately and gave God thanks. Thankfulness is a quality all Christians need but we all sometimes lack. If we want God to care for our needs, the least we can do is to thank Him when He does.

One wonders if Rebekah observed, or perhaps even overheard the content of this prayer. If she saw, it must have favorably impressed her. If she also heard, it would have amazed her. Here was a servant of her grandfathers' brother, who had moved away many years ago! He still worshiped the true God and had spoken to her at their very well. In any case, her amazement was due to grow by leaps and bounds as the story unfolds!

### **24:28-31 - Rebekah's family welcomed Abraham's servant**

Rebekah ran home and told the people of her mother's house all that had happened. This included at least that she had watered the man's camels and he had given her gifts and asked a place to stay. If she heard the prayer, she would have told them the man was a servant of Abraham.

Rebekah had a brother named Laban. He heard Rebekah's story and saw the gifts she had received. So, he ran to the well and urged the servant to come to stay with them. Laban later played an important role in Jacob's search for a wife. It turns out he was greedy and deceitful. One wonders how much he was influenced by the rich gifts Rebekah had received, when he made this generous offer of hospitality.

Note that Laban greeted the servant and blessed him in the name of the Lord. One wonders if this was his normal greeting, or if it was because Rebekah had observed the servant pray to the Lord. Worshipers of the true Lord were few and far between in that day and area. No doubt if he knew the man worshiped the true God, this would also encourage his hospitality, just as Christians today have much in common when they meet.

Why is it called Rebekah's *mother's* house (see a similar point on vv 53,55)? Normally, as Coffman points out, the family is identified as the father's house. Rebekah's father was Bethuel, and the account later refers to a Bethuel who was still living – v50. One explanation is that, for whatever reason, the father is not much in charge any more. His wife and son seem much more actively involved in the decisions that are made, though Bethuel was once consulted. Perhaps he was very elderly or somehow disabled. Coffman suggested that perhaps the Bethuel in v50 was a son, who had the same name as his father, but the father was dead.

### ***24:32,33 - Abraham's servant determined to state his case***

The servant was brought to the house and his camels were provided for. Water was also brought to wash the feet of the servant and the other men with him. This was a common act of hospitality for travelers, as in the case of Abraham in Gen. 18.

Food was also provided for the servant himself, but he was determined to press on with his errand before he would even eat. No doubt, this was because he was so excited and concerned that he could not comfortably eat until he knew the outcome of his mission. God was obviously prospering him. He wanted to pursue while he could.

Besides, the people of the family would no doubt be wondering at his unusual behavior (especially if they already knew he was from Abraham), and they too would be eager to hear his story. And by proceeding immediately even before eating, he was showing them how important he considered this matter to be.

### ***24:34-36 - The servant told about Abraham and his family***

He began by telling about Abraham. Surely they would want to know some news about their relative. This was also important to the servant's mission. The girl and her relatives needed to know about the family she would be asked to marry into. It would help if the family were related to and known by her own family. It would also help if they were wealthy enough to secure the daughter's care. The servant gave them assurance of all this.

Then he began to tell about Isaac, the prospective groom, how he was born, and why it was important for him to get a wife in this manner. He also mentioned that the family wealth would all go to this son.

### ***24:37-41 - Next, the servant told about his mission to find a wife for Isaac***

He told them the reason Abraham wanted a wife from his own relatives. In so doing, he brought the Lord into the story showing that they were confident this was the doing of the Lord. If the family were believers in the Lord, as the servant expected them to be, this would make a major impression on them too. Even more important than financial security ought to be the knowledge that this marriage would be established in harmony with God's will.

In fact, as he proceeded, he would show that God had specifically picked the very girl he wanted to marry Isaac. Yet, at this point he had made no direct reference to Rebekah nor told that he had a specific girl in mind.

Imagine the amazement of the family, and Rebekah in particular, as this story unfolded. Imagine knowing that God Himself had directly and specifically chosen you to be married to a particular man!

### ***24:42-48 - The servant repeated the story of how he met Rebekah***

The servant told how he met Rebekah at the well and how she precisely fulfilled the sign he had prayed the Lord to give him. This story, of course, was known to the servant and had already even been recorded here for us. The purpose for repeating it was to impress Rebekah and her family that she was indeed the one God had chosen.

The servant was convinced he had found the right girl. That was not enough. His project now was to convince her and the family so that she would be willing to go with him. Surely, this evidence would show that God was telling all of them that Rebekah was the one chosen.

### ***24:49-51 - Rebekah's family accept God's will***

Abraham's servant then came directly to the point. He had made his mission clear and presented the evidence for his request. He plainly asked them if they would allow Rebekah to go with him to become Isaac's wife. Note the words "kindly and truly," which are respectful, but also show that, under the circumstances, it would be cruel treatment to him, after all he had been through, should they refuse.

Laban and Bethuel, the brother and father, both gave the exact answer the servant had sought. There was really nothing for them to decide if they believed in God. God had already clearly decided the matter and revealed his will. They did not see that it was a matter for them to dispute one way or the other. They said he should take Rebekah to be Isaac's wife, as God had spoken.

That was the goal sought by God and the servant in all the signs and other evidence presented to the family.

Interestingly, nothing has been said to indicate that Rebekah herself had been consulted. Perhaps she was observing the conversation. But in that day the family could decide for the child, at least for a daughter. However, this was more than that. God had decided and revealed his will. There was really no need to consult Rebekah. If she believed in God, she really had no more choice than they did. Of course, if she believed in God, she would not want to do anything different. What a great joy to be chosen by God to be the wife of so great a man, so destined to play a major role in the history of the world and of God's plan for all mankind!

### ***24:52,53 - The servant gave thanks to God and gifts to Rebekah's family***

The servant again gave thanks to God. Now he knew the final verdict. God had greatly blessed and directed him in his efforts to accomplish a very difficult mission. He ought to have thanked God, even as we ought to do when God so blesses us.

The servant then had many gifts of jewelry and clothing for Rebekah. He had precious things for her mother and brother (note again

that the father is not mentioned – see notes on v28). This was no doubt the custom of the time, but especially in this case the gifts would express appreciation to the girl and her family for their willingness to cooperate in so difficult an arrangement.

### ***24:54-58 - Rebekah agreed to go the very next day***

Having resolved the mission, the servant was willing to eat. They stayed that night, but in the morning he wanted to leave with Rebekah. The family naturally wanted to spend some time with her. They were about to lose her, probably for good. None of them had ever seen Abraham since he left. He obviously had no intent to let his son go back to the homeland, so the chances they would ever see Rebekah again were very slight. They requested that she stay at least ten days before she left. (Note once again that her brother and her mother are the only ones mentioned as having any say in these decisions – no mention of a father – see on v28.)

But the servant wanted to leave. The Lord had prospered him this far and he wanted to get back to his master and have the job completed. Was he perhaps afraid they might change their minds? In any case, he knew he had found the girl and he wanted to get back with her. Besides, ten more days would not really have helped much. They had her with them since birth and would never see her again, so ten days would not make much difference in the long run.

They agreed to just ask Rebekah and accept her decision. Note that they did have respect for Rebekah. The decision as to whether or not she should marry Isaac had been out of their control anyway. But here they did consult her, and she agreed to go.

This tells us much about Rebekah. “I will go.” She was obviously a courageous young woman, as well as diligent and hospitable. She showed faith in God too. The signs had evidently convinced her this is what God wanted. With just one day’s notice, she left her home and family to travel with totally strange men many miles from home to a strange land she knew nothing about, to marry a young man she had never met. This took nearly as much faith as Abraham had manifested when he left to go to Canaan.

Good and godly women are rare jewels, greatly to be treasured. One who will devote herself to God’s will and to her husband should be loved and appreciated. This is a beautiful, though unusual romance, as lovely as any to be found in fiction.

Coffman points out that Christians must make a similar commitment to become members of the church, the bride of Christ. We must be willing to act in faith to accept the message of the Bible to commit ourselves to serve God for a lifetime to receive an eternal reward from Christ, whom we have never seen. Yet, we must act by faith based on the evidence in God’s word.

### ***24:59-61 - Rebekah's family blessed her and sent her away***

Before Rebekah left, the family pronounced a blessing on her. People always wish well to those who are undertaking great steps in life, especially a marriage. Yet this almost seems to be an inspired prophecy.

We will see that fathers, in this Patriarchal Age, often pronounced blessings on their sons. These blessings sometimes virtually amounted to prophecies of the future of the son or his descendants. Nothing indicates that any of these people were prophets, though they apparently worshiped the true God. In any case, their blessing came absolutely true, so they somehow were guided by God to know the future. (Perhaps they had heard of the promises God had made regarding Isaac).

They said her descendants should be multiplied millions and should possess the gate or have the dominion over their enemies. This is exactly what God had promised to Abraham would come true through Isaac (and therefore through Rebekah), and it did come true as the Scriptures reveal.

So, the servant left taking his men and Rebekah and her nurse and her maids (servants). Later accounts show the nurse was named Deborah (35:8). They all rode on camels. This shows that Rebekah's family too had been somewhat prosperous that even their daughter had servants.

(The word "sister" is interesting. Why is she not called "daughter"? Her father, as we have wondered, may not have been involved much if at all. But her mother was surely involved. Perhaps Rebekah's brother Laban, as the male leader of the family, pronounced the blessing in these terms.)

### ***24:62-67 - Rebekah and Isaac meet and marry***

Abraham had been living in Hebron (23:19) when Sarah died. However, at the time of this story Isaac had been to Beer Lahai Roi, where Hagar had fled from Sarah after she had conceived Ishmael (16:14). Isaac later lived there (25:11), and here we are told simply that he dwelt in the South. Either Abraham's whole family had moved or else Isaac had already moved some distance away from his father.

He was meditating in the field in the evening, when he saw the camels coming. No doubt he knew the mission on which Abraham had sent his servant. What he was meditating about is not stated. Perhaps it was spiritual meditation as godly people ought to do (Phil. 4:8; Psa. 1:1,2; etc.). Perhaps it included plans for a wife.

No doubt, when he saw the camels, he concluded who it was. In any case, he began to walk to meet them, as v65 shows. Rebekah from her camel saw Isaac and asked the servant who the man was coming toward them. He informed her who it was. She dismounted and

covered herself with her veil as was the custom, apparently, for brides before they have wed.

The servant told Isaac what had happened. What an amazing story Isaac then heard. While his new bride stood by, he heard from the servant the amazing blessing and guidance God had given whereby this very woman was chosen by God himself to be his wife. The story is filled with amazement and romance from beginning to end. Who ever said the Bible contains nothing romantic?

Isaac took Rebekah to live in his mother's tent, presumably till the marriage. Then he married her and loved her. This gave him comfort after his mother's death.

Note that Isaac and Rebekah had never met before she came riding home to be his bride. How long she was there before the marriage is not stated. But they learned to love. Love is not necessary before marriage, though it is perfectly good and even an advantage. But love is something married couples must **learn** in marriage. If people are a reasonably good match and both love God, they can learn to love one another if they will.

In fact, love is commanded in marriage (Ephesians 5:25-29; Titus 2:4). Couples do not just "fall into" or out of love, as so many moderns speak of. Love is a choice of the will that can blossom into a beautiful emotion. But the commitment is what must underlie the relationship. The fact a married couple do not love one another constitutes no justification for divorce. What they need to do is to recognize their error, repent, and learn to love.

Then note the close relationship Isaac must have had with his mother. When he was 37, she died. He was still in need of comfort 3 years later. This tells us much about the close relationship he and Sarah had.

So comes to a climax one of the most beautiful stories in the Bible, and one of the most beautiful love stories ever told anywhere. God honors marriage and He honors those who honor His will regarding it. A godly wife is truly a great blessing from the Lord.

# Genesis 25

## 25:1-18 - Abraham's Other Descendants and His Death

### ***25:1-4 - Abraham had several sons by his wife Keturah***

The account of Abraham's life is coming to a close. As promised, God gave him the son through whom the promises were to come true. His godly wife died, and Abraham found a good wife for his heir.

Nevertheless, God had said Abraham would be a father of many nations. Several of these would come from Ishmael and Isaac. Yet, Abraham also took another wife named Keturah, and she bore him six sons who also in turn added more descendants to Abraham.

The exact timing is not stated. Keturah is called a concubine (v6; cf. 1 Chronicles 1:32), meaning a secondary wife or one without the full privileges of a primary wife. (See the discussion regarding Hagar, and note nevertheless that she was a "wife" - v1). It does not seem, from the record, that this was done while Sarah was alive. However, Abraham did have Hagar as a concubine while Sarah was alive. If he married Keturah after Sarah died, then he would have been at least 137 years old when he married her (cf. 23:1). To have had six sons at this age, when he thought he could have none at 100, would be truly amazing. For this reason, some argue that, as with Hagar, Abraham married Keturah while Sarah was still alive. This may be so, but seems of little consequence either way. Stories are often told out of chronological sequence in order to complete other stories or themes.

Little is known about most of Keturah's sons. The account here gives further information about only two, Jokshan and Midian. There are other references in the Bible that could refer to the descendants of Jokshan. Midian, however, was surely the head of the Midianites, who became a mighty nation and were often in contact with Israel in later years. They are mentioned numerous times in Scripture. They settled east and southeast of Palestine (see v6).

So, the Israelites, who descended from Abraham through His grandson Jacob, eventually became two nations, Judah and Israel. In addition, we have the following nations from Abraham: Ishmaelites through his son Ishmael, Midianites through his son Midian, and Edomites through his grandson Esau. What other nations may have come is uncertain. It is surely amazing to see so many nations descended from one man.

### ***25:5,6 - Abraham sent away all his sons except Isaac***

Abraham had, at the guidance of God, sent away his son Ishmael so that there would be no conflict with Isaac and no doubt about who

was to be Abraham's heir (chap. 21). The same was done with his other sons by Keturah. He gave them gifts, no doubt providing for them so they could get a good start in life. But he sent them away, during his lifetime, to the east so they would be away from Isaac.

This no doubt pleased God, as in the case of Ishmael. It guaranteed that Isaac would clearly be his heir (v5), and that there would be no conflict among the sons. Isaac was a special son through whom special promises would come true. There was to be no doubt in anyone's mind who was to be Abraham's heir and through whom the promises would come true. This was all clearly settled by Abraham during his lifetime so there would be no conflicts afterward.

These sons were sent to the east, which would be toward the Arabian Desert. It appears that they and their descendants, like many of the other descendants of Abraham and Lot, eventually intermarried and merged to become what is today known as the Arabians.

(Coffman argues that the term "concubines" here means that Abraham had other secondary wives in addition to Hagar and Keturah, but I see no reason why that is necessarily true. Hagar and Keturah would constitute "concubines," plural. No others are named. They may have existed, but nothing here requires it.)

### **25:7-11 - The death of Abraham**

Sarah had died in Gen. 23, and Abraham had provided a burial place for her in the cave of Machpelah in a field purchased from Ephron the Hittite. Finally, after these many and wonderful promises and blessings of God, which have been recorded in detail through 14 chapters of Genesis, this great man of God died at the age of 175.

No doubt, he is one of the greatest men in Bible history, and therefore one of the greatest men in the history of the world. Few men have as much recorded about their lives in the Bible. Surely, none ever received greater personal promises directed especially to him, and few are referred to again so frequently through Bible history after their lives.

His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham where he had buried Sarah. Apparently, the conflict between these sons had ended (like that between Esau and Jacob eventually was outgrown), or perhaps they set it aside for the funeral. There is no record of further conflict between Isaac and Ishmael after Abraham sent Ishmael away.

Abraham was dead, but the promises lived on. In a sense, the whole of Bible history is a fulfillment of the promises made to this great man. Since that is true, the account immediately proceeds to take up the account of Isaac, through whom the promises came true. We are told that God blessed him, and he lived at Beer Lahai Roi, where Hagar had gone when fleeing from Sarah (see *map*).



## **25:12-18 - A genealogy of the descendants of Ishmael**

Since Ishmael was mentioned in connection with Abraham's death, the record proceeds to give the last information provided about Ishmael: a brief genealogy of his descendants.

We will comment on none of his specific descendants except to point out that there were twelve princes and their descendants became numerous, just as God had promised several times to Abraham and to Hagar (see notes on 17:20). In fact, v16 says the descendants of these princes were nations (plural). This could be just an expression for the tribes, like the descendants of Jacob, or perhaps they did separate to some extent.

Ishmael also died at the age of 137. His descendants are said to have lived east of Egypt. They too, most likely, eventually became part of what we today call Arabs.

## **II. Isaac – 25:19-28:9**

### **25:19-34 - The Birth and Early Life of Jacob and Esau**

#### **25:19-22 - Isaac's wife Rebekah conceived sons.**

The record proceeds to take up the history of Isaac, after the death of Abraham. He was forty years old when he married Rebekah (see chap. 24). Rebekah, however, had a similar problem to Sarah. She was barren and without children. They had to wait twenty years to have sons (v26).

Isaac prayed to God about it, and Rebekah conceived. God had promised many descendants through Isaac. Surely God intended to keep His promise. What anguish Isaac went through in the meantime, we are not told, though it must have been somewhat similar to Abraham's. No doubt, he had been told about all Abraham and Sarah went through, so perhaps he was a bit more patient than they had been. Remember, Abraham was still alive at this time to advise Isaac.

When Rebekah did conceive, she really conceived! Two boys were in her womb – twins!

Note that the inspired record calls these boys "children." The Bible, in passages like this, tells us much about how God views unborn life in the mother's womb. He uses terms, such as this one, which are identically the same (both in English and in Hebrew) to the terms otherwise used for children that have been born. In short, they are terms that mean, by their very definition and usage, human individuals. This demonstrates that God views the life in the mother's womb to be a living human being. It follows that it is worthy of all the care and protection that ought to be given to children who have been born.

So, a woman who has conceived has a human individual in her womb. It is not just a part of her body, but is a separate person, her baby. For her to deliberately have it killed, as in the modern practice of abortion, is murder as surely as it would be if she had it killed after it is born. She ought rather to love and cherish and protect her baby. This is clearly and necessarily implied by the use of the term “children” and other such terms the Bible used for unborn babies (cf. Luke 1:36-44).

However, something was unusual about these boys. They were struggling together in Rebekah’s womb. Babies in the womb often move, and the mother can feel this when they are more advanced in development. But this was unusual. They were fighting one another, and Rebekah could surely feel them doing so. She wondered, if everything was well as she thought it should be, why this was happening. As is proper for one whose children are supposed to be special to God, she asked God about it. We are not told how she asked. Note that Abraham would still have been living at this time. He was a prophet. Perhaps she appealed to him, or perhaps she went to her own husband Isaac, since God often spoke to the head of the family to reveal His will.

### ***25:23 - God’s prediction regarding Isaac and Rebekah’s sons***

God answered Rebekah with a prophecy about the future, not just of the boys, but of their descendants. It is interesting how often statements or predictions about people in Genesis - especially about sons - are also or even primarily predictions about the ***descendants*** of those sons. This has happened before and will happen frequently through the rest of the book.

Perhaps this is because these people lived soon after the flood and soon especially in the history of God’s dealings with the descendants of Abraham. People are naturally interested in their offspring, but especially in this time of history early after the flood. But because of God’s promises, Abraham and his descendants were especially interested in the future of their offspring.

Each of Rebekah’s two sons would become a nation. Just as the sons were fighting already in Rebekah’s womb before they were even born, so there would be conflict between them and their descendants after they were born. One would be stronger than the other, and in particular the descendants of the older son would serve those of the younger son. This is contrary to normal expectations. Generally the older son dominated by having the birthright (double portion of the father’s possessions) and the family leadership. For a younger son to dominate would be unusual. This prediction, however, referred primarily to the future descendants of the sons.

This was eventually fulfilled, of course, in that Esau was the first-born and his descendants were the Edomites. Jacob was the younger son, and his descendants were the Israelites. God’s promises to Abra-

ham came true through the Israelites, and they eventually dominated the Edomites, exactly as God stated here.

This statement by God shows that God knew and intended from the beginning that Jacob would be the son through whom the promises to Abraham and Isaac would come true. He would receive the leadership in the family and the promises, else how could his descendants dominate Esau's (remember that the promises concerned the descendants)?

This choice, made by God even before the boys were born, is referred to later in Malachi 1:1-3 and Rom. 9:10-13. Some use these references to argue for unconditional predestination of individuals to eternal life or eternal punishment. But when we read the original references, we see they have nothing to do with that. First, they are not predictions regarding individuals primarily, but rather to their descendants. Second, they have nothing to do with eternal life or eternal death, but rather to the conflicts and domination of nations here on earth. Individuals in either nation could still be saved or lost eternally.

Furthermore, it is most likely that God made these predictions on the basis of His foreknowledge of the future character of the boys and their descendants. So, the predictions, even as they stand, were not unconditional! God foreknew the kind of men Jacob and Esau would choose to be, though He did not compel them to be good or evil. He allowed them to choose their paths in life; but knowing what paths they would choose, He picked the one who would best serve His purposes as the head of the nation through whom He would fulfill His promises.

So, from before birth it was known that Jacob's descendants would have conflict with and prevail over Esau's descendants. It follows that Jacob should receive the promises and therefore the special inheritance from Isaac, just as Isaac had from Abraham.

However, the conflict predicted between the descendants began with conflict between the boys themselves. They struggled even in Rebekah's womb, and they had competition and conflict throughout much of their lives.

### ***25:24-26 - The birth of Esau and Jacob***

Time came for the boys to be born. The first to be born was red and hairy like a garment (as from an animal skin). He was named Esau (generally understood to mean "hairy").

The second turned out to be entirely different from his brother, both in appearance and temperament. We are later told that his skin was smooth, not hairy like Esau's, and even his voice was different. As he came out, he took hold of his brother's heel. He was named Jacob, meaning one who takes the heel or a supplanter (as one who tries to drag someone else down).

Since a point is made about taking the heel and the name given, there must be some significance. The idea seems to be that the sons

struggled or competed at birth. Hosea 12:3 says this had been happening even in the womb. So, these sons struggled in the womb, at birth, through much of their lives, and into the relationships of the nations that descended from them.

They were born when Isaac was 60 years old, whereas he had been born when Abraham was 100.

### ***25:27,28 - Jacob and Esau had different dispositions***

The Bible tells little about the early years of the boys. But when they grew up, they were entirely different in lifestyle and temperament, as they were in appearance. Esau loved to hunt and be in the fields. Jacob was mild and preferred to stay in the tents.

The Bible does not, as far as I can tell, condemn either lifestyle as such. It simply shows how the great differences between the boys manifested themselves and continued to create conflict. Morris argues that Esau's interests and occupation show a lack of interest in productive work and spirituality. His later conduct surely shows lack of spirituality, but nothing says this is true of his occupation.

The account then records a tragic, terrible error committed by Isaac and Rebekah. As their sons grew and their conflicts continued, the parents took sides. They played favorites. Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating the food that Esau killed in his hunting. But Rebekah loved Jacob more. So, instead of working together to try to teach the boys to love one another and become peaceable, the parents allowed the conflict between the boys to cause conflict between them.

Few errors that parents make can have more tragic results than playing favorites and taking sides in their children's conflicts. It not only alienates the parents from one another, but it magnifies the problems between the children, causing the conflict to continue and escalate. Instead of teaching the children to learn to get along, the parents lead the children to believe their conflicts and fusses are justified. In the case of Esau and Jacob, it led to strife that continued for years. The problem eventually resulted in threats of murder, so that one son had to leave home for many years. And all of this occurred in a family that God had chosen through whom great promises were to come true. What a shame and disgrace! Let us as parents take a lesson.

Abraham had, at God's guidance, avoided this kind of conflict when it began among his sons, by making absolutely clear from the outset which son would be his heir. Here we see the wisdom in this.

### ***25:29-34 - Esau sold his birthright to Jacob***

This story reveals how the course of events brought about great influences on future history. God had already said that Jacob was to become the leader over his older brother. In light of the nature of the promise to Abraham, this surely meant that God's promise would come true through Jacob, not Esau. Yet, Isaac preferred the older brother

and acted as if he did not realize that the younger was the one God had chosen.

The account does not say whether or not Jacob at this time knew that he was to have the promises and the leadership. But surely, his mother remembered, since God had made the prediction expressly to her, and she preferred Jacob anyway. Most likely, she was working to bring about Jacob's dominance. She surely did so later in the matter of the blessing (chap. 27). So, she may have told Jacob of the prediction God had made.

Unfortunately, the manner chosen by Jacob and Rebekah to bring this about was not wise and, at least in the case of the blessing, was downright deceitful and disrespectful. Their whole approach was based on competition and conflict rather than love, concern for others, and a desire for peace (as Abraham had shown toward Lot). Later events show that Rebekah's brother Laban was deceitful and competitive, so Rebekah may have learned such conduct in her parents' home and carried it over into her own family.

Esau came in from the field one evening very tired and hungry from hunting. Meantime Jacob at home had been cooking some stew or pottage. Esau asked Jacob to give him some of the stew because he was so hungry. As a result, he was called Edom (meaning "red" — ASV footnote), since it was red pottage. His descendants were later called Edomites.

Jacob said he would give Esau some stew if Esau would sell him the family birthright. The birthright involved a double portion of the family inheritance, and with it generally went leadership in the family, head of the clan, etc. (Deut. 21:17; Gen. 27:29). It also included spiritual leadership (Gen. 22:9; 26:25; 35:1). This would be a great privilege in any family, but especially in this family since God had promised such great blessings to come true through them. Normally this birthright would go to the oldest son, Esau in this case. And it might have appeared this would be the case in this family since Esau was so clearly the favorite of his father Isaac.

Jacob clearly desired the birthright, perhaps realizing that it had been predicted he would have the family dominance. Esau, however, did not care about it. Perhaps Jacob knew this from previous events or discussions. In any case, he offered Esau a deal: a meal for the birthright.

Esau agreed because he reasoned he was about to die anyway from hunger, and what good would the birthright do him if he died? So he agreed, even swearing an oath. Jacob, having secured the birthright, fed him the food and Esau went away.

Joseph Free (p68) records a similar example, recorded in the Nuzi tablets, in which a son sold his inheritance rights to his brother. So, such transactions did occur in those societies.

But the passage says that, in doing this, Esau showed that he despised his birthright — i.e., he did not value it as he should have. (“Despise” is used relatively here.) In God’s view, Esau did not appreciate what, by natural right, should have been his. In the first place, the meal he bought was not of great value. Surely Jacob was close to home when Esau made this agreement. Surely there was other food not far away. And who dies of hunger in a few moments or hours? Surely, he could have survived without Jacob’s stew, so his attitude was silly.

But more important the event shows that he just did not care much for the birthright and what it meant. Had he truly valued it, he would have refused to give it up even for something of great value, let alone for a simple meal of stew.

Other passages state Esau’s error in this. Hebrews 12:16,17 shows that his act was profane. This means he did not properly respect and honor something that possessed great spiritual value. His birthright carried with it great importance in God’s plan for mankind. This meant nothing to Esau (though the passage shows he later changed his mind, after it was too late).

This event reveals the character of Esau. The account later states that he married women whom he ought not to have married, and this became a problem to his parents. Whether Esau was eventually saved or lost eternally, I do not know. He does seem to have changed in later life. But the point is that, at this time in his life, his character was not what it should have been. God evidently knew ahead of time that this would be the case, so He chose Jacob to be the one through whom the promises would come true.

However, Jacob does not appear to be completely honorable here either. While he is not deceitful and disrespectful as his mother led him to be in the matter of the blessing in chap. 27, yet neither is he loving and concerned for his brother as he should have been. He should have been willing to share and be his brother’s keeper. Instead, he took unfair advantage of the situation to drive a bargain that he knew cheated Esau. The result eventually led to further alienation and conflict between him and Esau, as often happens when we take advantage of one another.

It seems to me that Jacob, and later Rebekah, made the same kind of mistake Sarah made when she tried to help God’s plans along by having Abraham marry Hagar. They knew what God had promised and they didn’t see it happening, so they decided they must help it along. Instead, they should have acted by faith in God and waited patiently for His will to be accomplished. They did not consult His will and act in His way, but went on in their own ideas, even though those ideas were selfish and unkind toward others.

In the matter of Rebekah’s barrenness and then the children struggling within her, Isaac and Rebekah had consulted God. Now it

seems they went their own way and did not seek His will. God had a plan, so He worked it out anyway, as in the case of Abraham and Sarah. But trouble resulted because it was not done His way. I believe that, had Jacob not used unkind methods but waited patiently, God would still have arranged for him to receive the birthright and the blessing. But it would have happened God's way in God's time. If there is anything to be learned from the story of Abraham and his descendants it is that, when God makes a promise, you may have to wait a long, long time for Him to fulfill it.

In the end, God granted the blessing and birthright to Jacob because he was still better suited to God's purposes than Esau. But that does not justify Jacob's methods. Let us not imitate him simply because his methods appear to have worked. Let us see all the problems that occurred in Isaac's family and later in Jacob's own family because of deceit and selfish unkindness, and let us learn to do things God's way by faith in Him.

Incidentally, Isaac himself appears to me to be somewhat to blame in this too in that he should have imitated Abraham and settled this matter of who would be heir once and for all early on, in harmony with God's prophecy. This would have removed cause for much of the conflict and deceit. Fathers need to take firm leadership in their families to prevent problems. Lack of making decisions is often as much a cause of problems as making bad decisions.

# Genesis 26

## Chap. 26 - Isaac's Relations with the People of the Land

Little has been said to this point about Isaac himself, other than the accounts of his birth, God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the selection of Isaac's wife, and the birth of his sons Esau and Jacob. God knew Abraham would command his household after him to follow God (18:19), so surely Abraham instructed Isaac about God's special promises and the fact they must come true through him. Nevertheless, the record to this point nowhere says that God had directly revealed these matters to Isaac.

But now that Abraham had died, it was time for God to begin dealing directly with the son through whom these promises were to be fulfilled. The entire record of the Old Testament, from the time of Abraham on, deals directly or indirectly with those through whom these promises would come true.

### **26:1-5 - God appeared to Isaac**

#### **Famine caused Isaac to go to the king of the Philistines – 26:1**

There was a famine in the land, so Isaac determined to go dwell in the region controlled by Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar. Gerar was northwest of Beersheeba (see *map*). A famine in the days of Abraham had led him to go to Egypt (12:10ff). On another occasion, he had lived near Abimelech in Gerar (20:1,2), though there was no reference to a famine in that case. The language here might indicate that this was the first serious famine since the one in Abraham's days.

Abimelech appears to be a family name or general name for the kings of the Philistines in Gerar, similar to Pharaoh in Egypt, Caesar in Rome, etc. It is unlikely that this was the same man Abimelech that was referred to so many years earlier in the days of Abraham (though men did live long lives in those days).

#### **God repeated the promises to Isaac – 26:2-5**

Here is the first recorded time that God spoke directly to Isaac (if He did so earlier, the event is unrecorded). The record clearly shows that God intended to deal directly with Isaac, as He had done with Abraham. Now that Abraham had died, the time had come for God to deal with his son, in order to fulfill His promises.

The Lord appeared to Isaac and spoke to him, as He had done with Abraham, Noah, and others in this age. This is why we call it the "Patriarchal Age." God spoke His will directly to the fathers (patri-



archs) who headed the families. There was no record of God commanding anyone to write down His laws till the days of Moses.

God first instructed Isaac not to go to Egypt. This may indicate that Isaac knew that was what Abraham had done in the famine in 12:10ff. However, in this case, God wanted Isaac to stay in the land He had promised to give to Abraham's descendants. God promised that, if Isaac would stay in these lands, God would adequately bless him. The subsequent record shows that this was completely true.

However, God went further and repeated to Isaac the whole promise that He had given to Abraham. He expressly stated that He had given this promise with an oath to Abraham. The promise concerned Abraham's descendants and included the following: (1) They would become a great nation, numerous like the stars of heaven. (2) They would receive the land of Canaan. (3) In their seed, all nations of the earth would be blessed (Jesus would come). This simply repeated the promise given to Abraham, but the point is that God repeated it to Isaac as a promise to come true through him and his descendants.

Then God said He had made this promise because Abraham had obeyed His voice and kept His charge, commandments, statutes, and laws. Note that nothing is said about the obedience of any descendants. This did not necessarily imply that Isaac had not kept God's commands. The point was that the promise was made to Abraham because of his obedience, and it would be kept for that reason, regardless of the obedience of the descendants.

Note that the passage directly states what some people want to deny: God blessed Abraham because of his obedient faith. Some attempt to use Abraham as proof that God blesses men on the basis of faith only without or before obedience. Yet here is undeniable proof that God's blessings to Abraham were conditioned on his obedience (see also notes on chap. 22).

What commands did Abraham obey? Some argue such passages as this mean Abraham kept the Ten Commands, including the seventh-day Sabbath. But there is no evidence here of any such thing. The Ten Commands were not given till many generations later. God did not give all the same commands then as He had given to Abraham. Did Moses and others of his generation have to offer their sons as sacrifices? Surely not. Yet, was that command not included in the reference here about Abraham's obedience? Surely it was – see our notes on chap. 22 where God expressly stated that Abraham's obedience in that matter was the reason God blessed Him. So, the passage simply means Abraham kept whatever commands God had given Him. Nothing here proves he kept the Sabbath (see on 2:1-3).

Imagine how Isaac would feel having God so speak to him. If this truly were the first time this had happened, it must have been an event of great significance to Isaac to have God speak personally to him and

repeat these promises. He had known it to be so from the word of his father. Now he knew it from the voice of God. Surely, this also showed him the importance of obeying God as his father had done.

Other passages where this promise is repeated are: Gen. 12:2,3,7; 13:15,17; 15:5-8,18-21; 18:18; 22:16-18; 24:7; 26:3,4,24; 28:3,4; 32:12.

### **26:6-11 - Isaac and Abimelech**

Isaac then remained in Gerar as God had commanded. But he also told the same lie that Abraham had told. He said Rebekah was his sister, because he feared the men of the land would kill him to take her, since she was so beautiful. This is the same lie Abraham had told regarding Sarah, both to Pharaoh in Egypt (12:11ff) and to Abimelech (20:2,12ff). Actually, Sarah had been Abraham's half-sister, whereas Rebekah was only Isaac's cousin (though perhaps the Hebrew word for "sister" could include such a near relative as a cousin). But the fact remains that this was deliberate deception, because it withheld the fact she was his wife.

Here we see a pattern that affected Abraham's descendants repeatedly. The children often repeated the sins and errors of the parents. Doubtless Isaac had witnessed his father tell this lie about Sarah, so he did the same. Similar repeating of errors occurred with favoritism being played between children and with deception in other forms. Parents need to learn that our children are likely to repeat our sins.

Yet, serious problems had occurred when Abraham had told this lie. Apparently, Isaac forgot the problems or else thought it was worth doing even though it might lead to such problems.

Note also the great beauty Rebekah must have had, for she was surely an older woman at this point. Yet even so she had such beauty that Isaac feared for his life.

Abimelech apparently had a house near where Isaac lived. As time passed, one day Abimelech looked out a window and saw Isaac "sporting" or "showing endearment" (NKJV) or "caressing" (NKJV footnote) his wife. Whatever this was, it was clearly not something a man would do with just his sister but only with his wife.

Abimelech determined to confront Isaac about this. Isaac admitted she was his wife, but he explained that he had feared for his life. Abimelech quite rightly then rebuked Isaac, pointing out that one of the men of the city might have taken Rebekah and lain with her. Such adultery would bring guilt, and Isaac would bear some responsibility, since he had lied to them.

Abimelech, however, brought no consequences on Isaac. He simply charged all his people to leave Isaac and his wife alone, or they would be put to death.

Surely, such weakness in Abraham and Isaac should warn us of the danger of allowing sin in our lives, even when we otherwise seek to

serve God. Yet we can be forgiven, for God evidently eventually accepted Abraham and Isaac for their faithfulness.

### ***26:12-33 - Conflict between Isaac and the Philistines***

#### **Isaac's prosperity – 26:12-14**

Isaac continued for a time living in the territory of Abimelech. He even sowed seed and reaped a harvest that year. This is unusual in the Bible record, especially for Abraham's family. Cain had been a tiller of the soil, but Genesis rarely refers to farming the land. Mostly Abraham's family had been shepherds.

Perhaps the famine conditions had moved Isaac to try this means to provide grain for his family and herds. In any case, the effort was successful. God had promised to bless him if he would stay in the land, and He surely did bless him.

Isaac became very prosperous, continuing to prosper. He not only had good crops, he had great possessions of flocks and herds and many servants. He was a very rich man. This happened despite the fact he had moved to Gerar to escape a famine! Abraham had been very rich, we recall – so rich that he and Lot had separated. Surely, Isaac received his father's wealth. Yet clearly he was multiplying that wealth.

However, the riches led to jealousy, as they often do. The Philistines envied Isaac. Isaac was a stranger in the land. Doubtless, it irritated the people to see him prospering so. He lived in their land and farmed ground near them, yet he gained wealth even beyond their ability to do so. Perhaps they suffered much more than he did in the famine. This envy led to the problems described in the following verses.

#### **Conflict over wells – 26:15-22**

For those who farm and raise flocks, water is a major necessity. This was true for Isaac, as it had been for Abraham. Apparently, water was a special concern in that region, since we so often read about wells in the accounts. The envy of the Philistines especially showed itself regarding the wells Isaac used to provide for his vast wealth.

Abraham had lived in this area and had built wells there. He too had conflict with the Philistines regarding his wells (21:25ff). The Philistines had filled up the wells he had dug. Why they did so is not clear. Perhaps they thought that, if they filled up the wells Abraham and Isaac would move away. In any case, they had filled the wells.

Abimelech then asked Isaac to leave his territory. He had permitted him to stay there awhile, but when Isaac prospered so, Abimelech asked him to leave. Perhaps he observed the growing jealousy among his people and feared open conflict. For whatever reason, he asked Isaac to leave.

So, Isaac moved a distance away, into the valley of Gerar. There he dug open the wells his father had built and called them by the same names his father had called them. Perhaps he thought the people

would not bother him, since he had moved away, and since these wells had been built and named by his father. His father had even made a covenant with Abimelech regarding them — 21:25ff. He even dug another well and found running water — perhaps a spring.

But the people would not let him alone. There was strife over the water from these wells too. Isaac named the well Ezek, meaning “quarrel.” So, he had them dig another well, and again there was strife. So he named that one Sitnah, meaning “enmity.” Note that the wells were so important that they were actually given names.

Isaac moved once more and had his servants dig. They found water again, but this time the Philistines did not quarrel with him over it. He named this one Rehoboth, meaning “spaciousness.” Finally, he had moved far enough away that there was space for him. The Lord, he said, had made room for him, so he could now be fruitful. Rehoboth can be found on some maps even south and a little west from Beer-sheeba (see *map*).

Note the peaceable nature of Isaac here. He could easily have tried to defend the wells as his right. He clearly needed water for his flocks, and his servants had dug these wells. His father had dug the original ones, and Abimelech had made an oath with his father regarding them. Nevertheless, Isaac was evidently a man willing to give in rather than fight. This was similar to his father’s willingness to let Lot have first choice of the land, rather than have strife. Surely, we too should be unselfish to avoid strife.

### **God appeared again to Isaac – 26:23-25**

We are not told why, but Isaac moved again, this time up to Beer-sheeba (see *map*). This is one of the southernmost cities of Canaan, known as the southern extent in the expression “from Dan to Beer-sheeba.”

This city had also been important in Abraham’s life. He had lived there when Abimelech had made a covenant with him (21:22-34). They had made terms of peace there, so Abraham called it “Beersheeba,” meaning, “Well of the oath” (or other possible meanings). He had also there called on the name of God — i.e., worshiped Him. He had also lived there after he had offered Isaac (22:19).

So Isaac was familiar with this area. He returned there, and God appeared to him as apparently He had appeared to Abraham there (ch. 22). God identified Himself as the God of Abraham. Many false gods existed, but He was the true God that Abraham had worshiped. What an honor to Abraham to have God identify Himself with Abraham!

God promised Isaac that he should not fear; God would be with him to bless him and his descendants. This blessing would be for the sake of Abraham. This was much like the promise of vv 3-5, but the specific promise to Abraham is not here repeated.

Isaac then built an altar or place to worship God. Abraham had often done this — 12:7,8; 13:4,18; 22:9. Jacob later did so — 33:20. This is the only record we have of Isaac doing so, though of course he may have done so other times that are not recorded. Clearly, the point is that he was honoring God for the promises and blessings God had given him.

He pitched his tent here. Like Abraham, he was a nomad or traveler. He had no permanent home and had not yet received the land as an inheritance. Again, his servants dug a well.

### **A covenant between Abimelech and Isaac – 26:26-31**

Abimelech came to visit Isaac, even as Abimelech had done with Abraham in 21:22ff. He was accompanied by a friend and also the commander of his army Phichol. This was the same name for the commander of the army when Abimelech visited Abraham — 21:22. It seems this too was a title, not just a name, or else this man had the same name as the one previously. It just seems so unlikely that both these are the same men as in Abraham's day.

Isaac asked why they had come, inasmuch as they had disliked him enough to send him away (v16). Abimelech said they had come to make an oath or covenant of peace between them. He recognized that God had blessed Isaac, and he wanted peace.

It could be he saw that God would continue to bless Isaac, and eventually Isaac would be strong enough to be victorious in battle against his people. So, he sought peace while it was more likely (in his view) to be obtainable. Or perhaps he genuinely thought this would help maintain his favor with Isaac's God.

The covenant he offered was that they would not harm one another. He said his people had not harmed Isaac since he had left them. Of course, they had made his life miserable till he was compelled to leave them! But it was true that he had sent Isaac away in peace when he could have sought to harm Isaac for the lie he had told about Rebekah, and he had done no physical harm.

The covenant he offered was basically the same that Abimelech had made with Abraham, as mentioned above. Isaac agreed and made a feast for them, eating and drinking with them. The result was that early the next morning they swore an oath to one another. They then left in peace.

### **Isaac's servants dug yet another well.**

The same day, Isaac's servants brought him word that they had dug another well and found water. Quite evidently, water was a major consideration. It has been mentioned repeatedly in this chapter. It may have been that lack of water was the cause of the famine (v1).

In any case, Isaac named the well Shebah (one possible meaning is "oath"). The city there was named Beersheeba (city of the oath), and

continued to have that name till the time Moses wrote this. Now this was the same name Abraham had given it, and for the same reason — he and Abimelech had there made an oath not to harm one another (21:31,32). So it would appear that Isaac was just giving the place and its well the same name his father had given it, even as he had done in v18.

### **26:34,35 - Esau's wives**

Here the account records, almost incidentally, some information about Esau's wives. He was forty years old when he married: clearly not a young man. His parents must have been quite elderly (by our standards), since Isaac was 40 when he married (25:20), and Rebekah was barren for some time after that.

But the women Esau married were bad choices. First, he married Judith and Basemath, both of them daughters of Hittites. These wives were a grief to Isaac and Rebekah. We will learn more about why this was so in 27:46; 28:8,9; 36:2ff.

Remember that, when a wife was chosen for Isaac himself, Abraham was determined that the wife must not be chosen from among the people of the land where they lived (chap. 24). Such women were considered completely unacceptable as wives for God's people, especially for one through whom the promised blessing was to come. Doubtless, after Rebekah was so carefully chosen for Isaac, neither of them could be satisfied with women of the land as wives for Esau. In fact, when Jacob married, they made very sure he too went back to their homeland to get a good wife and not marry a woman of the land (28:1ff).

As in the case of Isaac, this again shows the importance of making a wise choice in marriage. Marriage to the wrong person can be a source of great trouble to anyone, but especially to one who seeks to serve God. We are not told whether these women worshiped idols, but that was almost universally the case among the people of the land, and that was the reason such people were unacceptable as marriage companions for God's people.

Spiritual reasons are also the main reasons why Christians should not marry people who are not faithful children of God. A Christian has, as his highest goal, the desire to please God and receive eternal life. A non-Christian does not share these goals or at least seeks them in a way contrary to Scriptures. This means that the Christian does not share common views on the most important aspect of life with the one whom he loves most in life. The resulting conflicts can completely disrupt the unity that should exist in the home, especially in spiritual matters. The Christian must believe that the one he or she loves most is destined to be lost eternally. Perhaps greater conflict may result over concerns for the children. Whose views will dominate? Such concerns can make marriage to a non-Christian nearly intolerable.

Bad as such concerns as these may have been for Esau, he went even further and married **two** such women. God never intended for a marriage to involve more than one man and one woman. He did, however, allow polygamy under this age. But it always involved serious problems. And when neither of the women involved were servants of God, the problems just multiplied.

Finally, this shows how unsuitable Esau was to be the one through whom the promise to Abraham should come true. He had proved his disdain for the promises when he sold his birthright (see on chap. 25). Here he showed his disdain by marrying women who were completely unfit to be ancestors of those through whom the promise would come true. Abraham and Isaac were especially concerned that the promise would come true through men who married women who could help keep the lineage pure spiritually and otherwise. Esau showed no such concern.

This can help us understand subsequent events and why God chose Jacob even before he and Esau were born. By His foreknowledge, God knew Jacob would be more suited than Esau as the heir of the promises. To be sure, this does not in any way excuse Jacob's deceit (in chap. 27) nor even his selfishness (in chap. 25). But he was still far more suitable than Esau. Again, I am convinced that, had Jacob done things God's way and waited for God's purposes, he would have received the promises without the devious methods to which he resorted (see notes on chap. 25,27).

# Genesis 27

## Chap. 27 - Jacob Received Isaac's Blessing by Deceit.

### ***27:1-4 - Isaac determined to give Esau a blessing***

This chapter records one of the most interesting, and yet confusing, accounts in the life of Isaac and Jacob. Remember, God had promised, when Esau and Jacob were born, that “the older (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob)” (25:23). God clearly intended for Jacob's descendants to dominate Esau's, despite the fact Jacob was the younger son. We must assume from this that God intended for the promises regarding Abraham's descendants to be fulfilled through Jacob, not Esau (see notes on Genesis 25:23).

Further, Esau had freely sold his birthright for a bowl of soup (25:29-34). We are told there that he despised the birthright (v34), and Hebrews 12:16,17 clearly condemns Esau for profaning his birthright. Although Jacob had acted selfishly, still he had obtained the birthright legally, and it was clear that Esau did not want nor deserve it. This should have confirmed that the place of dominance in the family, and especially the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, should have come through Jacob, not Esau.

Further, we have commented on Esau's foolish choice of wives (26:34,35). All this should have shown unquestionably that Esau was unfit to be the one through whom the promises to Abraham would be fulfilled, and that it was God's will for this come to pass through Jacob. Surely Isaac and Rebekah knew these facts.

However, Isaac played favorites and preferred Esau, where Rebekah preferred Jacob (25:28). Perhaps Isaac still hoped that somehow God would change His mind and determine to give the preeminence to Esau. In any case, he here determined to give a special blessing to Esau.

It seems clear that the blessing was not the same as the birthright, yet it was closely related, especially in this case (see v36). The blessing was a statement of the father's will and hopes for the future of the children. Blessings could be stated on any child or all children (Gen. 49), but it was especially done for the one who would become the leader of the family. See Gen. 48:8-22; 49:28; Deut. 33:1; Heb. 11:20.

Perhaps blessing children was a custom in that day, but it was especially important among Abraham's descendants. Isaac did it for his sons, and Jacob did for his sons and for Joseph's sons (see notes on Genesis 48 & 49). In this family, like the birthright, the blessing was especially important because of the promises to Abraham. Whoever re-



ceived the promises to Abraham would also receive great blessings (or his descendants would). Further, since these were men of God and God spoke through them, their blessings appeared to take the form of inspired prophecies that would necessarily come true (see again notes on ch. 48,49). Note “in the presence of the Lord” (v7). (Joseph Free records evidence from the Nuzi tablets, that a patriarchal blessing in that society could be legally binding, even in a court of law – p70.)

So, Isaac prepared to pronounce a blessing on the son Esau, who was the oldest and his favorite. Isaac was getting old and his eyesight was not good. He did not know how much longer he would live, so he wanted to give the blessing now. (Jacob later gave his blessing to his sons shortly before he died.) Isaac loved the food Esau fixed from the animals he killed in hunting (25:28). So, he asked Esau to take his weapons, go hunting, fix savory or delicious food, and bring it so Isaac could eat of it and then bless Esau.

The Waldrons calculate that, at this point, Esau and Jacob were about 77 years old; and of course, Isaac was elderly, probably about 137. Esau had married when he was 40 (26:34), and Jacob was the same age. Some time had doubtless passed. But the point is that Isaac died when he was 180 (35:28), so although he was elderly and could not see well, yet he lived many years after this. Furthermore, Jacob and Esau were very mature men. They were not little boys or even young men here. They were fully mature and responsible for their conduct.

It appears clear to me that, at least to some extent, Isaac was to be blamed for the problems that ultimately resulted in this case. Clearly, he and Rebekah were wrong in playing favorites and promoting a spirit of competition between their sons (25:28). Further, it would seem that, because of his favoritism toward Esau, Isaac was having a hard time accepting God’s determination that the promises to Abraham should come through Jacob.

Morris and Coffman flatly accuse Isaac of sin in this. Morris even appears to rationalize the acts of Rebekah and Jacob. He claims to do this because God nowhere says Rebekah and Jacob sinned. But God also nowhere says Isaac sinned, yet Morris has no problem accusing Isaac of sin! In fact, God states that Isaac’s blessings on his sons were an act of faith (Heb. 11:20)!

Morris assumes that Isaac directly rebelled against God’s will and intended to give Esau the blessing promised to Abraham’s descendants. But that is not necessarily the case. We do not know what blessing Isaac intended to give. He later did give Esau a blessing, without violating God’s will regarding Jacob, so perhaps he never intended to give him the full promise as given to Abraham.

It is true that this whole situation is in some ways hard to understand, yet it does not follow that Isaac intended to contradict God’s will. He may have intended only to give a general blessing. Or he may

have known he would speak by the guidance of God as a prophet, and perhaps he would have been content to simply say what God gave him to speak at the time. For example, when Jacob gave blessings to Joseph's sons and to his own sons, he gave greater preeminence to sons who were not the firstborn, and he clearly did so by God's guidance (see ref. above). Why could not Isaac have done the same?

It may be that he did hope God would change his mind and prefer Esau as he himself preferred him. On the other hand, when the blessings were stated, he humbly submitted to God's will. And later he did give Jacob expressly the promise that had been given to Abraham and to him (see 28:3,4). It seems that this must be included in the faith described in Heb. 11:20.

So perhaps Isaac began in rebellion against God and changed his mind as the situation unfolded. Or perhaps he never really intended to do what would contradict God's will. In any case, all four of the principal actors in this event suffered greatly for the folly we are about to study.

### ***27:5-10 - Rebekah plotted to deceive Isaac***

Rebekah overheard the instructions Isaac had given, and she determined that her favorite son should receive the blessing rather than Esau. While Esau went hunting, she called Jacob and explained the situation.

Note in her account she added that Isaac intended to bless Esau "in the presence of the Lord." This was not recorded in v4, but doubtless Isaac really did say it or else Rebekah understood it was so meant. This would imply, as stated above on v4, that this blessing would affirm God's real intent. Knowing this, Rebekah was determined the blessing should go to Jacob, not Esau.

So, she commanded Jacob to kill two kids from the flock. She would make savory meat from it, and Jacob would take it to Isaac and receive the blessing intended for Esau.

Note that she uses her authority as mother to command Jacob. This may be what leads people to think Jacob was a lad. But in fact, Jacob was about 77 years old (see on vv 1-4 above)! He was hardly of an age that he would have to obey his mother, especially when she commanded him to do what he knew was sinful and would violate his father's will!

### ***Was Rebekah justified in her conduct?***

What Rebekah proposed here was unquestionably deceitful and led to outright lies (note on v35 and other verses below). Such is unquestionably sinful. See 1 Peter 2:1,22; 3:10; Matthew 15:18-20; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8,27; 22:14,15; Proverbs 6:16-19; 19:22; Psalm 24:3-5; 40:4; Exodus 20:16; John 8:44; Acts 5:1-9.

Furthermore, she clearly rebelled against Isaac as head of the family. Rebekah knew, and she explained to Jacob, that what they were about to do was just the opposite of what Isaac intended. See Genesis 2:18; 3:16; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:12-14; 3:4,12; Titus 2:4,5; 1 Peter 3:1-7. Mothers who so act should not be surprised when their children deceive **them** and rebel against their authority. They have taught their children to so act by their own example!

Morris goes to great lengths to try to justify Rebekah and Jacob, even saying that their lies and deceit may have been justified. He argues that the Bible nowhere says they were wrong, and that lying may be justified when necessary to avoid more serious sins (p. 431ff). He even implies that those who speak against Jacob's conduct are guilty of anti-Semitism (p. 427)! However:

(1) As explained above, God nowhere says Isaac sinned, yet Morris does not hesitate to freely and repeatedly say so! Why is it anti-Semitism to think Jacob sinned, but not anti-Semitism to argue that his father Isaac sinned? If proper application of clear Bible teaching shows that a person violated that teaching, where is the racial prejudice in saying it was sin? Isn't this the same kind of reasoning that many use to try to prove the Jews who killed Jesus should not be accused of sin?

(2) Morris says that the only people who condemn Jacob are Esau and Laban, who are not godly witnesses (p. 428). However, he overlooks the statement of Jacob's own father Isaac who was clearly a man of God, a patriarch and spiritual head of his family, and almost surely a prophet. In 27:35 Isaac clearly stated that Jacob took the blessing by "deceit."

(3) It is true that people should not sin in order to obey parents (Acts 5:29). But Isaac was not asking Rebekah and Jacob to sin. Even if Isaac himself was about to sin (which is uncertain), that would not justify them in committing lies and deceit. They should have simply refused to be involved in committing the sin.

(4) Morris emphasizes that Isaac acted out of favoritism toward Esau. Perhaps he did. But Morris fails to mention that Rebekah was also guilty of favoritism toward Jacob!

(5) Rebekah's brother Laban later practiced great deceit against Jacob. This shows that Rebekah's paternal family commonly practiced deceit, including deceiving family members. Rather than justifying her, why not rather conclude that she was simply following the sinful pattern she learned when growing up?

(6) Jacob later strongly objected when Laban so deceived him. Why then should he justify himself in deceiving his own father? Jacob's own sons also later deceived him in the case of Joseph. If we can recognize these as sinful acts, why justify Jacob and Rebekah? Why not

recognize that it is all part of a pattern of deceit practiced in a family, all of whom learned it from one another?

(7) Morris contends that Rebekah recognized Isaac was about to sin, so she concludes she would be justified in the measures she took to prevent his sin. This is based on his assumption that it was quite clear to her that Isaac was about to give Esau the promise given to Abraham. But it is not all that clear that Isaac was about to do this (see above). Why not just as easily conclude that Rebekah was acting on her favoritism for Jacob and wanted him to receive whatever good she thought Esau was about to receive, regardless of what it was?

(8) Even if Rebekah thought Isaac was about to sin and if she was right about it, why not follow the Bible teaching and simply confront Isaac (Luke 17:3,4)? Why not take Jacob and go talk to Isaac and tell him that he had no right to give Esau that which God intended to give Jacob? She would thereby fulfill her duty to stand for what was right, and if Isaac proceeded to sin anyway, she would have been free of any responsibility. Wherein does the situation justify lying and deceit?

(9) If in fact Rebekah was primarily concerned that the promise to Abraham might go to the wrong person, why didn't she just put her faith in God to handle it right? If the blessing were given as a prophecy of God, would not God compel Isaac to say what was right? Even if Isaac wanted to say something wrong, would not God put right words in his mouth, even as He later did for Balaam? And if the prophecy was not from God, then what difference would it make what Isaac said? He could not defeat God's purpose.

Did Rebekah consult God before acting as she did? It appears to me that, even if Rebekah was acting out of concern for God's promise to Jacob, she clearly was trying to "help God out" without acting according to His will. This was what Sarah had done in the case of Hagar, and look at the problems that resulted there! And Rebekah's act was worse than Sarah's, for she not only acted without God's consent but she lied and deceived. ***The fact that we seek to promote God's will in general does not justify disobedience to His specific instructions!***

### **Why did God honor the result?**

We all may wonder why God allowed Rebekah and Jacob's method to **work**, if in fact it was sinful? Why did God honor the blessing that came on Jacob by deceit? This is not easy, but consider these thoughts.

(1) God had determined before the boys were born who would be heir to the promise (see on 25:23). This was based on Abraham's faithfulness, not on that of the heirs (26:5). If God had chosen Jacob, Jacob would be the heir, not **because** he gained the blessing by deceit, but **despite** the fact that he so acted. Even had Isaac sinned in trying to give the promise to Esau, God would have intervened and corrected

the matter. So God was not honoring the blessing that Jacob received by deceit. He would have blessed Jacob even if he had not deceived his father.

(2) As shown above, Esau was far less fit to receive the blessing than was Jacob. Even though Jacob sinned here, he was more suited to God's purposes than was Esau. This does not justify what Jacob did. It simply means, again, that God used him *despite* what he did.

(3) We may compare this to many other Bible instances. Compare especially Jacob's own sons in selling Joseph to Egypt. God later used the result of this act to bring Jacob's family to Egypt and save them from the famine. Joseph said this was the act of God, so the brothers should not feel so bad (see Gen. 45:5-11; 50:15-21).

Does this mean the act of the brothers was not sinful and should somehow be rationalized? Did God "honor" the result of their act? No, Joseph said they meant it for evil. It was a sin such that he himself tested them to see that they had repented. God simply used the act to bring good to accomplish the goal He intended all along to accomplish. The people sinned, but God saved them from the famine anyway, because it was necessary to do so in order to fulfill His promise to Abraham. This is exactly how we should view the sin of Rebekah and Jacob.

Remember, the blessing did not grant either son eternal life or eternal punishment. It simply used them for God's purposes. God sends His blessings on the just and unjust (Matthew 5:45). Many people in Jesus' lineage were evil (such as the kings of Judah), yet God used them.

### ***27:11-13 - Jacob objected to his mother's plan***

He said his father might figure out the deception despite the fact he was blind. He might feel Jacob and recognize that he was smooth-skinned, not hairy like Esau. He would realize that Jacob was trying to deceive him and might pronounce a curse on Jacob, not a blessing.

Oh, Jacob, Jacob! How foolish! He objected to the plan, but not for the right reason! He did not say, "No, we can't do that. That would be lying and deceit and disrespect for my father." He was just afraid it would not work and he would get caught!

Furthermore, what difference would it make what Isaac thought or said or meant, if God was the one giving the blessing? And if it came from God, then how could Jacob fool God? How foolish men are when they think they have accomplished their goal because they fooled **people**. God is the one who matters. Here we see that Jacob, like his mother, was definitely not thinking properly. How can such thinking be rationalized?

To relieve him, Rebekah said she would accept the curse on herself! Then she again asserted motherly authority and insisted that he do what she said! What about fatherly authority? If they were really so

concerned about the authority of parents, why did both Rebekah and Jacob rebel against the father who was the head of them both?

But was Jacob resolved of guilt because his mother accepted it? Pilate tried the same thing in the death of Jesus. He washed his hands of guilt, and the people said they accepted it on themselves and their children (Matt. 27:24,25). But God held both Jews and Romans guilty (Acts 2:23). Likewise, people think if a preacher tells them to do something but it turns out to be wrong, God will condemn only the preacher. But Jesus said both would fall into the ditch (Matt. 15:14). We must not have fellowship in sin (Eph. 5:11).

But sure enough, Rebekah did receive a curse for her sin. She not only deceived her husband and angered her other son, but she lost her favorite son. The record surely indicates that he left home as a consequence of this event, and she never saw him again. Her family remained divided till the day of her death. And think what she did to her relationship to God!

### ***27:14-17 - Rebekah prepared the food and arranged the deception***

So, Jacob got the goats and Rebekah used them to cook the kind of delicious meat Isaac loved. But to complete the deception she also put some of Isaac's clothing on Jacob so he would smell and feel like Esau. Then she took the goatskins and put them on Jacob in places where Isaac might feel him and he would feel hairy like Esau. That way Isaac would be deceived by smell, feel, and taste. Looks would not matter, since Isaac was blind.

### ***27:18-20 - So Jacob went to perform the deception***

Though four of the five senses had been disguised, the fifth was the sense of hearing. Jacob had to speak to Isaac. Being a different kind of man, he had a different kind of voice. This made Isaac suspicious.

Isaac asked who it was that addressed him as "father." At that point, deception was not enough. Jacob had to either admit the deception or else proceed with a direct lie. He said he was Isaac's firstborn Esau. No more direct lie could be imagined. As often happens, lying and deceit led to more lying and deceit. They are sins that grow and grow.

So, Jacob asked Isaac to eat the food and bless him. But Isaac was still not satisfied. He asked how Esau found the meat so quickly. Killing a kid in captivity might not take long, but finding and killing wild game would take longer. How did it happen so quickly?

So, another lie was needed. Jacob said the Lord had brought him the game. Now Jacob had not only deceived and lied, he had lied about God! He had brought God into the deception. Surely this took God's name in vain. He knew he was lying about God! How sin grows!

### ***27:21-25 - Isaac was deceived and decided to bless Jacob***

Isaac was still not satisfied. The voice was simply not right. So, he called the son closer so he could feel him. He felt him and concluded that the voice was Jacob's, but the hands were Esau's. Finally, he asked again if this was really Esau. And once again Jacob must tell the lie. Yes, he said he was Esau. So, Isaac decided to bless Jacob, thinking he was Esau. The main blessing is recorded in v27-29.

The suspense in Jacob must have been incredible. Esau might have come back at any moment. If so, the game would be up! Meanwhile, Isaac was dragging the thing out, clearly uncertain. What agony!

Apparently satisfied at last, Isaac decided to eat the food. He told the son to bring it to him and he would eat it. He did eat and drink.

Note the deceptions and lies: (1) The food and the clothing and the animal skin on Jacob's flesh were all calculated to deceive. (2) When asked directly who he was, Jacob told Isaac that he was Esau the first-born. (3) When asked how he found the food so quickly, he said God helped him find it. (4) When Isaac asked again if it really was Esau, Jacob again said he was.

### ***27:26-29 - The blessing***

Isaac finally decided to pronounce the blessing. He called his son near to kiss him. He then smelled Esau's clothing (which Jacob wore); this led to the blessing.

He said his son smelled like a field the Lord had blessed. So God would give him the blessings of the field: the dew of heaven and fatness of earth, plenty of wine and grain. All these were blessings of prosperity and good produce from the earth. Such was a fine blessing, though it had no direct relationship to the promise to Abraham.

Then he said other peoples and nations would serve and bow to him. He would be master over his brothers and his mother's sons would bow to him. He then pronounced a curse on any who would curse him and a blessing on any who would bless him. Note that, in saying this, the meaning was not primarily of great blessings to Jacob himself. The reference was especially to blessings to his descendants (see on 25:23 and on chap. 48,49).

This blessing related directly to previous statements. The promise to curse those who cursed and bless those who blessed had been stated to Abraham (12:2,3). This showed a great promise to the one Isaac here blessed, as to Abraham. However, I do not see that this inherently proved he would receive the great promises regarding Abraham's descendants. Nothing here is said about inheriting Canaan or though his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed. It may be implied he would become a nation, but that also happened to Esau as well as others. Personally, I am not sure Isaac pronounced on Jacob the promises

regarding Abraham's descendants until 28:3,4. Some might claim he intended to give them to Esau here, but it is not clear that he did so.

Further, God had said Jacob would rule over Esau (25:23). If Isaac was deliberately giving Esau the dominance over Jacob, then he would be flatly contradicting what he knew to be God's will. Of course, the statement was being made to Jacob, but Isaac thought it was to Esau. So if Isaac spoke of his own will, clearly he was sinning.

However, was not Isaac speaking as a prophet guided by the Holy Spirit? This is almost surely the case. This would be like Jacob apparently spoke when he pronounced blessings on his and Joseph's sons (Gen. 48 & 49). Further, Isaac himself recognized that, after the blessing had been given, it could not be changed (vv 33,35). If this was just the blessing of a man, and if it was given under deceit, why could it not be changed?

But if Isaac spoke by direct guidance of God, surely God knew who was being blessed. He was not fooled. In that case, it cannot possibly be denied that what Isaac said is what God intended to come on Jacob, not on Esau. This would be like Balaam blessing Israel as God wanted, despite what the prophet wanted to say.

So did Isaac sin here? If he simply said what God wanted said, then we cannot know that he would have pronounced these same blessings on Esau had Esau been present. Had Esau been there, God would have guided him to a completely different blessing. Perhaps Isaac really wanted to say these things to Esau, not to Jacob. His reaction when Esau came indicates this. If so, his motives may not have been pure, but this hardly would constitute deliberate rebellion against God.

On the other hand, how can it be said, as in Heb. 11:20, that he pronounced the blessing by faith when he really did not even know which son he was blessing? I suggest three possibilities: (1) He spoke what God told him to. Though he did not understand it, he knew it was what God wanted, so he said it. (2) He was willing to accept the consequences. When he realized it had been spoken to Jacob and not to Esau, knowing he had said what God wanted said, he still accepted the fact that Jacob was the one to receive that blessing (v33). He made no attempt to change it. (3) He then accepted fully the fact that Jacob was the one to receive the promise to Abraham and he directly repeated that blessing to him in 28:3,4. In fact, even if it cannot be said that the blessing of 27:27-29 was said by faith, surely the blessings of 27:39,40 and 28:3,4 were said by faith.

### ***27:30-33 - Esau returned to great consternation of both himself and Isaac***

Jacob had barely left when Esau arrived with the food he had prepared. What an exciting story!



Esau offered his food to Isaac and asked him to bless him. Naturally Isaac was confused and asked who it was that spoke. When he heard it was Esau, he was amazed and explained that someone else had come and brought food and that he had eaten and given the blessing. Of course, we can appreciate both Esau and Isaac's amazement. But note two points especially.

First, Isaac trembled exceedingly. Why? Doubtless because he realized something was seriously amiss. He realized he had been deceived, which would upset anyone. But this was no casual matter. One may be deceived in a matter of no consequence and not be much bothered. But this blessing was of great importance, and he here realized he had given it to someone he had not intended to give it to! Being an older man and perhaps easily upset, he was greatly distressed.

Morris assumes Isaac also now realized he had sinned. Perhaps, but not necessarily so, as we have seen. However, he may have realized fully that his desires for Esau had been thwarted. He may now have come face to face with the fact that nothing was going to bring to his favored son the blessings he wanted him to have.

Second, Isaac realized that what he had said was irreversible. He said, "and indeed he shall be blessed." This surely indicates that he knew he spoke by the guidance of God. How could he be so sure the blessing would prevail if he had just spoken his own heart's desire? Why could he not change it despite Esau's pleas? Clearly he was here saying the blessing would stand as given.

As explained on vv 5ff above, I do not take this to mean there was some magic in the words themselves and whoever by hook or crook could get them spoken to him, he would get the blessing. So, if Jacob could manage to get them said to him, then God had to honor the words, even if God did not want to do so. Nonsense! If a man seeks God's favor by deceit, will he succeed? Surely not. God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7). God gave favor to Jacob because it was His will to do so from the beginning. It had been promised long before. God knew what was happening and guided Isaac to give the blessing that properly ought to go to the son whom God knew stood before Isaac. Isaac too knew he spoke by God's guidance, so what God had spoken could not be changed.

### ***27:34-36 - Esau also sought a blessing***

Esau then realized he had lost the blessing and began crying bitterly. He urged his father to also give a blessing to him. By this time Isaac realized what had happened: Jacob had come and taken the blessing by deceit. Note that Isaac calls it exactly what it was: deceit. While Isaac was not blameless in the situation, nevertheless he could recognize deceit when he saw it. Surely, an honest person who understands Bible teaching can recognize that Isaac was correct about this. Jacob had practiced deceit. Here at least is one clear statement that

Jacob had sinned, and it was spoken by the spiritual leader of the family. (Can Morris or anyone else produce any such Bible statement that Isaac clearly sinned in this situation? See notes on v5.)

Esau too then recognized that Jacob had been deceitful. He pointed out that Jacob had been properly named. Jacob means “supplanter” or “deceitful” or “one who takes the heel” (NKJV footnote). See on 25:26. The meaning was that he took what belonged to others by deceit. So Esau said this is what Jacob had done. He had taken both Esau’s birthright and his blessing. Of course, this was not entirely true. Jacob may have taken Esau’s birthright, but there was no deceit in that. Esau had willingly given the birthright because he did not value it.

He then asked Isaac again whether he could give him some kind of blessing. Heb. 12:17 states that Esau sought with tears to change his loss, but it was too late for it to be changed. Clearly, this refers to the event we are studying. One wonders how truly Esau had changed his mind. Did he really value the birthright and blessing now for their spiritual value as the promises to Abraham? Or was it simply honor and land he wanted? The fact he immediately desired to murder Jacob shows he had not achieved much spiritual goodness even yet (v41).

In any case, again I state, as shown on chap. 25 and previously in this chapter, that God had made the choice before Jacob and Esau were ever born. Jacob would have been the one through whom the promises came true, even had he never deceived anyone and had Esau not sold him the birthright. God would simply have found some other way for Jacob to gain the preeminence. This is exactly what God later did for Joseph in relationship to his brothers and for Joseph’s son Ephraim in relation to Manasseh (see notes on Gen. 48 and 49). Joseph gained the birthright though he was not the oldest son, and his son Ephraim gained the greater blessing though he was not the older son. And all this occurred without any deceit or sin of any kind on their part, so far as the record goes.

God simply foresaw that, with all his errors, Jacob was better than Esau as the one through whom the promise was to come. Jacob made many mistakes and God worked with him for many years to humble him and to bring him and his sons to submission to God’s will. But in God’s infallible eyes, Jacob was more fit than Esau for this purpose.

Remember, however, that nothing here says Esau would be lost eternally. We are not discussing eternal salvation but simply the question of through whom the promise to Abraham would be fulfilled. Esau could surely have repented of his sins and been saved eternally, just as Jacob must have repented of his deceit. I do not know whether Esau repented or not, but he was surely a much different man years later when Jacob returned home.

### **27:37-40 - Isaac's blessing to Esau**

Esau still wanted a blessing, and Isaac would still want to give him one. First, he was his son, and all sons could receive blessings of some kind. Second, he was still the older son and Isaac's favorite. However, Isaac pointed out that his previous blessing had made Jacob master of his brothers and given him blessings of prosperity. So, what was there left to give to Esau?

Note at this point, as in v33, Isaac recognized that the blessing on Jacob could not be withdrawn or changed. See notes on v33. Again, this does not mean there was magic in the words. Most likely, by this point Isaac recognized this was of God. He could never have said to Jacob what he did had it not been God's will. God had unquestionably confirmed that Jacob, not Esau, would be preeminent. Isaac at this point simply submitted to the inevitable. He could not change what had been said, since it was God's will.

Now if God's promise had made Jacob to dominate Esau, what could Isaac do with a further blessing? He could not make Esau dominate Jacob. Nevertheless, Esau wept and pled for a blessing, whatever blessing his father could give him. (See Hebrews 12:17.)

So, Isaac pronounced a blessing on Esau too. He could not give him preeminence over Jacob, but he gave what he was allowed to give. This blessing too must have come by prophecy from God. Hebrews 11:20 says Isaac blessed Esau as well as Jacob by faith.

So Isaac said Esau would dwell with the fatness of the earth and dew of heaven. This was similar to Jacob's blessing, but there was nothing about this that could not happen to both men and their descendants. Surely, Esau at least did become quite wealthy. (There is some doubt about the translation here, however.)

He then said that Esau (i.e., his descendants) would live by the sword. They would indeed serve Jacob (his descendants) as prophesied regarding Jacob. But there would be times (a time?) when this service would cause the nation to become restless, and they would be able to remove the yoke from their neck. This would imply that, at times at least, they would be relatively free from Israel's domination.

This too came to pass. Sometimes the Edomites served Israel rigorously, but at other times they were relatively free. This largely depended on Israel's faithfulness to God. When she became unfaithful, her surrounding enemies could dominate her or at least free themselves from her. See 2 Sam. 8:14; 2 Kings 8:20-22.

### **27:41 - Esau determined to kill Jacob**

The effect of all this was that Esau burned with hatred against Jacob. Presumably, he was angry because of the deceit, but also because Jacob got the blessing. Perhaps he was especially galled by the fact that the blessing gave Jacob dominance over him. He presumably thought

that, had he himself been able to get the blessing, he would have dominated Jacob.

So bitter was he that he determined to kill Jacob. He would not do it while his father was alive, but he might not live long. Isaac himself had implied this (v2), though it turned out he was mistaken. Esau apparently did not want to cause his father grief, or he respected him too much to do this while his father would know of it. Yet he was determined to kill Jacob after Isaac died.

Clearly at this point Esau refused to accept the fact that God was the One who had chosen the blessing to go to Jacob. His desire to commit murder shows his rebellion. However, Rebekah and Jacob must accept much blame for this. The way this all came about would surely make it hard to accept as God's will!

Rebekah and Jacob were reaping the consequences of their sin. Had they acted righteously and waited upon God to show whom He had chosen, Esau would have had no grounds for such passion. How he would have reacted, we cannot say. And there was surely no justification for his hatred. But as it was, Rebekah and Jacob were definitely to blame for the consequences too.

### ***27:42-45 - Rebekah urged Jacob to flee from Esau's wrath***

Rebekah heard of Esau's desire to kill Jacob, so she decided it was time to send Jacob away. This would avoid the danger. She suggested that Jacob go visit her brother Laban in Haran for "a few days" till Esau's anger burned out. Then she said she would send for Jacob to return.

Laban had been involved when Abraham's servant went to find a wife for Isaac (chap. 24). Even then, he had been quite influential in the family. Presumably by this time he had become the head of his clan. We have no record that Rebekah had visited her family during all this time, but perhaps messages of some kind had passed back and forth. She apparently had some idea of her brother's circumstances and whereabouts.

She evidently did not think it would be long till Jacob could return home. She was obviously mistaken, as it turned out. When Jacob arrived at Laban's, he agreed to work many years for his wives. Yet even when he returned, he feared Esau's hatred. Apparently, his mother never did inform him that it was safe to return. In any case, the visit turned out to be much longer than she anticipated.

Rebekah said she feared losing both her sons in one day. This implies that, if Esau killed Jacob, she would lose Jacob. Then she would lose Esau either as punishment for the murder or perhaps because he would have to flee for his life. In any case, she would lose both sons if Esau carried out his plan. But if Jacob left, she thought she would just be without Jacob awhile, Esau's anger would cool, and Jacob could return home.

However, so far as the record goes, Rebekah never again saw her favorite son. When Jacob returned many years later, Isaac was still alive (despite his fears that he might die soon), but there is no record that Rebekah was living. Here again is further consequence of Rebekah and Jacob's sin. Her son may have gained the blessing (which he would in effect have gotten anyway, had they just been patient), but she lost her favorite son for the rest of her life! She was reaping as she sowed.

***27:46 - Rebekah urges Isaac that Jacob should marry better than Esau had***

Esau had not wanted his father to know about his plans to kill Jacob. Perhaps Isaac did not hear of his threats, as Rebekah had heard. On the other hand, doubtless Rebekah was not eager to discuss the deceit and blessing incident with Isaac (doubtless they discussed it eventually — wouldn't that have been an interesting discussion?). She would not want to bring up the strife and hatred it caused. In any case, when Rebekah spoke to Isaac about sending Jacob away, she did not use Esau's hatred as a reason.

Instead, she said Jacob needed to find a wife, and that wife should not be one of the women from the land where they lived (daughters of Heth apparently means Hittites). She brought up Esau's wives and the burden they were to her. She said her life would hardly be worth living if Jacob married a woman like them. This was doubtless a point on which she and Isaac could agree (26:34,35). This would be a good reason for Jacob to leave to go back to Rebekah's family. He could go for a wife, even as Abraham had sent back to the family for a wife for Isaac. Isaac evidently agreed, and this was what was done (chap. 28).

Actually, it is strange that this decision had been so long in coming anyway. Jacob was as old as Esau — they were twins. Esau had two wives when he was forty years old (26:34,35). Much time had passed since he married them. As mentioned on 27:1ff, Jacob and Esau may have been 77 by this time. Why had no wife been found for Jacob?

Perhaps they had taught him not to marry a woman of the land, so he had not done so, and no acceptable woman had been found. But why had he not been sent earlier to his mother's family for a wife? Why had no such provision been made for Esau before he made his foolish marriages?

It would appear that Isaac and Rebekah had been remiss in this. They knew how a wife had been obtained for Isaac. They knew their sons should not marry women of the land. Perhaps Esau fell in love and married before they had given the matter serious thought. Still he had been forty years old. While men lived much longer in that day than now, still they should have made provision for Esau. And when they saw his mistake, they should surely have made provision for Jacob. If they truly valued the promise of seed as promised to Abraham, they should have taken action much earlier.

Why they failed, we are not told. Nevertheless, the tragedy that had occurred finally led them to do what they presumably should have done long ago.

# Genesis 28

## III. Jacob – Chap. 28-36

### 28:1- 9 Jacob Sent to His Uncle for a Wife

#### ***28:1,2 - Isaac sent Jacob to the house of Laban to find a wife***

As discussed in 27:41-46, Rebekah had good reason to urge Jacob to leave. He needed to find a wife who respected God, unlike the wives of Esau. It seems to me that this matter should have been attended to long before. However, the immediate reason for the decision was a matter of much greater urgency: Esau sought to kill Jacob. So, Rebekah had urged Isaac to send Jacob to find a better wife than Esau's.

Isaac clearly now had no doubts that Jacob was chosen of God and must succeed Isaac as the one through whom the promise to Abraham would come true. He must become the leader of the family, receiving the birthright and all the blessings of family leader. The blessing may have been obtained by deceit, but Isaac spoke by God's guidance, giving Jacob the preeminence. This agreed with God's prediction before the boys were born and with the fact that Jacob had legitimately obtained the birthright.

Isaac therefore agreed to send Jacob away to get a good wife. Jacob was no longer a young man! Esau had been married for years. It was time Jacob married and began to have the offspring through whom the promises could be fulfilled. Whether or not Isaac knew of Esau's threats, we are not told.

He clearly told Jacob, as had been said regarding himself when he took a wife, that his wife should not be of the people of Canaan. He must go to the family of Rebekah's father Bethuel and find a wife among the daughters of Rebekah's brother Laban. They were dwelling in the land of Padan Aram. This agrees with 25:20.

Padan Aram was the region north and a little east of Canaan, on the Euphrates River far upstream from the Persian Gulf. There in the city of Haran was the area Rebekah's family lived (v10). (See *map*.)

Doubtless Rebekah had received some word from her father's family, so that she knew something of their whereabouts and circumstances. These people, of course, were also Abraham's relatives and therefore Isaac's relatives. The hope, of course, was that Jacob would there find a woman more willing to believe in the true God than were the idol-worshiping women of Canaan.

In sending Jacob, Isaac also blessed him. The blessing is given in the next verses.

***28:3-5 - Isaac repeated to Jacob the blessing God had given to Abraham***

Isaac then pronounced upon Jacob the full blessing that had been given to him, as it had been originally given to Abraham (see on 26:3,4). The blessing was that God would multiply him so he would become a great company of peoples, and God would give him the land of Canaan. Though he was then a stranger in it, yet it would be his, as had been promised to Abraham. The blessing did not state “in your seed all nations of the earth will be blessed,” but that was repeated to Jacob directly by God, when God Himself appeared to Jacob and gave Him the blessing (v14).

Surely, Isaac intended for Jacob to receive the whole blessing given by God to Abraham’s descendants. This time, without doubt, Isaac spoke by faith, as recorded in Heb. 11:20. There was no deceit in Jacob’s obtaining this blessing. It was much clearer and fuller than the one stated in Gen. 27. This was God’s clear and unequivocal intent regarding Jacob.

So, Jacob left home, as his father instructed, to journey to the family of Laban, brother of his mother.

***28:6-9 - Esau, seeing that his wives displeased his parents, took yet another wife***

Esau too had been greatly affected by what had happened. He had developed some appreciation for the privileged position that he had lost. From caring nothing about it at all, he had come to value it greatly.

Specifically, he had come to care about his standing in the eyes of his parents. When they told Jacob not to take a wife from Canaan, he recognized this as a clear indication of dissatisfaction with his choices. He was correct in this (26:34,35; 27:46). People often learn their errors without being told them, simply by the fact other people choose not to do as they have done.

Though he had been his father’s favorite, Esau then realized that even his father disapproved of his wives. Esau set about to regain his good favor in the eyes of his parents. He chose another wife, this time choosing one who was at least related to Abraham’s family. He chose a descendant of Abraham’s son Ishmael, who was of course Isaac’s half brother. In fact, he chose a daughter of Ishmael, a woman who was a sister to Ishmael’s firstborn son Nebajoth (see on 25:13). This, of course, made her his own half cousin, daughter of his father’s half brother. She was named Mahalath, called Basemath in 36:2,3.

This may have indicated that Esau was improving his attitude toward things of importance to his parents. Whether or not he was be-



coming concerned about God too is not clear. However, he did not solve his problem. He still had two wives he never should have married, and the descendants of Ishmael too had been rejected as regards the promise God had given Abraham.

## **28:10-22 - Dream of the Ladder into Heaven**

### ***28:10,11 - As he traveled, Jacob slept with a stone for a pillow***

So, Jacob headed for Haran from Beersheba. Isaac and his family had been living at Beersheba when the events of chap. 27 occurred (cf. 26:33). Beersheba is in far southern Canaan (see *map*). Haran was the city in Padan Aram where he hoped to find his uncle Laban.

Understand that Jacob was traveling a distance of hundreds of miles (Coffman says 500 miles) — a very great journey for that day. People traveled only on foot or on animals. Jacob was a homebody, not a man of the fields like Esau. Such a journey would have been hard on him, especially when he left on such short notice. He would be separated from his family perhaps for the first time --surely, he had never been separated from them to this extent. Nevertheless, he was (as earlier discussed) probably in his seventies. So, he should have been completely capable of such a journey.

Yet, he ended up staying away from home far longer than any of them expected. While we may not know exactly what all God had in mind as He worked in Jacob's life, yet it is clear that this time spent away from home was important to Jacob's spiritual development. He had to learn to be independent from his parents and become a leader of his own family. He also had to learn to overcome his deceitfulness and develop a true trust in God. Subsequent events helped Jacob develop the qualities that would be so important to him as the head of the twelve tribes that would become the nation through whom God fulfilled His promises to Abraham.

As he traveled, however, one of the greatest events in his life occurred. It clearly changed his whole life and his attitude toward God. It occurred one night when he stopped to sleep. He placed a stone at his head as he prepared to sleep. Why he did so is not clear (it seems a very hard pillow), but it is mentioned because it becomes useful in the story that follows.

### ***28:12-15 - Jacob dreamed about a ladder into heaven and God spoke to him***

As he slept, Jacob dreamed a dream. Dreams were one way God revealed his will as He spoke directly to men. Though dreams had not been especially important in Jacob's life, so far as we have recorded, they became very important in his son Joseph's life (see chap. 37ff).

In fact, this is the first recorded time that God spoke to Jacob. God had spoken to Isaac after the death of Abraham, when the responsibility to lead the family fell on his shoulders (26:3,4). Here God saw the need to likewise speak to Jacob. Jacob's father was still alive, but Jacob was becoming independent from his father's family for the first time. He surely needed assurance of God's help and guidance. In any case, God determined that it was time to begin dealing directly with the chosen successor to Isaac.

God appeared in a dream in which Jacob saw a ladder ascending from earth to heaven. God stood at the top of the ladder, and angels ascended and descended on the ladder. Clearly, this was somewhat symbolic, as all such dreams were. But what was the meaning?

Angels are God's servants, doing God's will among men. They often acted as messengers of God, or they would be sent to earth to do other tasks among men as God chose (see on Heb. 1:14; 12:22; Psalm 103:20; etc.). The dream then, at the least, demonstrates God's involvement in the affairs of men on earth. The angels come from God (descend) to earth to do his will on behalf of men. They ascend to God as though to return after completing their duties, etc. How all this is done, I cannot say. But remember the dream expresses this symbolically.

This would assure Jacob (and all of us) quite impressively that God is involved in affairs on earth. God has not gone away and left men to fend on their own with no guidance, assistance, or concern from their Creator. God is very involved (Matt. 10:27-31; Acts 17:22-27). This would give much comfort to Jacob as he went out on his own away from home. The blessings that had been promised to him had already assured him that God had great things in store for him. But as far as the record goes, this had all been told him by his family members. Now he heard the message from God Himself.

Coffman points out that the ladder also has significance as a symbol of Jesus. Jesus told Nathanael that he would see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man – John 1:51. Jesus is the only way to God – John 14:6. He is the one mediator between God and man - 1 Timothy 2:5. So, our only means of communication with God is by means of Jesus.

So, we today can be assured that God is involved in our lives, not ignoring us. He sends His angels to assist in our lives, though we can never see them (even as Jacob could not before or after this dream). And we have Jesus as the means to open the way to heaven whereby we may have access and communion with God.

In the dream, God spoke to Jacob and repeated to him the very promises that had been given previously to Abraham and Isaac. He began by identifying Himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac – the God who had made the promises that Jacob would be familiar with.

God then promised that Jacob's descendants would become numerous as the dust, would spread about throughout the region, would inherit the land where Jacob was, and through those descendants would come a blessing on all nations (see on 26:3,4; 28:3,4).

God then promised to be with Jacob wherever he went, to bring him safely back to the land of Canaan, and to never leave him till He had kept all His promises to him. Clearly, the vision of the angels would reassure Jacob of God's intentions. God was involved in affairs on earth. Specifically, He intended to be involved in Jacob's life and would be there to help Jacob and provide for Him.

Coffman points out at length that the word for ladder means just that – a ladder, not a stairway or staircase. He points out that some try to make it out to be a staircase such as led up to pagan ziggurats. But nothing states or implies any such reference to a ziggurat. The ladder reached to heaven, not to the top of a ziggurat. At the top was God, not a pagan temple. Those who went up and down on the ladder were angels, not people going to worship at a pagan temple. Why change from what the text says to satisfy the pagan mode of worship?

### ***28:16-19 - Jacob set up a pillar and named the place Bethel***

This event made a great impression on Jacob, as God intended it to do. Imagine how it would affect anyone to have seen such a vision and heard such a message, especially if God had never spoken to one before. Jacob received an impression that he surely never forgot. He would need this encouragement in the difficulties ahead of him, and God provided for his need.

Jacob awoke and said that God was surely in that place and he did not know it. Of course, God is everywhere, and presumably Jacob knew that. But God had been present with him there in a special sense that had never occurred before. God had appeared to him and spoken to him. Specific places were more emphasized in the Old Testament than in the New. But Jacob seemed to realize that in this place God had been present to speak to him in a special way.

He determined to make memorials to remind himself and others of the great event that had occurred. First, he said the place was the house of God and the gate of heaven. Again, this would mean simply that it was the place where God came to speak Jacob and to assure Him of His presence and concern for men. So, Jacob named the place Bethel (house of God), where formerly it had been named Luz.

Bethel was many miles north of Beersheba (see *map*). Abraham had visited it earlier. He had even built an altar there (12:8; 13:3,4). Jacob later returned there, in fulfillment of God's promise (35:1). Much later it became a center of idol worship in the northern nation of Israel, so it was destroyed (1 Kings 12:28-33; 2 Kings 23:15-17). This shows that the place was not especially important to God in and of itself. What happened there is what made it important.

Jacob also determined to remember the place by a physical memorial. People throughout time have made memorials to commemorate special events. Stones were often set up in a pillar as memorials in those days. So, Jacob made a pillar, including the stone that had been by his head. He then anointed it with oil, another act often used in those days to dedicate something to God's service or give it special importance (cf. Gen. 31:13,45f; Lev. 8:10-12).

### ***28:20-22 - Jacob then made a vow to God***

The event taught Jacob the need to become a more spiritually-minded person, more devoted to God's service. He made promises and offered gifts to God as an expression of his appreciation for God's great promises to him.

He made a vow, a solemn promise, saying what he would do if God kept all these promises. God had said he would be with Jacob and keep him till he returned to Canaan. So Jacob said, if God would do this, providing for his needs on the trip and bring him back in peace to his father's house, he would give a tithe to God.

Jacob presumably expected this return to come soon. He had nothing to give God at the time. But the Lord had promised much to him, so he promised to return of it to God. He said the pillar would be God's house (Bethel) symbolically, and he would give a tenth to God.

Tithing was strictly an Old Testament practice. Abraham had done it in Gen. 14:20. The Mosaic Law commanded it in Lev. 27:30; Deut. 14:22. But the New Testament has a different law about giving. It teaches us to give free-will offerings on the first day of the week, according as we have prospered and purposed in heart (1 Cor. 16:1,2; 2 Cor. 9:7). This may involve more than a tenth, or less in cases of poverty.

While we do not give a specified percent, yet we should learn from Jacob's attitude. He gave because he wanted to give of his own free will. He recognized it as returning to God part of what God had given him. God is so generous to us, how can we withhold what we can do for Him?

Jacob kept this vow (35:3,7), though exactly how he did so we are not told.

# Genesis 29

## 29:1-30 Jacob Finds a Wife

### ***29:1-3 - Jacob arrived at the well near Haran***

As Jacob continued on his journey, nothing else noteworthy happening till he arrived in the land of the east. Doubtless, he asked directions as he traveled but did not yet know exactly how near he was to his destination at Haran. And he especially might not have known where he would find Laban's family.

He saw a well in a field, with three flocks of sheep gathered around it. The well was a place for watering sheep. This well had a large stone covering its mouth. The flocks of sheep would all come together, then the stone would be removed, all the flocks would be watered, and the stone would be replaced.

Why this was done is not stated, but the most likely explanation seems to be that the stone was large enough that most of the keepers of the sheep could not move it alone. Some women, like Rachel, may have brought sheep. Others may have been lads. It may have taken several of them to move the rock, or they may have waited till a strong man came to move it. So, by mutual agreement, they did not move the rock till enough people arrived. And knowing that some would need help, perhaps out of courtesy they waited till everyone was there, otherwise some may come at a time when no one else was there to help them. In any case, these flocks and their shepherds were just waiting for others to come.

Obviously keeping of sheep was a common occupation in that day, and wells were of great importance for watering the sheep. Being a shepherd himself, Jacob would have been attracted to other shepherds. Perhaps he expected that they might know about his relatives, since they too kept sheep. Further, if many people in an area used a well, it would be a common meeting place.

Recall from Genesis 24, that this is similar to how Abraham's servant had located Laban's family when he had traveled to the area to find a wife for Isaac. He too had stopped at a well, though his intent was to meet the women who came to draw water, not necessarily to find shepherds.

### ***29:4-6 - Jacob's inquiries informed him that he was near the home of Laban***

So, Jacob stopped and asked the men where they lived. When they answered "Haran," he knew he was close to his destination. See on 28:10 regarding Haran. Note *map*.

He then asked if they knew Laban, son of Nahor, and they said they did. See notes on Gen. 24 and 28:2,5 regarding Laban. Laban was actually the immediate son of Bethuel (28:25), who was the son of Nahor, who was in turn Abraham's brother (24:15). So, "son" here is used in the sense of grandson or descendant.

Since these men knew Laban, Jacob began inquiries, doubtless intending to ask directions how to find Laban. He began by asking if Laban was well. They replied that he was. But before Jacob could make further inquiries, they said that Laban's daughter Rachel was coming with the sheep. Ironically, Jacob met his future wife Rachel at the well as he sought Laban's family, just as Abraham's servant had found a wife for Isaac.

### ***29:7-9 - Jacob asked about the practice of gathering at the well***

Jacob then asked the shepherds why they had gathered the sheep at the well at that time of day. It was still "high day" — what we would call the middle of the day, the sun was high. It was time for the sheep to be abroad feeding in the fields, not gathered together lying down as these were (v2). As a shepherd, he seemed to think they were not using their daylight well. They should go ahead, water the sheep, and take them to the fields.

The shepherds then explained that they waited till all the flocks came, then they moved the stone and watered them all. Again, as above, this seemed to be a matter of necessity and/or common courtesy, so no one would come and be unable to water.

Meanwhile, Rachel came with her father's sheep. We are told she was a shepherdess. Women did tend sheep, at times, as was done by Zipporah before she married Moses. Laban had sons, yet Rachel also tended sheep. Perhaps there were so many sheep she needed to help. Or maybe she watched them in the day, when there would be little danger from fierce animals. In any case, it would take an active, brave woman to do the job, since it did involve outdoor work and some dangers. Rachel was apparently such a woman.

Jacob was not a man of the fields as Esau was; yet he was an experienced shepherd, as the subsequent story reveals. Doubtless, Rachel made a good impression on him as a shepherdess.

Morris comments incidentally on the fact that Jacob knew the language of all these people. He was in a strange land hundreds of miles from home. These people surely spoke a language different from what the people of Canaan spoke. Jacob had no interpreter, yet apparently he had no difficulty speaking with these people. The most likely explanation is that Abraham's descendants continued to speak the language of their fathers within the family circle, while also learning the language of the Canaanites, so they could communicate with them.

### **29:10-12 - Jacob moved the stone, then introduced himself to her**

On meeting Rachel, Jacob removed the stone from the well's mouth and watered her sheep. Apparently, whatever the reason others had for waiting, he did not see it as necessary in this case. He was strong enough to move the rock. Clearly, the others did not need Rachel, a woman, to help them move it. So they could fend for themselves. Perhaps he also sought to make an impression on Rachel as a man of strength, action, and courtesy.

Jacob then greeted Rachel with a kiss and weeping. Doubtless, this was a kiss of greeting from a relative, nothing more at this point. Yet, Jacob was emotional being so glad to have found his mother's family. Nevertheless, this must have made a strange impression on Rachel. Here she met a completely strange man, who moved the rock and watered her sheep. Then he kissed and greeted her with weeping!

Jacob then told Rachel who he was. He was the son of Rebekah, who was in turn her father's sister. He and Rachel were cousins. Now Rachel obviously had never met Jacob and surely had never met her Aunt Rebekah, who had been gone for so long. Surely her family had told her the romantic story of how the servant came from Abraham to seek a wife for Isaac. So her Aunt Rebekah had gone off on a day's notice to marry a man she had never met, all because it was clearly God's intent.

Surely all this moved Rachel herself deeply as she here met this son of Rebekah. Perhaps they had heard from Rebekah in some form over the many years and kept some track of her. But here she met Rebekah's son and was doubtless deeply impressed by him, even as he was by her. In any case, she left her sheep (presumably in Jacob's care) and ran to tell her father the wonderful news.

### **29:13,14 - Laban welcomed Jacob**

When Laban heard about Jacob, he ran to meet him, embraced him, kissed him, and brought him home. Jacob then "told Laban all these things." Doubtless Laban and his family had a million questions to ask about their sister and her family. She had been barren for a long time after her marriage, and if we are correct that Jacob was here about 77 years old, then Rebekah had been gone from home for more than 90 years (remember she had been barren for 20 years after her marriage to Isaac)! There is no indication she had ever returned home in all that time, though there may have been some communication. So, her family wanted to hear all about her and her husband and children, etc.

Laban then said Jacob was his bone and flesh — i.e., he was a close relative. Actually, he was a relative both through Rebekah and through Isaac. So he invited Jacob to stay with them. Remember, Jacob had

only expected to stay for a relatively short time. He might have originally thought that, at the end of a month, he might be ready to leave for home, taking a new bride with him. Abraham's servant had found a wife for Isaac and started home in less time than that. However, Jacob's brief stay extended to about 20 years, as the story will reveal.

***29:15-19 - Jacob offered to serve Laban seven years if he could marry Rachel***

During the month he stayed with Laban, Jacob clearly had been working. Laban felt it was unfair to expect Jacob to work without pay, just because he was a relative. He asked what wages Jacob wanted.

We are not told exactly what Jacob had been doing, but the work he subsequently did was that of a shepherd, so we might reasonably conclude that he had worked as a shepherd during this month. It is also clear that Jacob had grown deeply in love with Rachel. Since she was a shepherdess, they may have spent much time together. In any case, Jacob was determined that Rachel was the one to be the wife he had come to find.

Remember, however, that Jacob was probably about 77 years old at this time (see on chap. 27). Rachel herself, having a father close to Rebekah's age, was not likely to be very young by today's standards. Nevertheless, considering how long people in those days lived, they were doubtless still comparatively young and active.

Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance, much like her Aunt Rebekah. This must mean she had a pretty face and a nice figure. These surely attracted Jacob. Rachel means "ewe."

However, Rachel also had an older sister named Leah (a name of uncertain meaning, perhaps "gazelle" or some such meaning). Where Rachel is said to have been beautiful, Leah is said simply to have had delicate eyes. Exactly what this means is not clear. Some think it means they were weak or otherwise inferior. Some take it they were pretty. In any case, that is all that is said regarding her. She was evidently unattractive, at least by comparison to her sister. This must have been a trial to her. Their account mentioned her here only because she later enters the story prominently.

Jacob, however, was unquestionably in love with Rachel, not the older daughter Leah. So he bargained with Laban. He had at the present no great wealth to offer Laban in exchange for his daughter. So he offered to work seven years for Laban if, at the end of that time, he could marry Rachel. Laban concluded that it would be far better for her to marry such a near relative than to marry someone of the land. So he agreed.

We will see, of course, that Laban was not a man of his word. Whether he was already planning to cheat Jacob is not clear. Perhaps he anticipated that Leah would find someone else to marry during the



seven years Jacob worked for Rachel. In any case, they reached a clear bargain that Laban eventually violated.

Note that, unlike Isaac, Jacob chose his own wife based on his personal love for her. Isaac's wife had been chosen for him, with no prior meeting between the two. This shows that different marriage customs existed in that time. Isaac and Rebekah had sent Jacob to her family with the express understanding that he could pick out his own wife. They would not even have met her when he married her, though they did have definite input regarding her family background. Clearly, the Bible does not bind any one way in which a man's wife is chosen.

Coffman argues at length that Leah would have been a better wife for Jacob than Rachel – Jacob had been turned too much by a pretty face and figure. Doubtless Rachel had her faults, as the story will show; yet, overall Coffman's "evidence" is thoroughly unconvincing and mostly irrelevant. He especially neglects to mention that Leah obtained her husband by crass, disgusting deceit and in so doing introduced polygamy into Jacob's family against his will. This deceit and polygamy led to incredible strife and heartache in the family. That hardly seems to describe a particularly good wife.

### ***29:20-22 - The time of Jacob's marriage arrived***

As had been agreed, Jacob worked the seven years for Rachel. So great was his love for her that these seven years seemed only a few days to him. We would consider this to be a very long time to work for a wife. It was a smaller part of his life then than it would be of ours. Nevertheless, he clearly was deeply attached and devoted to Rachel. Clearly romantic love is not unknown to the Bible. Their love made the years more pleasant, but surely made subsequent events more trying.

When the seven years had been completed, Jacob had to go to Laban to remind him that the time had come for him to be given his wife, as agreed. Laban then gathered all the people from the area and had a great feast.

While we are not given much in the way of specifics, this shows that marriage then as now must begin with a public ceremony to make official, public declaration of the beginning of a marriage. Despite the lack of details, it is clear that, at the end of the ceremony, Jacob and his chosen woman would be recognized as man and wife. What legal implications may have been involved are not mentioned. But clearly a wedding ceremony requires conformity to recognized society standards for what constitutes the beginning of a marriage. It requires a public notification that, beginning with that ceremony, the couple will be considered man and wife.

## **29:23-26 - Leah is given to Jacob by deceit instead of Rachel.**

Laban had made a bargain, but he plotted deceit and trickery. In the evening, when it was time for the bride and groom to retire to their bedroom for their honeymoon night, Laban sent a different woman instead of Rachel. He took his other daughter Leah and sent her in to Jacob. Jacob had relations with the wrong woman!

We are told, incidentally, that Leah had a maidservant named Zilpah. She becomes important in the story later.

In the light of morning, however, Jacob saw that he had been given Leah, not Rachel. He confronted Laban, as you would expect, and asked why he had done this. Jacob had served seven years for Rachel and had been given a different woman. What an obvious refusal to honor a bargain! What a way to treat a kinsman! The man was a despicable cheat, deceiver, and hypocrite! Jacob asked why Laban had so deceived him. Laban simply replied that their custom required the older daughter to marry before the younger one did.

This was, of course, a lame excuse for his lies and deceit. He could easily have told Jacob ahead of time about this custom, if indeed it was truly a custom. He could have told Jacob when they made the bargain or anytime subsequently. In any case, he could have given Jacob a choice about it! As it was, it was pure conniving dirty work, clearly contradicting Jacob's choice and the agreement regarding whom he would marry!

We may wonder why Jacob did not discover the switch before he had relations with the woman. Details are not given, but the point to remember is that this was a deliberate deception! Remember the great detail Rebekah had gone through to deceive Isaac in chap. 27. Now her brother was working to deceive Jacob, so presumably he did whatever he needed to do. Doubtless, it was night when he and Leah went to their bed. The bride could have insisted there be no lights in the room, pretending modesty. She was almost surely wearing a veil till that time. She probably was about the same size as Rachel. The sisters may have had similar voices, and she probably spoke softly, even whispering to him in bed. Note that, in chap. 38, Judah spent the night making love to his own daughter-in-law without learning who she was.

From Laban's viewpoint, he doubtless did want Leah married before Rachel. And he probably thought Jacob was the best man for her to marry. And presumably, he did not intend to refuse Jacob the right to marry Rachel; he just wanted him to take Leah too. And he figured he would get extra work out of Jacob for it. And if it failed, what did he have to lose? Jacob was so in love with Rachel that, even if he discovered the switch and refused to accept Leah, Laban might have thought he could just give him Rachel, and how would Laban be any worse off?

On the other hand, one wonders what Rachel and Leah thought about all this. Possibly Leah was secretly in love with Jacob, and she may have realized she would have difficulty ever finding a man as good as him. Clearly, she grew up in a family that practiced deception, and she may have gone along hoping all would work out and Jacob would someday love her too. Maybe Laban convinced her that Jacob really liked her and would accept her once it was all over. But she still must have gone along with the deception. She knew Jacob had worked all those years for Rachel, not for her. She surely knew he thought he was marrying Rachel. Doubtless, she took measures to be sure he did not discover who she really was till it was too late! Remember, all she had to do to avoid the deception was to speak up at any time before the wedding bed and plainly state that she was Leah, not Rachel!

Perhaps she had at first objected to the whole thing but ended up obeyed her father. Remember how Jacob himself had gone along with Rebekah's plan to deceive Isaac, despite his original misgivings. In any case, the result for her was in many ways a sad, sad marriage. One wonders how often later she may have regretted what she did on this wedding night. Surely it was humiliating to deliberately go to the wedding bed to make love to a man whom she knew preferred someone else and thought he was making love to another woman.

Then one wonders about Rachel's role in all this. When did she know about the deception? Surely she, of all people, must have objected. How humiliating to her to know that her own sister was taking her place in her wedding bed with the man who loved her, chose her, and worked seven years to marry her! Did she obey her father despite her objections and the obvious immorality involved? Was she not told till it was too late to be able to warn Jacob? Or was she physically restrained so that she could not go to Jacob? Of course, her father probably told her that she would eventually get to marry Jacob. Perhaps he even lied and said that Jacob liked Leah too and had agreed to marry her first. This is all speculation; but putting ourselves in her place, we can see that it was surely a terrible ordeal for her.

Then there was Jacob himself. What an ordeal for him! But note the amazing parallels between how he had treated his father and how he himself was treated on this occasion. He had masqueraded as his brother deceiving his father in order to gain for himself a position and privilege that his father expected to give to Jacob's brother. Jacob had practiced lies and deceit for the sake of personal gain. Now here in reverse a woman had masqueraded as her sister to deceive Jacob in order to gain for herself a position and privilege that had been promised to her sister. She (and/or her father) had practiced lies and deception for personal gain.

Doubtless, this similarity smote Jacob's heart as he pondered what had been done. He certainly "got a taste of his own medicine." He

was reaping as he had sown, and he did not like it a bit! He recognized it for what it was: deceit. And he confronted Laban with it. Now if what Laban did was so wrong that Jacob spoke against it, why would anyone try to justify what Jacob himself had done to his father?

Perhaps this similarity may be why Jacob did not react more strongly than he did. Perhaps he saw the indirect retribution for his own misconduct. One almost wonders if God, while surely not approving of Laban's act, yet permitted it to teach Jacob a lesson. In any case, there can be no doubt that Jacob suffered the effects of other people's deceit here and repeatedly throughout his life. It can only be hoped that he learned the folly of deceit till he was sick of it. What a price to pay! Through all this it becomes clear that God was humbling Jacob to develop in him the qualities needed in one who would receive the blessings promised to Abraham. I can think of no case after this in which Jacob deceived or deliberately wronged others except that he played favorites among his sons.

### ***29:27-30 - Jacob also married Rachel***

By the time Jacob confronted Laban, relations between Jacob and Leah were an accomplished fact. To reject her as wife now would be a terrible ordeal for everyone and a shame to the family. So Laban suggested Jacob just marry Rachel too! He could have a honeymoon week with Leah, then he could marry Rachel! Of course, he wanted Jacob to serve another seven years! One could hardly work seven years for the younger daughter, then insult the older daughter by not working as long for her!

So Jacob was trapped. He saw no other solution, so he agreed. He spent the honeymoon week with Leah. Though he had to work seven more years to finally "pay" for Rachel, yet she was given to him as wife just a week after he had married Leah. Then he worked the seven additional years. What a shameful, embarrassing fiasco for all involved!

Rachel, we are told, was also given a handmaid as servant. Her name was Bilhah, and she too becomes involved significantly in the story before it is over.

Finally, we are told that Jacob loved Rachel more than he did Leah. He may eventually have loved Leah to some extent. He was basically a good man. Though this had come about by deceit, and Leah had played a part in it, I doubt he could live at odds with her the rest of their lives.

Nevertheless, he loved Rachel more. And what else could one expect? She was the one he loved to begin with. He wanted her all along, and worked for her. He had never chosen Leah but had been given her by deceit. How could he love her as he did Rachel?

Here we see the terrible consequences of polygamy and deceit. The results were problems that everyone in the family had to live with the rest of their lives! No man can have more than one wife without

competition, conflict, and comparisons resulting, especially when it all resulted from lies and deceit. What a tragic, and all because of sin.

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that, at this time God did not necessarily treat polygamy as sin. It was not His original intent, but he apparently allowed it. Abraham practiced it. Jacob himself later took two other wives by choice. Other great men of God, such as David, had more than one wife. This was not condemned inherently, but was apparently tolerated as divorce was (see Jesus' comments on Matt. 19:3-9). Yet, it still led to many problems in every case where we know anything much about it.

## **29:31-30:24 - The Birth of Jacob's Children**

### ***29:31-35 - The birth Jacob's first four sons***

Jacob had gone to his mother's family to find a wife. He ended up with, not one, but two! Despite the deceit and sin in the lives of these people, God still had made a promise to Abraham. He still intended to fulfill it for Abraham's sake and to bring His Son into the world to give man salvation from sin. Jacob may have been the victim of deceit, but at least this time he was not the perpetrator if it.

To fulfill His plan, God needed Jacob to have many descendants. This is what God had promised, and He doubtless would have fulfilled it even had there been no deceit. But Jacob did now have two wives to give him descendants.

God had different plans for Jacob's sons, however, than he had for the sons of Abraham and Isaac. With Abraham, God had chosen just one of his sons to be the one through whom the promises would be fulfilled. His other sons were not involved in these promises. The same was true for Isaac's sons. But Jacob's sons were all going to receive the fulfillment of the promises. Jesus came as a descendant of Judah, but the land and nation promises involved all Jacob's sons. As a result, the story tells in some detail about the birth of all twelve of the sons.

The first four sons were all born to Leah. This was because she was loved less than Rachel (the old KJV says she was "hated," but as in some other passages this means she was loved less than Rachel was). God opened her womb in sympathy for her. This may indicate that the primary blame for deceiving Jacob rested on Laban. Perhaps Leah had at least objected before submitting to her father, or else she soon repented of her part (what else can we expect considering the mess she found herself in!).

In any case, Leah had a son, Jacob's firstborn. She named each of her sons according to thoughts in her heart at the time. She felt gratitude to God that He had sympathy on her in her affliction. And she hoped that her husband would love her more since she had born him a son. So, she called the firstborn Reuben, meaning "See, a Son."

Leah then had three more sons, apparently in a relatively short time. The next son was named Simeon, meaning “Hearing.” She chose this because God had seen that she was unloved (i.e., compared to Rachel), and God had heard her and given her another son.

The third son was named Levi, meaning “Attached.” This was because she was convinced the three sons would lead Jacob to become more attached to her.

Finally, she bore a fourth son and named him Judah, meaning “Praise.” This was simply because she praised the Lord for the sons He had given her.

Leah then stopped bearing for the time being.

Thus began Jacob’s family, the sons who would eventually become the heads of the 12 tribes of the great nation of Israel: such a tragic beginning, accompanied in so many ways by sorrow and human frailty. Yet, God worked with these people in their weaknesses and problems. He helped them learn to change, grow, and become useful in His plans. But considering how the family had begun, what were the chances that all would run smoothly and the children would all turn out well? The storm was just beginning!

# Genesis 30

## Jacob's Children (cont.)

### ***30:1,2 - Rachel envied her sister and urged Jacob for children***

Note: My discussion of Leah and Rachel's competition for children is handled humorously and facetiously at times. I mean absolutely no disrespect whatever to the Bible record. I do mean, however, disrespect for the foolish rivalry, envy, and jealousy between the women, which was clearly the consequence of polygamy and the deceit that brought about the polygamy.

These verses continue describing the birth of Jacob's children. Leah had borne four sons, whereas Rachel was still barren. This resulted in envy. The subsequent events seem so childish that we find it almost difficult to take them seriously. Nevertheless, the result illustrates the folly of polygamy and the strife it engenders.

In frustration, Rachel insisted that Jacob give her children or she would die. This naturally angered Jacob. Surely he was not the reason she had no children. His fertility had been clearly demonstrated! The obvious problem was that Rachel was barren. Jacob attributed this to God, saying that there was surely nothing he could do about it if God chose for Rachel to be barren. Note further the irony of Rachel's statement. God eventually did give her children, and she died in childbirth (35:16-20).

Also, note how important childbearing was to these people. The attitude is completely different from today. Of course, that was a different society, and even more important, God had given specific promises to these people - promises that required having many offspring. Male children were especially important because they could inherit the family name, property, etc., whereas daughters would leave the family when they married.

Nevertheless, the Bible does view children as a blessing from God (Psalm 127:3-5; 128:2-6). Parents ought to appreciate them. The modern indifference or even antagonism toward children is clearly unbiblical. This is not to say that any Scripture teaches that couples must have as many children as they possibly can, but it does show that children should be appreciated as a blessing.

It is interesting to observe how often conception, or failure to conceive, is attributed to God (see 29:31,32,33,35; 30:2,6,17,18,20,22,23,24). Several people (who may not have been in-

spired) state this view, but several inspired statements show that it was definitely true in several instances (29:31; 30:17,22).

So, at least in some cases, God directly intervened to cause some conceptions or barrenness. This does not mean that all conception (or barrenness) is the result of direct intervention by God. Some, perhaps most, is simply the course of nature, by which people are born, get sick, die, etc. All of this can be attributed to God in the sense that He ordained the laws by which such things happen, and therefore He should be given praise for the birth of children. But the fact He chose to cause birth or barrenness in some specific cases does not prove He does so in all cases. He had a special interest in this family because of His promises to Abraham. There are likewise cases where He is specifically said to have caused people to become ill or to die or to get well, but that does not prove that every case of illness or death was specifically caused by God.

### ***30:3,4 - Rachel urged Jacob to take Bilhah as a wife***

Being unable herself to conceive, Rachel came up with a plan whereby she could have children vicariously. The score was 4-0 against her. Unless she changed her strategy, she was about to lose the whole ball game. So, she called in a pinch-hitter!

Rachel suggested that Jacob have relations with her handmaid Bilhah. Since Bilhah was Rachel's servant, any child born would belong to her mistress by law. So, Rachel could provide Jacob with a child who would be hers legally.

This was the same method Sarah had used with Abraham and was apparently socially accepted in that time. Of course, the man had to marry the handmaid, so she was also his wife, otherwise it would be adultery. So, Jacob did make her his wife (v4). But she would be a concubine — a wife who was also a slave, not a free woman (cf. Gal. 4:21-31).

Jacob agreed, took Bilhah as wife, and went in to her. Exactly why he agreed is not clear. It was legal by civil law, and apparently God tolerated it at that time. Perhaps Jacob did it thinking it would help prevent family strife. If so, he should have known better; if two wives caused problems, what would happen when he took a third? Or perhaps he thought it would at least help fulfill the promise of many descendants. Regardless of his intent, it surely did have this latter effect.

Again, all this seems childish and even sinful to us. And it would violate our law, civil and moral. But providing he married the maid, there would have been no sin under the law at the time.

Exactly what is meant by "bearing a child on my knees" is not clear. This could have been literal, if Rachel had been the one to attend Bilhah at the time of her birth. But perhaps it was simply symbolic, meaning Bilhah would bear the child, but Rachel would hold it (as on her lap) as her own child.



### ***30:5-8 - Bilhah bore Dan and Naphtali***

Bilhah did conceive. So successful was the attempt that Jacob tried again with her and was successful again. Both children were sons.

Rachel named the first son “Dan,” meaning “Judge.” She believed God had judged her case, heard her voice, and given her a son. Doubtless, she had been praying for a child and concluded that this was God’s answer.

The second son Bilhah bore to Jacob was named “Naphtali.” This name means “wrestling.” Rachel chose it because she believed she had wrestled with her sister and had prevailed.

This continues to show the rivalry that existed between the women. Perhaps our baseball illustration was more appropriate than may have seemed at first. The women themselves seem to have considered this to be a competition. Rachel, however, chose the sport of wrestling for her illustration. So, instead of pinch-hitters, we have a tag team!

### ***30:9-13 - So, Leah gave her servant Zilpah as a wife to Jacob. Result: Gad and Asher***

But there were two teams in this game, and what works for one team may work for the other! Leah was still ahead in the score 4-2, but her team hadn’t scored for a while and the underdog was making a comeback. It was time for her team to call in a pinch-hitter! She offered her maid Zilpah to Jacob as wife. Note again that he did indeed marry her, so she became wife #4 (v9)!

And sure enough, the pinch-hitter not only made a hit, she got two RBI’s! Zilpah bore a son, whom Leah named “Gad.” This has traditionally been taken to mean “troop,” meaning a troop was coming. Sure enough, Leah viewed her side as a team, and she had added a new player!

However, other evidence indicates the name means “fortune” (NKJV footnote). In this case the meaning would be that fortune had come to her. This seems to have greater value as a name, but I’m not sure which meaning is intended here.

Zilpah then conceived a second time, even as Bilhah had done. Leah named the second son “Asher,” meaning “happy.” She felt happy, and was convinced other women would call her blessed (happy). After all the score was now 6-2 in her favor!

### ***30:14,15 - Leah hired Jacob for her son’s mandrakes***

Leah’s oldest son Reuben was in the fields during the time of wheat harvest. There he found some mandrakes and brought them to his mother Leah.

Apparently, some folks believed mandrakes could improve fertility. So, Rachel was immediately interested in them and asked for some. Perhaps she assumed mandrakes had been the secret of Leah’s success. Of course, Leah doubtless understood Rachel’s intent. Neither team

had scored for a while, so the team managers decided to make a trade. Rachel would get the mandrakes in exchange for Leah's getting another time at bat! Jacob had to spend the night with Leah.

Doubtless such a deal was painful to Rachel. She didn't want Leah to have more children, but she apparently really hoped the mandrakes would help her barrenness. So she agreed.

Note Leah's response to Rachel: "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" Apparently, she meant that Jacob had not been spending the night with her much lately. I see no other reason why she would have to make a bargain to get his attentions.

But what an accusation for her, of all people, to make! **Leah** accused **Rachel** of taking away **her** husband! Some people surely have short memories. I seem to recall that Jacob was originally supposed to be **Rachel's** husband, and it was **Leah** who took **Rachel's** place by deceit. Otherwise, Jacob would never have been Leah's husband at all. Yet, here she was accusing **Rachel** of having taken **her** husband!

### ***30:16-18 - Leah conceived again and bore Issachar***

But the deal was made. So when Jacob came home from the field that evening, Leah met him and announced the deal: one husband for so many mandrakes! Jacob had to spend the night with her. Again, compliant as always, Jacob agreed.

And sure enough, Leah hit a homer! She conceived and bore another son. This one she named "Issachar," meaning "hire" or "reward." She had given her maid (apparently meaning Zilpah) to her husband, and so God had rewarded her. I'm not quite sure I follow the logic, but my illustration of the trade is not so bad after all. Even Leah viewed this as a reward for the deals she had made.

Note that v17 says God listened to Leah. I doubt this means God listened to her for the deal she made with Rachel. I suspect it means that, beside her trade with her sister, Leah had been praying about this. If so, then it was the prayer that influenced God, not the manipulations.

### ***30:19-21 - Leah also bore Zebulun and Dinah***

But the inning wasn't over yet. Leah conceived yet another son and named him "Zebulun," meaning "dwelling." She believed her sons were a good endowment to her from God and was convinced her husband would dwell with her, since she had given him six sons.

Apparently, he did continue to spend some time with her, for she afterward had another child. This one, however, was a girl. Leah named her "Dinah," meaning "judgment."

Genesis 37:35; 46:7,15 mention that Jacob had "daughters." This may mean that Dinah was not the only daughter. It would be surprising to have so many sons without more daughters. If there were other

daughters, then presumably Dinah is mentioned, where the others are not, because she is significant in a later event involving her. On the other hand, it may be that the “daughters” mentioned in those verses were actually the wives of Jacob’s sons. These would have become part of Jacob’s family and would have been viewed as daughters.

### ***30:22-24 - Rachel then conceived and bore Joseph***

But Rachel still had a turn at bat. The score stood 8-2 against her (not counting the Daughter). But she finally came through. She conceived and bore a son. She was still behind 8-3, and was destined to never catch up. But at least she was not shut out.

She said God would yet add another son, so she named this one “Joseph,” meaning “He will add.” Did she mean Joseph was the son that was added (to the ones Bilhah had given her)? Or was she convinced she would have still another son after Joseph? It seems to be the latter. If so, one wonders how she knew.

But again, the credit for the child does not go to the mandrakes (though who knows whether they may have helped?). The credit is given to God. He heard Rachel, who also had evidently been praying. The son was a blessing from God. She said God had finally taken away her reproach (barrenness).

### **30:25-43 - Jacob’s Further Labors for Laban**

#### ***30:25-30 - Jacob wanted to return to Canaan, but Laban persuaded him to stay***

Jacob had now worked for Laban 14 years for his two wives. It appears that these 11 sons were born in the seven years following Jacob’s marriages to Leah and Rachel. If so, Leah was a busy woman, since she had six of the sons herself. On the other hand, it may be that Jacob continued to work for Laban some time after the completion of those seven years.

After the birth of Joseph, Jacob went to Laban to tell him he wanted to leave. He had fulfilled his agreement and wanted to return to his own country and presumably to his parents’ family. He had not intended to stay long with Laban, but had already been there at least 14 years.

Laban, however, realized that God was with Jacob and had blessed Laban because Jacob was with him. He therefore asked Jacob to consider staying and continuing to work for him. He asked Jacob to name his wages and he would give what Jacob asked (assuming, no doubt, that it would be a reasonable request). Clearly, Laban was not doing this as a favor to Jacob. He knew he had prospered because Jacob was with him, and he wanted to continue for his own benefit. But remember this promise: Laban promised to give Jacob whatever wages he requested.

Now Laban had proved himself to be untrustworthy, not a man of his word. Jacob knew this by now. Jacob could profitably work for him only by making an arrangement that would benefit himself, even if Laban was dishonest.

Jacob then reminded Laban of his own faithfulness and hard work. When he had come, Laban's flocks had been relatively small (though he was presumably wealthy, it had been small compared to the result of Jacob's work). Jacob pointed out that Laban had prospered as a result of Jacob's efforts, but Jacob and his family had nothing material to show for it. He had a family, but no possessions he could use to provide for them.

### **30:31-34 - Jacob stated his wages in terms of animals of unusual appearance**

So, Laban again asked what he should give Jacob, but Jacob said he did not want anything given to him. He simply wanted an understanding regarding the arrangement for his future pay. The arrangement confuses me, but the following appears to be the agreement:

(1) Jacob's wages would be that all the strange-colored animals born in the future would be his. He would take the speckled and spotted sheep, the brown lambs, and the speckled and spotted goats.

(2) Laban, however, would receive all the normal colored animals — the white sheep, etc. Hence, if any animals of these colors were found among Jacob's flocks, he would be considered to have stolen Laban's property.

(3) However, it appears that v32 means Jacob would first go through the flocks and remove all that were **already** strange colored. These would be taken by Laban and put under the care of his sons (v35). Some commentators assume that, though Laban's sons cared for these, they belonged to Jacob. Then Jacob would care for the normal-colored flocks of Laban, but any that were born strange-colored among these in the future, they would belong to Jacob.

Laban readily agreed, doubtless thinking that he had made a great bargain. Most animals were the normal colors. And besides, Jacob was apparently going to begin only with those who were normal colored. What were the chances that many among them would be born with the strange colorations?

However, the laws of heredity, studied more recently, show that recessive traits, though not appearing at all in the parents, yet may be present in the genes. So given time they can show up again in a minority of the offspring. Jacob obviously knew this and from these he intended to make his profit. Laban probably knew it too, but thought Jacob would receive so little, that Laban make the best profit.

Of course, any that were off-colored and thus became Jacob's, he could breed. And their offspring (if strange colored) would be his too

(but if they had any normal-colored offspring, he had to return those to Laban).

### ***30:35,36 - The flocks were separated***

So Laban, with Jacob's help (v32), removed all the strange-colored animals among his flocks. These were to be cared for by his sons, but they were separated from the flocks Jacob cared for by three days' journey (so they could not intermingle).

Meanwhile, Jacob kept the other flocks of Laban — the normal-colored ones. But if any strange-colored ones were born among these, they became Jacob's flocks.

The result was three flocks: (1) the original off-colored ones, being cared for by Laban's own sons; (2) the normal-colored ones being cared for by Jacob, but all belonging to Laban, and (3) the strange-colored ones born among Laban's flocks after this time, these belonging to Jacob.

### ***30:37-40 - Jacob's plan to increase the offspring belonging to him***

Jacob had a plan whereby he expected to prosper more than might otherwise be expected. He took rods and made them various colors (streaks, spots, etc.) by peeling back the dark-colored bark and exposing the white-colored wood underneath. He then put these in the gutters near the troughs where the flocks went for water. The animals would go for water and would there conceive. But seeing the various colored rods, they brought forth offspring of various colors: streaked, speckled, and spotted. These, of course, would be Jacob's animals, so he separated them out from the flocks of Laban.

How this worked is not stated. Jacob perhaps believed there was some connection between what the animals saw and how they conceived. If so, it may have been that God revealed it to him to do this. Or it may have been a silly superstition. If so, it would not have been wrong, but neither would it, of itself, have produced the effect that result. Whatever Jacob thought, the method worked simply because of the intent of God. God made it work for Jacob's benefit, since he had made these great promises to him. The story later reveals that God had promised to help Jacob prosper (see on 31:5-13).

Jacob also had the animals face the streaked and brown and separated his own. This is confusing. There should be no such colors in Laban's flock, except as they were born. Then they should be put among Jacob's. And what difference would it make what they faced? I wonder if it could mean that he made Laban's flocks face the streaked and brown rods?

### ***30:41-43 - Jacob planned to make the stronger offspring his***

Jacob's plan went even further. Not only did he place the variegated rods before the animals when they conceived, but he was select-

ive regarding when he used them. When the stronger animals came to drink, he would place the rods before them. But when the weaker animals came to drink, he would not put the rods before them.

The result was that, when the stronger animals conceived - most likely producing stronger offspring - they were more likely to have the variegated colors. These belonged to Jacob. The normal-colored offspring, however, were more likely to be weak. These belonged to Laban. This was simply a matter of selective breeding, a principle still used today.

So in the end, Jacob became extremely prosperous. He not only had large flocks, but as a result he had male and female servants, camels and donkeys, etc. All these were indicators of great wealth.

One may think Jacob was cheating Laban, but not so. Laban had promised to pay Jacob whatever wage Jacob wanted (v28). Jacob had named it, and Laban had agreed to it. True, Laban did not know what the outcome would be, but he had admitted that he had already become very wealthy from Jacob's work. And Jacob agreed that Laban was far wealthier from Jacob's work than he had been before. Laban did not suffer from Jacob's labors, but he profited greatly in the overall picture. And don't forget that Laban had already cheated Jacob out of at least seven years of labor by refusing to keep his bargain regarding Rachel.

And Laban had implied in his offer that he was willing to reward Jacob for having made him rich (though he may not have meant it). But the main thing to remember is that, no matter what the deal had been, Jacob would have become rich, for God was the One who was blessing him. And further, we will see that Laban himself later changed the plan for Jacob's wages numerous times and still Jacob prospered because of God's blessings.

# Genesis 31

## Chap. 31 - Jacob Leaves for Canaan

### ***31:1-3 - Jacob determined to return to Canaan***

As described in chap. 30, Jacob had served Laban faithfully as he had agreed to do. However, the result was that Jacob's flocks had become numerous and strong compared to Laban's. With obviously faulty reasoning, Laban's sons claimed that Jacob had taken away all their father's wealth and possessed it for his own. Jacob heard that they said this.

Laban also was no longer favorable toward Jacob. He had begged Jacob to stay, because he saw he was getting wealthy from Jacob's work (30:27). So, he and Jacob had made an agreement that Laban had approved (30:28,34). Obviously, he had expected the arrangement to gain him more wealth. Probably he had become wealthier, but Jacob's prosperity had increased so much more than his that he felt cheated by comparison. This is discussed at more length as the story proceeds.

All these events doubtless made Jacob wonder if it was time for him to return to his father in Canaan. He had come to his mother's people expecting a short, temporary stay. It had turned into a very long stay, yet he always had in mind to return. He had asked to do so in 30:25.

Now, finally, God gave a direct revelation (cf. vv 10-13) telling Jacob that he should return to his father's family, and furthermore God promised to be with him. God had promised this when Jacob left Canaan to go to Padan Aram (28:15). Here He repeated the promise when telling Jacob to leave Padan Aram to return to Canaan.

All this evidence showed that the time had come for Jacob to return to his father's house and claim his rightful position as leader and patriarch of the family. God was working to bring about the fulfillment of his promises to Jacob.

Note how the revelations of God to Jacob show that God spoke to the head of the family in this Patriarchal age.

### ***31:4-9 - Jacob consulted with his wives about the decision to leave***

Jacob knew it was time to go home, but he was not sure his wives would agree. He was a stranger in a foreign land, far from his father's family; but they were living in their own land, with their father's family. How would they react to his decision to leave? He called them to

explain his decision. Note that a good husband, though the head of the family, will try to discuss with his wife decisions that will affect her.

He called them to the field where the flocks were, presumably as a way of maintaining secrecy, so Laban could not learn his plan. He told them he was convinced their father no longer looked favorably upon him. He reminded them that he had faithfully served their father, but Laban had deceived him and changed his wages ten times (cf. vv 41,42). This does not mean he could itemize ten such specific instances. It was simply an expression for a large number. It is comparable to our statement: "He's done it a dozen times!"

Nevertheless, Jacob claimed that his prosperity came from God's blessings on him, not because he had mistreated Laban (as the sons implied). Laban had repeatedly changed the agreement with Jacob, attempting to gain wealth for himself instead of Jacob. Laban would say that Jacob could have the speckled animals for his wages, so God would make the flocks bear speckled offspring. Seeing that the speckled prevailed, Laban would change the agreement so he would have the speckled and Jacob would have the streaked. Then God would make the flocks bear streaked. No matter how Laban changed the agreement, God would make it work for Jacob's good, not Laban's.

### **Did Jacob deceive or cheat Laban?**

Some have claimed that Jacob prospered by cheating Laban. But consider these points:

- 1) Jacob here affirmed, in the presence of witnesses, that he had treated Laban faithfully (31:6,38-42).
- 2) At no point did the witnesses contradict Jacob's statements. In fact, they agreed.
- 3) Everything Jacob did completely harmonized with Laban's agreement.
- 4) In fact, Laban had initiated several changes in the agreement, seeking his own profit; yet the result always worked out to Jacob's advantage.
- 5) God said that He was the One who made the results work for Jacob's benefit. He specifically affirmed that Laban had mistreated Jacob and commanded Laban not to attempt to punish Jacob (31:7,12,24,42).
- 6) The method Jacob used could have worked only if God had made it work. It could not have worked by any natural means without God's direct intervention.
- 7) Laban himself never accused Jacob of deceit, despite the fact that Jacob accused Laban of mistreating him.

Note that Jacob had learned that deceit and lying are not the way to deal with others. He had tried it against his own father in chap. 27. He got the blessing, but tore the family apart and had to leave home as



a result. Dealing with Laban, he had carefully avoided all deceit and had dealt with utmost honesty. Nevertheless, God had prospered him.

So Jacob learned: (1) He did not need to cheat and deceive to gain blessings. This is the basis on which I have maintained that, had Jacob refused to deceive his father, God would still have given him the blessing by which he would have prevailed over Esau. Here we see a case where Jacob refused to deceive, and still he was blessed. If God determines to bless us, no under-handedness is needed to gain the blessing.

(2) Jacob learned that deceiving others is wrong. When one deceives and cheats others, as Jacob had deceived Isaac and cheated Esau, the practice does not seem so bad; but being the victim of deception by others is a very unpleasant experience! Jacob learned by personal experience that deceit bears bitter fruit.

One can try all he wants to justify Jacob's deceit against Isaac, but Jacob's own testimony here shows that he himself later realized that deceit was wrong. From this time on we never read of him cheating others. He always acted in strict faithfulness with what had been agreed.

### ***31:10-13 - God had promised to bless Jacob***

To further persuade his wives that he had done right and that leaving was the thing to do, Jacob told them of God's revelations to him. He had a dream in which the rams leaped on the flocks when they conceived (this seems to refer to the males cohabiting with the females). In the dream, the rams were all streaked, speckled, and spotted.

The purpose of the dream was to reveal why the flocks bore the various colors they did. God was controlling the conception, causing the flocks to conceive in the colors that Jacob would receive. Morris tries to give a natural explanation for this, while saying that God intervened to control what males mated with what females. Whether this is correct, or whether the result was miraculous, nevertheless the point was that God controlled the result for Jacob's good and as a punishment to Laban.

Then an angel spoke to Jacob in a dream. This may have been another dream, perhaps the one in v3. The angel explained that all the rams were causing the flocks to conceive in the colors that would belong to Jacob. Further, it said God was aware of how Laban was treating Jacob. The point was that God was controlling the outcome for Jacob's good. Note that God here expressly revealed that God knew Laban's treatment of Jacob was wrong.

He then told Jacob to leave the land where he was dwelling and return to the land of his family. He reminded Jacob of the vow he had made to the Lord at Bethel, and stated that He was that very God. Clearly, this was a reminder of the promises God and Jacob had made

at Bethel (28:16-22). This assured Jacob that God remembered His promise and would keep it. It also reminded Jacob of his promise to God.

Jacob's explanations to his wives showed them that Jacob had been honorable in his treatment of their father, but their father had been dishonorable to him. Nevertheless, Jacob had become wealthy, not by dishonest means but by faithful service and God's blessings. Furthermore, this showed that it was time to leave, and he had God's own authority for this.

### ***31:14-16 - Jacob's wives agreed that it was time to leave***

Rachel and Leah then responded, both of them agreeing that Laban had mistreated them as he had mistreated Jacob. They therefore agreed that it was right to leave.

They described their father's treatment of them, saying they had no inheritance in their father's house. They were convinced he would never give them any inheritance, so there was no reason to stay in hopes of that. They had nothing to lose by leaving. Their father's greed had convinced them of this.

Further, he had treated them as strangers. He had sold them and consumed their money. I can only assume this refers to his selling them to Jacob. Apparently, they had both all along resented their father's high-handedness in this. They may have never agreed to the arrangement, perhaps had never even been asked about it. In any case, the price Laban had agreed to was clearly exorbitant. It proved to them that their father was greedy and would even sell his own daughters for his own profit. On the other hand, Jacob's conduct had showed how much he valued them, so they appreciated him for his sacrifice on their behalf.

The reference to consuming their money may mean that Laban just took what he got for selling them and used it for himself. The daughters never received any gain from it. Women in that day were typically sent away with a dowry. The father sent money with the bride, thereby enabling her and her husband to set up housekeeping, etc. A large dowry showed that the woman was important and much to be desired. Laban, however, rather than sending a dowry with his daughters, sold them for his own profit. This showed he did not value them, but treated them like mere slaves. In this sense he consumed their money.

The women then concluded that God had given their father's wealth to Jacob in complete justice. It was really their wealth, since it had been paid to purchase them and no dowry had been given with them. By rights and justice, the property should belong to them and their children anyway. So they had no objections to leaving. They consented to do as God had instructed Jacob.

Note the lack of family love, loyalty, or devotion between Jacob's wives and their father's family. This shows the great alienation people

endure, even within their own family, when they practice deceit, greed, and under-handed cheating. Laban and Rebekah's family was filled with such mistreatment, even toward their closest family members. No wonder Rebekah practiced it. Jacob lived with such conduct all his life, yet apparently he himself was cured.

### ***31:17-21 - Jacob and his family fled from Laban***

Having discussed his plans with his wives and received their agreement, Jacob fled. He placed his wives and sons on camels to ride and took with them all the livestock and possessions he had gained. His intent was to leave Padan Aram and return to the land of his father Isaac in Canaan.

He chose to leave when Laban was occupied with the major project of shearing his sheep and would not be likely to discover Jacob's plan for some time. (Note that, contrary to Laban's sons in v1, Jacob had not taken all of Laban's sheep.) Sheep shearing was a time of feasting and celebration (1 Sam. 25:2,36), besides a time of much work. The total situation would make it unlikely Laban would pay attention for some time to anything Jacob might do. Jacob was already separated from Laban by three days journey (30:36). This too would give Jacob time to travel some distance before Laban discovered his intent.

So, Jacob deliberately departed in a way that Laban would not know his intent. He fled and crossed the river (presumably the Euphrates) and headed toward the mountains of Gilead. Gilead is the region on the east side of the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee.

Why would Jacob sneak away without telling his father-in-law? This is explained later (v31). He was afraid Laban would not agree for him to leave. Laban had objected once before when Jacob tried to leave (30:25). Now Jacob had even more property and possessions than he had previously, all of which he had gained from Laban. Laban might refuse to let Jacob take his family and possessions, perhaps even using force to prevent it. In any case, there figured to be an unpleasant scene. Laban's reaction, when he did hear what had happened, showed the wisdom of Jacob's approach.

Note that Jacob here used secrecy, but there is no indication that he deliberately deceived Laban, as he had done to his father in chap. 27. Failing to tell someone what you know or plan to do is different from deliberately saying or doing something intended to lead them to believe something that is untrue. Secrecy and confidentiality, which leave people unaware of your intents, are never forbidden in Scriptures. People may simply assume they know what to expect, and you may choose not to inform them otherwise. We do not owe it to tell everyone everything we know or intend, but that is different from deliberately leading them to believe what is untrue.

(Note: The NASB and NIV translate vv 20,26,27 that Jacob "deceived" Laban. But the NASB footnote shows the word does have an al-

ternate meaning: it says he “stole the heart” of Laban. How did he do so? By deliberately leading him to believe an untruth? No, the verse itself explains simply “by not telling him that he was leaving.” As explained above, not telling something you know does not constitute deceit, unless we lead people to believe we have told them everything. Compare New Testament examples of Paul and other Christians who fled danger for the sake of their own safety. They did not tell their enemies they were leaving. Were they guilty of deceit?)

However, unknown to Jacob (v32), Rachel did practice deceit and even theft. She stole Laban’s household idols (cf. v30ff). These were generally small images used in idolatrous families. Just as each nation may have its primary god, each city or region may have a favorite god, so families sometimes had favorite gods, worshiped by means of images kept in the home. Laban evidently had these. Often they would be made of gold or silver and so had some material value.

The fact Laban possessed such idols shows that, though he apparently worshiped the true God of Abraham to some extent, he also worshiped other gods. This was unfortunately common among people in that time and society. They worshiped many gods. Instead of viewing God as the one true God so that no other gods should be worshiped at all, they viewed God as one god among many. They may have preferred one among the others, perhaps even preferring Jehovah as their main god, yet they were not opposed to worshipping others. This sad state plagued the nation of Israel throughout its history. Genesis 35:2 indicates that several people in Jacob’s family practiced idolatry.

We may condemn such practices, and rightly so. But remember such was the common practice of their society (unlike ours), and they were just influenced by people around them. Are God’s people today much different? We may not overtly bow before idols, but aren’t our people sometimes influenced by those around us to participate in activities, even religious practices, that God does not approve? Don’t we see members who compromise with denominational practices, even participate in them, not making a clear distinction between right and wrong? Don’t we see some who compromise with the morals of society and participate in practices that God would not want? If we can recognize Laban’s error, let us learn to avoid similar errors in our own lives.

Further, Rachel too was influenced by the deceit so commonly practiced in her family. The account does not state that she intended to worship these gods. She may have taken them simply for their material value. But she definitely practiced deceit and greed.

We have seen that her father was a deceiver, her Aunt Rebekah was a deceiver, and her sister Leah was a deceiver. Clearly, deceit was a common family practice as Rachel here stole from her father and later deceived him about her guilt. She probably justified it on the grounds that her father owed it to her as her inheritance or dowry (see on vv 14-

16). But all Jacob's possessions had been earned by honorable labor in harmony with agreements reached with Laban. Rachel here acted simply like a common thief.

***31:22-24 - Laban pursued Jacob, but God warned him to do no harm***

Because he was so busy shearing his sheep, Laban did not hear for three days that Jacob had left. That time, plus the distance Jacob had been away from Laban to begin with, gave Jacob a significant head start. Doubtless, it took Laban a while, even after the discovery, to arrange his affairs and prepare his pursuit.

But he was evidently determined to not allow Jacob to leave. He took his brethren (probably his sons and other relatives) and pursued Jacob. It took him seven days, but he finally overtook them in the mountains of Gilead. Of course, Jacob could not travel fast with his flocks and herds, wives and children (33:14). Having only men prepared for travel, probably on camels or other animals, Laban was able to overtake him.

But the very fact Laban undertook this pursuit demonstrated malicious intent. Why take so many men with him, unless he expected some physical confrontation when he found Jacob (see v29)? If he intended just to say good-bye, he could have gone alone or with a handful of servants. Why travel so long with such obvious determination? Why not simply let them go? Laban's whole reaction shows that Jacob was justified in fearing that Laban would not let him take his family and possessions with him.

This also demonstrates Laban's greed. He had made agreements with Jacob about all this. He had even changed the agreement repeatedly (vv 7-10), always seeking his own advantage. Yet events had always worked out to Jacob's advantage. Clearly, despite his previous agreements, Laban intended to prevent Jacob from leaving with all these possessions and people.

Furthermore, God's reaction to Laban confirms that He knew Laban's intent. God appeared to Laban in a dream and warned him not to even speak good or bad to Jacob. The clear implication, if he could not even speak good or bad, was that he surely was not to do anything harmful to Jacob (cf. v29). Laban may have been an idolater, but he at least believed in God enough to respect this warning.

All of this demonstrates that Laban, not Jacob, was the one who did wrong in their relationship. Jacob had not cheated nor deceived Laban.

***31:25-30 - Laban asked why Jacob left secretly and why he stole Laban's gods***

Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains of Gilead; having overtaken him, Laban pitched his tents nearby. These men were no-

madic shepherds. They would move their great flocks and herds to where there was food and water, and there they would pitch tents and stay awhile. Jacob had done this, though likely he intended to stay only a very short time before moving on. Seeing that Laban had caught up, however, he knew there was no point to continue to flee. Confrontation was necessary.

Laban then met Jacob and asked why he had left secretly. Why had he not told Laban his plans so Laban could send them off with a great celebration and could kiss his daughters and grandchildren good-bye? Instead, he said, Jacob had left like a thief stealing captives taken by force. He said this was foolish.

Of course, all this was subterfuge. If this was all he cared about, again, why bring many relatives with him and travel seven days? Would he do all this just to say good-bye to his family? Not likely. But this was all he could say now. He essentially admitted that he had intended to do more. He said he had the power to do great harm to Jacob (implying he had brought a number of men with him). Again, why take so much power unless he had originally intended to use it? He did not need it to just say good-bye. But he admitted that he would not use force because God had warned him not to even speak against Jacob.

He admitted that he could understand Jacob would want to leave to return to his father. Of course, he already knew Jacob wanted to do this. And he could not deny that Jacob had a right to take everything with him that he had taken. This left him with no excuse for having taken such a strong force of men on such a long pursuit. So, he came up with an excuse. He asked why Jacob had taken Laban's household idols.

Now this was more subterfuge. While the loss of his gods might have upset him, it was hardly worth the cost of providing for such a large group of men on such a long journey. Had he been able to recapture the gods, it would hardly have been worth the effort. Obviously, this had not been his real original intent. But he brought up the gods to justify his pursuit.

Incidentally, as some commentators have pointed out, what kind of gods can be stolen? Any god that lacks the power to prevent its own theft must not be much of a god!

### ***31:31,32 - Jacob explained his reasons and offered for Laban to search for his gods***

Jacob stated, as previously discussed, that his reason for fleeing was that he feared Laban would not let him go. He feared Laban would try to stop him by force, as he evidently had intended to do. Jacob was completely justified, and little Laban could say to deny it.

However, the issue of the household gods was unexpected by Jacob. He had stolen nothing. He took only what rightfully belonged to

him. He did not know Rachel had stolen anything. He was innocent in this matter.

So, he said anyone who was found having possession of the gods could be put to death. He was willing to allow Laban freely to search for any property that was his. If he could identify it in the presence of the witnesses of his brethren, he could take it home with him. Clearly, Jacob did not expect that his beloved Rachel would be guilty. One wonders what would have happened had she been caught.

Joseph Free (p71) gives evidence from the Nuzi tablets that a son-in-law, who possessed his father-in-law's gods, could make legal claim to all his father-in-law's estate. This may help explain why Rachel stole them and why Laban wanted them back. But still, why would Laban be so concerned knowing that Jacob was leaving the area – even a seven-day journey? Why suspect Jacob of making such a claim if he completely left the area of Laban's estate?

### ***31:33-35 - Rachel hid the gods by further deceit***

So Laban searched all the tents. Note that there were at least several of them. Apparently, Jacob and each of his wives had separate tents. Stopping to camp during the travels must have been a major undertaking. Laban searched the tents of Jacob, of Leah, and of the two maids, Bilhah and Zilpah. Nothing was found, so he went on to Rachel's tent.

Rachel knew severe problems would result if she were discovered. Both her father and her husband would be seriously angry with her. Serious confrontation, even a battle, might result. Jacob had already agreed that the thief would die.

But she was resourceful and well schooled in the family tradition of deceit. She hid the idols in her camel's saddle, which would serve as an item of furniture in the tent when not in use for travel. She then sat on it, and when Laban searched all around, she said she could not get up because it was her time of the month. So Laban did not find the idols.

This shows that the idols were quite small. It also shows that Rachel was a skilled deceiver. Commentators point out that the deception was especially effective because a woman was considered unclean during her menstrual period, as was anything she sat on. This would prevent Laban from asking her to rise or from searching the camel saddle.

### ***31:36,37 - Finally Jacob was fed up and unloaded on Laban for years of mistreatment***

Jacob became angry and rebuked Laban for all the trouble he had caused and for the apparent false accusation he had raised. Laban had mistreated Jacob for years. Jacob was upset by Laban's hot pursuit, as though Jacob had done something wrong. Jacob was in the right and

Laban in the wrong, and Jacob intended for all to know it. He had been treated like some kind of thief and had been misused for years. He was determined to have it out with his father-in-law once and for all.

The Waldrons point out that even searching Jacob's belongings had been an insult. Laban would not take his own son-in-law's word for the fact he knew nothing of the theft, despite Jacob's twenty years of faithful service. This insult followed his years of mistreatment of Jacob, and even then Laban had found nothing to justify his conduct. Jacob was rightly upset.

So Jacob asked Laban what sin Jacob had committed that justified this hot pursuit. Laban had searched everywhere. Jacob asked him to produce the evidence of any wrongdoing by Jacob, and let Laban's relatives serve as judges of the matter. Of course, Laban had no such evidence, which was Jacob's point. There was no justification whatever for what Laban had done. Jacob had taken nothing except his own hard-earned possessions. Laban's pursuit was completely unjustified.

Note that speaking in anger is not always wrong (Eph. 4:26).

### ***31:38-42 - Jacob then rebuked Laban for all the years of mistreatment***

Having proved that Laban's pursuit was unjustified, Jacob proceeded to prove before his family and all Laban's men that Laban had mistreated him for years.

First, he explained his own upright conduct. In twenty years of service, he had kept Laban's sheep from miscarrying. This would require great diligence. He had not eaten Laban's animals for his own food, even though he might have done so since he was working for Laban. Further, if any of Laban's animals was slain by animal or by accident, Jacob replaced it with one of his own. Anything stolen, Laban required Jacob to repay. This should not necessarily have been required. It would depend on whether or not such losses were the result of negligence. But Jacob was giving evidence that he had not been negligent (cf. Exodus 22:13). He had willingly gone beyond the requirements of duty to see that Laban did not suffer even when it was not Jacob's fault.

He reminded Laban of the hardships he had endured: drought by day and frost by night. He had to stay awake at night to protect the sheep. These were normal hardships for shepherds, but Jacob's point is that he had earned his pay from Laban. He had not neglected his duties. He had not slept on the job, as some shepherds might have. He did not leave the sheep unprotected during bad weather. He suffered with them, and all this was for Laban's benefit. But instead of appreciating all that Jacob had done, Laban just made more demands!

Jacob had served Laban a total of twenty years: 14 years to pay for Laban's daughters, then six more years working for the flocks and herds he had gained. All that Jacob possessed he had earned by hard



work. Laban had agreed to it all. In fact, Laban had changed the agreement ten times, always trying to make the agreement more to his own advantage. Rather than honoring the agreements made, he changed them whenever he could to his own benefit.

Jacob concluded that he had been protected from Laban's deceit and mistreatment only because God was with him. God protected Jacob because He saw Jacob's faithfulness. Without God's protection, even after all Jacob's faithful work, Laban would have sent him away empty-handed. This was why Jacob had fled (v29) and why God had warned Laban not to harm Jacob.

And on top of all this was an even greater deceit that Jacob did not mention: Laban had given him the wrong woman as wife even after Jacob labored faithfully for seven years! Why he did not mention this is not stated. Perhaps it was because everyone knew it and he did not want to further embarrass his wives by bringing in up.

Note that Jacob here explained quite clearly the lesson he had learned about deceit. He had ceased to practice it, but had been completely honest with Laban. He clearly condemned such deceit in Laban, showing how wrong it is. Therefore, no one should attempt to justify Jacob's own deceit in chap. 27. Jacob had learned his lesson! See earlier notes on vv 6-10.

This discussion shows the time period Jacob had been with Laban: a total of twenty years.

### ***31:43-47 - Laban proposed a covenant of peace***

Since Laban was completely unable to answer Jacob's accusations, he proposed that they treat one another properly in the future. He stated that Jacob's wives were his daughters and Jacob's children were his children (descendants) and Jacob's flock was his flock. Everything Jacob possessed had come from Laban. But he could do nothing to them. The point seems to be that, since all had come from him, he was not willing to harm them. This could be a false attempt to deny that he ever intended to harm them, or it could mean that he realized after all that had happened that he should not hurt them. In any case, he does not appear to be admitting guilt or apologizing as he surely ought to have done.

However, he proposed a covenant between him and Jacob. This appears to be a last resort. He had been unable to accomplish anything regarding his real purpose in coming. So to save face and resolve the impasse, he proposed that he and Jacob make a covenant to do one another no harm. Jacob had no reason to oppose such a covenant. He had never intended to harm Laban, and he was glad for Laban to agree to do no harm to him or his possessions.

As a symbol of the covenant, Jacob took a stone and called upon his brethren (presumably Laban and his relatives, though it might have included Jacob's sons) to also take stones. Together they made a heap

of stones as a witness to the covenant. Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. Both terms mean “a heap of witness,” but Laban simply spoke in Aramaic and Jacob in Hebrew.

Stones were commonly used for such memorials. When either of the parties or the witnesses saw the stones, they would be reminded of the covenant. We today likewise often place monuments where men make great agreements, such as at places where wars are settled or treaties signed, etc. See Gen. 28:18; 35:14; Josh 24:26,27; 4:1-24.

It seems to me that this is likewise the symbolic meaning of the two tablets with the Ten Commands. God them made, not so much because they contained the most important commands (Jesus said love for God and man are the two greatest commands), but as a symbolic memorial to the covenant.

### ***31:48-50 - The covenant was sealed***

Laban explained further that the heap would be a witness between him and Jacob. It was also called “Mizpah” meaning “watch.” The idea was that the Lord would watch the conduct of both Jacob and Laban. The two men might separate from one another, but God would still see (and reward) them if they did wrong to one another.

Laban added that God would witness if Jacob mistreated his wives, the daughters of Laban, or if he took other wives besides them. It is interesting that Laban was concerned about whether Jacob took other wives, yet he himself was responsible for the fact Jacob had more than one wife. Jacob had wanted only one, but Laban had by deceit given him another, and the competition between those two had driven him to take two others.

### ***31:51-55 - Neither man should pass the heap to do violence to the other***

Laban said the heap would be a reminder that neither of the men should do harm to the other (cf. 26:26-33). It would stand between them. If either one sought to attack the other, the pillar of stones would remind him that he had covenanted to do no such harm.

Further, he reminded everyone that God would be aware if either did harm to the other, and God would judge them for any such misconduct. This in effect called upon God to be witness and judge to the oath being made.

Laban referred to the God of Abraham (Jacob’s ancestor), the God of Nahor (Abraham’s brother and Laban’s ancestor), and the God of their father. One wonders whether these expressions all referred to the same God or to different gods. The NKJV translators capitalized them all, implying they thought all the references were to the true God. If so, then Abraham’s father and brother worshiped the true God, or at least Laban wanted people to think they all did so (though we have seen that Laban also worshiped other gods).

Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. This probably is a name for God (note how “Fear” is capitalized in the NKJV). God is the one whom Isaac feared and the One Who deserved to be feared.

Jacob then offered a sacrifice to God and made a feast for his brethren (again referring to his relatives, who had come with Laban). The men ate and stayed all night on the mountain. The next day Laban kissed his daughters and their children. Then he departed.

# Genesis 32

## Chap. 32,33 - Jacob's Meeting with Esau

### **32:1,2 - Angels of God met Jacob**

Having met with Laban, Jacob proceeded on his way. He had escaped unharmed from his father-in-law, but now he had to face an even more fearful enemy. Jacob had left home because his brother Esau had threatened to kill him after Jacob had received Isaac's blessing by deception (27:41ff). Here he was returning home. How would Esau receive him?

Jacob remembered Esau's threats, as doubtless did Esau. However, that threat had occurred some 20 years before the present story. Jacob had matured and changed in the meanwhile. What had happened with Esau? Jacob had no way to know. Rebekah had said she would send a message to Jacob when it was safe to return home. Evidently, Jacob had never heard from her. If Esau was still upset, the outcome could be far more destructive than anything Laban had been capable of.

The brief and somewhat confusing account given in these verses informs us that, as Jacob traveled to meet Esau, angels of God met him. This is difficult, but it may help to understand the situation. God had told Jacob to return home, so Jacob knew he was doing what God wanted. Further, God had promised to bless Jacob and be with him when he returned home (31:3). Nevertheless, the situation would be frightening for Jacob, especially because of his concern for his wives and children.

Given this circumstance, the appearance of the angels almost surely was intended to reassure Jacob that God was with him and would protect him (compare this to Jacob's dream regarding angels in Genesis 28:12ff). On seeing them, Jacob said "This is God's camp (or "host" — ASV)," and called it Mahanaim, meaning "double camp" or "two hosts" (ASV) or "two companies" (NASB footnote). If we understand the "camps" or "hosts" to refer to armies, then the angels would appear as an army to serve as protection for Jacob's family. Jacob's camp was not alone: besides his own camp consisting of his family and servants, God had sent a camp of angels to protect him. Mahanaim was located east of Jordan and north of the Jabbok (see a *map*).

This may be compared to 2 Kings 6:16,17, where God allowed the armies of angels to appear to Elisha and his servant to give them assurance. They were being pursued by an army of enemies, even as Jacob feared he was in this case. The appearance of God's angels reassured

them that God intended to protect them. This seems to be the point of this appearance of angels to Jacob. (Cf. Psa 103:20; Heb. 1:14.)

### ***32:3-5 - Jacob sent messengers to prepare Esau for his arrival***

Jacob knew he must face his brother sooner or later. There was no point avoiding the fact. When we face such a hard situation, often we fare better if we initiate contact by showing our good will. This was Jacob's chosen course.

Jacob sent messengers to tell Esau that he was coming home. Esau lived in the land of Seir, the country called Edom. Edom was the name given Esau in 25:30. Seir was a Horite who had lived in the territory where Esau moved (Gen. 36:20). This region was to the south of the Dead Sea (see **map**). Apparently, Esau and his descendants had settled there during the time Jacob had been gone. Later, (perhaps even by this time) the area came to wear his name of Edom.

The messengers were instructed to tell Esau that Jacob was coming. He had lived with Laban and was returning with flocks and herds and servants. But Jacob worded the message humbly, calling himself Esau's servant and asking to find favor in Esau's sight.

Both Jacob and Esau doubtless remembered that Isaac's blessings had stated that Jacob would dominate Esau. Jacob, however, sought no personal quarrel with Esau. In this too he had learned his lesson. He simply wanted peace to return to his father's land. He sought to reassure Esau that he did not want strife.

Why did he mention his flocks and servants? Perhaps it was to assure Esau that he had prospered and that he had no need nor desire to take anything from Esau.

### ***32:6-8 - Jacob was alarmed to hear that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men***

The messengers returned with a disconcerting message. They said Esau was coming to meet Jacob with 400 men. Jacob may have hoped Esau would just ignore his return. Or perhaps he would come with a small delegation and greet Jacob, then let the matter drop. However, 400 men sounded like a great danger. If they came with warlike intent, there would be little Jacob could do to defend his family.

In his fear, Jacob separated his people and animals into two groups or companies. He said that, if Esau attacked one, it may be destroyed, but at least the other might escape. This shows that Jacob had no hope of defeating Esau. If he had thought he could overcome Esau, he would likely have wanted his people to stay together for defense purposes.

### ***32:9-12 - Jacob then prayed for God's protection***

Having made what preparations he could, Jacob then prayed to God about the problem. Note that he prayed, but he also acted accord-

ing to his best wisdom. This is a proper approach to prayer. We should do what we can, not expecting God to do everything for us. But we should not expect either to prevail by our own power and wisdom; we should put the matter in God's hands (Phil. 4:6,7; 1 Peter 5:7).

Jacob's prayer demonstrates the kind of prayers God's people should offer. First, he trusted in God's word, claiming God's promise that, if he would obey God and return to his father's land, then God would be with him. Prayer must harmonize with God's word. Jacob demonstrated that he was simply asking for God to do what He had said He would do.

Jacob then expressed humility, admitting that he did not deserve the blessings God had given him. None of us deserve God's blessings, yet God offers them richly if we humble ourselves and trust Him to provide. Specifically, Jacob said that he had left home with only his staff, but was returning with two companies of people and animals. We need similar humility. We should realize that our blessings are gifts from God, nothing that we have earned by our own merit.

Then he raised his specific request, describing the problem plainly. He was afraid of Esau, fearing that he would come and destroy his family, mother and children. So, he prayed for deliverance from this danger. We should identify our needs to God specifically.

Finally, he also claimed God's greater promise that Jacob's descendants would be so numerous they could not be counted, like the sand of the sea. That could not occur if Esau came and destroyed Jacob and all his family. So, Jacob's request clearly harmonized with God's promises.

We too should pray in time of need, being sure our prayers harmonize with God's word, humbly acknowledging our own unworthiness and our complete dependence on God, while also doing what we can to bring about what we request.

### ***32:13-15 - Jacob then determined to send presents to Esau***

When we have repented of mistreating another person, gifts may indicate the depth of our sorrow. Jacob was again taking the initiative. He did not wait for Esau to come and begin the fight. He showed Esau that he sought appeasement, not strife.

Further, the gift was of great value, consisting of hundreds of animals: goats, sheep, camels, cows, and donkeys. That Jacob could give away so many animals showed that he was a rich man indeed. It also showed Esau that Jacob sought to take nothing from him. Jacob had plenty for himself, and was willing to share even what he had.

Whatever Esau's original intent and expectation, he could no longer believe that Jacob came with warlike intent. If there was war, it would be because Esau insisted on it, not because Jacob wanted it.

### **32:16-20 - Jacob sent the gift if several successive groups**

Jacob did not send this whole present all at once. To strengthen the impression made by the gift, he divided it into groups and sent one drove following another, then another, separated by some space. Each group could then impress Esau, strengthening the assurance that Jacob sought good relationships, not strife.

Each group was guided by men who would explain to Esau that this was a present from Jacob, who was yet to come. The men were instructed to speak respectfully to Esau, calling him “lord.”

All this was done to appease Esau’s anger and to convince him that Jacob came in peace. He hoped Esau would accept these gifts and recognize that Jacob no longer sought strife.

### **32:21-23 - Jacob then sent his family over the Jabbok**

So, Jacob sent this present ahead to Esau, but he waited another night in camp before himself departing to meet Esau. He did, however, move his whole family and company over the brook Jabbok, including his wives and sons and servants. Interestingly the record mentions two wives, clearly Leah and Rachel. These two were the only wives in the sense of the word used for free women. Zilpah and Bilhah, however, are also mentioned as being his two female servants. As discussed earlier, he had married them too, but they were concubines (slaves), not free wives.

So Jacob took them and sent them over the brook. Apparently, then he returned to be alone, presumably to spend the night in prayer before facing this great danger (see v24ff).

We are told that these events occurred at the brook Jabbok. This brook is located east of the Jordan River, and empties into the Jordan about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea (see *map*). So, Jacob’s company had moved from Mesopotamia to Gilead, where they met Laban when he caught up to them. Now they had crossed through Gilead to meet Esau, who was coming up from the south of the Dead Sea.

### **32:24-32 - Jacob wrestled with God**

#### **A “man” wrestled all night with Jacob – 32:24,25**

This brings us to an event of major importance, yet somewhat hard to understand. Jacob was alone, apparently still on the north side of the brook. A man wrestled with him all night till the break of day. This is explained further as the story proceeds. Clearly, the event was caused by God and almost surely had symbolic significance. But what was the meaning?

The one he wrestled with is called a “man,” yet Jacob later concluded he had seen the face of God (v30). Hosea 12:3-5 refers to this

incident and calls this an “angel.” So, the “man” must have been an angel or God in the form of a man.

On other occasions earlier in Genesis angels appeared like men and are even called “men.” On occasion such men are even referred to as “God.” See Gen. 18 & 19. Exactly who this was or how it was managed, I do not know. However, it was clearly a manifestation of God. Some believe it was Jesus in the form of a man.

For some reason this man wrestled with Jacob all night. Finally, he saw he could not prevail against Jacob to defeat him, so he touched Jacob’s hip socket and put it out of joint.

Some claim this event was just a dream or a symbol, but never really happened. However, Jacob limped the next morning as a result of it (vv 31,32). Surely, it literally happened, yet it must have symbolic meaning. Consider further as we attempt to determine the meaning.

### **The man/angel gave Jacob the name “Israel” – 32:26-28**

When daybreak came, the man/angel told Jacob to release him. Why he had to leave at daybreak is not clear. I can only conclude that his purpose was fulfilled. Jacob, however, insisted he would not let go till the man/angel pronounced a blessing on him. By this time he was apparently sure this was a representative of God, so he was determined to receive God’s blessing.

The man/angel asked Jacob’s name. When Jacob responded, the man/angel gave him the new name of “Israel.” This means “Prince with God” or something similar, referring to one who has a special position or has prevailed with God. He said the reason for giving this name was that Jacob had wrestled with God and with man and had prevailed. Remember that God had also changed the names of Abraham and Sarah, indicating their special role in His plan.

This may help us understand the meaning of the event. It appears that Jacob went to be alone to pray to God. He wrestled in prayer, urging God to hear his prayer and (presumably) protect him from Esau.

Seeing that Jacob continued so in prayer, God determined to send a man/angel to wrestle literally with Jacob as a symbol of his wrestling in prayer. Jacob seems to have figured this out, so he refused to let the man/angel go till he had received the blessing he requested.

The angel gave Jacob a new name indicating that he had prevailed. He prevailed with Laban, and God had already said he would prevail over Esau. The point seems to be that God was reassuring Jacob that he would prevail in this confrontation with Esau, and he had prevailed with God.

Does this mean that, in so wrestling, Jacob was opposing God? Not at all. Surely God would not reward one who had opposed him, as he here rewards Jacob. Does it mean that God did not want to bless or protect Jacob? No, for He had already promised to do so.



The point, it seems to me, can only be that God was testing Jacob, similar to his test of Abraham when he told him to offer Isaac. God was willing to bless Jacob and even wanted to do so, as He had wanted to bless Abraham. But first Jacob had to prove how much he really wanted God's blessing (like Abraham had to prove his faith).

God wants all His people to pray. He wants to give us the blessings we need, but He wants us to request them. Sometimes He waits to see how earnest we are before He meets the request. See Luke 18:1,7. In this case, He was about to give Jacob a great blessing and wanted him to prove his great desire and commitment to receive it. So, as a man might spiritually wrestle in earnest pleading with God for a blessing, so Jacob was required to wrestle physically, but as a symbol of this earnest pleading with God.

Having so wrestled all night, the man/angel finally agreed to give the blessing Jacob requested. He then gave Jacob the great name that was passed on to the nation that became his descendants in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. The name stands for the prominent position God gave Jacob. He was no longer a supplanter but a Prince with God. Perhaps this shows God's confirmation that Jacob had learned not to supplant or deceive, so he had grown to stand in God's favor.

The Waldrons add that, if we can prevail with God and receive His favor, then we need not fear what anyone else may do to us.

This is my best explanation, though I grant some other meaning may fit the event better.

### **Jacob called the place Peniel or Penuel – 32:29-32**

Having been given his new name, Jacob then asked the angel what his name was. He apparently was fairly sure that it was a representative of God (see v30). He seems to want confirmation of this. He knew the "man" was from God, but did not know exactly who it was.

The man/angel, however, refused to state his name (we are not told why). He simply asked why Jacob asked about his name. He did, however, grant the blessing Jacob requested. This, in effect, assured Jacob that the man was from God.

Jacob then named the place Peniel, meaning "Face of God." He said he had seen the face of God and not died for it. Of course, he had not literally seen the face of God. He saw only the face of God in the form of man (like people saw Jesus) or an angel who represented God. Had he seen the real face of God, he could not have lived (Exodus 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16). But he had seen God's face through this representative form, which was amazing of itself.

We are then told that he crossed over Penuel as the sun rose. This is the same word or meaning as Peniel. Apparently he crossed over the ford of the Jabbok at the place he had called Peniel. That name continued for some time.

He limped on his hip, for the man/angel had wounded him there. This proves that this was a real event. Like the blinding of Saul in Acts 9 and the striking Zacharias dumb in Luke 1, this seems to be a sign to remind Jacob of this great event.

Apparently, the shrinking of a certain muscle caused this lameness. In memorial of this event the Israelites, we are told, from that time on did not eat that specific muscle (i.e., the similar muscle in animals).

Jacob had urgently requested God to help him through the great trial he was about to face with Esau. By means of this wondrous event, God assured Jacob that He would be with him and Jacob would prevail. In so doing, God also gave Jacob a great proof of God's honor to him, a proof that was clearly remembered by later generations. Such confirmation is the purpose of Bible miracles.

## Genesis 33

### ***33:1-3 - As Esau arrived, Jacob and his family approached***

Jacob had made his preparations to meet his brother. He had sent gifts and had divided his possessions into two companies. Above all, he had prayed to God. Finally, the time came for the meeting that he dreaded. He saw Esau coming with his band of 400 men.

Esau might have initially wondered whether Jacob would be aggressive, since God had predicted that Jacob would dominate him (though these predictions pertained mainly to the nations that would spring from them). But by this time Esau surely knew that Jacob wanted reconciliation. The gifts Jacob had sent unquestionably demonstrated a desire for peace. He intended no harm to Esau. Besides, Esau had been the one to threaten violence to Jacob, not the other way around.

However, Jacob had no indication of Esau's attitude. The last he had known, Esau had threatened to kill him. He had received no gifts or messages of any kind from Esau. He would have entered this meeting completely unaware of Esau's intent.

He made one last preparation. He placed his family in order so the concubines and their sons went first, then Leah and her children, then Rachel and Joseph. Jacob himself preceded them. This arrangement was probably so the ones he cared for the most would be the most protected.

Jacob approached Esau bowing to the ground seven times. This was clearly a sign of respect and peaceableness. His attitude was not one of aggression but of peace and respect. He did not grovel before Esau, but he did show honor and a desire for mutual respect. Coffman cites the Tel-el-Amarna tablets as stating that the proper way to approach a king around this time was to bow seven times.

### ***33:4 - Esau greeted Jacob with kisses and embraces***

By this point Esau surely had no doubts about Jacob's intents. He quickly removed all Jacob's questions about his intents by running to meet Jacob and embracing him. He fell on his neck and kissed him. Both men wept for joy in their peaceable reunion.

We are not told specifically what words of reconciliation were spoken. Nor are we told what caused the change of Esau's heart. However, on Jacob's side, we have been shown how he had experienced 20 years of being deceived and cheated. This surely taught him what it was like to be deceived and cheated by others. We have thoroughly discussed how he had learned not to deceive and cheat others, but had dealt honorably with Laban despite Laban's mistreatment of him. He

had openly rebuked Laban's deceitfulness. While no passage directly states it, I believe we can necessarily infer that he was sorry for his own use of deceit and cheating toward his father and brother. He now knew such conduct was wrong and should not be practiced.

We can only conclude from Esau's conduct that the 20 years of separation and alienation had worked a similar change of attitude in him. His mother had said, when Jacob left, that Esau's anger would cool. Apparently, it had done so. Almost certainly his father and mother had talked to him about his wrong attitude toward his brother. Most likely, he had even come to accept the fact that God had decreed that the promises to Abraham would be fulfilled through Jacob. Jacob's gifts showed unquestionably that he had no ill intent toward Esau. Surely, Esau's heart too had changed, as it ought to have changed.

In any case, the men met, not just peaceably, but with open demonstrations of love and reconciliation. They were brothers after all. They were sons of parents who loved God and had set godly examples before them. Surely, they had come to see the shame of their mistreatment and alienation. Both sought reunion.

On being reunited and observing their mutual desire for reconciliation, both wept for joy. There is a time for people to weep, even for men to weep. This was such a time.

### ***33:5-7 - Esau was introduced to Jacob's family***

Esau then asked Jacob about his family. Jacob said these were the children God had graciously given him. He continued to speak respectfully, referring to himself as Esau's servant.

Note that children are a blessing from God, and Jacob openly stated his regard for his children (cf. Psalm 127 & 128). We should appreciate the goodness of God in giving us children. Then we should care for them with appreciation as a blessing from God. Does our society reflect a proper attitude of appreciation toward children?

Jacob's wives and children then were introduced to Esau, coming in order as Jacob had placed them. All of them bowed too, showing their respect for Esau. Children should be taught to show respect to their elders.

### ***33:8-11 - Jacob persuaded Esau to take the gifts***

Esau then brought up all the "company" he had met. This must refer to the groups of servants Jacob had sent with gifts. The servants had explained the intent to Esau, but he wanted to check about this with Jacob. He asked, doubtless, not just for information, but also to bring the subject up so he could insist that he did not need such gifts (v9).

When Jacob explained that he hoped the gifts would make a favorable impression, Esau objected saying that he had enough of his own property and Jacob should keep these gifts. We have been told nothing

of Esau during the time Jacob had been gone, but the fact he could bring 400 men with him implies he was influential and almost surely wealthy. Perhaps he had already received his inheritance from his father. In any case, he did not need the animals Jacob had given.

However, the purpose of the gifts was not to meet a need but to show good will. So, Jacob insisted that he still wanted Esau to take them. If Esau looked favorably on Jacob, he should keep the gifts as an expression of good will between them. Some comment that, just as offering a gift in that society expressed a desire for good relations, so accept the gift indicated acceptance of a good relation. So, Jacob sought Esau to cement their good will by taking the gift.

Jacob said he had seen Esau's face as looking on the face of God, and Esau was pleased with him. Such language is strange to us. Surely, he was not saying that Esau was like God to him. More likely is that, when he saw Esau and realized Esau was favorable to him, no longer an enemy to be feared and avoided, he considered it a blessing from God. It was as though he had found favor before the face of God Himself. Whether this is exactly the point I am not sure, but clearly Jacob is exuberantly expressing his great joy that he had found favor before Esau. He had met Esau with fear and trepidation. His joy was unbounded when he learned that, not only was there no danger, but in fact he and Esau were reconciled.

For this reason he urged Esau to take the gift he had offered as an expression of good will. He assured Esau that he too had great blessings from God. Finally at his urging, Esau accepted the gift.

### ***33:12-16 - Esau offered to escort Jacob's company***

Esau was then ready to depart. He suggested that their two companies travel together. Jacob objected, not because he doubted Esau's sincerity, but because their respective companies were so different in nature that they would find it hard to travel together. He had a family of small children, the oldest being at most twelve years old. He had great flocks of animals, including some nursing their babies. He had already traveled hard fleeing from Laban. If he drove the flocks too hard, even for one day, they might die.

Implied is the fact that Esau's band of men would want to move faster than Jacob's company. They no doubt had work and families to return to. So, Jacob urged that they separate and meet again some other time, even in Seir where Esau lived.

Esau then suggested that most of his company would proceed, but he would leave some of his men to protect Jacob's company and help them on the way. Jacob surely appreciated the gesture, but he said there was no need. He was convinced he had servants enough to do what his family and flocks needed. Finally, Esau agreed he would leave, so he returned home.

Note how concerned both brothers were for one another. Instead of competition and animosity as had previously existed, they were seeking ways to care for one another. Instead of seeking personal advantage at the expense of the other, they sought to assist one another. Clearly, they acted here as brothers ought to act.

Also, note that nothing is said of their parents, Isaac and Rebekah. Doubtless, the men discussed their parents, though the subject is not recorded. Surely, Jacob sought to know of his parents' well-being. He would also want to know where they were so he could visit them. They are not mentioned again in Genesis except as in 35:27-29; 49:31. Isaac was still alive, but Morris concludes he was about 153 years old at this time (he died at age 180). He thinks Rebekah had already died, since she is not mentioned in the account again. If so, she never again saw her favorite son Jacob after he left due to her plot of deception.

Jacob said he would visit Esau in Seir, the land of Edom where Esau dwelt. Whether or not Jacob ever did so is not mentioned (cf. 36:6-8; 35:8,27-29).

### ***33:17-20 - Jacob went to Succoth then to Shechem, where he built an altar***

Jacob then went to a place called Succoth. There he made booths (probably temporary shelters) for his livestock and even a house for himself. Instead of continuing to live in tents, he apparently had a real house for a time. The place was called Succoth, meaning "booths" (NKJV footnote).

This place was still east of the Jordan near the Jabbok brook, near Penuel where Jacob had crossed. However, it is believed to be west from Penuel in the direction of Canaan (see **map**). And it is a little north of the Jabbok. Apparently, Jacob decided to stop his travels and rest awhile. So, he traveled a little west toward Canaan and even crossed again to the north of the brook.

He had been traveling hard to escape Laban, and he had traveled in fear of Esau. Now that both these problems were resolved, he no longer needed to continue to travel for the time being. He decided to spend a while and allow the flocks to recover. He stayed long enough that he even built a house.

Then sometime later he moved on to Shechem (see **map**). This we are told was actually in the land of Canaan. He pitched his tent there. He had finally safely arrived in the land promised to Abraham, having traveled all the way from the family of his mother and his wives in Padan Aram.

Shechem was between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim, not far from where the city of Samaria was later located (capital city of the northern nation of Israel). The city became the place of a serious problem for Jacob's family, as described in the next chapter.

There Jacob actually bought a parcel of land on which to pitch his tent. He bought it from the descendants of a man named Hamor. Hamor was the father of Shechem, who becomes important also in the events of the next chapter. The price was 100 pieces of money.

This is interesting. Except for the cave of Machpelah, where Sarah was buried, Abraham had bought no property in Canaan. We have no record of Isaac buying property, despite the fact the whole land was promised to their descendants. Yet here, apparently for the first time, we have one of the patriarchs buying land to live on.

He there built an altar to worship God. This was as had been done by Isaac and Abraham (see on 26:25). When they stayed very long at a place, they built a place to worship God and offer sacrifices to Him. Jacob called this altar El Elohe Israel, meaning God, the God of Israel. Note that he here refers to himself by the name given him by God in 32:28.

The New Testament in John 4:5,6 indicates that Jacob at some point had a well dug here

# Genesis 34

## Chap. 34 - Defilement of Dinah and Slaughter of the Shechemites

### ***34:1,2 - Shechem violated Dinah***

This story evidently occurred several years after Jacob had moved back to Canaan. He stayed with Laban for 20 years (31:41). At that point, the oldest of his sons could not have been over 12, and Dinah was younger than they were. By the time of this story, the older sons were men and Dinah was old enough to be of marriageable age – probably in her teens - so significant time must have passed.

This story shows the difficulty of keeping a family morally and spiritually pure when the live in a land filled with evil people. This problem tends especially to affect the children in a family. Lot had faced this problem in Gen. 19. Abraham appears to have been somewhat successful in dealing with it (note Genesis 18:19). Isaac's son Jacob appears to have been less influenced than Esau. Perhaps being shepherds, they had lived in open countrysides and had not commonly associated with the Canaanites.

However, Jacob had moved near Shechem and had purchased some land there (33:18,19). The record noted that he was apparently quite close to the city. With all of his children, and having different wives to look after them, he failed to keep them sufficiently separate from the people of the land to maintain their purity.

The problem here related to Jacob's daughter Dinah. Whether or not Jacob may have eventually had other daughters besides Dinah is not stated; but she is the one named, perhaps because of this very event. She went out to visit the daughters of the land. Her problems began with association with sinful people. The Bible does not teach us to refuse all company with evil people, but warns of the danger of forming too close a companionship (1 Corinthians 15:33). These were notoriously wicked people, as subsequent events show. Dinah's friendship with them led to tragedy.

Dinah attracted the interest of Shechem, the son of Hamor who was prince of the city (33:19). Shechem may have been a family name, so both the city and this son were named after an ancestor of that name. In any case, Shechem would have been an important young man in that city and likely could have chosen any of a number of girls. But instead of choosing one of the girls of the city, he liked Dinah.

He took her and lay with her and violated her. The record does not say to what extent Dinah cooperated or shared in the guilt. The passage



nowhere implies any guilt on her part (see notes on v26 regarding why Dinah stayed in Shechem's house). It is not completely clear how overtly Shechem may have forced her. Some translations say that he "forced" her and some commentators say the language implies that he raped her. In any case, the later reaction of the brothers shows that fornication was clearly forbidden in that time, even as it is today (note v7). 1 Corinthians 6:9-11,18; 7:2-4,9; Romans 7:2,3; Revelation 21:8; 22:14,15; Exodus 20:14; Hebrews 13:4; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Proverbs 5:1-23; 6:23-7:27; Mark 7:20-23.

Note that, although Jacob's sons were deeply grieved over this event, neither Shechem nor his father nor any people of the city show any remorse whatever. The implication is that such conduct was simply accepted by them, as though this was commonly done. Rather than offer any apology to Jacob or his family, they actually kept Dinah in their home (v26) and proceeded to make marriage arrangements.

Such open involvement in sin, with so little sense of guilt, shows the depth of depravity in this city. Jacob and his family could hardly have lived there long without being aware of the evil of the people. This leads one to wonder how hard Jacob had worked at training his family to remain pure. Later events, both in this chapter and later, show that Jacob's sons were also highly influenced by the evil around them.

### ***34:3,4 - Shechem wanted to marry Dinah***

As a result of his relationship with Dinah, Shechem was greatly pleased by her and wanted to marry her. He treated her well. He asked his father to get her for him for a wife. While the fornication was horrible, this at least shows some slight amount of decency in Shechem. He did not view Dinah as just a "one night stand." He really did love her and want her as a wife. Nothing really tells how Dinah viewed all this or how favorable or opposed she was to the marriage (see v26).

Marriages in that day were largely arranged by parents, especially among men so important as the prince of the city. Yet, clearly the young people could influence the parent's decision. So, Shechem worked through his father.

Note again that neither Shechem nor his father show any remorse for the fact the relationship had been consummated before marriage.

Besides the fornication, there is the problem of intermarriage with the people of the land. Clearly, Abraham did not want this for Isaac, and Isaac did not want it for Jacob. He and Rebekah were grieved over Esau's marriage with women of the land. Had Jacob not taught Dinah of these dangers?

On the other hand, marrying into Rebekah's family does not seem to have been an attractive alternative for Jacob's children. We are not told much about whom his children married, but we are also told nothing about efforts to go back to the relatives in Padan Aram to find

spouses. In fact, after the terrible problems with Laban, it is unlikely Jacob would want his children to return. Laban had acted so corruptly in deceit and idolatry, and Jacob had faced such a confrontation with Laban when he left, that perhaps his relatives may no longer have been desirable.

### ***34:5-7 - Jacob's sons were infuriated by this scandalous conduct***

Meanwhile Jacob had heard what had happened. Dinah had not returned from her visit. Somehow he learned why. His grief is not described in depth, yet he must have been deeply grieved. The anger of his sons makes clear that the family all knew this was wrong. Surely he did not want his daughter to marry under these circumstances. The passage even states that, from Jacob's view, Dinah had been defiled.

However, he chose to say and do nothing till his sons returned from tending the livestock in the fields. The record does not explain exactly why he waited, but apparently he either wanted their advice, or else he wanted to make sure he talked with them before they did anything.

Meanwhile Hamor came, as Shechem had requested, to discuss the marriage proposal with Jacob. Hamor seems matter-of-fact, perhaps even glad his son had found a pleasing young woman.

Jacob's sons, however, heard what had happened. They came in from the fields very grieved and angry. Shechem had done a disgraceful act in Israel (note how Jacob's new name was applied to his descendants). He had done what ought not to be done in lying with Dinah. This reaction shows clearly that Jacob and his family knew that such conduct was sinful.

Contrast this to the attitude of Hamor. Doubtless he saw no reason why this should be a grief to Jacob's family.

### ***34:8-12 - Hamor and Shechem offered gifts and a future relationship with Jacob's family***

Hamor then discussed the matter with Jacob's sons as well as Jacob. He explained that Shechem longed for Dinah and wanted her for a wife. He then further proposed that this just be the first of many intermarriages: Jacob's sons could marry daughters from the land, and his daughters could marry their sons. Jacob's family could live in the land and buy and trade and acquire possessions. V23 later shows, however, that Hamor had impure motives, or at least he suggested ulterior motives to the men of Shechem for these offers.

This proposal could hardly have been pleasing to Jacob's family. Why should any decent people want to intermarry with such corrupt people under any circumstances? But in particular, after such treatment of their daughter, how could they consider forming multitudes of close relations with these people? The whole problem had begun be-

cause their relationship had been too close. Surely they must have realized that.

Note the references to Jacob's daughters (plural). This could mean that Jacob already had more than one daughter, or perhaps it just meant that surely Jacob's sons would have daughters in the future.

Shechem himself then added his urgent desire to marry Dinah. He offered to give Jacob and his sons whatever they would ask: a large dowry or whatever they wanted. Again, despite the fornication, Shechem came across as sincere in his devotion. But both he and his father ultimately are abominable. The son forced a woman he professed to love, the father offered a relationship to benefit others but really sought to benefit himself and his tribe, and neither ever showed the slightest remorse for their evils.

Note that Jacob and his sons were all present in this discussion. We are not told at what point Jacob's sons cooked up their scheme for vengeance. It is clear from Jacob's answer in v30 that he did not know of their intent and would not have approved of it. Perhaps there was more than one discussion with Hamor and Shechem. Perhaps Jacob's family asked to be able to think awhile, or maybe the discussion lasted many hours, with people coming and going. Anyway, we will see that somehow the boys devised a plan that fooled both the Shechemites and their father.

### ***34:13-17 - Jacob's sons insisted that all the people of Shechem must be circumcised***

Jacob's sons responded that the men of Shechem all had to be circumcised in order to have relations with Jacob's family. They said they could not give their daughter to an uncircumcised male. Such would be a reproach to them (obviously because of their relationship to God — Gen. 17). But if all the males would be circumcised, they would agree to intermarry and do commerce with the Shechemites as proposed. They even went so far as to say they would become one people with them. However, if this proposal were refused, they would take Dinah and leave. However, we are told they answered deceitfully, because Shechem had defiled Dinah.

Note that this was the answer of the sons of Jacob. The passage does not say Jacob was involved in the plot (cf. v30). However, one wonders what he thought of the suggestion, even assuming he did not anticipate the violence that followed. Surely he did not want his family to have such a close relationship with people who were so wicked and had so treated his daughter. Would circumcision alone really solve the problem? Can a physical ritual remove such deep moral corruption? Did he really want the intermarriage that his sons seemed willing to accept?

Worse yet, how could he accept that his family would become one people with the Shechemites? How could that be harmonized with the

promise to Abraham regarding his descendants? Surely, they had to remain a separate people to achieve God's will. Surely, he had not forgotten the extent Abraham and Isaac had gone to find good wives for their sons. He may have decided not to send his sons back to Laban, but this arrangement was surely unacceptable!

One wonders about Jacob's choices here. Why did he not take firm, godly leadership of his family and insist on an upright resolution? Perhaps he was so grief-stricken he did not think clearly. Maybe it all happened too fast for him to think things through.

Another possibility is that Jacob was never involved in this part of the discussion. Clearly he was involved in v11. But v13 just as clearly says that his sons made this proposal. Maybe they did this without Jacob's presence. Maybe they offered to think about the matter, then gave this answer in a later meeting. Or maybe Jacob was absent for some reason, and they answered while he was gone. The account does not say he was present, nor was it necessary that all this should have been arranged in an hour's time. Maybe there were discussions lasting many hours, maybe even more than one day.

Still another possibility is that Jacob never dreamed that a whole city of grown men would ever accept such a proposal. Coffman suggests that even Jacob's sons never expected the proposal to be accepted. In that case, their initial deceit consisted of making a proposal to be united with the Shechemites when they never intended to do such a thing in the long run.

In any case, note that Jacob's sons here joined many other family members in practicing deceit. Jacob had practiced deceit as taught him by his mother. His mother's brother had practiced it against Jacob, and apparently his first wife Leah had cooperated to some extent. Rachel had practiced it. Can we be surprised now to see his sons practice it? And they later practiced deceit even against Jacob himself. How our own sins come back to haunt us in our children!

### ***34:18-21 - Hamor and Shechem sought to persuade the Shechemites to accept the proposal***

Hamor and Shechem, not knowing the deceit involved, readily agreed to the proposal. Circumcision at any age is painful, but for grown men it is especially difficult. However, Jacob's sons had not asked for money, though Shechem had promised to pay almost any amount. So Hamor and Shechem were favorable.

Shechem especially was eager to proceed because he really delighted in Dinah. We are told he was more honorable than all his father's household. The meaning here is not certain. It could mean his position in the family gave him more honor than anyone else had, as perhaps he was next to be prince over the city. Or it could mean he was more nearly upright than the others. If so, the others must have been

real gems! He did seem to show a desire to do right by Dinah after he had humbled her with immorality.

However, the proposal of Jacob's sons involved all the men of the city, so they all had to be convinced to have this painful operation. Hamor and Shechem met with them at the gate of the city, the common meeting place for councils and legal transactions.

They could not argue simply on the basis that Shechem wanted Dinah, for that would not convince all the men to suffer this pain. So, they conveniently mentioned nothing about the fact that was their ultimate motive. They explained that other men could find husbands and wives for their children. And especially they emphasized the trade that would be available. Jacob's family was very prosperous, so trading with them would result in prosperity for others too.

***34:22-24 - They suggested that the Shechemites could gain all Jacob's property!***

Hamor and Shechem then told the Shechemites about the requirement of circumcision. To unite the two peoples, all the males had to be circumcised. But they offered a major enticement. They claimed that all the livestock, property, and animals of Jacob's family would become theirs.

Exactly how this would happen is not clearly stated, but Jacob's sons were not the only ones practicing deceit here! Somehow Hamor and Shechem had a plan to take Jacob's property, either by sharp trading or by marriage or by force. Or perhaps they just expected that, as Jacob's family became intermixed with other people, the two groups would become one, so eventually all Jacob's property would be shared among them all. In any case, they appealed to greed as motivation.

In the end, the men of the city agreed. Every male agreed to be circumcised and, on a certain day, all had the operation. Remember, Hamor was the prince of the city and Shechem was clearly influential. So, the men went along for their own sakes and to follow Hamor's lead.

***34:25,26 - Simeon and Levi slew the Shechemites in their time of pain***

Circumcision would be very painful for grown men. Like many operations, the pain would be especially great on the third day, so much so that the men would be essentially incapacitated. They would surely each one be lying in his home, not at all capable of defending himself.

So on that day, Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi, the second and third sons of Leah (and therefore full brothers to Dinah) took their swords and killed all the men of the city. Specifically, they killed Shechem and Hamor, and they removed Dinah from Shechem's house. Since the men were unprepared to defend themselves, two men could go into one house at a time, killing each man there. Others would be in

their own homes and would probably know nothing about what was happening till the men came to their home.

It is natural to wonder why Dinah was still in Shechem's house. Why had she not fled to return to her own family? 2 Samuel 13:1-19 may help explain. When David's son Amnon forced his sister Tamar (v14), he then sent her away. She objected, saying it would be wrong to send her away after he had relations with her (v16). So evidently in that day, if an unmarried man and woman had a sexual union, even by force, she was still expected to stay with him and they should marry. So, Tamar objected when Amnon sent her away and refused to marry. But Shechem wanted to marry Dinah, so this would likely explain why she stayed with him.

We are also not told exactly whose idea it was to murder these people, nor are we told how involved the other brothers were in the plot. We are simply told that Simeon and Levi were the ones who carried it out. Were other brothers involved too? Doubtless some were too young. Others may not have been willing to participate. Perhaps some stayed home so Jacob would not miss them all and wonder what was happening till it was too late. Perhaps some never knew about the plan. We are not told.

We may wonder also why they killed all the males in the whole city. Why not just kill Shechem? He was the one who did the wrong. Hamor might have been included because he did not punish his son and apparently saw nothing wrong with what happened. The sons of Jacob may have thought the whole city deserved punishment because they were all as bad as Shechem and his father. Besides, none of the citizens seemed upset by Shechem's treatment of Dinah. From a practical viewpoint, however, Jacob's sons had to kill all the males. If they killed just Shechem and Hamor, the other men would surely come and seek vengeance on Jacob's family.

In any case, this was clearly a terrible crime. Jacob later rebuked them for it. And Simeon and Levi were specifically disinherited from the birthright because of this very act (49:5-7). Jacob's statement on that occasion clearly states that this act was improper.

### ***34:27-29 - The sons of Jacob then plundered the city***

Not only did they kill the men, but the sons of Jacob (this appears to include more than just Simeon and Levi) came and plundered the city. They took all the animals and all the wealth. They even took the children and wives captive, though we are not told what they did with all these people. They made plunder of everything in the houses. They did this because of the way Dinah had been defiled.

Again, such extreme violence seems out of all proportion to the crime that had been done. Surely punishment was needed, but why such extreme measures against uninvolved people? While this surely was improper, we must also remember that it was fairly common in

that day. Such events were still happening in the days of the judges and David. Also, the brothers knew that eventually this land was to become theirs. Perhaps they thought they were justified in destroying at least this much of the people of the land.

It appears that more of the brothers were involved in this than just Simeon and Levi. Probably there was so much plunder that, while two men alone might be able to kill all the males, it would take more than that to round up and carry off so much booty.

### ***34:30,31 - Jacob rebuked his sons for their conduct***

Finally, Jacob somehow learned what had happened. He rebuked Simeon and Levi (see also on 49:5-7). The main argument he made was that their conduct would make Jacob and his family obnoxious to the people of the land. While his sons may have killed all the males in this city, there were many more people left in the land. What was to keep them all from gathering together against Jacob and destroying him and his household? One wonders if the boys had considered this possibility.

On the other hand, Jacob did not bring up the fact that his sons had committed great injustice, including murder and taking innocent people as captives. This would seem to be a greater problem than what Jacob mentioned.

Jacob's leadership in this case seems weak at best. Why did he not punish his boys? If Hamor was to blame for not punishing Shechem, why didn't Jacob punish his sons? He did at least rebuke them, and eventually disinherited them from the birthright. But it surely seems stronger measures should have been taken. (On chap. 27 Morris tried to defend Jacob's deceit of Isaac, saying God nowhere specifically condemned Jacob. However, on this occasion Morris condemns Jacob, despite the fact that again God nowhere specifically condemns him.)

Simeon and Levi simply answered Jacob saying, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?" Of course, Shechem was wrong and deserved to be punished. But that did not justify taking the law into ones own hands. Above all, it did not justify killing so many uninvolved people.

Yet, no further response from Jacob is recorded. Perhaps he realized that, wrong as his sons were, he too was to blame in that he had taken no action against Shechem. So far as the record states, he himself never even spoke out to Shechem or to his father against what was done. Could he not at least have raised a protest, perhaps tried to take the family before the judges. He could surely have demanded the return of his daughter!

Imagine having a man commit adultery with your daughter, perhaps even without her consent or at least by seduction, and you don't even tell him he was wrong! Jacob may have felt the city would stand behind Shechem, but he could at least have told them they were wrong.

What Jacob could or should have done is unclear, but surely he had shown serious lack of firmness.

What grief Jacob must have endured for his family! How hard it can be at times to raise children. They are often a grief to the heart. Jacob surely grieved over Dinah. Then to add to that, his sons had murdered many people, most of them completely uninvolved in the wrong done. What sorrow of heart!

The Bible is an honest book, telling both the good and the bad in its heroes.



# Genesis 35

## 35:1-15 - Renewal of Jacob's Commitment to God

This chapter relates some various events around this time in Jacob's life. There is no reason to necessarily believe these events all occurred in chronological order relative to other events in the account. Historians often tell events by topic, rather than by strict chronological order.

### ***35:1,2 - God told Jacob to go to Bethel, where he purified his family***

Jacob had just endured a terrible experience with the defilement of his daughter Dinah followed by the slaughter and plundering of the Shechemites by his sons. Any father, who cares about his children and wants them to honor God, would be devastated by such events. Surely, Jacob was humbled and deeply troubled. The natural reaction would be to examine his own responsibility for these problems and to seek a renewal of the commitment and relationship he and his family had with God.

At this time God spoke to Jacob to remind him of His original appearance to Jacob, the promises He had made, and the covenant Jacob himself had made with God. This had occurred at Bethel, as recorded in 28: 19ff. Here God told Jacob to return there and build an altar. As discussed earlier, altars were places to worship God (see on 26:25). Clearly, God was calling on Jacob to renew his covenant and his service to God.

Jacob then commanded his family and everyone with him to put away their foreign gods, change their garments, and purify themselves (cf. Josh. 24:2,14,23). The changing of garments symbolized their desire to please God. It showed the seriousness of their commitment (cf. Exodus 19:10,14; Lev. 13:6). What we wear may show respect or lack of respect for events, such as weddings, funerals, etc. While mere externals will not substitute for pure hearts, nevertheless pure hearts will reflect themselves in outer expression of our attitudes toward the importance of occasions, etc. Surely, Jacob's command showed that he was renewing his service to God and wanted his family to do the same. The terrible events they had experienced showed them all the need to serve God more faithfully.

Specifically, the command to put away foreign gods showed that at least some of them had been serving other gods. This problem had been mentioned in 31:19,30,34, where Rachel had stolen Laban's household gods. This shows that Laban's family had worshiped other

gods in addition to Jehovah. Jacob's wives had come from such a background, and it is likely they were somewhat influenced by it. We were not directly told that Rachel worshiped the gods, and it was clear that Jacob himself knew nothing about it. Nevertheless, it indicated that dangerous influences were at work in Jacob's family.

God's servants often face the danger of compromise with the sins of the world around them. We today may not have overt idolatry in our families, largely because people around us do not practice it. Yet how often do we struggle to keep other sins out of our lives and the lives of our wives and children, especially when those sins are common among people around us? Compromise with the world is a real danger. How often do we find evidence it has crept in when we did not oppose it strongly enough.

How long had Jacob known his family was practicing idolatry? Had he known about it for some time, or had the terrible events of chap. 34 opened his eyes to the problems in his family? If he had known previously, had he tried to remove it and faced resistance from his family, or had he tolerated it? Could it be that his family was also affected by the events of chap. 34 so they were now willing to listen to him and remove the evil, where perhaps they had not been willing before? In any case, surely the problems of chap. 34 showed them all that they had become slack in other areas of their service to God. This explains why Jacob saw the need to purify his family's commitment to God and clean up their lives in general.

Let us all learn to diligently oppose compromise with sin in our families. If we need spiritual renewal in our families as Jacob's family needed, let us take the steps now to deal with it before it is too late!

### ***35:3,4 - Jacob's family purified themselves to prepare to worship at Bethel***

Jacob then told his family they would go to Bethel, as God had told him to. He would make an altar so they could worship the true God who had come to him in his distress and had cared for him ever since. This is what God had promised to do, and Jacob had promised to serve God as a result.

The family responded by giving Jacob all their foreign gods. They also gave the earrings in their ears. All these were then hidden (buried?) under a terebinth tree near Shechem. This was more than just a way to get rid of them. It appears to be a symbolic act of permanently separating such things from their lives. Sometimes an outward act such as this reminds us of the serious need to put away some evil from our lives.

Why did they give up their earrings? Jewelry is not always wrong to wear in all forms or occasions. Abraham's servant had given Rebekah a nose ring when he came to seek a wife for Isaac (24:22). The context would imply that these earrings were somehow associated with

their idol worship. Jewelry often contains symbolic significance. Some today wear symbols of devotion to a spouse such as a wedding ring or a heart-shaped necklace. Some wear symbols of religious significance, such as a cross. So, perhaps these earrings included symbols related to idolatry.

### ***35:5-7 - God protected them in their journey to Bethel, where Jacob built the altar***

They traveled to Bethel, as God had instructed. As they did, the people of the land did not pursue them because of the fear of God. Doubtless another reason God had told Jacob to go to Bethel was to leave the area where Jacob's sons had slaughtered the Shechemites. So long as they remained there, the people might seek vengeance, as Jacob had feared. It appears that God protected them as they traveled, so the people were afraid to attack them.

They came to Bethel, which had been called Luz before Jacob renamed it (see *map*). There he built the altar God had commanded. He named it El Bethel, meaning God of the House of God. He had called the place Bethel as he traveled to Padan Aram, fleeing from Esau's anger. Now he named the altar after the God of Bethel, the house of God.

### ***35:8 - Death of Rebekah's nurse Deborah***

When Rebekah left home to marry Isaac, she had taken with her a nurse (24:59). At that time we were not told the nurse's name. Here we are told she was named Deborah, but we are told only that she died and was buried under a terebinth tree near Bethel. The tree was then named Allon Bachuth meaning Terebinth of Weeping, evidently because of their grief at her death.

This is a somewhat strange, yet interesting, statement. Why are we given this information when nothing else has been said about her? This was many years after Rebekah had married Isaac. Evidently, Deborah had become very important to the family. The account records her death and the family's sorrow, even though Rebekah's death was not recorded! This again shows how important servants sometimes became in families. Even though people possess humble positions, they may yet become of great value in their service to others.

The only way this record makes sense to me is that, though we do not know specifics, sometime Jacob's family must have had contact with Isaac's family, and at that time Deborah came to live with Jacob. Since we are not told of Rebekah's death, it is likely she died while Jacob was with Laban. Perhaps because Deborah had cared fondly for Jacob before he left home, all agreed that it would be good for her to serve in Jacob's home after the death of Rebekah.

### **35:9-15 - God repeats the name Israel and the promise given to Abraham**

God had earlier appeared to Jacob at Bethel. Now He appeared to him again and renewed His covenant. This is said to occur “when he came from Padan Aram.” Yet, he had evidently been back from Padan Aram many years. His kids, the oldest of which was no more than 12 when Jacob left Padan Aram, had grown up to the point the young daughter was desired for marriage and the older sons had slaughtered a city! Perhaps this simply means this is the first time Jacob had come to Bethel since he came from Padan Aram.

God repeated that the name Jacob wore should be Israel, no longer Jacob. This is the name given Jacob by the “man” he wrestled with (32:22ff). Israel means “Prince with God.” Despite the sins of his family, Jacob was apparently again in God’s favor. I can only assume he had repented of any errors that led to his family problems. This did not forbid Jacob from wearing the name of Jacob, for he continued immediately to be so called in the inspired record (vv 14,15, etc.). But God showed that He confirmed the name Israel. (This was a “not ... but” expression: the first term is not forbidden, but the second is emphasized.)

Some say names do not matter, so they justify calling the church and God’s people by names not authorized in Scripture. But if names do not matter to God, why did He so often give people names or change their names?

God then repeated the promise to Jacob that He had given to Abraham and Isaac. He had also stated it to Jacob in 28:13-15, though He does not here say everything that He had earlier said nor in the same way. He adds that a company of nations would come from Jacob, evidently viewing the twelve tribes as each being a nation. He said also that kings would come from Jacob.

God identified Himself here as God Almighty. This designation was used elsewhere, as in 17:1 (see notes there). It emphasizes that He is all-powerful, able to do all He chooses to do. Doubtless this appearance and assurance of His strength was comforting to Jacob in this time of spiritual renewal after the troubles of chap. 34.

God then left off talking with Jacob. Once again, the patriarch of the family had received a direct communication from God. These communications were very important, but seem to be relatively rare. God spoke at those special times when His men needed guidance or encouragement.

Jacob then did as he had done the first time God had spoken to him at this place. He set up a memorial of stones in the form of a pillar and poured oil over it (see on 28:18-22). Then he again called the place Bethel. He is also said to have poured a drink offering. This was a form of sacrifice that was also described later under the Law of Moses.

## 35:16-22 - Death of Rachel

### ***35:16-20 - Rachel died in childbirth***

Jacob then decided to travel on from Bethel. Shortly before he came to Ephrath, Rachel came into childbirth. Ephrath is also called Bethlehem (v19), which was later the city of David and, of course, the birthplace of Jesus – Micah 5:2. (See *map*.)

In 30:22-24 Rachel's first son Joseph had been born. She had said then that God would give her another son. This came true, but many years later. Benjamin must have been born many years after Joseph and the other sons. Joseph was born before the first time that Jacob requested to leave Laban (30:25). This must have been toward the end of the second group of seven years Jacob served for Rachel and before he began serving to gain Laban's flocks. That would make Joseph about six years old or so when Jacob left Laban (cf. 31:41). He was 17 in chap. 37. It would seem that he must have been somewhere close to 17 when Benjamin was born. How old this would make Rachel is not clear, but she must have been relatively young to die.

At Bethlehem, however, Rachel went into childbirth. Her labor was hard, but the midwife assured her the son would be born. She did have the son but she died doing so. Before she died, she named the son Ben-Oni, meaning Son of My Sorrow (NKJV footnote). Apparently, the sorrow referred to her death. In any case, Jacob chose not to use that name. He named the son Benjamin, meaning Son of My Right Hand, though others say it means Son of Days (old age).

When Rachel died, Jacob again put up a pillar as a memorial. But this was a memorial to her death, and was placed at her gravesite.

Jacob had suffered hard times. First came the problems with his daughter and his sons, then his wife died. Yet God was molding Jacob to make him the kind of man He wanted him to be.

### ***35:21,22 - Reuben committed adultery with Bilhah***

Jacob then continued traveling and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. There another sinful tragedy occurred. Reuben committed adultery with Jacob's servant wife Bilhah.

Oh, what grief this must have been to Jacob! How he had suffered with his family in these recent stories! It was bad enough that a young man of the countryside had defiled his daughter Dinah. That was sinful, but at least he wanted to marry her and she was free to marry. And there is nothing stating that Dinah initiated the act or even necessarily approved of it.

But in this case, Jacob's firstborn son committed adultery with one of Jacob's own wives! There was no way to avoid the clear proof that someone in his family sinned this time. And what a horrible sin! The woman was already married, and to Reuben's father at that! There

was no hope for Reuben and Bilhah to ever marry. There was nothing here but lust and evil.

How it happened we are not told. Who initiated the evil or who seduced whom we are not told. But clearly, Reuben was old enough to know better. His younger brothers had been so incensed at the immorality perpetrated by Shechem on Dinah that they had killed in vengeance. And Bilhah could have no excuse. She was married. She knew what was happening. Even sinful Gentiles knew better than to do such evil (see 1 Cor. 5:1).

What Jacob said or did at the time we are not told. The record says simply that he heard what had happened. What terrible disappointment in his family! It is hard to believe he was not somewhat responsible for all the horrible sins of his family. Had he not somewhere failed in his teaching and leadership of the family?

We are told, however, that Reuben was punished later. Reuben lost the birthright because of this sin. This must surely have grieved Reuben. That cherished birthright, which his father had so desired, was taken from him and given to a younger son. See on 49:3,4; 1 Chron. 5:1.

### **35:23-26 - Summary of Jacob's Sons**

These verses simply list again the twelve sons of Jacob. Leah bore Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, then later Issachar and Zebulun. Rachel bore Joseph and Benjamin. Rachel's servant Bilhah bore Dan and Naphtali. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Gad and Asher.

We are told these sons were born in Padan Aram. Of course, Benjamin had been born in Bethlehem in Canaan, not technically in Padan Aram. Apparently, the statement is just a generalization, not meant to be taken precisely. Another view is that Jacob was still on the journey home from Padan Aram when Benjamin was born, so the statement includes him as a generalization.

### **35:27-29 - The Death of Isaac**

#### ***35:27-29 - Jacob returned to his father Isaac, who later died***

The tragedies in Jacob's life had not yet ended. Still another was yet to occur. He came to his father at Mamre, also called Kirjath Arba or Hebron. It was north and a little east of Beersheeba (see *map*). Abraham and Isaac had both dwelt there at times.

This is the first time we have heard anything about Isaac since Jacob left home. Many years had passed since that time, for Isaac died at 180 years old. Even before Jacob left home, however, Isaac had been blind. Clearly little of major importance had happened to him since then.

It is probable that Jacob had visited his father during the years since he had returned from Padan Aram. But since leaving Padan

Aram, he seems to have gradually moved his family further south toward where his father lived. Finally, he moved to Hebron to be with his father.

Sometime after Jacob arrived – probably a number of years later - Isaac died. He breathed his last and joined his ancestors, for all must die. He was old and full of days, having lived a long life.

His sons Jacob and Esau buried him. The two who had struggled all their lives were united again in the death of their father, as they had been united when Jacob returned. Though their descendants fought and struggled, there seems to be little evidence of further enmity between them. This must have been a great comfort to Isaac.

Again a great man of God had died. Death is so tragic, yet it is a blessing to know the one who died was pleasing to God. Isaac is listed in the chapter of faith in Heb. 11, so we conclude that he joined Abraham in his eternal reward.

# Genesis 36

## Chap. 36 - Genealogy of Esau

**36:1-3 - This chapter contains the genealogy of Esau, who is also called Edom (cf. 25:30)**

As with Ishmael, God's special promises regarding Abraham's descendants did not come true through Esau. However, he was a descendant of Abraham, and Isaac had made great promises to come true through him (27:39,40). This genealogy simply shows that God indeed did remember Esau. A similar genealogy is also listed in 1 Chronicles 1:35-54.

First, the record lists the names of Esau's wives: Adah, daughter of Elon, Aholibamah, daughter of Anah, and Basemath, daughter of Ishmael. These names are all different from the names given in the earlier accounts in 26:34 and 28:9. Clearly there is no contradiction. Even an uninspired writer could have recognized such an obvious error and corrected it, if in fact the names were incorrect.

Morris deals with this and other difficulties in his commentary. We will not deal with them in detail here. But to illustrate how they can be dealt with, the answer here is almost surely that these women had more than one name. That was common. It is even possible that their names were changed, perhaps when they married. We simply are not given the details. By way of illustration, we recall that the names of Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob all were changed. Why would it surprise us if these women had more than one name or if their names were changed?

**36:4,5 - Esau's five sons**

Esau had five sons by his three wives, in contrast to Jacob, who had twelve sons by his four wives. From these five sons came all the descendants of Esau listed here. We will comment on the people in the genealogy only on those points where something of special interest appears.

One of Esau's sons was named Eliphaz, which we note was also the name of one of the friends who debated with Job. Since so many people in the Bible and in history in general have had the same name, there seems to be no way to know if there was any connection between this Eliphaz and the one in the book of Job.

The sons of Esau were born to him in Canaan. The next verse will tell us that Esau took his family and moved from Jacob, so apparently his five sons were born before he moved.



### ***36:6-8 - Esau moved apart from Jacob***

We are not told when this move occurred. However, the reason is stated that their possessions were too great for them to dwell together. This is similar to what had happened to Abraham and Lot (chap. 13). When men had great flocks and herds and many people to support, they needed much land and water. They could not easily dwell close to someone else who also had great flocks and herds. So the two men moved apart.

Esau moved to the area of Mt. Seir. Since Esau is also called Edom (see also v1), the descendants were also called Edomites. This is doubtless why this point continues to be made. Also, the area of Mt. Seir is apparently named for the man named Seir. This appears to be why he and his descendants are listed in v2off.

Mt. Seir was located south of the Dead Sea and just a little east. It appears to be, not so much a particular mountain peak as a range of mountains. So, the Edomites generally lived in the region south of the Dead Sea. They, of course, had many conflicts with the Israelites throughout subsequent history, exactly as had been predicted before their birth and in the promises of Isaac. The general region of Edom later became known as Idumea.

### ***36:9-14 - These verses list the sons of Esau again, along with some of their sons***

The only one of any particular interest is Amalek. He is identified as the son of a concubine named Timna. She was married to Eliphaz, son of Esau. There would appear to be something unusual here, else why name the concubine and not the real wife? The significance may be that Amalek became the father of the nation of the Amalekites. These people became a serious rival of Israel and a real thorn in their side. If this is correct, then here is yet another nation that came from the descendants of Abraham. Esau was Abraham's grandson, and Amalek was Esau's grandson. However, the Waldrons doubt that this Amalek was the ancestor of the Amalekites, because Amalekites existed before this (14:7).

### ***36:15-19 - These verses simply name the chiefs that came from the sons of Esau***

What exact role the chiefs had is not stated; however, they were apparently some sort of tribal leaders. The descendants of Esau must have been divided into tribes by ancestry just as were the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Ishmael.

Coffman points out that Teman became so important that the Edomites were sometimes referred to as Teman (see Amos 1:12; Obadiah 9).

### **36:20-30 - Here we are told the descendants (sons and chiefs) of a Horite named Seir**

Seir is significant, as v20 says, because these descendants inhabited the land. They lived in Mt. Seir, the mountain range apparently being named after him.

Esau moved into the area where these people lived. Deuteronomy 2:12 says that Esau's descendants dispossessed the Horites and destroyed them. It is likely, however, that at least some of the Horites survived and intermarried with Esau's descendants.

### **36:31-39 - These verses list some of the kings that reigned over the Edomites**

We are not told exactly when these men reigned, but we are told they were kings before Israel had kings. Of course, Israel had no kings till many generations after they came back from Egyptian bondage. Since Moses wrote Genesis, we must conclude that he entered this information, but these men may have actually reigned later than the events we are reading of in Gen. 35 and 37. Israel had no kings when Moses wrote this, but God predicted through Moses that Israel would set kings over them. So, Moses knew by inspiration that it would happen.

Coffman points out that most of the kings listed were not succeeded by their own sons, most likely indicating that wars and rebellions overthrew the kings. Also, the capital city seems to have moved several times as the monarchy changed hands. All this should have stood as a warning to the Israelites that having kings would not be so advantageous as they thought. However, they did not learn the lesson (see 1 Samuel 8).

### **36:40-43 - Once again chiefs of the Edomites are named**

The point here is not clear, since we have already been given a list of chiefs. These may have been later chiefs coming after those named earlier. Or these may have been a few of the more outstanding ones, listed according to where they lived, rather than according to ancestry.

Such genealogies may seem at first to have little significance to us. However, they accomplish at least the following things:

- 1) This genealogy proves that God kept His promise to make Esau a great nation.
- 2) Genealogies demonstrate that these were **real** people, not make-believe.
- 3) They also prove that this record is intended to be **history**, not myth or legend.

# Genesis 37

## IV. Joseph – chap 37-50

### Background Study of Joseph

The following information reviews the study of Abraham and his descendants as recorded to this point in the book of Genesis.

#### ***God's promises regarding Abraham's descendants***

God had made several promises regarding Abraham's descendants.

These were made to Abraham in Gen. 12:2,3,7 and repeated to him in Gen. 15:5-8,18-21; 13:15,17; 18:18; 22:17,18; 24:7

They were repeated to Isaac in Gen. 26:3,4,24.

And they were repeated to Jacob in Gen. 28:3,4; 32:12.

See also Exodus 32:13.

The promises consisted of three parts:

#### **The great nation**

The promise concerning a great nation is stated in Gen. 12:2; 15:5; 18:18; 22:17,18; 26:4,24; 32:12; Ex. 32:13; cf. multitude of nations — 17:4-6. This promise meant that Abraham's descendants would become a nation consisting of many people, like the sands of the seashore and the stars of heaven. This was fulfilled in that the nation of Israel did become many people — Exodus 1:7; 1 Kings 4:20.

#### **The land of Canaan**

God promised to give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan. This promise is stated in Gen. 12:7; 13:15,17; 15:7,18; 24:7; 26:3; 28:4. Some folks insist that this promise has never been fulfilled. But the Bible clearly states that it has been fulfilled: Josh. 23:14; 21:43-45; 1 Kings 8:56.

#### **The blessing on all nations**

God further promised that through Abraham's seed would come a blessing on all families of earth. This is stated in Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4. The New Testament quotes this promise in Gal. 3:8,16 and Acts 3:25,26, where it is shown that the one who fulfilled this was Jesus and that the blessing was forgiveness of sins through His death. [Cf. Acts 13:32,33.]

This was the ultimate solution to the problem of sin. The promised blessing of salvation came into the world through Abraham's descendants, but the blessing itself (salvation) was to come upon all families or

nations. Both the Jews and the early Christians misunderstood this, thinking it was just for Jews.

These promises became the theme of the Bible as God dealt with Abraham's descendants to bring about the fulfillment of the promises. Much Old Testament history is an account of Abraham's descendants, one of whom was Joseph.

### ***Abraham's family and descendants***

#### **Abraham's immediate family**

By his concubine Hagar Ishmael was born (Gen. 16:15,16).

By his first wife Sarah Isaac was eventually born (Gen. 21:1-3).

By his second wife Keturah six sons were born (Gen. 25:1,2).

As in the passages above, God chose Isaac to be the one through whom his promises to Abraham would be fulfilled.

#### **Isaac's immediate family**

Isaac's wife was Rebekah. Through her he had twin sons, Esau and Jacob (Gen. 25:19-26).

Again, as shown in the passages above, God chose Jacob through whom the promises to Abraham would be fulfilled.

#### **Jacob's immediate family**

Jacob had four wives. Through these four wives he had 12 sons. These sons eventually became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel.

### ***Joseph's Birth and Early Life***

#### **History of Joseph's birth**

Jacob fled from Isaac's house because he had deceived his father and received the blessing that Isaac intended to give to Esau (Gen. 27). His parents sent him to Padan Aram to find a wife from among the people of Rebekah's brother Laban. There he chose to marry Rachel; but because of deceit, he ended up marrying both Laban's daughters Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29). These wives in turn gave their handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah to Jacob as wives.

The sons of Jacob are summarized as follows (see Gen. 35:22-26):

By Leah: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

By Bilhah: Dan, Naphtali.

By Zilpah: Gad, Asher.

By Rachel: Joseph, Benjamin.

So, Joseph was born in Padan Aram, the son of Jacob and Rachel (Gen. 30:22-24). He was next to the last of 12 brothers. He was grandson of Isaac and Rebekah, great grandson of Abraham and Sarah.

"Joseph" means "he will add." Rachel gave him this name because she said God would add another son for her (Gen. 30:24).

This brings us to the story of Joseph, which begins being told in Gen. 37.

## **37:1-11 - Joseph's Dreams and His Brother's Hatred**

### ***37:1,2 - Joseph brought an evil report about his brothers to his father***

At this point the account begins to concentrate on events involving Joseph. Jacob dwelt in the land of Canaan, the land where his father was a stranger. We are told nothing more specific at this point, but v14 implies he was living in Hebron (cf. 35:27).

The story takes up when Joseph was 17 years old. This is quite young considering all that he was about to suffer. Some people argue that we cannot expect teenagers to live for God because the pressures are too great or they are too dependent on their parents. The story of Joseph shows how responsible teenagers can be, if they truly dedicate themselves to the Lord.

At the beginning of the story, Joseph and his brothers were responsible for feeding the sheep. This of itself was a responsible position. Several other people in the Bible did such work, especially in their younger days, including David, Jacob, Rachel, etc.

At this point Joseph was working with his brothers, especially the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. This would have been Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. Presumably, some of the older sons, especially the sons of Leah, were involved in other work. By this time they would have been mature men, most of them in their twenties (since all had been born in a twelve-year span and Joseph was the youngest born during that period).

However, Jacob's brothers were not good men. Exactly what they did is not stated, but they did evil and Joseph reported this to his father. This demonstrates that Joseph had a higher standard of right and wrong than they did. It also introduces the conflict between Joseph and his brothers that becomes the focus of the story.

Some have criticized Joseph for being a "tattletale." Perhaps Joseph did wrong here; no one is perfect. But the passage does not say what the evil was that he told his father. Surely some evils should be reported to those in authority. Where we got the idea that it is bad to tell people in authority when we know others have done wrong, I have no idea. I know of no Scripture that teaches such a thing.

### ***37:3,4 - Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph led the brothers to envy him***

A second cause of trouble between Joseph and his brothers was the favoritism Jacob showed toward him. The record expressly states that Jacob loved Joseph more than he did his other children because Joseph was born in Jacob's old age. Probably this included the fact that Joseph was the son of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel, and that he and Rachel had waited so long to have a son.

Jacob showed his favoritism by giving Joseph a coat of many colors. This was a visible demonstration of Jacob's partiality, since he gave such coats to none of the other sons. Every time anyone saw Joseph, they would immediately be reminded that he was the favorite son.

When the other sons saw that Jacob loved Joseph more than he did them, they naturally resented Joseph. Their resentment went too far, however, for they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

Again, some commentators imply that Joseph was to blame, at least to some extent, in this. They imply that his actions here were arrogant, proud, even self-righteous. This is, of course, a possibility. A young man who is favored in this way could easily become spoiled and act improperly. However, the text nowhere states nor necessarily implies this. It seems to me to be unfair to imply someone is wrong when we cannot prove it to be so. We can agree, however, that the events that occurred here to Joseph would have helped him to learn patience and strength in God's service.

In my view, however, Jacob was definitely unwise, if not outright wrong, to show such favoritism. He no doubt learned such a practice from his parents, since Isaac and Rebekah had played favorites between Esau and Jacob (Gen. 25:28; chap. 27). Yet, he should also have learned the danger of such a practice because of the terrible strife that had occurred between him and Esau as a result.

The Bible clearly shows that partiality is wrong because it violates the law of love (James 2:1-9). It is a failure to treat others as we would want to be treated (Matt7:12). We would not want favoritism shown if we were the child who was unfairly discriminated against. And favoritism also hurts the favored one, because he grows up thinking he deserves special treatment. It also causes resentment and alienation between children, as shown here and in the case of Jacob and Esau. Doubtless Joseph was influenced by this favoritism, yet the subsequent suffering helped to humble him.

### ***37:5-8 - Joseph had a dream that exalted him above his brothers***

Still another event caused the brothers to have more hatred for Joseph. He had a dream in which he and his brothers were binding sheaves of grain in a field. His sheaf stood upright, but the sheaves of the brothers bowed down to his sheaf. He told his brothers the dream, and they properly understood that the dream pictured Joseph as ruling with dominion over them. They resented the dream and hated Joseph even more for it.

Like many other events, dreams are not necessarily supernatural. They can be quite natural, having no significance whatever as revelation from God. Written or spoken words likewise can be natural, revealing nothing from God; or they can be supernatural as a revelation

of God's will. The same can be said for healings, languages, clouds, floods, etc. They can be natural, operating entirely within the realm of natural law, or they can be used by God as supernatural signs of His power above and beyond natural law.

In this case, we will see that these dreams were used by God to reveal the future to Joseph (cf. the dreams interpreted by Daniel in Dan. 2 & 4, Jacob's dream in Genesis 28; etc.). This is clear first because there were two dreams, both teaching similar things, and what they appeared to mean absolutely and amazingly came true. Furthermore, Joseph later demonstrated Divine ability to interpret dreams, as he did for the butler, baker, and Pharaoh himself. None of this should be taken to imply, however, that our dreams today are ever supernatural revelations. The gift of direct revelation has ceased. Dreams now are natural, like our speech, writing, healing, languages, etc. (See 1 Cor. 13.)

This dream did have the effect of increasing the brothers' hatred for Joseph. People tend to resent excellence. Joseph was better morally than his brothers. They doubtless resented the fact he told his father about their wrongs. He was also the favorite of his father, though that was not his fault. And now these dreams implied he would rule over his brothers. This might be expected if he were the oldest son, but he was next to the youngest. This, combined with all the other circumstances, compounded the brothers' antagonism.

### ***37:9-11 - Joseph dreamed again, this time that he would rule his whole family***

To agitate the situation further, Joseph had still another dream. This time the sun, moon, and 11 stars bowed down to him. He told this dream to his brothers and to his father. His father immediately took it to mean that Joseph's father, mother, and 11 brothers would bow down to him. Note that there was never any question about what the dreams implied. Even the brothers and Jacob understood.

However, this time even Jacob rebuked Joseph for the dream. He doubtless could not believe that all the family, including the parents, would come to serve Joseph. Nevertheless, he remembered the event.

Again, some have criticized Joseph for telling the dreams. But why? They were obviously revelations from God. Why should he keep God's revelations quiet? Other dreams in later aspects of his life were told and interpreted. And the dreams obviously concerned Jacob and the other brothers. Why should he not tell them?

Further, had he not told the dreams, that would have defeated their prophetic purpose. Jacob and the brothers would not have realized, as they later did, that all that happened in Egypt was in fact God's will. We are told that Jacob kept the dreams in mind. How could he have done so had he never heard them? There was obvious prophetic

significance to the dreams, and prophecies have teaching value only if they are told.

Nevertheless, the brothers not only hated Joseph, they now also envied him. Doubtless they envied his favored position with the father. They also apparently envied the status that the dreams implied Joseph might have in the future. It was bad enough, in their view, that their father was placing Joseph ahead of them, but now it appeared he might have permanent preeminence over them.

Envy is a burning passion that eats a person from within, leading to many forms of evil. In this case it led the brothers to seriously mistreat Joseph, as the story develops. See further on envy: 1 Peter 2:1; Romans 1:29,32; Matthew 27:18; Titus 3:3; James 3:14-17; 1 Timothy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 13:4; Galatians 5:19-26; Romans 13:13.

Again we see here the influence parents have on their children. Even the birth of each of these boys had been a cause of envy and jealousy. Their mothers envied one another's children, because they were all married to one man. The sons grew up surrounded by envy. Who can be surprised then that the sons themselves grew up to be envious!

One interesting sidelight is the fact that Joseph's mother was dead by the time the dream was fulfilled. So, what mother would bow to Joseph? It could just symbolically represent the idea that the whole family would serve him. Even his mother, though dead, would be indebted to him for the authority he would possess for the good of her descendants. Or perhaps it referred to Leah who undoubtedly served as mother also to Rachel's sons.

## **37:12-36 - Joseph Sold as a Slave into Egypt**

### ***37:12-14 - Jacob sent Joseph to check on his son's welfare***

An event occurred, presumably soon afterward, which gave Joseph's brothers the opportunity to vent their hatred on him. The brothers went to feed the flocks in Shechem. This was far to the north from Hebron, north of Jerusalem, west of the Jordan, slightly closer to the Dead Sea than to the Sea of Galilee (see *map*.) Jacob's family had lived there earlier, but had left because of conflict with the inhabitants in which Jacob's son had killed many men (see chap. 34). Jacob had owned land there, so perhaps that is why he sent the flocks there.

For some reason Joseph had not originally gone with the brothers, perhaps because of the great distance. However, Jacob (Israel) became concerned about the brothers, perhaps because they were so far from home and had been gone so long. He determined to send Joseph to check on the brothers' welfare and then return and report to him.

Note that, at this point, Jacob was living in Hebron. This was west of the middle of the Dead Sea (see *map*).



### ***37:15-17 - Joseph went to Dothan to find his brothers***

Doubtless this was a very long journey for one so young as Joseph. Yet, when he arrived at Shechem, he still could not find his brothers. A certain man found him wandering in the fields, obviously looking for something. The man asked what Joseph was seeking, so he said he was looking for his brothers who were feeding their flocks.

The man fortunately had overheard the brothers say they would take the flocks to Dothan, so Joseph went there to seek them. Dothan was yet further to the north and a little to the west of Shechem (see *map*).

Free notes (p73) that he had personally excavated the remains of ancient Dothan and found evidence that the city was old enough to have existed in Joseph's day. He cites another archaeologist who found evidence of skeletons in pits, indicating that the subsequent events in this story were not unheard of.

### ***37:18-20 - Joseph's brothers determined to kill him and cast him into a pit***

The brothers saw Joseph coming, presumably recognizing his coat of many colors (v23). Even before he got there, they determined to try to kill him. They called him "the dreamer," obviously ridiculing the dreams he had. They said, if they killed him, his dreams could never come to pass. So they decided to kill him, cast him into a pit, and then claim that a wild beast had killed him.

Here we see the horrible effects of jealousy and hatred combined with deceit. Joseph was their own brother, and these were grown men. Yet their hatred was so harsh they were willing to kill him and lie to conceal their sin. And all of this existed in the family of the one whom God had chosen to be heir of His promise to Abraham. These men would in fact eventually become the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel!

But remember that all these men were just half-brothers to Joseph. His only true brother Benjamin was doubtless still at home. And jealousy had run rampant in the family, as described above, since these boys were born. It would only be natural that children of the different wives should be jealous on one another, considering how jealous the mothers were of one another. Laban ultimately bore responsibility too because his daughters had surely learned deceit and selfishness from him.

Nothing justifies what was done here, but it is easier to understand when we remember the horrible example the mothers had set for these boys. Let parents learn the lesson.

### ***37:21-24 - Reuben convinced the brothers to just put Joseph in a pit***

Reuben determined to try to save Joseph from his brothers. He was the oldest. Probably he realized that he would be held accountable

if harm came to Joseph, or perhaps he just acted with greater maturity and compassion than the others (cf. v30).

He suggested that they not kill Joseph, for that would be shedding of blood. Doubtless, they all realized that murder would be an extreme measure that they probably would not want on their consciences. They were violent men, having shed blood in the matter of Shechem. But those people were not their own brother, and they had seriously wronged their sister. This was outright murder and without provocation. Doubtless, they felt provoked, yet they surely knew nothing Joseph had done could possibly justify murder. Otherwise, why did they plan to cover it up?

Reuben suggested that they just cast Joseph into a pit. Apparently, there were pits easily available, so they stripped off his coat and put him in a pit that had no water in it.

The record reveals Reuben's intent. He planned to come back later, probably when the others were not around, and help Joseph escape so he could return him safely to Jacob. What the other brothers intended at this point is not clear. Perhaps they themselves did not know what they would finally do. Maybe they planned to kill him later, or maybe a wild animal would kill him. In any case, they left him in the pit awhile to suffer.

Reuben, despite his earlier sin with Jacob's handmaid, is shown on this occasion to have been a cut above his brothers. However, even so he did not take the stand he should have. What the brothers planned to do was a horrible sin. He ought to have rebuked them for it and made clear that, if they went ahead with plans, he would tell their father exactly what they had done. This would almost surely have stopped the sin, but it would have put him in his brothers' disfavor. So instead he used the family standby approach: he used deceit! He did not tell his real plan but suggested an alternative, while secretly planning to defeat the brothers' purpose.

### ***37:25-28 - The brothers sold Joseph to passing merchants***

The brothers then sat down to eat a meal, though one wonders how they could do so in good conscience knowing how they were treating their brother. Meanwhile, a group of traveling Ishmaelites passed by. They were traveling from Gilead, the area east of Jordan, taking spices of various kinds down to Egypt.

This gave Judah an idea what to do with Joseph. He evidently did not want to kill him either. So he suggested they not kill him but sell him as a slave to the traders. That way they would not be guilty of killing their own brother, plus they could make some money in the process. The brothers agreed, so they took Joseph out of the pit and sold him for 20 pieces of silver to Midianite traders who passed by. These traders in turn took Joseph to Egypt.

It appears that neither Judah nor Reuben wanted to actually kill Joseph, though Reuben wanted to return him to Jacob whereas Judah did not mind selling him. Later, when he had a chance to test the brothers to see if they had repented, Joseph held Simeon as a hostage. One wonders if this indicates that he was a ringleader in the plot against Joseph.

Ishmaelites were descendants of Abraham through Hagar's son Ishmael. Midianites were also descendants of Abraham through Keturah, his wife after Sarah died (Gen. 25:2). The account might seem to mean that two groups of traders were involved. However, v28 calls them both Ishmaelites and Midianites. Genesis 39:1 calls the group Ishmaelites. Yet 37:36 says they were Midianites. Apparently, both terms could be used for the one group that bought Joseph (cf. Judges 8:24,26). Perhaps this particular group consisted both Ishmaelites and Midianites. Or perhaps the two nationalities had become so intermixed by intermarriage and living in the same region that the terms became interchangeable. Coffman suggests they may have been Ishmaelites by race but lived in the area called Midian and so were Midianites by residence.

### ***37:29,30 - Reuben later returned to the pit only to find Joseph missing***

Reuben evidently was not present when Joseph was sold. He had probably left the brothers on some pretext, intending to go back to the pit by a roundabout route, so he could release Joseph. But while he was gone, and before he came back to the pit, the brothers sold Joseph. When he arrived at the pit, Joseph was gone.

He came to the brothers in grief, having torn his clothes, and asked where he would go since Joseph was gone. This is likely an expression for grief, since he did not know what had happened to Joseph. He may have thought the brothers had killed him or wild animals had gotten him. Anyway, he revealed his real attitude in the case. He knew Jacob would hold him responsible when they got home.

### ***37:31-35 - The brothers deceived Jacob to believe Joseph had been killed by an animal***

Having rid themselves of Joseph without killing him, the brothers then entered into a cover-up so Jacob would hold none of them accountable. The plan involved (guess what!) deceit! They took the coat of many colors and dipped it in the blood of a kid. Then they brought it to their father, said they found it, and asked if he recognized it as Joseph's.

He, of course, recognized the coat and assumed Joseph had been torn and killed by a wild animal. He tore his clothes and wore sackcloth (signs of great grief) and mourned many days. He mourned so long that even his sons, guilty as they were, along with the daughters (plural

— he had more than just Dinah) tried to comfort him. But he refused to be comforted saying he would die in his grief (go down to Sheol, the grave or the abode of departed spirits).

One wonders if the brothers about this time were beginning to regret their deed. They could not, of course, admit their deed to Jacob, for that would bring his wrath on them. Yet, in their haste and anger, they had likely not fully reckoned on their father's reaction. They had wished Joseph dead or at least gone, but had never wished their father dead. They had, however, become the source of untold grief to him and had to wonder if in fact they would be the cause of his death. Far too often, when people plan evil, they do not foresee the depth of consequences.

While we may sympathize with Jacob, we also see that he and his family were just reaping what they had sown. At the instigation of his mother, he had disrupted his parental family by deceiving his father, resulting in terrible alienation between him and his brother (chap. 27). Then he had married into his mother's family, a family rife with deceit. He and his wives had practiced favoritism, jealousy, and deceit. Now all this had come home to roost as his own sons deceived him, motivated by jealousy over his favoritism. One grieves for him, yet we must not miss the lesson that we reap what we sow.

### ***37:36 - Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar***

Finally, we are told that Joseph was taken by that band of Midianites down to Egypt, where he was sold to a man named Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's guard. So, Joseph ended up in the house of a very influential man. His story there will be resumed in chap. 39.

Note that the chapter ends with Joseph a slave, his father mourning till he is nearly dead, and the brothers all guilty of hatred and deceit to the point of incredible evil against their own brother. Such is the consequence of evil. The brothers needed to be taught important lessons, and God was in the process of teaching them, even as he had taught Jacob himself.

# Genesis 38

## Chap. 38 - Judah's Unfaithfulness and His Children

Moses is not yet finished describing the wickedness among Jacob's sons. We have been told how his oldest son committed adultery with one of Jacob's wives and how his next two sons murdered a whole city of men. We have been told how the brothers in general were so jealous of Joseph that they nearly killed him and were willing to sell him as a slave. This chapter tells of the immorality in the life of Judah, the next son in line. The one bright spot in this story, however, was Joseph. He has been introduced, and his story has been interrupted to tell this story about Judah.

God inspired this story to be written for perhaps several reasons. First, Judah does become the ancestor through whom Christ eventually will be born, so his story is of interest in the record of Abraham's descendants and Jesus' ancestors.

Second, the record shows how thoroughly Jacob's family had become infiltrated by evil. There can be no doubt of it by this point. God did not tell these stories to justify the conduct of those involved. Clearly, the actions involved are evil. Even Judah admits his unrighteousness before this story is over. God is being honest in the record.

Third, the contrast between all these brothers and Joseph shows how truly worthy a hero Joseph was. To have lived such a godly life as he did, facing such horrible circumstances, and having come from such a wicked family, was truly amazing. This contrast shows that he truly was worthy to receive the birthright, which he does in the end receive, even though Judah was the head of the kingly line.

It must be remembered, however, that the history of Jacob's sons is not yet complete. God will yet teach these wicked brothers some very important lessons. They will repent, surely of their treatment of Joseph and presumably of their sin in general. In particular, Judah will show himself to be a much better man than he is at the time of this story. These stories serve to show that God can forgive people of great sins. Many of us are as bad or worse than these men were, but we must too repent to be eternally rewarded.

Finally, be reminded that God did not use these people in his plans because they were all sinless men destined for eternal life. Being used by God for His purposes and being destined to eternal life are two entirely different things. Consider all the kings who were descendants of Judah and ancestors of Jesus. Were they all righteous and godly men? By no means! God used them to fulfill his promises to Abraham because of Abraham's righteousness, not because all the people in the

nation or in Jesus' genealogy were righteous. Why then should we expect them to all be godly at this point of the story?

And remember also the incredible wickedness of the society in which these people lived. Conduct like that of Jacob's sons was commonplace and generally accepted among them. That Jacob's sons should be so influenced seems to me to show weakness in Jacob's leadership as a father. But God's people commonly struggle to overcome the sins of those around them, and quite often our children are influenced.

How many children of young people, brought up by parents in the Lord's church today, struggle with the sins of those around them? And remember that Jacob's family was the only one he knew of anywhere around him that was even trying to serve the true God. He was seriously isolated in his efforts. This does not by any means justify sin. But it does show we too would have faced similar problems had we lived in similar circumstances.

Some commentators point out that this may be why God sent Jacob and his family to Egypt where, as shepherds, they would be isolated from the Egyptians. This helped keep them from losing their identity by intermarrying with the people of the land. When they left Egypt and captured Canaan, God commanded them to destroy all the people of the land for the same reason.

### ***38:1-5 - Judah's marriage to a Canaanite woman***

Judah at this time began to establish ties with people among the Canaanites around them. He departed from his brothers, perhaps moving a little ways from them, or at least leaving them from time to time to visit with his friends. He apparently befriended a man named Hirah, who was from Adullam. A town named Adullam was located not far northwest from Hebron, the place where Jacob was living in 37:14.

Judah not only made friends among these people, he also found a woman he wanted to marry. She was the daughter of a Canaanite named Shuah. Little has been said about where the sons of Jacob got their wives; however, the options were limited. They could hardly go back to Laban and his family (as had been done for Isaac and Jacob's wives), not after the conflict Jacob had with Laban. And what are the chances that godly wives would be found in that family anyway?

There were simply not many options left. It is not clear whether or not Judah at this time knew that he would receive the family leadership. Surely he knew of the sins of his three older brothers, but whether or not he knew they would be disinherited as family leaders has not been made clear. In any case, he ought to have chosen a wife carefully, as his father and grandfather had tried to do, in order to bring up godly children to carry on the family's service to God.

While we are told little specifically about the woman Judah married, the result was so tragic that we can only conclude that Judah did

not make a good choice. With all the sin and turmoil in Jacob's family, what are the chances Judah would make a good choice? Jacob, grieving over all that had happened, was not likely to give good guidance to Judah. In fact, there is no indication that Judah consulted either God or his father in the matter. Judah's wife may have been largely responsible for how terribly his children turned out. If she was deeply involved in the idolatry and sins of the Canaanites, this would explain much of what later occurred.

In any case, Judah married her and had three sons by her. The first was named Er, the second Onan, and the third Shelah. This happened when Judah was at an unknown place called Chezib.

### ***38:6,7 - Er married Tamar but died for his wickedness***

As time passed, Judah's firstborn grew old enough to marry, so Judah chose a wife for him. This was Judah's firstborn son, and we may wonder whether his own marriage problems had taught him the need to guide his son's choice. In any case, he chose a woman named Tamar. We are told nothing else about her background, but the subsequent account might indicate that she at some point became a believer in the true God.

However, tragedy struck Judah's family even worse than it had Jacob's. Jacob's sons committed some terrible sins, yet God spared their lives. On the other hand, Judah's firstborn Er was so corrupt God killed him. We are not told exactly what sins he committed. Perhaps he was idolatrous like the Canaanites, maybe because of his mother's influence. God slew various people for their sins in Bible accounts (Leviticus 10:1-3; 2 Samuel 6:6,7; Acts 5:1-11; etc.).

We must remember that Judah, corrupt as he was here, would turn out to be the one through whom Christ would be born. Judah's firstborn figured to be the next generation through whom this ancestry extended, unless God intervened. This would give him a very influential position in the history of the nation of Israel. God could use people who were not sinless, working with them to try to bring them to repentance. But He would only go so far. Apparently, Er was so completely unacceptable that God knew nothing could be done to bring him to repentance.

### ***38:8-10 - Onan slain for not raising up an heir for Er***

Now the responsibility to raise up seed to Judah fell to the next son Onan. God still needed seed at least godly enough that He could work with them to bring about His plans. Whether or not Judah understood this, God understood it.

The law at that time and through the Mosaic age was that, when a son died without a son to inherit, his brother was to marry the dead son's wife. They would then bear a son to inherit the first husband's possessions and position (see Deut. 25:5-10; Matt. 22:24-26; see the



book of Ruth). Judah instructed Onan to fulfill this law. This was especially important in this case because of the importance of the seed in fulfilling the promises to Abraham.

Onan then had relations with Tamar to raise up seed to his dead brother (v8). But he sinned as clearly stated in v9. He did not want to cause Tamar to conceive, because he knew the child would be counted as his brother's child and would inherit for his brother instead of for Onan himself. He did not want to give his brother offspring, so he spilled the seed (some think the language means that he repeatedly did so – note “whenever” in the ESV). This was wrong because it violated the law of inheritance as described above, and it was especially serious because God wanted the descendants of Israel to grow to be a great nation to fulfill his promise to Abraham (see also v11,14).

For this sin, God killed Onan as He had Er. This sin may not seem to us to be any worse than other sins committed by Jacob's sons. But the point seems to me to be that God still knew He could work with Jacob's sons and eventually use them for his purpose to fulfill the promise to Abraham. But if a man refused to fulfill the duty to have sons, God could not use him for that purpose. And God apparently knew Onan, like Er, was of no mind to change. Whatever the reasoning, God is always just, and He determined Onan should die for his sin.

Sometimes people believe that God killed Onan for practicing birth control (contraception). However, Onan used no artificial contraceptives; that was not the issue here. Others claim he was killed for committing masturbation (“Onanism”). While that practice is objectionable, it has nothing to do with this case. Onan's sin is expressly stated: he refused to raise up seed to his brother, thereby refusing to obey a specific command of God. Note that, since the New Testament has replaced the Old Testament, the law that Onan violated no longer even applies today, so Onan's case tells us nothing about any law today. (See Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.)

### ***38:11 - Judah promised Tamar she could marry Shelah when he was grown***

After Onan died, Judah had only one son left to raise up seed to carry on the family inheritance: that duty would fall to the youngest son Shelah. However, Shelah was apparently not old enough to marry, so Judah told Tamar to go back to her father's house and live there as a widow till Shelah was old enough.

However, Judah had other motives. He feared that the same thing would happen to Shelah as had to the other brothers. He might die too, leaving Judah with no seed at all. Perhaps he knew Shelah had a similar nature to the other boys. Or perhaps he never intended to give him



to Tamar at all. If so, then Judah was violating the law in his own way as surely as Onan had done.

Surely this was a difficult time for Judah. Two of his sons had been slain by God for their sins. This had never happened in his father Jacob's family, bad as things had been there. Again, it is likely his wife was at least to some extent to blame for all these problems. If so, he would have known that he was also having a bad marriage. While he himself was to blame for much of this, and there can be no excuse for sin, yet surely Judah would have been a deeply troubled man at this point in his life.

### ***38:12 - Then Judah's wife died***

We are not told how or why she died. Apparently, she would have been young, at least by the ages people in those days lived. Judah himself lived many years after this, as the account shows. We are led to wonder if she died because of her sins, even as her sons had. In any case, Judah's life so far was extremely tragic, all his immediate family having died except for the youngest son.

After he mourned the loss of his wife, he went with his friend Hirah to the sheep shearing at a place called Timnah. One wonders whether this Hirah may have had a bad influence on Judah. There was a town named Timnah northwest of Adullam some distance, but whether this is the same town I do not know.

### ***38:13,14 - Tamar determined to take action since she was not allowed to marry Shelah***

Now Tamar had waited patiently to be given as wife to Judah's youngest son Shelah. How many years had passed we are not told; but Shelah was clearly grown, yet he and Tamar had not been married. Judah had not fulfilled his promise. What efforts Tamar had made to remind Judah we are also not told. In any case, she became convinced Judah was not going to keep his word, so she decided to take matters into her own hands.

Hearing that Judah was going up to Timnah to shear his sheep, she decided to meet him on the way. Here we have more deception. She removed her widow's clothing and dressed as a harlot. She covered herself with a veil and sat in an open area on the road Judah would travel.

The passage does not say exactly what she wore that indicated her to be a harlot, though there have been garments in all ages that have given such indications (Proverbs 7:10). Some have claimed that the wearing of a veil of itself indicated harlotry (note v15). That may or may not have been true; it would surely not be the case today in our society, so such a significance might depend on the society. But in Tamar's case, the veil was essential to the deception, since Judah would otherwise have recognized her.

Tamar clearly wanted to be married again and fulfill her wifely responsibility. Yet, it is unclear what all her motivations were. Morris thinks she had become converted to God and was committed to fulfilling the promise to Abraham to produce offspring for her husband in Judah's line of descent. Perhaps she was just committed to fulfilling the law of inheritance, or maybe she just strongly wanted children. That was clearly important, especially to women in that family. We are not told her background or beliefs. In any case, she strongly wanted to have a child.

Yet, one has to oppose her methods, even as we opposed Jacob's methods when he deceived Isaac. If she really believed in God, she should have trusted Him to bring about the fulfillment of His promises. Perhaps she should have confronted Judah for his wrongs or even publicized them somehow. In any case, what she did was adultery by any standard. It is true Judah was no longer married. She too was not married, but she had been espoused to Shelah and the proper course would have been for her to marry him. However, Judah was clearly refusing to fulfill his promise to give Shelah to her. In any case, seducing Judah to commit adultery was not a moral solution.

***38:15-18 - Judah propositioned Tamar, as she hoped he would***

Judah saw her as he passed to (or perhaps back from) the sheep shearing. He thought she was a harlot (as she obviously intended him to think), so he propositioned her.

Now in the entire story so far, Judah has appeared as a weak man at best, uncommitted to faithful service to God. He had cooperated in the sin of selling Joseph, though he had at least tried to keep the brothers from killing him. In his family life, though he was weak, his only clear instance of sin was that he had not given Shelah as husband to Tamar. This act of adultery, however, was clearly sin, as he himself later admitted (vv 23-26).

One can see why he would be tempted. His wife was gone, so he had no means of lawful fulfillment. Such acts as this were extremely common in that society, even being practiced in worship to their gods. Morris says the word for harlot in this context implies a temple harlot. Judah had been through much hardship in his life and was at a spiritual low point. Furthermore, sheep shearing was a time of feasting and merriment, so he was otherwise open to temptation. Tamar must have known enough about his morals to at least think that he might be susceptible; if he had a reputation for purity, why would she even conceive such a scheme?

Note that he thought she was a harlot because she covered her face (see on v14 above). This would seem to indicate that covering the face with the veil in that day was not the common practice of women generally. It might have been a sign of harlotry. Or the meaning could

simply be that Tamar had to cover her face in order to deceive him to think she was a harlot, because otherwise he would have recognized her as his daughter-in-law (v16).

When he asked if he could come in to her, she asked what the price would be. He promised a kid from his flock. But of course, he had none with him, so he would have to send it later. She asked what he would give her as pledge to prove he would send it later. She asked for his signet, cord, and staff. Whatever these were, they were personal belongings that would clearly identify Judah as their owner. Her intent was to obtain something from him such that he could not afterward deny that he was the man who had lain with her.

Judah agreed, lay with her, and she conceived. Clearly, this was the goal she had sought to achieve. She was thereby able to give seed to Judah, providing descendants to inherit as was her role to do.

### ***38:19-23 - Judah sent payment by his friend, but the “harlot” could not be found***

Tamar immediately went home and changed back into the clothes of her widowhood. Note that in this she laid aside the veil. This again indicates that women did not wear veils in general in daily life at that time (at least not that kind of veil).

Judah then sent his friend Hirah with a kid to pay his debt to the harlot. But he could not find her at the appointed place. He asked around and no one knew of any harlot who frequented that spot. So he was unable to pay the debt, but returned to report this to Judah.

Judah decided to drop the matter. He had tried to pay the debt, but could not do so. He felt his obligation was ended. If she wanted to keep the items he had pledged, he would let her keep them. To make a greater issue of the matter would lead to his conduct being known, which would bring shame on him and those with him. This shows that he now knew his act was shameful. He had done it, but had no desire for his conduct to be known. Little did he know that his act would be recorded for all time in a book that has since been read by untold millions!

### ***38:24 - When Tamar’s conception became known, Judah determined to punish her***

Tamar’s pregnancy of course soon began to show. As a result, three months later Judah heard that she was with child. Since she had no husband, it was clearly a case of adultery. Judah demanded that she be burned for her sin.

This shows that Judah knew adultery was a sin. He was as guilty as she was, but he demanded she be killed! There was apparently a double standard in those days, so it was terrible for women to do what men could do. Nevertheless, Judah doubtless knew he too had been wrong. But no one knew about his sin, whereas hers was evident.

### ***38:25,26 - Tamar produced the evidence that Judah was the father of her child***

When Tamar was brought out to be punished, she had proof of the man by whom she had conceived. She sent Judah the signet, cord, and staff that he had left as a pledge with the harlot. He, of course, recognized them, which is exactly why she had wanted them.

Judah acknowledged they were his (though we are not told to whom he said so). He then admitted that, sinful as she had been, she was more righteous than he had been. This does not mean she was sinless; but he had been equally guilty with her in the adultery. And what was more, he had refused to give her the son she should have married. So, he was even more guilty than she was.

Apparently, she was not given to Shelah as wife. She had conceived and could produce an heir, which would have been the purpose of giving her to Shelah. It seems it would not have been proper for her to marry Shelah after she had been joined to his own father. Nor would it have been proper for Judah to marry her, since she was his daughter-in-law. So, he never knew her again. The implication seems to be that she remained a widow, but at least she had children.

The point to recognize is that Judah here admitted his sin. Bad as Tamar had acted, he was worse, and he admitted it. See the notes at the beginning of this chapter for the consequences of all this regarding how God used men in his plans, even though they were sinners.

### ***38:27-30 - Tamar gave birth to twins***

Finally, the time came for Tamar to give birth. Like Rebekah, she gave birth to twin boys. One of them put out his hand first. In order to identify the twins, so there would be no confusion as to which was born first, the midwife put a scarlet thread around the hand of the one who put out his hand. Presumably, she expected that he would proceed to be born, and then they could identify him as the firstborn.

But a strange thing followed. That boy pulled his arm back in and the other brother was actually born first. Though the one had put out his hand, he did not come out first, so his brother was actually the firstborn.

The midwife called this a breach, so the one who was actually born first was named Perez, meaning a breach. A breach is a breaking of custom, law, or promise, etc. Since the other brother started to come out, he would be expected to be the firstborn. Since Perez came out instead, he breached expectation. The other brother then was born and was named Zerah, an unknown meaning.

So, we have the account of the birth of Perez, the son who succeeded Judah in the genealogy from Abraham to Christ. How strange that God must use such sinful people to bring about His purposes. We can only hope that all involved learned from the event and repented.



# Genesis 39

## Chap. 39 - Joseph in Potiphar's House

### ***39:1,2 - Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar***

Chap. 37 had ended with Joseph a slave in Egypt, sold there by the Ishmaelites who had bought him from his brothers. Chap. 39 here takes up the account of Joseph in Egypt, showing that he had been sold as a slave in the house of a man named Potiphar, who was an officer of the Pharaoh, captain of the guard. Pharaoh was the general name for kings in Egypt, like "Caesar" later became a term for all the emperors of Rome.

Though God had allowed Joseph to be sold as a slave, yet God's providence is repeatedly demonstrated in this story. Providence is God's power to work through natural law in the world He created to provide what is needed for His will to be accomplished on earth. The term is not used in the story, yet we are repeatedly told that God was "with Joseph."

Because of God's care, Joseph was successful in every endeavor he undertook. Despite this, for a while, people continued mistreating him. In every case, however, he did right and God provided for him. In this case, He was successful in Potiphar's house. By diligent service, Joseph became a blessing to Potiphar.

One important lesson to be learned about providence is that people often do not understand what God is doing or how the result will work out for man's good. In this case, if God was with Joseph, why was he a slave? Why had he been so hated and mistreated by His brothers? Providence does not guarantee that God's people do not suffer. On the contrary, God's people in every age have suffered. What providence assures is that God's purpose is ultimately accomplished despite the hardships people must suffer along the way.

### ***39:3-6 - Joseph was promoted to overseer of Potiphar's house***

Potiphar saw that Joseph's work prospered because the Lord was with him, so Potiphar was favorable toward Joseph and made him overseer of all that he owned. All was put under Joseph's authority, so much so that Potiphar did not know what even happened with his property. All he knew was the bread that he ate — i.e., the things he personally used. All the rest was entrusted to Joseph.

This was not an unusual practice in those days. Slaves may not have been free, yet they were often quite powerful and influential because they were successful and so were given great power by their mas-

ters. Joseph Free (p74) describes archaeological confirmation that slaves from Canaan were common and highly valued in Egypt. Furthermore, such slaves commonly rose to become stewards over their master's property.

God then blessed Joseph and thereby blessed Potiphar's house for the favor he showed Joseph. Everything Potiphar owned, in house or field, God blessed.

We will note again and again how Joseph served faithfully regardless of the mistreatment he received. This is stated quite as a matter of fact, yet it is very noteworthy. Joseph had been the favored son of an extremely wealthy man. He became a castoff from his family and served as a common slave. Most people, having received such mistreatment, would give up or at least do minimal labor. They would view their master as an enemy and would do the very least amount of work possible. They might turn from God and deny Him. Joseph, however, did the best he could wherever he was.

We today need to learn that, like Joseph, we can always be faithful to God, no matter what circumstances we face (1 Cor. 10:13; Phil. 4:13). And we can always find ways to be useful if we will serve obediently.

Finally, we are told that Joseph was a very handsome man. This will enter into the subsequent story.

### ***39:7-9 - Potiphar's wife tempted Joseph to commit fornication***

Potiphar's wife, in this story, demonstrates many of the characteristics of evil people who care little about serving God. Joseph was a handsome young man in an inferior position. She had a position of wealth and influence. Often such people think that one such as Joseph would do their bidding for favors they can receive. So, she asked him to commit fornication with her.

This had to be a serious temptation to Joseph. Doubtless, he possessed all the normal appetites of young men. Accepting her proposal could lead to pleasure and possibly even greater favors, whereas refusal could lead to problems (as it eventually did). There was reason to believe that their relationship would never be discovered. He was far from home, and had been seriously mistreated. He may have reasoned that he deserved some recompense.

Nevertheless, unlike Potiphar's wife, Joseph was clearly righteous. His attitude and conduct show us how we can be right. It is possible to do right, but for wrong reasons. Some do good things, but to please friends or relatives, as a family tradition, or for political or business reasons. But these are not sufficient reasons to do good.

Others have legitimate motives, but they are not the ones Joseph emphasized. Some do right out of fear of punishment. Jesus said to **fear** Him who can destroy body and soul in hell (Matt. 10:28). Others do right out of hope of reward (Heb. 10:34-36). These are valid reasons

for obeying God. However, there are other reasons for service to God, but we sometimes forget them. Joseph will remind us of them.

### **Love for fellowman**

Joseph refused to betray Potiphar's trust, especially since Potiphar had treated Joseph well. He reminded Potiphar's wife how Potiphar had entrusted Joseph with everything. No one was greater in the house than Joseph, and the only thing not under his power was Potiphar's wife. To commit this act would be to betray and mistreat his master, who had treated him so well. This was the first reason Joseph gave for not sinning.

1 John 5:2 — Love for others should also lead us to do God's commands. The proper way to show love is defined for us by God's commands. We are not left to just decide for ourselves what **we** think is best. If we love others, we do what **God** says, even if we cannot reason out why that is a better alternative than others.

[Rom. 13:8-10]

### **Love for God**

Joseph's second reason for refusing to commit fornication was that it would be a sin against God. He would lose his favorable relationship with God. God had richly blessed Joseph. Joseph was grateful to God and knew that sin would alienate him from God.

1 John 5:3 — For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. We should obey, not just because we fear punishment and seek reward, but simply to express our devotion and appreciation to God.

Joseph did what was right because it was **right**. It was the loving thing to do to others and to maintain a right relationship with God. This should also be our attitude.

[Matt. 22:36-40; Psalm 51:2-4]

### **39:10-12 - Joseph resisted repeated temptations**

Potiphar's wife, however, persisted in evil. Some wicked people are far more persistent in evil than good people are in righteousness. She spoke to Joseph day by day, trying to persuade him to sin. Finally, when no one was around, she grabbed him and tempted him.

Clearly, she wanted to do evil, yet surely there were other men available to her. Some people just consider it a challenge to get good people to sin. Often they feel more justified in their own evil if they know they can get good people to sin too. Or perhaps she pursued Joseph because he was just so good-looking and (in her mind) available. [Rev. 2:20]

Proverbs 1:10 — My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. Young people should expect schoolmates, people at work, relatives, to ask them to drink, smoke, tell dirty jokes, use drugs, watch immoral movies or TV shows, use profanity, dress immodestly, dance and com-



mit other sexually suggestive acts. Refusal may lead to ridicule and pressure from evil people. But “do not consent.”

Often our attitude is that we don’t want to do anything that anyone can definitely prove to be sin. But we are attracted to the pleasures of sin, so we want to get just as close as we can. We may associate with people and go places where sin is common and temptation is great.

Joseph, however, first refused to sin. He “just said **no.**” But he did more. He played it safe. He refused to **be** with her or to **listen** to her (vv 10,12). He stayed as far as possible, not just from the sin, but also from the temptation. When it became necessary, he “fled” — he absolutely left the scene of temptation.

Joseph did not get as close as he could to the sin, enjoying the company of the woman and “flirting” with her, thinking he was all right as long as no overt act of sin resulted. He avoided the people and the whole situation that was likely to lead to sin.

When she suggested sin, he explained to her why that was wrong. When she continued to want to do it anyway, he refused to even listen to her.

Proverbs 5:8 — When a woman tempts a man to sin, “Remove your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house.” We must do more than determine to “say **no.**” We must stay away from temptation.

Proverbs 4:14,15 — Not only must we avoid the path and ways of sin, we must “turn from it and pass on.” Don’t linger by the gate, wishing you could participate, feeling sorry for yourself. Stay away! [Matthew 6:13; James 1:14,15]

Just being tempted is not necessarily sinful. We cannot live in the world without being tempted. Even Joseph’s circumstances placed him near temptation because he had to work in the house where the woman was.

But the attitude of a Christian is that he **wants to avoid** the temptation as much as possible. We should not enjoy being tantalized by sin. We should view it as repulsive so we do not want to participate.

The person who enjoys being around temptation, and sees how close he can get, will soon fall into sin. And the desire to enjoy being around sin is a sinful attitude of itself!

Many young people get themselves into all kinds of trouble, but they never think it’s their fault. They never **intend** to do wrong, so when they get in trouble, they blame it on the circumstances or other people.

These people are the opposite of Joseph. They allow themselves to be surrounded by tempting situations. They associate closely with evil companions, and they refuse to leave tempting situations until it is too late!

They blame their circumstances, but they don't realize that it is **their own responsibility** that they are in those circumstances. If they were like Joseph, they would have recognized the danger and fled the situation! Instead, they stay, eventually sin, and then make excuses. The solution is to be like Joseph and stay as far from sin as possible.

[Rom. 1:32; [1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 13:20; 6:27]

### **39:13-18 - Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of trying to seduce her**

Potiphar's wife then reacted in a way that is common to sinful people who have been rebuked by godly people. If they cannot lead good people to sin, they determine to persecute those who expose their evil. She took vengeance as "a woman scorned."

#### **Sinful people often hate those who do good.**

When Joseph refused to sin with Potiphar's wife, she lied about him and had him imprisoned. These are acts of hatred and ill will.

Note that the other servants might easily accept her lies. She belittled Joseph as a "Hebrew" - probably a racial slur, since we will see later that the Egyptians did not associate with Hebrews (though apparently they had no objection to making them slaves). Jealousy of Joseph's success and authority might have led the other servants to believe her lies.

Proverbs 29:27 — He who is upright in the way is an abomination to the wicked. Evil people often dislike the ways of righteous people. The more deeply involved in evil they are, the stronger their hatred of good people is.

John 15:18-22 — The world hates good people like it hated Jesus, because we are not like the world. If we were like the world, the world would have no reason to hate us. We should expect some people to hate us like they did Him, maybe on the job, at school, in the neighborhood, with relatives, etc. [Matt. 20:37]

Matthew 27:18 — When the Jews wanted to kill Jesus, Pilate knew that they had handed Him over because of envy. They were jealous because He had a large following.

John 7:7 — The world hated Jesus because He testified that its works were evil. The Bible abounds with examples of people who were hated because their good lives made other people feel guilty: Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Stephen, etc. Good people not only refuse to sin, but they reprove the practices of those who do evil (Eph. 5:11). People often feel embarrassed and resentful when their errors are revealed.

John 3:19-21 — Evil men love darkness and will not come to the light because they don't want their deeds reprov'd. Evil is rebuked, not just by the words, but by the lives of good people. When everyone else

is committing sins, sin doesn't look so bad. "Everybody's doing it." But when some persist in doing right, it proves people have no excuse. So persistent sinners resent the conduct of the righteous. [1 John 3:11-13]

### **Evil people often slander or lie about the righteous.**

When Joseph refused to sin with her, Potiphar's wife told others **he** was the one who suggested the sin, but he fled when she refused. She blamed her sin on him! Lying and false accusations are common forms of persecution of the righteous. Numerous similar examples exist.

1 Kings 18:17 — Ahab accused the prophet Elijah of being a troublemaker because he opposed the worship of Baal.

John 10:20; 9:24 — Pharisees and Jews said Jesus was a sinner because He healed on the Sabbath, or that He healed by the power of demons.

Acts 28:22 — Early Christians were called "a sect which is everywhere spoken against." [1 Peter 2:12; 3:16]

Luke 6:22,23,26 — We are blessed when men hate us, separate us, reproach us, and speak evil of us, for that is how they treated the prophets.

No matter how good your life, expect people to lie about you, defame you, and look for some means to discredit your stand for truth so people will not believe your teaching and so wicked people can feel justified in their sins. And it is amazing how often people lie about good people by accusing them of the sin that the sinner himself is most guilty of!

### **Evil people often end up bringing physical persecution on the righteous.**

Finally, by false accusations Potiphar's wife had Joseph imprisoned. She used the garment that he had left as evidence that he had been there to seduce her. Of course, it proved no such thing, but false evidence served her purpose better than no evidence. Note that, in both instances of major sins against Joseph, his garment was made to rationalize the evil done to him.

Again, the Bible is filled with examples of righteous people imprisoned, beaten, and killed by evil people: Daniel, Jeremiah, Stephen, Paul, all the apostles, and Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:12 — Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Expect it, for it will surely come.

John 15:20 — A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. We should not deliberately irritate people, just to be persecuted. But if we live like Jesus, persecution will come.

John 16:1-4 — People will reject us, refuse to associate with us, and even kill us, thinking they are pleasing God!

“To be forewarned is to be forearmed.” If we know to expect such treatment, we can be ready. Instead of becoming discouraged, we will just see it as a confirmation of the truth. And if other Christians suffer for their faithfulness, instead of criticizing them, we should support and encourage them.

***39:19-23 - Potiphar then imprisoned Joseph because of his wife's false accusation***

When Potiphar returned home, his wife repeated to him the same lies she had told about Joseph to the other servants. This made Potiphar angry, so he placed Joseph in the prison for the prisoners of the king.

Women have used this trick on innocent men throughout the history of the world. Doubtless, many men have made advances toward women and were justifiably accused. But in this case the woman falsely accused a righteous and innocent man. This is a common way for women to get revenge on innocent men. Godly men ought to realize this and do all they can to avoid this danger. And we should remember that one person's word against another's does not constitute convincing evidence.

Potiphar was in a difficult position. Joseph had been a faithful servant and had brought Potiphar much profit. Surely he did not want to lose Joseph. Yet, his wife was making accusations against Joseph of a nature which, if true, were very angering to any husband.

On the other hand, there is no evidence that Potiphar even attempted to hear Joseph's side of the story. He acted in anger. It may well have been that he would not have believed Joseph even if he had asked for Joseph's story. Joseph would have had to make accusations against Potiphar's wife, and he would not have wanted to believe such things of her. It would have been one person's word against another's. Such situations usually end up with people believing the person with the more honorable position. It is an old, sad story.

On the other hand, the punishment Potiphar exacted was relatively light for such an offense. If a slave attempted to rape the wife of a high official, one would expect severe punishment, probably even death. The fact that Joseph was only imprisoned may imply that Potiphar retained some sympathy toward Joseph and perhaps did not completely believe his wife's story. Or at least he may have recognized the lack of evidence and may have known his wife well enough to decide to show some mercy. But he probably believed he had to exact some penalty against Joseph. To do otherwise would be to call his wife a liar in the presence of all the servants (remember, he had to live with this woman), and would have led the other servants to think they could get away with real wrongdoing. Of course, God doubtless influenced the outcome, for He had a use yet for Joseph.

### ***39:21-23 - Joseph found favor with the keeper of the prison***

The story ends with Joseph in prison. But again, Joseph did not use mistreatment as reason to do evil. He had gone from the position of a favored son to that of a slave and finally a prisoner. Yet he continued to serve as faithfully as he could in whatever position he found himself.

And again, the Lord blessed Joseph. Once again, as in vv 2,3, we are told that He was with Joseph. The keeper of the prison began to look with favor on Joseph. As a result of his faithfulness and God's blessings, Joseph was soon in charge of the whole prison, even as he had been in charge of Potiphar's household. The keeper put all the prisoners under Joseph's care. Everything that happened was subject to Joseph's responsibility. The keeper did not even know what happened in his own jail!

Now this is amazing! We could understand it with Potiphar and a servant. But Joseph was a prisoner, yet the prison keeper put the prisoner in charge over the prison! Surely, he must have believed Joseph to be innocent and thoroughly trustworthy. In any case, he was sure Joseph would not misuse his position to escape or to allow others to escape.

Again it is clear that we can always do right. No matter how dim the outlook, we never have to sin and should never justify sin. Most people in Joseph's situation would have turned against God or at least made no effort to be useful. Yet, Joseph persisted throughout in doing right, even as we should. If Joseph could do right in his situation, surely we can do right in whatever situation we find ourselves.

# Genesis 40

## Chap. 40 - The Dreams of the Butler and the Baker

### ***40:1-3 - Pharaoh's butler and baker were imprisoned***

It may have seemed to Joseph at this time that God had turned completely away from him. He had been sold as a slave then falsely accused and imprisoned. How could he fall any lower? Yet, completely unknown to Joseph, God was actually working for his good and for the good of His chosen people, the Israelites. God had yet to keep his promise to make Abraham's descendants a great nation, give them the land of Canaan, and send the Messiah to bless all nations.

Part of God's plan for Joseph involved the king's butler and baker. Both had offended the king, and both were placed in the jail with Joseph. The primary work done by these two men will be revealed as the story proceeds. What they did to anger the king is not stated in either case, so it must be irrelevant to our story.

Remember that Joseph was by this time in charge of the prison, subject to the captain. He had responsibility for all the prisoners (39:22,23).

### ***40:4-8 - The butler and baker each had a dream but could find no one to interpret them***

The captain put the butler and the baker, like other prisoners, under Joseph's keeping. After a time there came a night in which each of them had a dream, each on the same night. We are told up front that these dreams had interpretations — they were given to reveal a message.

When Joseph came in the next morning, he saw that the men were sad. When he asked about their sadness, each told him they had a dream, but neither had found anyone who could interpret his dream. So, they did not know the message the dreams were intended to give.

Joseph had experience with his own dreams (see notes on 37:5-8). He informed the men that interpretations belong to God, so he asked them to tell him the dreams.

This is interesting in several ways. First, we wonder how Joseph knew that God would interpret these dreams. The interpretations of his own dreams had been rather straightforward. Yet it is clear from Joseph's statements, and subsequent events, that Joseph knew God could interpret dreams.

It must be remembered that this was still the patriarchal age in which God revealed His will directly to men as the heads of their families. Joseph must have been about 28 years old — 11 years had passed

since his brothers had sold him (note Genesis 41:1,46). It seems that God must have revealed Himself to Joseph in some way in order for Joseph to have this confidence that God would help him interpret these dreams.

Of greater significance is Joseph's affirmation that interpretation of dreams belongs to God. This simply means that only one who was directly guided by God could give the proper meaning of a dream with assurance. Daniel 2:11,20-22,27,28,47 shows that servants of false gods could not reveal the meaning of dreams.

Clearly, these were not natural dreams but revelations from God requiring direct inspiration from God to explain. The fact Joseph was enabled to explain them proves he had some power of direct revelation from God. Likewise, the conclusion necessarily follows that people who are not inspired, like the astrologers and magicians in Dan. 2, cannot truly interpret dreams. And since direct revelation has ceased (1 Cor. 11), it necessarily follows that there is no such thing today as dreams that serve as direct revelations from God. There can be natural dreams today, like there are natural healings. But there are no supernatural revelations by means of dreams, just as there are no miraculous healings today.

#### ***40:9-11 - The butler's dream***

First, the butler told his dream. He dreamed that a grapevine was before him. The vine had three branches that budded, blossomed, and produced ripe grapes. The butler took Pharaoh's cup, pressed the grapes into the cup, and gave the cup to Pharaoh, obviously so he could drink it.

Joseph would subsequently give the interpretation of the dream, but first observe what the butler's job involved. Whatever else it may have involved, one responsibility was to provide the king's drink. Nehemiah had this job for the king of Persia (Neh. 1:11; 2:1ff).

Such a job may seem rather insignificant, yet in fact was extremely important. In those days, a common form of assassination was poisoning. So kings allowed only their most trusted servants to provide their drinks, making absolutely certain the drink was safe (cf. vv 13,31). Often the butler would taste the king's drink before the king was allowed to drink it. Likely, the butler also provided the drinks for all the king's guests, since many of them would also be concerned about poisoning. The reference to the grapevine in the dream may well indicate that the butler was responsible for the king's vineyards, and prepared the drink from the time it was produced till the time the king and his guests drank it.

It is likely also, since the butler would so frequently be in the king's presence, that he would overhear important affairs of state. He must be a man the king could trust not to reveal secrets or be bribed or otherwise speak or act indiscreetly. It is likely even that the king might

discuss matters of state with such a servant. That seemed to be the case with Nehemiah.

It is also interesting how the butler provided the drink for the king. He squeezed grapes directly into the cup. Such a practice may have been reserved for kings or rich people, nevertheless it helps disprove the idea that people in those days drank only fermented grape juice. Some folks claim that people in those days had no way to preserve unfermented grape juice. This story implies they found ways to do so and that they appreciated drinking unfermented drinks, otherwise why not just drink it fermented? Other information confirms this to be true.

#### ***40:12-15 - Joseph's interpretation meant the butler would be restored to his position***

Joseph's interpretation was simple. The three branches represented three days. The dream simply meant that, in three days, the king would restore the butler to his former place as butler. There he would put the king's cup in his hand as he previously had done. Clearly, this was a very favorable interpretation, which the butler rejoiced to hear.

Joseph took the opportunity to make a request. He asked the butler, when he was serving again before the king, to remember Joseph and tell the king about his mistreatment. He briefly told his story, how he had been stolen from the Hebrews and put in a dungeon though he had done nothing worthy of such treatment.

Joseph might have had reason to expect kindness from the butler. If the butler had been imprisoned despite being innocent (as the dream would imply), then he could sympathize with Joseph's unjust imprisonment. And the help Joseph had given should have led the butler to want to help Joseph. Although, the subsequent story shows that the butler forgot Joseph's request, nevertheless this request ultimately became the occasion, not just for Joseph's rescue from prison, but eventually for the rescue of Jacob's family from death.

#### ***40:16-19 - The baker's dream and its interpretation***

The baker saw that Joseph's interpretation of the butler's dream was good. This probably means that it made good sense, but perhaps also that it was favorable — something the butler was happy to hear. So, he proceeded to tell his dream.

He had three baskets of bread, which he had baked for Pharaoh. As he was carrying them on his head, birds came and ate the baked goods from the uppermost basket.

The baker's job was important for the same reasons as the butler's job. He had to provide food that was tasty and nutritious, yet with no possibility of poison. He doubtless fed far more than just the king. So, he too had a responsible position.



Joseph's interpretation of his dream, however, was quite unfavorable. The three baskets again represented three days. But whereas the butler in his dream served the king again, yet the baker in his dream had lost his goods. This represented the fact he would permanently lose his favor with the king. He would be killed by being beheaded and hung, so the birds would eat his flesh as they had eaten the food in the dream.

Morris suggests that, in the dream, the baker should have made provision to protect the goods in the baskets so that animals and insects could not get to it. This was especially true since the food was prepared for the king, and the baker's job was to protect the king's food. So, he suggests that the dream implies the baker had been negligent and therefore deserved the punishment he received. Morris tends to speculate too much, in my view, but in this case he may have a point.

Doubtless Joseph's interpretation was sad for the baker, and Joseph would have difficulty revealing it. But the interpretations were obviously from God, so they had to be delivered.

Obviously, the baker could not give the king a report that would help Joseph. However, his dream was important because the fulfillment of Joseph's interpretation would reassure the butler, and eventually the king, that Joseph could really interpret dreams (41:9-13). Like other miracles, this served to confirm the word of the inspired man (Mark 16:20).

### ***40:20-23 - The dreams came true exactly as Joseph had interpreted them***

The third day was the king's birthday. He had a feast in celebration. Such celebrations may have been the occasion of giving out favors to the people. In any case, the king gave a feast for his servants and favored the butler by restoring him to service, so he again put the king's cup in his hand. But the baker was hung, just like Joseph had said.

The butler, however, did not remember Joseph. Joseph had asked the butler to tell the king about Joseph, so he could be released from prison (vv 14,15). The butler was forgetful and ungrateful, however, and forgot Joseph. This doubtless also caused Joseph further disappointment and discouragement. Nevertheless, the groundwork had been laid, surprisingly, for Joseph's release and ultimate exaltation.

# Genesis 41

## Chap. 41 - The Pharaoh's Dreams

### ***41:1-4 - Pharaoh's first dream***

Events in this chapter occurred two years following the dreams of the butler and baker in chap. 40. The butler had been restored to his position, but in all that time had not thought to help Joseph out.

Just as the butler and baker had dreamed dreams, so Pharaoh himself had two dreams. These dreams changed the destiny of Egypt, and especially of Joseph and of Jacob's family.

In the first dream, Pharaoh stood by the river, and seven fat cows came up out of the river and fed in the meadow. Then seven ugly, gaunt ("lean") cows came up out of the river and ate up the seven fat cows. Pharaoh then awoke.

### ***41:5-7 - Pharaoh's second dream***

Pharaoh slept and had a second dream. In this dream seven good, plump heads of grain grew, followed by seven thin, blighted heads. Then the seven thin heads devoured the plump, full heads. Again, Pharaoh awoke to discover it was just a dream.

The dreams were obviously similar, and Joseph later explained that they both meant the same thing. God sent two dreams, however, in order to emphasize the message (v32). Often repetition in the Bible is a way of providing emphasis. A dream, in particular, might not be given much significance if it just happened once. God repeated the dream in a different form to show that the first dream was no accident. God got Pharaoh's attention, so that he wanted to know the explanation.

In fact, dreams in these stories about Joseph came in pairs every time. God had sent two dreams to Joseph in different forms, then the two of the butler and baker, then the two to Pharaoh.

### ***41:8-13 - The butler told Pharaoh about Joseph's ability to interpret dreams***

Pharaoh was disturbed by the dreams. They obviously had some significance, but he could not determine what it was. He called for his magicians and wise men, but there was no one who could interpret the dreams (cf. v24).

This demonstrates the weakness of occult methods. The magicians were practitioners of witchcraft of various kinds. The magicians in Daniel 2 likewise could not interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Like those magicians, psychics and other occult practitioners today claim to

have supernatural power, but they are frauds. Whatever power they may have is from the devil or from natural sources. They can never duplicate the true miracles of God. See Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6,27; Exodus 7:11,22; 8:7,18,19; Isaiah 8:19,20; Daniel 1:20; 2:1-13,27f; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8; 22:15; Acts 8:9-13; 19:18-20; 13:4-12.

We may wonder why they did not at least attempt to give interpretations. The meaning clearly referred to some tragedy. Coffman suggests that they were unwilling to displease Pharaoh by giving an interpretation of coming tragedy, when they did not know the real meaning.

The butler, however, remembered that Joseph had interpreted his dream. He reminded Pharaoh of the event in which he had imprisoned the butler and the baker. He recalled the dreams the two men had, and he told about Joseph's interpretations and how the dreams had come to pass exactly as Joseph had interpreted them (see chap. 40).

At this point the real purpose of the dreams of chap. 40 becomes obvious. At the time of the dreams, they may have appeared to have little value. What happened to the butler and the baker would have happened with or without the dreams. What real good was there in knowing three days ahead of time what was about to happen, since neither man could change the outcome anyway? The only possible benefit could have been to Joseph, had the butler remembered to tell the king about him.

Here, however, we see that the real purpose of those dreams was to give Joseph an opportunity to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams. The story of Joseph is a story of Divine providence. At many points one may have doubted whether there was any purpose in the events. One might even have believed that God was being unfair to Joseph. Yet, through it all God had a purpose. Now this purpose was unfolding in a dramatic way that all could understand.

#### ***41:14-16 - Pharaoh sent for Joseph***

So, Pharaoh called Joseph, and he was brought from the dungeon. He prepared himself for Pharaoh by shaving and changing his clothing. This showed respect for the king and a desire to make a favorable impression. Note that our appearance often indicates respect (or lack of respect) for other people or events. We should remember this when we choose how to appear when the church meets to worship God.

Some modern folks think that men in Bible times all had long hair and beards because they did not know how to cut hair or shave. Here is one of many proofs that they did know how to do such things. They used sharp instruments far more commonly than we do, for swords and spears were their weapons of war. Further, we see that shaving was an acceptable practice for men, as exemplified by this man of God.

When Joseph arrived, Pharaoh said he had a dream, and he had heard that Joseph could interpret dreams. Joseph responded that interpretation of dreams was not his own (human) power, but the power was in God who could give an interpretation that would set the king's mind at peace (from being disturbed by his inability to understand the dream). Here again is the clear teaching that these dreams were inspired of God so that only God could interpret them (cf. on 40:8; Dan. 2).

***41:17-24 - Pharaoh repeated the dreams basically as they are recorded in vv 2-7***

(See notes on vv 2-7). Pharaoh added just a couple of his personal reactions and observations on the dreams. He said the gaunt cows were so ugly that he had never seen such ugliness in the land. He also added that, when the lean cows ate up the fat ones, the lean ones were made no fatter, but were just as ugly as they had been at the beginning.

***41:25 - Joseph began his explanation***

First, Joseph explained that the dreams were “one” — i.e., they both had the same meaning and conveyed the same message. The purpose for sending two of them must have been to emphasize the meaning as an important message from God (see on v32).

Further, Joseph said this was a message from God to tell Pharaoh what the future held. This shows again that these dreams were not natural but supernatural (see notes on 40:8). While we today may have natural dreams, we will not experience dreams such as these, for these were messages from God such as will not be sent today.

***41:26-28 - The dreams symbolized two periods of seven years each***

Since the dreams are “one” in meaning, Joseph explained that the seven good cows meant the same thing as the seven good heads of grain. They both represented seven years. Likewise, the seven thin cows meant the same as the seven thin heads of grain, and they also represented seven years. He specified that these were years of famine. Again, he emphasized that this was a revelation from God of future events.

One wonders if the cows coming up from the river because the Nile river was the source of their crops. This is surely true, whether or not it was the meaning of the dream. The east wind might have indicated terrible weather such that the river could not grow good crops. These points could follow, but they were not stated nor emphasized by Joseph.

Note that the dreams of the butler and baker had emphasized items in numbers of three, representing the three days till the dreams would be fulfilled. In Pharaoh's dreams the numbers are seven, representing not days but years.

### ***41:29-32 - The dreams pictured seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine***

Joseph then expressly stated the full meaning of the dreams. The seven fat cows and heads of grain represented seven years of plenty in the land. There would be good crops. However, those years would be followed by seven years of famine. So great would be the famine that all the rich produce of the years of plenty would be depleted and not remembered.

He then stated clearly that the dreams meant the same thing, but God repeated them to emphasize that these events were sure and would shortly occur. See notes on v7. Here is emphasis by repetition.

The expression “will shortly bring it to pass” is important, because it shows that the events would occur in the near future, not the distant future. People should remember this too in the book of Revelation. 1:1,3 says the events pictured there “must shortly take place” and “the time is near.” To apply these prophecies generally to events thousands of years later is to miss the point.

### ***41:33-36 - A man should be appointed to gather food in plenty to prepare for the famine***

Unlike the dreams of the butler and baker, these dreams were given at such a time that action could be taken to prepare for the coming events. Joseph urged the king to appoint a wise man, with officers under him, who would collect grain during the years of plenty. They could take one fifth of what was produced, and gather it into storage bins in the cities. Then when the years of famine arrived, the people would have food from the years of plenty.

Clearly, this was the purpose for which God gave the dreams. They were warnings ahead of time so the people could act wisely and prepare for the famine. We will see, however, that a specific purpose even more significant related to Joseph himself and his people.

### ***41:37-39 - Pharaoh honored Joseph for giving a good interpretation***

The pharaoh recognized the wisdom of Joseph’s advice and recognized further that Joseph would have the wisdom to carry out the plan. Clearly, Joseph’s interpretation of the dream was from God, showing that he was blessed and guided by God. Pharaoh then concluded that Joseph was the one to be in charge of gathering the grain, for no one else had such wisdom and discernment.

Again, the amazing providence of God is here revealed as all the horrible mistreatment Joseph had suffered came to culmination in his being exalted to high position as ruler in Egypt.

### ***41:40-44 - Pharaoh then exalted Joseph to the second-highest position in the land***

He said Joseph would rule all the land. Only the pharaoh was above him. Further, the king placed his own signet ring on Joseph's hand, gave him a gold chain on his neck, and clothed him in fine linen garments. He had him ride in the second-greatest chariot, and people were required to bow before him. Because Pharaoh ruled the land, he had the right to give power to Joseph. He decreed that no one could lift hand or foot in all the land without Joseph's permission. This was doubtless an exaggeration, but it showed how powerful Joseph was.

It is interesting that, whether he was treated well or poorly, Joseph always rose to the top of whatever positions were available to him. In Potiphar's house he had been second only to Potiphar himself. In the prison, he was second only to the keeper of the prison. Now in the government he was to be second only to the king.

Who can imagine such a sudden and complete turn in a man's state of affairs? One day he was in the dungeons of Egypt. Then, less than a day later, he was second in command only to the king of one of the greatest nations on earth! What an amazing change this must have seemed to Joseph! Even Pharaoh must have been amazed by it. Surely, he did not often take an unknown foreigner out of prison and make him a ruler, let alone the second in the kingdom.

Note how, with Joseph as with many other of God's servants, there was first a period of testing, then resulting glory for those who remained faithful. So it is with us that this life is a period of testing followed by eternal life in glory.

Note that rings were a special symbol of authority. The ring bore a symbol used to authorize commands. Possessing the ring demonstrated that Joseph indeed possessed the authority the king had described (cf. Esther 3:10).

Again, the providence of God is revealed.

### ***41:45,46 - Pharaoh gave Joseph a special name and a wife***

Pharaoh also gave Joseph the special name of Zaphnath-Paaneah. The meaning of this is unsure. Morris suggests it may have some reference to life or salvation, emphasizing that Joseph would save the lives of the people.

Pharaoh also gave Joseph a wife named Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah, priest of On. It is probable that Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name and an Egyptian wife in order to make Joseph more acceptable to the Egyptian people. Married to an Egyptian, he would at least be part of Egypt by marriage. (Note Genesis 43:32, which shows that, as a Hebrew, Joseph would have been rejected by the Egyptians.)

Presumably On was a false god of Egypt, perhaps a name for the sun god. Pharaoh probably thought Joseph should marry a priest's

daughter since he was so highly favored by God. Since Joseph worshiped the true God, however, one wonders how much conflict he had about religion with his wife or her family. His dedication to God ought to have led him to talk with her, before agreeing to marry her, sufficiently that he was sure she would accept Jehovah as her God or at least not oppose Him.

Coffman goes to great length criticizing Joseph for this marriage, insisting that Asenath made idol worshipers from Joseph's sons and thereby influenced Israel to become idol worshipers. While this is possible, there is absolutely nothing in Scripture to confirm it. It is purely unfounded speculation, and it appears to me to defile the reputation of Joseph unfairly since there is no evidence for it and since Joseph otherwise showed great wisdom and faith.

We are told further that Joseph was thirty years old at this time. He had been seventeen when all these adventures began (37:2). Much had happened to him in thirteen years. He was clearly a very young man to have such great responsibility. It is interesting that he came to power at the same age that Jesus began His public ministry.

He passed throughout the land in the fulfillment of his duties. Obviously, wherever he went the people were subject to him. Doubtless, his duties would have required much investigation of the land and much planning in order to provide the necessary storehouses and arrange for the crops to be collected.

#### ***41:47-49 - Joseph gathered the grain in the years of plenty***

As Joseph had predicted, Egypt entered seven years of plentiful, bountiful crops. The ground produced abundantly. Joseph had been given high position, but his special task was to accumulate grain to have it ready for the famine. He appointed storage places in every city, so that the people would bring the crops from surrounding fields and store them in each city.

This plan was simple and wise. The people had such plentiful crops they surely would not miss what Joseph took. Doubtless, they could not sell the excess, since everyone else had good crops. They would not likely resent giving the excess to the government, especially if they believed a famine would come later. By storing grain in every city, Joseph did not need to transport it far, yet he was able in the famine to disperse it easily back to the people near each city.

So, Joseph gathered so much grain it was like the sand of the sea. He quit keeping records of how much he had because it could not be accurately measured. Imagine the immensity of the project Joseph had undertaken, if he could not even count all the grain he collected!

#### ***41:50-52 - Joseph had two sons***

God also prospered Joseph's family. He and his wife Asenath had two sons born during the years of plenty. The firstborn was named

Manasseh, which means “making to forget” (ASV ftnt). He chose this name because his good fortune at the hand of God led him to forget all the hard years of toil and all his sorrow over the separation from his father’s house. (Coffman also censures Joseph for claiming to forget his father’s house, yet it is entirely possible that Joseph referred only to the grief that remembering his father’s house brought him.)

The second son was named Ephraim, which meant “fruitful.” Joseph chose this name because he had become fruitful even though he was in a land of affliction.

These two sons become important in God’s plan. As it would turn out, Joseph received the birthright or double portion of land in Israel, so each of his sons became father of a tribe in Israel.

### ***41:53-57 - The years of famine began***

As Joseph had also interpreted in the dreams, the seven years of plenty came to an end. The nation then entered the seven years of famine. This famine affected all the lands surrounding Egypt, but only Egypt had bread because they had stored it up during the years of plenty.

This shows how easily prosperity can turn into poverty. When we are richly blessed, we sometimes take the blessings for granted. We fail to appreciate how quickly and easily they can be lost. We need to remember to trust in God in times of plenty and in time of need. It would also appear that the story teaches the wisdom of saving our possessions in time of prosperity so that we have something to carry us through times of hardship. Some people criticize “saving for a rainy day,” but the story of Joseph appears to show the value of it.

When the people had used up their bread, they went to Pharaoh for food. He in turn told them to go to Joseph. Joseph opened the storehouses he had built and provided the food the people needed.

The chapter concludes by telling us that people came even from other countries to buy grain from Egypt because of the famine. This would become significant in fulfilling God’s plan as the story proceeds.



# Genesis 42

## Chap. 42-45 - Joseph's Reconciliation with His Brothers

### ***42:1-4 - Jacob sent his sons to Egypt for grain***

The famine in Egypt also affected the surrounding regions, including Canaan where Jacob's family lived. Surely, God had been using Joseph in Egypt to prepare a place for his family to survive the famine, though none of them would have known this.

Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, so he instructed his sons to go there to buy food. But only ten of the brothers went. Joseph, of course, was already there, unknown to his family. Benjamin was not allowed to go because Jacob was afraid something terrible would happen to him as had happened to Joseph. Many years had passed since Joseph had gone to Egypt when he was seventeen. Benjamin was surely a grown man by this time.

Jacob was now showing favoritism toward the last remaining son of Rachel, even as he had previously done to Joseph. Some people do not learn easily. However, we will see that the other brothers have learned their lesson, and as a result their attitude toward Benjamin was different from what it had been toward Joseph.

### ***42:5-8 - Joseph's brothers bowed to him and sought to buy grain***

The brothers went to Egypt to buy grain, not knowing Joseph was there, and surely not expecting him to be governor of the land. As it turned out, the brothers had to go before Joseph to buy grain. This might appear to have been coincidence. Grain was stored throughout the land, so how did it happen that they went before Joseph to buy grain? Very likely, there was a rule that foreigners had to appeal to the governor personally for grain. V34 implies that foreigners had to have official approval in order to trade in the land, and perhaps Joseph had to grant that approval. In any case, of course, it occurred by God's design.

When the brothers came, naturally they did not recognize Joseph. Joseph, however, recognized them. He had been thirty when he had been appointed governor (41:46). That would have been thirteen years since his brothers last saw him. Then the seven years of plenty had followed, and this was two years into the seven years of famine. So, it had been over twenty years since Joseph and his brothers had seen one another. Since he was younger than they, he would have changed the most. Further, he was now dressed as an Egyptian and followed Egypt-

tian customs (41:42-45). And he was governor of the land. The chances were slim they could ever have recognized him.

However, they had been older to begin with, so would have changed less than Joseph had. The fact there were ten of them as brothers, along with the fact they were from Canaan, doubtless dressed as they always had, would have given him the advantage in recognizing them. Further, as will be seen, they spoke their native language, which he understood, but he spoke Egyptian. Knowing that people from other countries were coming for grain, he may even have been expecting to see them eventually. Imagine the emotions he felt when he first saw and recognized them. But he treated them roughly and acted as though they and he were strangers.

In any case, they bowed down to him as the governor. This, of course, fulfilled Joseph's dreams — the very dreams that had contributed so to their hatred of him, which in turn had led them to sell him as a slave to begin with (37:5-11). Clearly, the dreams and their fulfillment were acts of God.

#### ***42:9-12 - Joseph accused his brothers of being spies***

This began a lengthy interchange between Joseph and his brothers in which he repeatedly tested them in various ways. The subsequent story reveals that Joseph intended to use the situation to test his brothers to see whether they were still the jealous, evil men who had sold him as a slave. If they had not changed, he might use his authority to teach them a lesson. And ultimately, he knew they and all his family needed to come to Egypt to survive the coming years of famine. Anticipating that he would eventually see his brothers when they came to Egypt for food, he may even have made some plans for how he would handle the situation.

Doubtless, their sin had dwelt in all their minds for over twenty years. Joseph remembered his dreams and all that had transpired as a result. He lived every day with the consequences. The situation gave him a perfect opportunity to test the brothers to see whether or not they regretted their treatment of him. (Some have proposed other reasons for his conduct, such as the fact that he did not want the Egyptians to think he would show favoritism to people from his native land. But as the story proceeds, it becomes clear that he had much more in mind.)

Since they did not recognize him and he was in charge, he used the opportunity to accuse them of being evil men. Joseph saw that Benjamin was not among them. He purposed to determine what their attitude was toward Benjamin to see if they hated him as they had hated Joseph.

He accused them of being spies who had come to see the weaknesses of the land, presumably for the purpose of assisting some foreign power in defeating the Egyptians. This accusation would give him

opportunity to see if they would turn against one another and betray one another as they had betrayed him. It was probably one of Joseph's duties to make sure that no foreign powers attacked Egypt to take their grain by force.

Not knowing his purpose, of course, they denied they were spies. They said they were all sons of one man, come to buy food. Spies would not likely all be brothers, but the main point seems to be that they were there simply to provide food for their family.

***42:13-17 - Joseph insisted that the brothers bring Benjamin to Egypt***

As he persisted in accusing them of being spies, they added that they were brothers from Canaan, but the youngest brother had remained in Canaan with their father, and one brother "is no more." This vague term would imply he was dead (43:7), but would cover what really happened. They were apparently trying to assure him that their family situation was all that motivated them to come.

Joseph continued claiming they were spies, so he said they must bring their youngest brother there to prove they were telling the truth. This would not, of course, prove the point completely since they could have had a brother and still be spies, or they could bring another man and claim him as their brother. But if they really were spies, would they have come back at all? Joseph's purpose was not so much to be logical as to determine their attitude toward Benjamin.

He proposed to keep the brothers in prison but send one of them to bring the younger brother to Egypt. Doubtless, he understood why they had left Benjamin at home. His test would show whether or not they really cared for him and wanted to protect him. This would also give them an opportunity to bring Benjamin to harm as they had done him. They had sold Joseph as a slave into Egypt. Would they jump at the opportunity to bring Benjamin there too? Furthermore, the coincidence between what they had done to him and what he was proposing would surely eventually strike them. Finally, it would give him a chance to see his brother Benjamin.

In any case, he put them all in prison for three days while he and they considered the situation.

***42:18-20 - Finally, he decided to keep just one brother and sent the rest to bring Benjamin***

On the third day Joseph brought them from the prison and proposed basically the same course of action with some variation. Instead of all staying but sending one home, he proposed that one stay in the prison and all the rest go home. That way they could carry grain to their family. If they would return with their younger brother, he would conclude they had proved they were true men. They agreed to this.

Joseph said he proposed this because he feared God. I am unsure whether this means the true God, the same one they served, or whether he expected them to take it just as a general statement that he was a religious man. In any case it seems to imply that, because of his religion, he was willing to offer a more compassionate proposal than he had first suggested.

This proposal would allow them to carry grain to their family, which he of course knew truly existed. It would also allow him to accomplish his test of their attitude toward Benjamin.

***42:21,22 - The brothers realized they were receiving pay-back for their sin against Joseph***

At this point the brothers stated among themselves the very thing Joseph had hoped to remind them of. They had three days to think about their situation and how they had mistreated Joseph. Now they were being falsely accused and mistreated, just as they had mistreated their brother. They had been in prison, even as he had been sent away a prisoner. Now one of them would stay a prisoner, and the favored youngest son would have to be endangered even as they had endangered the favored younger son. All this reminded them of their guilt. Surely, their act had weighed on their minds these twenty years, and such misfortune would remind them that they deserved to suffer for what they had done.

So, among themselves they admitted their guilt, not realizing that Joseph could speak their language and would know the significance of their comments. They said they were guilty because they would not heed their brother when he pleaded with them. Obviously, this referred to the time they had put Joseph in the pit and then sold him as a slave (Gen. 37). They remembered his anguished pleadings, even twenty-some years later. Now they themselves were pleading and being ignored, even as they had ignored Joseph's pleas. So they concluded these troubles had come on them for that reason. Little did they know how right they were!

Reuben then reminded them that he had warned them not to sin against the lad, but they would not listen. He concluded that his blood was being required at their hands. The account in Gen. 37 shows that he did try to keep them from killing Joseph but to just place him in a pit. However, he seems to imply here that he had said more than that, for he says they would not listen. They had listened to his suggestion to put Joseph in the pit instead of killing him. So, either he had chosen not to remember his own guilt or else he had said more at the time than is recorded in Gen. 37.

In any case, it is clear that shedding innocent blood is sinning against someone, a boy in this case. Likewise, it is wrong today, including when done to unborn "boys" or children.

And see how God was using the opportunity to mold these evil men. They were to become the heads of the tribes of the great nation that would descend from Abraham. God could use them effectively only if they would humble themselves and repent of past evils. That outcome would eventually result from Joseph's testing of them.

#### ***42:23,24 - Joseph took Simeon to remain bound in Egypt***

Meanwhile, Joseph overheard everything the brothers said. They assumed he could not understand because he had been speaking to them through an interpreter. He was so affected by their statements that he wept when he heard them. The emotions of over twenty years of mistreatment burned in his heart. Now he could not restrain himself when he heard his brothers discussing their mistreatment of him. Doubtless, this was the first time he learned that Reuben had tried to save him. But he wept to himself and then returned to speak to them.

He intended to see the effect all this would have on the brothers. This event proved to him that they did regret what they had done to him, but he yet sought to know how fully they had changed. Were they just sorry for the consequences, or were they changed to the point they would not mistreat Benjamin? To determine this, he proceeded with his plan.

He took Simeon and bound him to keep him in Egypt while the other brothers returned home as agreed. One might wonder why Simeon was chosen. He was the second oldest, but the oldest (Reuben) had tried to help Joseph. Perhaps Joseph chose Simeon because he remembered Simeon as being the one who had shown greatest antagonism against him.

#### ***42:25-28 - Joseph had each brother's money returned in his sack***

Joseph had the men's sacks filled with grain, but he also commanded that their money should be put in their sacks plus they would be given provisions for the journey (I suppose this means extra meal in addition to what were taking to bring home).

As the men were returning home and were ready to make camp, one of them opened his sack to feed his donkey. There he found his money in the mouth of his sack. He told the others and they were all afraid, attributing the act to God. Again, they were more right than they realized.

It is not clear why Joseph returned the money, but the effect on his brothers was to cause them to fear. Perhaps they thought that, in addition to all their other problems, they were now subject to accusation of stealing. In any case, they would surely wonder why the money was there, since they had gone with the full intent of paying for what they were given. It caused them to wonder what was happening and

why. Perhaps Joseph did it as a kindness in addition to causing them to wonder in all these ways.

***42:29-34 - The brothers returned to Canaan and there told their story to Jacob***

They told Jacob that the ruler had spoken roughly, accusing them of being spies. They had claimed they were honest men, all brothers with the younger one at home and one who was no more. The ruler had then required them to leave a brother as a prisoner and bring the younger brother as proof that they were honest. If they did so, then the brother who stayed would be restored and they would be allowed to trade in the land.

***42:35,36 - Jacob grieved at the turn of events***

The men then opened their sacks of grain, and they all found that their money had been restored. Evidently, only one man had opened his sack to feed the animals on the way, but the others had not realized they too had their money. This increased their fear.

Jacob responded by bemoaning his troubles. He said Joseph was no more, Simeon was no more (i.e., no more with them, though he still lived in prison), and then they wanted to take Benjamin. He said all this was against him, and they had bereaved him. This was probably just a general statement, not an accusation. But there was far more truth in it than Jacob realized.

***42:37,38 - Reuben assured his father that he would bring Benjamin back safely from Egypt***

He went so far as to say Jacob could kill Reuben's two sons if Benjamin did not return. Obviously, this was just an extreme way of reassuring Jacob that Reuben would diligently seek to care for Benjamin. What good would it do to kill Reuben's sons?

Note that Reuben was clearly a grown man to the point of having two sons.

Nevertheless, Jacob refused to let Benjamin go back. He was the only son left (of Rachel), since Joseph was dead (or so Jacob believed). If anything happened to Benjamin, even by accident, Jacob was convinced he would die from sorrow.

It appears that the brothers wanted to return to Egypt immediately to bring Simeon back, but Jacob refused. He feared the loss of another son more than he hoped for the return of Simeon.

# Genesis 43

## Joseph's Reconciliation with His Brothers (cont.)

### ***43:1-5 - Jacob urged his sons to return to Egypt for grain***

Some time passed without anyone going back to Egypt. Because the famine was so severe, however, Jacob's family had soon eaten up all the grain they had bought, so he told the brothers to go back to buy more.

Judah spoke for the brothers and reminded Jacob that the Egyptian ruler had told them they could not see his face again without their brother. He said they would go down if Benjamin was with them, but otherwise they would not go down. The expression "see my face" means that Joseph would not even grant them an audience to consider their requests unless his conditions were met.

### ***43:6-8 - Jacob complained that his sons had told the ruler about their brother***

He asked them why they had given such information to the governor. They said that he had asked about their family, specifically questioning whether their father was alive and whether they had another brother. They asked, quite reasonably, how they could have known he would require them to bring back the brother to Egypt. Of course, knowing who the ruler was, we understand these questions quite well, but they would have had no way to know.

### ***43:8-10 - Judah said he would bear responsibility for Benjamin***

Judah reminded Jacob that this was a matter of life and death for all of them, including their children. Surely at this point prospects must have been frightening indeed. The famine had continued for some time, and they doubtless had several children to provide for. But one point for Jacob to consider was that there was no point in keeping Benjamin at home to protect him because, without food, he would die anyway, and so would the rest of the family.

Judah promised to be surety for Benjamin. If Benjamin did not return safely, Judah would accept the blame forever. He said that they really would have already returned before this had they not waited so long (meaning, doubtless, because they did not want to take Benjamin back so they had procrastinated).

This shows increased maturity and responsibility on the part of the men, especially Judah. With Joseph, they had wanted to kill him, and they deceived the father to cover up. Now Judah was ready to pro-

tect the favorite brother and take all the blame personally if all did not work out.

***43:11-14 - Jacob agreed to send Benjamin along with money and gifts with the sons***

Finally convinced, Israel said to take a gift for the ruler: some balm and honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. This might imply that the land was producing some of these products, but apparently not the grains or other crops that would be sufficient to sustain life. Or perhaps these were still left from before the famine, whereas the staples like grain were sparse.

Jacob then told them to take back double their money. This would return the money that had been put in their bags from the first trip, since it may have been an oversight. In addition, they should take money to pay for the food they were getting on this trip.

He agreed for them to take Benjamin too, and he asked for God's mercy on them before the ruler so that Benjamin and Simeon could both return. Finally, he resigned himself that, if he was bereaved of his sons, he would have to endure that fate. The only alternative really was to send Benjamin back or the whole family would die.

Jacob's favoritism had led him to protect Joseph and Benjamin for years, even though Benjamin was by this time a grown man with children of his own. Yet, none of his efforts had prevented tragedy from taking Joseph from him, and now he might likewise lose Benjamin. Yet he had to learn to trust God to meet their needs.

***43:15-17 - Joseph's brothers went to Egypt taking Benjamin and all that Jacob had sent***

Having arrived in Egypt, they were granted an audience with Joseph. When Joseph saw his brother Joseph, he instructed his steward to kill an animal and prepare a feast so the men could eat the noon meal with him at his own house.

Clearly, Joseph had further plans, yet this all must surely have seemed extremely strange to the brothers. First, they had been accused of being spies, then they were invited to dine with the governor of the land!

***43:18-23 - The brothers spoke to Joseph's steward about the money that had been returned***

When they were taken to Joseph's house, the brothers were afraid thinking they were in trouble because their money had been in their sacks. They thought Joseph intended to accuse them and make them all slaves, keeping even their animals. So again they acted maturely, without deception, and told Joseph's steward in a straightforward way what had happened. Note that this is the godly way to act when you fear someone is upset with you: just go to them and seek to discuss the problem – Matthew 5:2,24.



They told the steward how, the first time they had come to buy food, their money had been found in their sacks when they were returning home. So, they had brought all that money with them to repay it, and they had other money to buy food this time. They said plainly that they did not know how the money got into their sacks.

The steward, however, told them to not be afraid, because he had their money. Their God must have put their money in their sacks. This was, of course, technically true. He did have their money. I suspect this statement was intended to assure them that he considered the bill paid. He received their payment and no longer held them accountable for the bill nor for the fact they received their money back. And it was God's working that had led the steward to put the money in their sacks. Joseph had instructed it, but the whole event was being led of God. Perhaps Joseph had even made this clear to the steward. In any case, the main point is that there were no grounds for the brothers to worry about the money.

He then brought Simeon out from prison to them. The account presents all this as just a matter of historic fact, yet it must have been a joyous reunion.

### ***43:24-26 - The brothers prepared to meet Joseph, then bowed before him***

The steward brought them into Joseph's house and gave them water to wash their feet. He also provided feed for their donkeys.

Realizing that they were to eat with Joseph at noon, they prepared their present for him. When he came, they gave him the present and bowed before him to the earth. This, of course, again fulfilled the dream of Joseph in Gen. 37, except this time all eleven brothers were involved (previously Benjamin had not been there).

### ***43:27-30 - Joseph wept on seeing his brother Benjamin***

When Joseph met them, he asked about their welfare. He asked about their father, whether he was still alive. Again, of course, they could have had no knowledge why he was so inquiring.

They told him their father, who was his servant (this was just a respectful way of talking to a ruler), was alive and in good health. But then they bowed and prostrated themselves to him again, fulfilling the dream yet once more.

Joseph then saw Benjamin and asked whether he were the youngest brother, who would of course have been his own full brother. When he perceived that it was Benjamin, he pronounced a blessing on him from God.

This meeting, however, was so touching, after he had been away from his brother for so long, that Joseph was moved to tears. He had to leave the room and go to his own chambers to find somewhere to weep in private.

Imagine all these many years he had been away from his brothers. It was now surely well over twenty years since he had seen Benjamin. He had endured so much suffering and heartache, having missed his family so long. These other brothers had all done him wrong, but Benjamin had never wronged him and was his own full brother. Surely this would move any man to deep emotions.

***43:31-34 - Joseph and his brothers dine, though at separate tables***

Joseph then recovered and controlled his emotions, washed his face and returned, commanding for the meal to be served. However, he did not sit at the same table with his brothers. He had his own table apart from them, and all the Egyptians who were eating were at another table. This was because it was an abomination to Egyptians to eat with Hebrews. This is interesting in light of the fact that Jews themselves later refused to eat with people of other nations (Acts 10:28; 11:3; John 4:9; Gal. 2:11-13).

Note that this fact becomes important in God's overall plan. The fact that Egyptians would not associate with Hebrews would be important in keeping God's people separate. They would not intermarry and be influenced by the evils of the society around them. This may be a major part of God's reason for bringing about the entire move to Egypt. It appears that Jacob's family was becoming much too involved with people in Canaan. This will be discussed further later.

One wonders about Joseph himself, since the Egyptians would know he too was a Hebrew. He probably had a separate table because of his rank, but could it also have been because he too was a Hebrew? He had adopted many Egyptian ways, as earlier discussed, so perhaps that satisfied the Egyptians to accept him as an Egyptian.

Joseph did something else that amazed his brothers. He had them seated at the table in order from the oldest to the youngest. They recognized this to be the case. The chances that twelve men should be so seated in order by accident are almost impossible. Doubtless, they could think of no reason for such an amazing event.

Finally, Joseph sent servings to them from his own presence. He deliberately made sure that Benjamin received five times as much as any other of the brothers. Doubtless, they wondered about this too. Joseph may have done it simply as an honor to the one he knew to be his full brother. But perhaps it was also done to see how the others would react. Would they resent this favoritism to Benjamin like they had resented the treatment Joseph had received at home? In any case, there was apparently no issue made of this favoritism, for the men simply ate and drank and enjoyed the meal.

Joseph was not yet through testing his brothers. He was actually about to come to the greatest test of all. He had insisted that they bring Benjamin, not simply so he could see him, but so he could see how the

brothers would treat Benjamin. Were they still jealous men, even to the point of hatred and injury, as they had done to him? He had some evidence they had changed, but having Benjamin there would give him the best chance of all to test whether or not the men had really changed. The testing is about to proceed to a climax. He would see whether or not they had changed, and would challenge them to change further if needed.

# Genesis 44

## Joseph's Reconciliation with His Brothers (cont.)

### ***44:1-3 - Joseph's cup was put in Benjamin's sack***

The testing of the brothers here continued. Joseph had treated the brothers well, but now would give them one final test. He would accuse Benjamin of wrongdoing, so he could see how the other brothers would react. What would they do when they had a chance to allow Benjamin to become imprisoned or enslaved, like they had sent Joseph into slavery?

He again told his steward to put every man's money in his sack of food. Then he was to put Joseph's silver cup in Benjamin's sack, along with his money. Then at dawn the next morning, the men left with their donkeys.

### ***44:4-6 - Joseph sent his steward to accuse the brothers of stealing his cup***

After the men had left but were still near by, Joseph sent his steward after them. The steward was to rebuke them for returning evil for good. He was to accuse them of having stolen the cup Joseph used for drinking and for divination. So the steward overtook them and made the accusation.

One tends to wonder what the steward thought of all this. Had Joseph taken him into confidence so he knew what this was all about? Or was he just an obedient servant who did what he was told without question? In any case, he is sure to have wondered what was going on.

One also wonders why Joseph made reference to divination. All such was condemned under the Mosaic Law, in cases where it was an appeal for knowledge to someone other than God (Deut. 18:9-14). There had been no reference whatever to using a cup for divination in any of Joseph's interpretation of dreams, so surely he did not really use it for such a purpose. Perhaps this was just his way of explaining how he had known so much about the brothers. Or perhaps the steward, who may well not have been a servant of the true God, simply chose on his own to express this Egyptian myth about how Joseph got his powers. However, Joseph himself implied a similar thing (without referring to the cup) later on.

### ***44:7-10 - The brothers denied guilt, but the steward said the guilty one would be a slave***

The brothers were, of course, completely baffled by the steward's accusation, for they knew they were really innocent. They reminded

the steward of their honesty in bringing back the money that had been in their sacks the first time. Why would they have brought the money back, even before being confronted about it, if they intended to steal a cup?

They then offered that, if the cup was found in the possession of any of them, that man should die and the rest would be slaves of the lord. They had no hint, of course, that this would really come to pass. They affirmed this because they were certain they were innocent.

The steward agreed with their proposal, except he determined to keep as a slave only the one who had the cup. The other men would be allowed to go free.

This was an obvious parallel to the treatment they had given Joseph. He was giving them a golden opportunity to do to Benjamin as they had done to him. They could let Benjamin be taken as a slave, and they would return home free men. In this case it would not even be their own fault. They would be completely bystanders. Yet, their reaction would show whether they had truly repented and now cared for their younger brother.

***44:11-13 - When the cup was found in Benjamin's sack, all the brothers returned with him***

The brothers then took their sacks to open them for the steward. He began with the eldest and proceeded down to the youngest (though one wonders again, as old as these men were, how he would know this). The cup, of course, was found in Benjamin's sack, since the steward himself had put it there.

The steward had said that the other men would be free to go. Only the one who had the cup would be taken as a slave. But the men reacted in grief, tearing their clothes. Each one reloaded his donkey and returned to the city.

Now they had been given the perfect opportunity to desert Benjamin to slavery. It would have been even easier to do so than it had been with Joseph. Had they not changed their attitudes, they would surely have jumped at the opportunity to be rid of their father's favorite.

However, earlier events had shown that they were sorry for how they had treated Joseph. And furthermore, they had seen how hard Jacob had taken Joseph's "death." They also had been warned at great length how hard it would go on Jacob if Benjamin did not return, and they had made great reassurances that they themselves would be held accountable if Benjamin did not return. So, they had matured to the point that they were not about to go back and face Jacob without Benjamin. They all returned to the city to deal with this new emergency on Benjamin's behalf.

#### **44:14-17 - Judah confessed error and offered for all the brothers to become slaves**

Judah had taken personal responsibility before Jacob that he would see that Benjamin returned safely. So, he here took the leadership role in speaking to Joseph. He and the other brothers all returned to Joseph's house and fell before him to the ground.

Joseph asked what they had done, asking them if they did not realize he had the power of divination. See notes on v5. Clearly, this was an attempt to "pull the wool over their eyes." In the first place, he had surely not divined properly when he had accused them of being spies. Why had his "divination" not told him about the condition of their father — why had he found it necessary to ask them?

It seems to me that this was just part of the testing in which he was giving them an excuse as to how he knew about the cup. Of course, he really knew because he had instructed the steward to put the cup there. So, there was no divination at all. Joseph knew this, so he must have been pretending about the "divination" claim to see if they had really repented.

In any case, Judah spoke for the group and confessed that they had been caught and had no excuse. Note that Judah accepted the guilt of Benjamin as being guilt for the whole group. He simply threw them on the mercy of the governor. He said that they all were at his mercy and would serve as slaves along with the one in whose possession the cup was found. He expressly refused the suggestion the steward had made earlier that only Benjamin be held as slave. Instead, they all offered to serve as slaves.

Perhaps Judah offered this with the thought that, if they all served, they might be released sooner (since 11 men would do the same amount of service much sooner than one alone). Or perhaps he thought there was no point in going home if they did not bring Benjamin. Or perhaps it was just an act of union with Benjamin, showing the governor how much they cared for him, and perhaps by this show of caring they might find mercy. Or perhaps he just did not know what else to do about the situation. He had offered to Jacob that he would stand responsible for Benjamin's safe return, so this was all he could think to do.

In one last trial of the brothers, Joseph expressly rejected this group punishment and insisted that only the one who had taken the cup would be punished. The rest could go home freely. Again, this gave them the perfect opportunity to mistreat Benjamin as they had Joseph. One wonders if he made the comment that they could go in peace to their father as a reminder of how the father would view them if they returned without Benjamin.

#### ***44:18-23 - Judah pleads on Benjamin's behalf***

Judah then offered an eloquent plea on Benjamin's behalf. He began by pleading for the governor's patience, since he was like Pharaoh in power. He reminded the governor that he had asked them about their father and young son, and they had told him that the father loved the young son because his brother was dead and his mother had no other children.

Yet, the governor had insisted that they bring the son down (Judah conveniently mentions nothing about the charge of spying). They had told the governor that the younger brother could not leave his father lest the father die. But the governor had insisted that they could not see his face again without the younger brother.

Judah's point, of course, is that the young brother, accused of thievery, would not even had come in the first place had it not been for the governor's insistence. They had never wanted to bring him.

#### ***44:24-31 - Judah said that their father would die if Benjamin did not return with them***

Judah then related how Jacob had wanted them to go back to Egypt to buy food without taking Benjamin. But the brothers had insisted they could not go without Benjamin because the governor had insisted they bring him.

Their father had then reminded them that the other son of his wife had been torn to pieces, and if this son were to suffer calamity and not return to the father, he would surely die for sorrow. Hence, the brothers would become the cause of their own father's death.

This was an overt emotional appeal for mercy on the grounds of the harm that would come to their elderly father if Benjamin was not allowed to go back. Judah is trying to get the governor to see how important it was for Benjamin to return to the father.

#### ***44:32-34 - Judah offered to stay as a slave in Benjamin's place***

Further, Judah stated that he had become surety for Benjamin to his father, saying he would be responsible and bear the blame forever if Benjamin did not return.

So, Judah offered to stay as a slave in Benjamin's place and allow Benjamin to go home with the other brothers to their father. So, he was offering to be a substitute. He admitted someone needed to be punished, but let it be a substitute for the one who had been caught. He was willing to be the one to pay the penalty.

This was truly a magnanimous offer on Judah's part. How many people would offer to stand as slaves in place of someone else? Yet Judah offered, first because he had offered to stand surety for Benjamin, and second because he could not bear to return and see the harm that would come to his father. So, if Judah could not go back and

see his father's grief, he might as well stay a slave in Egypt. And if he stayed, they why not let the younger son return?

Note the irony in the situation and how much Judah had changed since the enslavement of Joseph. In Joseph's case, it had been Judah who had suggested that Joseph be sold as a slave. Now that same brother – yet very much a changed brother – was offering to become a slave himself in order to save Benjamin from slavery.

Consider how much this event should help us appreciate Jesus' death on the cross in our place. Judah here demonstrates the concept of a sacrifice. He would pay the penalty for Benjamin's sin - even though he himself had committed no crime - so that the one who was guilty could avoid paying the penalty of his crime. That is the essence of what Jesus did on the cross.

Truly, Judah proved beyond all question that he and his brothers no longer hated the favored young brother. They no longer even attempted deceit, nor did they try to avoid the consequences of their action, as they had done in Joseph's case. Judah freely admitted the wrong and was willing even to stand the punishment in place of the one who was the favored son.

Joseph had accomplished his goal in putting the brothers to the test and teaching them proper attitudes.



# Genesis 45

## Joseph's Reconciliation with His Brothers (cont.)

### ***45:1-3 - Joseph revealed himself to his brothers***

Judah's speech was the final proof to Joseph that his brothers had truly repented. He no longer had any questions about their intentions toward Benjamin. Whereas they had willingly sold Joseph as a slave into Egypt, they had defended Benjamin. Judah had even offered to be a slave instead of Benjamin. They had showed sincere concern for Benjamin and deep sorrow for the harm that might come to their father if Benjamin was harmed.

Joseph determined the time had come to tell his brothers who he really was. He emotionally commanded all his servants to leave. Doubtless, the servants had little or no idea what had happened. Yet they knew their duty was to obey Joseph, so they left the room. When the servants had left, Joseph's emotions were so great that he wept loudly enough that the servants and other household members could still hear him.

He then told his brothers plainly that he was Joseph. He asked them again whether his father was still living. Of course, they had already told him their father was living, but that was when he inquired as the governor of the land. Now he was inquiring for personal information as a son speaking of his own true father. He did not doubt their word, but just wanted to talk about the one whom he had especially missed all these years. Yes, he loved his brothers, especially Benjamin. But his mother was dead, and the one he really missed was his father, with whom he had been so close before he left Egypt. He wanted to talk to them more about his father and how he was. The brothers, however, were so astonished they were troubled and could not even speak!

What an amazing turn of events! Joseph had now been in Egypt 22 years. He was 39 years old (see on v6). During that time he had suffered great grief and hardship. Then he had been highly exalted, yet even so he missed his family and had no contact with any of his true kin. Now to have met his brothers, and to be able to reveal to them who he really was, had to be an incredibly emotional time.

But for the brothers, this was an even stranger turn of events. Joseph had known for some time who they were, and perhaps had anticipated the possibility of their coming even before they arrived. But they had no expectation at all of seeing Joseph; or if by chance they saw him, they would have expected him to be a slave. That the very

governor of the land would claim to be their long-lost brother, would surely shock them incredibly.

What's more, the implications that must immediately have occurred to them were more than a little unsettling. This brother, whom they had sold as a slave, was now the governor and therefore capable of bringing upon them any form of vengeance he chose. They were at his mercy. What kind of reception would they receive? Surely they had no idea whatever how to act in response to such a shocking turn of events.

***45:4-8 - Joseph assured his brothers that all had worked for good according to God's will***

Joseph realized how disconcerting this must all have been for his brothers, so he told them to come nearer. He had calmed down from his initial emotional outburst, so if they came nearer, they could talk more calmly. He could perhaps explain so they could understand more easily.

He told them again that he was in fact their brother Joseph. He reminded them that they had sold them as a slave in to Egypt. Now they had never mentioned this but had always said simply that the other brother "was not." This helped identify to them that he really was Joseph, since he knew this.

However, he also discussed what he knew must be on their minds. They were carrying a great burden of guilt for how they had treated him, and they no doubt wondered what vengeance he might now take. He assured them that they need not be angry or grieved over what they had done, for God had sent him to Egypt to preserve life. He then told them that, although the famine had lasted two years, there were to be five more years in which there would be no harvests nor even planting. Why not even planting? Perhaps this was all caused by drought or some other weather condition such that they would be afraid even to waste seed by planting it.

In any case, he knew there was great danger to the family. If he had not come to Egypt and prepared a place there for them during the years of plenty, no one would have survived. But especially, none of their family would have survived. Of course, had they not survived, then God's promises to Abraham would not have come true. So, the result of all this would be a great deliverance for their posterity. It was all a great step in God's fulfillment of His eternal plan for man's salvation through Abraham's seed.

Clearly, during the time he had been ruling as governor, Joseph had figured all this out. Doubtless, it had all made sense to him especially since he had seen his brothers. Surely he had been confused for a long time as to why he was being so mistreated. But the revelation of Pharaoh's dream, Joseph's exaltation as governor, and now the appearance of his brothers had made all this clear to Joseph.

So, Joseph concluded that, really it had not been them that sent him to Egypt so much as God had sent him. This is a “not ... but” expression (see other examples in John 6:27; 12:44; 1 Cor. 1:17; 15:10; 1 Peter 3:3,4; Mark 9:37; Matt. 10:20; Acts 5:4; 1 Thess. 4:8; Genesis 45:8). The point was not a denial that the brothers had sent him there, for they surely had. But Joseph was emphasizing a greater purpose. God intended to use it for the salvation of them all.

God had made Joseph as a father to Pharaoh — a protector and provider for him. He was lord of Pharaoh’s house and ruler of all Egypt. Joseph Free (pp 78,79) cites evidence from Egyptian monuments that these exact titles were used for rulers in ancient Egypt.

Here is an incredible statement of Divine Providence, though the expression is not used. As in the story of Esther, God was working for the preservation and care of His people. Yet, He was working behind the scenes, often with no miracles involved or at least by events that would appear to be completely according to natural law. As the events unfolded, it might seem to God’s people that great suffering was occurring for their harm. Yet the end result was a great deliverance from problems. Note, for example, Jacob’s statement in 42:36, “All these things are against me.” Yet unknown to him, all these things were working for his good! This is a major evidence of God’s providence. In particular, note how God’s providence is able to take events that men intend to result in harm, but God uses them instead for the good of His people. The greatest such example is, of course, the crucifixion of Jesus.

Here also is an excellent example of forgiveness. Joseph’s brothers had indeed done him a great wrong. He had put them to the test so see if they had repented and to encourage them to change. But meanwhile he had come to see that, whereas he had the power to do them great harm, God willed that he instead do them a great good. He was returning good for evil, instead of taking vengeance. Such a forgiving spirit, by one who had been so deeply wronged, is a great example to us. However, it also shows that we do have the right to expect repentance of those who have wronged us, before we forgive. It also shows that sin must be repented of, no matter how long ago it was committed.

### ***45:9-11 - Joseph sent his brothers to bring their family to Egypt***

Joseph then revealed his plans for the family. He told the brothers to go and get their father (and of course all the family). They should tell him that his son Joseph was still alive and was indeed ruler of all Egypt. So, he was to bring all the family and live in Egypt.

Joseph had even planned the specific place where they would live. It was called Goshen in northeast Egypt. This was a place large enough to hold them all, yet having food for all their flocks and herds. This is interesting, since the land was producing no food. One wonders wheth-

er there was still pasture for animals, or whether Joseph could provide grain even for their animals. Some have reported that this is still an area with some of the best pastureland in Egypt. In any case, Joseph promised to provide for them all, so they would not come to poverty in the remaining five years of famine.

This also shows how far Joseph had gone in understanding the situation. He had not only come to understand that God had sent him to Egypt for a purpose, but he had planned out even where his family would live that would meet their needs.

Coffman calls attention to Joseph's use of the expression "Thus says your son Joseph." This is exactly the form later used by prophets to reveal their messages from God. This example shows the significance of the expression. It means one person sends a message by means of a messenger, but the messenger is not the originator of the message. He simply carries a message given him to carry on behalf of someone else. The Scriptures are a message from God to man.

#### ***45:12-15 - Joseph then embraced and kissed his brothers***

He then reassured them that all this was really true. They were seeing him with their own eyes, and Benjamin, who was his full brother, should recognize that he truly was their brother speaking to them with his own mouth. So again he urged them to agree to go tell Jacob all that they had seen with their eyes, and then hurry to bring him down to Egypt.

Imagine the great shock all this was to the brothers. One moment they were guilty over their brother, not knowing what had become of him but thinking he was likely even dead. Worse yet, the governor had accused one of them of stealing. They doubtless feared for their lives. Then Judah had offered to stay as a slave in place of Benjamin. The result was not that one of them would stay a slave in Egypt. Nor was it even complete forgiveness of that wrong so they could return home in peace. The result was the discovery of their long-lost brother, complete reconciliation over the sin they had committed years before, and an offer by the king that they could come and live at his expense! Imagine how all this affected them, especially Benjamin who was Joseph's full brother and had been the one accused of stealing the cup!

He then embraced Benjamin and wept some more, and Benjamin in turn wept. Finally, he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Then, as would be expected, they all talked and discussed the amazing events of the past 22 years. Doubtless, he told them much of what had happened to him, and they told him more of their own lives and circumstances. Surely there would be much to talk about whenever brothers have been apart for 22 years. But especially would this be so when such major, incredible events had happened.

### ***45:16-20 - Pharaoh ratified Joseph's decision for his family to come to Egypt***

The report of these events was taken to the Pharaoh himself, so he heard that Joseph's brothers had come. One wonders how much Joseph had told any of the Egyptians about his background. In any case, Pharaoh was truly glad for Joseph, as were all the servants. They must have greatly respected Joseph and appreciated how he had saved their lives.

Pharaoh was glad to agree with Joseph's plans for his family. He told them to load their animals and go to Canaan and bring their households back to Egypt. There he would agree for them to have the fat of the land — i.e., the richest places to live in. They should even take carts with them to bring their families back. They should not worry about bringing back their goods, for they would be richly provided for by the Egyptians.

Again, none of this would ever had been possible had it not been for the good Joseph had done for Pharaoh and all Egypt. They were glad to provide for his family as an expression of their gratitude and love for Joseph.

When we reach the good part of the story, we are amazed by all the provision God had made for His people. While they were suffering hardship, it was hard to imagine all could work out so well. But when we see God's goodness, our hearts are amazed. Let us remember the lesson while we are suffering.

### ***45:21-24 - So Joseph sent his brothers back to Canaan***

Then Joseph's brothers believed what had happened and agreed to take action. Joseph gave them the carts as Pharaoh had commanded, and he gave them provisions for the journey. This included ten donkeys loaded with goods from Egypt and ten female donkeys with grain, and food for Jacob and the family on the journey.

He also gave them gifts. He gave each of them changes of clothing, but he gave five changes to Benjamin along with 300 pieces of silver. Perhaps these were just his expressions of his love. But perhaps they also served to reassure them that all this was really true. Perhaps he realized that Jacob would have trouble believing all this without some visible proofs.

Perhaps Joseph even thought the brothers might themselves come to doubt, disbelieve, or even quarrel about it after they were gone. He warned them not to become troubled along the way. This could mean troubled about his intentions toward them — maybe they would fear he was going to take vengeance on them all when he got them in Egypt. Or they might fear that Joseph intended to tell Jacob and bring punishment on them all. Or maybe they would start blaming one another for the terrible things they had done and would be afraid to tell Jacob. In

any case, he reassured them, by words and by gifts, that they did need to proceed and bring Jacob to Egypt.

***45:25-28 - The brothers bring the good news to their father Jacob***

The brothers did go to Canaan and told all this to their father. At first, Jacob indeed did not believe them. Of course, this would be an almost unbelievable story. His heart stood still. Doubtless, this was a shock physically as well as emotionally.

But they reassured him of what had happened, and they showed him the carts and goods Joseph had sent. This served (as described above) to reassure him. He then revived in spirit, believed them, and determined that Joseph was in fact alive and he would get to see him before he died.

What a joyful climax to this story as Jacob was the last to know what Joseph had first understood, then the brothers realized it. Now finally Jacob was coming to understand the truth about his favored son. He was not dead at all. Not only was he alive, but he was truly the ruler of all Egypt. What an incredible story! Better than fiction, it is the truth of God's dealings for the good of His people.

# Genesis 46

## Chap. 46 - Jacob's Family Moved to Egypt

### ***46:1-4 - God spoke to Israel about the journey to Egypt***

Jacob had been convinced that Joseph was alive and ruled in Egypt. He and his whole family then proceeded to move to Egypt where Joseph could provide for them through the famine. The last we had record, Jacob had been in Hebron (37:14); but that had been many years earlier when Joseph was just 17. Where Jacob's family was at this time, we have no idea. As they traveled, however, they stopped at Beersheba where Jacob could offer sacrifice to God.

Beersheba was in the far southern region of Canaan (see *map*). Isaac had spent much time there. There he had built an altar to God, dug a well, and God had appeared to him to repeat the promise given to Abraham (26:23-25). Isaac had been living there when Jacob left to go to Rebekah's brother Laban to find a wife (28:10).

While Jacob stopped here, God appeared to him, even as He had appeared to Isaac (as described above). This appearance was a vision in the night. God promised Jacob that he should not fear to go to Egypt, for God would be with him there. Presumably, Jacob needed this reassurance because he was leaving the land God had promised to give his descendants.

God promised He would make Jacob into a great nation in Egypt. This repeated a promise given to Abraham. Jacob's journey to Egypt did not mean that the promises were being set aside. In fact God here said specifically where this promise would begin to be fulfilled.

He said further that Joseph would put his hand on Jacob's eyes. He would not only be in Joseph's presence, but Joseph would touch him. Various commentators claim this refers to the final act of closing the eyes of one who has died. If so, then Jacob would die in the very presence of his son Joseph, which is what occurred.

But that would not be the end of God's dealings with Jacob. God promised to bring Jacob out of Egypt again. This did not refer to Jacob personally, at least not in his lifetime, for he died in Egypt. His body was, however, taken back to Canaan for burial. But the main point is that his family would not stay in Egypt. They would indeed inherit the land of Canaan as God has promised.

### ***46:5-7 - Jacob and his family traveled to Egypt***

Jacob and his sons then took their livestock and goods and carried them into Egypt. Pharaoh had said that they need not bring the goods (45:20), but of course people would have many personal possessions

that they would not want to leave behind. They had acquired many possessions in Canaan, for Jacob was a wealthy man. Much of this was taken with him to Egypt, especially his livestock.

But above all, with Jacob went the family. This included his sons and daughters (note the plural) and his children's sons and daughters. All his descendants went with him.

***46:8-27 - These verses name specifically the people who went with Jacob into Egypt***

All Jacob's sons are named, according to their mothers. Then the sons of the sons are named. Two daughters are included: Jacob's daughter Dinah (v15) and Serah (v17), a daughter of Asher. Rachel is apparently not counted because she had died, and Zilpah and Bilhah appear also to be not counted. Further, the wives of Jacob's sons are not counted (v26), though surely they went into Egypt. Presumably, these are not counted because they were not descendants of Jacob.

V26 said there were 66 people who went with Jacob into Egypt and who came out of his loins. Then a total of 70 is said to have gone (v27).

If Leah is counted in the 33 associated with her (v15), then she is counted in the 70 (v27), but not in the 66 (since she did not come from Jacob's loins — v26), and Jacob is not counted in the 70 or the 66. Perhaps Zilpah and Bilhah are not counted because they were dead, like Rachel.

On the other hand, if Leah is not counted in the 70, then Jacob himself must be counted with Leah's descendants (cf. vv 15,8). In this case, none of the wives are counted, neither Jacob's wives nor his sons' wives, because they are not Jacob's descendants. The number 33 for Leah's sons and daughter (v15) then must include Jacob (see v8). Then the number 70 (v27) includes Jacob, but the 66 in v26 excludes Joseph and his sons (who were in Egypt) and excludes Jacob (because he did not come out of his loins).

But cf. Acts 7:14 which says 75 souls went into Egypt, but only that they were "relatives," not specifically that they were descendants of Jacob. McGarvey on Acts and Morris on Genesis suggest that this number must include some of the wives. One wonders why all the men were living but so few wives. Morris believes that, of the 70 listed in Genesis, not all had been born yet, but they are counted because they were in their father's loins and would become the stock from which the nation grew. If so, perhaps all the wives are counted, but the sons unborn are not counted in Acts 7. Or perhaps Joseph and sons are not counted in Acts and maybe even Jacob is not counted, but the rest are wives. In any case, there is not necessarily a contradiction, but the exact way to harmonize the accounts is difficult to determine. (The Waldrons offer a different possibility.)



[Note: Exodus 1:5 says 70 souls came out of his loins. See Deut. 10:22.]

It is amazing how few daughters ran in this family! Presumably, this was by God's intent since men inherited property and became the heads of the families. But note that v7 says Jacob and his sons did have daughters, so apparently they were simply not counted, except for one daughter and one granddaughter. Why those are counted, we are not told.

### ***46:28-30 - Jacob and Joseph meet***

Judah, who seems to have become somewhat of a leader, went ahead of the group to prepare and point out the way to Goshen. Previously the brothers had met Joseph elsewhere. Clearly, Goshen was somewhat apart from other Egyptians, for Joseph had planned it so.

Joseph heard that his family had arrived, so he took his chariot and traveled to Goshen to meet his father. They met and embraced and wept for quite some time. Israel then said he was ready to die, having seen Joseph alive again.

Surely this would be an amazingly emotional time. Doubtless, it had been at least 22 years since Jacob had seen Joseph. In all this time Jacob had thought his favorite son was dead. Now he had learned that his son was not only alive but actually ruled all of Egypt; and by his power, Jacob's family would be protected through the famine. What a reunion that would be!

One wonders at exactly what point Jacob learned that Joseph's brothers had sold him as a slave into Egypt. 50:16,17 shows that he definitely did learn the truth at some point. With the event being so far in the past, and with the joy of finding Joseph again, Jacob could have borne this knowledge better at this time than any time earlier. However, it surely would have placed a serious source of conflict between Jacob and the other sons.

### ***46:31-34 - Joseph used his family's occupation as reason to separate them***

Plans had already been made for Jacob's people to live in Goshen. However, Joseph here gave instructions to his family so they would know what to say that would confirm this decision in Pharaoh's mind. Joseph said he would go tell Pharaoh that his family had come and that they were shepherds by occupation. They kept flocks and herds. When Pharaoh met Joseph's family and asked them their occupation, they were to confirm what Joseph had told Pharaoh.

This, of course, was the truth. Abraham and Jacob had kept large flocks and herds. And Jacob had come returned from Laban very wealthy with animals. But the point was that shepherds were abominations to the Egyptians. Nevertheless, Joseph did not want his family to hesitate to openly admit their occupation to Pharaoh. If they openly

admitted they were shepherds, Pharaoh would be even more pleased with the decision for Joseph's family to live in Goshen. This would separate them from the Egyptians, while yet providing everything they needed.

Physical separation from Egyptians would result in many advantages. One would be lack of conflict. Egyptians hated shepherds and hated Hebrews. Conflict would surely result if Jacob's family mixed and kept their flocks among the Egyptians. Further, the Israelites would need good grazing land, which Goshen provided. Perhaps the separation would be important spiritually more than any other way, so that the Israelites would not accept the Egyptian idolatry.

In any case, this was the plan, and we will see that it worked well.

# Genesis 47

## 47:1-12 - Jacob's Family Is Presented to Pharaoh

### ***47:1-4 - Joseph presented five of his brothers to Pharaoh***

Since Joseph's family had arrived in Egypt, and since Pharaoh had taken such an interest in them, Joseph determined to bring his father and five of his brothers to meet Pharaoh. He especially wanted to finalize the decision about where his family would live. Pharaoh had told Joseph that he had authority over all the land, and he had promised that his family could have the good of the land (45:18). Joseph intended for them to live in Goshen (45:10). Nevertheless, Joseph wanted a definite confirmation from the Pharaoh regarding this decision.

This was doubtless another example of Joseph's wisdom. He could have made the decision himself, yet he knew his decisions were subject to Pharaoh's alteration. By obtaining Pharaoh's official ratification, Joseph showed respect for the ruler. Further, he also made the decision official, not only for the present, but for the future as well. He knew they would be in the land at least till the famine was over, but he knew not how much longer they might remain. The best arrangement was to have a definite agreement with Pharaoh that his people could live in Goshen.

So, Joseph presented his brothers to Pharaoh. He first informed him that his family had come into Goshen and that they had come with their flocks and herds. This laid the groundwork for Pharaoh to understand their occupation. Up to this point there is no indication that Pharaoh was aware of Joseph's family's occupation, but Joseph knew that the Egyptians hated shepherds (46:34).

As Joseph had expected, Pharaoh asked his brothers about their occupation, and as he had instructed, the brothers said they were shepherds. They explained the lack of food in Canaan and their need for good pasture for their flocks. They then respectfully requested to be able to live in Goshen.

### ***47:5,6 - Pharaoh agreed for Joseph's family to live in Goshen***

As Joseph had hoped, Pharaoh was receptive to his family staying in Goshen. He told Joseph that, since his family had come, they could stay wherever Joseph wanted. In particular, he ratified the decision for them to stay in Goshen.

Then he went even further and asked Joseph to choose some of them who were especially competent as herdsmen to care for Pharaoh's own livestock. Though the Egyptians hated shepherds, they evidently

enjoyed the benefits of having livestock. They did not mind, apparently, eating the meat or using other products that came from the animals. They just did not want to have to take care of animals themselves!

So, the presence of Joseph's brothers gave Pharaoh a good opportunity to have his flocks cared for without having to assign Egyptians to do the hated task. This was an outcome even better than Joseph had expressed hope for. Not only could his family stay in Goshen, but they could gain the Pharaoh's favor and justify beyond any possible question their presence in Goshen. Surely no one could object to their living there if they cared for the king's own herds!

### ***47:7-10 - Jacob met and blessed Pharaoh***

After the brothers had met Pharaoh, then Joseph brought in his father Jacob. Jacob pronounced a blessing on Pharaoh, then Pharaoh asked Jacob how old he was.

Jacob answered that he had lived 130 years, but this was less than the ages his fathers had attained. Jacob lived yet another 17 years before he died at age 147 (v28). But this was even so a younger age than Abraham (175 — Gen. 25:7) and Isaac (180 — Gen. 35:28). Since Jacob lived yet another 17 years, it is not clear how he knew he would not live as long as his ancestors had. Perhaps he just realized that he was more feeble at his age than his father and grandfather had been at that age.

He also said that the days of his life had been "evil." This does not necessarily mean sinful but troubled and difficult, full of strife and hardship. Surely, his life had been difficult in many ways. It was a time of "pilgrimage," for he lived as a foreigner in Canaan, not having received possession of much of it though it had all been promised to his descendants. Sin and trouble had surrounded him and his family. He had fled his father's house at an early age and lived many years with his uncle, who continually took unfair advantage of him. His family life had been marred by jealousy among the wives. His sons had committed many sins. Then he had lost his favorite son for over twenty years. Indeed, such problems would make life difficult.

Observe that Jacob blessed Pharaoh, rather than the other way around. Hebrews 7:7 says the lesser is blessed by the greater. One might have expected Pharaoh to bless Jacob, but there seems to be no doubt that Jacob was recognized as the one who should bless Pharaoh.

Clearly, Jacob was not greater in terms of earthly authority, for Pharaoh ruled many more people than did Jacob. However, Jacob was clearly the older of the two, as shown also by the fact Pharaoh asked about his age. So, Jacob's age gained him respect. Probably there was also respect for his spiritual leadership and his relationship to God. Pharaoh clearly recognized the spiritual training of Joseph, and doubtless realized it came through his family, especially his father. There may be other ways Jacob was recognized as the greater as well.

It is not stated exactly what blessing Jacob pronounced on Pharaoh, but it likely would have included such things as gratitude to him for his care of Joseph, having taken him from prison to make him governor. Also, there would be gratitude to Pharaoh for the fact he had agreed for Joseph's family to live in Egypt. In these ways, and doubtless other ways, Pharaoh deserved a blessing from Jacob.

Coffman points out that, indeed Pharaoh and Egypt were blessed so long as they treated Jacob's family well. They had plenty of food, where other people suffered. And the nation prospered under Joseph's leadership. But when another king arose who mistreated the Israelites, problems of all kinds resulted, included the ten plagues, the death of the firstborn sons, and the destruction of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea.

### ***47:11,12 - So Joseph placed his family in Goshen to live***

With the approval of Pharaoh, Joseph confidently located his family in Goshen, the best area of Egypt (i.e., the best grass and other provisions for the flocks). History concludes this area was in the northern part of Egypt, probably north and east. This likely included some of the delta region of the Nile, known for rich grass and water. This would meet the needs of the flocks and herds.

This area is here called Rameses, the same name as one of the cities the Israelites later built when they became enslaved (Exodus 1:11). Presumably, that city was later built in the area where the Israelites would then be living.

Joseph there provided for his family all that they needed, according to the number of people in each family. This is exactly the reason God had brought them to the land of Egypt.

### **47:13-26 - Joseph Sold Food to the People**

#### ***47:13,14 - The people of Egypt gave money for grain***

As the famine continued, there was no grain grown in Egypt, therefore there was no bread. This does not say nothing at all grew that was edible. We have seen that pastures grew to feed the animals. Doubtless, other things grew, but not enough grain to feed the people. They languished (fainted — ASV) due to lack of food.

Joseph then charged the people for food, distributing grain according to a standard of payment. The money went to Pharaoh, presumably to support the government. This does not say Joseph was selfish or became wealthy. The money went to Pharaoh, not to Joseph.

One may wonder about the fairness of charging people for grain that had earlier been taken from the people. However, it must be remembered that every government needs income to do its work, therefore every government taxes the people. The people had been taxed during the years of plenty, but now they had no income due to the fam-

ine. How could the government obtain taxes from people with no income? They sold the grain as a form of income. This seems to be instead of taxes.

The alternative would have been a system of mass welfare. It does not serve the well-being of people to give them necessities of life on a mass scale year after year. They become lazy and begin to expect others to provide for them. They lose their self-respect and their work ethic. By requiring payment, Joseph made clear that this was not a gift, but people were still expected to do what they could for what they received. They had money as a result of the years of prosperity. It is a fundamental principle that people who are able ought to pay for what they get rather than be supported by others year after year.

What is more, some means was needed to control the distribution of food. If no payment was required, how would the government control the people's demand for food? Systems of rationing always result in black markets and crime. In time of famine, families would have tried to horde food. By requiring payment, Joseph could control the people's demand for food — they would not ask for more than they needed because they would have to pay for all they took. The result would restrain the outflow of food, assuring that it would last through the years of famine.

What may seem cruel actually was a means to provide for the people's needs.

#### ***47:15-17 - The people then gave their livestock for food***

Finally, the people had paid all their money for food. They went to Joseph and asked for food, yet admitting that the money had failed. Joseph then required that they give their flocks for food. Livestock in those days were investments, therefore a form of wealth. Joseph continued to demand that they pay what they were able to pay. This incidentally confirms that those ancient societies did have forms of money besides their flocks and physical possessions.

Further, the people had no grain so how could they feed the animals? By taking them from the people, Joseph insured the continued care of the livestock, so there would still be animals in Egypt when the famine was over.

So the people brought in their livestock of all kinds: horses, cattle, donkeys, sheep, etc. Again note that the Egyptians hated herdsmen, but did not object to owning herds and expecting people to care for them.

#### ***47:18-20 - Then the people gave themselves and their land for food***

At the end of that year, the people ran out of animals, as they had earlier run out of money. They suggested to Joseph that, since they had neither money nor livestock, they had nothing to give for the food but

themselves and their land. The land was of no value at the time since it could not grow crops. So all they had was their own strength. They offered to become servants of Pharaoh if Joseph would only give them food.

Note that this was their suggestion, not Joseph's. In any case, becoming a servant in exchange for food is perfectly legitimate and always has been. This does not justify the cruel capture of people against their will, forcing them to become slaves, such as characterized slave trade in our own country and others. However, God has always allowed people to trade their service for the necessities of life, even if it required them to become slaves. He has, however, required slave owners to treat their slaves well. Joseph doubtless was a model master.

Again, people should do what they can in exchange for food (2 Thess. 3:10). It would have been unreasonable for able-bodied people to demand to receive food, yet refuse to work for it. These people offered to work for their food.

Again, the alternative would be a welfare society. Our modern society exalts welfarism and abominates slavery. Slavery can be terribly abused (as can anything else), but Joseph clearly viewed it as superior to welfarism. So long as people were able to work, they should work, not expect handouts.

V20 seems to indicate that first Joseph took the people's land in exchange for food. Then he proceeded to make the people servants of Pharaoh. Note also that a compassionate master, such as Joseph would have been, could provide for servants what they could never provide for themselves. In such a case, service was preferable to the alternatives. The people here evidently considered this an act of compassion toward them, as it surely was.

### ***47:21,22 - Joseph then moved the people into the cities***

We are not told exactly why he did this. Perhaps one reason was so the people could be closer to the food (which was stored in the cities) and he could distribute it more easily. Perhaps another reason was that the land no longer belonged to the people, so he moved them off it to a central location, then divided up the people to work the land in a more organized manner.

The priests, however, were exceptions. Apparently, they were protected by Pharaoh (note that this was stated to be Pharaoh's rule, not Joseph's). Pharaoh gave them food, so they did not have to sell their lands. Nor, by implication, did they become servants.

### ***47:23-26 - Afterward, the people paid the government a tax of one fifth of their produce***

Joseph then told the people that they and their land belonged to Pharaoh. However, apparently the end of the famine was drawing near. Since Joseph was the only one who had seed, he gave seed to the

people and told them to sow it. Then at the harvest time, the people could keep  $\frac{4}{5}$  of the crop and give  $\frac{1}{5}$  to Pharaoh. This then became the law, that from then on  $\frac{1}{5}$  of the people's produce went to Pharaoh, the priests being the exception.

Note the reaction of the people: they were grateful because Joseph had saved their lives. They were willing to work and be Pharaoh's servants.

Modern Americans would view this arrangement as being objectionable, because the people were made servants. But the fact is that the terms were far better than anything we have today.

Assuming this was the only tax the people paid to the government, their total tax bill was 20% of their income. We today pay a sliding scale in which 10% is a minimum but goes much higher. But that is just federal income tax. Then we have social security at 15% (we pay half, but the employer pays the other half and passes the cost on in the cost of their product). Then there are state taxes of all kinds: income tax, sales tax, and property tax, which can easily add up to 10-15% more. And this doesn't count all the many taxes on businesses, which taxes are passed on to the people whenever we buy a product. In any case, the average American pays far more than 20% of his income in taxes.

We may not be considered servants of the government, and our property may be considered our own, but as long as the ruler was benevolent like Joseph, the Egyptian people were not oppressed at all. And remember that this followed a terrible famine. All people would expect to suffer after such a famine. They would be grateful just to be alive, and that is exactly the attitude of these people.

### ***47:27,28 - Jacob lived seventeen years in Goshen***

Meanwhile, Israel was dwelling in the land of Goshen. There they grew and multiplied and had possessions. This seems to contrast to the Egyptians who became slaves with no property or money. Joseph's family was provided for by Joseph, was working for Pharaoh, and received the benefit of their flocks as income. If this is correct, then they were probably blessed to be separated from other Egyptians, because the Egyptians could easily have come to resent them.

It is interesting that "Israel" here refers, not to Jacob himself, but to the people descended from him. "They" (plural) had possessions and multiplied, etc. This may be the first time that "Israel" is used to refer to the people, not just the patriarch.

The people are said to have multiplied exceedingly. This, of course, is what God had said would happen to them in Egypt. We are not told specifics, but in any case the numbers were growing rapidly.

Then we are told regarding Jacob himself that he lived 17 years in Egypt. He had come when he was 130 (47:9).



***47:29-31 - Jacob urged Joseph to bury him in Canaan, not in Egypt***

As Jacob aged, it became clear that the time of death was drawing near. He called Joseph and required a solemn oath of him, that he would take his body to be buried back in Canaan. He would not be buried in Egypt but in the burial place used by his fathers.

Joseph promised he would abide by his father's wish. Jacob required an oath, so Joseph gave it. Israel then bowed himself, presumably giving thanks to God for this promise from Joseph.

Placing the hand under the thigh was apparently a sign of assurance of the oath, making it a very serious commitment, not to be disregarded. See also Gen. 24:2.

The burial place of the fathers refers to the cave of Machpelah, which Abraham had purchased to bury Sarah in. See on 23:17-20; 49:29-32.

# Genesis 48

## Chap. 48 - Jacob Adopts and Blesses Joseph's Sons

### *48:1,2 - Joseph visited Jacob before his death*

Jacob had settled in Egypt with his family and had received Joseph's promise to take his body back to Canaan after his death. Now the time had come that he was sick and about to die. This was told to Joseph, so he brought his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim for Jacob to bless before his death. Note that they are listed as Manasseh and Ephraim, Manasseh being the firstborn (see 41:50-52; 46:20). But we will see that Jacob, by God's guidance, places Ephraim before Manasseh in prominence.

Jacob was told that Joseph was coming to see him, so he took strength and sat up in bed.

### *48:3-5 - Jacob stated his intent to adopt Joseph's sons*

Jacob reminded Joseph about the time that God had appeared to him at Luz in Canaan and there had blessed him. See Gen. 28:13-29 (35:6-12). Luz was then renamed Bethel by Jacob.

What was the significance of that event? That was the time when Jacob was on his way to Mesopotamia to find a wife from his mother's family. God appeared to him in a vision of angels going up and down on a ladder into heaven. Then God repeated to Jacob the promise that He had given to Abraham and to Isaac regarding their descendants.

Here Jacob reminded Joseph of that promise. It was a promise that his descendants would be a multitude of people and would inherit Canaan. Why bring this up here? Jacob was about to describe what role Joseph's descendants would have in the fulfillment of that promise.

Jacob then referred to Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Note that Jacob named them in reverse order from their ages, and this became the order in which they were generally thought of from then on.

He said that Joseph's two sons, born to him in Egypt, would be counted as Jacob's sons, just like Reuben and Simeon (Jacob's first two sons). The significance of this is of major importance, but may not be obvious on the surface.

Jacob was, in effect, legally adopting Ephraim and Manasseh. From this time on they would be treated just like Jacob's other sons. We would expect Joseph himself to inherit and be treated like one of the other sons. But by adopting **both** of Joseph's sons, Jacob was hereby giving Joseph's descendants a double portion among his sons. He was, in fact, bestowing the birthright on Joseph! Joseph would

have one portion more than each of his brothers (cf. vv 16,22; Josh 14:4). **Note 1 Chronicles 5:1!**

Jacob's purpose was later fulfilled in the history of the nation. Ephraim and Manasseh each became a tribe and each inherited territory in Canaan as a tribe. The end result was that two tribes came from the one son Joseph, so Joseph's descendants received twice as much as that of any other brother.

Note that, in effect, this made thirteen tribes to inherit in Canaan. However, though the Levites were treated as a tribe in some ways, they did not inherit a territory because they were the priestly tribe and received cities throughout Israel. But even though Levi did not inherit territory as a tribe, yet twelve tribes inherited territory because two tribes inherited through Joseph.

Reuben was actually the oldest son of Jacob, but he had lost the birthright by his immorality with Jacob's handmaid (see on 49:3,4; 1 Chron. 5:1). Simeon and Levi did not receive it because of their violence in the matter of Shechem (49:5-7). Judah received prominence, since the line of kings descended from David were of his tribe, so Jesus was born of that tribe. But the double portion (birthright) went to Joseph through his two sons.

What a great blessing and honor was here bestowed on Joseph and his sons! The reason for this decision is not stated. It does not seem to me to be likely that this was done simply because Joseph had always been Jacob's favorite. However, Joseph was the oldest son of the wife that Jacob had really always intended to be his first and true wife Rachel. The other wives had sons before her, but that was the result of deception, and had never been Jacob's intent. Even more important, it seems to me, this was a reward for Joseph's faithfulness compared to his brothers.

This also shows that God could bestow the birthright on the son whom He chose, not necessarily the firstborn son. It was given to Isaac over Ishmael. Jacob received it by trickery and deceit; but it was likely he would have received it anyway simply because it was God's will. Trickery and deceit were not needed for Jacob to receive the birthright. If it had been God's will (as it evidently was), he would have received it by God's intervention, even as did Joseph.

#### ***48:6,7 - Jacob then reminded Joseph of the death of Rachel***

Joseph's offspring would still be considered Joseph's descendants, but they would wear the name of the brothers (Ephraim and Manasseh) in their inheritance. That is, if Joseph were yet to have other sons, they would be numbered as parts of the tribes wearing the names of Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph would only have two tribes from him — a double portion but no more — no matter how many other sons he might have. (As far as we know, he had no more.)

Jacob then recalled the death of Rachel when he came out of Padan. She died and was buried in Ephrath, which is Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. I am not sure why Jacob brings this up unless his decision to give Joseph the birthright was at least partly because Jacob had always intended Joseph's mother to be his true wife. See on Gen. 35:9,16-20.

#### ***48:8-11 - Joseph then presented his sons to Jacob***

To this point Jacob had pronounced a blessing that applied to both Ephraim and Manasseh. The two boys together would inherit as tribes, so both were blessed in this regard. However, Jacob now paid specific attention to each son individually and made a distinction between them. He was about to show, of the two sons, which of them would have the preeminence or birthright.

He asked who the boys were. He was somewhat blind in his old age (v10), yet almost surely he knew who they were. This was mainly a way of addressing the boys and introducing the blessing he had for them individually.

Joseph stated that they were his sons, a blessing to him from God. Jacob said to bring them to him so he could bless them. He then embraced the boys and kissed them as a grandfather would the grandsons he loved.

He then rejoiced that he was so blessed to be with these boys. He had lost all hope of ever seeing Joseph again. Now he was privileged to see, not just Joseph, but even Joseph's two sons. Surely, this should bring great joy to any man under such conditions.

#### ***48:12-14 - Jacob placed his hands on the boys' heads to bless them***

Joseph then brought the boys from beside his knees to Jacob that they might receive the formal blessing, as he bowed before his father in respect. "Beside his knees" does not mean the boys were small – they were grown men by this time. It describes them moving from Joseph's sides to be presented before Jacob. Coffman says they may have been kneeling in respect (and so Jacob could place his hands on their heads).

Manasseh was the firstborn, so Joseph put him on his left side and Ephraim on his right side. That way, when they approached Jacob, Jacob would naturally place his right hand on Manasseh and his left on Ephraim. That would put Manasseh on Jacob's right hand, the right hand being the place of greatest honor, especially the position of the firstborn, throughout Scripture (Jesus is now on God's right hand, etc.).

However, when Jacob reached out his hands to place them on the boys' heads, he crossed his hands and put his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left on Manasseh's. This gave Ephraim the place of pre-

minence instead of Manasseh. The passage says Jacob did this knowingly or intentionally. The significance will be seen as the story proceeds.

#### ***48:15,16 - Jacob then pronounced a blessing on Joseph and on the boys***

He appealed to God, the God of his fathers Abraham and Isaac, who had cared for him all his life. He mentioned specifically the angel of God that had redeemed him from evil. God's angel had been involved in Jacob's life on several specific occasions. See Gen. 22:11-18; 28:13-15; 31:11. Which case is meant here is not clear. Perhaps he referred generally to God's protection and care to help him avoid harm.

He then called on the Angel to bless Ephraim and Manasseh. He called for God to place Jacob's name on them — i.e., they would be counted as his sons and inherit as tribes like his other sons did (see on v5 above). In fulfillment of the promise to Abraham and Isaac, they would grow into a great multitude of people.

This great blessing was pronouncing the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham to come true through these boys. What an awe-inspiring event!

#### ***48:17-19 - Joseph attempted to correct the placement of Jacob's hands***

Joseph saw that his father had placed his right hand on Ephraim and his left on Manasseh. He assumed this had been done unintentionally because Jacob was blind and aged and had made a mistake. He attempted to correct his father, explaining that Manasseh was the firstborn and the right hand (with the greater preeminence) should go to him. He even reached out to change his father's hands

Jacob, however, refused to change. He said, he knew who was the firstborn, and he knew Manasseh would be great and a great people. But the descendants of the younger brother would be greater than those of the older. His descendants would be a multitude of nations. Note again, as in many such blessings we have seen, the application became a prediction about the son's descendants, not primarily about the son himself.

Here then, just as Jacob had pronounced the birthright or double portion on Joseph, though he was not the firstborn son, so Jacob then reversed Joseph's sons and gave the birthright or preeminence to the younger son, not to the firstborn. This was done deliberately and clearly by God's intent.

Note again that God chose whomever He would have to receive the birthright or preeminence. It was not necessary for one to use deceit to gain preeminence. Likewise, God had chosen Jacob and would have given the preeminence to him by the course of events had he simply trusted God and waited for his will.

***48:20-22 - Jacob then pronounced his blessing on each of the sons of Joseph***

Jacob then spoke of Ephraim and Manasseh as they would become a sort of byword. Israel (both the man and the nation) would bless people saying, “May God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh.” This would be a way of pronouncing blessing on people like Jacob and God had pronounced a blessing on Ephraim and Manasseh. The passage again distinctly states that he gave Ephraim a higher blessing than he gave Manasseh.

He then reminded Joseph that, as he (Jacob) was about to die, he still wanted Joseph and all Jacob’s descendants to go back to the land of their fathers (Canaan). Though Jacob would die in Egypt, he had already made Joseph promise to take his body back to Canaan for burial (see chap 47). Now he urged Joseph to remember that they were all to go back. This was their destiny as promised to Abraham. They were to remember this promise, not forget it.

Specifically, in that inheritance, Joseph would have one portion above each of his brothers — he would have the double portion as the one who had the birthright (see on v5).

Jacob referred to the land he took from the Amorites with his sword and bow. The meaning here is not clear. In Gen. 34:28 his sons had used force against the inhabitants of Canaan, yet it does not appear that God approved that act. One wonders if Jacob is here using the past tense but referring to a future event. He (i.e., his descendants) would take the land from the Amorites (and other inhabitants) by force, not now, but at the time when Joseph would receive a double portion of land among the other tribes. (Cf. Josh. 24:32; John 4:5?).

Note how this chapter helps us understand the concepts of both the birth and the blessing.

# Genesis 49

## Chap. 49 - Jacob's Predictions Regarding His Sons

### *49:1,2 - Jacob called his sons together*

As Jacob neared death, he had pronounced a blessing on Joseph and his sons in chap. 48. Here he called all his sons to him and pronounced predictions and/or blessings regarding all of them.

What Jacob said often described certain characteristics of a son and connected them to the future of his descendants. This may indicate that the characteristics of the father became general characteristics of his offspring. It may simply show that something the father did would have consequences to the offspring. Or it may simply be something about the offspring that can be illustrated by some characteristic of the father. In other cases there seems to be nothing about the father that relates to the prediction, or at least nothing that we have been told about.

So, Israel (Jacob) called his sons together and urged them to listen to what he had to say to them. He said that his statements would be predictions regarding their future. Surely, the brothers would listen carefully, think seriously, and remember their father's words. These were, in effect, his dying words. They concerned the future and descendants of each son, and they were surely inspired of God.

Men often pronounced blessings on their children in Bible times (see Genesis 27). These expressed the father's hopes or anticipations for his offspring; but when the man was the inspired patriarch, his statements would be inspired of God.

In this case, these men would receive the effects and benefits of a great promise to their great-grandfather Abraham. These promises would lead to these men becoming a great nation and inheriting Canaan. They eventually became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. Surely, they had been told many times about these promises and took them quite seriously. So, Jacob's predictions here would have been important to these men.

The language used is highly poetic and therefore highly symbolic. It is sometimes not easy to know exactly what Jacob meant by some references. It helps to consider the fulfillment in history, but sometimes even then we are not sure of what he referred.

Note that v28 expressly states that Jacob was speaking regarding the twelve tribes (cf. v16). So, the ultimate application of these prophecies is, not primarily to the son, but rather to the tribes that came from the sons.

Note also the reference to “the last days” (cf. Acts 2:17; etc.). Whatever Jacob referred to, surely little of it referred to the final days before Jesus’ final personal coming. This shows that this expression does not, as some people seem to think, refer generally to the last days of the existence of the human race on earth.

### **49:3,4 - Reuben**

Reuben was the firstborn, so Jacob addressed him first. He called Reuben the beginning of his strength (cf. on Deut. 21:17; Psalm 78:51; 105:36). The sons, especially those of Jacob, would be the means through which his strength would be exercised. Reuben was the first expression of that strength. He would express Jacob’s excellent dignity and power.

However, in the past Reuben had failed to demonstrate and make use of his position properly. This would have severe consequences to his offspring. He had been unstable or boiled over (ASV) like water — i.e., in the heat of his passions he had lost control. The instance referred to is clearly identified. It occurred when he went to his father’s bed or couch and defiled it. See on Gen. 35:22, where he committed adultery with Bilhah.

Not much was made of this event in the record when it occurred. However, here Jacob showed the ultimate consequence of that sin. Reuben would not have the preeminence. Normally the firstborn would have a double portion of his father’s goods and would have leadership or preeminence in the family. But this would not happen in Reuben’s case because of his sin. This ended up affecting the whole tribe that descended from him. The tribe inherited a portion on the east of Jordan along the east side of the Dead Sea. They were remote from the other tribes and were often attacked by surrounding enemies. As a result they had little influence on the nation.

Joseph had already been promised the birthright in the form of a double portion of the land in Canaan. We will see that the leadership among the sons would come from Judah’s tribe. So, Reuben really received no special advantage from being firstborn. This was the consequence of sin. See 48:5,6; 1 Chron. 5:1; Deut. 27:20.

Note how sin can have lasting consequences, even on future generations, even if we have repented of it.

### **49:5-7 - Simeon & Levi**

Next Jacob spoke of Simeon and Levi together. They were next in order of birth after Reuben. But they would not have prominence either and are described together because they too had committed a sin and had done it together.

They were instruments of cruelty, having expressed fierce anger and cruel wrath. This refers to the murder of the inhabitants of Shechem in 34:25-30. They slew men and took the spoils, including anim-



als. This is spoken of poetically in the singular (a man, an ox), but everyone knew they had done this to many people and animals. (The earlier account may not have mentioned the ox, but that does not prove it did not happen. Jacob had been there and learned later of what they had done, so why be surprised if he added here details not mentioned before?)

Again, this great sin would bring great consequences on them and their descendants. First, Jacob strongly expressed his disavowal of their act. His soul would not enter into their council — he had not been consulted or agreed to their act. And his honor would not unite with what they had done. He was not responsible and would have nothing to do with it. He did not want his honor stained by their act. Rather, he pronounced a curse upon it.

The consequence was they would be divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel. As a result, these tribes did not have a lasting territory of their own in Canaan. The Levites became the priestly tribe and received only cities scattered throughout the land (Josh. 14:3,4; 21:1-42). Simeon received a territory that consisted of cities in the midst of Judah. Eventually it appears that they were absorbed into Judah and lost their identity as a separate tribe. See Josh. 19:1,9; 1 Chron. 4:39-43; 2 Chron. 15:9 (see note on map 6 in *Baker's Bible Atlas*).

### **49:8-12 - Judah**

Next in age was Judah. Whereas Jacob had severely rebuked the first three sons for their sins, he had praise for Judah. Judah too had committed serious sins, but in the matter of going to Israel for grain and bringing about reconciliation with Joseph, he had taken a role of strong, wise leadership. He had shown great repentance for his wrongs and commitment to do right.

As a result, his tribe would become the ruling tribe. They would have the leadership and preeminence that might have been expected to go to Reuben (1 Chron. 5:2). He would dominate his enemies. Other family members would praise him and Jacob's descendants would bow down to him. Again, the reference may include the immediate sons but probably refers more to future generations.

Judah is compared to a lion's whelp (offspring) who goes up from the prey and lies down. Lions are powerful animals, thought and spoken of like royalty (Ezek. 19:5-7; Micah 5:8,9). They are dignified, strong, and dominant. These qualities would characterize Judah's tribe.

V10 specifically becomes a major link in the chain of prophecies regarding the coming Messiah. Judah would have the scepter, symbol of kingly authority. Lawgivers would come from between his feet — as his offspring. The tribe of Judah became the tribe of kings, the offspring of David being the rulers. (Num. 24:17; Psalm 60:7; 108:8).

This power would not depart from Judah till Shiloh came. The people would be obedient to him. Shiloh means “peace.” There was a city named Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant was for awhile, but God destroyed that (Jer. 7:12). The reference is to a particular person: “to Him shall be the obedience.” The only possible meaning is that this is a prophecy of Jesus, the ruler of peace whom the people must obey (Micah 5:2-5; Psalm 2:6-9; 72:8-11). He is the Prince of Peace. Cf. Romans 5:1,2; Luke 1:79; John 16:33; 14:27; Philippians 4:6,7. This is the universal understanding of all but those whose liberal views prevent them from accepting so obvious a prophecy of Jesus.

So, Jacob here refers to the promise to Abraham of the great blessing on all nations. These promises to Abraham were the covenant underlying all the promises to Jacob’s descendants. They would become a great nation and would inherit in Canaan as Jacob was describing. But their seed would also bring the promised blessing on all nations through Jesus.

Further, Judah’s tribe would live in a land of grapevines, so it would be as though they washed their clothes in the blood of grapes. Their eyes would become dark like grapes, yet they would enjoy good health as illustrated by teeth white like milk. These expressions describe prosperity and good health in the land of their inheritance. Cf. Deut. 8:7,8; 2 Kings 18:32; Isaiah 63:2.

### **49:13 - Zebulun**

Zebulun is described next, though not next in age. Little is said except that he would dwell by the haven of the sea and become a haven for ships. His border would adjoin Sidon.

This may seem to imply that the tribe would be located on a sea-coast, however that does not seem to be what happened. Zebulun did inherit in the north of Canaan somewhat near Sidon but not on the sea coast (see *map*). Likely, the point is that, dwelling near the seacoast towns (the verse does not say it would be on the sea), Zebulun would benefit from the sea trade and assist the traders. Note how Deut. 33:18,19 describes they would partake of the abundance and treasure of the sea. Trade from the seaports would travel through Zebulun to other tribes. So, the passage refers symbolically to the trade of the ships’ cargo, rather than to the ships themselves. (See also Josh. 19:11; Matt. 4:13.)

### **49:14,15 - Issachar**

Next came Issachar. Again, not much detail is given. He is compared to a strong donkey who lies down between two burdens. Older translations say he would couch between two sheepfolds. His tribe would live in a pleasant land, where they had pleasant rest. They would bear burdens and become a band of slaves (note the clear reference to his tribe, not just himself personally). See Judges 5:16; Psalm 68:13.

This seems to imply that Issachar would have a pleasant location in Israel, but would live more like servants than warriors (like Judah). They would be strong and capable of serving, and would bow the shoulder to the burden. But the lying down may imply a lack of ambition, or at least a disposition to peace rather than war. Or if older translations are correct, it may refer more to simply living in a land that is well suited to caring for animals.

#### **49:16-18 - Dan**

Dan is described next. He would become a tribe and judge his people. He would have a certain amount of leadership influence.

However, he would also be like a serpent along the path that bites at a horse that passes by, causing the rider to fall off. This seems to picture treachery, sly cruelty to others, like a snake that cannot be trusted. Dan did have strength in war, living at the extremities of the nation. But they also prevailed by deceit and treachery. See Deut. 33:22; Judges 18:26,27.

Note also that one of Jeroboam's golden calves was set up in Dan, thereby becoming a source of stumbling and poison to the nation (1 Kings 12:26-33).

#### **49:19 - Gad**

Gad would be attacked by a troop, but would triumph in the end. Note that "Gad" means a "troop" or "fortune" (Genesis 30:11 – NKJV footnote). This could refer to the fact that the tribe of Gad inherited east of Jordan. As such, they faced many invasions and attacks from neighboring nations. Yet, they were strong and victorious when they were faithful to God. [See another prediction in Deut. 33:20,21]

#### **49:20 - Asher**

Asher would provide rich bread and royal dainties. This implies that Asher would inherit fruitful land, growing bountiful grains, from which would be produced bread and other desirable foods. Asher eventually inherited rich land along the Mediterranean Sea just south of Tyre and Sidon. Like Zebulun, she too would benefit from the sea trade. [Cf. Deut. 33:24,25.]

#### **49:21 - Naphtali**

Naphtali was compared to a deer let loose to run, which would then run freely and swiftly. This may imply fleetness or swiftness, an advantage in war (see Judges 4:6,10,15; 5:18).

Also, Naphtali was good with words, perhaps characterized by good speakers, poets, etc. (see Judges 5:1-31).

#### **49:22-24 - Joseph**

Jacob then returned to Joseph, saying about as much about him as about Judah. This shows that these would become dominant tribes, which is exactly what happened.

Joseph was represented by two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, because he received the birthright. So he was compared to a fruitful bough growing by a well with abundant water. His branches would spread and produce much fruit — offspring, wealth, etc. This came true for Ephraim and Manasseh.

Yet this prosperity would not come easily. Archers hated and shot at him, causing great grief. Yet he would remain strong, strengthened by the hands of God, the Mighty God of Jacob. Joseph suffered much in his life, yet ended up triumphant. So likewise would his descendants.

God is described as both shepherd and rock, expressing provision and protection. Like a shepherd leads his flock to pasture and a rock is a place to hide when endangered, so God had cared for and protected Joseph and would do so for his descendants.

### ***49:25,26 - Joseph would receive God's help and blessings***

These rich blessings would come on Joseph and his offspring because the God of their father would protect them. God would give him blessings from heaven, from the deep (water and seas), blessings of breasts and womb (offspring).

These blessings would continue to Joseph like Jacob felt he himself had been blessed even beyond his ancestors. He had a larger family and perhaps flocks and herds. But perhaps more especially, his sons became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel and would eventually become the nation that would wear the name of Israel himself. Abraham and Isaac had received the promises, but they came true most especially to Jacob's sons. He felt as though these blessings had reached as high as the hills.

These blessings would crown the head of Joseph (through his descendants), despite the fact he had been separated so long from his brothers.

### ***49:27 - Benjamin***

The last tribe to receive Jacob's blessing was Benjamin. He is called a ravenous wolf who devours prey in the morning and divides the spoil at night. This would indicate a people bold and strong, but perhaps also warlike and greedy. Boldness and strength are good, but the warlike tendency to spoil others could be dangerous. (Cf. Judges 20)

### ***49:28 - Conclusion of the blessings***

The previous statements are here called the blessings Jacob (Israel) pronounced on the "twelve tribes of Israel," each one blessed according to the blessing appropriate to him.

Note that this is clearly prophetic, for it speaks of twelve tribes, though at this point they did not yet exist as tribes. This is the first reference in the Bible to the twelve tribes.

This also shows that the blessings referred to the descendants of each of Jacob's sons, not primarily to each son himself. This is what Jacob said, and the blessing he pronounced, regarding the tribes.

### ***49:29-33 - The death of Jacob***

Jacob then repeated to the sons the charge he had earlier given to Joseph (47:28-31 — see notes there). He wanted to be sure they buried him in the cave in the field of Ephron, in the field of Machpelah, in Mamre, in Canaan. Abraham had bought it from Ephron, and there were buried Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah. Jacob was determined they would bury him there too. (Remember that Mamre is essentially the same as Hebron.)

Having so blessed his sons and stated his last will regarding his earthly remains, Jacob drew his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Thus ended the life of one of the great patriarchs of Bible history. The role played by Jacob in God's plan for our salvation is such that all of us ought be grateful to him, and especially to God, for the great plan for our salvation. Jacob had done many foolish and even sinful things, especially in his earlier years. Later, he had suffered for these mistakes. In older years he appears to have gotten wiser, though still making some mistakes.

God grant us to receive the blessing brought on all nations through Israel's descendant Jesus Christ. And may we be received into glory in fulfillment of that promise.

# Genesis 50

## Chap. 50 - Burial of Jacob and Death of Joseph

### ***50:1-3 - Joseph had Jacob's body embalmed***

The death of Jacob caused great sorrow to his family, especially to Joseph who had been so close to him. The death of any good and great person is sad, though as God's people we have great hope for the future. But grieving for the death of a righteous person is not wrong.

So, Joseph commanded that the body be embalmed by the methods of the Egyptians. Exactly what this involved is not stated, however Egyptians have been famous for their methods of embalming. Some of the mummies they so embalmed are still preserved even thousands of years later. The process required special physicians and great lengths of time — forty days in this case.

Not only did Joseph and Jacob's family mourn for him, but the Egyptians also mourned for 70 days. Apparently, this was an especially long period since it is expressly mentioned. For most Egyptians this was doubtless a ceremonial mourning, like our official days of mourning for the death of some great man. The Egyptians could not sorrow like Jacob's family did. However, the very fact they officially mourned showed their great respect for Jacob because he was the father of their great governor Joseph.

### ***50:4-6 - Joseph requested to take his father's body back to Canaan***

When this long period of mourning had ended, Joseph spoke to Pharaoh to tell him about the oath he had made to bury his father in Canaan. Joseph first mentioned this to Pharaoh's household and asked them to make the request to Pharaoh for him.

Joseph based this request on the favor he hoped the people had for him. Obviously, for the governor to be gone so long would be a serious event and would require favor from the king. Joseph explained, however, how his father had a burial place in Canaan, and how he had expressly requested Joseph to swear to take him to that place for burial. The king then granted permission for Joseph to go and bury his father as he had promised.

### ***50:7-9 - A great funeral procession accompanied Jacob's body to Canaan***

So great was the respect that Joseph had in the eyes of the Egyptians that a whole host of people went with him to the burial. All

Jacob's and Joseph's family went, of course, except their flocks and children. These stayed in Goshen.

But Pharaoh's servants went too, as did the elders of Pharaoh's house and the elders of the land of Egypt. These elders were doubtless rulers or highly respected family leaders, who would be among the most important people in the nation. For them to take time to travel so far for such a funeral showed great respect to Jacob and Joseph.

They took chariots and horsemen with them. These may have been for protection from attack, since an attack on so many important rulers could be devastating to the country. But soldiers often parade at the funerals of important people. It is part of the pomp and ceremony to honor the dead.

The result would have been a very great procession. For so many to travel so far for Jacob's burial was a great honor.

***50:10,11 - The Canaanites observed that this was a great mourning***

This great procession then came to a certain threshing floor at a place named Atad, perhaps owned by such a man. There they had another great period of mourning and lamenting for seven days.

This made a great impression on the inhabitants for they saw the great number of important people gathered, and they saw the long lamentation that was made. They realized that this was an important person and a time of great sorrow for these Egyptians.

The place where this occurred was beyond Jordan, and was named Abel Mizraim, meaning "the mourning of Egypt."

***50:12-14 - Jacob's body was buried in the cave of the field of Machpelah***

Joseph and his brothers then did as Jacob had requested. They buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah. This was the field Abraham had bought when Sarah died. See notes on 47:29-31; 49:29-32.

After they had buried Jacob, Joseph and his brothers returned to Egypt with all those who had traveled with them.

***50:15-18 - Joseph's brothers pled for his forgiveness***

After Jacob had been buried, Joseph's brothers were concerned that he might then take vengeance on them for having sold him as a slave. They perhaps thought that he had avoided taking vengeance before this out of respect for Jacob; but with him gone, Joseph might act otherwise. Perhaps they were remembering how they themselves might have acted in times past! In any case, their concern shows that they realized they were guilty before Joseph.

They sent messengers to Joseph telling him that Jacob, before he died, had asked Joseph to forgive his brothers for the evil they did to him. Note that this shows that Jacob did learn what the brothers had done to Joseph. Who told him or when was never stated.

Then the men themselves asked for Joseph's forgiveness, reminding him that they were servants of God. They even fell down on their faces before Joseph and offered to be his servants. This again fulfilled the dream Joseph had many years earlier. Note the interesting similarity between the brothers' sin and their offer. They had made Joseph a slave, now they offered to be his slave. This might be viewed as an attempt at restitution, but in any case it clearly showed the sincerity of their repentance. Joseph wept at this request of the brothers.

Note how this gives an important lesson about forgiveness of those who sin against us – see Luke 17:3,4; Matthew 5:23,24; James 5:16.

### ***50:19-21 - Joseph stated the intent of God's providence for them***

Joseph then reminded the brothers that, what they did out of evil intent, God had used to save the family alive through the famine. He had explained this in 45:5-8 (see notes there). Joseph urged them not to be afraid. He did not intend to harm them.

He asked, "Am I in the place of God?" What did this mean? I suspect Joseph meant that, if he were to harm them at that point, he would have been acting in clear violation of God's will. Hence, he would have been acting as though he thought he was God and so could change God's plans.

If God intended to use this situation for the good of His people, how could Joseph properly rebel against God's will and still punish his brothers for it? Perhaps also the implication is that, if the brothers had repented (as they had clearly shown they had), how could Joseph still hold their sin against them? To do so would be to violate God's will.

Finally, Joseph comforted his brothers and assured them that he would continue to care for and provide for them and their families.

**V20 is one of the clearest statements of Divine providence in Scripture.** Even though the brothers meant harm by their action, God was able to use it for the good of His people. God cares for His people and accomplishes His plans despite the evil intents of men. This should be a great encouragement to us. No matter what evil men may plan, God can work for what He knows to be good in the end. This is clearly demonstrated in this story of Joseph, in the story of Esther, and of course in the death of Jesus.

### ***50:22,23 - Joseph lived 110 years***

The years passed with Joseph and his father's household still in Egypt. Joseph lived to be 110 years old. He lived many years to an old age (though not as old as Jacob).

He lived long enough to see his great grandchildren. He saw Ephraim's children to the third generation (his great grandchildren if Ephraim is counted, or his great, great grandchildren if Ephraim is not



counted). He also saw the sons of Machir, who was son of Manasseh. These sons would be Joseph's great grandchildren. They were brought up on his knees — he was able to hold them and care for them.

***50:24,25 - Joseph urged his brothers to take his bones to Canaan when they returned***

As Jacob had done, Joseph was able to see that the time of his death was coming, so he also gave instructions regarding his earthly remains. Whereas Jacob had asked to be buried in Canaan, Joseph simply asked that his bones be taken to Canaan when their descendants left in the future. This request was made of Joseph's brothers. One wonders how many of his actual brothers were still alive. Some may have been, but the term may simply refer to relatives.

In making this request, Joseph asserted that God would "surely" bring the Israelites out of Egypt and take them to Canaan. This showed Joseph's great faith in God's promise. He was confident that God would definitely fulfill the promise He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would receive the land of Canaan. They had been removed from the land because of the famine, but Joseph was so certain the promise would stand that he knew the people would return.

Hebrews 11:22 upholds this event as an act of faith on Joseph's part. So great was his faith in God's promise that he was sure the people would leave, so he wanted them to be sure to take his bones back to Canaan.

Notice how this faith contrasts to the doubts some of Abraham's family had at times regarding God's promises. We too sometimes have similar doubts. We need faith like Joseph to have confidence that God will fulfill His promises.

***50:26 - Joseph then died at age 110***

His body was embalmed (as Jacob's had been) and placed in a coffin. There it was kept and was taken to Canaan when the people left Egypt many hundreds of years later. See Exodus 13:19; Josh. 24:32.

So ended the life of another of God's great servants. The story of Joseph is an amazing testimony to God's plan to provide for His people and to keep His promises. God did not just preserve Joseph through his trials, but He used the circumstances to save His people and fulfill His promise to Abraham. Surely, we ought to respect the life of Joseph and learn to imitate his faith and commitment to doing right no matter what problems befall us.

His story is filled with great lessons and morals, yet it is more still than that. It is just great literature. It is an amazing story, far greater than even the stories of modern fiction. Nothing can match God's plan, and the fact that it is true history makes it even more amazing.

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